

PROMOTING SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE TRAINING

ESTONIA COUNTRY REPORT



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Abstract

In Estonia lifelong learning and therefore continuing vocational education and training (CVET) is on the governments' agenda. The social partners are involved in the policy development regarding CVET and participate in implementing policies in order to respond to labour market needs. Social bargaining mostly takes place at a company level. Estonia has one of the lowest trade union memberships in the EU. While the trade union membership decreased recently, the membership of the employers' confederation remained stable. The role of the social partners in CVET can be summarized as follows:

- **Anticipation and identification of skills needs:** The social partners are involved in relevant boards concerning the identification and development skills such as the sectoral skills council and the OSKA system. The social partners state that their level of involvement in this area is adequate. The trade unions mentioned that for their sectoral organizations participating in the sectoral skills councils is challenging as they have very limited resources.
- **Mobilising resources:** The social partners were very engaged in opening the Estonian Unemployment Fund for employees at a risk of unemployment. Furthermore both sides agree in the importance to invest in CVET. On Unemployment Fund level unions are satisfied with the amount of money mobilised for upskilling those at a risk of unemployment. A broader cooperation is needed between the institutions to develop proper upskilling pathways and for using different training facilities for the best quality of training. The social partners state that there is a need of focussing more on elderly and low-skilled people. Also, the trade unions say that the government is working closer with the employers' confederation regarding education, whereas the employers' confederation sees itself rather as a partner of the Ministry of Education and Research.
- **Information, support and guidance:** The social partners inform their members about relevant changes in regulations and also sensitize them to focus more on training. The trade unions appreciate the ESF funded courses for employees. They would like to have more capacities to keep up-dated with relevant information about training programmes and spread these to their members. The social partners are further satisfied with guidance provided by the Unemployment Insurance Fund, but see the challenge in reaching people.
- **Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency:** The social partners are engaged in the Adult Education Council which advises the Ministry of Education and Research regarding strategic planning, developing and financing CVET. Social partners are furthermore involved in the process of developing professional standards for each profession through the national level Professional Councils. They also participate in VET school boards and the Estonian Qualification Authority. They therefore are highly involved in the quality assurance of CVET. The trade unions state that training offers often meet labour market needs but not always the personal interest of employees.
- **Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications:** The Estonian labour market is very flexible and employers often do not require formal qualifications if these are not needed. Since 2008 the Estonian Qualification Framework (EstQF) links the Estonian 5-levels occupational qualifications framework to the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF). In general, the social partners are satisfied with the processes of recognition.
- **Provision of learning:** The trade unions train their members regarding wages, vacation and other regulations concerning work life. Member organizations of the employers' confederation also offer such trainings on a sectoral level. On a local level, social partners participate in VET school counsellor boards. They are satisfied being involved also at that stage. Although its level of influence could be bigger.

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1 Introduction

Estonia nowadays arouses international interest by its strong economic growth and its digital development. The Estonian economy mainly consists of micro and small sized companies. Due to demographic changes and migration the number of inhabitants is declining (Cedefop, 2017). The ageing population as in other European countries has not affected labour market yet, but strategies are in progress to be prepared for the future. Therefore, the government sets its educational strategies towards labour market needs and people's possibilities of participating in labour market. The country has implemented the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020. The strategy initiates changes in the learning approach, increasing participation of lifelong learning and also has a digital focus (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015). Estonia's official language is Estonian. There is a large minority speaking Russian. Most VET institutions teach in Estonian, but there are still schools where they teach only Russian or both Russian and Estonian (Cedefop, 2017).

2 Facts and figures on employee training

In the following, central facts and figures on employee training are presented. For the sake of comparability, cross-national statistics are used.

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, work-shops 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.

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	44.3	42.3	1.9	51.2	48.2	3.0
Men	38.9	37.3	: ^u	47.4	44.6	2.9 ^u
Women	49.5	47.3	2.2 ^u	54.5	51.4	3.2 ^u
Age groups						
25-34	51.2	48.9	: ^u	58.8	55.8	3.0 ^u
55-64	37.3	35.8	: ^u	43.1	41.0	: ^u
Educational attainment level ¹⁾						
ED 0-2	23.1	21.6	: ^u	28.2 ^u	26.4 ^u	: ^u
ED 3-4	37	35.3	1.7 ^u	41.4	38.3	3.1 ^u
ED 5-6	60.6	58.3	2.4 ^u	65.3	62.2	3.1 ^u

Source: AES, 2007, 2011; special evaluation of Eurostat

1) ISCED97

u low reliability, : not available

The employed persons' participation rate in job-related non-formal education and training in Estonia lies considerably above EU average both for 2007 and 2011. Within this period, the participation rate experienced an increase by 7 percentage points, which is in accordance with the overall EU average. As for other European countries, non-employer-sponsored training does only play a minor role in Estonia. Women are much more likely to participate than men (55 per-cent / 47 percent), whereas on the EU average the gap is rather negligible (37.9 percent / 37.5 percent). The participation rate of younger people is much higher than the participation rate of the elderly. This holds also true for other European countries, but the difference is more pronounced in Estonia than in the EU average (16 percentage points / 5 percentage points). Individuals with higher education (ISCED97= 5-6) are more than twice as likely to participate in job-related non-formal education and training than those with lower educational attainment levels (ISCED97= 0-2). This correlation between educational attainment level and participation in training can also be observed for other European countries.

The Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) informs about enterprise activities. Continuing vocational education and training (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, work-shops, 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			2015		
	All forms of CVT	Courses	Other forms of learning	All forms of CVT	Courses	Other forms of learning	All forms of CVT	Courses	Other forms of learning
Average	67	56	50	68	57	55	86	64	81
Small	62	50	46	64	52	51	85	60	79
Medium	85	80	64	83	76	69	92	83	87
Big	96	95	87	97	96	86	99	98	98

Source: CVTS, 2005, 2010, 2015

Estonian companies' participation rates in continuing vocational training are above EU average for 2005, 2010 and 2015. Since 2005 the participation rate has experienced a considerable increase from 67 per cent up to 86 per cent which is in accordance with an EU wide increase of companies' participation rates in this period. The increase was mainly driven by small enterprises whose participation rate rose by more than 20 percentage points. Still, small enterprises are less likely to participate in continuing vocational training than medium and big companies (85 per cent / 92 per cent / 99 per cent in 2015). This pattern can also be observed for other European countries, whereby the difference is even more pronounced on the EU average (69 per cent / 86 per cent / 95 per cent in 2015). While in 2005 and 2010 Estonian companies participated somewhat more often in courses than in other forms of learning, other forms of learning have strongly gained importance ever since and are nowadays much more common than courses (81 per cent / 64 per cent in 2015). On the EU average firms participate slightly more often in courses than in other forms of learning (61 per cent / 60 per cent in 2015).

2.2 Motives and barriers for employee training

Table 2-3: Main barriers for employee training

In percent

Individuals	2016	Companies (non-training)	2015
No need for (further) education and training	77	The existing skills and competences of the persons employed corresponded to the current needs of the enterprise	44
Conflict with work schedule or training organised at inconvenient time	27	Other	37
Family responsibilities	20	People recruited with the skills needed	16

Source: AES, 2016; CVTS, 2015; multiple answers possible

When asked for obstacles to participation in (more) education and training, three quarters of the employees stated no need for (further) education and training (77 percent). One quarter of the individuals wouldn't participate in (more) education and training due to conflicts with their work schedule or training being organised at inconvenient time (27 percent). Another 20 percent named family responsibilities as main barrier (20 percent). From the non-training companies' point of view, the main barriers for participation in employee training are sufficient skills and competences of the employees (44 percent) and recruitment of people with skills needed (16 percent). These are also the most important barriers for non-training companies on the EU average (82 percent / 55 percent). Obviously Estonian non-training companies see far less barriers than other European countries do.

3 Legal framework and institutional setting

In the following the embedment of CVET in the Estonian education system is described as well as the regulatory framework, the funding, the regulations on training leave and the role of training providers. In Estonia the term CVET is a synonym for adult education (EQAVET, 2016).

3.1 Embedment of CVET in general education system

In Estonia VET programmes are provided at a very early stage on ISCED level 2 which take two years or on ISCED level 3 which take two and a half years or up to three years depending on the share of work practice. VET programmes are also provided at post-secondary level (ISCED level 4) with a duration of half a year to two and a half years and a practice share of minimum half of the time. If graduates enter to professional higher education after that, the prior VET knowledge may reduce the duration of the programme. VET programmes are mostly provided at upper secondary and post-secondary levels. These programmes are open for students who have not completed basic education although this is rarely the case (Cedefop, 2017).

The VET System in Estonia distinguishes between initial (IVET) and continuing VET (CVET). Both IVET and CVET shall ensure individuals' access to the labour market as well as further their readiness for lifelong learning and participating in social life (Parliament, 2013). IVET is provided at EQF levels 2 to 5 and CVET at 4 and 5. The latter includes adult courses provided by VET institutions. To get access to formal CVET, learners either need a vocational qualification or validated competences and an educational qualification at EQF level 4 (Cedefop, 2016 /Cedefop, 2017).

Since 2006 there are also apprenticeships (*töökohapõhine õpe*) in Estonia which are provided at all VET levels, for both IVET and CVET and lead to qualifications with EQF levels from 2 to 5. For these apprenticeships VET institutions cooperate with companies. The learner's practical experience at the company takes at least two third of the duration (Cedefop, 2017 / Parliament, 2013).

Non-formal CVET, adult learning, can take place at the workplace or at VET institution.

There are public, private and municipal VET schools, with 80 percent being public schools.

3.2 Regulatory level of CVET

In Estonia, Education is part of the Education Ministry's (*Haridus- ja Teadusministerium*) area of responsibility, although the system is decentral organized and flexible. Besides the ministry, the institutions involved in decision making are VET schools, a quality assurance body, the sectoral skills councils and awarding organisations (Cedefop, 2016).

The most relevant regulations concerning CVET in Estonia comprise:

- The Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013) determines among other things the bases for the organisation of teaching and education, the rights and obligations of learners, as well as the establishment, management and funding of vocational institutions. The act was passed by the parliament in 2013 in order to fundamentally change the regulation of the VET system. Notable changes were initiated, such as linking new categories to the Estonian Qualifications Framework, focussing on outcome-based principles in VET, establishing the right to provide instruction and implementing the use of Estonian vocational education credit points in order to measure study volumes (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).
- The Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015) determines the basics for CVET, the requirements for managing continuing education institutions, the provision of continuing education, regulations of study leave, financing CVET and supervision. The act was mainly introduced to strengthen the right of access to lifelong learning (Cedefop ReferNET Estonia, 2014). Although training at companies is not legally organized in Estonia, it is seen as part of the Adult Education act (EQAVET, 2016).
- The Professions Act (Parliament, 2008) gives the bases for creating and functioning of the professional qualifications system as well as its administrative supervision.
- The Vocational Education Standard regulates uniform requirements for CVET and therefore describes learning outcomes of all types, in particular knowledge, skills and attitudes obtained during courses. It also defines principles for curriculum updates, and for recognition of prior learning and work experience (Cedefop, 2017 / Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Future skills and keeping updated in work life play a major role in Estonian policies. Therefore, the strategic planning is integrated in the Estonian Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020, which is the basis for governmental decisions in educational funding for the years 2014 to 2020. The strategy aims at equipping the Estonian people with all kinds of learning opportunities fitting their individual needs and capabilities during their whole life (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015).

Social partners participate in policy development and implementation. Their level of involvement is regulated by national legislation as well as partnership agreements. Employers have influence in the professional councils (*kutsenõukogud*) and developing standards for all the occupations (Cedefop, 2017).

3.3 Public financing/funds and tax incentives

Formal CVET programmes in Estonia are mostly state-financed. Besides, private VET schools can apply for state commissions. In the year 2016/2017 with 99 percent almost all the IVET and CVET learners were in programmes funded by the state (Cedefop, 2017).

For each curriculum group (e. g. “media technologies”) and each VET provider the Education Minister defines the number of learners that are going to be financed by the state. Within the curriculum group the school itself can select the specific curriculum (e. g. “printing technology” or “photography”) as well as the study form. The system is flexible in transferring the funding to another curriculum group or for CVET in that exact group, if the curriculum group chosen is not full (Cedefop, 2017).

In case of apprenticeships travel costs and study allowances are financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) (Cedefop, 2017).

In order to finance CVET for adults a three-pillar division was established:

- the Ministry of Education and Research finances the training of employed adults in education and training institutions,
- the Ministry of Social Affairs finances training for unemployed people and job seekers through the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The Unemployment Insurance Fund itself gets its finances from employees’ and employers’ payments.
- The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication finances the professional training of employed adults in companies. These programmes are co-funded by the ESF and delivered through work-related training (EQAVET, 2016 / Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Individuals are eligible for tax deductions of their training costs. Companies are allowed to deduct training costs from taxable income (Cedefop, 2017 / Parliament, 1999).

3.4 Regulations on training leave

The regulations on training leave are determined by the Adult Education Act (Parliament, 2015) which grants the employee’s the rights of training leave for CVET. Therefore the learner must show a written proof of the provider. During the study leave granted for participation in CVET with the purpose of professional development, an employee shall be paid the average study leave pay based on a calendar day for twenty calendar days. It is possible to get another 15 days in order to prepare for final examinations and pay must be calculated from the national minimum wage, what is EUR 500 per month in 2018. If there are any kind of entry examinations requested the employee has the right to take unpaid educational leave (Cedefop, 2017 / Cedefop ReferNet Estonia, 2014).

3.5 Training providers

Based on the ownership status VET institutions are divided into state, municipal and private institutions (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

In Estonia CVET is provided by general secondary schools, VET institutions, institutions of higher education and many private training providers. Private training providers need a license which shall be issued

by the Ministry of Education and Research. Both public and private providers are supposed to get assessed every three years (EQAVET, 2016). The quality of trainings in private institutions has been assessed several times in the tripartite council of the Unemployment Insurance Fund with weak results so far. At the same time state-owned vocational schools and universities are under-represented among training providers regarding the finances of the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

In order to make CVET more attractive for people, promoting participation in CVET is of high political priority. The labour market and education cooperation programme aims on improving its image. VET providers may receive counselling and support from professional PR-companies focussing on communication strategies. Hence, specialists at VET schools receive regular seminars and in-service training (Cedefop, 2017).

4 The role of the social partners

Traditionally collective bargaining in Estonia has been decentral organized. Social bargaining mostly takes place at a company level, also about CVET. There are only two agreements on a sectoral level, namely in transport and in healthcare. Minimum wages are bargained at a national level once a year. Estonia has one of the lowest trade union memberships in the EU. At a number of minimum five employees, a trade union may be founded – at a minimum of five trade unions, a federation of trade unions may be founded. There are no such limitations for employers’ organizations (Eurofound, 2017).

The main trade union at national level and the largest one at the same time is the Estonian Trade Union Confederation (*Eesti Ametiühingute Keskkliit - EAKL*) with 21,211 members in 2016. The Estonian Employees’ Confederation (*Teenistujate Ametiliitude Keskorganisatsioon - TALO*) is the second largest union with about 3,000 members who are mostly cultural workers and public servants. In 2013 the *Union of Estonian Financial Sector Employees (EFL)* – the first one for the financial sector – was established. Since 2007, employees can also be represented by an employee trustee at enterprise level. While representatives of trade unions are elected by the union’s members, the trustees are elected by the employees of their company. Trade unions have the prior right for collective bargaining (Eurofound, 2017).

While the trade union membership decreased recently, the membership on the employers’ side remained stable. The only national employers’ organization is the Estonian Employers’ confederation (*Eesti Töandjate Keskkliit - ETTK*) with 114 members in 2016 (1,500 companies are directly and indirectly represented). The biggest employer association is the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (*Eesti Kaubandus-Tööstuskoda*) with 3,211 members, which focuses on entrepreneurship and the economy and does not participate in collective bargaining (Eurofound, 2017).

Challenge: CVET in collective bargaining law

Due to the collective bargaining law both sectoral level agreements and national level agreements can only be extended to all people (not only the members) regarding wages and working time – not for CVET. Trade unions want to change the collective bargaining law in order to open lifelong learning to even more people.

In Estonia there are no specific regulations for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as most companies in Estonia are micro and small-sized.

The following chapter has a focus on the information and assessments from the interview partners.

4.1 Anticipation and identification of skills needs

In Estonia social partners are involved in policy development regarding CVET and also participate in implementing policies in order to respond to labour market needs. They participate in sectoral skills councils (Cedefop, 2016). The Estonian labour market is divided into 16 sectors based on statistical classifications of Economic fields. Each sector is managed by a sector skills council. The experts of these councils map the main occupations, develop the occupational qualification standards and create schemes for awarding qualifications. Sectoral organizations of employers and trade unions as well as training institutions, ministries and other associations are involved (Kutsekoda, 2018a). *ETTK* and *EAKL* themselves are not in charge of the sectoral skills councils but their sectoral member organizations participate. For instance the Union of Estonian Health Care Professionals (*ETK*) is represented in the sectoral skills councils by the organisations of the midwives. In general, the social partners feel that their involvement in the fields of anticipation and identification of skills needs is adequate. The employers’ side state that their member organizations have no issues participating. The trade unions explain that for the sectoral organizations it is very difficult to participate as they are very small and have very limited resources only.

Since 2012, the government has focussed on the skills needs in Estonia. Therefore representatives of different ministries, the Estonian Qualifications Authority, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and other relevant institutions worked together in a task force which lead to the creation of the *OSKA* system (Eurofound, 2017).

Best practice: OSKA

OSKA combines labour market projections with qualitative insights from sectors and other sources. It helps to learn and teach the skills needed. It analyses the needs for labour and skills necessary for Estonia’s economic development over the next ten years. Each year, the need for labour and skills is evaluated and recommendations for training requirements are prepared in five OSKA sectors. The implementation of OSKA is overseen by the OSKA Coordination Council, which has nine members: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Estonian Employers’ Confederation (*ETTK*), the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Estonian Service Unions’ Confederation (*TALO*), the Estonian Trade Union Confederation (*EAKL*) and the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. There are also sectoral expert panels at the Estonian Qualifications Authority that prepare forecasts of labour requirements and skills to gather expertise from job creators, schools and public authorities. The implementation of OSKA is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) (Kutsekoda, 2018b).

Best Practice (company): AS Norma is implementing a learning development tool

AS Norma manufactures and supplies safety equipment components to the automotive industry in Estonia and around the world. They have about 850 employees. The company faces current trends and challenges of employee training due to digitalization. In order to identify future skills needs they currently use a training-matrix-system. Training needs are identified by talking to the employees with the results then being transferred to the HR Department. AS Norma is now implementing a new learning development tool. The tool enables the HR department to see how employees develop their skills. The employees' job descriptions are deposited and employees can ask for specific trainings in that tool.

4.2 Mobilising resources

CVET is bargained at a company level in Estonia. Many companies do not deal with that topic and the trade Unions state that many sectoral organizations are too small and do not have the resources to focus more on that topic. Both, the trade unions and the employers' confederation say that it is problematic to deal with CVET as they do not have a specific budget and not enough resources. The social partners agree that their efforts in CVET would be more successful if they had more resources.

Usually the employer decides which skills or competences are necessary and chooses the adequate training measure. Employees may state wishes for their professional development. If these ideas fit the enterprise's needs, the companies do support it. If there is a conflict between employers' and employees' idea of relevant training, the trade unions try to advise their members and enable them for discussions with the employers.

EAKL was highly involved in the opening of the "Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund" (*Töötukassa*) back in 1999, in the restructuring of it to the main labour market institution in 2008 and opening the measures for people who are at a risk of unemployment in 2017 which is explained in the following box:

Best practice: Töötukassa "Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund"

Töötukassa is a quasi-governmental organisation which administers the social insurance provisions related to unemployment and supports people in getting employed. Since May 2017 the organization offers services to prevent unemployment. The target group are employees who have to change their jobs or need support in remaining in their job due to a lack of skills or a need for upskilling. The services include a degree study allowance for employed or unemployed also for obtaining CVET, labour market training for employed persons at risk of unemployment, support for obtaining qualifications and a training grant for employers for improving the skills of their employees (Töötukassa, 2018).

Challenge: Training funding in Health Care Sector

For employees in Health Care Sector 60 hours of training is mandatory every year – 40 hours are covered by the Health Insurance Fund (Haigekassa) and 20 are paid by the employer. The hospitals do not have the money to pay for the training for all their employees. In these cases *ETK* covers the costs for their members. They already discuss that problem at company level.

The trade unions agree that the social dialogue is working on a national level and that they mostly feel involved by the government. Though, they state that regarding education the government is still working closer with the employers' confederation. At the same time the employers' confederation sees themselves as a "partner" of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The trade unions are not yet satisfied with the governmental efforts on CVET. Although it is improving and the topic is gaining more importance, there should be more investments on CVET. The organisation recommends a mandatory job training for all the employees in a five year rhythm. Also they feel like the government is highly focussing on the field of digitalization and might therefore forget more traditional professions such as bus drivers for example. The Employers' confederation also states that a closer focus on older and low-skilled people is needed.

The Employers' Confederation and the Trade Unions plan on working more together on the field of CVET in order to get more people employed, especially elderly and low-skilled people.

4.3 Information, support and guidance

In case of a change in regulations concerning training the trade unions as well as the employers' confederation inform their members. The employers' confederation also sensitizes their member organizations to the importance of CVET and explain that they shall invest in training, also in training ealderly people. As CVET is bargained at a company level and many companies do not sufficiently focus on training, the trade unions tell them to pay more attention to that.

There are sometimes ESF funded courses for employees offered at VET schools which are free of charge. *EAKL* informs their member organizations about these courses. They also discuss training needs and relevant training topics with their member organizations and suggest these to the ministry.

VET schools inform about courses on their websites. It is sometimes difficult for people who need any kind of training to find this information. If the social partners receive information about relevant courses, they forward it to their member organizations. The trade unions are dissatisfied because they do not have the time to keep up-dated with training offers. They therefore sensitize their members to inform themselves about courses being of interest for employees. The social partners find the Unemployment Insurance Fund helpful that also advises people in finding interesting training courses. Though, the trade unions state that there has not been a significant effect yet as they just opened it for employees in May 2017 and also they assume that most of the people have not heard of it yet.

Best practice: Pare

Pare, the Estonian Human Resource Management Association, is a partner organization of *ETTK*. It was established in the early 1990s in order to support the development of HR Management in Estonia. It has 300 members, mainly HR professionals from both private and public sector. Pare is involved in labour law elaboration and participates in relevant discussions for HR work. It shares information in networks for HR specialists and also collaborates with governmental and other institutions such as the Estonian Qualifications Authority. Pare also provides seminars for HR professionals (Pare, 2018). The experiences of Pare have shown that companies seem to stick to more traditional ways of CVET and that they mostly do not use E-Learning.

4.4 Contribution to quality, transparency and efficiency

The social partners are engaged in the Adult Education Council alongside other institutions such as relevant ministries or education institutions. As an advisory body, the Adult Education Council advises the Ministry of Education and Research regarding strategic planning, organisation and financing of adult education, advises regarding implementing changes in that field and shares its expertise. Social partners also participate in VET school boards. Further they are involved in the process of developing professional standards for each profession through the national level Professional Councils. On the local level cooperation between providers and enterprises exists in some sectors (EQAVET, 2016).

Best Practice: Participation in VET school boards

Due to the Vocational Educational Institutions Act (Parliament, 2013) social partners participate in VET school counsellor boards at a local level. These boards consist of seven members and it aims on linking VET schools and society and therefore advises VET schools and VET school management on how to plan and organise educational and economic activities (Cedefop, 2017). Social partners are also involved in the process of developing professional standards for each profession (EQAVET, 2016).

Best practice: Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*)

The Estonian Qualifications Authority (*Kutsekoda*) is the institution involving the social partners in skills an employability measures. It was established by the Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Estonian Employers' Confederation (*ETTK*), Ministry of Social Affairs, Estonian Employees' Unions' Confederation (*TALO*) and the Confederation of Estonian Trade Unions (*EAKL*). It is *Kutsekoda's* task to develop a support structure for the occupational qualification system to increase the competitiveness of Estonian employees and promote the development, assessment, recognition and comparison of their occupational competence. The organization's functions include coordination the activities of the sector skill councils, keeping the register of occupational qualifications, introducing the Estonian occupational qualifications system on the national and international level and to act as a national reference point for vocational qualifications and as a coordination point for the EQF implementation (Kutsekoda, 2018c).

In general the social partners find CVET attractive for employees if it meets the needs for work qualification. The trade unions state that training offers often meet the labour market needs and that the problem is rather the personal training interest of the employee. They often want to take training courses they are personally interested in and which sometimes is not in the company's interest. There are also challenges in participating in employee training especially regarding working hours and late-night-shift. The fact that participation in training often does not lead to any kind of change in position or in responsibilities, neither to a rise in salary is an individual barrier to CVET.

Challenge: Digitalisations and Inclusion of elderly people

In general the social partners state that the digitalization and its claim to keep up-to-date also at work environment is a main challenge. This also effects elderly people at work who might struggle more regarding technological changes. In general, the fact that there is a high demand on employees has not arrived at all the companies yet. There is a lack of actions to focus more on elderly people.

ETK explains that many carers are elderly people on a low-skilled level or lost their former job. To work as a nurse they would have to participate in a training programme but they do not have the time and money to do so.

4.5 Recognition and validation of competences and qualifications

The Vocational Education Institutions Act legally determines the recognition process (Parliament, 2013) while the VET standard sets relevant principles for VET providers. Furthermore, the Estonian lifelong learning strategy encourages the broader use of validation practices (Ministry of Education and Research, 2015). In general, the Estonian labour market is very flexible and often employers do not require formal qualifications (Cedefop, 2017). The social partners see no problems in the processes of recognition.

Best practice: Estonian Qualifications Framework (EstQF)

In order to link the Estonian 5-levels occupational qualifications framework to the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF) the Estonian Qualifications Framework (EstQF) was created. A working group was established to develop an 8-levels comprehensive national qualification framework. Both employers' and employees' organisations were involved as well as Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications. According to the Occupational Qualifications Act, the EstQF has eight levels, the first being the lowest and the eighth being the highest. There are four sub-frameworks, namely 1) general education qualifications, 2) VET qualifications, 3) higher education qualifications, and 4) occupational qualifications (Kutsekoda, 2018d).

The trade unions state that the role of certificates depend on sectors and occupations. In health care sector mostly a diploma is needed, especially for nurses or doctors. For carers on the other hand a diploma is not specifically required. The social partners do not see any problems in the recognition of qualifications in different regions of Estonia, neither in different industries. The trade unions also state that the issue of recognizing informal qualifications is declining as the educational system nowadays is rather outcome oriented. The social partners seem to be satisfied with the political efforts in the recognition of competences.

4.6 Provision of learning

EAKL is organizing training for their members regarding wages, vacation, and other regulations concerning work life. Also ETK informs and trains shop stewards regarding these rights. On the Employers' side trainings are offered by sectoral organizations rather than by ETTK. The social partners do not provide any kind of CVET programmes. There are many providers and at a local level they participate in VET school counsellor boards. The social partners are satisfied with that level of involvement although more time is needed for these activities.

5 Conclusion

Estonia faces a very comfortable economic situation, especially having a dominant role within the Baltic States. Anyhow, an ageing population and the fast development due to digitalisation demands investments in skills development. The government has already prioritized the need for lifelong learning with its corresponding strategy. For that purpose innovative systems such as the OSKA system which focusses on future trends of work were established. The social partners are also involved in skills development. They also seem to have understood the importance of employee training and the need for a longer participation in the labour market. They therefore address these topics to their members. In general it seems that the social partners, especially the trade unions, want a higher level of involvement in governmental decisions and reforms in this field.

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