# Research paper

Stemming the tide: tackling early leaving from vocational education and training in times of crises

Synthesis report of Cedefop/ReferNet survey

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

The **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training** (Cedefop) is the European Union's reference centre for vocational education and training, skills and qualifications. We provide information, research, analyses and evidence on vocational education and training, skills and qualifications for policy-making in the EU Member States. Cedefop was originally established in 1975 by Council Regulation (EEC) No 337/75. This decision was repealed in 2019 by Regulation (EU) 2019/128 establishing Cedefop as a Union Agency with a renewed mandate.

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Foreword

While celebrating the European Year of Skills and with VET institutions striving to enable individuals to reach their full learning potential, 1 in 10 young people in Europe still does not qualify in upper secondary education (9.6% in 2022).

These low-educated young people, known as early leavers from education and training, are more likely to experience lower levels of professional accomplishment, well-being and life satisfaction. They face an increased risk of becoming unemployed or inactive and are widely known as NEETs: people who are neither in employment nor in education or training (Cedefop, 2016a, 2016b and 2023).

Determining the whereabouts of early leavers, as swiftly and thoroughly as possible, increases their potential to re-engage with education and training and qualify. Once equipped with the right knowledge, skills and competences, these young people have a better chance to respond to labour market demands and enjoy a fulfilling career, achieving tangible personal and professional growth. Benefits at social level are also not negligible, as people's social and professional inclusion contributes to establishing strengthened economic development and social cohesion.

To support this possibility, high quality and updated data obtained by national monitoring and early warning systems are indispensable in systematically monitoring developments at both national and EU levels.

This report, drawing on a survey carried out in 2022 with Cedefop's reporting network ReferNet, provides useful insights into data availability and gaps to measure early leaving from VET (ELVET) at national and regional levels. It brings to the attention of policy-makers, researchers, and VET providers the persistent limitations in measuring the magnitude of ELVET, using a common European definition and indicator that would allow targeted actions. The report's conclusions offer possible solutions.

The survey was conducted at a time when social cohesion was threatened at global level. The war of aggression against Ukraine that led to massive influx of refugees into the EU, and the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that closed down VET institutions worldwide, have both jeopardised the learning process of millions of young people. Within this context, better understanding of the phenomenon of early leaving from VET is a necessary precondition for designing effective responses, aiming to help all individuals to be equipped with the appropriate skills to cope with future transformations and to thrive.

Cedefop promotes high quality and inclusive VET, and we invite all young people to celebrate together the many European years of skills to come, where no learner should leave VET early.

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Executive summary

This synthesis report is based on a survey carried out during 2022 with Cedefop's reporting network ReferNet. It makes an important contribution to understanding the magnitude of early leaving from VET (ELVET) in those European countries where relevant data are available, and the mechanisms and support measures countries employ to measure and monitor the phenomenon at national and regional levels.

The report puts special focus on the main factors leading to early leaving from initial VET as reported by EU Member States, Norway and Iceland. It details the support measures teachers, trainers, school principals and companies providing work-based learning received to overcome the challenges society faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

This research is part of Cedefop's pioneering work within the VET for youth team to support policy-makers and VET practitioners tackling early leaving from VET in Europe. For more than a decade, Cedefop has led research, promoted peer learning through its policy learning fora, and developed and managed online toolkits to benefit learners at risk of dropping out, early leavers from VET and young NEETs. The VET toolkit for tackling early leaving and the VET toolkit for empowering NEETs offer a platform of intervention approaches, good practices and interactive tools designed for both policy-makers and VET teachers and trainers. The community of ambassadors tackling early leaving from VET, created and coordinated by Cedefop since 2017, plays a vital role in enriching and disseminating the toolkit resources.

The findings of this survey feed into Cedefop's project on Tackling early leaving from VET. It aims to support EU Member States and the European Commission in the implementation of the Council recommendation on pathways to school success (Council of the European Union, 2022) and the achievement of Education and training 2030 strategic target to lower the rates of early leaving from education and training (Council of the European Union, 2021).

An overview of the findings is presented comparatively across the participating EU Member States, Norway and Iceland in the following thematic sections of the survey:
(a) national definitions of ELVET and data collection mechanisms;
(b) processes and mechanisms for monitoring early leavers;
(c) early warning systems;
(d) factors leading to drop out from VET;
(e) the effects of COVID-19 on the learning process and ELVET rates;

(f)   support provided to learners, VET teachers and trainers, VET schools and principals, as well as to companies offering work-based learning during lockdown to carry out distance learning;

(g)   support to Ukrainian refugee students in the VET institutions of host countries.

National data on early leaving from VET were provided and presented for nine countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland and Spain). Such data are based on different definitions and criteria and do not allow for any comparison among the countries surveyed.

Summary of findings

ReferNet's answers suggest that, overall, there are no national definitions of ELVET in European countries, either close to Cedefop's working definition or their own definition. Only two countries (Latvia and Hungary) explicitly reported that a national definition of ELVET is available, though these do not match all the criteria defined by Cedefop. Often, it was reported that instead of ELVET national definitions, other indicators or definitions are used and monitored. The EU definition of early leaving from education and training and different dropout measurements were the ones mentioned most often.

Despite the overwhelming lack of official definitions in all countries (except two), the existence of data collection on ELVET was reported by 18 countries. Data are collected, for instance, through school registries or national databases which register relevant information on learners; methodologies and indicators vary considerably. While countries report that ELVET-relevant data/information are collected and exist in several countries, it does not always mean that the relevant indicators are readily available or even that it is possible to calculate ELVET. In several cases, it was stated that there is no regular monitoring of ELVET or VET-specific data analysis conducted regularly, but it is possible to extract ELVET-related information. In five countries (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia), there are plans to implement regular (e.g. yearly) data collection in the future; Latvia is a planning for one-off data collection. Age is one of the most discussed criteria for any available data collection on ELVET or any alternatives provided by the countries. In a few cases, age is not registered at all, as with dropouts or contract dissolution in Germany and Lithuania.

A centralised system that gathers nominal information on early leavers and includes mechanisms to ensure that a majority of VET providers flag early leavers

in a timely manner is available in half of the surveyed countries. Most of the surveyed countries have local or coordinated services responsible for getting in touch with early leavers and referring them to relevant measures, available either at both national and regional level or at national or regional level only.

Around 20 countries have processes and mechanisms in place for identifying and supporting learners who are still in VET but are at risk of dropping out: early warning systems; related continuing professional development (CPD) for VET teachers and trainers in schools; and multidisciplinary teams to support learners. All except one offer career guidance to support learner choices and pathways. Half of the countries have arrangements to make up for lost learning, but only eight provide CPD to in-company trainers to enable them to identify and support apprentices at risk. Belgium-FR, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, France and Latvia have all the six above examined services available for identifying learners at risk of early leaving.

In total, 17 countries reported that they collect data on the factors leading to dropout of VET. Ten mentioned such data collection taking place at both regional and national level (Austria, Belgium-FL, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia), five (Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands) stated that it is available only at national level, while Belgium-fr, Belgium-DE and Czechia indicated that it is taking place only at regional level. No information on whether such data are systematically collected was reported by five countries (Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia, Cyprus and Poland). According to the survey findings, the top four reasons for dropping out of VET in Europe are (in descending order):

(a) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to low overall education achievement and attendance' was the factor mentioned most often. It was indicated 16 times in total, by seven countries as a factor appearing always or often, and by nine countries as a factor occurring sometimes.

(b) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to health and wellbeing issues', was second most frequent factor mentioned by 12 countries.

(c) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to lack of family engagement and support' was the third most frequent factor reported by 11 countries.

(d) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to lack of or insufficient guidance to support their choices' was the fourth most frequently mentioned factor reported by 11 countries.

Following up on previous Cedefop preliminary research on the effects that extended school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic may have on dropout rates (Cedefop, 2020), the survey aimed at collecting information on how the learning continuity was impacted by COVID-19 in initial VET as well as on whether the extended school closures led to higher rates of ELVET. Findings show that, in 12 countries, VET institutions were closed due to COVID-19 pandemic for more than 6 months. In eight countries, VET institutions were closed for 3 to 6 months, while in six countries, they were closed for 1 to 3 months. VET institutions were closed for less than 1 month only in Belgium-DE. Information is less readily available on how long companies providing work-based learning were closed due to lockdown. In six countries, companies were closed for more than 6 months. In nine countries, the school and company closure periods were equal, while in five cases, companies were closed for a shorter period than schools.

In all countries, VET institutions offered online courses during lockdown and, in almost all, monitored learner participation. The monitoring picture changes significantly when it comes to work-based learning in companies: only in eight countries was it found that companies monitored the participation of VET learners in online distance learning. Although participation in online sessions was generally monitored, only three countries were able to provide data; most replied that no relevant information was available. This lack of information did not allow us to draw any conclusions on the effects of school and company closures due to COVID-19 on dropout rates in initial VET.

Findings on the support in distance learning and teaching in school-based VET provided during lockdown show that most surveyed countries (22) reported that learners in school-based settings were provided with psychological and mental health support during school closures. 16 countries offered training on digital skills and competences to VET learners to facilitate their participation in online learning. 18 countries reported that they provided free internet connection and necessary equipment to facilitate learners' access to online learning. 18 countries adapted the school-based programme to distance learning, e.g. teaching of practical elements of school-based learning through simulations. Only in a few countries was online material in school-based learning settings translated for ethnic minorities and refugees.

Contrary to school-based learning, much less information was available about support in distance learning and teaching in work-based learning settings. Only four countries reported that free internet connection and the necessary equipment

to support VET learner access to online learning was provided by companies offering work-based learning. Companies provided VET learners with training on digital skills and competences to support their participation in distance learning in only a few countries. Only three reported that learners in work-based settings were offered psychological and mental health support. 12 countries adapted the work-based learning programmes for VET learners to distance learning (e.g. practical elements were taught through simulations or hands-on sessions were converted to theoretical courses). Only one country reported that online material and guidelines for learners in work-based learning were translated into different languages spoken by ethnic minorities and refugees.

In most of the countries (20) school VET teachers and trainers were provided with access to free equipment and internet connection required to offer distance learning during school closures. They were also offered training on how to use digital tools and platforms, and to create digital teaching content. In approximately half of the countries, VET teachers and trainers were well informed on privacy issues, copyright, and data protection to implement distance learning.

The degree of support teachers and trainers received in school depends largely on the support schools received from governments during lock down. Most countries reported that schools received financial support to implement distance learning but only in 12 countries did schools receive financial support and the necessary equipment to provide teachers and trainers with training on digital skills and tools. In half of the countries, schools were provided with free internet provision and the necessary equipment for distance learning. In almost all countries, VET school principals received guidelines on how to implement distance learning for learners.

Similarly, the support provided to companies offering work-based learning, was crucial as it helped determine the support these companies offered to their apprentices. The survey results show that only in Belgium-DE and three more countries (Germany, Latvia and Netherlands) did companies receive financial support to implement distance learning in work-based learning (produce online material, purchase equipment, etc.). Only in three countries (Germany, Latvia and Austria) did companies receive financial support and necessary equipment during lockdown to train in-company trainers on digital skills and tools. In a very small number of countries (six) did learners in paid work-based learning receive financial support during company closures. Only in nine countries did in-company trainers

receive guidelines from responsible authorities on how to implement distance learning for learners in work-based learning.

Key policy messages

ELVET measurement proves a complicated issue: on one hand, national definitions and data collections methodologies vary considerably as they reflect different national contexts and needs; on the other hand, the consequent lack of comparable data does not allow for comparative analysis at national and EU levels. Collecting comparable data on early leaving from VET, though, is a need that clearly stems from the current discourse focus on evidence-based policy-making to prevent and counteract early leaving; it cannot be neglected. As harmonising national definitions and data collection approaches across countries is not a readily available option, possibilities to measure early leaving from VET arise from the Labour Force Survey 2024 module. This will include variables that will be collected every 8 years, distinguishing between general and vocational education (Eurostat, 2023).

(a) DROPEDUC (formal education or training abandoned). This variable aims to discover if respondents ever started but did not successfully complete a formal education programme. In addition to the information provided in HATLEVEL (level of educational attainment), this variable provides a general picture of people who have at any time started but then not completed some other formal education ('dropouts'). It also allows further analyses of those with a low level of education (i.e. whether a person with lower secondary education ever started upper-secondary education but then left without attaining a qualification at this level).

(b) DROPEDUCLEVEL (level of the formal education or training abandoned). This variable aims to gather information about the level of formal education a person started but did not successfully complete.

(c) DROPEDUCREAS (main reason for not completing the formal education programme referred to in DROPEDUCLEVEL). This variable aims to know why respondents did not successfully complete the formal education referred to in DROPEDUCLEVEL.

(d) MEDLEVQUAL (medium educational attainment qualifications). This variable aims to gain more detailed information on the education pathways of the respondents, by collecting detailed information on the programme orientation of ISCED level 3 or 4 (formal) qualifications/formal programmes a person has successfully completed before or after having completed his/her highest educational attainment level.

Although this 2024 LFS module is a great development also reflecting earlier recommendations drawn from Cedefop (Cedefop, 2016a; Cedefop, 2012), it is still to be seen whether the data collected will allow the derivation of relevant statistics and indicators, whose feasibility should be investigated based on several aspects including quality of the data collected and sample sizes. Further, as this module will only be applied every 8 years, it does not allow systematic data collection to measure ELVET on an annual basis. Therefore, further research may be required to investigate possible avenues for regular improvement to existing national and European data on ELVET.

Quantitative data need to be complemented with qualitative data. The findings of this study provide clear indications on common factors leading to dropout from VET in several countries, laying a good basis for further discussion and policy learning. However, more detailed information covering a wider range of factors needs to be systematically collected. This leads to strengthening the analysis and conclusions of Cedefop study on leaving education early (Cedefop, 2016a), where factors leading to ELVET were thoroughly analysed. According to that study, data on factors influencing early leaving from VET need to be collected regularly either from centralised systems or through systematic surveys: individual and family background, such as health and well-being and migrant or ethnic minority background; education and training organisation, such as student orientation and VET programme content; and labour market factors, such as employment outcomes of VET graduates and overall economic context. As low-education achievement is the most frequent factor mentioned in this paper by ReferNet countries for dropping out of VET, the academic performance of students should also be monitored. In the new 2024 LFS module, Cedefop's earlier findings and recommendations are addressed and the following main reasons for not completing a formal education programme are included (Eurostat, 2023):
(a) financial reasons;
(b) preference to work;
(c) reasons linked to the education programme;
(d) own illness or disability;
(e) care responsibilities;
(f) other family reasons;
(g) other personal reasons;
(h) other reasons.

Collecting this information from 2024 through the LFS is an important development, however, as this module will be only collected every 8 years, it is not frequent enough to address timely policy solutions. Further, this list of reasons included in the 2024 LFS module is not comprehensive enough to capture the

complexity of the phenomenon and the coexistence of various factors together. Also, important aspects that this study showed to be determinant, such as academic underachievement, are not considered, and issues specific to school or work-based learning within a VET programme still will not be identified. To allow targeted policy-making, countries should collect either from centralised systems or through systematic surveys, at national, regional and local levels, all the factors that lead a student or apprentice to drop out from their VET programme and remain out of formal education and training.

While, in most countries, there is a well-developed culture of inclusion in school-based learning settings, there is more uncertainty when it comes to companies, as information and data on work-based learning is scarce. For example, many factors leading to early leaving from work-based learning settings remain unknown; in most of the countries, it is not known if companies monitored the participation of apprentices in distance learning during lock down; and very few countries offered financial support to companies to support the continuing professional development of their trainers on digital skills during company closures. The findings suggest the need also to cultivate an inclusion culture in work-based learning settings and employ effective policies to empower companies and trainers and support apprentices at risk of dropping out; lowering the rates of early leaving from companies is of equal priority to tackling the phenomenon of early leaving from VET.

Despite the sudden change that occurred in teaching and learning processes and methods during the unexpected COVID-19 crisis, governments managed to provide sufficient support to ensure learning continuity. There has been a clear shift during lockdowns towards online and blended teaching and learning, requiring a high level of digital skills from both teachers and trainers, and learners. The clear policy focus on a just digital and green transition leaves no doubts about the fact that digitalisation is becoming our new normal in so many sectors and activities. Education strategies, though, have typically been designed with all learners in mind, without sufficient attention to the specific barriers faced by disadvantaged learners: it is necessary to link the aspect of digitalisation with that of inclusion to support vulnerable VET learners by enhancing their access to and use of digital means. Government support provided during the pandemic should also be sustainable and consolidated through provision of quality continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that are accessible to all VET teachers and trainers, to help them develop digital skills for inclusion and keep pace with the constant digital upskilling required to practice the teaching and training profession effectively in our digital era.

CHAPTER 1.
Introduction

1.1. Why to monitor early leavers

Early leaving from education and training (ELET) has been identified as a source of major social concern. Its prevention has been a strategic objective and a top policy priority in the EU for decades, as low levels of education and low skills can have a negative impact not only on citizens' social and professional inclusion but on the whole economy and society.

Individuals cannot reap the benefits of further education studies even though advantages are manifold, not only financially but also in other areas: on average, individuals who stay longer in education have higher job satisfaction, take better informed decisions for their health and social life, and increase their non-cognitive skills. One European estimate calculated from more than a decade ago puts the additional lifetime income for a student staying at school for an extra year at more than EUR 70 000 (NESSE, 2009).

In contrast, low-skilled adults often accumulate several vulnerabilities and are furthest away from the labour market or are in precarious jobs and at risk of unemployment, yet they benefit the least from upskilling and reskilling opportunities (Psifidou and Livanos, 2023). Based on Cedefop estimates of future trends in labour market participation, showing the breakdown by gender and the total labour force for people aged 20-24, even though overall participation is due to increase for the low-educated, it is then estimated to decline further to 2035 for both men and women. Early leavers are also at greater risk of becoming NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training) and socially excluded (Cedefop, 2023a).

ELET also carries very high costs for national economies, with the lifetime cost reaching EUR 1 to 2 million per early leaver. The cost of such exclusion has been calculated in the Netherlands, where the lifetime cost of early school leaving is estimated at around EUR 1.8 million. In Finland, the annual cost of one early school leaver reaches EUR 27 500, with the lifetime (40 years) cost of over EUR 1.1 million; and it is widely believed that this is an underestimate of the real cost. In Ireland, the annual cost to the state in benefits, together with lost tax revenue per male early school leaver, has been estimated at EUR 29 300, even before costs associated with health or crime are considered. A country with high levels of ELET will struggle to maintain high levels of employment and social

cohesion. Apply these high levels of ELET across Europe and it will struggle to compete in the global marketplace (European Parliament, 2011).

The wider 'economic' costs in terms of lower productivity, lower tax revenues and higher welfare payments, are huge. One calculation based on the assumption that early leavers have 6% lower productivity than those who are qualified in upper secondary education, and using the 2005 figure of 23% unqualified leavers, suggests that ELET cost the European economy a productivity loss of 1.4% (European Commission, 2006).

ELET also generates very large 'social' costs. It has been shown to lead to later social breakdown, increased demand on the health system, and lower social cohesion. It perpetuates the cycle of which it is part.

In the long-term, ELET is a tremendous waste of potential, for individual, social and economic development. When it is associated with an extended period of inactivity and disengagement from education and training and the labour market, it becomes a wasted opportunity for society to invest in its own future. It is not surprising that ELET is considered a major policy priority not only in Europe but across the developed world.

To counter these potential negative consequences, reducing the share of early leavers to below 10% of young people aged 18 to 24 was first adopted as part of the Lisbon strategy and has been one of the Europe 2010 and 2020 main strategic targets. Within this EU policy debate for tackling ELET (European Commission, 2011), Member States were called to lay down a common European framework for policies to tackle ELET and ensure that comprehensive national strategies are adopted by Member States by 2012 (Council of the European Union, 2011). Implementing a strategy for the modernisation of vocational education and training (VET) including specific action against school dropout, was among these policies.

In the latest Education and training 2030 strategic framework (Council of the European Union, 2021), the strategic objective has been renewed for a new goal: to reduce the average share of early leavers to less than 9% by 2030; this is reflected in the commitment of all EU countries within the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-30). Within the Priority area 1 on Quality, equity, inclusion and success in education and training, and the Priority area 3 on Teachers and trainers, two main policy actions were deemed vital at national level (Council of the European Union, 2021):

(a) promoting educational success strategies at national level to foster the successful conclusion of education and training pathways by all learners and to reduce early leaving and low-achievement, by supporting a whole-school

and community approach with an overall inclusive learner-centred vision of education (point vii, p. 17);

(b) supporting initial education, induction and continuous professional development of teachers and trainers at all levels, especially to deal with the increased diversity of learners and their specific needs, to tackle early leaving from education and training, to promote work-based learning, supporting the development of basic and advanced digital competences and innovative pedagogies, including ensuring that teacher education addresses teachers' competences to teach in digital environments (point v, p. 19).

A new Council recommendation on *Pathways to School Success,* aiming to ensure better educational outcomes for all learners, regardless of background or situation, by lifting the performance in basic skills and reducing early leaving from education and training, was adopted in 2022 (Council of the European Union, 2022). The Recommendation takes a holistic view of school success, looking at both educational achievement (i.e. competences and skills developed) and attainment (diplomas or certificate obtained after successfully completing a certain level of education), as well as well-being at school. As part of an integrated strategy, the Recommendation calls on EU Member States to work on strengthening data collection and monitoring systems. The availability of systematic data collection and centralised monitoring systems to track early leavers, is of utmost importance to targeted and effective policy-making. These may facilitate information sharing, cooperation between stakeholders and services in charge of contacting them, and better coordination of re-engagement measures for early leavers.

In the EU policy discourse, the need for collecting better data is also prominent in earlier Council Recommendations. The *Council Recommendation of 20 November 2017 on tracking graduates* recognises that, in cooperation with stakeholders, Member States should improve the availability and quality of data on the activities of graduates and, where appropriate, people leaving higher education and vocational education and training without graduating. They should develop graduate tracking systems that may include:

(a) the collection of relevant anonymised administrative statistical data from education, tax, population and social security databases;

(b) the development of longitudinal graduate surveys at education system and, where appropriate, institutional level, in recognition of the importance of qualitative data on people's transition to the labour market, or to further education and training, and their subsequent career paths;

(c)   the possibility for public authorities to link, on an anonymised basis, data from different sources, to build a composite picture of graduate outcomes (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. C 423/3).

In addition, the European Commission's Recommendations of the Expert Group on Graduate Tracking *Towards a European graduate tracking mechanism* (European Commission, 2021) acknowledge the relevance of following up on early leavers from VET and higher education. This states in Annex 4 (European Commission, 2020) that 'Tracking early leavers (dropouts) could contribute to a greater understanding of the specific factors (e.g. reasons for leaving) associated with early leaving from VET and the measures that are effective at tackling this issue' (p. 19).

The monitoring of early leavers also helps collect useful data for evaluation of measures, such as analysing whether participants in different support measures have ultimately completed upper secondary education. Evaluation of VET-related measures to combat ELET is of utmost importance within the context of evidence-based policy-making, although such evaluation is far from being systematic in Europe, as concluded in a pioneer study Cedefop published on early leaving from VET in 2016 (Cedefop, 2016b). According to Cedefop research findings (2016b), very few VET policies and initiatives are supported by evidence of their success in either preventing or counteracting early leaving from VET. Few evaluations analyse the real impact on individual learning pathways and even fewer analyse how and why specific policies had an impact on individuals' learning outcomes. A Cedefop study (2016b) found that important improvements could be made to the scale and focus of evaluations of measures to tackle early leaving, and such evaluations should be encouraged in EU policies and guidelines. The same conclusions were reached in the assessment study of the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving (European Commission, 2019).

Centralised monitoring systems may increase knowledge of the education pathways of early leavers and the protective and risk factors linked to early leaving (Cedefop, 2023b). The policy framework for school success included in the Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success highlights the importance of strengthening high-quality, attractive, and flexible vocational education and training, combining the acquisition of vocational skills with key competences (Council of the European Union, 2022). The Recommendation advocates for preventing early leaving and underachievement through systematic monitoring, and supporting well-being at school, in all forms and types of education including VET, placing a special focus on learners coming from a disadvantaged socio-economic background.

Learners at risk of early leaving often present distress signs long before they leave. If these signs are detected promptly, there are more chances of reengaging young people with relatively simple interventions. Early intervention allows for better results with fewer resources. Each learner is different and so are his or her ways of showing that something is not going well. Absenteeism, low academic attainment, and disruptive behaviour in the classroom are often linked to potential early leaving. Other signs, such as emotional distress, can easily go unnoticed. Practitioners are best placed to design and use early warning systems, to help them recognise distress signals and spot pupils at risk: they are in direct and regular contact with them, and they track absenteeism and academic attainment in their daily work (Cedefop, 2023b).

The crucial role of VET teachers and trainers in identifying early signs of student disengagement to prevent dropout, has been emphasised by the Council conclusions on European teachers and trainers for the future (Council of the European Union, 2020). Promoting inclusive education and training and making it a reality for all VET learners is associated with high-quality VET and young people's effective learning; it largely depends on VET teachers' and trainers' knowledge and competences. This is why, according to Cedefop, being able to identify learners at risk of early leaving and how to support them, as well as creating inclusive learning settings in both school and work-based contexts, should be an integral part of teachers' initial education and training, as well as part of their lifelong learning opportunities and continuing professional development (CPD).

Within this supportive European policy framework and plethora of tools and guidelines developed for policy-makers and VET practitioners to address early leaving from education and training, important progress was made in reducing the early leaving rates and making this strategic objective one of the most successful in Europe. However, it is still a phenomenon that concerns a significant share of young people, the future workforce of our societies: 1 in 10 young people aged 18-24 years old in the EU are early leavers from education and training (9.6%) in 2022, meaning they have not qualified in upper secondary education. This is translated into 3.2 million young people who do not have a secure future (Psifidou, 2023a).

Long-term trends show deterioration of basic skills performance in Europe and worrying signals about learners' and teachers' well-being. The COVID-19 crisis has made these challenges more evident and urgent, but data on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and extended school closures on early leaving rates in Europe remain lacking.

1.2.   The Cedefop/ReferNet survey

Cedefop conducted an EU survey on measuring and monitoring ELVET with special focus on supportive measures provided during school and company closure due to COVID-19. The survey was disseminated to Cedefop's reporting network ReferNet and inputs were collected by EU Member States, Iceland and Norway during 2022.

This survey comes as a follow-up to a previous Cedefop study (Cedefop, 2016a) which focused on ELVET, and highlighted the need for better data collection and systematic use in shaping targeted policy to tackle early leaving.

According to the Eurostat definition, early leavers are individuals aged 18-24 who have completed, at most, a lower secondary education and were not in further education or training during the 4 weeks preceding the labour force survey (LFS). The EU indicator on ELET provides a common measurement of the phenomenon but also hides a great variety of situations.

According to Cedefop 2016 study findings (Cedefop, 2016a), this limits the usefulness of the indicator as basis for decision and policy-making in VET, especially at country level. It does not enable policy-makers to identify in which parts of the education system the problem of early leaving from VET (ELVET) is most prevalent and to develop targeted actions. Some countries address this gap by having different national monitoring systems; others do not yet have such data and only use the EU indicator to measure the rate of early leaving.

An ELVET indicator could facilitate the comparability and comparative analysis of data collected across countries, aiding discussion and exchange among EU countries. It could also complement the data collected under the ELET indicator, by providing a specific focus on VET at EU level. Therefore, the main objective of the Cedefop/ReferNet survey was to take stock of the current situation and to find out if and to what extent data on early leaving from VET (ELVET) are collected at national and/or regional levels. This allows assessment of the feasibility of developing an ELVET indicator based on a common definition.

The questionnaire aimed at collecting new evidence to respond to key research questions:
(a)   whether countries have national definitions and collect specific data on early leaving from VET (ELVET) to inform policy-making, listing, at the same time, the characteristics of such data (when available);
(b)   what national/regional/institutional initiatives and mechanisms are in place (if any) to detect and support learners at risk of dropping out as well as early leavers (those who have already left prematurely);
(c)   what main factors lead to early leaving from initial VET;

(d) if possible effects of COVID-19 on the learning process in initial VET are monitored and what they might be;

(e) if support is offered to Ukrainian refugees for their integration into national VET systems and of what kind.

To meet these research objectives as precisely as possible, the questionnaire was structured around the following seven main sections, in line with the stated research questions.

(a) Definitions and data collection. The first section seeks to collect national definitions of ELVET and to understand whether data collections on ELVET are available in countries. The characteristics of data collected are also explored: specifics of data collection in each country, such as periodicity and disaggregation.

(b) Monitoring early leavers. The second section focuses on processes and mechanisms for monitoring early leavers, such as the existence of centralised systems gathering nominal information on early leavers.

(c) Identification of learners at risk. In the third section, focus is placed on processes and mechanisms for identifying learners at risk, such as early warning systems to detect signs of learners at risk of early leaving, relevant professional development opportunities for VET teachers and trainers, and career guidance opportunities offered to learners.

(d) Factors leading to ELVET. The fourth section seeks to understand whether countries collect information on the factors leading to ELVET as well as to identify the most frequent and important ones.

(e) The effects of COVID-19 on the learning process. The fifth section examines whether participation of learners in online courses was monitored in school-based and work-based settings during school and company closures.

(f) Support in distance learning and teaching. The sixth section explores the measures taken and the type of support offered by countries during lockdown due to COVID-19 to learners in school-based learning, learners in work-based learning, VET teachers and trainers, VET schools and principals, and companies offering work-based learning during lockdown.

(g) Support to Ukrainian refugee students. The seventh section explores the measures taken by countries to support the integration of Ukrainian refugee students into national VET systems in Europe.

In total, 28 responses were received, covering 26 EU Member States (Malta not included), Norway and Iceland. Only limited information became available for Ireland and Croatia. Belgium provided information on its three regions (French region (BE-FR), Flemish region (BE-FL) and German region (BE-DE)) separately, reflecting that the situation differs from one region to another; as a result, the three

regions of Belgium are treated as separate units in the presentation of the figures. The overall analysis and figures are, therefore, based on 30 responses.

The findings of this survey feed into Cedefop's project on Tackling early leaving from VET and aim to support Member States and the European Commission in the implementation of the Council Recommendation on pathways to school success (Council of the European Union, 2022) and the achievement of the ET 2030 related strategic objective.

An overview of the findings is presented comparatively across the participating EU Member States in the following chapters, in line with the seven thematic sections of the survey. Data on early leaving from VET are presented for nine countries. Such data do not allow for any comparison among Member States.

CHAPTER 2.
Definitions and data collection

This chapter explores whether ELVET national definitions and data collections are available. It also discusses how feasible it is to develop a common European definition of ELVET and to achieve data collection and calculation of a comparable ELVET indicator.

2.1. Understanding and monitoring early leaving from VET in Europe: limitations and constraints

Reducing early leaving from education and training is one of the main objectives of the Europe 2030 strategy and one of its headline benchmarks. Despite the policy interest, there is yet to be produced an agreed set of statistics and indicators to reveal the link between VET and early leaving. The former is due mostly to conceptual, methodological, definitional and operational aspects that differ greatly from country to country (Cedefop, 2012).

According to the statistical literature on measuring early leaving from education and training, it is widely accepted that a variety of measurement approaches are feasible depending mostly on data availability as well as on the goal of the measurements. When measuring early leaving from VET, certain aspects ought to be considered: for example, two main kinds of indicators – 'completion' and 'dropout' measurements – can be identified. Completion indicates the achievement of a given educational result, such as completion of a programme or attainment of a certain level of education; dropouts refer to people who abandon education or training before a given educational result is achieved.

Completion measurements are further sub-divided between 'successful completion measurements' and 'completion measurements'. The first category considers only successful graduations and corresponding diplomas: 'completion' includes both successful and simple completions, the latter including those students obtaining a certificate different from, and lower than, the diploma that would be normally obtained after a successful completion. The OECD differentiates between graduation rates and successful completion rates. Graduation rates emphasise graduation patterns among the young population, aiming at measuring prevalence within a particular age group; successful completion rates focus on graduation relative to enrolment patterns, and so are more oriented towards analysing probability.

Dropout rates can also be further classified: 'status dropout measurements', 'cohort dropout measurements' and 'event dropout measurements'. The first category targets the share of the young population in a particular age range that has not attained a given educational level and that is not in education. 'Cohort dropout measurements' consider the cohort of new entrants and measure those who, over time, have dropped from education and training. The 'event dropouts' category measures the relationship between the dropouts from education in a given time interval and the population exposed to the risk of this. These measurements could be shares, rates, ratios or probabilities depending on the type of data and the methods used for calculations.

The indicator 'Early leavers from education and training' is calculated annually based on the Labour Force Survey (LFS), referring to young people (18-24-year-olds) with, at most, a lower secondary education that are not in formal education and non-formal training within the last 4 weeks. According to the former taxonomy, this indicator must be considered as a 'status dropout measurement' since it is intended to reflect dropout from the education and training system as a whole and it considers both the formal and non-formal components of the system. It is calculated based on cross-sectional data from a household sample survey and exploiting individual micro data. Subsequently, it does not exploit longitudinal data and therefore has no reference to cohort or event dropout as defined above.

This EU indicator is useful and used for cross-national comparison of reducing the share of early leavers to below 9% for young people aged 18 to 24. According to Eurostat, the share of ELET has decreased steadily and gradually from 13.8% in 2010 to 9.6% in 2022 (Figure 1).

Figure 1.   **ELET in EU-27, Norway and Iceland by gender (%, 2022)**
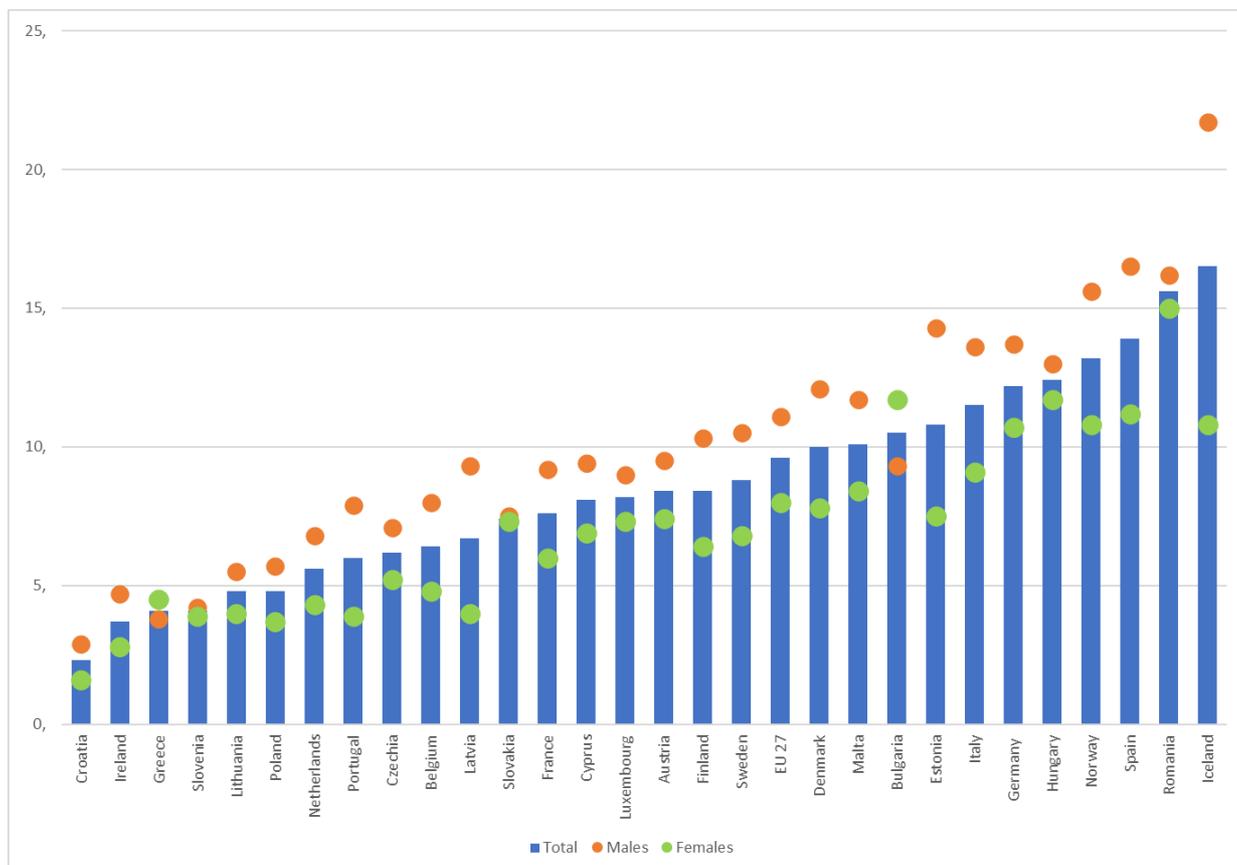
Source: Eurostat, Early leavers from education and training by sex (EDAT_LFSE_14).

Although early leaving rates have been reduced at EU level, one in 10 young people still leaves education with a lower secondary education qualification, at most. The average rate of 9.6% reflects a clear improvement in the EU. However, across EU Member States, the rate of early leavers varies significantly: in 2022, it ranged from 2.3 % in Croatia to 15.6 % in Romania and 16.5% in Iceland. The countries with the lowest rates of early leavers were Croatia, Ireland, Greece, Slovenia, Lithuania and Poland, where the share was below 5 %. In total eight Member States (Romania, Spain, Hungary, Germany, Italy, Estonia, Bulgaria, Malta), Iceland and Norway still display a share higher than 10% in 2022. The current state of play shows that there are considerable differences between the EU Member States, with 16 countries having already met the new ambitious EU-level target for 2030, meaning having reached a share of early leavers from education and training that is already less than 9%.

Differences in ELET rates can also be considerable among regions within the same country, between genders, with male young people generally being more

prone to early leaving from education or training in Europe ([1]), and for specific population groups, such as young people with a migrant or refugee background ([2]). The indicator is still above 10% for young men in 13 countries, while it is above 10% for young women in only seven countries.

Cedefop (Cedefop, 2016a) points out that the EU indicator on ELET enables EU-level comparisons, but it is not sufficient or detailed enough to monitor progress at national and regional levels. It was designed for international comparisons between different education systems across the EU (and beyond) and is recognised as serving this purpose well. It also does not allow detailing early leaving from VET alone, as opposed to general education. In an effort to fill this gap, the new 2024 LFS module will address some of the significant shortcomings that Cedefop identified in its earlier work (Cedefop 2016a and Cedefop, 2012) allowing it to collect information on learning pathways and dropout instances from VET. It will also allow to identify the share of early leavers who drop out from vocational pathways as opposed to general education, so measuring ELVET to a degree. However, it will still not be possible to measure ELVET on an annual or biannual basis, as these variables will only be collected every 8 years. It will also not provide a full picture of the phenomenon as other characteristics of students and apprentice learning pathways, such as programme specialisation, will still be not known.

2.2.   Definitions on early leaving from VET (ELVET)

The Cedefop/ReferNet 2022 survey gives insight into existing national definitions and data collection to assess if achieving a common EU definition and data collection on early leaving from VET is feasible soon.

Since no EU-level definition currently exists, ReferNet members were asked to consider specific criteria against a potential national definition for ELVET. Cedefop's proposed working definition of ELVET is outlined in Box 1.

([1])   Males are more likely to become early leavers from education and training in all Member States, except in Greece and Bulgaria.

([2])   See also Cedefop working paper (2022) drafted by Hippe and Jakubowski on expected early leaving among native and migrant students: evidence from PISA for EU Member States.

Box 1.   **Cedefop's working definition of ELVET**

ELVET
(a)   referring to persons aged 18 to 24;
(b)   the highest level of education or training they have completed is ISCED 2011 level 0, 1 or 2 (ISCED 1997: 0, 1, 2 or 3C short);
(c)   have started vocational training at ISCED level 3 or 4 but did not receive an upper secondary VET qualification;
(d)   they have not received any education or training (i.e. neither formal nor non-formal) in the 4 weeks preceding the survey (currently not engaged in education and training).

Source: Cedefop.

Dropping out of VET may have occurred at an earlier age, for example at 15, but to be considered an early leaver from VET, an individual should belong to the 18-24 age range according to the EU definition for ELET. Cedefop's working definition of ELVET builds on the EU definition of ELET, adding to it information on starting vocational training but not receiving a VET qualification.

ReferNet's answers to this survey section suggest that, overall, there are no national definitions of ELVET in European countries. Only two countries (Latvia and Hungary) explicitly reported that a definition of ELVET is available, although not fully addressing Cedefop's criteria. Often it was reported that other indicators or definitions are used and monitored instead of ELVET. The EU definition of ELET and different dropout measurements were the ones mentioned most often (see Chapter 2.3.).

The most comprehensive definition on ELVET is used in Hungary, where three out of the four criteria (a, b and d) are identical to those ones included in Cedefop's working definition. Regarding criterion I, the Hungarian definition states: 'have started vocational training at ISCED level 3 (VET that does not award a secondary school leaving certificate) but interrupted it (did not complete the required grades, or if completed the required grades, did not acquire a vocational qualification)'. It differs from the working definition provided by Cedefop for the purposes of this mapping exercise in that it only applies to vocational education and training that does not lead to a secondary school leaving certificate.

ReferNet Latvia stated that Latvia has defined ELVET as 'Early school leavers from VET 16-20'. While no further information is provided about the exact specifications of data or methodology used to adopt this definition, it can be clearly seen that the Latvian definition differs from Cedefop's proposal in one of the most basic criteria: the age range.

2.3. National ELVET data collection: overview

Despite the overwhelming lack of official definitions in most countries, 18 countries collect data, following different definitions and understandings, either on dropping out of or early leaving from VET (Austria, three regions of Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden) (Table 1). Data are collected, for instance, through school registries or national databases which register relevant information on learners (for more information on how countries collect data on dropping out of or early leaving from VET (Annex). In five countries there are plans to implement regular (e.g. yearly) data collection in the future, while in Latvia there is a plan for one-time data collection (Table 1). Among countries where currently there is no data collection, there are plans to implement regular data collection in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia . There are no such plans in Cyprus, Lithuania and Luxembourg. Greece, Croatia and Hungary have provided no information on whether data collection is currently taking place or whether there are any plans for the future.

Table 1.   **Data collection on ELVET: existing and future plans**

Data available but not regularly	Czechia; Belgium*-DE
Regular data collection available	Austria; Belgium*-FL, Belgium-FR; Bulgaria Denmark; Estonia; Germany; Finland; France; Ireland; Iceland; Latvia; Luxembourg; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Romania; Sweden
Plans to implement regular data collection in the future****	Spain**; Italy; Portugal; Slovenia; Slovakia
No plans to implement regular data collection in the future	Cyprus; Luxembourg; Lithuania
No information about future data collection plans	Croatia; Hungary***; Greece

*In Belgium, the data were reported for three regions separately: in BE-DE data are not collected regularly (while in BE-FL and BE-FR it is) but extraction is possible anytime it is needed. However, in BE-DE data cannot be disaggregated by employment status. Belgium-FL stated that data are collected both at national and regional level.

**In Spain, no regular data collection on ELVET takes place. Such data have been extracted for the purposes of this survey for the first time. ELVET data collection may become regular in the future subject to the agreement of the Spanish National Institute of Statistics and the Spanish Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

***Data collection is available until 2020.

****These plans are based on the information ReferNet had in 2022, without prejudice to any policy changes that may be implemented by governments in the future.

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

The data collection, where available, can be further described as follows:

(a) in countries where data collection is carried out, it is regular (except for Belgium-DE and Poland, where there is no information on regularity even though they do provide statistics);

(b) in all 16 countries (including all three regions of Belgium), the data can be disaggregated by gender;

(c) in 11 countries the data can be disaggregated by employment status (not in Belgium-DE, Bulgaria, Czechia, Iceland and, no information regarding Germany, Ireland, Poland);

(d) in 12 countries data can be disaggregated by citizenship (not in Czechia, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Romania, Sweden); in Norway, data are provided on those with citizenship but not on those without citizenship;

(e) in 13 countries the data can be combined with a total number of persons aged 18-24 (not in Czechia; no information in Germany, Ireland, Romania, Poland).

Figure 2. **Data characteristics in 16 countries (including the three regions of Belgium) where there is regular data collection (number of countries, 2022)**
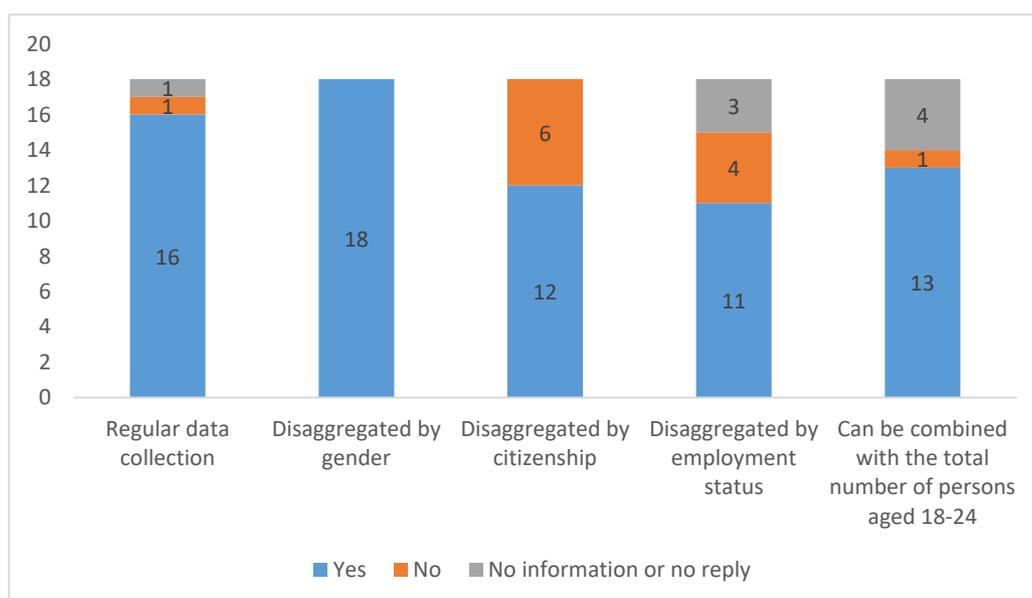
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

In the survey responses, age is one of the most discussed criteria for any available data collection on ELVET or any alternatives provided by the countries. While for ELVET and ELET EU indicators the age bracket is 18-24, a wider or narrower age group is often used nationally. In Austria, a wider age group is monitored for ELET: 15-24 with specific policy interest in those aged 15-17, i.e. the age group that has completed compulsory education, but is still within the

'education until 18' training obligation period. The compulsory education age is also mentioned in other cases: in Greece there is no definition of early leaving from VET and dropouts are of interest only until the age of 15, i.e. until compulsory education is completed. Similarly, in Italy, data collection takes place, for 14- to 18-year-olds, of those enrolled and those who have received an upper secondary VET qualification. There are no data on those who did not receive the qualification. In Luxembourg, the early leaver definition considers the compulsory age of education, which is 16, so the age range of early leavers is 16-24. The Netherlands considers young people aged 12 to 23 when it comes to defining early leavers.

In some cases, age is not registered at all; this is the case for the dropouts or contract dissolution rate in Germany and Lithuania.

There may also be other differences in definitions used for data collection purposes, covering aspects that need to be carefully considered when further exploring data availability. In Austria, the definition of ELET also includes an allowance aspect: those receiving pension are not regarded early leavers from education and training. Belgium-FL registers only those who leave education, while the relevant definition and statistics do not consider participation in training.

While countries report that ELVET-relevant data/information is collected and exists in several countries, it does not always mean that relevant indicators are readily available or even that it is possible to calculate ELVET. For instance, ReferNet Sweden states that data collection on ELVET is taking place, but at the same time it is not possible to single out learners from vocational education. This means that all young people who classify as early leavers from education and training are registered, but those leaving from VET cannot be singled out from the rest of the early leavers.

In several cases, it was stated that there is no regular monitoring of ELVET or VET-specific data analysis conducted regularly, but it is possible to extract required ELVET information. This was the case in Spain where, in 2021, for the first time national LFS data were linked to education participation by INE (Spanish National Institute of Statistics), by linking registers of the LFS sample corresponding to early leavers (18-24 years) with the Census database of participation in education and training. Similarly, at Cedefop's request, the ELVET indicator from Poland was calculated, based on Poland's education data system. ReferNet Austria, Bulgaria, Lithuania and Norway also mentioned that ELVET data can be obtained upon request. However, it is not clear if the data that could be provided would fully comply with Cedefop's working definition or if there are methodological differences.

Countries report many different measurement approaches for early leaving, including from VET. There are completion measurements (where consideration is given to graduations and diplomas) in Slovenia, which monitors completion rate in

VET programmes; and dropout measurements in Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia and Finland drawing from national registries or other sources.

The fact that differences may occur in methodological and definitional nuances was exemplified by the analysis provided by ReferNet Luxembourg: although relevant information is collected, there are crucial differences, which reduce the comparability of the indicator. More specifically, some data on ELVET (18- to 24-year-olds) could be made available through the graduate tracking study on transition from school to working life TEVA (*Transition École – Vie active*). However, such data only register learners in the last school year and not all years of IVET programmes (3 years for CCP (vocational capacity certificate – *certificat de capacité professionnelle*) and DAP (vocational aptitude diploma – *diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle*) programmes and 4/5 years for DT (technician's diploma – *diplôme de technicien*) programmes). Based on the data collected, the following indicator can be calculated for Luxembourg: those aged 18 to 24 or 16 to 24 (compulsory education); the highest level of education or training they have completed is ISCED 2011 level 0, 1; they have started the last year of vocational training at ISCED level 2 (CCP), 3 (DAP), or 4 (DT) but did not receive an upper secondary VET qualification; they have not been registered in the national school system 6 months after the date when they left the last year of the IVET programme.

The annex provides a summary of ReferNet's answers regarding national definitions and data collection.

2.4. Examples of available national ELVET data

Cedefop's reporting network, ReferNet, was asked to report on the availability of data and to provide statistics on ELVET indicators in their country as defined by Cedefop for this reporting exercise. Only a few countries had data on the actual ELVET indicator, following (or close to) the definition provided by Cedefop. In some cases, where no ELVET indicator was available, countries provided statistics on some other ELVET-related indicators, most often on ELET. Since the ELET indicator is readily available from Eurostat for all Member States, this chapter covers only specific examples of nine countries (Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Netherlands, Poland and Spain) which provided VET-related indicators ELVET or other alternatives like dropouts, provided that the indicators focus on VET students only. The countries that provided statistics on ELET without any possibility to single out ELVET-related data are not featured in this chapter.

2.4.1.   Estonia

ELVET is monitored in Estonia but following a different definition from the one proposed by Cedefop for this reporting exercise. Only the first year of study, and only those who have interrupted their studies in VET institutions and have not continued in formal education during a year (from 10 November of year X to 10 November of year X+1), are monitored. This means that those who interrupt their studies at a later stage are not covered. It is not known whether those who do not continue their studies in the first year will continue later.

The share of early leavers from vocational secondary education in the first year and early leavers from VET in general are monitored as performance indicators of VET institutions (Estonian education information system data). Around half of VET learners who interrupt their studies during a year continue in a different programme.

From 2018 to 2021, the total ELVET rate in Estonia was generally stable between 4% and 5%. As a comparison, the ELET rate between 2018 and 2021 was fluctuating, first falling from 12% in 2018 to 8.5% in 2020 and subsequently increasing again to 9.8% in 2021 ([3]).

The data can be broken down by relevant socio-demographic groups. There is only a marginal gender difference in ELVET rate, while citizenship plays a crucial role: those without Estonian citizenship are significantly more likely to end up in ELVET status. In 2021, the ELVET rate was as high as 14% for those without citizenship.

Figure 3.   **ELVET rates by sociodemographic characteristics, 2018-2021 in Estonia**
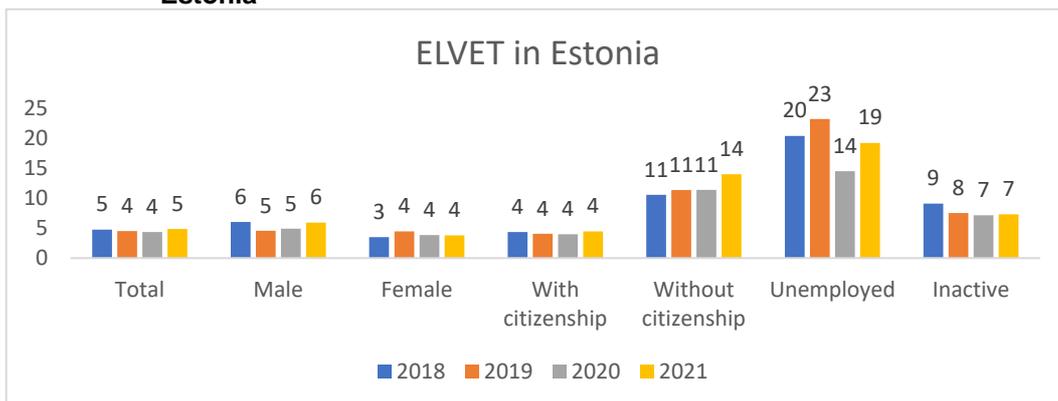
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

([3])   Eurostat (EDAT_LFSE_14)
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_04_10/default/table?lang=en

Data are also available for the labour market status only for those who are unemployed. As the above graph shows, this group has significantly high rates of ELVET.

2.4.2. Finland

Data provided by Finland as ELVET-relevant are quite rich, although they do not provide specific information strictly on ELVET: they rather refer to 'dropouts of VET (age group 18-24)'. In 2018, the ELVET rate in Finland was 2.1% and decreased to 1.1% in 2022. Learners without Finnish citizenship were most disadvantaged (2.7% in 2021). Data also suggest a gender gap disadvantaging men. According to the data, the unemployed or inactive are also more prone to be ELVET compared to the employed.

Figure 4.   **ELVET rates by sociodemographic characteristics, 2018-22 in Finland**
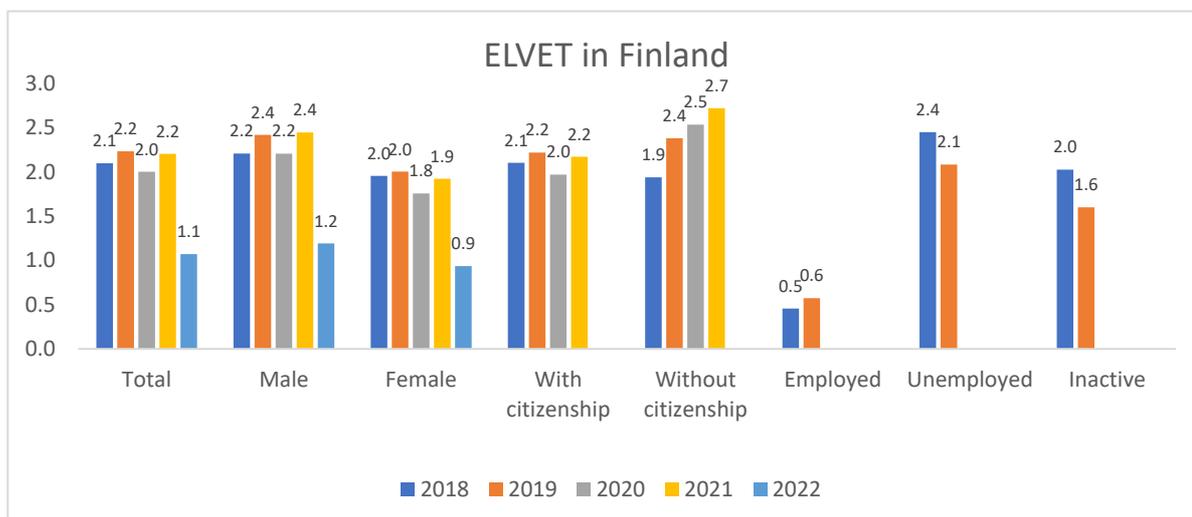
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

2.4.3. Germany

Germany has no statistics on ELVET as defined by Cedefop for this reporting exercise. However, the issue of early leaving from VET is monitored and analysed, using other indicators. There are two indicators available, both linked to ELVET and partly fulfilling the criteria given in Cedefop's working definition:

(a) contract dissolution rate: the main ELVET indicator which refers to learners in the dual apprenticeship system (which covers approximately two thirds of IVET learners);

(b) young people with no formal VET qualification *(nfQ – nicht formal Qualifizierte)*. This also fulfils some of the criteria of Cedefop's definition.

Dissolution rate is measured as an approximate value for the proportion of training contracts that are started but are terminated prematurely. It shows that about a quarter of apprenticeship contracts are terminated prematurely. This is significantly higher for those who do not have German citizenship.

Figure 5.   **Dissolution rate of apprenticeship contracts, 2018-20 in Germany**
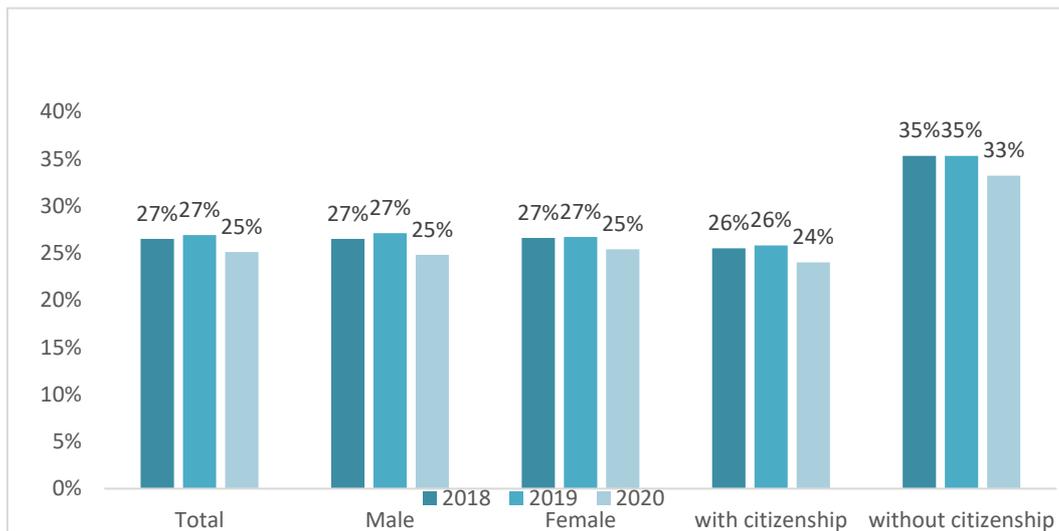
Sources: 1) Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.
2) Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (ed.): Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2022. Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung. (A5.6, pp. 138-147). 2022.
3) Uhly, Alexandra: Ausbildungsverlauf unter Pandemiebedingungen. Vorzeitige Vertragslösungen und Abschlussprüfungen in der dualen Berufsausbildung im Jahr 2020. Deskriptive Analysen auf Basis der Berufsbildungsstatistik. Bonn 2021.

The second indicator shows the share of young people with no formal VET qualifications, who are not currently engaged in education and training but working in low-qualified jobs or are unemployed. In 2020, 15.5% (or 2.33 million) of young people aged 20 to 34 in Germany had no formal VET qualifications at any level and so lacked the prerequisites for qualified participation in working life; for the age group 20-24, the nfQ quote was lower at 13.9% ([4]). While there is a minor gender difference in this indicator, young males being somewhat more disadvantaged, the most disadvantaged group concerns is with no German citizenship. A full third of young people without German citizenship have no formal VET qualification.

([4]) 21.7% of them have no general secondary school leaving certificate at all. 28.9% have obtained the general lower secondary school leaving certificate (EQF Level 2); 23.1% have obtained the general intermediate secondary school leaving certificate (EQF 3) and 26.3% have the general upper secondary school leaving certificate (EQF 4) (BIBB Datenreport 2022, Table A11.2-1, p. 288). However, these general secondary school leaving certificates do not qualify for working life.

Figure 6.   **Young people with no formal VET qualification, 2018-22 in Germany**
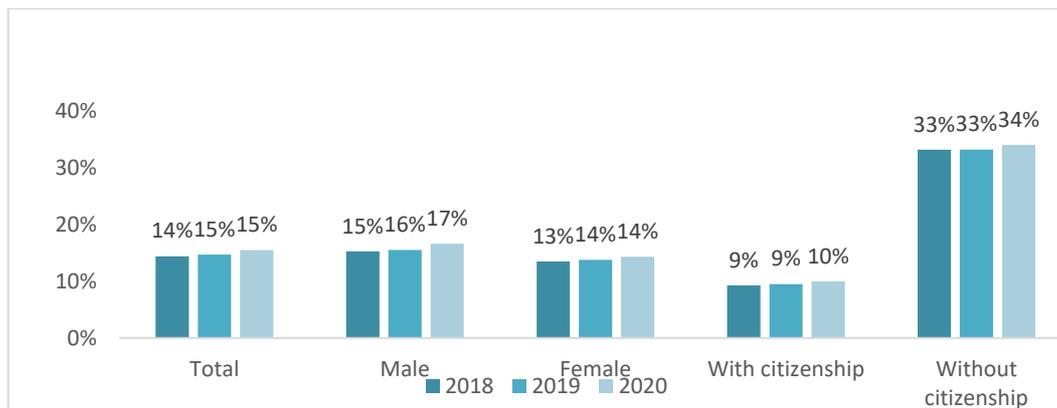
NB: data for 2020 are based on a modified survey methodology so with limited comparability to 2019 and earlier https://www.bibb.de/datenreport/de/index.php

Source: 1) Cedefop based on ReferNet survey 2022.
            2) *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung (Ed.): Datenreport zum Berufsbildungsbericht 2022. Informationen und Analysen zur Entwicklung der beruflichen Bildung. (A11, pp. 287-288). 2022.*

2.4.4.   Hungary

Hungary is one of the few countries where there is a definition of ELVET and where also data on ELVET are provided. This refers to persons aged 18 to 24; with primary education as their highest level of education or training they have completed; have not received any education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey; have started vocational training at ISCED level 3 (VET that does not award a secondary school leaving certificate) but interrupted it (did not complete the required grades or, if completed the required grades, did not acquire a vocational qualification).

Data are available only until 2020. The collection of ELVET data was discontinued after 2020 because it was not included among the mandatory set of Eurostat data; negotiations continue with relevant institutions in Hungary regarding the future collection of ELVET data. In addition to the ELVET data collected by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the National Office for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning examines the dropout data of vocational institutions. This indicator examines dropout rates from the vocational institution; it does not apply to the 18-24 age group, but to all students participating in school-based vocational education (initial VET). The analysis examines how many learners are removed from the register of vocational institutions by comparing the number of enrolled students at the beginning and end of the school year, and between two academic years (excluding graduating students).

Figure 7.   **Rates of ELVET 2018-20 in Hungary**
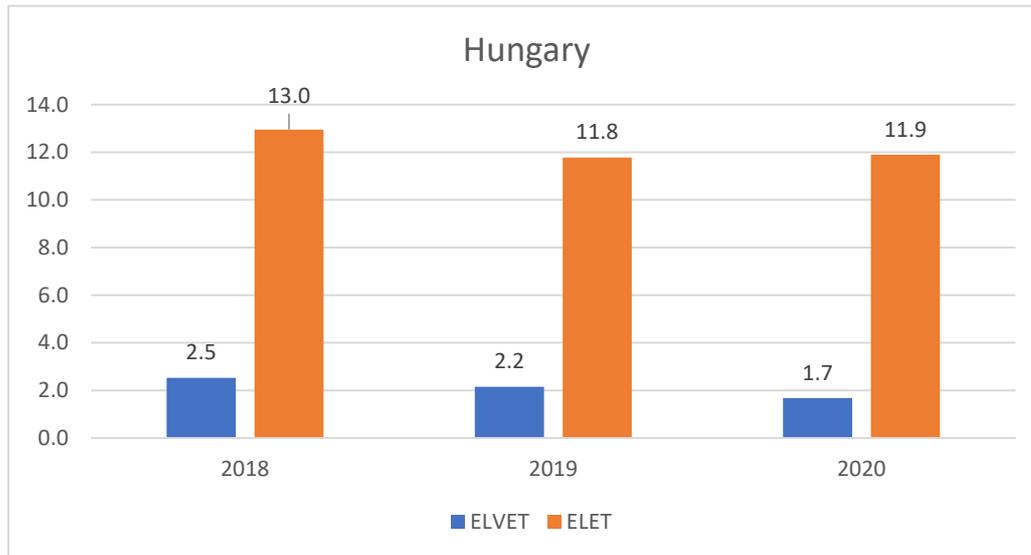
The ELVET rate reflects the overall share of VET in education. In 2018, the ELVET rate was 2.5% and decreased to 1.7% in 2020. The overall ELET rate also decreased in these years from 13% to 11.9%.

2.4.5.   Latvia

Latvia has a definition of ELVET and data collection. The ELVET rate of Latvia in 2019 was 3.6% and fell to 2.8% in 2020 and 2021.

Figure 8.   **Rates of ELVET in comparison to ELET 2019-21 in Latvia**
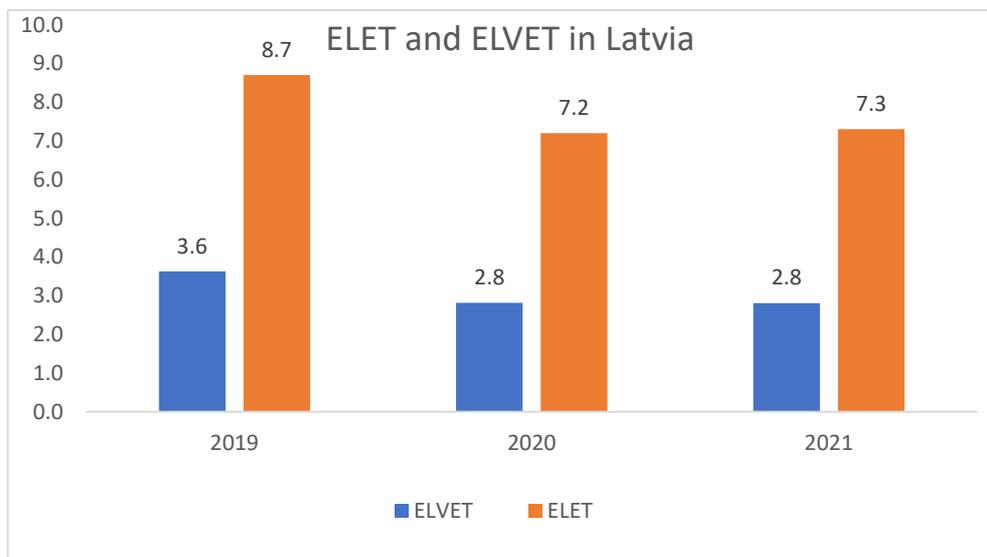
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

2.4.6.   Netherlands

ELVET indicators from the Netherlands are provided by Statistics Netherlands. Data are available for 5 years (2018-22) for the total share of ELVETs, and disaggregated data by gender and migration background, or for 4 years (2018-21) for the disaggregation by employment status. The data show that ELVET has varied between 5% to 7% during the period analysed; they also suggest there are significant gaps according to gender and migration background. Men and those of migrant origin have an early leaving rate almost double that of women and those with national origin, respectively. Early leavers from VET comprise most unemployed people compared to the total early leavers from VET, either with or without benefits. Those who are employed without benefits cover less than a quarter of total early leavers already in employment.

Figure 9.   **ELVET rates by sociodemographic characteristics, 2018-22 in the Netherlands**

ELVET in the Netherlands (comparing ELVET with the age group, by gender and migration background)
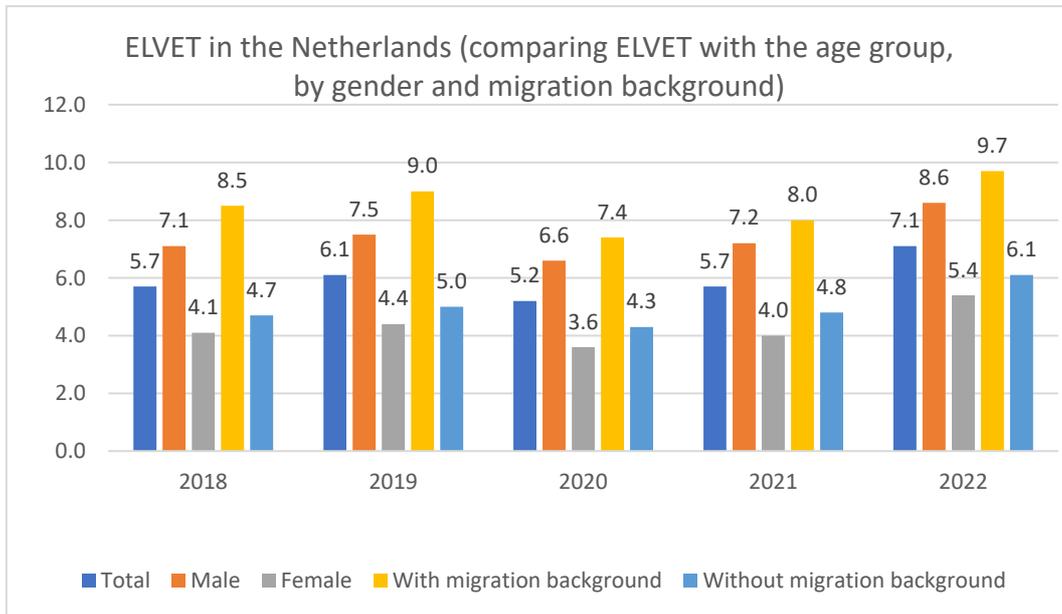
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

Figure 10.   **ELVET rates by employment, 2018-21 in the Netherlands**

Comparing ELVET with all school leavers (by employment)
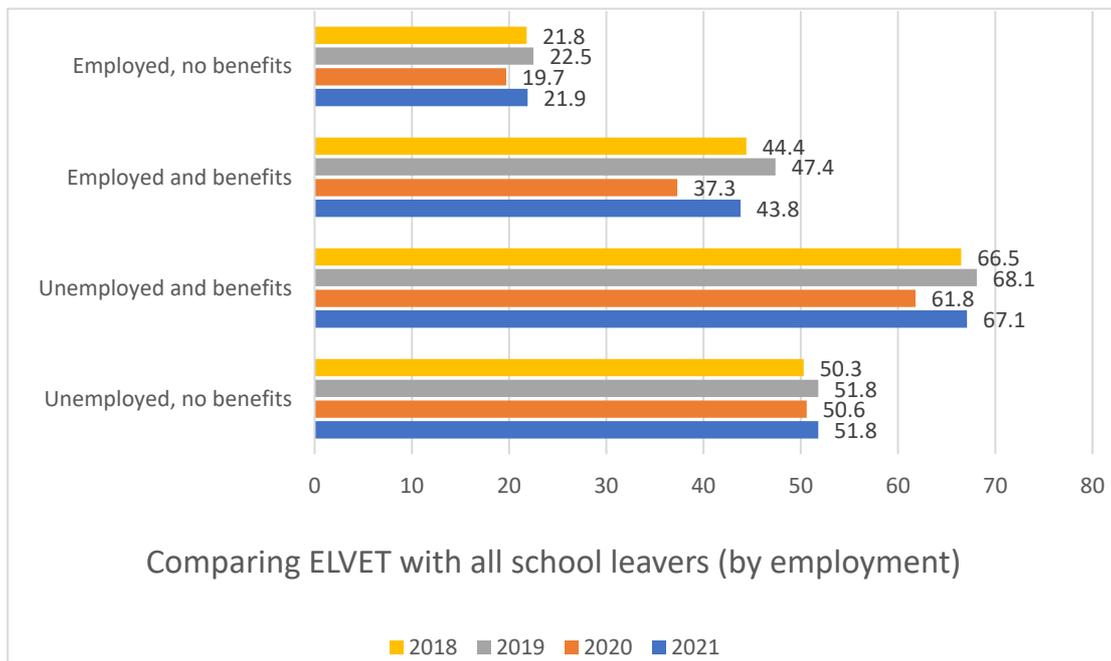
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

2.4.7. Norway

There is no national definition of ELVET, but statistics on ELVET can be produced based on register data using the definition chosen. According to ReferNet Norway, the natural definition would be those who have been enrolled in ISCED 35, are no longer enrolled in ISCED 3, and have not graduated. As those younger than 21 who are not in ISCED 3, have not completed ISCED 3 or have quit ISCED 3 are followed up, it would be natural to use that definition.

Figure 11. **ELVET rates by sociodemographic characteristics, 2018-21 in Norway**
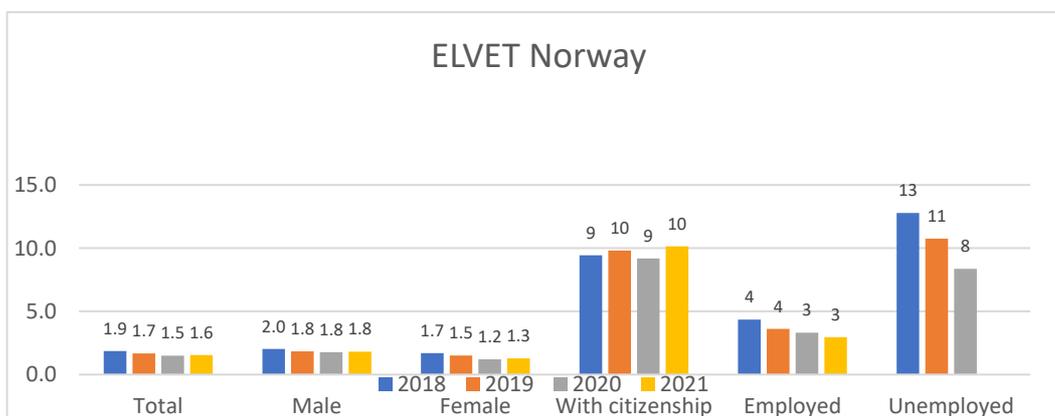
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.
ELVET in Norway stands at the level of 2% with only slight gender differences over the period 2018-2021.
Those with citizenship have particularly high level of ELVET.

2.4.8. Poland

The data for Poland were prepared based on data collected in the education data system. Instead of the total number of young people aged 18-24, the number of early leavers from VET was calculated from the number of vocational school students aged 18-24 who continue, or do not continue, their education. The effectiveness of preventing dropout from the education system in Poland is due to local government units monitoring compliance with compulsory education and the obligation to study up to the age of 18, which may also affect the low percentage of ELVETs in Poland.

Figure 12.   **Rates of ELVET, 2018-21 in Poland**

Poland: % of ELVET out of all IVET students

2018 2019 2020 2021
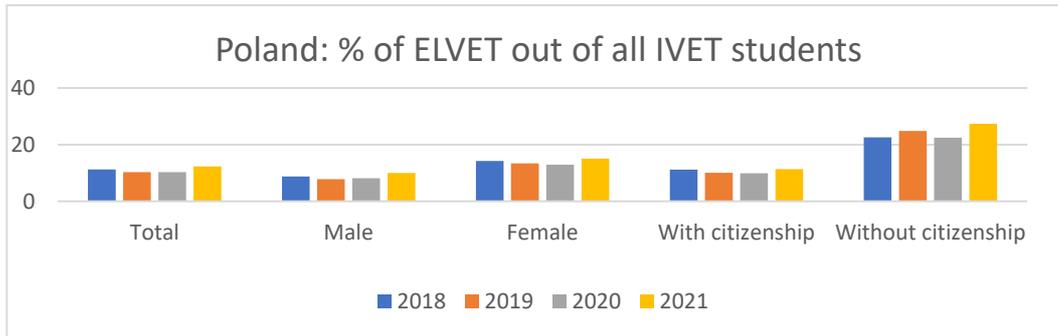
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

The indicators show that the ELVET share of all initial VET (IVET) students was 12% in 2021, with females being more often in ELVET status than men (15% against 10% respectively). Poland's data presented in the above graph also clearly show that citizenship plays a relevant role in ELVET.

2.4.9.   Spain

Data were prepared by INE (Spanish National Institute of Statistics) by linking registers of the LFS sample corresponding to early leavers (18-24 years) with the Census database of participation in education and training from 2014/15 to 2020/21 school years. Participation data were provided by the educational statistics of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. Only the last enrolment of each early leaver is considered. In the oldest school years, enrolment coverage could be more limited.

Figure 13.   **ELVET rates by sociodemographic characteristics, 2021 in Spain**

ELVET in Spain 2021

Total	Male	Female	With citizenship	Without citizenship	Employed	Unemployed	Inactive
2.9	4.0	1.6	2.8	3.0	5.2	6.4	0.7
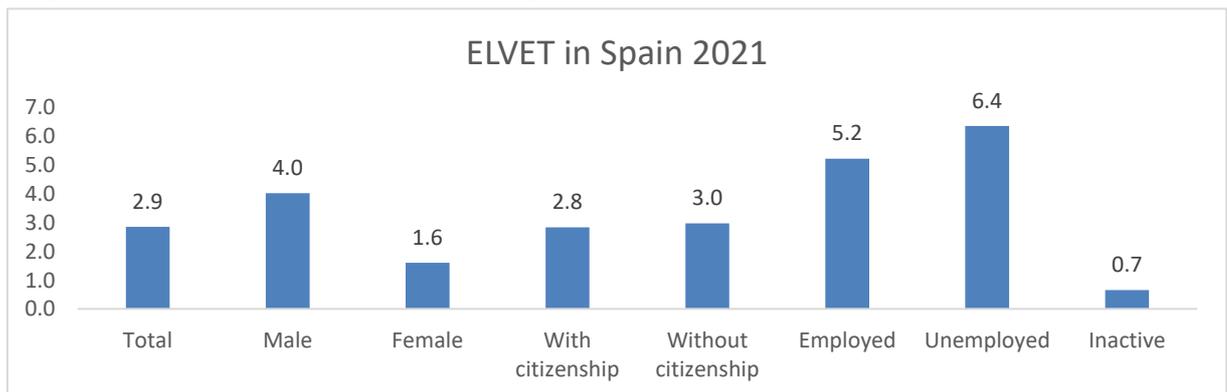
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

The analysis showed that there are 95 000 early leavers from VET (and 446 000 total early leavers). This makes the ELVET rate 2.9% and the general ELET rate 13.3% in 2021.

Data from Spain also allow analysis of ELVET for different socio-demographic groups. There seems to be a significant gender gap, with young men being more disadvantaged than young women at rates of 4% and 1.6% respectively. Having Spanish citizenship does not significantly differentiate the young when it comes to probability of early leaving from VET.

Employment status is the most crucial factor in impacting the ELVET rate. Those who are inactive in the labour market – i.e. without a job and also not searching for one – seldom leaving education but those who are either employed or unemployed but actively searching for a job have quite high chances of ELVET. This indicates that working while studying may not be a feasible option for students, who may fail studies with this dual responsibility. At the same time, those already in gainful employment may see less value in continuing their studies and may be less motivated to graduate.

CHAPTER 3.
Monitoring early leavers

This chapter seeks to understand the current state of play regarding mechanisms and processes for monitoring and supporting early leavers in European countries. More specifically, the survey focused on the following two aspects:

(a) availability of a centralised system that gathers information on early leavers;

(b) availability of local or coordinated services responsible for getting in touch with early leavers and referring them to relevant measures.

A centralised system that gathers nominal information on early leavers and includes mechanisms to ensure that a majority of VET providers flag early leavers in a timely manner is available in more than half of the surveyed countries. A detailed overview is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.   **Monitoring early leavers (a)**

Centralised system gathering nominal information on early leavers		
Exists	**Does not exist**	**No information**
Austria	Belgium-FR	Croatia
Belgium-DE	Bulgaria	
Belgium-FL	Cyprus	
Denmark	Czechia	
Estonia	Germany	
Finland	Greece	
France	Italy	
Hungary	Lithuania	
Iceland	Romania	
Ireland	Slovakia	
Latvia	Slovenia	
Luxembourg	Spain	
Netherlands	Sweden	
Norway		
Poland		
Portugal		

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

In most of the countries local or coordinated services responsible for getting in touch with early leavers and referring them to relevant measures are available either at both national and regional level or at national/regional level only. A detailed overview is presented in Table 3.

Table 3.   **Monitoring early leavers (b)**

Local or coordinated services responsible for getting in touch with early leavers and referring them to relevant measures are available		
Both national and regional level	**National level only**	**Regional level only**
Austria	Latvia	Belgium-DE
Belgium-FL		Belgium-FR
Denmark		Italy
Estonia		Lithuania
Finland		Poland
France		Sweden
Germany		
Luxembourg		
Netherlands		
Norway		
Portugal		
Slovakia		
Slovenia		

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

CHAPTER 4.
Identifying learners at risk

The survey sought to collect information about European countries have processes and mechanisms in place for identifying learners who are still in VET but are at risk of dropping out, and for supporting them. More specifically, the survey focused on:

(a) whether VET institutions have an early warning system in place to detect early signs of learners at risk of early leaving;

(b) whether professional development for identifying distress signals from VET learners is available to VET teachers and trainers in schools;

(c) whether in-company trainers have access to professional development to help them identify distress signals from VET learners in work-based learning;

(d) whether VET institutions have arrangements to make up for lost learning as an alternative to suspension from school in case of habitual absenteeism;

(e) whether VET institutions offer career guidance to learners (including counselling or mentoring);

(f) whether a multidisciplinary support team is available for VET learners at risk in the majority of VET providers: this can include VET school staff and/or other professionals through cooperation with relevant external services, including social workers, health professionals, family support workers, youth workers and outreach care workers.

The results of the survey are summarised in this chapter.

VET institutions have an early warning system in place to detect early signs of learners at risk of early leaving in the three regions of Belgium and 16 more European countries: Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. In six countries (Cyprus, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia) there is no such early warning system and in five (Bulgaria, Ireland, Croatia, Poland, Finland) no relevant information is available or no reply has been provided.

Continuing professional development (CPD) activities for identifying distress signals from VET learners is available for VET teachers and trainers in schools in 20 countries (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Slovakia), while in-company trainers can access such CPD activities for VET learners in work-based learning in only eight countries (Belgium-FR, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Ireland France,

Latvia and Luxembourg). Relevant CPD opportunities for VET teachers and trainers in schools are not available in four countries (Cyprus, Greece, Iceland and Sweden), while in six countries (Bulgaria, Belgium-FL, Croatia, Finland, Romania, Norway) no information is available or no reply has been provided. There are no relevant CPD opportunities for in-company trainers in 11 countries (Austria, Belgium-DE, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Spain and Sweden), while another 11 countries (Bulgaria, Belgium-FL, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) have stated that no information is available or have provided no reply.

VET institutions have arrangements to make up for lost learning as an alternative to suspension from school in case of habitual absenteeism in two regions in Belgium and 13 more European countries (Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Austria Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden). In seven countries (Belgium-DE, Cyprus, Greece, Iceland, Poland, Slovakia, and Spain) no such arrangements are available, while eight countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway and Romania) have provided no reply or no information.

Career guidance provision to learners (including counselling or mentoring) is available in all countries except Spain ([5]); no relevant information is available in Croatia.

A multidisciplinary support team is available for VET learners at risk in the majority of VET providers in 21 countries including Austria, all three regions of Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia and Sweden. There is no such facility in most VET providers in two countries (Cyprus and Spain), while five countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Norway, Romania and Slovakia) have reported that no information is available regarding the existence of such support in the majority of VET providers.

Belgium-FR and five more countries (Czechia, Germany, Estonia, France and Latvia) have all the six specified services available for identifying learners at risk of early leaving (Figure 14).

([5]) Article 96 of the New Organic Law on VET in Spain, approved in March 2022, foresees the provision of the guidance service for all persons studying VET, but currently there is no professional guidance counsellor in most of the specific VET centres.

Figure 14. **Availability of services for identifying learners at risk (number of countries)**
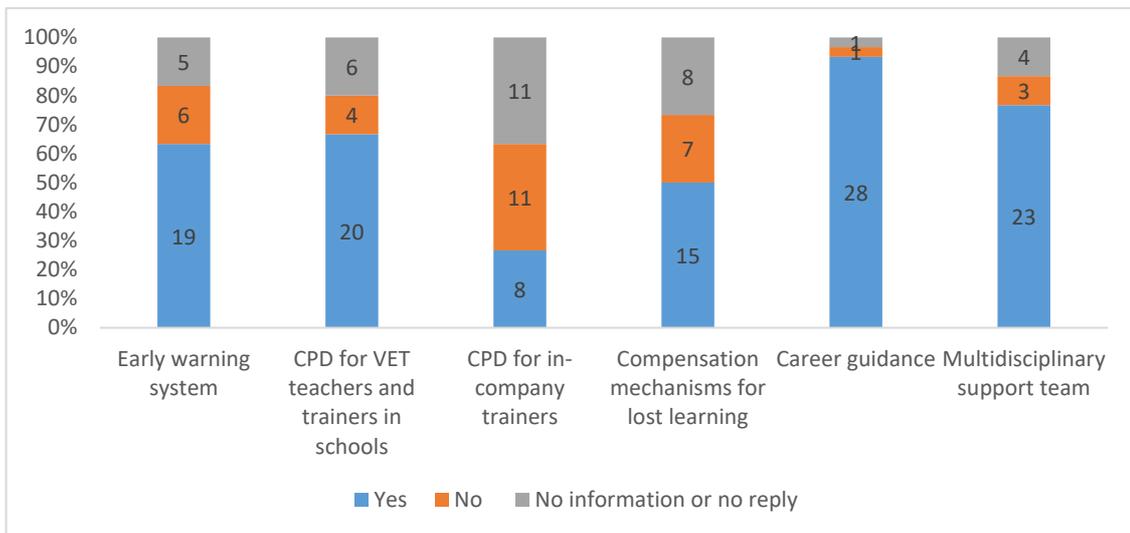
NB: Belgian regions are counted as separate entries for graphic representation purposes.
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

CHAPTER 5.
Factors leading to dropout

The survey sought to understand whether countries collect information on the factors leading to dropout, as well as on the administrative level (both national and regional, national only or regional only) at which such information is collected. Countries were given a list of 14 reasons identified by previous Cedefop research (Cedefop, 2016a) and were asked to report on how often the specific reasons play a role in VET learners dropping out in their national context. The list provided to the countries included the following reasons:

(a) systemic/structural reasons (e.g. low permeability of the education system; early differentiation and track selection);
(b) low overall education achievement and attendance;
(c) insufficient guidance;
(d) negative self-perception and self-esteem;
(e) inappropriate/unattractive programme content and organisation;
(f) inappropriate/unattractive teaching methods;
(g) lack of apprenticeship placements;
(h) lack of family engagement and support;
(i) health and well-being issues;
(j) gender issues (e.g. males tend to drop out more often to seek employment);
(k) migrant or ethnic minority background;
(l) poor employment outcomes for VET graduates due to unattractiveness of the labour market (e.g. VET qualifications lead to low-paid jobs);
(m) unsatisfactory working conditions during their work-based learning;
(n) lack of work readiness (e.g. dysfunctional working relationships in the workplace).

Countries were also given the possibility to specify other frequent reasons not included in the above list for dropping out of VET.

The survey findings are summarised below.

In total, 17 countries reported that they collect data on the factors leading to dropping out of VET. Ten of them mentioned it is taking place at both regional and national level, five (Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania and Netherlands) stated that it is available only at national level, and two, including two regions of Belgium (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE) and Czechia, indicated that it is taking place only at regional level. No information on whether data are systematically collected on the

factors leading to early leaving from VET is available in four countries (Bulgaria, Spain, Croatia and Poland).

A more detailed overview of the findings of the survey is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. **Data collection on factors leading to dropping out of VET (by level of collection)**

	Data collection takes place	No data collection	No information available
Both national and regional	Austria Belgium-FL Denmark Finland Germany Hungary Iceland Italy Portugal Slovakia	Cyprus France Greece Luxembourg Norway Romania Slovenia Sweden	Bulgaria Croatia Poland Spain
Only regional	Belgium-FR Belgium-DE Czechia**		
Only national	Estonia Ireland Lithuania Latvia Netherlands		

* There is no regular, structural data collection on the reasons, but only in the form of selective research assignments, both nationally and regionally.

** Such data are collected in individual research surveys carried out mainly in regions with high dropout rates.

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

According to the survey findings, the top four reasons for dropping out of VET in Europe reported by countries are the following (in descending order).

(a) The factor that was mentioned most often was 'VET learners drop out of VET due to low overall education achievement and attendance'. It was indicated 15 times in total, by seven countries (Belgium-DE, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Italy, Lithuania and Austria) as a factor appearing always or often, and by eight countries (Belgium-FL, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Netherlands, Portugal and Romania) as a factor occurring sometimes.

(b) The second most frequent factor was 'VET learners drop out of VET due to health and wellbeing issues', mentioned by 11 countries (always or often in

Belgium-DE and sometimes in Belgium-FR, as well as Austria, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands).

(c) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to lack of family engagement and support' was the third most frequent factor leading to ELVET, reported by 11 countries (always or often in Czechia, Italy, Austria, and sometimes in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania).

(d) The fourth most frequently mentioned factor leading to ELVET was 'VET learners drop out of VET due to lack of or insufficient guidance to support their choices' reported by 10 countries (sometimes in Austria, Belgium-DE, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the reasons least mentioned for dropping out of VET, but still significant to be considered for policy-making purposes, are the following.

(a) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to systemic/structural reasons (e.g. low permeability of the education system; early differentiation and track selection)'. Seven countries (Belgium-DE, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania and Portugal) reported that this reason occurs 'rarely or never', while four countries (Belgium-FL, Czechia, Germany and Austria) reported that this reason occurs 'sometimes' in their national context.

(b) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to lack of apprenticeship placements or other in-company training' was mentioned by six countries (Belgium-DE, Czechia, Germany, Lithuania, Norway and Portugal) as a reason that 'rarely or never' occurs and by five countries (Austria, Finland, Iceland, Italy and Netherlands) as a reason that occurs 'sometimes' in their national context.

(c) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to poor employment outcomes for VET graduates, i.e. due to unattractiveness of the labour market (e.g. VET qualifications lead to low-paid jobs)' occurs 'rarely or never' in five countries only (Belgium-DE, Belgium-FR, Denmark, Italy, Latvia, Austria) and 'sometimes' in five countries (Finland, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Romania).

(d) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to unsatisfactory working conditions during their work-based learning' is mentioned in five countries (Belgium-DE, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania) as 'rarely or never' and another five (Belgium-FR, Denmark, Italy, Austria, Finland) as 'sometimes'.

(e) 'VET learners drop out of VET due to inappropriate/unattractive teaching methods' is mentioned in only three countries (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Latvia, Lithuania) as occurring 'rarely or never', while in only six countries

(Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Finland) this occurs 'sometimes'.

Figure 15. **Reasons for VET learners dropping out in European countries (number of replies)**
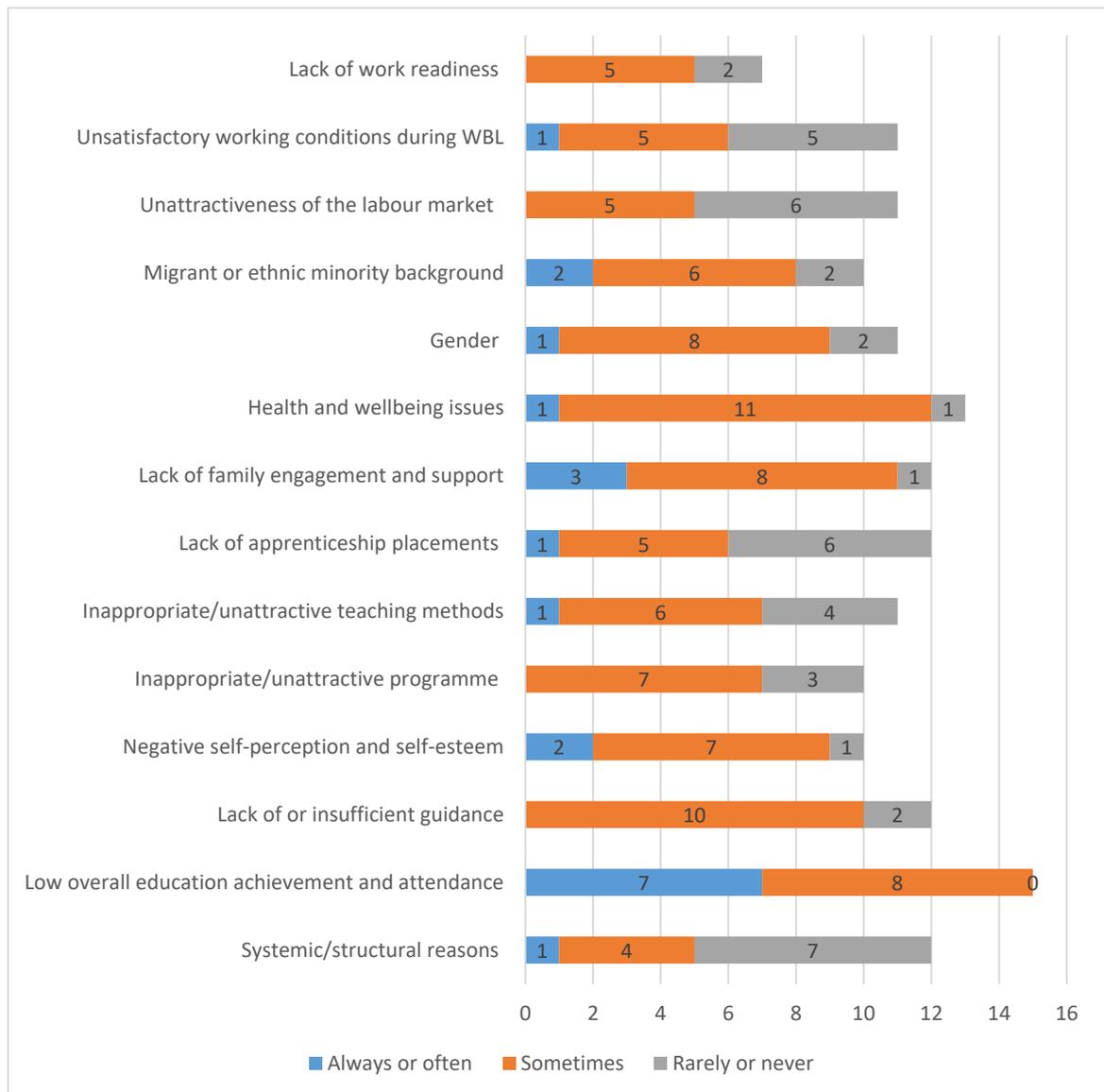
NB: three Belgium regions are counted separately. Countries which replied 'no information' or gave no reply to the question, are not displayed here.
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

Countries provided further insights into the factors leading to dropout in ways that could contribute to the retention of learners in VET. ReferNet Belgium reported that paid WBL/apprenticeships can be a source of learner motivation and commitment to training. A small proportion of learners who broke their WBL training

contract or apprenticeship mentioned financial difficulties. This was highlighted particularly by learners enrolled in adult training; from the age of 18, the financial compensation VET learners receive might not be enough to make a living.

ReferNet Czechia mentioned the following factors as reasons for dropout:
(a) socially disadvantaged families;
(b) learners' low aspirations and lack of interest in education;
(c) appeal of the labour market arising from low unemployment rates and allowing even young, low-skilled people to get a job easily;
(d) failure at the state part of the *Maturita* exam to qualify in upper secondary education.

ReferNet Germany mentioned the following factors influencing the contract dissolution rate during work-based learning in Germany (Uhly, 2022, pp. 143-146):
(a) timing: two thirds of contract terminations occur in the first year of training;
(b) region: the East of Germany is more affected;
(c) size of company: small companies are more affected;
(d) branch: skilled crafts and liberal professions are more affected;
(e) occupation: the service sector, in particular occupations in the hotel and restaurant trade, in the transport sector, in the body care sector (e.g. hairdressers), or cleaning sector, are more affected. Construction trades and food trades (e.g. butchers) are also affected;
(f) occupational segment and training model: the segments where the production-oriented training model prevails are more affected (Rohrbach-Schmidt and Uhly, 2016).

ReferNet Denmark indicated the transition to other youth educational programmes as a factor for dropping out; ReferNet Finland highlighted the lack of interest in vocational studies or in the chosen study fields.

Hungary indicated employment conditions as a factor for dropping out (but not necessarily for wellbeing issues), as well as the unattractive nature of physical work that often VET qualifications lead to (e.g. dirty or oily). Other reasons include changes in preferences about the chosen qualification/profession, lack of interest in the chosen qualification/profession, and change of residence.

The main reason for dropping out of VET mentioned by Lithuania is after finding a job. Although VET institutions offer flexible study schedules to accommodate work, sometimes learners find it difficult to study and work at the same time, lose their motivation to study, or prefer social and financial support from employment services to VET.

In Slovakia, compulsory education lasts for 10 years, so it often coincides with the first year of upper secondary programmes. This traditional feature was aimed to facilitate the transition from lower secondary programmes to a variety of schools offering upper secondary programmes, including VET. It was assumed that enrolment in a new school while still in compulsory education should also result in completion of the full secondary programme. However, this is not the case for learners from marginalised Roma communities (MRC). There are reports from schools on dropping out from VET by young Roma due to insufficient interest in the completion of training; for Roma females this may be due to family reasons (marriage, birth of a child). Specialists of the Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities stressed that the first year of upper secondary education, when compulsory education usually ends, is the most critical: 'An important role is played by the length of compulsory schooling, which ends with the grade when the learner turns 16. Due to inclusion in the zero grade (preparatory classes before entering primary education) or due to repetition of grades, compulsory education often ends before or with the completion of lower secondary education and thus learners do not have a legal obligation to continue their education.' An increasing share of ELET is also visible from the following European survey data on income and living conditions relating to marginalised Roma communities (EU SILC_MRC 2020 survey): 59% of 16-year-old children from MRC are in education, but only 48% of 17-year-olds and 36% of 18-year-olds are in education or acquired at least a certificate of apprenticeship (Markovič and Plachá, 2022).

ReferNet Austria focused on personal aspects and mentioned the following problems as main factors for dropping out:
(a) personal problems with teachers or in-company trainers;
(b) exclusion by classmates, bullying;
(c) low education level of parents and unemployment status of parents;
(d) early parenthood and caring responsibilities.

ReferNet Netherlands mentioned that dropping out of a VET programme is explained also by the fact that learners regret their choice and want to change to another study programme. This early-school leaving is temporary because these dropouts mostly enter another study programme in the next study year.

CHAPTER 6.
Effects of COVID-19 on learning

Following up on previous Cedefop research on the effects that extended school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic may have on dropout rates (Cedefop, 2020), the survey aimed at collecting information on how the learning continuation was impacted by COVID-19 in VET; it also considered whether extended school closures have led to higher rates of ELVET. The survey focused on the following aspects:

(a) how long VET institutions and companies were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic;

(b) whether VET institutions and companies offered online courses within the context of school-based and work-based learning during lockdown;

(c) whether participation in online sessions was monitored.

The relevant results of the survey are presented in this chapter.

In 11 countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia) and Belgium-FL VET institutions were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic for more than 6 months. In eight countries (Spain, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Finland and Sweden), VET institutions were closed for 3 to 6 months, while in five countries (Cyprus, Estonia, France, Luxembourg, Norway) and Belgium-FR, they were closed for 1 to 3 months. VET institutions were closed for less than 1 month only in Belgium-DE.

Information is less readily available on the period during which companies providing work-based learning were closed due to lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic. In six countries (Greece, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Poland, Slovakia), companies were closed for more than 6 months. Greece, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia were the four countries where the lock-down period lasted for more than 6 months both for schools and companies. In Italy and Romania, companies stayed closed for longer than schools (which were closed 3 to 6 months). From the information that is available on companies, in nine countries the school and company closure period was equal, while in five cases companies were closed for a shorter period than schools.

Figure 16. **Closure of VET institutions and companies providing work-based learning due to lockdown caused by COVID-19 pandemic**
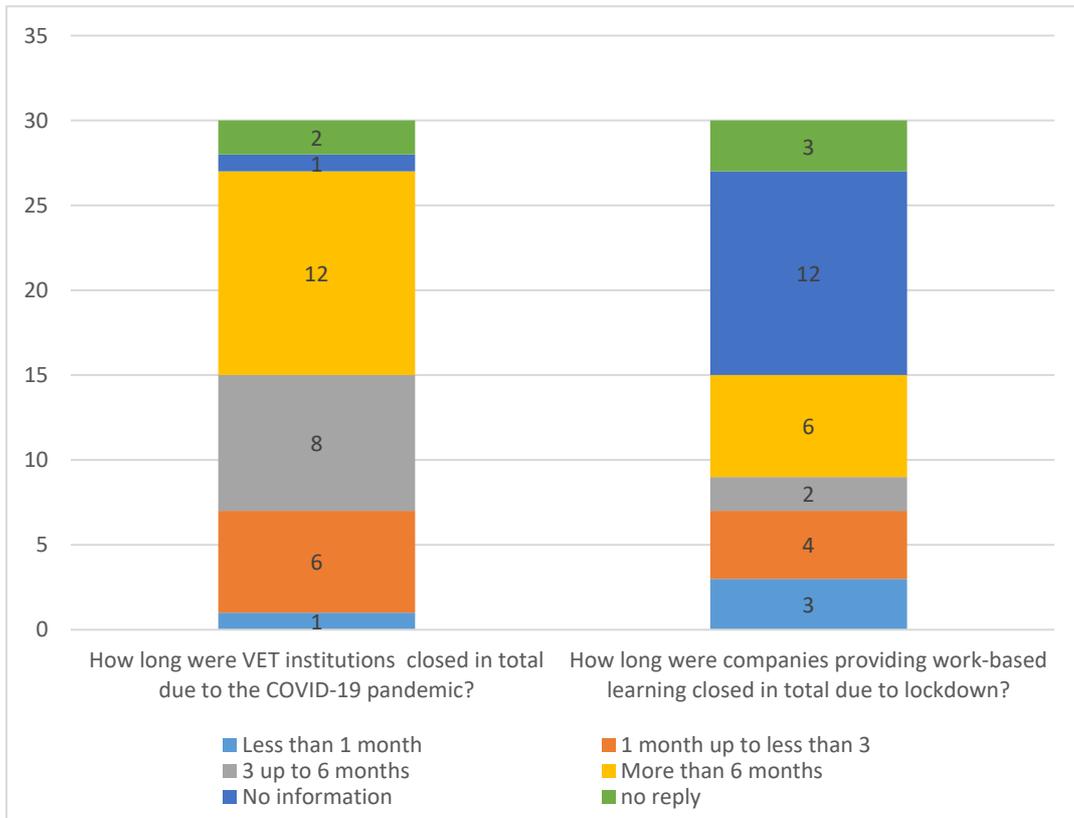
In all countries, VET institutions offered online courses during lockdown. In almost all countries, VET institutions monitored participation of learners in online courses (this did not happen in Belgium-DE, and relevant information is not available in the Belgium-FL and Romania). The monitoring picture changes significantly when it comes to companies: only in eight countries (Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Finland), did companies offering work-based learning monitor the participation of VET learners in online distance learning. In three countries (Denmark, Norway and Slovenia), companies offering work-based learning did not monitor participation of VET learners in online sessions, while in all three regions of Belgium and in 15 more countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, France, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden), no information or no reply was available. Cyprus stated that companies offering work-based learning to VET learners did not provide any online distance learning sessions during lockdown, so Cyprus is not counted in the third column in Figure 17.

Figure 17. **Monitoring the participation of VET learners in online distance learning in school-based and work-based settings**
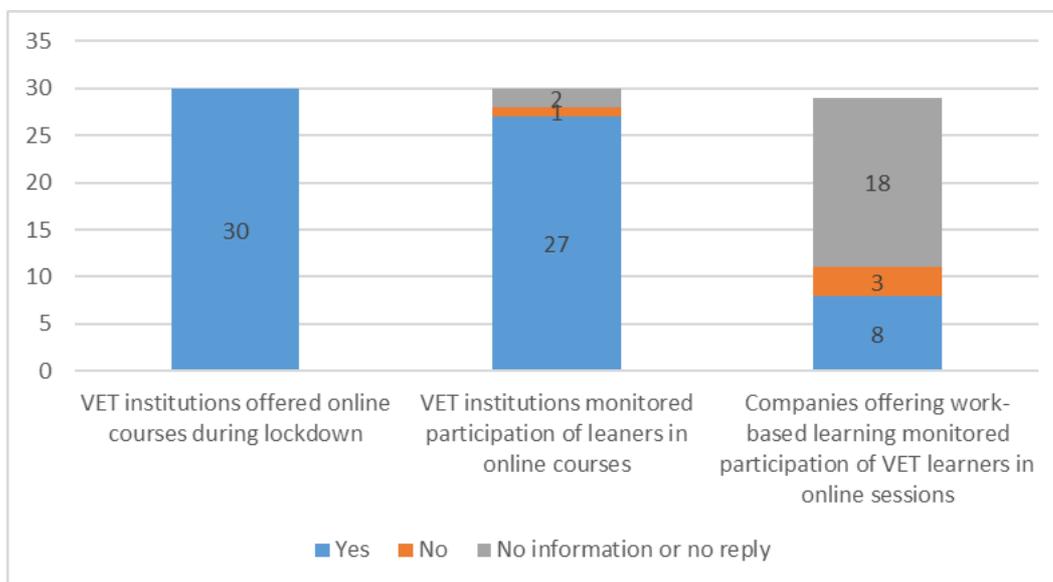
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

In response to the question 'If participation of leaners in distance learning was monitored, what was the percentage of VET learners in your country who disconnected from the learning process (did not attend online courses) during school and company closures?', most countries monitored school-based learning while only eight countries did so for work-based settings. Although participation in online sessions in school settings was widely monitored, only three countries were able to provide data; most replied that no relevant information was available. Only ReferNet Czechia, Slovenia and Finland reported that the percentage of VET learners who disconnected was less than 10%; Italy responded that the respective percentage between 10% and 25%.

As further information was not made available on participation rates during online distance learning through this Cedefop/ReferNet survey, we were not able to measure the effects of school and company closures due to COVID-19 on dropout rates in initial VET.

CHAPTER 7.
Support in distance learning and teaching

This chapter presents an overview of the survey findings on the support in distance learning and teaching provided by countries during lockdown to the following target groups:

(a) learners in school-based learning;
(b) learners in work-based learning;
(c) VET teachers and trainers in schools;
(d) VET schools and principals;
(e) companies offering work-based learning.

7.1. Support to learners in school-based learning during school closures

The survey sought to collect the following information on the support offered to VET learners in school-based learning:

(a) whether VET institutions offered psychological and mental health support;
(b) whether VET institutions offered training on digital skills and competences to facilitate VET learner participation in online learning;
(c) whether VET learners in school-based settings were provided with free internet connection and the necessary equipment to facilitate access to online learning;
(d) whether online learning material in school-based learning was translated for ethnic minorities and refugees;
(e) whether the school-based learning programme was adapted to distance learning (e.g. practical elements of school-based learning taught through simulations).

The survey also invited countries to indicate any other support measures introduced for learners in school-based learning during school closures.

Austria, two Belgian regions (Belgium-FR and Belgium-DE), Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden reported that learners in school-based settings were provided with psychological and mental health support during school closures. Two countries (Spain and Slovenia) did not take such measures, while for one Belgian region

and four more countries (Belgium-FL, Bulgaria, Ireland, Croatia and Slovakia) no information was available or no reply was given to the relevant survey question.

16 countries including two Belgian regions (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE), Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, France, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden offered training on digital skills and competences to VET learners in school- based settings to facilitate their participation in online learning. Five countries (Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway) did not offer relevant training, while in seven countries and one Belgian region (Belgium-FL, Ireland, Croatia, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain), there was no relevant information or no reply was provided to the question.

18 countries including the three regions of Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden reported that they provided free internet connection and necessary equipment to facilitate learner access to online learning in school-based settings. Five countries (Austria, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Slovakia) did not take any such measure, while five others (Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Poland) did not provide any relevant information or reply.

Almost half (14) of the countries reported that the online material in school-based learning settings was not translated for ethnic minorities and refugees (Austria, Bulgaria, all three regions of Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden). Such material was translated in only six countries (Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania). No information or no reply was provided by eight countries (Czechia, Germany, Ireland Croatia, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland).

18 countries including two Belgian regions (Belgium-FL, Belgium-DE), Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden) reported adapting the school-based programme to distance learning, e.g. teaching of practical elements of school-based learning through simulations. One Belgian region and four more countries (Belgium-FR, France, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovenia) indicated that they did not implement this measure, while no information or no reply is available for six countries (Germany, Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Slovakia).

Figure 18. **Support to learners in school-based learning during school closures (number of countries)**
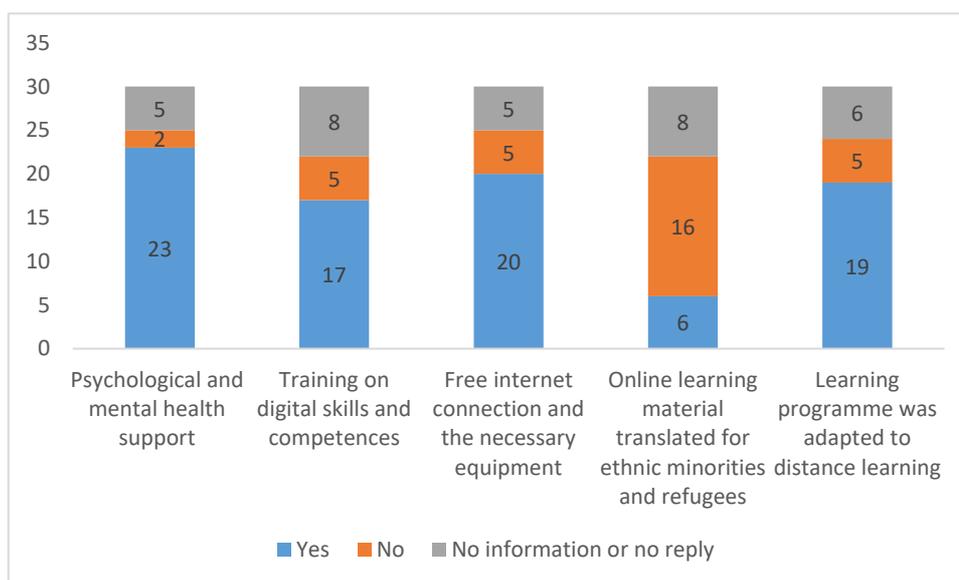
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

In addition to the above measures, countries indicated specific measures they adopted to support learners. For example, in Czechia, in 2021, the National Tutoring Plan was launched by the Ministry of Education to mitigate the negative effects of the interruption of in-person teaching. The activities set out in the National Tutoring Plan were implemented in 94% of schools, with 80% introducing only tutoring and 2% of schools only socialising activities. A total of 247 000 students of basic and upper secondary schools benefited from the tutoring programme, representing 22% of all students in the programme's target group; this included all basic school students, students of lower grades of 8-year *Gymnázia* and students of conservatoires. The funds were targeted at schools with a higher proportion of students in need of support.

In Belgium-FR, tutoring programmes (in person or remote), or financial support for tutoring and increased instruction time (e.g. through summer schools, extended school day, school week or academic year), became available. Slovakia also opted for tutoring. Out-of-class (afternoon) tutoring covered by the National recovery and resilience plan (NRRP) was organised by schools providing VET programmes to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. A detailed manual for schools was issued by the education ministry: 42 schools were supported during the first phase (15 October to 31 December 2021) and 74 during the second (17 January to 17 June 2022). Teachers received a EUR 200 (gross) monthly supplement for the education of at least six learners for at least 40 learner hours. Where there were fewer learners, the sum was EUR 150.

In Cyprus, supportive educational material for all classes and levels was uploaded onto the Ministry's website, as well as on individual school websites. In Bulgaria, a national platform for online resources and materials was also available.

In Luxembourg, a summer school was offered for those learners who needed to catch up, and materials were available online.

In Spain, various flexible arrangements to VET provision were introduced to support programme completion and allow learners and workers to acquire (new) skills and qualifications to find or maintain their jobs: reducing the duration of work placement modules to a minimum; exempting from the work placement module learners from the health, sociocultural and community services branches who worked during the COVID-19 emergency; integrating work placement and project training into one module; and replacing practical training in companies with a proposal for activities associated with the working environment.

In Lithuania, students experiencing social exclusion and those with special needs were provided with educational support.

In Portugal a school support website (*Apoio às Escolas*) was created, to help schools adjust to the new reality to respond effectively to teaching activity at a distance; here schools can find FAQs, a bank of resources, tools and documents, as well as suggestions for methodologies and activities to support distance learning in all education and training pathways, including VET courses. In addition to the guidance roadmaps for schools to make curricular operationalisation more flexible and support the development of online strategies and activities, along with evaluation, the *#EstudoEmCasa* project was also created, which allowed students to watch on television and online, recordings of classes facilitated by teachers. Most subject areas/disciplines were covered, as well as study methods and the promotion of autonomous work. A wide range of digital resources, proposals for weekly lesson plans/projects, and respective evaluation suggestions were made available to schools and students. Publishers, generally responsible for producing textbooks, gave free access to their databases and resources to both students and teachers.

7.2. Supporting work-based learning during company closures

The survey sought to collect information on the support provided to VET learners in work-based learning during company closures due to COVID-19, by asking:

(a) whether companies offering work-based learning provided VET learners with free internet connection and the necessary equipment to facilitate their access to online learning;

(b) whether they offered training on digital skills and competences to facilitate VET learner participation in distance learning;

(c) whether they offered psychological and mental health support;

(d) whether online material and guidelines for learners were translated into different languages spoken by ethnic minorities and refugees;

(e) whether learning programmes were adapted to distance learning (e.g. practical elements taught through simulations or hands-on converted to theoretical courses).

Countries were also asked to indicate any additional support measures taken in their national context for VET learners in work-based learning.

In contrast to school-based learning, much less information was available in countries about work-based learning settings. Only four countries reported that free internet connection and the necessary equipment to facilitate VET learner access to online learning was offered by companies with work-based learning; 12 countries took no measures and no relevant information was available for 14 countries. ReferNet Denmark specified that it is normal and expected for VET students to have access to the internet and necessary equipment. ReferNet Estonia stated that, as WBL is organised in cooperation with VET institutions and companies, it was VET institution responsibility to support online learning. ReferNet Netherlands reported that, during the lockdown, VET schools were responsible for learning progress by students. It may be that some companies offering work-based-learning supported the students that worked and learned in that company, but there was no regulation and companies had no specific COVID-19-related responsibilities. An overview is presented below in Table 5.

Table 5.   **Companies offering work-based learning provided learners with free internet connection and the necessary equipment to facilitate their access to online learning.**

Yes	No	No information
Belgium-DE	Belgium-FL	Austria
Germany	Belgium-FR	Bulgaria
Latvia	Cyprus	Croatia
Lithuania	Denmark	Czechia
	Estonia	Finland
	Greece	France
	Hungary	Ireland
	Iceland	Italy
	Luxembourg	Netherlands
	Slovenia	Norway
	Spain	Poland
	Sweden	Portugal
		Romania
		Slovakia

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

In six countries, companies offering work-based learning provided VET learners with training on digital skills and competences to facilitate their participation in distance learning. Nine countries did not take such measures, while in 15 countries no relevant information was available. Table 6 provides an overview.

Table 6.   **Companies offering work-based learning offered VET learners training on digital skills and competences to facilitate their participation in distance learning.**

Yes	No	No information
Belgium-DE	Belgium-FR	Austria
Germany	Cyprus	Belgium-FL
Hungary	Denmark	Bulgaria
Italy	Estonia	Croatia
Latvia	Iceland	Czechia
Lithuania	Poland	Finland
	Slovenia	France
	Spain	Greece
	Sweden	Ireland
		Luxembourg
		Netherlands
		Norway
		Portugal
		Romania
		Slovakia

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

Only three countries reported that companies offering work-based learning offered psychological and mental health support to VET learners. 10 countries offered no such support, while in 17 countries no relevant information was available. ReferNet Luxembourg reported that there might have been a few companies (mostly those with many employees) offering this kind of mental health assistance, but there was no generalised offer. In Austria, no information is available on the extent to which companies offered psychological and mental health support, even though it can be assumed that such support was provided in some individual cases. Table 7 presents an overview.

Table 7   **Companies with work-based learning offering psychological and mental health support to VET learners.**

Yes	No	No information
Belgium-FR	Cyprus	Austria
Germany	Denmark	Belgium-DE
Lithuania	Estonia	Belgium-FL
	Greece	Bulgaria
	Iceland	Croatia
	Luxembourg	Czechia
	Norway	Finland
	Slovenia	France
	Spain	Hungary
	Sweden	Ireland
		Italy
		Latvia
		Netherlands
		Poland
		Portugal
		Romania
		Slovakia

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

Only one country reported that online material and guidelines for learners in work-based learning were translated into different languages spoken by ethnic minorities and refugees; 16 countries reported that no such measure was taken and no information was available in 13 countries. ReferNet Bulgaria and ReferNet Latvia reported that IVET is provide in the official state language by law.

Table 8 summarises the survey results for this topic.

Table 8. **Online material and guidelines for learners in work-based learning were translated into different languages for ethnic minorities and refugees.**

Yes	No	No information
Luxembourg	Austria Belgium-DE Belgium-FL Belgium-FR Cyprus Denmark Estonia Finland Greece Iceland Ireland Luxembourg Norway Slovenia Spain Sweden	Croatia Czechia France Germany Hungary Ireland Italy Latvia Netherlands Portugal Poland Romania Slovakia

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

12 countries reported that companies offering work-based learning adapted the learning programmes for VET learners to distance learning (e.g. practical elements were taught through simulations or hands-on sessions were converted to theoretical courses). Nine countries reported that no such measure was taken, and another nine countries had no information. ReferNet Iceland reported that some companies referred to school-based learning during lockdown. In Luxembourg, the chamber of commerce offered general introduction online courses for learners in sales (*Connaissances de base de produits* and *Culture de service*). ReferNet Slovakia reported that training companies supported distance learning by ad hoc video tutorials; national authorities also recommended the development of video tutorials to facilitate or shorten later spells of work-based learning. Despite general recognition of the importance of simulations for learning, there is no evidence of substantial implementation of simulations induced by the pandemic. In Austria this measure was taken only in exceptional cases.

The relevant results are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9.   **Learning programmes for learners in work-based learning were adapted to distance learning.**

Yes	No	No information
Belgium-FL	Austria	Bulgaria
Belgium-FR	Belgium-DE	Croatia
Germany	Cyprus	Czechia
Estonia	Denmark	France
Finland	Italy	Ireland
Hungary	Luxembourg	Norway
Greece	Slovenia	Portugal (*)
Iceland	Spain	Romania
Latvia	Sweden	Slovakia
Lithuania		
Netherlands		
Poland		

(*)   In the absence of conditions for carrying out simulated practice, schools in Portugal, within the scope of their autonomy, could decide to carry out other alternative activities at a distance, considering the training standards of the professional course and the student profile at the end of compulsory schooling to avoid compromising, as far as possible, the achievement of the objectives associated with the WBL. The possibility of taking up WBL face-to-face does not invalidate the possibility that it may continue to take place and be concluded at a distance.

Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022

Figure 19.   **Support to learners in work-based learning during company closures due to COVID-19 (number of countries).**
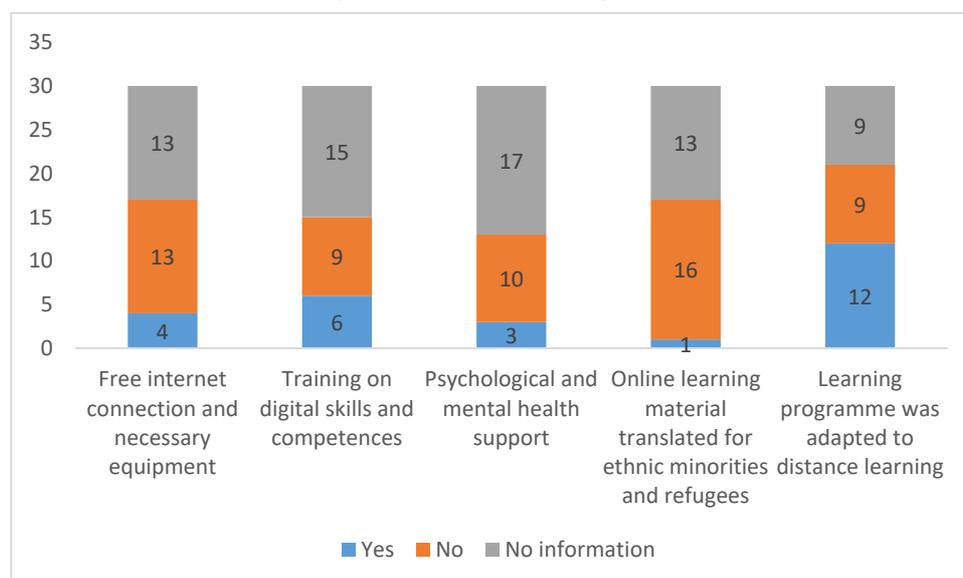
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

In addition to the above measures, nine countries indicated specific actions adopted to support learners. In Belgium-FR, the Walloon Institute for dual training and self-employment in small and medium-sized enterprises IFAPME (*Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises*) professionals intensified regular distance contacts and support for

learners (videoconferencing, telephone) who were in distress. Due to deterioration in the health situation at the end of 2020, the 90-day deadline for joining a company was suspended from 19 November 2020 to 31 March 2021. Individual analyses of a trainee's situation were conducted to decide whether they could continue to look for a company within the IFAPME network or whether they should be reoriented towards another sector or another training operator. For learners who were linked to a company by a WBL contract or an apprenticeship agreement, remote communication was strengthened to inform them of the steps to be taken in the context of the suspension of contracts and agreements, the steps to take for temporary unemployment, and the payment organisations.

In Germany, relatively few training companies used a home office environment for apprentices (20%) or the possibilities of digital learning and working; they preferred having the apprentices on site, since this is usually the best learning environment (Biebeler and Schreiber 2020, pp. 5-6 and pp.16-28). Only about a third of the training companies in the selected occupations used or planned to use mobile devices or telephone and video conferencing systems to enable apprentices to learn at a distance. Digital media (such as apps and learning programmes or research on the internet) were used by slightly more than half of the companies. In industry and commerce, as well as in the public sector, digital end devices and media were used comparatively frequently. However, this survey took place at an early stage of the pandemic (Spring/Summer 2020) and it seems that the use of home office increased among apprentices later on: according to the DGB survey which took place in February 2021, almost 60% of the apprentices interviewed completed at least parts of their training from home. Only 35% of respondents were provided with all the materials and technical equipment they needed to work and learn from home; 20% got no working and learning materials at all (DGB survey 2021, pp. 22-24).

In Spain, a royal decree establishing measures to adapt the VET training period to the pandemic situation was published.

In France, several measures were put in place: 3 additional months to allow young people to find an employer and sign an apprenticeship contract (in 2020, following confinement); possibility of partial activity; extension of refugee residence permits; and adaptation of examinations thanks mainly to continuous monitoring.

In Hungary, classes were organised in larger blocks, the proportion of practical lessons required for obtaining the qualification was reduced, and possibility for consultation was provided.

In Latvia, the curricula (especially timetable) were changed to reach learning results without compromising quality.

ReferNet Norway reported that that specific measures were taken, but these varied depending on the company or the apprenticeship training office and how they chose to follow up.

In Austria, the focus of measures during the pandemic was mainly on maintaining training contracts through measures such as apprenticeship short-time work and financial support for companies, but some measures, at the time of this survey (2022), are being taken to compensate for learning deficits that arose. The so-called 'Digi-Scheck' (digitalisation check) is available to apprentices to catch up on training content missed due to COVID-19, especially on the topics of digitalisation and sustainability. Three course measures of up to EUR 500 each are eligible for funding per apprentice and year (funding volume around EUR 2 million). If the training company agrees, the Digi-Scheck can also be used during working hours. In future, in cooperation with the Austrian Economic Chamber, new teaching videos and learning materials will be developed, especially for apprentices for the digital learning platforms of the Ministry of Education. Preparatory courses for the apprenticeship-leave exam are being expanded. Training network measures to deepen technical knowledge, to impart key personality-building qualifications or for new developments in the field of digitalisation, are being expanded.

In Greece, students were provided with career counselling and psychological support through online classes.

7.3. Support to VET teachers and trainers in schools during lockdown

This part of the survey focused on four selected aspects of support provided to VET teachers and trainers in schools during the COVID-19 lockdown:
(a) whether VET teachers and trainers in school-based settings were provided with access to free equipment and internet connection required to offer distance learning during school closures;
(b) whether they were trained to use digital tools and platforms, and to create digital teaching content;
(c) whether they were well informed on privacy issues, copyright and data protection to implement distance learning;
(d) whether they had access to psychological and mental health support.

Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden (20 countries) reported

that VET teachers and trainers in school-based settings were provided with access to free equipment and internet connection required to offer distance learning during school closures. Four countries and one Belgian region (Belgium-FL, France, Iceland, Slovakia, Spain) said that no such measure was taken, while in four countries (Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Norway) no relevant information or no reply was provided.

In most of the countries (all three Belgian regions and 21 countries as follows, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Cyprus Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden), VET teachers and trainers were offered training on how to use digital tools and platforms, and to create digital teaching content. The only country that did not offer this type of training was Iceland. In five countries (Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands and Norway), no information or no reply was provided.

In approximately half of the countries (including Belgium-FR, Belgium-FL, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and Finland), VET teachers and trainers were well informed on privacy issues, copyright and data protection to implement distance learning. The remaining half of the countries (13 as follows, Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden) indicated that there was no information available or no reply was provided. Only Belgium-DE replied that no such measure was taken.

In less than half countries (including Austria, Belgium-FR, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden) access to psychological and mental health support during the pandemic was provided to VET teachers and trainers. Six countries (including Belgium-FL, Belgium-DE, Greece, Spain, France, Romania and Slovenia) replied that no such measure was taken. 10 countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia) indicated that no information was available or provided no reply.

Figure 20. **Support to VET teachers & trainers in schools during lockdown due to COVID-19 (number of countries).**
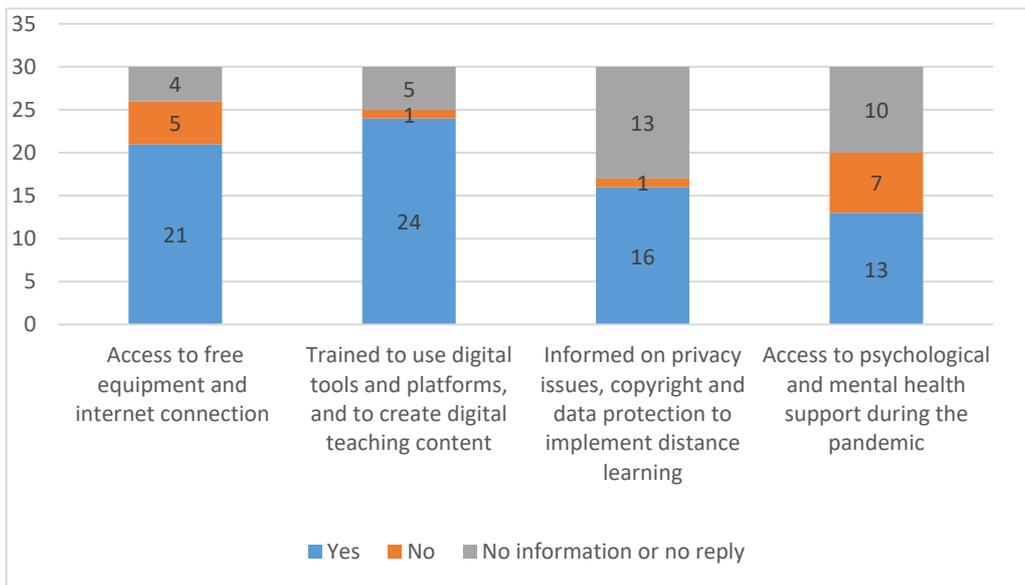
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

7.4.   Support to VET schools and principals during lockdown

This survey section aimed at collecting information about the type of support VET schools and principals were provided with during the COVID-19 lockdown. It was structured around the following four topics:

(a)   whether school principals in VET received guidelines from responsible authorities on how to implement distance learning for learners;

(b)   whether schools received financial support to implement distance learning for learners;

(c)   whether schools were provided with free internet provision and the necessary equipment to implement distance learning for learners;

(d)   whether schools received financial support and the necessary equipment to provide teachers and trainers in schools with training on digital skills and tools.

In most countries (Belgium-FL, Belgium-DE plus 22 countries, as follows, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden), VET school principals received guidelines on how to implement distance learning for learners. Only three countries (Austria, Belgium-BEDR, Iceland) replied that no such measure was taken, while

in three countries (Ireland, Norway, Romania) no information was available or no reply was provided.

In more than half of the countries (all three regions of Belgium and 16 more countries as follows, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg ([6]), Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland) schools received financial support to implement distance learning for learners (produce online material, purchase equipment). This did not happen in seven countries (Austria, Cyprus, France, Hungary, Iceland, Slovakia, Sweden). In four countries (Croatia, Ireland, Norway, Romania) no information was available or no reply was provided.

In 17 countries (including Belgium-FR, Belgium-FL, Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Cyprus Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia) schools were provided with free internet and the necessary equipment to implement distance learning for learners. This did not occur in seven countries (Belgium-DE, Denmark, France, Hungary, Iceland, Spain, Sweden). In six countries (Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway) no relevant information was available or no reply was provided.

In only 12 countries (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE plus ten countries as follows, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal) did schools receive financial support and the necessary equipment to provide teachers and trainers in schools with training on digital skills and tools. This was not the case in nine countries (Austria, Belgium-FL, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). Also, in nine countries (Croatia, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden) no information was available or no reply was provided.

([6]) In Luxembourg, IT equipment is centrally financed and managed by the Central IT management Service of National Education. However, all schools received the necessary material to implement distance learning. Online Material and support to teachers was provided by SCRIPT (the Ministry of Education Pedagogical Innovation Service).

Figure 21   **Support to schools and principals during lockdown due to COVID-19 (number of countries)**
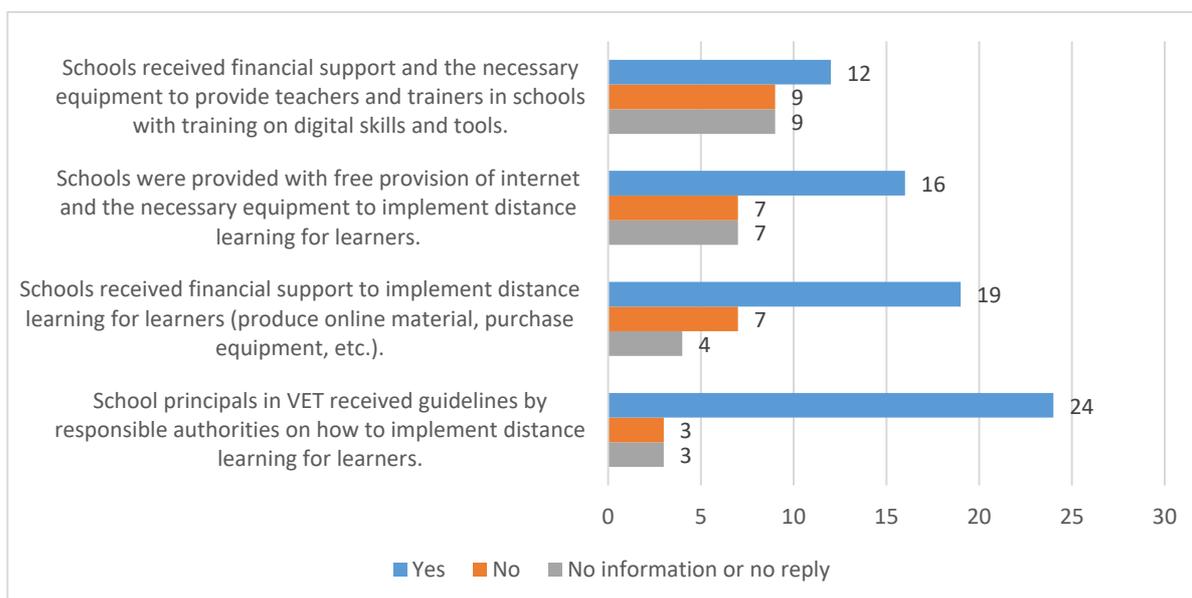
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

7.5.   Support to companies offering work-based learning during lockdown

This section focused on support measures targeted to companies offering work-based learning during lockdown due to COVID-19. It consisted of the following questions:

(a)   whether in-company trainers received guidelines from responsible authorities on how to implement distance learning for learners in work-based learning;

(b)   whether companies received financial support to implement distance learning for learners in work-based learning (produce online material, purchase equipment);

(c)   whether companies received financial support and the necessary equipment to train in-company trainers on digital skills and tools;

(d)   whether learners in paid work-based learning received financial support during company closures.

In only nine countries (Germany, Estonia, Ireland France, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Finland) did in-company trainers received guidelines from responsible authorities on how to implement distance learning for learners in work-based learning. In-company trainers did not receive guidance from responsible authorities in two regions of Belgium (BE-FR and BE-DE) and in eight more countries: Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway,

Sweden. In Belgium-FL and 10 more countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain) there was no information available on this topic or no reply was provided.

Only in Belgium-DE and three more countries (Germany, Latvia and Netherlands) did companies received financial support to implement distance learning for learners in work-based learning (produce online material, purchase equipment). In most countries (Belgium-FR plus 17 more countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden), this measure was not implemented. Eight countries (Belgium-FL, Czechia, Croatia, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia) did not provide any relevant information or reply.

Within the same context of financial support for companies, only three countries (Germany, Latvia, Austria) replied that companies received financial support and necessary equipment to train in-company trainers on digital skills and tools. Two regions of Belgium (BE-FR and BE-DE) and 16 more countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden) replied that no such measure was implemented, while no information or no reply was available in nine countries (Belgium-FL, Czechia, Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia).

In six countries (Belgium-FR, Belgium-DE, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg and Norway) learners in paid work-based learning received financial support during company closures. No such measure was implemented in 11 countries (Austria, Belgium-FL, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia) while another 12 countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden) stated that no relevant information or reply was available.

Figure 22. **Support to companies offering work-based learning during lockdown due to COVID-19 (number of countries)**
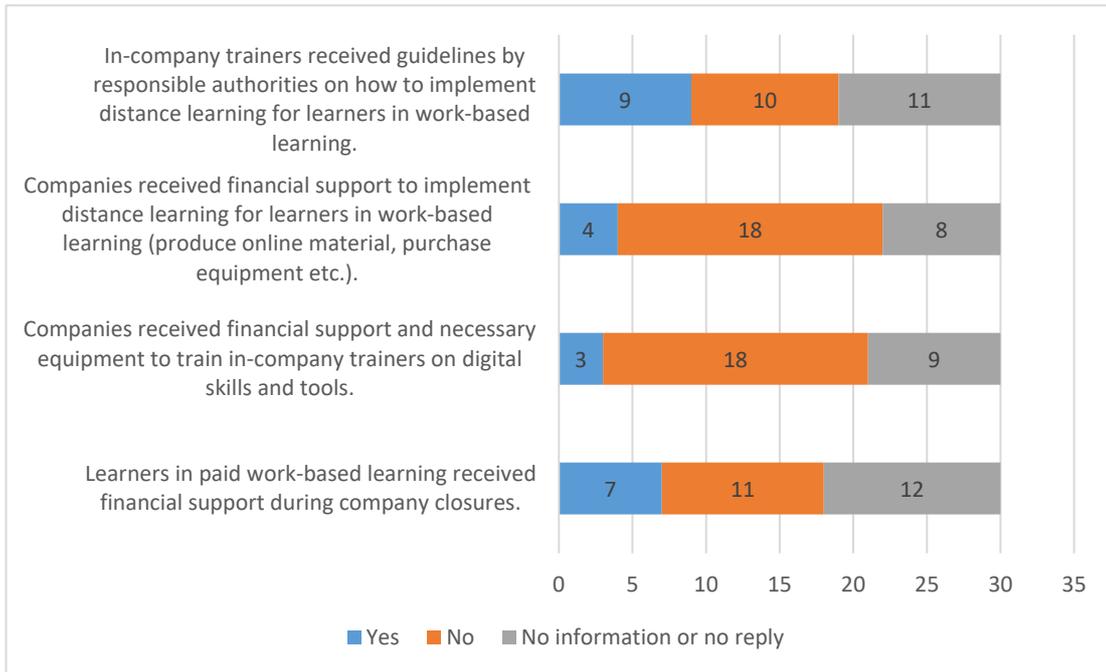
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

CHAPTER 8.
Support to Ukrainian refugee students

This chapter explores the challenges VET policy-makers and providers face in getting Ukrainian refugee students into education and training and providing them with opportunities to socialise, learn in a new sociocultural and linguistic setting and acquire interpersonal and professional skills (Cedefop, 2022). More specifically, it seeks to provide insights on the following topics:

(a) whether VET teachers and trainers were trained to work with refugee students from any country (before the war in Ukraine);

(b) whether VET schools received financial support from responsible authorities to integrate Ukrainian refugee students;

(c) whether VET schools received guidelines and materials from responsible authorities to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugee students;

(d) whether VET schools provided psychological and mental health support to Ukrainian refugee students.

According to the survey results, VET teachers and trainers were trained to work with refugee students from any country (even before the war in Ukraine) in approximately half of the countries (14 countries, Belgium-FL, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Greece, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Sweden). This was not the case in 11 countries (Austria, Belgium-DE, Belgium-FR, Denmark, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), while in five countries (Bulgaria, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Romania) no relevant information or reply was available.

In 15 countries (Austria, Belgium-FR, Belgium-FL, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Finland) VET schools received financial support from responsible authorities to integrate Ukrainian refugee students. This did not happen in 10 countries (Belgium-DE, France, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden). In four countries (Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Romania) no information was available on this topic.

In most of the countries (24 countries, Austria, Belgium-FR, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden.) VET schools received guidelines and materials from responsible authorities to facilitate the integration of Ukrainian refugee students. This measure was not implemented in four countries (Belgium-DE, Iceland,

Netherlands and Poland), while no relevant information was available in Belgium-FL and Ireland.

In most countries (20 countries as follows: Austria, Belgium-FR, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden), schools provided psychological and mental health support to Ukrainian refugee students. In five countries (Belgium-DE, Iceland, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain) schools did not provide such support. In five countries (Belgium-FL, Bulgaria, Denmark, Ireland, Slovakia) there was no information available on this topic.

Figure 23.   **Support to Ukrainian refugee students (number of countries).**
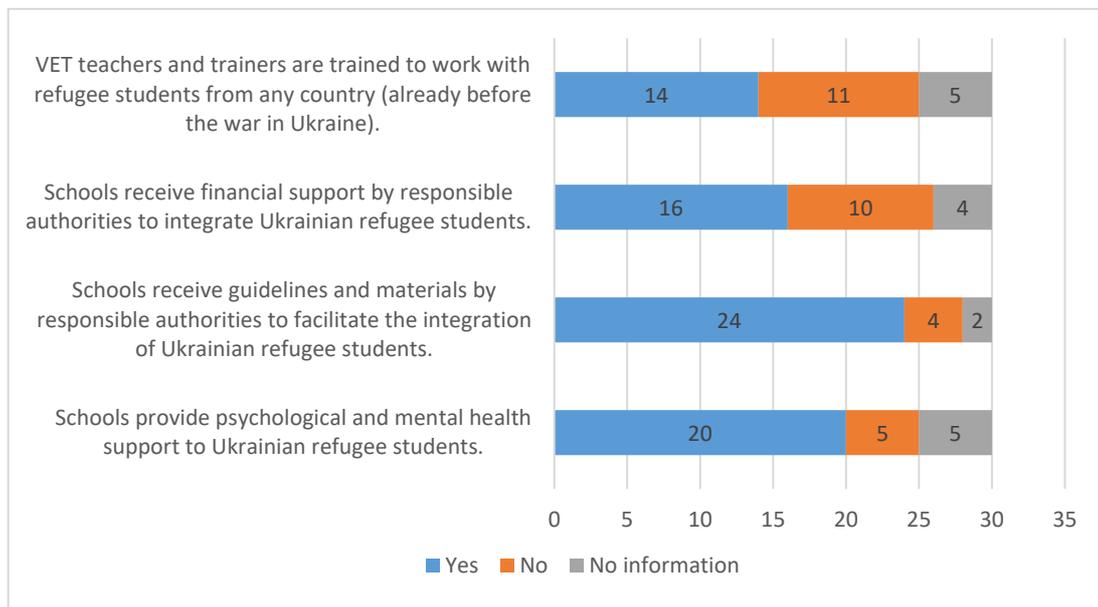
Source: Cedefop based on Cedefop/ReferNet survey 2022.

Other measures not included in this survey were also taken in Member States to support the integration of Ukrainian students. These include several countries hiring Ukrainian teachers in the schools of the host countries; in Spain, Ukrainian adults were hired as language assistants for students and there was special guidance for the validation of previous studies.

CHAPTER 9.
Conclusions

Early leaving from education and training (ELET) exposes young people and adults to reduced socio-economic opportunities and to a high risk of social exclusion. To ensure truly inclusive VET and equal opportunities for all learners at all levels and types of education and training, efforts must continue to bring down the rate of ELET, aiming for more young people to obtain at least an upper secondary education qualification. This requires systematic monitoring and measurement of the rates of early leaving not only at European and national levels but also at regional and local and institutional level within each country; and at all orientations, VET and general education. While this is possible to a certain extent at European level through Eurostat's indicator on ELET, the data collected do not allow us to know the size of the phenomenon by type of education and training; early leaving from VET (ELVET) as defined in this study cannot be calculated. Further, among early leavers, there are some who never started upper secondary education of any kind and this also cannot be shown by the Eurostat indicator.

Cedefop initiated efforts to measure ELVET when a pioneer study on the role of VET in tackling early leaving was published in 2016 (Cedefop 2016a). This study drew important conclusions about national data limitations and presented recommendations for developing an ELVET indicator at EU level.

To update the 2016 study findings, Cedefop carried out a survey of its reporting network ReferNet to collect national data on ELVET, to understand how ELVET is understood/defined at national level, and to study any progress that may have been made at country level to improve national ELVET data and monitoring mechanisms.

While monitoring of statistics and collection of comparable data in terms of definitions and age groups is of major importance for policy monitoring and evidence-based policy-making, the results of the survey show that this does not apply to the current situation in the EU, Iceland and Norway in relation to early leaving from VET. Analysis of the survey results shows that overall national ELVET definitions are not readily available in the countries surveyed and, national data collections are often scarce and incomparable. In many cases, the existing Eurostat ELET data cannot be broken down in the different components and have some other insights/sources to get more in-depth data on VET. Further, country-specific data collections, when available, are based on quite different concepts, making comparative analysis difficult. Multiple concepts are applied in some

countries, even in parallel, and based on different methods of data collection, leading to potential overlapping and duplication of data (double counts, under coverage, etc.). Although some data revision might be possible in some countries, collected data show that numbers on ELVET are available only to a limited extent and basically not comparable across countries. This fact has important follow up implications, as lack of clarity in basic definitions is also reflected in follow-up questions referring to concepts used to build the definitions, providing information that is unclear and of limited comparability. Major issues of comparative ELVET statistics are conceptional and cannot be delivered before these issues are solved.

Using national data sources to achieve an EU-wide comparable ELVET indicator does not seem a feasible option soon. It would require significant efforts and close cooperation between countries to agree and adopt a common ELVET definition, as well as standardisation of national registries for data collection. However, this may be difficult to achieve. Administrative data are collected to respond to country-specific monitoring needs, so achieving a common approach at EU level is challenging.

According to the conclusions of Cedefop's earlier study (Cedefop, 2016a), it would be more feasible to work towards adjusting the existing comparable EU-wide data collection tools. This will become possible to a degree with the 2024 LFS module, which will collect data on an eight-yearly basis by means of the following variables:
(a) DROPEDUC (formal education or training abandoned);
(b) DROPEDUCLEVEL (level of the formal education or training abandoned);
(c) DROPEDUCREAS (main reason for not completing the formal education programme referred to in DROPEDUCLEVEL); and
(d) MEDLEVQUAL (medium educational attainment qualifications).

But even with these variables, the feasibility of relevant statistics and indicators must be investigated thoroughly based on accuracy and reliability. This includes sample sizes, uses of proxies and several other important aspects. This feasibility check will only be possible after the launch of the 2024 LFS module survey and relevant data collection.

Based on the Cedefop/ReferNet survey, several countries have systems or mechanisms in place to monitor early leavers. However, at European level there is room for improvement, as almost half of the countries reported that they have no centralised system gathering nominal information on early leavers; in a third of the countries there is no information available as to whether there are local or coordinated services responsible for getting in touch with early leavers and referring them to relevant measures. Such systems are essential for the design of timely intervention and/or compensation measures. They can significantly improve

national outreach strategies and play a crucial role in the (re)integration of early leavers into education, training and/or the labour market. Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving offers important resources to its users on how to develop systems to identify and monitor early leavers at national, regional or local level.

When focus is shifted to prevention, and more specifically to mechanisms in place for identifying learners who are still in VET but at risk of dropping out, there seems to be increased awareness at European level compared to the monitoring of early leavers. Such early warning systems, relevant professional development opportunities for VET teachers and trainers in school-based learning settings, and multidisciplinary support teams, are available in at least two thirds of the European countries. Cedefop has developed tips and guidelines on how to implement or improve early warning systems to identify those at risk and on how to establish multidisciplinary support teams to offer comprehensive support for those at risk (Psifidou and Kyriakopoulou, 2023).

Challenges in terms of prevention, raised by the survey findings, include lack of relevant professional development opportunities for in-company trainers to support apprentices at risk of dropping out and promote inclusive work-based learning, as well as lack of compensation measures to make up for lost learning as an alternative to suspension from school in case of habitual absenteeism.

Although career guidance arrangements for VET learners are available in almost all countries, 11 of them report lack of or insufficient guidance as one of the main reasons leading to ELVET. Psifidou at al. (2022) inquired into the role of career guidance and counselling in European-level practices and policies supporting learners at risk and early leavers. The study showed that career guidance and counselling cover transversal supporting measures in all three types of ELET policy (prevention, intervention and compensation). They are conceptualised as crucial measures in holistic and comprehensive strategies and practices that may contribute to preventing learners from dropping out, empowering individuals to remain in education and training, and supporting them in reengaging into mainstream education and/or training.

Successful approaches to career guidance and counselling were based on:
(a) comprehensive strategy, in which career guidance and counselling are integrated elements of policies and practices aiming to counteract ELET;
(b) strong multi-stakeholder collaboration so that different services and professionals may address individuals' diverse needs based on their qualifications and training;
(c) mixed approach where generic career guidance and counselling are accompanied by individualised supporting measures to address the diverse needs of individuals effectively;

(d) case management approach that encourages collaboration with other services and professionals, including individuals' families and peers, to cope with complex needs.

The research has also identified information gaps and scarce evidence in relation to three main areas suggesting that further research is required in this field:
(a) the contribution of career guidance and counselling to support apprentices during work-based learning;
(b) the available training and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for professionals in relation to career guidance and counselling services explicitly for tackling ELET;
(c) the extent to which appropriate resources and tools are available and accessible to all the career and guidance professionals involved in supporting early leavers and those at risk of ELET: this remains unknown. Considering that the unprecedented COVID-19 conditions led to online career guidance and counselling services provision, these resources should become more widely known and accessible to all professionals.

Based on these findings, career guidance and counselling are central to preventing early leaving and should become an integrated element of the education and training system, starting as early as in primary education (Psifidou, 2023b),

In addition to insufficient career guidance, countries have reported most often the following three reasons for dropping out of VET, alerting policy-makers and VET practitioners:
(a) VET learners drop out of VET due to low overall education achievement and attendance;
(b) VET learners drop out of VET due to health and well-being issues;
(c) VET learners drop out of VET due to lack of family engagement and support.

Cedefop's VET for youth team working to promote inclusion has developed a set of intervention approaches to empower policy-makers and VET practitioners on these vital aspects: how to design tailored learning pathways; how to promote comprehensive support to tackle complex needs; and ensuring community involvement to tackle ELET. Cedefop will intensify research efforts in this direction, with a view of constant provision of support to VET stakeholders.

However, the Cedefop/ReferNet survey has provided positive feedback on the following aspects, which countries flagged as the least frequent reasons leading to ELVET:
(a) systemic/structural reasons (e.g. low permeability of the education system; early differentiation and track selection);

(b) lack of apprenticeship placements or other in-company training;
(c) poor employment outcomes for VET graduates because of the unattractiveness of the labour market (e.g. VET qualifications lead to low-paid jobs);
(d) unsatisfactory working conditions during their work-based learning;
(e) inappropriate/unattractive teaching methods.

These findings show that structural factors linked to the lack of flexibility/permeability and low quality of VET identified in Cedefop's 2016 study as important factors leading to dropout, have been addressed over the years through the efforts Member States have made to modernise and reform their VET systems.

VET learners seem to be generally satisfied with teaching methods and working conditions during their work-based learning, as these are not frequent reasons for them to abandon their studies. Cedefop's synthesis report on Teachers and trainers in a changing world, based on ReferNet national inputs from 29 national reports from EU+ (EU Member States plus Norway and Iceland), shows that countries invest a lot in preparing and supporting VET teachers to promote inclusive VET throughout their professional careers (Cedefop, 2022). However, persistent challenges, such as lack of impact evaluation on the effectiveness of CPD and insufficient needs analysis, must be tackled (Psifidou, 2023c). Further efforts are needed to promote a culture of inclusion in training in the workplace and preparing trainers to identify and support apprentices at risk (Psifidou, 2023b)

Cedefop leads research and surveys to support the continuing professional development of VET teachers and trainers and promote peer learning through policy learning fora with key EU stakeholders including Member States, European associations of VET providers, and European social partners of education: ETUCE and EFEE. Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving new intervention approaches and good practices, focusing on VET teacher and trainer professional development for inclusive teaching and training, as well as for digital inclusion and wellbeing, aim to guide policy-makers and VET practitioners on how to promote inclusive VET and prevent early leaving.

The 2016 study, carried out by Cedefop and others, to investigate the causes of early leaving from VET, showed that VET learners often drop out due to lack of apprenticeship placements or other in-company training that would allow them to complete their studies and qualify in upper secondary education. The current survey shows that 6 years later (the 2022 survey), this factor is one of the least frequent reported by countries as leading to early leaving from VET. This may be explained by the great efforts made at EU level through the European Alliance for Apprenticeships (EAfA) that has united governments and key stakeholders with the aim of strengthening the quality, supply and overall image of apprenticeships

across Europe, while also promoting the mobility of apprentices with the provision of hundreds of thousands of placements. Since 2020, EAfA calls for new commitments on digital and green apprenticeships, have been focusing on the economic sectors that will be in the front line of the transition to a climate-neutral Europe. The renewed alliance has also addressed important horizontal issues such as gender, social inclusion and the internationalisation of VET.

The results of the Cedefop/ReferNet survey show that VET learners overall have a positive perception of the employment outcomes of VET graduates, with countries reporting that VET learners rarely drop out due to poor employment outcomes and labour market unattractiveness. This finding coincides with that of Cedefop's first opinion survey which shows a generally positive citizen perception of VET in EU Member States. Around 68% of Europeans think that VET at upper secondary level has a positive image, especially in its capacity for providing job opportunities, preparing people for the world of work, and matching employer needs. According to data from the Labour Force Survey, 2022, the employment prospects of young people who have recently graduated in VET are, and remain, favourable, with an employment rate of around 80% in the EU, 13 percentage points above their counterparts with general education qualifications. There are also good long-term employment prospects as employment rates for adults with mid-level VET qualifications are high. EU citizens generally agree that VET plays an important role in society: strengthening their country's economy, reducing unemployment, and tackling social exclusion (Cedefop, 2017). However, according to Cedefop's first opinion survey on initial VET, its general image is positive, but not as positive as that of general education. Not everyone knows what VET is or receives relevant information about it. As a result, there is little participation in VET in some countries and it is considered for those who may not succeed in general/academic education. There are still countries that need to increase the attractiveness of VET to students, parents and teachers and make VET a first option.

The Cedefop/ReferNet survey also focused on the support measures teachers, trainers, school principals and companies providing work-based learning received to overcome the great challenges our global society faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Findings show that support measures taken by countries during extended school closures differ significantly between school-based and work-based learning settings. A wider range of measures, including psychological and mental health support, training on digital skills, provision of free internet connection and adaptation of learning programmes to distance learning, were taken by most countries in school-based learning settings. Countries' readiness to respond to COVID-19 challenges, at least in school-based

learning settings, is indicative of the intensification of the digital transition of VET, which is expected to gain further ground in the future. The least frequent measure concerned the translation of online material for ethnic minorities and refugees, both in VET institutions and companies. It is worth mentioning that information for companies offering work-based learning was limited and measures to monitor participation in distance learning during lockdown and to promote inclusion were scarce.

In supporting Ukrainian refugee VET students, the survey findings suggest that schools in most countries received guidelines from responsible authorities on their integration, providing them also with psychological and mental health support. Approximately half of the countries received financial support from responsible authorities and, in slightly less than half of the countries, VET teachers and trainers were trained to work with refugee students from any country even before the war in Ukraine. As a response to the war, and acknowledging the need in this field, Cedefop has developed an intervention approach on psychosocial support, which can significantly help VET practitioners and policy-makers towards this direction.

In response to these findings, Cedefop proposes four key policy messages.

First, collecting comparable data on early leaving from VET is a need that clearly stems from current policy discourse focus and cannot be neglected. The collection of comparable data ideally requires a European ELVET definition and methodology to be adopted and all countries to collect data based on it. Agreeing on a European ELVET definition and relevant data collection requires collaboration and engagement at different levels and in all countries. As this is not a readily available option, possibilities to measure early leaving from VET arise from the Labour Force Survey 2024 module. This will include new variables (DROPEDUC, DROPEDUCLEVEL, DROPEDUCREAS and MEDLEVQUAL) that will be collected every 8 years, distinguishing between general and vocational education. Although this represents a great development, also reflecting earlier recommendations drawn from Cedefop (Cedefop 2016a; Cedefop, 2012), representativeness, quality and comparability of the statistics and indicators which could be derived are still subject to feasibility checks. Further, the 8-year frequency of this module does not allow systematic annual data collection to measure ELVET. Further research may be required to investigate possible avenues for improving the existing national and European data on ELVET on a more regular basis.

Second, quantitative data need to be complemented with qualitative data. The findings of this study provide clear indications on common factors leading to dropout from VET in several countries, laying a good basis for further discussion and policy learning. However, more detailed information covering a wider range of factors needs to be systematically collected. This comes to strengthen the analysis

and conclusions of Cedefop's study on leaving education early (2016a), where factors leading to ELVET are analysed. According to that study, factors influencing early leaving from VET that need to be regularly collected, either from centralised systems or through systematic surveys, include individual and family background, such as health and well-being and migrant or ethnic minority background; education and training organisation such as student orientation and VET programme content; and labour market factors, such as employment outcomes of VET graduates and overall economic context. As low education achievement is the most frequent factor mentioned by ReferNet countries for dropping out of VET, the academic performance of students should be also monitored. The new 2024 LFS module includes the following main reasons for not completing a formal education programme:

(a) financial reasons (e.g. too high enrolment fees; needed to work to make a living);

(b) preference to work (e.g. did not complete formal education because he/she found work or because he/she wanted to work and to look for work. It corresponds more to personal fulfilment than to monetary aspects);

(c) reasons linked to the education programme (e.g. dissatisfaction with the programme; the programme did not meet interests, was not useful enough or was too difficult);

(d) own illness or disability (e.g. physical or mental health issues, including depression);

(e) care responsibilities (e.g. care for own or partner's children or relatives);

(f) other family reasons (e.g. marriage; follow the partner; do activities of a housewife/-husband);

(g) other personal reasons; (e.g. change of living place; lack of motivation; conflict with teachers or other students; want to focus on hobbies);

(h) other reasons.

Collecting this information as of 2024 through the LFS is an important development; however, as this module will be only collected every 8 years, it is not frequent enough to address policy solutions promptly. Further, this list of factors in the 2024 LFS module is not comprehensive enough to capture the complexity of the phenomenon and the coexistence of various reasons. In addition, important influences mentioned above, such as the academic underachievement, are not considered. It will also not be known if there are reasons specific to school or work-based learning within a VET programme. To allow targeted policy-making, countries should collect either from centralised systems or through systematic surveys at national, regional and local levels all factors that lead a student or

apprentice to drop out of their VET programme and remain out of formal education and training.

Third, in most countries, there is a well-developed culture of inclusion in school-based learning settings but there is more uncertainty when it comes to companies; information and data on work-based learning is scarce. For example, many factors leading to early leaving from work-based learning settings remain unknown. In most of the countries it is not known if companies monitored apprentice participation in distance learning during lockdown; and very few countries reported that during company closures, financial support was offered for supporting the continuing professional development of in-company trainers on digital skills. The findings suggest the need to cultivate an inclusion culture also in the work-based learning settings and employ effective policies to empower companies and trainers and support apprentices at risk of dropping out; lowering the rates of early leaving in companies is of equal priority in comprehensively tackling the phenomenon of early leaving from VET. Cedefop, in its VET toolkit for tackling early leaving, suggests the following conditions for improving inclusiveness in work-based learning and preventing early leaving:

(a) ensure the learner, the company and the training provider share a common understanding of the roles, responsibilities and rights of the learner;

(b) establish quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that employers comply with their training responsibilities;

(c) establish feedback mechanisms to monitor whether the learner is facing difficulties in work-based learning;

(d) establish processes for mediating conflicts between trainees/apprentices and in-company trainer/employer;

(e) promote the development of professional identity; this requires an engaging and motivating process which enables young people to perceive the training as meaningful;

(f) provide professional development opportunities and support to in-company trainers to empower apprentices facing disadvantages, identify distress signals from learners, and give prompt support to apprentices or trainees at risk of dropping out;

(g) avoid discrimination and promote inclusive work-based learning environments;

(h) facilitate flexible arrangements for the learner to combine school-based training and work-based training.

Fourth, despite the sudden change that occurred in teaching and learning processes and methods due to the unexpected crisis caused by COVID-19, governments managed to provide sufficient support to ensure learning continuity

during the pandemic. There has been a clear shift during lockdowns towards online and blended teaching and learning, requiring a high level of digital skills from teachers and trainers, and from learners. The clear policy focus on a just digital and green transition leaves no doubts about the fact that the digital era is here to stay: digitalisation is becoming our new normal in so many sectors and activities. The use of digital tools opens a wide range of learning opportunities, especially for students with special needs and learning difficulties. ICT can facilitate and complement different teaching methods and lead to positive outcomes if it is well-targeted and if certain conditions, such as the provision of digital guidance to VET teachers and practitioners, are met. However, digital education strategies have typically been designed with all learners in mind, without sufficient attention to the specific barriers faced by disadvantaged learners. Further, inclusive education measures have not always included a clear 'digital' dimension. Support from governments during the pandemic should be sustainable and consolidated through provision of quality continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities that are accessible to all VET teachers and trainers, to help them know how to use technologies promoting inclusion and keep pace with the constant digital upskilling required to practice effectively the teaching and training profession in our digital era. Cedefop's VET toolkit for tackling early leaving gives advice and guidance to policy-makers and VET practitioners involved in the design and delivery of e-learning, blended learning and the use of digital devices and methodologies in vocational education and training. This advice is grouped as follows (Psifidou and Treves, 2022):

(a) raise awareness on the potential of digital tools for inclusion;
(b) prioritise overcoming language barriers to access digital technologies and content;
(c) provide teachers with training and guidance to develop their digital skills;
(d) develop a monitoring and evaluation system concerning the use of digital technologies;
(e) change attitude and create a supportive environment;
(f) provide mental health support and psychological assistance in the context of remote learning and teaching;
(g) develop blended learning approaches;
(h) foster intersectoral partnerships;
(i) consider ethical issues associated with the use of information and communication technologies in education and training.

Cedefop's novel European VET teachers survey (EVTS), planned to be launched in the academic year 2025/26, will provide important evidence focused on VET teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) needs and their

motivation to participate in different CPD activities. It will centre on topics concerning the digital and green transition in initial VET (ISCED level 3), as well as methods to promote inclusion. This pioneer survey will allow us to measure the effectiveness of CPD on teachers' preparedness and performance to offer high quality and inclusive VET.

This report aspired to provide better understanding of the phenomenon of early leaving from VET, which is a necessary precondition for designing effective responses to help all individuals become equipped with the appropriate skills to cope with future transformations and to thrive in their life. It is our hope that it will inspire policy-makers to take actions that will allow every single young student to celebrate successful learning and life pathways.

Acronyms

CCP	certificat de capacité professionnelle [vocational capacity certificate]
CPD	continuing professional development
DAP	diplôme d'aptitude professionnelle [vocational aptitude diploma]
DT	diplôme de technicien [technician's diploma]
EAfA	European Alliance for Apprenticeships
ELET	early leaving from education and training
ELVET	early leaving from vocational education and training
EU SILC_MRC	European survey data on income and living conditions relating to marginalised Roma communities
IFAPME	Institut wallon de formation en alternance et des indépendants et petites et moyennes entreprises [Walloon Institute for dual training and self-employment in small and medium-sized enterprises]
INE	Spanish National Institute of Statistics
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	initial vocational education and training
LFS	labour force survey
MRC	marginalised Roma communities
NRRP	Slovak National recovery and resilience plan
TEVA	Transition École - Vie active [transition from school to working life]
VET	vocational education and training

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Annex 1. National definitions and data collection on ELVET

Country	National definition of ELVET	Data collection on ELVET	Alternatives used, mentioned by ReferNet (definitions, indicators)
Austria	No	Yes	The definition and data collection in Austria has so far referred to ELET but covering an extended age group (15-24). The acronym FABA (early leaving from education and training) is used in Austria; it encompasses leaving both from general and from vocational education. While the data collected would in principle allow disaggregation for VET, the overall data collection has so far been carried out exclusively according to ELET. There are data collections specific to VET, for example for individual types of VET schools or for apprenticeship training, but no general data collection for ELVET is available.
Belgium	No	Yes	Early school leaving measures the proportion of young people aged 18-24 who are neither in regular education nor out of the regular education system. There is no national definition of early school leaving specifically for VET or centralised data for IVET due to the institutional organisation of competences in VET (Communities and Regions).
Bulgaria	No	Yes	Students leaving education are the ones who were enrolled at the beginning of the previous school year but left school before its end. Leavers are not considered to be dropouts from the education system, as they can continue their education in the next school year. There is no differentiation between leavers from general education and leavers from VET. Age ranges are not part of the definition.
Cyprus	No	No	The EU definition for ELET is adopted. There are no official data collections on early leavers from public VET schools in Cyprus.
Czechia	No	Yes	Early leavers from education are defined in line with the Eurostat definition. Early leavers from schools/school dropouts: there is no precise definition of this term. It refers to students who drop out of basic or upper secondary schools or who fail to successfully pass *Maturita* or final examinations. The relevant data can be obtained from the School Registers, administered by the Ministry of Education. However, they are not adjusted for students leaving but continuing their education at another school, they are not processed on a regular basis, and they are not publicly available. Statistics presented within the context of this study are not specifically on ELVET.
Germany	No	Yes	There is no definition or data on ELVET; however, two VET-related indicators are monitored and statistics provided: 1) contract dissolution rate, referring to learners in the dual apprenticeship system (which covers approximately two thirds of IVET learners). It is measured as an approximate value for the proportion of training contracts that are started but are terminated prematurely; 2) unskilled young people, i.e. with no formal VET qualification.

Country	National definition of ELVET	Data collection on ELVET	Alternatives used, mentioned by ReferNet (definitions, indicators)
Denmark	No	No	Statistics Denmark counts the number of leavers from VET after 1 year. There is no age criterion involved. No specific ELVET data are collected.
Estonia	No	Yes	Share of early leavers from vocational secondary education in the first year and early leavers from VET in general are being monitored as performance indicators of VET institutions (Estonian Education Information System data). ELVET during the first year of study is monitored, as it is most frequent. At national level only those who have interrupted their studies and have not continued in formal education during a year (from 10 November of year X to 10 November of year X+1) are considered ELVETs. Around half of VET learners who interrupt their studies continue in a different programme during the same year.
Greece	No	No	No data collection on ELVET. Data available in Greece are collected for NEETs (15 to 29 age group not in education, employment, and training). Data provided in this report concern NEETs and are described according to Hellenic National Statistical Authority.
Spain	No	No	For this survey, Cedefop's working definition was used, referring to early leavers whose last enrolment corresponds to a VET programme. A first exercise was conducted for 2021 linking national LFS data and education participation data (Census database).
Finland	No	Yes	Data on dropouts of VET (age group 18-24) are collected.
France	No	Yes	More general definition used: an early leaver is a 16- to 30-year-old (29 years of age) who has been enrolled in a training cycle and who has left the initial training system without having obtained a level of qualification corresponding to the general baccalaureate or a vocational diploma classified at level EQF 3 (CAP) or 4 (Bac) of the qualification framework (art. D313-59 of the Education Code). Therefore, this definition encompasses all three existing pathways at the secondary education level: general, technological and vocational.
Croatia	No	No information	

Country	National definition of ELVET	Data collection on ELVET	Alternatives used, mentioned by ReferNet (definitions, indicators)
Hungary	Yes	No	ELVET refers to persons aged 18 to 24; with primary education as their highest level of education or training they have completed; have not received any education or training in the 4 weeks preceding the survey; have started vocational training at ISCED level 3 (VET that does not award a secondary school leaving certificate) but interrupted it (did not complete the required grades, or if completed the required grades, did not acquire a vocational qualification). This definition refers to the data collection available until 2020. In addition to the above ELVET data collected by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, the National Office for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Learning monitors the dropout data of vocational institutions. This indicator applies to all students participating in school-based vocational education (initial VET). The analysis examines how many learners are removed from the register of vocational institutions by comparing the number of students enrolled at the beginning and end of the school year and between two academic years (excluding graduating students). The data can be disaggregated by training types/sectors/professions/grades, etc. based on SZIR (Information System for VET) data.
Iceland	No	Yes	A student who has begun studies but leaves without concluding his/her studies (after 4 years from commencing upper secondary studies or aged 20). Statistics are also collected after 6 and 7 years.
Italy	No	No	Not obtaining a 3-year qualification in the Italian VET (IeFP) system by the age of eighteen, according to the principle of right-duty to education and training of Legislative Decree no. 76/2005. The age range is 14-18.
Lithuania	No	No	Data collection includes: 1) Eurostat definition and LFS; 2) school statistics on dropouts; 3) National Education Agency also manages the student register (*Mokinių registras*) which includes schools' data about learners who stopped learning and reasons for that. Upon special request this information can be extracted; 4) indicators on VET learners who have stopped learning.
Luxembourg	No	No	There is a national definition of early leavers but not specifically from VET. This definition takes account of the end of compulsory education in Luxembourg which is at 16 years old.
Latvia	Yes	Yes (data collection on ELVET is planned as a one-time project)	This is the definition: 'Early school leavers from VET (16-20)'.

Country	National definition of ELVET	Data collection on ELVET	Alternatives used, mentioned by ReferNet (definitions, indicators)
Netherlands	No	Yes	An early school leaver is a young person who is between 12 and 23 years old; is not enrolled in a school; does not have a basic qualification (a diploma at minimum Intermediate Vocational Education, level 2 (ISCED 3; MBO - *Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs*) level 2, integrated lower and upper secondary general education programmes (HAVO – *hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*) or pre-university education (integrated lower and upper secondary programmes, VWO – *voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs*); and does not come from practical education or secondary special education.
Norway	No	Yes	There is no general national definition of ELVET, but statistics on ELVET may be produced based on register data using the definition chosen. A definition could refer those who have been enrolled in ISCED 35, are no longer enrolled in ISCED 3, and have not graduated. As young people under 21 who are not in ISCED 3, have not completed ISCED 3 or have quit ISCED 3 are followed up, it would be natural to use that definition, but a different one may also be used. Statistics on students who have quit ISCED 3 for GEN and VET breakdown is available.
Poland	No	Yes	The data provided for this survey were prepared from data collected in the Education Data System, based on the Act of 15 April 2011 on the Education Data System.
Portugal	No	No	In Portugal, the official indicator on ELET (early learning from education and training) is obtained through Labour force survey, conducted by the Portuguese National Statistics Institute, the INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística*). Based on the longitudinal database of students, calculations of 'early leaving from VET' could be attempted.
Romania	No	Yes	Data collection refers to the population aged 18-24 who did not complete their (lower and/or upper) secondary education and is not included in any education or training programme, from the total population aged 18-24. There is regular data collection on Early School Leaving, but not specifically on students who were enrolled in initial VET and left at a certain moment. The Institute for Statistics collects these data based on a sample included in AMIGO (Household labour force survey). AMIGO is a method for statistical research of the labour market. The survey allows the measurement of the active population - employed and unemployed - and the inactive population, highlighting the structure of the labour force according to various characteristics (sex, age, level of education and training, occupation, professional status, branch of activity, etc.) under conditions of international comparability. The data collected on ESL are not yet collected, considering such a high degree of specificity of the former education or training programme that the early school leavers left at a certain moment. This is why we cannot distinguish early school leavers based on their last form of education path.

Country	National definition of ELVET	Data collection on ELVET	Alternatives used, mentioned by ReferNet (definitions, indicators)
Sweden	No	Yes (but not possible to single out VET)	Criteria: 1. persons aged up to 20. 2. The highest level of education or training they have completed is ISCED 2011 level 0, 1 or 2 in upper secondary school. 3. Not currently in upper secondary school. 4. Have not acquired an upper secondary school degree. Statistics on early leavers from the Swedish National Agency for Education are not limited to those who have started a vocational education pathway. Based the data collected it is not possible to single out those from vocational education.
Slovenia	No	No	ELET indicator is used. There is no explicit definition of ELVET at national level. In VET, Slovenia defined quality indicator 4 'Completion rate in VET programmes', which is twofold: it includes a percentage of students who successfully and in expected time completed a VET programme and a success rate at the final examination of VET programme. Both datasets can be disaggregated by gender, region, NQF, type of VET programme and sector. Precise methodology for the collection of ELVET data is yet to be developed.

Country	National definition of ELVET	Data collection on ELVET	Alternatives used, mentioned by ReferNet (definitions, indicators)
Slovakia	No	No	There is no definition of early leaving from VET. While the EU definition of early leaving from education and training (ELET) and respective Eurostat statistics is widely used, no specific attention is paid to early leaving from VET. No data on ELVET are collected. There are only data offering some related information. There are LFS data on ELET but it is not possible to identify ELVET from an available dataset of the Statistical Office. The Statistical Office collects data every 8 years via the EU Labour Force Survey ad hoc module 'Young people on the labour market. It would be possible to identify ELVET data from the data that will be collected via this module in 2024 if Eurostat introduces the respective change in guidelines. Adult Education Survey data collected in 2022 and to be published in 2023 focus on adults over 25 years of age but without distinguishing between VET and general education level attained. Trexima/education ministry/labour ministry: graduate tracking methodology developed under the surveillance of the labour ministry makes it possible to create a trajectory of all graduates also including spells of unemployment, retraining or other labour market tools support. In the education ministry were to offer a list of VET school dropouts, it would be possible to apply the same methodology and create very solid proxy data for ELVET. It would, however, not be possible to guarantee full coverage for the 18-24 age cohort. SCSTI/RIS: these data focus on learners in formal education and, therefore, only aggregated data on dropouts from schools including VET schools, collected as of 15 September, were available from the 2022/23 school year. No individualised data on dropouts have been available from SCSTI/RIS until now.

Stemming the tide: tackling early leaving from vocational education and training in times of crises

Synthesis report of
Cedefop/ReferNet survey

This synthesis report, based on a survey carried out during 2022 with Cedefop's reporting network ReferNet, aims to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of early leaving from vocational education and training (ELVET). Such understanding is a necessary precondition for designing effective responses to help individuals to equip themselves with the appropriate skills to cope with future transformations and to thrive in life.

The report has special focus on the mechanisms and support measures countries employ to measure and monitor the phenomenon at national and regional levels; the main factors leading to ELVET as reported by EU Member States, Norway and Iceland; and the support measures teachers, trainers, school principals and companies providing work-based learning received to overcome the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war of aggression against Ukraine. These challenges included carrying out distance learning during school and company closures and supporting Ukrainian refugees to integrate into the national VET systems of the host countries.

It is anticipated that findings will inspire policy-makers to take actions to allow every single young student to celebrate successful learning and life pathways.