

Youth Education and Employability in EU challenged by culture and technology

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Abstract

2020 was the year of finalization of many programs upon which other ones were build, by principle, more solid, sustainable and effective directing to a unification that will assure social inclusion and economic growth. Programs with higher impact on education, research and culture, respectively Erasmus+ 2021-2027, Horizon Europe and Creative Europe, were launched in last two years, setting the path toward which the future of youth can be foreseen. In this programs cross border dimension is appraised as the approach to European citizens that pursue intellectual and cultural development beyond personal benefits, contributing to the community and society by making human capital more employable and competitively more advantaged.

Unlike policies related to legislation and security, policies related to education are difficult to be imposed because from one side they rely on the will and responsibility of citizens and their elected governing entities to improve themselves and from the other side their effect in the short run exacerbate individuals and their domain (family and community). The actual challenge is with the most presumed active and performing group of population (youth) whose potential is conditioned from the degree to which the human capacity is exploited. For this reason, education and employment take a particular attention because it is generally concentrated in this life period.

This study tries to evidence how culture and technology, as main influencers of social-political-economical change, have challenged education and employment of youth, to have a clearer perspective on the real possibility of programs to succeed.

Keywords: Culture, education, employability, European Union, technology, youth.

Introduction

Freedom of movement is the fundamental principle of the European Union (EU). Concretely free movement of labor is one of the four key principles aside free movement of goods, services and capital. To ensure it, there has to be some sort of standardization to ease the move, in terms of human capacity. This standardization has to be interpreted in this contexts as a common denominator or a single unit measure to the chance for free movement.

EU acknowledges education as a very important instrument in achieving this principles and the unification of Europe. All the problems faced in the last decade, especially the crises (financial and migration) brought to the fore again how important it is to inspire youth to be responsible citizens and representative ones in terms of capability, not only to benefit the economy. So growth, mobility and employability takes a special focus when discussing youth.

As education policies are decided at the Member State level, the EU facilitates cooperation between members, while supporting the mutual recognition of diplomas and fostering mobility. (Salm&Klugman:2017)

This study is a desk research and literature review of publications of research department and think tank of the European Parliament with regard to education and employment confront evolution of technology and cultural development.

A. Education, Employability and Employment

Education should be understood as a process to reaching a final goal, not the final goal itself. The final goal itself, when it is not the pleasure of reaching a higher intellectual and cultural level on a personal aspect, it is the intention to get employment and satisfy the need to provide beyond personal aspect.

It is each persons own decision, sometimes solution, to make the choice on how to proceed in its own life path as an active and capable human being. Making the choice of a decent-right-responsible-affordable education and/or employment is affected by the background and opportunities to which a person is exposed.

Education takes different forms, more common being: formal, informal and non-formal one or from a different view point, academic and non-academic. But education starts at a very early stage of the development of a human being. The challenge is to have good basic skills (literacy, numeracy and science) along with critical thinking and creativity and problem solving skills in order to go have access to higher levels of education/employment (Katsarova:2017).

The latter depends on good educators and trainers. These have to be individuals that come from a solid foundation of basic skills, that blend well the theoretical and practical knowledge and the system must assure that the knowledge transmission-assimilation is effective noted in the students ability to easily integrate to labor market. The paper on "Teaching careers in the EU: Why boys do not want to be teachers?", addresses the difficulty to develop programs that fully prepare teachers for the profession in practice and the necessity to raise the status and attractiveness of the teaching profession that is currently facing problems like aging teacher population, teacher shortage, few young teachers and significant gender imbalances in staffing at different levels of education because of social construct of femininity and masculinity, low pay and stressful, unattractive, to much patience needed, features that relate more to the mothers role. The given resolutions on this problem is more recognition by the society of teachers, investing in them and equipping them with ICT skills, entrepreneurial skills and inclusive education techniques in line with latest developments, better pays and work conditions, further training and more protection against violence and harassment in education institution (Katsarova:2020).

Regarding the literacy, in the study of Research for CULT Committee –Science and Scientific Literacy as an Education Challenge it was stated that EU is threatened by the spread of misinformation, disinformation and pseudo-science. The resolution to prepare scientifically literate citizens was posited in 6 points: 1. Conceptualize scientific literacy in curriculum and competence frameworks, 2. Address the threats relating to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, 3. Support innovation and lifelong

learning in science education, 4. Develop adequate instruments for assessing scientific literacy, 5. Build teachers capacity to foster scientific literacy, 6. Promote participatory research and open science (Siarova & Starnadel & Szonyi: 2019).

The non-formal learning are considered programs that offer basic skills, resolve certain issues, train for a specific job, blend theory with practice or specialize in specific field. They can be in the form of short courses, workshops and seminars. Are mainly used to provide access to formal high education for adults. The problem that makes them not very pursued is their validation, consequently they are not recognized with the same seriousness of a course for example expressed in credits. From the other side validation will need collaboration of labor market, education system and organizations engaged with this activities NGO.¹

Employability is the qualitative measure of a job in terms of skills, attitudes and attributes so to be employed and function successfully in required roles.²

For persons who do not continue on classic higher education, a second option is vocational education and training. But this again is a process and as so it needs to be updated on an ongoing basis to keep up with the dynamics of job market demands. For this it cannot be seen as only a second opportunity for less academic performing persons but also as a lifelong training necessity. The less the working skills are developed, the higher is the possibility to lose the job. Although here arises a problem: unfair distribution of workforce that creates under-qualified or over-qualified labor which can be channeled through better monitoring mechanisms at a national level in recruitment, short term contact etc.

The demand for skills is effected by: digitalization, globalization, the green economy and demographic trends.³ As digitalization so far didn't prove to automate work to the point of decreasing demand for work, it is evident that it pressured to a highly skilled and qualified work supply, new jobs (especially care jobs), increase in active working years. Globalization from the other side is shifting the industrial economy to knowledge economy.

The problem created here is with those who do not reach the sufficient level of educational qualification and leave education and training and can't keep up with the dynamics of the labor environment. The resolution can be to update skills continuously through life, have access to opportunities to do so and have incentives/encouragement to undertake such activities.

By promoting studies abroad and facilitating mobility, youth has proved to develop new skills like increase chances to employability, adaptability and flexibility, knowledge of different languages and cultures, translated in intercultural competences, increase in self-efficiency/reliance/awareness. Anyway as education policies are decided at the Member State level, the role of EU remains facilitation of cooperation between members, while supporting the mutual recognition of diplomas and fostering mobility. (Salm & Klugman: 2017).

¹ Chircop, D., Clarós, E. (2018, December). Infographic Lifelong Learning. Non-Formal Learning: Access and Validation. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

² Yaqoob, N. (2016, July) *Employment vs Employability*. From: <https://fromtheresearchdesk.wordpress.com/2016/07/10/employment-vs-employability/>

³ Hogarth, T. (2019, September). Skills for the labour market: EU policies for VET and upskilling. European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies. Brussels.

According to the study on “Skills development and employment” for the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, the three main forms of developing skills to increase employability of citizens in changing labor market are: apprenticeship (as a form of VAT), internships and volunteering.⁴

European Union has developed special structures and policies to support VET activities. CEDEFOP that supports development and implementation of VET policies. European Training Foundation that supports reformation of education and training systems. Along this the main policies include: European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training, key competences of VET curricula and lifelong training, Youth Guarantee, Quality Framework for Apprenticeship and European Solidarity Corps etc. with the most important being Education and Training 2020, European Pillar of Social Rights and the New Skills Agenda.

The Agenda is a package of measures to bring improvements in three areas: 1. Basic competences, 2. Visibility and comparability of competences, 3. Labor market and skills intelligence to facilitate effective career decisions in the fields of education, training and (un-)employment.⁵ It gives special attention to employment orientation through ‘career management skills’ to better channel skills, interests and opportunities for education and employment. Effective lifelong guidance provision requires programmes and policies in a crosscutting perspective as well as in each of the relevant fields: 1. education (schools), 2. vocational education and training, 3. higher education, 4. Adult learning, 5. employment (for working people, older workers and unemployed) and 6. social inclusion (e.g. early school leaving and dropout, long-term unemployed or disabled), 7. transnational mobility in education and employment (e.g. ERASMUS, EURES, Euroguidance) (Kraatz:2017). Career management skills prove to prevent dropouts, increase educational attainment, increase self awareness on taking based decisions on education and after education, on career.⁶

Employment from the other side is the clash of social and political forces, out of which a business tries to reach its main goal: maximization of profit.

The changes in the structure of employment can give a picture on the development of skills. Technology and globalization brought polarization of employment (increase of gap between high skilled and low skilled) and low labor cost that lower the compensation.⁷

Is the governing institutions duty to position in identifying where there is a need to intervene to reskill and upskill. EU has supported countries with policies with this regard but yet VET systems need to be functioning at a national level to respond effectively with trained work force to the changes of the labor market.

The interval between education and employment offers a good platform to evidence

⁴ Broek, S., Hogarth, T., Baltina, L., Lombardi, A. (2017, April). Skills Development and Employment: Apprenticeships, Internships and Volunteering Directorate General For Internal Policies-Policy Department A: Economic And Scientific Policy.

⁵ Kraatz, S. (2017, September). New Skills Agenda for Europe: State of implementation. European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic and Scientific Policy. Brussels.

⁶ Kraatz, S. (2017, October). Skills development and employment: the role of career management skills. European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic and Scientific Policy. Brussels.

⁷ Hogarth, T. (2019, September). *Skills for the labour market: EU policies for VET and upskilling*. European Parliament, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies. Brussels.

the potential and will to solve problems related to the most active and performing part of society, youth and employees.

When considering this interval is important to address some issues: the steady ageing of EU population, quality and relevance of formal education, less experienced youth unemployed, lower severance payments as a consequence, difficulty to work during education, position of national labor markets, structural characteristics of labor markets, social inequalities (Katsarova: 2016).

Regardless of the provisions of EU on vocational training, youth exchange and engagement in the European unification in respect to freedom and rights of everyone, policies especially those related to education are implemented through open method coordination, meaning that EU does not impose policies.⁸ Anyway the Union initiatives on youth employment are many: EU Youth Strategy, Europe 2020 Strategy (school drop-out rate at less then 10% and 40% of 30-34 years old holding a tertiary degree), ET 2020, Youth on the Move, Youth Employment package that established Youth Guarantee financed through Youth Employment Initiative, The European Alliance for Apprenticeship, Quality Framework for Traineeships, Public Employment Service Network, European Pact for Youth, European Solidarity Corps and last but not least Horizon Europe, Erasmus 2021-2027 and Creative Europe.

A category in this interval that needs special attention are the NEETs. NEETs is the acronym used to refer to young people who are not in education, employment or training or cover the unemployed (can't find work) and inactive (don't look for work). (Lecerf:2017). Studies have categorized them in more sub-groups to give a clearer picture of the composition of the NEETs.

The difference in composition of NEETs between countries can help in identifying problems easily and addressing them correctly, working with more efficient policies. Factors that cause this difference are generally demographic: gender (more female NEETs the males), age (increase of NEETs with age), education (less educated NEETs). Employment is effected by family responsibilities, disability and discouragement from long term unemployment.⁹

B. Education and Culture

Oxford English dictionary defines culture as "the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively" or "the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society." As so, culture takes the most important place in a discussion for education, especially for EU and its multicultural societies.

Earlier in this paper we mentioned, the importance of critical thinking and creativity and problem solving skills, to advance in education and employment. Culture is the best instrument to facilitate this. Through technology today individuals have access to culture and art but still it has to be educated also regulated and structured from

⁸ Katsarova, I. (2016, March). *The EU's youth initiatives: Closing the gap between education and employment*. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

⁹ Lecerf, M. (2017, March). *NEETs: who are they? Being young and not in employment, education or training today*. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

educative institutions. Informal and non formal learning can be used for this. Cultural and arts education in compulsory school curricula, when taught on an equal footing with other subjects and approached in an experimental way, offers children an area for exploration and learning through experience and self-expression. (Pasikowaska-Schnass:2017).

Society from the other side acts on conditions of civilization, meaning they always push to advance higher in cultural and social developments, always in respect of democracy, citizenship and diversity. They need a sense of belonging but also they need to adopt to changes in the learning and working environment.

Europe for Citizen programme is the most important platform to address and promote citizenship that goes beyond legal status and electoral right. The objectives of EfC are crucial for strengthening citizenship and democracy in the EU and therefore it is important that decision-making regarding the core elements of the programme is conducted in the basic act to ensure the democratic legitimacy of the decision-making. A study for CULT Committee- Europe for Citizens: Towards the next program generation, recommended further action to increase thematic cohesion and simplicity of the program for its objectives to be fulfilled all together. For this it was recommended to streamline the programme in a more consistent way around citizenship, participation and democracy that are the core topics of the programme (Makinen: 2018).

Another issue of the intercultural communication is the language. Language is the main way a country expresses its culture and autonomy in terms of identity. One language for Europe it's not possible because the priority is to preserve democracy, transparence and accountability.¹⁰ Anyway multilingualism is a step forward to cross borders (hurdles), to widen culture, be more accepting, understanding, attractive in terms of competitiveness, a more educated and cultures society still preserving diversity.

EU promotes multilingualism through the goal of citizens that are proficient in mother tongue plus 2 other languages. But achieving this has faced many hurdles when considering the digital single market because smaller languages can't keep up with the language technologies. For this EU launched in 2015 the Strategic Agenda for the Multilingual Digital Single Market that had in its main programme language technology services.¹¹

C. Education and Technology

Digitalization and technology have revolutionized all the aspects of life, from economy to culture and politics. Education takes a special importance here because it is a process, as emphasized earlier in this paper, and as so it walks parallel with the developments. Referring to the education that leads to capable individuals that react efficiently to the changes especially in activities that will provide the living

¹⁰ Katsarova, I. (2019, September). Multilingualism: The language of the European Union. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

¹¹ Pasikowska-Schnass, M. (2018, September). Languages and the Digital Single Market. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

(employment-labor market), digital exposure is crucial. Gaining digital access is conditioned from the persons own ability to reach out for it. Nevertheless age, level of education and skills, technology and infrastructure in learning/working environment pressure the decision to education and employment.¹²

The shift from hard skills to soft skills came as a necessity to fit the labor market and further European citizenship. With this regard education is the only instrument to assure a decent preparation of learners of any age who then go to look for work. European values of human dignity and right, freedom, democracy, equality and rule of law can be embedded through technology integrated into a social inclusive education. Emphasizing the importance of lifelong learning, informal and non-formal education through digital education can offer an adequate formation of learners, teachers, employees that perform highly and get compensated fairly for their effort, contributing to the society at the same time. The differentiating advantage that every person or actor on this plane creates, will lead to a more fair competitiveness, in terms of employability, that translates to economic growth and living standard increase.

A study of the Scientific Foresight Unit, concretely the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology, on "Rethinking education in the digital age", identified 4 stakeholder in the digital education era: policy makers and public administrations, students, educators, business and employers. Also it recommended 4 comprehensive instruments that policy makers in EU can opt for in order to regulate education responding to rapid technological changes: incorporating education in the digital age into existing and future research frameworks to further promote evidence-based policy, supporting the creation of a knowledge-sharing platform for education in the digital age, simplifying and harmonizing the recognition and validation of lifelong learning, and offering a harmonized, yet versatile cloud solution for the provision of high-quality (open) educational resources.(Braun, Marz, Mertens & Nisser:2020).

Benefits that technology and its development has brought to society are undeniable and can be easily distinguished. However it has also proved to have negative effects on an individual level, especially in 2 direction: health (addiction) and culture and society.¹³ In another study of the Scientific Foresight Unit, concretely the Panel for the Future of Science and Technology, on "Harmful internet use Part I &II", there were identified 3 health problems: generalized internet addiction, online gaming addiction, online gambling addiction. Regarding problem on social and cultural direction there were identified 8 harmful effects: internet addiction, harm to cognitive development, information overload, harmful effects on knowledge and belief, harm to public/private boundaries, harm to social relationships, harm to communities and harms to democracy and democratic citizenship. These aside from other types/aspects of harm like harm to privacy, cyber-security, cybercrime etc.

From the same study it resulted that educated adolescents and young males were more predisposed to develop an addiction and cause harm in an environment that

¹² Chircop, D., Claros, E. (2019, October). Adult learners in a digital world. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

¹³ Brey, Ph., Gauthier, S., Milam, P., Scientific Foresight Unit. (2019, January). Harmful internet use. Part II: Impact on culture and society. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels and Lopez-Fernandez, O., Kuss, D. J. (2019, January). Harmful internet use. Part I: Internet addiction and problematic use. European Parliamentary Research Service. Brussels.

favors evidently

co-morbidities. And the treatment proved to be more effective is cognitive behavioral therapy and family support. Policies to prevent and mitigate this effects go from 'no action' policies to using internet as an educative tool and instrument and further to establishing entities to address problems and offer support.

Conclusions

It remains at the willpower of European countries to create initiatives for people to pursue education and employment being aware of the benefits of it beyond personal goals. Meanwhile member countries have full responsibility for the education, training, employment system.

European Union should promote best practices to direct other countries on the principle of lead-by-example and expand its function (role) in supporting and coordinating education and employment. EU can contribute in informed policy decision and reforms to reflect to the outcome with high cultured employable young people. Investment in education is crucial to increase chances of young people and adults in the labor market.

Development of skills by training and education does not automatically mean higher social and economical outcome, if the process does not substantiate to be efficient, let alone effective. Upgrading knowledge and skills throughout life can be achieved by access in learning/working opportunities and encouragement to use and further transmit this assimilated knowledge and skills, so that progress from one generation to the next one assures at least no repetition of the same mistakes.

Considering that the many policies regarding education and employment overlap, it is important to engage youth, as the main subject of them, in consulting and advisory positions, to voice their opinions and interests on policy making at all levels.

Differences between countries in Europe, regarding progress in terms of policy implementation, can be overcome through digital transformation as a good way to measure capabilities and upskill or reskill as necessary.

A measure of the level of social emancipation of a country is its culture. Educating citizens of Europe to be acceptant of a different culture respecting it, yet conserve ones culture, all in a multicultural demanding environment is key to assure principal of freedom and democracy in EU. Adopting technology to facilitate cultural exchange and cross borders (for example through language learning) can accelerate integration and policy implementation. Further research is needed to calculate the losses and missed opportunity from multilingualism.

It is a national level responsibility to control and monitor, through specific structures, the developments of education and technology; to provide resources and funds to increase awareness on problems that come from internet and treat the issue institutionally for families and community.

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