

Education, the best route to employment

DISCLAIMER: All opinions in this column reflect the views of the author(s), not of EurActiv.com PLC.

16 Nov 2015 - 06:13 updated: 16 Nov 2015 - 15:47

European Commission by Tibor Navracsics

25

35

1



Tibor Navracsics [European Commission]

Jobs remain the best route to inclusion, but only high-quality education and a broad mix of relevant skills lead to employment, writes Tibor Navracsics.

Commissioner Tibor Navracsics is in charge of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

At the start of this Commission's mandate, President Jean-Claude Juncker clearly set out its political priorities, summarised in his "Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change". One year down the line, those priorities have lost none of their relevance. If anything, they have acquired even greater urgency. In a post-crisis scenario, the priority is to build a European Union of convergence, jobs and growth, with a stronger focus on employment and social performance. This is about long-term and sustainable growth, improving employability, reaching convergence among member states and building resilience. Improving education is central to all of those objectives.

The reason is simple: education is and remains the best guarantee against unemployment,

and having a job is the best guarantee against becoming marginalised and excluded. In today's world, a person's ability to find a job - their employability - is more than anything linked to their education. University graduates and highly skilled young people are more likely to be in work - and at a higher salary - than their less educated or less skilled peers. This is particularly striking when we think that there are currently 23.5 million unemployed people across Europe, 4.7 million of them young people, and yet, 2 million vacancies remain unfilled and four out of ten European employers report difficulties in finding employees with the right skills. This means that our education systems are not delivering - or at any rate, not as much as they should.

My main mission is helping member states modernise their education systems and make them fit for the 21st century. This means not only the technical skills relevant to specific activities or sectors, but also the full range of transversal skills that are vital to an ever-changing knowledge economy, an entrepreneurial mindset, creativity, problem-solving, teamwork, languages and communication, for example.

They also include creativity, flexibility and the ability to take risks - the great components of entrepreneurship. These are the types of transferrable skills that need to be nurtured through good, innovative approaches to education. This approach thrives when the worlds of education and of work come together, when there are solid partnerships between the academic world and the world of business - the types of partnerships that we are developing at EU level, for instance through the European Institute of Technology. The key to success is providing the right blend of skills, rather than exclusively focusing on a few.

This process begins long before people enter the labour market, and it must become a political priority at all stages of education: schools, vocational training and higher education. But for all this to happen, education must be inclusive in the broad sense and from the start. With more than 5 million early school leavers across Europe, and some vulnerable groups much more affected than others, it is imperative that our education systems do more to address the needs of disadvantaged learners, thus achieving convergence within our societies and not only among member states. This means making sure that schools offer an inclusive learning environment for all, where pupils and students from diverse backgrounds feel accepted and supported, where they are given the same opportunities for personal fulfilment and social mobility.

Jobs remain the best route to inclusion, but only high-quality education and a broad mix of relevant skills lead to employment. Education from pre-school onwards remains the best safety net against social exclusion. If we are serious about being social, then the EU needs to put people at the heart of our work, and show that we are investing in their future. Today's education is tomorrow's society.