

PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING

POLAND COUNTRY REPORT



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Content

1	Introduction	4
2	Facts and figures on employee training	6
2.1	Participation in employee training.....	6
2.2	Motives and barriers for employee training	8
3	Legal framework and institutional setting	9
3.1	Embedment of CVET in general education system.....	9
3.2	Regulatory level of CVET.....	10
3.3	Public financing/funds and tax incentives	11
3.4	Regulations on training leave	11
3.5	Training providers	12
4	The role of the social partners	12
4.1	Anticipation and identification of skills needs	13
4.2	Mobilising resources	14
4.3	Information, support and guidance	15
4.4	Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency.....	15
4.5	Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications	16
4.6	Provision of learning	17
5	Conclusion	17
	References	19
	Interview partners	21

Abstract

Employee training in Poland has become more important in recent years. The positive economic development combined with a decline in unemployment has led to a significant skills shortage in many branches. As the number of older employees leaving the labour market is bigger than the number of young people who are entering the workforce, the number of skilled workers will decline significantly within the next years. For this reason employee training for fulfilling the skills needs in a fast developing market economy is getting increasingly important.

- **Anticipation and identification of skills needs:** The identification of skills needs and competences by private training providers is mostly informal. Employers have to decide which qualifications are needed and what kind of training is offered – a difficult situation for many SME's which often lack the necessary resources.
- **Mobilising resources:** The influence of social dialogue and of collective agreements on employee training – and, hence, mobilising resources – is limited. Still, the introduction of the National Training Fund (NTF) in 2014 has led to an expansion of support for CVET courses.
- **Information, support and guidance:** Information on employee training is mainly carried out by public authorities. Very active in this field is the Association of Polish Crafts (*ZRP*) which informs on the regional level about employee training and funding opportunities. The social partners only play a subordinate role. The introduction of a new search portal in 2015 considerably improved the transparency training offers and it has become the central source of information for CVET in Poland.
- **Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency:** In the public system of vocational education (both IVET and CVET) there are two levels of quality assurance – internal and external. The quality assurance in the field of public schools is sufficient and has improved in the recent years. However, many private training providers are not undergoing a qualified certification.
- **Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications:** The main goal of the Integrated Qualifications System, introduced in 2016, is supporting lifelong learning. The social partners were involved in developing this system and became a member of the advisory board. Apart from the government recognised certificates the significance of the certificates depends on the quality of the training provider.
- **Provision of learning:** Employee and employer representatives are – with the exception of the *ZRP* – not actively engaged in providing employee training. They do not have the financial and personal resources for offering employee training.

1 Introduction

Poland joined the EU in 2004 together with seven other Eastern-European countries. With a population of 38 million people Poland is by far the largest country of the new Eastern European member states. The economic structure of Poland is characterised by a strong industrial sector (a share of the workforce of 30 percent in 2015, in comparison to an EU share of 24 percent) and a persistently high percentage of workforce engaged in agriculture. At 11.5 percent, it is two and a half times above the EU average of 4.5 percent (Ministry of Economy, 2015).

In recent years, Poland has seen the sharpest decline in unemployment among all EU countries. With 17.9 percent in 2005 Poland had the highest unemployment rate in the EU, while in 2016 only 6.2 percent of the labour force were unemployed. This rate is almost 4 percentage points below EU average. In addition to above-average economic growth, the migration of Polish workers into Western European countries contributed to this development. According to information provided by the Polish statistical office, around 2.2 million Poles lived abroad in 2013 for more than three months (Eurostat, 2017b). The preferred target countries of Polish migrants are Great Britain (650,000 migrants) and Germany (560,000 migrants) (Brill, 2014). In May 2017 almost 380,000 Polish employees were working in Germany.

One consequence of this development is an increasing shortage of skilled labour in Poland. According to the results of a survey conducted in 2015, 40 percent of the personnel managers interviewed in Poland have problems to fill employment vacancies (Manpower Group, 2015). On the other hand, Poland had the third lowest rate of job vacancies among the EU member states (EU average: 1.7 percent) at 0.6 percent in 2015. These findings could be an indication for a mismatch of demanded and offered qualifications and thus refer to an increased need for further training.

Due to the demographic development it is very likely that the shortage of skilled labour will significantly intensify in Poland in the next years. Poland is among the countries with the most unfavourable demographic forecasts in the EU. Between 2015 and 2025, a population decline of 2 percent (680,000 persons) is to be expected, by 2050 the population will shrink by almost 12 percent compared to 2015. The comparative figures for the EU are 0 percent and -4 percent, respectively.

According to the prognosis there will be a huge decline of the Polish working age population (2015 around 24 million). From 2015 to 2025 a decline of around 1.3 million persons is expected (about 5.5 percent) and by 2050 Poland's working age population will shrink by almost a quarter (22.5 percent and 5.4 Million) (Central Statistical Office, 2017).

Vocational education and training in Poland is organised on a national level, whereby the reform in 2012 has significantly increased the scope for arrangements at the regional level. School-based courses (*Zasadnicza Szkoła Zawodowa*) are predominant, while dual vocational training is widespread in the craft sector. The reform of vocational education and training in 2012 has significantly increased the practice share of school-based VET courses and expanded the influence of enterprises in this field.

In the school year / training year 2014/2015 around half of the young people completed vocational training. However, it should be noted that two-thirds of these young people have completed a technical college, which leads to the acquisition of a vocational qualification as well as to a university entrance qualification. Conversely, this means that only around 16 percent of an age cohort have completed a

dual vocational training or a basic vocational secondary school. More than 80 percent of the school leavers in 2014/2015 have university entrance qualifications (Central Statistical Office, 2016).

2 Facts and figures on employee training

The following chapter looks at participation in employee training in Poland from the individual and the company perspective and also puts a focus on factors that may prevent both sides 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 employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training in Poland lies considerably under the EU average. While only a bit more than one quarter of the Polish employees took part in job related training, it was 40 percent in EU average. Additionally, the gap between Poland and the EU increased between 2007 and 2011. In Poland there was a slight increase in job-related non-formal education and training by 2 percentage points while the overall EU rates rose by more than six percentage points in the same period.

As is the case in the EU, most training in Poland is employer-sponsored and roughly 90 percent of the training activities are paid by the employers. Younger people are more likely to participate in job-related non-formal education and training than are the elderly. This is in accordance with the EU average, although the situation is more pronounced in Poland (8 percentage points compared to 5 percentage points in the EU).

Generally, a positive correlation between the educational attainment level and the participation rate in employee training can be observed for 2007 and 2011. In Poland this correlation is unusually high: in 2011 only 7 percent of the individuals with low levels of education (ISCED= 0-2) participated in training while for individuals with higher education (ISCED= 5-6) the share surged to almost 50 percent. Higher educated people are thus more than six times as likely to participate as are people with lower education, while on EU average they are only twice as likely.

It should also be noted that the participation rates in employee training remained constant between 2007 and 2011, regardless of the level of education. While the age and the level of education have a considerable influence on the development of education in Poland, gender plays only a subordinate role. Women's training rates were 4 percentage points above that of men in 2011. To sum up, the participation rate in Poland is significantly below the EU average, and in particular low-skilled workers have little access to continuing vocational training.

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	24.2	:	:	26.3	23.4	2.9
Men	21.7	:	:	24.2	21.8	2.4
Women	27.2	:	:	28.9	25.4	3.5
Age groups						
25-34	26.8	:	:	29.2	25.8	3.4
55-64	19.6	:	:	21.2	19.4	1.8 ^u
Educational attainment level ¹⁾						
ED 0-2	7.3	:	:	7.2	6.4	: ^u
ED 3-4	16.7	:	:	17.9	16.1	1.8
ED 5-6	47.3	:	:	46.5	41.0	5.5

Source: AES 2007, 2011; special evaluation of Eurostat

¹⁾ ISCED97

u low reliability, : not available

The latest available Eurostat data from the annually recorded Labour Force Survey of the overall adult population in continuing education also shows very low participation rates for Poland. Additionally, the gap to the EU average has become significantly greater in recent years. In Poland the participation rate declined from 4.4 percent in 2011 to 3.7 percent in 2016, while the EU records an increase from 9.1 percent in 2011 to 10.8 percent in 2016. This means that the participation in continuing education on EU average was almost three times higher than in Poland.

In accordance with the low participation rates of individuals, companies' rates are also very low compared to the EU average. About one in five companies offer CVET while the share is almost two thirds in the EU. Between 2005 and 2010 the participation rates went down for all size classes of enterprises which is not in accordance with the EU wide development, where all the rates increased. Thus, Poland belongs to the bottom three within the EU.

In Poland as well as in other European countries there is a strong positive relation between a company's size and its likelihood to provide CVET. The difference between small and big companies is remarkably high in Poland: companies with 250 employees and more offer CVET in 75 percent of all cases whereas the rate is only 16 percent for small companies with less than 50 employees (EU average: 93 percent / 63 percent). These figures indicate that there is considerable potential for the intensification of employee training in Poland, especially in smaller enterprises.

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	35	24	27	22	20	14
Small	27	16	21	16	14	9
Medium	55	43	43	41	38	28
Big	80	72	65	75	72	55

Source: CVTS 2005, 2010

2.2 Motives and barriers for employee training

When asked for the main barriers to participation in (more) training, most individuals stated no need for (further) education and training (60 percent). Less important obstacles are family responsibilities (22 percent) and costs too high (16 percent). No need for training and family responsibilities are also the main barriers on EU average (50 percent / 21 percent). "Cost too high" ranks only fifth but the EU-wide share is fairly close to the Polish one (13 percent vs. 16 percent). Eight out of ten "non-training companies" state that they do not provide training because the existing skills and competences of the employees corresponded to their current needs. Seven out of ten recruit people with skills needed rather than offering training and four out of ten state that employee training is too expensive. These are also common barriers at the EU level (77 percent / 49 percent / 31 percent).

Table 2.3: Main barriers for training

In percent

Individuals	2011	Companies (non-training)	2010
No need for (further) education and training	60	The existing skills and competences of the persons employed corresponded to the current needs of the enterprise	81
Family responsibilities	22	People recruited with the skills needed	69
Cost too high	16	Too expensive	43

Source: AES 2011, CVTS 2010, multiple answers possible for companies

These answers were not to be expected in this form, since it is often claimed that the widespread school-based vocational training is too theoretical and does not correspond to the requirements on the labour market. Therefore it is surprising that employers state the extensive qualifications of workers as reasons for the low level of training needs.

3 Legal framework and institutional setting

The regulations of vocational education and training are based on the Act of 7 September 1991 on the Educational System (ILO, 2017a; Text No. 425) (*Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991 r. O systemie oświaty*), which has been modified several times. In this act, which came into force two years after the end of the communist era, the Polish education system was reorganised to meet the needs of a free market economy.

A strong influence on the current situation of VET in Poland has been the comprehensive reform in 2012 (Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 11 January 2012 on Lifelong Learning (ILO, 2017b; Text No. 186)). Inter alia, the reform process has led to a modularisation of VET and as one result, to a closer connection of IVET and CVET.

For the financing of vocational education and training, two laws have to be emphasised. One is the Labour Code of 26 June 1974 (1974, No. 24 poz. 141). Since 2002 the labour code is administrated by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy (Act of 26 July 2002 to amend the Labour Code and several other acts (Text No. 1146)). Besides financing benefits for people losing their jobs, the main objective is the activation of VET-programmes for people who are looking for work and/or are threatened by job loss.

The second important act is the act on promotion of employment and institutions of the labour market (Act of 20 April 2004 on Promotion of Employment and on Labour Market Institutions (Text No. 1001)). In chapter 14 “Instruments concerning Human Resources Development” the training fund and the regulations for financing or co-financing the costs of CVET for employees and employers are described (Translegis Publishing, 2004).

The amendment of the abovementioned act on promotion of employment and institutions of the labour market introduced a new instrument of developing human resources: the National Training Fund (NTF) finances continuous learning of employees and employers (Sadowska-Snarska / Stypułkowska, 2015).

The Ministry of National Education (*Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej – MEN*) plays an important role in the field of IVET and CVET. Since a couple of years ago the *MEN* has an own department for CVET. It is responsible for the creation of professional training courses for adults.

Regulation of working conditions and actions to reduce or avoid unemployment are under the authority of the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (*Ministerstwo Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej – MPIPS*). The *MPIPS* operates four active labour market programmes in the CVET sector provided by the local labour offices:

- Financing of Examinations and Training Loans
- Apprenticeship for Adults
- Work Practice
- Training Courses

3.1 Embedment of CVET in general education system

The significance of employee training or adult education in the Polish VET-system has increased with the VET-reform of September 2012. The workforce in Poland has a very high level of education. More than

85 percent of the Polish people in the age group between 15 and 64 years have an upper secondary or tertiary education degree. This is 12 percentage points above EU average (Eurostat, 2017a). Although the rate of Polish people with a tertiary degree is slightly below EU average (25 percent compared to 27 percent in the EU), Poland is one of the countries in the EU with the strongest academisation tendencies. In 2013, 40 percent of the age group 30 to 34 had an university degree, which was three percentage points above EU average (European Commission, 2014, 35 ff.), while only less than 20 percent completed vocational training at the basic vocational schools (*Zasadnicza Szkoła Zawodowa*) or an apprenticeship in the craft sector (Cologne Institute for Economic Research, 2015, 22 f.). Due to these developments Poland is facing a shortage of skilled workers in the recent years.

To improve the quality and the attractiveness of IVET and CVET, the following measures have been part of the reform in 2012:

- Classification of occupations. It has been defined (within IVET and CVET) how occupations can be acquired. Each occupation consists of one, two or three qualifications. For each qualification one can gain a certificate. There are around 200 occupations with 250 qualifications listed.
- Introduction of two optional curricula for VET – subject centred curricula or modular curricula. The modular curricula can be easily modified, depending on the needs of the labour market.
- Implementation of vocational qualification courses. This is a kind of shortcut to acquire separate qualifications in CVET, which are certified by taking part in external exams. After acquiring all qualifications (1, 2 or 3) required in a given occupation students (adults) receive the diploma confirming vocational qualifications.

3.2 Regulatory level of CVET

Generally, a distinction must be made between CVET courses under governmental responsibility and private courses. Private CVET courses are mostly not regulated by any regulatory body. It is a market-decision whether the training offers meet to the needs of the respondents (employers, employees) concerning the topic and the quality of the courses.

Government-recognised CVET is under the control of two ministries. As mentioned above, the Ministry of National Education is responsible for all VET-courses at upper secondary and post-secondary level including CVET. The *MEN* has an own department where curricula for CVET-courses are developed.

The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy is particularly in charge of active labour market programmes, provided by the Local Labour Offices. The main goal is to improve employability of unemployed and job seekers by helping them to formally confirm their skills and qualifications.

Besides the two ministries, various other institution are involved in VET and CVET in Poland. One of the most important authorities is the Association of Polish Crafts (*Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego – ZRP*), which is the main certification body for professions and courses in the craft sector.

The voivodeships (regional units) are responsible for the implementation of IVET and CVET and the administration of vocational schools. Each voivodeship has a body of employment consisting of representatives from trade unions, employers' organisations, agricultural chambers, labour market experts and academics, which is also responsible for vocational training (Cedefop, 2012, p. 34 f.). The reform in 2012 strengthened the role and the influence of the regional bodies.

3.3 Public financing/funds and tax incentives

CVET training courses in public schools are free of charge. For other training courses the training fund, which has been established in 2004, is the main source of funding. The money for the training fund comes from the Labour Fund, which has been in force since 1974. According to the current legal provisions, employers are obligated to pay 2.45 percent of the gross salary of employees in this fund (Accace, 2017, p. 7).

The entitlement for funding has been extended in 2014 and is fixed in the Act of Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 14 May 2014 on the allocation of funds from the National Training Fund (NTF) (*Rozporządzenie Ministra Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z 14 maja 2014 r. w sprawie przyznawania środków z Krajowego Funduszu Szkoleniowego*).

Employers applying for co-financing for employee training must pay 20 percent of the costs, while 80 percent are financed by the NTF. For small enterprises (up to ten employees) 100 percent of the costs can be financed from NTF resources. However, the total amount granted by the NTF may not exceed 300 percent of the average wage per participant within a year (Eurofund, 2016b).

There is also the possibility to receive grants for the dissemination/promotion of the funding possibilities, which the ZRP regularly makes use of. Most of the funding from the NTF is reserved for public training courses. The vast majority of private CVET courses has to be paid by employees directly or by their employers.

3.4 Regulations on training leave

According to the Labour Code each employee has the right to improve his or her professional qualifications or to acquire or supplement his or her knowledge or skills. In contrast to this right, the regulations for getting paid training leave are quite restrictive. They are only granted for employees who are directed by the employer to take up training courses. The payment leave is paid by the employers; there is no funding or co-funding by any public institution. These regulations are based on the article 103 (2) of the Labour Code (Labour Code, 1997, Article 103 (2)).

The following regulations are listed in article 103 (2):

- 6 days – employee taking part in external examinations
- 6 days – employee taking part in matriculation examination
- 6 days – employee taking an examination confirming vocational qualifications
- 21 days – in the last year of study to prepare a thesis and taking final exams

Apart from these provisions, employees have no entitlement for getting paid training leave. As indicated in chapter 2, training courses are not popular and not widely used by employees. In Poland the training leave instruments are not monitored. So there is no valid information available, what kind of improvement is needed to promote CVET for employees (Eurofound, 2016a).

3.5 Training providers

CVET is provided by various institutions in Poland. Since the VET-reform in 2012 public secondary vocational or upper secondary vocational schools are much more involved in adult education. In 2015, more than 70.000 persons were sent by the Polish job centres to qualification courses in public vocational schools. As mentioned in the interview by a representative of an employer organisation (ZRP) this is around 30 percent more compared to the situation before the reform.

Besides the public sector there is a wide range of private training providers. Several thousand providers are active in various fields like foreign language courses, sector related training courses, courses for the development of soft skills and seminars in IT. When Poland joined the EU in 2004 the prices for CVET courses fell significantly as a result of EU subsidies. This kind of funding has been reduced significantly. However, according to the information of the interviewee from the AHK in Poland, still 14 percent of the 146,000 training courses (listed in register for educational institutions) in 2016 were co-financed by the ESF.

There is currently no reliable information on the number of training providers available. The Statistical Office accounted 65,000 training providers in 2015, while the register for educational institutions listed only 10,900 providers (mostly public or government approved) in 2016. However, the experts agree that a further consolidation of the providers in the CVET market is necessary. This is not only due to the huge number of training providers but also because of the lack of quality assurance for many private providers. Because many training offers are not underlying a systematic evaluation, the quality of the training has a great variation (Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung, 2014, p. 28 f.f).

4 The role of the social partners

The previous chapters have focused on general aspects and the development of continuous vocational training and employee training in Poland in the recent years. The following information concentrates on employee training and the role of the social partners. Six different topics have been analysed and discussed with the interview partners: 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 learning.

The biggest Polish employer organisation is Employers of Poland (*Pracodawcy Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*) with 10.000 associate companies employing 5 million workers (<http://pracodawcyrp.pl>). The Confederation Lewiatan (*Konfederacja Lewiatan*) with 3,900 associate companies employing 835,000 workers also plays an important in representing employers' interests, especially in the international sphere. Besides that the Polish Craft Association (*Związek Rzemiosła Polskiego – ZRP*) is another important employer organisation which unites about 300 000 micro-, small and medium sized enterprises.

The three trade unions with the most members are *Solidarność* (722.000 workers), the All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (*Ogólnopolskie Porozumienie Związków Zawodowych – OPZZ*) with almost 500.000 members and the Trade Unions Forum (*Forum Związków Zawodowych – FZZ*) with around 400.000 members. All three trade unions cover a wide range of members from various branches (Eurofound, 2014).

One interview partner from the Polish German Chamber of Commerce (AHK) explained that the large number of trade unions and employers' organisations makes it difficult to agree on a unified position, which weakens their negotiating position. In other words: if employers' organisations and trade unions are not able to agree amongst themselves, it is difficult to implement the corresponding receivables – e.g. in the field of employee training – against the government.

4.1 Anticipation and identification of skills needs

As mentioned above, Poland has a low rate of unemployment, a declining population combined with a labour shortage in many sectors. For these reasons the anticipation and identification for upcoming skills needs is getting more and more important. Much has been done in this field in Poland in recent years, but a differentiated analysis is needed to describe the present situation.

The education reform in 2012 has created new opportunities for faster adaptation of qualification requirements in CVET offered by public institutions. The modularisation of vocational training, combined with greater scope for adapting the curricula to the needs of regional labour markets, has led to a qualitative improvement in VET sector. At the regional level, vocational schools, employment offices, entrepreneurs and the education curators of the voivodeships are requested to work closely together on IVET and CVET curricula to meet the labour market demands (Koerbel, 2015). According to the interviewee of the AHK, clear progress has been achieved in this field. Two years ago the financial resources of the public vocational schools started to orientate on the training performance for the regional labour market. This was planned as an additional incentive for a labour market orientated qualification.

Best practise: Initiative by the Ministry for Economic Development; implementing project groups in selected sectors (metal, automotive, etc.) to define learning programmes for the future

The initiative started in 2016 and the first results are expected for 2018. Nine project groups for different sectors have been installed. In the recent month the first meetings took place. Each group consists of stakeholders from various institutions like politics, science, social partners, chambers etc. The main goal is to develop job profiles for initial vocational training as well as for employee training, which will meet the qualification requirements in the future. This strategy represents a novelty for Poland.

The identification of skills needs is on the agenda of the *ZRP*. As discussed in the interview, the *ZRP* cooperates with the Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training at the University of Cologne, Germany, and has been a partner in the project "Identification of future skills needs in micro and craft (-type) enterprises up to 2020" (Burschfeld et al., 2011).

At present the *ZRP* is working on new examination standards for craft masters. Furthermore, a set of new basic training programmes for various professions in the craft sector is created in cooperation with public authorities.

In contrast to CVET organised by the government or the *ZRP* the identification of skills needs and competences by private training providers is mostly informal. Hence, employers have to decide which qualifications are needed and what kind of training is offered. However, interviews with three SMEs in the craft sector have shown that these companies have no or only little resources to determine the qualification needs of their employees. For this reason additional guidance is required to prepare these companies for the future qualification of their employees.

Digitisation and industry 4.0 is, according to the statement of an employer representative, a huge challenge for Polish companies. Many are complaining about the lack of advanced digital competence especially from older workers. Due to the wide application of new technologies by young people they are a natural carrier of information and good practices used by employers. In many large companies, inter-generational dialogue in the workplace is being used to transfer knowledge in the area of new technologies.

Best practise: Actions to avoid skill shortage in a medium sized company (automotive supplier with 2.500 employees)

This company with an own vocational training centre pursues different strategies to keep the skills of the employees up to date. First, it cooperates with a public school for adults to qualify new employees for new technologies. Theoretical education takes place in the public school (30 percent), practical training in the company-owned training centre under the supervision of experienced employees/trainers (70 percent). Second, its trainers, who conduct the employee training, are also responsible for the identification of the skills needs/qualification requirements. Third, it cooperates with external experts who provide knowledge on specific technical issues and organise study trips (e.g., to automobile manufacturers). Finally, external training providers are introduced for the knowledge transfer of soft skills.

4.2 Mobilising resources

From a financial perspective, the introduction of the National Training Fund (NTF) led to an expansion of support for CVET courses. Not only unemployed or persons who are threatened by unemployment can apply for grants for CVET. Each employee has the opportunity, in consultation with the employer, to submit proposals for participation in CVET courses. The employer must, however, agree to the proposals. Employers are reimbursed 80 percent of the costs incurred, SMEs under 10 employees may receive even 100 percent (Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2014, p. 10 ff.). Twice a year funding from the NTF can be applied for. According to the interview from the ZRP, the available budget is quickly exhausted due to the high number of applications and the unbureaucratic funding.

“The influence of social dialogue and of collective agreements on the nature of the continuous education system has been limited, and there is no indication of change in this regard” (Eurofund, 2009). Although this source is almost ten years old, not much has changed in this period. The representatives from the trade union and the employer organisation interviewed for this survey had the same opinion. The interviewee from the trade union claimed: “Collective bargaining agreements are not very much developed in Poland. Frankly speaking, there are rather few existing in our country (and their number has been still decreasing) – one of the reasons is the weakness of social partners”.

In this context one has to keep in mind that Poland is one of the countries with the lowest level of trade union coverage. While the EU average is 24 percent of the workforce, it is only 12 percent in Poland. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the proportion of unionised workers in state-owned enterprises and institutions is three times higher than in the private sector (ETUI, 2016). In many companies, especially in the craft sector, there are no representatives from trade unions. The interviewee of the employer representatives’ organisation states: “In companies where trade unions are responsible for the HR training field, HR departments are happy to cooperate. Unfortunately, these are not frequent activities. Trade unions are mainly trained in labour law.”

Generally spoken: Agreements on employee training besides the regulations in law (Labour Code, Employment Act) take place on company level. In most cases these arrangements are concluded on bilateral level between employer (HR) and employee.

4.3 Information, support and guidance

Information and counselling on employee training is mainly carried out by public authorities. Very active in this field is also the *ZRP*. The person interviewed for this survey explicitly appreciates that the NTF also provides funding for counselling and information on CVET courses. The *ZRP* makes use of this and informs on regional conferences – together with the chambers and guilds – on employee training and funding opportunities within the framework of the NTF. This was confirmed by the three interviewed craft enterprises, who stated that they had been advised by the chamber or the guild in the training of their employees.

Apart from *ZRP*, the social partners play a subordinate role in advising on employee training. The question concerning advising was answered rather unspecific by the interview partners. A trade union representative said: "Employees are informed about the training offered by the central administration, local government (councils), or trade unions. Sometimes by the employers themselves or by their organisations."

The interviewee from the employer organisation stated that there are many websites where one can search for private training offers. Typically they are run by training companies or affiliated organisations of such companies. NGOs often promote their training in social media. Private training is a huge, decentralised and unregulated market in Poland. In 2015, according to the information provided by the AHK respondent, this sector has a yearly turnover of 1.5 billion Sloty (nearly 400 Million €).

Three respondents (employers' representatives and the interviewee from the AHK) emphasised that the introduction of a new search portal in 2015 considerably improved the transparency training offers. This portal is increasingly gaining acceptance and is becoming the central source of information for CVET in Poland.

Best practise: Portal for employee training offers

In 2015, a new portal, the so-called Database of Development Services, was installed:

<https://uslugirozwojowe.parp.gov.pl/>

This portal is run by a public authority. For getting listed in this portal, the training providers have to fulfil certain quality standards. For those whose courses are co-financed by the Polish state or by the EU, registration is mandatory. This portal with numerous search options provides information on the eligibility of the courses, on the training providers themselves and contains an evaluation of the courses of former students.

4.4 Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency

In the public system of vocational education (both IVET and CVET) there are two levels of quality assurance – internal and external. External quality assurance is conducted by the Regional Education Authori-

ties (*curator oświaty*) under the responsibility of the Education Minister (CEDEFOP, 2016, p. 36 f.). The check comprises four areas:

1. the learning outcomes in the vocational training centres,
2. the organisational processes in the vocational training centres,
3. the work of vocational training centres in a regional setting; cooperation with the local actors (for example, employers),
4. the work of the management of vocational training centres (Goźlińska et al., 2013, p. 1 f.).

Internally the work quality of the vocational training centres has to be measured by the school principals every year. The internal quality assurance procedures should be done in cooperation with the teachers including three aspects of pedagogical supervision: evaluation, compliance audit and support (CEDEFOP, 2016, p. 36 f.). In addition, further initiatives have been launched to increase the quality of CVET in recent years.

Best practise: Initiative to improve the quality assurance in CVET

A couple of years ago, the employment offices started receiving funding for the active labour market policy (vocational training) depending on the integration rates in the regional labour market. This has led to a significant improvement in the quality of the CVET courses, which is evidenced by the rising labour market integration of the participants. According to the information from the respondent of the ZRP, this rate rose from 42 percent in 2011 to 77 percent in 2015. However, the rise was also encouraged by falling unemployment rates. The main qualification fields are the electric, automotive, office and insurance profession.

The quality assurance in the field of public schools and training providers, which are recognised and certified by public authorities, is sufficient and has improved in the recent years. But as mentioned above there are thousands of private training providers, which are not undergoing a qualified certification. A respondent from the trade union stated: “Social partners are a bit dubious about the quality of employee training provided by commercial entities – as there’s a lack of a clear quality standards in the country”. The interviewed person from the AHK has the same concerns. According to the Statistical Office Poland, in 2015, 86 percent of the registered training providers are one-man companies. Very few of them are subject to quality control. The only quality corrective factor is the competition (supply and demand).

4.5 Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications

The Act on the Integrated Qualifications System that introduced the Polish Qualifications Framework (*Polska Rama Kwalifikacji – PRK*) and the integrated qualifications registry (*Zintegrowany Rejestr Kwalifikacji – ZRK*) came into force in the beginning of 2016. The validation occurs both on the national and sectoral level. The implementation of the *PRK*, which includes all types of qualifications, is therefore seen as an action that concludes the series of reforms in the formal education system. It provides a new impetus for change in non-formal education, and enables the greater integration of Poland’s qualifications system.

The main goal of the Integrated Qualifications System (*Zintegrowany System Kwalifikacji – ZSK*) is supporting lifelong learning. All qualifications have an assigned *PRK* level and the information about qualifi-

cations included in the ZSK is available in the internet portal www.kwalifikacje.gov.pl (CEDEFOP, 2016, p. 34). The interviewees state that the social partners were involved in the Integrated Qualifications System and that they are a member of the advisory board. The introduction of the new system was appreciated and welcomed by the social partners.

Another important topic concerning the recognition of qualifications is the significance of certificates for employees, employers and also for customers. Apart from the government recognised certificates the significance of the certificates depends on the certifying training provider. The respondent of the employer organisation states that the certificates are as important as the training institution or organisation they are issuing. The validity of the certificate depends on who conducts the training. The three companies which have been interviewed for this survey underline the importance of certificates. Official certificates are considered to be trustworthy and are a proof of the professionalism of the staff. Another company claimed that valid certificates improve the standing towards customers.

4.6 Provision of learning

Generally spoken, employee and employer representatives are – with the exception of the ZRP – not actively engaged in providing employee training. They do not have the financial and personal resources for providing employee training.

The interview partners wish to play a more active role in this field and to be stronger embedded in the decisions and strategies of the public authorities. One interview partner stresses the needs for more influence in the field of employee training and the provision of learning in the following way: “The Commitment of social partners is insufficient. It is especially needed in the area of training for specific business expectations, defining desirable competences, and building comprehensive strategies to ensure that trained people will have the qualifications to work and develop their career skills.”

Concerning the provision of employee training one has to take into account that Poland has a larger rate of micro enterprises than many other EU countries have. This means that employers of these companies have a limited freedom in designing specific training courses. Problems to organise training leave or financing employee training are major hurdles to ensure the participation of employees in CVET courses. This has been a central finding of the three company interviews. Without financial support and/or external support by the public authorities or social partners it will remain difficult to increase the participation rate in employee training significantly.

5 Conclusion

Employee training in Poland has become more important in recent years. The positive economic development combined with a decline in unemployment has led to a significant skills shortage in many branches. Because the number of older employees leaving the labour market is bigger than the number of young people who are entering the workforce, the number of skilled workers will decline significantly within the next years. For this reason employee training for fulfilling the skills needs in a fast developing market economy is getting increasingly important.

From the political point of view, numerous initiatives have been launched (VET-reform in 2012, introduction of the national training fund in 2014, implementation of a search portal with training offers in

2016, initiative for identification of skills needs in 2016), which should facilitate the implementation of employee training.

While the quality of public training offers has been improved and the funding for employee training (even for micro-enterprises) widened, this by far was not the case in the field of training programmes offered by private providers.

There was a consensus among the interview partners that the training offers from private providers were largely unregulated and not very structured and that they were subject to wide variations in terms of quality. It was also recognised that there are too many providers on the market and a consolidation will be necessary in the near future.

Furthermore, the analyses have shown that the social partners are still not sufficiently involved in the area of employee training, apart from *ZRP*. There is a need for better coordination between employees and employers organisations in order to strengthen their positions in negotiations in the field of CVET. It is also necessary to increase the human resources of experts, who are dealing with issues on employee training.

The interview partners stress that a stronger involvement of the social partners in the field of employee training is highly appreciated. Public initiatives without an appropriate involvement of the social partners will hardly be enough to significantly increase the low participation of the Polish workforce in employee training.

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