

Transitions from Initial Vocational Education and Training Qualifications to Working Life in Finland – Observations and Reflections from an International Expert Panel

2 Problem statement

The international expert panel's work is based on the observation that, in Finland, unemployment among those with an IVET qualification has long been higher than that of UAS graduates and higher than that of IVET graduates in the other Nordic countries (Høst, 2012; Albaek et al., 2015; Education Statistics Finland Vipunen, 2026).

The persistently high unemployment for IVET graduates indicates that this is a structural problem related to the transition of graduates to employment and higher education. In addition, the current unemployment figures for IVET graduates are aggravated by the cyclical weak situation in the labour market. When general unemployment rises, the number of job openings declines and it becomes difficult especially for new entrants to enter the labour market. This was demonstrated in 2020, when the effects of the COVID pandemic hit the Finnish labour market (see Appendix 4). In addition to this, other reasons for IVET graduate unemployment can be identified. The structural changes in the employment structure, entailing a shift from manufacturing to more knowledge intensive jobs and human services can explain some of the high variation in the unemployment levels of IVET graduates between industries. The structural changes are also considered to reduce the overall demand for IVET graduates and increase the demand for higher education graduates (OECD, 2025a), which can result in higher unemployment rates for IVET graduates. On top of this, the Finnish labour market has been seriously affected by the geopolitical situation with regard to the war in Ukraine and the resulting export restrictions to the Russian Federation. Another reason is imbalances between the students' choices of IVET programmes and the demand in the labour market for specific types of IVET graduates. Furthermore, youth unemployment varies significantly between regions and over time. Considering the multiple factors contributing to the unemployment of IVET graduates, we conclude that the problem does not have one simple cause and hence has no simple or uniform solution, and should instead be addressed with consideration for the specific conditions and opportunities of different sectors and localities.