

HUMAN CAPITAL MOBILITY OF A SKILLED WORKFORCE

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Abstract:

Recent communications of the European Commission emphasises new elements on its agenda, such as a “rethinking education” coordinate. This refers especially to the VET system and the collaboration of the education institutions and the economic actors. An issue which has gained the Commission attention is the system for international equalization of the diplomas obtained by VET students in order to a better mobility inside the EU28. This paper is written as part of a *Partnership for exchange* project between Hungary, Finland, Belgium, Estonia and Romania. In the project are involved university institutions from Hungary, Finland, Estonia and Romania. From Hungary and Romania there are also two associations, representatives of enterprises at local level and from Belgium there are involved two private companies with experience in European projects and quality of projects. The objective of this article is to emphasize the benefits of the ECVET system in order to obtain mobility of the human capital of a skilled workforce. It also gives an inside of the Romanian practical placement situation inside the universities and the VET system from this country and also the perception of the ECVET system here. The article uses national and European statistics.

Keywords: vocational trainings, workforce mobility, ECVET system

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge in today's society is increasingly exponential and the switch in qualification and skill requirements are imminent and evident. In a Europe that wants to catch up with the economy of US and Japan a higher level of adaptability at the needs of the economic markets is demanded. Young and old alike are asked to be trained and to adapt their skills in order to obtain a job.

At the European level there is a mismatching between the lack of specialized workers and the rate of unemployment (Grasedieck, 2013). There also is a mismatching inside the higher vocational education trainings and the evolution of the economic needs. This issue came into the attention of the European Commission and the Lisbon Strategy touched upon higher vocational education and training as a major driver of competitiveness and of innovation (COM (2005) 24 "*Working together for growth and jobs. A new start for the Lisbon Strategy*"). Partners from five countries (Hungary, Romania, Finland, Belgium, Estonia) have realized the validity of the major conclusion of the European studies in their local circumstances: there is significant mismatch between workers' knowledge and skill levels and actual job requirement in the labor market. This gave the idea to organize a series of thematic workshops in the partner countries around different aspects of the on-the-job trainings. This exchange of experience, under the name of *Partnership for Exchange of experience in Student on-the-job Training*, will lead to a cross fertilization of practices and, later on, will end up with learner placements for internships in partner countries. This project also represents a step ahead for the introduction of the ECVET system in the EU28.

Since 2009, the European Parliament recommended the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) to be implemented in all the European countries in order to assure a similar basis as the ECTS system, for the vocational training for a better mobility of the human capital inside the community by "facilitating mobility among learners throughout Europe" (http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/lifelong_learning/c11107_en.htm, accessed on 8 March 2014). ECVET aims at facilitating transnational mobility and recognition of learning outcomes in VET and at borderless lifelong learning. Transnational learning mobility is very specific since it focuses on transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new knowledge, skills and competences (Council, 2011). This concept points to qualifications as the core element and objective of mobility and it is central to ECVET (CEDEFOP, 2012).

This paper serves as an information basis for the project above mentioned (PEST). The article is a desktop analysis made with the purpose of emphasizing the ECVET importance in the mobility of a skilled workforce and the situation of ECVET system in Romania, together with the higher VET and internship program.

1. METODOLOGY

For writing this article we have used desktop analysis: study of the European statistics and different reports regarding the ECVET system and its implementation, study of the existent literature. It is an article which represents a case study on Romania, serving as a support material in the exchanges that are realized in the partnership project co-financed by the European Commission, PEST.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ECVET SYSTEM

2.1. VET in Europe

Vocational Education in Europe has a long tradition dating back to the handicraft from the middle Ages. During the time new professions arise from the division of work and new skills and competences were asked on the labour market. Therefore, the vocational education has increased its importance and in the 20th century in Europe this type of education was introduced in the education system (Grasedieck, 2013). Referring to our time this type of education is not neglected by the European Community, VET being an essential part of EU policy since the very establishment of the Community. Vocational education and training has a key economic function in up-skilling and integrating young people into the labour market and in providing high quality technical skills. It is also a crucial element of the EU Lisbon Strategy, which aims at transforming Europe into the world's most

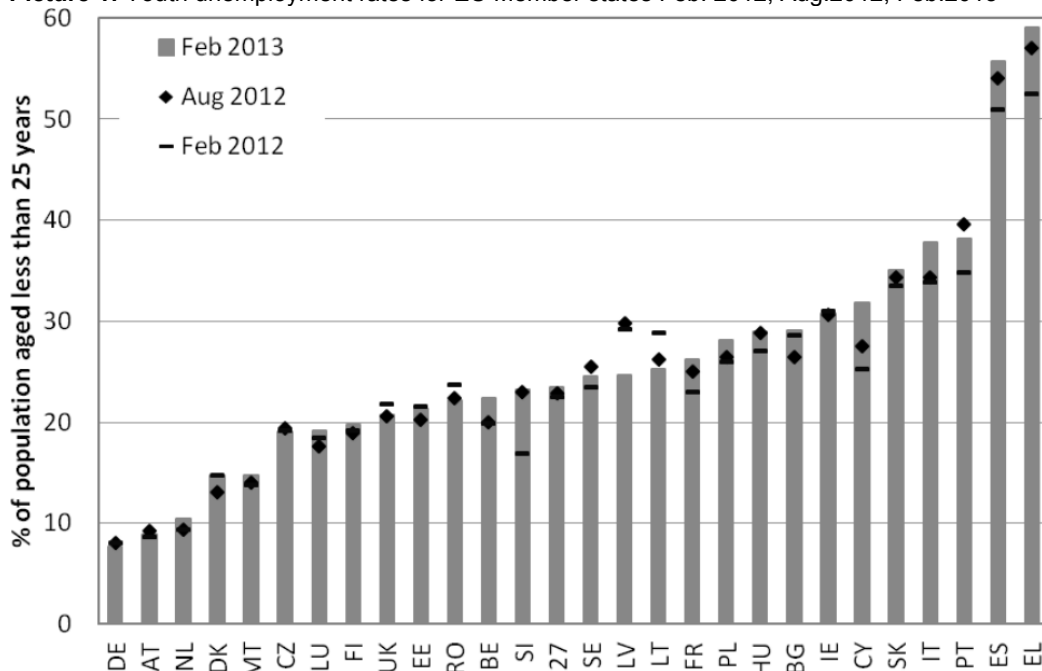
competitive and dynamic knowledge-based society (<http://epthinktank.eu/2013/10/02/european-cooperation-in-vocational-education-and-training-europe-2020-strategy/>).

There was created a framework and the European Commission supports initiatives that will bring to the improvement of training and quality of teachers, trainers and other education providers, and also attempts to reduce the discrepancies between courses taught in higher education, but also on the tertiary level. These objectives can be accomplished by using the transnational collaborations and the mobility of the students and teachers, of the human resource.

2.2. The benefits of ECVET

In the literature there are studies which appreciate that the European society is passing through a crisis because of the unemployment rates of young people which are just finishing their studies (Grasedieck, 2013). This fact can be seen also in the statistics of the European Commission. Since 2008 the unemployment rates of the youngsters in EU27 has increased with 2.3% (see fig. 1). This situation exists in spite of a lack of specialists in Europe. A first problem which was identified is the disconnection between theoretical university education and the practice in many of the European countries. Another problem is the difficulty of the transnational mobility of the qualified workforce because of the different national systems for accreditation and recognition of the competences and skills. With this regards the European credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET) was conceived as „a powerful tool of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) for increasing cross-border cooperation in education and training” (Cedefop, 2012). It can be used to support learners’ geographical mobility as part of an education and training program. At the ECVET 2012 Annual Forum, Mr Antonio Silva Mendes (Director, DG EAC, European Commission) reminded that “the Member States had agreed to increase mobility in VET so that six percent of all learners can benefit”. Currently the figure is close to three per cent so there is still much work to be done (ECVET annual forum paper, 2013).

Picture 1: Youth unemployment rates for EU Member states Feb. 2012, Aug.2012, Feb.2013

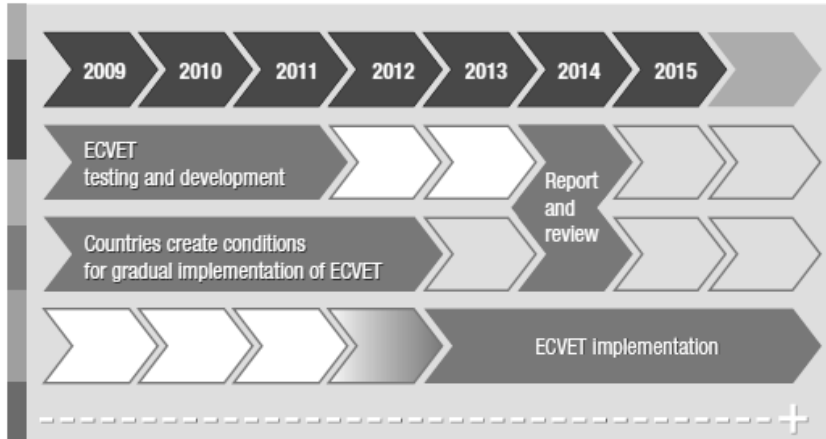


Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020>

Going through different documents of the European organization in charge for the development of vocational education, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), we have identified the main advantage of using ECVET system: facilitates the mobility of a skilled labour force by assuring a quality framework of the process. This means that young and adult learners can be educated and trained in no matter which country of EU28 and by using the ECVET framework their acquired competences and skills will be recognised in all EU28. This advantage has an important impact on the specialization of the human capital. The mobility in the skilled work force can cover the gap in the previously presented situation of the European society.

By recognizing the previous learned competences and skills, ECVET supports also long life learning mobility and also contributes to the students' mobility "by supporting transition between jobs, countries, educational levels and professions" (ECVET Magazine, 2014). ECVET can be used also as a tool for: preventing school leaving and recognition of non-formal and informal learning. Even though, what we need to understand is that the process for implementing ECVET is a long one, which will be accomplished during a period as is emphasized also by the Cedefop (see fig. 2). In the situation phase of implementation that we are today with ECVET there is a need that all the decision makers and employers, education providers, chambers to be brought together and consulted with regards of the framework that will be established. Our PEST project is actually contributing to this necessity and to the development of this stage.

Figure 2: Gradual implementation of ECVET



Source: European Commission, 2009.

3. THE SITUATION IN ROMANIA

3.1. VET in Romania

The education system in Romania starts with the early childhood education and care which is regulated by the Ministry of Education starting with the kindergarten. The Romanian Educational System is divided along two main levels:

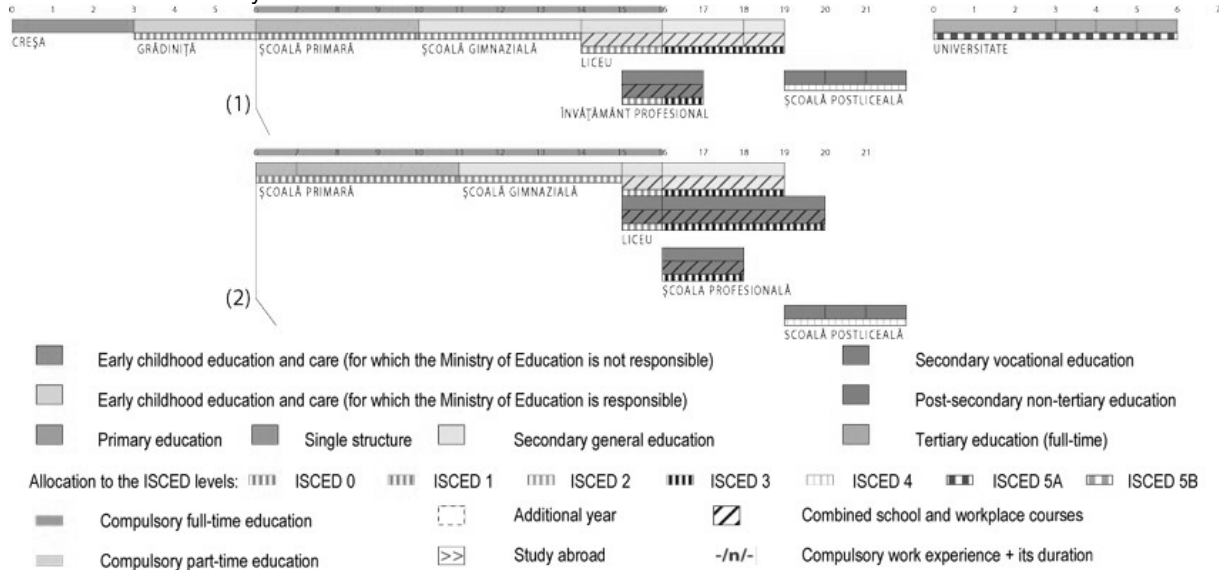
A. Pre-University Level is structured in 4 cycles:

1. Kindergarten - optional, composed of three or four grades
2. Primary school comprises two 4-grade periods:
 - a. Elementary school - grades 1 to 4
 - b. Gymnasium - grades 5 to 8
3. High school - four grades (grades 9 to 12)
4. Vocational education, which can continue or supplant High School to prepare students for careers that are based in manual or practical activities.

B. Higher education is organized (or in the process of being organized) according to the principles of the *Bologna process*, which aims at the construction of the *European higher education area*. It has the following four components:

1. Bachelor - 3 years in most disciplines
2. Master - 2 years in most disciplines
3. Doctorate at least 3 years
4. Lifelong learning which includes *postgraduate* education occurring outside the Master/Doctorate framework.

Picture 3: Education system in Romania



Source: PEST Presentation, Brussels, 2013.

As it can be noticed that vocational education in the Romanian education system is present at secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary level. The European statistics shows that the share of students interested in IVET in Romania is higher than at the European level (63.1% in comparison with 50.3%). For 2012 data is showing that adult participation in lifelong learning (1.4%) is lower than that of EU counterparts (9%). This effect is caused mainly by the lack of training in companies; only around 24% of employers from Romania have invested in the training and perfection of their employees, while at the EU level the percentage went over 60% (European Centre for the Development of Vocational training 2014).

Regarding the employment rate for IVET graduates (aged 20-34) the percentages show a higher rate than EU average. If we compare the employment of IVET graduates from Romania with those from general education is with 4.1% points higher than their counterparts. But when speaking about this statistics one needs to keep in mind the fact that the number of students that are choosing to follow VET in Romania is very low, the majority want to attend the university level (European Centre for the Development of Vocational training 2014).

3.2. Internships in higher education in Romania

In Romania, in higher education system, internships having the meaning of Practical Placement are regulated by the Law No. 258/2007 (Lache, S., Moja, A. and Strajescu, C., 2010). This type of internship is mostly not a paid one but a compulsory one being included in the set of compulsory normative requirements of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). The internship learning objectives and outcomes, length, credit points allocation, themes and evaluation methodology are described in the Practical placement syllabus in the same manner and level of detail as for any other subject in the curriculum. The minimum level requirements stipulated by ARACIS at national level are of 2-3 weeks of practical stages per year, beginning with the second year of study. The PP may take place in a distributed way – during the academic year, or lumped – in well defined periods. As *host organizations* there may be institutions, enterprises, research units, laboratories of the faculty or of other faculties within the accredited higher education framework. The students that are already employed may perform Practical placements at their workplace, if the requirements from the syllabus are fulfilled. Practical stages are organized based on the Practical Placement Agreement, which contains information related to the place and period of the internship, organization and tutoring, the responsible people in the university and on the host organization behalf, the obligations and the rights of the student. In Romania all these three possibilities exist: enterprises search for students in order to select future employees, so they are offering practical places; students search for an enterprise in order to gain practical knowledge or become an employee of the company; university search for PP in companies for their students in order to fulfill the curricula (Lache, S., Moja, A. and Strajescu, C., 2010).

3.3. ECVET in Romania

At the Romanian national level there was created a team besides the National Agency for Community Programs in the field of education and training in the frame of the Ministry of Education. This team was part of the project started in 2011. The scope of the project was to contribute to the reform of education and training in Romania through the development of ECVET at all national qualification levels. Also one of the objectives was to adopt the needed measures in order to apply ECVET for the VET qualification at all NQF and EQF levels. At national level this is the association which helps with creating the common ground for the implementation of ECVET.

Analyzing the situation of the Romanian National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and the VET we could gather some characteristics of the ECVET implementation in Romania. There are some strong points which we would like to emphasize:

- There is a common national offer of VET;
- Training units based on unit points;
- The certification is under the national administration;
- There is a continuous assessment.

Even though there is a lack of flexibility in training delivery and the training deliverers do not offer customized pathways. Also a negative aspect is the fact that there is a disconnection from the market needs, as mentioned before in the article, and the bureaucracy is heavy.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The efforts at European Community level are high in order to implement a system which can solve important social and economic issues of the EU28. The difficulties are related to the common ground that needs to be found. The exchange of experience between countries, between different institutions (education institutions, chambers, employers associations, education deliverers) can be a huge benefit for this phase of implementation of ECVET system.

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