

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM - A PRIORITY CONCERN OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Ioana Florina MINZU, PhD
“Athenaeum” University of Bucharest

Abstract:

Education should be and usually is the dream, hope and aspiration to a better world for children and their families. Maybe, in our days, education should represent a priority also to local communities and nations around the world in order to reach out a welfare state without hunger and poverty.

Due time, it became a painful true that education matters. Painful not because of the sacrifices that one must make to have an education, nor because of the family efforts made to sustain their children during the time that they are in school, but because the fact that after almost a decade of learning, more than 25% of the young people find themselves in the front of a lack of employment on the labour market. And then they ask themselves if it's worth learning or not. And this question is a real problem for humanity.

Important changes and diversity of the contemporary world affected EU member countries, bringing profound changes in all areas: political, diplomatic, legal, social, financial, economic, technical and technological, religious, informational, environmental, military etc.

But, even with all these domains in crises, everybody has to realize that the world's future development goals cannot be fulfilled without education.

Keywords: *dropout rate, education crisis, barriers to education, the labour market, unemployment*

JEL Classification: *A19, E24, I24, I25, J64.*

I. Introduction

Education allows people to acquire skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that are fundamental to guarantee their basic socio-economic needs and enable a sustainable development of their societies.

Although, the right to education is universally and upheld in numerous international human rights treaties and national constitutions, there are still millions of peoples without a minimum education.

Despite every effort and the impressive progress made on educational access in some countries and regions, in 2012, 58 million children of primary school age were not going to school: 23% attended school in the past but left it, 34% are likely to enter school in the future and 43% are likely to never enter school. Also, 63 million adolescents of lower secondary school age are not attending school.¹

National education systems should respond to individuals and global population needs, but also to countries and world of work today expectations. Quality of education which a young person receives in school is crucial to its future course in life.

II. Impediments to education

Fast changing of social and economic conditions require higher levels of qualifications and skills. This is why an upper secondary qualification is the minimum qualification for a valuable participation in the labour market and for integration in society.

The problems arise from the way in which various barriers to education work in combination, over time, and their cumulative impact. Among the factors that were studied² - age, gender, location of the household, cultural norms, education of parents, child health problems, economic hardships, family issues, and other personal characteristics, together with the direct and indirect costs of education, lack of schools, teachers and equipment, as well as bad teaching practices and violence at school - household wealth was statistically the most significant determinant of school attendance. All this impediments are precursors of school dropout.

As a consequence, children from poor households are less able to afford the direct and indirect costs of education and more likely to be involved in child labour. It is a causal relationship that determines a vicious circle: children from disadvantaged families become parents with low levels of education, which, in turn, are unable to support children in learning. This is why the reforms should go far beyond the relevance and quality of education, and include broader changes in public policy that empower families to choose education over labour.

Another problem of the educational system is to timely adjust the curriculum to match the current technologies. National educational system, from elementary school to PhD, should be an exact reflection of the industrial new-era requirements and economical needs from each country. Revised school curricula must reflect the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, and be relevant for the well-being and valuable employment of all groups in the 21st century.

To achieve a valuable learning is necessary to improve teachers' working conditions and provide them with ongoing support and training, so that they can effectively lead student-centered learning. Also, qualified teachers mustn't be paid poorly, nor to have a low social and professional status.

Regarding the financial needs for universal basic education we must say that the availability of school places and the number of teachers are the minimum demands for participation in basic education. In order to have medium and long term results, we must increase global investment in education by governments, aid donors and private corporations.

III. Educational system and youth unemployment in European Union

Young people are the present and, most of all, the future of European Union. This is why, the situation of young people who are studying and entering professional and adult life of the society is important for each country economy and at European level.

The quality of learning is essential for people's basic needs and fundamental for global sustainable development. Along with the basics, they need to acquire attitudes, values and skills as well as information in order to value global well-being and to be prepared for 21st century employment opportunities.

There is a clear link between good quality learning in schools and levels of employment, as inadequate learning leaves young people unprepared for the labor market. High youth unemployment rates reflect the difficulties faced by young people in finding jobs.

The Europe 2020 Strategy sets out as target reducing school dropout rates³ to less than 10% and increasing the share of the population aged 30 to 34 having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40% by 2020. Also, 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed.⁴

Every sixth young person aged 18 to 24 in EU-28 still leaves school with just lower secondary education and participates in no kind of education or training after that, risking on having a life of poverty and being victims of social exclusion.

No. crt.	Country	Dropout school rate (%)				
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
1	Austria	8.3	8.3	7.6	7.5	7.0
2	Belgium	11.9	12.3	12.0	11.0	9.8
3	Bulgaria	13.9	11.8	12.5	12.5	12.9
4	Croatia	-	-	-	4.5	2.7
5	Cyprus	12.7	11.3	11.4	9.1	6.8
6	Czech Republic	4.9	4.9	5.5	5.4	5.5
7	Denmark	11.0	9.6	9.1	8.0	7.7
8	Estonia	11.6	10.9	10.5	9.7	11.4
9	Finland	10.3	9.8	8.9	9.3	9.5
10	France	12.6	12.0	11.6	9.7	8.5
11	Germany	11.9	11.7	10.5p	9.8	9.5
12	Greece	13.7	13.1	11.4	10.1	9.0
13	Hungary	10.5	11.2	11.5	11.9	11.4
14	Ireland	11.4	10.8	9.7	8.4	6.9
15	Italy	18.8	18.2	17.6	16.8	15.0
16	Latvia	13.3	11.6b	10.5	9.8	8.5
17	Lithuania	8.1	7.2	6.5	6.3	5.9
18	Luxembourg	7.1	6.2	8.1p	6.1	6.1
19	Malta	24.8	23.6	22.6	20.5	20.4
20	Netherlands	10.0	9.1	8.8p	9.2	8.6
21	Poland	5.4p	5.6p	5.7p	5.6	5.4
22	Portugal	28.7	23.2	20.8	18.9	17.4
23	Romania	18.4	17.5	17.4	17.3	18.1
24	Slovakia	4.7	5.0	5.3	6.4	6.7
25	Slovenia	5.0	4.2	4.4	3.9	4.4
26	Spain	28.4	26.5	24.9	23.6	21.9
27	Sweden	6.5	6.6	7.5	7.1	6.7
28	United Kingdom	14.9	15.0	13.5	12.3	11.8
29	Total EU	14.0	13.5	12.8p	10.38	9.83

Note: p – provisional, b – break in series. Source: Eurostat.

The 2014 EU employment rate for persons of working age (20-64) rose to 64,9%, an increase of 0,8% compared to 2013. Youth unemployment rates (persons aged less than 25 years) are generally much higher, sometimes more than double unemployment rates for persons of all ages (15–74).⁵ The financial and economic crisis severely hit the young.

No. crt.	Country	Youth employment rate /Youth employment ratio ⁶ (%)				
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014 ⁷
1	Austria	8.8 /7.1	8.3 /6.9	8.7 /6.5	9.2 /7.1	10.3
2	Belgium	22.4/10.9	18.7 /11.8	19.8 /12.3	23.7 /12.7	23.2

3	Bulgaria	21.8/21.8	25.0 /21.8	28.1 /21.5	28.4 /21.6	23.8
4	Croatia	32.6 /14.9	36.1 /15.7	43.0 /16.7	49.7 /18.6	45.5
5	Cyprus	16.6 /11.7	22.4 /14.6	27.7 /16.0	38.9 /18.7	35.9
6	Czech Republic	18.3 /8.8	18.1 /8.3	19.5 /8.9	18.9 /9.1	15.9
7	Denmark	13.9 /6.0	14.2 /6.3	14.1 /6.6	13.0 /6.0	12.6
8	Estonia	32.9 /14.5	22.4 /11.8	20.9 /12.5	18.7 /11.3	15.0
9	Finland	21.4 /9b	20.1 /8.4	19.0 /8.6	19.9 /9.3	20.5
10	France	23.3 /12.4	22.6 /12.0	24.4 /12.2	24.8 /11.2	23.2
11	Germany	9.9 / 8.3	8.6 /7.5	8.1 /7.1	7.9 /6.3	7.7
12	Greece	32.9 /14.9	44.7 /17.4	55.3 /20.3	58.3 /20.6	52.4
13	Hungary	26.6 /12.4	26.1 /13.3	28.1 /14.7	27.2 /15.4	20.4
14	Ireland	27.6 /19.2	29.1 /18.8	30.4 /18.7	26.8 /16.1	23.9
15	Italy	27.8 /19.1	29.1 /19.8	35.3 /21.1	40.0 /22.2	42.7
16	Latvia	36.2 /17.8	31.0 /16b	28.5 /14.9	23.2 /13.0	19.6
17	Lithuania	35.7 /13.2	32.6 /11.8	26.7 /11.2	21.9 /11.1	19.3
18	Luxembourg	15.8 /5.1	16.4 /4.7	18.0 /5.9	16.9 /5.0	22.6
19	Malta	13.1 /9.5	13.3 /10.6	14.1 /11.1	13.0 /9.9	11.8
20	Netherlands	8.7 /4.3b	7.6 /3.8	9.5 /4.3	11.0 /5.1	10.5
21	Poland	23.7 /10.8	25.8 /11.5	26.5 /11.8	27.3 /12.2	23.9
22	Portugal	27.7 /11.5	30.3 /12.7	37.9 /14.1	38.1 /14.2	34.8
23	Romania	22.1 /16.4	23.7 /17.4	22.7 /16.8	23.6 /17.2	24.0
24	Slovakia	33.9 /7.1	33.7 /7.1	34.0 /9.3	33.7 /9.2	29.7
25	Slovenia	14.7 /14.1	15.7 /13.8	20.6 /13.8	21.6 /13.7	20.2
26	Spain	41.5 /18.0	46.2 /18.5	52.9 /18.8	55.5 /18.6	53.2
27	Sweden	24.8 /7.7	22.8 /7.5	23.7 /7.8	23.6 /7.5	22.9
28	United Kingdom	19.6 /13.7	21.1 /14.3	21.0 /14.0	20.5 /13.3	16.9
29	Total EU	21.1 / 12.8	21.5 / 12.9	23.0 /13.1	23.5 /13.0	21.9/11.6

Note: p – provisional, b – break in series. Source: Eurostat.

In December 2014, 4.960 million young persons (under 25) were unemployed in the EU28, of whom 3.289 million were in the euro area.^{8,9}

Education and employment indicators show that the more highly educated individuals are, the more likely is that they will be employed. This underlines a direct connection between the quality of the curricula in schools and levels of employment after graduation.

IV. Challenges in the area of education and youth labour in Romania

The major factors in early school dropout in Romania are: financial problems, parents and brothers educational example, disorganized families, edge-of-law activities - prostitution, membership of street gangs, lack of trust in the education system, early marriage custom and having a child,

lack of individual security in the school area, migration and the reintegration of immigrants' children.¹⁰

There are some aspects that must be acknowledged: the early school leaving rate in Romania remains well above the EU average; the availability and access of early childhood education and care services is limited, especially in rural areas and for the Roma community; participation in lifelong learning remains far below the EU average; the quality and labour market relevance of higher education is inadequate; and the tertiary attainment rate remains the second lowest in the EU.^{11 1}

The relevance of university education for the labour market is a major concern because there is a limited relation between universities and innovation - research areas and a slow process of adaptation of university curricula and teaching practices to labour-market requirements.^{12 2}

Romanian authorities analyzed the situation and tried to find some solutions, such as: second chance programs, making school more appealing, encouraging the local authorities and specialized NGOs to involve students in their programs etc. Despite efforts, in adopting all the national strategies^{13 3} have been significant delays and Romania have not successfully developed policies to increase the number of graduates from upper secondary school.

Regarding youth unemployment, although the rate is declining (from 24,7% in January 2014 to 23,4% in October 2014), it continues to be above the European average (21,8% in October 2014).

Current educational system, from elementary school to PhD, should be an exact reflection of requirements the industrial era imposes. Unfortunately, in Romania, in the last 20 years, a lot of young people graduate university studies just because their parents want to or it looks good in the society view. They do not choose a university in order to use it in the future professional activity. And this is reflected in the labor market: we have unemployed with diplomas and a lot of people with medium level jobs even they graduated university studies.

The lack of qualifications or even experience in the technical area in the industrial era is another problem. Technical universities are difficult and require a greater effort than the others. That is why, students are avoiding them. The result is that we have jobs that cannot be occupied and young people fighting for the same job in some sphere of activity (such as law, public relations, public administration).

¹ COM (2015) 272 final, p. 5.

² The draft strategy on tertiary education aims increasing the relevance of higher education, as well as increasing accessibility to disadvantaged groups.

³ For example, it was elaborated a national programme for early childhood education and care (comprising ante-preschool education and preschool education for 2014-19, but it will become operational with the new school year 2015-16).

Traditional educational system, used in many European countries, supplies each student with one well-focused profession and majority of people never in their life time crosses the boundaries of their profession.

Maybe, instead of teaching students some “particular” knowledge, new educational system should rather teach them how to learn new knowledge on their own and fast, how to readjust their qualifications.

Romanian educational system must adjust the curriculum to match to the current technologies, based only on the functional/outcome approach and general principles of human knowledge, if we want an economic progress.

We also need to teach the teachers before they can start teaching the students. But not forcing them to do it just to keep their job because is non-productive: they will learn just to have the diplomas, nor to have the skills and the “passion” for teaching. The teachers must be stimulated by rewards that increase self-esteem, confidence, motivation and financial status.

V. Conclusions

We must focus on children who are struggling to realize their right to an education and to fulfill their dreams for a better future because universal education is vital for national economic prosperity and social well-being.

Due to the limited resources, policymakers must determine what should be prioritized. There is needed a new and stronger political commitment to the education of every child, sustained by the necessary resources - human and financial. This is a worthy investment taking into consideration the long-term benefits for every nation.

The reform of education systems is no easy task, but it has to address the inequalities, poverty, vulnerabilities and, indeed, the aspirations of children and families. In fulfilling this task, decision makers must also take into account the involvement of civil society and analyze the opportunity of implementing programs that can mobilize society's most promising future leaders to grow and strengthen the movement for educational equity and excellence.

Education reform also needs to ensure a schooling offer adapted to the economic and social realities and a good quality education that prepares children for a productive adult life. Also, the education sector reforms need to ensure that all education strategies and action plans are inclusive and include children with special needs.

Maybe the most important aspect is the quality of education and the link to learning outcomes. Improving the quality of education is a critical demand because it reduces dropout and unemployment, to which children

and young people are most vulnerable. Ensuring access to education is not enough; the quality of learning is also decisive.

Breaking the key barriers to universal basic education, as gender discrimination, child labour, language challenges, disabilities, must concern us all, not just the policymakers.

Different countries need policies that are tailored to their specific circumstances, but every country needs to consider education as a priority and to act according to that.

References

¹ Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global, 2015, p.18.

² The analyses made by UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF highlight five important barriers to education. First, one-half of the world's out-of-school children live in conflict affected countries. Second, entrenched gender roles continue to influence whether or not a child starts and stays in school. Third, a household's reliance on child labour often competes with that family's hopes for education. Fourth, too many children are sidelined by education that is delivered in a language they neither speak nor understand. And finally, the considerable barriers that prevent children with disabilities from claiming their right to an education are only reinforced by a lack of data on their numbers and their needs. Idem, p. 14.

³ <http://tellmaps.com/uis/oosc/>. UNESCO eAtlas of Out-of-School Children.

⁴ European Commission, [Taking stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth](#), COM(2014)130 final, Brussels, 2014.

⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Labour_market_and_Labour_force_survey_%28LFS%29_statistics.

⁶ *Youth unemployment rate* is the percentage of the unemployed in the age group 15 to 24 years old compared to the total labour force (both employed and unemployed) in that age group. *Youth unemployment ratio* is the percentage of unemployed young people compared to the total population of that age group (not only the active, but also the inactive such as students).

⁷ *Youth unemployment ratio* for 2014 are not published yet.

⁸ Up to 31 December 2014, the euro area (EA18) included Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia and Finland. From 1 January 2015 the euro area (EA19) also includes Lithuania.

⁹ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/6581668/3-30012015-AP-EN.pdf/9d4fbadd-d7ae-48f8-b071-672f3c4767dd>.

¹⁰ <http://www.unicef.ro/media/buletin-informativ-nr-7/abandonul-scolar-timpuriu-cauze-si-possibilitati-de-prevenire/>.

¹¹ COM (2015) 272 final, p. 5.

¹² The draft strategy on tertiary education aims increasing the relevance of higher education, as well as increasing accessibility to disadvantaged groups.

¹³ For example, it was elaborated a national programme for early childhood education and care (comprising ante-preschool education and preschool education for 2014-19, but it will become operational with the new school year 2015-16.

¹⁴ School-to-work transitions in Europe: speed of convergence to permanent employment, *autori* Balan Mariana, Vasile Emilia – Conferința Internațională Perspective Europene ale Pieței Muncii – Inovare, Competențe, Performanță, 09-10 Decembrie 2013, București, Secțiunea *Tendințe și prognoze în ocuparea forței de muncă*, Publicată în Proceedings-ul Conferinței *Theoretical and Applied Economics. Special Issue*, ISSN 1841-8678 (print), ISSN 1844-0029 (online), pp. 42-54. <http://www.ectap.ro/supliment/european-perspectives-of-the-labour-market-innovation-competences-performance/19/>

BIBLIOGRAFY

Communication from the Commission: Europe 2020 - A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, COM(2010) 2020 final.

Funding of Education in Europe 2000 - 2012: The Impact of the Economic Crisis, Eurydice Report, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, European Commission, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2013.

The Global Learning Crisis - Why every child deserves a quality education, United Nations Educational, UNESCO, 2013.

National Sheets on Education Budgets in Europe - 2014, Eurydice Report, European Commission, 2014.

Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global, UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UNICEF, Montreal, 2015.

Recommendation for a Council Recommendation on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Romania and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of Romania, COM(2015) 272 final, Brussels, 2015.

The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Implementation Report, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2015.

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

<http://www.oecd.org/education/>

<http://www.educationincrisis.net/>