

Training & Employment

Continuing training at European firms:

The first steps towards homogenization

Vocational training at the workplace during working hours is an essential aspect of lifelong learning, which has been adopted as a priority in European development policy. However, the continuing vocational training uptake rates vary considerably from one country to another. Considerable differences also exist depending on the size of firm. Beyond these cleavages, firms' continuing vocational training practices seem to be at least becoming more homogeneous although they are not yet quite converging.

"By 2010 the European Union average level of participation in Lifelong learning should be at least 12.5% of the adult working age population" this was one of the conclusions reached by the Council of the European Union in May 2003. In this framework, vocational training at the workplace during working hours is an essential component of lifelong learning. Common statistical standards of vocational training at the workplace are used to draw up vocational training policy and to monitor the improvements achieved in the various countries in this respect. Without denying either the importance of the various national vocational training systems or that of training approaches other than continuous training at the workplace, analysis of these data makes it possible to differentiate between the European Union countries in terms of the intensity of the vocational training practices adopted at their firms.

Cleavages between countries in companies' vocational training uptake rates

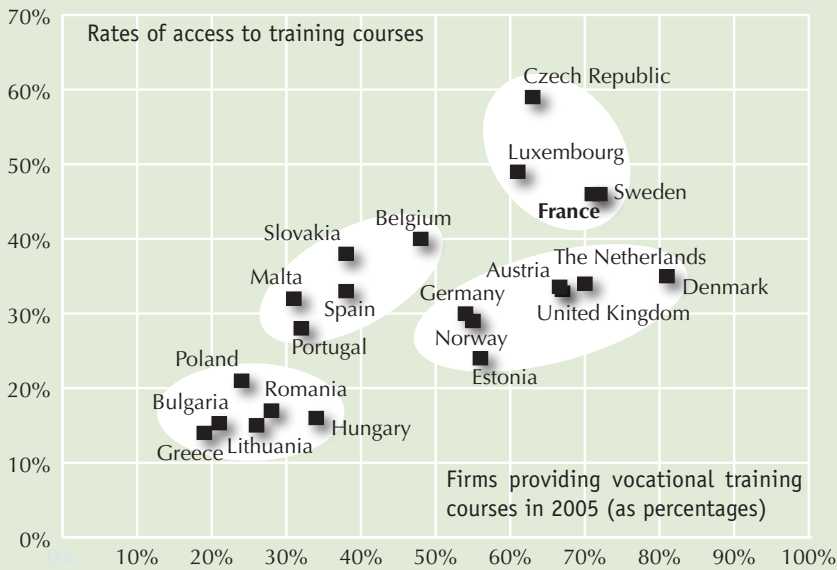
Continual vocational training among firms with at least ten employees varies from one country to another: there are conspicuous differences in the numbers of firms providing training, employees' rates of access to vocational training and the mean number of hours an employee can expect to spend in training during a given year. Upon combining these various indicators, four groups of countries can be distinguished in Europe (see the inset on page 4).

In 2005, the companies established in France, Sweden, Luxembourg and the Czech Republic were those most actively involved in vocational training: 74% of French firms declared that they had trained at least one employee that year, for example. Almost one French employee out of two spent 28 hours on CVT (continual vocational training) courses on average, which corresponds to 13 hours per employee. However, the fact that most French firms tended to give preference to training courses (71%) over other forms of training (44%) such as on-the-job-training is one of this country's specificities. In addition, France is one of the countries where companies' continuing training expenditure is the highest in terms of the percentage of the total labour costs.

The firms in Austria, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom show a fairly similar pattern to that observed in the previous group, but employees in the second group have lower rates of access to vocational training courses, and less than one employee out of three on average benefited from vocational training in 2005. However, these countries have the highest rates of use of other forms of training: in the United Kingdom and Norway, in particular, eight firms out of ten practice other forms of training.

In Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Malta and Slovakia, 34% of employees have access to vocational training courses. This figure does not differ very greatly from that observed in the previous group. In these countries, however, firms providing vocational ...

European countries' vocational training rates



The European countries are presented on this graph depending on the employees' rates of access to vocational training and the percentage of the country's firms providing vocational training. In addition, they are arranged in clusters based on a set of indicators used to assess the continuing vocational training rates (see the inset on page 4).

Data source: Eurostat. Data processing: Céreq, 2008.

Vocational training prospects

- The ratio between the number of hours spent annually undergoing CVT and the total number of people in employment.

Companies providing training

- Firms which provided at least one of their employees with a CVT opportunity during the year.

Rates of access to vocational training

- Ratio between the number of employees who attended at least one training event and the total number of employees.

Rates of financial contribution to continuing vocational training efforts

- CVT expenditure as a percentage of the total labour costs.

... training account for lower proportions: at less than two firms out of five on average, at least one of the employees participated in vocational training in 2005.

The fourth group of countries consists of Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Lithuania and Greece. Firms in these countries give their employees less continuing vocational training and the mean number of hours of training an employee can expect to undergo is lower here than anywhere else in Europe. The number of hours spent annually undergoing CVT per employee amounted to less than five hours in 2005, but this was mainly due to the small proportion (16% on average) of employees who had access to training, although the mean

duration of the training period per trainee was longer here than anywhere else in Europe. Hungary also differs from the other countries in this group in that the cost of vocational training is particularly high in this country, whether the cost is calculated per trainee, per hour of training, or as a percentage of the total labour costs.

Marked differences depending on the size of firm

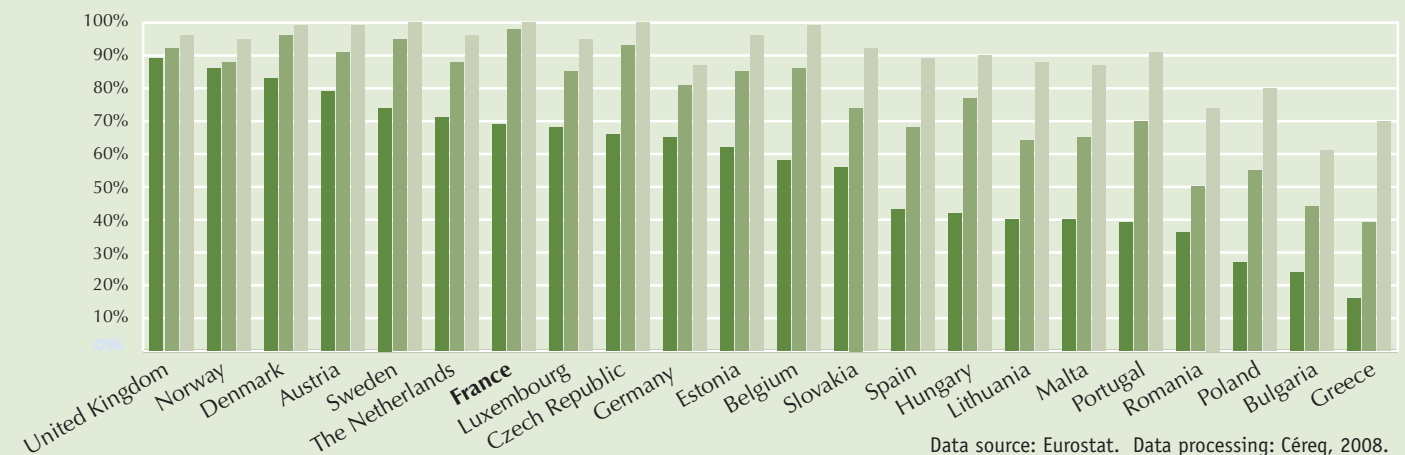
In addition to the geographic factor, the size of firms seems to be one of the main factors determining vocational training efforts. Firms with at least 250 employees were those most strongly engaged in vocational training in all the European countries in 2005, regardless of which indicator was used to assess continuing vocational training practices. The greatest differences observed were among small firms with less than 50 employees. The difference between the percentages of small firms providing vocational training amounted to 73 points, for instance, ranging from 16% in Greece to 89% in the United Kingdom, whereas the difference between large firms in this respect was only 39 points, ranging from 61% in Bulgaria to 100% in Sweden, France and the Czech Republic (see the graph below). In all these countries, most of the large firms give their employees continuing vocational training.

The cleavages between countries therefore seem to result mainly from differences between the practices of small and medium-sized structures. To promote training on the premises during working hours, it therefore seems to be necessary to enhance the awareness of small and medium-sized firms and to incite them to make greater use of continuing vocational training. Beyond the institutional context, companies' vocational training commitments were found to depend to a great extent on the size of firm. The practices of small French firms resembled those

European companies' involvement in vocational training, depending on their size

Proportions of firms providing vocational training in 2005

Firms occupying ■ 10 to 49 persons ■ 50 to 249 persons ■ 250 persons or more



Data source: Eurostat. Data processing: Céreq, 2008.

of their Swedish and Danish counterparts more than those of the large firms in their own country, for instance, since the annual training prospects amounted at these firms to approximately nine hours in all three countries and the rate of access to training courses and workshops was about 30%. Likewise, large French firms' vocational training policies tended to resemble those of their Belgian and Slovakian counterparts, since the number of hours spent annually undergoing CVT per employee amounted in all three countries to 18 hours and the employees' rate of access to training courses was 56%.

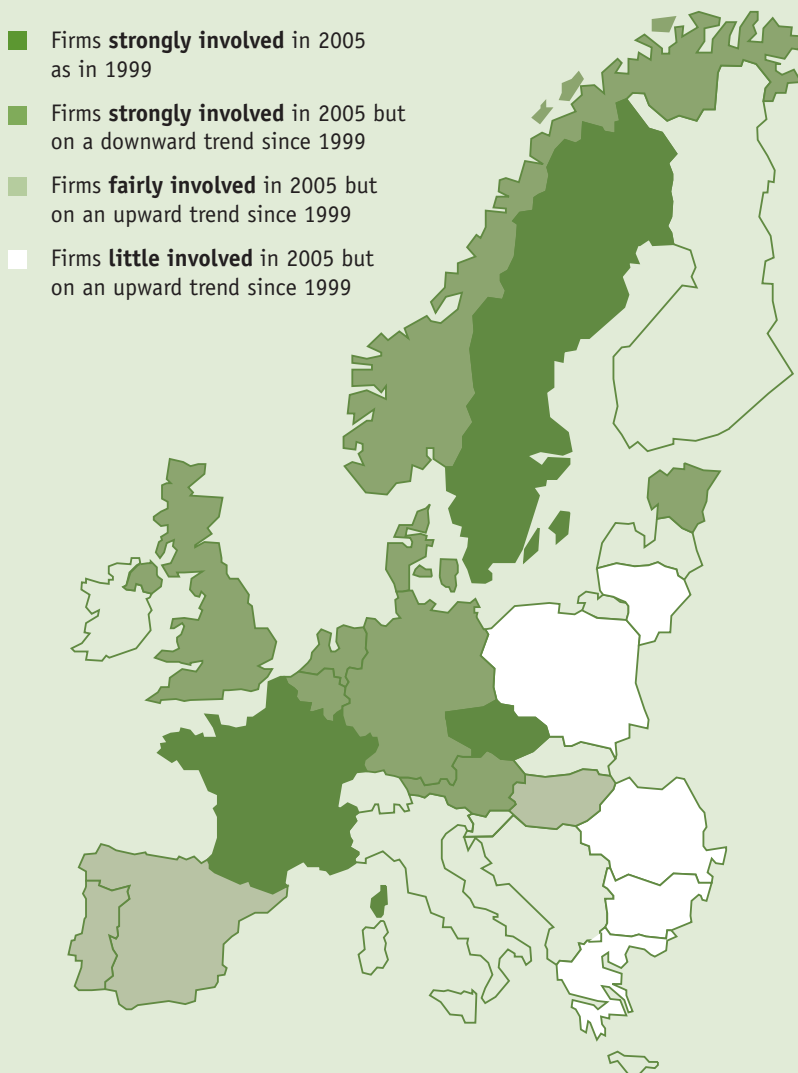
The only exceptions here are the United Kingdom and Norway. In the United Kingdom, the number of continual vocational training hours spent annually undergoing CVT per employee amount to only about six hours, regardless of the size of firm where they are employed, and the rates of access to vocational training vary by only 29% among small firms and 34% among large firms. This homogeneity is probably due to the low level of initial training in the U.K., which would explain why British employers have to train their employees, whatever the size of their firm. The annual training prospects in Norway amount to eight hours at small firms and eleven hours at large firms. The rate of access to training courses and workshops varies very little in this country depending on the size of structure, from 28 to 30%. Two aspects of the Norwegian system might explain these particularities. On the one hand, the initiative for vocational training is shared between employees and their firms, and this training mostly takes place outside working hours. This means that training does not perturb the organization of the work at small firms. On the other hand, large companies in this country have begun to organize vocational training in collaboration with PMEs, which explains why the training practices of firms of all sizes tend to be similar.

Towards more homogeneous vocational training practices in Europe

If one looks at the trends between 1999 and 2005 (see the inset on page 4), the countries in question can be seen to fall into the same four groups as above (see the map above). However, these distinctions between groups of countries and the fact that vocational training practices have changed very little on the whole tend to mask the decrease in the dispersion among these countries which has occurred since 1999. Although we cannot talk about convergence, there seems to be a trend towards more homogeneous vocational training practices among firms in all the European countries.

Companies established in France, Sweden, Luxemburg and the Czech Republic were

■ European firms' involvement in continuing vocational training in 2005



Data source: Eurostat. Data processing: Céreq, 2008.

A look at European companies' continuing vocational training practices

The data presented in this issue were based on the CVTS (*Continuing Vocational Training Survey*) survey coordinated by Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities. The CVTS, which focused on continuing vocational training financed at least partly by firms, was carried out in the European Union member countries and Norway. The questionnaire in all these countries was submitted to private firms with ten or more employees (apart from those in the healthcare, educational and agricultural sectors). The CVTS survey was conducted in France by Céreq, in concertation with Dares (the French Ministry of Labour's Directorate for research, surveys and statistics) and INSEE. The surveys denoted CVTS-1, CVTS-2 and CVTS-3, focusing on the years 1993, 1999 and 2005, respectively, have already been completed. The results provide an index to company vocational training policies, employees' rates of access to vocational training, the duration of the training undergone and the costs involved. Among the various modes of continuing vocational training, the distinction is made in these surveys between training courses and other forms of CVT (such as on-the-job training, job rotation, self-directed training and conferences) "which are planned in advance and organized or supported with the specific goal of learning" (Eurostat). 100 000 firms responded to the CVTS-3 survey. The size of firm was defined as follows: small firms were taken to be those occupying 10 to 49 persons, medium-sized firms, those occupying 50 to 249 persons and large firms, those occupying more than 250.

■ The Eurostat website: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>.

already characterized in 1999 by their strong involvement in vocational training. The situation has remained fairly stable since then in these countries in comparison with their European neighbours. The percentage of firms providing training has decreased slightly in Sweden, and employees' rate of access to vocational training has increased considerably in Luxemburg as well as in the Czech Republic, where training efforts have been progressing gradually since the mid-90s. The firms in these four countries therefore seem to have acquired fairly strongly anchored training practices.

In Austria, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, vocational training is still a relatively strong tradition, although the figures have dropped since 1999. The proportions of firms providing vocational training in these countries is still fairly high, but employees' rates of access to training courses have decreased, especially in Norway, Denmark and the United Kingdom, where it has dropped by 30%.

Companies established in Spain, Portugal and Hungary, on the contrary, have engaged intensively in vocational training since 1999. Employees' rates of access to courses and the proportions of firms dispensing vocational training have increased considerably, especially at PMEs. More than 30% of firms in Spain and Hungary give their employees vocational training. The figures have increased two-fold in Portugal. It is worth noting that the institutional context has changed in these countries since 1999. In Hungary, the legislation on the modes whereby financial contributions are allocated to vocational training has recently been changed to incite companies, especially PMEs, to launch more intensive continuing training efforts. In Spain, firms providing training are entitled to pay lower social contributions. The smaller the companies, the larger these reductions are. The Portuguese system has undergone some major changes. Since 2004, it has been stipulated in this country's labour code that at least 10% of each company's employees must undergo at least 20 hours of vocational training per year. The use of other forms of continuing vocational training has also increased particularly strongly in these three countries. Along with Austria and Romania, they are among the countries which have progressed most conspicuously in this respect.

Companies established in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland and Greece have recently launched vocational training efforts. Employees' rates of access to training and the proportions of firms dispensing training have increased considerably in these countries, although the cleavage with

Trends in European companies' vocational training practices

The analysis presented in this issue was based on an ascending hierarchical classification of the data collected in the CVTS-2 and CVTS-3 surveys (see the inset on page 3), which yielded typologies of companies' continuing vocational training practices in the various countries under investigation. In the first stage, a typology focusing on the year 2005, which yielded four groups of countries, was drawn up based on the following five indicators, expressed as percentages: firms providing vocational training of all kinds, those providing vocational training courses, those providing other forms of CVT, and employees' rates of access to vocational training and the number of hours spent annually undergoing CVT per employee. In the second stage, the way these practices have changed in each country was analysed in terms of the companies' vocational training commitments in 2005 and the changes in three indicators since 1999: the overall proportion of companies providing vocational training of all kinds, the proportion of those providing training other than courses and workshops, and employees' rates of access to courses and workshops.

the other European countries still persists. In Romania, which constitutes the most extreme case in this group, employees' rates of access to vocational training has increased more than two-fold and the numbers of firms providing vocational training have increased 3.5-fold, but these figures are still among the lowest in Europe. However, these countries, which were the least strongly involved in vocational training in 1999, seem to have responded to the 2000 Lisbon Process recommendations inciting all member countries of the European Union to intensify their efforts on continuing vocational training lines.

The training financed by firms themselves does not fully account, however, for the adult lifelong learning efforts being made in each country. The duration of this training is usually quite short and it rarely leads to obtaining qualifications or diplomas. The French vocational training system, for example, is so designed that the frontier between the age at which people undergo their initial education and training and that at which they carry out their occupational activities is more clear-cut than anywhere else in Europe. The State educational system is responsible for providing youths with their initial training, whereas French firms provide continuing vocational training for their employees. French firms actually feature among those which make the heaviest staff training investments in Europe. On the other hand, France ranks last in the European Union in terms of providing employees with training leading to a diploma or recognized qualifications. In 2003, only 1% of French employees declared that they had undergone training of this kind during the year. This paradoxical situation is probably one of the main challenges facing the new vocational training reform in France.

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Further reading

- *Mesurer la formation tout au long de la vie. Une enquête européenne réalisée en 2003* (Measuring lifelong learning. A European survey conducted in 2003), M. Möbus, *Net.Doc*, no. 29, Céreq, October 2007.
- *L'Europe de la formation tout au long de la vie reste à construire* (Lifelong learning still remains to be set up in Europe), M. Théry, P. Rousset and C. Zygmunt, *Bref*, no. 187, Céreq, June 2002.
- *Disparité d'accès à la formation continue dans les entreprises en Europe* (Disparities in access to continuing vocational training at European firms), K. Nestler and E. Kailis, *Statistiques en Bref*, no. 22-2002, Eurostat, July 2002.

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