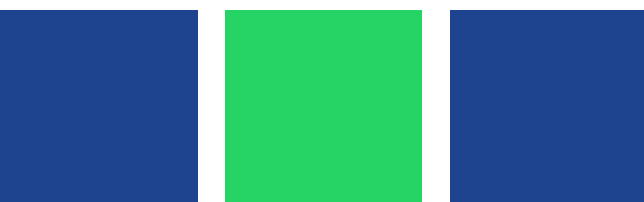

IMPLEMENTING EUROPEAN PRIORITIES IN VET

Making national VET agile,
flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality assured

FINLAND



Implementing European priorities in VET

Making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive,
inclusive and quality-assured:

Finland

Thematic perspectives provide national overviews of specific themes in a common format and offer comparative dimension across the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

This thematic perspectives series complements the general information on vocational education and training (VET) policies and systems provided in [VET in Europe database](#) and the [Timeline of VET policies in Europe](#). The themes presented in the series feature high on the European agenda.

This thematic perspective was prepared based on data/information from 2023.

Thematic perspectives are co-financed by the European Union and ReferNet national partners.

ReferNet is a network of institutions across Europe representing the 27 Member States, plus Iceland and Norway. The network provides Cedefop with information and analysis on national vocational education and training (VET). ReferNet also disseminates information on European VET and Cedefop's work to stakeholders in the EU Member States, Iceland and Norway.

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Please cite this publication as:

Korkala, S., & Vasenius, M. (2024). *Implementing European priorities in VET: making national VET agile, flexible, innovative, attractive, inclusive and quality-assured: Finland*. Cedefop Refernet thematic perspectives.

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/implementing-eu-priorities>

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CHAPTER 1. Introduction

The Finnish National implementation plan (NIP) is based on the [2021 Education Policy Report of the Finnish Government](#). In February 2024, the 2022 NIP was updated based on the new (June 2023) government programme 'A strong and committed Finland' that outlines vocational education and training (VET) policy for the coming years. This thematic perspective describes the main policy developments that took place in 2023 considering the change of the government programme and the updated NIP.

The main VET challenges and objectives include:

- (a) on the way of VET to becoming more flexible and responsive to the labour market needs, rapid demographic changes and the accessibility to training in different parts of the country are still a challenge;
- (b) changes in the working life and shortage of skilled labour require VET to be more attractive for learners bringing forward transversal competences and make better use of digitalisation; closer cooperation with the working life and continuous development of vocational competences regardless of age are also needed;
- (c) inequality and the increasing segregation urge VET to be more inclusive and promote equal opportunities; not everyone completes at least upper secondary education, for example, because of limited learner study abilities, lack of attachment to education institution's community or insufficient guidance and support;
- (d) the information underlying decision-making is not always fully available.

CHAPTER 2. Main policy developments in 2023

2.1 Agile and resilient VET, adaptive to labour market needs

Developing upper secondary education content to promote agile and resilient VET is one of the measures in the NIP within its 'Developing VET content' measure.

A working group established by the Ministry of Education and Culture to remodel vocational qualifications, presented its final report in November 2023. It noted progress in the development of VET content aimed to increase the flexibility of further vocational qualifications and specialist vocational qualifications ⁽¹⁾, and use of small competence units (micro-credentials) (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023a). The working group also proposed several measures that have been incorporated into the NIP, such as enforcing the personal competence development plans for every learner as required by law, more content in English, reinstating physical education and health education, strengthening the teaching of financial and entrepreneurship competences at all levels, and ensuring that immigrants meet the VET language proficiency requirement.

The implementation of the above measures started in 2023 and should be completed by 2027.

2.2 Flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities

Developing the education guidance for flexible VET and providing lifelong learning

(1) For details about the Finnish VET system please see [Cedefop's VET in Europe database](#).

opportunities are the updated NIP measures. In 2023, operational cooperation between VET, general upper secondary education and higher education institutes was improved. However, the separate funding for compulsory education and continuous learning was not implemented.

The reform of continuous learning aiming to ensure that everyone can enhance skills throughout their careers and social activities concluded in 2023 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023). As a result, the Service Centre for Continuous Learning and Employment (SECLE) was established, which in 2023 funded the labour market related competences' development through education and training programmes. This helped improve study opportunities for the unemployed and the under-represented groups ⁽²⁾. The Ministry of Education and Culture monitored the implementation of the extended compulsory education and released its [report](#) in December 2023 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023b).

In 2023, legislative changes of VET funding provisions were drafted ⁽³⁾ to improve the quality of VET and to increase employment after graduation through the better training match with the labour market needs, offering more modules, and better integrating language teaching into employment-oriented training or into preparatory training for further studies. The new proposal suggests a bigger share of VET funding to be allocated for completed units and qualifications as well as graduate employment and lifelong learning outcomes rather than purely for the learning time.

2.3 Innovative and excellent VET

The Vocational education sustainable development and green transition development programme 2022-23 (EDUFI 2024b) supported the efforts of achieving the global Agenda 2030 (Finnish National Commission for Sustainable Development, 2024) objectives in VET and addressed the challenges posed by climate changes and biodiversity loss. Within the programme, a roadmap for the sustainability of VET and VET provider sustainable development programmes were developed. An active culture of experimentation in VET supporting a sustainable future was also piloted through Responsible and sustainable VET (VASKI) project (see below).

In 2023, within VASKI project involving 61 training providers, VET providers prepared their own sustainable development programmes, organised open skills development events, trained teachers and carried out carbon footprint calculations. The roadmap for sustainability of VET was completed in 2023 and the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) organised a webinar series for education providers to support its implementation. The project ended in December 2023.

In Finland, there are 14 centres of vocational excellence, in which VET providers are developing education and training content. Each centre has a specialisation, such as technological studies, but all promote innovation and participation of SMEs and focus on creating sustainable solutions.

2.4 Attractive VET, based on modern and digitalised provision

The NIP aims to develop attractive VET based on modern and digitalised provision of training

⁽²⁾ For example, low qualified adults.

⁽³⁾ Once adopted, the changes are expected to come into effect in January 2025.

and skills for example by developing study content and qualifications as well as developing the digital VET environment. The [Digital services for continuous learning programme](#) in 2021-25 supports transitions between education and working life through stakeholder effort coordination, more digital guidance and career planning services (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2024). In 2023, the Ministry of Education and Culture published the [target architecture report](#) clarifying the technical platform requirements.

The NIP also emphasised the use of digitalisation and development of operating methods to support the competence of education providers in managing digitalisation, creating new digital services, teaching materials and pedagogic models. In 2023, EDUFI focused part of its teacher training resources on the theme of digital competence development and utilising technology in teaching and training. In 2023, education providers, teachers, learners of all ages were also encouraged to use the Library of open educational resources which also helps sharing teaching materials between its users (Library of Open Educational Resources, 2024).

2.5 Inclusive VET promoting equal opportunities

In Finland, VET learners have the right to receive special-needs support to fulfil the qualification competence requirements. It can be long-term or regular special-needs support, for example, based on learning disabilities, illness, or other reasons. In case of difficult learning disabilities or severe disabilities a student may require intensive special needs support (EDUFI, 2024).

The NIP specifically aims to further develop special needs support in VET. Measures towards this objective launched in 2023 supported by the working group to:

- (a) strengthen learning support from early childhood to upper secondary level and streamline (make uniform) such services for VET and general education;
- (b) speed up identification of special-needs and implementation of support;
- (c) secure necessary multi-professional special-needs support and guidance
- (d) comprehensively ensure pedagogical support measures, guidance, and student well-being.

The legislative changes needed to accomplish these goals were drafted in 2023.

2.6 VET underpinned by quality assurance

The NIP measure for developing education provision methods, operating models and cooperation in education aims to ensure that VET is underpinned by quality assurance. The programme for the reform of education provision, operating models and cooperation in upper secondary education examined upper secondary education from the perspectives of direction and guidance, financial resources, the content of study opportunities, how structures are organised, and how to enhance cooperation. The 2022 NIP measures, including preparation for the uniform national guidelines for the development of education provision methods, operating models and co-operation in upper secondary education concluded in 2023.

Finland participates in EQAVET activities and maintains the operation of the quality network with the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) as the national reference point. EDUFI coordinates the National Quality Network of VET meetings. In September 2023, EDUFI started to work on 2023-26 activities covering for example an assessment model of the effects of renewing the national qualification requirements and creating monitoring

indicators for the national sustainability roadmap of VET, which was supported by the VASKI project (see Section 2.3).

CHAPTER 3. Involvement of VET stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments related to NIP

Finland involves stakeholders in the implementation of policy developments in several ways. Major policy developments are usually prepared and monitored by working groups appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Stakeholders that are actively involved in such working groups are VET providers, working life representatives (mainly trade unions), and student union representatives. Representatives from other ministries and Members of the Parliament also participate.

Stakeholders are usually involved in the preparation of legislation and regulations. After a new policy has been implemented, monitoring groups have the responsibility to monitor and assess the implementation of policy developments. The groups also provide support for implementation.

In addition, Finland has various national and regional networks that focus on certain aspects of VET. For example, Digitalisation in VET network supports VET providers. Business and industry committees, established by the Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), participate in the development of qualification structure and vocational qualifications and produce information about the quality of competence demonstrations and assessments annually. The committees include representatives from the education sector, employers, employees and the self-employed. They usually help design policies via statements and questionnaires.

CHAPTER 4. Achievements of implementation

Since 2020, most progress has been made regarding the VET recommendations concerning developing agile, resilient VET alongside developing flexible VET, providing progression, and lifelong learning opportunities.

The 2022 version of NIP, drafted during the previous government programme, outlined two major reforms in Finnish VET: the parliamentary reform of continuous learning and the extension of compulsory education. Both reforms were completed in 2022 and their implementation is currently being monitored and supported.

Finland has a long tradition of involving stakeholders in the preparation of legislative changes starting from the early stages of development. Involving stakeholders in the planning of future policy developments, for example via different working groups appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, creates commitment through co-operation and makes the implementation stage of larger reforms smoother.

In addition, substantial progress has been made towards the priority of developing innovative and excellent VET, for example through two big development programmes concluded in 2022: the Right to Learn Programme and the Programme for the sustainable development of VET and the green transition that supported VET providers in green and digital

transitions. The Right to Learn Programme (2020-22) developed the quality and equality of vocational education and training through several projects and measures including, but not limited to, improving learning outcomes, developing guidance and support as well as strengthening the wellbeing of students. Digitalisation was a cross-cutting theme throughout all the projects.

CHAPTER 5. Challenges of implementation

The current Finnish government programme affected the implementation of the NIP. Some of the objectives and measures of the former 2022 NIP have lapsed after the new programme came into effect in June 2023. For example, in developing upper secondary education content, some of the legislative changes that were planned in the previous government programme were halted in parliamentary proceedings and later lapsed after the new government programme was agreed.

In general, policy developments that require legislative changes may take longer to achieve because the processes can be lengthy and complex. This can also cause delays in the implementation process. For example, developing the funding system of VET is an objective in the current as well as in the previous government programme, and the reform will continue until 2025. Some of the measures to be taken may have changed in the new government programme but the general goal remains the same. This also makes the evaluation and monitoring of progress more difficult.

CHAPTER 6. Conclusions

This paper was written shortly after the new government programme of Finland had come into effect causing changes in the objectives and measures of the Finnish NIP. Developing the guidance of education to promote flexible VET and providing lifelong learning opportunities is one of the measures remaining in the revised NIP.

Regarding EU priorities described in Chapter 2, most progress has been made on developing agile, resilient VET alongside developing flexible VET, providing progression and lifelong learning opportunities. The Right to Learn Programme and the Programme for the sustainable development of VET and the green transition were the two development programmes with most progress.

As for challenges, the policy developments that require legislative changes may longer time because of the new government programme and therefore cause delays in the implementation process. The current government programme aims to develop the funding system of VET through legislative changes which aim to improve the quality of VET and to increase employment after graduation. These legislative changes are supposed to come into effect in January 2025.

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