



European
Commission

Education and Training **MONITOR 2018** France



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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Training Monitor 2018

France

Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2018 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2017. It therefore complements other sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.

Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country's education and training system. Section 3 looks at investment in education and training. Section 4 focuses on citizenship education. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and training, while section 8 covers adult learning.

The manuscript was completed on 1 September 2018.

Additional contextual data can be found online (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)

1. Key indicators

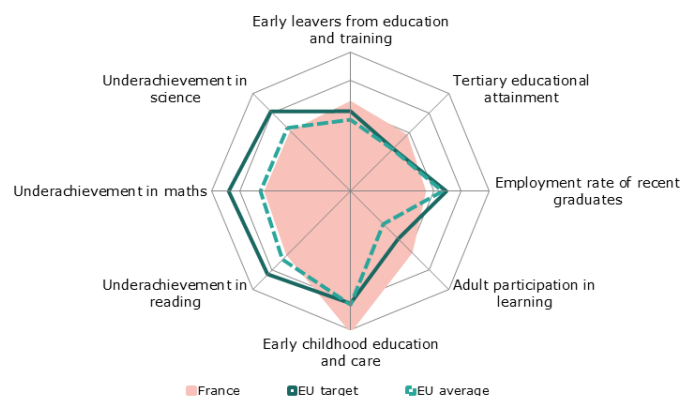
		France		EU average		
		2014	2017	2014	2017	
Education and training 2020 benchmarks						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)		9.0%	8.9%	11.2%	10.6%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)		43.7%	44.3%	37.9%	39.9%	
Early childhood education and care (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory primary education)		100.0% ¹³	100.0% ¹⁶	94.2% ¹³	95.3% ¹⁶	
Proportion of 15 year-olds underachieving in:	Reading	18.9% ¹²	21.5% ¹⁵	17.8% ¹²	19.7% ¹⁵	
	Maths	22.4% ¹²	23.5% ¹⁵	22.1% ¹²	22.2% ¹⁵	
	Science	18.7% ¹²	22.1% ¹⁵	16.6% ¹²	20.6% ¹⁵	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-8 (total)	75.2%	74.4%	76.0%	80.2%	
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	18.4%	18.7%	10.8%	10.9%	
Learning mobility	Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	2.9% ¹⁶	:	3.1% ¹⁶	
	Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	13.2% ¹⁶	:	7.6% ¹⁶	
Other contextual indicators						
	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	5.5%	5.4% ^{16,p}	4.9%	4.7% ¹⁶	
Education investment	Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	€6 378	€6 587 ¹⁵	€6 494 ^d	: ¹⁵
		ISCED 3-4	€10 147	€10 415 ¹⁵	€7 741 ^d	: ¹⁵
		ISCED 5-8	€12 058	€12 382 ¹⁵	€11 187 ^d	: ¹⁵
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Native-born	8.6%	8.3%	10.4%	9.6%	
	Foreign-born	15.5%	15.5%	20.2%	19.4%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	Native-born	44.4%	45.4%	38.6%	40.6%	
	Foreign-born	38.5%	38.1%	34.3%	36.3%	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4	66.7%	61.6%	70.7%	74.1%	
	ISCED 5-8	80.4%	83.0%	80.5%	84.9%	

Notes: data refer to weighted EU averages, covering different numbers of Member States depending on the source; d = definition differs, p = provisional, 12 = 2012, 13 = 2013, 15 = 2015, 16 = 2016.

On credit graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by DG EAC on the available countries; on degree graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by JRC over Eurostat and OECD data.

Further information can be found in the relevant section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2017, UOE 2016) and OECD (PISA 2015). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers represented by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers represented by the centre of the figure).

2. Highlights

- The government has introduced measures to improve basic skills, reduce inequalities and transmit moral and civic values.
- The age for compulsory education will be lowered to three from September 2019.
- Complementary reforms of upper secondary and tertiary education have been launched to improve guidance and success rates.
- The authorities are encouraging more research on education, innovative practices and strengthening evaluation.
- France continues to perform well on the Europe 2020 headline targets on early school leaving and tertiary education attainment.

3. Investing in education and training

The budget of the Ministry of Education for school education increased by 2.6 % in 2018 compared to 2017, reaching EUR 50.6 billion (MEN, 2017 a). In 2016, France spent 5.4 % of its GDP on education (compared to the EU average of 4.7 %). 2.4 % of GDP was spent on secondary education, ranking France second in the EU (EU average 1.9 %). The 2018 budget for primary education has been increased (see Section 5 below)¹. The *'Grand Plan d'Investissement'* will dedicate EUR 0.3 billion to pilot innovative projects for teacher training and EUR 0.4 billion to improve the completion rate for tertiary education (Premier ministre, 2018a). The authorities are expecting the number of students entering tertiary education between 2016 and 2026 to increase by 327 000, which will call for further spending increases (MESRI, 2018a).

4. Citizenship education

France puts a strong emphasis on citizenship education. It is one of two EU countries — together with Belgium — where citizenship education is provided as a compulsory separate subject for all grades of general education (Eurydice/European Commission/EACEA, 2017). The topic is also a cross-curricular theme incorporated in other subjects. Recent official documents place respect for others within the scope of basic skills, alongside reading, writing and mathematics.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2015, the French action plan for the 'Great mobilisation of schools for the values of the Republic' led to a stronger focus on moral and civic values and critical thinking. A 'Citizen Pathway' (*Parcours citoyen*) was launched in 2016, consisting mainly in moral, civic and media education, and targeted at all levels of school education (MEN, 2018a). There are no specialist teachers of citizenship education but increased efforts have been made since 2015 to strengthen teachers' competences in transmitting values related to civic and moral education, both in initial teacher education (ITE) and in continuing professional development (CPD) programmes. The role of teachers in this area has moved towards helping students to learn, for instance by promoting their ability to engage in debates and develop critical thinking. This requires a significant shift from the traditional central role that teachers have played to the role of facilitator of student learning. In continuation of the 'Citizen Pathway' initiative, France will launch a one-month universal national service for all young people aged 16 in 2019.

As in a number of countries, the curriculum for citizenship education for initial vocational education and training is less developed than for general education. This could require measures to ensure the same offer for all types of education. The Observatory for Secularism is of the view that schools need to be socially mixed to ensure secularism (Premier ministre, 2018b).

¹ Annual expenditure by educational institutions on primary students in France is 15 % lower than in OECD countries, whereas it is 37 % higher for upper-secondary students. (OECD, 2017a).

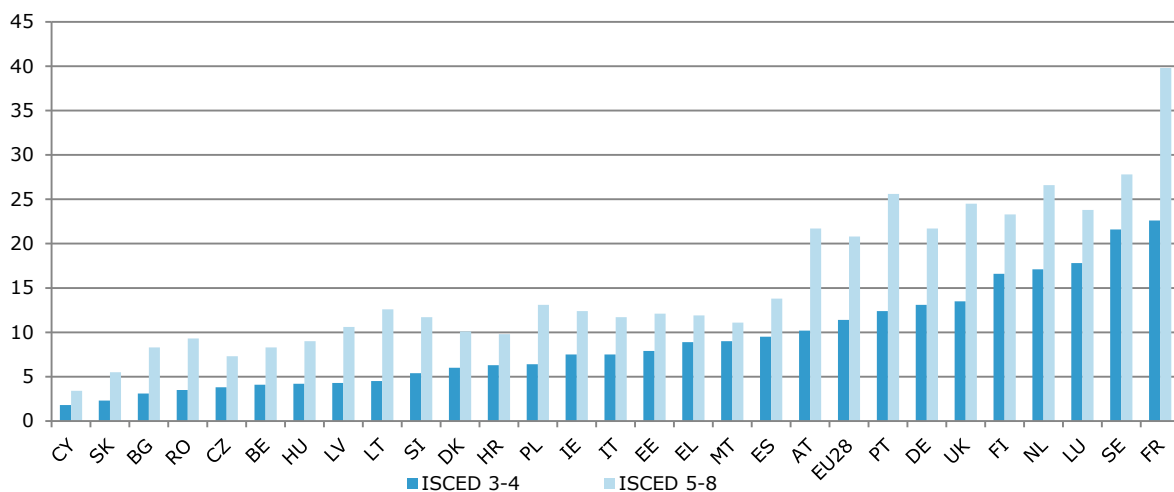
France also promotes the active participation of students in the social and democratic life of the classroom or school. Elected student councils have become a requirement for each lower secondary school as places for learning democracy. Generally, student participation in the collective life of the school has been assessed as having a stronger impact on civic knowledge or voting later on than participation outside the school, making student participation particularly relevant (CNESCO, 2016). According to the EU-SILC survey, France has the highest proportion of citizens who are active in social, civic and political activities with a strong correlation with educational attainment (see Figure 2 below).

The 2017 Law on equality and citizenship allows for the validation by higher education institutions of the knowledge and competences acquired by students through non-academic activities that include citizenship involvement.

A 'Citizen Reserve of National Education' was created in 2015. It enables civil society volunteers to work alongside teachers on citizenship and secularism projects.

In February 2018, the government adopted a national plan for the prevention of radicalisation that includes educational measures. These include: (i) educating teachers more about the values of the French Republic, (ii) revising the status and inspection of schools that do not have a contract with the Ministry and doing the same for home-schooling, and (iii) systematically educating pupils about the media and information to develop critical-thinking, instil a culture of debating and reduce the risk of on-line radicalisation (MEN, 2018b).

Figure 2. Active citizens by educational level 2015 (% of people ages 16 and over)



Source: EU-SILC, Eurostat: Social participation and integration statistics. Online data code *ilc_scp19* and *ilc_scp20*.

Note: 'Active citizenship' is defined as 'having attended meetings, signed petitions, or otherwise participated in activities related to political groups, associations or parties.'

5. Modernising school education

France performs well in reducing early school leaving. The 2017 rate was 8.9 %, which is below the EU and national targets for 2020 (less than 10 % EU, less than 9.5 % France).

Box 1: An original project to fight against early school leaving

The *Demos* project offers children from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to become members of a youth orchestra to help integrate them socially and fight against early school leaving. It is notably supported by the European Social Fund.

More information: <http://demos.philharmoniedeparis.fr/>

Socioeconomic and territorial disparities in educational outcomes remain strong at all educational levels. Inequalities linked to pupils' immigrant background are also high (European Commission, 2017). Inter-generational social mobility is at risk due to the strong impact of the parents' background on educational outcomes (OECD, 2017b, p.48). Access to higher education varies widely between regions; hence social mobility also strongly depends on a pupil's geographical location (DEPP 2017a, France Stratégie, 2016).

Basic skill levels in primary education are low. French results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS 2015) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2016) are at the bottom of the results of EU countries (IEA, 2017). To help improve policy-making, enable teachers to adapt teaching practices to pupils' needs, provide inspectors with indicators on schools' performance and give students feedback on their results, the Ministry has set up new pupil, school and education system evaluations (MEN, 2017b), in line with recommendations from the country's Court of Auditors (Cour des Comptes, 2018).

The type of secondary school-leaving diploma (the '*baccalauréat*') obtained is strongly dependent on a pupil's socio-economic background. While 77 % of children whose parents are managers have a general education diploma and 9 % of them a vocational diploma, the corresponding proportions for children of blue-collar workers are 34 % and 44 % (MEN, 2017c). Similar findings hold true for higher education.

To improve basic skills and reduce inequalities, France is lowering the starting age of compulsory education from six to three starting in September 2019. The measure targets those few children who do not participate in early childhood education and care (ECEC), most of whom are from disadvantaged and immigrant backgrounds. The focus will be on language acquisition and well-being as foundations for building basic skills. All children ages 4-6 already participate in ECEC².

Plans to improve continuing professional development are focusing on improving (ECEC) teachers' competences to tackle individual students' difficulties. It is argued that staff dealing with children in ECEC are not sufficiently aware of and trained in research findings on child development, educational methods or socio-economic inequalities (Taddei F., 2018), and that such training will be decisive for the measures to have an impact on child well-being, basic skills and the reduction in inequalities.

The halving of class size in the first two grades of primary education will progressively be extended to all classes in disadvantaged schools until September 2019. The government is planning to strengthen teacher training to improve teachers' ability to deliver differentiated teaching. This is essential if class size reduction is to have an impact. It is estimated that reducing the size of classes may bring about an increase of 2 percentage points in GDP and create 120 000 jobs over the long run (Premier ministre, 2018a). Positively, teachers in priority education get bonuses; however, they enjoy an accelerated accumulation of points which helps them move faster to a school of their choice. This could exacerbate the already high turnover in disadvantaged schools (OECD, 2017b).

The newly created catch-up holiday tutoring for pupils entering secondary education and increasing the number of assistants for pupils with a disability are two measures aimed at better enabling teachers to effectively tackle individual pupils' difficulties (European Commission, 2017 and MEN, 2017a). The measures may also help to further reduce the historically very high rate of grade repetition in France, which has already decreased sharply since the introduction of a law in 2014 stipulating that it should be exceptional (DEPP, 2016 and 2017b). This was in line with an OECD analysis that the practice is expensive and ineffective in improving learning outcomes (OECD, 2017b). Nevertheless, a 2018 decree giving back to teachers the possibility to propose grade repetition was welcomed by stakeholders and could reverse the trend. The belief remains strong among parents and teachers that grade repetition is beneficial (CNESCO, 2015).

² Source: Eurostat, table educ_uoe_enra10.

Teacher participation in continuing professional development (CPD) is comparatively low (OECD, 2014). 18 hours of annual participation are compulsory for primary education teachers, while there is no similar obligation for secondary education teachers. The budget allocated for CPD is far from being fully used (Assemblée Nationale, 2016)³. The difficulty of replacing teachers and insufficient reimbursement of costs are regular obstacles to participation. Participation in CPD is not taken into account for career advancement, except when acceding to supervisory positions. This is contrary to a number of recommendations by various public bodies (European Commission, 2017). Content-wise, the subject-specific approach is prevalent in CPD in France, combined with training to support the implementation of reforms. This contributes to the low level of French teachers feeling (well) prepared in terms of pedagogy — 60 % compared with 89 % on average across the OECD (OECD, 2014). The newly created *Conseil scientifique de l'Éducation nationale* may help to deliver on the Ministry's intention to better articulate training with the latest research findings. A guide of good practices for teachers to support teaching reading and mathematics was released in April 2018 (MEN, 2018c).

While the OECD *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS) highlighted a low level of collaboration practices between teachers in France, only half of the schools have a dedicated room for such exchanges besides the teachers' room (CNESCO, 2017). Also, classroom furniture is not sufficiently adjustable to enable group workshops that are commonly used for differentiated teaching. Modernising teaching would therefore require some improvement in the infrastructure in many schools.

Box 2: Coordinated reforms of upper secondary and tertiary education

Upper secondary and tertiary education are being reformed in a mutually complementary manner (MEN, 2018d and MESRI, 2018b and 2018c). Both reforms are subject to wide consultations.

The upper secondary reform plans improving guidance and modernising the school-leaving examination ('baccalauréat').

On 14 February 2018, France's Council of Ministers adopted a communication on the *baccalauréat* reform in general and technological education. The objective is to better direct the examination at preparing for higher education or the labour market. The revised *baccalauréat* — to be fully in place by 2021 — will include a stronger role for continuous evaluation during the last 2 years of schooling (40 % of the final mark) and five examinations (60 %), including a written philosophy test and an oral test.

Streams ('*filières*') will be replaced by a more flexible curriculum: pupils will follow a common curriculum, including a new 'Scientific and digital humanities' course, and opt for specialities. They will have one and a half hours of guidance per week during the last 2 years of upper secondary education. This could help to address the impact of parental background on students' choices and help reduce the failure and dropout rates in higher education, which disproportionately affect less advantaged students (DEPP, 2017c).

In the context of increasing numbers and cohorts' proportion of young people entering higher education, the sector is being reformed to increase the completion rate at bachelor level ('licence'). Very low and uneven completion rates make the current situation neither efficient nor equal: the socio-economic background of students impacts on their type of *baccalauréat* which in turn is strongly correlated with success or failure at university (see Section 6 below). Together with the improved guidance and preparation at upper secondary level, access to and conditions for success at higher education are being reformed.

In France, all *baccalauréat* graduates are entitled to admission to the university and study programme of their choice. The strong and long-term increase in the proportion of cohorts passing the *baccalauréat* (88 % in 2017, MESRI, 2018a), combined with an increase in the population, has put strong pressure on higher education institutions. This has led to, among other things, random selection of students in certain study areas where demand for places exceeds availability.

On 8 March 2018, a new higher education law was promulgated to support guidance to and

³ For instance, in 2015, less than a third of the available budget for primary education teachers' CPD was used.

success in higher education. It is to be implemented beginning in September 2018. Information for prospective students on the 'Parcoursup' platform has been improved to combine right of access, an end to random selection and individualisation of pathways framed by a 'contract for pedagogical success'. Universities can require those who wish to study in particular fields to have specified levels of competences or to take complementary courses if their secondary education has not provided sufficient preparation ('attendus'). Financial support is provided to the teaching staff to implement the individualisation of pathways. Educational support, more flexibility in programmes and the promotion of new forms of teaching methods are planned to increase completion rates.

A number of stakeholders have argued against universities imposing so-called expectations ('attendus') which they fear could constitute a disguised selection system, while authorities repeatedly state that the traditionally taboo selection is not envisaged. The Conference of Presidents of Universities of France warned of the need to align funding with the ambitions of the reform (CPU, 2018).

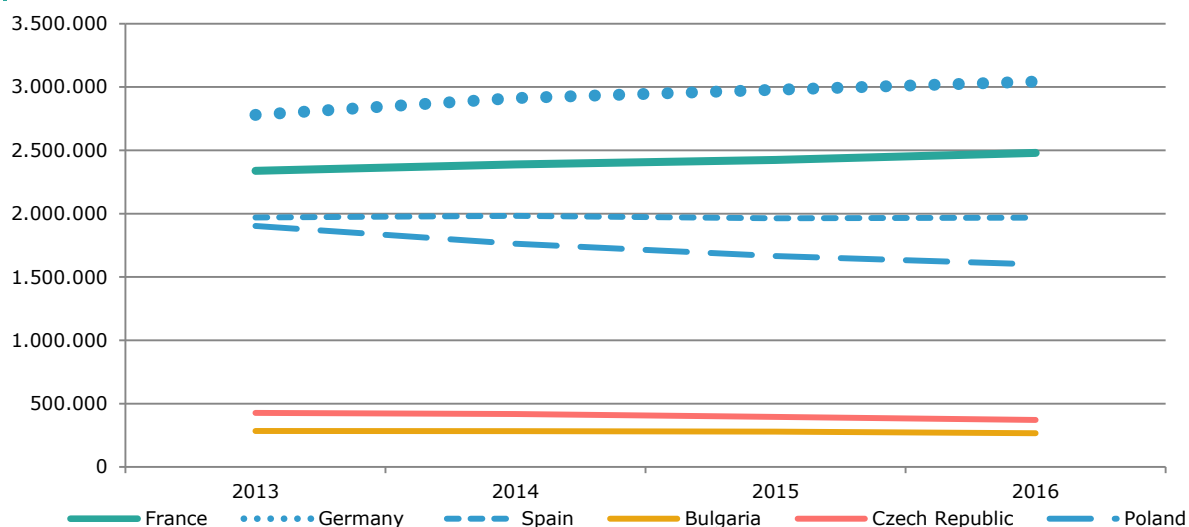
6. Modernising higher education

The percentage of French people ages 30-34 with tertiary education was 44.3 % in 2017, well above the EU average of 39.9 %. In 2015, 49.2 % of people ages 17-33 held a tertiary education degree, compared with the national target of 50 % for 2020.

Student numbers in higher education continue to increase (+ 1.4 % or 36 000 additional students in 2017 compared to 2016, see Figure 3 below) with a steadily rising proportion of vocational upper secondary graduates going on to higher education (MESRI, 2018a). Only 28 % of students graduate from their bachelor programme within 3 years, 41 % within 4 years. The figures are lower for holders of a technological or vocational *baccalauréat*. 31 % of students drop out after only 1 year, a part of them changing programme (MESRI 2018b). This has led the government to propose the reform presented in box 1 above (MESRI, 2018c and 2018d).

Measures have been adopted to support greater equity in higher education, together with the on-going reform. 21 000 additional places were created in September 2018: 17 000 in universities and 4 000 in short-cycle institutions. The Government committed to creating 10 000 additional places in programmes with high demand from students. Minimum numbers of places reserved for holders of the technological or vocational *baccalauréat* in technological and vocational higher education will be increased substantially to help support completion of studies. Minimum percentages for holders of a needs-based grant will be guaranteed. In addition, under the 2018 law to support guidance to and success in higher education, students will be exempted from paying annual social security contributions.

Figure 3. Students enrolled in tertiary education



Source: Eurostat. Online data code: [educ_uoe_enrt03](#).

7. Modernising vocational education and training

The labour market integration of vocational education and training (VET) students is slowly improving and there is potential for increasing the labour market relevance of the initial VET (I-VET) system. In 2017, 48 % of recent graduates from school-based VET and 69 % of recent graduates from work-based VET found a job (DEPP 2018a and 2018b). The employment premium of work-based pathways can be observed at all ISCED levels. Significant efforts have been made by public authorities to tackle the challenges in VET, notably by increasing the financial incentives for apprenticeships.

The 2018 European Semester country-specific recommendations to France included the following recommendation: 'Pursue the reforms of the vocational education and training system, to strengthen its labour market relevance.' (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The 2018 VET reform encompasses all stages of apprenticeships (see box below). The French government plans to improve the transparency and funding of the apprenticeship system, with direct financing of the centres based on individual contracts (instead of a structure-based funding through the regions) and companies' incentives targeted to SMEs and first level of qualifications. The authorities are also planning improvements in school-based VET which represents around 75 % of I-VET (MEN, 2018e). The measures target attractiveness, efficiency, labour market relevance and bridges with other pathways including European mobility.

Box 2: The 2018 reform of VET and apprenticeships

The initial and continuing VET system in France still faces challenges with effectiveness (in terms of access and labour market outcomes) and efficiency (in terms of financing and governance). Parallel to the reform of general and technological education presented above, an ambitious VET reform was initiated in 2017 (adopted on August 1st 2018). Its aim is to enable all individuals (and in particular the most vulnerable) to upskill or reskill in order to build their professional career and protect it against labour market changes and unemployment risks. I-VET is to be made more attractive to young people and relevant to labour market needs and contracting conditions simpler and safer both for apprentices and employers. For continuing VET, the personal training account will be modernised, the quality of the training provided improved, and access to training for the unemployed and low-skilled should be supported by increased means. In both sub-sectors, the funding mechanisms and governance will be simplified by a National Skills Agency '*France compétences*' and through readjustments in the joint management by the State, the regions and social partners (e.g. regions are to be given a greater role in guidance,

but a lesser role in apprenticeship steering). Additionally, a massive Skills Investment Plan was launched at the end of 2017 (EUR 14 billion, 5 years), with the objective of upskilling and returning to the labour market 1 million low-qualified unemployed adults and 1 million young people not in education, employment or training (the objective for 2022 is to increase the number returning to work by 15 %), and to support some aspects of the reform and policy experimentation.

8. Promoting adult learning

The 2018 VET reform (see above) puts significant emphasis on continuing vocational education and training (C-VET) to address the needs of the adult population with a particular focus on the low-qualified. In 2017, the share of low-qualified people ages 25-64 stagnated (21.6 %). Their participation in learning and their employment rate slightly improved (52.7 %) in line with the economic recovery. Still, the gap remains substantial compared to the rest of the population, and equality in access to training could be improved, especially for low-qualified adults, SME employees and jobseekers. For employees, re-boosting the C-VET system would help to increase the number of participants in courses. One of the flagship measures to help individuals secure their professional pathway is the reform of the personal training account. It includes the account to be credited in euros instead of hours and to be made available on a new mobile application enabling peer reviews of the training provision, backed by more career guidance. It will still be possible to use the account for longer-term training projects to secure a professional transition. For the quality of the learning offer, providers benefiting from public funds will also need to be certified by an independent body beginning in 2021. A strengthening of the solidarity system will help SMEs finance their company training plans and give their employees easier access to training.

In 2017, only 57 % of individuals ages 25-64 possessed basic or above basic overall digital skills (compared with the EU average of 59 %).

Some aspects of the reform may show results that will be in line with the EU Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways. These include systematically proposing basic skills modules to jobseekers and keeping the top-up for low-qualified people's personal training accounts. All existing tools on validation of non-formal and informal learning can be mobilised. It should be noted that the decree of 4 July 2017 widened the scope of eligible activities and shortened the reference period to one year instead of three.

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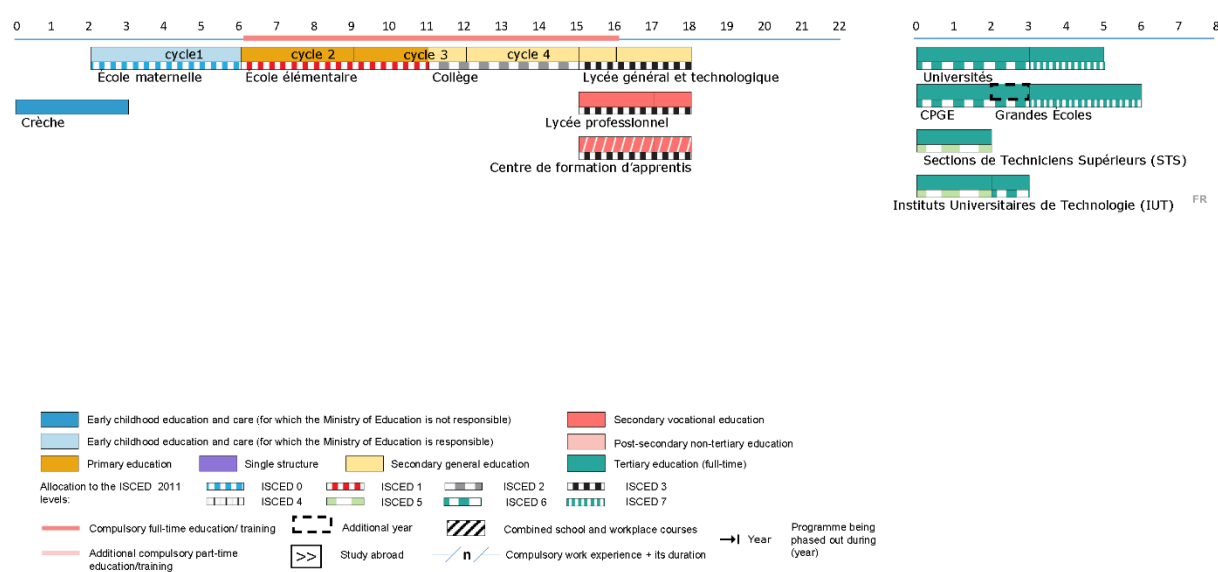
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10. Annex I: Key indicator sources

Indicator	Eurostat online data code
Early leavers from education and training	edat_lfse_14 + edat_lfse_02
Tertiary educational attainment	edat_lfse_03 + edat_lfs_9912
Early childhood education and care	educ_uoe_enra10
Underachievement in reading, maths, science	OECD (PISA)
Employment rate of recent graduates	edat_lfse_24
Adult participation in learning	trng_lfse_03
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	gov_10a_exp
Expenditure on public and private institutions per student	educ_uoe_fini04
Learning mobility: Degree mobile graduates	JRC computation based on Eurostat / UIS / OECD data
Credit mobile graduates	educ_uoe_mobc02

11. Annex II: Structure of the education system



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2017/18: Schematic Diagrams.* Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg; Publications Office of the European Union.

Comments and questions on this report are welcome and can be sent by email to:
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