

PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING

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JOINT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS ON PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING



KEY MESSAGES

- Rapid labour market changes such as the industry 4.0 revolution, digitalisation, social, demographic and environmental transitions and global challenges require joint actions on improving employee training. A skilled workforce is one of the main assets of the European social and economic model and this should be further developed to cope with the challenges posed by the future of work. Education, training and lifelong learning was reaffirmed as a priority by European heads of state and government while proclaiming the European Pillar of Social Rights in November 2017. Support for training to adults provides benefits for workers, employers and the whole of society.
- There are many different national laws, rules and approaches to the organisation and provision of employee training. Some countries have wide-ranging and strong vocational training policies set in legislation, while in others training provisions are set by collective agreements, at various levels, or agreed directly between employers and employees in the workplace. Opportunities to access training can also be dependent on the size of the company/workplace. Access to effective employee training should be facilitated while respecting the diversity and flexibility of systems, which vary according to diverse industrial relations practices.
- Financing levels and mechanisms of employee training vary significantly across Europe. This reflects the different levels of economic development in the Member States, but also different choices and responsibilities of the actors. Whatever the financing model, an important success factor is the involvement of social partners and the cooperative attitude between them when it comes to the management of funding, time and human resources. Improvements to national education and training systems could be further fostered through targeted financial support to Member States as part of the European semester process.
- Employee training can contribute towards creating a good working environment, which ensures employees' well-being in their work, motivates them, and enables them to progress in their career and earnings. In turn, employers benefit from the enhanced motivation and productivity of their workforce and overall businesses performance. This means that there is a shared interest and a shared responsibility of employers and employees to contribute to upskilling and reskilling, leading to successful enterprises and an appropriately skilled workforce.
- Because they take an active role and have direct knowledge and experience of both labour and training markets, social partners are well placed to foster a diversified offer of training options in the search for the best possible fit with employers' and workers' needs on the labour market.
- **Social dialogue and collective agreements**, in particular at the sectoral level, play an important role in the governance of training systems and in creating training opportunities and improving the relevance and provision of employee training. This includes social partners working together to foster transition and career paths between sectors. The establishment of training funds has occurred in several Member States and can play an important role.
- Paid time off for work-relevant training and a right to training are established practices in some Member States. In such cases, social partners play a role in facilitating employees' effective access to training. This could provide inspiration for other countries, depending on the national context.

- Employee training should be of **high quality, effective** and equally relevant for the worker and the employer. It should respond to the need for improving **professional, soft and transversal skills** and contribute to **workplace and industry-related career development**. Employee training offers should also respond to new and emerging developments in labour markets and enterprises. These offers should be tailor-made, innovative in terms of new training methods, take into account work organisation and be delivered online, where appropriate, and in a work-based environment. In addition, it should be **accessible** and benefit from pooling/mutualised resources within and between sectors.
- Training provisions must be designed in a way that fosters and supports mobility between and within sectors. Securing these transitions benefits workers' employability and employers' capacity to attract new recruits.
- The **changes and transitions in the labour market** require effective upskilling and reskilling, according to identified needs, and defined by labour market intelligence tools and social partner involvement at all appropriate levels, so as to respond to the existing and future skills demand identified by employers and trade unions across sectors and occupations. A good match between the training offer and enterprises' need for an increasingly skilled workforce is a key condition for employers to offer training and for workers to access training and **remain in quality employment while continued digitalisation**, automation, and artificial intelligence changes their everyday work.
- Employee training should be seen as an overall approach within which there may be a need for a targeted approach to specific groups. In such cases, and as part of the wider approach to active labour market policies, Member States should provide effective and systematic support including financial resources for training that supports the integration of the low-skilled, unemployed and socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the labour market, in particular migrants and refugees, via employee training and adult apprenticeships. The training needs of older workers and of NEETs in particular should also be taken into account. As part of this, Member States should ensure the implementation of the upskilling pathways Council recommendation with the effective involvement of social partners, as applicable.
- Training schemes, developed with the involvement of the social partners, should aim to decrease the **gender gap** in certain professions, **support women's career development**, and to ensure that they can also reach high-level and managerial positions where they are disproportionately under-represented. It is also important to encourage more women to study STEM subjects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WITH THESE KEY MESSAGES IN MIND, THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING POLICY:

- 1** EU social partners call for the future ESF+ to support investments in education and skills to adapt to the current and future needs of the economy. The future Erasmus programme should also support the modernisation and reform of education and training systems.
- 2** Member States and social partners should work on a tripartite and bipartite basis to enhance access to and participation in employee training. This should be developed in a way that benefits all workers, enterprises/workplaces as part of a lifelong learning perspective that draws on the potential and actual needs of a diverse workforce in the public and private sectors and in small, medium and large companies and workplaces. The way in which training in the workplace is organised and undertaken needs to be jointly agreed between employers and employees through a mix of collective and individual arrangements. This involves training taking place preferably during working hours or, where relevant, outside of working hours (in particular for non-company-related training). Employers take a positive approach to employee training. When a worker asks for, or has an entitlement to training, employers have an interest in discussing such requests to ensure that it supports the employability of the worker in a way that is also in the enterprise's interests.
- 3** Social partners need to ensure that the way in which they approach employee training is coherent with broader societal, educational and employment-related challenges, such as the need for governments to ensure that all Europeans have a minimum level of basic skills when leaving school, or the objective of improving the use of public resources dedicated to upskilling or retraining the unemployed as part of active labour market policies.
- 4** National social partners, in discussion with governments, are best placed to organise training provision in a way that will increase access and which will simultaneously focus on effective training, based on learning outcomes. Consideration of concrete measures, arrangements and tools needs to occur at the appropriate level in the Member States.
- 5** Social partners should work together to maximise the role of social dialogue to achieve effective access to training with appropriate capacity building and financial support, especially at the sectoral level. Mutual learning between governments, social partners and training providers could further support a more effective use of available resources for skills training nationally. Quality and effective employee training is conceived in a way that responds to the identified training needs of the employer and the worker, possibly through workplace training plans, elaborated by social partners.
- 6** Employee training should be based on **appropriate skills assessments**, designed according to the needs of workers, where relevant, and employers, and founded on **forecasting the changes** and developments in jobs, of the work tasks and the whole industry in general. This assessment should be part of a worker's competence development cycle, to be re-evaluated regularly. The European skills passport could be helpful in presenting a person's skills and competences.

7 Member States, social partners, and education and training providers and local and regional authorities, as appropriate, should work together to improve mechanisms for identifying data on skills needs and the link between them and its use in education and training systems content. In many cases the sectoral and regional level is the most relevant for gathering reliable data on skills needs. Work is being undertaken by Cedefop in this regard and should be used as inspiration for further actions.

8 Member States, social partners and education and training providers should work together to develop national strategies that ensure digital skills are taught on all levels from basic digital skills to advanced levels according to sectoral and industry needs and to all workers, whether low-, medium- or high- skilled. European and national social partners (cross-industry/sectoral) can play a supportive role for enterprises in their efforts to set up skills plans to accommodate ongoing and future changes.

9 Member States, employers and employees should see employee training as an **investment and not a cost**. Therefore, appropriate financial inputs from different sources, including social contributions, are essential to support upskilling and reskilling, guidance and career counselling, raising awareness among employees and companies/workplaces, and social partners' actions on the issue, especially at the sectoral level. Member States could also introduce alternative financial models to pool/mutualise support to employee training between companies and sectors. In addition, Member States should ensure tripartite cooperation on the allocation of available public resources to employee training.

10 One of the major challenges of employee training is the cost for employers, in particular for SMEs. It is therefore necessary to explore the role of various types of incentives (including financial) in encouraging employers to offer training to their employees and employees to invest in their employability.

11 Another very relevant issue concerning employee training is the adequacy, quality and relevance of the training offer. Social partners very often play the role of training providers together with many other institutions. An adapted training offer, taking into account work organisation is a necessity, especially for small businesses with a limited number of staff, to further promote and encourage employee training in all sectors and in businesses of all sizes.

12 Trade union representatives can play an active role in encouraging workers to take up training and/or benefit from career guidance services, and provide support services to employees for using the potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning. Trade unions should provide their representatives with the appropriate resources and training to do so. Employers should seek to ensure that their career guidance and HR support services are available to all workers and that they keep workers informed of training opportunities.

13 Member States, social partners and education and training providers, should design employee training in a way that is based on the learning outcomes approach and that is compatible with the validation and certification of skills, as defined in national practices and which provides access and help to acquire further and higher qualifications. In addition, non-formal and informal learning should be better acknowledged as part of career progression and be validated as part of employee training.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Facing fast-changing labour market demands, employers have a rising need for an adequately qualified workforce. In the wake of global trends like the digitalisation of the economy, employees are faced not only with higher demands for competences but also with the requirement to continuously adapt and further develop their skills to maintain their employability. In countries in which the demographic change leads to a rapid ageing and a shrinking workforce, lifelong learning becomes even more important for individuals to remain employable at higher ages. It is important to bring together individual needs regarding the personal, social and professional development with general labour market and business demands.

One of the main objectives of this study project is to identify in a broader European context how social partnership can contribute to the promotion of employee training. A particular challenge in a cross-country comparison is that similar actions can lead to different results – always depending on the country-specific institutional framework and the economic conditions. Among the twelve surveyed countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), there are countries with a long tradition of a strong social partnership, countries which are expanding their social partner activities and finally countries whose social partnership has been severely hit by the financial and economic crisis after 2008 and related government reforms.

An important result of the cross-country comparison is that in all countries, employers and employees need support regarding provision of and participation in employee training, and that social partners are key actors in this regard. It could be shown that a general lack of financial resources is often not the main obstacle to training. It is more challenging to provide support in the form of additional information and guidance for specific target groups like low-skilled employees or small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In addition, time restrictions are an important obstacle, in particular when the economy is booming and the order books are full.

In the following, the main results of social partners' involvement in promoting employee training are summarised.

ANTICIPATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS NEEDS

- Successful approaches in the anticipation and identification of skills needs combine high quality labour market data with social dialogue. The institutional participation of social partners in labour market projections and the identification of training needs can contribute significantly to avoiding skills mismatches.
- To achieve a comprehensive anticipation and identification of skills needs, sectoral and regional approaches are needed. These may be complemented by inter-sectoral approaches, as appropriate. Better cooperation between sectors could furthermore help individuals in their career planning, facilitate changes between sectors and contribute to the development of an overall educational strategy.
- The strategic inclusion of further actors in the process of anticipating and identifying skills needs has proven to be a successful tool to obtain useful and broad information on future skills developments. Relevant actors could be, for example, research institutions or educational institutions like training providers. A further advantage of integrating them at an early stage is that they can promote quick implementation of new training measures in the training market.

- A flexible training market is helpful to identify skills needs because the flexibility presupposes that training providers are able to perceive changing training demands and to respond quickly to new skills needs. This flexibility can only be achieved by an exchange between companies and training providers. Social partners can promote the dialogue between training market and labour market by bundling the interests of their members. Alternatively, social partners can act as an intermediary and communicate the needs of their members to the training providers.

MOBILISING RESOURCES

- Promoting the value of employee training is an important field of action. Social partners can play a role in communicating the benefits of training – for the individual development of employees as well as for the competitiveness and innovative capacity of companies – among their members and thereby raise the overall awareness of further training opportunities for all employees.
- The awareness of the value of training and the common understanding that employee training is an investment and not only a financial burden is an important requirement to increase the awareness and the willingness of employers and employees alike to mobilise resources. In practice, time resources are often more of a bottleneck for employee training than financial resources. Therefore, social partners can contribute to finding solutions for instance as part of their efforts to inform, support and provide guidance at the enterprise level.
- A reliable and well-known structure of financing employee training can help to increase training participation. In Europe, there are many alternative tools used for this, for example, the right to paid training leave (by law or through collective agreements), personal training accounts or (mostly sectoral) training funds. The success of the different tools depends on the country-specific institutional framework. However, an important precondition for the tools to succeed is that their existence and their functioning is well communicated to all potential users.
- Sometimes, the individual training needs of employees do not coincide with the needs of employers. This is for example the case when employees at risk of unemployment have better labour market perspectives if they choose training measures which prepare for a change of employer and, often related to this, a sectoral change. Thus, there needs to be a partial promotion of employee training which is independent of the current employer. Publicly funded individual training accounts are one possibility to support the individual career development of employees independently of their actual employer. Skills assessments are another way to identify employees' training needs, while fostering a strengthened sense of individual responsibility for their training development.

INFORMATION, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

- Informing both employers and employees about available training offers and offering effective support and guidance in employee training is a key issue in all surveyed countries.
- It is at the employee and company level that the balance between employers' and employees' training needs should be sought. Social partners can play a role in increasing participation in and efficiency of training measures.
- Employee training should be seen as an overall approach within which there may be a need for a targeted approach to specific groups. In such cases, and as part of the wider approach to active labour market policies, Member States should provide effective and systematic support including financial resources for training that supports the integration of the low-skilled, unemployed and socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the

labour market, in particular the migrants and refugees via employee training and adult apprenticeships. The training needs of older workers and of individuals not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in particular should also be taken into account. As part of this, Member States should ensure the implementation of the upskilling pathways Council recommendation with the effective involvement of social partners, as applicable.

- There is a particular need to foster information, support and guidance in SMEs. Bundling SMEs' needs can contribute to better training results that a single enterprise could not reach alone.
- The further development of online tools that make available training offers visible and give information about the quality of training courses would be helpful for raising awareness of training opportunities. In addition, the use of online courses that allow for training employees independent of set course times could be better promoted. Such approaches will be particularly useful for SMEs which may otherwise lack access to information and training offers.
- Independent information from a neutral third party concerning employees' career prospects or employers' business needs may be beneficial. This approach can help alleviate potential conflicts of interest.

VALIDATION OF SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS AND RECOGNITION

- All European countries have established procedures for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications. However, in most countries the existing procedures are often not well-known and, in consequence, not well established. Social partners can play a role in contributing to the promotion of existing recognition and validation procedures and communicate their benefits among their members (e.g., via a better identification of individual skills needs and the derivation of corresponding training needs).
- The expertise and labour market knowledge of social partners can be important for the development and improvement of transparent and simple procedures for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications.
- The value of recognition and validation procedures depends on acceptance in the labour market. However, in many countries certificates are not transferable – neither between regions nor between sectors. In the context of work being undertaken to develop the European Qualifications Framework, it would be useful to advance a standard format for describing learning outcomes for the purposes of the comparison and transparency of qualifications. This should take place in the form of a common understanding, from the bottom up, of learning outcomes. Such an approach should not be about the harmonisation of learning outcomes. At the same time, there needs to be sufficient flexibility at the national level, while having in place a structure that allows for further comparability and which fosters mobility.

THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING IN CHANGING LABOUR MARKETS DRIVEN BY INNOVATION AND DIGITALISATION

- Digitalisation and ICT skills play a role through the whole educational system and are correspondingly gaining importance in employee training. To adapt and invent training measures for digital skills, it is necessary to support employers and employees in defining which digital skills are needed. Once these skills needs are identified it is important that curricula are adapted in a timely and effective way where necessary, particularly in the case of new occupations. In addition, non-formal training measures can be developed which respond to these needs.

- Even in times of ongoing digitalisation soft skills and professional skills remain important or are even gaining importance. Employee training has a role to play in providing a balanced mix of the necessary skills.
- New pedagogic and didactic procedures are necessary to fully exploit the advantages of digital learning. Furthermore, new digital learning formats need to be applied in a targeted way to support disadvantaged groups and, thus, ensure easy and equal access to training for all employees.
- SMEs can also profit from digital learning but they are often not able to build the digital infrastructure on their own. Therefore, social partners can install platforms that help them to cooperate with other SMEs and/or inform companies about financing options.
- Digitalisation can support social partners' information and guidance offers if the tools are user-friendly.
- Big data analytics can contribute to a better skills anticipation and improve the match of training offers to labour market needs.

QUALITY, TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENCY IN THE PROVISION OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING

- Most social partners are very satisfied with the quality of employee training in their respective countries and their involvement in quality assurance. Social partners help to ensure the relevance of training to labour market needs.
- In some countries social partners criticise the inadequate fit of existing training offers. Sometimes, training offers do not meet the demand and are in consequence not efficient. Again, this can be improved by a better and institutionalised inclusion of social partners in the anticipation of training needs and the derivation of subsequent measures to better align the training market to labour market needs.
- Informal and non-formal short-term training courses are becoming increasingly important, but they are not necessarily part of national quality systems. Social partners can play an important role in giving orientation to their members.
- The connection between existing initial vocational education, training and university offers on the one hand and employee training on the other hand should be improved to provide training more efficiently. It is important that social partners work together with educational institutions and companies and employees. Existing institutional connections (e.g., social partners' involvement in the boards of VET schools) should be used to this end.
- To further increase efficiency in the provision of training, it can be helpful to establish networks for information exchange and cooperation between enterprises and unions. This could lead to a joint definition of training content and to a corresponding organisation of the training supply.

2. INTRODUCTION

Facing fast-changing labour market demands, employers have a rising need for adequately qualified employees, while workers need to continuously update their skills. In general, global trends like the digitalisation of the economy not only lead to higher demands for competences but also require a continuous adaption and further development of skills to maintain employability. In countries in which demographic change leads to a rapidly ageing and a shrinking workforce, lifelong learning becomes even more important to maintain trainability and employability at higher ages as a prerequisite for high rates of old age employment. Lifelong learning is essential for individuals and companies to retain prosperity – be it to increase productivity and competitiveness, to foster personal and career development, or to foster equality and social cohesion in society. In this entire process it is important to bring together individual needs such as personal, social and professional development with labour market demands so that companies remain competitive.

For these reasons, the European social partner organisations have initiated a project on promoting social partnership in employee training. The objective is to compare the role of the social partners in employee training in twelve countries. The analysis of their different involvement and engagement sheds light on well-functioning institutional settings and gives the possibility to identify functional equivalents. The comparison gives the countries the possibility to learn from each other and to identify overarching European trends.

Due to its crucial importance, employee training has been on the agenda of the European Union (EU) for a long time and is an integral part of many European initiatives. An important milestone in the European cooperation in education and training is, for example, the Copenhagen process which was launched in 2002 (EU, 2002). Its aim was to foster European cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, notably including social partners. The Copenhagen process was set up to meet the objectives set by the European Council in Lisbon. It is considered to be the vocational equivalent of the Bologna process on higher education. Through the Copenhagen process, tools such as EUROPASS were implemented. The achievements of the Copenhagen process were evaluated by a number of communiqués, namely those of Maastricht (2004), Helsinki (2006), Bordeaux (2008) and Bruges (2010). Most recently, new priorities were defined in the Riga conclusions (EUR-Lex, 2016a). In this context, five medium-term deliverables in VET for the period 2015-2020 were defined, for example, in the field of promoting work-based learning and improving quality assurance mechanisms – all concerning initial vocational education and training (IVET) as well as continuing vocational education and training (CVET) including the field of employee training.

The Copenhagen process is furthermore an integral part of the so-called “Education and training” (ET 2020) strategic set of rules which aim at achieving the education-related targets of the Europe 2020 strategy. The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) was agreed upon by the European Commission and the Member States in 2009 (EU, 2009; EUR-Lex, 2016b). A lifelong approach to learning as well as the improvement of the quality and efficiency of education and training are amongst the core strategic objectives. These are important preconditions to be able to react to demographic or technological changes. The current work cycle was adopted in November 2015 and runs from 2016 to 2020. Among the top priorities are the provision of relevant and high-quality skills and competences for employability, innovation, active citizenship and well-being (e.g., creativity, sense of initiative, and critical thinking) and the improvement of transparency and the recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning and labour mobility (e.g. by means of the European quality reference framework) (EC, 2018a).

In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg (Gothenburg summit) by the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission. The first of the 20 key principles states that “Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market.” (EU, 2017, p. 11). Both general and vocational education are targeted. The European Pillar of Social Rights also emphasises the importance of social dialogue and the involvement of workers in order to pursue joint goals.

At the moment it can be observed that participation rates in employee training have risen in most European countries (using the EU Labour Force Survey). However, the training benchmark within the ET 2020 framework which states that at least 15 percent of 25- to 64-year olds (employed and non-employed) should participate in learning has not been met in most countries and is stagnating at around 11 percent (Eurostat, 2017). In particular trade unions see a main challenge in unequal access to training. Often workers who are in most need of training, such as low-skilled workers, have most difficulties to participate in training (ETUC, 2018).

The social partners play a crucial role in providing employee training and in increasing the participation rates in training. In this regard, the role of the social partners goes far beyond the negotiation of framework conditions. The engagement of social partners – employer as well as employee representatives – facilitates the introduction of a learning culture in enterprises in which lifelong learning is a natural component and comprises all groups of employees. In addition, the social partners can also engage in anticipating skills needs, mobilising resources, the process of the recognition and validation of competences and qualification, assuring the quality and efficiency of training etc.

The scope of action of the social partners in designing employee training depends on the overall institutional setting and, for example, the engagement of governmental institutions in this field. In consequence, different activities of the social partners can be functionally equivalent in international comparison and lead to equivalent outcomes. Thus, in international comparative studies, the institutional framework always needs to be considered when analysing the role and the scope of action of individual actors in employee training. This also holds for the derivation of policy recommendations. Solution approaches and recommendations always need to follow the principle of subsidiarity.

This final report on promoting social partnership in employee training is structured in the following way: Chapter 3 gives a brief introduction into the project design and methodology. Chapter 4 presents main facts and figures from international comparable data sources. Chapter 5 presents the results of the analysis of the role of social partners in four main fields of actions in employee training. It covers, first, the anticipation and identification of skills, competences and qualifications needed (Chapter 5.1), second, the mobilisation of resources (Chapter 5.2), third, the role of information support and guidance (Chapter 5.3), and, finally, the validation of skills, competences and qualifications and recognition (Chapter 5.4). The key results are illustrated in a cross-country comparative matrix. Chapter 6 elaborates on two main challenges in the field of employee training and how the social partners can contribute to the development. The two challenges in focus are the role of employee training in changing labour markets (Chapter 6.1) and the improvement of quality, transparency and efficiency (Chapter 6.2). Chapter 7 concludes.

3. PROJECT DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This final report is part of a comprehensive social partner project on promoting social partnership in employee training. It is based on desk research, expert interviews with social partner representatives of twelve European countries as well as several cluster seminars including country-specific and cross-country workshops. It sums up the results of the twelve individual country reports and derives general recommendations on social partner involvement in the field of employee training.

The twelve surveyed countries were jointly chosen by the steering committee and the researchers. The selection of countries results in a well-balanced geographical and institutional cross-section of EU members. The countries are Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden. Each country report was based on comprehensive desk research which covered quantitative and qualitative aspects of employee training. The desk research comprised literature as well as data research. The main international surveys on further training (e.g., the Adult Education Survey – AES and the Continuing Vocational Training Survey – CVTS) were the key data sources used as they provide reliable and comparable data for all countries. Selective results were included in the country reports.

As the activities of the social partners in employee training depend on the general institutional setting in the respective countries, different framework conditions require a different kind of engagement by the social partners. Thus, the country reports go far beyond a mere statistical comparison of employee training. Different activities of the social partners in various countries can lead to the same outcome – thus, they are functionally equivalent. The country-specific employee training activities are, for example, closely connected to the initial VET system. Therefore, the country reports covered the individuality of each country in great detail. At the same time, they were kept comparable enough to derive transnational results.

The country reports also took into account that employee training as well as the role of social partners in employee training may differ at the national, regional, sectoral, and enterprise level. In particular, reforms were often introduced at the sectoral or regional level and developments were therefore first observable at this level. Further key issues were the question how social partners can promote employee training in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as well as the question how social partners can contribute to the alignment of the training offer to the specific [sectoral] labour market demand.

The results of the comprehensive desk research were accompanied by interviews with social partner experts from the selected countries. These expert interviews were essential to classify the findings and to allow for an alignment between formal regulations and practical experience. Also, soft factors such as the image of employee training or the motivation of companies and employees to invest in employee training could be better addressed in qualitative expert interviews. Furthermore, country experts were helpful in identifying examples of best practices in the different countries to highlight particularities in the provision of employee training at the national, regional or enterprise level. The experts were chosen in close cooperation with the contracting authority as it was deemed important to find a well-balanced mix of experts who reflect various attitudes on employee training.

In the following, the focus of the quantitatively and qualitatively substantiated country analyses is briefly outlined.

The focus of desk research was particularly in the following fields:

- Participation in employee training: Based on a detailed literature research, results from international and national statistics and surveys (AES, CVTS) on the extent of training activities of individuals and companies in the twelve target countries were described.
- Governance: A special focus was given to the institutional setting and the role of different actors in employee training. In particular, the role of trade unions and employer organisations was charted to understand the process of creating the framework conditions for employee training. This also comprised legal regulations and collective bargaining agreements on employee training. Cost-sharing aspects and quality standards in employee training were also covered. This understanding was crucial to show how the social partners can promote employee training.
- Brief overview over the education system: To guarantee a comparability of the twelve country reports, they briefly outlined how employee training is embedded in the country specific education systems. The role of the social partners and enterprises in VET and university education differs significantly between European countries. These differences may induce different needs of employee training with respect to the training time and content.

The focus of the expert interviews was particularly in the following fields:

- Contextualisation of key issues in employee training: Key issues such as motives and barriers for engaging in employee training which were obtained from desk research were discussed with country experts from the social partners. This allowed for a comparison of formal regulations with real life experience of the experts. In addition, soft factors such as the image of employee training and social partners' assessment of their involvement were addressed which could not be captured by desk research alone.
- Best practices: Country experts provided examples of best practice in the respective countries which served to highlight particularities in employee training in the countries and were presented in the country reports. Furthermore, the experts shed light on barriers that – from their respective point of view – hinder the implementation or further use of employee training. These challenges were also highlighted in the country reports.

For each country, the results of the desk research and the social partner interviews were condensed and combined in a matrix. This matrix gives an assessment about how various fields of employee training are organised in the respective country and if and how social partners are involved. The selected topics include the anticipation and identification of skills needs, the mobilisation of resources, information, support and guidance as well as the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications (see also Cedefop, 2014). The matrix and the related findings are presented in Chapter 5 of this report.

The results of the twelve country reports were also presented and discussed in three cluster seminars – for four countries each – in Vienna (July 2017), Warsaw (November 2017), and Stockholm (April 2018). In preparation of the seminars, (translated) drafts of the country reports were sent to the participants. At the seminars, the interviewed country experts gathered to exchange their experience with colleagues from other countries as well as with the European social partner organisations and the researchers. These seminars were also used to capture additional input for each country, and the results of the cluster seminars were used to finalise the respective country reports. In addition, external experts from Cedefop, the European Federation of Centres of Career Guidance and Skills Assessment as well as company representatives responsible for employee training were invited. The outcomes of the desk research and cluster seminars contributed to the identification of social partners' policy recommendations, which are presented at the beginning of this report.

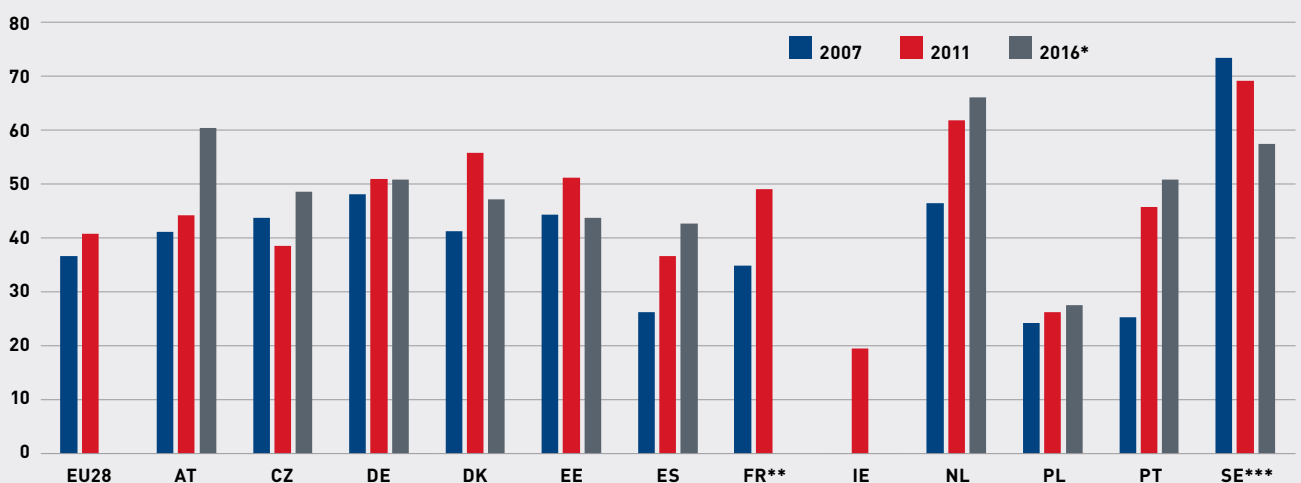
4. FACTS AND FIGURES ON EMPLOYEE TRAINING

As outlined in Chapter 3, this study combines desk research with qualitative information from expert interviews. Even though comparative international statistics always need to be interpreted with caution as they heavily depend on country-specific institutional settings, in the following some key statistics on employee training shall be presented. These figures give a first broad impression of the relative importance and prevalence of employee training in the surveyed countries.

4.1 EMPLOYED PERSONS' PARTICIPATION RATES

To shed light on the extent of employed persons' participation in training, we rely on data from the Adult Education Survey (AES). In this survey, individuals were asked about their participation in learning activities during the last twelve months. Learning activities are divided into formal education, non-formal education and informal education. Formal education and training is defined as education provided by the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous "ladder" of full-time education. Non-formal education and training is defined as any organised and sustained learning activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions (courses, workshops or seminars, guided-on-the-job training – such as planned periods of education, instruction or training directly at the workplace, organised by the employer with the aid of an instructor – and lessons). Informal learning is defined as intentional learning which is less organised and less structured than the previous types. The participation rate in education and training covers participation in both formal and non-formal education and training. Employer-sponsored learning activities are defined as all activities paid at least partially by the employer and/or performed during paid working hours¹.

Figure 4-1: Employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training



In percent, persons from 25 to 64 years

* Break in time series for all countries between 2011 and 2016

** Break in time series for France between 2007 and 2011

*** Sweden changed data collection mode between 2011 and 2016

Source: Own illustration based on AES, 2007, 2011, 2016; special evaluation of Eurostat

¹ The EU Labour Force Survey derives different individual participation rates because individuals were asked whether they had received formal or non-formal education and training in the four weeks preceding the survey. Adult learning covers formal and non-formal learning activities – both general and vocational – undertaken by adults after leaving initial education and training.

The AES data show that on average there is an increase in participation rates in employee training in Europe. As there is a break in time series between 2011 and 2016, the data for 2016 should be treated with caution when comparing data over time. Hence, decreases, as for example in the Swedish data, should not be over-assessed as in this specific case the data collection mode was changed between 2011 and 2016 (Statistics Sweden, 2017). Ireland has not published its AES 2016 data yet and French data is online but there is no special evaluation of EUROSTAT available yet which is why there is no data for 2016 for these countries or for EU 28.

Still, some general differences in average participation rates become visible. In 2006, the participation rates were the highest in the Netherlands (66.1 percent) and the lowest in Poland (27.6 percent). Portugal experienced the sharpest increase (26 percentage points). Sweden and Estonia are the only countries in our sample whose participation rates declined in this period though the decline in Estonia is negligible and Sweden's participation rate probably decreased due to methodological changes.

Table 4-1: Employed persons' participation rate by sex and age groups
In percent, job-related non-formal education and training, persons from 25 to 64 years

	Age groups					
	All	Women	Men	25-34	35-54	55-64
AT	60.4	59.4	61.2	63.0	60.6	55.0
CZ	48.6	46.7	50.2	50.7	49.7	41.2
DE	50.8	51.0	50.6	49.7	52.3	47.7
DK	47.2	50.6	44.2	46.2	49.6	42.2
EE	43.8	51.9	36.4	45.9	44.0	40.6
ES	42.7	44.1	41.5	43.9	44.1	35.6
FR*	49.1	50.1	48.0	55.5	49.7	36.7
IE*	19.5	17.2	22.5	22.7	16.4	not available
NL	66.1	68.4	64.3	66.9	66.1	65.0
PL	27.6	29.8	25.7	28.0	28.1	24.9
PT	50.8	50.5	51.1	57.3	51.6	39.3
SE	57.4	60.7	54.5	53.8	59.4	56.3

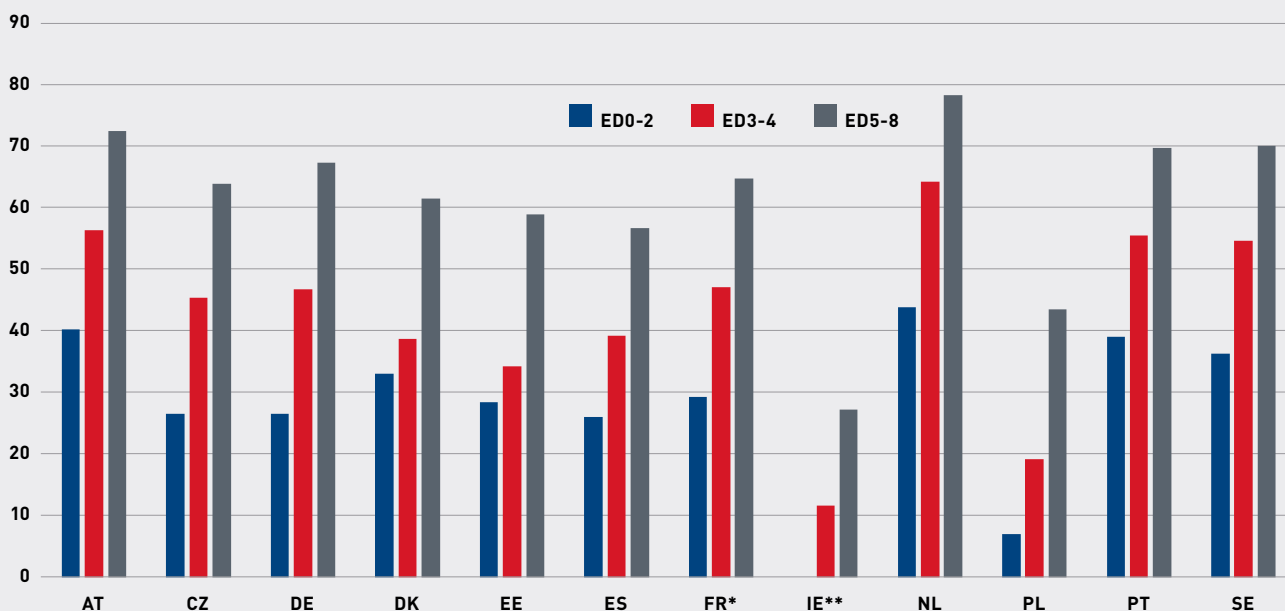
* Latest available data (2011)

Source: AES, 2016; special evaluation of Eurostat

Improving access to training is an important objective in lifelong learning, Table 4-1 shows the participation rates by sex and age groups. There is no uniform picture concerning the participation rates of men and women. In many countries there are no substantial differences in participation rates. In Sweden, Spain, Poland, Estonia, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands men participate less in further training. The difference is the largest in Estonia, where 52 percent of women participate, while the share is only 36 percent for men. In Austria, the Czech Republic and Portugal men are somewhat more likely to participate than women.

Furthermore, younger people (25-34 years) are more likely to participate in education and training than the elderly (55-64 years) – except for Sweden where it is the other way round. The gap is the largest in Portugal and the smallest in Germany and the Netherlands – both in absolute and in relative terms. There is no clear pattern for the persons aged between 35 and 54. In six countries their participation rate lies between the rate of the young and the elderly. In five countries their participation rate is the highest. For Ireland, there is no data available for the elderly so a comparison between all three groups is not possible.

Figure 4-2: Employed persons' participation rate by educational attainment level ¹⁾
In percent, job-related non-formal education and training, persons from 25 to 64 year



* Latest data available: 2011

** Latest data available: 2011, ED0-2 not available, ED3-4 not reliable

¹⁾ ISCED2011

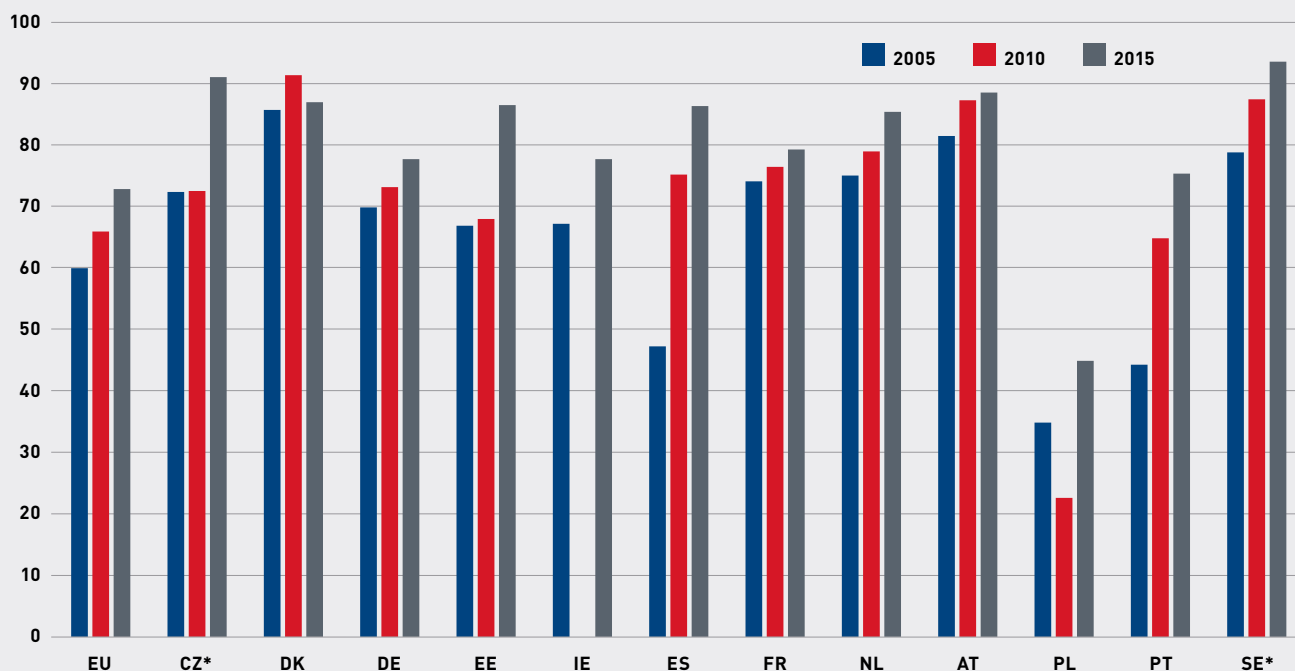
Source: Own illustration based on AES, 2016; special evaluation of Eurostat

An important target group of employee training are low-skilled persons. For this group, employee training is a prerequisite to keep up their employability. For all surveyed countries, there is a strong positive relationship between the educational attainment level and the participation rate. Employed persons with a high educational level (ISCED 5-8) participate far more often than those with a low educational level (ISCED 0-2). The relative gap is the largest in Poland, where only seven percent of the lower educated participate in non-formal training, while the share is six times higher for the higher educated (43 percent). For most countries in our sample, the higher educated are about twice as likely to participate in non-formal training than the lower educated.

4.2 COMPANIES' PARTICIPATION RATES

The Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) informs about enterprise activities in the field of employee training during one calendar year. Continuous vocational training (CVT) in the context of the survey is divided into courses and other forms of learning. Courses are usually separated from the active workplace (learning takes place in locations specially assigned for learning, like a classroom or training centre). They show a high degree of organisation (time, space and content) by a trainer or a training institution. Other forms of CVT are typically connected to the active work and the active workplace, but they can also include participation (instruction) in conferences, trade fairs, etc., for the purpose of learning. The following types of other forms of CVT are identified: planned training through guided-on-the-job training; through job rotation, exchanges, secondments or study visits; through participation (instruction received) in conferences, workshops, trade fairs and lectures; through participation in learning or quality circles; and through self-directed learning/e-learning.

Figure 4-3: Enterprises' participation rate - In percent



* "Break in time series between 2010 and 2015", only for CZ and SE

Source: Own illustration based on CVTS, 2005, 2010, 2015

In 2015, the proportion of companies providing training lay above the EU average for all surveyed countries, except for Poland. In most European countries, the share of enterprises providing training experienced a positive trend between 2005 and 2015. The EU average increased from 60 percent up to 73 percent. In all surveyed countries companies provided more training in 2015 than they did in 2005. Spain experienced the sharpest increase with participation rates going up from less than 50 percent in 2005 to nearly 90 percent in 2015. Besides Spain, there were also sharp increases in Estonia, Portugal and Poland (the increase in the Czech data may be driven by the break in time series and therefore should be treated with caution). In Poland, the share of enterprises providing training dropped by more than ten percentage points between 2005 and 2010 and then increased by more than 20 percentage points between 2010 and 2015. Still, the share is by far the smallest in our sample with less than half of Polish enterprises providing training. The increase in Poland may be driven by a new National Training Fund which was introduced in 2014. Denmark is the only country in our sample whose enterprises recently offered less often training than they did before (2015 vs. 2010), albeit at a high level: nearly 90 percent of Danish enterprises provide training.

4.3 BARRIERS TO EMPLOYEE TRAINING

When analysing participation rates in employee training an important question is what prevents employees from participating more in training and why companies are not providing more training. Table 4-2 lists the main barriers for employee training from both perspectives in an EU comparison. When interpreting these results, it has to be kept in mind that the prevalence of the individual barriers can differ significantly between the individual member countries.

Table 4-2: Main barriers for employee training EU28 - In percent

Individuals	2016 ¹⁾	Enterprises (non-training)	2015 ²⁾
No need for (further) education or training	77.5	Existing qualifications, skills and competences corresponded to the current needs of the enterprise	81.8
Conflict with work schedule or training at inconvenient times	40.2	People recruited with the skills needed	54.9
Family responsibilities	32.5	High workload and limited / no time available for staff to participate in CVT	32.0

¹⁾ No data available for Ireland

²⁾ No data available for Latvia and Sweden **Source:** AES, 2016; CVTS, 2015; multiple answers possible

When asked for obstacles to participation in (more) education and training, more than two thirds of the European employees stated no need for (further) education and training. This is not only the main individual obstacle on the EU average but also in each surveyed country. What is not observable from the data is whether this self-assessment coincides with the assessment of employers and the developments of the labour market. It is important to consider the role of information, support and guidance mechanisms which guide individuals to training measures that are relevant for the labour market and, thus, prevent mismatches (see also Chapters 5.1 and 6.1).

Conflicts with work schedule and family responsibilities rank second and third for employees on the EU average. Hence, mobilising resources – in particular time resources – is a main issue (see also Chapter 5.2). These barriers are also common among the surveyed countries but not decisive for all countries. In France for instance, the lack of employer or public service support ranks third, while family responsibilities only rank sixth. And in the Czech Republic, other personal reasons are more important than family responsibilities and problems with the work schedule.

From the point of view of European companies which do not provide training, the main barrier for participation in employee training is the fact that the existing qualifications, skills and competences of the workforce are already perceived as corresponding to the current needs of the enterprises. More than eight out of ten non-training companies name this barrier. Again, it must be ensured that this assessment is in line with employees' assessment as well as with labour market needs.

More than half of non-training companies state that they recruit new personnel with the skills needed rather than train their existing workforce. This is set against the backdrop of, on the one hand, increasing skills shortages that make it more and more difficult for companies to hire workers and, on the other hand, fast-changing labour market needs make it necessary to continuously develop the skills of existing employees.

One third of the non-training companies state that due to a high workload there is limited or no time for their staff to participate in employee training. Again, these barriers are also seen in the individual surveyed countries although their importance varies between the countries. This suggests that there is a need to look at different ways and in which forms training can take place. For example, training can take place during working hours, outside of working hours or a combination of the two. Flexibility in the undertaking of training is important for enabling learners to fit it around their work and private responsibilities. The use of digital learning platforms can also help to make training more accessible at a time and location that is convenient for learners and employers.

Interestingly, a lack of financial resources is not perceived as the main barrier for (more) employee training in Europe – neither for individuals nor for non-training companies.

5. THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL PARTNERS

As outlined in the previous chapter, countries differ regarding the extent of participation in training by both employed persons as well as enterprises. However, merely looking at and comparing average participation rates may hide underlying developments, reforms and the degree of social partner involvement in the respective countries. This makes it necessary to have a closer look at the story behind the figures.

Since the aim of this report is to highlight the role of social partners in promoting employee training, this chapter describes social partner involvement in four dimensions: anticipation and identification of skills needs, mobilisation of resources, involvement in information, support and guidance as well as validation and recognition of skills, competences and qualifications. The main findings of the country reports are condensed in the matrix presented in figure 5-1. These findings are based on the authors' desk research in combination with the input of the interviewed social partners (see Chapter 3). Hence, both the official system of social partner involvement as such, but also the de facto outcomes and the satisfaction with the system as described by the interviewed social partner experts define the overall assessment. Arrows indicate the influence that recent reforms, policy shifts or other events have in the relevant fields.

Figure 5-1 shows a wide heterogeneity in outcomes both across as well as within the selected countries. Almost all countries display some fields in which they are somewhat closer or further away from what may be considered an optimal outcome (in terms of the system as such or social partners' satisfaction with its implementation), and there is no single country that performs well in all selected fields jointly. There is also substantial variation when it comes to the evaluation of the four fields across the selected countries. For example, while the anticipation and identification of skills needs works quite well in five out of the twelve countries, there is still room for considerable improvement in two other countries. Mobilising resources works well in three out of the twelve countries, but there are also three countries with substantial scope for improvement. In the field of information, support and guidance, no country has reached an optimal state just yet, with two countries lagging clearly behind. The recognition and validation of competences and qualifications has an optimal assessment in only one of the surveyed countries, while there is still scope for better outcomes in three countries.

The remainder of this chapter looks at the selected fields in more detail and provides examples of best practice along with recommendations as to how social partner involvement can be further improved.

Figure 5-1: Social partners' assessment of employee training in four selected dimensions

Country	Austria (AT)	Netherlands (NL)	Czech Republic (CZ)	Spain (ES)	Poland (PL)	Germany (DE)	Portugal (PT)	Denmark (DK)	Estonia (EE)	France (FR)	Ireland (IE)	Sweden (SE)
Anticipation and identification of skills needs	***	***	* ↑	**	**	***	* ↑	***	**	**	**	***
Mobilising resources	***	***	*	**	* ↑	**	**	***	* ↑	**	**	**
Information, support and guidance	**	**	*	**	**	**	*	**	**	** ↑	**	**
Validation of skills, competences and qualifications and recognition	** ↑	** ↑	**	*	* ↑	* ↑	**	***	**	**	**	**

Prominence of issues shown on a scale from 1 to 3 stars

* = low ** = intermediate *** = strong

↑ indicates positive trend

5.1 ANTICIPATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS NEEDS

The anticipation and identification of skills needs is important because all labour market actors need to know which future skills are needed to adapt their plans:

- individuals need this information for their career development planning;
- employers need to adjust their human resource development strategy and personnel planning to this information and
- public and private training providers need do adapt their training supply to existing and future skills needs.

The anticipation and identification of skills in Europe takes place on different levels and in different forms.

The most common forms are committees and councils. Committees and councils at national, regional and/or sectoral level with social partner involvement are existing in all countries. These committees are bipartite among employees' and employers' organisations or tripartite with additional government participation. In the Czech Republic, social partner participation is not balanced, but rather dominated by the employer side. In Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands, further experts (i.e. researchers, training providers) are institutionally involved in the anticipation of skills needs (see best practice boxes for Austria and Sweden). The inclusion of further actors can be an important success factor to get useful and broad information on future skills needs and to achieve a quick implementation of new training measures in the training market.



Best Practice AUSTRIA: Research in the Standing Committee for New Skills

The social partners are involved in the Standing Committee for New Skills at the Public Employment Service (*Arbeitsmarktservice – AMS*) which is a consultant board and consists of AMS researchers, social partners, governmental representatives, sectoral experts, and employers. It aims at identifying qualification needs and determining the AMS' training programme for the unemployed.

The results are rated as very helpful by the social partners as they provide useful information for the training of the unemployed, but also for companies and employed people. One representative summarises that the social partners are very satisfied with involvement and process, as it is a good mixture of research analysis and practical experience combined with a realistic view of AMS' possibilities and training providers' capacities. All relevant players are involved.

Source: Seyda, 2017

An important prerequisite for a constructive dialogue on future skills needs is a reliable data base which offers orientation for all involved actors. Sweden has become a leader in anticipation because the bipartite and tripartite dialogue is based on a sound data base (see best practice box Sweden).



Best Practice SWEDEN: Swedish skills assessment and anticipation (SAA)

Sweden has become a leader in developing tools for the assessment and anticipation of skills needs on the labour market (OECD, 2016b). The success of the future skills anticipation lies in the sound data base provided by Statistics Sweden as well as the Public Employment Service (PES) in combination with a constructive dialogue with trade unions and employer organisations. SAA is based on the combination of different tools and an active dissemination of the results by all stakeholders. This allows the adaptation of regional policies on the respective skills needs.

Source: Flake, 2018b

In France, Denmark and the Netherlands, anticipation takes place mainly at sectoral level and has a very sector-specific focus. The social partners claim that more cooperation and coherence between the sectors would be helpful. This is important for individuals and their career development. Sometimes, in order to keep up the employability of individuals, changes in employer or sector are necessary. To ease changes, a solely sector-specific approach is not enough. In addition, a national approach is also helpful to develop a – national – strategy for overarching trends like digitalisation or skills shortages. In particular, social partner organisations which act as an umbrella organisation can promote better cooperation and coherence between different sectors.

In the Czech Republic, Poland and Estonia, institutionalised processes of anticipation have been introduced only recently. This may be one reason why in Estonia the trade unions complain about insufficient resources for the anticipation of skills needs. In Poland, the anticipation is not treated as a main issue of social partners due to a lack of resources. In France and the Netherlands, the anticipation has a longer tradition. However, the social partners see potential to improve their system: to help individuals in their career development and to simplify changes between sectors it would be helpful to harmonise the results of and to improve the cooperation between the different sectors. In Germany, the social partners trust in the German bottom-up process where the need is identified at enterprise level and faced by a very flexible training market; overarching themes are picked up by the social partners.

Best Practice CZECH REPUBLIC: Joining forces in skills forecasting

As employers are increasingly facing skill mismatches (OECD, 2016a), new projects have been realised at various levels. The Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has initiated in 2017 the so-called “Compass Project” aiming at developing a comprehensive and sustainable system of future skills needs anticipation. Apart from the National Training Fund (NVF) and the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (*Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí – VÚPSV*), social partner representatives, regional authorities and regional Labour Offices also provide their expertise. After an evaluation at the end of 2017, the project is set to propose an institutionalised system of skill needs forecasting with a high level of social partner involvement in the next four years.

Source: Zibrowius, 2017

Best Practice ESTONIA: OSKA

OSKA combines labour market projections with qualitative insights from sectors and other sources. It helps to learn and teach the skills needed. It analyses the needs for labour and skills necessary for Estonia’s economic development over the next ten years. Each year, the need for labour and skills is evaluated and recommendations for training requirements are prepared in five OSKA sectors. The implementation of OSKA is overseen by the OSKA Coordination Council, which has nine members: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Estonian Employers’ Confederation (*ETTK*), the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Estonian Service Unions’ Confederation (*TALO*), the Estonian Trade Union Confederation (*EAKL*) and the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. There are also sectoral expert panels at the Estonian Qualifications Authority that prepare forecasts of labour requirements and skills to gather expertise from job creators, schools and public authorities. The implementation of OSKA is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) (Kutsekoda, 2018b).

Source: Jambo, 2018

Social partners are involved in the updating of formal training regulations and/or in the development of new professions in some countries. In doing so, the social partners identify and bundle skills needs which influence the training regulations. If in addition, the training market is flexible these changes can be implemented quickly. If, as in Denmark, social partners are responsible for updating IVET and CVET curricula, they can respond very flexibly to changes in skills demands, which are implemented quickly by the training providers. However, Portuguese social partners are also involved in updating the national competence catalogue, but due to an inflexible training market these changes do not lead to changed training offers.

The training market itself can also contribute to the anticipation and identification of skills needs. If training providers are in a dialogue with the companies, they can pick up new trends quickly and respond to changing needs of enterprises independently of the institutionalised approach of anticipation (as, for example, in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, or Denmark). In Germany, the enterprise level is the main level for identification of skills (bottom-up approach).

In some countries, the social partners act as training providers or are members in the advisory board of important providers (as, for example, in Austria, the Netherlands, or Denmark). In the Netherlands, the social partners cooperate with VET schools so that social partners as providers react quickly and flexibly to the changing skill needs. In Austria, the employers’ associations and the trade unions are represented in the board of the most important training providers. However, social partner involvement in training provision does not mean that the training market is flexible. In Portugal, the social partners rate the training market as not sufficiently flexible although the social partners are – directly or indirectly – involved in the provision of training.

In many countries, the social partners do their own research on skills needs, mandate research institutes or are in the board of research institutes.

To make anticipated training needs visible, catalogues of competences or training measures can be helpful. The Portuguese National Catalogue of Competences and the system of Adult Vocational Education (*Arbejdsmarkedssuddannelser – AMU*) in Denmark list all available formal qualifications and are updated regularly.

In Ireland, France and Spain, the social partners are institutionally engaged on enterprise level to identify skills needs and are involved in the development of enterprises' training plans. However, trade unions in France and Spain want more involvement through negotiations and codetermination instead of counselling and approval.

SUMMARY

- Successful approaches in the anticipation and identification of skills needs combine high quality labour market data with social dialogue. The institutional participation of social partners in labour market projections and the identification of training needs can contribute significantly to avoiding skills mismatches.
- To achieve a comprehensive anticipation and identification of skills needs, sectoral and regional approaches are needed. These may be complemented by inter-sectoral approaches as appropriate. Better cooperation between sectors can furthermore help individuals in their career planning, facilitate changes between sectors and contribute to the development of an overall educational strategy.
- The strategic inclusion of further actors in the process of anticipating and identifying skills needs has proven to be a successful tool to obtain useful and broad information on future skills developments. Relevant actors could be, for example, research institutions or educational institutions like training providers. A further advantage of integrating them at an early stage is that they can promote quick implementation of new training measures in the training market.
- A flexible training market is helpful to identify skills needs because the flexibility presupposes that training providers are able to perceive changing training demands and to respond quickly to new skills needs. This flexibility can only be achieved by an exchange between companies and training providers. Social partners can promote the dialogue between training market and labour market by bundling the interests of their members. Alternatively, social partners can act as an intermediary and communicate the needs of their members to the training providers.

5.2 MOBILISING RESOURCES

When talking about potential barriers to (more) participation in employee training often a lack of resources is mentioned – both, with regard to money and time (see Chapter 4.3). In most surveyed countries, time is perceived as an even stronger barrier than money. In particular, during a good economic situation where companies have full order books enterprises do not have the time to release their employees for training. After 2008, in the context of the financial and economic crisis, some enterprises managed to invest the time which was available due to short-time work in training. In particular in countries with a strong tradition in collective bargaining, as, for example, Germany or Sweden, companies managed to find such solutions. However, at the same time enterprises in other countries which were particularly hit by the crisis were forced to cut down their engagement in employee training during the crisis, like Ireland and Portugal.

The surveyed countries differ in their assessment of the available financial resources for employee training. In Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Sweden the social partners rate the financial resources as adequate. In the three Eastern European countries, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Poland, as well as in Portugal, Ireland and Spain the social partners rate the resources as insufficient. In Germany, the employer associations are satisfied with the resources whereas trade unions see a need for more investment in employee training. In Spain, however, due to the changing legislation, social partners cannot estimate if the provided financial resources are adequate for the future. Spanish social partners rate as very good that more financial resources are available for the identification of skills needs.



Best Practice SPAIN: Financial resources for new CVET planning

In Spain, CVET procedures and processes have to be reorganised corresponding to the new legislation. This planning is currently taking place and resources of several million Euros are dedicated to planning CVET in a new way, an amount that is about six times as high as in the years before. Within the national social dialogue, first meetings took place to establish a constant structure and all stakeholders are discussing how to split the budget up and for which projects to use it. Furthermore, a few million Euros have been allocated for training to trade unions and employer organisations. In the point of view of the social partners, the outcomes of the negotiations are a positive progress, but it has taken since 2015 to reach it (UGT-CEC, 2017).

Source: Wörndl, 2017

In nearly all surveyed countries access to training of low-skilled employees and too little training provision by SMEs is mentioned as a problem, irrespective of the amount of financial resources. In all countries the social partners stated that employers as well as employees should be more aware of the value of further training – for the personal development of employees as well as for the competitiveness of companies. In particular enterprises need to see it more as an investment in the future than mere costs.



Best Practice PORTUGAL: Variable pricing schemes

Some training providers have variable pricing schemes. While daytime courses are for free, evening courses have to be paid. This is intended to motivate employers and employees to create space for training in the daily work-routine.

Source: Flake, 2018a

The financing of employee training is organised in different forms. Training funds exist in several of the surveyed countries (i.e., the Netherland, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Estonia, France and Ireland). All of them are financed by the employers. The amount of the contribution to the funds is determined via collective agreements or by law. In some countries, only employers can ask for money from the fund, in other countries employees or both – employers and employees – are eligible for funding.

Advantages of funds are that a reliable financing structure for employee training exists. Furthermore, SMEs can be supported if they pay less money to the funds as for example in France and/or if financial resources are redistributed through the fund. General problems of funds may be that they are too bureaucratic, do not have enough resources or that money is left over and is not transferable afterwards. In addition, a high number of funds can lead to a lack of coordination and transparency between funds as is criticised, for example, by social partner organisations in the Netherlands and France. This is in particular the case when funds are organised on sectoral level. In these cases, funding is often limited to sector-specific skills provision – even though cross-sectoral approaches would be more helpful for the personal development of employees and their individual employability. Social partner organisations can contribute to a better cooperation between funds.

Independent from the type of financing employers shoulder the largest share of training costs as long as the training measure is related to the current workplace. In some countries, additional public resources, e.g., in the form of stipends are available for employees. However, these mainly aim at upgrading training measures which lead to a higher formal degree – less to non-formal or informal training offers.

In almost all countries there is a common understanding that the employer pays for training which is compulsory and/or helpful for the job. However, in countries like Germany, there is a discussion about whether employees also should shoulder a part of the costs (in form of money or leisure), because they too profit from training. To understand this German discussion, it is important to know that enterprises not only offer initial vocational training but also pay remuneration to apprentices.

In nearly half of the surveyed countries collective agreements play an important role in employee training. The issues agreed differ widely: In Sweden, for example, a right to training leave is agreed whereas in Germany mainly procedures for identification of company specific and individual qualification needs as well as guidance in employee training are regulated. If the collective agreements are at sectoral or national level (as in the Netherlands, Germany, France or Sweden) it is necessary to implement the agreements on enterprise level. Social partners can support enterprises to breathe life into the agreements, for example by providing general guidelines for human resource development structures or appraisal interviews which can be adapted to the specific company.

In many countries like Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Sweden and France individuals/employees have access to (paid) training leave under certain circumstances (see country reports for details). However, in some countries this training leave is not fully exploited due to very complicated regulation as in France, or because employees do not ask for the leave as in Austria, because the right is not well known or the need for and benefit of training is not appreciated. Not only from the employer's point of view but also from the individual side, time restrictions are an important barrier to training. To better direct time resources, an enterprise-specific and individual approach is necessary which can be invented for example in the appraisal interview (see Chapter 5.3). In addition, the use of modern forms of training like e-learning offers a lot of flexibility to learn when it is possible.

Personal training accounts can cover paid training leave for job-related trainings as well as training measures not connected to the job which are attained outside the working hours. There are different ways of funding a training account: it can, for example, be financed via training funds, private contributions and public interest or public grants which bundle existing support programmes. An individual training account can foster an individual's career development irrespective of the current job. How far the shared responsibility for training between employer and employee is touched depends on the concrete regulation of the account.



Best Practice FRANCE: Personal Training Account (*Compte Personnel de Formation*)

The personal training account (PTA) was created by an inter-professional agreement between the social partners in 2015. The account “hosts” training hours the employees acquire during their professional life as well as the training programmes the employees may apply to. The account is automatically updated at the end of each civil year, increasing the stock proportionally to the accomplished working time with a maximum of 24 hours (48 hours for low-qualified persons) per year and a ceiling of 150 (400) hours in total. These hours may be financed by a training fund (*Organismes Paritaires Collecteurs Agréés - OPCA*), the labour administration, the region or the state, the employer or the account holders themselves. Only certain training programmes or services which are named in a list of funded training measures (*Liste Nationale Interprofessionnelle*) can be funded as part of the PTA (Centre Inffo, 2015). The employee can decide how and when to use this account, but has to apply for the money from the *OPCA*s. For training measures outside working time, the employer’s approval is not necessary. If the training takes place during working time, the employer must agree. The salary is maintained and paid by the *OPCA*.

The *OPCA*s are managed by the social partners. They collect the compulsory contributions paid by companies for employees’ vocational and further training. Agreements on sectoral level determine the obligatory contribution to the *OPCA*, which depends on the company size: Companies with less than 11 employees pay 0.55 percent of their wage bill, companies with 11 or more employees pay 1 percent.

With the current reform in France, the PTA will change. As proposed by the minister of labour the PTA will be the one and only instrument which all people can use more autonomously without obligatory intermediaries such as *OPCA*s or other institutions. The account’s unit will change from hours to Euros; with an individual maximum of 500 Euros per year (low-qualified persons 800 Euros) and a ceiling of 5,000 (8,000) Euros.

Source: Seyda, 2018b

SUMMARY

- Promoting the value of employee training is an important field of action. Social partners can play a role in communicating the benefits of training – for the individual development of employees as well as for the competitiveness and innovative capacity of companies – among their members and thereby raise the overall awareness of further training opportunities for all employees.
- The awareness of the value of training and the common understanding that employee training is an investment and not only a financial burden is an important requirement to increase the awareness and the willingness of employers and employees alike to mobilise resources. In practice, time resources are often more of a bottleneck for employee training than financial resources. Therefore, social partners can contribute to finding solutions for instance as part of their efforts to inform, support and provide guidance at the enterprise level.
- A reliable and well-known structure of financing employee training can help to increase training participation. In Europe, there are many alternative tools used for this, for example, the right to paid training leave (by law or through collective agreements), personal training accounts or (mostly sectoral) training funds. The success of the different tools depends on the country-specific institutional framework. However, an important precondition for the tools to succeed is that their existence and their functioning is well communicated to all potential users.
- Sometimes, the individual training needs of employees do not coincide with the needs of employers. This is for example the case when employees at risk of unemployment have better labour market perspectives if they choose training measures which prepare for a change of employer and, often related to this, a sectoral change. Thus, there needs to be a partial promotion of employee training which is independent of the current employer. Publicly funded individual training accounts are one possibility to support the individual career development of employees independently of their actual employer. Skills assessments are another way to identify a person’s training needs, while fostering a strengthened sense of individual responsibility for their training development.

5.3 INFORMATION, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Knowing about available training offers and how to best use them is crucial for employers and employees. This concerns training contents and training formats alike. Hence, the importance of efficient mechanisms to inform, support and guide their members is a pivotal concern of social partner organisations. But it is not solely incumbent on social partners to address these issues: public entities such as ministries, employment agencies or other actors as well as training providers themselves are also involved. A well-functioning interaction between the various stakeholders is essential for the best possible outreach.

A general distinction needs to be made between various layers of social partner involvement when it comes to information, support and guidance: the topic can be addressed at the national level (e.g., via broad information campaigns about the benefits of employee training), it can be tackled at the regional or sectoral level (where social partners and other actors can take into account particular economic circumstances), the company level (where training needs analyses can identify enterprise-specific skills needs) or entirely at the individual level (e.g., personal career development irrespective of the current occupation).

Social partners' approaches vary considerably between the different countries investigated for this report. In Poland, social partners only play a subordinate role in information, support and guidance, while other actors such as the Association of Polish Crafts as well as the individual chambers are active in this field. In the Czech Republic and Denmark, social partners focus on the enterprise level to inform their members about employee training and its benefits. Austrian social partners inform and guide directly through their organisations and indirectly via their training providers. The focus on the individual is prevalent in France: The French support system for instance includes individual counselling on career development and competence assessment that outlines employees' career perspectives and suggests appropriate training. Given the lack of social partnership at the national level in Ireland, employers' umbrella organisations have shifted their focus to policy advice and promoting the importance of training at the political level. In the Netherlands, trade unions offer career guidance in all labour market regions and also some training funds have own information offers.



Best Practice NETHERLANDS: Learning Ambassadors

In a pilot project, the FNV has established with other partners so-called learning ambassadors on the factory floor at Philips (a-advies, 2017). The idea stems from the UK. Learning ambassadors are employees who inform their colleagues about their training possibilities as well as about their training rights and motivate them to use them. In particular low-skilled persons can be reluctant to talk to their supervisors about their needs for training. The ambassadors overcome this hurdle. The project partners have also developed a handbook for the learning ambassadors themselves in which they find information on how to proceed.

Source: Flake, 2017

Public actors are also important when it comes to providing information about employee training. Statutory authorities such as employment agencies or education providers such as vocational schools inform about training courses and their benefits. Main channels are webpages and brochures, but also direct engagement for instance at employment fairs. It appears that this information provided by third parties is seen as relevant and important also by social partners: Some respondents indicated that in the case that social partners themselves offer training, a neutral source of information would be considered useful.



Best Practice GERMANY: Social partners' agreements (*Sozialpartnervereinbarungen*)

Social partner agreements such as "*Fachkräfte sichern: weiter bilden und Gleichstellung fördern (2015-2020)*" were initiated by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs while the social partners were involved in the development and implementation. The guideline for social partners (*Sozialpartnerrichtlinie*) regulates the conditions for support. A social partner agreement or a collective agreement is mandatory for public support. The aim is to support social partners and companies to ensure the supply of skilled employees. The focus lies specifically on networking activities especially for SMEs and on sectoral dialogue.

Source: Seyda, 2018a

Three major challenges are identified by social partners when it comes to information, support and guidance in the field of employee training. According to the interviewed representatives, it is important to appeal to disadvantaged groups (such as low-skilled workers, the elderly or migrants) and it is equally important to find the right response to the question how SMEs can be properly addressed. In addition, a balance needs to be struck between enterprises' training needs at the one hand and the individual development of employees at the other.

From an employer's perspective, investing in training for low-skilled target groups may seem as less beneficial than investing in training for higher qualified staff. However, given an imminent lack of skilled workers and demographic constraints, tapping new skills potentials should be high on the agenda of employers. Offering more training to these employee groups may be a key success factor to keep a competitive edge. However, appropriate training offers need to be available and employers as well as employees need to know about them for such an approach to work. In Portugal, the additional challenge is that many employers, especially in micro-enterprises, are low-skilled themselves, which makes it even harder to inform and convince them about the benefits of employee training. At the same time, and when it comes to basic skills, there is an important role for state education in all countries as this is where the primary responsibility for teaching such skills lies.

The role of SMEs in the context of information, support and guidance is also crucial. Whereas larger enterprises often have established training systems to systematically skill their workforce, smaller enterprises with only a handful of employees typically lack the financial and time resources to come up with detailed individual training plans. Regular performance interviews as well as systematic career development is less common in SMEs, as well. As sending one employee out of only five poses a greater challenge to a small firm compared with sending one employee out of 1,000 to training does in a large enterprise, SMEs need to be adequately addressed with their specific needs. Easier access to information about training as well as easier participation in training may be offered via new digital channels, as social partners *inter alia* in Ireland and Denmark point out (see also Chapter 6.1).



Best Practice IRELAND: Skillnet Ireland connects private companies to coordinate their training needs

Skillnet Ireland (www.skillnetireland.ie) brings together networks of private firms with similar training needs, typically on a regional or sectoral basis. Currently, 65 training networks are listed supporting 14,000 companies and 50,000 trainees. Via the Training Networks Programme, Skillnet enables these firms to jointly carry out training they could not offer alone. "Member companies, and their employees, are directly involved in the identification, design, delivery and evaluation of training". Skillnet Ireland is co-funded by the Department of Education and Skills through an annual grant of approximately €18 million from the National Training Fund in 2017 and employers. Social partners are present in the board of Skillnet Ireland, with three members from trade unions, three members from employers and three members nominated from the government.

Source: Zibrowius, 2018b

Whether it concerns the right training offers for specific target groups or general access to training for enterprises in general: the objectives of employees and employers need not necessarily coincide. Proper information, support and guidance are especially relevant when it comes to finding solutions that take into account the needs of both sides. As training markets in some countries such as Germany or France are considered as non-transparent given a large variety of training providers, social partners at all levels – in cooperation with other stakeholders, where appropriate – may be tasked with offering tailor-made information and guidance for employers and employees. However, at times social partners may find it beneficial for both sides to outsource this task to a neutral third party to avoid potential conflicts of interest, e.g., when they themselves act as training providers.

Irrespective of the level of their involvement, the importance of informing their members and supporting them in finding appropriate training offers is considered as very important by all interviewed social partners. It is apparent that evolving skills needs need to be tackled and that employees require appropriate training to adapt to changing labour market conditions. Chapter 5.2 has shown that in a number of countries that were part of this project there is a right to training for employees. However, the training resources are often not used as employees either do not know about their right to training or how to make use of it. Thus, improving information, support and guidance offers can also significantly contribute to increasing participation rates.

Best Practice FRANCE: Counselling in career development (*Conseil en évolution professionnelle*)

The counselling in career development is a free service of information, counsel and guidance at individual level concerning further vocational training and education. It is operated by the *OPACIFS* (part of the *OPCA* which is responsible for the *Congé Individuelle de Formation*), the *Pôle Emploi* and other institutions (Ministère du travail, 2018). In their recent inter-professional agreement, the social partners stipulated measures to improve the *CEP*: the guidance should be more professional and of higher quality, more evaluation should be done, the access to guidance should be easier and the employees should get more support in their education planning.

Source: Seyda, 2018b

In general, the role of social partners can involve offering support and guidance to their members, in addition to providing them with information. To this end, guiding both employers and employees to the relevant and effective training offers is the key to success. Even though the overall assessment of social partner involvement in information, support and guidance leaves room for improvement, efforts are undertaken by social partners to make training markets and available offers even more transparent and easier to navigate through. Additional resources, both by social partners directly or indirectly via public funding, may help to promote this important topic even further. The training needs of older workers and of individuals not in employment, education or training (NEETs) in particular should also be taken into account. As part of this, Member States should ensure the implementation of the upskilling pathways Council recommendation with the effective involvement of social partners, as applicable.

SUMMARY

- Informing both employers and employees about available training offers and offering effective support and guidance in employee training is a key issue in all surveyed countries.
- It is at the employee, respectively the enterprise level that the balance between employers' and employees' training needs has to be found. Social partners can play a role in increasing participation in and efficiency of training measures.
- Employee training should be seen as an overall approach within which there may be a need for a targeted approach to specific groups. In such cases, and as part of the wider approach to active labour market policies, Member States should provide effective and systematic support including financial resources for training that supports the integration of the low-skilled, unemployed and socio-economically disadvantaged groups in the labour market, in particular the migrants and refugees via employee training and adult apprenticeships. The training needs of older workers and of NEETs in particular should also be taken into account. As part of this, Member States should ensure the implementation of the up-skilling pathways Council recommendation with the effective involvement of social partners, as applicable.
- There is a particular need to foster information, support and guidance in SMEs. Bundling SMEs needs can contribute to better training results that a single enterprise could not reach alone.
- The further development of online tools that make available training offers visible and give information about the quality of training courses would be helpful for raising awareness of training opportunities. In addition, the use of online courses that allow for training employees independent of set course times could be better promoted. Such an approach will be particularly useful for SMEs who may otherwise lack access to information and training offers.
- Independent information by a neutral third party concerning employees' career prospects or employers' business needs may be beneficial. This approach can help alleviate potential conflicts of interest.

5.4 VALIDATION OF SKILLS, COMPETENCES AND QUALIFICATIONS AND RECOGNITION

A first set of European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning was published jointly by the European Commission and Cedefop in 2009 and has been regularly revised since then (Cedefop, 2016a). However, the analyses of the twelve countries revealed that even though all countries have introduced some sort of recognition and validation procedures, the further development and the promotion of these procedures is still an ongoing process in most countries.

The importance and acceptance of recognition is connected to the importance of formal certificates on the respective labour market which varies significantly in Europe. In some countries where formal qualifications are of great importance, the way in which competences are acquired is of larger importance than in other countries. This holds in Austria, France and Germany, for example. In all three countries recognition still only plays a minor role. In Germany, the validation of non-formal and informal competences aims primarily at guiding people in a formal qualification path, which again shows the importance of formal learning. Other countries are much more advanced when it comes to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal competences. The well-developed French system for recognising non-formal and informal competences includes a right for employees to validate their prior

learning. But the system is very little used and French society lacks a broad acceptance for qualifications beyond formal education. Denmark also has a legal framework for the validation of prior learning which exists for almost all forms of formal adult education and training and individuals have a right to request an assessment of their prior learning which is used, for example, when people are looking to obtain new vocational degrees. In contrast, formal qualifications are of comparatively little importance in Estonia and there is a broad acceptance of the validation of prior learning.

In most countries, the familiarity with the recognition and validation of non-formal or informal qualifications is limited. Employees as well as employers are often not aware of the possible recognition procedures and its benefits. The low awareness levels may partly be explained by the fact that the systems and processes for recognising prior learning are still fairly new in many countries. In many countries social partners describe the promotion of existing procedures as an important (and ongoing) task.

Best Practice DENMARK: Minkompetencemappe.dk - An online tool that gathers all individual competences

Employees have the possibility to enter their formal as well as their non-formal qualifications and competences at a webpage (www.minkompetencemappe.dk). There, all individual skills and qualifications are gathered and stored. Individuals get an overview about what they already achieved and all competences are made transparent. This helps particularly when employees aim at reaching a formal vocational degree and can present credible information about all their prior learning outcomes. This way, they may be able to shorten the duration of their training and get only the courses they truly need.

Source: Zibrowius, 2018a

A relevant precondition to better promote existing recognition and validation procedures are high quality standards so that the results of the procedures are reliable. All actors on the labour market need to have confidence in the results. In Poland, the validity of certificates is a challenge, as there are many certificates on the labour market which are regarded as not trustworthy. The issue of trustworthiness also becomes very evident in Portugal. The Portuguese government committed itself to the promotion of a national system of recognition of prior learning – probably due to its low general education level and few formal certificates on the labour market. It was a flagship project and a large number of certificates were issued. This led, however, to an overload of the responsible institutions and the quality and therefore the reputation of the process suffered. In consequence, the system had to undergo some major reforms and is currently being re-established. Part of these reforms was the introduction of a new passport for employees which allows for the documentation of prior learning. Similar passport systems exist in other countries. In Denmark, for instance, employees can store all their achieved competences and qualifications online. In the Netherlands, digital passports are used in certain sectors.

Transparency and standardisation play a major role for the recognition and validation of prior learning. Both are required for a comprehensive recognition of certificates of non-formal or informal education. Therefore, the introduction of National Qualifications Frameworks and their assignment to the European Qualification Framework contribute significantly to the establishment of recognition and validation procedures. In this context it would be useful to advance a standard format for describing learning outcomes for the purposes of the comparison and transparency of qualifications. This should take place in the form of a common understanding, from the bottom up, of learning outcomes. Such an approach should not be about the harmonisation of learning outcomes. At the same time, there needs to be sufficient flexibility at the national level, while having in place a structure that allows for further comparability and which fosters mobility. The Austrian social partners expect that the introduction of the Austrian National Qualifications Framework in 2016 has led to more transparency of recognition procedures because the concrete value of a training measure is now visible and the process of standardisation is better known. In France, the high complexity of the system is expected to be reduced by the ongoing reforms. To improve transparency, Dutch social partners have prepared a quality label for providers.



Best Practice ESTONIA: National Qualifications Framework (EstQF)

To link the Estonian 5-levels occupational qualifications framework to the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF), a working group was established to develop a comprehensive national qualification framework, the EstQF (Estonian Qualifications Framework) (Kutsekoda, 2018a). Both employers' and employees' organisations were involved as well as Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. According to the Occupational Qualifications Act, the EstQF has eight levels with four sub-frameworks, namely 1) general education qualifications, 2) VET qualifications, 3) higher education qualifications, and 4) occupational qualifications (Kutsekoda, 2018d).

Source: Jambo, 2018

The recognition and validation of competences and qualifications is often implemented at a professional or sectoral level, rather than on a national level. In Sweden, for instance, there are national standards but the recognition is organised at the sectoral level. There are also sectoral differences when it comes to the importance of formal certificates. In regulated sectors, formal qualifications still play a major role even in countries in which formal certificates are in general of little importance – as in Estonia. However, in many countries the national and cross-sectoral transferability of recognition and validation certificates is limited. This lack of transferability is a challenge and needs to be improved.

Even though the instrument of recognising and validating competences is – in theory – open to all employees, it often focuses on specific target groups. It is, for example, in most countries of particular importance for migrants. In Sweden, the recognition of prior learning is often regarded as an instrument for the integration of migrants and can be used as a “fast track” into the labour market. In Ireland, the Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) is responsible for the recognition of foreign qualifications.

In Spain, there are large bureaucratic burdens as the recognition procedures lie within the responsibility of the Autonomous Communities. This accounts for the unattractiveness and limited utilisation of the recognition of prior learning in Spain. Besides bureaucratic restraints, financial burdens can also lead to an under-usage of recognition procedures. Dutch social partners, for example, see this as a challenge.



Best Practice NETHERLANDS: EVC as part of a career-guided trajectory

The costs for employees to get a certificate of experience can amount up to several hundred Euros. A part of these costs is tax-deductible for employers. On top of this, for example, the training fund for municipalities (*A+O fonds Gemeenten*) covers an amount of 1,000 Euro per city-worker if EVC is part of a career-guided trajectory (Duvekot, 2016). The training fund does also provide information about EVC providers (*A+O fonds Gemeenten*, 2017).

Source: Flake, 2017

The extent of the social partners' involvement in the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications differs among the surveyed countries. In some countries the social partners are strongly involved and processes are tripartite. Dutch social partners for instance play an important role in the development and implementation of the recognition of prior learning. Social partners in Poland sit in the advisory board, while social partners in the Czech Republic define the standards for assessment of vocational qualifications via the sector councils. In Sweden, the social partners are involved in contracting training providers which conduct recognition and validation procedures. In other countries, the social partners' involvement is less pronounced. In Ireland and Denmark for instance, social partners are not directly involved in the relevant organisations.

Overall, the social partners rate the possibility of recognising and validating competences and qualifications as positive. In many countries, these systems are, however, under-used by employees. In general, social partners would appreciate a stronger involvement, especially in countries where their involvement is only weak.

SUMMARY

- All European countries have established procedures for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications. However, in most countries the existing procedures are often not well-known and, in consequence, not well established. Social partners can play a role in contributing to the promotion of existing recognition and validation procedures and communicate their benefits among their members (e.g. via a better identification of individual skills needs and the derivation of corresponding training needs).
- The expertise and labour market knowledge of social partners can be important for the development and improvement of transparent and simple procedures for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications.
- The value of recognition and validation procedures depends on acceptance in the labour market. However, in many countries certificates are not transferable – neither between regions nor between sectors. In the context of work being undertaken to develop the European Qualifications Framework it would be useful to advance a standard format for describing learning outcomes for the purposes of the comparison and transparency of qualifications. This should take place in the form of a common understanding, from the bottom up, of learning outcomes. Such an approach should not be about the harmonisation of learning outcomes. At the same time, there needs to be sufficient flexibility at the national level, while having in place a structure that allows for further comparability and which fosters mobility.

6. KEY CHALLENGES AHEAD

Chapter 6 sheds light on some core fields in employee training – from anticipating and identifying skills, competences and qualifications needed; mobilising resources; providing information, support and guidance to recognising and validating skills, competences and qualifications. In the following, two key challenges in the field of employee training will be discussed. First, the role of employee training in changing labour markets driven by digitalisation in support of innovation is discussed in Chapter 6.1. Digitalisation changes the labour market and employers and employees need to keep up with current developments in order to remain competitive and employable. This trend covers all aforementioned aspects of employee training. It is an important task for social partners to accompany this development and to provide adequate guidance to their members. Second, quality, transparency and efficiency in the provision of training is discussed. Employee training can only be successful if it fulfils high quality standards, if training offers are transparent and if the provision of training is efficient. Chapter 6.2 shows how social partners can contribute to these three dimensions.

6.1 THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING IN CHANGING LABOUR MARKETS DRIVEN BY INNOVATION AND DIGITALISATION

There are trends in Europe which all countries have to face. Among these similar trends are digitalisation, ageing societies, globalisation, urbanisation or climate change. To respond to these challenges and to remain competitive companies need adequately skilled employees. Employee training is thus a key success factor to meet these challenges. In particular the digitalisation and the related technological changes and innovations preoccupy labour market experts. Also in this context, employee training is considered to be a key topic – although for many actors it is often not yet clear how digitalisation will concretely change labour markets and how employee training can respond to it.

Social partners in most countries consider digitalisation as an omnipresent topic and the main driver in education and training. In a broader context, it is seen as the one substantial challenge to overcome in order to remain competitive and productive in global markets. The new skill requirements which go along with increasing digitalisation are seen as an important challenge by social partners. Teaching the right digital skills is very important to keep up with global competition. There are only a few countries in which the social partners do not describe the digitalisation of the labour market as the top priority. Portugal was, for example, hit hard by the financial and economic crisis and is in general struggling with a low educational level of its population. Still, even though other issues are more pressing, they are aware that the country needs to deal with the increasing digitalisation of the economy in order not to fall behind the other countries and lose its competitiveness.

New technologies and digitalisation have the potential to allow for better personal and working lives, to improve productivity and to lead to overall better job creation if duly accompanied with a just transition approach and a policy mix. Some existing jobs and areas of activity will evolve; some traditional jobs will disappear, and new activities will be created.

DIGITALISATION AND (NEW) SKILLS NEEDS

Digitalisation influences the anticipated (future) skills needs in all countries. Accordingly, all social partners stress the importance of education and training in the face of digitalisation. Digitalisation not only presents new content requirements in the form of IT skills, but also higher requirements for cooperation and communication skills, as well as independence and planning competence, as the way of working and collaboration changes (Hammermann/

Stettes, 2016). For example, employees have to master challenges that lie beyond their everyday and familiar working processes and increasingly communicate in new network structures. In production, not only the work processes but also the manufacturing processes used to make the final products change. This can lead to redundant tasks being replaced by other, completely new activities for which employees are to be qualified. In addition, digital transformation is progressing at a rapid pace, so that training can hardly be planned exhaustively for a time horizon of several years. Rather, it can be assumed that company-specific further training must be adapted to changing business models at short notice [Seyda/Meinhard/Placke, 2018].

A main challenge which social partners identified for employers and employees is to exactly determine which digital skills are necessary to remain competitive and productive in a globalised world and, in consequence, to organise adequate training measures. Social partners see a need for better orientation in the identification of future skills needs as well as in the choice of training measures. As Chapter 5.2 has shown, information, support and guidance is already today a field where more orientation is needed. This challenge will probably intensify so that solution approaches must be found at short notice.

Even in countries with a well-developed training system as the Netherlands or Sweden, adjustments due to digitalisation are necessary. Economies with few natural resources like the Irish economy rely on the skills and the knowledge of its workforce. The teaching of “digital skills” for new labour market entrants is seen as just as important as upskilling the existing workforce. The continuing digitalisation of the economy is expected to increase the need of investments, because professional training schools still lack the necessary equipment. In several countries social partners stress the importance of training especially in combination with an ageing society and impending skills shortages. In this context, Austrian employer representatives state that the training necessary in the face of digitalisation should not only be addressed by employers but should already be integrated into school curricula.

Regarding the changing skills needs in different sectors, it is important to keep in mind that digitalisation affects all sectors and, thus, not only sectoral characteristics but also the overall picture is important to develop an overarching digital strategy. To meet the requirements and challenges of digitalisation, European countries pursue different strategies. In some surveyed countries, the public authorities have initiated strategies in response to the increasing digitalisation. Estonia, for instance, has implemented the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 which focusses on high participation in employee training as well as on digitalisation. The Czech government runs specific initiatives focussing on digital topics such as industry 4.0, thereby trying to raise awareness for the necessity of training. In Denmark, a tripartite committee decided to renew funding and reimbursement schemes and to overhaul the employee training system in order to tackle the challenges of the digital transformation. Social partners will also be involved in France, where the public agency France Stratégie is occupied on a national level with digitalisation and other “new” issues on a national level (e.g., environment) that go beyond the “classic” fields of social dialogue. In a lot of European countries national coalitions for digital skills and jobs are being created, following the launch of the EU initiative in 2016. These coalitions are partnerships between digital skills actors in Member States who work together to improve digital skills at national, regional or local level (EC, 2018b). Some social partners remark that if training is regulated in sectoral collective agreements and only covers certain professions, there may be a lack of flexibility in the wake of the digital revolution.

There are certain characteristics of a society that simplify the handling of new digital methods – even without any organised strategy. Polish social partners state that young employees, who are typically more familiar with new technologies than older employees, are natural carriers of information regarding digitalisation. In large Polish companies, intergenerational dialogue is being used to transfer knowledge in the area of new technologies from younger to older employees. Swedish social partners state that Sweden has always been open and positive towards structural change. The country’s openness facilitates adaption to technological developments and digitalisation-related changes.

When it comes to digitalisation, social partners are aware of special groups being affected differentially. The elderly are of special interest because social partners see the risk that the elderly struggle more regarding technological changes. In some countries, like Estonia and Poland, social partners state that there is a lack of actions to focus more on elderly people. In some countries social partners fear that digitalisation may actually have a negative impact on participation in training, for example among people that are not sufficiently digitally literate to follow online courses.

Some social partners put the spotlight on SMEs whose situation may be ameliorated through digitalisation, e.g., via e-learning. SMEs sometimes need specialised courses for their employees for which the SMEs do not reach the affordable number of participants. SMEs struggle to dispatch their employees to training measures which are often centralised and take place far away. Both problems may be overcome by e-learning. However, some social partners see a problem in the fact that SMEs may lack awareness for main trends like digitalisation.

Digitalisation not only imposes challenges but also offers new ways of learning and new possibilities of organising and informing about employee training. In this context, digital strategies are needed to respond to digital needs.

NEW DIGITAL TOOLS AND NEW DIGITAL METHODS

In many European countries, online tools have been set up to facilitate different aspects of employee training – both for employees and for employers. In Poland, many websites exist where one can search for training. In the Czech Republic, centralised information platforms or search engines bundle information about education and training. In Spain, the State Foundation for Employment Training (FUNDAE) provides an online platform for all training courses and in Denmark, the social partners have set up a webpage which offers information on all available formal employee training offers in the adult education system.



Best Practice DENMARK: An online tool that makes training offers transparent

Danish social partners have come together to set up the webpage amukurs.dk which offers information on all available formal employee training offers in the *AMU* system. It shows where and when courses are offered and thereby helps employers and employees find the right course that best fits their needs. Courses that are offered irrespective of the number of participants are highlighted so that employers and employees can better plan ahead and do not need to fear that a specific training is cancelled, something that may otherwise prevent signing up for courses in the first place. In addition, courses are evaluated and graded which also helps increase transparency in terms of training quality (www.amukurs.dk).

Source: Zibrowius, 2018a



Best Practice POLAND: Portal for employee training offers

In 2015, a new portal, the so-called Database of Development Services, was installed: <https://uslugirozwojowe.parp.gov.pl/>
This portal is run by a public authority. For getting listed in this portal, the training providers have to fulfil certain quality standards. For those whose courses are co-financed by the Polish state or by the EU, registration is mandatory. This portal with numerous search options provides information on the eligibility of the courses, on the training providers themselves and contains an evaluation of the courses of former students.

Source: Körbel, 2018

In addition to pure information about training offers, there are also online tools which focus on the quality of training measures. Interestingly, these offers address different target groups. The French Data-Dock, which was only introduced in 2018, provides information on the quality of training providers for employee training financiers. The Danish tool for quality measurement (www.viskvalitet.dk, run by the Ministry of Education) addresses both employees and employers and allows them to rate the training measures they participated in. Austrian social partners stress the increased transparency in the training market that results from easily accessible information in the internet.

Best Practice DENMARK: An online tool for training course evaluation

Often when considering whether or not to use employee training, employers are faced with a black box: are the offered courses good enough, are they qualitatively on a high level, will they be worth it? To introduce a tool for quality measurement, the Ministry of Education runs a webpage (www.viskvalitet.dk) where individual participants of training courses as well as their employers can rate the courses they participated in and thus allow a view in the black box. Ratings are made available as soon as at least 35 individual evaluations respectively five employer evaluations are available. By being publicly evaluated, training providers are incentivised to keep the quality of their courses as high as possible as they would otherwise run the risk of losing their business in case that employers will switch to better ranked training offers.

Source: Zibrowius, 2018a

Besides publicly available webpages, there are also digital tools which allow employees to manage their individual employee training. In the Netherlands for example, employees may use a digital passport in which their training is documented, although the prevalence differs among sectors. Danish employees can gather and store all their skills, competences and qualifications online which simplifies the recognition of prior learning. The French personal training account is currently being modified in such a way that it will allow direct and autonomous access for individuals. All relevant information will be available online and individuals will be able to book training measures with one click. The high amount of digital available data which are generated by using digital tools offers the opportunity to run Big Data analyses. Such analyses can be used to better detect skills needs and to increase the anticipation of skills (see Chapter 5.1).

Digitalisation not only requires more and new training measures, it also changes the forms of learning and offers innovative training measures. Digitalisation has the potential to increase the flexibility of training content in response to employers and employees evolving needs as well as in the form in which it is delivered. E-learning has gained importance in the past years and there is a rising relevance of digital learning instruments in Europe. Still, the popularity of e-learning differs among European countries. On the one hand, social partners in Portugal and Sweden state that e-learning is introduced in more and more fields and that it is gaining importance. On the other hand, German social partners state that digital learning methods could be used more intensively.

In many surveyed countries, social partners see e-learning as an opportunity to solve problems. One of the major advantages is seen in the high flexibility of e-learning offers concerning the place and the timing of learning. Social partners emphasise the possibility and importance of individually customisable training measures for companies and individuals. They state that e-learning makes it easier for firms to participate in training measures – especially for SMEs. In addition, digital learning methods can offer interactive opportunities for learning progress measurement.

Digital learning can offer new pedagogic methods which have to be invented further. Some social partners are not satisfied with the current form of e-learning as this mainly consists of making pdf learning material available. They stress the importance of practice-oriented training for the transmission of specialised knowledge.

SUMMARY

- Digitisation and ICT skills play a role through the whole educational system and are correspondingly gaining importance in employee training. To adapt and invent training measures for digital skills, it is necessary to support employers and employees in defining which digital skills are needed. Once these skills needs are identified it is important that curricula are adapted in a timely and effective way where necessary, particularly in the case of new occupations. In addition, non-formal training measures can be developed which respond to these needs.
- Even in times of ongoing digitisation soft skills and professional skills remain important or even gain importance. Employee training has a role to play in providing a balanced mix of the necessary skills.
- New pedagogic and didactic procedures are necessary to fully exploit the advantages of digital learning. Furthermore, new digital learning formats need to be applied in a targeted way to support disadvantaged groups and, thus, ensure easy and equal access to training for all employees.
- SMEs can also profit from digital learning but they are often not able to build the digital infrastructure on their own. Therefore, social partners can install platforms that help them to cooperate with other SMEs and/or inform companies about financing options.
- Digitisation can support social partners' information and guidance offers if the tools are user-friendly.
- Big data analytics can contribute to a better skills anticipation and improve the match of training offers to labour market needs.

6.2 QUALITY, TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENCY IN THE PROVISION OF EMPLOYEE TRAINING

Employee training can contribute significantly to the employability of individual employees as well as to the competitiveness of companies. It can only succeed with this task, however, if it is high quality, if the training offer is transparent and if its provision is effective and efficient. Social partner organisations contribute to these three dimensions in Europe significantly, although in different ways depending on the existing institutional settings.

In many European countries, there are national quality standards for training providers and/or for training offers. In Estonia, France, Germany or Ireland, there are, for example, public institutions which develop, supervise and certify quality standards in training. Social partners are actively involved in the responsible institutions by being members in the boards, sectoral chambers or advisory bodies. In Sweden, social partners have even more far-reaching responsibility in assuring high quality standards of training. They certify and regularly inspect quality standards of private training providers. In general, in most countries social partner organisations are satisfied with their role in defining quality standards and the quality itself. Exceptions are Spain and Poland. In Spain, the social partners complain about a decreasing influence whereas in Poland, the social partners have serious doubts on the quality of training. Thus, in countries where bipartite solutions alone are not (yet) possible, more governmental support is needed.

Best Practice AUSTRIA: Quality assurance by ÖCert

In 2011, Ö-Cert has started as an agreement concluded between the Federal Government and the Provinces and forms the legal basis of the Quality framework for the adult education sector in Austria. Ö-Cert is a certificate for training providers to ensure quality and cross-regional and federal recognition, to improve measures which ensure quality, to make adult learning more transparent and to reduce bureaucracy (BMB, 2016). Because employee training is an issue of the Provinces, different quality standards exist. With Ö-Cert, a nationwide certificate is introduced which can be characterised by “minimum standards at relatively high level”. Ö-Cert leads to more transparency (BMB, 2016). The social partners are involved in the process of quality assurance and they are satisfied with their involvement. However, some wishes of the employee side (*Arbeiterkammer*) are not realised (such as standardised conditions for cancellation, more persons who are fully employed and less persons who work as freelancers).

Source: : Seyda, 2017

Two aspects which are related to quality and transparency at the same time are national qualification frameworks as well as the structure of the training market. According to many social partner organisations, the development of national qualifications frameworks has contributed further to enhancing quality as the assignment of qualifications to the framework is related to certain standards. At the same time, this increases transparency in the training market. Regarding the market structure, the German training markets is, for example, characterised by many private providers and a strong competition. While the market mechanisms in a competitive surrounding can increase the quality of training, it may go at the expense of transparency if it is not embedded in a well-functioning information system (see Chapter 5.3).

Best Practice PORTUGAL: National Catalogue of Competences (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações – CNQ)

The National Catalogue of Competences (Catálogo Nacional de Qualificações – CNQ) has been introduced in 2007 and is an important transparency tool. It lists all qualifications in the general and vocational education and training system.

Source: Flake, 2018a

Best Practice IRELAND: QQI as a one-stop-shop

Qualifications and Quality Ireland (QQI) was established in 2012 as an independent state agency under the Ministry for Education and Skills. It was created by merging four former agencies that dealt with issues of quality assurance and qualifications in the field of further education and higher education. By combining these resources into one organisation, QQI offers today a one-stop shop in all matters of qualification ranging from quality assurance and the recognition of learning outcomes to maintain the Irish National Qualification Framework.

Source: Zibrowius, 2018b

A particular challenge is that the fast-changing labour market needs go hand in hand with new training demands. Enterprises and employees increasingly demand more individual offers and short-term courses. In many countries, there are no standardised quality criteria for many non-formal and informal training offers which meet this demand. It is therefore important that social partners help by giving orientation for their members. In an increasing number of countries, new digital solutions to improve the transparency of training offers and training quality are implemented (see also Chapter 6.1). This comprises for instance digital public databases which list the available training offer (content, duration, provider etc.). In the Dutch public sector, an online chat box was implemented which is accessible for all employees and shall foster the exchange of good experience with training offers. Social partner organisations can contribute to the improvement and dissemination of such information tools.

Best Practice: ESTONIAN Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*)

The Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*) is the institution involving the social partners in skills and employability measures. It was established by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Estonian Employers' Confederation (*ETTK*), Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation (*TALO*) and the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions (*EAKL*). It is *Kutsekoda's* task to develop a support structure for the occupational qualification system to increase the competitiveness of Estonian employees and promote the development, assessment, recognition and comparison of their occupational competence. The organisation's functions include coordination the activities of the sector skill councils, keeping the register of occupational qualifications, introducing the Estonian occupational qualifications system on the national and international level and to act as a national reference point for vocational qualifications and as a coordination point for the EQF implementation (Kutsekoda, 2018c).

Source: Jambo, 2018

The quality and efficiency of training can be regarded in two dimensions – the provision of training as well the training outcome with regard to the improvement of the employability and productivity of individual employees and in consequence the competitiveness of the company. Concerning the provision of training, in many countries there is a lot of potential to use more economies of scales. Often the contents of initial VET (IVET) are also partially interesting for employees. However, in many countries it is not possible or very bureaucratic to use just part of the IVET offer, for example in the form of training modules, for employee training. Portugal is a positive exception as the national training catalogue lists training contents in modules and makes them accessible for companies. In particular in countries where the social partners are members in the boards of IVET providers, they can use their role and existing connections to build a bridge between IVET and employee training. Also, cooperation with universities and universities of applied sciences could be improved. It is often very expensive for individual companies to buy training courses from universities. This could be improved by supporting networks which bundle the demands of companies and employees. Training needs of employees become increasingly individual and it is important – in particular for SMEs – to generate a critical mass so that training providers have an incentive to offer that training. Social partner organisations can promote the exchange and the cooperation between their members in networks in order to jointly define and organise training and offer it in an efficient way. This goes along with a critical assessment, where relevant, of public funding mechanisms in employee training. The Danish taximeter funding, for example, may set wrong incentives and could lead to an under-offer of less demanded courses. However, new digital learning possibilities (e.g., e-Learning and blended learning) offer new possibilities which need to be expanded and integrated in employees' and companies' work routines (see also Chapter 6.1). In France, social partners criticise the accuracy of fit of training measures. Existing training offers do not necessarily meet the demand. Thus, a better and institutional inclusion of social partners in the anticipation of skills needs (see also Chapter 5.1) as well as in the derivation of appropriate measures can also contribute to increasing the efficiency of employee training.



Best Practice CZECH REPUBLIC: Bringing vocational schools and companies together

The so-called POSPOLU-project (*Podpora spolupráce škol a firem se zaměřením na odborné vzdělávání v praxi*) aimed at “strengthen[ing] the social partnership between VET schools and businesses” (Cedefop, 2016b) by establishing means of cooperation and promoting further training in a series of workshops and conferences. Even though it was primarily aimed at cooperation at the level of initial vocational education, it also serves as a basis for cooperation in the field of employee training and thus allows for more targeted training offers that lead to a higher degree of employability. It remains to be seen in how far the three-year project (2012-2015) can have a longer-lasting impact.

Source: Zibrowius, 2018b

Regarding training outcomes, there are no consistent standards to measure the efficiency. The measurement of training efficiency is not trivial as employee training does have very diverse objectives on the individual level: From an individual’s perspective, the objectives reach from keeping up employability and reducing the risk of unemployment, personal development, preparation for new tasks to preserving the job satisfaction. From a company’s perspective, increasing productivity and creativity, introducing new technologies, improving competitiveness or employer branding are important motives for offering training. In consequence, there are no clear (qualitative) key indicators which can be surveyed by companies, training providers or social partner organisations. However, the efficiency of training needs to be better tracked. On a macro level, policy evaluation approaches need to become standard when new training initiatives are launched. Social partner organisations are important partners when it comes to the evaluation process and the interpretation and further proceeding with the results. On an individual level, employee interviews and development should be used more strategically to define the individual training objectives and evaluate the training outcomes. Social partner organisations can support their members in establishing standards for such talks. Employers could be supported with information and guidance on how to organise such talks and employees should be strengthened in claiming their right to such talks and also in defining and enforcing their own training objectives (see also Chapter 5.3).

SUMMARY

- Most social partners are very satisfied with the quality of employee training in their respective countries and their involvement in quality assurance. Social partner involvement helps to ensure the relevance of training to the labour market needs.
- In some countries social partners criticise the inadequate fit of existing training offers. Sometimes, training offers do not meet the demand and are in consequence not efficient. Again, this can be improved by a better and institutionalised inclusion of social partners in the anticipation of training needs and the derivation of subsequent measures to better align the training market to labour market needs.
- Informal and non-formal short-term training courses become increasingly important, but they are not necessarily part of the national quality systems. Social partners can play an important role in giving orientation to their members.
- The connection between existing initial vocational education and training and university offers on the one hand and employee training on the other hand should be improved to provide training more efficiently. It is important that social partners work together with education institutions and companies and employees. Existing institutional connections (e.g., social partner involvement in the boards of VET schools) should be used to this end.
- To further increase the efficiency in the provision of training it can be helpful to establish net-works for information exchange and cooperation between enterprises and trade unions. This could lead to a joint definition of training contents and to a corresponding organisation of the training supply.

7. CONCLUSION

One of the main objectives of this study project is to identify in a broader European context how social partnership can contribute to employee training and how to promote social partnership in employee training. A particular challenge in a cross-country comparison is that the same actions can lead to different results – always depending on the country-specific institutional framework and the economic conditions. Also, different approaches can lead to the same success. This can be described as functional equivalence. Thus, this study did not just rely on a random comparison of single social partner activities but considered broader fields of actions and objectives of employee training and analysed the different approaches.

Not surprisingly, the involvement of the social partners differs significantly in the different European countries. Among the twelve surveyed countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), there are countries with a long tradition in a strong social partnership, countries which are expanding their social partner activities and finally countries whose social partnership has been severely hit by the financial and economic crisis after 2008 and related government reforms. In sum, however, there is a tendency towards more social partner involvement. The social partnership model is often reflected in the way employee training is negotiated and regulated in the different countries.

The channels through which social partners exert influence differs even between countries with strong social partner involvement in the provision of employee training. A strong social partnership can, for example, on the one hand influence the national legislation on the provision of training or, on the other hand, lead to collective agreements which are binding and cover the majority of the labour force (functional equivalence). None of the two approaches is per se better or worse than the other. This heterogeneity in governance approaches needs to be kept in mind when deriving recommendations. Furthermore, solutions and recommendations need to follow the principle of subsidiarity. Furthermore, one needs to keep in mind that the role of the social partners goes far beyond the negotiation of framework conditions.

An important result of the cross-country comparison is that in all countries, employers and employees need support regarding the provision of and the participation in employee training, and that social partners are key actors in this regard. It could be shown that a lack of financial resources is often not the main obstacle to training. Within an overall approach to employee training there can be specific challenge to provide support for specific target groups, such as the low-skilled employees or small- and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, time restrictions are an important obstacle, in particular when the economy is booming and the order books are full.

Social partners need to communicate and emphasise the value of employee training to their members and the public. This awareness among all labour market participants is an important precondition to promote activities in employee training.

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