

Services for Apprenticeships (SERFA)

Erasmus Plus Project

Transnational Report

Apprenticeships across eight European countries:

Current situation, best practice and SMEs' needs

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1 Introduction: What are the main questions?

SMEs, including micro-businesses, are the backbone of the European economy and provide around two-thirds of private sector employment in the EU. Yet they often struggle to provide apprenticeship opportunities. Some of the most common reasons include: a lack of training infrastructure and personnel to supervise apprentices, as well as insufficient expertise and capacity to manage complex rules, employment law and administrative requirements.

The success of policy initiatives for apprenticeships and youth employability also depends largely on more SMEs being involved in providing placements. Traditionally, to meet these challenges, governments are focusing more on targeted support (such as financial incentives) and on enabling measures for SMEs to be involved in apprenticeships (such as infrastructure support).

Although these forms of support are highly valuable, they are however less effective if a business does not have internally the experience and expertise to manage the overall process. As such, SMEs need a more supportive approach than bigger businesses looking at bridging the gap in their knowledge around apprenticeship processes. The design and provision of such support is the final objective of the SERFA project.

As such, the project aims:

- To better understand barriers faced by SMEs when engaging with apprenticeship schemes and offer vacancies;
- To identify the SMEs needs to overcome those barriers;
- To support businesses in identifying their potential to offer apprenticeships vacancies and the associated benefits;
- To co-design, with SMEs, the services, tools and products helping remove the barriers and support SMEs in offering more apprenticeships;
- To promote the value of apprenticeships in SMEs and their benefits through an “Apprenticeship Champion” Campaign involving SME employing apprentices.

In order to provide a solid foundation for the development of support tools, the project team conducted extensive research into the framework conditions and the state of apprenticeship as well as the needs of SMEs in the eight partner countries. In this context, a business survey was carried out among small and medium-sized enterprises. The results of the searches and the survey were documented in national reports. This synthesis report summarizes the key findings.



2 Apprenticeship and Work-based learning – Status quo

2.1 Introduction: Statistical Information

Basic statistical information about apprenticeship is not available in all the countries participating in the SERFA project. Obviously this is the case for countries (Greece, Poland, Slovenia and Spain) which have undergone major changes in their Vocational Education and Training System (VET) recently. In all of the four countries mentioned above, apprenticeship or work based learning schemes have been introduced in the last few years. Hence no reliable data and statistics about apprenticeship are available yet.

In Austria, France, Germany and the United Kingdom extensive statistics are publicly available. At a glance they show major national differences and similarities in the established apprenticeship systems between the countries. The statistics show diverging trends in the development of the system. While in the UK the numbers of apprentices in training has been dramatically increased in the last decade, in Austria and Germany the number of apprentices has been declining. In this context, one important aspect is the difference in the average age of apprentices. In Austria, most of the apprentices are aged 15 to 18. Germany has experienced a rise in the age of the apprentices in the last years. The main target group in France are young people aged 16 to 25. In the UK, most of the apprentices are older than 20 years old. Differences in the age of the target group indicate discrepancies in the learning models of varying apprenticeship schemes in the countries (learning models for teenagers in Austria vs. adult education in the UK).

Another major difference among the countries is the dominant sector and size of training companies. In the UK and France the Service sector is dominant, while in Germany the most important sector is Industry. In France, most of the training companies have less than 10 employees; in Germany, middle and large sized companies are the dominant group. In Austria the highest share of apprentices is trained in micro, small and middle sized companies in the trade and crafts sectors. As a consequence of those differences in sector and size of training companies, the requirements and needs for the training of young people differ enormously. The preconditions for work-based learning processes are mainly influenced by workplace characteristics, which vary highly between sectors. Furthermore big sized companies have more possibilities for supporting their apprentices in a systematic way.

The statistics show a huge gender gap (an exception is the UK) in the apprenticeship system in Austria, France and Germany. This indicates a need for special support for female apprentices especially in sectors and occupations which are traditionally dominated by males (e.g. trades, craftsmanship and industrial occupations).



2.2 Legal Framework

The legal framework is the cornerstone of any institutionalised apprenticeship system. In general, the legal framework sets the basis for the governance of the apprenticeship system (e.g. defines responsibilities and stakeholders, number of professions, development and form of training curricula, amount of remuneration, procedure of assessment). A comparison between countries shows that there are countries with a historically well-established legal framework (Austria, Germany, and France) and countries which introduced an apprenticeship scheme quite recently (Greece, Slovenia, Spain, Poland). Therefore in the latter countries there are still ongoing processes of implementation, adaption and change. An exception is the UK, where apprenticeship has a long tradition, but is going through a major reorganisation and renewal of the system. The goal in the UK is to make apprenticeships part of the formal education system.

The legal framework specifies the form(s) of apprenticeships in the countries. CEDEFOP defines apprenticeship as follows (CEDEFOP, 2014, S. 1):

- learning that alternates between a workplace and an educational or training institution;
- part of formal education and training;
- on successful completion, learners acquire a qualification and receive an officially recognised certificate;
- apprentices usually have the status of employees and are paid for their work;
- ideally based on a contract or formal agreement between employer and learner, but sometimes, based on a contract with the education or training institution.

In Austria and Germany there is only one specified model of apprenticeship, which is an essential part of the upper secondary education system. At the end of the training apprentices acquire a Vocational Training Certificate at one common level. About 20 percent of the training takes place in part-time vocational schools and about 80% of the training takes place in the training company. Referring to the definition of CEDFOP, the arrangement of apprenticeship is more flexible in the remaining countries in regards to several aspects:

- A vocational qualification within the arrangement of the apprenticeship may be acquired at different levels (from a part-qualification to a high level degree). France, Greece, UK and Poland have a differentiated apprenticeship system with a varying range of possible arrangements. The duration of apprenticeship is highly diverging and varies from one year to four years.
- The systems differ in time arrangements of alternating schemes of training at the workplace and training institutions. In some countries there are arrangements with



short-time training periods at the workplace (e.g. Short vocational upper Secondary education in Slovenia) and long-time training periods (e.g. apprentices in the UK).

- The systems of contracting differ between and within the countries. There may be (1) a contract between the apprentice and the training company or (2) a contract between the training company and a training institution.
- Apprenticeship as a measure of labour market policy or educational policy: in Spain and Greece there is a strong emphasis on the integration young people in the labour market due to high youth unemployment. Nevertheless one goal of apprenticeship in all countries is to smoothen the transition from school to labour market.

In the following section further differences in the apprenticeship system will be described.

2.2.1 Responsibilities

The responsibilities for the legal basis of apprenticeships are quite similar in all the countries. It is either under the jurisdiction of the Ministries of Education (e.g. UK, Slovenia) or together with the Ministries of Employment (Austria, Germany, Spain, France). In Greece the legal regulation is based on a Presidential Decree and an apprenticeship agreement (Manpower organisation).

In most of the countries the responsibilities for the implementation and administration are delegated to authorities and stakeholders at the regional or local level. At the local level the main responsibility for the implementation and control of apprenticeships could either be located within regional authorities (vocational schools, training institutions, special purpose institutions, e.g. in France, Poland, Spain, Slovenia, Greece) or chambers (Austria, Germany, in Future in Slovenia the role of Chambers will be reinforced).

Exceptional cases regarding the governance structure are Spain and Greece. In Spain there is a high degree of decentralisation not only for the implementation but also for the regulation of apprenticeship programmes. In Greece the organising institution has high responsibilities when it comes to shaping the apprenticeship arrangements (see further discussions in Chapter 2.3).

2.2.2 Professions and branches

There are fundamental differences in the structure and number of professions which may be chosen by young people. In Austria and Germany there is a fixed number of available occupations defined by specific occupational profiles in the training regulations (Austria: 198 occupations, Germany: 327 occupations). The number of occupations in these countries is limited. Occupational profiles exist in all sectors. The occupational profiles are highly standardised.



In the United Kingdom the professions are defined by specific job roles which have to be accredited. With the ongoing reform it is planned that there will be about 600 to 800 different apprenticeship standards. In Poland the certification of apprenticeship is based on a qualification classification scheme (252 qualifications). One occupation may comprise several qualifications. Thus the degree of standardisation of occupations in the UK and Poland is not very high.

A very low degree of standardisation in apprenticeship could be found in Greece, Spain and France. In these countries the field/occupation of apprenticeship is rather defined by the VET programmes and diplomas than by workplace profiles. Accordingly there are no limits in the number of specific occupational profiles. The in-company training must be complementary to the selected VET programme. In France and Spain (employment system) national catalogues of occupations are established to which the VET programmes could be linked.

In all countries, certificates acquired by different apprenticeship programmes are nationally recognised.

2.2.3 Curricula

There are high discrepancies between countries regarding the definition and content of curricula. In Austria and Germany the basis for company training is defined by a training regulation for each company which defines the required learning outcomes at the end of the training period. Occupational standards are defined at a supra-company (standardised) level. Furthermore in Germany each company must develop an operational training plan. In the development of the training regulations the social partners (chambers and employee representatives) are highly involved. There are complementary curricula for the part-time schools.

In the United Kingdom the professional standards are developed mainly by employers with support of professional bodies. This results in a short description of standards including the learning outcome (competence profile), duration and assessment plan.

In France, Slovenia, Spain (education system) and Poland, binding curricula for the VET programmes are in place. In Slovenia and Poland the curricula is composed of a core curricula (parts for general education) and vocational specific modules. In both countries the specific content of the curricula is highly adaptable to the local needs and companies. In France the curricula is defined centrally by a decree. In Spain (education system) the curricula are organised around a modular structure of qualifications (in total: 664 qualifications in 26 professional fields at 5 different levels). The description of each qualification includes a description of competence and professional duties, units of competencies and assessment



criteria. The work-based parts of the training in companies should match with the binding curricula.

In contrast, in Greece there is no binding curricula for the in-company training. The training organisations are the ones responsible for the design of the in-company. Consequently the content of in-company training is highly adaptable to the needs of apprentices and companies. The only restriction for the in-company training is that it must correspond to the field of the VET programme.

The implementation of the training content may be an important aspect for the design of a support system.

2.2.4 Remunerations

In comparison it is obvious that apprentices receive remuneration if the contract between the training company and the apprentice is declared as a working contract. This is the case in Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom and France; partly in Spain (employment system) and Poland.

In Austria and Germany the minimum wage is laid down in the sector-specific collective agreements and thus varies highly between different sectors. The amount depends on the apprenticeship year (in Austria: up to 80% of the wage of a skilled worker). In France the amount of remuneration depends on the age and training year and is calculated as a percentage of sector-specific minimum wages (25% for apprentices under 18 in the first year and up to 78% for apprentices over 21 years in the third year). In the United Kingdom the remuneration depends on age. The minimum remuneration is set by the government (between £5.55 an hour for 18-20 year olds up to £7.20 for people aged over 24).

In Spain and Poland, whether or not an apprentice receives a remuneration depends on the respective status of the apprenticeship programme. In Spain apprentices get a remuneration in the employment system (not in education system because a working contract is not compulsory) according to the collective agreement. In Poland apprentices obtain minimum remuneration if the status is the one of a worker (not if it is a student status), but the level is very low (minimum levels: 4% of an average monthly salary in the first year up to 6% in the third year).

In Greece the minimum level of remuneration is determined between 75% and 80% of the minimum wage of an unskilled worker, but an apprenticeship contract does not equal a working contract (that means e.g. no right for holidays or bonuses).



In Slovenia the determination of remuneration is currently part of the learning agreement, but it is not controlled. It is planned that in future the remuneration must be part of the learning agreement.

In all countries except the UK, the remuneration has to be paid by the training companies (for further details about subsidy schemes see chapter 2.4). The remuneration is the major part of the costs that training companies have to bear. Therefore a supporting system has to be sensible about cost-benefit relation of the apprenticeship training and should support companies – under consideration of specific institutional arrangements – in the development of adequate training management models (implementation of sustainable learning models to effectively combine training and work) to have a high return on their investment.

2.2.5 Formal and qualificatory requirements for trainers

The international comparison of formal and qualificatory requirements of trainers is complex. Due to institutional differences in the implementation of apprenticeship there are various roles for trainers. In some countries there is a stronger emphasis on in-company training than in other countries.

Basically two roles of trainers for the practical part of the vocational education may be differentiated: trainers in a specialised training institution (e.g. tutors, teachers, and instructors) and trainers for the in-company training (e.g. tutors, supervisors). The standards for teachers and trainers for the theoretical part of the training are excluded in this analysis (e.g. teachers in theoretical subjects in part-time vocational schools in Austria and Germany). Usually there are higher requirements for teachers than for trainers.

The comparison shows that quality standards for trainers in specialised training institutions (of any kind) in general are higher than for trainers in companies. In every examined country there are minimum quality standards to become a trainer at a training institution (e.g. France, UK, Spain, and Poland). It is a common requirement that trainers in the training institution should have at least high professional expertise and a certificate in the respective profession at least at the level of the programme they train. In some countries an accreditation to become a trainer in a training institution is needed (e.g. France).

In general the quality standards for in-company trainers are lower than for trainers in training institutions. In all countries the in-company trainer should have at least professional expertise in the occupation or field of training. However, a certification or an accreditation for becoming an in-company trainer is not always required. In Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Spain (employment system) and Poland an accreditation is needed (mostly that includes a pedagogical preparation). In the United Kingdom, France and Greece there are no standard formal requirements for in-company trainers. However, the formal requirements are only



relevant for the person responsible for the apprentice in the company. In practice, apprentices may be often accompanied by someone who is different from the person officially responsible.

A well-shaped apprenticeship support system has to consider closely the roles, tasks and responsibilities of the trainers. The training of trainers is key (1) to increase apprenticeship training activities of companies and (2) to increase the quality of apprenticeship training. Skilled trainers can raise the quality and therefore the benefits of apprenticeship training for companies. For example this includes: (1) to deal with young people in a pedagogical sense, (2) to integrate the apprentices in the company and (3) to design effectively the process for workplace learning.

2.2.6 Assessment

To acquire a certificate, learners usually have to undergo an assessment. The purpose of an assessment is to prove that the learners have acquired particular professional competencies, skills and knowledge. The assessment procedure and assessment plan are usually defined in the curriculum (see Chapter 2.2.3). The international comparison shows that the assessment process may be designed in different ways. Basically it could be differentiated between a continuous assessment and an endpoint assessment. Continuous assessment processes are implemented in France, Greece, Spain and Slovenia. Mostly continuous assessment is a combination of ongoing evaluation (e.g. apprenticeship book; regularly meetings between apprentice, in-company trainer and trainer of training institution) and final exams (written or/and practical). Endpoint assessment exists in Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom and Poland.

Assessment is not only an instrument to prove that professional skills and competencies have been acquired by the apprentice, it also helps manage and if necessary adapt the learning process of the apprentices according to the requirements. In other words, assessment is an instrument to ensure and improve the quality of apprenticeship. The implementation of ongoing assessment procedures and evaluations is an instrument to adapt the learning process along the needs of learners and companies. A well-shaped support system has to find ways to introduce, to implement and to improve systematic feedback procedures in a given institutional configuration.

2.3 Institutional Framework/Involvement of Stakeholders

In general, it could be stated that institutions are the result of a dynamic, historical process. Educational institutions are a cornerstone in the institutional configuration of a modern society. Their function is basically to create the skills needed for economic prosperity. Hence educational institutions are complex entities and not easy to understand. Furthermore, the



particular national apprenticeship systems are only a part within a complex setting of educational institutions within a country. So, this chapter shall provide only a basic overview about the differences and similarities of the institutional framework and their major stakeholders. The focus lies on the organisation of the practical part of training.

It can be concluded from the comparison between countries that the main pattern of apprenticeship governance is similar. The governance system is mostly designed as a multilevel structure. The policy, legal basis and responsibilities are defined at central level. At central level the governance is either under the control of the Ministries of Education (e.g. UK, Slovenia) or/and the Ministries of Employment/Economy (Austria, Germany, Spain, France). But the degree of centralisation of the control at the federal level differs between countries. In all of the countries (except Spain) there is a high degree of centralisation. In these countries, the standards and guidelines for apprenticeship training are set at the federal level. According to the constitution in Spain, the autonomous regions have a strong influence on the governance of apprenticeships at the regional level (although general guidelines are defined at federal level). In Greece the governance of the apprenticeship system relies heavily on the implementing institutions due to a lack of nationally defined standards.

The implementation, administration, control and monitoring are settled either at the regional level or at the local level. Regional authorities are heavily involved in France and Spain. In France regional councils have a strong impact on organisational aspects of the training. There are no responsibilities for regional authorities in Austria, Germany, Greece, England, Poland and Slovenia. In Austria, Germany and Slovenia (in future) the chambers are responsible for the administration and control of the implementation at a regional level. In Austria and Germany the chambers are working on behalf of the Ministry of Economy like a regional authority. In the United Kingdom control of implementation is taken over by independent institutions (e.g. quality body). In Poland the chambers are only involved in the sector of craftsmanship (e.g. adaption of curricula, external examination, and organisation of training). In Greece there are no authorities or bodies at the regional level.

The role and involvement of social partners differ widely between countries. In Austria and Germany, the social partners (chambers and representatives of employees) are strongly involved in the governance of the apprenticeship system through committees or advisory boards (in realpolitik the social partners have strong influence on policy and implementation). For example they are involved in the process of developing training regulations and quality assurance. In Slovenia it is planned to strengthen the role of social partners. In Spain, Poland and Greece social partners have an advisory role, but no responsibilities in governance and implementation. Moreover interestingly, in Spain the trade union does not support the implementation of apprenticeship. In the United Kingdom the social partners are not involved.



The implementation of the process of vocational learning takes either place in specialised VET institutions or/and companies. In Austria and Germany the VET institutions are part-time schools with theoretical and practical training. In other countries there are specific (often school-based) VET institutions providing theoretical and practical training operating at different levels. The time arrangement between the VET institution and the company is in some countries (e.g. UK, Spain, Greece, and France) very flexible and individually adaptable to the needs of the apprentices and/or the companies. In Poland and Slovenia the time arrangement is determined by the VET programme. In most countries the VET institutions have the main responsibility for the training of the apprentices (either taken place in the VET institution or company). For example this is the case for Greece and Spain. Companies are not in all systems the main training place.

In general the companies have to meet minimum requirements for the training of apprentices, which are either controlled by the chambers, regional authorities or VET institutions. The companies are obliged to train apprentices according to an agreement with VET institutions (e.g. Spain, Greece) or on the basis of a training regulations (Austria, Germany). Companies are responsible for the organisation of in-company training and support for workplace learning along adequate pedagogical settings. Furthermore in all the countries the companies are not allowed to use apprentices for occupational tasks beyond the field/occupation of the apprenticeship programme.

This short description shows the complexity of the specific institutional settings of the national apprenticeship systems and the responsibilities of the stakeholders. Basically it means that a support system has to be aware of different responsibilities and roles of stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of the training process. A well-constructed supporting system should be conscious about the needs and problems of the stakeholders in the process of implementation. The needs of stakeholders may vary between different apprenticeship schemes.

2.4 Financial Implications

In almost all countries (see chapter 2.2.4) apprentices get remuneration for the training period. The remuneration is a major part of the costs companies have to bear. An exception is Spain (education system) where apprentices receive no remuneration (hence there are no costs for companies). Further costs result out of learning materials, in-company trainers (for time of training as they can't be productive in their profession) and in some cases professional equipment. School-based VET institutions are mainly funded by the public (e.g. Austria, Germany, Greece, Slovenia, and Poland). In France training centres are funded by the state. In Spain and the United Kingdom the companies have to pre-finance the service of the VET institution (and get a public grant in the UK).



In almost all countries extended funding systems are established which reimburse the training costs to a great extent. An exception is Germany where no basic subsidy scheme is in place. On principle two models could be distinguished. (1) In the United Kingdom, France and Austria the funding is based on apprenticeship levies. Companies pay an apprenticeship levy to a dedicated fund. The reimbursement of training costs and incentive payments for the training of apprentices are mainly financed by this fund. (2) Public funding: In Spain, the companies get the costs reimbursed for the training centre. In Greece, there is a basic subsidy up to 50% of the apprenticeship remuneration. In Slovenia, costs for pilot implementation of apprenticeship will be refunded within the ESF project. In Poland, the companies get the costs for apprentices totally refunded (co-financed by the employers).

The funding of apprenticeship training is an important aspect that may be crucial to determine whether companies will offer a training place or not. In countries with a long apprenticeship tradition, it is common employer knowledge – as in Austria or Germany – that apprenticeship training has a positive cost-benefit ratio on the long run. In countries with short apprenticeship tradition, employers may not be aware of the long term benefits of apprenticeship training. A support system should develop persuasive arguments to convince employers that they should train young people. It may be a promising approach to show employers how to implement apprenticeship training as successful recruitment strategy to hire skilled people and train them for their own needs.



3 Support Services for Companies – Status quo

3.1 Supporting institutions

3.1.1 Public Institutions

The role of public institutions and the type of support differ widely between the countries. In Austria, the Federal Ministry for Science, Research and Economy, being responsible for the vocational training in enterprises, offers both financial support (basic subsidies and quality-oriented subsidies) and counselling measures (Coaching for apprentices and training companies). Furthermore, the Austrian Public Employment Service (Arbeitsmarktservice Österreich) plays a crucial role, offering several types of support to companies: Job placement; subsidies for apprenticeships, if companies accept young people from disadvantaged groups; supra-company apprenticeships and integrative vocational education.

In Germany, routine funding and support programmes by the state are regulated by the Code of Social Law III, including vocational preparation, promotion measures and programs, measures to extend vocational orientation, preparatory measures, and funding programs such as JOBSTARTER. Moreover, there are also subsidy programmes by the provinces (Länder).

In the UK, companies are supported by the government by a newly set up Digital Apprenticeship Service. The services include tools to estimate and manage apprenticeship fundings, recruiting apprentices, finding training providers and apprenticeship types.

In Poland, the main support given to companies in regards to vocational training is the reimbursement of the wages of young workers taken as interns or apprentices. This task is conducted the Voluntary Labour Corps by commissioning of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

In Spain the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport as well as the Public State Agency for Employment supports companies indirectly by offering information on the principles of dual training. In addition, regional governments and the regional public employment services provide information and guidance to companies. Furthermore, public schools and VET institutions involved in dual training offer information and coordinate actions between companies and students. Also in Slovenia, schools and their organisation units give support to companies for work based learning.

In Greece, Manpower Organisation of Greece (OAED) supports apprenticeships by career guidance, VET and promotion of employment, the National Institute of Labour and Human Resources is the designated intermediary body of the operational program “Human Resources Development and thus provides training and counselling to small and very small enterprises. Furthermore, universities and technological education institutions are engaged in



apprenticeship programs focussing mainly on general advice on the overall recruitment procedure; on giving information, counselling and support regarding the content of apprenticeship programs and on implementing events through which companies can approach applicants and apprentices.

In France, public institutions mainly support companies at a regional level (Regional Council) by allocating funds to the businesses that are involved in apprenticeship schemes and at a local level to spur very small businesses to take on apprenticeship. Besides, the Maisons de l'Emploi (partner in the SERFA project) may also set up special events to bring together applicants, training organisations and companies.

3.1.2 Social Partnership institutions

In Germany and Austria, social partnership institutions play a vital role in apprenticeship and offer a variety of support services; therefore they are also important providers of support for companies. In Germany the chambers of commerce as the competent bodies provide training consultancy, giving advice regarding extra-company training and inter-company training options in the region, the planning and organisation of apprenticeships, the coordination between company and VET schools. They also provide further education measures to companies. In Austria, the chamber of commerce offers general information on the legal and organisational framework of the dual training (website, brochures, personal advice), information on the recruitment of apprentices and on quality assurance measures, legal information on the apprenticeship contracts and the employment of apprentices, on internships abroad, statistical information on apprenticeship and forms for training documentations as well as training folders. Apprenticeship counsellors at the apprenticeship offices of the Chambers give advice for (starting) training companies and mediators offer help when training related problems arise. Furthermore, the apprenticeship offices administrate the coaching for apprentices and training companies. The chambers also take part in professional orientation via school visits, information days, professional information measures, competence checks, etc.

Also in those countries where social partnership institutions are not directly involved in the legal framework of apprenticeship, they are important stakeholders in regards to support of companies. In Poland, chambers and guilds provide information support to companies, issuing brochures on the apprenticeship training and providing practical information on the organization of apprenticeships, terms of employment, remuneration options, etc. In Spain, the chambers of commerce offer training and in-company training and develop professional certificates foreseen by dual training in the employment system. Therefore they provide



information and assessment to companies in order to enable them to take part in dual training. The main national Spanish trade unions are actually fighting against the dual principles applied in Spain in the **employment system** because they fear frauds and abuses of the “contract for training and learning. Instead, they want to establish dual training in the **education system** with a mandatory contract.

In France the chambers support the businesses through the administrative process of contracting apprentices. In Slovenia, the new Apprenticeship Law enhances the role of chambers in regards to cooperation with schools and employers in the preparation of training plans, the preparation of national catalogues for WBL, to carry out guidance service for employers and mediate between the employer and the apprentice in case of disputes and other tasks. However, the role of chambers currently is mostly not recognised.

In Greece, social partnership institutions focus on implementing voucher training programs for unemployed people in order to place them in jobs in the private sector. In the UK, social partnership organisations do not play a vital role at a national level. Some organisations are identified as training providers for certain sectors.

3.1.3 Private Institutions

In Austria and Poland, private institutions are not involved in supporting companies in regards to apprenticeships. In Austria this is due to the broad support given by public institutions and social partnership institutions and the strict legal framework of initial VET. There are private employment agencies which are subject to the same conditions as the PES in regards to the placement of job applicants, but they are not involved in the placement of apprentices. Also in Slovenia, private institutions do not play a role in giving support for the implementation of WBL.

In Germany, private institutions do play a role in supporting companies. Often, they are funded by public money in the context of regional or national programs and measures. Recently, business consultancies have identified gaps in the markets and start consulting companies e.g. regarding apprenticeship marketing and recruitment. The support given is varied. There is no overview on these services and the effectiveness most likely differs between providers.

In Spain, many private training centres provide advertising, counselling and assessment for dual training such as the “contract for training and learning” as one of their business activities. On the Internet, we can find many consultancies and training centres promoting and providing information on those types of contracts, which contribute to their own development. Furthermore, different organisations, foundations or NGOs work to promote and foster the development of dual training.



In Greece as well, private institutions support companies, one being Gnosi Anaptixiaki Business Development Consulting. This company offers integrated support service like labour and employment market studies, training – employment related studies, assessment of activities supporting employment and vocational training, training material assessment – dissemination of innovation in training, training needs research studies, design and implementation of vocational training programs and implementation of new technologies in Vocational Training (tele-training, e-learning).

In the UK, most employers use an external organisation to provide the Apprenticeship training. Training organisations – colleges of further education or independent training providers – now need to be registered on the new Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers. The training provider can deliver apprenticeship training to employers that will use the apprenticeship service to select the training provider and pay for apprenticeship training, deliver apprenticeship training to their own apprentices, or apprentices of their connected companies’.

In France, the Fondation d’Innovation Pour l’Apprentissage (FIPA) was set up in 2015. The FIPA, working under the scope of foundation FACE, is meant to develop all forms of apprenticeships based on businesses’ initiatives. The FIPA’s purpose is to reach a target figure while it is striving to develop innovative apprenticeship patterns for all, including senior workers and job seekers as part of an actual culture of apprenticeship. However, no significant contribution has been seen since it was set up.



4 Examples of best practice

In the following, a few very different examples of support services for apprenticeships will be presented, illustrating how enterprises can be supported in the planning, preparation and implementation of apprenticeship training.

4.1 *The Apprenticeship Training Agency model (UK)*

Cornwall Maritime Network created the Cornwall Apprenticeship Agency (CAA) in 2012 and pioneered the employer-owned model of providing skills brokerage to SMEs, 92% of whom have never engaged with apprentices. The CAA was awarded its ATA status from the UK National Apprenticeship Service the same year and started trading across all business sectors in Cornwall. Since then the CAA has expanded into the UK Apprenticeship Agency and delivered more than 1,200 new Apprenticeships in SME's across the UK in a broad range of apprenticeship frameworks.

The Apprenticeship Training Agency (ATA) model is intended to support the delivery of a high quality Apprenticeship programme with a focus on small employers who wish to use the services of an ATA to source, arrange and host their Apprenticeships. This could be for a number of reasons including them not being able to commit to the full framework, short term restrictions on employee numbers, or uncertainty about the value of an Apprenticeship.

The distinctive feature of the ATA model is that it is the ATA which acts as the apprentice's employer and which places them with a host employer. The host employer pays the ATA a fee for the apprentice's services; this fee being based on the wage agreed with the host (at least the minimum Apprentice rate) and the ATA management fee.

The ATA model therefore provides useful support to SMEs because it overcomes many of the traditional barriers they face when engaging with apprentices. In particular an ATA:

- provide free SME advice: SMEs do not know how to recruit apprentices;
- helps the SME specify their apprenticeship requirements;
- undertakes low cost but high quality apprentice recruitment;
- acts as the apprenticeship employer, removing the SME from employment legislation;
- provides advice on training provision;
- provides ongoing pastoral support during the apprenticeship to the apprentice to ensure host SMEs release the apprentice for training;



- allows an early transfer from employment in the ATA onto the payroll of the SME, providing a risk free means of trialling the apprentice before employment.

4.2 Coaching for Apprentices and Training Companies (AT)

The aim of the program is to provide both apprentices and training companies with support during training, in order to improve the quality of teaching and, in particular, to counteract the dropout of training. Accordingly, the focus of the objective is also the positive placement of the final examination and, where appropriate, a university entrance degree for apprentices. In addition, the Directive has defined priorities - apprentices with a background of migration and ethnic minorities, young women in untypical professions and training in small and medium-sized enterprises. In addition to the positive completion of the apprenticeship exam, the focus is on an increase of the range of company training courses and on the relief of the small-scale structure through external support.

For enterprises, this measure includes the following aspects:

Consulting for training companies

Companies or persons responsible for training can ask for advice on training, quality management, teaching qualification, further education and additional training, subsidies as well as legal questions via the responsible apprenticeship office in the federal state. For this purpose, a quota of up to 23 consultants is available within the framework of the program. This performance is clearly separated from the coaching, but the consultants can recommend a further coaching.

Coaching for training companies

Similar to apprentice coaching, a coaching for all challenges in the course of the training of apprentices can be applied for at the responsible apprentice office. In the same way, those enterprises which fall under the focus can make use of support services by coaches in the run-up to the apprentices' training or in the development of training. This is to remove any obstacles at an early stage and to increase the willingness to train apprentices.

A case management is not provided in the coaching for training companies, the duration of the coaching process is generally not limited. Further co-workers may be involved on a voluntary basis in the coaching process. The participation of the apprentices may only be implemented with the explicit consent of the apprentices.

The goal of coaching for training companies is, among other things, to increase mutual understanding at the level of the employer and the apprentice and to prevent the early ending of apprenticeship contracts. Training coaches work closely with apprenticeship advisors.



4.3 Promotion measures and programs (DE)

In Germany, an abundance of programmes, tools and instruments support the promotion of vocational education and training. These measures and programs have in common that they target the integration of ‘more difficult’ young people.

Companies benefit by:

- receiving financial support when participating. Additional costs that arise from taking on difficult youngsters are partially covered.
- receiving better oriented, trained and prepared candidates that possess apprenticeship maturity as well as work experience.
- getting to know potential candidates in the practical phases when young people spend time in companies.
- Receiving expert support regarding social, personal and learning problems of potential apprentices.

According to SGB III, there are measures of extended vocational orientation for young people that have not made their choice about a profession. These measures are funded by the federal employment agency as well as schools and training providers.

In order to facilitate the transition from school to dual training for young people with special support needs (e.g. under-performing pupils), there is a career entry support program *Berufseinstiegsbegleitung* (BerEb). It is based on the concept of early and consistent support through apprenticeship mentors. Support covers the entire “education chain” from vocational orientation, career choice, apprenticeship maturity, application procedure and start of the apprenticeship. It ends 6 months after the start of the apprenticeship and thereby, ensures the successful integration.

In order to develop apprenticeship maturity and/or vocational integration, there is the instrument of *Berufsvorbereitende Bildungsmaßnahmen* (BvB). These are pre-professional training measures, funded by the federal employment agency and implemented by training organisations. Measures typically last 10 months and convey practical experience, insight in different job profiles and contents of the first year of an apprenticeship. The young people spend up to half of the time in the company to prepare for training. In addition, an educational institution teaches technical expertise and social skills. Measures include elements of: vocational orientation, vocational basic competences, in-company training, basic competences in IT and media, on-desk training, application training, language development, secondary general school leaving certificate after returning, mobility training, intercultural



training and gender training. Measures are undertaken according to individual training plans stage by stage up to the start of an apprenticeship.

Entry qualification Einstiegsqualifizierung EQ (or EQ Plus) is aimed at young people who have not yet found an apprenticeship vacancy. Under this program, they complete a six- to twelve-month company internship, which prepares them for a specific vocational occupation. When accepted on an apprenticeship, the regular training period can be shortened. Companies can receive subsidies from the federal employment agency to cover the financial compensation for the internship.

Assisted Apprenticeship (Assistierte Ausbildung, AsA) targets young people with special need for support as well as training companies. Prior to the start of an apprenticeship and/or during the phases of in-company training young people receive support regarding: learning difficulties in theory and practice, language problems, social problems, problems in the company or with exams. The objective is the successful completion of the apprenticeship.

4.4 Subsidy program for private companies which provide internships (GR)

OAED is a public corporation with headquarters in Athens and supervised by the Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Welfare. Its first establishment dates back to 1922 and over the years, the organisation has evolved to its current form. The purpose of OAED is the implementation of government policy on employment and to fight unemployment, strengthening and facilitating the integration of the country's workforce in the labour market, insuring against unemployment, promoting vocational education and training and their connection with employment, intellectual and social development of the workforce and their family, in view of improving their standard of living.

OAED offers a subsidy program for private companies which can hire senior students under an apprenticeship scheme. The duration of the program is different for each category of students. For example, university students can have a 3 or a 6-month apprenticeship. Students from technological institutes are obliged to have their 6-month apprenticeship in order to have their degree. OAED motivates businesses and generally, private sector employers, banks and institutions, organisations or services not covered by the public sector, to accept students for the accomplishment of their internship, (in order to facilitate the necessary training process to obtain their degree). The used means are everyday practical techniques and guidance from experienced staff of the company to the trainees. This particular method is much in request from the private sector. The advantages are for both sides (employer & employee). Firstly, the employer has new people ready to learn about the practical techniques of his company. Secondly he receives subsidy for each apprenticeship he offers.



5 Experience and needs of enterprises: results of the company survey

A small company survey was conducted to explore the needs of enterprises in eight countries (Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Spain, Slovenia, United Kingdom, and Poland). In the country reports the results of the survey are described individually for each country. This report focuses on the transnational results and shall gain basic insights about common and diverging needs of companies in different national contexts.

5.1 Target groups chosen for survey

The survey was conducted via an online tool. The online survey was centrally implemented by the SERFA Austrian project partner (Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training) in seven language versions. The partners were responsible for inviting companies to complete the online survey in their respective language. Most of the project partners used their extended business network to invite them to participate (see country reports for further information) with particular focus on small and medium enterprises. Thus the selected target group for the survey is not representative of the business structure of the participating countries.

For analysis purposes only fully completed questionnaires were used. The total sample represents 268 companies (Austria: n=20 companies, France: n=30 companies, Germany: n=56 companies, Greece: n=22 companies, Slovenia: n=25 companies, Spain: n=65 companies, United Kingdom: n=28 companies, Poland: n=22 companies).

5.2 Statistical Profile of participants

In total the sample represents micro, small and medium sized companies. Three out of four companies in the sample have less than 100 employees. This corresponds well to the main target group of the overall SERFA project. The small number of big sized companies (more than 250 employees) in the sample is mainly located in Austria, Germany, Spain and Slovenia. For the other countries there are only micro, small and medium sized companies in the sample.

Currently the majority of companies in the sample are employing apprentices in their company. This applies particularly for countries with a well-established apprenticeship system (Austria, Germany, United Kingdom and France) and Slovenia. For Spain and Poland there is a small number of training companies in the sample. Most of the training companies have between one and five apprentices.



Table 1: Company size and number of apprentices of participating companies

Answer	Count	Percentage	Answer	Count	Percentage
1 to 4 employees (1)	49	18,3%	No apprentice	120	44,8%
5 to 9 employees (2)	45	16,8%	1-5 apprentice	90	33,6%
10 to 25 employees (3)	50	18,7%	6-10 apprentices	18	6,7%
26 to 49 employees (4)	30	11,2%	11-25 apprentices	16	6,0%
50 to 99 employees (5)	26	9,7%	26-50 apprentices	15	5,6%
100 to 249 employees (6)	28	10,4%	51-250 apprentices	9	3,4%
250 to 499 employees (7)	8	3,0%	Total	268	100,0%
500 or more employees (8)	32	11,9%			
Total	268	100,0%			

Source: SERFA-business survey (n=268 companies).

The sector structure of business in the sample is evenly distributed, with the exception of “Manufacture of food products” sector which is strongly overrepresented. This is because the business network of the Spanish project partner FEDACOVA comprises mainly the agri-food sector. In the German subsample there is strong emphasis on the sector of accommodation and catering.

Table 2: Sector of business (ISIC4 standard)

Answer	Count	Percentage
Manufacture of food products	41	15,3%
Other economic services	19	7,1%
Accommodation and catering	17	6,3%
Education and training	12	4,5%
Information and communication	12	4,5%
Construction of buildings	10	3,7%
Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment	9	3,4%
Health and social services	7	2,6%
Manufacture of machinery and equipment n.e.c. (Not elsewhere classified)	7	2,6%
Retail trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles	6	2,2%
Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	6	2,2%
Marine industries and services	5	1,9%
Other manufacturing	5	1,9%
Other services (hairdresser, cleaning, employment services)	5	1,9%
Wholesale trade, except of motor vehicles and motorcycles	5	1,9%
Other (less than n=5)	102	38,1%
Total	268	100,0%

Source: SERFA-business survey (n=268 companies).

5.3 Reasons for not offering apprenticeships/internships

The vast majority in the transnational sample specified that they have a previous experience of apprenticeships. Almost three out of four companies stated that they have offered apprenticeships in the last five years or even more than five years. Only companies in Greece, Spain and the United Kingdom report less experience with apprenticeship than the average.



Table 3: Have you offered an apprenticeship in the last five years?

Answer	Count	Percentage
No, I never have offered apprenticeships (1)	60	22,4%
Not in the last five years, but I had apprentices before that time (2)	18	6,7%
Yes: 1-5 apprentices during the last five years (3)	105	39,2%
Yes: more than 5 during the last five years (4)	85	31,7%
Total	268	100,0%

Source: SERFA-business survey (n=268 companies).

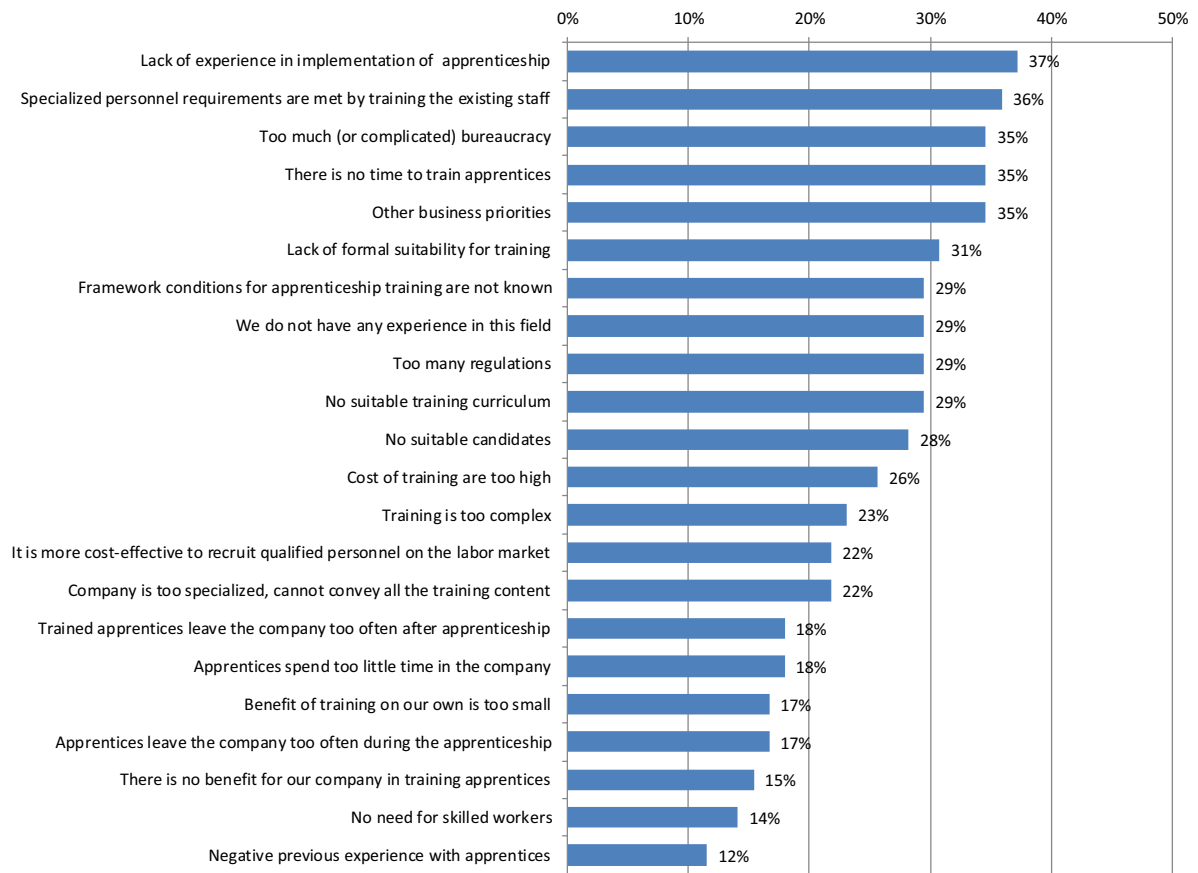
The reasons why companies have not offered apprenticeships in the last five years are varied from a transnational perspective. The top reasons relate to formal requirements to become a training company (personnel requirements, bureaucracy etc.) and different priorities of companies (no time, other business priorities etc.). The companies do not have any experience to deal with different barriers for providing apprenticeship training. Interestingly the low costs-benefits-ratio argument is not decisive for not offering apprenticeship training.

In particular, countries with a rather short apprenticeship tradition answered that they do not know the framework for apprenticeship training sufficiently and they do not know how to implement training in their companies due to a lack of experience (e.g. Greece, Spain, and Slovenia). In Poland companies don't see a benefit in offering apprenticeship places.

Consequently, from a transnational perspective a support system with the aim to overcome training barriers must address different issues. Indeed the barriers to apprenticeship training have a common denominator (lack of experience, knowledge of framework, knowledge for implementing). But the results indicate also (on this item country specific responses are rather small) that the tangible support measures have to take the institutional conditions in each country into account. For example, the cost-benefit factor related to apprenticeship training depends heavily on the duration of the in-company training. Furthermore, if the duration of apprenticeship training is short, it is difficult to bind apprentices to the training company and consequently apprentices will leave the company after the training very likely.



Figure 1: What are the reasons why you have not offered apprenticeships in the last five years?



Source: SERFA-business survey (n=78 companies, filter question).

5.4 Reasons for training apprentices/interns

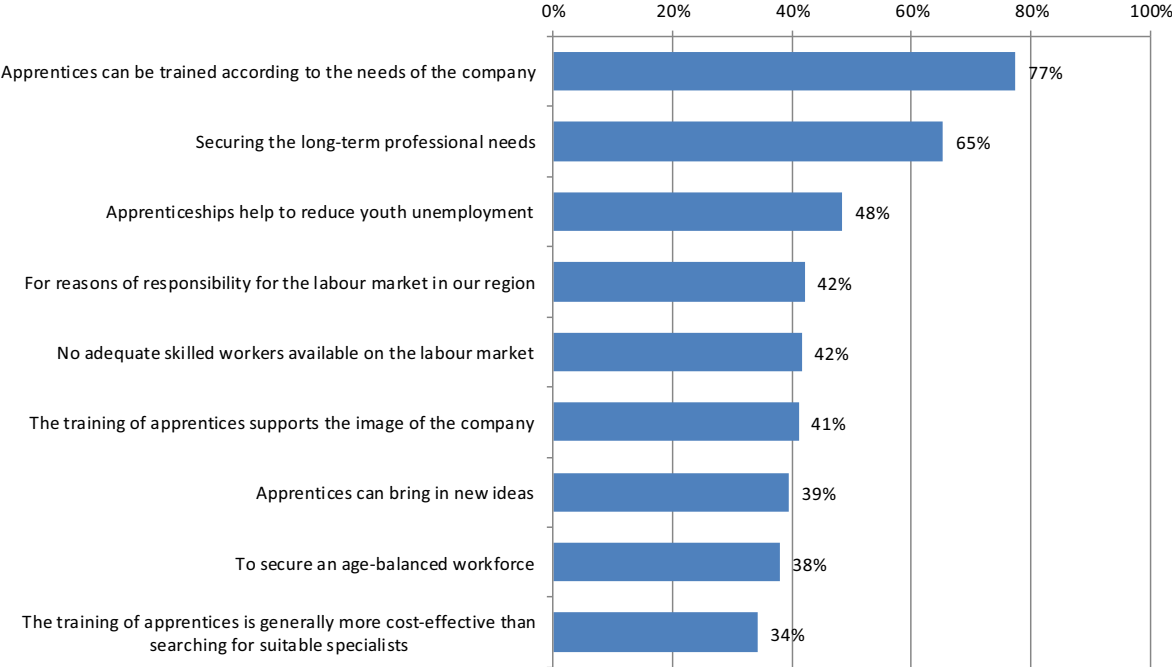
A great share of companies in the sample state that they have had experience with apprentices for at least five years. From a transnational perspective the main motivation of companies to engage in apprenticeship training is that they can train their own workforce according to the needs of the company. Companies are aware of a major advantage of apprenticeship training: the possibility to adapt training according to the company-specific needs within the apprenticeship framework. Strongly interconnected with that motivation is the second most important reason: to secure long-term professional needs. This means that for companies the offer of a training place is not just a short term investment, but is a long-term strategy to equip themselves with skilled workers on the long-run.

These two major reasons apply for all countries in the sample (except Poland), but with slight differences in the ranking order. Interestingly, in Austria and Germany the reason “secure long-term professional needs” is more important than that “apprentices can be trained to company-specific needs”. The explanation may be that in both countries (both have a long tradition in apprenticeship training) exist a strong occupational labour market which



relies on a skilled workforce. Hence, the engagement in apprenticeship training is aligned to a long term perspective. Companies in both countries see apprenticeship as an investment with a positive long-term cost-benefit ratio.

Figure 2: What are the reasons you have taken on an apprentice before?



Source: SERFA-business survey (n=190 companies, filter question).

The ratings of the other potential reasons are nearly equally distributed. Remarkable is the rather high agreement to non-firm-specific motivations “to reduce youth unemployment” and “responsibility for the labour market in our region”. This is an indicator that companies engage themselves in apprentice training not only for economic reasons but also to take social responsibility in their region. But of course, to strengthen the regional labour market means at the same time to secure the external supply of a skilled workforce. In particular, this is important for companies in Austria, Germany and Slovenia. The statement that “apprenticeships help to reduce youth unemployment” has high approval rates in France, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom and Poland. Companies in these countries agree that apprenticeship is a proper remedy to youth unemployment.

Other reasons such as “support the image of a company”, “bring new ideas”, “secure an age-balance workforce” and “apprenticeship is cost-effective” are particularly important for the same countries. For Austrian and German companies, to secure an age-balanced workforce is rather important. In Greece and the United Kingdom, companies see in apprenticeships a cost-effective way to hire skilled workforce.

It is important to know the main reasons of companies' engagement in apprenticeship training:

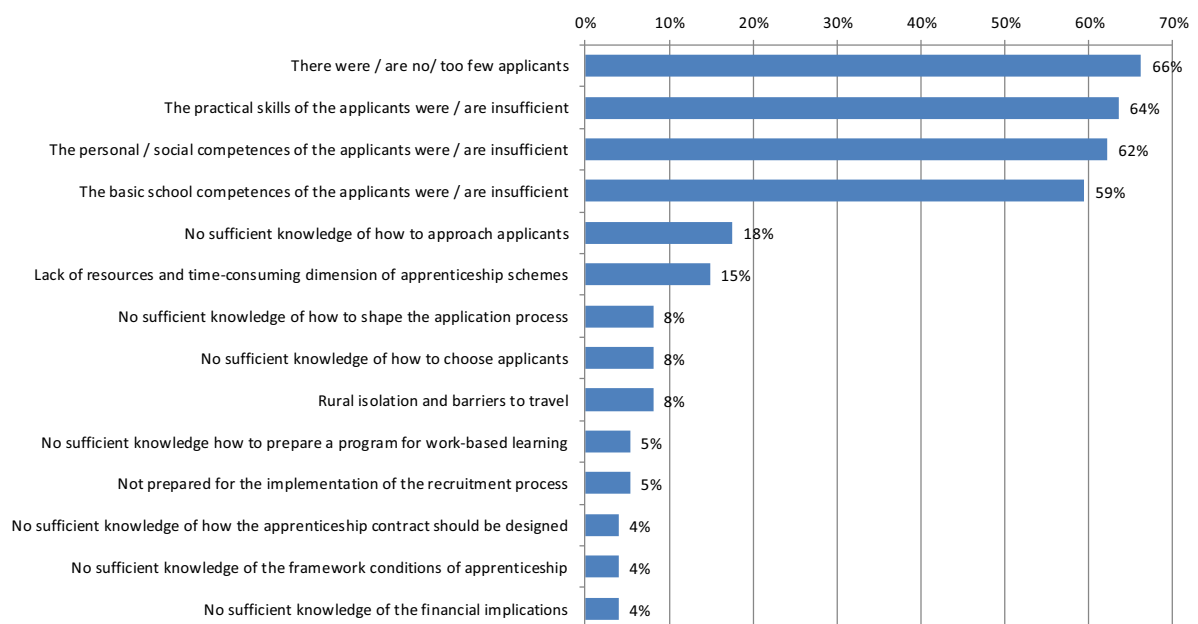
- to motivate non- training companies to offer training places
- to motivate training companies to continue with apprenticeship training (e.g. find solutions to overcome problems)
- to increase the number of training places offered

A support system can use them as rational arguments to convince companies and approach them at different levels (e.g. economic, social responsibility).

5.5 Recruitment of apprentices/interns: Problems, challenges and needs

In the transnational sample, about 40 Percent of the companies report that they had problems with recruiting young people to fill in the offered training places. But the analysis at country-specific level shows that this result is the outcome of extraordinary approval rates in Austria, Germany and partly in France. In the remaining countries, problems in recruiting apprentices are rather low.

Figure 3: What were these problems [in the recruitment process]?



Source: SERFA-business survey (n=74 companies, filter question).

The results of the survey reveal a clear picture regarding the kind of recruitment problems companies have to deal with. Note that the figure includes only companies (mostly German and Austrian companies) which reported problems in the recruiting process. The most important problem is that there are too few applicants that apply for the offered training



places. On the German apprenticeship market the number of unfilled apprenticeship posts exceeds the number of young people who want to begin an apprenticeship. The second most important problems relates to the skills and competencies of the young people. Companies complain that the levels of practical skills, social competencies and basic school competencies of the applicants are too low for the requirements of the apprenticeship place.

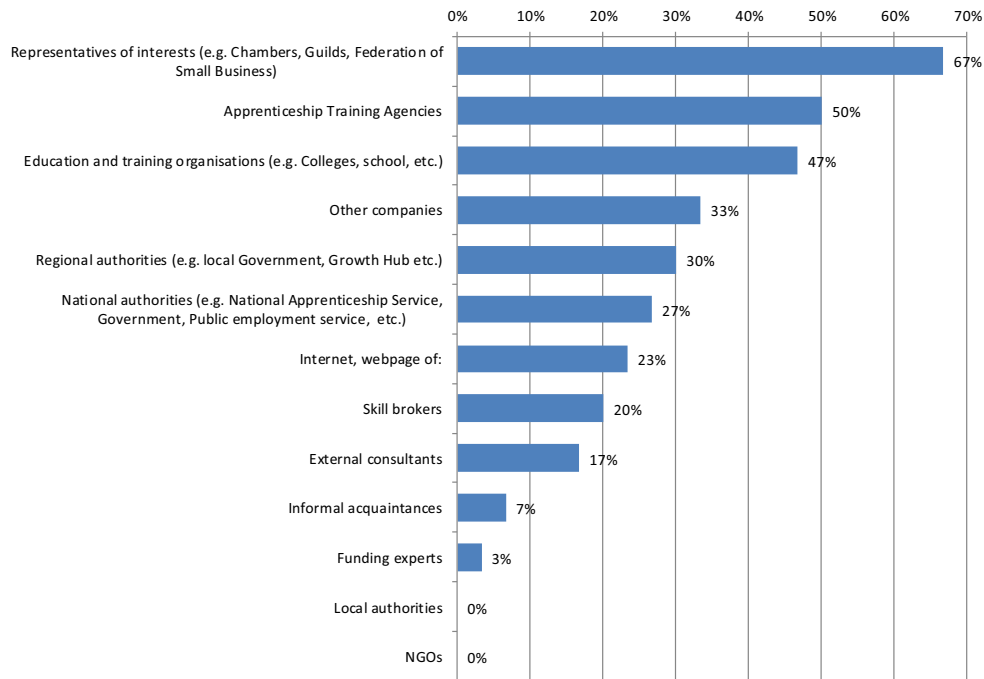
Other barriers such as the company's lack of knowledge of how to organise the recruitment process adequately are not the main reason stated by the business. One could identify here a contradiction. On the one hand companies complain about low numbers of interested young people and on the other hand they do not reflect if their own recruitment process addresses young people in a suitable way. The changing labour market needs changes in the organisation of the recruitment process in order to be an attractive training company and to address new target groups. A support system could identify problems in the recruitment process and help to deal with problems to fill an apprenticeship place with young people who meet the requirements or to organise the learning process according to the competencies of the chosen young people.

5.6 Support received

Only about 40 percent of the companies which reported problems in the recruitment process specified that they received support in dealing with their problems. The subsample in this question almost only represents Austrian and German companies ($n > 3$ companies). The reasons may be: (1) there are problems in the recruitment of apprentices in these companies only due to a different situation on the labour market and (2) an extensive support system has been established only in these two countries.



Figure 4: Did you receive support in dealing with these problems. If yes, please specify:



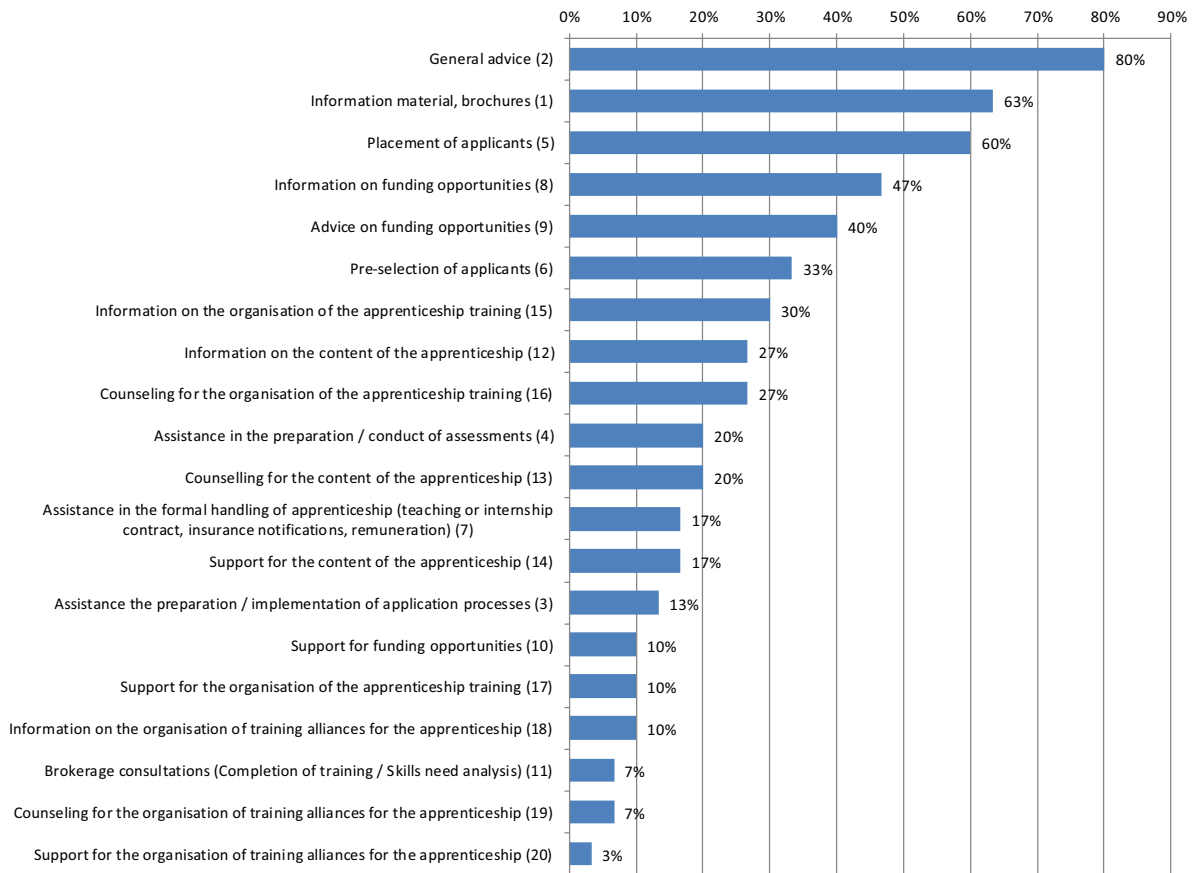
Source: SERFA-business survey (n=30 companies, filter question).

The majority of supported companies received support by bodies of representatives of business interests. That is because in Austria and Germany the chambers of employers have legal responsibilities for the implementation (e.g. administration, control, quality assurance) of the apprenticeship system. Also important for companies are the specialised apprenticeship training agencies which might differ between the countries. As apprenticeship training takes place mostly in cooperation with other training organisations (e.g. colleges, schools, training centres) these institutions are important resources for dealing with problems in the recruitment process. Interesting is that other companies are sometimes also a help for fighting problems. Companies may work together and may cooperate in the recruitment process rather than being competitive.

One remarkable feature is that national authorities (e.g. public employment services) are not very helpful to deal with recruitment problems. The same is true for specialised services like “skill brokers”, “external consults” and “funding experts” (except in the UK). An explanation for this result is not that such services are not helpful but rather that these services/offers don’t exist in the countries of this subsample (mainly represented by Austria and Germany). Also electronic resources (internet, webpages) were used infrequently.



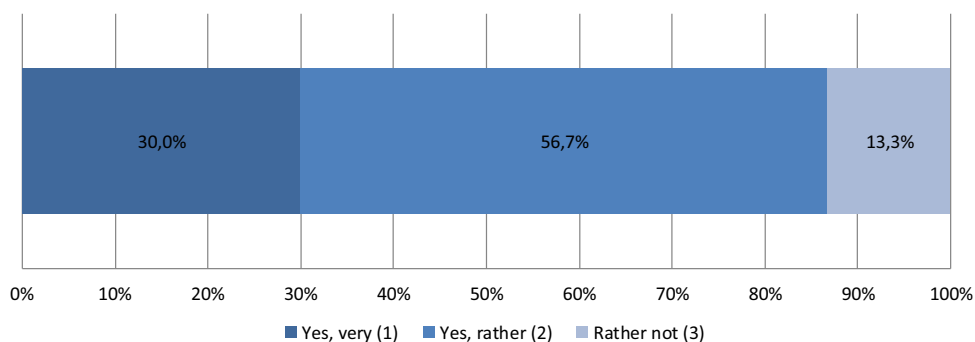
Figure 5: Which support did you receive?



Source: SERFA-business survey (n=30 companies, filter question).

The main topics of the received support are “general advice”, “information material, brochures” and “placement of applicants”. Important topics are also information and advice about “funding opportunities”. Notably specific topics like “pre-selection of applicants”, information and counselling about the “organisation and content of apprenticeship”, support in the “application process” were not chosen by the companies. It is difficult to judge whether there isn’t a need from companies regarding specific topics or there are no specific offers to talk about these topics.

Figure 6: Did you benefit from the support?



Source: SERFA-business survey (n=30 companies, filter question). Remark: Answer category “Not at all (4)” with zero responses.

Companies answered that they partly benefitted from the support. That means on one hand that support services are able to support companies in dealing with problems, but on the other hand it indicates also that support services could be improved.

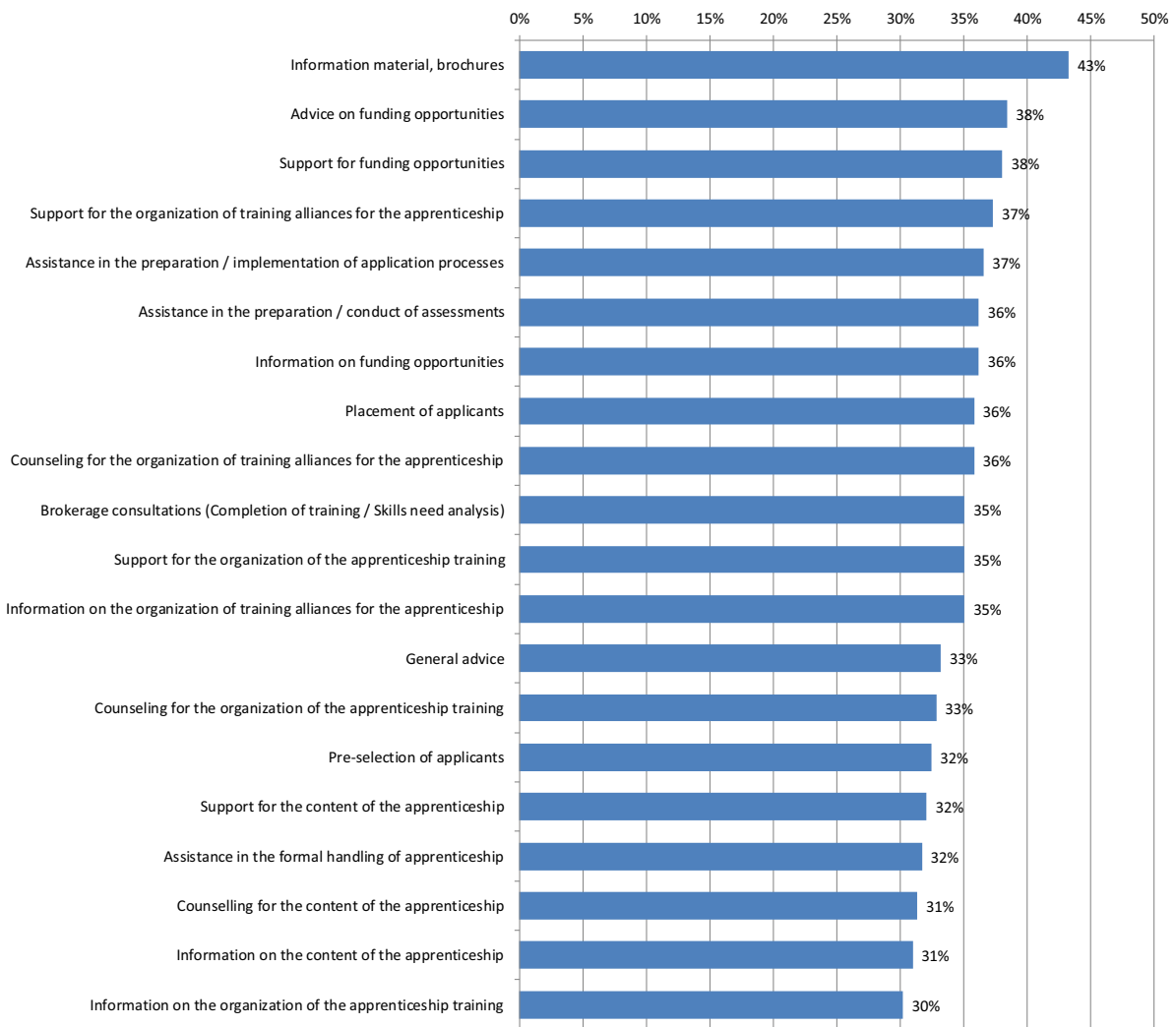
5.7 Need for support

In the survey we asked all of the participating companies what kind of support they would like to receive for the preparation and the implementation of apprenticeship training. We provided therefore a list of twenty different support measures and themes. The result is presented in the graph below (Figure 7). The agreement responses on each item are not very high. The agreement rates do not vary much between various measures listed in the questionnaire. The interpretation of this result is therefore difficult.

The preparation and implementation of apprenticeships is a complex process and may depend strongly on the preconditions of a company, the organisation, the size, the sector of industry and so on and so forth. From this it follows that the needs of companies are very different to each other. The proper measure for one company may not be the proper one for another company. Companies wish support measures specifically designed for their individual needs. All kinds of support measures (e.g. information, advice, assistance, guidance, counselling) are relevant for companies. Although the results show no country-specific patterns, the needs of the companies may be influenced by the institutional setting.



Figure 7: What kind of support would you like to receive in the preparation and implementation of apprenticeships?

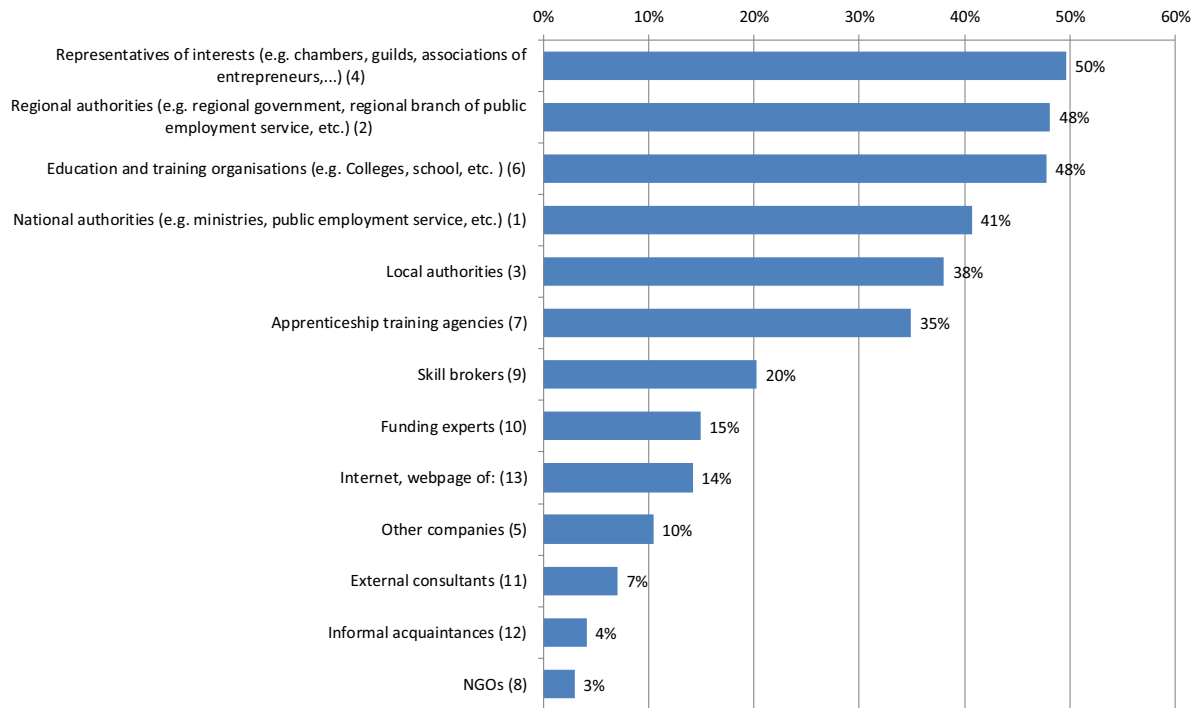


Source: SERFA-business survey (n=268 companies).

Companies would like to receive the support by the main institutions that are responsible for the administration and implementation of the apprenticeship system (Figure 8). On a transnational perspective companies want support services mainly by (1) representatives of employers, (2) authorities on national, regional and local level and (3) training organisations.

The nominations of employer representative bodies are particularly high in Austria, Germany, Greece and Spain; and very low in the United Kingdom. Notably in Austria, Germany, Slovenia (all three on national and regional level), Spain (regional level), France and Poland (both on local level) companies would (also) like to receive support by authorities on different levels. Companies in Greece and the United Kingdom expect no particular support by authorities.

Figure 8: And by whom?



Source: SERFA-business survey (n=268 companies).

More wanted support from education and training organisations and/or apprenticeship training agencies were specified in Austria, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Slovenia and Spain.

Other institutions like “Skill brokers”, “Funding experts”, “External consultants” and “NGOs” have in all countries except in the United Kingdom only low numbers of frequencies. That may be explained by the fact that similar services are not available in the countries and therefore not known. Another reason e.g. for the counts of “Skills brokers” in the United Kingdom is, that a number of companies which made use of the services of a skill broker were invited to answer the questionnaire.

In general it may be concluded that these results reflect the varying institutional configuration of apprenticeship in the countries. Companies want to specifically get support services from those institutions which are responsible for the implementation of apprenticeship.



6 Conclusion

6.1 In general

The **Austrian dual system** is a well-established part of the Austrian system of vocational education. There is an elaborated legal framework and a rather complex system of governance. The involvement of social partner institution is one of the key factors of the high acceptance of the apprenticeship system. Furthermore, there is a differentiated system of subsidies and grants which gives incentives to companies to train apprentices.

The strength of the Austrian dual system (as well as the German or Swiss model) is the combination of two learning places: Vocational schools for the theoretical part of vocational education and general education and the companies for the practical training. In the apprenticeship system the apprentices learn how to work in a workplace setting and a work process. As the apprenticeship contract is both training and an employment contract, there is a smooth transition from education to employment. That is one of the reasons why youth unemployment is still rather low in Austria

Nevertheless, the number of applicants as well as apprenticeships offered is declining not only because of demographic reasons. On the one hand, the dual system has to compete with other forms of initial education (such as full-time vocational schools on different levels, schools of higher education and the tertiary educational institutions), the image of apprenticeship is declining, and fewer youngsters with high potentials decide to take up apprenticeship. On the other hand, those who go for apprenticeship sometimes lack basic competences which make it difficult for companies to select apprentices. Furthermore, the quality management of apprenticeship needs improvement both on a systemic level and within the companies.

German enterprises generally show a rather high interest in providing apprenticeships. The benefits they gain from providing training are clear; companies know what they can win. If companies don't engage in apprenticeships, then for different reasons:

- Companies think they don't have a demand in skilled workers. This, however, is a very short-term perspective. Sooner or later, demand will arise and will have to be covered from the external labour market. With the growing lack of skilled workers due to the demographic change, this strategy will become ever more difficult especially for SMEs.
- Companies fail to find qualified applicants. This shows a demand in companies giving more importance to apprentice recruitment as well as in modernising recruitment strategies.



- Companies are too specialised. This shows a demand in more collaborative training networks that step in where companies on their own cannot cover the entire training regulation.
- Companies think that apprentices too often leave the company after completed training. This shows lacking awareness of the means of integrating and committing apprentices/employees to the company.
- Companies have generally made negative experience with apprentices and therefore, withdrawn from training. This issue can refer to a bundle of problems whose origin are not necessarily (solely) the apprentices. Apprenticeships are realised within relationships between companies and apprentices, and both parties often contribute to problems. Negative experience may be related e.g. to recruitment issues as well as to the quality of the provided training.

Looking at the demands expressed by surveyed companies, one further issue has been expressed:

- Companies require support on funding opportunities.

Apprenticeship, or dual training as it is called in **Spain**, is a quite recent policy in this country, replacing since 2012-2013 the old “internship” policies. The willingness of developing apprenticeship is unanimous and strong at national and regional level. It was born with the economic crisis and inspired by German apprenticeship solutions, considered as a model in this field, with many years of experience.

However, as anything new, dual training in Spain is imperfect and still have number of deficiencies. First, dual training is very opaque, and lack of clarity. We can find two main ways of accessing dual training in Spain:

- The academic way, supported by the ministry of education. In this case, a student of medium or high grade of vocational training can chose to perform part of his training in a company, in the framework of his formal I-VET. In this case, there is no mandatory working contract for the student, who will receive a grant which will be variable, depending on his region, school, city, company...This dual training is growing fast since its implementations, as over the first years, the number of students choosing this modality grew up over 200%.
- The employment way, supported by the ministry of employment and social security. In this case, a youth unemployed can apply for a professional certificate, and through his VET provider, get a “contract for training and learning” with a company. The company will get bonus for his employment, covering the youth cost in the company.



This dual training, despite successful, is criticized by trade unions as they reproach it to foster precarious employment conditions instead of facilitating labour market integration, without offering clear educational value, as the professional certificate accreditation lacks of transparency.

Also, apprenticeship in Spain suffers from a notoriety deficiency among companies. SMEs surveyed in the region of Valencia revealed that if most of them still don't take apprentices, it is mostly due to the lack of knowledge and understanding about dual training modalities, while companies having hosted apprentices generally didn't reported particular difficulties. Also, if the desk research evidences the existence of supporting organisations, mostly regional authorities, these services seem to be rather addressed to youth than companies. The companies surveyed missed support from public services and from business support associations.

Following the change of government in 2015, extensive reforms in the education sector of **Poland** were announced at the end of 2015 . The aim of the reforms is to raise the quality of education in upper secondary schools, including vocational schools. Under the education reform, starting from the 2017/2018 school year, Poland is to return to its previous system of eight-year elementary schools followed by four-year high schools or five-year technical schools.

In addition, the school year 2014–2015 was declared as the 'Year of Vocational Schools', which was marked by a programme of improvement of the quality of vocational education. The sector, neglected and underfunded until recently, now has a chance to adjust to conditions in the contemporary labour market, both in Poland and in Europe. Efforts to increase the attractiveness and quality of vocational education in Poland are being made, however still systematic cooperation with companies remains an issue. The mismatch between qualifications required by the labour market and those provided by VET schools remains significant.

The funding method for VET means that Powiat authorities fund VET programmes even if qualifications are not in demand, while it discourages them from funding vocational qualifications that are costlier to provide and often more in demand (Cedefop 2015a). However, within the framework of the current reform of vocational education it is planned to strengthen actions aimed at closer linking education with the labour market.



In **Slovenia** schools are responsible for most of the tasks regarding arrangement and preparation of WBL in companies as well as for quality assurance. As evaluations of CPI have shown, the majority of information and guidance for companies is provided by the schools.

In **Greece**, there is a specific legal framework regulating and framing the implementation of apprenticeships programs and projects. We can separate the apprenticeships in Greece into three main categories:

- a) Apprenticeships for university students (2-6 months)
- b) Apprenticeships for technological institutes' students (6 months)
- c) Apprenticeships for Training Institutes' and technical schools' students, supervised by the Manpower Organization of Greece (OAED)

All professions and branches are available for someone who is looking to have his/her practice, so the trainees need to search the best company for them, as well as the companies for the perfect trainees.

The specific curricula for the implementation of different apprenticeship programs are designed according to the field of studies / expertise and, therefore, the needs of the trainees.

Regarding the remuneration of trainees within apprenticeship programs, the salary equals to 80% of the official national salary of an unskilled worker, according to the National General Collective Labour Agreement. In government agencies, public entities, etc., a different remuneration system applies.

- The main key stakeholders for apprenticeship in Greece are:
- Manpower Employment Organization of Greece
- Universities and educational institutions
- Public and private VET institutions
- Social partner institutions

6.2 For the aims and objectives of the project

In **Austria**, public institutions (ministries, the Austrian Public Employment Service) as well as social partner institutions provide a great variety of support for training companies (both in regard to financial, organisational, legal and educational aspects) in order to keep up the level of apprenticeships offered as well as to raise the quality of training. Despite of the involvement of social partners, which take a vital role in developing training regulations, accreditation of training companies, final examination of apprentices and – last but not least



– information and counselling of training companies and apprentices, especially small and medium –sized companies often are reluctant of taking part in dual training. This is partially due to a lack of information on the benefits of training apprentices and partially to a lack of direct guidance and counselling.

As well as some of the support measures and tools developed and implemented in the Austrian system could serve as a model for other countries (e.g. the variety of quality oriented subsidies) the Austrian system also needs innovative approaches to individual support for SMEs.

The SERFA fields of action can be derived from the expressed problems and demands of companies and in **Germany**, are as follows:

Regarding issue 1: SERFA could raise companies' awareness regarding the changing labour market in Germany and the growing lack of skilled staff across industries. Providing apprenticeships is one way forwards to tackle this issue which is why the importance of apprenticeship grows. The sooner companies start providing training the more competitive they are in the present and future. SERFA could encounter this problem e.g. by an awareness / information campaign.

Regarding issue 2: SERFA could help raising awareness of the grown importance of recruitment issues and convey information on how to improve and modernise apprentice recruitment. SERFA thereby could build on the outputs of the StartApp project that has developed a manual containing nearly 50 instruments of apprentice recruitment and an abundance of practical tips and advice in this context.

Regarding issue 3: An option for SERFA would be strengthening collaborative training networks. There are many ways to do so; however, pre-conditions in partner countries are very different. Thus, the project needed to find feasible means that would work in all partner countries and go along with the project budget.

Regarding issue 4: SERFA could tackle the issue by illustrating means of integrating and committing apprentices/employees. There is an abundance of instruments available; however, companies often don't implement them. Raising the awareness for the importance of retaining apprentices (also to prevent drop-outs during the apprenticeship) and providing respective tools to companies could be a task of SERFA.

Regarding issue 5: There is a lot companies can do themselves to avoid negative experience with apprentices and there is a large potential of raising awareness of such measures. In this context, SERFA could provide material regarding e.g.



- Designing an effective company training plan and ensure the organisation of training according to plan
- Improving apprentice recruitment: better selecting suitable candidates that fit in the company and have the required hard and soft skills; better adaptation to the current apprenticeship market and means of taking on low-achieving youngsters
- Improving integration: better welcoming apprentices and improving the induction phase
- Raising the motivation of apprentices
- Providing a friendly work environment and suitable facilities
- Providing qualified trainers
- Establishing a positive relation between trainer and apprentice (including feedback culture and conflict management)
- Defining transparent learning objectives and providing a concept/schedule that works towards it (including regular reflexions)
- Improving the cooperation between learning venues (VET school and company)

These are all aspects of apprenticeship quality. In order to tackle such issues, SERFA could build on the project Berlin Apprenticeship Quality that has developed a quality concept for in-company training.

Regarding issue 6: There is already an abundance of information and advice regarding funding opportunities available, provided mainly by chambers and employment agencies. Developing additional material therefore doesn't seem to be useful; however, companies needed to be encouraged to actively seek the information that is available.

Very useful information gained through the survey in **Greece** is regarding the main problems / challenges that companies face during the apprenticeship procedure. The main problems are:

- The basic school competences of the applicants were / are insufficient
- The practical understanding or basic practical skills of the applicants were / are insufficient
- There were / are no/ too few applicants
- The personal / social competences of the applicants were / are insufficient
- The lack of knowledge on how to choose the right applicants
- The lack of resources and time-consuming dimension of apprenticeship schemes



- The lack of knowledge on how to share the application process and approach the applicants

In order for companies to be able to deal with and overcome these problems / challenges, the following needs for support are formed:

- Support, information and advice for funding opportunities
- Assistance in the formal handling of apprenticeship (teaching or internship contract, insurance notifications, remuneration)
- Pre-selection of applicants
- Information on the content of the apprenticeship.
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For **Spain**, the main deficiencies identified are the lack of publicity of apprenticeship, providing general understanding of dual training opportunities, so as to eliminate the first apprehension of companies and encourage them to go toward work based training programmes. Then, there is a lack of very practical and ground based information, such as information on funding programmes, pre-selection procedures, etc.

In order to overcome this need, in Spain, initiatives should be reinforced, focusing especially on dissemination and oriented supporting services offered to companies.

The survey conducted in the SMEs sector for SERFA purposes in **Poland** confirms the need of better engagement of SMEs into apprenticeship schemes. The need was previously identified in the report „Cooperation of vocational schools with employers” by NATIONAL CENTRE FOR SUPPORTING VOCATIONAL AND CONTINUING EDUCATION with adequate recommendations on national, regional, local and school levels.

Although, the surveyed companies in majority do not report recruitment problems with apprentices (88%), which is due to the apprenticeship system in Poland (the involvement of enterprises in VET is mostly arranged through agreements between employers and individual schools) they still need support required mainly for funding opportunities (90%), training alliances, brokerage consultation as well as assistance in formal handling of apprenticeship (more than 50% respondents indicated the above). Moreover, the involvement of companies in the apprenticeship and willingness to host and train apprentices is not on the satisfactory level. It results also from less interest in VET system in last two decades when more emphasis was put on general education than VET.



The Serfa survey results show that surveyed companies in **Slovenia**, who have no experiences with WBL, need properly skilled workers. We could assume that they do not expect those needs to be fulfilled by offering the apprenticeships; because the most frequent very important reason for not having apprentices those participants chose is “other business priorities”. The next reasons by importance are lack of knowledge regarding training procedures, regulations and bureaucracy. This gives the Serfa project an opportunity to spread awareness among the companies that by offering apprenticeship they can train their own employees.

Companies that have (or had) students on WBL are aware of the advantages of practical training of youth, especially in meeting their specific and long term professional needs that they cannot fulfil with the workers on labour market. Surveyed companies have chosen social responsibility as the second most important category of their motivation for training young people. This point of view is however not common in the country as previous projects, evaluations and public debate about the new apprenticeship law have indicated, but it presents the direction to be fostered, within the Serfa project as well.

Most participants do not cite any problems with recruitment of students, which is not surprising, considering the usual selection procedure of companies for WBL. Answers of the companies that have problems with the recruitment show the well-known picture in our country: the companies are unwilling to invest into the practical training (investment of time and skills of employees to train students) and complain about the insufficient competences of the youth at the same time. This gap could be well addressed through the Serfa communication strategies.

For surveyed companies the financial aspect is the least important motivation for accepting a student for practical training, which does not contradict the most important needs to support for companies, where top needs are related to funding opportunities. Funding for companies is mostly project based and there are constant changes. Here we also have to take into account that in Slovenia there are no calculations on cost/benefit ratio available. Other most important needs for the companies that could be addressed within Serfa project are assistance in formal handling of apprenticeship and counselling for the organization of training alliances for the apprenticeship, especially for SMEs.

