



European Training Foundation

Developments in vocational education policy in 2015–17 in Turkey

Progress towards the medium-term deliverables of the Riga Conclusions



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This report presents vocational education and training (VET) policy developments in Turkey in the period 2015–17. It covers all five Europe-wide priority areas or medium-term deliverables (MTDs) agreed at Riga in June 2015. The report has been drafted within the terms of the mandate given to the European Training Foundation (ETF) by the Riga Conclusions to monitor and analyse progress of the EU candidate countries towards the MTDs. This document is based on the annual monitoring reports of Turkey submitted to the ETF.

Aspects of vocational education and training context and policies in 2015

In 1987 Turkey applied to join what was then the European Economic Community, and in 1997 it was declared eligible to join the EU. Accession negotiations started in 2005.

At the beginning of the reporting period, the population of Turkey was 77 695 000 (see Annex for key country statistics), with one in five people (21.3% in 2015) aged between 15 and 24 years. The country had a service-oriented economy, with this sector accounting for two-thirds of gross domestic product (GDP) and industry accounting for 26%. The structure of employment did not follow the same pattern: the majority of the country's workforce was employed in services (52%, 2015) while the agriculture sector employed nearly 21% of the workforce but only generated 8.5% of GDP. In the period 2013–15 the economy grew at an annual rate of 3% and above, making it one of the fastest growing in the region.

The labour market was characterised by low participation and gender divides. The employment rate in Turkey had continued to grow in recent years and stood at 53.9% in 2015. It remained, however, significantly below the EU average (70.1%, 2015). This is partly due to the low share of women in employment (32.5%, 2015). Despite recent improvements, this remained the lowest among all candidate countries and twice as low as the EU average (64.3%, 2015). Unemployment in Turkey had been on an upward trajectory since 2012 and reached 10.3% in 2015. However, it was still the lowest of all candidate countries and remained close to the EU average (9.4%, 2015). Likewise, Turkey had the lowest youth unemployment rate of all the candidate countries (18.4%, 2015). The rate had increased since 2013 but still scored below the EU average (20.3%). The country's workforce was low skilled, with nearly four-fifths of the economically active population having a low or medium level of educational attainment, although the proportion of the population aged 30 to 34 that had completed tertiary education had been increasing.

Turkey's performance with regard to the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) benchmarks had been mixed. The country progressed in terms of two education-related headlines – increasing tertiary attainment (from 19.5% in 2013 to 23.6% in 2015) and reducing the rate of early leavers from education and training (from 37.5% in 2013 to 36.4% in 2015). The rate of early leavers remained high, however, despite the fact that since the 2012/13 school year compulsory education in Turkey had been increased from 8 to 12 years. The rate of young people aged 15 to 24 years who were not in employment, education or training (NEETs) had been following a downward trend since 2013 but was still well above the EU average (23.9% in 2015 compared to 12% in the EU 28) and was characterised by a prominent overrepresentation of women. The high rates of early leavers and NEETs accounted for Turkey having one of the lowest educational attainment rates for young adults (25 to 34-year-olds) with more than one in two of them not attaining upper secondary education. The figures for adult participation in lifelong learning had improved slightly in recent years, albeit from a relatively low level (from 4.5% in 2013 to 5.5% in 2015 compared to the EU average of 10.7%). The PISA 2015 results provided updated data for another ET 2020 target – underachievement in reading,

mathematics and science. Between 40% and 51% of 15-year-olds in the country were functionally illiterate in each tested subject area, far worse than the EU averages and worse than Turkey's PISA 2012 results, thus raising concerns regarding the quality of education in the country.

Initial VET (IVET) in Turkey was provided in two major forms: through vocational school programmes comprising internships and through apprenticeship schemes implemented by vocational training centres in cooperation with enterprises. Approximately 49% of the country's upper secondary students were enrolled in VET in 2015 (2 788 000 students in total)¹. Opportunities for continuing education and training for all (workers, jobseekers, disadvantaged persons) were jointly designed and implemented with stakeholders. Formal and non-formal ISCED 3 provision for adults took place in a wide range of institutions, including public education centres, vocational education centres, tourism education centres, open education institutions, vocational and technical education centres. Vocational schools provided courses funded by the Turkish Employment Agency (ISKUR) as part of the active labour market policies that were implemented. The private sector was also involved based on protocols signed with the Ministry of National Education.

National and international studies and surveys confirmed that acquiring the right skills remained a challenge in Turkey. This was strongly corroborated by evidence provided by employers' organisations. Findings from the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC, 2015) indicated that, compared with adults in the other participating OECD countries, adults in Turkey showed below-average proficiency in all three domains assessed (literacy, numeracy and problem solving in technology-rich environments). The low average proficiency in literacy and numeracy reflected the relatively low levels of educational attainment among adults in Turkey: nearly 80% of 55 to 65-year-olds and over 50% of 25 to 34-year-olds had not completed upper secondary education. Ongoing education and training reforms in the country focused on enhancing the educational attainment and skills of the workforce to contribute to the goal of moving towards a value-added, innovation- and technology-based economy.

The Turkish Ministry of National Education's Strategic Plan (2015–2019), the Vocational and Technical Education Strategy Paper and Action Plan (2014–2018), the National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014–2018) and the National Employment Strategy of Turkey (2014–2023) comprise the framework within which Turkey has committed to implement and monitor the Riga MTDs. Turkey agreed to work on the implementation and monitoring of all five MTDs, while prioritising and conducting – with the support of the ETF – an ex-ante assessment of two of them: (1) promote work-based learning in all its forms (MTD1); and (2) introduce systematic approaches and opportunities for initial and continuing professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors in both school and work-based settings (MTD5).

1. MTD 1 – Work-based learning with special focus on apprenticeships

1.1 Baseline situation in 2015

The legal basis for work-based learning in Turkey was provided by the Vocational Training Act and the Law on Apprenticeships (1977). Practical training was compulsory in all formal VET programmes.

Social partners were actively involved in the implementation and governance of work-based learning schemes. Employers were obliged by law to offer internship places to students from vocational

¹ The share of VET enrolments had been constantly increasing in the previous decade.

schools. According to the Vocational Training Act, companies that employed more than 10 employees had to provide skills training to secondary school students.

Internships formed an integral part of the four-year secondary school programmes. In these programmes, students would usually spend two days a week in the school and three days in the company.

Apprenticeship schemes were outside formal education. They combined periods of practical training in enterprises with periods of theoretical instruction provided in vocational training centres (usually one day per week). The length of apprenticeships varied from two to four years, depending on the profession. The number of apprentices was nearly 200 000 (annual stock) but had been steadily decreasing in the previous 10 years.

Both apprentices and students were entitled to an apprenticeship wage or training pay, respectively.

Although apprenticeships in Turkey were well established and had a long tradition, they faced the challenge of becoming less attractive to young people, especially in the crafts, trades and in small businesses. The main concerns regarding internships for VET students concerned their quality and effective implementation. Awareness of these challenges prompted Turkish policy makers to prioritise work-based learning in the context of the Riga Conclusions follow-up in 2015. The policy options considered in that regard related to improving the supply of and access to apprenticeships in Turkey, improving the quality of internships for VET students and improving data collection and analysis for work-based learning.

1.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

Between 2015 and 2017 Turkey adopted amendments in its work-based learning legislation. The aim was to make existing apprenticeships more attractive and to promote entrepreneurship through apprenticeships. The new legislation provided for more apprenticeship places, fewer financial burdens for employers who were engaged in these schemes and incentives for start-ups established by apprenticeship scheme graduates.

An amendment to an existing Active Labour Market Services Regulation was enacted in February 2016. This increased the duration of and access to publicly funded work-based learning. The amendment also allowed students from vocational and technical secondary schools to benefit from work-based learning programmes funded and implemented by ISKUR.

The recent amendments to the Apprenticeship Law (passed on 2 December 2016), whose implementation began in the 2017/18 school year, include the following points.

- Apprenticeships are included in compulsory formal education, serving as an alternative pathway to school-based vocational education. The new legal provisions give more young people the opportunity to participate in apprenticeship schemes in VET, while helping the crafts, trades and small businesses to find more apprentices.
- State support is ensured to eliminate wage differences among apprentices in companies of different sizes and to reduce the burden on enterprises: the wages received by students from all enterprises (small and large) are not less than 30% of the minimum wage in Turkey, while interns can claim at least 15–30% of the minimum wage (depending on the number of employees in the company providing the training). (Candidate) apprentices are exempt from revenue stamps, income tax, tax refunds, severance payments and similar financial requirements, while their social insurance contributions are paid by the state. Two-thirds of the skills training and internship fees paid to the apprentices and vocational secondary school students by employers are covered by

the state. All payments made by the companies to students and (candidate) apprentices are exempt from tax.

- Students who successfully complete apprenticeship training are given the opportunity to set up their own business by receiving a master craftsperson certificate and a business-opening certificate. Turkey's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Organisation (KOSGEB) provides a grant worth TL 50 000 (EUR 12 500) and an interest-free loan of TL 100 000 (EUR 25 000) to graduates who open their own business. In this way, it promotes entrepreneurship through apprenticeships.

The Statistical Institute launched the Official Statistical Programme to integrate VET work-based learning data.

Turkey became a member of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships in June 2015.

2. MTD 2 – Quality assurance mechanisms in line with EQAVET and continuous information and feedback loops to initial and continuing VET

2.1 Baseline situation in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, the development of a national approach to quality assurance was well advanced and a quality assurance National Reference Point was established. The Ministry of National Education, the Turkish Quality Association, the Board of Inspection, the Internal Audit Unit and provincial and district organisations had a mandate in relation to quality assurance in IVET. The Vocational Qualifications Authority had that mandate for continuing VET (CVET) and adult education, and the Council for Higher Education was responsible for post-secondary VET. The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funded a project entitled Improving the Quality of Vocational Education and Training in Turkey in 2012. This represented an important attempt to finalise the development of a national quality assurance approach, including the establishment of a National Quality Assurance Centre for VET, which steered the various groups involved in quality assurance (Ministry of National Education, related institutions, non-governmental organisations, training providers and social partners) and the development of a quality assurance framework using the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) Reference Framework as a reference standard.

The E-graduate system had been introduced by the Ministry of National Education in Turkey in 2007. It had become a web-based data management system that continued to track graduates from VET and technical education by storing data on their employment status, as well as data on student enrolment, attendance, examination entries, grades, report cards and information related to work-based learning. The E-graduate system monitored transitions from VET to work and included data on graduates' school types, their transition to higher education, the sectors they worked in and the remuneration they received.

2.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

Turkey devised a national quality assurance approach using the EQAVET framework. It adopted a National Education Quality Framework, a far broader document, in 2015. Compared to the other candidate countries, Turkey reported that it had consulted and shared decision making with the highest number of stakeholders when developing the quality assurance approach. The national

quality assurance approach is applicable to both IVET and CVET but does not address work-based learning associated with either IVET or CVET. The approach has been formally agreed and its partial implementation began in 2016. All EQAVET indicators are applied (occasionally, not yet on a regular basis) to assess the quality of IVET, while two indicators (1A and 1B) are used systematically to assess CVET. Turkey developed plans to finalise the piloting of the quality monitoring and evaluation system with a view to mainstreaming it in the near future.

Turkey did not report activities relating to the improvement of data on the employability of VET graduates and their transition to work. The E-graduate system continued to be the main tool for the systematic collection of data that was used to monitor and improve the quality of IVET provision.

3. MTD 3 – Access to VET and qualifications for all through more flexible and permeable systems, guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning

3.1 Baseline situation in 2015

Upper secondary education (of which VET is a part) became compulsory in the country in the 2012/13 school year. VET students accounted for almost half of upper secondary enrolments (49%) and the figure was constantly rising over the previous decade.

Regular promotional activities, such as vocational and technical education fairs, career fairs and skills competitions, were conducted to attract learners to VET. Companies received tax incentives to establish private vocational schools.

Psychological and educational guidance was offered in formal education. Guidance and career planning lessons were offered in grade 8 of compulsory education (the last year of lower secondary education) which included possible visits to vocational schools.

A comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF; Turkish Qualifications Framework: TQF) was established and was awaiting legislation.

Turkey already had some procedures and practices in place for validating non-formal and informal learning. The country had adopted relevant legislation based on which it had developed procedures and identified institutions to validate non-formal and informal learning for qualification levels 1 to 5.

Pilot projects focused on the validation of non-formal and informal learning were undertaken by the Ministry of National Education and their number was increasing. Validation of non-formal and informal learning was one of the six priorities of the Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014–2018). The Ministry of National Education adopted a national framework and operational guidelines for the recognition of prior learning.

3.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

The actions taken by Turkey during the reporting period concerned VET provision, outreach and permeability, and NQF development.

Turkey continued to implement measures to improve access to VET. Legal provisions were adopted to enhance private VET provision: a new regulation that came into effect in March 2016 gave the private sector the right to set up private VET upper secondary schools not only in the Organised Industrial Zones, but also in other areas where necessary. The Vocational Skills Development Project

(MESGEP), which started in 2013 as a pilot initiative to meet the specific needs of vulnerable learners, was rolled out countrywide (81 provinces) in 2017.

During the reporting period, Turkey was faced with an unprecedented and continuously increasing influx of refugees from Syria. The number exceeded 2.7 million. The huge inflow of refugees created new social, economic and political demands that required an urgent response. All refugees could enrol in free Turkish language and skills training courses offered by the Ministry of National Education's public education centres. These courses did not lead to formal vocational qualifications, but were sufficiently advanced to allow graduates to use their skills in ways that supported income generation. The ministry was also responsible for ensuring that all refugee children had access to schools and took steps to remove administrative barriers to enrolment. The ministry approved the establishment of 'temporary education centres' to enable Syrian refugee children to continue their education.

Legislation was adopted in favour of better VET permeability. Following the amendments to work-based learning legislation (December 2016) in Turkey, apprenticeships were no longer excluded from formal education, nor were they a dead-end pathway: apprentices now have the right to continue to higher education by completing various courses in the relevant subject area.

The TQF was enacted in law: the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles on the Implementation of the Turkish Qualifications Framework (TQF Regulation) entered into force via Decision 2015/8213 of the Council of Ministers and was published in the Official Journal of 19 November 2015. The TQF management and governance structures are now well established. There is broad stakeholder and social partner engagement in designing and implementing all aspects of the qualification system. By mid-2016 the Vocational Qualifications Authority had published 327 qualifications across 13 sectors in its qualifications database. The country already has a functioning system for validating non-formal and informal learning, and 85 000 certificates for VET qualifications have been issued to date. Turkey referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in March 2017.

4. MTD 4 – Key competences in both IVET and CVET

4.1 Baseline situation in 2015

All eight key competences have been included in the national curriculum as the basis for general education and VET since 2004.

Entrepreneurship was included as a basic skill in all education programmes in Turkey starting from primary education. It was also included in the new modular VET curricula as a transversal key competence.

Opportunities to acquire previously underdeveloped key competences in CVET were provided primarily through active labour market policies for unemployed and vulnerable groups. Such policies helped them to catch up with functional literacy, ICT skills and foreign languages.

4.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

Between 2015 and 2017 Turkey reported few developments in the area of key competences; most of them were related to their promotion in CVET through the qualifications standards.

5. MTD 5 – Systematic initial and continuing professional development of VET teachers, trainers and mentors

5.1 Baseline situation in 2015

At the beginning of the reporting period, the in-service development of teachers and managers was planned and implemented at central and local level. The in-service training of teachers in vocational schools was also carried out within the scope of national and international projects, and within the scope of protocols signed with businesses.

The share of VET teachers participating in continuing professional development activities on business premises was relatively high (49%, 2015).

There were no structured requirements for becoming a trainer or mentor in a company. Nor was there training for the trainers or mentors working with apprentices or VET students in enterprises.

Teachers' salaries remained below the OECD average.

5.2 Policy developments between 2015 and 2017

In 2017 Turkey approved a Teacher Strategy Paper (2017–2023). It sets out specific goals and priorities in relation to the professional development of teachers. A competency-based and integrated system for needs assessment, monitoring, orientation and evaluation was recommended at the provincial and sub-provincial level. Expansion of the school-based professional development model was also recommended. A competency-based career progression and reward system was envisaged.

Turkey reported placing a greater focus on distant and online training for VET teachers, and on exploiting the opportunities of Erasmus+ and other EU projects for diversifying and enriching continuing professional development for VET teachers.

Conclusions

Since 2015 Turkey has further reformed its VET system. In the area of work-based learning, the country took action to improve the attractiveness of apprenticeships and to modernise them by linking them more closely to entrepreneurship and business initiatives. An EQAVET-compatible national quality framework was adopted. The E-graduate system continued to be the main tool used to systematically collect data to monitor and improve the quality of IVET provision. Legislation was adopted in favour of better VET permeability (allowing apprentices to continue to higher education); the TQF was enacted in law (2015) and referenced to the EQF (March 2017). The country had a functioning validation of non-formal and informal learning system in place. Few developments were reported in the area of key competences, most of them related to their promotion in CVET through the qualifications standards. A new Teacher Strategy Paper (2017–2023) was adopted and greater focus was placed on distant and online training for VET teachers.

The actions performed show that Turkey has been addressing the main themes of the Riga Conclusions. The country could make further progress along these lines if – in the remaining period up to 2020 – it takes into consideration the following issues:

- implement the newly adopted legal provisions and design further actions for enhancing work-based learning quality;
- upgrade quality assurance mechanisms to address the work-based learning associated with both IVET and CVET and ensure the regular application of the EQAVET indicators to monitor quality in VET;
- target measures at groups facing barriers to VET and labour market entry, such as NEETs, and prevent early leaving from education and training in a more efficient way; at the same time, continue to implement the NQF and the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- further strengthen the promotion of key competences in VET curricula, with a particular focus on opportunities to acquire and develop those skills through CVET; reinforce monitoring of the acquisition of key competences;
- improve teacher training, including peer learning and networking on a national scale, and develop a structured approach towards trainers and mentors in companies.

Annex: Turkey – Labour market, education and contextual indicators, 2015

Total population		77 695 000
Relative size of youth population (15–24) [%]		21.3
Activity rate (20–64) [%]		59.9
Employment rate (20–64) [%]		53.9
Employment rate of recent graduates (20–34) [%]	Total	61.9
	General	47.4
	Vocational	59.3
Unemployment rate (15–74) [%]		10.3
Unemployment rate (15+) by education [%]	Low	9.7
	Medium	11.3
	High	10.9
Youth unemployment rate (15–24) [%]		18.5
Expenditure on education as share of GDP [%]		5.1 (2014)
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary [%]		49
Students in VET programmes in upper secondary		2 788 000
Participation in lifelong learning (25–64) [%]		5.5
Tertiary educational attainment (30–34) [%]		23.6
Underachievement (15 years) [%]	Reading	40
	Maths	51.4
	Science	44.5
Early leavers from education (18–24) [%]		36.4
Persons not in employment, education or training (NEETs) (15–24) [%]		23.9
Educational attainment of economically active population (15–74) [%]	Low	58.3
	Medium	20.4
	High	21.3

Notes: Low: ISCED 0–2; Medium: ISCED 3–4; High: ISCED 5–8.

Sources: Eurostat, OECD, UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Acronyms

CVET	Continuing VET
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in VET
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ET 2020	Education and Training 2020
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICT	Information and communication technology
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
IVET	Initial VET
MTD	Medium-term deliverable
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
NQF	National qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD)
TL	Turkish lira
TQF	Turkish Qualifications Framework
VET	Vocational education and training

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