

Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Research

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

***Embargo until pronounced
Check against delivery***

***Embargo jusqu'à l'intervention
la version prononcée fait foi***

Debate on "Fostering youth employment through education and training: role and best practices within regions in Europe"

26th Session of the Chamber of Regions, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of Europe

.../...

- 2 -

26 March 2014, Strasbourg, France

9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Contribution (10') by

Mr Csaba BORBOLY

(Member of the EDUC Commission and President of Harghita County Council in Romania)

Ladó Tihamér-Zsolt

(Federation of Youth Organization
of Ciuc Region)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you for the invitation to this session of the Chamber of Regions. As you all know, the Committee of the Regions and the Congress of the Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe have a **close cooperation** on several subjects of common

.../...

interest. Youth employment, education and training are certainly among these subjects and they have a prominent place on the political agenda of the CoR. So I am happy to take part in this debate.

At the beginning of 2014 more than 5 and a half million young people in the EU 28 Member States were still unemployed¹ and about 7 and a half million Europeans between 15 and 24 are not employed, not in education and not in training.

Although the overall youth unemployment rates are slightly lower than one year ago, they remain shockingly high and even more so in certain EU countries.

It is evident that the efforts to improve the life of the young people in Europe **need to be intensified**.

This is why youth employment has often been part of the discussions and consultative work of the Committee of the Regions.

To address the problem a coordinated approach at all levels and fronts is crucial. First of all, out-of-date elements in the education systems need to be adapted to today's reality.

At the CoR we are of the opinion that successful learning that integrates the **use of ICT** creates an environment in which learners can be better equipped to meet the needs and demands of the current and future labour market. This is an extremely important issue at local and regional level.

Access to **open educational resources and new technologies** should be available to all learners regardless of the level of education, of their socio-economic background or of their geographical location.

To achieve this, **access to broadband** in all regions is of key importance.

The development of **digital and online materials** and of more **internationally**-oriented curricula, together with **skills assessment** and the development and recognition of **non-formal** educational systems, can help in this direction².

Both Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 can support education providers in the development of new education and business models³.

The social environment and school system should be able to enable the **creativity** and the ability of young children to assimilate everything new into an interested, open and innovative way of living.

Childhood is a period during which the basis for European innovativeness is evolving⁴.

Of course, it is obvious that the answer to the unemployment issue cannot be identical in all Member States and regions. Regions should find the most fitting solutions **in line with their needs**, and develop their own governance and planning structures together with channels for cooperation.

Concerted efforts to address issues and improve formal and non-formal education, social aspects and employment of young people are required at all governance levels. The target group should be all ages.

The Committee of the Regions has urged Member States to step up efforts and promote the **learning mobility** of all young people so that formal and non-formal learning can be available under equal conditions, regardless of where they live.

1 http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_PUBLIC/3-28022014-AP/EN/3-28022014-AP-EN.PDF

2 CdR 5961/2013

3 CdR 6183/2013

4 CdR 2414/2012

It is important in the area of **transversal skills** development to foster within the education system the attitudes and skills of young people to self-employment by developing personal qualities such as **creativity, responsibility, risk-taking, problem solving and team work**.

Vocational education and training policies should be aligned with regional and local economic development strategies and to develop **partnerships** between education, business and research. In view of this, equal investment in young people's cultural education and kinaesthetic skills is especially worthy of support.

The public and private benefits of education go beyond the purely economic⁵.

The Committee of the Regions has also stressed the key role that local and regional authorities play in framing and implementing measures to combat unemployment, providing young people with opportunities and support, and exchanging good practices.

We actually believe that a substantial proportion of the resources dedicated to the youth employment initiative should be **allocated to local and regional authorities**, to increase their ability to implement initiatives supporting youth employment in the way that is most appropriate to local conditions.

Synergies between the relevant strategic initiatives and the different funding mechanisms are required.

Maximum impact is achieved through **cooperation between regional and local authorities, employment services, advisory bodies and educational establishments**.

We have noticed that the best results in terms of youth employment are seen in countries where young people have the chance to take part in **high-quality traineeships** and where well-established apprenticeship schemes⁶ form an integral part of the training and work placement system.

This is also the case when employment services are effective.

Efficient employment services, linking education and business and involving voluntary and third sector organisations can contribute to the better integration of young people into the labour market.

We have of course welcomed the so-called **youth guarantee**, under which, within four months of finishing school or a work contract, young people receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship.

But we need to pay close attention to its practical implementation. At the same time, training programmes should be designed in a way to **support and anticipate the school-work transition** but also prevent young people from remaining too long in the education or training system without prospects⁷.

Opportunities to return to training **to improve or convert skills**, within the framework of **life-long learning** should be offered to all regardless of their time of entry into the labour market.

And we should certainly not forget **the gender dimension of youth unemployment**. For instance, young women are more likely to be in inappropriate employment and suffer the consequences of the gender pay gap, even in traineeships, and of the lack of adequate work-life balance measures.

These aspects should be taken into consideration in youth employment schemes.

⁵ CdR 2392/2012

⁶ SWD(2012) 406 final.

⁷ CdR 789/2013

We also believe that Member States should promote **dual or twin-track apprenticeships**, also during higher education and also the effective cooperation between schools, colleges and bodies responsible for vocational training and teaching, the business world and employment services, if necessary through cultural and structural measures and financial or fiscal incentives, offered where appropriate by regional and local authorities.

The variety and high quality of the offered traineeships is crucial and in this respect, the local and regional authorities can set a good example by implementing high-quality work experience programmes.

High quality means also **giving an allowance, meeting certain requirements with regard to social security, health and safety in the workplace and formally certifying** the knowledge and skills acquired by the trainee.

Member States should devise and implement policies and instruments that assist **young people's business start-ups**, not least through forms of guarantees on loans and leasing operations and lower interest rates on loans, and by means of micro-credit instruments.

As a member of the EDUC Commission I was rapporteur on the topic of **European higher education in the world**.

As this topic can be linked to today's discussion, I would like to highlight the most important and relevant ideas of this document:

Firstly Member States should develop programmes and support mechanisms - national or targeted at regions in special situations - to assist higher education institutions at local and regional level in implementing their internationalisation strategies

Secondly I would highlight the importance of language skills in order to internationalise higher education. In this way the role of local and regional authorities as facilitators in the acquisition of such skills is highly important in a multilingual and multi-ethnic Europe. higher education institutions should offer educational opportunities in more than one language, including minority languages.

As the president of Harghita County Council from Romania I would like to present to you a few projects which Harghita County Council has initiated directly concerning youth employment.

Firstly our council is involved in charity work for our children – There has been a campaign with community work – aimed to help those institutions – schools, kindergardens, day care centers – which didn't receive an operating licence, due to their financial situation.

This was a remedy for basic problems such as water supply, drinking water problems and sanitation.

We have an apprenticeship programme. At national and county level too there is a lack of professional workers and craftsmen.

- This programme aims to stop early school dropout, and also to motivate the young to stay in the country rather than to migrate.
- With the help of this programme the young can learn a profession or crafts.

Thirdly the county council has elaborated **a project which focuses on keeping talented young people in the country** and to stop the braindrain process.

In this respect the council offers scholarships in different areas and has also initiated a programme for young doctors, offering them apartments in exchange for working at the county hospital.

At country level, in Romania in 2015 **Cluj Napoca will be European Youth Capital**. Their mission will be to strengthen the role and support the active participation of young people and youth organizations in creating change in our society.

To summarize this issue is a complex one that will not be easily solved. However, public authorities at European, national, and in particular at regional and local levels can play a major role in addressing youth joblessness by motivating the training of young people –

apprenticeship, traineeship, by encouraging job creation, by creating support programs for young entrepreneurs, by initiating youth-related Operational Programmes and also by combating early school leaving.

Harghita County Council made an application for local youth organizations to appoint experts who can make recommendations in order to reduce youth unemployment. The best recommendations were from Lado Tihamer Zsolt, who is here with me today. He is the representative of the Federation of Youth Organization of Ciuc Region. My expert proposes the following :

- uniform wages for the entrant teachers at EU level
- enterprises should have the opportunity to apply for the compensation of salaries for fresh graduates
- to promote partnerships between companies and vocational schools at EU level.

Finally, the CoR believes that young people themselves and youth organisations should be **actively involved** in the drawing up of strategies.

Therefore, on 1st April, the CoR will welcome about 150 young people from a variety of organisations, think-tanks, political parties and institutions and will hear their views on the future of a multi-level Europe.

The EU, the Member States and the local and regional authorities with the involvement of civil society need to continue the efforts and work all together to tackle the problem. I hope that these unacceptable youth unemployment rates will soon belong to the past.

Thank you for your attention.