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Continuing training for employees in Europe: the differences between countries continue to narrow

More European employees undertook training in 2010 than ten years previously. The latest European survey of continuing training in enterprises also shows that there are still considerable differences between countries, even though they are tending to narrow. Formal courses remain the dominant form of training within enterprises, with only a small number of countries making any significant use of other types of training.

enterprises
continuing training
CVTS courses Europe
on-the-job-training
testing

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Increasing individuals', and particularly employees', participation in training is one of the European Union's major policy objectives. According to the Lisbon European Council 2000, the purpose of training is to increase workers' human capital in order to improve the competitiveness of the European economy, and is therefore to be encouraged. The indicators provided by the most recent wave of the European Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS, cf. Box 3) provide the basis for making an overall assessment of enterprises' training effort in European countries and gaining up-to-date information on trends. There are considerable disparities within Europe in employees' access to continuing training, enterprises' funding of training and the type of training undertaken. While the volume of training undertaken has tended to become more equal over time at the same time as it has increased, training practices continue to be characterised by relatively stable national specificities.

Overview of continuing training for employees in Europe

In 2010, European enterprises stated that they had provided training for 38 % of their

employees, in the form of formal taught courses lasting on average 26 hours. Dividing the number of hours' training in the form of courses by the total number of employees produces an average volume of training per employee of 10 hours, or 0.6 % of their annual working time. In contrast, and depending on the classification used (cf. Box 1 for a definition of the types of training), only 21 % of employees undertook guided on-the-job training, 9% took part in learning or quality circles, 8% attended conferences, workshops, trade fairs and lectures, 3 % undertook self-directed learning and 2 % received training as a result of job rotation, exchanges, secondments or study visits. Thus courses still constitute the predominant type of training provided in European enterprises.

In 2010, 56 % of European enterprises provided training for at least one of their employees in the form of courses, while 53 % offered one of the five other types of training mentioned above. Overall, the various types of training being often combined, a total of 66 % of enterprises provided training.

Employees' rate of access to training and the share of enterprises providing training ●●●

●●● increase with size of enterprise. In the case of courses, employees' rate of access rises from 25 % in enterprises with between 10 and 49 employees to 46 % in those with at least 250.

Overall, in 2010, European enterprises spent 1.6 % of their total wages bill on employee training, with France situated at the top of the distribution.

National specificities remain

On the basis of an analysis of employees' access rates to CVT by type of training, three groups of countries can be identified (cf. Box 1). The first includes most of the EU member states from the former Eastern bloc (Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania). It is characterised by limited training provision. In these 'low training' countries, both the share of enterprises providing training (30 %) and employees' rate of access to courses (22 %) are low. The same applies to rates of access to on-the-job training (16 %) and to learning and quality circles (7 %). Similarly, employees' training in the form of courses (7 hours' training per year) and enterprises' financial contribution rate are at the bottom of the scale.

This can be explained in part by the high shares in these countries' economies of small enterprises (between 10 and 49 employees), which usually provide little training. This effect is compounded by a particularly low rate of access to CVT courses compared with the European average for this size class; in larger enterprises, the rate is close to the European average.

The two other groups of countries stand in contrast to the first one. The characteristic they have in common is a high level of training

provision in the form of courses; the main difference between them is the extent to which they use other forms of training. One of these groups is made up of countries in which extensive use is made not only of courses but also of other types of training. It includes the UK, Sweden, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovenia. In these 'diversified training' countries, employees' rate of access to courses is high (44 %) and it remains high, relative to the average, for on-the-job training (28 %) and learning and quality circles (17 %) as well. Similarly, the share of enterprises providing training is high, whether it be courses (60 %) or other forms, for which the difference is even greater (68 %).

This situation is largely the result of national specificities. In Germany, for example, the dual vocational training system, which encourages on-the-job learning, remains the point of reference for continuing training in enterprises. In many industries, moreover, professional mobility is dependent on continuing training, which encourages enterprises to develop training programmes.

The group of countries with high levels of training provision in the form of courses but not other types of training includes many countries, among which are the Benelux countries, France, Spain and Italy. In these 'undiversified training' countries, the share of enterprises providing training in the form of courses is high (60 %) but close to the average for the other forms (58 %). Similarly, employees' rate of access to courses is high (41 %) but lower for on-the-job training (16 %) and even lower for learning and quality circles (8 %), which brings these countries close to those in the first group. France is emblematic of this group: continuing training here is constructed on a school-based model in which formal courses take pride of place. The legal obligation on enterprises to fund conti-

Training expectancy

is the ratio of the total number of hours' training provided to the number of employees, whether they undertook training or not. This synthetic indicator represents the average duration of training per employee.

Box 1 • Types of training

Alongside the traditional courses designed for groups of employees, the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) also identifies several other types of continuing vocational training funded by enterprises that are often less structured and more individualised.

Guided on-the-job-training is characterised by planned periods of training, instruction or practical experience in the work place using the normal tools of work, either at the immediate place of work or in the work situation.

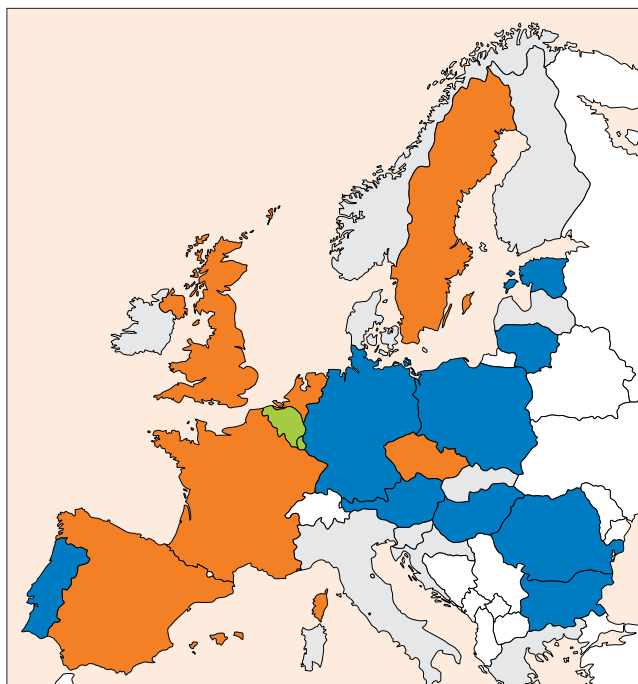
Job-rotation, exchanges, secondments or study visits: job-rotation within the enterprise and exchanges with other enterprises must be planned in advance with the primary intention of developing the skills of the workers involved.

Learning circles are groups of persons employed who come together on a regular basis with the primary aim of learning more about the requirements of the work organisation, work procedures and work places. **Quality circles** are working groups, having the objective of solving production and work place based problems, through discussion.

Self-directed learning occurs when an individual engages in a planned learning initiative where he or she manages the training time and the place at which the training takes place, using one or more learning media.

Attendance at conferences, workshops, trade fairs and lectures must be planned in advance with the primary intention of training or learning.

Box 4 • Typology of countries by average duration of training per employee and per year (level in 1999 and change between 1999 and 2010)



Source: CVTS4. Field: enterprises from 10 or more employees, from private and semi-public sectors.

- training expectation, higher than average in 1999, has declined since
- training expectation, lower than or equal to average in 1999, has increased since
- training expectation, higher than average in 1999, has increased still further since.

NB: The average training expectancy is 9.5 hours per employee per year in 1999, against 10.9 in 2010.

The evolution of the use of training in EU member states can be observed only in the countries included in all three waves of the CVTS, that is 17 of the 27 current member states (cf. Box 3 on previous page). The other EU member states, for which data are not available for all three waves, appear in grey on the map.

This restriction explains the slight differences observed compared with the figures in the previous section.

●●● policies advocated by the European Union with the aim of promoting continuing training for employees in the countries making least use of training (European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund). What is more, this convergence between European countries in the rate of employee access to training is as pronounced in smaller enterprises (10 to 49 employees) as it is in larger ones.

Over and above these broad trends, some countries stand out by virtue of their specific trajectories (cf. map below). Thus Belgium and Luxembourg are the only countries where training expectancy, which was already high in 1999, has increased still further since then. Furthermore the countries that have seen the sharpest rises in training expectancy in the form of courses since 1999 are Portugal (from 7 to 17 hours per employee) and Romania (from 3 to 15 hours). These increases may be attributed to changes in national legislation. In Portugal, the normative and institutional framework for continuing training has been significantly

modified. Since 2003, the Labour Code has obliged employers to provide training for at least 10% of their permanent employees each year. This obligation is supplemented by specific measures aimed at groups with low levels of initial training. Similarly, since the 2000s, Romania has amended its legislation on continuing training, notably by updating its Labour Code in 2003 in anticipation of joining the EU.

The countries in which training expectancy in the form of courses has declined the most are Sweden (from 18 to 11 hours per employee and per year) and the UK (from 13 to 8 hours). These two countries seem to have replaced longer taught training courses with shorter courses or other forms of training.

While employee access to continuing training varies considerably from one group of EU countries to another, levels of training provision are, nevertheless, tending to converge, with the countries providing the least training catching up with those providing the most. ■

Further reading

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