

# On-the-Job and Off-the-Job Training in European Companies Context

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**Abstract:** Companies face unexpected changes in an economic, social, and global environment. Their training and development activities could overcome this uncertainty and support their innovation power. Selecting a suitable form of training affects the company's competitiveness and is one of the essential issues of the company's success. Therefore, the European statistical office regularly conducts a Continual Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) over five years. The survey collects data about training and development activities in enterprises with more than ten employees in 29 European countries. The paper uses CVTS data to analyse the training activities in the workplace over 15 years. It focuses on the intensity of training and methods used in companies. The findings reveal different approaches in selected individual countries and time development. Thus, the article brings new research questions to the human capital investment topic.

**Keywords:** enterprises; on-job training; off-job training; European Continual Vocational Training Survey

**JEL Classification:** M12; M53; 015

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation, technological progress, and crises challenge companies and their training and development systems. As Vasanthi and Basariya (2019) point out, employee training is essential and unavoidable for the growth of an organisation. The idea underlying this assumption is that training plays a key role in enhancing two of the main sources of competitive advantage for the firm: its human capital and its organisational knowledge (Aragon et al., 2003; 2014). The acquisition of training and skill has been seen as a long-term strategy on part of either the employer or the employee, overlooking the immediate requirements of the job in which the employee is currently working (Korpi & Tåhlin, 2021). It is an essential part of the organisational learning (OL) approach. As Aragón points out, one of the approaches to OL defines it as a process by which organisations learn and develop new knowledge. This process is integrated by another four sub-processes: knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation and memory (Huber, 1991).

The COVID-19 pandemic hindered training in enterprises and posed significant challenges for training (OECD, 2021). Training and development lead to a broad spectrum of economic and social benefits, such as innovation (Makkonen & Lin, 2012), improved health and well-being of employees, and better adaptation to changes (OECD, 2021). Training and development affect the company's productivity (De Grip & Sauermann, 2013). Therefore,

firms should carefully plan investments in these activities with a long-term view and systematic approach (Vodák & Kucharčíková, 2011). The provision of training is changing, there is a shift in delivering of training, especially a shift to online is more evident (CEDOFOP, 2022).

This paper investigates the training activities from the perspective of the organisation. The comparative time analysis could reveal the essential feature of present corporate training in Europe. It also aims to analyse progress and change in providing on-the-job or off-the-job training in European companies.

### *1.1. Training and Development in Companies: A Literature Review*

The choice of training method illustrates one of the most crucial decisions in training planning (Koubek, 2012; Jevana, 2017). The wide range of training and development activities divide into two main groups – on-the-job and off-the-job. Over the past decade, there have been changes in training methods due to increased learner's needs, advancements in technology and increasing trends in mobile technology (Jevana, 2017). According to Bafaneli and Setibi (2015) there has been a significant rise in on-the-job training for several decades. Training and development activities are divided into on-the-job and off-the-job training. Off-the-job training is provided for a group of participants outside their workplaces. In addition to traditional classroom training, learning by doing is becoming a future trend (Innovation Training, 2020). Based on the survey that was carried in the UK revealed that about half of the training delivered across all industries and sectors happens through on-the-job training. Studies have shown that on-the-the-job training is crucial in the improvement of the requisite skills of employees. Studies have shown that on-the-the-job training is crucial in the improvement of the requisite skills of employees (Orrje, 2010). On-the-job training (on the job or on-job) illustrates methods of training and development that take place at the workplace and connect to job tasks. This method has made a significant impact in the industrial sector. A structured on-the-job affects the worker and the entire organisation (Ahadi & Jacobs, 2017). On-the-job methods often involve work instructions, coaching, mentoring, job rotation, counselling, apprenticeship, task assignment, meetings, learning by doing, and self-directed or self-managed learning. Work instruction is a guided on-the-job activity directly provided at the workplace. Coaching establishes questions between a coach and an employee. Mentoring is based on the advice of an expert to an employee. Apprenticeship is time spent with a more experienced colleague. A task assignment targets some specific task solved with a senior co-worker. Job rotation means a change in a job position or workplace. Meeting with colleagues from different departments illustrates a cross-knowledge exchange in a company (Koubek, 2012). Self-directed or self-managed learning encourages individuals to take responsibility for their learning needs to improve performance in their present job or to develop their potential (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). This individual approach represents the main feature of on-the-job training. Personalised training tailored to employee-specific learning belongs to one of the announced trends in training and development for the future (Innovation Training, 2020).

There are several international studies related to vocational training in the international context. One complex analysis of the topic was introduced in Wieringen and Attwell (2013). For the analytical part of the paper, data from the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) are used. The CVTS (2023) defines Continuing vocational training (CVT) as “training measures or activities which have as their primary objectives the acquisition of new competencies or the development and improvement of existing ones. It should be financed at least partly by the enterprises for their persons employed who either have a working contract or who benefit directly from their work for the enterprise, such as unpaid family workers and casual workers.”

Contrarily, the off-the-job training is mainly provided for a group of participants. These off-the-job activities often take place outside the company and include internal training. The most used off-the-job methods include classroom training, business game or role-playing, workshops, adventure education, and case studies. A classroom or vestibule training occurs at a specific place, mostly face-to-face. A business game and role-playing target specific soft skills in the form of a game. Workshops or group exercises are case studies that solve some specific issue. Outdoor training is learning by movement, mostly solved collectively. A case study analyses a specific or complex topic in depth. Most methods are off-the-job (Martin et al., 2014; Ahadi & Jacobs, 2017). Experiential learning (or learning by doing) is one of the trends for the future in training and development (Innovation Training, 2020). The European Union is aware of the importance of vocational training in enterprises. Therefore, the European statistical office (EUROSTAT) regularly conducts Continual Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) over five years. This survey collects information about training and developing activities financed (or at least partly funded) by enterprises with more than ten employees in 29 European countries.

## 2. Methodology

This paper is based on the literature review of the topic training and development in companies and represents findings from a quantitative analysis comparing results from European Continuing Vocational Survey (CVTS) in reference years 2005, 2010, 2015, and 2020. Data was obtained through Eurostat online data browser, whereby European data from the reference year were published in January 2023. Data is collected based on Commission Regulation No 1153/2014 of 29 October 2014, amending Regulation (EC) No 198/2006n. In general, this survey is mandatory for 27 countries of the European Union and was also conducted in Norway and Serbia. Therefore, CVTS enables analysing results in time, place, and an international comparison with another European countries. Employees holding an apprenticeship or training contract should not be considered for CVTS. The training measures or activities must be planned in advance and organised or supported with the special learning goal. Random learning and initial vocational training (IVT) are explicitly excluded. CVT measures and activities cover both CVT courses and other forms of CVT.

The survey CVTS regularly collects information about enterprise training activities in seven sections which cover data about providing a continuous vocational training (CVT) activity, CVT strategy implementation, then information about participants, costs, time,

characteristics, and assessment of CVT. The paper focuses on several aspects and aims to provide on-the-job or off-the-job activities from a time perspective.

All asked training methods are divided into CVT courses and other forms of CVT. CVT courses are typically clearly separated from the active workplace. Learning occurs in locations specially assigned for learning, like a classroom or training centre. They show a high degree of organisation (time, space, and content) by a trainer or a training institution. The content is designed for a group of learners. All other training activities which meet CVT definition are called Other forms of CVT.

The survey CVTS (2023) defines, "Other forms of CVT are typically connected to the active work and the active workplace, but they can also include participation (instruction) in conferences, trade fairs etc. for the purpose of learning. These other forms of CVT are often characterised by a degree of self-organisation (time, space, and content) by the individual learner or a group of learners. The content is often tailored according to the learners' individual needs in the workplace. The following types of other forms of CVT are identified as planned training through guided-on-the-job training; planned training through job rotation, exchanges, secondments or study visits; planned training through participation (instruction received) in conferences, workshops, trade fairs, and lectures; planned training through participation in learning or quality circles; planned training through self-directed learning/e-learning." Based on the literature review, the authors off-the-job comparable with the CVT course, and on-the-job activities are similar to the other forms of CVT excluded categories with conferences and fair trades. This analysis compares first the ratio of *training enterprises* which provide at least one planned CVT activity in the reference year and has a minimum of ten employees. According to the statement of CVTS, most countries for CVTS three to six conducted their surveys in line with the regulations for reference years 2005 (CVTS3), 2010 (CVTS4), 2015 (CVTS5), 2020 (CVTS6) and reported no significant processing errors. Comparing the different waves of CVTS, some changes were implemented to improve the quality of CVTS and better legislation adaptation. These changes did not seriously impact the comparability between the waves since 2005 (CVTS, 2023).

Based on the literature review and secondary data, the authors set two research questions, RQ1 and RQ2. These questions help to answer and map organisations' attitudes toward training and development and the methods these organisations use to train employees.

- RQ1: What attitude to training and development do European companies apply?
- RQ2: Which training methods (on or off-the-job) do European companies prefer?

To answer these questions, data from CVTS in four reference years were used to compare organisations in European countries as well as identify the main differences.

### 2.1. Data Sample

The survey CVTS covers all enterprises with ten or more employed persons in the most NACE categories. Although NACE categories were slightly adapted in 2010, data should be comparable from 2005 to 2020. The CVTS is a sample survey; therefore, the results include the

usual statistical measurement errors. According to the quality statement of CVTS, the accuracy of data should be overall satisfactory, and the national submitted data pass the validation of EUROSTAT. Table 1 presents the number of relevant enterprises for the specific CVTS and the response rate for the reference year. The total number for CVTS6 is not yet published.

Table 1. Number of enterprises in CVTS for specific reference year (EUROSTAT, 2023)

CVTS (Reference year)	Net sample size/ number of participating enterprises on survey
CVTS3 (2005)	78,000
CVTS4 (2010)	101,000
CVTS5 (2015)	111,000
CVTS6 (2020)	N/A

The authors analyse the main trends in on-the-job and off-the-job training in European countries. Due to satisfactory data relevance gained in 29 European countries, the survey CVTS illustrates an appropriate data set. According to research questions and for better visibility, the paper emphasises results based on this concept:

- the first or three first-ranked countries in the reference year 2020,
- the last or three last-ranked countries in the reference year 2020,
- EU 27, an average of 27 countries, which are state members EU from 2020,
- the Czech Republic (Czechia), it is not involved as the first or the last ranked country
- EU 27 represents the mainstream in the reported year, if some data is missing then the following country with comment.

### 3. Results and Key Findings from the CVTS Survey

This chapter introduces selected findings to answer the research questions about what attitude to training and development European companies have and which training methods (on or off the job) European training companies prefer. All are compared in the time context to find the positions of Czech organisations in the training and development of employees.

#### 3.1. *Ration training Companies in Europe*

Proportion of organisations which provide training in Europe differs significantly. Figure 1 presents the proportion of enterprises which provide training to all relevant European enterprises in 2020. Figure 1 shows the EU-27 average and three countries listed on the top and in the bottom of the ranking list in 2020 expressed in percentage. The Czech Republic, with 85.9%, is ranked fourth. It means that 85.9% of enterprises invest and provide some training and development to employees.

The average of 27 EU countries (EU 27) declares 67.4% training enterprises and ranks 18th place from a total of 29 countries. Latvia is the best-ranked country in 2020, where 96.8% of all enterprises are training enterprises. It means that almost all companies in Latvia provide a minimum of one planned training activity to their employees. Norway keeps with 93% second place, and Sweden 91.5% is third place.

On the contrary, with 17.5% of training companies, Romania represented the last rank in 2020. From this it is deduced that 82.5% of Romanian companies provide no single planned

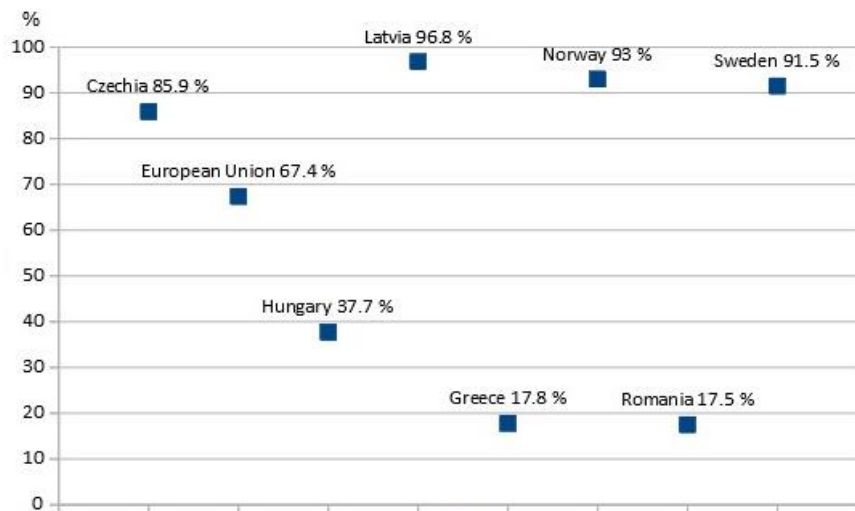


Figure 1. Ratio (%) of training companies to total enterprises in 2020 (CVTS, 2023)

training activity or measurement. A similar situation is reported in Greece, with 17.8% training enterprises and 82.2% non-training enterprises. Hungary is the third last ranked country with 37.7% training enterprises. Five European countries declare between 40% and 49%. Twenty-two asked European countries represent more than 54% of training companies. The complete ranking of training enterprises is available on websites of European data browser (EUROSTAT, 2023).

Figure 2 below illustrates the time changes in on-the-job and off-the-job training in selected countries. For the change presentation over time, the average of 27 EU countries, the best and worst ranked countries, and Czechia were selected. The 27 EU average shows a slight increase from 55.6% to 70.5%. Due to the COVID pandemic, there was a decrease in 2020 to 67.4%. Latvia, in the first place, shows a sharp increase between 2010 and 2015, by 59.4% in total. The Czech Republic reports an increase of 18.4% in this period. Overall, since 2005, 72% of training enterprises reached 85.9% of training enterprises. Romania shows a negative trend, with Europe's worst training ratio to non-training enterprises in 2020. In 2005 Romania reported 36.4% of enterprises training. In 2020 it was only 17.5%. Overall, between 2005 and 2010, most countries experienced a positive trend, with the EU27 average increasing by 8%.

Due to the economic crisis, Romania is experiencing a rather significant decline. The increase between 2010 and 2015 can be explained by the economic recovery and increasing innovation in the context of technological progress. The decline in the last period is marked by the COVID pandemic, which has dampened planned activities in education and development.

Figure 3 shows the training enterprises and types of off-the-job training activities. The most commonly used training method mentioned by respondents was a course. Over 81.5% of training enterprises plan courses on a long-term basis. Compared to 2005, there was a slight decrease; 83.6% of training enterprises used a course as a planned development activity for their employees. There was a slight increase in 2010 and a slight decrease in 2015. Clearly, while this is quite a popular development method, the figure shows that this proportion is more likely to decline in the long term but is unlikely to be used anymore. Regarding on-the-job

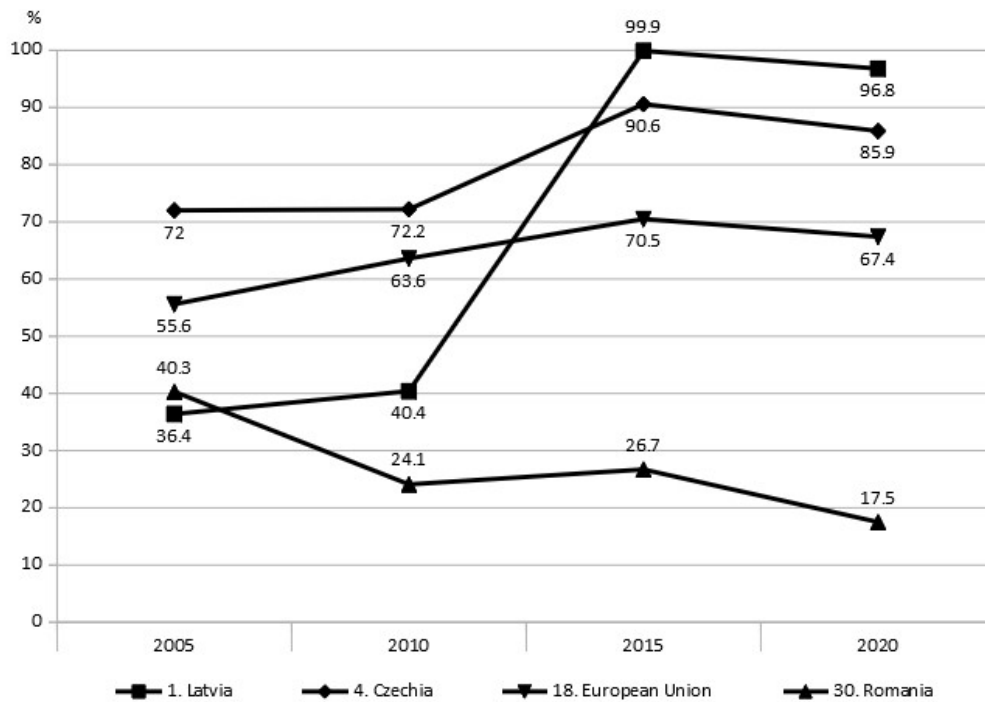


Figure 2. Change of providing of on-the-job and off-the-job training in training enterprises in selected European countries in year 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 (CVTS, 2023)

methods, this needs to be broken down more by the nature of the individual activity. In the case of guided on-the-job, this is a widely used method. In 2005, 49.4% of training companies used this method. Despite a slight decrease of 1.2% in 2010, there was an increase of 10.3% between 2010 and 2015. This increase is mainly driven by certain countries, as the analysis below will show. In 2020, 63.9% of training companies used the guided on-the-job method, the second most used on-the-job method. That reflects the trend towards individualisation also in training, a development linked directly to the workplace.

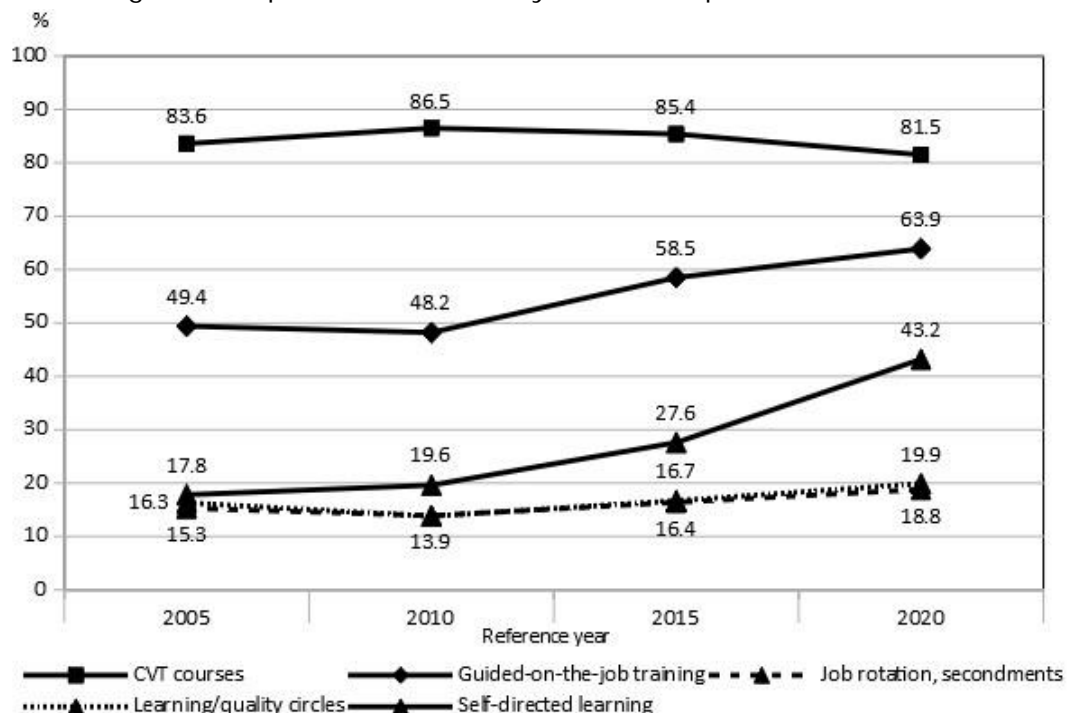


Figure 3. Types of on/off-the-job training activities, an average of 27 EU countries (CVTS, 2023)

The self-directed method and e-learning are the only ones showing continuous growth among the mentioned methods. In 2005, 17.8% of training companies used this method. An increase of 1.8% in 2010, and 27.6% in 2015 already reported using it, probably due to the proliferation of individual e-learning courses. In 2020 and thanks to the COVID pandemic, 43.9% of training companies are using it as a planned development activity.

Globally, almost the same proportion of training companies use job rotation, learning, and quality cycle methods. Despite a slight decrease in the use of this method in 2010, there was a slight increase in subsequent periods. Job rotation was used by 15.3% in 2005 and 18.8% in 2020. In the case of the quality ring and similar on-the-job methods, this is 16.3% in 2005 and 19.9% in 2020.

### 3.2. Providing Off-the-job Training in European Enterprises

The most common method of the off the job continuous vocational training in Europe is provided in the form of courses. CVT courses take place out of the working place and are often designed for a group with a high degree of formal organisation.

Figure 4 indicates that Czech training companies use the CVT course as the method the most. In 2015, 98.7% of Czech training enterprises used this method. In 2020, there will only be a decrease of 0.2%. That compares to the EU27 average of 81.5% in 2020, 85.4% in 2015, and relatively stable values over the long term.

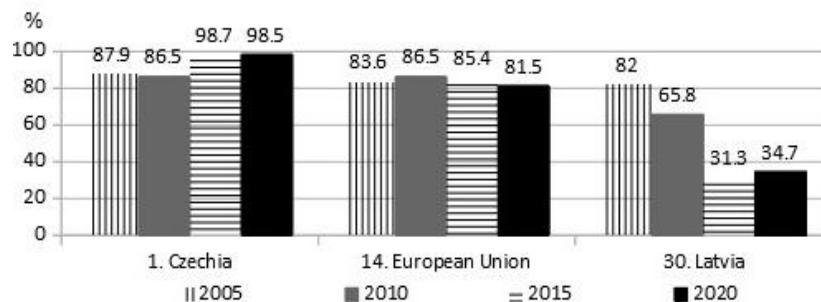


Figure 4. Ratio (%) of enterprises providing CVT training to all training enterprises (CVTS, 2023)

The country with the lowest number of training companies using the course method, i.e., the off-the-job method, is Latvia. From an initial 82% in 2005, there has been a decline to 31.3% in 2015. In 2020, the use of the course method in Latvia grew by 3.3%.

### 3.3. Providing On-the-job Training in European Enterprises

On-the-job training is a planned development activity associated with a degree of self-organisation. The content is adapted more to the needs of an individual learner. European training companies mostly use guided on-the-job training in the workplace. In comparison with the previous outcomes, the situation is reversed. Figure 5 shows that all training enterprises in Latvia use guided on-the-job training. The EU27 average has also seen a gradual increase since 2010. In 2015, 63.9% of training companies used this method. Surprisingly, in the case of the Czech Republic, the trend is the opposite. If we compare the data from 2010, 58.2% of training companies used this method, but in 2020 only 29.7%



declared using on-the-job training. Firms' attitudes toward using job rotation, exchanges, secondments, or study visits confirm that Sweden tops the ranking for 2020 with 36.1%, but there is missing data for 2015 and a low confidence note for the other data. Therefore, the Netherlands is listed here, ranked second with 32.6% in 2020. As Figure 6 shows, relatively few companies in the Czech Republic use this method. In contrast, 18.8% of training firms in the European Union used this method in 2020. In the Netherlands, it is even 32.6% of training companies. Here, it depends on the willingness of employees to change location, commute, or otherwise be flexible. If we look deeper into the on-the-job methods, the most common in European enterprises are participating in learning or quality circles. These methods are often used in the manufacturing industry. Interestingly, this method slightly increased in the European Union, with 19.9% of companies using this method in 2020. Moreover, it ranked up to the 21<sup>st</sup> position with this value. Thus, most European countries use this method in at least a fifth of training companies.

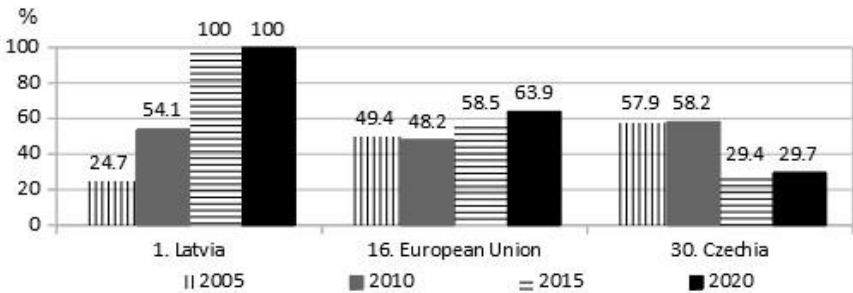


Figure 5. Ratio (%) of enterprises providing a guided on-the-job training to all training enterprises (CVTS, 2023)

In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, fewer and fewer companies are using this option. In contrast, Finland has seen a significant increase, with 41% of training companies using this method in 2020 (see Figure 6).

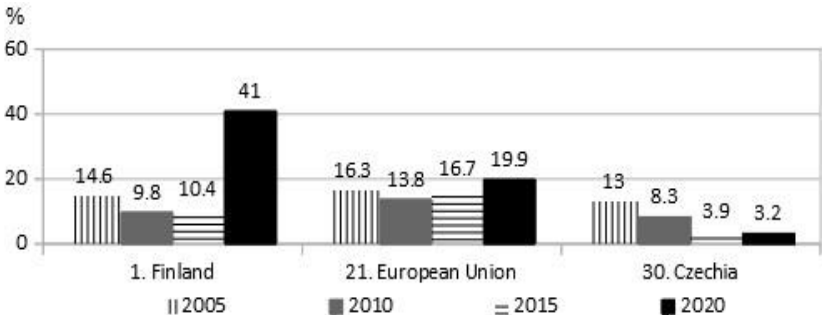


Figure 6. Ratio (%) of enterprises providing a learning or quality circles to all training enterprises (CVTS, 2023)

Thanks to increasing digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been logically a significant increase in self-directed learning methods, primarily through e-learning. This activity is planned by an average of 43.2% of training companies in the EU in 2020. Ireland reported that 64.3% of training companies provide this method but needs a figure from 2010. Therefore, the study mentions the Netherlands, which was in second place with 62.5% in 2020.

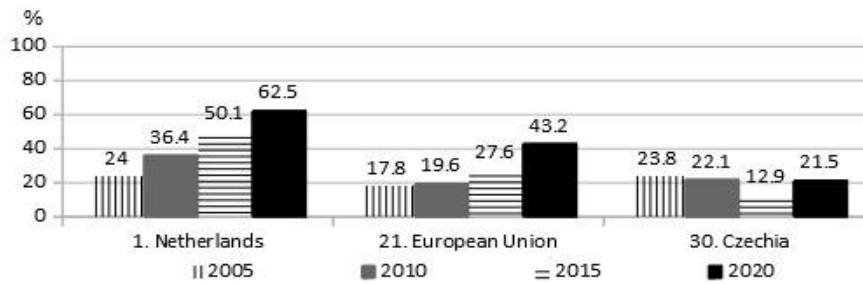


Figure 7. Ration (%) of enterprises providing a self-directed learning methods, e-learning to all training enterprises (CVTS, 2023)

Data in Figure 7 also show in the Czech Republic a positive trend, increasing from 12.5% to 21.5% in 2020. Although a fifth of Czech training companies report using this method, it is in last place in the country overview. That is in contrast to course delivery, which ranks first with 98.5%.

#### 4. Discussion

Training and development is a significant investment that affects company performance (Alipour et al., 2009; Dardar et al., 2012; Martins, 2021), innovation (Makkonen & Lin, 2012) and promotes adaptation to unexpected changes (OECD, 2021). The training method illustrates one of the most crucial decisions in corporate training and can be classified by two main groups – on-the-job and off-the-job training. This paper examines the situation in European countries. Data from the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) were analysed to understand European companies' situation in the last years. The survey is mandatory for participating countries conducted by Eurostat every five years. The sample of respondents counts 111,000 European companies with more than 10 employees in 2015. This paper compares data from 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020. The results of this data analysis confirm the importance of training and development for European companies and provide answers to two research questions set in chapter 2. Based on the RQ1 authors looked at the situation in the training intensity in European organisations. The highest number of firms providing at least one training or development activity was in Latvia (96.8%) in 2020, with a significant increase between 2010 and 2015. Czechia has a relatively stable development being in fourth place (85.9%) in 2020, above the EU 27 average (67.4%). The lowest ratio of training companies shows Romania (17.5%). As the diverse approach in the literature to appropriate training methods, findings presented in the paper show that European countries vary significantly in the intensity of employee training and methods the companies use for it. RQ2 aimed to map the methods used for training in Europe. Although most Latvian and Czech companies train their employees, a different training method is preferred in each country. Czech firms prefer mostly off-the-job methods. Contrarily, Latvian companies prefer on-the-job methods. The average of 27 European countries shows that off-the-job training has been the most popular method since 2005, but the increase in on-the-job training has been visible since 2010. Self-directed learning has led to relatively significant growth in recent years, but not in Czechia. Czech enterprises show the lowest share of using off-the-job methods among all surveyed European countries.

This paper opens a discussion of why Czech companies use less on-the-job methods than other European countries. The trend in the literature or in other countries shows an increasing trend of on-the-job methods and the importance of using this training method. The paper results provide a good starting point for further research and studies related to training and development in organisations. Due to the limitation of data from one survey (Eurostat), the subsequent research work of the authors will focus on other surveys and research papers as well as primary data collection. This paper encourages examining the training methods and their benefits to companies more in detail.

## 5. Conclusions

The literature review presented in the paper as well as an analysis of data from CVTS confirmed the importance of training and development of employees in organisations. Systematic and continuous vocational training influences the performance of employees and overall organisations. Data from Europe show that the enterprises training is an important issue and they are willing to invest systematically into the development of their employees. Continuous vocational training influences the performance of employees and overall organisations, while different approaches in selected individual countries and time development are required. This paper brings new insight to the problematic of on-the-job and off-the-job training and brings new research questions to the topic of human capital investment. Organisations use both on-the-job and off-the-job methods of training, and it is visible that the intensity differs among countries, and the Czech Republic is not an exception. Although the data are limited to findings from one survey, the paper brings an interesting time comparison and gives space for further and deeper analysis of the topic in the international context.

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Conflict of interest: none.

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