



National Dialogue for Youth Employment: New Approaches, New Challenges

Improving the Status of Young People through Cooperation

The past few years have seen numerous measures undertaken to promote youth employment. Thorough efforts continue to involve the education system modernisation, stimulating entrepreneurship, matching the labour market supply against the economy's demand, boosting innovations, ushering socially responsible cooperatives and social enterprises, offering additional youth training and retraining opportunities, as well as many other measures for increasing the employment rate of this population group. Conference participants at the "National Dialogue for Youth Employment: New Approaches, New Challenges" had the opportunity to exchange experiences and notes from their previous work in the area and, based on successful examples from Serbian and European practice, give recommendations for future work.



The worldwide youth unemployment rate tends to be higher than the unemployment rate of the general population. The reasons why young people constitute a hard-to-employ population category are manifold and range from the lack of quality jobs and insufficient previous work experience to the incompatibility of their skills and knowledge with the needs of the modern economy. In September 2017, for instance, people between the ages of 15 and 29 constituted 22.5% of the general unemployment rate in Serbia. The youth unemployment rate in the region has been decreasing for years: it still however remains significantly higher than both the European average and the Serbian general population's unemployment average. The Government of



the Republic of Serbia is working intensively and jointly with its partners on improving the position of youth, and the "National Dialogue for Youth Employment: New Approaches, New Challenges" event held on November 1 in Belgrade at the crowded hall of the "Madlenianum" theatre served as platform for discussing results programmes and measures implemented to that end had achieved.



The National Dialogue was launched two years ago under the "Youth Employment Promotion" project of the German Development Cooperation, a project implemented jointly by German Organisation for International Cooperation GIZ and Ministry of Youth and Sports. This year's dialogue was organised with the support of the Government of Serbia's Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit implementing the Swiss programme „From Education to Employment“, also involving Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, and locally, IP/ NIRAS. It is a four-year partner programme between governments of Switzerland and Serbia that targets youth unemployment reduction and social innovation promotion.

This year's Dialogue introduced results and various activities relevant stakeholders in Serbia achieved in terms of improving the status of young adults. Dialogue's participants had the opportunity to learn about best practice



examples in inclusive employment in Austria and about new social innovations concepts that encourage youth employment in Europe.

The conference focused on panel discussions that introduced successful experiences in either applying or improving the existing employment models: stimulating entrepreneurship and (self) employment by developing hubs; establishing socially responsible cooperatives and social enterprises; training young adults for the known employer and the labour market; introducing innovative partnership models between the public, private and civil sectors, and introducing a new approach for planning employment, both locally and regionally.

The emphasis was also placed on the partnership between two large donors, Federal Republic of Germany and Swiss Confederation, supporting Serbia in building a democratic, inclusive society and a modern economy, competitive in the European and world mar-

kets. More specifically, German Development Cooperation and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) intensively cooperate in the area of education, such as on introducing dual/cooperative education elements, but also in combating poverty and creating opportunities for sustainable economic development in the mentioned areas.



Results of Measures to Increase Youth Employability

At the opening of the National Dialogue, Minister of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Mr Zoran Đorđević, emphasised that, among other things, “most unemployed young adults in Serbia have completed only secondary or primary education and hence lack sufficient skills and knowledge required for the modern economy. We, therefore, must modernise our educational system with the help of our economy. Furthermore, we need to encourage youth entrepreneurship to stand as the pillar of our future development”. He underlined that young adults, along with other vulnerable groups in the labour market, such as Roma population and persons with disabilities, are the focus of the implementation of the National Employment Action Plan. Minister Đorđević also confirmed that finalisation of the National Employment Action

Plan for the following year is underway in a joint effort with partners.

Minister underlined the IT sector as the one of the fastest growing employment sectors experiencing progressive growth and offering highly paid jobs. Currently, this sector provides around 20,000 jobs in Serbia and in the upcoming few years that figure is expected to rise to 50,000.

Mr Nenad Popović, Minister for Innovation and Technological Development confirmed the assessment of the Minister of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs that digitalisation and modern technologies development are to provide a significant employment potential. He reminded that the Serbian Government is working vigorously to





create the environment for boosting innovations and innovative entrepreneurship.

Minister for Innovation and Technological Development also referred to one other priority of the Serbian Government – the development of women's entrepreneurship. "We'll enjoy support of our partners in that quest, namely the EU Institute for Innovation and Technology, the World Bank, EBRD, and several states. Our aim is to lend a hand to women entrepreneurs by offering specific actions and support for developing their innovative and creative potentials", said Popović.

Minister for Innovation reminded us that young people too need support to realise their business and creative ideas, and to that end numerous institutions in Serbia, from Petnica Research Station to numerous incubators and hubs that provide material and logistical support, give young adults opportunities to further advance their potentials.

Serbian Government with Germany as its largest bilateral donor is working intensively on creating an environment for improving



the position of youth. Germany has thus far invested more than 1.7 billion Euros in improving economic and living conditions in Serbia. The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Serbia, His Excellency Mr Axel Dittmann reminded that the two countries signed a Protocol on Intergovernmental Negotiations on Development Cooperation in September 2017, an agreement stipulating another 40 million Euros to Serbia for projects. He said that the German Development Cooperation aided the situation of young people who, compared to the general population, face double the risk of unemployment. The following are only some of the German Development Cooperation's projects that have dealt with improving youth employability, namely: Professional Orientation, Reform of Vocational Education and Training, Youth Employment Promotion, Private Sector Development, etc.

Dittmann highlighted the necessity of aligning the needs of the economy and young people still in school or transitioning between school and work. The Ambassador praised the Serbian Government as responsive to those ideas and very serious in terms of



modernising the educational system. "We shall continue to promote good examples and successful practices with our partners" stressed Dittmann, and announced the forthcoming founding of an institution for facilitating start-up development in Serbia. Ursula Läubli, the Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office in Serbia, agreed with aforementioned speakers and added that the weight of economy's input in projects such as these must not be overlooked. She emphasised joint success of Switzerland, Austria and Germany in introducing dual education elements in secondary vocational schools in Serbia. Over 200 companies, 60 schools, and more than 2000 students studying in 19 educational profiles, currently participate in this education system. These students attend theoretical lessons in their classrooms while adequately trained mentors provide practical training in companies. The Swiss Cooperation Office in Serbia has invested 15.5 million CHF in the "From Education to Employment" programme

that is since 2015 being implemented in cooperation with the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit of the Serbian Government, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development, and Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The following information confirms the fact that mentioned programmes truly improve the position of young adults in Serbia: the 2013 youth unemployment rate of 39.8% has by 2016 dropped to 28.5%. Snežana Klačnja, Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Serbia highlighted this information at the conference. "Despite the 11% decrease in the unemployment rate, no one from the main stakeholders should feel content before the unemployment rate drops to a single digit number", Klačnja reminded in her address and added that future measures and programmes must be at least equally, if not more successful than the current one.

Youth Opportunities are Opportunities for the Society

Peter Vandor, Vienna University Business and Economics professor explained how young people tend to be entrepreneurs by nature, and based on research, 40% of those planning to start an own business want to be socially useful. He also presented several very successful social entrepreneurship projects, one of which was manufacturing children's prostheses with 3D printers to produce almost fully functional limbs that use complex sensors to mimic the arm and leg movement.

Vandor's message to young people was to not give up on their good ideas, while his message to the economy was to not give up on its youth. "Young people should be given the opportunity to achieve when in their most fruitful and creative years, to gain experience and self-confidence that will help them contribute to the community they live in", said Vandor. He believes this may regulate the problems of brain drain and ever-present high youth unemployment.



Best Practice Examples



The conference included two panel discussions: "New Models for Youth Employment: What Works and How?" and "Youth Employability: From Short-Term to Long-Term Solutions". Panellists and the audience actively participated in discussions on the outcomes of youth employment measures and models and steps to be undertaken in the future.

Messages about the great economic potential of youth were best illustrated by practical examples. The documentary "I Choose to Step Up" about young adults who are successful in their own professions and in those they have additionally trained for best showed how new generations know how to take advantage of given opportunities.

One of featured young entrepreneurs was Maja Stojiljković, a law graduate who due to a shortage of funds for opening her own law office decided to endeavour in bee keeping. She managed to develop her own business owing to the advisory and material assistance of the German Development Cooperation's project Youth Employment Promotion.

She encouraged participants in the "New Models of Youth Employment: What Works and How?" panel to venture into entrepreneurship. Zoja Kukić added onto her suggestion by explaining how she managed to develop Startit Centre with her colleagues, an organization that supports start-up businesses.

In the panel, Dejan Mitić (Association for Local Development Kamenica) and experts Aleksandra Vladislavljević and Stanislava Vidović talked about young adults' traits that separate them from older generations that had grown up and studied before the age of high-speed Internet and digitalisation. Young women and men of today are well informed and dedicated, yet still insufficiently encouraged to dive into entrepreneurship. Panellists also mentioned the need to support vulnerable groups and discriminated young people through social enterprises and cooperatives.

Youth support however, must fit their real needs and specificities. "Not all young adults are the same", the panel concluded. Different unemployment causes should be handled differently, depending on the context. This panel's recommendation was to involve young people in the process of improving their own position and jointly examine the most efficient method for removing the roots of unemployment.

Association is crucial for the success of this venture, and all actors interested in promoting



youth employment must join forces to achieve the defined objective while being open to social innovation.

During the second panel entitled “Youth Employability: From Short-Term to Long-Term Solutions”, Bogdan Vasić (welding trainee), Goran Kostić (Alfa Plam), Vladimir Marinković (Sunce Marinković), Rajka Babić (Obrenovac Technical School), Marija Stojadinović (Business Development Centre Kragujevac), Bojana Mladenović (Town of Šabac) and Dragica Ivanović (Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran, and Social Affairs) explained the effects programmes and measures implemented so far had on youth employment.

The emphasis was placed on the effects of collaboration between schools and the economy in: giving practical knowledge to young adults in areas in demand on the labour market; career guidance and counselling that allows young adults to realise their own talents and skills, and best practice examples on how local governments can contribute to employment promotion. More specifically, the town of Šabac had devised an efficient employment action plan that takes into account both the

needs of local businessmen and the education system’s ability to source employers with qualified job candidates. Mentioned youth employment promotion measures and their more comprehensive character require local governments, the economy, and the education sector to join forces to the maximum extent possible. Achieving this goal calls for a continuous dialogue with all key stakeholders in the sphere of youth employment, as only so a complete picture of the needs (be it economy, individual employers, or youth), the context in which these needs arise, and the ways to meet those needs, can be assembled. It is necessary to develop mechanisms that allow continuous and unhindered “absorption” of innovative and effective approaches in youth employment ranging from individual instances to the national and local level. Professional public may use current individual employment initiatives’ success stories as guidelines on how to improve the position of this population group, while employers and the unemployed youth may look at them as encouragement.

The “National Dialogue for Youth Employment: New Approaches, New



Challenges” served as platform for hearing the voices of those most concerned with the issue. Bogdan Vasić is a young man who got a job at the Goša Institute after having completed his welding training. His newly found passion for this occupation encouraged him to further advance his skills and become a welding instructor. He shared his experiences and satisfaction with choosing this new career with those present at Madlenianum. His story is one of many successful stories that ensued from projects implemented by the Serbian Government, German Development Cooperation, and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The conference “National Dialogue for Youth Employment” gave two examples of quality and well-implemented social initiatives: magazine “Lice ulice” that financially directly aids marginalised population groups, and the venture of employing asylum returnees from the EU. Liza Maria Somer (Social Impact Award), young entrepreneur from Vienna who had primarily worked in education only to later establish a social enterprise for hiring and socially integrating migrants, shared her experiences.

Recommendations for Future Activities

Dialogue participants were unanimous in regard to future activities defined within several key recommendations. The conclusion underlined the need to continue with the dialogue on specific actions that each and every party in the initiative is to undertake within own competence to get common and applicable solutions that encourage youth employment and preserve sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

The consensus was to further consider ways of turning best practice examples into specific mechanisms that will permit effective youth employment approaches to be integrated into local and national programmes.

And finally, the need to join forces to strongly promote successful youth employment examples was highlighted to serve as inspiration and encouragement to others to become actively involved in programmes that may improve economic position of youth and their social activity and impact decision-making on the country’s future road of development.



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