

Education fails to follow labour market trends

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The Conference on “New Skills for New Jobs”, co-organized by the Regional Cooperation Council and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, to find the most efficient ways to align the education system with the labour market is taking place in Sarajevo.

The experts assess that the education system in South East Europe does not follow the European and global labour market trends. However, this could be change with a bit of will and effort. A team of experts has already been established and is analysing the market needs; and there are programs to be used for education reform available to the countries aspiring towards the EU.

In the estimate of experts, the education system in our region is not adapted which is reflected in the fact that young people are being educated for the professions which the labour market is overflowing with while there is almost no interest in the qualifications which are in demand by the labour market. **Jelica Minić**, Deputy Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, explains the reasons that led to this:

“Our region underwent deindustrialisation. It is now mostly relying on the service sector. What is advised to our region is to enter a new phase of reindustrialisation – and it would be very important that the education sector anticipates this new cycle which the region will most likely enter after exiting the crisis.”

Given that the countries of the region were impoverished by shutting down the industry which was brought about by dissolution of Yugoslavia and wars that were led, several generations of working class was permanently lost, said **Krsto Pejović** of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Montenegro.

“The percentage of change in ownership structure in South East European countries was to a certain extent fatal for the employees and the society in general. Normally, this had its consequences. Some industries and production stopped. It is hardly at issue that the entire generation was left without jobs but that hundreds and hundreds of generations have been left without these jobs – and the period of poverty and social outcast status set in for these people,” said Pejović.

Researcher Network

When it comes to younger generations, **Petar Bejaković** of the Croatian Institute of Public Finances said that young people should be more active in the education process.

“There is a lack of jobs on the market but young people with their expertise, skills and knowledge are also often not equipped to meet all those requirements the employers set. As for the employers, they are expected to be more active in better voicing their needs and also taking part in training of young people. They cannot just complain that the education system is producing youth that does not have the necessary knowledge and skills but they also need to assist in their training,” said Bejaković.

Bejaković mentioned that the responsibility partially rested on the education system employees who are still well paid to be interested in change:

“The fact is that, perhaps, if the education system would be more present in the market, and I do not believe that privatisation is an ideal solution, but in any case if the education system stakeholders would exert more influence on the financial side and position of the education system, the situation would probably be better.”

Jelica Minić of Regional Cooperation Council reminded that there are EU assistance programs available for candidate and non-candidate countries that could facilitate harmonisation of education system and labour market.

“There are many EU agencies and the entire region is already closely cooperating with the European Training Foundation. There are also many other European institutions to work together with. Furthermore, within the London School of Economics, a network of researchers from our region was established addressing the labour market and social cohesion; and we hope that this network will earnestly contribute to tackling these gaps and providing some good guidelines as to the way forward,” said Jelica Minić.

One of these programs is education for small and medium-size entrepreneurs, mentioned **Efka Heder** of the Croatian Centre for Lifelong Entrepreneurial Learning:

“Targeting the faculties which are in reality drivers, or engines, leaders of competitive economies in our region. In order for all this to function in sustainable development, you must target the main element – entry into the very system of education, i.e. primary education where you target the school as a unit of change and not a teacher, or a student, or a segment of education, but rather the entire society in order to create friendly entrepreneurial environment in long-term development, i.e. raise the average percentage of entrepreneurial thinking.”

Experts in this field advise to have additional training for the existing personnel and also to establish and strengthen non-university centres, two-year colleges or professional academies focusing more on a specific vocational education.

“Thus, it is very much necessary to develop non-university education sector sometimes in the future, primarily the two-year colleges, and improve their quality so they could meet the needs and be more focused on a specific vocational education than are the classic research or academic disciplines thought at the universities,” believes **Predrag Lazetić** of Serbian Centre for Education Policy.

Though the process of changing the education system is lengthy, it is not beyond the reach if there is political will and if people who decide on the future of countries from the region have a vision that this region needs not be behind the times in Europe, but that it can, in line with its capacities, be a leader in some areas, when compared to other countries.

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