

Report on Inclusive Vocational Education and Training System in Armenia



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Prepared within the framework of the Council of Europe project
“Enhancing social human rights in Armenia” 2024-2025

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Abbreviations

MoESCS – Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (Republic of Armenia)

VET – Vocational Education and Training

IVET – Initial Vocational Education and Training

VEI – Vocational Education Institutions

CVET – Continuing Vocational Education and Training

ILO – International Labour Organisation

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

SEN – Special Educational Needs

RA – Republic of Armenia

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

ETF – European Training Foundation

VSNT – Vocational Special Needs Teacher

Introduction

Access to education and employment for young people is one of the priorities for governments around the world. In this context, young people with disabilities are of particular concern due to their lower levels of attainment, which can lead to social exclusion and long-term career difficulties.

This report on the inclusive vocational education and training system in Armenia has been prepared in the framework of the Council of Europe project “Enhancing social human rights in Armenia” 2024-2025. The project is being carried out as part of the Council of Europe’s Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026. The project’s primary objective is to enhance the protection of social rights in Armenia in line with the European Social Charter and other relevant international standards, in order to respond effectively to crisis situations. This initiative seeks to align national policies and practices with international standards and provide comprehensive support to national and local authorities, the Human Rights Defender’s Office, and civil society organisations (CSOs).

The European Social Charter forms an important part of the Council of Europe’s Action Plan for Armenia 2023-2026. While almost all articles in the Charter are relevant to this report, Article 15 is of particular importance and therefore is referred to more frequently than other Articles. Article 15 concerns individuals with disabilities right to independence:

Article 15: The right of persons with disabilities to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community.

With a view to ensuring to persons with disabilities, irrespective of age and the nature and origin of their disabilities, the effective exercise of the right to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community, the Parties undertake, in particular:

1. to take the necessary measures to provide persons with disabilities with guidance, education and vocational training in the framework of general schemes wherever possible or, where this is not possible, through specialised bodies, public or private;
2. to promote their access to employment through all measures tending to encourage employers to hire and keep in employment persons with disabilities in the ordinary working environment and to adjust the working conditions to the needs of the disabled or, where this is not possible by reason of the disability, by arranging for or creating sheltered employment according to the level of disability. In certain cases, such measures may require recourse to specialised placement and support services;
3. to promote their full social integration and participation in the life of the community in particular through measures, including technical aids, aiming to overcome barriers to communication and mobility and enabling access to transport, housing, cultural activities and leisure.¹

Other articles in the European Social Charter which are particularly relevant for this report are Article 9, which sets out everyone’s right to appropriate facilities for vocational guidance, and Article 10, which sets out everyone’s right to appropriate facilities for vocational training. For States Parties to the European Social Charter that have not accepted Article 15§1, vocational training for all is dealt with under Articles 9 and 10.²

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-115023-gbr-2005-factsheet-art-15-social-charter-web-a5/1680ad82fd>

² Conclusions on Art 9, Armenia 2020

The report was prepared by Per-Åke Rosvall, an expert in vocational education and training, with the support of Tatevik Manukyan, a national consultant. The report is based on information provided by the Republic of Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Armenian laws and regulations, and national reports produced by the Republic of Armenia, the Council of Europe, EU authorities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as state of the art examples accessible through digital search engines. The work supporting the development of this report was carried out between May and August 2025.

Executive summary

Armenia has recently established important legal and policy foundations for addressing issues related to inclusive practices in the vocational education and training (VET) system, including a 2024 Law on VET, ratification of the CRPD, and policy references to reserved admission places and state funding for reasonable adaptations. However, implementation remains partial and unevenly distributed.

This report reviews the current situation and challenges of inclusion in Armenian vocational education and training with a focus on individuals with disabilities, highlights international examples of good practice, and finally outlines recommendations for strengthening inclusion in Armenian VET.

Current situation and key challenges

- **Low and uneven participation:** Only a small number of learners with disabilities are enrolled in VET, concentrated in a limited set of institutions and regions.
- **Fragmented procedures and supports:** Entry into VET depends on special education needs assessment processes from general education; there is no standardised, VET-specific procedure for pedagogical-psychological support.
- **Capacity gaps:** Most VET institutions lack dedicated specialists (e.g., psychologists, vocational special needs teachers), and VET staff generally have limited training in inclusive pedagogy and practices.
- **Accessibility and affordability barriers:** Physical, digital and financial obstacles persist; and insufficient funding for reasonable accommodation limits access of individuals with disabilities to VET.
- **Weak transition and labor market links:** Career guidance is inconsistent, and support from public employment services for individuals with disabilities remains limited.
- **Quality assurance:** Monitoring frameworks rarely integrates disability indicators or qualitative input from learners with disabilities.

Key good practice lessons

- Establishing specialist roles and regular, interdisciplinary support teams (e.g., Finnish Vocational Special Needs Teacher model).
- Strengthening learner-centered self-awareness and long-term employability development (Spanish occupational self-analysis tools).
- Providing state-coordinated digital tools, intermediate labor market supports, and diverse job pathways (e.g., Swedish integrated approach).

Priority recommendations

- Strengthen regulation, funding, and inter-ministerial coordination for inclusive VET.
- Enhance Individual Learning Plans (ILP) by ensuring active involvement of vocational education professionals.
- Introduce mandatory inclusive pedagogy courses and programmes designed for vocational education professionals.
- Create national pools of specialised teacher and career consultant experienced with disability inclusion.

- Improve physical and digital accessibility and create a centralised online platform listing accessible VET opportunities.
- Integrate disability indicators into monitoring, and ensure meaningful participation of learners with disabilities (“Nothing About Us Without Us”).

Implementing these measures will require targeted funding, institutional capacity building, and sustained coordination between the education sector, the labour market and social services, in order to transform legal commitments into sustainable results in terms of inclusion and employment for persons with disabilities.

Defining key terms in inclusive vocational education and training systems

Education is often regarded as the key to success, both on a personal level and for the broader society. From early childhood education to higher learning, the impact of education is profound, influencing the way individuals think, interact with others, and contribute to society. Education goes beyond the classroom, providing a foundation for lifelong learning and empowering individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations.

The importance of education is evident in multiple aspects of life, from economic growth to social development. In that context, unemployment rates serve as an indicator of the overall wellbeing of both a nation and its citizens. Unemployed individuals face a higher risk of poverty and mental illness. Acquiring skills and knowledge through education usually increases employment opportunities. Therefore, inclusive access to education - including vocational education and training (VET) – is crucial for improving individuals' employment prospects.

This report specifically focuses on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in VET. Consequently, it is essential to define the key concepts of *individuals with disabilities*, *vocational education and training* and *inclusion*. These terms including the European Social Charter Article 15 will be described and discussed in this chapter.

Defining individuals with disabilities

When discussing inclusion, the individuals may vary depending on the context and goals, and inclusion may relate to gender, migrant background, disability. This report focuses on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in VET. Thus, it is necessary to clarify how this term is defined in international and supranational legal framework.

After a long period of disabled people being considered as objects of charity and care, the human rights perspective has started to change the legal scenario since the 1970's. This process began with the very first UN Declarations³ and was completed with the approval of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), adopted by the General Assembly with Resolution 61/106, on 13 December 2006, which came into force on 3 May 2008, the same year of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines persons with disabilities as 'those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'.

Not only the United Nations but also other international organisations, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe for instance, have developed norms or standards about disability which, even though different in contents, approaches and scopes, are all meant to promote the human rights of persons with disabilities and to fight against their discrimination or social exclusion which could involve restrictions (or even denial) of opportunities in education, housing, transport, cultural life and access to public places and services.

The most important international sources of law are treaties that are legally binding to States parties, creating legal obligations for them. All international human rights instruments protect also persons with disabilities, because they include the principle of universality together with the principles of equality and non-discrimination⁴.

³ Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons of 1971, adopted by the General Assembly with the Resolution 2856 on 20 December 1971, and Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons of 1975, adopted by the General Assembly with the Resolution 3447 on 9 December 1975.

⁴ The most relevant United Nations human rights conventions are: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment of 1984, the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families of 1990.

Some international and regional human rights conventions are addressed directly to the protection of the rights of disabled people or have some provisions regarding them, such as the ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) of 1983, the European Social Charter (article 15) of 1961 revised in 1996, the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities of 1999, the African Charter of Human and People's Rights [art. 18(4)] of 1981, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (article 13) of 1990, the Protocol of San Salvador (Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) (art. 6 e 9) of 1988.

However, for the purpose of this report, the Council of Europe's definition, particularly as articulated in the European Social Charter, is the most relevant.

Article 15 reflects and takes forward the shift in values that has occurred in Europe with regard to persons with disabilities, in which ideas of welfare and segregation have given way to an approach centred on inclusion and choice.⁵ The underlying vision of Article 15 is one of equal citizenship for persons with disabilities and, fittingly, the primary rights are those of "independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community".⁶

Article 15 is one of the rights protected by the Charter which is exceptionally complex and particularly expensive to resolve.⁷ Therefore, the measures taken by a State to achieve the Charter's objectives must meet the following three criteria: (i) a reasonable timeframe, (ii) measurable progress and (iii) financing consistent with the maximum use of available resources.⁸

States Parties must be particularly mindful of the impact that their choices will have for groups with heightened vulnerabilities as well as for other persons affected including, especially, their families on whom falls the heaviest burden in the event of institutional shortcomings.⁹

Therefore, "Article 15 applies to all persons with disabilities regardless of the nature and origin of their disability and irrespective of their age. The European Committee of Social Rights has stressed the importance of moving away from a medical definition of disability towards a social definition that focuses on the interaction of health conditions, environmental and personal factors."¹⁰

This definition has guided the preparation of this report. However, it should be noted that this definition provided difficult to use at all times during the preparation of the report, for example when searching for relevant information where similar definitions could be used. Some studies may focus on specific disabilities without using the general term "disability" in their titles or keywords.

Similarly, documents from the Republic of Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS) employ both "individuals with special educational needs (SEN)" and "individuals with disabilities" in national laws and statistics. In reports and correspondence with international partners such as the United Nations and the Council of Europe the term "individuals with disabilities" is more commonly used. MoESCS documents may also classify such individuals under broader categories such as "disadvantaged groups" or "handicapped populations" (see, for example, *State Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Armenia until 2030*).

It should also be noted that terms such as "functional variation" and "functional diversity" are more widely used as alternative to "disability". These terms emphasise that limitations often arise

⁵ [Conclusions 2003, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15; European Disability Forum \(EDF\) and Inclusion Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 168/2018, decision on the merits of 19 October 2022, §176

⁶ [International Association Autism-Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 13/2002, decision on the merits of 4 November 2003, §48

⁷ [European Disability Forum \(EDF\) and Inclusion Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 168/2018, decision on the merits of 19 October 2022, § 191; [International Association Autism-Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 13/2002, decision on the merits of 4 November 2003, §53

⁸ [International Association Autism-Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 13/2002, decision on the merits of 4 November 2003, §53; [European Action of the Disabled \(AEH\) v. France](#), Complaint No. 81/2012, decision on the merits of 11 September 2013, §79; [European Disability Forum \(EDF\) and Inclusion Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 168/2018, decision on the merits of 19 October 2022, §191

⁹ [International Association Autism-Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 13/2002, decision on the merits of 4 November 2003, §53

¹⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/prems-115023-gbr-2005-factsheet-art-15-social-charter-web-a5/1680ad82fd>

from environmental rather than individual factors - for example, a person who uses a wheelchair may require support to reach the workplace but not to perform their job duties. Nevertheless, as “individuals with disabilities” remains the terminology used by the Council of Europe, this report adopts that term, except when citing sources that use other terms.

Defining vocational education and training

How vocational education and training (VET) is organised varies extensively both between and within countries. VET is commonly divided into initial vocational education and training (IVET) and continuing vocational education and training (CVET).

IVET is often, but not always, referred to as a continuation of compulsory schooling, and is sometimes limited to a certain age group. IVET programmes are often two to four years long. IVET often includes some general schooling such as language, mathematics and social science.

CVET programmes and courses can require prior education or workplace experience in the field, but they can also be offered without specific requirements, in which case they are referred to as adult education. CVET programmes and courses are usually shorter in duration, sometimes a few days or hours. In addition, CVET tends to focus more on learning specific methods or procedures (see Council of Europe, *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture - Guidance Document for Vocational Education and Training*, 2024: p. 14).

When comparing Armenian VET to that of other countries, it is important to keep these distinctions in mind. This report primarily focuses on Armenian IVET, and therefore most international comparisons are also limited to IVET. A more detailed account of Armenian IVET is provided in the chapter *Overview of the current VET system in Armenia with regard to inclusiveness*.

Defining inclusion in VET

Numerous international organisations—including the Council of Europe, UNESCO, Cedefop, the ILO, and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education—have developed standards and conventions on inclusion in VET. These frameworks recognise the complexity of coordinating multiple stakeholders in inclusive processes.

Those stakeholders are often categorised as:

- Policy-makers (responsible for policy design, content, and structures of VET),
- VET institutions (management and teaching staff),
- Learners, and
- Labour market actors.

While international standards often address all four groups collectively, implementation strategies tend to focus on one or two at a time to reduce complexity, since stakeholders may hold different understandings of inclusion. For example, employers may view inclusion primarily in terms of workplace productivity, whereas learners may associate it with social belonging.

To establish a shared understanding of inclusion in VET, it is useful to return to Article 15 of the European Social Charter, which states:

“Disabled persons have the right to independence, social integration and participation in the life of the community.”

The three key concepts - *independence*, *social integration* and *participation* – are central to discussing inclusion in VET. Note that these concepts correspond closely to Bernstein’s (2000) and Rosvall and Nylund’s (2022) triad of individual enhancement, social inclusion, and political participation which is also widely used when describing VET.

To contextualise these ideas within VET, each concept - independence, social integration, participation, and economic inclusion - is elaborated below. The latter is added here because

economic factors directly affect the other three dimensions, as emphasised in the *Digest of the Case Law of the European Committee of Social Rights*:

“The obligation of States to take measures to promote persons with disabilities’ full social integration and participation in the life of the community is strongly linked to measures directed towards the amelioration and eradication of poverty amongst people with disabilities.”¹¹

It is important to note that independence, social integration, participation and economic inclusion are interdependent and inseparable in practice. However, to deepen understandings of their interdependence it is helpful to discuss each concept separately. The presentation below is based on the Council of Europe’s forthcoming publication *Anthology on VET* (Kersh & Rosvall, in press).

Inclusion in VET as independence

The concept of independence refers to gaining competence, knowledge and critical understanding. When entering VET this can be knowledge of options available, competence to choose and critically understand short- and long-term consequences of different options. Independence is fostered through pedagogical practices in both schools and workplaces, encompassing professional methods, transferable skills, and the capacity to respond to challenges. These elements enhance individuals’ confidence and autonomy, facilitating both workplace independence and transitions from VET to employment.

Inclusion in VET as social integration

The concept of social integration refers to the right to belong and to be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally, including the right to autonomy. In VET contexts, learners should be integrated in both their immediate learning environment and wider community of practice, such as school councils and workplace meetings.

Inclusion in VET as participation

Participation refers to the possibility to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order at the workplace and in civil society. Inclusion and competences for democratic culture are essential for participating in formal and informal transformations of the workplace and society.

Economic inclusion

Economic inclusion refers to participation in socio-economic life, including employment, skills development, and enhancing labour market and vocational skills. For vulnerable groups, financial support, such as grants and scholarships - can play a vital role in facilitating access to education, training, and employment opportunities.

Short summary

People with disabilities face higher risks of poverty or social exclusion¹² and consequently are at higher risk of unemployment¹³. However, progress is being made towards improving inclusion.¹⁴ The conceptual division of inclusion into independence, social integration, participation and economic inclusion provides a useful analytical framework for understanding and promoting inclusion in VET.

As this report demonstrates, many thematic areas - such as access to VET (independence), combating discrimination (social integration), involving learners in quality assurance (participation), and funding mechanisms (economic inclusion) - align with these dimensions. Numerous national and international legal frameworks employ similar concepts, which are interrelated in practice. However, distinguishing them conceptually enables a focused analysis of

¹¹ <https://rm.coe.int/digest-ecsr-prems-106522-web-en/1680a95dbd> p. 141

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20221214-2>

¹³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-euro-indicators/-/3-02122014-bp>

¹⁴ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/career-without-barriers-building-inclusive-and-resilient-education-and-training-systems>

each dimension, particularly when adapting general education frameworks to the specific context of VET and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

The right to education and training under Article 15 of the European Social Charter

The European Committee of Social Rights has previously stressed the importance of moving away from a medical definition of disability towards a social definition.¹⁵ An early example is that endorsed by the World Health Organisation in its International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF 2001) which focuses on the interaction of health conditions, environmental factors and personal factors.¹⁶ Article 1 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) crystallises this trend by emphasising that persons with disabilities include those with long term disabilities including physical, mental or intellectual disabilities which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Importantly, this means there is no a priori exclusion from inclusive education based on the type of disability.¹⁷ Indeed, Article 2 of the UN CRPD which prohibits discrimination “on the basis of disability” may be read to go further by including those who have had a record of disability in the past but who continue to be treated negatively and those who never had a disability but may nevertheless be treated by others as if they had a disability (‘the so-called attitudinally disabled’).¹⁸ Article 15 applies to all persons with disabilities regardless of the nature and origin of their disability and irrespective of their age.¹⁹ An equality of treatment should exist, not only by law but also in practice, between persons with disability who are nationals of other States Parties to the Charter lawfully resident or regularly working in the territory of the State Party concerned.²⁰

Under Article 15§1, all persons with disabilities, irrespective of age and the nature and origin of their disabilities, are entitled to guidance, education and vocational training in the framework of general schemes wherever possible or, where this is not possible, through specialised bodies, public or private.²¹ As under Article 10 of the Charter, vocational training, under Article 15, encompasses all types of higher education, including university education.²² The Committee examines Article 15§1 issues as they apply to all persons with disabilities (not just as they apply to children).²³

Securing a right to education for children and others with disabilities plays an important role in advancing their citizenship rights and guaranteeing their fundamental rights.²⁴ Under this provision of the Charter, the existence of non-discrimination legislation is therefore necessary as an important tool for the advancement of the inclusion of children with disabilities into general or mainstream educational schemes.²⁵ Such legislation should, as a minimum, require a compelling justification for special or segregated educational systems and confer an effective remedy on those who are found to have been unlawfully excluded or segregated or otherwise denied an effective right to education.²⁶ Legislation may consist of general anti-discrimination legislation, specific legislation concerning education, or a combination of the two.²⁷

The focus of this Article is on inclusive education. The right to an inclusive education relates to the child’s right to participate meaningfully in mainstream education. Inclusive education implies the

¹⁵ Conclusions 2020, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1

¹⁶ Conclusions 2020, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1

¹⁷ Conclusions 2020, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1

¹⁸ Conclusions 2020, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1

¹⁹ *International Association Autism Europe v. France*, Complaint No. 13/2002, decision on the merits of 4 November 2003, §48

²⁰ Conclusions XIV-2 (1998), Statement of Interpretation on Article 15

²¹ Conclusions 2020, Andorra

²² Conclusions 2012, Ireland

²³ Conclusions 2020, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1

²⁴ *International Association Autism-Europe v. France*, Complaint No. 13/2002, decision on the merits of 4 November 2003, §48

²⁵ [Conclusions 2007, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1](#)

²⁶ [Conclusions 2007, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1](#)

²⁷ [Conclusions 2007, Statement of Interpretation on Article 15§1](#)

provision of support and reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities to access schools effectively. This may include: adaptations to the classroom and its location, provision of different forms of communication and educational material, provision of human or assistive technology in learning or assessment situations, as well as non-material accommodations, such as allowing a student more time, reducing levels of background noise, sensitivity to sensory overload, alternative evaluation methods or replacing an element of the curriculum by an alternative element.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in its General Comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education, has also stated that “inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers with a vision serving to provide all students of the relevant age range with an equitable and participatory learning experience and the environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences. Placing students with disabilities within mainstream classes without accompanying structural changes to, for example, organisation, curriculum and teaching and learning strategies, does not constitute inclusion. Furthermore, integration does not automatically guarantee the transition from segregation to inclusion.”²⁸

Reasonable accommodation should be adequately tailored to an individual’s circumstances and learning needs.

The qualifications that learners with disabilities can achieve should be equivalent to those of others (regardless of whether those with disabilities are in mainstream or special education or of whether special arrangements were made for them during the school-leaving examination).

Teachers and assistants dealing with pupils and students with disabilities should be adequately qualified.

With regard to the access to education of children with disabilities, the absence of reliable and detailed data statistics, especially concerning the number of those who are excluded from education, is a key problem in terms of the development and efficient implementation of States Parties’ policies on school inclusion and hence the right to inclusive education.²⁹

²⁸ [Conclusions 2020, Andorra](#)

²⁹ [European Disability Forum \(EDF\) and Inclusion Europe v. France](#), Complaint No. 168/2018, decision on the merits of 19 October 2022, §263

Overview of the current VET system in Armenia with regard to inclusiveness

According to the Republic of Armenia’s “Law on Education”, 12-year general secondary education and primary vocational (handicraft) or secondary vocational education are compulsory until a learner reaches the age of 19, if this right has not been exercised at an earlier age. Secondary education in state educational institutions is provided free of charge.

Compared to international standards, both primary³⁰ and secondary vocational education fall under the concept of initial vocational education and training (IVET). Primary vocational (handicraft) education is situated within compulsory education (ISCED2) and typically includes learners aged 10-15 years, with the goal of preparing specialists holding a primary³¹ vocational (handicraft) qualification.

To obtain a qualification degree of a craftsman of primary education, the duration of instruction within primary vocational (handicraft) education programs ranges from six months to three years. The primary vocational (handicraft) education is provided in vocational schools, other vocational education institutions, educational centres and penitentiary institutions.

The proportion of student cohorts choosing VET fluctuates between years and differs between school levels. Between 2019 and 2022, about 29.8 – 35.3 percent of the cohort chose VET during their basic education, while only 8.6 – 9.1 percent of the secondary education did so during the same period (see Table 1).

Table 1, Student admission at VET institutions in 2019-2021³²

Year	Graduated from school:	Total	Women	Entered VET institution			
				total		women	
				Number	%	Number	%
2019-2020	Basic education	31,065	14,502	9,256	29.80	3,800	26.20
	Secondary education	18,424	9,608	1,588	8.62	1,181	12.29
2020-2021	Basic education	31,812	15,048	11,509	36.18	4,827	32.08
	Secondary education	19,170	9,730	1,749	9.12	1,245	12.80
2021-2022	Basic education	32,615	15,436	11,524	35.33	4,912	31.82
	Secondary education	20,507	10,464	1,863	9.08	1,436	13.72

Only a small proportion of students in basic VET continue into secondary education. The profiles within basic VET are listed below:

³⁰ Translations differ in documents, sometimes primary, sometimes basic. Which one should we use?

³¹ In reports and statistics on Armenian education the terms “primary” and “basic” is used for VET for the ages 10-15. We have used the term used in the original document.

³² <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GavywsCK4nLead3ErRQKVpAgbBtJERR/edit?o&tab=t.0> p. 9

Profiles³³ within primary vocational education

- Arts
- Management, business administration
- Environment
- Informatics and informative technologies
- Engineering

- Manufacturing and production
- Architecture and construction
- Agricultural sciences
- Forestry
- Personal services
- Transport services

Secondary vocational education (ISCED3), generally corresponding to the age group 16-19, aims to prepare specialists with a secondary vocational qualification based on at least basic general education. To receive a qualification degree of a specialist in secondary vocational education, the duration of instruction of basic education programs ranges from two to five years. Secondary vocational education is provided in colleges and higher education institutions.

Profiles within secondary vocational education

- Education
- Arts
- Journalism and information sciences
- Management, business administration
- Law
- Environment
- Information and communication
- Engineering

- Manufacturing and processing
- Architecture and construction
- Agricultural sciences
- Fishery
- Health care
- Social work
- Personal services
- Science of security services
- Transport services

Admission to primary and secondary vocational education institutions is based on applications submitted by individuals who have completed at least basic general education, and selection is made competitively, in accordance with national legislation. Outside the general admissions competition, applicants who meet the requirements of Article 15 of the Law on Education, on the rights of persons with disabilities, may be admitted through reserved places, as stipulated in Order No. 60 on Approving the Admission Procedure for Vocational Educational Institutions and on Annulment of Order No. 254-N of April 5, 2012, of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia.

Basic education programs in both primary and secondary vocational education may be implemented through different forms of instruction, namely school-based education, workplace-based education, distance-learning, external studies, or individual vocational instruction (apprenticeship). However, the predominant mode of instruction remains school-based education.

For instance, the basic educational programme “*515 Decorative applied art Embroider-lace maker*”, leading to the qualification of Embroidery and Lace Maker, can be offered either as full-time or external (distance learning) education. Vocational education institutions (VEIs) may implement this program in three formats:

- a one-year programme following secondary education,

³³ These profiles is taken from the Statistical yearbook of Armenia 2024. However, there are other programmes here: [NATIONAL CENTRE FOR VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING DEVELOPMENT](#)

- a one-year programme based on basic education without third level of secondary education,
- a three-year programme based on basic education including third level of secondary education.

All three alternatives include a 12-week internship. Thus, most VET programmes in Armenia follow this traditional school-based structure. However, pilot projects introducing the German dual system—where the majority of instruction takes place at the workplace—are currently ongoing and under development.

The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of the Republic of Armenia does not maintain separate statistics on persons with disabilities, but it records data on individuals with special educational needs. According to data from the Republican Pedagogical-Psychological Centre, as of May 2025, there are 87 students with special educational needs enrolled in vocational and secondary professional education and training institutions. These are mainly students admitted after completing the 9th grade of general education.

The Torino National Report 2018-2020 notes that several institutions -such as the Yerevan State College of Humanities, Yerevan State Craftsmanship School of Ornamental Arts, Vanadzor Craftsmanship school, Yerevan State Craftsmanship School of Decorative Applied Arts - have been relatively successful in enrolling students with special educational needs. In contrast, only a few students from this group were found in other colleges. Since that report, one of these colleges has closed, while another— the Yerevan State Craft School of Ornamental Art—has opened. However, it is uncertain whether this new institution has achieved similar success in recruiting individuals with disabilities.

A 2024 study in the field of VET conducted in institutions from Lori and Shirak regions identified eight colleges enrolling two to six students with disabilities respectively. This may indicate an increase in the number of students with disabilities attending colleges outside Yerevan since Torino Report 2018-2020.

Legal and policy framework for inclusive VET currently in place in Armenia

The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Vocational Education and Training regulates, among other matters, the main functions of vocational education institutions (VEI), admission procedures, and the organisation of vocational and work-based learning. The law also includes specific regulations and rights for students with special educational needs (SEN). The most relevant articles for students with special educational needs are listed below.

Law of the Republic of Armenia on Vocational Education and Training, Adopted on May 22, 2024

- Article 10. Main functions of VEI
 - Point 8: Providing persons with special educational needs with necessary services, including reasonable adaptations for efficient and high-quality organisation of education on an equal basis with others.
- Article 15. Organisation of vocational education and work-based learning
 - Point 3: The education of students with special educational needs shall be organised on the basis of the assessment of the need for their special educational conditions, designation of relevant teaching and psychological support services, and, where appropriate, an individual training plan.
 - Point 4: Upon the request or consent of the student (his/her legal representative) with special educational needs, a general educational

institution provides the VEI with information about teaching and psychological support services collected based on the assessed need of the person.

- Article 30. Rights and responsibilities of the students and trainees of the VET system
 - Point 8: In case of need for special educational conditions, receive education on general basis and benefit from reasonable accommodations without additional payments.
- Article 37. A VEI's funding
 - Point 3: Funding shall be provided to state-owned and public VEIs from the state budget to provide reasonable adaptations in the process of organising the education of students who need special educational conditions, including students with disabilities. The funding procedure shall be established by the Government.

In addition to this law, the Republic of Armenia, as mentioned in the introduction of this report, has ratified most of the articles of European Social Charter, with Articles 15, 9 and 10 being particularly significant in terms of inclusion within VET. In addition, the Republic of Armenia has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRDP) in 2010. Together with national legislation, the CRPD places strong emphasis on teacher education and the elimination of discrimination, as reflected in Article 24, points 4 and 5 of the Convention:

4. In order to help ensure the realisation of this right, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education. Such training shall incorporate disability awareness and the use of appropriate augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, educational techniques and materials to support persons with disabilities.

5. States Parties shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities.

As demonstrated through these laws, policies and international conventions, Armenia has established and implemented a framework aimed at actively promoting and supporting the inclusion of individuals with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN). These legal frameworks aim to ensure equal access to education, employment, and social participation, while fostering environments that accommodate diverse needs. By mandating inclusive approaches and protecting the rights of learners, these instruments help create more equitable opportunities, reduce discrimination, and encourage societal awareness and acceptance of all individuals, regardless of ability.

Organisation and practice of inclusion in VET in Armenia

It should be noted that legislative reforms and ratifications of international conventions concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities have primarily been applied to general education. The practical application of the Law on VET, adopted in May 2024, is still ongoing. Below follows a description of current organisation and practice of inclusion in VET in Armenia.

Organisation entering VET

There is currently no *specific* procedure for individuals with disabilities entering VET. The entrance procedure for VET relies on the general procedure for assessing students with special educational needs. This procedure is described as follows:

If a student demonstrates persistent learning difficulties during the educational process, an application for the assessment of special educational needs may be submitted, based on a request from the educational institution where the student is enrolled, provided that the application is accompanied by a signed consent form from the parent, or based on a request from the guardianship and trusteeship authority.

The assessment of special educational needs may also be carried out directly on the basis of a parent's application, following the same procedure. The Director of the Regional Centre forms a group of pedagogical staff members (the Assessment Group) to assess the student's special educational needs. This group includes at least two staff members of the Regional Centre (a special educator and a social pedagogue) and one psychologist. If necessary, other educators and specialists may also be involved in the Assessment Group. The assessment process, which lasts between five and 25 working days, involves the student, the parents, and pedagogical staff from the educational institution.

Based on the results, Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) are developed to support the student's education. The entire process of assessing the need for special educational conditions and developing an individual learning plan is carried out based on the Law "On Vocational Education and Training" and Order No. 370-N, dated April 13, 2017³⁴, issued by the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia, which approves the procedure for delivering pedagogical-psychological support services in the organisation of education.³⁵

However, it is important to note that the entry into VET currently follows the general procedure, and there is no established procedure for providing pedagogical-psychological support in vocational educational institutions.

According to the Law on General Education, nine types of assessment tools are available for evaluating special educational needs, addressing domains such as speech and language, communication, hearing, vision, intellectual (mental), emotional, behavioural, motor impairments, and exceptional abilities. The assessment tools include tasks, workbooks, and stimulating materials, designed for learners aged 15-18, 19, and older.

The assessment of special educational needs is carried out in three stages:

1. Observation of the student's participation in educational programs.
2. Identification and evaluation of the student's developmental capabilities using appropriate tools.
3. Determination of special educational conditions.

Following the Regional Pedagogical-Psychological Centre's conclusion and report, the educational institution and the Centre jointly develop and approve the student's Individual Learning Plan within 5 to 10 working days. This plan defines the special educational conditions and the support services to be provided to the students, their teachers, and parents at various levels to ensure these conditions.

³⁴ <https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/172774>

³⁵ Information provided by MoESCS.

Yet again, it should be noted that this procedure applies to general education, and does not include, for example, the adaptation of teaching material and workbooks for VET programmes. Moreover, there is no guarantee that VET staff - administration, teachers, mentors or career counsellors - possess the expertise and to implement such support measures effectively.

A 2024 study in the Lori and Shirak regions revealed that most of the studied VET institutions lack psychologists and other specialists designated to address the needs of students with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN).

The study also reported cases where, during the admission process, career specialists guided applicants in choosing a profession. In some cases, the guidance was constructive, allowing the applicant to make informed choices. However, in other cases, the guidance was discriminatory, career with specialists excluding professions they deemed “difficult to access” for certain applicants.³⁶

Furthermore, concerns have been raised about the growing prevalence of paid education in primary and especially in middle VET institutions, which may limit access for economically disadvantaged groups of the society³⁷. However, the new law on Vocational Education and Training (May 2024) and Order No. 60-N of MoESCS (July 2024) stipulate that persons with disabilities are entitled to tuition compensation from the state budget if, during their studies, they are assessed as having moderate or severe functional limitations. In theory, this provision addresses earlier concerns regarding affordability, although the practical implementation of these regulations warrants ongoing monitoring.

Organisation during VET

As described in the previous section, when a student demonstrates persistent learning difficulties, an Individual Learning Plan is developed to define the necessary pedagogical-psychosocial support services such as psychological counselling, special education, social pedagogy, or occupational therapy, as well as reasonable accommodation.

However, it should be noted that there is currently no established procedure for the provision of pedagogical-psychological support services in the context of vocational education and training. As a result, the provision of these services lacks a coordinated approach. Additionally, there is no defined procedure for the allocation of funding for ensuring reasonable accommodation.³⁸

This aligns with findings from the European Committee of Social Rights,³⁹ which expressed strong criticism regarding the lack of information and resources for individuals with disabilities, particularly in relation to financial and personal assistance, technical aids, accommodation, and mobility support. Thus, there seems to be a lack of mapping and/or structural support for individuals with disabilities in general, including individuals attaining VET.

Similarly, the latest Torino Process system monitoring report on Armenia (European Training Foundation 2023: p. 8) concluded that “the VET system is poorly supplied in terms of financial and human resources” compared to international standards. The MoESCS has also confirmed that no procedure currently exists for funding reasonable accommodations.

Several projects have been implemented in order to increase flexibility in VET, especially by introducing pilot courses or programmes with a large proportion of workplace-based learning. Most of them are solely funded by the private sector, or supported by NGOs and the European Union, in collaboration with the Armenian government. Examples include GIZ’s Private Sector

³⁶ <https://caritas.am/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/%D5%84%D4%BF%D5%88%D5%92-%D5%B0%D5%A5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%A6%D5%B8%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-18%E2%80%A402.2025.pdf>, p. 63

³⁷ <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GavywysCK4nJead3ErRQKvPAgbBtJERR/edit?o&tab=t.0>, p. 8

³⁸ Information provided by MoESCS.

³⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/rapport-arm-en/1680a1c0ad> pages 19-20

Development and Technical Vocational Education and Training Programme for South Caucasus, MAVETA, Skills for Jobs, Transitions from education to employment, and Apprenticeship for better job placement of vulnerable youth in Armenia. However, it remains unclear to what extent these pilot projects include or target individuals with disabilities, and their long-term sustainability is uncertain. Given Armenia's policy commitment to social inclusion, it is crucial that the needs of persons with disabilities are systematically integrated in all levels of all VET initiatives.

The majority of VET and higher education institutions (vocational schools and colleges) operate under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports (MoESCS). However, since VET intersects with the labour market, there are numerous overlapping responsibilities with other ministries related to each VET profile respectively (e.g., Health, Agriculture, Environment, Emergency Services, and others), which can lead to fragmentation between policy development and implementation.

Another challenge in the VET sector concerns the separation between colleges and vocational schools. From an administrative and pedagogical perspective, it may be more effective to unify these into a single type of VET institution, maintaining distinctions only at the programmatic level (i.e., between primary and secondary VET). This would be particularly advantageous for VET institutions in rural areas, which may struggle to fill VET programmes with students from just one category: vocational primary or secondary VET students. Coordinating courses at different levels with the same profile can enable quality VET with a small number of students, which can benefit rural areas in particular.

This approach would also allow for simplification of the existing structure and regulations by bringing them into a unified framework.

Transitions, career education and support leaving VET

Career guidance was introduced into Armenia's VET system in 2013, and since 2018 at least one trained career specialist has been functioning in each VEI, with salaries covered by the state. Career specialists receive periodical training by the Professional Orientation and Competence Development Centre.

Transfer of information between institutions occurs on an ad hoc basis, as no formal regulations or procedures exist to ensure continuity. Specialists may consult individual learning plans if needed, but beyond this there are no specific plans for supporting the individuals transition to different levels (see Bridge of Hope, n.d.).

There is no evidence of how public employment services are involved in supporting individuals with disabilities transitioning from VET to employment. According to ETF (2022), expenditure on active labour market programmes is below 0.02% of GDP, and each public employment service officer manages an average of 322 jobseekers. This situation suggests limited capacity for targeted support for individuals with disabilities and inter-agency collaboration.

Professional training for staff working with young people with disabilities in VET

Professional development is a critical component in ensuring effective inclusion of young people with disabilities in VET. Reports indicate that various short-term training sessions have been conducted to raise awareness among VET staff.

In preparation for the transition to full inclusion in vocational education and training (VET), starting from 2024, regional pedagogical-psychological support centres have conducted a total of 66 training sessions for the pedagogical community on the following topics: “*Changing Perceptions and Expanding Teachers’ Rights and Opportunities*,” “*Implementation of a Fully Inclusive Education System in Preliminary and Secondary Vocational Education*,” and “*Development of Individual Learning Plans*.”⁴⁰

The MoESCS has also conducted a number of additional training sessions on broader topics, including “*Learning Strategies for Students*”, “*Enhancing Children’s Psychosocial Resilience*”, and “*Emotional Literacy as a Means of Preventing Bullying*”. While these initiatives represent important first steps toward policy implementation, longer-term, systematic professional development programs are essential. Such programs should not only build technical competencies for inclusive education but also address deeply rooted cultural attitudes and stigma, which often act as invisible barriers to participation.

Quality assurance

Description of quality assurance systems currently in place.

The Republic of Armenia is included in the European Training Foundation (ETF) which operate within key EU instruments intended to support partner countries to design and implement reform strategies that align with EU and partner countries national policies. One of the ETF’s key instruments is the Torino process, which monitors developments in education, skills and employment systems across the ETF’s partner countries and is based on national reports and country questionnaires.

These reports are important sources of information, including for VET and lifelong learning. Some of the reports includes information on individuals with disabilities and/or SEN. However, the report “Key policy development in education, training and employment” does not explicitly address the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, despite inclusion being a critical indicator of social well-being.

Although the Torino Process is based on self-assessment, its findings offer important insights that can be utilised to strengthen quality assurance systems in Armenia.

Below is an example from the 2022-2024 Torino process system performance monitoring (Level 1) country questionnaire on Armenia.

Selection of comments to: Outcome B.2.4: Excellence in social inclusion and equity: Question 53: Part 1

The achievements in domain of social inclusion within the system of VET can be resumed as follows:

- Presence of the concept of inclusive education and country’s commitments for ensuring internationally defined pre-conditions.
- Presence of at least four special education institutions in Yerevan and at least one in the regions of Armenia reorganised as regional pedagogical-psychological support center for learners with specific educational needs.
- Law on VET requiring equal opportunities to deliver VET programmes, particularly via establishment of conditions for those with special educational needs and for their inclusion in the mainstream education, in all VET institutions

⁴⁰ Information provided by MoESCS.

- Modular VET programmes allow flexibility of education for learners with specific educational needs

- Implementation of WBL is policy priority, which models can contribute to increase possibilities for further employment.

Remaining constraints in domain of social inclusion within the system of VET can be resumed as follows:

- Insufficiency of the legal framework of VET sector and metrological documents ensuring regulation of stakeholders' relations involved in the implementation of inclusive education

- Lack of needed resources for adapting the VET institutions' current facilities, building adapted new facilities, purchase and instalment of corresponding equipment, development of human, methodological and didactic resources

- Absence of system and staff for specialised services, including for pedagogical and psychological support

- Teaching and administrative staff of VET institutions is not aware about methodology of work with learns having special educational needs

- Absence of systemic work for professional orientation of the persons with special educational needs at general education schools

- Absence of requirement for mandatory training of pedagogical and administrative staff of VET institutions and lack of programmes for development of the skills needed for effective implementation of inclusive education

- Lack of awareness raising activities among the persons with specific educational needs and their families on benefits and availability of VET programmes.

As demonstrated, self-evaluation is an important vehicle of information in terms of quality assurance, providing valuable insights into both the achievements and the remaining challenges. For instance, the establishment of the concept of inclusion, the creation of four special education institutes, and the adoption of the Law on Vocational Education and Training constitute significant milestones that provide a foundation for continued progress and practical implementation.

The “remaining challenges” identified through such evaluations can be translated into concrete recommendations within national action plans. The Torino process can serve as an instrumental component of ongoing quality assurance. However, similar initiatives, such as the Inclusive VET Situational Study Armenia, carried out by World Vision Armenia with financial support from the European Union, can be used as complementary source of evidence in quality assurance processes.

Some of the concerns and recommendations in previous assessments have been reflected in the 2024 Law on Vocational Education and Training, indicating that evaluation results play a crucial role in shaping legislation. Nevertheless, many identified issues remain insufficiently addressed in practice, emphasising that policy transformation must be accompanied by the development of structured and systematic quality assurance mechanisms to ensure effective implementation.

In May 2025, a workshop titled “Internationalisation as a Guiding Principle for the Development of the VET System: Testing the ETF Diagnostic Tool” was held at the American University of Armenia. The event was organised at the initiative of the National Head of the Department of Preliminary and Middle Vocational Education of the Ministry of

Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Armenia (MoESCS) noted that the VET system's diagnostic process will help to understand how vocational education and training is organised and how quality assurance is envisioned within it. Furthermore, ETF experts presented the VET system diagnostic tool and its intended applications, which is based on the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) framework. The tool considers the VET system through the following domains: Policy and governance; Qualification standards; Provision; Assessment, Validation, and certification; and Data. As mentioned earlier, it is important to integrate monitoring and analysis concerning individuals with disabilities into these quality assurance domains.

In addition to evaluation reports, academic research constitutes an important source of information for quality assurance. However, research concerning individuals with disabilities within VET remains limited internationally, and where it exists, it often focuses on narrow or specific aspects (González and Marhuenda-Fluixá, 2021). This limitation is also evident in Armenia, where few peer-reviewed research articles address VET in the context of disability and inclusion. Nevertheless, research conducted in the broader field of general education provides valuable perspectives that can inform inclusive quality assurance practices, including rural-urban disparities and the inclusion of learners with specific disabilities.

Key findings from selected studies include:

- As a result of a survey, Tadevosyan (2019) found that parents of children with Special Education Needs (SEN) identified inadequate conditions and low quality of education as the main reasons of exclusion of their children from mainstream schools. Tadevosyan argues that this perception is justified, as staff in many rural Armenian schools lack appropriate qualifications. Tadevosyan's conclusion indicates disparities in teacher training preparing for work with students with special education needs between rural and urban contexts. Similarly, Holavins and Lebedev (2023), in a comparative study of post-Soviet countries, pointed to insufficient teacher preparation for inclusive education in Armenia. Azetian and Aslanian (2021) reported that only 13% of 70 teacher trainees in an inclusive education course were familiar with methods for working with children with severe and multiple developmental disabilities, while 78% reported difficulties in establishing contact with such children (see also Iarskaia-Smirnova, Bolshakov, & Walker, 2025; Arekelyan, 2025). Allan et al. (2020) found that teacher students living in Yerevan might be more open to long-term sustainable change in thinking and practice when it comes to inclusion of individuals with high-functioning autism compared to established practicing teachers trained under Soviet defectology principles, particularly those working outside Yerevan, where exclusionary practices are more commonly embedded in the practice.
- Miller (2004), who examined the experiences of deaf or hard-of-hearing students, concluded that it is important to include diversity in the classroom since it promotes acceptance, equality and friendship. However, barriers to inclusion persist due to inadequate adaptations and ineffective professional development. A side result was that students with disabilities valued opportunities to be listened to, since they often felt that their voices were neglected. This underscores the importance of incorporating learners' perspectives in effective quality assurance systems.
- Holavins and Lebedev (2023) also identified a widespread lack of public understanding of inclusive education, suggesting the need for broader societal efforts to foster positive

attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Similarly, larskaia-Smirnova et al. (2025) found that acceptance of inclusive education among Armenian parents ranks among the lowest in the region. Mullins et al. (2024) likewise reported high levels of exclusion experienced by children with disabilities in general schools.

- Breen, Farinaz, and Pitassi (2019), along with Avagyan (2025), found that employers' attitudes toward hiring people with disabilities in Armenia are influenced by anticipated negative reactions from others within the workplace, indicating social stigma as a persistent employment barrier.

The studies listed above should not be seen as an exhaustive literature review since there are several obstacles to complete such a review. One of these obstacles, discussed earlier in this report, is the inconsistent use of terminology and concepts. Consequently, research relevant to individuals with disabilities in VET can appear under diverse keywords, depending on the specific research focus.

Key challenges and gaps in ensuring inclusiveness in VET in Armenia

Key challenges and gaps in ensuring inclusiveness in VET in Armenia, identified through an examination of the legal and policy framework, MoESCS written feedback, available reports and research evidence, can be summarised as follows:

- Accessibility – physical, digital, financial access;
- Attitudinal barriers, such as discrimination and stigma;
- Curriculum and teaching materials – insufficient adaptation for diverse learning needs;
- Teacher training and institutional capacity;
- Access to career education and guidance, particularly regarding adaptation for diverse learners;
- Limited availability of flexible learning formats and pathways;
- Barriers of transition to employment, including labour market discrimination;
- Insufficient monitoring and weak quality assurance mechanisms.

Good International Practices

Providing a general description of VET in European countries is very challenging, since structures, policies and practices differ between nations, regions, and even within VET profiles within a single country. Substantial differences usually exist between initial VET, which generally targets young people still in or recently completed compulsory schooling, and continuing VET, which typically serves adults facing unemployment or those seeking to further develop their professional skills.

The French education system and the German dual model are often discussed as two opposite educational models. The French one is considered more school-based, while the German one prioritises apprenticeship routes (Grollmann and Ruth, 2006). Nevertheless, both systems and models share certain characteristics when compared to general education, which traditionally prepares students for university studies⁴¹.

Unlike general education, which has deep historical roots in ancient Greece, medieval monasteries, and universities, VET education has a comparatively short history, emerging primarily during industrialisation. This historical difference continues to influence both policy and practice, shaping the distinct identities of general education and VET (Nylund and Rosvall, 2016). General education, with its foundations in ancient philosophy, has a stronger emphasis on *bildung* – that is abstract and intellectual development, while VET, rooted in industrialisation, focuses more on practical skills, procedural knowledge, and behavioural regulation (for example, punctuality).

Educational policy is under recurrent transformation due to changes in society. In general education, key stakeholders include politicians and university-affiliated subject representatives (or teachers with university background). In VET, stakeholders primarily include politicians, labour market actors and VET institution representatives.

Because general education has a longer history and deeply entrenched traditions, with well-established structures protecting subject areas, its policies tend to change less frequently and less drastically. In contrast, VET - with its shorter history and close ties to the labour market - is more vulnerable to political shifts and labour market pressures.

Accordingly, VET policy is more often exposed to changes, often in relation to shifts in parliamentary majorities or due to labour market pressure. Responses from labour market representatives can be intended to compensate for recessions or changes in production, such as the green transition. In summary, VET policies are more often exposed to change and are to a greater extent influenced by labour market logic than general education policies (Lappalainen, Nylund, and Rosvall, 2019). This is important knowledge, since the transformation of VET policies seems to be less inclusive in times of recession, when labour market representatives call for greater productivity and have less economic surplus to invest in more inclusive workplaces.

It should also be noted that developing countries, or countries that have recently been categorised as such, tend to prioritise general education and/or STEM education. Vocational education and training in low-threshold professions is not usually the first priority (Bartlett and Pagliarello, 2016). Therefore, the development of VET curricula and policies often follows the development of general education.

⁴¹ Even here generalisations of VET are difficult since some European countries have VET programmes that gives merits to university studies or even promote university studies. The latter is then often in STEM or polytechnics profiles.

Introduction to good international practices

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education has a policy brief on the participation of learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities in vocational education and training⁴², in which they make recommendations based on policies and practices in 26 countries. The analysis of the 26 countries identifies four patterns, which they transferred into the following recommendations: management pattern, vocational education and training pattern, learners' pattern and labour market pattern (see also Pereira, Kyriazopoulou, and Weber, 2016). A summary of the patterns is listed below:

Management pattern

Policy makers should:

- Set up a legal framework and agreement among all the services involved: education, employment and local authorities. This will allow schools to develop partnerships and networking structures with local companies for practical training and/or employment after graduation.
- Promote effective school leadership by ensuring that schools are properly supported in developing an inclusive policy where differences among learners are considered a 'normal' part of the educational culture.
- Enable schools to implement a teamwork approach, including establishing multi-disciplinary teams with clear roles.
- Put in place clear, coherent training routes for school staff to develop the expertise needed to co-operate with internal and external support services.

Vocational education and training pattern

Policy makers should:

- Promote and ensure an approach where pedagogical methods, materials, assessment methods and goals are tailored to individual needs.
- Enable schools to safeguard learner-centred approaches with regard to planning, goal setting and curriculum design to be used in the learning process.
- Create a framework allowing schools to establish individual learning processes using flexible approaches, which allow for the development and implementation of individual plans for learning, education, training and transition.
- Put in place monitoring systems that examine the efficiency of measures being implemented by schools. This will help schools to focus on developing and implementing efficient educational measures that prevent or reduce dropouts and on finding new educational alternatives for disengaged learners.
- Ensure that all VET programmes and courses are under permanent review, in order to match learners' skills to labour market skills requirements.

Learners' pattern

Policy makers should:

- Support and monitor educational policies to ensure that schools focus on learners' capabilities.
- Provide initial and continuous training opportunities for staff, to enable

⁴² https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/VET%20Policy%20Brief_EN.pdf

teachers to put learners' abilities at the centre of educational approaches and see opportunities rather than challenges. Teachers should make all learners feel more confident and assertive.

- Ensure that schools respect learners' wishes and expectations in all steps of the transition process.

Labour market pattern

Policy makers should:

- Put clear measures in place at policy level so that schools can establish and maintain resilient connections with local employers.
- Ensure adequate support for learners and employers to back up the transition phase from education and training to employment. Furthermore, in order to sustain the transition to the open labour market, competent staff must provide targeted follow-up activities for as long as required to address the needs of young graduates and employers.⁴³

Based on the analysis of 26 countries, the recommendations can be considered robust and evidence-based. In the pursuit of best practices, these recommendations may serve as a roadmap for developing context specific national strategies. For example, the design of flexible learning methods depends on the national VET structure, which includes divisions between school-based and workplace-based learning.

It is common that contemporary European education policy emphasises the organisation of education and teaching in ways that accommodate the individual needs of each student. This approach is considered to be essential for supporting every student in reaching their full potential. However, research has shown that teachers and career counsellors often interpret this policy as requiring strictly individualised teaching or career counselling methods. Since educational resources have decreased rather than expanded during this policy shift, teachers find it challenging to implement individualised teaching (Rosenblad, Schaffar, and Löfström, 2024; Eiriksdottir and Rosvall, 2019). However, “to meet each individual student” does not mean requiring the creation of individualised, specific tasks for every student. It can rather be interpreted as designing learning activities that stimulate every student, regardless of previous knowledge and skills, through the use of differentiated instruction techniques.

Social inclusion and teacher-student relations

A paradox in educational work with students with disabilities who struggle to meet academic standards is that they are sometimes perceived primarily as “practically oriented”. In Western societies, there is an often unconscious historical tradition of division of practices as theoretical, intellectual and academic on the one hand, and practical, manual and vocational on the other. Former education is typically associated with the former, while individuals who do not succeed in traditional academic contexts are often categorised as belonging to the latter group. However, theory and practice are not mutually exclusive; rather they are integrated in processes of daily life. For instance, a carpenter who can think abstractly about design, climate impact, and construction principles, in addition to mastering manual skills, will likely be more employable than the one possessing only technical proficiency.

Nevertheless, this persistent conceptual divide between the “practical” and the “theoretical” raises challenges in educational guidance for individuals with disabilities.

⁴³ https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/VET%20Policy%20Brief_EN.pdf

Students with disabilities who are unsuccessful in school may be directed toward VET, apprenticeships, or combined school- and workplace-based learning models. For many, this is a good solution. However, in some cases, certain disabilities, such as AD/HD or Autism, are associated with social difficulties, and some individuals may have negative social experiences, including harassment, that exacerbate their challenges. Research has shown that educational institutions can serve as “safe spaces” where students with disabilities interact with a limited number of peers and teachers who recognise their abilities rather than their limitations. By contrast, workplaces are often perceived as less forgiving environments, where mistakes are less tolerated and derogatory language is more prevalent (Niemi and Jahnukainen, 2019; Kurki and Niemi, 2024; Rosenblad, Schaffar, and Löfström, 2022).

As a consequence, when directing students with disabilities toward workplace learning, it is important to create a soft handover and to have continuous dialogues with the students and workplace representatives. Additionally, courses and training programmes for workplace mentors can be highly beneficial (Bartram and Cavanagh, 2019).

Based on a literature review of Nordic research on special education needs in IVET, a group of researchers examined both individual and group learning plans (Björk-Åman et al., 2021). They emphasise both the value of individualised learning plans developed collaboratively with learners and the importance of social inclusion within mixed-ability groups. Similarly, Björk-Åman and Ström (2025) highlight the positive peer-learning effects when individuals with and without disabilities learn together. Peer learning has also been identified as beneficial in broader educational contexts, fostering mutual understanding and acceptance of diversity.

An additional finding of significance concerns the societal impact of such inclusive educational settings. Exposure to diversity during schooling enhances acceptance and understanding of individuals with disabilities (Allan et al. 2009). This, in turn, contributes to greater social inclusion and employability, as peers without disabilities are more likely to accept, collaborate with, or employ individuals with disabilities later in life.

It has also been demonstrated that organisational awareness of disability-related learning is crucial. Hanson, Robinso, and Codina (2022) emphasise the importance of creating institutional environment where colleagues learn from job coaches, interns, graduates and management about different disabilities and the experiences of young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Broader learning and professional development opportunities within organisations are also essential, particularly when managers actively support interns and graduates to develop skills, qualifications, and career plans (Hanson, Robinson, and Codina 2022, 2019). Although this study concerns internship, its conclusions are transferable to vocational education institutions VEI as well (see also Gjertsen, Hardonk, and Ineland, 2021).

In school based VET systems, VET teachers are often recruited from professional fields and subsequently obtain teaching qualifications through shorter pedagogical training programmes. Teachers who have undergone a shorter pedagogical training programme are usually less exposed to and trained in using different teaching methods and procedures than teachers in general education. Consequently, VET teachers often rely on improvised or ad hoc methods to address the needs of students with SEN (Holmgren and Pettersson 2024). The study further revealed that many VET teachers do not actively seek collaboration with colleagues or administrative support.

It can thus be concluded that VEI administration needs to use outreach methods so that individuals with SEN or disabilities receive adequate support. Clear communication channels

should be developed between the school administration and management teams, and local level VET teachers. Effective dissemination mechanisms should be developed to promote the exchange of knowledge and best practices regarding SNE in VET across VET programmes, schools, and regions (Holmgren and Pettersson, 2024, 118).

Micro-credentials

Internationally, there has been an expansion in the use of micro-credentials, which refer “to the learning outcomes of short-term learning experiences, such as short courses or training programmes. They offer a flexible, targeted way to help people develop the knowledge, skills, and competences they need for their personal and professional development”⁴⁴. Micro-credentials frequently target disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, offering a potentially flexible and learner-centred pathway to employment.

To build a curriculum vitae (CV) that includes micro-credentials can be advantageous, as the accumulation of such credentials clearly indicates the learner’s progress and commitment to skill development. However, it is equally important to consider micro-credentials in relation to other learning options. Micro-credentials often focus on developing knowledge and competences of immediate relevance to employers’ needs, meaning that the knowledge acquired in micro-credential courses may be more applied and short-term in nature compared with longer, more comprehensive courses and programmes. This reflects the distinction between applied knowledge and abstract knowledge, where the latter tends to have greater durability and transferability across contexts (cf. Wheelahan and Moodie, 2022; Varadarajan, Koh, and Daniel, 2023).

In relation to the inclusion of individuals with disabilities, it should be noted that many learners within this group prefer stable, structured learning environments that allow for the development of relationships with teachers and peers and familiarity with the educational setting. Consequently, frequent transitions between new environments, teachers, and equipment - as often required in micro-credential models - can hinder learning progress, particularly for those who require environmental adaptations or experience social difficulties (e.g., individuals with autism or mental health conditions).

Transitions, career education and support leaving VET

The growing number of concepts such as lifelong learning and career management skills indicates a growing recognition that competence in navigating transitions, career planning, and lifelong learning, is essential for sustainable employability. Research has shown that individuals considered vulnerable, such as immigrants, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, people living in segregated areas and individuals with disabilities, face particular challenges in these areas (Rosvall, 2022)

Long-term training programs are generally more effective for strengthening career planning, vocational identity formation, and professional expectation development, as these processes require educational rather than purely technical training interventions (González and Marhuenda-Fluixá, 2021, 325f). Nevertheless, the inclusion of individuals with disabilities present complex challenges, given the high heterogeneity within this group. Differences not only exist between individuals but also across contexts, as the same person may require varying types of adaptations or support in different situations.

As noted by González and Marhuenda-Fluixá (2021, p. 326),

⁴⁴ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials>

“...[p]rograms that support and develop employability and that are conducted upon experimental conditions do have a positive impact upon young people with functional diversity, and this is a promising result in relation to the expansion of such programs in order to facilitate their access into the labor market and hence more and better chances for social inclusion and participation as adult citizens.”

Integrating structured career education into VET empowers learners with disabilities to proactively plan their professional future. Comprehensive career guidance should explore individual strengths, interests and reasonable accommodations, helping learners to develop personalised action plans. Workshops on self-advocacy, interview techniques and workplace rights can build resilience and self-confidence. By linking each module’s learning outcomes to real-world career pathways, educators transform theory into tangible goals, motivating learners to engage fully with both vocational content and broader career development (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, 2012).

Individuals with disabilities require a holistic, coordinated approach as they navigate educational and career transitions. By blending targeted support, collaborative planning and embedded career education within VET, institutions can transform potential obstacles into opportunities for growth. A robust network of peers, professionals and technologies not only enhances learner outcomes but also cultivates independence and long-term employability (Rosvall 2022).

Inclusion and mental health

In a study including students experiencing mental health challenges, participants explicitly or implicitly suggested improvements in school environments and practices that could help them to cope, thereby enhancing their functioning. These suggestions included treating mental health as general concern rather than an issue confined to a specific group, thereby reducing stigma and symptom frequency. Moreover, small interventions, such as providing structured support in organising schoolwork and daily activities, were found to be surprisingly beneficial (Rosvall, 2020b; Rosvall and Nilsson, 2016).

In practice, this implies that all school staff should work together to create a learning environment that minimises stress and adapts inclusive teaching methods. For example, team building activities can be integrated with professional skill development, thereby promoting both social cohesion and vocational competence.

As mentioned in an earlier section, incorporating workplace-based learning into vocational education and training (VET) makes it more challenging to monitor and address potential negative outcomes, such as stress, anxiety or more serious mental health difficulties. Therefore, whenever a VET learner is on placement, it is essential that school staff maintain regular, open dialogue with both the learner and their workplace mentor. Scheduling regular check-ins and coordinating support mechanisms helps identify emerging stressors, fatigue and emotional distress early on. This allows reasonable adjustments or targeted interventions to be implemented without delay. This collaborative framework strengthens the learner’s support network and ensures consistency between theoretical instruction and practical experience, enabling coherent guidance at every stage. As mutual trust develops, learners feel more confident to voice concerns, and mentors are better equipped to provide sensitive, informed responses. By nurturing a three-way partnership between educational staff, learners and workplace supervisors, institutions can safeguard learner wellbeing, build resilience and promote a truly inclusive and supportive VET environment (Mikkonen et al., 2017).

Peer support programmes have also proven highly effective in mitigating mental health issues. Peer support programmes can profoundly enhance the mental health of students with disabilities in vocational education and training by fostering a sense of belonging, mutual understanding and empowerment. Through structured peer sessions, participants with similar lived experiences share coping strategies, exchange practical advice and offer emotional reassurance, which can alleviate feelings of isolation and anxiety common in workplace settings. This collective, experience-based approach enables participants to develop resilience and self-esteem as they witness the progress of others facing comparable challenges. Facilitators guide conversations toward skill-building, communication, and problem-solving, equipping learners with both the vocational competencies and psychological tools for success. Importantly, these programmes encourage adaptive thinking and positive peer modelling, which have been proven to reduce stress and improve overall well-being. By incorporating peer support into the curriculum, institutions demonstrate their commitment to inclusive education, fostering a sense of community and normalising conversations about mental health. As relationships deepen, participants feel more comfortable seeking assistance from tutors and wider support services, creating a robust network of care. Ultimately, embedding peer support programmes not only enhances individual mental health but also cultivates a more supportive, empathetic and productive vocational training environment for both learners and trainers alike (see Best practice intervention study from Spain, below).

Finally, several studies have identified positive correlations between the inclusion of physical education within vocational education and training programmes and improved mental health outcomes (Solberg, Laundal, and Garrels, 2023; Grüne et al. 2020). Therefore, it is important to ensure that physical education opportunities are accessible to all students, including those experiencing mental health challenges and disabilities.

Examples of good practices

Below follows short descriptions of specific examples that has been found to describe inclusion in VET and inclusion in entrance to the labour market.

Inclusion in VET in Finland

In the Finnish educational system, upper secondary education is divided into two distinct pathways: general upper secondary education, which primarily prepares students for higher education (university studies), and vocational education and training (VET). Vocational education and training is usually delivered through school-based programmes that integrate workplace practice periods. However, it is also possible for a full qualification to be obtained entirely through workplace-based education and training.

Finnish VET places high demands on the experience and competence of their teachers. For example, to qualify as a vocational special needs teacher (VSNT), an individual must possess a general teacher qualification, professional experience as a teacher in general, and working experience with learners with special educational needs before entering university-level studies in vocational special needs education. Thus, vocational special needs teachers enter the profession with an extensive body of professional experience and pedagogical competence.

A study by Ryökkynen and Rätty (2022) serve as an example of best practice in Finnish VET. The study was carried out in 2018 and it is based on interview material collected from nine vocational special needs teachers.

One of the key themes emerging in the study was the importance of regular meetings between the VSNTs and students with disabilities. Most of the VSNTs reported meeting their students regularly, often through scheduled individual sessions or classes. The regularity of meetings

was found to be crucial for establishing trust and supporting progress. Moreover, the VSNTs' prior experience interacting with diverse individuals representing different professional positions (i.e. teachers, learners, and industry practitioners) was identified as instrumental in helping them foster openness, dialogue, and engagement among learners.

The VSNTs also pointed out that their rich professional background enabled them to encourage learners to experiment in different workplace simulation settings. Moreover, this diversity of experience allowed them to devise multiple, flexible support strategies, whereas a narrower background might have confined them to a single, less adaptive approach.

The VSNTs also pointed out the value of interdisciplinary experience, specifically, how working alongside professionals from other sectors (such as social workers, general educators, VET teachers, and workplace supervisors) strengthened their understanding of when and how to collaborate effectively. Such collaboration was viewed as essential for the learner's development, enabling productive discussion about progress and preventing help from becoming an obstacle for further progress. This is to avoid situations where the support inadvertently limits the learner's growth. For example, a student with limited social skills might initially prefer to work alone in a separate room. While this may be a useful short-term accommodation, failure to plan for gradual social reintegration could ultimately hinder long-term development.

Through their broad expertise, VSNTs could also be considered to have a triple professional role as teacher, special needs educator, and vocational mentor. This enables them to navigate and communicate effectively across educational, social, and labour market contexts, understanding and using the professional "language" of each. For example, they could engage in discussions about productivity and efficiency with industry representatives while simultaneously advocating for learner well-being and inclusion, reflecting the dual focus of VET (see also Hirvonen and Peuna-Korpioja, 2018).

Key points derived from the Finnish case study (Ryökkynen and Rätty 2022) can be summarised as follows:

- The expertise and experience of vocational special needs teachers are essential. In Finland, such teachers typically possess both substantial workplace experience and a high level of university studies (Bachelor's or Master's degree).
- Professionals serve as mediators in the boundaries between education and the labour market, representing the learner's voice.
- A balanced focus on the learner's vocational competence and overall well-being is critical to fostering sustainable learning and inclusion.

Building self-awareness and well-being through occupational self-analysis in Spain

For learners with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, it can be challenging – for both the learners themselves and the educators - to accurately assess individual limitations across different contexts. With the goal of broadening learners' self-perceived capacities, Fernández-Solano et al (2023) conducted a pilot-study testing an Occupational self-analysis programme involving young people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. The researchers also examined the programme's effects on participants' well-being.

The Occupational self-analysis programme builds on the See-Judge-Act approach. In this study, participants attended 90-minute weekly group sessions where they first "saw" by observing and reflecting on their participation in working life, then "judged" and analysed what aspects were difficult and how these challenges could be overcome, and finally "acted" by deciding what

changes they wished to make. The model helped participants identify meaningful activities, recognise obstacles (motor, cognitive, social, or emotional), and discuss what forms of support were needed—whether external or self-generated. The intervention lasted nine months.

Compared with a control group, participants in the Occupational self-analysis programme achieved greater progress in several measured domains. Specifically, they showed increased awareness of the importance of social interaction, the relationship between health and occupation, motivation and personal development, and their own abilities. In addition, they reported higher levels of self-perceived health than those in the control group.

From these findings, it can be concluded that enhancing learners' self-awareness is a critical component of vocational education for individuals with disabilities. Such awareness fosters improved workplace interaction, greater insight into personal challenges and capabilities, and higher motivation to engage in both occupational and social life. The Occupational self-analysis programme thus represents a promising pedagogical model for promoting inclusion, self-efficacy, and well-being among young people with intellectual disabilities (Fernández-Solano, Rodríguez-Bailón, and Del Baño-Aledo, 2023).

The transition from VET to employment in Sweden

Inclusion of individuals with disabilities in VET extends beyond merely providing opportunities for individuals to obtain a qualification or a certificate. The main goal is to promote independence, social integration and active participation in society, including the labour market. Consequently, the transition from VET to employment is as equally important as inclusion within VET itself.

This section presents two examples from the Swedish context that illustrate different forms of support for individuals with disabilities to enter the labour market: (1) digital tools developed by the Swedish Public Employment Service, and (2) Samhall, a Swedish state-owned intermediate labour market company that supports individuals with disabilities in gaining employment.

Digital tools

Technological developments can simultaneously facilitate and complicate access to employment for individuals with disabilities. To enhance employability for job seekers with disabilities and support employment professionals, the Swedish Public Employment Service has developed a dedicated webpage⁴⁵. The webpage includes a set of digital tools that can be used by individuals with disabilities, their relatives, support staff, and employment agents (e.g. human resources staff). The platform includes accessible e-learning materials, films, chat support, podcasts and other resources.

Information directed at individual with disabilities and their relatives is organised into thematic sections: Preparing for work, Applying for work and Working. The website's text can be easily translated into different languages through a built-in translation function, while films and podcasts are currently available in Swedish (for more information on web accessibility, see "The Web Accessibility Directive"⁴⁶).

⁴⁵ <https://arbetsformedlingen.se/other-languages/english-engelska/additional-support/disability>

⁴⁶ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/web-accessibility>

State support for individuals facing the greatest barriers to employment

There are various policy instruments across Europe, which promote inclusion of individuals with disabilities into the labour market. For example, employers can receive wage subsidies or the state can establish job creation initiatives (Desiere, Langenbucher, and Struyven, 2019).

In Sweden, the government created in 1980 a state-owned intermediate labour market company – Samhall – tasked with employing individuals who face the greatest barriers to employment.⁴⁷ The following section summarises how Samhall operates and presents its guiding principles:

How Samhall works

The Swedish Public Employment Service determines eligibility for employment at Samhall. All employees at Samhall share the dual characteristics of having some form of disability and possessing the capacity to work.

Mission

Samhall's mission is to create enriching jobs for people with disabilities. As a state-owned company, its annual goal is to transition from Samhall to other employers 1,500 employees. To achieve this, Samhall provides training and job matching in various sectors, including cleaning, care, logistics, and manufacturing.

By harnessing the skills and abilities of all its employees, Samhall aims to contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive society.

Collaborative approach

All Samhall employees are referred through the Swedish Public Employment Service, after which they receive training and are matched with suitable roles.

Samhall collaborates with partner companies that share its commitment to diversity and inclusion in the labour market. Through these partnerships, Samhall's customers help create meaningful employment opportunities for individuals who may have long been excluded from the workforce.

This sustainable business model has earned Samhall recognition as one of the most sustainable companies in Europe (see <https://samhall.se/in-english/>).

Critical perspectives and ongoing challenges

While Samhall has achieved notable success in supporting individuals with mild or moderate disabilities, it has also faced criticism from state authorities, national labour unions, and employer organisations such as the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. These stakeholders argue that Samhall has been less effective in assisting individuals with the most severe barriers to employment.

⁴⁷ <https://samhall.se/in-english/>

According to labour union representatives within Samhall, the company's operational model has become increasingly demanding, with performance expectations that many individuals with significant disabilities cannot meet. As one representative explained:

“Because the demands placed on employees are so high, those with the greatest needs cannot cope with them—it is difficult to find suitable work placements even at Samhall.” (Kasurinen 2022)

This suggests that Samhall, in its current form, primarily serves individuals with mild to moderate disabilities. The company's evolution over time may help explain this. Between 1980 and the mid-1990s, Samhall maintained an industrial production focus, offering simpler, structured work tasks. Since then, however, its operations have shifted toward the service sector, where labour is often time-pressured (e.g., cleaning specific areas within fixed timeframes). Such demands can be particularly challenging for workers with certain disabilities, especially those requiring a slower pace or consistent environmental conditions.

A labour union representative noted:

“I think we should have it a little like Samhall used to be - simpler jobs, like packaging postcards, folding laundry, or picking goods in a store.” (Kasurinen 2022)

This observation underscores the importance of maintaining diversity and flexibility in job creation initiatives for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that employment opportunities are matched to varied abilities and needs.

In conclusion

In line with Article 15 of the European Social Charter, Sweden and other European countries have established regulations and recommendations promoting access to employment, independence, and participation for persons with disabilities. However, the practical implementation of these commitments remains unevenly distributed. Many initiatives - including those described above - demonstrate progress but fall short of achieving full inclusion for all individuals with disabilities.

This highlights the need for ongoing innovation and flexibility in policy design and practice, ensuring that diverse forms of support are available to foster independence, social integration, and meaningful participation—the three core principles underpinning inclusive vocational education and employment.

Integrating inclusiveness in VET – suggestions for consideration

This section discusses current practices in Armenia related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in vocational education and training (VET), while also considering international best practices and possible referral mechanisms.

Armenian praxis considering international best practices

Legal policies

The Law of the Republic of Armenia on Vocational Education and Training (VET) was adopted in May 2024. As the law is relatively new, its objectives and practical implications have not yet been fully realised.

Creating an online platform addressing SEN student issues and VET

The implementation of the 2024 Law on VET requires extensive adaptations of existing practices to ensure inclusiveness and accessibility. These adaptations will affect multiple stakeholders, including VET institution staff, young people with disabilities, and labour market representatives. Consequently, it will be challenging to maintain a comprehensive overview of these changes.

To address this, it is recommended to develop an online platform that consolidates information relevant to all stakeholder groups. The platform should include:

- An overview of the new law and its regulations;
- Detailed information on each stage of the VET process, including:
 - Entry – available programmes, locations, application procedures, and funding opportunities;
 - Participation – accessibility measures, required adaptations, and available accommodations;
 - Transition – accessible support mechanisms for the move from VET to employment.

According to the Torino Process reports, many improvements in VET and career guidance in general, including initiatives aimed at young people with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEN), are often carried out through temporary projects, most of them funded by the European Union, as well other donors or charity organisations. It is difficult to review to what extent these projects are accessible for individuals with disabilities in VET.

Incorporating information about such projects into the proposed online platform would greatly enhance transparency and accessibility for individuals with disabilities and other stakeholders in the VET sector (see also the section on Financial Support below).

Flexible organisation of VET programmes

For young people with disabilities, traditional VET programmes may be unsuitable in terms of structure, content, and delivery methods. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MoESCS), together with vocational education institutions (VEIs), has initiated the development of VET programmes designed to be more accessible, particularly those with an arts focus in Yerevan and surrounding regions.

It is important that these efforts continue and expand to include a broader range of programmes and geographical areas. A potential direction could involve integrating the needs of learners

with disabilities into the Government Programme of the Republic of Armenia, which envisions the introduction and expansion of dual training systems.

However, it is important to consider inclusion not only as physical or structural accessibility, but also as the development of independence through knowledge accumulation. To foster independent decision-making and civic participation, learners with disabilities should have continued access to general education subjects that promote critical thinking and social awareness.

In practice, this means that, where appropriate, subjects such as Armenian Language, Fundamentals of Economics, Political Science and Sociology, Law, History, Foreign languages, Physical education, Landscape studies and Ecology, Civil Defence and Computer Skills should remain even as the share of workplace-based learning increases in favour of school-based education. These subjects provide essential competences for independent living and social inclusion, while also supporting effective participation in workspace environments. For example, communication and problem-solving skills - such as understanding that a written, collectively signed statement carries greater institutional weight than an individual verbal complaint - are crucial. Moreover, learners must acquire knowledge about internal and external stakeholders relevant to their profession in order to fully integrate into the labour market and society.

Integrating career guidance into the educational process

Career guidance, including professional orientation, has been repeatedly identified in existing reports on Armenia as an area requiring improvement, even though some progress has been noted⁴⁸. While these reports generally refer to public VET institutions, it can be assumed that similar opportunities for enhancement exist in relation to career guidance for individuals with disabilities.

Inclusion of career consultants in individual learning plan development

Career consultants should be actively included in the development of Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), as they tend to adopt a longer-term perspective on students' educational and professional trajectories than other school staff, whose focus is often on more immediate concerns such as the students' current health, school environment adaptations and academic performance (cf. Rosvall, 2020a).

Both are of equal importance. However, the career consultant can contribute a long-term perspective to individuals' lifelong learning. It is important to include those long-term perspectives in the creation of the Individual Learning Plan. This highlights long-term goals for all stakeholders, including learners, teachers, and labour market representatives.

Establishing a pool of specialist career consultants

It is recommended to create a national pool of specialist career consultants with expertise in supporting individuals with disabilities in VET. This group could serve as a resource for other career consultants, vocational education institutions (VEIs), VET staff, and labour market representatives, facilitating knowledge sharing, professional development, and coordinated support.

⁴⁸ https://openspace.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2019-11/TRPreport_2019_Armenia_EN.pdf page 48

Developing a Dedicated Programme of Professional Orientation

A dedicated professional orientation programme targeting individuals with disabilities should be established. The programme should include both theoretical and practical elements such as lectures and workshops as well as on-site visits, job shadowing opportunities and workplace-based training. Such an approach would enable participants to gain a realistic understanding of different professions and their accessibility, while also enhancing motivation and confidence.

Create a pool of forerunners

For young people with disabilities, it can often be difficult to visualise pathways to achieving educational or professional goals, primarily due to the lack of visible role models who have successfully navigated similar challenges.

Establishing a network or “pool of forerunners” — individuals with disabilities who have recently completed VET programmes or entered the labour market — could provide invaluable peer support and inspiration. By connecting prospective VET students with these forerunners, it becomes possible to enhance engagement, strengthen self-efficacy, and broaden the individual’s “horizon of action” (cf. Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997).

In essence, such interactions help learners imagine themselves within a profession and believe in the feasibility of their aspirations.

Supporting transition from VET to employment

Empirical research indicates that factors beyond certification significantly influence employment outcomes (Pereira, Kyriazopoulou, and Weber 2016). Therefore, support measures extending beyond the acquisition of a VET diploma are essential. Active stakeholder participation—including educators, employers, and career consultants—in the transition from VET to employment has proven to be highly beneficial (see, for example, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2013). Such collaborative efforts can ensure smoother transitions, sustained employment, and continued skill development.

Quality assurance in international standards

In terms of quality assurance there are several international standards and recommendations for disability inclusion in general⁴⁹, disability inclusion for business⁵⁰ and inclusion as competences for democratic culture in VET (Kersh and Rosvall, in press). However, specific standards for assessing the quality of inclusion of students with disabilities in VET are currently lacking.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned standards and recommendations can be adapted and applied to the specific VET context in Armenia. . It is therefore recommended to conduct a systematic review of existing practices and select a subset of relevant international standards for implementation in quality assurance processes. For example, the National Centre for Professional Education Quality Assurance (ANQA), which implements and oversees quality assurance processes in initial VET, could expand its mandate to include the evaluation of inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Given the small number of learners with disabilities at each educational level and the diversity of their needs, it is advisable to employ qualitative rather than quantitative evaluation methods to ensure depth and contextual understanding.

⁴⁹ https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/assets/documentation/UN_Disability_Inclusion_Strategy_english.pdf

⁵⁰ https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/Disability%20Inclusive%20Supply%20Chains_%20A%20Guide%20for%20Business_accessible_%2016%2004%2025.pdf

Finally, as emphasised elsewhere, the principle 'Nothing About Us Without Us' (p. 5)⁵¹ is highly relevant to quality assurance. Active participation of individuals with disabilities in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of inclusion practices is essential to ensure authentic, meaningful, and sustainable improvements.

Standardised/mandatory training for staff

Classrooms, by their nature, are diverse in terms of students' abilities. However, when inclusive practises are adopted, this diversity becomes even more pronounced compared to traditional settings where students are grouped by ability. In a context where only a small number of students with disabilities have been included in mainstream classrooms, staff often lack experience with methods and pedagogical approaches that effectively support and engage a more heterogeneous student population.

To address this, the introduction of standardised and mandatory training for all educational staff would be highly beneficial.

Key recommendations include:

- Mandatory training and evaluation of teaching methods and procedures that stimulate all students in a diverse school setting.
- Specialised training on how to meet the specific needs of students with disabilities.
- Mandatory training on recognising, preventing, and addressing discrimination against students with disabilities.
- Adoption of a whole school approach to inclusion, meaning that inclusion is integrated in the teaching of knowledge and skills, and in the institutional methods and procedures. In this model, inclusion is not the responsibility of a single department or group of specialists but a shared commitment of all staff members.

Research has found more progressive and inclusive thinking and attitudes among teacher education students in Yerevan (Allan, Hallett, and Hallett, 2020). This suggests the importance of extending targeted training to professional groups - such as teachers, career consultants, and workplace mentors - whose views of inclusion may currently be less developed or less positive.

Building awareness and competence among these key stakeholders is essential for the consistent implementation of inclusive practices across the VET system. .

Integration in existing general policies and evaluations

Reports and research recurrently demonstrate Armenia's efforts to advance inclusive and democratic standards for all across all sectors, including education and VET. These efforts are evident in national initiatives, many of which are supported by EU-funded projects or international collaborations.

One such example, described in a publication by the Council of Europe⁵², concerns a project initiated by the Armenian Solidarity Centre and the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia. The project addressed the early entry of apprentices into the labour market, which had resulted in increased vulnerability and violations of labour rights. The initiative aimed to raise awareness of labour rights among apprentices—an approach that could serve as a model for integrating disability awareness within similar projects.

⁵¹ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2022/06/uneg_guidance_on_integrating_disability_inclusion_in_evaluation_0.pdf

⁵² <https://rm.coe.int/prems-007925-fra-2508-competences-culture-de-democratie-9567-web-16x24/1680b5cf38>

Questions related to disability inclusion should also be incorporated into evaluations of VET programmes, lifelong learning, and workplace practices. Doing so would help raise awareness and strengthen systemic consideration of disability-related issues across all levels of education and employment. Where possible, individuals with disabilities should be included in policy formulation and evaluation teams, as their lived experience provides an invaluable insider perspective.

It is crucial to ensure that persons with disabilities actively participate in decision-making processes concerning their education and professional opportunities.

To achieve this, internal and external participatory platforms should be established within the VET system — such as advisory councils, focus groups, and representative committees — that allow persons with disabilities to regularly contribute opinions and feedback.

However, recent studies indicate that while Armenia’s inclusion-related programmes demonstrate a general commitment to social inclusion, most activities remain concentrated within general education. For example, the 2023 report on the implementation of the Comprehensive Programme for the Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (2023–2027) (<https://www.mlsa.am/blockpage/132>) shows that measures to ensure accessibility and reasonable accommodation in educational institutions have primarily been implemented in higher education institutions, with no specific reference to vocational educational institutions.

To promote genuine inclusiveness, future initiatives must explicitly address the VET sector. Including vocational education institutions in upcoming inclusion programmes would ensure equitable access to educational opportunities and support systems for all learners with disabilities, regardless of their chosen educational pathways.

Financial support

It is recommended to introduce a more standardised and transparent system for financial support for students with disabilities, covering areas such as transport, accommodation, educational adaptations (e.g., ergonomic equipment, technological assistance, or audio/visual communication tools). Although legislation guaranteeing free reasonable accommodation and adaptations is in place, further measures are needed to ensure that all individuals requiring financial assistance can effectively access these supports.

According to the Torino process 2018-2020 Armenia National report (p.44), only a few vocational education institutions (VEI) have been successful in attracting students with special educational needs (SEN), most of which are located in Yerevan.

While later reports⁵³ indicate a gradual increase in the number of students with disabilities enrolled in vocational institutes outside Yerevan, additional financial and social support is required to make Yerevan-based institutions accessible to students from other regions.

General conclusions on financial support for Armenian VET systems drawn elsewhere remain valid here:

“Experience of other countries in the Torino process but also of EU countries shows that the consolidation and prioritisation of efforts to promote excellence and innovation can

⁵³ <https://caritas.am/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/%D5%84%D4%BF%D5%88%D5%92-%D5%B0%D5%A5%D5%BF%D5%A1%D5%A6%D5%B8%D5%BF%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%A9%D5%B5%D5%B8%D6%82%D5%B6-18%E2%80%A402.2025.pdf>

help to improve system performance in key areas such as access and quality.”
(*European Training Foundation, 2023, p.9*)

This suggests that underfunded VET systems are likely to lack innovation in inclusive practices and accessibility.

A recommended measure would be to draw up an internal accessibility plan covering a two- to three-year period, followed by systematic evaluation of expenditures and outcomes. For example, the lack of appropriate funding for accommodation has been repeatedly identified in reports and self-evaluations as a major barrier to access and participation for students with disabilities in vocational education institutes with SEN profiles.

Financial support must also be considered from the perspective of VET institutions themselves. As highlighted throughout this report, many pilot projects aimed at improving VET quality or flexibility are funded by private sector actors, NGOs, the European Union, or the Council of Europe. While these projects are valuable for innovation, their short-term nature poses challenges for achieving sustainable inclusion.

Therefore, it is recommended to consolidate expertise from these projects within a single institutional framework. This coordinating body - ideally the MoESCS or the National Centre for Vocational Education and Training Development - should appoint a specialist on the inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

Their tasks should include monitoring ongoing projects, ensuring that inclusion aspects are systematically integrated into all VET initiatives, and facilitating long-term continuity of inclusive practices.

Indeed, there are several current projects in Armenia where the theme of inclusion of persons with disabilities could be effectively incorporated, thereby maximising impact and ensuring that inclusion becomes a sustained and integral component of VET development.

Recommendations

To ensure equitable access to vocational education and training (VET) for individuals with disabilities in Armenia, comprehensive and targeted improvements are required across policy, pedagogy, infrastructure, capacity building, and monitoring. These recommendations aim to create a coherent and sustainable framework that empowers learners with disabilities to realise their full potential and contribute meaningfully to the national workforce and society.

Strengthen Policy and Institutional Framework

- Develop a comprehensive national inclusion strategy with clear objectives, timelines, and dedicated budget allocations.
- Revise existing regulations to mandate the provision of reasonable accommodations and strengthen anti-discrimination safeguards across all VET institutions.
- Establish an inter-ministerial coordination body to oversee inclusive policy implementation and continuous stakeholder engagement.

Adopt Inclusive Teaching and Learning Practices

- Implement continuous professional development programmes for teachers and trainers to effectively address diverse learning needs in every course and training programme.
- Integrate assistive and adaptive technologies specifically tailored for the VET sector to enhance both instruction and learner participation.
- Strengthen existing individual learning plans by involving VET instructors, disability specialists, career consultants and the learner in their formulation and review.
- Provide systematic training for educators in differentiated instruction and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, ensuring that teaching methods accommodate varied abilities and learning preferences.

Improve Physical and Digital Accessibility

- Continue to improve existing VET campuses to increase physical accessibility, including accessible transport systems.
- Ensure that all learning materials, including syllabi and digital learning resources, comply with WCAG 2.1 accessibility standards.
- Provide portable assistive devices and software licenses free of charge to students with disabilities to facilitate independent learning.
- Assemble information on courses and programmes accessible for individuals with disabilities at one webpage.

Integrate career education into the educational process

- Include career consultants in the development of Individual Learning Plans to ensure long-term career perspectives are embedded in each learner's educational trajectory.
- Create a national pool of specialist career consultants trained to support individuals with disabilities in VET and facilitate collaboration with others.

- Design and implement a dedicated professional orientation programme targeted to individuals with disabilities, incorporating lectures, workshops, job shadowing, and workplace placements.
- Create a pool of forerunners or role models of successful individuals with disabilities in education and employment, to inspire and mentor learners entering VET or employment.

Continue to explore flexible forms of education and learning

- Explore flexible VET models in terms of programme length, and the proportion of school-based and workplace-based learning, to accommodate varying needs and circumstances.
- Examine flexibility within the labour market context, particularly considering rural-urban disparities in employment opportunities and accessibilities.
- Develop adaptive financial mechanisms, such as wage subsidies, stipends, or direct job creation programmes, to support both learners and employers in promoting inclusive vocational training.

Build capacity and professional development

- Design and implement mandatory training modules for all VET personnel on disability rights, inclusive pedagogy, communication etiquette and anti-bias awareness.
- Establish a national pool of certified inclusion specialists who can be deployed to VET centres on demand to provide targeted expertise and on-site support.
- Facilitate peer-learning and professional exchange networks where educators and staff share best practices, case studies, and extracurricular inclusion activities.
- Encourage partnerships with international training providers and organisations to ensure that Armenia’s capacity-building efforts align with global standards for inclusive vocational education.

Develop robust monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms

- Create a centralised data management system to collect and analyse information on enrolment, retention, and employment outcomes for learners with disabilities.
- Conduct annual impact assessments involving learners, families, employers, and disability advocacy groups to evaluate the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives.
- Integrate disability-related indicators into institutional performance reports and national monitoring frameworks, ensuring that inclusion outcomes inform policymaking and accountability mechanisms.
- Use structured feedback loops — such as surveys, focus groups, suggestion boxes—to continuously refine inclusion strategies in real time.
- Ensure that individuals with disabilities are actively represented in monitoring and evaluation processes, reinforcing the principle of “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

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The European Social Charter, adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996, is the counterpart of the European Convention on Human Rights in the field of economic and social rights. It guarantees a broad range of human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare.

No other legal instrument at pan-European level provides such an extensive and complete protection of social rights as that provided by the Charter.

The Charter is therefore seen as the Social Constitution of Europe and represents an essential component of the continent's human rights architecture.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.