

Volunteering, A Key Factor to Increase the Employment Rate, in the European Context

~ Ph. D. Student **Loredana Nicoleta Zainea** (Doctoral School of Management, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania)

E-mail: loredananicoletazainea@gmail.com

~ Ph. D. Professor **Paul Marinescu** (Faculty of Business and Administration, University of Bucharest, Romania)

E-mail: paulmarinescu1@gmail.com

~ Ph. D. Student **Dragoș Tohănean** (Doctoral School of Management, The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania)

E-mail: tohanean_dragos@yahoo.com

Abstract: Volunteering is one of the ways to optimize social cohesion, sustainable integration into the labor market, through the creation of the necessary framework for acquiring specific skills and competencies. It will prepare the citizens to face and adapt smoothly to the dynamic changes from the socio-economic environment.

The European Union sustain the volunteers by promoting cross-border volunteering and their mobility, in order to develop a European identity, intercultural learning and creativity, by using efficient and effective the limited resources.

The aim of the paper is to briefly analyze the ways in which volunteering, education and innovation contribute to achieve the European Union objective related to the employment rate. The authors achieved the objective of the paper by using a quantitative method.

In the last decades, in Europe, the demand for highly skilled jobs has increased, also directly proportional the employment rate for the people with a high degree of education, endowed with the necessary abilities and competencies for the knowledge society.

The paper highlights that volunteering represents an opportunity to gain new competencies and skills, by enabling the transformation of this knowledge into economic and social innovation which leads to productivity and creation of highly qualified jobs.

Keywords: volunteering, employment rate, innovation, education

JEL Classification: O35, A13, J21

Introduction

In the last decades, volunteering has become an important factor which contribute to education, social cohesion, dissemination of the European values and promotes solidarity, social responsibility, civic participation and engagement of civil society (Agermann & Sittermann, 2010).

Also, the involvement in volunteering activities in various fields, such as: art and culture, environmental conservation, political engagement, health, social welfare services, among many others (McAllum, 2017), offers the possibility of theoretical and practical training, through which the volunteers can develop new skills and competences, necessary for the insertion on the labor market, as well as gaining the respect of the community or certain social positions.

The most valuable advantage is represented by the European single market, which influences the economic growth, productivity and competitiveness of enterprises in the context of globalization, energy policies, environment, transport, circular economy, etc. and it allows European citizens to travel, learn, work.

In order to ensure a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy growth, the Europe 2020 Strategy defined five priorities related to different areas such as: education, research - development, poverty and social exclusion, climate change and energy, as well as increasing the employment rate (COM, 2010). The member countries have set their own goals in accordance with the local conditions and possibilities, which are integrated into the European strategy.

The transition from the First Industrial Revolution to the present one, respectively the Fourth Industrial Revolution, was made through a continuously qualitative technical,

economic and social process (Marinescu, et al., 2018).

As Peter Drucker was saying: every organization needs one core competence: innovation (Drucker, 2011). Innovation was the key element which led to technological breakthroughs, global competitiveness and the reconfiguration of several industries by creating new jobs and increasing the employment rate continuously.

European regional development strategies rely on the innovative capacities of networks and projects (Ansell, 2000). The European Union monitors and coordinate the exchange of good practices, national policies, as well as the employment legislation or social policies, which positively influence the quality of life, standard of living and socio-economic development of society.

The aim of the paper is to briefly analyze the ways in which volunteering, education and innovation contribute to achieve the European Union objective related to the employment rate. The paper comprises, besides the introduction, three sections such as: literature review, followed by the research methodology, results and discussions and in the final part conclusions are presented.

Literature review

Volunteering

Volunteers represents a unique resource (distinctive from paid staff), which requires the organization to make strategic decisions by specifying how to relate to this resource, and how to develop it (Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013).

The public and private sectors promote voluntary activities, as an expression of

their social responsibility, which have the effect of improving their own images, as well as solving community problems.

Volunteering, generally speaking, is entirely based on interactions between people,

whether we are talking about relationships volunteers-beneficiaries/clients, volunteers-employees or volunteers-volunteers (Rusu, 2016).

Table no. 1. Volunteering definitions

No.	Definition
1.	Volunteering is an action that is undertaken by free will or choice, provides a benefit to others, and involves lack of payment. (Cnaan, et al., 1996)
2.	Volunteering provides benefits to the individual, be it enjoyment, skills, or the sense of having given something back. (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2004)
3.	Volunteering constitutes all forms of voluntary activity in any location, whether formal or informal, full-time or part-time, occurring regularly or sporadically. (Volonteurope Impact Group, 2011)

From the above definitions (Table no.1) it can be said that volunteering is an activity that can be carried out periodically or occasionally, in a formal or informal environment, full-time or part-time.

On one hand, through volunteering it can be obtained individual benefits, such as: acquiring new skills and competences, increase the feeling of self-esteem and self-confidence (Andronic, 2014), enlarge the friends network, gain an honorary position (Agermann & Sittermann, 2010) and satisfaction for contributing to the welfare of the society.

On the other hand, the volunteers can offer benefits to the community by solving the problems of the ones in need and contribute to social cohesion (Zainea & Marinescu, 2018).

Volunteering represents a free choice taken by each citizen, time freely given (Paine, A. E., et al., 2010) it can take place anywhere and anytime, and does not imply a financial or material compensation.

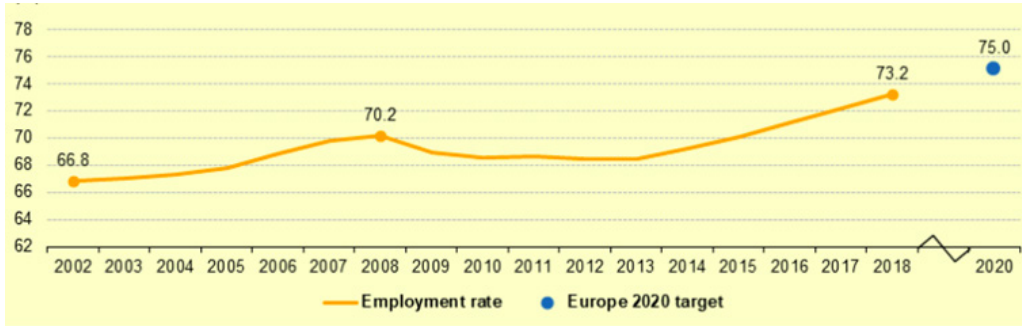
Employment rate of workforce

Although due to the fluctuations in the labor market caused by demographic changes, financial and economic crises, the evolution of the knowledge-based economy, the emergence of new professions or the decline of others, the rapid development of technologies, global competition and the lack of experience, skills or qualifications required has led to an increase unemployment rate, at European level, among young people, starting with 2008, reaching a maximum level of 23% in 2013 (Eurostat, 2015).

The employment statistics play a central role in European Union policies. The Europe 2020 Strategy (COM, 2010) focuses on creating jobs, and sets 3 important goals:

- 75% of persons between the ages of 20 and 64 must work;
- the share of early school leavers should reduce below 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree;
- reduce by 20 million the people which are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Figure 1: Employment rate age group 20 to 64, EU-28, 2002-2018



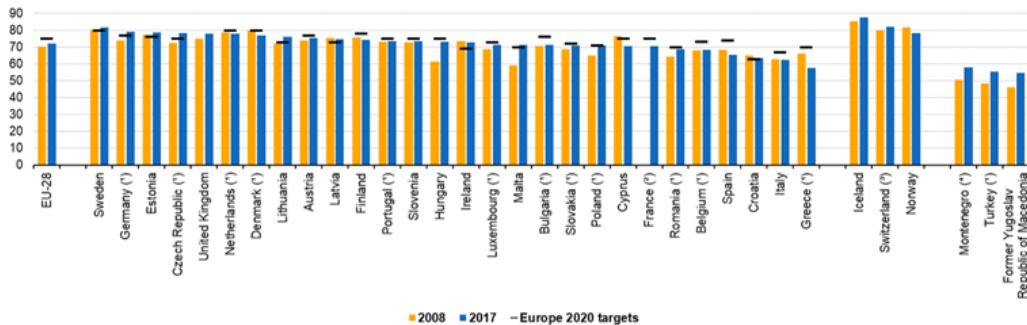
Source: Eurostat, 2019

In 2017, the European total employment rate reached 72.2%, while in 2018 it increased to 73.2% (Eurostat, 2019). If this growth rate is maintained, it can be accomplished the target of 75%, set for 2020.

The employment rate statistics of the European Union member states are different and reflect significant differences related to gender, age or level of educational studies.

The general E.U. objective of employment, respectively 75%, has been adapted to the socio-economic conditions of each state member, thus it become a national objective.

Figure 2: Employment rate age group 20 to 64, by country 2008 and 2017 (%)



(*) Break(s) in time series between 2008 and 2017.
 (*) No data for 2008.
 (*) 2010 data (instead of 2008).
 (*) 2011 data (instead of 2008).

Source: Eurostat, 2018

As can be seen (Fig. 2), in 2017, the employment rates in the European area stood between 57.8% (Greece) and 81.8% (Sweden).

Romania, Belgium and the Mediterranean countries, had a percentage below 70% regarding the employment rate, which placed them at the lower limit, while Switzerland, Norway and Iceland were at the upper limit.

Also, it can be mentioned that in 2017, only nine European countries accomplish the national employment objective.

The employment rate can be seen as a structural indicator due to the fact that it provides a detailed image over the labor market and the economic systems, whose structure is influenced by the quality of the employment conditions and the ratio between the demand - supply of the workforce.

The employment statistics can represent the starting point for various macro - economic analyzes, competitiveness or productivity studies or behavioral analyzes.

Research methodology

The authors used a descriptive research method to accomplish the aim of the paper. The research was made based on the official statistics from National Institute of Statistics from Romania. Regarding the literature review, the needed information was gathered from numerous sources, such as: books, articles, working papers found in electronic databases (e.g. Sage Journals, Google Scholar) and in various Romanian libraries (e.g. Romanian National Library, The Central University Library from Bucharest „Carol I”).

Results and discussions

Ways of increasing the employment rate

1. Volunteering

Volunteering increases the solidarity between generations, facilitates people's adaptation to the phenomenon of globalization and technological evolution, as well as increasing the degree of employability on the labor market.

At the individual level, volunteering is a way of connecting with the community. At the societal level it contributes by reducing racism, eliminating prejudices and increasing the degree of tolerance towards disadvantaged groups.

The coaching / mentoring training and personal development courses, conducted within the volunteer associations, reinforce the sense of responsibility towards the organization and the society, improve the entrepreneurial and managerial skills and prepare the citizens to be able to introduce innovative models of work within organizations.

Through volunteering the citizens can gain different skills, which can increase their adaptability to the labor market and there can apply the fundamental values of the European Union namely solidarity, social inclusion, honesty, active citizenship.

Being part of various volunteering activities, can be a launching pad for occupying important social positions within the local community, or it can develop various competencies, which are assimilated to a formal or informal experience, constituting a competitive advantage in CV's and in professional life.

The workforce competences must be constantly improving in order to meet the requirements of the employers, not to create an imbalance between the supply and the demand in the labor market.

The duration and magnitude of the economic crises, rapid technological changes as well as workforce migration, have major impacts over the organizations and society, volunteering mitigate these risks, by learning the citizens how to react autonomously to any change.

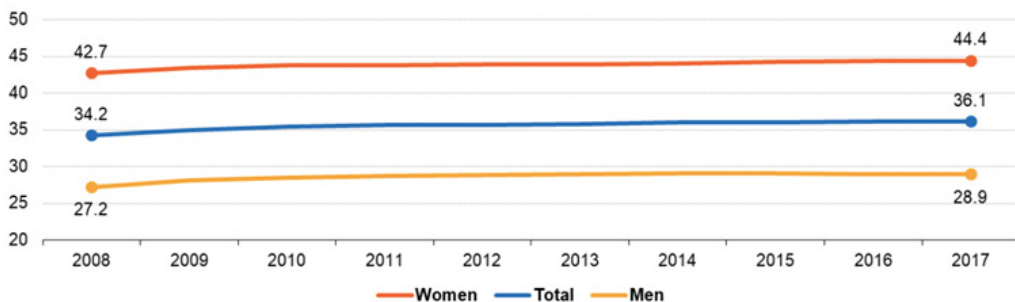
One of the conclusions that can be drawn is that volunteering represents an opportunity to learn, acquire new skills and competences, and the transformation of this knowledge into economic and social innovation leads to highly qualified jobs, productivity and contributes to increase the degree of adaptability to the challenges in the labor market which is constantly changing.

2. Innovation

Currently, there are structural and complex changes, which represents one of the most important challenges (Toma & Marinescu, 2015) within multiple areas of activity, where innovation plays an important role in the sustainable evolution of the society and implicitly within the organizations where are materialized into new strategies, concepts, ideas that addresses to the social needs - from the labor market and working conditions, to education, health and community development (Popescu, 2016).

Innovation represents the core of renewal processes in organizations and is regarded as the key driver in organizational success, as well as a solution to welfare problems (McCann & Ortega-Argiles, 2013).

Figure 3: Employment in knowledge-intensive activities, EU-28, 2008-2016 (% of total employment)



Source: Eurostat, 2018

According to Fig. no. 3, within the European space the percentage of women employed in intensive knowledge activities differs from men. Thus, in 2017, the percentage of women engaged in the mentioned activities was 44.4%, while the percentage of men was 28.9%.

The same graph reflects the upward trend of knowledge-intensive activities as a share of total employment from the European area, compared to 2008, where it can be noticed a share increase from 34.2% to 36.1%, in 2017.

On one hand, economic and social innovation can lead to the creation of highly qualified jobs and to productivity. On the other hand, the economic structure can be changed by establish a higher share of intensive-knowledge activities, which can positively influence the employment rate and ensure a highly qualified workforce.

Offering technical and scientific solutions through innovation, which will meet the new challenges of the global economy, namely security, active aging, climate change, clean energy, etc., as well as the structural transformations in enterprises, will have economic, social and environmental impact in European space.

The research and development objective set by the Europe 2020 strategy is strongly

connected with the tertiary education and employment objectives.

It is a well-known fact that public investments in research and development create the knowledge base, stimulate the needed talent by higher education organizations and innovative companies which leads to an increased demand for scientists and researchers in the labor market and contributes to industrial competitiveness and job creation.

3.Education

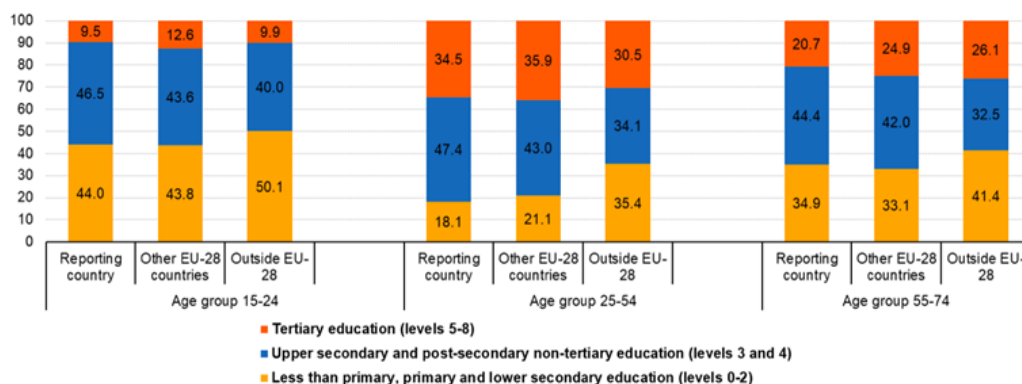
Through education people gain the skills and competences necessary to perform different voluntary activities in organizations (Musick M. & Wilson J., 2008).

The level of education is an important personal resource that enables volunteering. More educated people are more likely to have greater social networks, as well as valuable skills, and thus are more likely to be asked to give their time (Radovanović, 2019).

The level of education represents that level successfully completed which can be divided into three levels, as follows:

- low: ISCED 0-2 - under primary, primary and lower secondary education;
- medium: ISCED 3 and 4 - upper secondary education and non-tertiary post-secondary education;
- high: ISCED 5 - 8 - tertiary education

Figure 4: Population by educational attainment level, by age group and board group of country of birth, EU-28, 2017 (%)



Source: Eurostat, 2018

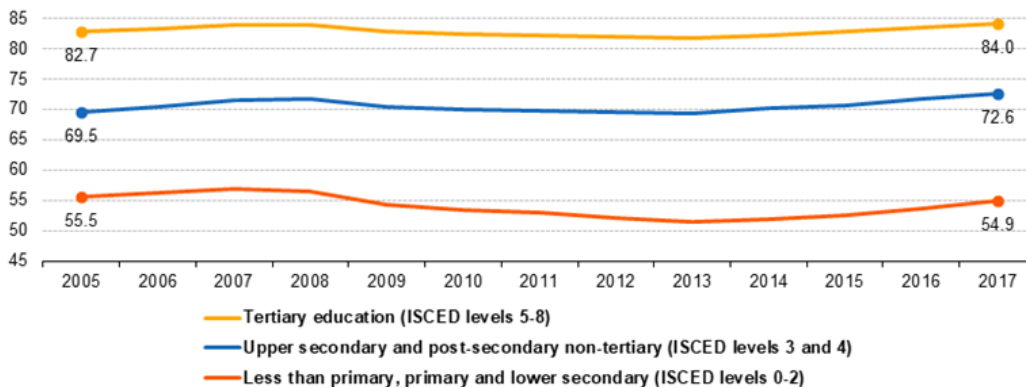
As can be seen in the chart above (Fig. no. 4), in Europe, the demand for highly qualified workforce is increasing, as evidenced by the high level of education for the 25-54 age group.

The low level of education, respectively ISCED 0-2, is more common between the migrants born outside the European Union, than people born in the European area.

In the case of medium level of education, respectively ISCED 3-4, it can be observed that this rate is lower for people outside the European area, for the age group 25-54 years.

The level of tertiary education, respectively ISCED 5-8, has a higher rate for migrants born outside the European Union space or in another country from the European area, than the rate related to the native population

Figure 5: Employment rate age group 20 to 64, by educational attainment level, 2005-2017



Source: Eurostat, 2018

In Fig. no.5, it can be seen that in 2017, the employment rate for people with low education level, respectively ISCED-02, was 54.9%.

In the case of medium level of education, respectively ISCED 3-4, the employment rate for persons with higher secondary education and non-tertiary post-secondary education was 72.6%.

The highest employment rate was found in the case of persons in the tertiary education level, respectively ISCED 5-8, of 84%.

In conclusion, it can be stated that educational achievement represents the effect of the education level achieved by each person and has an influence on each other's life and

career. Older generations will be replaced by the younger one, which is more educated, thus the future workforce will be highly skilled. However, it is necessary to correlate the education systems with the current requirements of the labor market, in order to avoid an excessive qualification that can lead to high unemployment among young people.

Conclusions

In the recent decades, in Europe, the demand for highly qualified workforce has increased, and the employment rate is higher for the people with a high degree of education,

endowed with skills for the knowledge society, essential for enriching the scientific and technological knowledge, having the scope to create an economy capable of absorbing and using this knowledge.

The paper highlights that volunteering represents an opportunity to gain new competencies and skills, by enabling the transformation of this knowledge into economic and social innovation which leads to productivity and contributes to increase the degree of

adaptability to the challenges from the labor market, which is constantly changing.

Also, the paper reflects how volunteering, together with formal education, can positively influence the employment rate and reduce the negative impact of financial economic crises, labor migration and demographic changes, by a thorough training for the young people in order to react autonomously to any change.

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