

ADAPTATION OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND COMPETENCIES FOR NEW LABOR MARKETS: THE CURRENT STATE OF INTEGRATION OF YOUTH FROM THE COUNTY OF GORJ

Constanța, ENEA¹ and Constantin, ENEA²

¹University “Constantin Brâncuși” Târgu-Jiu, Gorj, Romania, mail:eneconstanta@yahoo.com

²University “Constantin Brâncuși” Târgu-Jiu, Gorj, Romania, mail:eneconstanta@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: The technological developments in recent decades and the phenomenon of globalization has led institutions and specialists around the world to seek the competencies that every citizen of the Planet needs in order to integrate successfully into the social life in a “knowledge-based economy that would ensure economic development, better jobs and greater social cohesion”. (Presidency Conclusions ... Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000, paragraph 26.)

Competencies are, theoretically speaking (Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning - A European Reference Framework, November 2004, Working Group B “Key Competencies” Implementation of the “Learning and Training 2010” work program, European Commission) a transferable multifunctional package of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, social inclusion and for finding a job. They must be developed at the end of compulsory education and must serve as a foundation for learning as part of lifelong education.

Amid the transformation of economies of developed countries into service economies (from the ‘80s), there were growing concerns about adapting the theories on employment systems and labor market (bearing a strong “industrialist” imprint) to the tertiary sector. As the South-West region of Romania was (and still remains) a mono-industrial area, and the education of Gorj was strongly focused (and still is) on competencies specific to this field, we need to redefine it in order to find viable solutions for integrating the youth in the county, based on the acquisition of knowledge and skills adapted to the period we are going through.

KEYWORDS: labor market, modern learning methods, competencies, absorption young, Gorj education

1. INTRODUCTION

By 2020, the European higher education space will be an essential contribution to creating a Europe of knowledge, which is extremely creative and innovative. Faced with the challenge of an aging population, Europe can achieve this only if it fully develops the talents and capabilities of all its citizens and initiates them in the process of lifelong learning and in widening participation in higher education (Stated the ministers responsible for Higher Education, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve, April 28-29, 2009 under the Bologna Process 2020 - European Higher Education Area in the new decade). Since 2009, the European higher education system is facing its greatest challenge, due to the emergence of new opportunities of globalization and technological development with new suppliers, with new student quota and new types of learning.

Therefore, there is need for the emergence of modern learning methods, which would help graduates develop the competencies they need in the labor market and which will help them become active and responsible citizens.

Employment, a basic component of human development, remains one of the most sensitive issues of society; the harmonization of economic performance and competitiveness criteria with the equity and social justice leads to a multitude of problems that need comprehensive solving.

Starting from this goal, the labor market accumulates significant social tensions in the context of an accelerated restructuring process and erosion of job security.

The changes in the overall structure of population by sex, age, living environments, education level, which took place over the past decades, together with the phenomenon of unemployment caused a reduction in numbers and proportions of the employed population. Accordingly, the employment structure has undergone significant changes with the start of this process. Some structural changes are relevant and beneficial to the present society (such as achieving a modern structure of

employment) others are more confusing, atypical counterproductive, but the background where these changes occur, namely the economic downturn, remains unchanged¹.

In Romania, the transition to a flexible structure of the economy, with a tertiary sector able to integrate a large part of the population that is made available from the secondary sector in particular, takes time but is absolutely necessary because it is an objective trend that reflects the level of socio-economic development of a country. The economy restructuring has not yet ended; it produces many negative social effects. In the south-west of the country in the region of Oltenia, the restructuring of the energy sector will continue to generate an increase in unemployment, which will probably be only partially reabsorbed by the overall economic recovery. In addition, the restructuring of agriculture will issue a significant labor force still maintained in a survival agricultural system, due to the lack of opportunities in the city and in the non-agricultural economy.

The evolution of employment is influenced by several factors²:

- on the one hand, the foreign investment flow will create new jobs and small- and medium-sized enterprises will have a positive contribution to the occupancy rate growth, particularly reflected as non-wage labor (employers, self-employed, freelancers etc.);
- on the other hand, further restructuring and privatization will lead to pressures on employment, generating new layoffs.

We should also highlight the fact that, even if achieving a relatively high economic growth, the job market may remain

¹ “Occupational Mobility and Flexibility of Human Resources - the Premise of Improving Employment in Industry”, article published in the “Management & Marketing” magazine, authors, Anca Borza, Mirela Popa and Codruta Osoian, “Babes-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca

² Idem 4

strained, mainly because of the structure by age and occupations of the labor supply, which is not identical with the economy demands³. The mismatch between the supply and demand for labor is the effect of formative and educational causes, finally resulting in lower employment. For example, the process of mass privatization of Romanian enterprises has led and will lead to a series of actions of reengineering, retrenchment, extension, shifting or dissolution of units, at the same time providing valuable information on the creation and liquidation of jobs in industry and in the overall economy. With the weakening of occupancy rates, some business sectors create jobs, while others are losing. Thus, the manufacturing industry, constructions, hotels and restaurants, transports, health and social care have reduced employment, while agriculture, real estate, public administration, banking and financial activities, trade, etc. have increased it.

The industrial restructuring that took place after 1990 and that continues today in underperforming sectors, did not only mean a significant reduction in the number of jobs, but also the emergence of qualification requirements to effectively use new technologies, introducing the reconfiguration of occupations, and the creation of new professions.

The appearance and disappearance of qualifications related to the extensive changes in the content of occupations and qualifications are particularly notable. If in the EU member countries it is considered that every year, about 10% of the qualification stock is being renewed, in Romania, this process is more comprehensive⁴. Thus, the prolonged transition and economic recession, the structural adjustment, the change of relationships between different sectors (activities) in the economy generate an ongoing process of renewal of professions/occupations, of the knowledge system restructuring. Therefore, new occupations and qualifications arise and the occupations and qualifications acquired before lose their importance. Some of them disappear (mining occupations, for example), while for others, the demand is strongly compressed (occupations and qualifications in metallurgy, petrochemical industry, some manufacturing industry sub-branches etc.).

Sometimes the occupations and qualifications are maintained, but with the development of society, the relationship between knowledge and work habits change. However, knowing all this, it is difficult to say how many of the old qualifications and physically and morally worn and how many remain valid⁵.

MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY - A RESULT OF THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES AMONG INDIVIDUALS; THE CURRENT STATE OF INTEGRATION OF YOUTH FROM THE COUNTY OF GORJ

³ The reasons that determine a process or another in terms of employment may be: economic reasons (recession, structural adjustment, structural deficits and imbalances, inheritance, etc.); institutional (deficiencies in the labor market legislation, the functionality of scanty labor market institutions, the institutional capacity of each of the social actors, etc.); educational/formative (competency and qualification level adapted to the new requirements, skills and behaviors); social (insecurity of employment income, size of income replacement in case of unemployment, the sharp decline in purchasing power, etc.), and last but not least, the methods for managing labor market and human resources in general (active measures/passive measures relationship, supporting the creation of new jobs, unemployment mitigation measures etc.).

⁴ (***, 1997, p. 57).

⁵ Şutaru, 1996, p. 26

Maximum efficiency in human resource exploitation is achieved when human training, skills and aspirations are correlated with the requirements and conditions offered by the workplace. Under these conditions, the school and professional orientation is a necessity paramount for improving the employment of human resources. A prerequisite for man to be able to exploit his employment potential is to bring in the labor market the resources, qualification and skills required by the economic and social activity. Although it is extremely important that people should be oriented and trained for jobs demanded in the labor market, their aspirations, needs and skills should not be neglected either. The job or jobs obtained are rarely in accordance with people's wishes and practically there are very few jobs where people go to work happy. We often talk about "the need for social and professional integration" (especially the young), without raising the question of "job adaptation to the people's needs"⁶. In a competitive market, workers are basically free to choose their work place and type of activity, just as the consumer is free to choose between different goods and services available for sale. Although the range and variety of labor employment activities have increased, employment opportunities for the average worker did not follow the same trend. In a depressed labor market with high unemployment, which market is represented by the current trend, few companies will be hiring, and workers, far from being able to choose jobs that they agree with, may have no alternative but to remain in their current positions. Workers who "sell" their labor force are frantically concerned with finding jobs, while employers who "buy" it may choose to be picky (because of excess labor supply compared with demand).

Labor employment policy took the form of an uneasy compromise between the explicit goal of ceasing financial support of the state enterprises that registered deficits and the political pressure aimed at avoiding massive layoffs and widespread unemployment⁷.

Over the years that followed 1990 and especially in recent years, coupled with the crisis that covered the world, the most striking and the most alarming process in terms of employment, was the sharp and continuous decline in employment.

The massive decline in employment is attributed to the economic failures registered. With them, the volume of employment decreases, the occupancy rate is reduced, job security becomes fragile, and the finality is nothing else but the chronization of unemployment.

Even so, Romania is a country with high employment potential. In late 2004, the population of working age (15-64 years) represented about 15 million people (69.3% of total population), an active population of 9.5 million people, 8.7 million people employed and 799 thousand unemployed people. Romania's target for 2010 was an occupancy rate of 70% (60% among women and 50% among the elderly). The rate of early school leavers must not exceed 10%, at least 85 percent of the 22-year-old people should have completed the courses at a school, and 12% of the population should participate in adult training courses. According to the European Commission data, in 2005, Romania had an occupancy rate of more than 57%, compared to the European average of 63

⁶ Occupational Mobility and Flexibility of Human Resources - the Premise of Improving Employment in Industry", article published in the "Management & Marketing" magazine, authors, Anca Borza, Mirela Popa and Codruta Osoian, "Babes-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca

⁷ (Barr, 1994, p. 11)

percent, an unemployment rate of 7.7% and a long-term unemployment rate of 4.4%. Also, the occupancy rate among people between 55 and 64 years is over 39%, while the EU average is 42.5%.⁸

However, the direst situation is recorded for adult training: while in 2005 the percentage of professional training among the Romanian population was 1.4%, this percentage should have reached 12% by 2010. The European Union trend is to get, by 2013, as close as possible to full occupancy rate by increasing the supply of jobs and their quality, which will lead to quality and productivity at work⁹. It should also be acted on vulnerable groups (young people leaving the education system, women, elderly and disabled people) to attract and retain them in the labor market. To achieve these goals, in 2007-2013, Romania received and will receive over three billion Euros, namely 20% of the total EU money for human resources development. The money from the European Structural Fund (ESF) should be invested in programs of lifelong learning, of adaptability in companies, in active employment measures, particularly among the rural population or in education for developing a knowledge-based economy.

According to the press release dated October 5, 2010 of the National Institute of Statistics in respect of employment and unemployment in the second quarter of 2010, it recorded an occupancy rate of 60.1% of the working age population (15-64 years) and the unemployment rate was 6.8% ILO (International Labour Office)¹⁰. The occupancy rate of 20-64 year-old population was 64.8% at a distance of 5.2 percentage points compared to the national target of 70% set in the context of Europe Strategy 2020. In the second quarter of 2010, Romania's active population was 10,185,000 persons, of which 9,488,000 people were employed and 697,000 people were (by the ILO's definition) unemployed. The economic dependency ratio (number of inactive and unemployed people per 1000 people employed) was 1262‰, higher for the female persons (1589‰) and for those in the urban areas (1327‰). The activity rate of working age population (15-64 years) was 64.8%. The occupancy rate of working age population (15-64 years) of 60.1% had a higher level than the one in the corresponding quarter of the previous year (0.9 percentage points) and than the previous quarter (3.1 percentage points). As in the previous quarters, the occupancy rate was higher for men (67.1% vs. 53.2% for women) and for people in rural areas (63.7% vs. 57.6% in urban areas). The youth occupancy rate (15-24 years) was 25.8%. ILO unemployment rate of 6.8% is declining compared to the previous quarter (8.1%) and higher as compared to the corresponding quarter of the previous year (6.3%). By gender, the difference between the two ILO unemployment rates was 1.1 percentage points (7.3% for men vs. 6.2% for women), and by residential area, 3.9 percentage points (8, 6% for urban areas, vs. 4.7% for rural

⁸ National Institute of Statistics - Employment rate of employment in Romania, accessed on March 14, 2011

⁹ Septimia Dobrescu, employment manager in the European Commission, article printed in Economics, October 24, 2006.

¹⁰ According to the criteria of the International Labour Office (ILO - the ILO unemployment rate is the share of ILO unemployed in the active population. The ILO unemployed are 15-74 year-old people who meet all of the following three conditions: have no job, are available to start work within two weeks; have been actively seeking a job at any time during the last four weeks.)

areas). ILO unemployment rate was the highest (20.5%) among young people (15-24 years)¹¹.

In order to emphasize the individuals' integration into the labor market, I will describe a situation that exists in the county of Gorj, which is also reflected in the data issued for Romania.

In the county of Gorj, a county with a high mono-industrial degree of development, the labor force occupancy rate over time is as follows: according to the specific indicators published by the County Agency for Employment of Gorj, the total population on February 28, 2011 was 380,061 people, of which 250,300 were available labor resources; the active civilian population is 154,000 and the employed civilian population was 139,229 people; of which 80,100 employees and 14,771 unemployed, which formed 9.59% of the unemployment rate¹².

As regards the evolution of unemployment in the county of Gorj during 1991 - 2011, we can see a fluctuating trend, trend that showed both increases and decreases from one year to another, but for the past three years, we can see a slight decrease in the number of unemployed (Table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of unemployment in the county of Gorj during 1991 - 2011

Year	Unemployment rate (%)	Year	Unemployment rate (%)
31.12.1991	1.2	31.12.2001	10.1
31.12.1992	2.7	31.12.2002	10.1
31.12.1993	4.1	31.12.2003	8.9
31.12.1994	3.1	31.12.2004	7.8
31.12.1995	3.8	31.12.2005	9.3
31.12.1996	2.3	31.12.2006	8.7
31.12.1997	9.8	31.12.2007	5.5
31.12.1998	13.2	31.12.2008	7.3
31.12.1999	14	31.12.2009	10.95
31.12.2000	12.9	31.12.2010	9.62
		28.02.2011	9.59

Source: County Agency for Employment of Gorj on February 28, 2011

The number of registered unemployed, existing at the end of January 2011 (14737 people) increased during the month of February 2011, reaching to 14,771 people, following the flow of inputs and outputs made. Thus, the number of unemployed entering the records of CAE Gorj in February 2011 was 1664 people, as follows: 861 people through new listings (360 unemployment benefit recipients 75%, 501 people registered as unpaid unemployed); 803 people by reactivation (86 unemployment benefit reactivations 75%, 36 unemployment benefit reactivations 50%, 681 updates of unpaid unemployed job applications).

I should mention that out of 1787 unemployed included in the layouts of GTZ (German Company for Technical Cooperation), on the inputs and changes in the reporting month, 861 unemployed are new entrants and 803 updated in the records of CAE GORJ, and 123 are transfers from one category to another (transfer in paid from unpaid graduates, transfer in unpaid after expiry of the compensation, etc.). In February 2011, 1630 people were removed from the records of CAE Gorj, through: employment: 460 people (185 paid unemployed, 275 unpaid

¹¹ The source of data is the statistical Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) which is conducted quarterly in accordance with the European Parliament and Council Regulation No, 577/1998 on the organization of a statistical sample survey on employment in the European Community

¹² NIS source (labor force balance on January 1, 2010)

Name of curriculum	Year of the university degree	Number of graduates with degrees	No. of employees	No. of employees in their field of expertise
Finance and Banking	2006	70	39	19
	2007	115	68	41
	2008	486	192	105
	2009	211	87	30
	2010	152	103	26
Total		1034	489	221
Trade, Tourism and Services Economy	2006	59	50	31
	2007	90	59	42
	2008	317	211	101
	2009	146	116	45
	2010	100	66	19
Total		712	502	238
Accounting and Management Information Systems	2006	58	22	14
	2007	84	48	29
	2008	191	98	53
	2009	169	107	48
	2010	68	48	15
Total		570	323	159
Management	2006	49	30	22
	2007	53	20	147
	2008	125	71	56
	2009	108	72	38
	2010	80	38	13
Total		415	231	143
	2008	14	11	9
	2009	24	21	6
	2010	26	23	3
Total		64	55	18
Total school period under review		2795	1600	779

unemployed); outputs from the paid unemployed category, as a result of suspension, termination of monies due, other cases (161 people); outputs from the unpaid unemployed category, unless job maintenance is required (1009 people). The difference between the 1753 unemployed highlighted in the layouts of GTZ on the outputs and changes in the reporting month and 1630 people removed from the records of CAE Gorj in February 2011, outlined above, represents 123 unemployed people whose payment periods have expired under the law in force (transfers from one category to another). In February 2011, the categories most affected by unemployment among the paid unemployed are: that of people aged 40-49 years, 2679 people out of 8882 paid unemployed, representing a rate of 30.16% compared to 2667 people registered in January 2010 and that of people aged 30-39 years, 2156 people (24.27% out of 8882 paid unemployed) compared to 2075 people (23.42% out of 8861 paid unemployed) registered in January. For the unpaid unemployed, the categories most affected by unemployment are the people aged 40-49 years, 1581 people (26.85%) followed by the age group between 30-39 years old, 1513 people (25.69%). The conduct of the Employment Program in February 2011 led to the creation and employment of 460 jobs, of which 213 for women.

Regarding the distribution of unemployed by education, the situation is as follows: higher education - 1327 unemployed of which 807 are women; secondary education: 4711 of which 2330 are women; of these workers - 8733 (of which 3376 are women).

The people with higher education are mainly provided by the "Constantin Brancusi" University of Targu Jiu. To highlight the degree of integration of young graduates, we will consider their evolution in the last five years based on the example of the School of Economics and Business Administration. If we consider a comparative analysis of the number of students enrolled in the university curricula in the period 2006 - 2011, we can see a continuous decline in the student numbers; the difference becomes significant if we compare the academic year 2010 - 2011 with the academic year 2006 - 2007 (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' number evolution during 2006 - 2011

Curricula	Dynamics of the students' number				
	2006 - 2007	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011
University degree	2549	2686	2154	1941	1651
Master's degree	447	305	733	921	552
Doctor's degree	-	-	-	-	8
Total	2996	2991	2887	2862	2211

Source: Website regarding the school status in 2010

The professional insertion in the labor market of curricula graduates from the School of Economics and Business Administration, a basic component of "Constantin Brancusi" University of Targu-Jiu, during 2006 - 2010, February 2011, is shown in the following table (Table no. 3).

Table 3. The situation of professional insertion in the labor market of curricula graduates from the School of Economics and Business Administration - during 2006 - 2010

Source: Website regarding the school status in 2010. The data were obtained by the tenure teachers of the school by contacting each graduate on the telephone.

We can see that many young people who graduated this year and last year are unemployed.

This situation is not unique in the county of Gorj. The same goes for all graduates in the country. Every year, hundreds of young people receive a graduation degree, which is of no real use.

The higher education graduates within the university, in particular, have nowhere to find a job, the vacancies provided to the unemployed by the County Agency for Employment (CAE) of Gorj are generally for those without education or with only secondary education. For example, in the first half of March 2011, the total of jobs available is 106. According to representatives of CAE Gorj, out of the 106 available jobs, seven are for the high school graduates of the 2010 promotion; for those interested there are available two jobs of manager worker and five jobs of unskilled worker in building demolition, masonry, mosaic, crockery. At the same time, for people with higher education only two jobs are available, one of advisor/expert/inspector/trade economist and another one of vehicle engineer.

Following the analysis, the conclusion is: the higher education graduates are not sought after.

Every week, the list of job vacancies also includes offers for those with higher education. But many young people have lost hope that they would work in their field of expertise and are satisfied with almost any job. "For the people with secondary education or vocational qualifications the jobs available are: security agent, baker, bartender, chef, baker, carpenter, automotive electrician, blacksmith-concreter, plumber, locksmith, unskilled worker, pastier, guard, secretary, supply

service chief, truck driver, electric welder, carpenter, tinsmith, seller, car painter or bricklayer.

Currently, in the county of Gorj there are 16,383 unemployed and the unemployment rate is 10.89%. As a chance for those who would like to work, experience in the field is an advantage. Employers are looking for young and experienced staff, thus refusing to hire young graduates.

The recruitment specialists say that young graduates' chances to integrate in the labor market are quite small, given that companies are seeking experienced employees, in order to stop wasting time and money with training the graduates. Many graduates are waiting for CAE Gorj to organize the job fair for them, but they do not have much hope in it either.

We can see that the unemployment rate is rising and this is reflected especially among the youth who allegedly do not meet the job requirements, namely they lack the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for the employment.

In recent years, as a counteraction to these shortcomings, lifelong learning has become a priority for the global education system. Even if the role of basic formal education remains essential, lifelong learning, together with non-formal education, are coming to customize and develop skills as close as possible to the market and society requirements, on the one hand, and the learner's skill and soul, on the other hand¹³. The overarching priority of the "Lifelong Learning Program" is to strengthen the contribution of vocational education and training in achieving the Lisbon goal of making the European Union "the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth accompanied by quantitative and qualitative increase in the number of workplaces and greater social cohesion"¹⁴.

Concerns regarding the change of perception and thinking of knowledge assimilation, together with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities is quite old and yet new. Thus, cooperation on the European policies in vocational education and training has begun with the adoption of the White Paper on vocational education and training, the chapter entitled "Teaching and Learning - towards the Society of Knowledge", in which the European Union defines itself as heading towards a learning society based on acquiring new knowledge and lifelong learning. The document was published just before the launch in 1996 of the European Year of Lifelong Learning. Then in 1997, a Commission communication was issued, entitled "Toward a Europe of Knowledge," that links the lifelong learning objective with the proposals of programs regarding vocational education and training during 2000-2006. In January 2000 the Socrates II program was initiated, which started the subprogram Grundtvig aiming at adult education. And, more recently, in November 2006, the "Lifelong Learning Program 2007-2013" appeared. This program brought together the former Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programs. The first component of the Lifelong Learning Program was the Comenius Program that is addressed to public and private secondary education institutions (from kindergarten to post secondary schools) and to all those working in this sector: pupils, all categories of teachers and local authorities, parents' associations and NGOs acting in the educational field. In

¹³ The European Commission has gathered its initiatives on education and training under one umbrella - The Lifelong Learning Program. It has four subprograms - Comenius (for secondary education), Erasmus (for higher education), Leonardo da Vinci (for vocational education and training) and Grundtvig (for adult education) - and provides opportunities for people of any age to study anywhere in Europe

¹⁴ Lifelong Learning Program

addition, the Erasmus program appeared within the higher education institutions; among the key objectives the said program included the increase of quality and volume of student and teacher mobility in Europe, multilateral cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe, as well as the increase of transparency and compatibility between higher education and vocational qualifications obtained in Europe.

The European education, vocational training and youth programs are managed in Romania by the National Agency for Community Programs in the Field of Education and Vocational Training (NACPFEVT) subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research. Lifelong learning can take many forms; it takes place both inside and outside the traditional education and training systems. The strength of lifelong learning programs is that they place the individual's responsibility at the center of learning. It is the same for non-formal education, which is a training method within some activities of the European lifelong learning programs. Moreover, the three concepts, formal, informal and non-formal, complement each other in the lifelong learning programs. In short, if formal, official education takes place in an educational institution - school, college, etc., and informal education represents the spontaneous or unorganized environmental influences, family, group of friends, media etc. on the individual, non-formal education personalizes and develops the individual's personality, at home, at the workplace, in community, and sometimes even at school, formal education complements the official curricula with the skills, abilities, knowledge that each individual feels closer to the soul. In other words, formal education creates the base of competencies, skills and knowledge of the individual, after which it can be customized by non-formal education, while informal education is much more present than both.

Depending on the specific of each country, it may cover educational programs that would help in adult literacy, basic education for those who left the formal education system, improving life and work skills, and the general culture.

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED 1997), approved by UNESCO, non-formal education programs are not required to follow a "scale in steps" type system and may have varying durations. If for some European countries non-formal education is a component of educational policies, there are states where initiatives on this issue come mainly from the private area or NGO and where strategies on formal-nonformal-informal relationship are just beginning to take shape.

In Europe there have been several initiatives, starting with the Lisbon Strategy, which has scored some general provisions on overcoming barriers between formal and non-formal education, recognition of non-formal education pattern and acknowledgment that it increases the chances of young people to develop new skills and find employment. However, there are more steps to be done in order to be uniformly defined in the Member States.

In France, for example, extracurricular activities are very well developed even by the state. In Lithuania, non-formal education is seen by authorities as the part which forms intelligent, creative people, able to come up with feasible solutions and to engage in the public life. Holland also has a long tradition in this field. Many young people leisure activities are conducted in partnership with the school. Poland has a national youth strategy for the period 2003-2012, and non-formal education is an important part of it.

In Romania, the concept of non-formal education has not yet been defined in a formula that is universally accepted and recognized. However, the activities focusing on developing

personal and vocational skills outside the formal framework start to grow significantly, especially among young people, since it is a relatively new issue. In other countries, it is aimed at all the age groups.

We should not forget that today, societies are faced with the consequences of a global financial and economic crisis. In order to improve and sustainably develop the existing economy, the European higher education, dynamic and flexible, must take account of the innovation based on integration between education and research at all levels.

Higher education plays a key role in dealing with current challenges and promoting the cultural and social development of our societies. Lifelong modern learning involves acquiring qualifications, expanding the knowledge and understanding, acquiring new skills and competencies or personal development. Successful policies on modern learning include basic principles and procedures for recognition of previous studies based on the results, regardless if the skills, knowledge and competencies were acquired through formal, non-formal or informal studies.

The technological developments in recent decades and the phenomenon of globalization led institutions and specialists around the world to seek the competencies that every citizen of the planet needs in order to integrate successfully into the social life in a "knowledge-based economy that would ensure economic development, better jobs and greater social cohesion"¹.

This research has been also begun in the European continent especially after the Lisbon European Council in 2000 acknowledged education, training and employment as an integral part of economic and social policies needed for the economic transformation of Europe into the most dynamic knowledge-based economy. Several committees have been formed, in order to develop a European framework to define the "new basic skills"¹⁵. This framework should refer to the Information and Communications Technology, to the technological culture, foreign languages, entrepreneurship and social skills¹⁶. The activity of the working group for key competencies began in 2001 with the main goal to identify "new skills" and "how" these skills can be better integrated into the curriculum and then maintained and taught throughout the life. Within this research a particular accent was placed on disadvantaged groups, those with special needs, school drop-out and adult education. In this context, the "competency" term refers to getting "a degree of integration between capabilities and broader social objectives necessary for each individual". The Eurydice study¹⁷ considers key competencies as vital for successful participation in the social life. Many of these competencies are defined as generic or transversal. They should lead to more effective management of the educational course of each individual, interpersonal and social relations and communication and reflect the shift in emphasis from teaching to learning. In the "Progress Report of Working Group B" from 2003¹⁸, 8 areas of key competencies were established.

¹⁵ Presidency Conclusions ... Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000, paragraph 26.

¹⁶ Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning - A European Reference Framework, November 2004, Working Group B "Key Competencies" Implementation of the "Learning and Training 2010" work program, European Commission

¹⁷ Key Competencies. Study 5. Eurydice 2002

¹⁸ Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning - A European Reference Framework, November 2004, Working Group B "Key Competencies" Implementation of the "Learning and Training 2010" work program, European Commission

According to the report, the term of competencies refers to a combination of skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes and include the willingness to learn in addition to "knowing how." Thus the key competencies include three aspects of life:

- personal fulfillment and lifelong development (cultural capital): key competencies should enable people to follow their individual goals in life, driven by personal interests, aspirations and desire to continue learning throughout life;
- active citizenship and inclusion (social capital): key competencies should enable individuals to participate in society as active citizens;
- employment (human capital): each person's ability to obtain a decent job in the labor market.

The European society based on knowledge, need and aspiration realized since the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, reflects its wishes by substantiating the European Research Area. The main reasons that led to the onset of this attitude of Europe in order to create and strengthen a society of research and education are the accelerated globalization of research and technology and the emergence of new scientific and technological powers, particularly China and India, the arguments of a society where research, education, training and innovation are motivating factors in meeting the economic, social and environmental goals of the European Union.

The findings on the current status of a knowledge-based Europe are worrying, although Europe produces a third of the world's scientific knowledge and had notable successes in technology, medical research, chemistry, aeronautics and telecommunications. In recent years the European research process made a series of significant steps, and it is increasingly clear that Europe does not only mean the Euro area, that of banks and economy, but it is also a Europe of knowledge. The intellectual, social and technical aspects of Europe have been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a fundamental role in their development. Research, according to the Bologna Process, may be conceived only as an integral part of higher education in Europe. An open European area of higher education offers a great number of beneficial opportunities. At the same time, respecting our diversity, it requires continuous efforts to remove barriers and to develop a framework for teaching and learning, which would enhance an increasingly tighter mobility and cooperation. The opening of intergovernmental cooperation and the involvement of non-governmental organizations with competence in the higher education area, with a prompt and positive response from universities was founded by the decision of the European ministers present in 1999, who signed a document that relies on the general principles set forth in the Sorbonne Declaration.

The Bologna Declaration establishes a set of prime targets designed to lead to the achievement of a European area of higher education and to promote the European higher education system in the world, the fundamental charter of changes in the Romanian higher education. The global trends of integration, globalization and harmonization of the European education system are based on new educational policies regarding the approach of education based on skills. Under these conditions the complex of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors acquires new meanings, knowledge acquisition representing a constant in the analysis of the personality formation process.

In Romania, the current education law provides the framework for exercising the fundamental right to lifelong learning under the Romanian state authority. The law governs the structure, functions, organization and operation of the public, private and confessional national education system. In Article 2 (1) the vision of the law is to promote an education oriented on values, creativity, cognitive skills, volitional capabilities and

actionable capabilities, fundamental knowledge and knowledge, skills and abilities of direct utility in the profession and in society. The mission of the law is to train, through education, the mental infrastructure of Romanian society, in line with the new requirements, derived from Romania's status as an EU member country and from the operation in the context of globalization and to sustainably generate highly competitive national human resources, able to work effectively in today's and future society. The educational ideal of the Romanian school is the free, full and harmonious development of human individuality, the formation of autonomous personality and assumption of a value system that is necessary for the personal development and fulfillment, for entrepreneurship development, for active citizen participation in the society, for social inclusion and for employment in the labor market. The state provides the Romanian citizens with equal rights of access at all levels and forms of secondary and higher education and lifelong learning, without any form of discrimination. According to Article 4., of the same law, the main purpose of vocational education and training of children, youth and adults is to form competencies, understood as multifunctional and transferable set of knowledge, skills/abilities needed for: personal development and fulfillment, through the achievement of one's goals in life, according to one's interests, aspirations and lifelong learning desire; social integration and active citizen participation in society; employment and participation in the operation and development of a sustainable economy; forming a conception of life, based on humanistic and scientific values, on the national and universal culture and on the intercultural dialogue stimulation; education in the spirit of dignity, tolerance and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; growing sensitivity to human issues, to the civic and moral values and respect for nature and the natural, social and cultural environment¹⁹.

2. CONCLUSIONS

The formative process issues are extremely broad and complex, the formation of teaching type professional skills and competencies is the essential characteristic of the current educational process, the characteristic required by the gravity center shift from the aspect involving the assimilation of knowledge and information to the applicative one.

The requirements of the new century raised all over the world questions such as: "how long" and "by what methods" are we learning?

Particular attention was given to strengthening the capacity of initial vocational education and training to help provide the future graduates with the necessary skills for employment.

We often like to compare ourselves with countries with high-quality education.

Therefore, it is unacceptable for us not to be able, in 20 years, to design an appropriate curriculum for the context we live in.

At the moment universities must assume multiple identities and the manner in which they will be able to assume such multiple identities will be crucial for their future success. Universities no longer have a clear, distinct and unique mission as in the Humboldtian model.

Therefore, we believe that universities are not in crisis or in a deadlock, but in a time where they have to boldly assume both the identity of producing knowledge, and the identity of

exploiting knowledge, both the preparation for the university degree, and that for the master's degree etc.²⁰

Given the "Europe 2020" Strategy that sets ambitious goals for smart and sustainable growth, favorable to the inclusion, that must be met during the decade that we go through, with special emphasis on the need for measures to improve the levels of education with a view to increasing the occupancy rates of the workforce and to promote social inclusion and although Europe's future prosperity depends largely on its youth, too many of them still face considerable difficulties in terms of exploiting their potential and their contribution to society; too many are graduates with insufficient skills or no qualifications, unable to find jobs and are at risk of social exclusion, which in turn implies high costs for both the individual and the society as a whole. Finding solutions to this situation involves achievement of the following objectives²¹:

- Practical achievement of lifelong learning and mobility;
- Improvement of quality and efficiency of the vocational education and training;
- Promotion of equality, social cohesion and active citizenship;
- Stimulation of creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship at all levels of vocational education and training.

We should not think that Romania is the only nation facing such problems. Many Member States face the challenge of implementation of national strategies and instruments regarding lifelong learning, which is considered essential to enable not only young people, but also adults to acquire, maintain and develop knowledge, skills and competencies throughout their careers.

In particular, more flexible learning pathways are required, that will allow individuals who are at different stages of life to be able to make the transition between different systems of vocational education and training and between formal, non-formal and informal learning environments and to be able to attract people who do not fall into the classic pupil/student pattern.

In the coming years increasingly more jobs will require high-level qualifications, yet the EU has now a smaller percentage of people with a tertiary education qualification or at an equivalent level, and a smaller percentage of researchers than its competitors. In addition, the innovation capacity of Europe will require knowledge-based partnerships and closer connections between the educational, research and business environment to develop the triangle of knowledge. It will also be a way to ensure that those who have jobs requiring a lower qualification level can better adapt to the changing demands of the labor market.

In addition to achieving the personal goals and the social and economic ones, mobility for educational purposes may provide a useful way to enhance employability and ability to acquire or develop skills from the vocational, pedagogical, linguistic, interpersonal and intercultural points of view. The mobility for educational purposes can contribute to improving the quality of educational institutions and the cooperation between them. Although the policy programs and instruments of EU have made a significant contribution in this area, there is still considerable untapped potential for mobility for educational purposes, which remains far too often the exception. The

²⁰ Said Mr. Mircea Miclea (former Minister of Education and Research)

²¹ Official Journal of the European Union C 326/9 published on 03/12/2010

¹⁹ Law no. 1/2011, published in Official Gazette 18/2011.

opportunities of mobility for educational purposes in a context of formal education should be actively encouraged for groups such as studying young adults, teachers, trainers and teaching staff.

Young adults should also be able to benefit from such opportunities in the non-formal and informal learning environments. In addition, there should be explored new innovative forms of such mobility, including mobility in cyberspace and access to this form of mobility should be expanded, paying particular attention to disadvantaged groups and gender issues.

Additional efforts are needed to help young people deal with the multiple social and economic challenges they face. However, in a time of budgetary constraints, as at present, such efforts should focus on optimizing and streamlining policies and investment objectives by linking them more closely with the “Europe 2020” objectives and with the priorities of the strategic framework “ET 2020”²².

Within the flagship initiative “Youth on the Move”, which is part of the basic objectives of “Europe 2020” guidelines, the vocational education and training should be taken into account, mainly regarding the young graduates.

As regards the specific vocational education and training the following should be pursued:

- promoting the full implementation of integrated strategies of lifelong learning;
- ensuring the acquisition of key competencies that every individual needs, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, in order to succeed in a knowledge society;
- increasing participation in tertiary education or its equivalent,
- increasing the quality and attractiveness of education at all levels, especially in higher education and vocational and technical education;
- promoting the benefits of mobility for educational purposes regarding the increase of knowledge, skills and experience.

As for the youth, in particular, the emphasis should be placed on:

- promoting a cross-sectoral approach between youth policies and the policies in other relevant areas;
- both qualitative and quantitative strengthening of mobility for all young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, in non-formal and informal learning environments;
- promoting the results of non-formal and informal learning and improving their recognition, so that young adults may have better access to formal vocational education and training and to the labor market;
- encouraging youth participation in democratic life.

As regards the field of employment, vocational education and training, the youth and employment policies should cover in a properly coordinated manner the steps that young people must go through in their transition from education to the professional activity. Employment policies should contribute to reducing youth unemployment and improving the employment prospects of young people, as a key contribution to the achievement of

the 75% goal with respect to employment, laid down in the “Europe 2020” Strategy for employment and economic growth. Consequently, Romania and other European countries should implement and develop future policy initiatives aimed at achieving the broad goals of the initiative “Youth on the Move” in the larger context of “Europe 2020” Strategy and to achieve the two main objectives of EU, concerning specifically vocational education and training.

In this process, the close cooperation between all related policy areas at the European level should be ensured, particularly education, youth, social affairs, employment, research and innovation, in order to explore the possibility of common goals, where the more important is to obtain the progress achieved in promoting an education whose purpose is to increase employment in the labor market but also to improve life skills in the workplace.

REFERENCES

1. Constantinescu N.N., Piețele forței de muncă și politica socială în Europa Centrală și de Est, [Labour Markets and Social Policy in Central and Eastern Europe], Oxford University Press, 1994
2. Constantinescu, N.N., Reforma și restructurare economică, [Reform and Economic Restructuring], Economic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995
3. Cristea, S., Fundamentele științelor educației, Teoria generală a educației, [Foundations of Science Education, General Education Theory], Litera International Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003.
4. Kierzowski, H. “The Assessment, Economics of Transition in Eastern and Central Europe”, in Oxford Review of Economic Policy, vol. 13, no. 2, 1997
5. Pitariu, H.D. (2000). Managementul resurselor umane. Evaluarea performanțelor profesionale, [Human Resource Management. Professional Performance Evaluation], All Beck Publishing House, Bucharest.
6. Pitariu, H.D. (1983). Psihologia selecției și formării profesionale, [Psychology of Selection and Vocational Training], Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca
7. Romanian Statistical Yearbook, INSSE, Labour Force in Romania, Employment and Unemployment in 2004 - 2010
8. “Occupational Mobility and Flexibility of Human Resources - the Premise of Improving Employment in Industry”, article published in the “Management & Marketing” magazine, authors, Anca Borza, Mirela Popa and Codruta Osoian, “Babes-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, 2008,
9. European Commission - Education/Training, Ministry of Education - Lifelong learning and development strategies in the teaching career, Ministry of Education - Lifelong learning strategies European Funds - POS DRU, 2010
10. UNESCO: Non-formal education European Association for Leisure Time Institutions of Children and Youth UK Youth – Nonformality Open Education Centre Foundation Training educators for non-formal education Youth Partnership - Coyote (Publication supported by the European Commission and the Council of Europe)
11. International Center for Research on Higher Education (INCHER), University of Kassel, Germany.

²² Proposal for a Council Decision on guidelines for employment policies for Member States: Part II of Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines for acquiring knowledge, skills and competencies and for addressing personal and social challenges.

