

EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY - RESPONDING TO (UN)EMPLOYMENT WITH EDUCATION

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Abstract:

In this article, we analyse the response that education strategies and student mobility programmes can offer to the requirements of the Europe 2020 strategy. The main aspects brought forward are the current results obtained in the domains of education and employment, the outcomes of the mobility programmes and the issue of brain drain, with particular emphasis placed on Romania's situation from these perspectives.

Keywords: Europe 2020, education, internationalisation, employment, brain drain, Romania

Introduction

In a context of economic instability and to address the challenges ahead, the European Commission launched in 2010 *Europe 2020 - A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. The new strategy set goals that can be interpreted as being clear and, to a certain extent, quantifiable. The two domains and the goals pertaining to them that we bring into discussion in this paper are employment and education, and the interconnections that exist between them. One of the headline targets of the strategy is for 75 % of the population aged 20-64 to be employed. As to what education is concerned, the European Commission envisages the reduction to below 10% of early school leaving and for at least 40% of the representatives of the younger generation to obtain a tertiary degree.¹

As education and employment are strongly related, one of the seven initiatives of the Commission, *Youth on the move*, focuses not only on the

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¹ European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Brussels, accessed on 03.11.2015 at: [<http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20%20EN%20version.pdf>], p. 3.

quantity of the young people who stay in school, but also on the outcomes of the educational system and its response to the needs of the labour market. The progress of European employment rates of 69% on average for those aged 20-64 is encouraging, but we must keep in mind that, apart from the fact that this percentage is lower and the working hours are fewer than in other parts of the world, it only represents an average. In addition to the regional gaps, there are also gender gaps that must be taken into account, as in the case of women only 63% are employed, compared to a percentage of 76% in the case of men.² Also, the initiative of offering *better integration for migrants in the work force*³ might prove to be even more challenging both from a social perspective and from a financial one in the context of the current migratory waves from outside Europe. At the moment, the main concerns focus on more stringent needs such as relocation, expertise, equipment, shelter or medical supplies⁴, but the plans ahead cannot be made without bearing education or employability in mind.

Returning to the Flagship initiative *Youth on the move*, one of the goals to be attained in education is *to enhance the performance and international attractiveness of Europe's higher education institutions and raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU*. The Erasmus, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus and Marie Curie programmes should be envisaged as means of promoting entrepreneurship⁵.

Reforms and internationalisation in Romanian education

But, how far is Romania from reaching the goals set by the European Commission? We shall begin with the actions undertaken by our country in this direction, such as the higher education reforms. In an article on Romanian higher education in the interval 2009–2013, Adrian Curaj, Ligia Deca and Cezar Mihai Hâj bring forward the law of education adopted in 1995 (Law 84/1995) and the autonomy conferred to higher education institutions by this law. The reason for discussing this law is to

² *Ibidem*, pp. 6-11.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

⁴ European Commission - Press Release, *State of Play: Measures to Address The Refugee Crisis*, 4 November 2015, accessed on 03.11.2015 At: [[Http://Europa.Eu/Rapid/Press-Release_Ip-15-5958_En.Htm](http://Europa.Eu/Rapid/Press-Release_Ip-15-5958_En.Htm)]

⁵ European Commission (2010), *Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, Brussels, p. 11.

set a context, as this autonomy is considered to have positive outcomes, but the limitations that it has when it comes to personnel or financial policies is considered to have a negative effect on the employability of young people as higher education staff.

The authors also present an initiative of the World Bank, who offered support to higher education in Romania, directed at tackling the problems caused by the limited public resources in the domain of public higher education, namely the creation of a student loan scheme. This initiative materialised in the creation of an Agency for Student Loans and Scholarships but, unfortunately, the loan system was not functional.⁶

Furthermore, Romania together with the World Bank launched in December 2015 the Romanian Secondary Education Project (ROSE), financed to support 1.6 million Romanian students of *both pre-university and higher education*. According to Elisabetta Capannelli, World Bank Country Manager for Romania and Hungary, it is *the largest World Bank project in the Europe and Central Asia region to support education*. The project does not address only academic factors that lead to school dropout, but also personal factors *through remedial activities, tutoring, counseling, extracurricular activities, internships, summer bridge programs and learning centers*.⁷

In the same volume, Ligia Deca, Eva Egron-Polak and Cristina Ramona Fiț discuss the novelty brought by the Law of National Education of 2011 regarding the free movement of the members of academic communities and the introduction of university classification, which is perceived as an instrument of transparency that makes the Romanian system more comprehensible at the European level. The authors also examined the available statistics on student mobility and their conclusion is that, at the national level, the records are not sufficiently clear, due to the different definitions that are given to mobility and to the lack of centralisation of the existing databases. Two main sources that can be taken

⁶ Adrian Curaj; Ligia Deca and Cezar-Mihai Hâj (2015), "Romanian Higher Education in 2009–2013. The Bologna Process and Romanian Priorities in the Search for an Active European and Global Presence", in Adrian Curaj et alii (editors), *Higher Education Reforms in Romania. Between the Bologna Process and National Challenges*, Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 6-14.

⁷ The World Bank, press release (2015), *Romania Launches Project to Increase Students' Chances of Successfully Transitioning to Tertiary Education*, 3 December 2015, accessed on 15.11.2015 at: [<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/12/03/romania-launches-project-to-increase-students-chances-of-successfully-transitioning-to-tertiary-education>]

into consideration when making an analysis of the student motility are the data set based on the numbers given by universities and the data collected by the National Institute of Statistics, and these data are not always compatible. Staff mobility is also considered to be valuable, as it does not only contribute to the increase of student mobility but also to raising awareness and increasing attractiveness of the Romanian educational system. However, the current system is considered to be faulty at sending and also at attracting international staff members.⁸

A study on the internationalisation strategies of 92 public and private universities in Romania revealed that only 19 universities have set clear and detailed objectives on internationalisation, 15 do not have in their organisational chart a department of international relations, 43 have vague or no information on institutional internationalisation strategies, and 30 mention internationalization of education only in general terms, but do not have concrete targets. As to what foreign languages are concerned, one of the problems identified in the study refers to the relatively small number of programmes taught in English. However, this aspect differs from one higher institution to the other, as some institutions provide programmes in French, German, Italian etc. The situation is more promising when it comes to the requirement of taking foreign languages courses as part of the study programme. Nevertheless, in spite of this focus on foreign language competence in the case of students, members of academic and non-academic staff are not being offered language trainings in most institutions.

The conclusion of the study is that, despite the strengths of Romanian universities, such as the recognition abroad, the high quality international programmes, the high level of employability of graduates, the partnerships with the private sector, Romania's geographical position or the inexpensiveness of student accommodation possibilities, internationalisation is regarded primarily in terms of mobility and institutional partnerships, with a main focus on quantitative aspects,

⁸ Ligia Deca; Eva Egron-Polak and Cristina Ramona Fiț (2015), "Internationalisation of Higher Education in Romanian National and Institutional Contexts", in Adrian Curaj et alii (editors), *Editors Higher Education Reforms in Romania. Between the Bologna Process and National Challenges*, Heidelberg: Springer, pp. 131-137.

whereas other forms are less emphasized or are transmitted in a less coherent manner.⁹

Another aspect that should be taken into account when discussing internationalisation and that we consider to require improvement refers to the recognition of the diplomas obtained by students undertaking double degree programmes. These programmes could represent an example of the difficult endeavours that a student must undertake in order to continue his or her studies in Romania, upon taking advantage of the opportunity of studying abroad. For example, students who obtain bachelor degree diplomas in a partner university as a result of studying the final year at that particular university might not manage to return to their home university in due time to obtain an equivalence for their studies, to take the graduation exams or to defend the graduation thesis at their home universities. As a result, according to the current regulations, they have to address the *National Centre for Diploma Recognition and Equivalence* in order to obtain recognition of their diplomas¹⁰. Because of the big number of applications, it takes a rather long time to issue the certificate / attestation in recognition of studies, and this can cause problems for their applications for master degree studies.

Mobility programmes and employability

Next, we are going to discuss to what extent do students consider that the experience of studying abroad increases their employability opportunities and if their perceptions are in line with those of the employers.

As previously stated, one of the key goals on the Europe 2020 is to increase employability. Hence, we are going to bring forward the capacity of student motilities to address this goal, based on the results of *the Erasmus Impact Study Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions*. The study, the largest of its kind, was published in 2014 and it involved nearly 80000 respondents, both

⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 138-145.

¹⁰ Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas, accessed on 10.10. 2015 at: [<http://cnred.edu.ro/en/#recognition-of-studies-for-admission-to-university-in-Romania>]

students and businesses representatives.¹¹ With reference to the relevance of the experience abroad for employability in the perception of the employers, there is a significant increase of 27% from 2006 to 2013, reaching a percentage of 64%. These findings can be interpreted both as an increase in the awareness on the benefits of studying abroad or as a shift in the requirements on the labour market. Also, it is noteworthy that some mobile student showed personality traits that can increase their employability even before going abroad, as individuals predisposed to openness and adaptability are more interested into studying abroad. Nonetheless, the study registered a significant difference in the findings on the real effects of the mobility and the perception that the subjects had on these effects.

Approximately 81% of the Erasmus students estimated that they improved the above-mentioned employability factors, whereas the results of the survey revealed an improvement in only 52% of the cases. As to what knowledge skills are concerned, it is interesting to notice that the percentage of higher education institutions respondents who declared to have observed certain improvements in the mobile students' soft skills such as confidence and adaptability is extremely high, and it is actually higher than the percentage of the students themselves who have declared to have registered an improvement of these skills – 99% versus 90%. Since there is clearly a difference between findings and perceptions, these last reports should be interpreted cautiously. However, as these soft skills are difficult to be quantified, the perception of the outcomes should not be ignored, as it leads to increased self-confidence. Also, as progresses have been noticed at an institutional level, we can conclude that the improvement of these skills, even if not quantified, did occur.¹²

Work placements have a more direct effect on employability as they have the advantage of providing not only more or less measurable skills improvement, but also work experience. According to the study, more than one in three former Erasmus students, beneficiaries of work placements,

¹¹ European Commission - Press release (2014), *Erasmus Impact Study confirms EU student exchange scheme boosts employability and job mobility*, 22 September 2014, accessed on 11.11.2015 at: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1025_en.htm].

¹² European Commission (2014), *The Erasmus Impact Study. Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union., pp. 4-17.

was offered a job by their host company and they also developed entrepreneurship skills. Furthermore, five years after graduation, the unemployment rate of mobile students was 23% lower than that of non-mobile students.¹³

Another finding of the study, referring to the students' social life, reveals that 27% of Erasmus alumni had met their current life partner during their stay abroad.¹⁴ This aspect also has an indirect effect on employability as we are entitled to presume, even if the survey does not give evidence on this fact, that life partners were in many cases of different nationality, which could increase the interest of the alumni into leaving and working abroad.

An earlier study, the 2010 *Employers' perception of graduate employability* Flash Eurobarometer study by the Gallup Organization, requested by the European Commission, undertaken in 7036 companies of the 27 EU Member States of that time, as well as Norway, Iceland, Croatia and Turkey, also brings interesting insights into the issue of young graduates employability. More than half of the recruited employees of the companies who took part in this study carried out business or economic studies and engineering¹⁵ According to the above presented *Erasmus Impact Study Effects* [...], the top five fields of study among all mobile student and alumni groups were Business Studies and Management (21% to 25%), followed by Engineering and Technology, Languages and Philosophical Sciences as well as Social Sciences, which occupied the second to fourth places with only marginal differences per student group, representing 10% to 14% of the various groups of mobile students and 12% to 19% of the mobile alumni groups.¹⁶ Correlating the results of these two studies, we can conclude that they reveal not necessarily an increase in employability due to mobility, but an increase in employability as students who undertake motilities are studying mostly in the domains where companies are interested to recruit from.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

¹⁵ The Gallup Organization (2010), *Employers' perception of graduate employability*, Flash Eurobarometer study requested by the European Commission, November 2010, accessed on 15.11.2015 at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_304_en.pdf], p. 4.

¹⁶ European Commission, *The Erasmus Impact Study*, p. 37.

Approximately 70% of the graduate recruiters rather disagreed that it was very important that new recruits had studied or worked abroad. This experience was mostly appreciated by recruiters with international contacts or by employers in the industry sector.¹⁷ Conversely, teamwork skills, communication skills or the ability to adapt, that were considered by employers to be highly required by the employers, are skills that can be acquired or enhanced due to mobility programmes, which could connect mobility and employability.

According to the survey, the top five skills and capabilities required for today's employees, listed in the order of importance were team working skills, sector-specific skills, communication skills, computer skills and ability to adapt to and act in new situations. Foreign language skills merely occupied the 11th position.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that there are considerable variations in the scores obtained in different countries.

Interestingly, when asked about the skills that graduates should possess in the next 5-10 years, the rankings proved to be different, sector-specific skills, communication and foreign language competence gaining ground and team working and ability to adapt to and act in new situations losing ground. This is a perspective that higher education institutions should keep in mind when elaboration their curricula in order to prepare graduates for the labour market.¹⁹

The cooperation between the companies surveyed and higher education institutions to discuss curriculum design and study programmes was considered to be rather low.²⁰ Employers' perceptions, even if they are the result of more or less *impressionistic reactions*²¹, should be thoroughly taken into consideration in the domain of education. In Romania's case, the percentage of the respondents who had never cooperated with higher education institutions to discuss curriculum design and study programmes or in the recruitment of their graduates was of 45%. However, since the report of 2010, collaboration between higher education institutions and the

¹⁷ The Gallup Organization, *op. cit.*, p.6.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

²¹ Simon Sweeney, *Going Mobile: Internationalisation, mobility and the European Higher Education Area*, York: Higher Education Academy, 2012, accessed on 03.11.2015 at: [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/going_mobile.pdf]

business environment has increased, and there are also some universities that can be given as examples of good practice.²² Correlating the educational system with labour market requirements is part of The National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation for the period 2007-2013²³ and there has also been, according to Eurostat statistics, a slight increase in the percentage of youth employment from 20 to 29 years from 54% in 2010 to 55,2% in 2014.²⁴

The lack of dynamism is considered to be one of the deficiencies of the Romanian educational system, especially since the labour market has evolved rapidly in the past years, at a pace at which higher education institutions find it difficult to keep up with. The educational system cannot develop separately from the necessities of the business environment and from the standards set at the European and international levels. An evolution that cannot be overlooked is the professor-student communication and the inclusion of online tools.²⁵

Early school leaving

Another target of the Europe 2020 strategy is to reduce the rate of early leavers from education and training to less than 10%. Even if this rate has not been reached yet, as in 2013 the indicator stood at 12%, there is an evolution from the 14.7% of 2008, which allows us to conclude that the goals of the strategy are realistic in this domain. Analysing the statistical figures for Romania, it registers a percentage of 18.1% on the scale of early leavers from education and training in 2014, an improvement from 19.6% in 2005. Still, Romania registered an inconsistent evolution from 2005, as in 2008 it scored the lowest percentage, of 15,9%, lower than Norway and the

²²Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca official website, University of Bucharest official website, accessed on 03.11.2015 at: [<http://centre.ubbcluj.ro/fundraising/>], [<http://infoub.unibuc.ro/index.php/cariera>]

²³ Government of Romania, Ministry of Education and Research, The National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation for the period 2007-2013, accessed on 15.11.2015 at: [http://www.euraxess.gov.ro/plan_EN.pdf]

²⁴Eurostat statistics, *Youth employment from 20 to 29 years*, accessed on 20.11.2015 at: [<http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>]

²⁵ Costel Negricea; Nicoleta Dumitru and Tudor Edu (2011), "Betwen Hope and Reality the Role of Romanian Universities in the Student Employer Relationship," in *Holistic Marketing Management Journal, Holistic Marketing Management*, vol. 1(1), pp. 52-59, p. 56.

United Kingdom, whereas in 2010 it scored 19.3%. In 2014, Romania occupied an unfortunate 5th position, after Turkey, Spain, Malta and Iceland. At the level of the Member States, tertiary educational attainment for the age group 30-34 reached its target of 40% only in the case of women, as it scored 41.2% in 2013; the situation is different in the case of men where the progress is slower (36.9% in 2013). As ten countries already reached the target for both women and men, we can presume that the European targets can be met by 2020 for most countries. Romania is situated on one of the last positions and in 2014 it reached a percentage of only 25%. In this case, however, there is a clear evolution from 2005, when the country scored only 11.4%, and was situated last²⁶. According to Dina Maria Luț, Member States should consider a more preventive approach such as *teacher education, continuing professional development and quality early childhood education and care*.²⁷

In a study on the causes and consequences of early school leaving conducted among students enrolled in lower secondary schools and their parents from Centre, North-East and South-Muntenia Regions of Romania in two waves: 2011 and 2013, Claudiu Ivan and Iulius Rostas conclude that “*there is a significant correlation between school dropout and: limited family support, non-inclusive school environment, low grades the transition from one stage of education to another or pertaining to a vulnerable group*.”²⁸ The risk for school dropout is much higher in the case of Roma students, which led them to consider that education policies should focus more on offering equal opportunities to people from different ethnic groups and that social inequalities continue to exist in schools.

Brain drain and brain circulation

This leads the discussion to another aspect highly debated with reference to student mobility, namely the issue of brain drain, defined as

²⁶Eurostat statistics, *Europe 2020 indicators*, accessed on 01.11. 2015 at: [<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/europe-2020-indicators>]

²⁷ Dina Maria Luț, “Romanian Education and Training System in the Context of European Strategic Framework: a Comparative Analysis”, in *Anale. Seria Stiinte Economice*, vol. XVIII/Supplement, Timișoara: Eurostampa, 2012, pages 255-263, p. 258.

²⁸ Claudiu Ivan and Iulius Rostas (2013), *Early School Leaving: causes and consequence*, Roma Education Fund, accessed on 15.11.2015 at: [http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/early_school_leaving_causes_and_effects_2013.pdf], p. 16.

*the emigration of highly trained or qualified people from a particular country*²⁹.

The question that arises is if mobile students develop skills that increase their capacity of getting employed, hence, becoming more valuable on the labour market of their home countries, do countries respond with suitable employment offers?

A study on brain drain within EU countries for the interval 2003-2014, undertaken within the Erasmus+ Programme, shows that Romania is situated on an unfortunate 3rd place, after Poland and Germany on the brain drain scale. UK and Germany are in an interesting position, as they score high both for brain drain and brain gain. However, this migration of professionals is not a *zero-sum game*. In Romania's case, 26496 professionals moved to another EU country after obtaining a qualification here, whereas reports on brain-gain indicate a number of 582 professionals moved here after obtaining their qualifications in another EU country, so the resulted difference is of -25914.³⁰ It is noteworthy that these numbers are difficult to quantify as job mobility must also be taken into consideration and some people might return to their home countries and bring additional knowledge and value. Nevertheless, in Romania's case, the big difference between incoming and outgoing professionals clearly indicates a brain drain situation, in spite of possible variations in numbers.

Whereas international mobility programmes increase awareness on the specificities of the host country or the beneficiary's competencies in working in a foreign or intercultural environment, they should not be judged as sources of brain drain. They do make people more aware of their possibilities, but the incapacity of the home countries to offer proper employment for professions is what mostly causes individuals to work and also to become permanent residents of a foreign country, without bringing the added value to the country of origin.

Dennis Abbott, the spokesperson of Androulla Vassiliou - European Commissioner for Education, going against the affirmation that the Erasmus programme is a cause of brain drain, prefers to call this process

²⁹ Oxford Dictionaries, accessed on 03.11.2015 at:

[<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/brain-drain>]

³⁰ Claudiu Creangă, official website Erasmus-plus.ro (2014), *Movement in EU: Countries to where the European brains move*, 27 August 2014, accessed on 03.11.2015 at: [<http://erasmus-plus.ro/movement-in-eu-countries-european-brains/>]

*brain circulation*³¹, rather than *brain drain*.³² Hence, brain drain from Romania can also be explained by the incapacity of the young graduates to get employed in their fields of study. For example, a study undertaken by UNICEF revealed that in 2012 only 76% of the graduates from Industry, Construction and Architecture fields work in this sector.³³

Conclusions

In order to provide guidelines for the implementation of Romania's National Reform Programme (NRP)³⁴, the Council of the European Union issued a set of recommendations. Unfortunately the forecast on Romania's compliance with the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact is not a positive one. Regarding employment, some improvements have been registered in 2014, but it continues to be low in the case of women, young people, old people and Roma. A step that has been taken to tackle youth unemployment is the Youth Guarantee scheme. In the area of education, with early school leaving rates above EU average and a participation in lifelong learning below average, the relevance of higher education for the labour market is not adequate. The lifelong learning national strategy, the national strategy for reducing early school leaving and the drafted strategy on tertiary education to increase the relevance of higher education have been saluted, but a swift implementation is required.³⁵

³¹ The term *brain circulation* was introduced by Johnson and Regets in 1998, with reference to the return of Taiwanese and Korean researchers from the US.

Rasha Istaiteyeh, *Economic Development and Highly Skilled Returnees: The impact of human capital circular migration on the economy of origin countries: The case of Jordan*, Kassel, Kassel University Press, 2011, p. 30.

³² Rikke Mathiassen (2015), *Expert: Erasmus programme causes "brain drain"*, October 9, 2014, *Euroscope*, accessed on 03.11.2015 at: [<http://publications.eupeintheworld.com/expert-student-exchange-encourages-young-brains-flee-southern-europe/>]

³³ Pierre Valery; Constantin-Şerban Iosifescu; Ciprian Fartusnic; Tudorel Andrei; Claudiu Herteliu, Final report for UNICEF, *Cost of non-investment in Education in Romania*, Bucharest, November 2014, accessed on 04.11.2015 at:

[<http://www.unicef.org/romania/Cost.Noninvest.web.pdf>], p. 48.

³⁴ Government of Romania, *National Reform Programme 2015*, Bucharest, April 2015, accessed on 02.10.2015 at: [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/csr2015/nrp2015_romania_en.pdf].

³⁵ Official Journal of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Romania and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence*

Hence, the possibility of Romania and of the European Union as a whole to comply with the Europe 2020 strategy requirements in the domains of education and employment is uncertain and the goals are somewhat difficult to attain, as, despite the acknowledged and important steps forward that have been taken, among other aspects, communication between education institutions and the labour market continues to be deficient. Nevertheless, the progress that has been made so far allows us to regard the outcomes of the strategy from an optimistic perspective, even if its final goals will not be reached by 2020.

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Programme of Romania, 18.08.2015, accessed on 03.11.2015 at:

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