

REPORT FROM STUDY VISIT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM EXPERTS, ISTANBUL, 10-11 MARCH 2015

The aim of the Higher Education Reform Experts seminar titled *Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training in the Erasmus+ Partner Countries neighboring the EU: Partnership for socio-economic development in Istanbul* was to exchange experience between Partner Countries and EU countries how higher education could support vocational education and training.

In the 21st century, those entering the labor market need immediate job skills, but they also need a range of career and cognitive competences that will enable them to handle changing jobs and career contexts and to sustain their learning capacity. Nearly all countries report substantial career flux and development, so that those vocationally trained for one job often find their way into others. Programmes involving early specialization therefore need to be balanced by sufficient attention to general academic skills, as well as other wider soft competencies, to provide the foundation for lifelong learning, effective citizenship, and a successful career.

Open access to tertiary education further and address transition barriers perceived by students. Design adequate guidance, induction and financial support measures for less academically trained people wanting to attend university. Promote dual universities and dual programmes at regular universities and encourage more flexible, part-time university offers and the recognition of prior learning and experience.

Increasingly, countries are recognizing that good initial vocational education and training has a major contribution to make to economic competitiveness. Many of the unskilled jobs which existed in HERE countries a generation ago are fast disappearing, either because they have been replaced by technology or because HERE countries cannot compete with less developed countries on labor costs. Instead, HERE countries need to compete on the quality of goods and services they provide. That requires a well-skilled labor force, with a range of mid-level trade, technical and professional skills alongside those high-level skills associated with university education. More often than not, those skills are delivered through vocational programmes. At the same time VET systems face major challenges. Vocational programmes for young people, often rooted in education institutions, tend to develop their

own dynamic, and can be too separated from the fast-changing world of modern economies.

Very informative presentation has been delivered by Madlen Serban from European Training Foundation (Torino) with the special emphasize of the economic crisis and its' impact to VET. The crisis has had a polarization effect in both developed and developing countries. Youth unemployment is higher than the EU average in the partner countries, particularly in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria), South Eastern Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) and Eastern Europe (Armenia and Georgia). Those countries with a vision for economic development are faring better (Morocco, Israel, Kazakhstan and Turkey). After the crisis there is decrease in the higher education participation and an increase in VET participation, because fewer people can afford higher education and there is less confidence in its added-value.

As a most significant impression from HERE seminar hold in Istanbul is a general trend which shows significant absence of clear vision of further development of HVET and to which level it has to be organized. There are numerous examples of aberration and trials to find optimal model of HVET. And relatively quick give up of the newly developed models. Frequent example of aberration is lack of clear distinction between science and profession. And the most imposing example in that way is Egypt which changed complete system of HVET two times in less than last decade.

Very useful to situation in Montenegro was presentation of colleague from Slovenia, having in mind that we shared the same education system in former Yugoslavia and the fact that Montenegro as an independent country mostly followed Slovene reform solutions. Namely, according to presentation of Slovene colleague, abolition of former professional high education schools and its' including at universities wasn't showed as an adequate solution and numerous employers requested restoration of previous system. There are examples that, due to lack of adequate professional skills and knowledge of employees, companies organized internal system of HVET. As a most important trends in development of VET system in Slovenia, colleague stressed: 20% unemployed young people; skills mismatch/gap; growing number unemployed HE graduates; labor market needs vs. rigid educational system and LLL increasingly important.

Comprehensive presentation has been delivered by colleague from Georgia which national reform of VET system. The main aims of the reform are: Promoting full and equal participation from the social partners and civil society with Government in the development of policy and decision-making; establishing a nationwide flexible network of VET providers; designing VET programmes relevant to the current and future labor needs of Georgia's growing and diversifying economy; retraining of VET educators in modern education techniques and the latest developments in their field of expertise; providing a system of nationally and internationally recognized awards and qualifications that support flexibility for VET graduates in their search for employment; ensuring the full employability of VET graduates; promoting widespread recognition that vocational education and training is an attractive and rewarding pathway for personal development. The key progress areas are establishing a systemic approach to address labor market needs, revision and development of the occupational standards based on the DACUM methodology, transformation of VET programmes ' design from subject-based to a modular approach, improvement of the learning environment and professional development for VET teachers.

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