

The Role of Trade Unions in the Process of Training Skilled Workers as a Tool for Social Mobility

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Introduction

The study “The role of trade unions in the process of training skilled workers as a tool for social mobility” provides a comprehensive, albeit, given its content, necessarily brief insight into the topic of trade union engagement in education. The study pays great attention to trade union activities at the European level and to inspiring foreign examples of good practice.

Chapter 1 briefly discusses the link between social stratification, social mobility and qualifications (education). It presents the results of research showing a positive relationship between trade union membership and intergenerational social mobility and describes the initial situation in the Czech Republic.

In Chapter 2, the study focuses on current developments in European vocational education and training policy (in the following as “VET”), identifying relevant European VET priorities and, in particular, the role of trade unions in defining priorities and positions towards them. The study introduces ETUC's own resolution on improving the quality of apprenticeships and *work-based learning* and the ETUC position on the new skills agenda. An important contribution of trade unions to the debate on VET at European level is the 2016 trade union proposal for the European Quality Framework for Apprenticeship Quality. The study describes all 20 standards and related criteria for apprenticeship quality recommended by ETUC. For comparison, the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, presented by the European Commission in 2017, and its 14 criteria for defining the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships are described.

The involvement of trade unions and employers into the initial (or, more precisely, further) vocational education and training is not carried out exclusively at a local level. Often, the involvement of the social partners at national, regional and sectoral levels is crucial. The roles, duties and competences of the social partners, especially at the national level, usually result from the statutory management of the VET system in the respective country. Chapter 3 deals with this aspect of the role of trade unions. Examples of VET systems in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and France outline different approaches to the involvement of trade unions in the management and definition of vocational education and training, which could inspire the debate on the change of social partners in the vocational education system in the Czech Republic.

Chapter 4 describes examples of the activities of trade unions from different European countries which they introduced as a part of their involvement in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships.

Trade unions can play a crucial role not only in the initial education but also (and above all) in employee training. Chapter 5 of the study outlines the major challenges that the employee training is currently facing: the role of employee training at a time of labor market

transformation through innovation and digitization, and the quality, transparency and effectiveness of employee training provided. The chapter further discusses the role of social partners in the various dimensions of support for employee training: anticipating and identifying qualification needs; mobilization of resources; verification and recognition of competences and qualifications; information, support and guidance. It also presents related foreign good practice examples. At the end of Chapter 5, the 13 recommendations of the European social partners for future action in the field of employee training are described in detail.

The sixth chapter presents some examples of good practice from the Czech Republic.

1 Background

1.1 Social stratification, social mobility and qualification

Social inequalities that originate in the economic field are dealt with in research on **social stratification**. As modern society is much more variable than traditional society, the term stratification automatically includes the term **social mobility**, which refers to changes in the socio-economic position of individuals and groups.

The main types of social inequalities are socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities.

The basis for socio-economic differences is unequal access to rare goods – especially power, wealth and prestige. The summary of how much power, wealth and prestige people possess determines their overall social status.

In recent decades, sociology also significantly takes into account, for example, differences in attained **education**. Quality education, which equips individuals with the knowledge, skills and competences applicable in society and required by the labor market, is one of the conditions for obtaining and maintaining a quality job. Education is an instrument of rising social mobility. It is therefore necessary to strive to ensure equal access to education for all social groups, regardless of their socio-economic or health characteristics. In addition to **initial education**, in the time of a dynamically changing labor market, more attention must also be paid to **adult education**, with **employees** being the key group from the trade union perspective.

1.2 Connection between trade union membership and social mobility

According to the study “Bargaining for the American Dream. What Unions do for Mobility”¹ an American child born to a household in the lowest 20% of income distribution has only 7.5% chance of reaching the highest fifth of income as an adult. In Denmark, these chances increase to 11.7% and in Canada, to 13.4%.

Increasing mobility first of all means understanding why it is low.

¹ Bargaining for the American Dream - Center for American Progress. *Homepage - Center for American Progress* [online]. Copyright © 2019 [cit. 15.02.2019].

Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2015/09/09/120558/bargaining-for-the-american-dream/>

This study examines whether trade union membership contributes to mobility and responds by stating that **there is a strong relationship between trade union membership and intergenerational mobility.**

In particular, the authors claim:

- Greater mobility of children from low-income households has been demonstrated in areas with greater trade union involvement
- Areas with higher trade union membership have greater mobility as measured by the income of all children. With an increase in trade union representation of 10 percentage points, an increase of 4.5% income was recorded in the given area.
- Children growing up in union members' families have better results. For example, children of fathers without higher education earn 28% more if their fathers were members of trade unions.

Author's conclusions of the study are in line with the findings of other researchers – a decline in trade union membership is one of the reasons for the growing income inequality in the USA. For example, Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld (Harvard University and Washington University in St. Louis) stated that the decline in trade union membership was responsible for one third of the increase in male income inequality between 1973 and 2007.

However, this is not just about mobility in the families of trade union members. The study "*Bargaining for American Dream*" summarizes the ways in which trade unions help increase intergenerational mobility of non-union workers:

- Trade unions also contribute to wage increases for workers outside trade unions; the descendants benefit from higher family incomes.
- Children from families not engaged in trade unions can show higher mobility in areas with a high trade union representation, for example because they have a better opportunity to participate in trade union activities after entering the labor market.
- Trade unions generally advocate for measures that benefit all workers – such as minimum wage growth and increased costs on education and other public services, which benefit low-income parents and their children in particular.
- Trade unions in the USA have been found to be the main player to support middle class priorities.
- Another study showed that US states with a higher union representation also have a higher minimum wage.

1.3 Initial situation in the Czech Republic

The authors of the study "Output Analytical Report on the CVE System in the Czech Republic²" elaborated within the COOPERATION project stated that the unions participate in the system of further professional education only a little and, in the relationship to continuing vocational education instruments (CVE), the unions are relatively little active, which is attributed to limited capacities. Elsewhere in the study (p. 145), the authors explicitly state that trade unions demonstrate weak interest on the topic of continuing vocational training. In addition to tripartite, they are also represented in other CVE bodies, such as the National Council for Qualifications and Regional Councils for Human Resources Development, or more recently in the Regional Employment Pacts.

The study "Employees and Continuing Professional Education: Attitudes, Experience, Barriers³", which is also the output of the COOPERATION project, draws attention to some activities of the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (CMKOS) as a specific actor in continuing professional education. The study presents the following functions of CMKOS:

- initiator function
- observatory function
- participates in the creation of teaching texts
- CMKOS is a co-author of Act No. 179/2006 Sb.
- CMKOS as a contact and guidance point for CE.

Trade unions are represented in:

- **Council of Economic and Social Agreement** (tripartite body of government, trade unions and employers). The issue of education is dealt with above all by the RHSD CR working team for education and human resources, where trade unions are represented through delegates of CMKOS, ASO and higher education trade unions
- **National Council for Qualifications** (CMKOS and CMOS PS); the Council is an advisory body of the Ministry of Education for professional qualifications, established on the basis of Section 24 of Act No. 179/2006 Sb., on verification and recognition of further education results
- **Regional Councils for Human Resources Development**
- **Regional Pacts of Employment**
- **Sector Councils**
- **Sectoral agreements** anticipate in the implementation of the content of agreements.

² Výstupní analytická zpráva o systému DPV v ČR | Koopolis. Koopolis [online]. Available at: <https://koopolis.cz/sekce/knihovna/457-vystupni-analyticka-zprava-o-systemu-dpv-v-cr>

³ Výstup projektu KOOPERACE: Zaměstnanci a další profesní vzdělávání | Koopolis. Koopolis [online]. Available at: <https://koopolis.cz/sekce/knihovna/449-vystup-projektu-kooperace-zamestnanci-a-dalsi-profesni-vzdelavani>

Trade unions are a key player in **collective bargaining** – the legally regulated behavior of the social partners or their organizations regarding the determination of working or non-working conditions of employees and the regulation of relations between contractual partners. Only a trade union can conclude a collective agreement on behalf of employees. **Collective bargaining**, its content and objectives are subject to continuous enforcement (especially from the level of top trade union associations). For instance, the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions, within the framework of the coordination of collective bargaining conducted within the competence of its member trade unions, annually announces the main objectives that should be achieved in individual areas of collective bargaining in the following calendar year. According to the regular annual survey on wage and working conditions in collective agreements (IPP), framework conditions for professional development of employees were negotiated for approximately 35% of enterprise collective agreements.

2 Position of European trade unions in vocational and education training

EU institutions, European trade union confederations and employers' organizations have long been involved in defining the form of vocational education and training (VET). The importance grew further in the period of coping with the consequences of the economic crisis at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. European trade unions have been intensively involved in identifying key aspects of VET and have specifically identified their position on the VET parameters discussed. ETUC has developed its own resolution on improving the quality of apprenticeships and work-based learning. An important contribution to the debate on VET at European level is the trade union proposal for a European apprenticeship quality framework from 2016. The study outlines 20 standards and related criteria for apprenticeship quality recommended by ETUC.

2.1.1 The Bruges Communiqué and the Riga Conclusions

At EU level, there is a continuous defining and redefining of VET priorities.

The 2010 Bruges Communiqué brought long-term strategic objectives for European cooperation in VET for 2011-2020 and 22 short-term objectives for 2011-2014.

The current medium-term priorities are based on a review of past achievements over the period 2011-2014. **Five priority areas**, known as the "Riga Conclusions", have been identified for the 2015-2020 period. The definition of these priorities was the result of more than a year-long cooperation of the Latvian Presidency, the ministries responsible for vocational education and training, the European Commission, the **European Trade Union Confederation ETUC** and employers' organizations (BusinessEurope, UEAPME and CEEP)⁴.

- promote **work-based learning** in all its forms
- further develop **quality assurance mechanisms** in VET in line with the European Recommendation on quality assurance in VET
- Improve **access to VET** and qualifications for all through more flexible and progressive systems
- further **strengthen key competences in initial VET curricula** and provide more effective opportunities for acquiring or developing these skills through initial and continuing VET

⁴ ETUC backs the Riga conclusions on improving vocational education and training | ETUC. *Redirecting to <https://www.etuc.org/en>* [online]. Copyright © ETUC 2019 [cit. 15.02.2019]. Available at: <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/etuc-backs-riga-conclusions-improving-vocational-education-and-training>

- introduce systematic approaches to the initial and continuing **professional development** of teachers, trainers, instructors in vocational education and training in schools and in work learning.

ETUC's position on Riga Conclusions:

ETUC welcomed the conclusions of Riga.

Luca Visentini, ETUC representative at the meeting of Ministers responsible for VET in Riga, stated:

"We welcome the approval of the Riga Conclusions on vocational education and training. Creating job vacancies through investment in human capital – including education and training – now represents the core of the EU crisis solution. Competition in labor costs is not the answer."

"The ETUC is ready to cooperate to achieve the goals we have set together today. However, we are concerned about the European Commission's efforts to reduce the representation of the social partners in the CEDEFOP Administrative Board. Its tripartite nature and its role in implementing the strategy that has been discussed here today must not be sapped."*

"Employability means not only giving people the opportunity to find a job that matches their skills, but also enabling them to keep their jobs during the labor market transformation and equipping unemployed people to return to decent work rather than through precarious or low-paid jobs."

* authors' note: CEDEFOP is the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training, one of the EU agencies.

2.1.2 ETUC resolutions to improve the quality of apprenticeships and work-based learning

In March 2013, the ETUC Executive Committee formulated its opinion on improving the quality of apprenticeships and learning from work.

Resolution background:

- work-based learning (WBL) is generally linked to young people's apprenticeships and dual vocational education and training systems and is part of policies supporting the transition from school to the labor market. It is integrated into wider education and training policies related to labor market issues

- the European Commission, the European Parliament and some Member States of the Union are currently strongly emphasizing the role of apprenticeships and dual vocational education and training systems in facilitating the transition from VET to the labor market and in solving unemployment of young people
- work-based learning and dual systems are part of the strategy “Towards economic recovery leading to intensive growth of job vacancies” (18/04/2012)
- according to the ETUC, the European Commission is convinced that vocational education and training in general and, in particular, work-based learning together with labor market reforms can be successful tools in fighting unemployment in Europe
- ETUC believes that investment and various macroeconomic policies, other than austerity policies, should lead to the renewal and creation of job vacancies
- the ETUC recognizes that sound, work-oriented education policies and tools are essential to support and strengthen broader macroeconomic measures to address recession and unemployment, especially for young people. At the same time, however, ETUC stresses that vocational education and training, as well as research, should be seen in the broader perspective of promoting citizenship and human development, and not only as tools for the economy and the labor market
- based on its own analysis, ETUC is actively involved in launching and implementing the European Apprenticeship Alliance, signed by the European Commission, the European social partners and other stakeholders on 2 July 2013 in Leipzig
- apprenticeships systems, if well implemented, may significantly contribute to facilitating the transition from learning to the labor market, addressing the discrepancy between qualified skills in the labor market and encouraging employers to provide young people with fair and good employment
- in addition, Europe needs a common understanding of what quality apprenticeship means and what reforms are needed to ensure the proper definition and implementation of apprenticeships schemes, and, furthermore, to ensure full protection for apprentices
- in this context, the ETUC developed in 2012/2013 a project entitled “Towards a European Qualifications Framework for apprenticeships and work-based education: best practices and trade union contributions”, funded by the European Commission. The project examined apprenticeship, work-based learning and the role of trade unions in designing and implementing these programs in the following countries: United Kingdom, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Germany, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Denmark and Estonia.

The ETUC and its affiliates **undertake**:

- analyze obstacles to the proper and full implementation of apprenticeships and dual VET systems in as many EU countries as possible
- introduce trade union and social partner measures relevant to addressing these obstacles, support the activity of social partners in the European Alliance for Apprenticeship, and during the negotiation and promotion of national reforms

- ensure the quality of apprenticeships and dual systems by interconnecting them with the existing EU and national quality assurance tools for VET in order to create a possible European quality framework for apprenticeships
- ensure appropriate working conditions and protection for apprentices and young people involved in workplace-based learning.

Finally, the ETUC emphasizes that:

- trade unions across Europe should continue to show their active and determined support for quality apprenticeship programs
- trade unions across Europe should improve their involvement with apprentices in the workplace in order to represent their interests more effectively.

2.1.3 ETUC's position on the new skills agenda

In June 2016, the European Commission adopted the new A New Skills Agenda for Europe.

As part of the Agenda, the Commission proposed 10 actions to be implemented over the next two years⁵.

- a guarantee of acquiring skills to help adults with low qualification acquire a certain minimum level of reading and writing skills, mathematical literacy and digital skills and progress towards upper secondary education
- review of the European Qualifications Framework to better understand qualifications and make better use of all available skills in the European labor market
- the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, bringing together Member States and stakeholders from educational, employment and industrial sectors, to significantly expand the resources of digital talent and ensure that individuals and the workforce in Europe are equipped with the necessary digital skills
- a sectoral skills cooperation plan to improve knowledge on skills and address skills gaps in specific economic sectors
- a tool for developing the skills profile of third-country nationals to support the early identification and development of the skills and qualification profile of asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants
- a revision of the Europass framework, which will provide people with better and more user-friendly tools for presenting their skills and acquiring up-to-date useful information on skills and trends needed, which will help them choose their career and educational options

⁵ THE NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE, Národní ústav pro vzdělávání. *Národní ústav pro vzdělávání* [online]. Copyright © [cit. 18.02.2019]. Available at: <http://www.nuv.cz/t/new-skills>

- making VET a top choice; thanks to strengthening opportunities for learners in this field, gain experience in learning and promoting greater visibility of good VET performance in the labor market
- reviewing the Key Competence Recommendations to help more people acquire the core skills needed to work and live in the 21st century, with a particular focus on fostering entrepreneurial and innovative spirit and skills
- Initiative to monitor graduates in order to gain better information on how successful graduates are in the labor market
- a proposal to further analyze and exchange best practices on effective ways to mitigate brain drain.

ETUC opinion on Agenda of April 13, 2016⁶ (selected passages)

A healthy environment for skills development

- The European Commission has identified vocational education and training (VET) as the main lever to foster employability of workers. ETUC believes that VET indeed contributes to employability, but only if workers are provided with high-quality training provisions and if sustainable economic growth can provide quality jobs for workers and quality apprenticeships/traineeships positions. VET is unfortunately not the miraculous solution for fighting unemployment and precarious jobs. Thus, the ETUC demand for a **European Investment Strategy** is still key to creating a sound environment for employability and skills development.
- More attention should be put on high-quality education at all levels and on qualifications (which are described as knowledge, skills and competences) and not exclusively on skills. The work-related aspects of qualifications through, that formally recognize skills, are particularly important in the **wage-setting process** as important formal element used by the social partners in collective bargaining.
- On workplace-based learning for young people the Commission should further develop the European Alliance for Apprenticeship (EAFA) which was initiated by the social partners and approved by the national governments via the Council. The future ETUC Quality Framework for Apprenticeships, which will be finalized in April 2016 could serve to the overall European strategy on apprenticeship and “put flesh on the bones” of the European Apprenticeship Alliance.

a) The key role of trade unions as social partners

The role of the **social partners and social dialogue** at all levels of decision-making process on qualifications and training schemes should be recognized and fostered by the EU institutions. At company level, worker's representatives must be involved in the forward planning of both employment and skills, with the latter having to become a regular

⁶ Redirecting to <https://www.etuc.org/en> [online]. Copyright © [cit. 18.02.2019]. Available: https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/document/files/etuc_postion_new_skills_agenda.pdf

and shared feature of companies' policies for anticipating of change. There are good practices in this field, for example: co-decision in Germany, negotiation of company training plans in France, the involvement of 'trade union learning reps' (ULR) in the UK, etc. In general, a training culture in companies should be established as skills development and training provision should be part of the whole company overall strategy.

At the European level, **Sector Skills Councils** are best placed to identify skills requirements and should be thus better supported with clear and sustainable objectives defined by the Commission and sectoral social partners. Defining and anticipating *sectoral competences or professional profiles* at European level should be discussed with the sectoral social partners and governments within the preferred framework of the social partners.

Sector Skills Alliance as a project may also contribute to formulating European-level core curricula in a sector, but only with the involvement of the social partners. Professional curricula and skills in sectors should be defined with equal involvement of social partners and government. Therefore, the Commission's proposal whereby only the employers should design curricula and have partnership with training providers is not suitable.

Research activity is needed to support sectoral social partners' work in addressing **the conditions of rapid social, economic and technological change**.

b) strengthen the social dimension of VET

When launching a new initiative on skills, **poverty and discrimination** should be tackled. The Commission in its initiative should not only deal with improving skills provision of the unemployed and low-skilled, but also of part-time workers, temporary workers, as well as atypical workers and freelancers who should be helped to access training with contributory schemes, without placing the whole costs of their shoulders. It is imperative to pay special attention to equal access to training and equal career prospects for women, the disabled and socio-economically disadvantaged people. The Commission should also pay special attention to those not in education employment or training (the so-called "NEET").

The integration of migrants and refugees into the labor market should be a target of the initiative. Immediate legislative and financial support is needed for the integration of migrants into the labor market, in particular for measuring and auditing skills and competences of migrants, refugees and economic migrants. In this latter regard, it is crucial to establish on national level efficient, foreseeable and equivalent frameworks for formal validation of skills and qualifications. To ensure adequate coordination as well as trust within and between member states, relevant national agencies and Public Employment Services have to play a key role.

c) The ETUC demands guaranteed access to training for all

On one hand, 70 million low-skilled people need upskilling, and on the other hand skilled workers have continuous pressure on skills updating and on continuous training. Everybody should be supported to gain high quality and sustainable provision of basic skills, key competences and professional skills equally.

For the ETUC, the right for training must be reaffirmed as a European right. However, the sole Workers should have the right to and support for validation and recognition of learning in the workplace and in the labor market. In addition, concrete measures must be set up and implemented to guarantee an effective use of this right for training and employers' financial contribution to workers' training.

In line with this, the ETUC demands:

- **A Professional Skills Guarantee to ensure effective access to training for low-skilled workers and unemployed people, in order to ensure their employability and their capacity to adapt to the labor market.** This guarantee should be set as a European principle and implemented by the member states and social partners at national level. The definition of professional skills, the certifications/qualifications linked to them, and the training provisions to access these basic professional skills should be defined at national level by the social partners in the framework of social dialogue, and by governments. This complementarity between European and national level must ensure that all adults reach minimum requirements for employability and further training according to national regulations. One of the possible examples of this Professional Skills Guarantee is the "cross-sectoral certificate on basic professional skills" initiated by the French social partners (<http://certificat-clea.info/>).

Furthermore, sectors should define professional skills to ensure sector-specific professional needs.

As part of the Professional Skills Guarantee Initiative, the European Commission should provide a platform for the exchange of experiences and further encourage member states to reduce numbers of low-skilled people in Europe (using also the European Semester).

- **A Paid educational leave** to allow workers to upgrade their skills according to the new needs in their sector and ensure them access to training not related to job-specific needs as an opportunity to launch a new phase in their career. As individual workers and employers cannot be expected to bear all costs, governments and/or social partners must agree to provide transition schemes and lifelong learning in general, preferably in collective agreements, if not by law. The ILO 140 Paid Educational Leave Convention (1974) already defines this measure but many countries have not yet ratified it. The Skills Agenda should put special emphasis on this right. Transition schemes, retraining and access to VET, upper secondary and higher education must be offered to all, regardless of previous level of education.

Higher education should be accessible to all on conditions at least equal to those of young students. It is also critical for the overall quality of the workforce and thus for the non-cost competitiveness of the European economy.

- **Measures to guarantee access to training** for all kinds of workers. This must be underpinned by **the individual right to training, preferably guaranteed by collective agreements**, if not by law. As far as possible, collective agreements and legislation must ensure training provisions of workers in part-time jobs, precarious contracts, but also independent workers, freelancers and the self-employed, regardless of their previous levels of education.
- A key element to encourage workers to use their training rights is to provide them **access to career guidance and professional development**, which is not currently the case for many workers. Professional guidance schemes are essential to empower workers in their choices in terms of training, adaptation, and transitions.

d) the need to boost investment in training

The EU has an average of 27.5% of adults who participate in job-related employer-sponsored activities. According to Cedefop, big businesses more frequently provide training than small and medium-sized enterprises. Providing the right skills for the European workforce requires high levels of investment by companies in life-long learning. Sustainable EU-level and national investment policies on training should also be fostered, focusing on countries where the participation of adults in education and training schemes is low, contributing at the same time to social convergence. The Commission should deal with how to best use the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) and other EU investment tools and funds for training provision.

It appears that EFSI is not tailored for social investment, like training and skills development. The EU Commission must rethink its investing tools to cover social investment needs and make a better use of the existing funds such as the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The ESF should better support efforts to increase the participation of employees and companies in continuous VET.

e) Facilitate the mobility of VET learners

The ET2020 European objective of “At least 20 % of higher education graduates and 6% of 18-34 year-olds with an initial VET qualification should have had a period of study or training abroad” is far from being met. The ETUC is still convinced that this objective is relevant and that social partners should be involved and lend their effort to achieving this goal.

Funding under the **Erasmus + Program** is not sufficient for boosting VET mobility and barriers have to be tackled to improve mobility in VET. More resources should be available **at EU level** for VET learners of all ages. The role of the social partners in

ensuring quality of mobility in VET and on the effective use of Erasmus+ and other program funds on VET should be secured.

Another challenge of mobility is the **lack of understanding and trust in foreign qualifications** by the employers and the slow implementation of the Directive on Recognition of Professional Qualifications in regulated professions in the EU. Relevant solutions have been presented by different European Sectoral Social Partner Committees who have developed or are still developing (e.g. construction, automotive, textile sector) their qualifications frameworks/occupational profiles/core curricula or core skills in their sectors at European Level, but they are faced with resistance on implementing these agreements at national level.

The Commission considers mobility only through the prism of employability. Getting the unemployed and precarious workers into quality jobs and apprenticeship positions is, of course, fundamental, for several reasons. However, limiting mobility to a single aspect, in the wake of recent developments in Europe, is not appropriate. The ETUC strongly believes that mobility contributes just as much to EU citizenship, social cohesion and facilitating cultural understanding as much as democratic values. In times of increased populism, radicalism, and xenophobia, it is more important than ever that workers in Europe meet across national and cultural borders. Doing so as students undergoing education and training needs to be emphasized by the European Commission in the New Skills Agenda.

2.1.4 European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships: A trade union proposal

A European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships. A European Trade Union Proposal was presented in April 2016⁷.

The proposal for quality standards for apprenticeships summarizes:

- 20 quality standards adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee in 2013
- a series of quality criteria that make these standards easy to measure

⁷ A European Quality Framework for Apprenticeships | ETUC. Redirecting to <https://www.etuc.org/en> [online]. Copyright © ETUC 2019 [cit. 25.02.2019]. Available at: <https://www.etuc.org/en/publication/european-quality-framework-apprenticeships>

- compliance of these standards and criteria with the main principles of apprenticeship as defined by the European Alliance for Apprenticeship and that were already accepted by the EU Council
- compliance of these standards and criteria with the main principles of apprenticeship published by the European Commission based on the outputs of the EC Education and Training Task Force.

An overview of the 20 standards and criteria for apprenticeship quality recommended by ETUC

1. Definitions

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| ETUC Quality Standard | Apprenticeship schemes should be clearly defined on the basis of the proposal made by the European Center for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP): |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Is there a clear definition of an apprenticeship at the national and European levels? |

Definition of CEDEFOP:

Apprenticeship is “*systematic, long-term training alternating periods at the workplace and in an educational institution or training center. The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation*”.

2. Regulatory framework

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| ETUC Quality Standard | Apprenticeship schemes should be built on stable foundations on the basis of national law, regulations and/or collective bargaining agreements |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Is there a regulatory framework for apprenticeships? Does the regulatory framework specify the rights and obligations of apprentices? Does the regulatory framework specify the rights and obligations of employers? Does the regulatory framework specify the rights and obligations of training institutions? |

3. Social partnership and governance

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| ETUC Quality Standard | Apprenticeship schemes should be governed at all levels by a partnership between the social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations), together with public authorities and training institutions |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Are the social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) formally involved in the design of apprenticeship policy?</p> <p>Are the social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) formally involved in the implementation of apprenticeship policy?</p> <p>Are the social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) formally involved in the accreditation of companies for apprenticeships?</p> <p>Are the social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) formally involved in the accreditation of training institutions?</p> <p>Does involvement by social partners (trade unions and employers) in governance structures lead to influence over apprenticeship policy-making strategy?</p> |

4. Equal opportunities for all

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeships schemes should cover a wide range of diverse occupations and thus provide employment opportunities for all, men and women alike |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Do apprenticeship schemes provide for a variety of training linked to different occupations?</p> <p>Do apprenticeship schemes offer opportunities for all, and in addition include measures to encourage the participation of under-represented groups?</p> |

5. Equitable cost-sharing between employers and public authorities

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should be properly funded, with equitable cost-sharing between employers and public authorities at regional and/or national and European level |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Are apprenticeship schemes supported financially by employers?</p> <p>Are apprenticeship schemes supported financially by public authorities?</p> <p>Are apprentices exempt from paying tuition fees?</p> |

6. Responsiveness to labor market needs

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should cater for the real employment and skills needs of employers within the framework of sectoral and/or national priorities |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Are apprenticeship schemes developed in the light of future employment needs reflecting national and/or sectoral priorities? |

7. Formal contracts

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should require employers to enter into formal employment contracts with apprentices describing the rights and obligations of both parties |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Is there a labor contract?</p> <p>Does the contract with the employer cover the following: duration, employer's obligations; apprentice's rights and obligations, learning outcomes, pay, hours, holiday entitlement and termination?</p> <p>Does the contract with the training institution cover the following: duration, apprentice's rights and obligations, learning outcomes and termination?</p> |

8. Personal development and career opportunities for apprentices

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should support the personal development and career opportunities for apprentices |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Do apprenticeship schemes make provision allow for the development of key competences and transversal skills? |

9. Pay and social protection

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship scheme should ensure that apprentices are paid by the employer, according to collective agreements, or national and/or sectoral minimum legal wages, for the period of training |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Do apprentices receive remuneration from the employer, on the basis of collective bargaining agreements and/or the minimum legal wage?</p> <p>Do apprentices receive any other financial allowance?</p> <p>Are apprentices covered by social protection regulations?</p> |

10. Safe working environment

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should guarantee high quality and safe working environment, and the social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) should be given responsibility for monitoring the sustainability of workplaces and for accrediting interested companies |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Are apprentices covered by health and safety regulations in the workplaces, and are these regulations implemented?</p> <p>Are apprentices provided with personal protective equipment, where appropriate, to carry out their training?</p> |

11. Guidance and counseling

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should provide appropriate guidance and counselling for apprentices, both before and during training process |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Do apprentices have access to career guidance and counselling and guidance services provided by qualified professionals?</p> <p>Do public authorities produce statistics to show the completion rate for apprenticeships?</p> |

12. Quality assurance procedures

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should incorporate robust quality assurance procedures |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Is there a quality assurance system for apprenticeships at national/regional level?</p> <p>Are training institutions subject to quality assurance inspections carried out by independent bodies?</p> <p>Are companies subject to quality assurance inspections carried out by independent bodies?</p> <p>Are social partners (trade unions and employers' organizations) involved in the evaluation of apprenticeship schemes?</p> <p>Are apprentices involved in the evaluation of apprenticeship schemes?</p> |

13. Solid learning base

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship scheme should be built on a solid base of knowledge, skills and competence acquired in the primary and secondary school system |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Do apprenticeship schemes have specific educational entry requirements? |

| | |
|--|---|
| | If young people are unable to gain access to apprenticeships, are other measures available to integrate young people into the labor market? |
|--|---|

14. Balance between work-based and school-based training

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should include a strong training component, with a clear majority of learning provided in the workplace and a clear commitment to forward-looking developments within the labor market and society |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Do apprenticeship schemes provide for majority of time to be spent learning in the workplace?</p> <p>Do apprenticeship schemes contain guidelines for the coordination of work-based and school-based training?</p> |

15. Teachers, trainers and mentors

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | <p>Apprenticeship schemes should provide good quality training in the workplace, with in-company mentors trained for this purpose, and within training institutions employing trainers that have up-to-date and appropriate skills.</p> <p>Both mentors and trainers should enjoy good working conditions so that they are able to do their job properly.</p> |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Are teachers and trainers working with apprentices in training institutions required by law to have a formal qualification?</p> <p>Do apprenticeship schemes make provisions for the training of in-company mentors?</p> <p>Do apprenticeship schemes ensure that teachers and trainers have access and support to continuing training to carry out their technical and pedagogical obligations both in training institutions and in companies?</p> |

16. Competence based/duration

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should be competence-based and have a duration which enables apprentices to attain the appropriate standards to work competently and safely |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Do apprenticeships have a duration consonant with the learning required to carry out an occupation?</p> <p>Do the public authorities produce statistics to show the transition rate from apprenticeship to employment?</p> |

17. Certification and recognition

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should be certified by competent tripartite bodies to ensure that the knowledge, skills and competences acquired are recognized within the labor market and throughout the education and training system. |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Doe apprenticeship schemes ensure that social partners are formally involved in the assessment and certification of knowledge, skills and competences required to carry out a recognized occupation? |

18. Progression

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should offer qualifications which are clearly placed place within the National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs), thus ensuring progression pathways to other NQF levels and programs |
| ETUC Quality criterion | <p>Do apprenticeship schemes provide for qualifications which are formally recognized within National Qualifications Framework?</p> <p>Do apprenticeship schemes offer qualifications which provide progression pathways from one level to another?</p> |

19. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should ensure the recognition of knowledge, skills and competences acquired by means non-formal and informal learning. |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Do apprenticeship schemes recognize knowledge, skills and competences acquired by non-formal and informal learning? |

20. Mobility at the national and European level

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| ETUC Standard criterion | Apprenticeship schemes should include provision for the mobility of apprentices at the national and European levels |
| ETUC Quality criterion | Do apprenticeship schemes provide opportunities for the mobility of apprentices at national and European level? |

2.1.5 European Framework for Quality and Effectiveness of Apprenticeships

On 5 October 2017, the European Commission published a proposal for a **European framework for quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships**.⁸

The framework sets out 14 criteria for defining the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships, linked both to the development of work-related skills and the personal development of apprentices. It takes into account the diversity of VET systems throughout the EU and respects Member States' competences in the field of vocational education and training.

In accordance with national or sectoral requirements or collective agreements, the Commission proposes the following **14 criteria for defining the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships**:

Criteria for teaching and working conditions:

1. **Written contract**: an apprenticeship should be based on a written contract between the employer, the apprentice and the vocational training institution.

⁸ European Commission - PRESS RELEASES - Press release - European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships: Questions and Answers. *EUROPA - European Union website, the official EU website* [online]. Available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-17-3586_en.htm

2. **Learning outcomes:** comprehensive learning outcomes should be defined by the employers and vocational training institutions, ensuring both job-related skills and personal development.
3. **Pedagogical support:** In-company trainers should be designated and cooperate closely with VET providers and teachers. Teachers and trainers should be supported to update their skills.
4. **Workplace component:** at least half of the apprenticeship duration should be carried out in a workplace, and there should be opportunities to undertake part of such placement abroad.
5. **Pay and/or compensation:** apprentices should receive pay and/or compensation, taking into account cost-sharing arrangements between employers, apprentices and public authorities.
6. **Social protection:** apprentices should be entitled to social protection, including necessary insurance.
7. **Work, health and safety conditions:** the host workplace should comply with relevant rules and regulations on working conditions, in particular health and safety legislation.

Criteria for framework conditions:

8. **Regulatory framework:** a clear and consistent regulatory framework should be in place, based on partnership and a transparent dialogue among all relevant stakeholders.
9. **Involvement of social partners:** social partners, including in at sectoral level should be involved in the design, governance and implementation of apprenticeship schemes.
10. **Support for companies:** financial and/or non-financial support should be provided, particularly for particular for SMEs and micro-companies.
11. **Flexible pathways and mobility:** there should be flexible entry requirements, as well as opportunities for further education and training. Apprenticeships should lead to nationally recognized qualifications. Transnational mobility should be a component of apprenticeships.
12. **Career guidance and awareness raising:** career guidance, mentoring and learner support should be provided to ensure successful outcomes and reduce drop-outs.
13. **Transparency:** transparency of, and access to, apprenticeship offers within and between Member States should be ensured.
14. **Quality assurance and graduate tracking:** there should be quality assurance of apprenticeships and tracking of employment and career progression of apprentices.

History of the Framework development

The framework is based, in particular, on the Tripartite opinion of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) on “A Shared Vision of Quality and Effective Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning” of December 2016. It further elaborates the joint work of the social partners focusing on the quality and cos-effectiveness of the apprenticeships, leading to a joint statement by the European social partners (BusinessEurope, CEEP, ETUC, UEAPME) in June 2016. In March, two hearings were held with the European cross-sectoral and sectoral social partners. The proposal is also based on contributions from European associations of VET providers and parties involved in the European Alliance for Apprenticeships. The framework also supports the priorities of the recently established European Network of Apprentices, one of which is quality.

Study on the criteria compliance status in Europe

A study carried out in preparation of the initiative showed that:

- 14 countries meet less than 50% of criteria: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Romania
- 6 countries meet between 50% and two thirds of the criteria: **the Czech Republic**, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden
- 8 countries meet more than two-thirds of the criteria: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.

ETUC position

On the same day as the European Commission published a proposal for a European framework for the quality and effectiveness of apprenticeships, the **ETUC** commented on the proposal⁹.

“ETUC welcomes the European Commission making a framework proposal for apprenticeships. The ETUC has been calling for such a proposal to ensure fair training and workplaces for apprentices.

⁹ ETUC welcomes new European initiative on apprenticeships | ETUC. Redirecting to <https://www.etuc.org/en> [online]. Copyright © ETUC 2019 [cit. 25.02.2019]. Available at: <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/etuc-welcomes-new-european-initiative-apprenticeships>

Europe is taking an important step forward for learning and good working conditions for young people.

Under this proposal every apprentice in Europe should get a decent remuneration, a written contract, an opportunity to learn, social protection and health and safety.

Member States must now live up to the commitments taken with us last year. We call on employment and Education ministers to adopt this initiative. The ETUC and its affiliates are committed to take their part in efforts to encourage high quality apprenticeships.”

Thiébaut Weber, Secretary of ETUC

ETUC further stated:

“This apprenticeships initiative covers most of the recommendations issued by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in 2016 and is also the result of cooperation between trade unions, employers and Member States who agreed in December 2016 on a common apprenticeships strategy.

The framework supports a range of conditions to ensure the development of quality apprenticeships. It includes the need for clear national regulatory frameworks defining the rights and obligations of the parties and a strong call on Member States to involve workers and employers’ representatives in the development of apprenticeship policies and programs.”

3 The role of trade unions in initial VET: examples of national systems

National approaches to setting up a national VET system often differ significantly. One of the features defining the relevant VET system is the extent, content and form of fulfilling the roles that are given to the social partners in the management of the VET system and in the implementation of VET. In this respect, the position of the social partners in the Czech Republic is very limited, which was criticized by the OECD in 2010¹⁰.

OECD recommendation:

“Employers and trade unions should be more involved in VET Responsibilities and roles of competent authorities should be strengthened and clearly defined.”

The following chapter describes VET systems in Germany, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and France, where the position of trade unions in VET is considerably stronger and more systematic.

3.1.1 Germany

The main feature of the VET system in Germany is the close partnership of employers, trade unions and the government. Social dialogue and real co-decision are important preconditions for accepting system reforms. All stakeholders have a significant influence on the content and form of VET and ensure that their requirements and interests are taken into account. A responsible approach of all participants beyond particular interests is a prerequisite for the dual system effectiveness.

Basic characteristics of the dual vocational training system in Germany

The dual vocational education system is the main pillar of vocational education in Germany. It is based on the Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz – BBiG*) from 1969. The law was significantly amended in 2005.

The vocational training system is referred to as dual, because training is provided in two places: enterprises and vocational schools. Professional preparation in the dual system usually lasts three years (preparation for some professions lasts only 2 years, while in others up to 3.5 years; there is also the possibility of shortening the period of preparation for holders of school leaving certificates). The aim of the dual system is to provide a broad-based basic

¹⁰ OECD.org - OECD [online]. Copyright © [cit. 18.06.2019]. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/czech/45030212.pdf>

vocational training and qualifications and competences required to pursue a profession in a changing world of work in a well-organized training program.

The average age of trainees is between 16 and 18 at the beginning of the process. In the dual system of vocational training, the vocational school is an autonomous learning place. The task of the school is to provide basic and specific vocational training and to further extend the previously acquired general education. The final exams are focused on practical expertise, i.e. work-related requirements and processes in the relevant profession. Performance in general subjects is evaluated in school reports (Hensen, Hippach-Schneider, 2013).

After completing dual system training, most graduates enter employment. Later, many take advantage of further education opportunities.

In addition to the dual system, there are also other avenues for obtaining vocational training within the framework of full-time professional schools. These are attended by about 15% of members of the given age cohort. These study programs last between one and three years, depending on the particular focus of the profession and the educational objective¹¹.

Management of the vocational education system

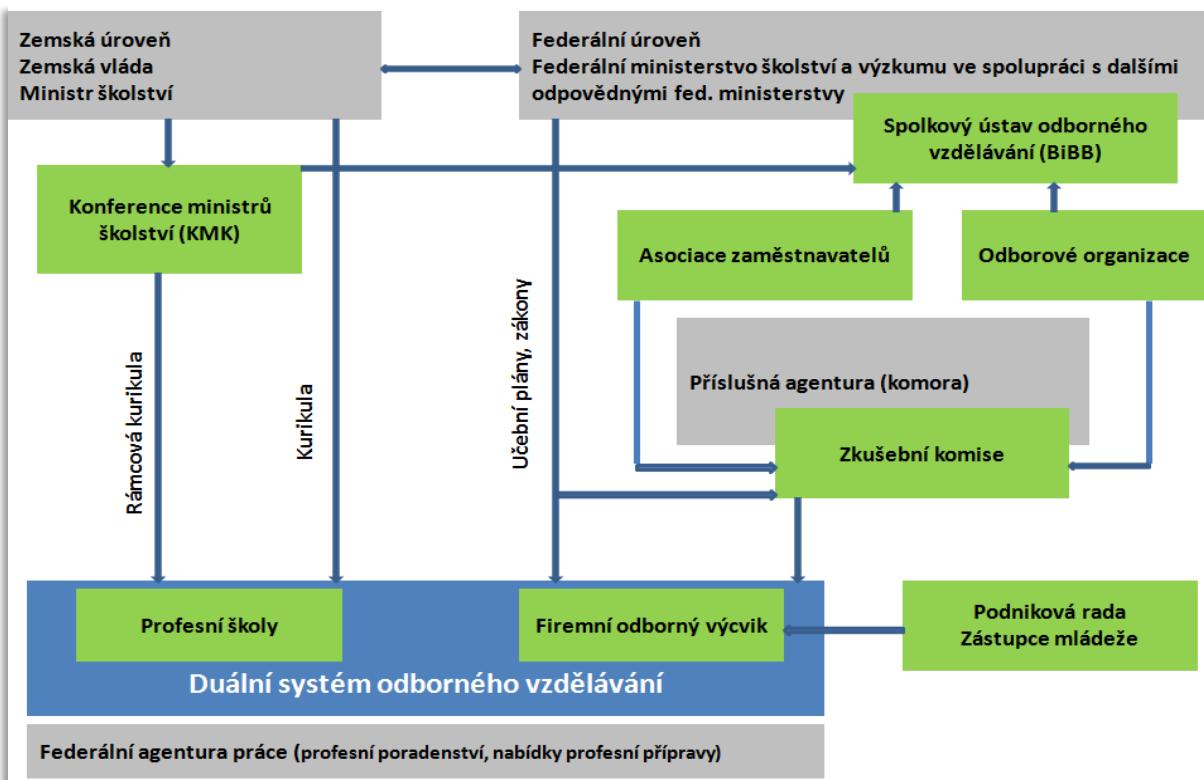
In Germany, responsibility for the management of a country is shared by the federal government and individual federal states. The most important decisions in relation to the development of a dual vocational training system are the outcome of discussions between the federal government, federal states, and industry. The outcomes of the consensus debates are concretized by all stakeholders **and the social partners** according to their respective competences.

The binding recognition of vocational training at federal level ensures that the basic principles agreed between industry and the federal states are taken into account. It also ensures that education in recognized fields of vocational training is provided in accordance with the curricula issued by the federal government.

In relation to the above-mentioned division of competences in the area of vocational education and training, an appropriate procedure has been developed to allow the coherence of activities between the federal government and the federal states, including the involvement of social partners (see figure).

¹¹ Duální systémy vzdělávání, Národní ústav pro vzdělávání. *Národní ústav pro vzdělávání* [online]. Copyright © [cit. 05.04.2019]. Available at: <http://www.nuv.cz/pospolu/dualni-systemy-vzdelavani>

Figure no. 1: Management of the vocational training system in Germany



Source: Le Mouloir, Isabelle. *Introduction to the German vocational education and training system and to the BiBB*. Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2013.

Hippach-Schneider, Ute, Krause, Martina, Woll, Christian. *Vocational education and training in Germany*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007. 98 s. (Cedefop Panorama series; Sv. 138) ISBN 978-92-896-0476-5.

The institution at national level, which plays a key role in achieving consensus among all key players involved in vocational education, is called the *Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung* – BiBB.

Federal Institute of Vocational Education and Training

BiBB manages the transfer of research results into enterprises providing vocational training and provides service and consulting services for the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and for vocational training providers. The **main board** (*Hauptausschuss*), consisting of **representatives of the four key players in vocational education**, is an advisory body to the Federal Government on essential vocational training issues within companies. The main board is unofficially called the German “parliament of vocational education and training”.

The main roles of the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung – BiBB*):

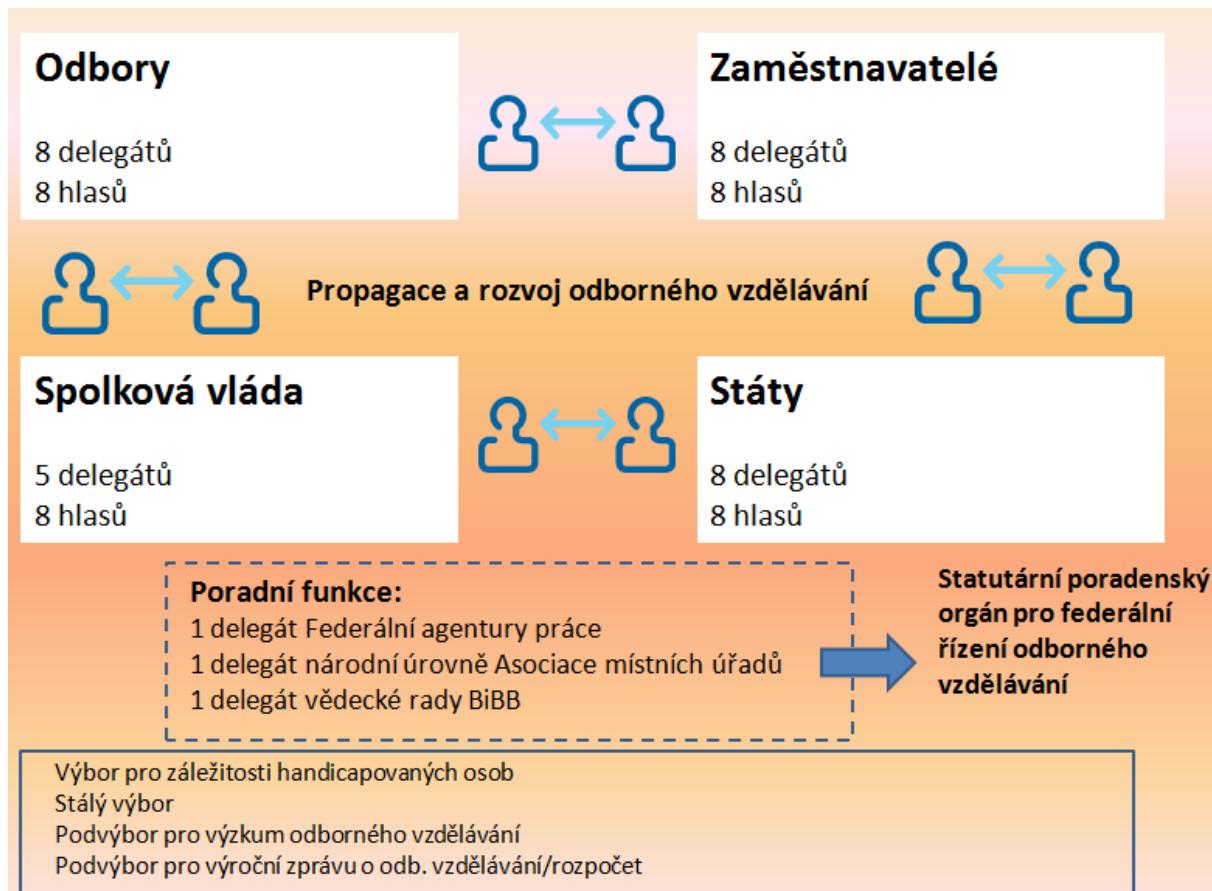
- national and international center of excellence for initial and continuing vocational education and training in Germany
- improving vocational education and training in terms of research, guidance and development
- vocational education and training planning and practice
- a team of experts for vocational education and training research.

The Main Board provides cross-cutting expertise on all matters relevant to vocational education and training in Germany and acts as a statutory advisory body to the Federal Government. Delegates represent:

- employers
- **employees**
- federal states (*Länder*)
- federal government.

The delegates work together in the Board, each group having the same number of votes. One representative of the Federal Labor Agency, the German Association of Local Authorities and a representative of the Research Council of BiBB may act as an advisory capacity in the decision-making process of the Board.

Figure no. 2: BiBB Main Board (“Parliament for Vocational Education and Training in Germany”)



Source: Le Moulloir, Isabelle. *Introduction to the German vocational education and training system and to the BiBB*. Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2013.

Fig. no. 2:

Trade Unions – 8 delegates, 8 votes

Employers – 8 delegates, 8 votes

Promotion and development of vocational education and training

Advisory functions – 1 delegate from the Federal Labor Agency, 1 delegate from the German Associations of Local Authorities, 1 delegate from the Research Council of BiBB

Statutory Advisory Organ for Federal Management of Vocational Education and Training

Committee on the Rights of People with Disabilities, Standing Committee, Vocational Education and Training Research Committee, Annual Report and Training / Budget Committee

Procedure for the development of vocational education and training regulations

The organization of a dual vocational education and training system requires a comprehensive and clear division of responsibilities. Employers and **trade unions** play a

central role in stimulating change, as the vocational training structure must be in line with industry requirements.

If changes are needed (e.g. new qualification requirements), the federal government, federal states, industry and trade unions will agree on the basic principles of adaptation changes.

The next stage of the activities is the creation of curricula and framework curricula, under continuous supervision and coordination by interested partners. The Federal Institute of Vocational Education and Training, in collaboration with experts nominated by umbrella organizations of the employers and **trade unions**, has the main overall control over the preparation of enterprise vocational training regulations proposals.

Without the involvement of the federal government, within the **collective bargaining**, the social partners (employers and trade unions) agree on details of vocational training, such as the level of remuneration for apprentices.

The enterprises bear the costs of preparation in the company and pay the apprentices the remuneration/pocket money (*Ausbildungsvergütung*). The amount of this remuneration for each profession is part of collective bargaining and becomes part of the collective agreement. The amount of pocket money increases every year of vocational training, and on average is about one third of the initial salary of a qualified worker in the profession.

Some collective agreements, as a measure, also provide for follow-up fixed-term employment for successful training graduates.

3.1.2 Austria

A key role in the functioning of the state is played by the Austrian model of social partnership – a system of coordination of economic and social policies between the representation of employers', **employees'** and governmental interests. The social partnership is not limited to the regulation of labor (economic) relations, but essentially entails all areas of social and economic policy. Therefore, the social partners also play a key role in the education sector.

Basic characteristics of the dual vocational education system in Austria

The apprenticeships (*Lehrlingsausbildung*) takes place both in the workplace of the enterprise (*Lehrbetrieb*) (practical training, about 80% of the education period) and in the apprentice school (*Berufsschule*).

Table no. 1: Distribution of education in the company and in the vocational school (Austria)

Apprenticeship – dual system of vocational training

| Learning in the enterprise | Learning in a vocational school |
|--|---|
| Learning in the enterprise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 80 % of learning time - Acquiring vocational skills and knowledge | Learning in a vocational school <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20 % of learning time - Acquisition of basic theory (65 % of learning time in vocational school) and general education (35 % of time) |

The basic legislative act is the **Federal Act on Vocational Training of Apprentices** (*Berufsausbildungsgesetz*, BAG). For each individual study program, the Ministry of Economics issues learning regulations, which bind companies in providing the corporate part of learning.

The regulations set the specific profession profile to the relevant study program. In a catalog structured for each year of vocational training, the professional profile covers the minimum range of skills, knowledge, and competencies mandatorily taught during the practice within the enterprise learning. In the newly described study programs, the profile is supplemented by a description of activities that sets (in the form of a short list) the professional requirements that a graduate of a particular study program must be able to meet.

The combination of a professional profile and a description of activities ensures that the curriculum provisions for the school part of the training will be in line. In most cases, professional profiles are supplemented by supporting manuals and learning materials.

After completing compulsory education, around 40% of graduates in Austria participate in the dual vocational education system.

Management and responsibilities in the vocational education system

The curriculum (for learning in an enterprise) and the curriculum (for education in a vocational school) specify the content of learning for each study program.

The enterprise curriculum (*Berufsbild*) is adopted under the teaching regulations of the Federal Ministry of Economics, Family and Youth. The incentives to modify existing or new curricula are mostly from enterprises or social partners. **The Federal Advisory Council on Apprenticeships** (Bundesberufsausbildungsbeirat, BABB) raises further proposals. **BABB**

is a body of social partners representatives acting as an advisory body on apprenticeship matters to the Ministry of Economics. Another task of the BABB is to prepare experts' opinions on the reform proposals.

BABB sub-committees or **educational research institutes of the social partners** are responsible for the specific form of company curricula and thus their orientation towards meeting the qualification requirements: on the employers side, it is the IBW (*Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft*), **on the trades unions' side, it is the ÖIBF (*Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung*)**. Continuous modernization of the teaching content regulations is essential to meet the requirements of modern professional profiles. The requirement for a new study programs is usually submitted by the social partners.

In principle, the **social partners** are responsible for making decisions on what the curricula and competence profiles of the study programs are based on and decide on the structure and content of vocational training. **Advisory boards are a form of involvement of the social partners in these processes.** In the case of the preparing own specific curriculum for training in an enterprise, expert groups are formed consisting of representatives of the **social partners** and vocational schools and under the guidance of the Ministry of Education.

The Regional Advisory Councils on apprenticeships consist of **social partner representatives in each federal state**. They provide consultations on all matters related to apprenticeships. They are responsible for preparing expert reports, proposals and recommendations on apprenticeships in the respective state.

Collective agreements and apprenticeships

Company training is largely paid for by the enterprises themselves. A large part of the company's cost of apprenticeship training is represented by **apprentices' remuneration**, which is **negotiated separately for each study program as part of collective bargaining** and is increasing gradually during each year of learning. In areas where no collective bargaining agreements exist, it is necessary to agree on the apprenticeship pocket money individually in the respective apprenticeship contract. Pocket money increases with each additional year of apprenticeship until it reaches about 80% of the salary of a worker qualified in the profession.

Final examination

At the end of the training, a **final exam** (*Lehrabschlussprüfung*, LAP) takes place to verify that the examined person is able to properly perform the activities necessary for the profession. The exam consists of theoretical and practical part. The theoretical part may be omitted if the examined person proves successful completion of the last year of the vocational school.

The Examination Committee consists of representatives of the employer and **employees**.

Supra-Company Apprenticeship Training

Young people who are unable to find a training place in the company have the opportunity to take part in so-called supra-company apprenticeship training (*überbetriebliche Ausbildung*, ÜBA).

Since 2008, ÜBA has been integrated into the vocational education and training system in Austria as its equivalent element, i.e. as part of the youth employment package, prepared by the social partners and the federal government. As a 'guarantee of apprenticeship training for everyone under 18', this measure guarantees a training place for all graduates of mandatory education who do not have a study opportunity at school or cannot find a training place in a company. The Austrian Labor Office (*Arbeitsmarktservice*, AMS) finances apprenticeship training in apprenticeship centers (workshops).

Instructor courses

Instructor courses can be organized by the Chamber of Commerce, the **Chamber of Workers and Employees**, and also by educational institutions that are members of these interest groups.

3.1.3 The Netherlands

Dual Vocational Education and Training System in the Netherlands

Secondary education in the Netherlands is divided into general (type of study HAVO) and vocational (VMBO and MBO). VMBO stands for Lower and MBO for Upper Secondary Vocational Education. MBO education (*middelbaar beroepsonderwijs*) is key to the economy of the Netherlands, as the proportion of participants in upper secondary education is 68% of vocational education to 32% of general education. The main elements of the MBO include two study paths (BBL – apprenticeship track and BOL – school-based track), four levels of study and selection of a study program based on the sector (agriculture, technology, economics and services, health and social welfare). Dual (apprenticeships) education includes only the BBL apprenticeship track, but at the same time, the BOL school-based track can be considered to be partially dual, as students spend on average 20-60% of their time in companies.

BBL x BOL

BBL-track is considered apprenticeship (dual) type of vocational education. Students start working immediately and go to school only one to two days a week to gain theoretical knowledge. In total, students must spend at least 60% of their working time in the company.

The BBL track refers to all four levels of study and its overall length is the same as in the BOL track.

BOL- track is a combination of school and practice and can therefore be considered in part as apprenticeship (dual) type of vocational education. Students go to school all week, but during the school year they have to carry out practice in the company for 10 to 20 weeks. The form of study within the BOL track may be full-time or part-time, but the duration of the study is the same as for the BBL track. BOL refers to all four levels of study (see 1.4.2.2.).

Both tracks lead to the same qualification/certificate. Their implementation in schools followed after the adoption of the Act on General Adult Education and Vocational Education (*WEB – Wet Educatie en Beroepsonderwijs* from 1996), i.e. in the 1997/1998 school year.

ROC

ROC = Regional Education and Training Center (“*Regionale Opleidingscentra*”; ROCs)

A typical ROC offers over 150 VET courses in the technology, health and social welfare, and economics sectors; it has about 10 000 VET students and about 2 500 students in adult courses.

ROCs are represented at national level by the Dutch Council for Vocational Education and Training (BVE Raad). ROCs bring together institutions for adult education, upper secondary vocational education and training institutions.

Regional Education and Training Centers have their representative body representing their interests: The Association of All Vocational and Adult Education Institutions (*MBO Raad*). The MBO RAAD, on behalf of its members, promotes collective interests in the sector and acts as the mediator between member schools, the government and the social partners. The Association negotiates working conditions for the craft unions sector and signs collective labor agreements. Its main task is also to cooperate in building competence-based vocational education and training.

Expert Centers participate in the creation of programs provided by the ROC, which identify the competences required by individual sectors. In response to these market requirements, ROCs develop appropriate education and training courses. ROCs are keen to maintain a strong relationship with employers, as this is the only way that they can offer their students courses leading to the development of competencies currently applicable to the labor market.

Continuing vocational training

There is no institutional framework for continuing vocational training in the Netherlands. Continuing vocational training is provided by educators who adjust their offer according to

the current market needs. The **social partners** also participate in the development of educational programs within the framework of the next VET by providing means from various funds.

The role of social partners

In the Netherlands, there is a relatively wide range of social partners who have an impact on vocational education. The involvement of the social partners in education and training is characterized as an important advisory and initiation role in many networks, bodies, councils or committees.

At national level, the main advisory body to the Dutch Government is the **Social and Economic Council**¹² (*Sociaal Economische Raad, SER*), which includes employers, **employees** and independent experts. The SER gives the government recommendations on major social and economic issues, including the interconnection of **labor market and vocational education**. Both the government and the social partners have their own negotiating responsibilities and roles. However, they are interdependent, as both parties have access to only part of the policy instruments. Therefore, their mutual cooperation is necessary to achieve the jointly defined objectives.

The Social and Economic Council has a total of 33 members, including 11 representatives from employers and **11 representatives from employees**. The remaining third are independent experts and experts appointed by the state.

Representation of three major employers' organizations:

- VNO-NCW (7 spots)
- MKB-Nederland (3 spots)
- LTO Nederland (1 spot)

Representation of three trade unions:

- FNV (8 spots)
- CNV (2 spots)
- VCP (1 spot)

At the beginning of the millennium, important actions were taken to strengthen the role of vocational education. The main initiators of these changes were the **social partners**. In 2003, a contract was signed between the government, the Labor Foundation and the VET platform, which led to the pioneering role of VET towards knowledge economy.

¹² *Sociaal-Economische Raad | SER* [online]. Copyright © [cit. 05.04.2019]. Available at: <https://www.ser.nl/en/SER/About-the-SER-/media/544A7D818CA04A2FA1DFCCE9E0F09057.ashx>

Until 2011, at the sectoral level, the social partners were brought together in an association of expert centers for vocational education, training and the labor market - COLO. In January 2012, the so-called SBB (Foundation for Cooperation on Vocational Education, Training and the Labor Market) was established.

At **regional level**, the representatives of the **social partners** are part of the supervisory board of most regional education and training centers (ROCs).

At the corporate level, the social partners are involved in the negotiation of **collective agreements**.

The social partners are also involved in **sectoral platforms** where they monitor the quality of VET examinations.

3.1.4 Denmark

Vocational education and training are implemented in Denmark based on a dual principle, which means that the **social partners play a key role in relation to the content and organization of VET**. The Danish VET system is even characterized by a high level of stakeholder involvement, where not only the social partners but also vocational schools, teachers and students are involved in the development of vocational education and training focused on compliance and shared responsibility.

The VET Act applies to the whole system of initial vocational education and training – it defines overall objectives as well as specific frameworks regarding the access, form and content of education programs, appoints **advisory committees**, the role of learning enterprises, student rights, etc.

The Ministry of Education has overall parliamentary, financial and legal responsibility for initial vocational training, sets overall objectives for vocational education and training, **and provides a legal framework in which stakeholders – social partners**, vocational schools and companies **adapt content and methodology to labor market and student needs**.

The placement of the pupil/apprentice in the company workplace within secondary vocational education and training is based on a contract between the apprentice and the company. **All training companies are approved by the social partners** through the relevant field industry committee and therefore meet the prescribed requirements, such as a certain level of technical equipment and the ability to assign apprentices different tasks in the given profession. More than 60 000 learning companies that can provide vocational training in at least one field are currently approved.

Social partners

The social partners play an institutionalized role at the various levels of initial vocational education and training – from the level where they participate in the Advisory Council for the Ministry of Education to the local level where they participate in local education committees. Their main role is to ensure that the benefits of vocational education and training are in line with the needs of the labor market.

- **Advisory Council**

The Advisory Council consists of 31 representatives of the **social partners**. It monitors developments in society and highlights trends in initial vocational education and training. The Council makes recommendations to the Ministry of Education for the creation of new, merging or cancellation of existing initial vocational education and training programs.

- **National Sectoral Committees**

National sectoral committees are the backbone of the initial vocational education and training system. Approximately 50 sectoral committees are responsible for 106 major VET programs. The committees usually have 10–14 members and **consist of labor market organizations (with membership parity between organizations of employers and employees)**.

Their main responsibilities include:

- playing a central role in the creation and renewal of VET programs, monitoring developments in their specific business, defining objectives, basic standards, and key competences according to labor market requirements
- conducting analyses, preparing development projects and maintaining close contacts with relevant stakeholders
- deciding on the regulatory framework for individual study programs within the limits set by legal standards, deciding for which study program to provide what education, duration and ratio between school teaching and practice in the company
- approving company as qualified training establishments and rules on conflicts that may arise between apprentices and companies providing practical training
- acting as ‘guardians’ of the sector and being responsible for the apprenticeships certificates issued.

Trade Union Committees and their secretariats are funded by the participating organizations.

- **Local Education Committees**

Local education committees are affiliated with vocational schools and are in close contact with vocational schools and local communities. Their role is to improve the responsiveness of vocational education and training to the needs of the local labor market.

They consist of representatives of local employers and **employees**, appointed by national sectoral committees, as well as representatives of employees, management and students appointed by schools.

Local Education Committees:

- cooperate with schools
- affect specific curricula and elective subjects
- assist and advise national sectoral committees on how to improve local companies as qualified training facilities
- resolve disputes between apprentices and companies
- help provide appropriate training facilities in local companies.

- **Vocational schools**

Vocational schools work with local education committees to define the content of each course. As a self-governing institution of vocational school, the **Board of Trustees** has overall responsibility for the administrative and financial functioning of the school; educational activities in accordance with the educational framework are administered by the Ministry of Education. The Board consists of representatives of teachers, students, administrative staff and **social partners**. The Board takes decisions on programs offered by the school and its capacities, sets school regulations and ensures that they are adhered to, guarantees responsible management of financial resources, including approving budgets and accounts, and participates in the operational management of the school, e.g. in the function of a principle. Operational management is responsible for implementing the overall strategy and objectives set by the Board of Trustees.

3.1.5 France

A: Development of qualifications on behalf of the state

The role of social partners in the preparation of study/apprenticeships programs

Standards of individual study programs are developed by ministries based on the opinions of advisory bodies such as the Vocational Advisory Committee (CPC, *commissions*

professionnelles consultatives). The main role is played by the Ministry of National Education, but also employment, social affairs, agriculture, youth and sport or culture.

CPC (*commissions professionnelles consultatives*)

CPC consists of representatives of employers, **employees**, government and individual experts. CPCs are divided into main sectors of economic activity. They are a mandatory place of consultation between the social partners for all vocational qualifications. This role was reinforced by the so-called "Act on Social Modernization" of January 17, 2002. All ministries with an interest in education were invited to create a CPC. Until now, six ministries have created 94 different CPCs. The Ministries of Social Affairs, Agriculture, Youth and Sport and Culture have CPCs. As regards the Ministry of Labor, it has seven CPCs in the following areas: construction and public works; wholesale and retail; industry; data management and processing; tourism, leisure, hotel and restaurant; transport and logistics; other services for businesses, local authorities and individuals. CPCs determine the needs of qualifications in relation to the development of professions.

The Ministry of National Education manages the largest number of certification processes. In order to develop and update professional qualifications, the Ministry relies on 14 CPCs corresponding to the main sectors in the economy. More than 800 members of the CPC of the Ministry of National Education are professionals from employers' and **employees'** side. CPCs are places of institutional representation of large companies, employers' organizations, **trade unions of workers in the sectors concerned**, educators, etc.).

Advisory Inter-ministerial Committee (CIC)

In addition, any plan to update or create a new national industry standard is submitted to another official consultative body: **The Inter-ministerial Advisory Committee (CIC - comité interprofessionnel consultatif)** is a consultative body on general issues related to vocational qualifications. The CIC also addresses future trends in education (general, technical and vocational). The Committee also works on cross-cutting issues that apply to all CPCs. The CIC consists of the chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of the CPC, the Ministry of Education, government representatives, employer organizations representatives, **trade union representatives** and individual experts¹³.

B: Qualifications issued by professional sectors

When creating their own certifications, vocational bodies turn to:

¹³ France: VET in Europe: country report 2016 | Cedefop. Cedefop | European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [online]. Copyright © 2019 [cit. 08.04.2019]. Available at: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/france-vet-europe-country-report-2016>

- Joint National Committee for Employment and Training (**CPNEF**: *commission paritaire nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle*)
- Qualifications and Employment Perspective's Observatories (**OPMQ**: *observatoires prospectifs des métiers et des qualifications*).

CPNEF

CPNEF were created by employers and trade unions under the National Inter-sectoral Agreement on job security in 1969. Their task was initially to work on the redeployment of workers dismissed for economic reasons, but their scope has quickly expanded to vocational training. Today, the task of CPNEF is:

- to issue recommendations on employment and vocational training
- to study quantitative and qualitative trends in employment
- to decide on the prioritization of education and the definition of specific sectoral qualifications.

OPMQ

In 2004, the Lifelong Learning Act and social dialogue led to the creation of **Qualifications and Employment Perspective's Observatories (OPMQ)**, mandatory for each sector of the economy. These observatories produce three types of outputs:

- studies on topics related to job and competence management in a particular sector (vocational education and training, change and replacement of competences, diversity and gender equality, age-management, etc.)
- statistical databases (sector economy, jobs and workforce, basic or lifelong learning, etc.)
- work maps or indicators (job descriptions, job overviews, etc.).

The purpose of OPMQ is:

- to help employers define their educational policies and employees to set their career goals
- to provide CPNEF research for subsequent qualitative analyses
- quantitative trends in employment and skills to decide on education priorities.

The above-mentioned sets out a framework within which OPQM work can be used by Vocational Advisory Committees (CPCs) or the Joint National Committee for Employment and Training (CPNEF) to identify sectoral competence requirements.

4 European Alliance for Apprenticeships: Examples of Trade Union Activities

The European Alliance for Apprenticeship Training (EAfA) is a multi-stakeholder platform aimed at enhancing the quality, supply and image of apprenticeships in Europe and promoting apprentices' mobility. These objectives are supported through Member States' commitments and voluntary commitments by stakeholders.

In addition to national governments, companies and business organizations, chambers of industry, commerce and crafts, educators and vocational training providers, youth and non-profit organizations, regional and local authorities, **social partners**, professional organizations and networks, as well as research institutes and expert groups.

The following chapter summarizes the activities of trade unions from different European countries as presented on the European Alliance for Apprenticeships website¹⁴

Netherlands Trade Union Confederation FNV

Description:

FNV is the largest trade union confederation in the Netherlands with 1 million members. FNV concludes more than 800 collective employment contracts for more than 5.1 million employees, for individual companies and entire sectors.

Activities

The strong point of the Dutch VET system is the intensive involvement of the social partners and **trade unions**. The social partners are well integrated into the Dutch VET system and contribute to both VET policy formulation and own VET delivery. This model of close cooperation between educational institutions and social partners contributed to the relatively low youth unemployment in the early years of the economic crisis.

- **Involvement with SBB** (*Stichting Samenwerking Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven*)

The Dutch trade unions are involved in improving the quality of learning in school-based VET in the work-based learning regime for employers, thanks to the participation of FNV in SBB, which is the cornerstone of cooperation in vocational education, training and the

¹⁴ Pledges - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission. European Commission | Choose your language | Choisir une langue | Wählen Sie eine Sprache [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1149&langId=en&idDataTable=340#empl_content_title

labor market. In SBB, trade unions, employers and vocational schools work together to improve the link between education and the labor market.

The purpose of SBB is:

- **Creation of qualifications**

Qualifications are based on competencies that are the sum of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for working in a lifelong learning society. They are used as a basis for the preparation of study programs but can also be applied to the process of accreditation of prior education, job search and examination.

- **Initial vocational training in companies**

Dutch legislation requires that any company that prepares pupils/apprentices and supervises their preparation receives accreditation from the SBB for this purpose. This means that these companies provide a good, safe working and educational environment and proper supervision. Each student has an instructor guiding the pupil through the learning process at the workplace. SBB employs a significant number of educational consultants to train and support companies.

- **Research and labor market information**

The SBB conducts research and provides information from the labor market, on the offer of apprenticeships jobs and the effectiveness of study/learning programs.

- **Linking VET fields and the labor market**

The SBB concludes sectoral agreements on interconnecting VET programs with the labor market. The sectoral coordination of VET and the labor market takes place in eight sector chambers and is covered by the SBB.

- **Collective agreements**

FNV concludes collective sector agreements on:

- fair pay and good working conditions in apprenticeships
- support for companies in creating workplaces for apprenticeships
- supporting the development of the competences of company instructors of pupils/apprentice

This special support is paid from sectoral educational funds.

- **Educational funds**

In many sectors, educational funds are created jointly by trade unions and employers; FNV is a member of the governing board of many of these funds. Sectoral levies and conditions are part of a collective agreement between employers and trade unions (FNV).

The funds offer:

- possibilities of education of company employees from a given sector
- support for vocational education and training by helping employers create apprenticeships in a company
- training and counseling for the pupils of company instructors

- **Visits to educational institutions**

FNV organizes visits to educational institutions in the Netherlands, in which way it seeks to present the work of trade unions and discuss with pupils the quality of vocational training by schools and learning companies.

In line with the objectives of the European Alliance for Apprenticeships and the Quality Framework for Apprenticeships, the ETUC has promised FNV to strengthen and initiate further dialogue in the Netherlands with employers, ministries, vocational schools and other stakeholders, in particular to:

- increase the number of apprenticeships spots for pupils, workers, refugees, migrants and vulnerable groups in the labor market
- strengthen the quality of apprenticeships
- Improve the pedagogical knowledge of instructors at workplaces.

Structure: Eurelectric, industriAll, EPSU

Description of organizations

EPSU and industriAll, representing trade unions and Eurelectric, representing employers' organizations, are recognized social partners in the European Social Dialogue Committee for the electricity sector.

The Union of the Electricity Industry, Eurelectric, is a sectoral association representing the common interests of the electricity industry at a European level. Eurelectric represents 3,500 companies across Europe with a total turnover of 200 billion euros. It covers all major issues affecting the sector, from generation and electricity markets, through distribution networks, customers, but also environmental and sustainability issues.

The industriAll European Trade Union is the voice of industrial workers across Europe. It represents 6.9 million workers across supply chains in the manufacturing, mining and energy sectors at a European level.

EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions. It is the largest federation of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and comprises 8 million public service workers from over 250 trade unions across Europe.

Activities

- Qualitative improvement of apprenticeships through the project “Analysis and background study on skills needs developments, vocational education and training systems in the changing electricity sector”. Funding for this joint project developed by the European social partners in the electricity sector was provided by the European Commission. The project focuses on young workers in the electricity sector and is based on a study conducted by external consultants. Until 2019, this study¹⁵ was identifying emerging skills gaps in the sector by comparing skills needs in the area of energy transfer and vocational training offer in providers VET and highlighting the value of apprenticeships systems to reduce the lacks in skills
- New project “*Capacity building to build skills intelligence at national level in the electricity sector*”, 2019-2020 – building on the ongoing project and the resulting recommendations this project will focus on capacity-building at national level to manage regular exchanges between national stakeholders (e.g. industry, VET providers, social partners and competent authorities) focused on facilitating a local youth employment agreements and apprenticeships
- Identification and visibility of best practices. The EU social partners play a key role in providing relevant information and details of best practice, for example through guidance to social partners at national level
- Ensuring and updating sectoral information on skills needs, so that relevant strategies and initiatives can be regularly reviewed: sectoral awareness of competence changes and industry needs is a key issue. To communicate with VET providers and to target VET provision as necessary, the European social partners must ensure sectoral information on skills needs, as required by the changing electricity market.

The European social partners aim to:

- agree on a set of competences with a unique taxonomy, referring to existing European guidelines to promote recognition of competences, with a European dimension including multiple countries and diverse systems

¹⁵ <https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/REPORT%20VET%20ELECTRICITY.pdf>

- Identify VET pathways and qualifications needed to acquire the required skills
- Establish common attractive educational frameworks (e.g. appropriate approaches to lifelong learning, apprenticeships contracts): one of the remaining challenges for sustaining the labor force in the electricity sector is the time needed to train new workers. According to the results of the project "Analysis and background study on skills needs developments, vocational education and training systems in the changing electricity sector", the European workforce in this field is trained in different ways, but apprenticeships appear to be the most effective preparation in the electricity sector. The information gathered during the project regional seminars in Prague, Madrid and Stockholm clearly shows that leading energy companies have implemented their own apprenticeship programs due to the lack of uniformity of standards and qualifications, which challenge companies in terms of providing the necessary skills to job seekers.

CFE-CGC ENERGIES (France)

Description of the organization

CFE-CGC Energies represents supervisors, technicians, engineers and managers in the energy sector, regardless of the field of their activity (technical, customer relationship, sales and marketing, etc.) or the nature of their work tasks (expertise, management).

As a trade union and social partner involved at both the French and European level (as part of IndustriAll Europe and FECER) and at the global level (as part of the IndustriAll Global Union), CFE-CGC Energies plays an active role in reflections, discussions and negotiations associated with extremely rapid changes that energy companies, their employees and their chain retailers in the energy sector are undergoing.

As a result, CFE-CGC Energies is closely involved in many projects aimed at strengthening social dialogue at company, sectoral and cross-sectoral levels. Regarding this fact, CFE-CGC Energies launched in 2016 a European project in cooperation with universities in different Member States to raise young people's awareness on issues related to social dialogue and energy transformation within the European Union.

Activities

- Promoting and raising awareness among employers from the energy sector about the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, approved by Member States in 2018
- Involvement in the European project "*The electricity sector and future challenges – Ensuring the right qualifications and good working conditions for young*

workers/trainees" of the European Committee for social dialogue in the electricity sector

- Dissemination of information to the network of CFE-CGC Energies and participating employers on the Quality Framework for Apprenticeships
- Promoting social agreements with concrete and measurable VET objectives, including apprenticeships (either as initial qualifications or as an instrument for retraining) as a tool for adapting skills in the connection with the energy sector transformation.

5 Worker training: the position and role of European trade unions

The importance of worker training is currently growing strongly in connection with the dynamics of changes in the labor market.

On June 19, 2018, a study „*Promoting social partnership in worker training*¹⁶“, **commissioned by the union's organization ETUC** and conducted by the German Economic Institute IW (*Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft*) was introduced. Based on the findings from 12 European countries, the aim of the study was to formulate common **recommendations for the role of social partnerships** in promoting worker training. The following chapter describes the main outcomes and recommendations of the study.

5.1 Key future challenges

According to IW institute, two fundamental challenges can be defined in the field of worker training.

The first is the **role of worker training at a time of labor market transformation based on innovation and digitization**. Digitization is changing the labor market and employers and employees need to keep abreast with current changes and remain competitive and employable. It is an important task for the social partners to follow this trend and provide appropriate support to their members.

The second challenge is the **necessary quality, transparency and efficiency of the staff training provisions**. This can only be successful if it meets high quality standards, if the education offer is transparent and if the training provided is effective.

5.1.1 The role of worker training at a time of labor market transformation based on innovation and digitization

Digitization and the need for new skills

Digitization affects expected (future) skills needs in all countries. Digitization is not just a new content requirement in the form of IT skills. Changing work and cooperation also places greater demands on the ability to cooperate and communication skills, as well as on autonomy and planning. For example, employees have to cope with challenges that lie outside their daily and familiar work processes. The need to communicate in new network

¹⁶ Promoting Social Partnership in Employee Training - Joint Recommendations and Report | ETUC. *Redirecting to <https://www.etuc.org/en>* [online]. Copyright © ETUC 2019 [cit. 27.02.2019]. Available at: <https://www.etuc.org/en/publication/promoting-social-partnership-employee-training-joint-recommendations-and-report>

structures has also been increasing. Not only work processes, but also production processes used in the production of final products have been changing in production. This can lead to the replacement of redundant tasks with completely new activities for which employees need to be qualified. In addition, digital transformation is moving at a rapid pace, so that education can hardly be accurately planned over a period of several years. Rather, it can be assumed that tailored in-company training needs to be quickly adapted to changing business models.

The main task for employers and employees identified by the social partners is to clearly identify what **digital skills are necessary** to remain competitive and productive in a globalized world, and, based on this finding, ensure **adequate training activities**. The social partners see a need for better orientation in identifying the needs of future skills as well as in the selection of training measures.

Even in countries with a well-developed training system, such as the Netherlands or Sweden, changes due to digitization are necessary. Economies with few natural resources are directly dependent on the skills and knowledge of their workforce. Teaching new labor market entrants in “digital skills” is as important as increasing the skills of the existing workforce. The progressive digitization of the economy is expected to increase the need for investment as vocational schools lack the necessary equipment. Social partners in some countries emphasize the importance of vocational training, especially in combination with an aging society and lack of skills. In this context, the representatives of employers in Austria state that digital education should not only apply to employers but should already be integrated into the school curriculum.

With regard to digitization, the social partners realize that it has different impacts on different groups. **Older people** should be given special attention, as the social partners perceive the problem that older people struggle more with technological change. In some countries, the social partners fear that digitization may have a real negative impact on participation in worker training, for example, in people **who are not digitally literate enough** to take online courses.

Some social partners have drawn attention to **small and medium-sized enterprises** (SMEs) whose situation can be improved by digitalization, for example through e-learning. SMEs sometimes need specialized courses for their employees, for which SMEs do not reach the required number of participants. SMEs strive to send their employees to training measures that are often centralized and are conducted in remote locations. Both problems can be overcome by e-learning. However, some social partners see the problem in the fact that SMEs may not provide sufficient information on major trends such as digitization.

Digitization not only presents challenges, but also offers new ways of learning and new ways of organizing and informing on staff training. Digital strategies that respond to digital needs are needed in this context.

New digital tools and new digital methods

Online tools have been developed in many European countries to facilitate various aspects of worker training for both employees and employers. In addition to publicly accessible websites, there are also digital tools that enable employees to manage their individual education. For example, in the Netherlands, employees may use a digital passport where their training is documented. Danish employees can accumulate and store all their skills, abilities and qualifications online, making it easier to recognize their prior education. The French Personal Educational Account is currently being modified to give individuals direct and independent access. All relevant information will be available online and individuals will be able to book training with one click. The large amount of available digital data generated by digital tools offers the possibility of **Big Data** analysis. Such analyses can be used to better identify skills needs and to improve skills foretelling.

Digitization requires not only more and new educational measures, but also changes the forms of learning and offers innovative educational measures. Digitization has the potential to increase the flexibility of educational content in response to the evolving needs of employers and employees as well as the flexibility in the form in which they are delivered. **E-learning** has gained in importance in recent years and the importance of digital learning tools has been increasing in Europe.

In many countries, social partners believe that e-learning is an opportunity to solve problems. One of the main advantages is the high flexibility of e-learning offers regarding location and timing of learning. The social partners emphasize the possibility and importance of individually adaptable training events for companies and individuals. It states that e-learning makes it easier for companies to participate in educational activities: especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition, digital learning methods can offer interactive opportunities for monitoring learning progress.

Digital education can offer new teaching methods that should be further developed. Some social partners are dissatisfied with the current form of e-learning, as it is primarily about making available learning materials in PDF format. They emphasize the importance of practically oriented education focused on the transfer of professional competences.

Summary:

- Digitization and IT skills play a cross-cutting role throughout the education system and are increasingly important in worker training. It is necessary to support employers and employees in defining the **necessary digital skills**. Once these needs for digital competences are identified, it is important that **curricula are adapted in a timely and effective manner**, especially in the case of new occupations. In addition, non-formal learning measures can be developed to respond to these needs

- Soft skills and professional competencies will remain important even as digitalization progresses. Worker training plays a role in providing a balanced mix of necessary skills
- New pedagogical and didactic practices are necessary to take full advantage of digital learning. In addition, new digital learning formats need to be targeted in order to support disadvantaged groups to ensure simple and equal access to training for all employees
- SMEs can also benefit from digital education but are often unable to create their own digital infrastructure. The social partners can therefore set up platforms to help SMEs work with other SMEs and/or inform enterprises about funding opportunities
- Digitization can support social partners' information and counseling tools if these tools are user-friendly
- Big data analyses can contribute to better anticipation of skills needs and improve matching of education offers with labor market needs.

5.1.2 Quality, transparency and efficiency of the provided employees training

Worker training can contribute significantly to the employability of individual employees and to the competitiveness of companies. But it can only be successful if:

- **high quality training** is ensured
- the training offer is **transparent**
- training is **effective and efficient**.

The social partners' organizations contribute significantly to these three dimensions of worker training in Europe, albeit in different ways depending on the existing institutional environment.

In many European countries, there are national quality standards for training providers and/or training offers. In Estonia, France, Germany or Ireland, for example, there are public institutions that develop, supervise and certify **quality standards in training**.

The social partners are actively involved in responsible institutions by being members of councils, sector chambers or advisory bodies.

In Sweden, the social partners have an even greater responsibility for ensuring high standards of quality training. They certify and regularly check the quality standards of private training providers. In general, in most countries, social partner organizations are satisfied with their role in defining quality standards and quality itself. In countries where bipartite solutions are not (yet) possible, more state support is needed.

There are 2 aspects of quality and transparency at the same time:

- **national qualifications frameworks**
- **the structure of the educational market**

According to many social partner organizations, the development of national qualifications frameworks has contributed to improving quality, since the assignment of qualifications to frameworks is linked to certain standards. This also increases the transparency of the vocational training market.

The particular challenge is that rapidly changing labor market needs go hand in hand with new educational requirements. Companies and employees are increasingly demanding more individual offers and short-term courses. In many countries, there are no standardized quality criteria for many non-formal and informal education offers that meet this demand. It is therefore important that the social partners assist their members in their orientation. More and more countries are implementing new digital solutions to improve the transparency of education offers and the quality of education. This includes, for example, digital public databases that publish available training offers (content, duration, providers, etc.).

The quality and effectiveness of education can be assessed in two dimensions:

- **Providing training**
- **Training results**

In both cases, dimensions can be evaluated with a view to improving the employability and productivity of individual employees and, consequently, the competitiveness of the company.

In many countries, there is a great **potential to save on the extent of training** in terms of training provision. The content of initial VET is also partly interesting for employees. However, in many countries it is not possible or very bureaucratic to use only part of the offer of initial vocational education and training (for example in the form of **training schemes**) for staff training. In particular, in countries where the social partners are members of the **boards** of VET providers, they can use their roles and existing links to build a **bridge between initial VET and worker training**.

Cooperation with universities and colleges of applied sciences could also be improved. It is often very expensive when individual enterprises buy courses from universities. This could be improved by supporting networks that link the needs of companies and employees. The training needs of employees are becoming increasingly individualized and it is important – especially for SMEs – to **create a critically high number of requirements** so that training providers have an incentive to offer this training. Social partner organizations can **promote exchanges and cooperation between their network members** in order to jointly define,

organize and offer training effectively. These activities are accompanied by a possible critical **assessment of public funding mechanisms for worker training**.

Better and institutional integration of the social partners in anticipating skills needs and, therefore, taking appropriate measures can also contribute to increasing the effectiveness of staff training.

5.2 Role of social partners

The study describes the role of the social partners in supporting worker training in 4 dimensions:

- **anticipating and identifying skills needs**
- **mobilizing resources**
- **validation and recognition of competences and qualifications**
- **information, support and guidance**

A comparative analysis of the above dimensions carried out among 12 European countries (including the Czech Republic) summarized the results of the assessment of the role of the social partners in the mentioned parameters.

| 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 | ** ↑ | ** ↑ | ** | * | * ↑ | * ↑ | ** | *** | ** | ** | ** | ** |

Legend: The number of stars (= low, ** = medium, *** = high) indicates the quality of the dimension. The arrow indicates a positive trend.*

Anticipating and identifying skills needs

Anticipating and identifying the skills needs is important because all labor market players need to know which future skills are needed to adapt their plans:

- Individuals need this information to plan their career development

- employers need to adapt their human resources development strategy and staff planning to this information
- both public and private educators need to adapt training offerings to current and future skills needs.

Anticipation and identification of skills in Europe takes place at different levels and in different forms. The most common forms are commissions and councils. Commissions and councils at national, regional and/or sectoral level with the involvement of the social partners exist in all countries. These committees are bipartite (employee and employers' organizations) or tripartite with government participation. In Austria, Sweden and the Netherlands, other experts (i.e. researchers, education providers) are also institutionally involved in anticipating skills needs. The inclusion of other actors can be an important success factor in providing useful and detailed information on future skills needs and ensuring the rapid implementation of new training measures in the training market.

In some countries, the social partners are involved in updating educational standards and/or in defining new professions. In doing so, the social partners identify and bring together skills needs that affect educational regulations. Moreover, if the educational market is flexible, these changes can be implemented quickly. If, for example, as in Denmark, the social partners are responsible for updating the fields of initial and continuing VET, they can react very flexibly to changes in the qualification requirements that education providers are rapidly introducing. The Portuguese social partners are also involved in updating the national competence catalog, but due to the inflexible education market, these changes do not lead to changes in the training offer.

The training market itself can also contribute to anticipating and identifying skills needs. If the dialogue between training providers and businesses goes well, they can quickly grasp new trends and respond to changing business needs independently of an institutionalized approach to anticipation (for example in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands or Denmark). In Germany, the main level for skills identification is the enterprise level (bottom-up approach).

In some countries, the social partners act as providers of education or are members of the advisory board of major providers (for example in Austria, the Netherlands or Denmark). In the Netherlands, the social partners work with vocational schools, so that social partners as training providers respond quickly and flexibly to changing needs.

In Austria, employers' associations and trade unions are represented in the board of the leading education providers. However, the involvement of the social partners in education does not, *a priori*, mean that the education market is flexible.

In many countries, the social partners carry out their own research on skills needs, delegate this task to research institutions or are in the board of research institutions.

Competency or training catalogs may be useful to improve visibility of training needs. The Portuguese National Competence Catalog or the Danish Adult Vocational Education System

(Arbejdsmarkedsuddannelser - AMU) publish a list of all available, regularly updated formal qualifications.

In Ireland, France and Spain, the social partners are institutionally involved at enterprise level to identify skills needs and engage in the development of company training plans. However, trade unions in France and Spain, instead of guidance and approving, require greater involvement through negotiation and co-decision.

Anticipating and identifying skills needs - summary:

- Successful practices to anticipate and identify the skills required combine high-quality labor market data with social dialogue. Institutional involvement of social partners in labor market projections and identification of educational needs can significantly contribute to avoiding imbalances between needs and supply of competences
- Sectoral and regional practices are needed to detailed anticipation and identification of skills. These may, where appropriate, be supplemented by cross-sectoral procedures. Better cross-sector cooperation can further help individuals in their career planning, facilitate cross-sectoral change and contribute to the development of an overall education strategy
- Strategic integration of other actors in the process of anticipating and identifying competency needs has proved to be a successful tool for obtaining useful and detailed information on future skills development. Relevant actors may be, for example, research institutions or educational institutions, such as training providers. Another advantage of their integration at an early stage is that they can support the rapid introduction of new training measures in the vocational training market
- A flexible learning market is very much needed in identifying skills needs, as flexibility assumes that training providers are able to perceive changing training requirements and respond quickly to new skills needs. This flexibility can only be achieved through exchanges between employers and training providers. The social partners can promote dialogue between the training and labor markets by connecting the interests of their members. Alternatively, the social partners may act as mediators and inform training providers of the needs of their members.

Mobilization of resources

When discussing potential barriers to (greater) participation in worker training, a lack of resources is often mentioned: both in terms of money and time. In most countries surveyed, time is seen as an even stronger barrier than money. Especially during a good economic

situation, when companies are busy clients' managing orders, companies have no room to free their employees for training. After 2008, in connection with the financial and economic crisis, some companies were able to find room for training employees because of the reduction in working time. Especially in countries with a strong tradition of collective bargaining, such as in Germany or Sweden, employers managed to find such solutions. At the same time, however, companies in other countries affected by the crisis (such as Ireland and Portugal) were forced to reduce the training of their employees during the crisis.

The countries surveyed differ in their opinion on the availability of financial resources for worker training. In Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, France and Sweden, the social partners assess the financial resources as adequate. In countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Portugal, Ireland and Spain, the social partners rate resources as insufficient. In Germany, employers' organizations are satisfied with the resources, while trade unions are asking for more investment in worker training. In Spain, due to the changing legislation, the social partners are unable to estimate whether the funds provided are adequate for the future. The Spanish social partners assess very positively that there are more financial resources available to identify the skills needed compared to the past.

In almost all countries surveyed, 1) **access to training for low-qualified workers** and 2) **too little training for employees by SMEs**, irrespective of the amount of financial resources, are reported as **problems**. In all countries, the social partners stated that both employers and employees should be more aware of the value of continuing education: for the personal development of employees and for the competitiveness of businesses. In particular, companies must see this as an investment in the future rather than mere costs.

The financing of worker training is provided in various forms. Training funds exist in several countries under review (the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Denmark, Estonia, France and Ireland). All are funded by employers. The contribution amount to the funds is determined by collective agreements or by law. In some countries, only employers can apply for funding from the fund, in other countries, only employees are eligible for funding, or, in others, it is both the employers and employees.

The advantage of the funds lies in the creation of a reliable funding structure for worker training. In addition, SMEs may be supported if they contribute less to the funds (for example in France) and/or if funds are redistributed through the fund. General financial problems can be:

- too excessive bureaucracy
- lack of means
- the means remain and there is no one to whom to transfer them

In addition, high level of financial means may lead to a lack of coordination and transparency between the funds, as criticized, for example, by the social partners' organizations in the Netherlands and France. This is particularly the case when funds are organized at sector level. In these cases, funding is often limited to the provision of sector-specific qualifications,

although cross-sectoral approaches would be more useful for the personal development of employees and their individual employability. Social partner organizations can contribute to better cooperation between funds.

Regardless of the type of funding, employers bear the greatest burden on the education cost, given that training is related to the current workplace. In some countries, other public resources, such as scholarships, are available for employees. However, their main aim is to improve educational measures leading to a higher formal level, less to non-formal or informal forms of education.

In almost all countries, it is generally accepted that employers pay for training that is compulsory and/or useful for work. However, in countries like Germany, it is discussed that employees should also pay part of the costs (in the form of money or leisure time) as they also benefit from training. To understand this German discussion, it is important to know that businesses provide not only initial vocational training but also remunerations to apprentices.

In nearly half of the countries surveyed, **collective agreements** play an important role in worker training. The areas agreed vary considerably: In Sweden, for example, the right for leave for education is agreed, while in Germany, the procedures are mainly agreed to identify the company's specific and individual skills needs and to provide guidance during worker training. Where collective agreements are at sectoral or national level (as in the Netherlands, Germany, France or Sweden), it is necessary to implement agreements at enterprise level. The social partners can encourage enterprises to 'bring life', for example by providing general guidelines on the human resource development structure or evaluation interviews that can be adapted to a particular society.

In many countries, individuals/employees have access to (paid) **leave for education** under certain circumstances. However, in some countries this leave for education is not fully used due to a very complicated procedure (France) or because employees do not even apply for it (as in Austria) because they do not know it much or because they perceive the need and benefits of training as insufficient. From both the employer and employee perspective, time constraints are an important obstacle to training. An enterprise-specific and individual approach is necessary to better steer time capacities, which can be determined, for example, in an evaluation interview. In addition, the use of modern forms of education, such as e-learning, offers plenty of flexibility to learn when possible.

Personal education accounts may cover paid time-off for vocational training as well as non-work related education which is achieved out of working hours. There are different ways to finance individual education accounts:

- through educational funds
- private contributions
- public grants linking existing support programs.

An individual education account can support the development of an individual's career regardless of the current job position. The specific account control settings affect how much training responsibility is shared between the employer and employee.

Example of good practice: France

The Personal Activity Account (PTA) was created based on an inter-professional agreement between the social partners in 2015. The account is the 'bearer' of training hours that employees go through during their professional life, as well as training programs that employees can apply for. The account is automatically updated at the end of each calendar year and increases proportionately to a maximum of 24 hours (48 hours for low-qualified persons) per year and up to 150 hours (400) hours. These hours may be financed by the Education Fund (*Organismes Paritaires Collecteurs Agréés - OPCA*), the labor office, the region or the state, the employer or the account holders. Only certain training programs or services included in the list of funded training measures (*Liste Nationale Interprofessionnelle*) can be financed under the PTA. The employee can decide how and when to use this account but must apply for OPCA money. In the case of educational measures out of working hours, the consent of the employer is not necessary. If training takes place during working hours, the employer must agree. Meanwhile, the employee's salary is funded by OPCA.

OPCA are managed by the social partners. They collect compulsory contributions from enterprises established for training and continuing education of employees. Sector-level agreements specify a binding contribution to OPCA, which depends on the size of the enterprise: Companies with less than 11 employees pay 0.55% of their wage costs, companies with 11 or more employees pay 1%.

With the current reform in France, the PTA will change (*note: the source study was published in June 2018*). As suggested by the Minister of Labor, the PTA will be the only and only tool that all people can use independently of mandatory intermediaries such as OPCA or other institutions. The account unit will change from hours to EUR; with an individual maximum of EUR 500 per year (low-qualified persons EUR 800) and a maximum of EUR 5 000 (EUR 8 000).

Mobilization of resources: summary

- Promoting the value of worker training is an important field of activity. The social partners can play a role in communicating the benefits of training – for individual employee development as well as for the competitiveness and innovation capacity of enterprises – among their members, thereby raising overall awareness of continuing education opportunities for all employees.

- Awareness of the value of education and a common understanding that worker training is, first and foremost, an investment and not just a financial burden is an important requirement to raise awareness and the willingness of employers and employees to mobilize resources. In practice, time capacities are often more of an obstacle to worker training than financial resources. Social partners can contribute to finding solutions, for example, as part of their efforts to inform, support and provide guidance at business level.
- Reliable and well-known funding tools for worker training can help increase participation in training. There are many alternatives to such instruments in Europe, such as the right to paid leave for education (by law or through collective agreements), personal education accounts or (mostly sectoral) educational funds. The success of the various instruments depends on the country-specific institutional framework. However, an important prerequisite for the success of instruments is that their existence and functioning are well communicated with all potential users.
- Sometimes the employees individual training needs do not match those of employers. This is the case, for example, when employees at risk of unemployment have better prospects in the labor market if they choose training that prepares them for a change of employer and often for a change of the sector in which they want to work. Therefore, there should also be support for worker training that is independent of the current employer. Publicly funded individual education accounts are one way to support the employees individual career development independently of their actual employer. Skills assessment is another way of identifying a person's educational needs while strengthening one's sense of individual responsibility for own professional development.

Validation and recognition of competences and qualifications

The importance of recognizing competences and qualifications is related to the importance of formal certificates for individual labor markets, which varies considerably across Europe. In some countries where formal qualifications are very important, the way competences are acquired is more important than in other countries. This is true, for example, in Austria, France and Germany. Recognition still plays a minor role in all three countries. In Germany, the validation of non-formal and informal competences focuses primarily on guiding people in the formal education track, which again shows the local perception of formal education importance. As regards the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal competences, other countries are much more advanced.

The well-developed French system for the recognition of non-formal and informal competences includes the right of employees to recognize their previous learning. However, the system is underused, and French companies generally lack the acceptance of qualifications beyond formal education. Denmark also has a legal framework for the validation of prior education which exists for almost all forms of formal adult education and training. Individuals have the right to ask for an assessment of their previous education,

which is used, for example, when people are trying to reach new levels of expertise. In Estonia, on the other hand, formal qualifications are of relatively minor importance and the validation of prior education is widely accepted.

In most countries, familiarity with the recognition and validation of non-formal or informal qualifications is limited. Employees and employers are often not aware of the possible recognition procedures and their benefits. The low level of awareness can be partly explained by the fact that systems and processes for the recognition of prior education are still relatively new in many countries. In many countries, the social partners identify support for these procedures as an important – and an ongoing – task.

Good practice example: Minkompetencemappe.dk - An online tool that gathers all individual competencies (Denmark)

Employees have the opportunity to enter their formal and informal qualifications and competencies at www.minkompetencemappe.dk. All individual skills and qualifications are gathered and saved here.

Individuals get an overview of what they have already achieved, and all competencies are transparent. This helps in particular when employees seek to achieve formal vocational education and can demonstrate credible information on all their previous learning outcomes. In this way, they may be able to reduce their training time and use only the courses they really need.

If the user chooses to do so, he/she is able to download diplomas and certificates automatically from the databases of initial and continuing education, and for some types of education, already from 2004.

An important prerequisite for better support for existing recognition and validation procedures is high quality standards ensuring the reliability of outputs. All actors in the labor market must have confidence in the results.

In some countries (Poland, Portugal), the authors pointed out the lack of confidence in the validity of the certificates. Subsequent reforms in Portugal led, *inter alia*, to the introduction of an ‘employee passport’, which makes it possible to document previous learning.

Similar passport systems exist in other countries. For example, in Denmark, employees can store their competencies and qualifications online (see above). In the Netherlands, digital passports are used in some sectors.

Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications is often done at a professional or sectoral level rather than at a national level. In Sweden, for example, there are national

standards, but recognition is organized at sector level. There are also sectoral differences regarding the importance of formal certificates. In regulated sectors, formal qualifications still play an important role in countries where formal certificates are generally of minor importance – as in Estonia. However, in many countries national and cross-sector transferability of recognition and validation of certificates is limited. This lack of transferability is a challenge and needs to be improved.

The extent of involvement of the social partners in the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications varies from country to country. In some countries, the social partners are strongly involved, and the processes are tripartite. For example, the Dutch social partners play an important role in the development and implementation of recognition of prior education. The social partners in Poland are members of advisory council, while social partners in the Czech Republic define standards for the assessment of professional qualifications through sector councils. In Sweden, the social partners are involved in concluding agreements with training providers, who ensure recognition and validation.

In other countries, the involvement of the social partners is less pronounced. In Ireland and Denmark, for example, the social partners are not directly involved in the organizations concerned.

Validation and recognition of competences and qualifications – summary:

- All European countries have established procedures for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications. However, in most countries, existing procedures are often unknown and, as a result, not well established. The social partners can play a role in promoting recognition and validation and explain their benefits to their members (e.g. by better identifying individual skills needs and derivation of appropriate training requirements).
- The expertise and knowledge of the social partners in the labor market can be important for developing and improving transparent and simple procedures for the recognition and validation of competences and qualifications.
- The usefulness of recognition and validation of competences depends on acceptance by the labor market. In many countries, certificates are not transferable between regions, nor across industries. In the connection with the development of the European Qualifications Framework, it would be appropriate to move forward in the standard format for describing learning outcomes for the purpose of qualifications comparison and transparency. This should take the form of a common understanding of bottom-up education outcomes. However, such an approach should not be about unifying learning outcomes. At the same time, there must be sufficient flexibility at national level, while there must be a structure that allows further comparability and promotes mobility.

Information, support and guidance

It is important for employers and employees to know the available training offers and how to make the best use of them. These are the training contents and forms. Therefore, the importance of effective tools for informing, supporting and guiding its members is a key concern of the social partner organizations. However, these issues do not serve only to the social partners but also to public bodies such as ministries, employment agencies or other actors, as well as training providers per se. A well-functioning interaction between different stakeholders is essential for the best reach.

Regarding information, support and guidance, different layers of involvement of the social partners needs to be distinguished. This topic can be addressed at:

- **state level** (e.g. through **extensive information campaigns on the benefits of worker training**)
- **regional or sectoral level** (where social partners and other actors can take into account **specific economic circumstances**)
- **enterprise level** (where training needs analyses can identify **employer specific needs**)
- **individual level** (e.g. **personal professional development** regardless of current profession).

The approaches of the social partners vary considerably from country to country. In Poland, the social partners play only a minor role in information, support and guidance, while other actors such as the Polish Craft Association and individual chambers are active. In Denmark, the social partners focus on the level of individual companies to inform their members about worker training and its benefits. The Austrian social partners inform and guide directly through their organizations and indirectly through their training providers. The focus on individuals prevails in France: for example, the support system in France includes individual career development and competence guidance, which outlines the career perspectives of employees and suggests appropriate training. Given the lack of social partnership at national level in Ireland, employers' organizations in charge focused on policy design and promotion of the importance of worker training at political level. In the Netherlands, trade unions offer career guidance in all regional labor markets; some training funds have their own information sources.

Good practice example: unionlearn (UK)

Unionlearn is an organization managed by TUCs to assist trade unions in promoting education. For its activities, it uses, for instance, the portal www.unionlearn.org.uk.

The unionlearn activity covers the topics such as:

- **apprenticeships** (outlining apprentices' rights; information and resources for apprentices; information and resources for trade union representatives; company levies on apprenticeships; apprenticeships charter)
- **barriers to education** (typical barriers to education; overcoming barriers to education; cooperation between employers and trade unions in education)
- **English, mathematics, ICT, digital competence**
- education and education campaigns in **health** area
- competences for a '**green**' economy
- **support for learners**
- support for **technical education**
- promoting **wider participation** in education
- **cooperation with employers**
- **youth employment and competences**

Resources used include case studies, courses, funds, sector councils and industry partnerships, publications, online tools such as Climbing Frame, Wranx or SkillCheck.

Careerzone section:

- career dictionary
- career comparison tool according to parameters such as salaries in individual professions, working time, gender pay gap; employment rate

The founder of the unionlearn itself, i.e. the TUC trade union, has on its website¹⁷ a section dedicated to education.

Good practice example: Training ambassadors (the Netherlands)

The pilot project of the FNV and other partners created so-called "training ambassadors" at the Philips factory. The idea comes from the UK. Training ambassadors are employees who inform their colleagues about their training opportunities, their education rights and motivate them to use them. Low-qualified persons in particular may be reluctant to talk to their superiors about their training needs. Training ambassadors overcome this obstacle. The project partners also developed a handbook for the ambassadors, where they find information on how to act.

¹⁷ Learning, skills and training | TUC. TUC - Changing the world of work for good [online]. Copyright © Trades Union Congress 2019, unless otherwise stated [cit. 17.06.2019]. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-guidance/learning-skills-and-training>

Public authorities are also important when it comes to providing information on worker training. Competent institutions, such as labor offices or education providers, such as vocational schools, provide information on training courses and their benefits. The main channels are websites and brochures, but also direct involvement, for example, at job fairs. This information provided by third parties is proving to be considered relevant and important by the social partners: some respondents stated that if the social partners themselves offer training, neutral sources of information are seen as useful.

Good practice example: Social partner agreements /Sozialpartnervereinbarungen/ (Germany)

Social partner agreements, such as “*Fachkräfte sichern: weiter bilden und Gleichstellung fördern (2015-2020)*” were initiated by the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, while the social partners were involved in their development and implementation. The conditions for support are set out in the Social Partners’ Guide (*Sozialpartnerrichtlinie*). The condition of public support is an agreement of the social partners or a collective agreement. The aim is to support the social partners and enterprises in ensuring sufficient qualified employees. It focuses mainly on networking activities, especially for SMEs and on sectoral dialogue.

In terms of information, support and guidance on worker training, the social partners identify three main challenges. According to the representatives of the respondents, it is important:

- **to reach disadvantaged groups** (e.g. low-qualified workers, elderly or migrants)
- to find the right answer to the question of how to **address SMEs correctly**
- to reach a **balance between the educational needs of companies** on the one hand and the **individual development of employees** on the other.

From an employer perspective, investment in training for low-qualified target groups may seem less beneficial than investment in training for more qualified workers. However, given the shortage of qualified workers and demographic constraints, it should be a priority for employers to seek new potential for the necessary competences. Increased training offers for these groups of employees can be a key factor for successfully maintaining competitiveness. However, appropriate trainings must be available. For such an approach to work, both employers and employees need to know about them. For instance, in Portugal, the problem is that many employers (especially in micro-enterprises) have low qualifications themselves, which makes it difficult to inform and convince them of the benefits of worker training. At the same time, in the case of basic skills, the role of public education is important in all countries, as this is where the primary responsibility for teaching basic skills lies.

The role of **SMEs** is also important in the context of information, support and guidance. While larger enterprises often have introduced training systems to systematically equip their workers with the necessary skills, smaller enterprises with few employees usually lack the financial and time resources to develop their own detailed training plans. Regular evaluation interviews as well as systematic career development of employees are less common in SMEs. Given that the sending one out of five employees is a bigger problem for a small business compared to one in 1,000 employee-enterprise, the specific needs of SMEs need to be addressed in an appropriate way. As the social partners point out, *inter alia*, in Ireland and Denmark, easier access to training information as well as easier participation in training can be offered through new digital channels.

Good practice example: Skillnet Ireland connects networks of private enterprises to coordinate their training needs (Ireland)

Skillnet Ireland (www.skillnetireland.ie) associates networks of private enterprises with similar educational needs, typically on a regional or sectoral basis. Currently, Skillnet Ireland has 65 training networks supporting 14,000 companies and 50,000 participants. Through the Training Networks program, Skillnet enables these companies to run training together that they could not offer themselves. Member enterprises and their employees are directly involved in the identification, design, delivery and evaluation of training. Skillnet Ireland is co-funded by the Ministry of Education in the form of an annual grant of approximately € 18 million in 2017 and by employers. The social partners are present in the board of Skillnet Ireland, with three union members, three employer members and three government-nominated members.

Regarding appropriate training offers for specific target groups or overall access to training for enterprises in general: the objectives of employees and employers do not necessarily coincide. The right information, support and guidance is particularly important when it comes to finding solutions that take into account the needs of both parties. Given that the educational markets in some countries, such as Germany or France, are considered confusing due to the large number of vocational training providers, the social partners at all levels – possibly in cooperation with other stakeholders – may be entrusted with the supply of information and tailor-made guidance to both employers and employees. However, from time to time, the social partners may find it appropriate to delegate this task to a neutral third party to avoid potential conflicts of interest (e.g. when acting as training providers themselves).

Irrespective of their involvement, the importance of informing their members and encouraging them to find appropriate training opportunities is considered very important by all the social partners interviewed. It is clear that emerging skills needs need to be addressed and that employees require training to help them adapt to changing labor market conditions.

In many of the countries surveyed, there is a right to worker training. However, educational resources are often not used because employees either do not know about their right to training or how to use them. Improving the offer of information, support and guidance can thus significantly contribute to increasing the participation rate in training.

Good Practice Example: Career Advice /Conseil en évolution professionnelle – CEP/ (France)

CEP is a cost-free provision of information and guidance on an individual level in the area of continuing vocational education and training. It is operated by OPACIFS, Pôle Emploi and other institutions. In their recent inter-professional agreement, the social partners have identified measures to improve this instrument. Counseling should be more professional and of better quality, more evaluations should be carried out, access to counseling should be made easier and employees should be given more support in planning continuing education.

In general, the role of the social partners may include providing information, support and guidance to its members. The overall involvement of the social partners in information, support and guidance allows for further improvement. The social partners focus on making the training market and available training offers more transparent and easier to navigate. Additional resources (from the social partners directly or indirectly through public funding) can contribute to strengthening support for this important topic. The training needs of older workers and individuals who are neither employed nor in education or training (NEETs) should also be taken into account. In this context, Member States should ensure increasing of skills (see Council Recommendation) with effective involvement of the social partners.

Summary: Information, support and guidance

- A key issue in all countries under review is to inform employers and employees about available training offers and provide effective support and advice on worker training.
- It is up to employees, or up to the company level to find a balance between the educational needs of employers and employees. The social partners can play a role in increasing the participation and efficiency of training measures.
- Worker training should be seen as an overall approach in which targeted approach to specific groups may be needed. In such cases, and as part of a broader approach to active labor market policies, Member States should provide effective and systematic support, including financial resources for education supporting the integration of low-qualified, unemployed and socio-economically disadvantaged groups into work through staff training and adult apprenticeships. The training needs of older workers, and in particular NEET, should also be taken into account.

In this context, Member States should ensure skills upgrading (see Council Recommendation) with effective involvement of the social partners.

- It is particularly necessary to promote information, support and guidance in small and medium-sized enterprises. Bringing together the needs of SMEs can contribute to better education outcomes that a single enterprise could not achieve alone.
- Further development of on-line tools that would make available educational offers and provide information on the quality of training courses would help raise awareness of educational opportunities. In addition, the use of online courses that allow staff to be trained regardless of time could be better encouraged. This approach will be particularly useful for SMEs that would otherwise not have access to information and vocational training offers.
- Providing information by an independent neutral third party in terms of employees' career prospects or employers' needs, may be beneficial. This approach can help mitigate potential conflicts of interest.

5.3 Recommendations of the European social partners

In the context of the above stated, the European social partners have agreed on the following recommendations for future action in the field of worker training.

1. The European Social Partners appeal to the **European Social Fund** (ESF) to support **investment in education and competences** in order to adapt them to the current and future needs of the economy. The Erasmus+ program should also support the **modernization and reform of education and training systems**.
2. Member States and the social partners should work on a tripartite and bipartite basis in order to **improve access to and participation in worker training**. The process should be developed in a way that benefits everyone: workers and enterprises as part of a lifelong learning perspective, based on the future and current needs of a diverse workforce in the public and private sectors and in small, medium and large enterprises. The way in which workplace training is organized and implemented must be jointly agreed by employers and employees through a combination of collective and individual measures. This includes training during or outside working hours (for a training not related to company's needs). Employers take a positive approach to worker training. When a worker requests a training or is entitled to training, employers show interest in dealing with these applications to ensure that they have supported the employability of the worker in a way that is also in the company's interest.
3. The social partners must ensure that the **way** they approach **worker training** is in line with the **wider societal and educational challenges**, as well as the **employment challenges**. For example, governments should ensure that all Europeans have at least a minimum level of basic skills when they leave school. Another manifestation of such

consistency is, for example, the aim of improving the use of public resources designed to increase the skills or retraining of the unemployed within active labor market policies.

4. The **social partners at national level** have the **best conditions** to discuss with governments to organize education in a way that improves access to it, while focusing on effective education based on learning outcomes. Consideration should be given to concrete measures, measures and instruments that are appropriate for each Member State.

5. The social partners should work together to **maximize the role of social dialogue** in achieving effective access to education, with adequate **capacity building** and **financial support**, particularly at **sectoral level**. The mutual exchange of knowledge between governments, social partners and training providers could further promote the use of available resources for skills training at national level. Quality and effective worker training is considered as a way of responding to the identified educational needs of the employer and worker, for example through workplace training plans developed by the social partners.

6. Worker training should be based on **appropriate skills evaluation**. The evaluation should be designed according to the needs of the employees and also to anticipate changes and developments in job vacancies, work content (job tasks) and the whole sector in general. This assessment should be part of a worker's competence development cycle, which is regularly reviewed.

7. Member States, social partners and education and training providers, local and regional authorities should work together to improve the **mechanisms for identifying data on required skills**, their connections and their use in education and training. In many cases, this is the sectoral and regional level that is perceived as the most relevant for the collection of reliable skills needs data. CEDEFOP's work in this area should be used as an inspiration for further action.

8. Member States, social partners and education and training providers should jointly develop **strategies** to ensure that **digital skills** are taught at all levels, from basic digital skills to advanced levels according to the needs of sectors and industry, whether low, medium or high qualification. The European and national social partners (cross-sectoral/sectoral) can play a supportive role for enterprises in their efforts to set competency plans to respond to ongoing and future changes.

9. Member States, employers and employees should see **worker training as an investment, not as costs**. Therefore, adequate funding from different sources is necessary for increasing qualifications and/or retraining, support services and career guidance to raise awareness of employees and enterprises, and for social partners' own actions in this area, particularly at sectoral level. Member States could also introduce alternative financial models to enable group/mutual cooperation in the field of worker training between enterprises and across sectors. In addition, Member States should ensure trilateral cooperation in the allocation of available public resources for worker training.

10. One of the main challenges of worker training is the **employers' costs**, in particular SMEs. It is therefore necessary to explore the possibilities of different types of incentives (including financial incentives) for employers to offer training to their employees, as well as the incentives for employees to invest in their employability.

11. Another very important issue concerning worker training is the **adequacy, quality and relevance of the education offer**. The social partners very often play the role of education providers together with many other institutions. The adaptation of the training offer, taking into account the organization of work (especially in the case of small enterprises with a low number of employees), is essential for stronger promotion and support of worker training in all sectors and enterprises of all sizes.

12. **Trade union representatives** can play an active role in **motivating employees** to engage in training and/or to use career guidance services. They can also provide support services to employees, using the potential for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. For this purpose, trade unions should equip their representatives with adequate resources and training. Employers should endeavor to ensure that their career guidance and human resource support services were available to all workers and that they provide them with information on training opportunities.

13. Member States, social partners and VET providers should set up **worker training** so that it is based on **learning outcomes** that is compatible with the **recognition and certification of competences** according to national practices and which **offers access to further and higher qualifications**. In the context of career development, non-formal and informal learning should be more recognized as part of employee vocational training.

6 Examples of good practice in the Czech Republic

A. Sector level: chemical industry

Two initiatives are currently being implemented in the chemical industry sector to support social dialogue: the project “**Promoting Social Dialogue in the Chemical Industry of the Czech Republic**” and “**Sectoral Agreement for Chemistry – Social Dialogue to Promote Employment**”¹⁸.

Sectoral Agreement for Chemistry – Social Dialogue to Promote Employment; basic characteristics:

- Main project partner: Association of Chemical Industry of the Czech Republic, **project partner: OS ECHO**
- The role of the social partners is to ensure the capacities of the implementers and promoters of the Sectoral Agreement for Chemistry to fulfill its objective
- The project is focused on ensuring higher employment and staff turnover in chemical industry through social dialogue of both social partners and relevant entities
- Funded by ESF (OP Employment)
- Implementation period 2016-2021

Focus of the Sectoral Agreement for Chemistry¹⁹

- A new generation of qualified workers in the chemical industry (with the Sectoral Agreement being subtitles as “Youth for the Chemical Industry”)
- The main objective of the Sectoral Agreement is to ensure the necessary employment structure and preserve the competitiveness of the Czech chemical industry, including areas such as logistics and chemicals management, for laboratory work and for environmental protection and waste management and recycling
- The agreement should also contribute to the promotion of the necessary systemic changes in the education system aimed at strengthening the importance of technical education in the Czech Republic
- It can serve as a platform for involving other employers and educational institutions.

Measures formulated in the Sectoral Agreement for Chemistry:

- Support of vocational education in the field of chemistry
 - competition “The Best Young Chemist of the Czech Republic Wanted”

¹⁸ Sociální dialog v chemickém průmyslu ČR. *Sociální dialog v chemickém průmyslu ČR* [online]. Available at: <http://www.socdial.cz/>

¹⁹ http://sekdochoda.socdial.cz/uploads/inq/files/SD_pro_chemii_scan_final%20%281%29.pdf

- excursions in chemical enterprises for secondary school pupils
 - professional practices
 - use of laboratories
 - universities
 - stabilization and development of cooperation with secondary vocational schools
- Promotion of chemistry at primary schools
 - Involvement of primary school pupils in the ‘Young Chemist’ competition
 - Excursion of elementary school pupils at secondary schools with chemical programs
 - Organization of project days, chemical courses and other activities for primary school pupils using secondary school laboratories
 - Promotion and expansion of the use of laboratory systems and other products at primary schools
 - Organizing open houses at secondary vocational schools and chemical/recycling enterprises
 - Popularization of chemistry in pre-school classes in kindergartens and the general public (presentations, lectures, programs, examples of good practice, etc.)

Strategic partners of the sectoral agreement (as of June 30, 2015):

- Ministries (MoLSA, MIT, MEYS)
- Associations and unions (including the ECHO trade union, the Czech Confederation of and the Confederation of Industry and Transport of the Czech Republic)
- Regions (Pardubice, Ústí and Zlín)
- Employers (e.g. AGROFERT a.s., Continental Barum s.r.o., Fatra a.s., etc.)
- Universities (Pardubice University, UTB in Zlín, VSCHT in Prague)
- Others (Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, AV ČR)

Support of social dialogue in the chemical industry of the Czech Republic – basic characteristics:

- Main project partner: Association of Chemical Industry of the Czech Republic, project partner: OS ECHO
- Focusing on social dialogue, inter alia, in adapting employers and employees to changes in the labor market with an impact on enterprises in the chemical industry. Another topic is the entry of graduates into the labor market.
- The main tool of the project is a social dialogue to address issues where it is necessary to reach a consensus of both social partners, including topics of care for employees and education of young generation for the chemical industry.
- Funded by ESF (OP Employment)
- Implementation period 2016-2020

Relevant framework project objectives:

- Improving cooperation and communication between employers and employees through social dialogue with the aim to achieving a broader consensus among social partners in implementing employment policy
- Development of mutual awareness of the social partners and presentation of their attitudes

Relevant project activities:

- Promoting social dialogue in the chemical industry: Generational tandem – employment and turnover of generations
- Employment of the young generation in the chemical industry as a common goal of the social partners

B. Continuing education program for workers with university education

- From the initiative of the Trade Union Association of Workers of Electric Railways and Bus Service, Prague Public Transit Company a specific educational program aimed at teaching specific programs in the group of persons with university education.
- Thanks to the acquisition of new competencies, they can work in the company, even if they are in a position that does not match their initial qualification.
- The program is based on a voluntary basis.
- If a job position corresponding to their initial qualifications opens up in the company, they can apply for it. In the meantime, they perform professions that are appropriate to the content of the qualification course.
- The trade union organization was the initiator of this type of training and considered it a successful qualification tool.

C. Trade unions and secondary school pupils

- **Trade unions KOVO and modernization of the paint shop in SOU ŠKODA AUTO**

Thanks to the initiative of the KOVO trade unions, a modernized paint shop of the Secondary Vocational School of ŠKODA AUTO was opened in 2011. It was an investment of CZK 11.5 million. The modernization of the paint shop was initiated by the chairman of the company Board Jaroslav Povšík²⁰:

"Here, at the vocational school, is where the future of the people who will produce our cars is shaped. Overall, the school is very well equipped, but in the case of the local paint shop,

²⁰ Odbory Kovo MB: Titulní stránka [online]. Copyright ©.r [cit. 17.06.2019]. Available at: http://www.odborykovomb.cz/assets/File.ashx?id_org=200202&id_dokumenty=1227

"we clearly saw that the local operation did not look good, so I am glad that this investment was successful. With Mr. Bohdan Wojnar, Member of the Board of Directors responsible for personnel, we agreed to continue to support young people who will bring new fresh ideas to the company and know how into further work."

The paint shop is designed for the study program "painter". It is a three-year program for about 58 apprentices (information valid in 2011). 20 new pupils are recruited every year. The investment enabled apprentices and teachers to work in a cleaner and safer environment, including social supportive environment. Furthermore, the work has become more efficient: thanks to the investment in the paint shop, more apprentices can work at the same time, they can paint and learn more.

- **Educational events for secondary school pupils beyond their study program**

Integrated secondary school Dr. Farského from Vysoké nad Jizerou, according to the announcement of the Chairman of the Trade Union Ing. Vítězslav Schmidt, provides pupils with education that goes beyond their vocational education and training, with the aim of improving their civic and social employability.

The school provides courses on:

- Financial Literacy
- Labor-law issues (provided by Labor Office experts, intended for pupils in the final years)
- Civil coexistence (provided by the Police of the Czech Republic)

- **Trade union discussions with apprentices on employees' rights**

In 2017, discussions were held with representatives of the Czech-Moravian Trade Union (ČMOS PŠ) – and apprentices²¹. The importance of trade unions for the defense of employees' rights, OSH issues, what to watch out for when concluding an employment contract, and other topics were discussed by trade union representatives with apprentices at Jihlava technical secondary school in May 2017. The event was attended by students at the 3rd year who took their final apprenticeships examinations in June of this year and pursued job opportunities or follow-up studies. However, they are not sufficiently prepared for the problems of working life. The event was also attended by a lawyer who answered the apprentices' questions.

²¹ Home page | ČMOS PŠ [online]. Copyright © [cit. 17.06.2019]. Available at:
https://skolskeodbory.cz/sites/skolskeodbory.cz/files/downloads/1501803096/e-zpravodaj_cmos_ps_5_2017.pdf

Pupils of the secondary technical school in Pilsen visited the headquarters of OS KOVO²². Future lathe operators and modelers debated with the chairman of OS KOVO, Jaroslav Souček, who explained to them what specific problems they might encounter once they finish their studies and enter into a regular working life and answered their questions. Subsequent reactions of pupils showed that they did not have much information about trade unions.

“.... Actually, only from TV when they talked about demonstrations. But I was not really interested in the unions either. Now I was intrigued by how much and what they do for people. How they care about work safety and that people have better conditions and receive fair rewards for their work. So, the discussion is definitely a benefit for me, and I will think about the unions.”

Ondřej Pelikán, pupil at SPŠ

²² Předseda OS KOVO besedoval s učni z Plzně | Odborový svaz KOVO. Odborový svaz KOVO [online]. Copyright © OS KOVO [cit. 17.06.2019]. Available at: <https://www.oskovo.cz/aktuality/predsedova-os-kovo-besedoval-s-ucni-z-plzne>

Conclusions

The study "The role of trade unions in the process of training skilled workers as a tool for social mobility" looked at the issue of trade union involvement in education.

The importance of acquiring, maintaining and changing qualifications, not only in vocational training but also throughout the career, has always been undeniable, but in recent years there has been increasing attention for at least two reasons: improving the perception of vocational education and training as a career choice, and the growing importance of adult education as a result of accelerating labor market changes.

In the context of the economic crisis and its consequences, the debate on the need for vocational education and training as an important model for acquiring qualifications, i.e. the knowledge, skills and competences needed for employability in the market in a wider context, has intensified. In a difficult post-crisis period, vocational education systems with a strong role of the social partners and with a substantial component of learning from practice have proved to be resilient and very competitive. Today, they are often presented as inspirational examples of good practice for other countries.

The second essential aspect of trade union involvement in the area of qualifications is continuing education. From a trade union perspective, employees are a priority target group for continuing education. The importance of maintaining, replacing or fundamentally changing the skills of employees is fundamentally increasing in times of dynamic labor market changes.

Many surveys show that enterprises will have to take the main role in changing the skills of employees. Trade unions can play an important role in this task both at the level of individual enterprises and at the level of trade unions.

It is evident that in the case of the Czech Republic there is a great opportunity for trade unions to expand and further strengthen their role. Examples of trade union activity outputs at European level, cited surveys and foreign good practice examples provide inspiration for defining a possible future strategy for how this role could be defined.

In the case of initial vocational education and training, it is, in particular, the strengthening of the role of the social partners in the management of VET, in defining the content, structure and qualification requirements for graduates and adequate representation in the VET governing bodies. Examples from five European countries show that such VET systems exist in Europe and that they are very successful.

Trade unions may, in initial VET, become spokespersons of pupils and students of secondary and tertiary vocational schools, performing practical teaching at the workplaces of enterprises. It can be an effective way to highlight the existence of trade unions and the

possibility of joining trade unions. Trade unions at the enterprise level can become arbitrators of pupils' and apprentices' interests in topics such as OSH aspect during carrying out practice at employers' site, quality of company teaching, remuneration in the regime of productive work, fulfillment of employers' promises to pupils under motivational contribution agreements, etc. Pupils/apprentices can be perceived as their future colleagues – employees.

The importance of worker training is currently growing strongly in connection with the dynamics of changes in the labor market. A potential trade union strategy to support worker training should respond to challenges such as the role of worker training in times of dynamic innovation and digitization. Trade unions should be involved in identifying what digital skills are necessary to keep employees competitive and productive in a globalized world and, based on this identification, ensure adequate educational activities. New digital tools and methods need to be developed.

The social partners should ensure and supervise that worker training is of the necessary quality, training offer is transparent, and own training is effective and efficient. The role of the social partners, including trade unions, in supporting worker training needs to be understood in four-system dimensions: anticipating and identifying skills needs, mobilizing resources, validating and recognizing competencies and qualifications, and finally information, support and guidance. The available comparative analysis, comparing the roles of the social partners in the above parameters across 12 European countries, showed that the Czech Republic is not doing very. At the same time, however, this brings a great opportunity for trade unions.

Successful practices of anticipating and identifying the required skills appear to combine high quality labor market data with social dialogue. The institutional involvement of the social partners in labor market projections and the identification of educational needs can make a significant contribution to avoiding imbalances between need and competences. There is a need to open up a forum to discuss new sources of funding for educational needs – the PTA tool (France), i.e. personal learning accounts, can serve as an example. There is a need to further promote the available tools for validation and recognition of competences and qualifications. In the Czech Republic, this may be a more systematic trade union support of the National Qualifications Framework. Significant progress is also needed in the field of state digitization, otherwise the Danish example of an online tool for gathering all individual "*Minkompetencemappe*" competences in the Czech Republic will not be transferable.

An important element of supporting worker training is the provision of necessary information and guidance. It is important for employers and employees to know the available training offers and how to make the best use of them. Therefore, the importance of effective tools for informing, supporting and guiding its members is a key concern of the social partner organizations. It is necessary to work in the given area at the national level (e.g. in the form of large-scale information campaigns), regional or sectoral level (at this level, it is possible to work with specific economic circumstances), at the enterprise level (here, the needs analysis can identify employer-specific needs) and at the individual level (e.g. personal

professional development issue regardless of current profession). The British unionlearn, an organization established by the TUC, has been inspiring in this respect, with the aim of assisting trade unions in promoting education or a network interconnecting smaller businesses and allowing them to undertake training that they would not otherwise be able to offer themselves.

The itinerary of the “Roadmap” of a possible strategy of Czech trade unions in support of worker training can help to fill 13 recommendations for future measures in the area of worker training agreed by the European social partners.

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