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CONTINUOUS EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF ADULTS – PURPOSE OF AN ACTIVE LIFE ON THE LABOUR MARKET

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Abstract

An active life on the labour market implies, besides the existence of jobs, continuous education and training of adults. Regardless of age, every person needs new knowledge, which one can obtain either by self-teaching or by attending training courses. The development of technology and information influences lifelong learning, which is why, in recent years, greater emphasis has been put on the education and training of adults. In this respect numerous Centers of Professional Training of Adults have been established, some of them attracting their learners through the implementation of projects financed from European funds, which meant free participation of adults to various courses of specialization, training or (re)qualification. The article highlights the importance of continuous education and training of adults related to the economic and social benefits deriving from it. The article analyzes some of the aspects of continuous education and training of adults that fosters active participation of adults in the labour market, concluding that, for an active professional life, the establishment of relationships between employers, employees, trainers and learners is required.

Keywords: *education, adult lifelong learning, labour market, active life, training programmes, lifelong learning.*

JEL Classification: *E24, I23, I25, J01, P46*

Introduction

Regardless of age, for an active life in the labor market, there is a need for education and training, especially nowadays, when the evolution of technology and the society of knowledge bring permanent professional changes. From lifelong education benefits not only the person who receives training, but also the whole economy and society, because a company's success needs continual education and training of its employees.

To cope with current and future economic challenges, Europe needs a continuously educated workforce and qualified to the highest standards. Adults with secondary education and with low qualifications are a resource that can be

improved through continuous education and training, thus reducing the number of unemployed adults, because, often, unemployment among adults appears also as a result of low levels of education and training. Employing companies must realize that, more often than not, the costs involved in continuous professional training of adults are significantly lower than those relating to the employment of staff.

Continuous professional education and training constitute a valuable resource for facilitating insertion of unemployed and inactive people in the labour market. People who are able to work, but who have not been given the chance to do so, do not need to consider themselves useless, but must be channeled towards continuous training, especially especially since, in the last 8-9 years, people belonging to vulnerable groups could benefit from qualification, re-qualification or training courses for free within the Adult Professional Training Centers and other state and private institutions which have received grants to help adults with the purpose of their efficient placement the labour market (anofm.ro, 2017).

Education does not end with the graduation of Bachelor, Master or Doctorate schools. Education takes place throughout life as long as people let themselves be educated. Never can it be said that a person holds so much information that he/she needs no more training, because there always appear new challenges and new perspectives. There is no specific age for learning, but there are different ways of learning that are specific to each age. Training offers are so many and permissive, that only those who do not want to learn will not learn. It is important to know that every offer of continuous professional training is a challenge. People who constantly seek something new, do not wait to be sent to training courses by the company where they work, but seek by themselves courses that improve their personal and professional development.

In a society in continuous expansion, education and professional training are not to neglect, they are a necessity to anyone who is not satisfied with a limited standard of living and who understands that constant training is required in order to deal with competitiveness. Listing the benefits of continuous education and training for an active life in the labor market is not praise, but a benefit brought to the entire society.

Background

Continuous professional training involves the development/improvement of basic professional abilities and skills, but also getting some new professional qualifications in the work field. This is done throughout life, being also known from the terminological point of view as lifelong learning/education/training, as well as permanent learning/education/training or vocational training.

Casanova (2003) defines continuous training as "training whose major objective is to prepare people for work", which leads us to regard this form of learning as a requirement of an active life in the labor market. Continuous learning, known as the lifelong learning (LLL) is defined as consisting of all learning activities undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences from a personal, civic, social perspective or for employment" (Eurostat, 2016, p. 9). The same definition is presented in the National Education Law (art. 328).

Continuous learning develops at any time. The information can be collected from specialty magazines and articles, from various websites, blogs, books but also from personal trainers/mentors, professionals trained in certain areas of interest.

Continuous education and professional training do not necessarily imply financial resources, i.e. sums of money allocated to the participation in education and training. Those interested in a particular area can obtain free information from various media. Of course there is information that costs, but those who want to train/improve will always find a possibility to receive that information (Mitulescu et al., 2014-2015).

Occupational status, educational level, age, skills and occupational category influence and determine the participation in continuous education and training of adults. The access to continuous learning of unemployed people, of inactive people and of employees in trades with a low qualification level is more limited, because the courses of education and training are often provided by companies or are paid by those interested in acquiring new knowledge in their major areas of interest. Inactive people in the labour market do not afford to allocate certain amounts of money to such courses, their only opportunity being the courses of (re)qualification / professional development / specialization funded grants (Mitulescu et al., 2014-2015).

Low-skilled workers can be supported to learn continuously, not only by employers, but also by the state. Recognition of informal learning as a form of continuous education and training of adults will increase the number of people placed on the labour market (CEDEFOP, 2016, p. 34). Policies aimed at supporting lifelong learning must take into account the fact that, when employees do not feel comfortable in certain learning environments that are brought to them, resistance to learning appears (CEDEFOP, 2016, p. 17).

One of the solutions to reform the labor market is the development of active learning throughout life. Continuous education and training of adults is essential for social and economic development of a country (Eurostat, 2015, p. 158). In other words, continuous education and training of adults ensure the transition to the knowledge society (Eurostat, 2016, p. 4). By 2020, the programmes for the continuous education and training of adults must be attended by at least 15% of adults of the Member States of the European Union. The feedback received from employers and other people interested in the improvement of adults allows them to identify "new challenging and appropriate objectives when the previous ones are achieved by establishing the conditions for a continuous learning" (Hattie, 2014, p. 159).

Some of the benefits of continuous education and training of adults in terms of their integration in the labour market include:

- the increase of the number of active people on the labour market and, consequently, the reduction of the unemployment rate among adults (25-64 years);
- the correlation of continuous education and training with the needs on the labour market;
- Greater adaptability on the part of employers, ensuring continuous training courses for their employees in order to improve professionally, so that their success rate can be higher;
- the gain of new knowledge, which allows improvement in a specific area of activity;
- the transmission of knowledge for optimal integration and mobility of adults on the labour market, which will result in a significant economic development etc.

If we talk about the disadvantages of continuous training of adults, it is likely that the uselessness of some of the training courses for adults would represent the biggest disadvantage. This often stems from poor or even absence of correlation between the courses of continuous professional training and labour market requirements.

Methods

This article starts from the assumption that adult education and training represents an active life on the labor market, as the unemployed must receive continuous training for a faster insertion into the labor market. The main objective of our research is to analyze adult education programs in Romania.

As an extension to the theoretical information synthesized in the literature and presented in that article, the research method used is the analysis and interpretation of the statistical data on the continuous education and training of adults, especially those looking for a job.

Results and discussions

From the perspective of the continuous education and training of adults, the integration of Romania into the European Union has brought new opportunities to support adults and their placement on the labour market and Romania can thus benefit from numerous grants for continuous education and training of adults, in particular those coming from vulnerable groups, such as unemployed, inactive people in the labour market, people looking for a job, ethnic minorities, victims of domestic violence, etc. It remains to be seen whether Romania knew how to take advantage of these funds and whether visible changes have occurred with regard to education and lifelong learning among adults.

According to statistics presented by Eurostat, one can speak of a evolution concerning the lifelong learning of individuals between the ages of 25 and 64, at the level of the states belonging to the European Union. The data in Table no 1 refers to all forms of adult continuous education and training. For a more concrete analysis of the evolution of the number of adults who have benefited from training, we took as reference years 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015. If we look at the EU accession as a determinant of the increase of the number of courses of continuous training of adults, we note that, in the case of Croatia, the percentage growth reported in the period 2010-2015 is only 0.1%. By the end of 2010, Romania had to have 10% of beneficiaries of adult continuous education courses. Member state of the European Union since 1 January 2007, Romania seems to have not given any interest this time in continuous education and training of a large number of adults, lifelong learning being only 1.3% in 2015, with 0.3% lower than that recorded in 2005, when there was not part of the European Union. The average percentage of lifelong learning in the EU was 10.7% in 2015, with 1.1% higher than that of 2005 and with 1.4% higher than that in 2010. As far as lifelong learning for adults is concerned, the states whose percentage is higher in 2015 than the objective set by the year 2020 (15%) are: Denmark (31%), France (18.6%), Luxemburg (18.0%), the Netherlands (18.9%), Finland (25.4%), Sweden (29.4%), United Kingdom (15.7%). Unfortunately, of all EU member states, Romania ranks last place related to this indicator. If no rapid action is

taken regarding the participation in the continuous education and training of adults, Romania will not achieve the percentage of 15% at the end of 2020 either.

Table no 1. Lifelong learning in the European Union

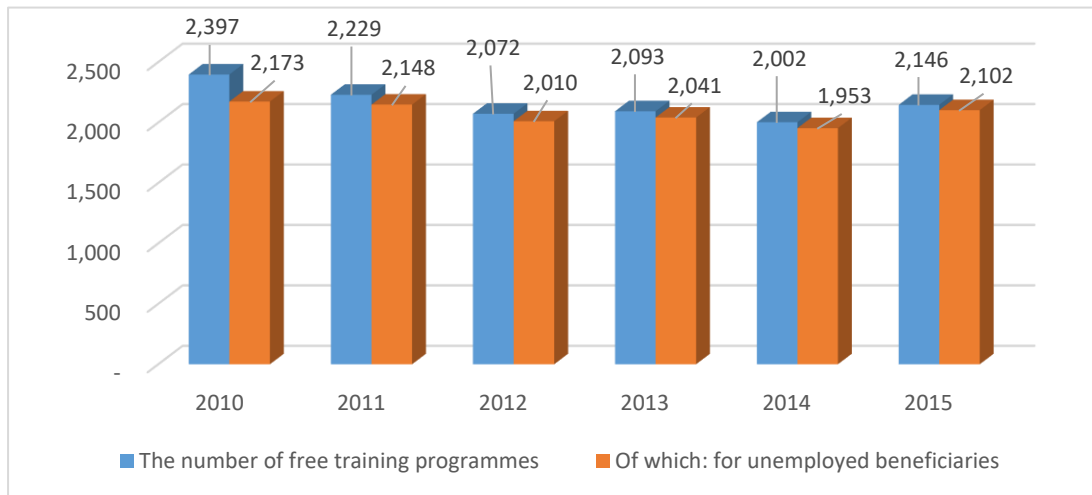
State	2000	2005	2010	2015
EU	-	9.6%	9.3%	10.7%
Belgium	6,2%	8.5%	7.4%	6.9%
Bulgaria	-	1.3%	1.6%	2.0%
Czech Republic	-	5.6%	7.8%	8.5%
Denmark	19.4%	27.4%	32.6%	31.3%
Germany	5.2%	7.7%	7.8%	8.1%
Estonia	6.6%	6.0%	11.0%	12.4%
Ireland	-	7.4%	7.0%	6.5%
Greece	1.0%	1.9%	3.3%	3.3%
Spain	4.5%	10.8%	11.2%	9.9%
France	2.8%	5.9%	5.0%	18.6%
Croatia	-	2.1%	3.0%	3.1%
Italy	4.8%	5.8%	6.2%	7.3%
Cyprus	3.1%	5.9%	8.1%	7.5%
Latvia	-	7.8%	5.4%	5.7%
Lithuania	2.8%	6.1%	4.4%	5.8%
Luxembourg	4.8%	8.5%	13.5%	18.0%
Hungary	2.9%	3.9%	3.0%	7.1%
Malta	4.5%	5.2%	6.2%	7.2%
The Netherlands	15.5%	15.9%	17.0%	18.9%
Austria	8.3%	12.9%	13.8%	14.4%
Poland	-	4.9%	5.2%	3.5%
Portugal	3.4%	4.1%	5.7%	9.7%
Romania	0.9%	1.6%	1.4%	1.3%
Slovenia	-	15.3%	16.4%	11.9%
Slovakia	-	4,6%	3,1%	3,1%
Finland	17.5%	22.5%	23.0%	25.4%
Sweden	21.6%	17.4%	24.7%	29.4%
United Kingdom	20.5%	27.6%	20.1%	15.7%

Source: data taken from the site <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/> and processed by the author

On the website of the National Agency for Employment statistical data on the number of free training courses are published on a regular basis. In the period 2010-2015, over 2000 free training programmes have been planned annually, most of which are intended for the unemployed; their purpose is to facilitate the access of unemployed people on the labour market (Chart no 1). Most free training programmes have been planned for the year 2010 - 2,397, 90.65% of them being intended for the unemployed.

In 2015, the number of free training programmes fell to 2,146, 97.95% of which were for unemployed beneficiaries.

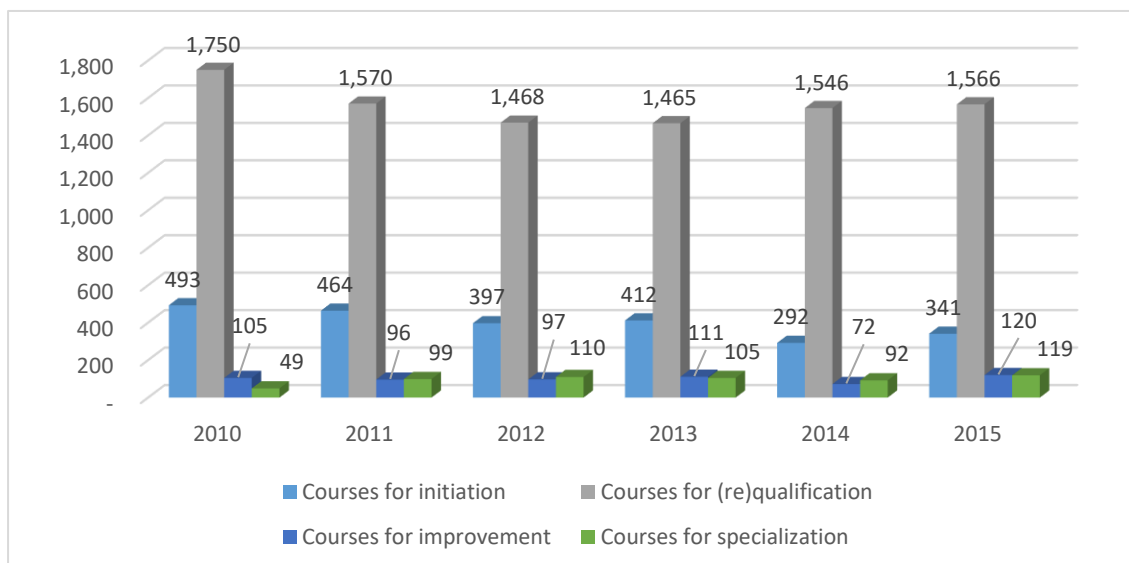
Chart no 1. Free training programmes in Romania, planned during the period 2010-2015



Source: statistical data collected from the site www.anofm.ro and processed by author

According to the data presented in Chart no 2, of the 2,146 planned courses for 2015, 341 were for initiation (15.89%), 1,566 were for (re)qualification (72.97%), 120 were for improvement (5.59%), while 119 were for specialization (5.55%). Courses for (re)qualification are the most wanted by adults, because upon completion they can practice a profession. These (re)qualifications are designed for graduates of secondary education (10 classes), who want to become: waiters, bartenders, bakers, tailors, accountants, secretaries, masseurs, WEB page designers, management assistants, network administrators, etc. There are three categories of courses for (re)qualification: level 3 - 1080 hours, level 2 - 720 hours and level 1 - 360 hours (Dănciulescu, 2016).

Chart no 2. Planned courses on form of training in Romania in the period 2010-2015



Source: Statistical data collected on the site www.anofm.ro and processed by author

Until the end of 2014, the operations financed from the European Structural Fund (ESF), were attended by 290,144 unemployed, of whom 138,517 were men and 151,627 were women (Table 2). Of the inactive people in the labour market, the operations financed by the ESF, were attended by 508,992 people. The number of females is higher, which is the consequence of the implementation and enforcement of the principle of equal opportunities. On the priority axis 2 - *Linking lifelong learning with the labour market* - 874 unemployed people have benefited from the support as well as 166,490 inactive people, which highlights a real interest in the continuous education and training of adults in order to maintain an active life in the labor market. To modernize the public employment service, there were no operations financed by the ESF, which draws attention to the lack of interest in this issue, which could be an important integrating factor in the labor market.

Table no 2. The number of unemployed and inactive people who participated in operations financed by the ESF, until 31 December 2014

Priority axis	Total number of unemployed people			Total number of inactive people		
	Men	Female	Total	Men	Female	Total
1. Education and professional training to support economic growth and the development of the society based on knowledge	67	81	148	54,257	66,415	120,672
2. Correlation of lifelong learning with the labour market	503	371	874	74,269	92,221	166,490
3. Growth of adaptability of workers and companies	1,737	2,173	3,910	11,757	17,683	29,440
4. Modernization of public employment service	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Promotion of active measures of employment	123,543	126,983	250,526	43,221	61,290	104,511
6. Promotion of social inclusion	12,663	22,011	34,674	32,789	55,090	87,879
Total	138,513	151,619	290,144	216,293	292,699	508,992

Source: Statistical data collected from www.fonduri-ue.ro and processed by the author

Given that "training requirements are in the magnitude of change" (Mihai, 2011, p. 111), continuous training of adults is more than just a basic condition to reduce unemployment, but it is, without any doubt, an opportunity for professional and personal development, for social integration and the promotion of economic growth. True, economic growth is influenced by a number of macroeconomic factors (Cristea and authors, 2010; Cristea and Drăcea, 2010), as well as the influence of foreign markets. However, increasing the number of adults who will attend lifelong training courses will certainly influence the increasing number of entrepreneurs. Professional experience and knowledge of trained adults will generate new business ideas, not only to ensure a living, but to employ work force that may impact economic growth on productive bases and not just on consumption bases. Creating continuous training programmes dedicated to those who want to become entrepreneurs can be an effective way to encourage entrepreneurship and economic growth.

Conclusions

Being the most important resources in society and in companies, human resources deserve and need continuous vocational training, regardless of the costs involved in this training. Information society and technological developments of the last decade have generated a desire of knowledge of those interested in specific fields and made adult training almost mandatory, so these people can face permanent changes taking place in society and in the workplace. Adults have benefited from education and initial vocational training, school years and the experience gained at the workplace thus creating the appropriate framework for education and continuous professional training.

Although interest in education has decreased in the last period, due to the existing imbalances in the labour market, companies must find motivation factors to trigger the desire of training in adults. There are companies, especially from multinationals, which annually invest very large sums of money for the continuous training of employees, on their improvement depending the success of the entire company. Of course, those who benefit from free training are required to work for a certain period within the paying company; Otherwise, in case of quitting, trained employees must repay the amount allocated to training.

Although the National Agency for Employment and the Centers of Professional Training of adults have implemented numerous projects to help disadvantaged adults to rapidly integrate on the labour market, taking advantage of non-reimbursable funds awarded as a result of writing projects in this respect, the adults belonging to disadvantaged to groups began to be skeptical regarding the usefulness of these courses, some of them graduating more free training courses in recent years without result. At the moment, it is quite difficult to convince the adults of the usefulness of such courses, especially since many of them are not fully in line with current requirements in the labour market. In spite of all the long talks about the continuous education and training of adults, in Romania, the efficiency of adult training programmes is quite low. Continuous training of adults still poses a challenge to the state and private institutions that have not rated and have not yet quantified the role of continuous education and training of adults. Development of campaigns to promote the importance of this type of training would not only change

the mentalities, but would also help create a more prosperous and more balanced Romania from the financial, cultural, psychological and social points of view.

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