

Definition and identification of competences linked to new labour market environments in Romania

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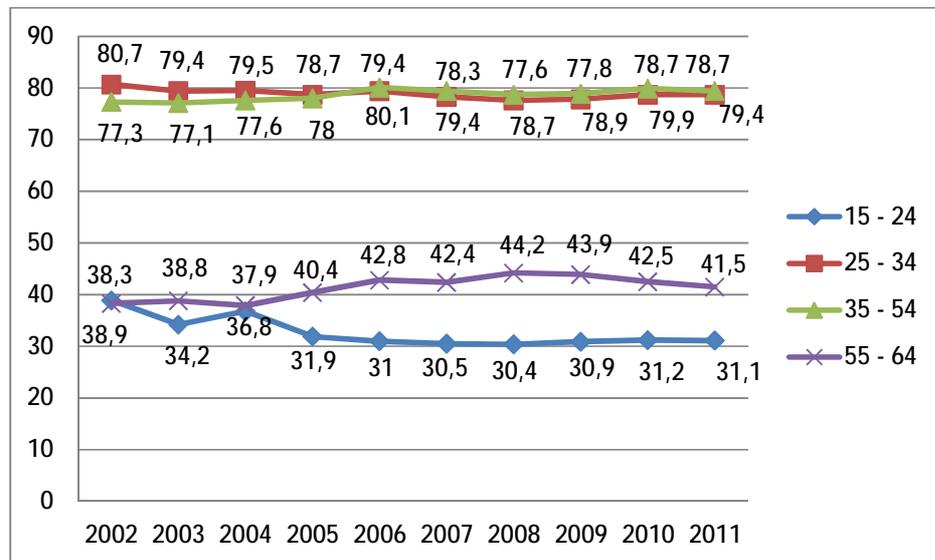
This study was elaborated in the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci project VTeCOACH *Competences assessment and improvement tool for VET learners and teachers for new working demands* (2012-1-ES1-LEO05-48196). The aim of the article is to present an overview of the new working environments at Romanian level and the competences demand, with focus on VET.

1. Labour market analysis - new labour market environments

Starting in 2000, the Romanian economy registered a strong rising trend and witnessed eight consecutive years of economic growth. Despite this period of sustainable economic development, the Romanian economy has not created more jobs and failed to recover massive losses in employment from the early years of transition. Nowadays, Romania continues to register low activity rates, while the crisis affected more the capacity of national economy to produce new jobs. Concluding, few job opportunities and low returns from employment explain the modest level of the activity rate in Romania during the last years.

Participation to the labour force by age shows a significant disparity between youth, middle age people and those with 55-64 years old. While youth and elderly register much lower activity rates, the economic crisis seems to be having a stronger negative impact on labour participation of the latter. Although the poor activity rate of individuals with 15-24 years old is partly explained by their increasing enrolment in schools, youth remains a group experiencing significant difficulties on the labour market which makes them vulnerable to inactivity. Also, education is one important factor that mediates the access of individuals to employment opportunities. Therefore, the activity rate is highly sensitive to education, registering huge disparities in between low educated individuals and those with tertiary education. Moreover, gender gaps in the case of activity rates are more reduced for people with tertiary education and more important for those with medium or lower level of education.

Activity rate, by age (%)



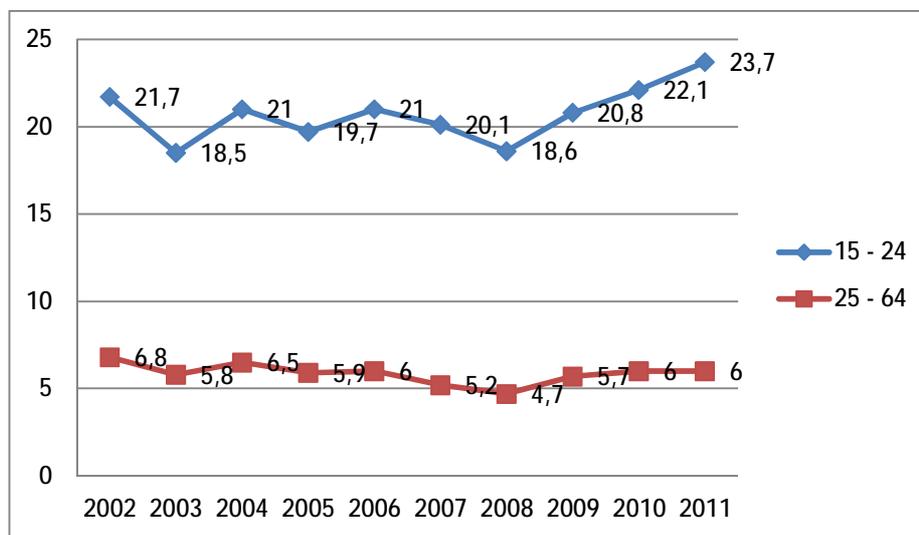
Source: Romanian Institute for Statistics

Despite the fact that Romania experienced a good period of sustainable economic growth (2000-2008), the employment registered a modest increase. This evolution is explained by poor job creation and low attractiveness of wages. After that, during the crisis years, the employment rate displayed a declining trend, for both men and women. Evolution of the employment rate by age shows that employment of older workers registered the most important growth when the economic context was favourable. On the other hand, they have been most vulnerable in front of the economic crisis as they recorded the sharpest decline in employment, starting with 2009. Also, since 2004, employment rate for those aged 15 to 24 years has displayed a decreasing trend due to their increasing interest for school, but also to lack of job opportunities and difficulties experienced by graduates who enter the labour market. Education level of individuals shapes their access to jobs as rates of employment are highest for those with tertiary education and lowest for low educated individuals. Moreover, education reduces gender disparities when it comes to employment rates.

From a comparative perspective, unemployment and long-term unemployment in Romania is below the levels of many European countries. Romanian economic context includes some specific factors which explain such a positive outcome. On the one hand, Romania has a large share of subsistence employment in agriculture which has represented a buffer for the national labour market. On the other hand, labour migration was boosted by the removal of the

Schengen visa in 2001. Thus, migration for employment abroad became a mass phenomenon, especially to Italy and Spain. So, even in recent years of economic downward, while the unemployment increased, it has never been reaching high levels. Despite the moderate level of total unemployment, youth unemployment has remained generally high. Furthermore, it has registered an increasing trend for the last years, while its growth rate was more important in crisis years. Nowadays, around two thirds of those unemployed aged 15-24 years are, in fact, long-term unemployed.

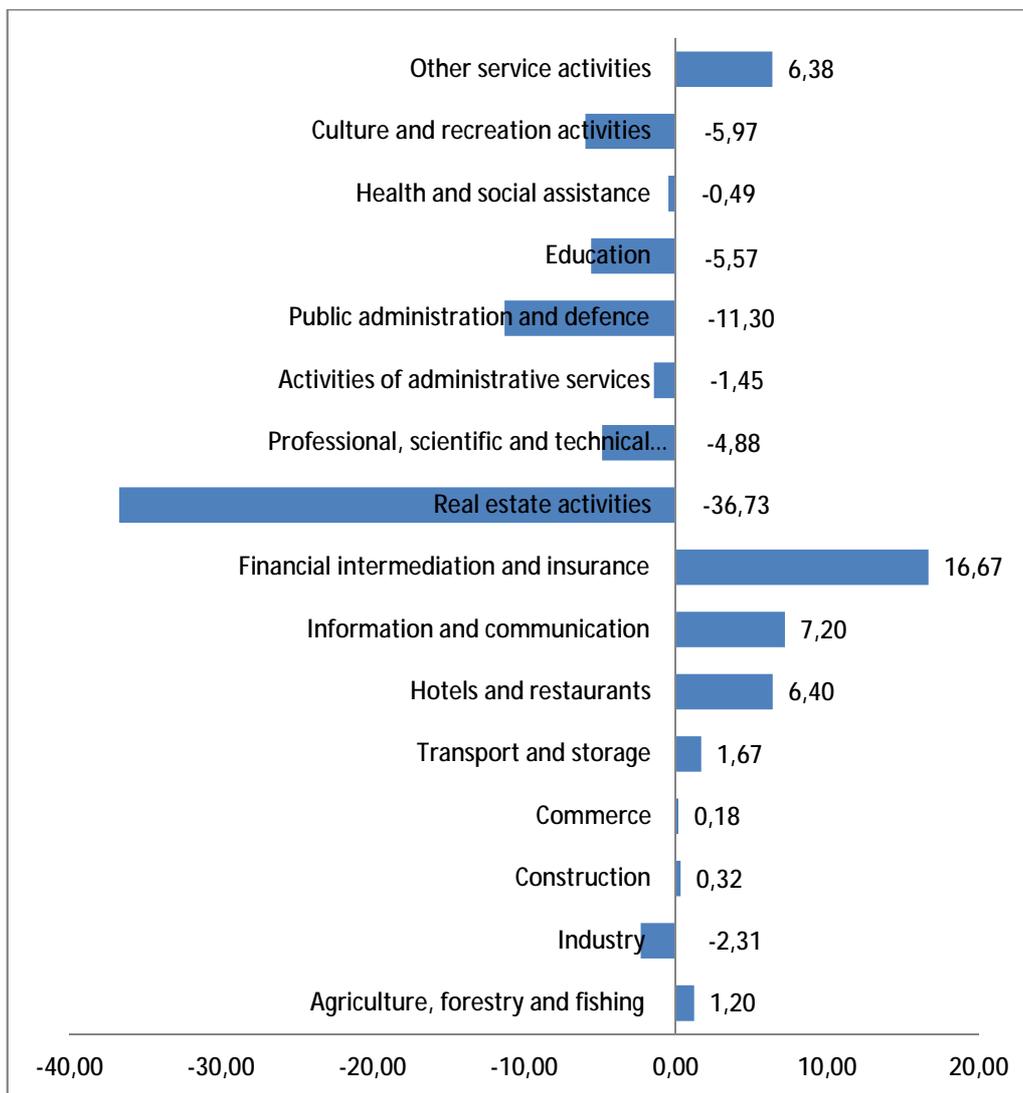
ILO Unemployment rate, by age (%)



Source: Romanian Institute for Statistics

Recent evolution of the volume of employed population shows that the downturn of the Romanian economy affected especially industry and service sectors such as culture and recreation activities, education, public administration and defence, activities of administrative services, professional, scientific and technical activities and real estate activities. So, most important job loss was registered by the real estate sector which was strongly negatively impacted after its significant boom in 2005-2008. As a result, construction sector has stagnated and companies from this sector struggle to maintain the existing jobs as much as possible. On the other hand, budgetary constraints imposed austerity measures in the recent years and determined employment reduction in the public sector, while industry suffered from losing contracts and reduced its activity.

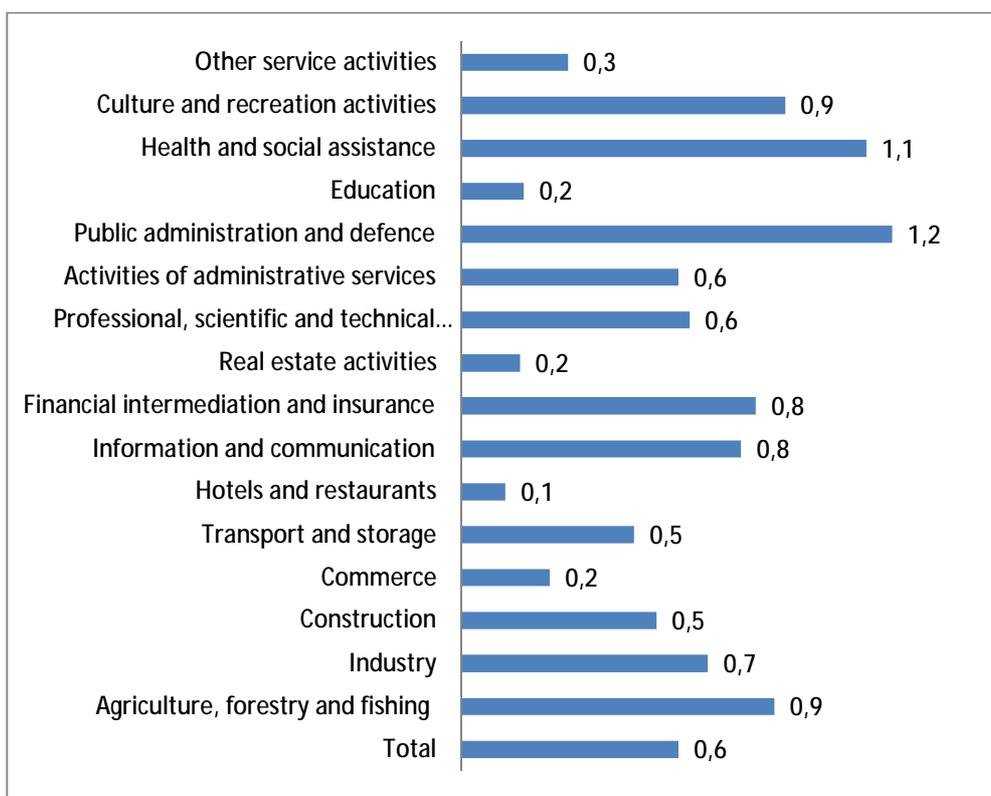
Civilian employed population in 2010, by NACE (% change toward 2009)



Source: Romanian Institute for Statistics

Generally speaking, economic crisis has reduced significantly the number of job opportunities and labour market was mostly frozen in the last 2-3 years. However, some sectors still register demand for labour such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, information and communication, financial intermediation and insurance, culture and recreation activities. Despite the fact that public sectors such as public administration and defence and health and social assistance register higher rates of vacancies, the hiring was not possible due to a governmental decision that stressed the need of public expenditures reduction. Public authorities declare that job openings in public institutions will be available in 2013.

Rate of vacancies in 2010, by NACE (%)



Source: Romanian Institute for Statistics

2. Transition from VET to labour market

Main barriers and difficulties faced by VET graduates in their transition to the labour market are as follows:

- ❑ Lack of job opportunities, especially in small towns and rural areas: increasing unemployment rate among youth in the crisis years and experiences of graduates clearly show that they are “outsiders” who struggle to access/get in the labour market in very unfavourable conditions, namely with very few job openings. Therefore, many VET leavers decide to migrate for employment abroad or in the large urban areas where there are more employment opportunities;
- ❑ Poor development of the career counselling services, both in and out of schools: Romanian career counselling services are still in an initial developmental stage. Generally, most VET learners don't benefit by counselling services when they have to choose a qualification or an educational/vocational route, as they don't benefit by

counselling services when they enter the labour market and start to look for employment;

- ❑ Low participation of graduates to active labour market programs: programs developed by the public employment agencies have low funds and, subsequently, low rate of participation. In fact, high share of unemployed graduates don't register themselves to the public employment agencies due to the lack of information.
- ❑ VET graduates lack important competences that are required at the workplace, especially the capacity to put into practice the acquired knowledge, to work with advanced technologies, to find solutions to specific problems, attitudes and work-related values.
- ❑ Lack of information on the job searching methods, professional profiles and employment opportunities: when leaving VET, most graduates have no knowledge on the job searching techniques and make use mostly of their personal relations - friends, relatives and acquaintances - for finding out information on jobs. They use mostly informal methods of job searching, while formal mechanisms of facilitating the meeting of graduates with the world of work are far to be efficient;
- ❑ Reluctance of employers to hire young graduates with no working experience: the Romanian educational system is perceived by the employers as being a poor provider of vocationally orientated competences. Therefore, VET graduates face the reluctance of the employers and managers in hiring youth with no working experience;
- ❑ Discouragement, lack of self-confidence: many VET graduates who don't find a job after graduation lose their self-confidence and become discouraged. As a result, they transit from unemployment to inactivity, becoming "housewives" or persons living from social benefit.
- ❑ Poor performance of programs supporting youth entrepreneurship: very few VET graduates decide to become entrepreneurs, while most of them become self-employed or start their own micro-enterprise.

3. "Wicked" competences: identification and definition in relation to new labour market environments

New working environments are characterised by the fact that the concept of lifetime job disappears, by the increased internal and external mobility of workers due to imbalances in the demand of profiles and the internationalization of companies, by the impact of ICT on working styles, by the need of reconciliation between professional and personal life and by increased importance of working environments based competences, both at interpersonal and intrapersonal levels.

As mentioned at the beginning of the article, the main aim of this study is to define and identify a framework of competences to be developed among the VET learners. We highlight the importance of transversal competences that need to be assessed and developed through innovative learning methodologies. This article is focused on identification the demand of *wicked competences*. Following Peter Knight and Anna Page (2007), we use the concept of wicked competences as those "transversal" competences associated with behaviours and attitudes that increase the employability of individuals.

Top 5 "wicked" competences demanded in new labour environments

NAME OF THE COMPETENCE	DEFINITION OF THE COMPETENCE	INDICATORS/MEASURES FOR ASSESSMENT
Team work	Capacity to develop efficient collaboration relations with co-workers	-ability to deliver in-time and quality outputs while working in a team -ability to interact efficiently with his/her co-workers
ICT competences	Skills and knowledge needed to exploit the potential offered by the use of ICT in the working place	-ability to use ICT for meeting certain tasks
Good attitudes, initiative, ability to work under stress	Ability to act with responsibility in the work place so that others could rely upon him/her	-responsiveness to solicitations -capacity to meet dead-lines

Communication in mother tongue	Ability to transmit and receive efficient messages	-ability to deliver presentation of his/her work results -ability to write a presentation of his/her work results
Communication in foreign languages	Ability to understand, talk and write in foreign languages (especially English)	-ability to have a dialog in a foreign language on a common theme -ability to put into practice technical instructions written in a foreign language (in his/her educational field)

4. Conclusions

Generally, competence assessment methodologies for VET are mostly orientated for evaluation of technical skills. Moreover, teaching methods still don't put much emphasis on developing team work or personality traits needed in the new working environments. More important advancements in teaching and assessing competences of project and team work or delivering presentations are registered for training programs as against the vocational educational programs. Major obstacles for wicked competences assessment include too large class size in some cases, high volume of knowledge that is to be delivered to VET learners (according to existing methodologies) and poor equipment of VET institutions with ICT in certain situations. Finally, VET teachers are not always trained to develop and, subsequently, evaluate such competences.

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