



spotlight on VET

# BULGARIA

## VET in Bulgaria

The Ministry of Education and Science coordinates national policy on vocational education and training (VET), while other ministries are in charge of schools in the areas they are responsible for (art, sports, etc.). The main VET providers are VET schools (VET secondary schools, art schools, sports schools), VET colleges and licensed private and public continuing vocational training (CVT) centres. Framework programmes regulate acquisition of VET qualifications by setting age and entry level requirements and specifying content and duration. There are six framework programmes:

- school-based initial VET (IVET) programmes 'A' leading to first level VET qualifications (EQF 2), can be accessed at age 13 at the earliest, after completing at least the sixth year of lower secondary education. The duration of these programmes is one to three years and varies with learners' previous educational backgrounds;
- school-based IVET programmes 'B' leading to second level VET qualifications (EQF 3) can be accessed after completing lower secondary education. These programmes give access to higher education (HE);
- school-based VET programmes 'C' for second and third level VET qualifications (EQF 4) can be accessed after completing lower secondary education and give access to HE. They are available after a one-year introductory programme to learners completing the seventh year of lower secondary school;
- school-based post-secondary non-tertiary VET programmes 'D' leading to fourth level VET qualifications (EQF 5) are offered by VET colleges;
- CVT centres offer workplace-based IVET programmes 'E' (apprenticeships) for individuals over 16. Usually, these programmes are short-term training courses for partial qualifications or courses enabling people to upgrade their VET qualifications;

- CVT programmes 'F' update or broaden professional qualifications and/or lead to first, second or third level VET qualifications. CVT centres offer these programmes for individuals over 16.

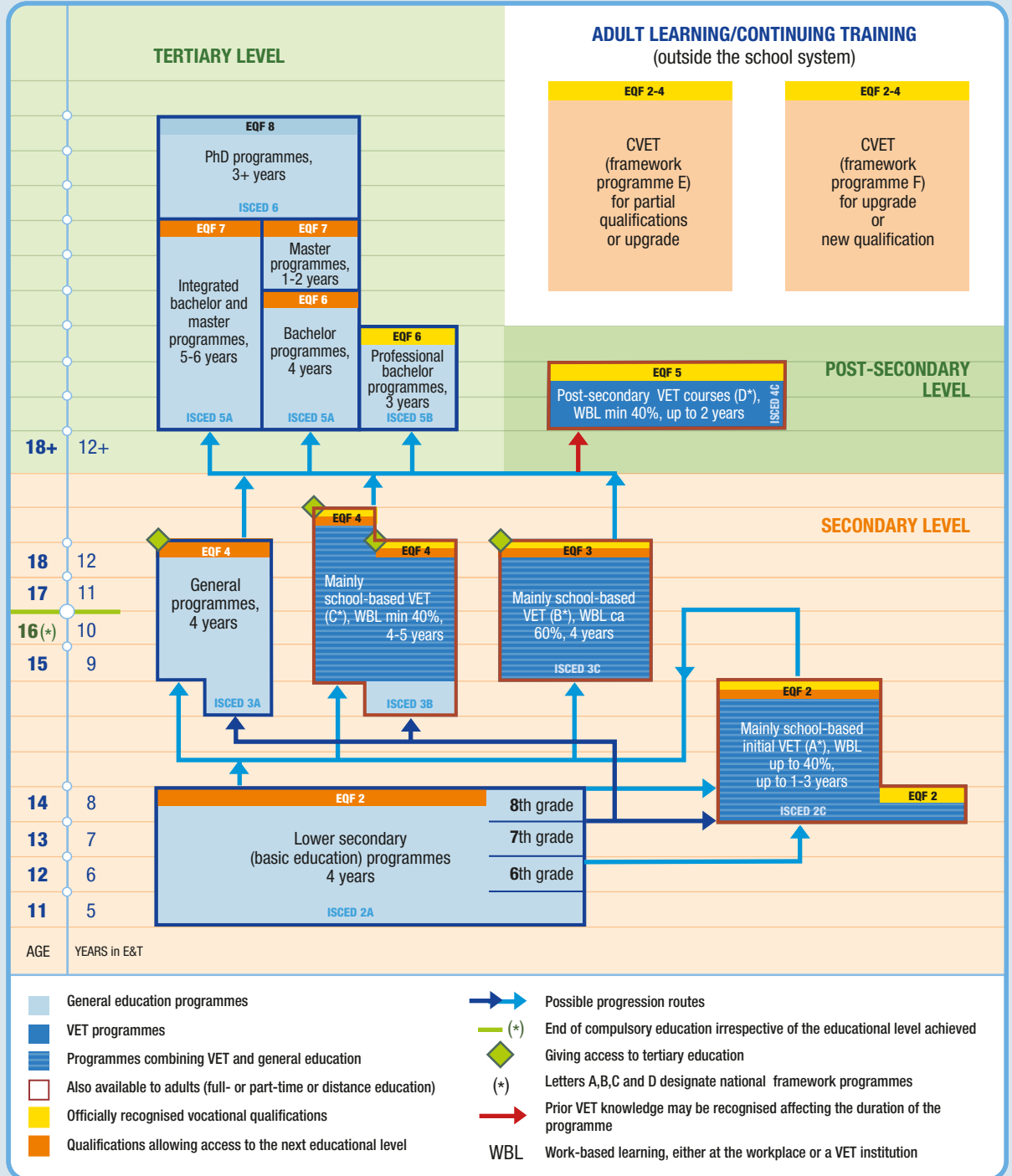
Qualification levels reflect complexity and what is expected from learners, ranging from the first level, which involves learning/performing routine activities carried out in stable conditions, to the fourth level, which encompasses performing complex activities in changing conditions, combined with management responsibilities. In school-based programmes, at least 40% of compulsory VET subjects are taught through practical training. All framework programmes, including A, B, C and D are available to adults.

VET qualifications are acquired after completing training and passing State exams that correspond to national educational standards for VET qualifications. Examinations are conducted by committees appointed by heads of each educational institution. Members of these committees include representatives of educational institutions, employers and employees.

In addition to assessing learning outcomes of VET graduates at institutional level, social partners are involved in designing and approving national educational standards coordinated by the National Agency for VET, before they are embedded in legislation. Helping shape VET policy, social partners are also active in the economic and social council, as well as other national councils.

Adult participation in lifelong learning is low. For many unemployed people, especially from disadvantaged groups, training at CVT centres is the only opportunity to enter the labour market, and for employees, to retain their jobs. These training courses are predominantly financed through active labour market policy schemes supported by the European Social Fund (ESF).

# VET in the Bulgarian education and training system



NB: ISCED 1997 was used on the chart. Conversion to ISCED 2011 is ongoing.  
Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Bulgaria.

## Distinctive features of VET

One distinctive feature of the Bulgarian VET system is equality of VET provision for students and adults. This is based on common framework programmes and national educational standards that regulate vocational qualifications, and opportunities given to VET schools to extend their capacity and facilities for their main function of training young people to training adults.

The role of municipalities is another important feature. They participate in VET policy implementation by providing for staff salaries, offering vocational guidance and training, training the unemployed and others, as well as providing the necessary equipment for VET providers and guidance centres using funds from the municipal budget.

National educational standards for VET qualifications at all levels are competence-based. In principle, this could ease implementation of ECVET. However, the design and approval processes of standards are slow and not yet available for all 539 professions listed.

Another characteristic of VET is a possibility of directly involving professionals in teaching. While general subject teachers at VET schools are required to have a professional teacher's certificate, staff teaching VET subjects only need a higher education diploma in the relevant speciality. Flexibility in involving industry professionals helps to make VET more relevant to labour market needs, but there are concerns that importance of pedagogical skills for VET staff is not adequately recognised.

## Challenges and policy responses

The VET Act has changed 22 times over the past 13 years. These constant changes have impeded consistency in VET development and testify to a lack of relevance between the model set out in 1999 and reality of the VET system. None of the changes in legislation have targeted improving VET's quality. Analysis of the quality assurance system in VET in 2011, commissioned by the Ministry of Education, concluded that VET provision was insufficient and inconsistent, and not in line with the European Parliament recommendation on quality assurance.

Responding to these challenges, the Ministry of Education developed a model for observing and monitoring vocational secondary schools using common national criteria and quality indicators. The objective is to develop and implement a single VET management system, which will track learners and training processes in VET. Resulting in better information on quality of training, this will help to analyse problems better and identify areas for improvement. The initiative is project-based and supported by the ESF.

The existing legal framework provides the necessary basis for implementation of the validation process. The VET Act specifies the procedure for recognition and certification of professional knowledge, skills and competences of unemployed and employed persons aged 16+ with at least six months' work experience in a profession. Implementation, however, is not widespread due to lack of methodological guidelines for the procedure, lack of systematic promotional activities in society and limited provision of career guidance services. Implementing the national qualification framework is also a challenge for the coming years.

Early leaving from VET is higher than from secondary education in general. VET policies themselves are not sufficient to respond to this and other socioeconomic challenges. To make mobility and lifelong learning a reality, a comprehensive approach is needed. VET policies need to become better linked to employment and social policies.



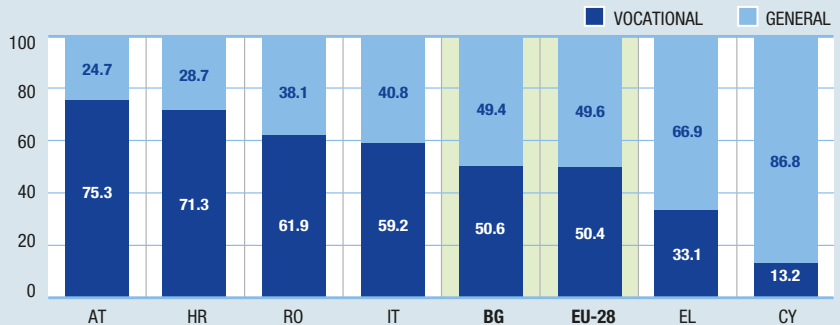
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## Education and training in figures

### Learners in upper secondary education enrolled in vocational and general programmes

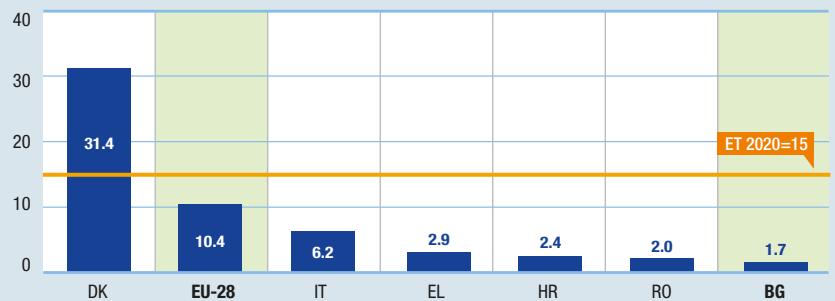
% of all students in upper secondary education, 2012



Source: Eurostat, UOE data collection on education systems, date of extraction 30.5.2013.

### Lifelong learning

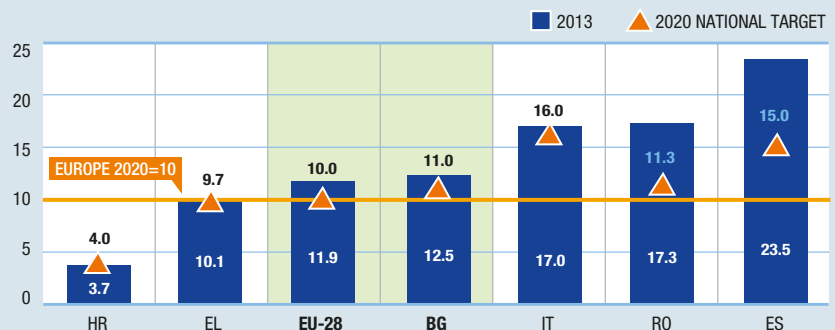
% of population aged 25-64 participating in education and training over the four weeks prior to the survey, 2013



Source: Eurostat, labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

### Early leavers from education and training

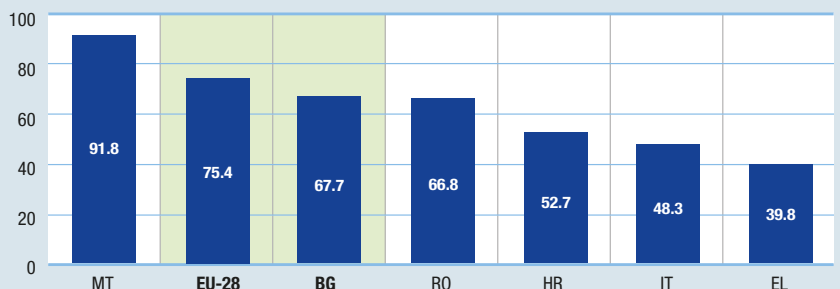
% of early leavers from education and training, 2013



Source: Eurostat labour force survey, date of extraction 19.5.2014.

### Employment rates of young people not in education and training

Employment rates of 20-34 year-olds no longer in education and training, 2013



Source: Eurostat, date of extraction 29.5.2014.



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## Further information

- Cedefop ReferNet Bulgaria (2012). *VET in Europe: country report Bulgaria*. [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2012/2012\\_CR\\_BG.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2012/2012_CR_BG.pdf)
- Eurydice (2014). Bulgaria: overview. In: European Commission (ed.). *Eurypedia*. <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Bulgaria:Overview>

<a href="http://www.refernet.bg">www.refernet.bg</a>	ReferNet Bulgaria
<a href="http://www.mon.bg">www.mon.bg</a>	Ministry of Education, Youth and Science
<a href="http://www.navet.government.bg/en">www.navet.government.bg/en</a>	National Agency for VET
<a href="http://www.az.government.bg">www.az.government.bg</a>	National Employment Agency
<a href="http://www.mlsp.government.bg">www.mlsp.government.bg</a>	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
<a href="http://www.vet-bg.com">www.vet-bg.com</a>	National VET portal
<a href="http://www.nsi.bg/en">www.nsi.bg/en</a>	National Statistical Institute

This spotlight is based on input from ReferNet Bulgaria.

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# CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development  
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylea), GREECE  
PO Box 22427, 551 02 Thessaloniki, GREECE  
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, E-mail: [info@cedefop.europa.eu](mailto:info@cedefop.europa.eu)

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