



spotlight on VET SWEDEN

VET in Sweden

The Swedish government has overall responsibility for the education system and sets the policy framework at all education levels. National goals and learning outcomes are defined centrally but with decentralised implementation. The government and the parliament are responsible for vocational education and training.

Steering documents regulating upper secondary school and municipal adult education are drawn up by the government and by the Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*). National programme councils for each vocational programme advise and support *Skolverket* regarding adaptation, development and modernisation of vocational education. The Swedish Agency for Higher Vocational Education (*Myndigheten för yrkeshögskolan*, MYH) oversees higher VET, approving and financing training providers who then cooperate with the world of work to develop and deliver programmes. Training providers can be run by municipalities, counties, State or private stakeholders. Social partners are strongly involved in the education system and guarantee a close link between education and the world of work.

VET pathways

Swedish vocational education and training (VET) starts after compulsory education at age 16 and includes programmes at upper secondary, post-secondary and higher levels.

Three-year upper secondary VET programmes (ISCED 353) lead to an upper secondary vocational diploma at level 4 of the European qualifications framework (EQF). There are 12 such VET programmes, focusing on different occupational fields, and each of them can be followed through two pathways: school-based and apprenticeship. Both pathways incorporate mandatory workplace training. In school-based programmes the overall share of work-based learning is at least 15%, while the share in apprenticeship is much higher at a minimum of 50%. Graduates with sufficiently high grades in particular subjects can access higher vocational education.

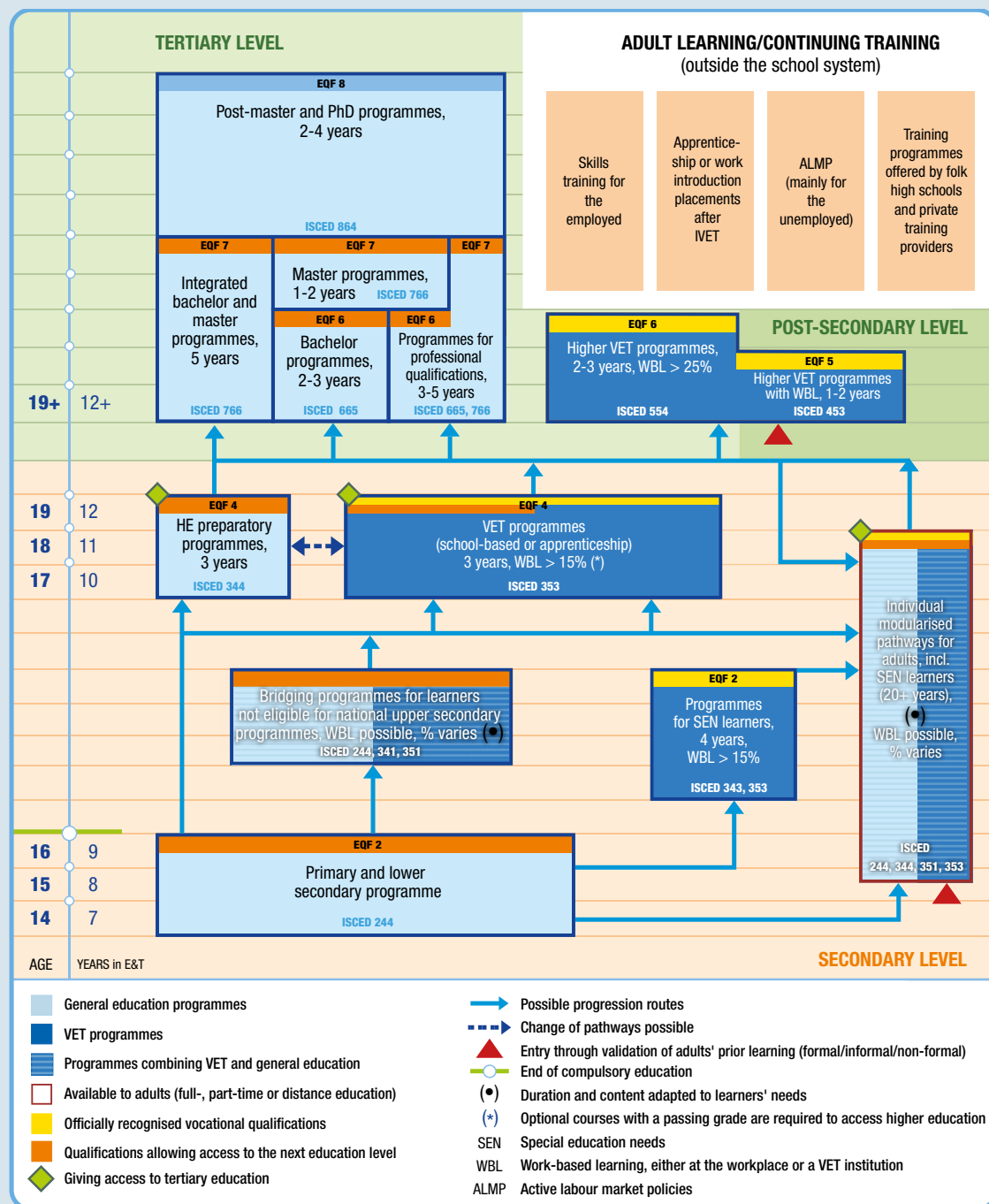
To enrol in an upper secondary VET programme, learners need passing grades in certain lower secondary programme subjects. Four bridging programmes (introductory programmes) offer an alternative way to gain access rights. Depending on learner goal and performance, these usually last from 1 to 3 years without leading to a VET qualification. However, learning outcomes might be recognised if learners continue to an upper secondary VET programme or could ease access to the labour market as semi-skilled workers.

At higher level, 1- to 2-year post-secondary (ISCED 453) and 2- to 3-year higher VET programmes (ISCED 554) are offered, leading to a diploma in higher vocational education (EQF 5) and an advanced diploma in higher vocational education (EQF 6). Programmes combine school-based learning with training at the workplace; the programme leading to the advanced diploma must include a minimum of 25% of workplace training.

Adult education is provided in many forms and has a long tradition. Learners aged 20+, can access pathways modularised according to their individual needs to gain a qualification in a new field or study the courses required to access higher vocational or higher general education.

Non-formal adult education has a long tradition and focuses mainly on specialised skills-oriented courses, aiming especially to integrate the unemployed or recently arrived migrants into the labour market. Non-formal adult education is financed through fees or by companies and organisations, with public grants also provided. Since 2016, non-formal qualifications and certificates can be referenced to the Swedish national qualifications framework (SeQF).

VET in Sweden's education and training system



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Sweden, 2022.

Distinctive features of VET

Social partners are represented in various councils and involved at many other levels, guaranteeing a close link between education and the world of work. For example, they are represented in the national programme councils for each of the 12 upper secondary vocational programmes, they are members of the Labour Market Council (*Arbetsmarknadsrådet*), an advisory body linked to the MYH, and they also support Skolverket in adapting, further developing and modernising vocational education.

Upper secondary education is governed by the State, financed by municipalities through a voucher system (funded through taxes) and provided locally. It is a decentralised system with private and public education providers competing in a market for learners. The voucher is paid by the municipality to the education provider the learner chooses to use.

Modularised programmes allow learners in upper secondary education to transfer one or more courses to another programme, for example when changing study route. Municipal adult education provides the same courses as secondary school, with a few exceptions, allowing learners to build on their earlier studies and, for example, gain access to higher education.

Lifelong learning has had a high value in Sweden for many years. In 2021, participation in lifelong learning was above 34%, making it the highest among the EU-27 Member States (Eurostat, 2022). Validation is also possible in municipal adult education courses at upper secondary and higher vocational level. Education, knowledge, skills and competences acquired through training, job experience or otherwise may be validated and recognised for part of a programme. Education providers are responsible for the process.

Challenges and policy responses

The digital transformation of the economy requires countries to respond: Sweden is a digital front-runner globally. The *Digitalisation strategy* (2017) guides the country's work in meeting its goals and becoming one of the world's leaders in the digital transformation. This strategy is complemented by others, such as the *National approach to AI* (2019) and the *Data strategy* (2021). In the 2022 edition of the *Digital economy and society index* (DESI), Sweden ranks fourth among the 27 EU Member States. However, despite having the highest share of ICT specialists in employment (8%) and an above-average proportion of ICT graduates, 55.1% of companies report difficulties in filling related vacancies. It is important that the country improve this, to avoid delays to the digital transition among businesses.

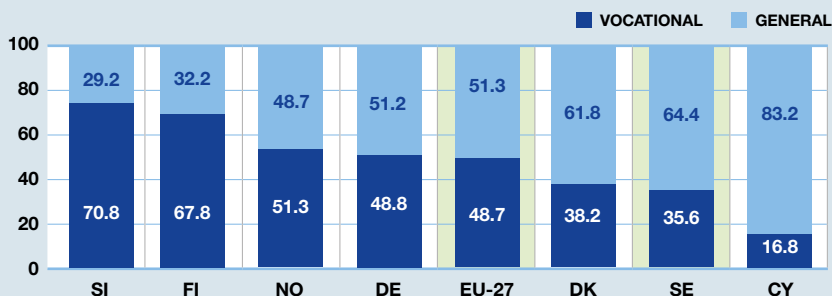
For several years the Swedish education system has been faced with a lack of teachers, especially VET teachers. According to the teachers' union, many teachers will retire in the near future and it is estimated that, by 2033, around 12 500 full-time VET teachers will need to be recruited. The number of students in VET teacher programmes must more than double in the coming decade to allow demand to be met. Teacher shortage is the worst in rural areas, where it is possible to have no certified teacher for the subject taught. In response to this, the Education Act was updated to introduce the use of distance education, applied since 30 June 2021: learners are taught in distance mode by a qualified teacher from another school.

Sweden has a persistent skills mismatch, with a lack of highly skilled workers. Reskilling and upskilling of the workforce is a key measure in addressing this challenge but, to tackle it at the source, there is a need to improve regional cooperation among VET schools. While there are many such schools, they are small, and the decentralised provision, public funding, and learner choice feed the risk of continued skills mismatch. Parliament has approved certain amendments to the Education Act from mid-2022, improving education planning, dimensioning, and offer.

Education and training in figures

Upper secondary students (ISCED 2011 level 3) enrolled in vocational and general programmes

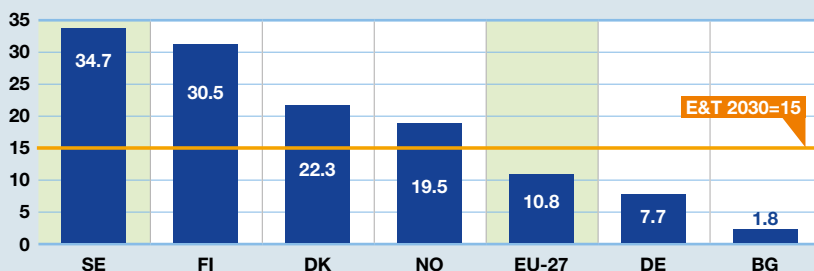
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2020



Source: Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat, UOE (UNESCO, OECD, Eurostat) data collection on education systems, date of extraction 30.9.2022.

Lifelong learning

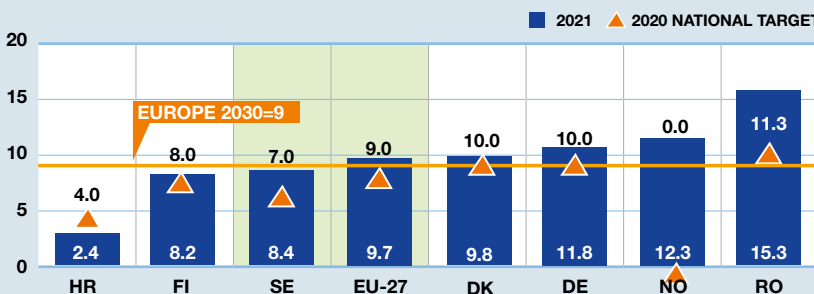
% of population aged 25 to 64 participating in education and training over the 4 weeks prior to the survey, 2021



Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 30.9.2022.

Early leavers from education and training

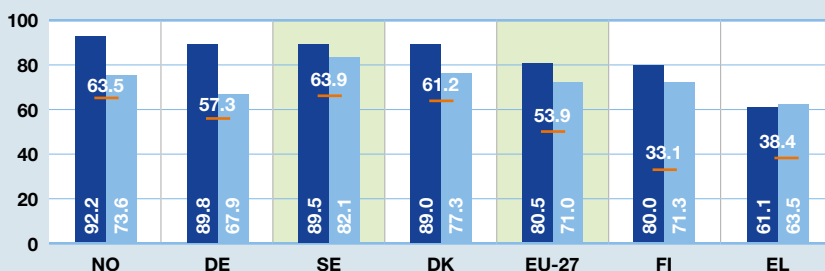
% of the population aged 18 to 24 with, at most, lower secondary education and who were not in further education or training during the 4 weeks prior to the survey, 2021



Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 30.9.2022.

Employment rates of young graduates

% of 20 to 34 year-olds no longer in education and training, 2021



■ Upper vocational secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)
 ■ Upper general secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education (levels 3 and 4)
 — Less than primary, primary and lower secondary education (levels 0-2)

Source: Eurostat, EU labour force survey, date of extraction 30.9.2022.



Further information

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www.arbetsformedlingen.se	Swedish Public Employment Service
www.lo.se	Swedish Trade Union Confederation
www.svensktnaringsliv.se	Confederation of Swedish Enterprise

This Spotlight is based on input from the Swedish National Agency for Education, Skolverket (ReferNet partner in 2022).



CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, GREECE
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu

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