



Technopolis - Tatjana Guznajeva, Juanita Garcia Gutierrez, Ana Oliveira, Matthias Ploeg

Adult, vocational education/training and lifelong learning systems have to be adapted and promoted to encourage greater participation and to reflect the current and future labour market needs

In most cases, job transformation calls for upskilling or reskilling, as some or all tasks, work processes have been affected. In recent years, the thematic focus of training programmes has been changed by putting a stronger emphasis on digital skills and development of ICT competences. This highlights the impact of automation technologies on the nature of work. As mentioned earlier, social and transversal skills also deserve as much attention as digital skills. However, to train some of them might be more difficult, especially in short training programmes and in an online setting.

The case studies reveal a lack of willingness among employees to undergo training and a lack of employers' investment in it. Given limited financial resources and pragmatic approach of enterprises, especially in SMEs, it is not surprising that employers allocate limited resources for upskilling or reskilling, focusing only on performance of tasks for a specific job. However, in case of a lack of sufficient support for training, significant financial burdens and risks associated with upskilling/reskilling fall on employers. This leads to two scenarios: either employers design training programmes themselves, identify private training providers to suit company/organizational needs, or employers rely on gradual upskilling/reskilling on-the-job that is associated with higher stress levels among workers.

Overall, lifelong learning and adult education/training are unpopular concepts across all examined regions. Among the key factors that discourage upskilling/reskilling among workers are listed:

1. Low motivation, unwillingness to invest financial resources and time in training;
2. Lack of accessible (free) training opportunities and a lack of awareness about them;
3. (Perception of) low relevance/quality of training programmes;
4. Lack of certification or recognition of qualifications among employers.

To partially tackle these challenges, governments invest in promotion of lifelong learning and of available training opportunities through communication campaigns, involving different communication channels (i.e., social and traditional media, events, training providers and influencers/thought leaders). The culture of lifelong learning is stronger among highly-skilled individuals that, in general, have more interest in training and, due to more developed skills and larger knowledge base, find the process of training easier and more enjoyable. This highlights that more efforts are needed to promote adult training and lifelong learning among the low-skilled.



Technopolis - Tatjana Guznajeva, Juanita Garcia Gutierrez, Ana Oliveira, Matthias Ploeg

One of the means that encourage skills development is the availability of tools that allow to assess them. Such tools have been tested in several projects in Portugal. Currently, Estonia is working on the development of the tools that enables both – assessment of skills and the development of an individual record on what skills training a person has undertaken. It is believed that such tools will allow to manage individual's own learning pathways and motivate participate in training.

The project Rampa Digital aims to expand peoples' digital skills in Portugal, regardless of their current job situation. The project offers a self-assessment tool to evaluate the baseline digital skills level and to tailor each participant's training. Following that, it provides free in-person training sessions to firms that want to integrate digital tools in their business, and to other NGOs (e.g., charities) so that they can then provide training to their communities.

Rampa Digital has been promoted by .PT (a non-profit entity responsible for managing and registering the webdomain .pt) and privately sponsored (together with Google.org). In view of experts, it has been an important support for businesses, given its comprehensive support and in-person trainings.

To address the second challenge on accessibility and awareness of training opportunities, the policymakers try to encourage employers to upskill/reskill their workers, and offer support, such as subsidies for training, free training programmes or involve PES in the design of tailored trainings. In regions where there is strong collaboration between PES, employers and employees, the design of tailored training is a more common practice. Such training is typically regarded as more relevant and of higher quality.

It is interesting to note that in many regions, the PES offer support for both the unemployed and employed individuals. Many employees are not aware that the PES could effectively support them during job transformation, by assisting in the search or provision of relevant upskilling/reskilling activities, or through advisory services on professional development and career opportunities.

Most examined regions have launched free online learning platforms that offer various types of programmes. The online format ensures flexibility in learning (e.g, at own pace, at convenient time) to encourage participation.

The "Future skills initiative" has been launched in 2021 in Latvia as a pilot and, following its success, it became a permanent programme. The "Future Skills Initiative" finances training provided by massive online learning course platforms with a particular focus on:

- ICT
- business



- data science
- professional language learning
- transversal skills

The platforms that offer training (e.g., Coursera, edX, FutureLearn) must comply with a set of criteria of the Cabinet of Ministers to ensure high quality of training. One of the key criteria is that the platform must be hosted by at least 10 higher education institutions included in the World University Ranking.

The initiative funds employed and unemployed individuals up to 500 EUR, with 50% of pre-financing. Individuals can participate in multiple courses, while the unemployed are also eligible to a stipend (5 EUR per day).

In 2022, the number of MOOCs offered through the initiative has reached 936, while the number of participants reached 936, of which 673 were women. The initiative has been successful due to selection of relevant themes/topics of trainings (especially in the context of technological transformation), online format that increased accessibility and flexibility of trainings, high quality standards, availability for all population groups that responds to needs of all individuals (employers, employees and unemployed) and stimulates lifelong learning, and due to reduction of financial barrier for participation in training.

In some regions, the lifelong learning initiatives have been criticized for offering access only to a limited number of individuals each year, for providing limited training offers at the beginner level or for vulnerable groups, thereby indirectly excluding them. Such issues are associated with a lack of funding for large-scale and comprehensive training programmes that provide diverse training opportunities for all skills levels and that meet different learning needs.

The discussions with interviewees show that the training and other needs of vulnerable groups that are currently employed might be quite different from an average individual on the labour market. Thus, existing mainstream lifelong learning systems rarely address their needs and stimulate empowerment. Once again, the difference between the concepts of inclusion and empowerment is highlighted. While vulnerable groups may be employed – included on the labour market, the absence of adequate lifelong learning systems does not encourage their personal and professional development. Typically, the support for the vulnerable groups comes from ALMP or NGOs that specifically target them. This approach might be effective, but it has a limited reach, thereby only a limited number of individuals can benefit from existing support mechanisms. Overall, this stresses that the policy approach for employed vulnerable groups is predominantly reactive than proactive, meaning that they get attention when they



Technopolis - Tatjana Guznajeva, Juanita Garcia Gutierrez, Ana Oliveira, Matthias Ploeg

are unemployed. Moreover, as in the case of ALMP that target the unemployed, it is not effective to provide a standard set of services and trainings to all members of the labour market, even if they are considered highly relevant for the future of work. This calls for an inclusive and, at times, resources-intensive approach to lifelong learning.

Among the vulnerable groups for which a large number of tailored training programmes are developed are the low-skilled youth/young people. Despite that many of them have jobs, the policymakers recognize that additional upskilling/reskilling is needed to help them uncap their potential and to utilize their knowledge/skills for the needs of the economy. By failing to invest in their skills development as soon as possible, this group might become the long-term unemployed, losing motivation to enter training or/and employment. Such individuals would have to be continuously supported through a comprehensive set of ALMPs and PLMPs, affecting the future of a country/region.

Among the successful initiatives that target the low-skilled youth is the Hungarian “Bridge to the World of Work”, which is part of the Second Chance Education Programmes launched in the country.

The “Bridge to the World of Work” initiative was implemented between 2008 and 2011 in Hungary. The initiative focuses on providing young people who were not in any type of formal education, or who had dropped out of school with training and individualised life path planning. The programme also tended to further focus on people who had behavioural and learning difficulties.

The initiative aimed to improve the self-image of young people, better their skills in relation to their peers and employees, and to acquire and/or further develop professional competences. The success factors of the initiative include:

- Both employed and unemployed young people who did not complete formal education could join the initiative and develop necessary skills;
- The initiative offered a comprehensive support to young people with disadvantages, recognising additional, behavioural difficulties, that prevent from successful integration on the labour market;
- Young people were given insights about work through workplace visits, discussions with employers and employees. This has increased their awareness of job-related tasks, activities and career choices, and stimulated their better preparation to the world of work.

The third challenge mentioned earlier, namely (the perception of) low relevance/quality of training programmes, is typically associated with previous education/training experience. If



Technopolis - Tatjana Guznajeva, Juanita Garcia Gutierrez, Ana Oliveira, Matthias Ploeg

the quality of compulsory education was poor, it will be difficult to attract people to join training courses later in life. In such cases, the policymakers should invest more resources in both the quality of training and in its promotion.

To ensure high quality of adult, vocational education and lifelong learning programmes, the successful approach of the regions focused on the following:

- Close collaboration between the policymakers (across different ministries – Ministry of Education, Labour), education providers, employers and employees to align training with industry needs and policies (e.g., smart specialization), to understand what skills are needed and how to design and deliver effective training programmes for the specific occupation group;
- Analysis of future skills in demand for a specific occupation or industry;
- Development of clear quality standards of training programmes;
- Delivery of training in collaboration with other providers, particularly higher education institutions, and with industries;
- Verification of the quality of offered training programmes.

Portugal and Estonia present excellent examples of such approach.

Fifteen years ago, the government in Portugal implemented a significant reform in the VET system with two main measures, which have significantly improved the quality of VET education and currently support technological transformation in organisations.

The first measure of the reform was to create a comprehensive National Qualifications System (SNQ), which set common standards for VET courses, homogenising its quality across regions and providers. Moreover, SNQ also includes a catalogue of skills, a system to anticipate skill needs, a national credit system for VET and an online tool to guide self-learners (OECD, 2020).

The second measure was the creation of a public agency, ANQEP, to coordinate and monitor the SNQ system and regularly update it. ANQEP results from the collaboration of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Security and Ministry of Economy making sure that the public stakeholders work together, and social partners are closely involved. The institutional architecture of ANQEP (which includes sectorial councils to discuss skill gaps at the industry level) and the activities it has developed to engage social partners have been recognised internationally, for example, by the OECD.

The role of coordination played by the ANQEP, its capacity to forecast skills gaps of the labour force at national, regional, and sectorial levels, and to translate those gaps into the VET system may be seen as crucial policy to support both employees and employers in the labour market transition. In May 2023, ANQEP announced the creation of over 365 specialized training centres in digital, renewable energy, industry, and ICT skills, to be financially supported by the European Commission's "Recovery and Resilience Facility



instrument". These centres aim to increase the provision of VET in high-demand occupations paying better wages, to contribute to reduction of social inequalities and to improve job quality among young, lower-qualified workers.

Although the results of the VET system reform have been relevant to the whole Portuguese territory, the region of Lisbon has a lot to benefit from a coordinated and high-quality VET system. Moreover, as the region becomes a larger nest for innovative businesses (namely, innovative startups), and the demand for qualified labour increases, the establishment of new training facilities gets even more critical, especially if the trainings aim to fill the current and future gap in advanced ICT and digital competences.

Success factors of VET reform, ANQEP and SNQ include:

- Collaboration of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Security allows to bring different perspectives to the VET system;
- ANQEP has put a lot of effort at engaging social partners, not only at a national level but also at a regional and sectorial level;
- The reform allowed to standardise VET programmes across different providers, and set the bar up to increase its quality.

Estonia offers the training grant for employers to improve skills and knowledge of their employees. Though the grant, training support is available across four different categories, each reflecting changing demand for skills:

- Recruitment training grant for employers. It is available to support emerging skills demands if a specific skill is considered critical, according to OSKA forecasts. First, employers are obliged to seek new employees matching skill requirement from those registered in the PES (Unemployment Insurance Fund). If no suitable candidates are found, employers receive a grant to train their current employees.¹
- Training grant for employers upon changing circumstances. The grant is supporting employee training due to internal restructuring at the company, the introduction of new technologies or changes to qualification requirements. The measure is meant to help employers and employees through disruptive periods, and to stimulate retention and upskilling of workers. The training funded through the grant must last at least 50 academic hours, indicating the need for significant learning to account for the changing working environment and conditions.²

¹ Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (2022). Recruitment training grant for employers. Available at: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/en/services/employers/recruitment-training-grant-employers>

² Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (2022). Training grant for employers upon changing circumstances, Available at: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/en/services/employers/training-grant-employers-upon-changing-circumstances>



Technopolis - Tatjana Guznajeva, Juanita Garcia Gutierrez, Ana Oliveira, Matthias Ploeg

- Training grant for employers for the development of employees' Estonian language skills. The grant is aimed at supporting businesses employing foreign talent. The training funded through the grant must be at least 50 academic hours.³
- Training grant for employers for developing employees' proficiency in ICT. The measure is supporting digitisation and other types of technological transformation. Employers are encouraged to consult the OSKA study 'OSKA ülevaade valdkonnaspetsiifiliste IKT-oskuste vajadusest' (OSKA overview of the need for field-specific ICT skills) to select most relevant ICT training. The training funded through the grant must be at least 50 academic hours and can last up to one year.⁴

The support of employers and, consequently, of vulnerable employees is regarded essential for increasing the labour market resilience and for supporting technological transformation in organisations. The use of OSKA forecasts to guide employers' decisions has been described as a particular strength of the Estonian AMLPs. The grant offers at least 50 academic hours of training, which suggests short-term, yet comprehensive training. Lastly, the grant stimulates the development of ICT-related competences and supports better integration of migrant workers in Estonia.

The last challenge, namely the lack of certification and recognition of qualifications among employers, has been successfully addressed in several countries, such as the Czech Republic and Malta. In absence of skills certification and recognition, employees will not be motivated to participate in trainings.

The National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic (NPI) prepares strategies for further development of general, vocational, art and linguistic education, continuing teachers' education and the area of pedagogical-psychological, educational and career counselling. Through 14 regional centres, NPI provides support to teachers, trainers and schools across all educational levels, except higher education.

Among the key missions of NPI is to develop standards of vocational CVET qualifications, to oversee the certification of vocational qualifications and to handle issues concerning the recognition of certified qualifications. In addition, it also supports career guidance at

³ Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (2022). Training grant for employers for development of employees' Estonian language proficiency. Available at: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/en/services/employers/training-grant-employers-development-employees-estonian-language-proficiency>

⁴ Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (2022). Training grant for employers for developing employees' proficiency in information and communication technology (ICT). Available at: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/en/services/employers/training-grant-employers-developing-employees-proficiency-information-and>



schools and cooperates with career guides for the labour market via networks such as Euroguidance.

The work of NPI has been stimulating adult, lifelong learning in the Czech Republic, as it supported the education/training providers in acquisition of certifications, which triggered the provision of qualifications for individuals that attended training programmes of these education/training providers. The qualifications issued by the education/training providers are in line with the European Qualifications Framework. Hence, they are recognised in the Czech Republic and in the European Union.

The effectiveness of the work of NPI has been ensured by the following factors:

- NPI has developed standards of vocational CVET qualifications in consultation with experts and stakeholders;
- NPI has promoted the recognition of qualifications by launched an open platform that publishes information about approved professional qualifications;
- NPI provides detailed instructions on how the examination for each qualification should take place, thereby ensuring compliance with standards.

The Trade Testing System in Malta is aimed at assessing individuals who have acquired skills on the job or through general life experience but do not have formal qualifications. The System provides assessment of individuals' knowledge, skills and competences through interviews, portfolio analysis, theoretical and practical tests.⁵

Candidates who have successfully passed the tests are awarded a Certificate of Competence in that particular occupation. For those occupations that do not have an MQF (Malta Qualifications Framework) level next to the occupation title, the applicant needs to have at least one year experience in a given occupation. For those occupations that have an MQF level next to the occupation title, the applicant needs to have at least three years' experience in a given occupation. In addition, Jobsplus cannot allow candidates to sit for more than two assessments for different occupations within a calendar year.

The System has had a positive impact on employability of individuals (both currently employed and unemployed). It was considered successful, due to efficient and effective assessment procedures and eligibility criteria, presented above.

⁵ <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/training-opportunities/trade-testing-system>