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Continuing Vocational Training in Belgium

1. Introduction

Overview

The public system of continuing vocational training (CVT):

- The regions and the linguistic communities are the most important actors for CVT initiatives (Perin 2008). Concretely, vocational training policy depends on the three Regions (Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia) while initial training depends on the three linguistic communities (Dutch, French and German-speaking) (Perin 2008).
- Training for a low skilled or unemployed person is organized in the regional public employment and training services. Training in this framework is mostly voluntary (Perin 2008). The social partners are represented as co-managers in the management committees of these trainings (Perin 2008).
- Validation of competencies is generally recognized by public employment services. However, they work together with social partners and the sectoral training funds. Since 2006, the Flemish Community has developed its own certification system (Perin 2008).
- Since 1988, the social partners have acknowledged the importance to develop (continuing) vocational training (Perin 2008). At all levels, the social partners play an important role in devising, organizing and managing the CVT system (Perin 2008).

- The National Labor Council (*Conseil National Du Travail*, NAR), at national intersectoral level, and joint educational committees, at sectoral level, are the negotiating authorities for vocational training in Belgium. Under the responsibility of the National Labor Council the joint education committees have a lot of tasks to fulfill, including the setting up of models of training programs per profession (CESIf0 2007: 1).

The role of collective labor agreements (CLAs) in CVT:

- The social partners develop the framework of the CVT system in interprofessional agreements that are negotiated every two years. Guidelines regarding funding are defined in intersectoral agreements and in sectoral agreements. Intersectoral CLAs are mostly formulated as objectives rather than obligations (Perin 2008).
- Thus, the intersectoral agreements rarely set up and regulate benefits but they rather formulate what the social partners expect to be done in the field of CVT. Sectoral CLAs specify the measures to be taken.
- Examples of what the social partners have concluded in CLAs: they have agreed on the financial contributions to CVT, they have established several kinds of benefits (e.g. time credit system or a training credit), they have established sectoral training funds, and they have defined objectives for benefits regulated by the state such as outplacement or paid educational leave (Perin 2008).

Levels of Bargaining

- In Belgium, different levels of bargaining are involved in providing CVT. Intersectoral bargaining takes place every two years and sets targets (Giaccone 2009: 7). Examples are objectives for time credits, outplacement, and paid educational leave (Perin 2008).
- Following the interprofessional agreements, at sectoral level specific measures are implemented. In fact, in each sector, the social partners develop a training system according to the specific needs. They work together with the public employment services (Perin 2008).
- The training funds are also based on agreements at sectoral level (CEDEFOP 2008: 31).
- The concrete training plan is normally discussed at company level within works councils (Perin 2008).

Actors

- As the National Labor Council is the central body of the social partners at federal level with the competence of concluding agreements in all areas, its members can also be seen as important actors of CVT (National Labor Council 2010: Membership).

- The main trade unions concluding CLAs on CVT are the following:
 - the Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (*Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens/Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond, CSC/ACV*),
 - the Belgian General Federation of Labour (*Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique/Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond, FGTB/ABVV*),
 - the Federation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (*Centrale Générale des Syndicats Libéraux de Belgique/Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België, CGSLB/ACLVB*).
- The following employers' organizations are involved in collective bargaining on CVT:
 - the Belgian Federation of Employers (*Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique/Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen, FEB/VBO*),
 - the French-speaking Union of Self-Employed (*Union des Classes Moyennes, UCM*),
 - the Flemish Organisation of the Self-Employed (*Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers, UNIZO*),
 - the Federation of Belgian Farmers (*Fédération des Agriculteurs Belges/Belgische Boerenbond, BB*).

Critical Junctures

Definition: Critical junctures are years or time periods when important decisions on the development of the collectively negotiated CVT scheme were made.

- Concerning the Belgian CVT system, there is one critical juncture: In the 1988 intersectoral agreement No. 43 the social partners acknowledged the importance to develop CVT (Perin 2008).

2. Important Collective Agreements (Examples)

- The 1988 intersectoral agreement No. 43 was followed by a law, as it is typical for intersectoral agreements in Belgium to become binding (Ilorens 1998). However, it is the most important agreement because in this agreement employers and trade unions acknowledged the importance of (continuing) vocational training provided by themselves (Perin 2008). The social partners agree upon paying obligatory contributions for financing training (Ilorens 1998). In order to put this agreement into practice, sectoral training funds were founded. Where there were no sectoral funds, the contributions for training were transferred to the national employment fund (CEDEFOP 2008: 31-32).

- The 1992 intersectoral agreement regulates the increase of obligatory contributions for training by companies (Ilorens 1998).
- The 1997 intersectoral agreement No. 66 concludes that the social partners specify the organization and purpose of sectoral funds which may also be related to (continuing) vocational training.
- The intersectoral agreement No. 77 of December 2001 is the basis for the implementation of the 'time credit system': This agreement allows workers to interrupt their career for a certain period of time and on a voluntary basis. The provisions of the intersectoral agreement are completed at sectoral level (Perin 2008).
- The intersectoral agreement on outplacement No. 82 of July 2002 defines the rules or objectives for outplacement, a benefit which has been established by law. Outplacement means training for older employees whose contract has been ended by the employer (Perin 2008).
- The agreement in the sector of manufacture of pulp and paper products of 2003 regulates compensation for training (Perin 2008).
- The 2003 agreement on CVT in the construction sector regulates compensation for training (Perin 2008).
- The 2005-2006 agreement in the insurance sector introduces a training credit for employed persons (Perin 2008).
- The 2007-2008 intersectoral agreement defines a specific target group for benefits that was not in the centre of training benefits until then: workers older than 45, low-skilled workers, migrant workers, women and unemployed persons (Perin 2008).
- Several sectoral agreements from 2007-2008 introduce a right on training for some subsectors: metal, distribution and finance sectors, as well as glassworks sector, subsectors of food industry and the merchant marine sector (Gyes 2007).

3. Important Sectors

- General CVT initiatives by sectors:
 - The most important sectors have been construction, Agoria (formerly Fabrimétal) and textiles. Later, initiatives have been launched for example in chemicals, printing industries, temporary work agencies, insurance, gas, electricity, wood industries and by the auxiliary National Joint Committee for white-collar workers (Cotton 2001: 21).

- Sectoral Training Funds (STF)
 - CEDEFOP (2008: 31) provides a non-exhaustive list of sectors with training funds in 1996: hotel/restaurants/bars, textile, garage/bodywork/metal, insurance, construction, food, confection, wood, electricity (installation and distribution), and transport. There are funds for white-collar as well as blue-collar workers.
 - However, as it is stated by CEDEFOP (2008: 30), there exists no overview on the total number of these funds.
 - Most sectoral training funds were founded after the 1988 agreement. Yet, several sectors already had an old tradition of training funds (CEDEFOP 2008: 31): in the metal industry sector since 1968, in the building sector since 1965, in the banking sector since 1968, and in the textile sector since 1978.
 - Concrete examples of STFs:
 - FVB (*Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid*) is a sectoral training fund for vocational training in the construction sector. In this sector, there are more than 159,000 blue-collar workers in more than 30,000 companies. Hence, it is a very important sector for the Belgian economy. Additionally, the FVB is a popular training fund with good experience in vocational training. (CEDEFOP 2008: 35).
 - Cevora (*Centrum voor Vorming van het Aanvullend Nationaal Paritair Comité voor Bedienden*) is a sectoral training fund for white-collar employees working in a diversity of sectors. Cevora was founded by the social partners of the Complementary National Joint Committee (see chapter 4) in Belgium with 52,000 enterprises and 366,000 white-collar employees (CEDEFOP 2008: 39).

- Time credit system:
 - Examples for the implementation of the time credit system for training leave are the insurance sector (Giaccone 2009: 24) and the auxiliary National Joint Committee for white-collar workers (Cotton 2001: 21).

4. Structure, Organization, and Mode of Administration

- Joint committees:
 - Joint committees are permanent, government-organized joint committees set up between employees and employers in every sector of economic activity or public service. The committees are composed of an equal number of representatives of employers' organizations and unions (CEDEFOP 2008: 32). They are organized by the Federal Ministry of Employment and Labor, presided over by a mediator appointed by the government and under supervision of the Minister.

- Thus, these committees are actually not based on CLAs (CEDEFOP 2008: 32). However, the joint committees organize and manage the sectoral training funds that are based on CLAs (Perin 2008).
 - Through the joint committees, the Belgian social partners can define the Belgian social policy, including minimum wages, wage scales, employment conditions and vocational training issues, including CVT (CEDEFOP 2008: 32).
 - There are 123 joint committees where CLAs on vocational training (continuing and initial) exist. In total, there are 172 joint committees and sub-joint committees (Perin 2008). In some sectors, the joint committees are charged to report and control the implementation of training systems by the companies. Example: metal industry (Perin 2008).
- Sectoral Training Funds (*sectorale opleidingsfondsen / fonds de formation professionnelle* STFs):
 - They play an important role within the Belgian vocational training market (CEDEFOP 2008: 31). They are important for continuing as well as for initial vocational training (CEDEFOP 2008: 33).
 - The funds exist in many sectors, based on the CLA No. 66 and the law of the 7th January 1958 (Perin 2008).
 - The main aim of these funds is to finance the training in a way that fits the demands of the companies (Perin 2008).
 - Currently, there are 128 joint committees that organize and manage these sectoral funds for vocational training (Perin 2008).
 - The funds are jointly managed by employers' associations and trade unions and regulated by existing social agreements signed by social partners (CEDEFOP 2008: 31). The main bodies of the funds are the board of directors and the general meeting. Both are composed of as many employees as employer representatives. Typically, the funds work with a full-time staff and with an additional staff of contracted people who provide the actual training (CEDEFOP 2008: 33).
 - Besides these rather common general administrative aspects, it must be noted that the funds are actually organized in very different ways. Some funds are large and very much institutionalized, while others are small, based on sectoral initiatives and often working with volunteers. In addition, the organization of the funds is shaped by the Belgian federalism: Some funds are working in the whole sector, others, however, are only covering employees on provincial level.
 - In sum, again it must be said that, unfortunately, there is no overview over these funds in Belgium at all (CEDEFOP 2008: 30).

- If there is no sectoral agreement in a sector, CVT must be based on the objectives of the interprofessional agreements. This means that the companies must anyway take provisions relating to training (Perin 2008). In order to implement the training programs, the social partners work together with the regional public employment bodies (Perin 2008). However, public authorities are not involved in the development and administration of the sectoral training funds (CEDEFOP 2008: 31).

5. Role of the State: Financial Support, Legislation, and Extension Procedures

- The mandatory parts of a CLA can be extended by Royal Decree. This means that the agreement will be binding for all employers within the jurisdiction of the joint committee which has concluded the agreement. The request for a Royal Decree is made by the sectoral joint committee or by an organization of the corresponding committee. In fact, the extension of a CLA is quite common (EIRO 2009: Industrial Relations), also in the domain of CVT (Perin 2008).
- Many CVT benefit schemes are actually set up by the state. Examples in this respect are outplacement or paid educational leave. However, social partners may formulate objective for these schemes in intersectoral agreements and they may also introduce sector specific implementation rules at sectoral level. And they are involved in different types of organizations that develop and organize training (Perin 2008).
- Concerning sectoral training funds, the link between the funds and the Belgian national and regional governments is not very strong, as public authorities are not involved in the development of these funds (CEDEFOP 2008: 31). But the state (via the regional training centres) awards financial subsidies to the different kind of funds (Cotton 2001: 24).

6. Financial Structure of the Collectively Negotiated Schemes

- In general, the funding of the CVT system is divided between public sector and the private sector. Funds are shared with the employers' contributions (Perin 2008).
- In interprofessional and sectoral agreements the social partners define training objectives in terms of financial contribution from the employers, but also in terms of participation rates (Perin 2008). The companies are free to decide how they fulfill their training contribution requirements: they can work together with the sectoral funds or they can invest the money for their employees themselves. Furthermore, they can also cooperate with private training operators or ask for public subsidies (CCE 2007: 19).

- In 45 per cent of all cases, the contribution is paid to a fund, a training center or to the *fonds de sécurité d'existence* (CCE 2008: 23).
- In 34 per cent of all cases, the contribution is paid to the public ONSS (National Social Security Office) which often forwards the money to an institution of a joint-commission (CCE 2008: 23).
- In 21 per cent of all cases, the receiver of the contribution is not known, meaning that the money has perhaps been invested within a company (CCE 2008: 23).
- Since 1998 social partners have agreed upon reaching to invest 1.9 per cent of the wage bill to the training of the workers and an additional 0.1 per cent of the wage sum in financing training of target (risk) groups. In 2006, social partners agreed upon maintaining this objective of 1.9 per cent for the next two years. The actual current expenditures have an average of 1.2 per cent of the wage sum (Perin 2008).
- Since 2007 the objective of an average expenditure of 1.9 per cent of the wage bill can be increased at the interprofessional level. However, the objective must not be higher than 0.2 percentage points over the last year's objective (CCE 2007: 16).
- The concrete contribution rate (objective of 1.9 per cent of the wage sum and 0.1 per cent of wage sum for risk groups) are regulated by the joint committees. The committees also establish the institution which will get and manage the contributions, for example a fund (CCE 2007: 19).
- Concerning the risk groups, about 75 per cent of the joint commissions have agreed in CLAs to pay the minimum which is 0.1 per cent of the wage bill. The other joint committees pay more than the minimum, the current maximum is 0.6 per cent (CCE 2008: 23).
- The STFs manage the training contribution of a specific sector and fund the training programs (Perin 2008). They are financed by social contributions (CEDEFOP 2008: 31). Most of the contributions are paid by the employers. Other contributions come from other funds, public institutions and from the European Social Fund (CCE 2008: 31). Contributions from public institutions are most common in the Flemish Community (CCE 2008: 31). Two examples of STFs:
 - The FVB is sectoral training fund for (continuing) vocational training in the construction sector. It is funded by mandatory contributions. The contribution for training agreed by social partners for this sector is set at 0.55 per cent of the gross wage mass, with 0.15 per cent aimed at risk groups and the remaining 0.4 per cent for permanent vocational training. Additionally, around 2.63 per cent of the gross wage sum is invested in (continuing) vocational training by the sector, above the compulsory mandate (CEDEFOP 2008: 36).

- *Cevora*: Sectoral training fund for white-collar employees working in a diversity of sectors. Contributions to *Cevora* are calculated on the total payroll of all companies within the relevant sectors: 0.2 per cent (CEDEFOP 2008: 39).

7. Benefits and Measures of the Collectively Negotiated Schemes

- The time credit system allows workers to interrupt their career for a certain period of time and on a voluntary basis. The worker receives a social benefit as a compensation for the wage loss. Furthermore, the worker gets a redundancy protection and the right to continue the career at the same conditions as before. The general framework of this system was organized by the 2001 intersectoral CLA No. 77. The concrete provisions are completed in each sector according to the specific needs and characteristics (Perin 2008). Furthermore, there exist training credits during employment. Examples are the following:
 - Agreement in the insurance sector 2005-2006 (quoted in Perin 2008): In this framework, a training credit is established at company level as a collectively given number of days per year, linked to the amount of workers under an employment contract multiplied by four. Reference date is the 30th June of the previous year. The credit contains CVT during and after working time. The workers have the right to express their training needs individually.
 - Initiative of the Complementary National Joint Committee for a diversity of white-collar employees: Employees have a personal right on vocational training during two days per year. The content of training is decided by the employer (Cotton 2001: 21).
- There is an outplacement scheme that is actually set up by law. However, at intersectoral level the social partners have formulated some objectives in the 2002 Agreement No. 82 (quoted in Perin 2008). This agreement contains a 'procedure of reclassification' in case of finishing the job contract by the employer. Nevertheless, the employee has to fulfill the following conditions:
 - he was not dismissed for professional misconduct;
 - at the time of the redundancy, he is aged of at least forty-five years;
 - at the time of the redundancy, he counts at least one uninterrupted year of service.
 This right does not apply to workers that can ask for retirement. As Perin (2008) indicates, further specifications for outplacement are probably agreed upon in sectoral agreements.
- Examples for compensation of time spent in CVT:
 - In the 2003 CLA of the pulp and paper industry is concluded that 0.5 per cent of the working time has to be reserved for training and is paid as if it was a working day (Perin 2008).

- In the construction sector, the 2005 CLA on CVT systems regulates the normal wage payment during the time spent on training (Perin 2008).
- Training Curriculum Vitae (CV): This concept was introduced in the metal sector through the 2007-2008 sectoral agreements (Gyes 2007). The company should keep a training CV for each worker, that provides an inventory of the workers' training career in the company. The CV includes informal training, on-the-job learning and task enhancement (Gyes 2007). The CV must be validated in a joint document drawn up by employer and employee (Gyes 2007).
- The STFs help retain employees or to give them additional and specialized training according to the competences needed by the companies. Often, the sectoral training funds work together with private and public actors. In these cases, the funds are responsible for the administrative and financial follow-up of the training activities. They reimburse the costs to the companies (CEDEFOP 2008: 34).
- Normally, the training programs are not organized by the funds themselves. It is more common that they are an important actor between the companies and the training suppliers (CCE 2008: 34). However, there are some funds that have a training institute that organizes actual training, mostly together with public actors; examples in this respect are the metal sector and the building industry (CEDEFOP 2008: 34).
- Several training activities are pursued for the unemployed, especially for low educated, senior or young unemployed, etc. Where these activities are carried out together with official training institutions they are often complemented by practical training in companies and mediation activities (CEDEFOP 2008: 33).
- A general rule for CVT is that it takes place during working hours. If not, the employee will be compensated with educational vacation and/or a financial incentive (CEDEFOP 2008: 34).
- In the following, two concrete examples of STFs:
 - The FVB is a STF for (continuing) vocational training in the construction sector. The FVB does not develop its own training activities but plays an intermediate role between the sector and public and private training suppliers. It refunds the training costs and the personnel costs for employees attending training activities: up to 212 hours yearly for each employee. To have access to FVB services and funds, a company must draw up a CVT plan for its workers (CEDEFOP 2008: 35-36). This fund has four pillars (CEDEFOP 2008: 35):
 - research: analyses of shortages in qualifications, mapping of training needs,
 - coordination: ensuring the supply of training,
 - information: personal contacts with target groups, such as students, employees and employers,

- training finance: FVP takes over the cost of training and the wage cost of the trainee from the individual organization.
- *Cevora* is a STF for white-collar employees working in various sectors. Its most important activity is developing training programs for white-collar employees. Courses are organized through the employers' initiative, they can be realized in-house but also as a type of external education. In addition, all employees in these sectors are entitled to attend one additional training day at their initiative. Besides this, *Cevora* also offers other services such a databank about the training market, studies about employment evolutions and so on. *Cevora* works together with other educational institutions and professional trainers (CEDEFOP 2008: 39-41).

8. Coverage Rates of the Collectively Negotiated Schemes

- 100 per cent of workers are covered by collective bargaining on CVT (Giaccone 2009: 15).
- All workers are covered by CLAs: every sector and every company worker is covered by the interprofessional agreements. However, the participation rate of formal training is only 40 per cent. At interprofessional level 63.5 per cent of the companies employing more than ten people are effectively organizing training for their employees (Perin 2008).
- Table 1 gives an overview of the percentage of companies providing CVT measures by sector.

Table 1 CVT Provisions by Sector as Per Cent of Companies with More than Ten People

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
Financial Intermediation	98.4
Electricity, Gas and Water Supply	95.1
Activities Auxiliary to Financial Intermediation	89.3
Sale, Maintenance and Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles; Retail Sale of Automotive Fuel	89.2
Manufacture of Machinery and Equipment+ Manufacture of Electrical and Optical Equipment	85.3
Manufacture of Transport Equipment	78
Post and Telecommunications	77.5
Manufacture of Chemicals, Chemical Products and Man-Made	76.1

Fibres + Manufacture of Rubber and Plastic Products + Manufacture of Other Non-Metallic Mineral Products	
Mining and Quarrying	71.7
Manufacture of Basic Metals and Fabricated Metal Products	71.6
Real Estate, Renting and Business Activities + Social and Personal Service Activities	68.3
Manufacture of Pulp, Paper and Paper Products; Publishing and Printing	68.2
Wholesale Trade and Commission Trade, except of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	67.6
Transports	61.7
Manufacture of Food Products, Beverages and Tobacco	60.2
Manufacture of Textiles and Textiles Products + Manufacture of Leather Clothes	59.2
Manufacture of Wood and Woods Products	48.5
Construction	46.3
Retail Trade, except of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	45.9
Hotels and Restaurants	43

Source: Perin 2008.

- There is no overview over the STFs in Belgium, therefore, it is not possible to present a solid number (CEDEFOP 2008: 30). However, Perin (2008) guesses that these funds cover 80 per cent of all workers.

9. The Politics around the Collectively Negotiated Schemes

Linkages to Public Reform Policies

We have not found any evidence.

Linkages to Wage Agreements and Wage Policy (e.g. Wage Restraint, Tripartite Agreements) and Other Agreements

- The role of the Belgian social partners in vocational training is a strong one: through the joint committees they not only discuss training issues, but also wage issues. And they are also engaged in/for public training organizations (CEDEFOP 2008: 32).

- Since 1998 social partners have agreed upon investing defined percentages of the wage bills in training of the workers and of target (risk) groups (see section 6 ‘Financial Structure of the Collectively Negotiated Scheme’) (CCE 2007: 16).

Actors’ Strategies and Conflicts among and between Them (State, Political Parties, Employers, Trade Unions)

- There is a high commitment of all actors to CVT and the system is marked by a unique public private mix (see section 1).

10. Recent Developments and Other Interesting Information

We have not found any evidence.

11. Contacted Experts

We thank the following expert and colleague for providing information and answering very specific questions:

- Perin, Emmanuelle, 06.07.2009, Research Assistant at Université Catholique de Louvain, e-mail interview.

12. List of Abbreviations

- BB: *Fédération des Agriculteurs Belges/Belgische Boerenbond* (Federation of Belgian Farmers)
- CCE: *Conseil Central de l’Economie* (Central Economic Council)
- CEDEFOP: European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
- Cevora: *Centrum voor Vorming van het Aanvullend Nationaal Paritair Comité voor Bedienden* (Sectoral Training Fund for White-collar Employees)
- CGSLB/ACLVB: *Centrale Générale des Syndicats Libéraux de Belgique/Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België* (Federation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium)
- CLA: collective labor agreement
- CSC/ACV: *Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens/Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond* (Confederation of Christian Trade Unions)
- CVT: continuing vocational training

- EIRO: European Industrial Relations Observatory
- FEB/VBO: *Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique/Verbond van Belgische Ondernemingen* (Belgian Federation of Employers)
- FGTB/ABVV: *Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique/Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond* (Belgian General Federation of Labour)
- FVB: Fonds voor Vakopleiding in de Bouwnijverheid (sectoral training fund in the construction sector)
- NAR: *Conseil National Du Travail* (National Labor Council)
- STF: Sectoral Training Fund
- UCM: *Union des Classes Moyennes* (French-speaking Union of Self-Employed)
- UNIZO: *Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers* (Flemish Organization of the Self-Employed)

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