



Gearing Adult Education Towards Occupational Mobility (GATOM)

National Assessment Report Poland

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1 Introduction

The typical professional career of the European workforce has traditionally been characterised by working in the initially learned occupation until the end of the professional life. During the last decades, however, the European labour markets have experienced dynamic developments, caused by economic, political, technological, social and demographic changes. These developments imply that a growing number of persons do not find an employment in their initial occupation and need to take on occupations that can be classified as a second career. Furthermore, today's rising skill shortages require companies to rely more on re-qualified workers. Hence, **occupational mobility** can increasingly be observed on labour markets and is also fostered to some extent by national governments and Public Employment Services. At European level, the European Commission designated the year 2006 as the European Year of Workers' Mobility, and Guideline No. 20 of the Integrated Guidelines for Growth and Employment (2005 - 2008) calls upon Member States to remove obstacles to mobility for workers.

As there does not exist, however, a standardised and/or commonly applied understanding of "**occupational mobility/change**", a working definition has been elaborated for the analyses of the study on hand. An occupational change is thereby characterised by the change into a new field of professional activity. This includes a substantial alteration of the work contents related to the job before and after the occupational change. In the context of an occupational change significantly different core competences are necessary to fulfil the new job-related tasks and it is not only an enlargement of activities/responsibility in terms of career development. The occupational change may be conducted with or without geographic mobility as well as within the same company or in conjunction with a new employer.

For successfully mastering an occupational change it will, among other issues, in most of the cases be necessary to **acquire new or at least update/strengthen existing knowledge**. Data for Germany, for example, show that about one fifth to one third of the workforce experiences an occupational change (*Seibert, 2007* or *Isaoglu, 2006*), and half of them cannot use their existing competences for their new job (*Hofbauer/König, 1973*). In Italy, the share of people (with apprenticeship training) changing occupation is estimated to be as high as 35 % - 41 %, and for Austria this percentage lies between 15 % and 68 % (depending on the time horizon considered) (*Klicpera et al., no date*).

So, the question arises whether the existing VET/adult education systems provide effective (re-)qualification opportunities geared towards persons intending to change to a job not strictly corresponding to the occupation they have initially been trained for. National research studies have shown that there exist a wide range of (re-)qualification instruments for qualifying the workforce for a second career. However, these are rather targeted at unemployed and hardly ever suitable for persons preparing their occupational change while being employed (e.g. inflexible time schedules, no public support for training costs, no advice from the Public Employment Service concerning the most appropriate measures etc.). In terms of both, the intention to reduce unemployment/foster employment and increase the participation in lifelong learning – both pinpointed by the Lisbon strategy – actively supporting planned and strategic occupational changes to a higher extent would be advisable. This form of occupational change is on average more successful than those conducted out of unemployment (*Mandl et al., 2006*).

So far, little is known, however, about the specific needs and requirements of persons strategically planning and preparing an occupational change while being in upright employment. Furthermore, no assessment has yet been made regarding the coherence of available (re-)training measures with the demand of the mobile workforce and their potential employers. Against this background, the project “Gearing Adult Education Towards Occupational Mobility – GATOM” which has been conducted with the support of the European Commission¹ follows the **objectives** to

- identify the demand of employees and employers with regard to (re-)qualification measures in the context of an occupational change planned/prepared during an upright employment
- investigate on the availability of VET/adult education measures being suitable for the (re-)qualification requirements of the mobile workforce
- analyse in how far the available VET/adult education system corresponds to the needs of people changing occupation
- eventually propose suggestions to gear the available education/training instruments towards occupational mobility

The project covers **eight European countries**. Research is conducted at national level under the co-ordination of the Austrian Institute for SME Research by the following partners:

- Austria: Austrian Institute for SME Research
- Finland: Turku School of Economics (TSE)
- Germany: Berufsbildungswerk Gemeinnützige Bildungseinrichtung des DGB GmbH (bfw) – Competence Center EUROPA
- Ireland: Tom Martin & Associates (TMA)
- Poland: EEDRI Institute
- Romania: CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY OF ROMANIA (CCIR)
- Spain: Ikei Research and Consultancy
- Switzerland: Schweizerischer Verband für Weiterbildung (SVEB)

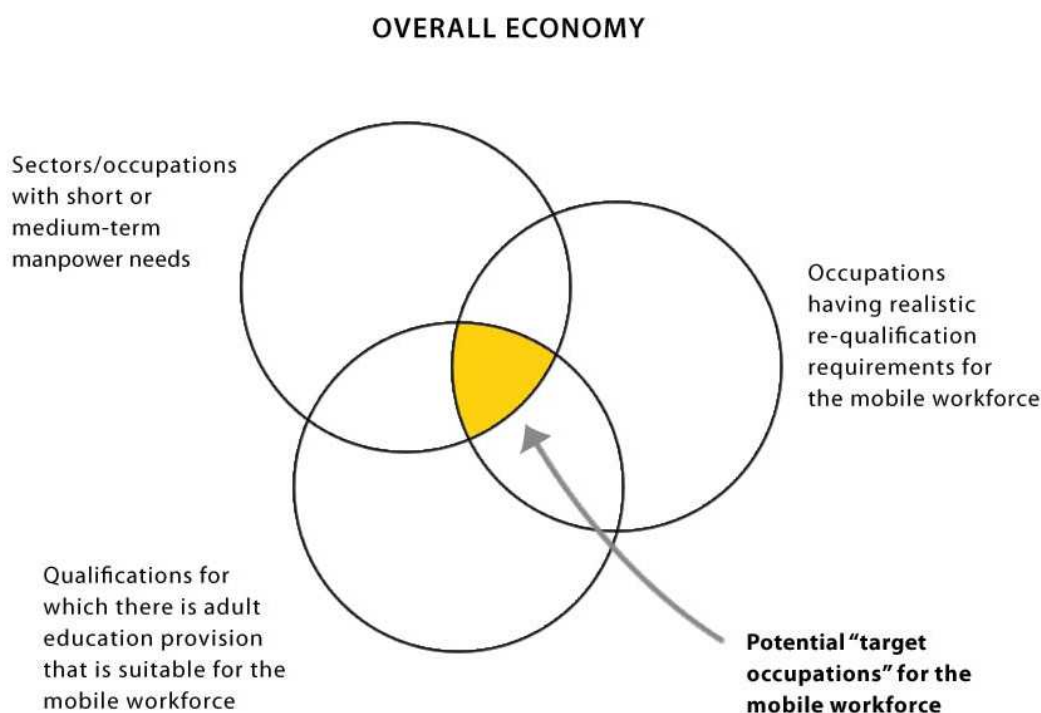
The report on hand constitutes the **National Assessment Report** for **Poland** providing a comparison between demand (i.e. employees’ and employers’ requirements) and supply of VET/adult education dealing with (re-)qualification for occupational change. Thereby, a focus has been set on **three professions** (plumbers, cooks, assistant nurses²) as target occupations for mobile workers. These jobs are deemed to be characterised by good job opportunities in the future as well as realistic qualification levels (see Graph 1). The recently observed process of dynamic development of construction and HO-RE-CA sectors in Poland proved to generate significant demand for plumbers and cooks, respectively. At the same time various analyses show that insufficient supply of employees might be one of the main barriers to further development of the sectors. Additionally periodic statistical analyses show that the highest

¹ Lifelong Learning Programme by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

² ISCO Codes (International Standard Classification of Occupations) of the selected professions: plumbers – 7136, cooks – 5122, for assistant nurses: institution-based personal care workers – 5132 or nursing associate professionals – 3231

demand (1 half of 2008) is for jobs requiring vocational education (51.7 % for people with basic vocational education and 15.4 % for people with secondary vocational education). With reference to assistant nurses the process of ageing of the Polish society as well as declining supply of nurses on the Polish labour market results in rapid growth of demand for nursing services both in health care sector as well as private households. The labour market's increasing demand for all of the professions is additionally strengthened by major job emigration of Polish employees, which took place over the last few years and significantly limited availability of qualified labour forces in the analysed three sectors.

Graph 1 Selection Criteria for the “Target Occupations“ of the Mobile Workforce



Source: Austrian Institute for SME Research, Tom Martin & Associates/TMA

In Chapter 2, an overview of existing **VET/adult education measures** suitable for (re-) qualification in the framework of occupational change is given. The identification of respective education/training instruments in the investigated sectors was conducted on the basis of the following criteria:

- Location: decentralised offer or e-learning
- Duration: not more than approximately 1 year
- Time schedule: evening/weekend classes, few blocked seminars
- Costs: reasonable with respect to the average income in the target job
- Teaching method and contents covered: focus on practical orientation and no particular specialisation within an occupation (broad, basic qualification)
- Eligibility criteria: no or little previous subject-oriented knowledge/skills required and accessible for adults

- Status of the implementing organisation: private or public
- Preferably certification after the attendance of the training measure

The necessary information was gathered in the form of **desk research** in spring 2008, supplemented by **qualitative interviews** with representatives of the training providers.

To analyse whether the VET/adult education system is generally suitable for people changing occupation during an upright employment the requirements of the enterprises and the workforce have been investigated through **qualitative interviews with mobile workers and concerned enterprises**. On the basis of a semi-standardised questionnaire 15 enterprise interviews in Poland were focussing on small and medium-sized enterprises in the construction sector, tourism and health/ elderly care and analysed their point of view on the qualification needs of the employees and the most suitable ways to acquire them. Similarly, 15 interviews with persons that have already experienced an occupational change (or were planning to do so in the near future) in Poland focussed on their experiences with (re-)qualification courses in terms of fostering and hindering factors, beneficial methods and support as well as potential improvement possibilities. The results of these 30 interviews for Poland (i.e. 15 with entrepreneurs, 15 with the workforce) are summarised in Chapter 3 of the report on hand.³

Chapter 4 derives **conclusions** regarding the suitability of the existing VET/adult education measures for strategically conducted occupational change. Corresponding **recommendations** for relevant stakeholders (i.e. governments, Public Employment Services, training providers etc.) have been pinpointed to better gear adult education towards occupational mobility.

Next to the National Assessment Reports also a **European Assessment Report** has been elaborated, providing cross-national comparisons of the issues under consideration.

The main findings of both, the National and European Assessment Reports are summarised in **Policy Manuals** in the national languages of the countries covered by the project.

Furthermore, at national level **individual training inventories** for the three occupations under consideration have been elaborated in national language aiming to make the training markets more transparent for persons planning an occupational change.

All reports and outcomes of the project on hand may also be downloaded for free on **www.mobility-training.eu**.

³ Thereby, it is to be considered that the research on hand was conducted in summer 2008, i.e. before the economic and financial crises affecting demand and supply on the labour market.

2 Overview on available training and education measures suitable for supporting occupational change

2.1 Construction sector/Plumbers

In Poland, the program for education of adults in the occupation of Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities (plumbers) is included in a wider, comprehensive Program Basis for education of the Fitters - comprising all specializations that can be distinguished within this group of occupations e.g. Fitter of central heating and hot water installations, Fitter of gas installations, Fitter of ventilation and conditioning installations, Fitter of water and sewerage installations, Other fitters of sanitary installations and facilities. In practice, such a broad approach to education applies mainly to vocational education of the fitters at secondary or postsecondary level. In case of training courses aimed at supporting the process of vocational reorientation their scope is usually limited to some segment of activities commonly assigned to occupation of the Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities.

Results of analysis carried out within this project show that the available training offer for adults is very diversified and usually is aimed at developing participants' qualifications only in particular fields of specialization of the fitter. In practice, there can be identified different courses which focus for example at: heating installations, gas installations, water and sewerage installations, ventilation and conditioning installations, developing of soldering skills or ability of reading and interpreting technical documentation as well as preparing participants for exams giving "energetic authorizations" (authorizations for exploitation and supervision of heating, gas, and electric installations). There can also be identified more comprehensive training measures some of which may for example prepare Fitters for journeyman or master's exams in fitting sanitary installations and sanitary facilities.

It should be stressed, however, that training courses preparing adults for energetic's authorization exams or craft's title (journeyman or master) exams are often treated as the next stage of their career development process – and therefore are usually taken by employees who already started working as Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities. In this context it is often the case that adults starting their careers as plumbers/fitters have low qualifications and neither energetic authorization nor craft's titles while the most experienced fitters have proven qualifications in most of specialization areas of the occupation.

It can be observed that in practice the available training measures for adults have a more significant role in developing/up-grading professional qualifications of fitters who are already active in this occupation rather than in supporting the process of occupational change (which in case of the fitters is seldom preceded by any vocational trainings).

Adults' trainings aimed at the development of skills within the occupation of plumber are provided mainly by the following categories of organizations: craft's chambers and guilds, vocational education centers, centers of practical education, technical colleges, private training companies as well as producers and distributors of sanitary installations and facilities.

Due to relatively small interest in training preparing adults for the occupation of plumber many training providers do not have a fixed offer of such courses, and decide not to specify costs of participation, schedule or detailed program of such courses in advance. However, in many cases they are capable of organizing such trainings in respond to individual requests. The majority of training programs in the field of fitting sanitary installations and sanitary facilities is based upon a module approach which increases adaptability of these measures to the needs of particular target groups.

The Polish Craft Association (ZRP) with its country wide network of craft's chambers and guilds is among the most relevant providers of adults' trainings in the field. Within its educational activity the ZRP appoints journeyman's and master's examining commissions verifying vocational qualifications of Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities, as well as organizes training courses preparing for the exams. Although ZRP does not elaborate and present a fixed offer of trainings for adults preparing them for the occupational change into plumber, there is a possibility of gaining particular skills/qualifications through attending e.g. journeyman's courses (even though the person might not be entitled to take final exam e.g. due to insufficient practical experience within the occupation or insufficient vocational educational background). There is also a possibility of organizing courses adjusted to individual needs of the particular training group.

Another relevant provider of training which might support the process of occupational change are the Vocational Education Centres (Zakłady Doskonalenia Zawodowego, ZDZ). Due to a country-wide spread of ZDZ's and their cooperating units the training offer is available in numerous Polish cities. The Centers have at their disposal training programs and experienced trainers which enable the provision of comprehensive trainings in the field of fitting sanitary installations and sanitary facilities, adjusted to the needs of the labour market.

Depending on the training provider, training program/content, and characteristics of the particular target group a complete training course usually covers from 100 to 300 hours. Most of the training measures can be regarded as participant friendly in terms of the possibility of reconciling vocational training with everyday professional work - the trainings are usually organized during weekends or in the afternoons.

The methodology of the available trainings envisages the development of both theoretical and practical qualifications among the participants, therefore the education programs usually comprise lectures as well as practical classes. In general, most of the trainings are open to all interested adults. Usually there are no requirements concerning qualifications of the candidates neither a necessity of taking any preliminary/entrance exams. However, in case some of the courses - especially these offered by the ZRP - there are requirements referring to the minimum level of education or length of professional experience.

When analyzing the available training measures which might facilitate the process of occupational change one should also mention a growing market of trainings provided by producers and distributors of sanitary installations and sanitary facilities. Despite the fact that in the great majority of cases there is no fixed offer of such trainings, they are focused only on particular groups of products/systems/installations, and usually last only 1-3 days their role in developing qualifications of plumbers should not be neglected. As in many cases the offer is accessible to all interested persons and often free of charge for participants, in practice there is significant interest in this form of education. An example of such training activity may be SME distributor of sanitary

installations and facilities ("Kano" from Zgierz) which in 2005 established its training centre and in cooperation with other companies from the sector has already provided trainings to c.a. 1300 participants!

2.2 Tourism/Cooks

In Poland, there is no system for education of adults in the occupation of cook and as a result the training offer available on the market is very diversified. In 2006, there was approved the Ministry's of Education and Science Program Basis for Education of Cooks, but in practice this guidelines are mainly reflected by programs of education at secondary and postsecondary level rather than training measures applying to adults.

Results of the analysis of the available training courses for adults show that depending on their provider the measures often differ according to their content, number of hours, certificates, costs etc. Among the main categories of organizations offering education of adults in this field one should mention for example vocational education centers, craft's chambers and guilds, centers of practical education, gastronomic technical colleges, high schools or private training companies. There are no statistics available on the number of adults trained by the respective groups and therefore it is difficult to assess which of them has a leading role in supporting the process of their vocational reorientation.

In general, the training offer can be divided into measures which are oriented at comprehensive preparation of adults for occupation of cook (usually over 100 hours of training) and those that address either only selected areas of the occupation or a wider context but in a very basic or cursory manner.

Taking into account comprehensiveness and territorial range of the available training offer significant role of Vocational Education Centers (Zakłady Doskonalenia Zawodowego, ZDZ) should be mentioned with regard to facilitating the process of adults' occupational re-orientation into cook. The measures are aimed at acknowledging participants with rules of nutrition, organization of production, culinary recipes, as well as basic practical skills necessary to work as cook. The offer comprises module system of trainings (prepared by the Program Committee of the Association of Vocational Education Centers) which enables high flexibility in adjusting training program to the needs of particular group of participants. Due to a country-wide spread of ZDZs and their cooperating units the training offer is available in numerous Polish cities. Depending on the training provider (ZDZ) and characteristics of particular target group a complete training course usually lasts from two to three months and covers ca. 140-160 hours of (practical and theoretical) trainings. It should be stressed that trainings offered by ZDZs can be regarded as participant friendly in the context of the possibility of reconciling them with everyday professional work - the trainings are usually organized in the afternoons and on Saturdays and Sundays. Moreover, the trainings are valuable in the context of certifying qualifications of its participant. Persons who pass final exam are provided with certificate authorized by the Ministry of National Education.

In comparison to such a comprehensive approach, on the other hand there is also a wide offer of trainings which cover only selected aspects related to the occupation of cook, e.g. preparing of particular categories of dishes. This kind of measures usually lasts from one to five days and they are most often organized by private training companies e.g. culinary studios. The quality of such measures may be very different

among one another. In some cases these are specialist courses provided by recognized cooks but there can also be found examples of trainings which provide their participants only with basic theoretical knowledge on cooking and should not be recognized as useful from the point of view of occupational change. This category of trainings may be interesting especially for the group of people who want to gain or upgrade their competences only in the chosen areas of the occupation of cook, e.g. adequately to the needs of particular employer or cooking specialization. Usually such trainings provide their participants with certificates of the training provider.

One of the characteristic features of the available training measures addressed to adults who want to gain new qualifications as cook is that most of the courses are based upon a modular system of education. Owing to this approach the program of training can be easily adapted to particular qualification needs of different groups of participants. Similarly, in terms of short-term trainings covering only selected aspects related to the qualifications of cooks such approach enables participants to build themselves a more comprehensive training program by choosing and merging different training modules.

One of the main conditions for launching of the training courses is recruitment of sufficient number of participants. Otherwise their costs are too high for participants or their organization not profitable enough for the provider. Due to a relatively low interest of adults in the offer of trainings supporting the process of their vocational re-orientation, many education providers do not have a fixed offer in this field and decide not to specify costs of participation, schedule or detailed program of such courses in advance. All these aspects are being agreed with individual candidates and depend on their number, time of recruitment, and qualification needs. For example, many members of the Polish Craft Association have the necessary potential, are well prepared and are interested in organizing such courses but in many cases do not have a concrete offer in this field. In fact such an approach causes that it is more difficult for the candidates to identify potential providers of relevant courses or compare different training offers between one another. Consequently, many candidates become reluctant to participation in such courses, if they do not know the exact terms of cooperation in advance.

In general, most of the trainings are open to all interested adults. There are neither requirements concerning qualifications of the candidates nor a necessity of taking any preliminary/entrance exams. In case of some of the courses there are, however, requirements referring to the minimum level of education (e.g. primary or gymnasium).

Methodology of the available trainings envisages development of both theoretical and practical qualifications among the participants, therefore the education programs usually comprise lectures as well as practical classes. Within the analyzed measures offering comprehensive preparation of the candidates to the occupation of cook the training programs are in general similar and comparable and usually all include aspects covering e.g. rules of nutrition, culinary recipes, hygiene, garnishment, technical equipment, basic elements of customer relations, occupational health and safety.

The available offer should be ranked high in terms of its accessibility for people professionally active. Most of the trainings are organized during the weekend or in the afternoons; moreover there is often a possibility of adjusting the timetable of training to the needs of particular training group. Similarly, the time necessary for completion of the courses which usually do not exceed three months can be regarded as reasonable for those who would like to change their occupation in a short time perspective.

Finally, it should be stressed that many training providers (those offering comprehensive approach to training of cooks) are accredited to provide participants with certificates issued at standardized forms of the Ministry of National Education. Obtaining such certificates may increase credibility of the candidates towards future employers.

2.3 Health and elderly care/Assistant nurses

The profession of medical carer has been introduced by the regulation of the Minister of Education of 27 June 2007, entered into the Journal of Laws under No 124 item 860, and assigned the numerical symbol 513[02]. The purpose of vocational training as a medical carer is to gain skills needed to care for sick and disabled patients and to act as nurses' aid in hospitals, social welfare homes, hospices and private homes. In many cases preparation for the commencement of the training in Vocational Colleges and Vocational Schools began only after the approval of the educational programme by the Minister of Education on 27th July 2007 (513[02]ZSZ, SP/MEN/2007.07.27). Many schools began the training from January 2008 and others during the 2007/2008 academic year. Thus, first graduates could formally undertake employment from July 2008 and the next group can be employed from February 2009.

The only way to become a medical carer is to start formal education lasting one year in a post-secondary school – usually Post-secondary Vocational Medical School or Post-secondary Vocational School or two years for those with basic vocational education only. It is possible to gain similar knowledge attending 85 hour courses providing basic knowledge of how to care for the old or disabled, but such courses don't award diplomas and the use of medical carer title. They also don't allow the possibility of working as nurse's or doctor's aid. In principle they only allow to perform the function of the so called "ward attendants" thus performing the basic sanitary work. Those without formal "medical carer" title confirmed by a relevant school certificate are unable to take the national test confirming the qualifications and enabling obtaining of the Europass Diploma Supplement.

The requirements which the institutions providing the training of medical carers must meet are very high. That is why such activities are undertaken by institutions which must comply with conditions ensuing from teaching programmes and basis of vocational training programmes. Institutions offering vocational training must have an appropriate team of educators – vocational teachers as well as anatomy, personal hygiene and computer labs which must be equipped according to guidelines set in basics of teaching programmes. The permission to open this training facilities must be granted by the Voivodship Sejmik (Sejmik Wojewódzki) and Educational Board (Kuratorium Oświaty) in the form of special resolution.

Public institutions which offer training for students with the upper secondary school background (one year training courses) and the lower secondary school background (two year training) are entitled to train for medical carer's profession. Private institutions can also offer training courses for medical carers but completion of such course does not entitle graduates to work as medical carers in hospitals and other health care institutions. The certificate is a confirmation of completion of medical carer training course.

The best training institutions are the following: Post-secondary Medical Schools (Policealne Szkoły Medyczne), Groups of Medical Post-secondary Schools (Zespoły Medycznych Szkół Policealnych), Medical Vocational Colleges (Medyczne Studia Zawodowe), Post-secondary Schools for Medical and Social Staff (Policealne Szkoły Pracowników Służb Medycznych i Społecznych), Part-time Post-secondary Medical Carer Studies (Zaoczne Policealne Studia Opiekunów Medycznych). Of this group of schools the Best known are: Warsaw Medical School (Zespół Szkół Medycznych) at Świętojerska 9, Medical Vocational College (Medyczne Studium Zawodowe) in Gniezno, Post-secondary School for Medical and Social Care Staff (Policealna Szkoła Służb Medycznych i Społecznych) in Krakow.

Medical carer training courses are also ran by Post-secondary Schools (Szkoły Policealne), Private Post-secondary Schools (Prywatne Szkoły Policealne), Educational Services Institutions (Ośrodki Usług Oświatowych) (private and public), Private Vocational Technical Schools (Prywatne Technika Zawodowe), Voivodship and County Centres of Continual and Practical Education (Wojewódzkie i Powiatowe Centra Kształcenia Ustawicznego) and the Post-secondary Schools of the Voivodship Local Government (Szkoły Policealne Samorządów Wojewódzkich). It is interesting to note that the Banking Education Society (Towarzystwo Edukacji Bankowej) started running post-secondary schools with "medical carer" specialization. Amongst the best known are: School of Medical Carers (Szkoła Opiekunów Medycznych) in Olsztyn, Private Post-secondary School (Prywatna Szkoła Policealna) in Dąbrowa Górnicza, Part-time Post-secondary Medical Carer College "KADRA"(Zaoczne Policealne Studium Opiekunów Medycznych "KADRA") in Wrocław (private school having a public school licence).

Institutions offering education and training for medical carer's profession have extremely well prepared teaching personnel, well equipped workshops and well organized cooperation with hospitals and other health care institutions. The teaching programme is constructed in such a way that the students receive basic knowledge of medicine, psychology, pathology and gain practical skills during practical instruction in health institutions.

Frequent and direct contact with sick patients and medical staff guarantee high level of professional preparation for the job.

The institutions which have the public school status do not charge any registration fees or tuition fees and award diplomas confirming qualifications and skills necessary to perform the profession of medical carer. No tuition charges and high possibilities of finding a job represent important incentives which should encourage candidates to gain medical carer's qualifications.

Schools which prepare students for medical carer's profession offer training on full-time and part-time basis. There are also schools which offer full-time tuition to students under 24 years of age. There are also options of extramural programmes used mainly by older or employed people wanting to gain new qualifications or change their profession (requalify).

One of the features which positively characterize the institutions training medical carers is their openness and taking active part in the life of local communities. For example, the School of Medical Carers (Szkoła Opiekunów Medycznych) is cooperating with the Blue Umbrella Association in Olsztyn for the Benefit of Chronically Immobilized Patients. This type of cooperation makes the future medical carers aware of sick patients' problems.

The vocational training programs are the same in all training institutions throughout the country. It is their basic common feature. This uniformity of requirements irrespective of place or training systems is viewed positively by managers of health institutions. It is a guarantee of equal and high level of vocational preparation of medical carers. Training institutions undertake various types of initiatives in order to provide access to the latest medical knowledge, such as:

- purchase of equipment used in the most modern health institutions in Europe and in the world
- meeting with the prominent medical personnel
- creation of convenient learning conditions (weekend classes)
- organization of theme competitions
- organization of theme seminars for general public
- creation of conditions to obtain EUROPASS documents
- organization of dormitories for students from other locations than the school
- setting up libraries with specialist literature
- sign language teaching
- participation in European programmes (eg. Leonardo da Vinci)
- cooperation with similar institutions in Europe
- practice abroad
- work in interest circles, for example, medical rescue circle, chemistry and biology circle, Polish Red Cross circle.

The purpose of this type of initiatives is to enrich the knowledge passed on during classes and its practical use in professional and social activities. Diversity of forms of activities offered in vocational training institutions facilitate decisions regarding the choice of profession and show its social and human dimensions. Employers value diversity of medical carers' interests and skills as they are helpful in contacts with sick patients.

3 Requirements of training and education measures in the context of occupational change

3.1 Construction sector/Plumbers

According to the majority of sectoral studies, the Polish construction sector is in a very good economic situation and there are optimistic prognoses for its development in the next few years at the point of time the study was conducted (summer 2008). This situation results in a significant increase of employment in construction as well as a dynamic increase of salaries of construction workers. According to data of the National Economic Chamber, in the first quarter of 2008 employment in this sector increased by about 42 thousand people. At the same time various analyses show that insufficient supply of employees might be one of the main barriers to the further development of the sector. Experts estimate that the shortage of employees for the construction sector equals to 120-150 thousands people. One of the occupations which is at the very top position in various rankings of most wanted employees in construction sector is the plumber.

A scope of works which is commonly ascribed to the vocation of plumber is, according to Polish classification of vocations and specialties, covered by category: Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities (the category comprises a few vocations including e.g. fitter of central heating and hot water installations, fitter of water and sewerage installations, fitter of gas installations, other fitters of sanitary installations and facilities). In December 2007, there were published the Ministry's of National Education Program Basis providing guidelines for education of Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Facilities.

Results of the interviews carried out under this project show that the available training measures addressed to adults in practice do not have a significant role in facilitating the process of their vocational reorientation towards employment as Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities.

Although there are clear guidelines on education programs that apply to the fitters, in practice basic plumbing works can be realized by employees with no educational background or proved qualifications in this field - there is no effective system of verifying authorizations or qualifications of people carrying out the work. The necessity of obtaining special certificates/authorizations refers to works concerning e.g. exploitation ("E") and supervision ("D") of:

- Facilities, installations and electro-energetic networks producing, processing, transferring and using electric energy (electric authorization: group 1)
- Facilities producing, processing, transferring and using heat and other energetic appliances (heat authorization: group 2)
- Facilities, installations and gas networks producing, processing, transferring, storing and using gas fuel (gas authorization: group 3).

Exams enabling obtaining the above mentioned authorizations are supervised by Examining Commissions appointed by the President of Energy Regulation Office and the certificates have a 5 year-long validity.

According to opinions of employers, practical plumbing skills of candidates are most important when considering them for a position of Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities – companies are most willing to employ people with previous professional experience as plumbers, or with practical experience in carrying out works of similar character. However, as result of the last years' mass emigration of Polish labour, as well as significant deterioration of the Polish system of vocational education, availability of people representing plumbing qualifications on the Polish labour market was largely reduced and is currently very limited. As stressed by the employers the emigration process concerned to a large extent high-qualified plumbers. Consequently, the narrow group of specialists that stayed in Poland takes advantage of this fact and has high salary expectations.

Due to the limited availability of qualified plumbers and relatively high costs necessary for their employment, companies very often choose to employ people with no qualifications or previous educational background in this field. Such an approach causes that employers take over the responsibility for providing candidates with knowledge/ skills/ qualifications required at the position of plumber in their company and decide to provide them with an in-house training in the first period of their employment. As a result, employers are very willing to employ people who do not have professional experience as plumbers, but have practical experience and skills gained unofficially when for example fitting or repairing sanitary installations and facilities at home – which makes training of such persons easier and more effective.

The existing difficulties in finding candidates with either adequate professional experience or at least educational background leads to a situation in which a great majority of qualification requirements for the position have an informal character and is narrowed to individual features of personality of the candidates.

In this context the most wanted employees are people who are honest, solid, reliable and who on the one hand will not cause troubles to the employer and on the other will represent him in a good way outside the company in contacts with customers.

Another important feature is the “imagination” of the candidates which should be considered in two contexts. First, one refers to creative imagination meaning e.g. ability of working out solutions to technical problems that might be encountered in their work. The latter one is about acting responsibly, avoiding potential dangers/threats to health and property which might be related to works carried out by them.

Willingness to learn and ability of lifelong learning is also crucial. Entrepreneurs emphasize that the specifics of the vocation of plumber significantly changed over the years and the fitters must continuously improve their knowledge. In comparison to a traditional perception of the practical installing skills required for the vocation, nowadays plumbers should for example also possess:

- good knowledge of products available on the market, especially systems of sanitary installations and facilities,
- knowledge in the field of features (chemical and physical) of various materials (e.g. how to join, bend, install elements made of different materials),
- ability to use different electronic appliances (e.g. programming /regulating /scaling facilities like thermostats, modern boilers etc.),
- ability to use product catalogues and manuals,

- ability to use installing and operating instructions/manuals.

The employers covered by this research had no experience in using training preparing for the vocation of Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities that are provided by specialized training organizations. The entrepreneurs also had hardly any knowledge of such offer. What is more, in practice last years they did not have applications from persons who didn't have previous professional experience as plumbers but instead completed training courses preparing for this vocation. According to the opinions of the companies there is definitely a lack of trainings available on the market, which would be adequate to qualification requirements (e.g. concerning knowledge of particular sanitary products and systems used by the companies) of potential employers of the Fitters.

Lack of interest (both in case of employers as well as people planning vocational reorientation) in training courses preparing adults for the work of a plumber was also confirmed by the representatives of organizations specialized in the provision of vocational trainings (e.g. Vocational Education Centres). Although the organizations have such courses in their training offer, over the last few years they suffered from significant difficulties in recruiting participants interested in it (in most of the cases they are not able to gather a sufficient number of participants to establish a training group).

One of the very interesting findings of the study is that currently vocational education in the field of plumbing (apart from vocational education of youths at school e.g. secondary level, or trainings preparing for exams related to obtaining special authorizations e.g. energetic) is to a significant extent provided by producers and distributors of sanitary installations and facilities or companies employing plumbers.

In practice the market of vocational training of plumbers has to a large extent been taken over by companies representing the construction sector which have developed internal and external training activities addressed to fitters of such products. The activities might be regarded, however, as an integrated element of the companies' marketing strategies and have a significant contribution to maintaining the current market share and gaining new markets for their products. On the one hand providing plumbers with trainings on fitting and exploitation of certain/selected sanitary installations and facilities enables their producers/distributors to significantly reduce costs of potential complaints (there are less damages of products resulting from their wrong fitting or exploitation). Some of the trainings are even ended with accreditation/authorisation of the participants to install selected sanitary products (fitting products by authorized persons might be one of conditions of maintaining products' warranty). On the other hand such approach may be considered as a form of loyalty programme. Plumbers are more keen to choose and recommend to their customers products and systems which they are familiar with. The trainings also help to build loyalty of companies' customers and distributors for whom it is a very favorable form of educating their employees: many of the trainings are free of charge for participants; education is often organized at client's premises (this enables saving costs and time that would normally be necessary to get to external training venues); trainings are adjusted to companies' needs – they are focused at installing and exploitation of products used/distributed by the company; participants gain knowledge of new products available on the market.

Miserable interest in trainings preparing for the vocation of Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities seems to also be confirmed by opinions of persons who recently started working in this field. As mentioned above, the last years of a very well economic situation in the construction sector and mass emigration of the qualified fitters caused that employers reduced their expectations towards qualifications of potential candidates for plumbers and in many cases employers are the group that more actively seeks for employment. Persons planning vocational reorientation and intending to develop their future career as Fitter of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities are usually aware of the situation.

None of the persons covered by this research who recently changed their occupation into plumbers preceded this process by any job-specific education. Moreover, the employees were not even seeking this kind of trainings – they were convinced that completion of such education does not determine chances for employment and they prefer that costs of eventual trainings are covered by their future employer. As it was stressed by the employees they knew that if they are to be offered a job they would receive it anyway (even without completion of any form of training) - they see no reason to complete trainings if no one requires them to do so. Additionally, many Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities choose to work on a basis of self-employment – in such a case verification of their qualifications is also very limited.

The employees were aware that the current situation on the market significantly influences salary levels of plumbers. Among the main reasons why they decided to start working as Fitters of Sanitary Installations and Sanitary Facilities was the expectation of higher earnings than in their previous jobs. In this context an interesting observation should be mentioned. Only one of the interviewees was planning his occupational change in a way that was focused at becoming employed at the position of Fitter. The rest of adults admitted that they were open for various job opportunities in the construction sector, and the fact they became plumbers is a result of combination of coincidence and best salary offer presented to them.

One of the repeated needs concerning education of adults in the field of fitting sanitary installations and sanitary facilities was that completion of the training courses should be confirmed by certificates which would be acknowledged not only in Poland but also in whole Europe. Moreover, the employees mentioned a need for supplementing the basic training program with foreign language classes (especially English) that could provide participants with knowledge of basic vocabulary related to their new job.

In general, employers admit that more and more often they see the negative consequences of lack of specialists/high-qualified plumbers and that in general every person who wants to change occupation and start working as plumber should precede this process by intensive trainings. The subject of trainings offered by producers and distributors of sanitary installations and sanitary facilities is narrowed only to selected groups of products while they do not provide general vocational preparation for the occupation of plumber which should concern every employee. According to suggestions of the employers at least a few months (ca. half-year, but in many cases even more), are needed to train a good plumber. Training courses should comprise both practical and theoretical exercises. Modern trainings should provide participants with knowledge and skills covering e.g. fitting and exploitation of sanitary facilities and installations; soldering; scaling and programming different appliances; physicochemical properties of different materials; reading and interpreting technical documentation; using manuals, instructions and products' catalogues; customer relations. Additionally, it is recommended that plumbers have energetic authorizations.

Companies admit that their knowledge on available training offer addressed to adults who want to change occupation into plumber is very limited. However, they stress that if they know a good, comprehensive training offer which would be compliant with their qualification needs, they would most probably be interested in it. It should, however, be stressed that in the context of current labour market situation, employers are rather careful or even reluctant to the provision of newly employed plumbers with external training (especially in case of measures providing participants with certificates proving their qualifications) – being afraid that this may paradoxically increase their willingness and possibility of job emigration.

Based upon supplementing interviews with experts (representing organizations specialized in provision of vocational education) a very interesting trend can be observed - the higher the market demand for plumbers (the better economic situation of construction sector), the less is the interest in vocational trainings preparing for this occupation. Experts explain this paradox in a following way. At the time of prosperity in the construction sector people who want to change their occupation into plumbers have no problems with finding a new job so consequently have little motivation to participate in educational measures. On the other hand, companies that have high demand for their services prefer to have the new employees at work (under supervision of qualified fitters) rather than on the training courses. When the economic situation in construction sector is getting worse then the interest in trainings increases.

3.2 Tourism/Cooks

Over the past few years, the HORECA industry in Poland has been developing significantly and further growth is expected due to favourable economic conditions, growing affluence of the society, VAT rate on catering reduced to 7 % until 2010 and increasing tourist traffic (generated largely by Euro 2012). The gastronomy market value already exceeded 18 billion PLN in 2007 compared to an estimated 13 billion in 2006 and is expected to grow by further 11 % by 2012.⁴

Rapid growth of the number of gastronomic points and dynamic development of both national and international catering & restaurant networks result in an increasing demand for qualified employees, especially cooks and chefs. Successful recruitment is impeded, however, by insufficient supply of candidates (largely attracted by foreign employers in other EU states) and exceptional rotation of personnel.

In 2006, there was approved a new program basis for education in the occupation of cook [occupation symbol: 512 (02)]. Although the document precisely indicates qualifications that should be gained during the education process, in practice there is no obligation of verifying qualifications of people working as cooks. Moreover, there is a legislative debate carrying on whether “cook” should be included in the list of craft occupations in the amendment Law on crafts, which causes that there is no uniform interpretation concerning organizations entitled to examining qualifications of cooks.

Results of a study realized within this project shows that in practice available training measures very seldom accompany or precede the process of change of adults occupation into cook.

⁴ data stemming from summer 2008

Lately cooks are among the most needed employees in Poland. This situation causes a favorable situation for qualified cooks and persons that are interested in starting their professional career in this field but on the other hand results in lowering employers expectations towards qualifications of candidates to work as cooks. In this context it should be stressed that there is a very weak link between the Ministry of Education guidelines for education of cooks and verification/execution of qualifications represented by people working in this occupation. As a consequence it is a common practice that in many cases people employed as cooks have no educational background in this field.

Although in general, employers agree that cooks should have education adequate for this occupation, they also share opinion that the most important qualification of candidates to work are their practical cooking skills.

The most desirable candidates though are people with professional experience as cooks, preferably gained in “good restaurants”. Lately there is also a great interest in cooks who come back to Poland after job emigration. Although almost each restaurant or canteen has a different menu and specialization, people with previous experience as cooks have the general knowledge and manual skills which to a large extent are helpful regardless of the profile of the restaurant. Moreover, employment of experienced cooks facilitates the process of transfer of knowledge and adoption of new ideas and practices - as it was mentioned by one of the interviewees once every two or three years his restaurant employs a new cook with professional experience just to “refresh the menu”. Additionally, companies state that they prefer people with previous track records in restaurants not only because of their knowledge of different kitchens and specialties but also because usually the cooks have better habits of behavior in the kitchen.

Representatives of companies from HoReCa sector admit that in the current labour market situation it is very difficult to find experienced cooks, as many of them left for abroad and those who stayed and worked in good restaurants can choose among numerous potential employers (and expect high salaries). In this context they agree that persons who do not have professional experience in the kitchen nor educational background in this field but have good practical cooking skills might also be perceived as good candidates and valuable employees. As mentioned by the companies, one of the keys to success to become a good cook is simply to like it – therefore, they are keen to employing people who treat cooking as hobby or passion (one of the advantages of candidates representing this group is that usually they have lower salary expectations than cooks with a proven track record in restaurants).

All of the employers covered by this study emphasized that when employing new cooks they attach very much importance to the sense of hygiene of the candidates (in this context they admitted that in the initial employment period they carefully observe and assess how the new employees behave at work e.g. how often wash their hands, clean the working place, use clean tools, wash and clean food etc.). As it was mentioned by employers it is very difficult to assess qualifications of cooks not seeing them working in the kitchen. It is also a great asset, if the person is familiar with at least basic rules of HACCP.

Among individual predispositions to being a cook employers most often mention good, sensitive and unique taste. Candidates for cooks should have a good memory and be capable of coordinating a few tasks at the same time. It is also of great importance that the person has a good sense of esthetics and elegance in garnishing food as well as is creative and open minded. Another important requirement posed to the candidates is very good health and lack of infectious diseases. In general non-smoking persons are preferred.

Age of cooks is also important to potential employers. On the one hand many of them prefer to employ very young persons as their salary expectations are relatively low and if they are ambitious, they learn quickly to soon become a valuable employee. However, some of the interviewed employers mentioned that they definitely prefer to employ more mature people (e.g. 30-50 years old) as the youths are less trustworthy (it happens they steal products or make jokes which may threaten the reputation of a restaurant) and more keen to job emigration. As mentioned by the owner of one restaurant people in middle age are more loyal, more dedicated to work and very often are a "factor stabilizing" the whole team.

Although the interviewed entrepreneurs admit that in general the content of existing programs for vocational education of youths at secondary or postsecondary levels provide a sound basis for the education of cooks in practice, however, many graduates do not possess qualifications adequate to the needs of their future employers. First, many students have difficulties in adapting to work in the "real environment of the restaurants", which may require e.g. ability to work in a team, ability of sharing or delegating tasks, ability to work under the pressure of time, experience in customer relations. Moreover companies complain that the graduates are not taught to be creative and innovative in cooking and that their ability of preparing dishes is too often limited to knowledge of concrete recipes.

One of the recommended solutions to this problem might be intensifying practices/apprenticeships of students in companies. It should be mentioned that in many major cities of Poland where there is insufficient supply of qualified cooks on the local labour market, many restaurants have already started close cooperation with vocational schools in this field.

In general, the companies are not familiar with the training offer addressed to adults who would like to change their occupation and become a cook. Although they would be willing to employ adults who carried out their process of vocational reintegration by completion of this kind of vocational training measures, in practice they didn't have (or at least do not recall) this kind of candidates for the last years. In the opinions of employers, people who want to change their previous occupation and become a cook usually do not look for training measures to gain new qualification before applying for the post. The current situation on the labor market allows them to expect to get a job of cook even without previous training courses - a rationale behind such an approach may be found in numerous job advertisements like e.g. "looking for a cook without qualifications". Unfortunately, it is a common practice that restaurants employ people with no education or professional experience as cooks. It is the employer who provides people with a possibility of gaining certain qualifications through intensive on the job trainings - usually starting with easiest tasks in the kitchen. Some employers provide their cooks also with external trainings but the measures are usually aimed at upgrading rather than gaining cooking skills (most often this are 1-3 days long trainings provided by some well known chef or trainings focused at selected foreign kitchens).

Interviews with adults who recently went through the process of vocational re-orientation confirmed that the companies' main expectations towards candidates for cooks refer mainly to their professional experience in this field as well as practical skills. Although educational background is also important the practical aspects prevail. As a result, candidates show low interest in attending trainings preparing for the occupation of cook. Only two out of five interviewed persons have completed trainings before starting the new job and only in one of the cases it was a course covering the subject in a comprehensive way (about 140 hours of training).

The most important reason for such low interest is that the candidates have no motivation for attending the training courses as in practice it does not determine the possibility of getting a job of cook in Poland. What is more as it was mentioned by one of the employees he did not expect the fact of completion of training course to help him in negotiating higher salary with new employer – “with no previous professional experience I am perceived as person with low qualifications anyway”. Another factor which discourages people from participation in trainings developing their basic cooking skills is a common belief that in practice almost everyone can be a cook (unfortunately this stereotype is fixed among the society e.g. by well known television culinary programs run by self-taught cooks).

Although the employees agree that in general there should be some official requirements concerning the minimum level of qualifications of cook they also admit that as long as it will not be executed by companies people will not invest their time and money in gaining such qualifications.

In the two analyzed cases motivations for taking up trainings were much different. One of the interviewed persons completed a 5 day long general training course providing participants with basic knowledge of e.g. processing food, preparing selected dishes, cooking tools and equipment, hygiene and safety rules. Surprisingly the reason why the person decided to complete the course was not increasing his chances for finding a job of cook – the person was rather sure he would be offered one anyway. It was a willingness to be better prepared for the first days at the new work and consequently to gain from the very beginning a better position/opinion within the team working in the kitchen. The other person who participated in a comprehensive 2 months training course organized by Vocational Education Centre believed it will help him to get a job in some good restaurant while the certificate (confirming completion of the course) might be helpful in the future when applying for a job of cook abroad.

In general, cooks complain about the quality and adequacy of educational measures and used to state that the available training offer “lacks behind” European trends in this field. One of the main weaknesses of the measures (especially as far as secondary and postsecondary level is concerned) is that trainings are provided by theoreticians and not experienced cooks/chefs and that in many cases participants have no contact with modern cooking facilities. However, within this study there were encountered also contrary opinions. The person who completed the two months training course assessed it as very useful and effective in supporting the process of vocational reorientation, also in the context of the possibility of reconciling it with everyday obligations of professionally active persons.

The employees stressed that there is poor promotion of the available training courses for adults as they are not well known among the potential target group. The information is very scattered and there is a lack of databases of institutions organizing trainings for cooks. Moreover although many organizations present trainings for cooks in their offer in practice such courses are organized very rarely as there is e.g. an insufficient number of participants to form a training group. This situation resembles a vicious circle as the courses are launched only when a certain number of participants is gathered, while people potentially interested usually give up when they do not know for sure if and when the training can be started. The interviewees admitted that the willingness of adults to participate in the training courses might be much higher if they knew the detailed offer and potential benefits resulting from completion of such training.

Moreover, the interviewed employees complained that diplomas obtained by participants of the courses are not honored/accepted in other European countries. The interviewees indicated that changing this situation might be an important incentive for the candidates for cooks to take up training courses in this field.

Additionally, it was pointed by the employees that the available education measures do not offer sufficient proportion of practical modules/components like internships in companies. In their opinion, incorporating such elements into the courses might facilitate the future recruitment process as the most talented of them might expect to be offered a job in the training/hosting company. Similarly, the available training measures usually do not envisage high involvement of practitioners/professional cooks in provision of the trainings. Finally, it would be an advantage, if the training measures are combined with English and German language classes (with special focus on vocabulary useful in the occupation of cook).

3.3 Health and elderly care/Assistant nurses

Progressive process of ageing of the Polish society as well as declining supply of nurses on the Polish labour market results in rapid growth of demand for nursing services both in health care sector as well as private households.

The health department estimates that health care and social welfare institutions could hire about 50 thousand medical carers. Although many young upper secondary school graduates (under 24 years of age) and adults expressed interest in the new profession, only 45 % of schools prepared for the training process were able to recruit an appropriate number of students.

While conducting the interviews it turned out that many individuals who graduated from the upper secondary schools could not find employment and for that reason decided to retrain and qualify as medical carers. Some individuals (particularly the older ones) indicated that they were forced to change jobs because of difficult work conditions, fear of expected company closure or family reasons.

In the opinion of the interviewees the formal requirements for the profession of medical carer are extremely high. The candidate for a medical carer must complete secondary education (maturity examination not required) and be in good physical and psychological health. The participants of the training have to, within one year, master the basic essential medical knowledge, learn to use the terminology of anatomy, physiology and pathology, be able to characterize pathogenic factors and explain pathological processes. The students who complete the upper secondary schools learn

the basics of anatomy at school which helps them to master the material necessary for the medical carer's profession. This is considerably more difficult for students with the lower secondary school or basic vocational school background. The trainees must also master quite a large portion of knowledge of psychology and pedagogy. The basic medical knowledge is the starting point of mastering the skills needed to care for sick and dependent patients.

One of the interviewees pointed out to the importance of receiving a proper training in the scope of human psychological processes so as to be able to offer emotional support to sick patients and their families and expressed willingness to participate in extended number of training sessions. The interviewees also stressed the importance of having appropriate skills needed to use medical tools and equipment in order to guarantee the patient safety during performance of nursing and sanitary treatments. Generally no comments were made regarding the number of hours dedicated to practical learning of the vocation and to the basic knowledge about the performance of duties. The respondents assessed the practical classes prepared for the particular teaching blocks as very instructive. In their opinion, practical programs prepared well for the practical instruction in hospitals and welfare homes.

During interviews on the subject of informal qualifications required in medical carer's profession the medical carers stressed the need to learn how to empathize with the situation and the needs of sick patients, have patience, acquire good communication skills and control over ones feelings and reactions. As one of the respondents remarked, "they teach us how to respect the sick, but you can't learn that - you must have it in you".

An informal way of gaining the knowledge about care for sick patients is through voluntary work. Two respondents indicated such method of learning and one of them needed such knowledge to be able to care for a sick person at home. The possibility of gaining professional knowledge in a post-secondary school on extramural basis encouraged that person to start training as a medical carer. Another respondent treated gaining of this profession as a stage in the preparation for the entry examinations for medical studies. The respondents stressed that many institutions offer different courses specializing in specific areas of knowledge concerning particular illnesses or care for sick patients. But only the post-secondary vocational schools offer comprehensive knowledge and skills needed to care for sick patients and work in cooperation with a doctor. The short courses are usually attended by people who care for a member of their family and do not intend to undertake employment in health care institutions. Such courses are offered by the Polish Red Cross, The Nurses' and Midwives' Union, medical unions and associations and public and non-public training centres.

The assessment of the extent and usefulness of the teaching program in the context of real needs and skills necessary for the practical performance of medical carer's profession must take into consideration the very short, in reality, a few months period of experience in the field of this profession. The graduates who completed this educational cycle highly regard the program and the vocational learning process and, in particular, the teachers' and practical instructors' qualifications. From the information given by the graduates it transpires that among the teaching personnel there are doctors, qualified nurses with bachelor degrees in nursing and top management members of health care institutions having appropriate pedagogical preparation. The graduates who hold the medical carer title stressed the usefulness of the content of teaching conveyed during the learning process in everyday work at hospitals or welfare homes. In no case was there any questioning of the content of teaching. They also

underlined the usefulness of anatomy, physiology and pathology classes or basics of psychology and pedagogy, as well as practical care for sick patients and lab practice. A similar opinion was given with regard to classes on work ethics in medical carer's profession, interpretation of Patients Rights Charter and practical exercises of solving difficult situations in patients' life. They also stressed the usefulness in professional work of the basics of the law (labour law, family law, criminal law), economics and the organization of work.

Those who began learning with the intention of changing professional qualifications underlined the very favourable conditions enabling them to gain a new profession. They are offered the possibility of full time, part time, extramural or evening classes and there is no need of resigning from the current job. Although the full time instruction in many schools has been designed for students under 24 years of age, appropriate conditions have also been set up for older people who are interested in full time instruction.

The fact that the studies are free of charge, regardless of whether they last one or two years, helps some to take up the training. Only some private schools which did not obtain the same rights as the public schools training for carer's profession charge registration fee and monthly tuition fees. An interview with a graduate of a private school confirmed the required standard of teaching and the equipment of laboratories for practical medical exercises including computer labs for simulation practice.

To summarise the above, the respondents expressed positive opinions about the training and the usefulness of the acquired knowledge in the execution of medical carer's duties.

During the interviews the respondents seldom expressed their comments and suggestions concerning changes or improvement of training principles. The most common comments and demands were as follows:

- high requirements regarding mastering of the knowledge contained in the training programmes in a short period of time (1 year),
- a proposal to drop one hour class on public health in favour of a class relating directly to care for old people (concerns training of post-secondary students),
- a proposal to end the training programme with state examination leading to the Europass Diploma Supplement – even with appropriate charge – which would facilitate undertaking employment in the EU countries,
- teaching English/German specialized vocabulary.

Directors of hospitals, health care institutions, old people homes and hospices expressed positive views about the creation of conditions for vocational training of medical carers. Currently, all hospitals report a shortage of qualified nurses as a large number of them left the country for employment abroad. The managers of health care institutions are convinced that the answer to the growing shortage of nurses may lie in the employment of professional carers – nurses' and doctors' aids. Polish nurses usually have higher education degrees. Medical carers will not substitute nurses but will help them with their work relieving them of duties not requiring such high qualifications. There is a chance that by employing medical carers the problem of shortage of nurses will be lessened.

Hospital directors believe that the requirements proposed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health concerning the knowledge and practical skills which medical carers should possess correspond to the needs of national health services. The one-year and two-year medical carer training courses meet their expectations. The skills of medical carers are highly regarded especially in such areas as:

- cooperation with nurses and execution of doctor orders relating to care for sick,
- unassisted performance of hygienic treatments to sick patients,
- care for patient's safety during treatments,
- having the basic knowledge of human anatomy,
- ability to use medical instruments and equipment and maintenance and disinfection of instruments during and after nursing treatments.

The best method of gaining the right qualifications is the combination of theoretical instruction and practice in a hospital or welfare home. Because of staff shortages hospitals willingly use help of volunteers who very often are candidates for medical studies and students of medicine but also individuals not prepared for contacts with sick patients and medical staff. Short courses are not able to adequately prepare this group which comes to contact with sick patients for the first time. Thus the volunteers will not replace those with professional training. The knowledge contained in the medical carer training program currently meets hospital needs. Unfortunately so far it has been difficult to employ medical carers as their number is still too small. The reason for that is shortage of candidates willing to train in this vocation and undertake such difficult and low paid job. One hospital director in a Voivodship town said that he was not able to find an effective method of recruiting this professional group. There is also a concern that too little differences in earnings of qualified nurses and medical carers may discourage a lot of candidates to take up nursing studies.

The knowledge gained during training is of substantial quality but in the opinion of employers there are equally important requirements not confirmed by certificates, such as: respect for sick or disabled patients, sense of responsibility for the health and security of sick patients, empathy, willingness to help other people and the feeling of pride and satisfaction of the performed work.

As it is easy to give a positive answer to a question about the usefulness of the content of training material it is difficult to assess at the moment to what extent the training program effectively teaches how to observe work ethics and respect patients' rights. According to one hospital director a person whom he employed in his hospital very quickly adapted to the new work conditions and skillfully makes use of theoretical and practical knowledge. Similar opinions about their new employees were expressed by other managers of health care institutions. The directors of hospitals in which the future medical carers had practical instruction suggested that the number of practical classes should be increased. They admitted that they gladly "patched up" the shortages of nursing staff thus giving a positive opinion of the trainees, the future medical carers and the training process.

The employers avoided making comments as to the content of training programmes and the teaching itself due to the fact that the profession of medical carer is still very new and hasn't been functioning for too long. However, they often expressed their satisfaction with the fact that such training has been made available and suggested the following:

- the need of wide promotional and information campaign among students of the lower and upper secondary schools encouraging them to train in the profession of medical carer
- financial support for the unemployed willing to get new qualifications and undertake employment in the new profession
- higher earnings for medical carers taking into account at the same time the adequate difference in the level of qualified nurses' earnings
- ensure that the learning process is not too theoretical. The so called theoretical lessons should be supported by practical instruction teaching how to put the theory into practice
- aim at the introduction of this training in all Post-secondary Medical Schools in the country.

The managers of health care institutions did not formulate any initial conditions for candidates who requalified and were prepared to undertake employment as medical carers. They were ready to employ everyone with a diploma confirming relevant qualifications. In principle they were not willing to employ candidates who had a criminal record. They would gladly employ teachers with medical carer's qualifications.

The profession of medical carer belongs to the group of public trust professions. The appropriate preparation requires formalized requirements as to the process and the content of training. In the opinion of employers it can not be just any training entitling to employment. That is why they assess the training system as adequate to the real needs and requirements of sick patients and the providers of treatment and care. There is an agreement as to the formal and informal requirements towards employees caring for sick patients in public as well as private health care institutions.

Demand for medical carers will be growing as Polish society is getting older and richer. More medical cares will be employed by private clients. Unemployment among people over 50 may represent an opportunity for a wide-spread action offering an opportunity to gain a new profession and work as medical carer. Those people possess qualities such as sense of responsibility, life experience and readiness to be useful in society, which are valued by the managers of health care institutions. They less often consider working abroad. Therefore, the offer and the training conditions should take into consideration this group.

The current training programme and training of medical carers fulfills all conditions guaranteeing appropriate preparation for the profession. It also seems sufficient with regard to candidates willing to requalify. However, it is still too early to provide full assessment of the programme and draw conclusions due to short period of functioning of this profession.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Assessment on the suitability of the available VET/adult education measures for supporting occupational change

The results of the analyses carried out within this study show significant discrepancies between health care and the remaining two sectors in the level of suitability of the available measures for supporting occupational change

It might be observed that in case of occupations which are not covered by the *system approach to education* the practical role of the available adults' training measures in the process of their occupational change is very limited. Neither in the case of the cook nor the plumber gaining qualifications adequate to specifics of the vocations can be regarded as a precondition for occupational change. As result, in both of the cases there is limited interest in the available offer among people preparing for vocational change - which in fact is a derivative of employers' expectations towards qualifications of their future employees. In this context, it should be stressed that the limited interest in the available adults' training offer for cooks and plumbers does not necessarily mean that the measures are inadequate to practical knowledge and skills useful in this professions. It is rather a result of combination of the following three factors:

- weak link between regulatory guidelines, requirements concerning professional competencies of cooks and plumbers (fitters of sanitary installations and sanitary facilities) and system of executing this qualifications in business practice,
- low supply of qualified plumbers and cooks on the Polish labour market (at the time of prosperity in construction and tourism sectors),
- social acceptance/common consent for carrying out cooking or plumbing works by people with no adequate educational background.

Although in both of the analysed sectors employees and employers indicated some desirable improvements of the available training offer, in general it was not the low quality or inadequacy of training program, high costs of participation or lack of possibility of reconciling participation in the trainings with professional activities that discouraged adults from taking up the measures.

On the one hand it might be concluded that in the current economic situation the supply of training measures, preparing adults' for occupational change into cook or fitter of sanitary installations and sanitary facilities, is higher than interest in this kind of offer. There can be identified many examples of organizations offering comprehensive preparation for the occupations which state that they are not able to recruit a sufficient number of people for establishing at least one training group per year. On the other hand, the training providers are not effective in creating demand for their services. First, their training offer is often not precisely defined. Second, potential target groups are not aware of the measures available on the market, which suggests the need for better promotion of the training offer and its potential benefits to participants and their employers.

A vitally more important role of the available VET/adult education measures in supporting occupational change was observed in the health care sector in which there can be observed a system approach to education of medical carers. In general, in this case both the employees and the employers expressed positive opinions and attitude

to vocational training of medical carers and usefulness of the acquired knowledge in the execution of medical carer's duties.

The existing system precisely defines the possible ways to obtaining qualifications necessary to become a medical carer and there is no place left for "taking a shot cut" to being employed at such position.

Moreover, the training offer addressed to people interested in vocational retraining and acquiring the qualifications of medical carer is very broad and usually different forms of training are available for training groups gathered according to age or education level, i.e.:

- training courses for the graduates of junior high schools and secondary schools;
- intra- or extramural training courses for working youth under 24 years of age, graduates of junior high schools and secondary schools;
- extramural training courses for working adults and unemployed, graduates of junior high schools and secondary schools.

The above mentioned training courses authorize the graduates to use the title of medical carer and entitle them to take up the job at health service and social welfare establishments. They can also take exams under the Regional Examination Board (OKE) to get a EUROPASS. The training provided by public institutions is free of charge.

The training of medical carers is subject to rigorous requirements concerning the programme, duration of the course and the acquisition of qualifications entitling to work with patients, nurses and medical doctors. This approach is fully justified by the fact a medical carer is the profession of public confidence.

According to the research, the training offers outnumber the potential candidates. There are training centers that had undertaken organizational, financial and didactic activities and yet did not manage to recruit students for the year 2008/2009. The Ministry of Health estimates the demand of public and private health service for medical carers at the level of 50 thousand people, while according to the health service establishments' managers, little more than 200 people took up the job after a year of training. At the same time, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education indicates a significant interest of private training centers in launching the training courses for medical carers.

Among the best practices meant to attract potential candidates there are "open days", promoting the job in the media, at Labour Offices, junior high schools and secondary schools for youth and adults. There is also a positive reception of training offers that enable the candidates to take the Regional Examination Board (OKE) exam intramurally, without the need to travel to OKE's premises.

Professional knowledge delivered to the students and a relatively short duration of the courses guarantee fast retraining and the possibility of employment to those who have just lost their job. The unemployed in poor economic condition may also apply for financial support of a local Labour Office.

The institutions offering training courses for medical carers pay utmost attention to building the image of the job as a profession of future and with a high rank in the socially utile jobs hierarchy. Traineeships and study visits to other EU member states also meant to contribute to this goal.

4.2 Recommendations

One of the key recommendations of his study is a necessity of increasing expenditures (both private and public) on promotion of vocational education in Poland. This refers both to promotion of particular education measures offered by various providers as well as increasing general awareness of the importance of adequate educational background for proper performance of particular occupations. Such activities could also be aimed at increasing general knowledge about qualifications that should be possessed by people working in certain occupations and consequently to decrease social acceptance of services provided by companies whose employees do not have such competences.

A very important issue is assuring more consistent execution of requirements concerning adequate qualifications of persons working in occupations which may have significant influence on health and safety of people using services provided by them e.g. services of gastronomic units, plumbing works related to use of electric and gas energy etc. A good example of such approach is the occupation of medical carer towards whom there are posed high vocational and ethical expectations.

Moreover, it is suggested to create more possibilities for completing the vocational education process with direct confrontation of theoretical knowledge with practical skills (e.g. providing incentives for higher companies'/employers' involvement in the education process).

It is also recommended to create a system providing easy access to taking state exams under the Regional Examination Board to facilitate the process of proving/verifying/certifying vocational qualifications. Such an approach might also require providing sufficient number of people with qualifications entitling them to be a member of the Examining Commissions.

Basing upon expectations of employees the available training measures should also provide its participants with a possibility of developing language skills (especially English and German).

Finally, it is also suggested that the training offer should take in consideration the different life experience of young and elderly people. Therefore, especially in case of medical carers the training program addressed to young people should give more attention to issues concerning building of sensitivity and social responsiveness.

Government

In terms of policy recommendations drawn up from this studies it is suggested to take measures (at national and other EU Member States' level) to unify qualification requirements within the EU in the analysed occupations (and probably many others), which is essential for facilitation of international mobility of employees. It is also recommended that vocational training providers should further develop a modular system of education so that trainees do not have devote time to re-education of knowledge and skills already possessed. This approach should contribute to the reduction of time and costs of such an education. In this context, it might also be useful to implement a system enabling the development of selected practical and manual skills at the primary school level. Another important issue is that vocational education should obtain stronger support of the national government, and local self-governments but at the same time the support should be supervised more effectively - there are many training courses financed with public funds which do not provide its participants with formally certified qualifications. Moreover, the vocational education process should be realized in close cooperation with chambers of commerce or crafts' guilds, whose members might for example provide internships to participants of the courses.

Training providers

There is a strong need for vocational training providers to develop close co-operation with employees' and employers' organizations. Usually the organizations are aware or in some cases even suffer from consequences of imperfections of existing system of vocational education. This cooperation might support the process of adjusting occupational education to labour market needs, new technologies or techniques.

Other public actors

Public Employment Services (PES) might have a very important role in fascinating the process of occupational change. This concerns not only people who are unemployed but also those who want to prepare for new occupations while still working for previous employer. To enable proper performance of PES' duties it is essential that it has good knowledge of market demand for certain occupations as well as good orientation on available training measures and their adequacy to requirements of the labour market.

For this reason one should recommend the development of closer cooperation between PES, academic/research sector and businesses to e.g. better understand employers' and employees' expectations towards certain vocations.

Another suggestion is that chambers of commerce, craft's chambers and employers organisations should have higher interest in the process of vocational education as this might help them to prevent or avoid many problems that otherwise will have to be faced in the future.

Future research areas

Results of analysis carried out under this study show many fields for potential improvements in vocational education of adults in Poland which might result in increasing utility of available training measures in the process of occupational change into cooks, plumbers or medical carers. It may be expected that many of the conclusions are applicable also to other sectors. Apart from the recommendation to conduct similar studies also for some other sectors in Poland it should also be considered to:

- analyse possibilities of development of system enabling monitoring of changes in employers' and employees' expectations concerning available vocational training measures for adults;
- conduct foresight research on the future labour market needs in particular occupations;
- carry out studies on the current state of the art and future vocational training needs with regard to occupations which fading away (e.g. cobbler, furrier, stove fitter etc.)

analyse necessary support of the vocational education system at the level of the EU and its particular Member States.

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