

# PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING

## CZECH REPUBLIC COUNTRY REPORT



With the financial support  
of the European Commission

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## Abstract

The Czech economic structure revolves around a strong industrial base that requires adequately skilled workers – qualified both via initial and continuing vocational education and training (CVET). Social partner involvement in CVET is particularly relevant in the field of recognition and validation of individual learning outcomes and in the field of quality assurance, where Sector Councils play an important role. Employee training is a general issue in sectoral or company-level collective agreements. Various government initiatives complement the CVET system. However, given financial cutbacks in the funding of these initiatives, social partners are asked to step in and fill the gap to keep the Czech workforce up-to-date in terms of skills and knowledge.

- **Anticipation and identification of skills needs:** Sector Councils play an important role in the identification of skills needs at the sectoral level. Initiatives focusing on national skills forecasts had been introduced but they were discontinued after the initial project. Employees' organisations argue that the identification of skills needs is at present mostly concentrated on the employer side. With the increasing importance of trends such as the digitalisation, pressure on the union side may rise for more involvement in this field.
- **Mobilising resources:** Employee training in general is implemented in decentralised collective bargaining agreements, even though enterprises and sectors can implement individual solutions. Employees are entitled by law to receive a minimum of training. Especially larger companies are aware of the benefits of training and invest in it, but resources are reported to be rather low. Public financial support of employee training is deemed insufficient: Although many companies make use of available opportunities, they frequently report an administrative burden that is too high in relation to the available financial benefit.
- **Information, support and guidance:** Many activities concerning the information and guidance of individuals interested in CVET are initiated by the National Register of Qualifications (NSK) or the public employment services (PES). Social partners inform employees about training offers mostly directly at the company level. At the national level, social partners may contract entities such as the National Training Fund to carry out investigations and recommendations that are used for their communication channels.
- **Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency:** Quality assurance with regards to the CVET system is not explicitly defined in the Czech legislation on a formal level. As more IVET providers are also starting to provide CVET, they adapt their existing quality assurance systems in this field. Still, assuring the quality of training remains one of the most important challenges. In addition, the available recognized degrees could be better promoted, thereby making them more transparent and widespread.
- **Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications:** Social partners – via the Sector Councils – define the standards for assessment of vocational qualifications and ensure that the process meets quality criteria. The sectoral ministries act as authorising bodies who have the power to grant, extend and revoke the authorisation to validate vocational qualifications. The actual validation lies in the responsibility of authorised entities and persons entitled by the ministries responsible for the respective occupation.
- **Provision of learning:** Employers choose or design their own training courses according to their specific needs. When it comes to defining qualifications needed for formal certification, Sector Councils – and, hence, social partners – are involved. All training providers are required to oblige to the contents outlined and defined at that level. Apart from that, commercial training providers may offer any course they deem appropriate.

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## **1 Introduction**

The Czech Republic was among the eight Eastern-European nations that joined the EU in 2004. With a population of approx. 10.6 million inhabitants, it was the second largest new member state and the country with the highest GDP per capita in this group. The Czech economic structure revolves around a strong industrial base that requires adequately skilled workers. Apart from the formal, university-centred academic track, the educational system of the Czech Republic comprises a variety of vocational degrees at the secondary and post-secondary level that lead to recognized vocational qualifications. These courses are predominantly school-based (no apprenticeship schemes / dual system), even though mandatory practical work-based training and work placement are integrated into IVET curricula. In addition, a system of lifelong learning includes various ways in which both employed and unemployed persons can pursue continuing vocational education and training (CVET) (MSRT, 2007).

## **2 Facts and figures on employee training**

To get a first grasp on the incidence of employee training, the following chapter looks at participation in employee training from the individual and the company perspective and also addresses influential factors that may prevent both actors from taking part in further training. For the sake of inter-country comparability we rely on data from the Adult Education Survey (AES) from 2007 and 2011 as well as the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) from 2005 and 2010. For both datasets, we focus on the latest available information. Additional information highlighting more recent developments will be added where appropriate.

### **2.1 Participation in employee training**

The Adult Education Survey (AES) informs about adult learning. Learning activities are divided into formal education, non-formal education and informal education. Formal education and training is defined as education provided by the system of schools, colleges, universities and other formal educational institutions that normally constitutes a continuous 'ladder' of full-time education. Non-formal education and training is defined as any organised and sustained learning activities that do not correspond exactly to the above definition of formal education. Non-formal education may therefore take place both within and outside educational institutions (courses, workshops or seminars, guided-on-the-job training – such as planned periods of education, instruction or training directly at the workplace, organised by the employer with the aid of an instructor – and lessons). Informal learning is defined as intentional learning which is less organised and less structured than the previous types. The participation rate in education and training covers participation in both formal and non-formal education and training. Employer-sponsored learning activities are defined as all activities paid at least partially by the employer and/or done during paid working hours.

In the Czech Republic, the employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training dropped from 43.8 percent to 38.6 percent between 2007 and 2011 while at the same time the overall participation rate in the EU went up to 40.8 percent. Non employer-sponsored training only plays a subordinate role in the Czech Republic, even though the participation rate doubled from 2007 to 2011. Contrary to 2007, women tend to be more likely to participate in job-related non-formal education and training than men in the most recent survey, which is in accordance with the EU average.

**Table 2.1: Employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training**

In percent, persons from 25 to 64 years

	2007			2011		
	All	Employer-sponsored	Non employer-sponsored	All	Employer-sponsored	Non employer-sponsored
All	43.8	42.6	1.2	38.6	36.1	2.5
Men	45.8	45.3	:u	36.9	35.2	1.7
Women	41.3	39.2	2.1	40.9	37.4	3.6
Age groups						
25-34	42.7	40.6	2.1 <sup>u</sup>	40.5	37.8	2.7 <sup>u</sup>
55-64	44.6	44.3	: <sup>u</sup>	33.6	31.9	: <sup>u</sup>
Educational attainment level <sup>1)</sup>						
0-2	26.9	26.5	: <sup>u</sup>	20.9	19.6	: <sup>u</sup>
3-4	41.5	40.6	0.9 <sup>u</sup>	35.6	33.4	2.2
5-6	59.9	57.9	2 <sup>u</sup>	56.8	52.6	4.1 <sup>u</sup>

Source: AES 2007, 2011; special evaluation of Eurostat

<sup>1)</sup> ISCED97

<sup>u</sup> low reliability,

: not available

In 2011 younger people were much more likely to participate in training than the elderly. The rates are relatively close to the EU figures (41.7 percent / 36.3 percent). Between 2007 and 2011, the participation rate for the elderly decreased sharply (by 11 percentage points) whereas the rate for younger people only decreased slightly (by 2 percentage points). On EU average, the rates increased for both groups. Concerning the educational attainment level one can see that the likelihood of participating in job-related non-formal education and training is positively correlated with education. This can also be observed for the overall EU rates. From 2007 to 2011 the Czech participation rate declined for all education levels, but the decrease was only mild for higher educated people (ISCED 5-6). This pattern is again opposite to the development we see for the EU average, where a shift in participation rates over all education levels can be observed.

The development of the employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training behaved differently than the EU average. It seems that the overall drop in the Czech Republic's participation rate between 2007 and 2011 was mainly driven by male and elderly people with low or intermediate level of education.

The latest available Eurostat data for the participation rates of the overall adult population in continuing education reveal that while the Czech participation rate momentarily exceeded the EU rate in 2011 and 2012 (11.4 / 10.8 percent versus 8.9 / 9.0 percent), it has fallen below the EU rate again and is at 8.6 percent in 2015 (10.6 percent in the EU). The spike in the Czech participation rate was mainly driven by



the availability of projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) in the years after the financial crisis (Šímová / Czesaná, 2014; Eurydice, 2017).

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

**Table 2.2: Companies' participation rate**

In percent

	2005			2010		
	All forms of CVET	Courses	Other forms of learning	All forms of CVET	Courses	Other forms of learning
Average	72	63	59	72	62	60
Small	66	56	88	68	57	55
Medium	93	88	76	90	82	77
Big	100	100	88	97	96	89

Source: CVTS, 2005; 2010

Companies' participation rate in continuing vocational training is above the EU average for both 2005 and 2010. While the participation rate increased on average in the EU, it remained at a constantly high level in the Czech Republic. In accordance with the EU average, small companies are less likely to participate in CVET and there are slightly more companies participating in courses than in other forms of CVET.

## 2.2 Motives and barriers for employee training

When asked for obstacles to participation in (more) education and training, most employees stated no need for (further) education and training (42 percent). Family responsibilities and other personal reasons were also common (22 percent / 16 percent). The shares are fairly close to the EU average (50 percent / 21 percent / 15 percent). From the point of view of non-training companies, the main barriers for participation in employee training are sufficient skills and competences of the employees (72 percent), recruitment of people with skills needed (24 percent) and that training is too expensive (10 percent). On average, non-training companies in the EU see more barriers than those in the Czech Republic, e.g., five reasons are named by more than 30 percent of the enterprises whereas in the Czech Republic it is only one.

**Table 2.3: Main barriers for training**

In percent

Individuals	2011	Companies (non-training)	2010
No need for (further) education and training	42	The existing skills and competences of the persons employed corresponded to the current needs of the enterprise	72
Family responsibilities	22	People recruited with the skills needed	24
Other personal reasons	16	Too expensive	10

Source: AES, 2011; CVTS 2010; multiple answers possible.

### 3 Legal framework and institutional setting

The most important legislation referring to continuing vocational education and training is the Act on the Recognition of Further Education Results (*Zákon o ověřování a uznávání výsledků dalšího vzdělávání* – C-VET Act) introduced in 2006 (effective since 2007) with major revisions in 2012 (Act 179, 2006). It introduced a comprehensive conceptual framework for CVET, most importantly establishing for the first time a well-defined nationwide system of formal CVET qualifications. Another important piece of legislation is the Labour Code (*Zákoník práce*) of 2006 that includes inter alia regulations on training leave (Act 226, 2006).

Regulation of working conditions and industrial relations falls within the authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí – MPSV*). The primary role of the MPSV in this area is to set up a legal framework for both individual and collective employment relations and to monitor its application. The MPSV also cooperates with the highest Czech tripartite body, the Economic and Social Agreement Council (*Rada hospodářské a sociální dohody – RHSD*). However, with respect to continuing education, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (*Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy – MŠMT*) is the most relevant public actor (see Chapter 3.2).

At the sectoral level, so-called Sector Councils (*sektorové rady*) play a very important role. They are de facto responsible for skills forecasting and quality control (via setting standards), even though the latter is not explicitly their given role (see Chapter 3.2). Sector Councils act as the “central system actor in terms of social partnership as well as quality assurance” (Ulicna / Curth, 2013, p. 95). Currently, there are 29 sector councils in the Czech Republic.

Above all, the National Register of Qualifications (*Národní soustava kvalifikací – NSK*) plays a central role in the field of CVET and its recognition. The NSK lists complete and partial qualifications as well as their qualification and assessment standards. It is also linked directly to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It can be seen as key instrument in the Czech national strategy of lifelong learning (MSRT, 2007) as it makes the qualification system more transparent to all stakeholders. The NSK links initial and continuing education and thus creates a system of validation and recognition of learning outcomes irrespective of where and how they were achieved (NSK, 2014). The MŠMT has set up the National Council for Qualifications (*Národní rada pro kvalifikace*) as an advisory body that discusses the preparation and



practical application of the *NSK* which includes representatives of several ministries, social partners, education or training providers, and other subjects such as the Labour Office of the Czech Republic (*Úřad práce České republiky*) (Eurofound, 2015).

### 3.1 Embedment of CVET in general education system

Employee training is particularly important for those individuals who need to update their existing skills to cope with changing labour market needs. In general, the workforce in the Czech Republic has a relatively high level of education: only 12.4 percent of all people aged 15-64 do not have at least an upper secondary schooling degree (compared to 26.5 percent on EU average) (Eurostat, 2017). However, the share of people with tertiary education degrees only amounts to 20.6 percent (compared to 27.2 in the EU), thus leaving room for training needs especially in times of increasing skill demand in the high tech manufacturing and service sectors. Such employee training, respectively CVET, in the Czech Republic is not directly linked to the general education system. However, some further training courses for teachers and pedagogical staff as well as specialised programmes for the unemployed do lead to officially recognised vocational qualifications (BQ-Portal, 2017). In many cases, institutions like secondary vocational schools (*střední odborná učiliště – SOU*) and secondary technical schools (*střední odborné školy – SOŠ*) that offer primarily initial vocational education have started to also provide continuing vocational training. The C-VET Act allows for the validation and recognition of non-formal training. In case employees successfully pass the relevant examinations, they receive a certificate stating that their qualification is recognised as “vocational qualification” (*profesní kvalifikace*). This will be treated in some cases as equivalent to the respective degree obtained via initial vocational education, e.g., a “comprehensive vocational qualification” (*úplana profesní kvalifikace*).

### 3.2 Regulatory level of CVET

CVET is regulated by various actors on various levels. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (*MŠMT*) has the overall responsibility for continuing education. The *MŠMT* approves qualifications and awards authorisations to agencies that are subsequently entitled to organise exams and award certificates (Eurofound, 2015). It is important to note, however, that the provision of training on a commercial basis that is not finished with a government-recognised qualification is not governed by any regulatory body (Šímová / Czesaná, 2014). Apart from that, Sector Councils are inter alia responsible for the identification of skills needs and the assessment standards, while the respective ministries are in charge of overseeing the authorised entities and persons who validate individual competences. In terms of quality assurance, training providers do not need to follow an explicitly defined protocol but much rather they need to obey the general standards laid out in different CVET regulations. Some providers rely on non-mandatory internal quality assurance programmes, while others are incentivised by a variety of pilot projects and measures such as quality awards.

### 3.3 Public financing/funds and tax incentives

In general, there is no unified coherent system of CVET funding. Training not resulting in a government-regulated qualification is paid for by employees directly or by their employers. The latter have the possibility to apply for a variety of targeted incentives and grants: there is special support for training employees in regions with high unemployment and employers can apply for programmes which are co-funded by EU structural funds (Šímová / Czesaná, 2014). Apart from that, two broad tax incentives are

available for both employers and employees in the Czech Republic: for employers, the costs for employees' training are deemed as part of overall business costs for taxation purposes and employees can deduct the costs for exams from their tax base (Šímová / Czesaná, 2014). The OECD (2017) praises the Czech tax system for employees as tax allowances are not restricted to training which is only related to a worker's current employment but also training that is related to the personal development and maintaining one's employability.

### **3.4 Regulations on training leave**

Employees in the Czech Republic may make use of paid training leave – both voluntarily and in case of mandatory training, e.g., when starting a new job. The training is supposed to be used for qualification upgrading. It encompasses general as well as company-specific content which can take the form of both certified and non-certified general or vocational continuing education (Cedefop, 2012). The Labour Code (*Zákoník práce*) states that employees are obliged to keep their skills up-to-date through an ongoing updating of their qualifications and that employers shall bear all costs associated with such activities (Act 226, 2006). Employers must also arrange for paid induction training and on-the-job-training if employees start their employment without any skills or are transferred to a new workplace or a new type of work. Apart from these provisions, employees are entitled to paid leave if they pursue a degree or prepare for an entry examination for formal education (Act 226, 2006).

### **3.5 Training providers**

Continuing education may be provided by various institutions. It may take place in public secondary vocational or upper secondary vocational schools that have broadened their scope beyond the provision of initial vocational education, it may be offered by private businesses specialised in the field of CVET or it may be provided directly by the companies, often in cooperation with schools. According to Eurydice (2017), there is no formal control of the evaluation of adult education programmes and courses provided by private subjects, commercial institutions, various professional associations, non-profit associations and other private organisations. In addition, these private adult education offers are not centrally monitored.

## **4 The role of the social partners**

While the previous chapters highlight selected aspects of the system of employee training in the Czech Republic, chapter 4 focuses on the particular role of social partners. To this end, it highlights their involvement in six distinct fields: The anticipation and identification of skills needs; mobilising resources; information, support and guidance; contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency; recognition and validation of competences and qualifications; and the provision of training. Each of these topics is described both in terms of official regulations and the de facto implementation by the social partners.

The Confederation of Employer and Entrepreneur Associations of the Czech Republic (*Konfederace zaměstnavatelských a podnikatelských svazů ČR, KZPS ČR*) and the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (*Svaz průmyslu a dopravy ČR, SP ČR*) are the most important employers' associations and are also part of the *RHSD*. On the side of the trade unions, the most important actors are the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions (*Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů, ČMKOS*) and

the Association of Autonomous Trade Unions of the Czech Republic (*Asociace samostatných odborů České republiky, ASO ČR*) (Eurofound, 2016).

#### 4.1 Anticipation and identification of skills needs

Anticipating and identifying upcoming skills needs is very important in the Czech context as the population is aging and fewer employees with higher qualifications will enter the labour market in the foreseeable future (Cedefop, 2015). Based upon the legislation of the C-VET Act, the Sector Councils play an important role in the identification of professional profiles and qualification needs (Ulicna / Curth, 2013). They monitor changes in skills demand and supply and ensure that qualification standards are kept up-to-date with recent developments and trends in the labour market (Ulicna / Curth, 2013). The short term labour demand of employers is also monitored by the Labour Office via its regional units. Initiatives focusing on long run national skills forecasts had been introduced and implemented inter alia by independent bodies such as the National Training Fund (*Národní vzdělávací fond – NVF*). However, these forecasts and results (published at [www.czechfutureskills.cz](http://www.czechfutureskills.cz)) were not continued after completion of the initial project.

At the regional level, so-called Territorial Employment Pacts were established with both public and private stakeholders and especially social partners. The activities of the pact's stakeholders include the coordinated development in the fields of employment and education – both in IVET and CVET. Smaller initiatives, e.g., in the South Bohemian textile sector, were able to tackle specific skills needs and respond by establishing a new textile study programme at the upper secondary level (I1).

Employees' organisations argue that at present, the identification of skills needs is mostly concentrated on the employer side (I2). With the increasing importance of trends such as the digitalisation, the pressure may rise for more union side involvement in this field to better capture the employees' skills needs.

##### Best practise: Joining forces in skills forecasting

As employers are increasingly facing skill mismatches (OECD, 2016), new projects have been realised at various levels. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí – MPSV*) has initiated in 2017 the so-called "Compass Project" aiming at developing a comprehensive and sustainable system of future skills needs anticipation. Apart from the National Training Fund (NVF) and the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs (*Výzkumný ústav práce a sociálních věcí – VÚPSV*), social partner representatives, regional authorities and regional Labour Offices also provide their expertise. After an evaluation at the end of 2017, the project is set to propose an institutionalised system of skill needs forecasting with a high level of social partners' involvement in the next four years (I1).

#### 4.2 Mobilising resources

Employee training in general is implemented in decentralised collective bargaining agreements in the Czech Republic, even though the level of detail may vary between sectors or companies (Eurofound, 2016). Enterprises and sectors can implement individual solutions as long as they fulfil the minimum standards outlined in the collective agreements. Employees are entitled by law to receive a minimum of training (especially upon entering the company or changing jobs within a company). Companies are aware of the benefits of training and particularly the larger firms invest in it. However, according to the NVF, resources for employee training are reported to be rather low, especially in times of economic

difficulties when these expenses are the first ones being cut. Public financial support of employee training is generally deemed insufficient: Although many companies make use of available opportunities, they frequently report a high administrative burden and many companies even give up applying for grants as they assess the time and personnel investment as too high in relation to the available financial benefit (I1).

Employee representatives go on the record saying that more resources in the field of employee training would be appreciated but that at present, this remains a field that is – at least at the national level – not yet at the highest priority (I2).

### 4.3 Information, support and guidance

Many activities concerning the information and guidance of individuals interested in continuing learning are initiated by the National Register of Qualifications (NSK). To this end, a web-portal was introduced that collects information on training offers as well as on qualification and assessment standards (Cedefop, 2016). Apart from that, the public employment services (PES) inform individuals about training offers, although focused particularly on job-seekers in the field of re-training. Still, the PES also actively carry out presentations and lectures inter alia for HR staff, e.g. via roadshows (Cedefop, 2016). The government is also trying to indirectly raise awareness for the necessity of training via specific initiatives focusing e.g. on industry 4.0 and digitization.

#### Best practise: Bringing vocational schools and companies together

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

Social partners inform employees about training offers mostly directly at the company level. At the employee side, there are no notable overarching activities at a higher (regional / national) level in the field of employee training, mostly because of a lack of available resources (I2). At the national level, social partners may contract entities such as the NMF to carry out investigations and bring up recommendations that are in turn used for their own communication channels (I1).

Employees’ representatives stress the role of personally transferred information about employee training: While information from official sources may be scarce, employees learn about training offers from fellow workers. According to the union side, employers also use employee training as a means of rewarding their staff, thereby increasing loyalty (I2).

### 4.4 Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency

Quality assurance with regards to the CVET system is not explicitly defined in the Czech legislation on a formal level. Instead, it is embedded in a framework of rules and regulations that also address other topics (e.g., the C-VET Act), thus making quality assurance an implicit matter. Various clauses refer to

quality aspects, even though a systematic quality assurance character is not directly mentioned (Cedefop, 2016). As more and more providers of initial vocational education and training (IVET) are also starting to get active in the provision of CVET, they adapt their existing quality assurance systems in this field.

Still, according to the *NVF*, assuring the quality of training remains one of the most important challenges to a system that otherwise can be considered as quite attractive. In addition, the available recognized validated degrees could be better promoted, thereby making them more transparent and widespread (I1). Concerning the issue of transparency, unions also agree that the system of recognition should be even more prominently positioned (I2).

As noted above, the Sector Councils play an important role in the field of quality assurance as they set inter alia the qualification and assessment standards for the recognition of continuing education. However, employee representatives consider their current role in the councils as being only advisory, thus shifting most of the responsibility to the employers. Depending on better (financial) support for their representatives, unions would like to increase their involvement in the Sector Councils. Still, the overall system is considered to be efficient, especially when companies and schools work together to provide employees with labour market relevant knowledge (I2).

#### **4.5 Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications**

The formal recognition and validation of individual qualifications is the centrepiece of the C-VET Act. The social partners – via the sector councils – define the standards for assessment of vocational qualifications and can thus ensure that the process of validation and certification meets all predefined quality criteria (Ulicna / Curth, 2013). The sectoral ministries act as authorising bodies who, as defined in the C-VET Act, have the power to grant, extend and revoke the authorisation to validate vocational qualifications (Act 179, 2006). The actual validation of individual competences lies in the responsibility of authorised entities and authorised persons (e.g., schools, private institutions, companies, or master craftsmen) entitled by the ministries responsible for the respective occupation (Cedefop, 2016). Validation practitioners are typically experienced teachers/trainers as well as professionals in the relevant sector. However, anyone passing a special preparatory course on pedagogical topics may become an authorised validation practitioner. Typically, though, assessors themselves have to be qualified in the relevant area (Cedefop, 2016).

While employee representatives stress the importance of formal qualification degrees, they also point out that the recognition of non-formal qualifications in the sense of the C-VET Act is not yet very widespread and that many employees still lack the knowledge about this option (I2).

#### **4.6 Provision of learning**

Employers choose or design their own training courses according to their specific needs. When it comes to defining qualifications needed for formal certification, sector councils – and, hence, social partners – are involved. All training providers are required to oblige to the contents outlined and defined at that level. Apart from that, commercial training providers may offer any course they deem appropriate and that is faced by sufficient demand in the market (I1).

Employee representatives are engaged in the provision of employee training only to a small extent, e.g., by offering some targeted courses. They stress, however, the importance of a close cooperation between companies and training providers such as schools as they see the necessity of teaching labour market relevant skills instead of just teaching employees some knowledge that is not related to the world of work (I2). The union side also points out that large enterprises use employee training far more often (see Chapter 2) and are even able to set up their own training programmes – e.g., in cooperation with schools –, while small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) lack the resources to do so and hence lag behind in employee training (I2).

## 5 Conclusion

Employee training in the Czech Republic has a longstanding tradition and is well established (Eurydice, 2017). Apart from public training providers such as secondary vocational or technical schools, a wide array of private training providers offer courses and training programmes. Social partner involvement is particularly relevant in the field of recognition and validation of individual learning outcomes and, although only implicitly, in the field of quality assurance. Apart from governmental supervision, Sector Councils play an important role in setting qualification and assessment standards for the recognition of the outcomes of individual employee training. It is important to note, however, that the role of unions in these Sector Councils is seen as only advisory by employee representatives, leaving room for improvement in the joint promotion of employee training.

Promoting employee training, as well as establishing addition – explicit – quality control mechanisms are seen as key challenges for employee training in the Czech Republic. Employee training is a general issue in sectoral or company-level collective agreements. Nevertheless, due to a lack of resources, employee representatives are often not able to make the case for employee training as urgently as would be necessary. As a result it remains a subject that is mainly in the hands of enterprises. In many cases, larger employers are able to offer more or more suitable training than SMEs, thus again leaving room for improvement for joint social partner action.

The government sees employee training as an important topic in the field of lifelong learning and has started various initiatives, e.g., concerning skills forecasting or the recognition and validation of individual adult learning outcomes. However, some of these initiatives have faded out once funding – e.g., via the European Social Fund – has ended. Here, social partners could step in and fill the gap, as achieving the goal of keeping the Czech workforce up-to-date in terms of skills and knowledge only works out with an appropriate institutional framework.



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#### **Acknowledgement**

The German Economic Institute thanks all interview partners for their kind and helpful support in sharing their expert opinion. This country reports aims at a balanced representation of different views and draws conclusions.

This study is carried out by the German Economic Institute as a subcontractor within the EU cross-sectoral social partners' (BusinessEurope, CEEP, UEAPME and ETUC) Integrated Projects of the EU social dialogue 2016-2018. It is supported by funding from the European Commission.

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