

## Cooperation in education - a long term investment to secure regional peace

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**Abstract:** *Education is a fundamental right, but not all have access to it for various reasons: poverty, political circumstances, family issues, cultural or religious barriers. At the same time, all political factors have understood that education should be positioned on the top of their priority list, as an investment that will produce effects in the long run. Human Capital performances depend to a large extent on the quality of education provided to workers from early stages of their development. Moreover, the wealth of a nation is measured today by looking also at its human capital performances<sup>2</sup>. Human capital is the knowledge and skills people possess that enable them to create value in the global economic system. Obviously, knowledge and skills are acquired through education and experiences in the school years. Employers look for not only skilled employees but also good communicators, efficient people working in a multicultural environment, and, last but not least, digital literate workers. Looking at the future of jobs, one can identify the trends related to the 4th Industrial Revolution occurred as a result of the drivers of change action. Cooperation in Education will ensure the best results in preparing today the workforce of tomorrow. The paper aims to present the challenges of the future in education, drivers and barriers related to the cooperation in education. It examines current opportunities in students' and teachers' mobility in the Black Sea region and how they have been exploited for mutual benefits so far, with recommendations for better results.*

**Keywords:** education, human capital, regional cooperation, higher education, quality assurance standards

**JEL Codes:** I20, I23, I28.

### 1. Education - a fundamental right

The Declaration of Human Rights refers to education as a fundamental right of any human being<sup>3</sup>, and shall be free at the elementary and fundamental stages. A special mention is dedicated to higher education that shall be equally accessible to all on merit basis. Tertiary education provides a valuable human capital that contributes to the nation's wealth and well-being. Therefore, investing in education means a long-run strategic goal for many nations in their effort to achieve a desired level of country development<sup>4</sup>. Education

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<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum - The Global Human Capital Report, 2017 <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-human-capital-report-2017>

<sup>3</sup> Article 26, Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank Classification of countries.

can provide children with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. It is also associated with increased incomes, reduced poverty and improved health.

*“Education is directed to ensure the development of human personality and to promote the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace”* - is the most appropriate provision of the Declaration of Human Rights which has served us as a starting point for our paper.

Even though education is a fundamental right, there are still a lot of people who do not have access to education and female citizens of many countries are struggling to get in education even if it is about fundamental education which is supposed to be ensured free of charge.

UNICEF estimates that over 70 million children across the world are prevented from going to school, and in many of the world's poorest countries, girls are far less likely to attend school than boys. But access is not everything, the quality of education makes the difference, at the global scale 38% of children abandon primary school without learning how to read, write and do simple arithmetic. In Europe, one in five 15 year-olds and one in five 16-65 year-olds have poor reading skills, also, it is estimated that around 13 million children<sup>5</sup> under 15 years of age and around 55 million adults between 15 and 65 years of age have literacy difficulties<sup>6</sup>.

Education can provide children with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. It is associated with increased incomes, reduced poverty and improved health.

The benefits of education are not solely the product of more years of schooling. Learning outcomes also matter and have a powerful effect on earnings, the distribution of income and long-term economic growth<sup>7</sup>. In lower-middle income countries, if all children born today could be educated to a basic level of literacy and numeracy skills, there would be a 13-fold increase in GDP over their lifetimes.<sup>8</sup> Universal basic skills can also make economic growth more inclusive.

Literacy difficulties cost the global economy 1.1 trillion euros every year and the EU economy over 350 billion euros every year. Recently, the report from the World Literacy Foundation shows that literacy difficulties cost the global economy 1.1 trillion euros in 2015<sup>9</sup> due to:

- ❖ Lost earnings and limited employability
- ❖ Lost business productivity
- ❖ Higher spending related to health problems
- ❖ Higher spending in the justice system due to more crime
- ❖ Lost wealth creation opportunities for individuals and business
- ❖ Higher spending on social services and benefits
- ❖ Lower technology skills capacity in future

<sup>5</sup> In PISA's 23 selected European countries on average 17% of the 15 year-olds have literacy difficulties (a score at level 1a, 1b and 2). If we assume a similar percentage in children at younger ages we can expect that 17% of the total number of 0-15 years olds in Europe -79 million in 2012- have literacy difficulties, which makes a total of around 13 million.

<sup>6</sup> In PIAAC 17 selected European countries have been studied out of the 28 European countries in total. The percentage of adults between 16 and 65 years of age whom are considered as having literacy difficulties (below a literacy score of 225 points; thus both on level 1 and or below level 1) is 16.4% on average (SE 0.17), which is slightly higher compared to the OECD average of 15,7% (SE 0.14). The total number of adults in the age of 16-65 within the 17 selected countries is 279.6 million (source: technical report PIAAC).

<sup>7</sup> Hanushek, Eric A., and Ludger Wößmann, Education Quality and Economic Growth, The World Bank, Washington, D.C., 2007, p. 1.; and Hanushek, Eric A., and Ludger Wößmann, 'The Role of Cognitive Skills in Economic Development', Journal of Economic Literature, vol. 46, no. 3, 2008, pp. 607-668

<sup>8</sup> Hanushek, Eric A., and Ludger Wößmann Universal Basic Skills: What countries stand to gain, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> WLF (2015). The economic and social costs of illiteracy; a snapshot of illiteracy in a global context. Final report from the World Literacy Foundation, 24 August 2015.

❖ Higher spending on education due to students falling behind

To resume, the estimated costs of low literacy for the 24 European countries included in the WLF report amount to 308 billion euros. Following this calculation, the costs for all 28 EU countries can be estimated at more than 350 billion euros, an amount which is significant enough to be considered in future policies regarding education and outcomes of education on the long run.

Disparities in access to quality education are among the most powerful determinants of income disparities because of the effect learning and skills have on productivity, wages and employment. Narrowing the skills gap would create the conditions for more equitable patterns of growth, while increasing the size of the economy and reducing poverty.

A special attention is paid to education at the global level, the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 states that it is vital to *ensure inclusive, equitable and good-quality education and lifelong learning for all*. Statistics<sup>10</sup> on education reveal significant differences in education between different regions of the world, some being severely underdeveloped, others are facing high dropout rates and severe functional illiteracy. Looking at statistics on education (annexes 1-11) of the Black Sea Region countries<sup>11</sup> it seems that it is a real need to take actions on several directions, which seems of common interest:

- Establishing a common strategic vision based on each country's interest to achieve its own educational goals. A good start in this sense is to look at the directions stated in the 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region - the report
- Identifying common goals in education as a basic ground for future projects implemented in partnership
- Looking for opportunities to setup common objectives in regional education strategies that might contribute to regional literacy improvement and economic development.

Along with the worldwide good intentions and the universal recognition of the importance of education there is strong evidence of growing populations gaining access to education, but also evidence of underachievement in learning, all these have brought into sharp focus persistent deficiencies in provision and quality. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report 2016<sup>12</sup> recognized the fact that "*ensuring inclusive, equitable and good-quality education is often a collective enterprise in which all actors make a concerted effort to meet their responsibilities.*" Moreover, we strongly believe that apart from these common efforts of the directly involved actors, progress cannot be achieved in the absence of cooperation between education institutions, teachers and students, at the national and international level.

In our view there are several options of cooperation, such as:

- sharing good practices,
- working together in projects for mutual benefits,
- developing new teaching methods and adapting them to students' specific needs
- designing courses applied to various cultural contexts
- monitoring the quality of education and creating tools to constantly improve quality

Monitoring the country facts sheets published in World Bank Education statistics, a few common objectives were identified as follows:

- In the area of the Early Childhood Development, the most frequent objectives listed in Black Sea Region countries are:

Goal 1: Establishing an Enabling Environment

Goal 2: Scope of Programs

<sup>10</sup> World Bank Education Statistics, <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/education/country>

<sup>11</sup> Black Sea Region countries are : Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2016, available at <http://gem-report-2017.unesco.org/en/>

Goal 3: Monitoring and Assuring Quality

- Regarding the issue of School Autonomy Accountability, the most desired objectives to be achieved are:

Goal 1: Level of autonomy in planning and management

Goal 2: Level of autonomy in personnel management

Goal 3: Role of the school council on school governance

Goal 4: School and student assessment

Goal 5: School accountability

Developing a coherent and cohesive education strategy for all countries of the region is not an easy task to be achieved due to the diversity of cultures, educational systems functioning, political will and economic means to support education and other social projects. Black Sea Economic Cooperation organization is gathering 11 countries from the region: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.

All eleven countries agreed upon the fact that education could be the key of future prosperity in the region, and education may serve as a tool in the modernization of their economies and to deeper regional integration. A Working Group on Education was established in 2005 and a set of general objectives were drafted and approved, as follows:

- promoting regional cooperation in the field of Higher Education,
- joint research projects and programs and greater valorization of the educational potential,
- encouraging higher student's mobility and exchange among the Member States,
- fostering a dialogue and collaboration to enhance the importance of education in the region,
- developing wider international cooperation with other international organizations in the field of education, particularly with the European Union and UNESCO.

In order to achieve these objectives and to be effective, the Working Group defined the key priorities as follows<sup>13</sup>:

- supporting the exchange of information and experiences with regard to the modernization of the educational systems in the BSEC member states aimed at increasing sustainable growth and the establishment of knowledge-based societies.
- promoting scientific research for sustainable development of the BSEC region.
- building stronger regional synergy between the relevant authorities of the BSEC member states and their business and academic communities.
- enhancing cooperation in the field of vocational training among the BSEC member states.
- enhancing the exchange of information in the field of higher education through an educational portal of BSEC.
- sharing experiences in quality assurance and developing a qualifications framework in higher education.
- sharing best practices in the development of policies for recognizing the results of previous formal, informal or self-education.
- Promoting lifelong learning opportunities through joint programmes among the relevant institutions in the BSEC Member States.
- Supporting joint university research projects and post-graduate programmes.
- Encouraging the mobility of academic staff and students among the BSEC Member States, including through bilateral and multilateral agreements and scholarships among higher education institutions.
- Promoting legal and institutional framework for issuing dual diplomas on Black Sea studies.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.bsec-organization.org/aoc/Education/Pages/Information.aspx>

- Developing the partnership with initiatives by the United Nations and other international organizations devoted to university cooperation on sustainability.
- Enhancing the BSEC Member States cooperation with technologically advanced countries, inter alia through organizing exchange programmes among national academies of sciences and universities.
- Promoting and supporting the development of joint academic programmes among the academies of sciences and universities of the BSEC Region.

A better regional integration means the increase of the economic and social well-being for all and a better understanding between nations, which can be achieved with well-educated people. Education is the key driver for employment mobility in the region to better cover the shortages on the labor market experience in certain industries across the Black Sea Economic Region.

## 2. Human Capital performances linked to education

Human Capital represents an important asset of a company, being the main driver to success. Companies are looking to hire people with a strong educational background and significant experience for their managerial positions.

Two interesting reports, **Report on Human Capital** and the **Future of Jobs** reveal the following trends:

- the future of jobs will be affected by numerous factors such as: demographic changes, technological shifts etc.
- the most important trend seems to be the changing nature of work, flexible work
- in many industries and countries , the most in-demand occupations or specialties did not exist 10 or even 5 years ago, and the pace of change is set to accelerate. One of the popular estimation says that 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that do not exist yet.

### DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC

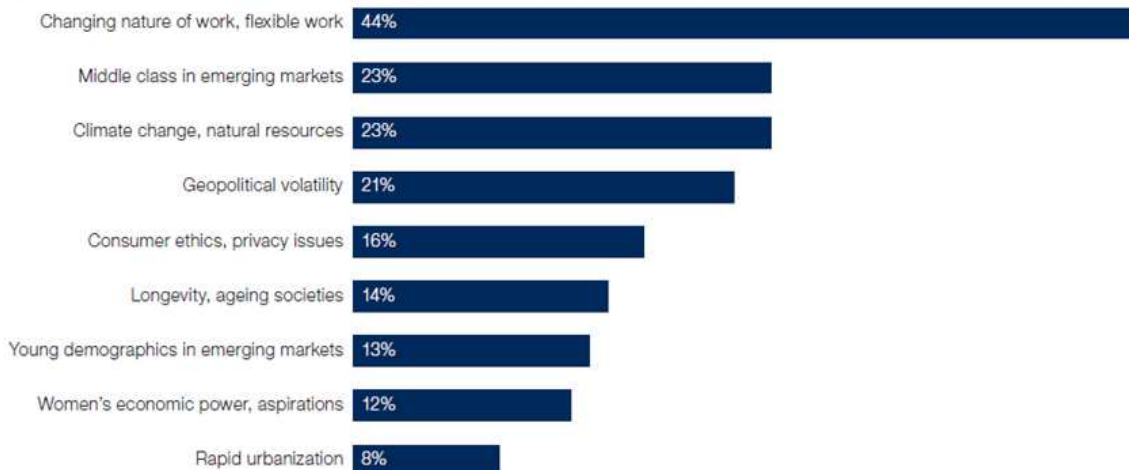


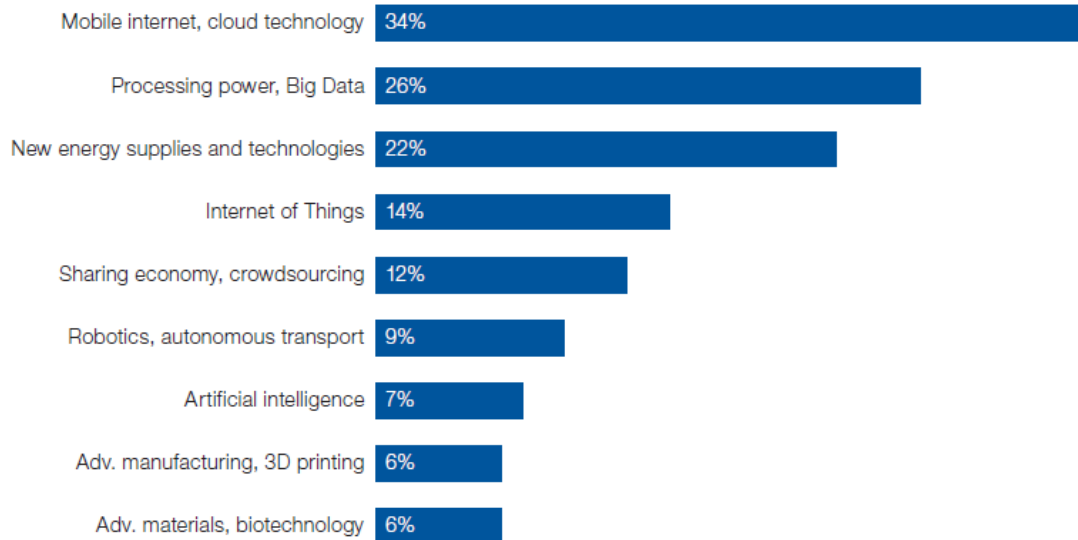
Fig. 1 Demographic and socio-economic factors affecting the future of jobs  
 (source: Future of Jobs Survey- World Economic Forum)

Looking at the World Economic survey we can see that the most influential factor is the “the changing nature of work, flexible work” (see Fig.1) and the rise of the “middle class in emerging markets” and both factors can be identified as being active in the Black Sea Region too.

The changing nature of work demand educational programs developed in partnership with industry, universities and other formal or non-formal educational institutions should reconsider their views on skills and competencies they aimed to build according to current trends existing on the labor markets. We are

teaching today for future jobs, not even existing yet, due to the dynamics of ICT technologies. New skills, such as learnability, seems to be more important to current employers in their staff selection procedures, they need human capital at the highest level but also willing to continuously learn to adapt themselves to the work environment and IT new developments( see Fig.2).

**TECHNOLOGICAL**



Source: Future of Jobs Survey, World Economic Forum.

Fig. 2 Technological factors influencing the future of jobs  
 (source : Future of Jobs Survey- World Economic Forum)

Looking at the most influential technological factors, illustrated in the Fig.2, one can realize that a few years ago, most of them not even existed, such as: cloud computing technologies, Internet of Things or Artificial Intelligence. So, flexibility at work is important and future employers need to be prepared to embrace it and that attitude should be built during school/training years.

**3. Drivers of cooperation in education**

Education is a current issue in casual, journalistic or political debates. Everybody is somehow involved in the educational process irrespective of the actual occupation. In Romania, the awareness of new trends in economy and IT has resulted in endless debates, consultations with the public and stakeholders and more or less welcome changes have been constantly brought about by relevant authorities in an attempt to respond to global and regional change. While change is definitely necessary, it may be at the same time rather confusing when it is unexpected and experimental, prone to last for only a short time. The recurrent question: ‘What is the future of education?’ echoes confusingly in the media and political discourses. Young high school graduates make real efforts to decide between vocational or higher education, as the media commentaries favour by far vocational education according to the current job market demand. We should point out here that universities have always looked ahead, to the future of individuals and the development of societies. After a long period of time, when higher education institutions were considered as hubs of progress, innovation and development, they have been under scrutiny and tenacious attacks these last years both from ‘success stories’ in the business world, from the politicians and stakeholders in general: higher education is behind times and needs to reconsider at a faster rate or else...

Globalization, which has reset and reshaped societies and economies worldwide, has placed a pressure upon education too. The concept of internationalization has derived in a natural way from the globalization process and it has been embraced by most countries as a solution to mass demand for higher education in the developing countries, in particular, and to the job market demand for highly qualified professionals (Altbach, 2005, p. 64). Under such circumstances, international cooperation in higher education is imperative for education modernization and for a refreshment and consolidation of its position and re-gaining credibility. While there are countries (e.g. South Korea) where young adults cannot even imagine not continuing their education after high school, mostly due to the importance given to highly qualified personnel by their government, different political positions and opinions have disadvantaged higher education. In Romania, out of over 4 million young adults, 1 million is not employed anywhere or enrolled in tertiary education. They are confused... The trend is similar in other European countries. Partnerships between universities may be a solution to the revitalization of higher education. In 2004, Samoff and Carrol defined academic partnership as 'a collaboration that can reasonably be expected to have mutual (though not necessarily identical) benefits that will contribute to the development of both institutional and individual capacities at both institutions that respects the sovereignty and autonomy of both institutions'. The challenges that universities worldwide are facing due to globalization and related processes, the pressure coming from the job market is a common feature of the current globalized world and similar efforts should be made by higher education to cope with these challenges. Joining forces and sharing efforts are necessary ingredients of the joint policies in the tertiary sector to strengthen the credibility of the university as the generator of innovation and progress in a globalized and highly information technology-driven world.

#### **4. Opportunities and barriers in regional cooperation in education**

The framework for regional cooperation in education for the countries of the Black Sea region was set back in 2005 due to the establishment of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). This provided for good opportunities to promote and further education in support of economic development and regional integration. The BSEC Agenda was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of BSEC in 2012 and includes generous objectives of enhancement of cooperation in the field of education. One of the general objectives of the Working Group on Education was internationalization of education, as an effective tool in dealing with the challenges of globalization and IT fast developments, by encouraging: student and professors mobility; curriculum design; joint or double degrees; joint research projects, exchange of good practices, legal and institutional framework for dual diplomas for wider recognition of studies, among others. An increasing number of higher education institutions have and are attempting to initiate and participate in regional collaborations under the form of partnerships in order to improve instructional quality according to the current needs of the job market for highly qualified specialists and expand their educational offer, wider visibility and prestige, attract more students in a time of the student population downsizing trend (in Europe, in particular).

The partnerships between universities, usually based on the signature of memorandums of understanding, include the following directions of cooperation:

- Curricula internationalization
- Student and faculty exchange
- Joint degree programs
- Collaboration in research
- Exchange of good practices in education
- Common QA standards

While the higher universities leaders are fully aware of the benefits of partnerships and increasing action is taken in this direction, cooperation between countries in the region depends on external factors independent of their authority and decision. The benefits of collaboration have been found in the line of quality

improvement, student mobility, circulation of human capital. On the other hand, in order to have equal advantages, both HEIs should have similar standards of quality, a certain reputation, accreditation and seriousness. There is always the risk of quality dilution by expansion in order to maximize revenues.

It should be noted that the 11 members states (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Hellenic Republic, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Republic of Serbia, Republic of Turkey, Ukraine) face issues of linguistic and cultural diversity, religious issues, different QA frameworks (some of the member states adopted the Bologna system of education, while others have their own system of education), different accreditation procedures.

In spite of the above-mentioned framework of cooperation, barriers to partnerships may arise for causes independent of HEIs control, such as:

- Local policies, government regulations
- Degree of centralization
- Degree of university autonomy
- Funding sources
- Personal views based on cultural background
- University and country visibility
- Facilities provided for foreign students and quality of life
- Higher cost of dual programs affecting equitable access to education for lower-income candidates

Local policies and views on education differ, sometimes considerably, from one member state to another. Governments in some countries (e.g. Romania) are more present in the life of universities, (through the Ministry of Education) than in other countries with an impact on the degree of university autonomy. As much as HEIs would strive to internationalize their offer and attract students, the legal framework may be a considerable obstacle because of a certain political orientation against brain drain or migration by way of studies abroad.

It is already common knowledge that students and academia choose to visit a university in a developed country rather than in a developing one, due to the facilities provided for foreign students and quality of life. In this case, any partnership agreement may run the risk of prevalence of a university in a more popular student destination, with a wider international experience and better financial resources, detrimental to a less known one, in spite of equal quality of education.

Partnerships in research are more likely to materialize, due to the interest of governments and HEIs to improve their international visibility with no political implications. The exchange of ideas and of scientists involves the interference of no other authority.

## 5. Conclusions

The demographic and socio-economic factors, the changing nature of work, the technological factor is as many drivers of change in education, for the reconsideration of educational programmes and providing an improved training of the human capital. The profile of the human capital of the near future includes besides new skills, flexibility and adaptability both to local and to international job markets. All statistics show differences, sometimes considerable, between the systems of education even in the same geographical area (e.g. the Black Sea region). They are basically due to local policies and government regulations, but all governments agree upon the need of internationalization of education, the need of regional cooperation in education, of establishing partnerships and exchanging good practice in order to devise common and joint educational and research programmes that might meet the requirements of the future job market, as unexpected as the changes may be. The role of education and its impact on economic growth, and beyond, as



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a driver of tolerance and good understanding between nations, is a fact that has been acknowledged at a theoretical level; it is now up to the governmental policies to reflect this role in their policies.

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