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Abstract

BENEFITS OF VET

In Poland, there is a shortage of research aimed to measure and describe the benefits of vocational education and training. Poland is now facing a major reform of the education system, educational research and the labour market. It is because vocational education is commonly believed to be outdated and at variance with the needs of the economy and the labour market. In effect, the educational policy is formulated on the basis of overall goals of the Lisbon Strategy and requirements of ESF programmes rather than the results of educational research carried out at home. An initiative which intends to address this situation is the December 2009 launch of a systemic project entitled “Investigation of the quality and effectiveness of education and institutionalisation of the research base”, co-funded by the European Social Fund as part of the Human Capital Operational Programme. While taking account not of the research results but measures initiated by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, increased access of youth and adults to different forms of learning and training is regarded as the basic benefit of reforming the VET system. The achievements in this sphere are mostly related to the development of the programme offer in the form of modular curricula, along with the accompanying educational packages, addressed to both formal and non-formal learning contexts. The external vocational exam is being developed, which should be seen as beneficial for the quality of vocational qualifications. The anticipated changes aim to extend the exam to cover not only formal vocational education and training but also non-formal and informal ways of acquiring qualifications. The transparency of vocational qualifications is expected to be enhanced – to the benefit of educational, career and geographical mobility – as part of efforts aimed to establish a National Qualifications System, underpinned by the currently designed National Qualifications Framework, the introduction of ECVET system for transfer of learning achievements and a system for the validation of learning outcomes. All of these plans, objectives and benefits will be described in the national lifelong learning strategy, which is now under preparation. Unfortunately, there are no empirical data which could illustrate the benefits derived from the activities undertaken so far in the field of VET. Likewise, no efforts are made to explore the potential impacts of the planned changes on the situation of Polish learners because it is assumed that the changes proposed in the recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council will also be advantageous for Poland, and relevant programme and policy initiatives are launched on this basis.

VET AND EMPLOYMENT; EMPLOYMENT-RELATED MOBILITY AND MIGRATION

The chapter has been divided into three parts relating to mobility and migration in connection with employment and VET. Its specific sections discuss the issues of mobility and internal migration within the territory of Poland, emigration of Polish citizens to other EU countries and migration of foreign nationals to Poland. Selected projects dealing with these issues have been discussed as well as recommendations for new research in these areas.

CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN VET PROGRAMMES AND THE LABOUR MARKET

Centralisation of the Polish system of vocational education and training, inherited from the former political regime based on a non-market economy, resulted in breaking the connection between the educational needs of the economy and the labour market. The VET Classification of Occupations (Klasyfikacja Zawodów Szkolnictwa Zawodowego), which underpins the formal VET system, lists 208

broad-profile occupations, with a prevalence of manufacturing and industrial occupations and a shortage of service and business occupations and occupations needed in a knowledge-based economy. The Classification of Occupations and Specialties (Klasyfikacja Zawodów i Specjalności), developed for the purposes of labour market statistics, is more akin to the economic reality. In 2002, the VET Classification of Occupations was synchronised with the labour market classification, which now helps better plan vocational education and training. This is considerably aided by the monitoring of deficit and surplus occupations, carried out by labour offices on the basis of the Classification of Occupations and Specialties. The VET system enhances its learning contents based on modular curricula and the accompanying educational packages. The National Vocational Qualifications Standards, designed on the basis of job requirements in individual occupations, are also helpful. In 2008, work was started on the development of the National Qualifications Framework, a new model of the core curriculum for vocational education and a new model of the external vocational exam. The results of these efforts, carried out with the time horizon of 2013, will provide the basis for a modernisation of the Polish system of qualifications and of vocational education and training. Even though the incrementally introduced changes seem to proceed in the desirable direction (i.e. ensuring coherence between the learning outcomes in VET with the labour market needs), it is difficult to offer an objective evaluation of the progress made due to the lack of objective research in this area. Labour market statistics is relatively well developed in Poland, mainly due to the government policies aimed to reduce unemployment and promote employment. In this context, data compiled by the labour offices in the form of statistics of deficit and surplus occupations are particularly useful as they may be used in managing the supply of completers of specific VET specialisations to the labour market. Regrettably, the education system does not make a sufficient use of this opportunity. There is not much knowledge in Poland about the linkages between education and vocational qualifications and the requirements of the labour market, mainly due to the lack of adequately configured databases. The main GUS database, produced as a result of the BAEL survey [Survey of Economic Activity of the Population] does not fully comply with the needs related to analysing phenomena at the intersection of vocational education and the labour market

TRANSITIONS

The paper has been divided into three parts, each discussing most recent research on different kinds of transitions: (1) from secondary and higher schools to the labour market, (2) returning to the labour market e.g. after maturity leave, and (3) from work to retirement.

Surveys concerning the entry of secondary school leavers to the labour market discuss measures undertaken by voivodships (provinces), powiat (district) labour offices and central agencies such as the Department of the Labour Market of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Research studies on labour market re-entry mostly focus on the so-called risk groups, e.g. parents returning to work after maternity or child care leave, the elderly, people with low qualifications, people with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma community.

Research on the transition from the labour market to retirement is connected with various measures to improve the activity of the 50+ age group, as the ageing of the workforce raises some concerns about the collapse of the pension system and shortage of labour in the near future.

Theme 1: Benefits of VET

1. Research objectives and problems to be solved

Owing to a scanty educational research base in Poland, there is a shortage of data to evaluate the directions of changes in the VET system. The lack of quantitative data is particularly acute, whereas qualitative research – done on a considerably larger scale – is frequently based on too small research samples to be used in the planning of changes affecting the entire system. A review of education and training policy made by Cedefop in 2008 identified a number of actions which could improve access to VET in Poland (Cedefop, 2008). These actions should aim to introduce new, more flexible vocational qualification paths, for example through modular curricula. Other measures include: validation of non-formal and informal qualifications and improving the functioning of the vocational counselling and guidance system, particularly with regard to supports offered to individuals. In addition, initiatives related to the financing of VET and projects ensuring better cooperation between employment-related institutions, educational establishments and social welfare centres should be put in place. In December 2009, the Ministry of National Education entrusted the implementation of a systemic project: “Investigation of the quality and effectiveness of education and institutionalisation of the research base”, co-funded by the European Social Fund as part of the Human Capital Operational Programme, to the Institute for Educational Research. The overriding goal of the project is to strengthen the system of educational research and enhance possibilities for using research findings in the educational policy and practices and in education management. As regards VET, research will be initiated on the operation of core curricula and methodologies for teaching individual subjects, in addition to systemic research on the quality and effectiveness of VET – that is, an investigation of intra-school, institutional and economic conditions as well as the conditions determining the competences of youth and adults in the labour market context. The project will be implemented until June 2015 (MEN, 2009).

2. Results of educational activities and research findings

Development of VET opportunities

In the recent years, modular programmes have been added to the available VET offer. The modular system, based on modules determined by job tasks, is now replacing instruction based on subjects determined by academic disciplines. In 2004-2008, as part of the project entitled “Development of innovative VET curricula”, modular curricula were prepared for 131 occupations (with the overall completed set increased to 185) identified in the VET Classification of Occupations (*Klasyfikacja Zawodów Szkolnictwa Zawodowego*) (Rozporządzenie MEN, 2007). Due to the fact that this “school-based” classification has a total of 208 broad-profile occupations, the offer of modular curricula should soon be

completed. The project was co-financed from the ESF under the Sectoral Operational Programme – Human Resources Development SOP HRD (<http://www.koweziu.edu.pl>). Due to the fact that this “school-based” classification has a total of 208 broad-profile occupations, the offer of modular curricula should soon be completed. Altogether, 3,438 educational packages consisting of a manual for pupils and a manual for teachers have been prepared for modular curricula. Manuals for teachers contain examples of lesson scenarios and model tools for the evaluation of the teaching process. On their basis, teachers of vocational subjects may develop their own teaching materials. . Manuals for pupils offer a detailed presentation of the learning content, sets of assignments, tests of progress and final tests for pupils from the content of every modular unit. Modular curricula have a flexible structure which allows for the updating, altering and replacing modules and modular units depending on the needs of learners and requirements of the local environment. Another advantage of modular curricula is their universality as they may be used in both formal and non-formal learning environments (for young and adult learners). So far, there have been no nation-wide studies on the effectiveness of the application and impact of modular curricula and educational packages on the quality of school-based vocational education. Certain qualitative data will be compiled in the course of the systemic project of the Ministry of National Education, implemented in 2009-2013 by the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (KOWEziU), entitled: “ A support system for schools and educational establishments implementing modular VET curricula”, and implemented as part of the Human Capital Operational Programme. In particular, it is planned to collect and disseminate examples of “good practices” in VET which are pursued with the use modular curricula.

Parallel to the activities undertaken by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is implementing modular curricula for non-school learning contexts and adult continuing education. In 2002-2004, the Phare 2000 project entitled “The national VET system” was implemented, whereby 89 modular VET curricula were developed (Symela, 2005) for occupations included in the Classification of Occupations and Specialties (*Klasyfikacja Zawodów i Specjalności*) (Rozporządzenie MPiPS, 2004).

On the basis of modular programmes, in 2006 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy prepared an ESF project entitled: “Modular training curricula for the staff of public employment services”, which was implemented in 2006–2008. As part of the project, documentation was drawn up for 20 modular training curricula for public employment services personnel and the Ministry’s database was extended with new modular curricula. In addition to that, a study on continuing education amongst public employment services was completed and an expert’s study was prepared with a proposal of systemic solutions regarding this issue.

In the coming years, two other projects in this regard will be implemented (<http://www.mpips.gov.pl>), viz.:

- (a) modular training for the staff of institutions offering labour market services and vocational insertion programmes (it is planned that ca. 100 trainers specialised to conduct modular training will be trained and some 2,000 staff will receive training);
- (b) an e-learning training package for the staff of labour market institutions, drawing on modular curricula which were prepared earlier.

Similarly to modular curricula for the school system, no nation-wide studies on the effectiveness of modular VET curricula in non-school contexts have been carried out to date.

Efforts to improve the external vocational exam and develop a validation system for learning outcomes

The system of external exams maintained by the Central Examination Board (CKE) and the Regional Examination Boards (OKEs), whose role is to validate qualifications acquired at school, is a key factor in improving the quality of school-based VET. A similar role is played by journeyman exams and master craftsman exams, which are administered by chambers of crafts and supervised by the Polish Crafts Association (ZRP). The first external vocational exams were organised in 2004 for the leavers from two-year basic vocational schools, and in 2005 for the leavers from three-year basic vocational schools. The first such exams for the leavers from technical secondary schools were held in 2006. In 2007, the vocational exam was made open to leavers from all types of vocational schools and post-secondary schools.

Every year, the Central Examination Board (CKE) collects and analyses the results of vocational exams (e.g. CKE, 2007). Their results point to a low pass rate of the vocational exam, notably its practical part. Another problem is posed by marked disparities in the exam's pass rate depending on the occupation; here, differences can reach as much as 70pp. This raises questions about the quality of practical training and about the quality of the exam itself; eventually, a new, more objective exam formula might need to be developed. The most extensive survey of the quality and effectiveness of the external vocational exam was done on the occasion of the research project entitled: "The external vocational exam. Analysis, diagnosis and prospects for change", which was carried out as part of the Human Capital Operational Programme (Białecki and Drogosz-Zabłocka, 2009). The opinion survey conducted among employers, teachers and examiners suggests that the exam does not confirm vocational qualifications but tests the knowledge and skills defined in the examination standards, developed on the basis of the core curriculum for a given occupation.

A person who has successfully passed the exam is awarded a certificate confirming the vocational qualifications in a given occupation, and the Europass Certificate Supplement. In this way, the informative function of the issued documents was enhanced, which was welcome by employers and allowed their holders to use the Supplement also in other countries.

The high pass threshold for the exam (e.g. 75% for the exam's practical part) is not reflected in increased employability, which invites the conclusion that employers do not particularly value school leavers with good or very good exam grades nor do they value the vocational qualifications certificate.

External examinations in VET were intended as a tool to improve the quality of vocational training through obtaining and disseminating objective and comparable results of such training across the country. Their introduction was also a result of the state's policy to implement external examinations at all levels of the education system (external exams at the end of primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school).

To allow for a full application of the external vocational exam in the evaluation of VET it is necessary to use complex methods of exam data processing. In addition to the results themselves, there should be some management of the impact of factors which are beyond the school's control and which can affect the exam results. For this purpose, the Educational Added Value (EWD) method has been developed in Poland. EWD indicators may be used by individual schools for self-assessment and also by the school supervision bodies for external evaluation. In 2005-2007, a methodological team of the Central Examination Board (CKE) worked on the testing of the EWD methods in the realities of the Polish system of education in the conditions of lower secondary schools. Currently, work is under way to extend the EWD method to cover general and vocational secondary schools (Dolata, 2007).

As part of ESF co-financed projects, in 2007-2013 work will be continued on preparing the external exam for individuals who want to obtain qualifications in out-of-school and continuing education contexts. Ultimately, vocational exams will be available to all persons concerned, also to those individuals who want to validate the learning outcomes obtained non-formally or informally. There are plans to ensure that such exams could be held more than a dozen times a year in examination centres working all year long, and the written part of the vocational qualification exam could be organised with the assistance of computers and/or the Internet, and have a distance exam option (Strategia..., 2005).

Enhancing the transparency of vocational qualifications and increasing mobility

Transparency of qualifications plays a decisive role in labour market policy; to this end, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy supervises work aimed to develop the National Vocational Qualifications Standards (*Krajowe Standardy Kwalifikacji Zawodowych*). Standardisation of vocational qualifications will help link requirements related to specific jobs with the topical offer of the VET system. This exercise is underpinned by the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act (Kwiatkowski et al., 2007). The years 2006-2007 saw the implementation of a Ministry of Labour and Social Policy project entitled "Development and dissemination of national vocational qualifications standards", implemented as part of the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development. As part of this exercise, 200 new standards were developed and a study investigating the

demand for such standards and their use in Poland was conducted. The opinion survey carried out among potential users revealed that vocational qualifications standards should be modified and updated every 3–5 years (depending on the sector), whereas identification of labour market needs should be done on an ongoing basis. It would be justifiable to set up a separate institution or an inter-institutional and interdisciplinary body, whose staff, adequately prepared methodologically and professionally, would carry out studies on the qualification requirements of the labour market and the economy and develop new and/or update the existing standards. It would also be desirable if a separate team of experts, providers and assessors with sufficient topical qualifications, education and professional experiences in a given sector could be set up for every branch of the economy, as this would guarantee that high-quality vocational standards would be developed (Kramek and Jeruszka, 2007).

Further planned activities envisage the establishment of a supra-sectoral structure to manage qualifications. Putting in place a National Qualifications System was planned in the draft national lifelong learning strategy which is currently being developed by the Ministry of National Education, and in the Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013. The latter defines the National Qualifications as a supra-sectoral and comprehensive system of legal, institutional, procedural and programme arrangements and mechanisms to support and facilitate obtaining, transferring, comparing, recognising, validating and certifying generic and vocational qualifications both in Poland and in Europe at large.

The key planned changes include a shift in emphasis from the teaching process to emphasis on determining and testing learning outcomes from different life paths and life situations (Bednarczyk i Woźniak, 2005). These activities will pave the way for the implementation of a credit system for recognising VET achievements based on ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training). This work will help validate non-formal and informal learning outcomes, which will enhance both transparency and comparability of competences and qualifications acquired outside formal education and training, and will ensure increased access to VET-related services (Rezultaty..., 2006).

In October 2008, the Ministry of National Education started work on designing and implementing the National Qualification Framework, conducted as part of the project entitled: “Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of the National Qualifications Framework model”. By the end of 2009, topical assumptions to the Polish draft of the qualification framework will have been completed, along with a schedule of further conceptual and implementation work. In addition to that, the assumptions for empirical research targeted at the analysis of the qualifications system in Poland were formulated. Their overall aim is to identify and define qualifications and competences and describe the major paths (be they formal, non-formal and informal) of acquiring, validating, confirming and recognising competences (such as generic, key or supravocational), specific non-vocational (such as hobby-related or those which arise from developing non-vocational interests) as well as vocational. The research will be exploratory in character. The studies conducted in Poland to date comprised only on some of the competences and qualifications used in the labour market, and most frequently were focused

on qualifications acquired formally. For this reason, the existing pool of knowledge on qualifications and competences is only fragmentary. In addition, identification of a system for validating competences is very important, as the smooth functioning of such a system is the basic precondition for the operation of the qualifications system. The study will consist of three interlinked parts (Sitek et al., 2009):

- a survey of qualifications and competences found on the labour market;
- a survey identifying qualifications and competences stipulated in the relevant legislation and selected internal regulations, and identifying entities participating in the competence validation process;
- a survey examining ways of validating competences in selected groups of occupations.

The Europass portfolio can be regarded as a valuable initiative to develop a transparent qualifications system in Poland; it came into force across the entire EU territory as of 1 January 2005. In mid-2005, the Europass National Centre in Poland started its operation. Initially, this role was performed by the Task Force for Training and Human Resources “Cooperation Fund” in Warsaw, and as of January 2009 – by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System in Warsaw. Currently, all Europass documents are used in Poland. The Europass Certificate Supplement has been issued since 2006 by the Regional Examination Boards (OKEs) to leavers from upper secondary vocational schools who passed the external vocational exam. Unfortunately, there is no research related to the use of Europass documents aimed to increase career and educational mobility of Polish citizens.

VET in lifelong learning (LLL)

The Continuing Education Development Strategy Until 2010, adopted in 2003 by Polish Government, is implemented at various administrative levels (central, regional and local) in collaboration with social partners (Strategia..., 2003). It mostly deals with tasks concerning the consistency of the formal education system with a non-formal one, and validation of non-formal learning outcomes. Currently, work is under way on a comprehensive, consistent and supra-sectoral national lifelong learning strategy which is to replace the present continuing education strategy. Additionally, the new strategy will have completely new conceptual underpinnings, extending its impact over the entire lifetime, and will no longer be addressed to those adults who have already left the education system. The currently developed LLS will cover all levels of education and training, ranging from supports to adults raising small children and pre-school education through tertiary education to continuing education of adults and senior citizens.

Due to wide regional and local disparities in the human capital stock, the success of a lifelong learning strategy in Poland will largely depend on the coherence between national policy directions and regional policies, i.e. detailed arrangements adopted locally and regionally.

Particularly important will be supports to human resources development in rural and post-industrial areas. Most of the planned activities will receive funding from EU sources pursuant to the provisions laid down in the Operational Programme Human Capital 2007-2013, co-financed from the European Social Fund.

The basic directions of the state's intervention plan envisage inter alia integrating vocational education and training within the entire education system (including tertiary education), labour, social organisations based on common principles of qualifications description and award as well as principles of providing support to learners. These principles include: motivating citizens and facilitating access to learning in various settings and in various forms, promoting involvement of many different bodies to facilitate learning among the wider public, development of lifelong guidance, emphasis on training human resources which play a special role in accelerating the country's development (teachers, trainers, personnel for modern economy, public administration, health care, etc.). In addition to that, changes are planned in curricula as well as evaluation and examination systems to allow for acquiring competences which are of major importance for individuals and for the economy at large (Sprawozdanie..., 2007).

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3. Conclusions and premises for further research

The activities and initiatives described above are all intended to bring a tangible improvement in the situation of the VET sector in Poland. Unfortunately, it is difficult to quote hard research data assessing the scale of social and economic benefits accompanying these positive changes. This situation is due to a number of reasons (Sztanderska, Wojciechowski, 2008), including:

- lack of basic statistics on the impact of education and training on the labour market;
- the data compiled are too extensive and ill-suited to the needs of labour market statistics; as a result, it is not possible to determine with accuracy in what occupations there is a surplus of learners, and in what there is a shortage;

- there are no reliable statistics concerning job vacancies;
- the classification of school occupations does not reflect demand for work reported by employers;
- the recently launched system of information about education is not as yet adapted to provide information about the supply of school leavers in specific occupations;
- there is no system in place to forecast labour demand and developments in specific occupations;
- there are no district-level statistics for (local) labour markets with vocational school networks;
- there is no information about vocational school leavers and their careers after they complete school.

Due to an imperfect system of dependable public statistics in Poland, it is rather difficult to get an overall picture of benefits derived from changes in the vocational education and training system. To address this issue, a state system for the monitoring of the career situation of vocational school leavers and qualification courses should be put in place. Such monitoring should be supplemented by forecasts of anticipated changes in demand for work in specific occupations. Likewise, the compiled data should be aggregated at the lowest possible local government level (such as the district level) as it is where decisions concerning training in specific occupations are made.

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Theme 2: VET and employment; Employment-related mobility and migration

The study has been divided into three parts relating to mobility and migration in connection with employment and VET. Its specific sections discuss the issues of mobility and internal migration within the territory of Poland, emigration of Polish citizens to other EU countries and migration of foreign nationals to Poland. Selected projects dealing with these issues have been discussed as well as recommendations for new research in these areas.

1. Review of projects and initiatives in the sphere of employment-related mobility and migration

1.1. Mobility and internal migration in Poland

Internal migration in Poland is understood as the movement of individuals within one administrative unit (city, municipality, province, etc.) or a political unit (state). We can distinguish the following types of internal migrations: inter-provincial, understood as movement of individuals from one voivodship to another; intra-provincial, denoting change of the place of residence within one voivodship; inter-district, understood as movement of individuals from one powiat to another, and intra-district, which refer to the change of residence within one and the same powiat. When we classify internal migration based on the administrative nature of the areas between which relocation has taken place, we can distinguish migrations: from rural to urban areas; from urban to rural areas, from one city to another, and between rural areas. Looking at the nature of the residence, we can distinguish: permanent migration (which involves registration of a permanent address) as well as temporary migration concerning temporary residence lasting over three months. Reports on the internal migration of Poles are prepared by the Central Statistical Office (GUS). In 2006, an increase in internal permanent migration could be observed. In 2005, the inflow of the population into urban areas totalled 230,340, as compared to 256,048 in 2006. The inflow of residents into rural areas reached 192,439 in 2005, and 217,500 in 2006. At the same time, the outflow from the cities was 262,958 in 2005, and 291,136 in 2006. In case of rural areas, it was 159,821 in 2005, and 182,412 in 2006 (Waligórska et al., 2009). There is a shortage of scientific literature on the topic. However, some forecasts concerning the future of the internal migration have been made. In the years 2008-2030, the inflow of the population into urban areas is anticipated at 270,000–242,000, and at 247,000–179,000 into rural areas. The estimated figures for the outflow of the population were the following: in 2008, 313,000 were expected to move out the cities in 2008, as compared 246,000 in 2030, while 204,000 were anticipated to leave rural areas in 2008, as compared to 175,000 in 2030.

1.2. Mobility and external migration of Poles

The labour migration of Poles is economic in nature, and is caused primarily by high unemployment, which is among the EU's highest (Wesołowska and Rabij, 2006). Unemployment is felt most acutely by young and unqualified people. Labour migration refers to two categories of migrants. The first comprises mostly poorly qualified and educated people: blue-collar workers and the unemployed. This group is one most threatened with pauperisation and one for whom finding a job is the most difficult. It primarily comprises people with education not higher than basic vocational, who as a rule take up simplest and worst-paid jobs that are not attractive to the local workforce. Their main labour market competitors are other immigrants. Another large group of immigrants includes people with university diplomas, well-educated, enterprising and with an increased awareness. However, due to the lack of records it not possible the assess their number (Olechowski, Rabij, 2006). As a rule, Poles emigrated to Western European Member States. In 2006, these countries included: United Kingdom, Germany, United States, Ireland, Canada. In Ireland, Poles now make up the largest ethnic minority. Other destinations for the Polish migration are: Norway, Sweden and Austria (Michałków, 2007). Surveys indicate that 75.9% of people living in Poland would change their place of residence if they were offered better employment prospects than those where they were currently living. At the same time, the largest share of the respondents (32.7%) declared that they were willing to live anywhere in the world. The survey included 1,164 respondents from Poland, who they filled in an on-line questionnaire on the basis of which the results were worked out (Manpower, 2008). It is estimated that, in 2008, 25,000 people emigrated from cities, and 10,000 from rural areas. It is anticipated that, in 2030, 14,500 people will emigrate from cities, and 5,500 from rural areas (Waligórska et al., 2009).

1.3. Migrants in Poland

Studies on the number of foreign nationals in Poland began with the commencement of the systemic transformation and the opening of the borders in 1989 (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2008). In 1999-2002, the share of foreigners in Poland accounted for as little as 0.2%, and in 2008 the official figure was 40,000, whereas unofficial estimates indicated as many as 300,000. A number of research projects highlighting these issues are under way. The Office for Foreigners is implementing a number of tasks; for instance, the European Refugee Fund has started such projects as: improvement of accommodation standard and social assistance to individuals seeking refugee status and recognised as refugees in Poland; developing "Refugee" – an IT application to monitor the social aspects of refugees' stay in Poland; improvement of the living conditions in centres for foreign nationals seeking refugee status or asylum, and providing social supports to the centres' residents in order to facilitate their contacts with the local communities. The Office for Foreigners is also a partner in two partnerships set up as part of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme with the aim of providing initial integration to individuals seeking refugee status in Poland. The partnership programmes are to be implemented with the involvement of refugees staying in the centres for

foreigners. The overriding goal of these projects is to vocational insertion and social activation of foreigners seeking refugee status. Other activities stipulated by the programme include: provision of legal aid and counselling assistance, vocational and computer courses, language classes and classes improving their knowledge about the Polish realia. The Office for Foreigners also takes part in an assistance project for Ukraine: GDISC - Capacity Building and Technical Support to Ukrainian authorities to Effectively Respond to Irregular Transit-Migration (ERIT). The implementation of the project started in February 2008. The project activities stipulate in particular the training of Ukrainian partners responsible for status procedures related to investigation of foreign nationals seeking protection, methodology of collecting, analysing, evaluating and making accessible information about countries of origin, verification of information sources, use of PKI in asylum procedures, process of analysing the application and preparing draft decisions related to award/refusal of granting international protection. In addition to that, assistance will be provided to the establishment of a separate unit for information about countries of origin and development of a basic database. The programme also includes a study visit of Ukrainian officials in Poland and Slovakia. The judges of Ukrainian administrative courts and the Supreme National Court will also be trained in asylum procedures and be provided with information about countries of origin. In addition to migration officials, the beneficiaries of the training programme will include the officers of the Ukrainian Border Guard Service, Security Service, Militia and NGO personnel.

Research has also been conducted on immigrants from Ukraine (Bieniecki et al., 2005). The study, conducted using qualitative methods (in-depth interviews, observation) and quantitative methods (questionnaires) covered migrants from Ukraine working in the Mazowieckie province. The qualitative survey comprised 20 in-depth interviews with Ukrainians staying in Poland and working legally, and those who worked without an official work permit. The questionnaire survey comprised Ukrainian citizens working in the Mazowieckie province, altogether 101 people aged 18-55 (Bieniecki et al., 2005). In 2006, foreign nationals received 12,063 individual and group work permits. This number does not include those foreigners who do not need work permits, e.g. many EU citizens, and those who work in the grey economy. It has to be borne in mind that those legally employed represent a small fraction of all labour migration to Poland. The number of illegally employed foreigners is estimated at several hundred thousands. Employing foreign nationals in Poland still remains a marginal phenomenon. The foreigners coming to Poland take advantage of small niches in the Polish labour market: one of them are large or medium-sized companies (usually with foreign shareholdings) which employ highly qualified personnel, mostly from EU countries.

Poland is a country with strong traditions of emigration. At the same time, other than in the neighbouring countries and excluding the migrations of professionals, it is not a country which is perceived as an attractive destination for migration. For this reason, immigration is a small-scale phenomenon and does not represent such a serious problem as in Western European countries (e.g. France or Germany). It is estimated that in 2008 some 10,500 immigrants came to cities and 3,600 to rural areas. According to forecasts, in 2030 their number will be 21,500 higher in the cities and 8,500 higher in rural areas. On the other hand,

as the Polish economy and society grows, deficits of labour will be felt in many business sectors. In most well-developed economies, such deficits are offset by accepting immigration.

2. Research findings and their critical analysis

2.1. Mobility and spatial migration in Poland

The scale of internal migration in Poland is small. Migration usually involves change of work or place of residence. To increase opportunities for finding interesting work with a satisfactory level of compensation, and in order to improve the quality of VET provision, the Ministry of National Education commissioned the development of modular VET curricula and educational packages (for teachers and pupils) to support the process of instruction for some 3,500 packages for the teaching of 131 modular curricula. This was done in 2005-2008 as part of the ESF project entitled: "Development of innovative VET curricula". The curricula are flexible in character, which allows for updating, altering, supplementing and replacing modules and their constituent units, depending on individual needs or those necessitated by technological developments. Importantly, they are oriented to ensure achieving specific results in the form of knowledge, skills and competences, in line with the requirements of the labour market and the needs of specific positions. These curricula may be used in the organisation of non-formal training for adults. Currently, research is being conducted by KOWEZiU (NCFSVCE) on the implementation of modular curricula. To date, such curricula have been introduced in 260 vocational schools, mostly technical secondary. However, there is no information about the effectiveness of either the curricula or the packages because no such research has been carried out as yet. Education plays a considerable role while seeking employment. It is estimated that in 2007-2035 we can expect an inflow of the population to regions with a low rate unemployment (such as Mazowieckie, Małopolskie, Wielkopolskie). Transformation of a part of current temporary migrations into permanent ones is an increasingly frequent phenomenon. The inflow of the population to regions where investment projects are planned (including those related to the influx of foreign capital to Poland), additional EU financing to the eastern regions of Poland, the natural assets and tourist attractiveness of those regions – all these are factors boosting population inflow in the long term. The construction of new transport routes will stimulate creation of new jobs in the areas situated in their vicinity. Other factors which affect population inflow include academic and research centres in cities (Waligórska, 2009). For this reason, education plays such a crucial role in finding the desired job, regardless of where it is located.

2.2. Mobility and external migration of Poles

Upon Poland's EU accession mass-scale immigration of Poles began, primarily to the United Kingdom and Ireland (Kłos, 2006). The Human Capital Operational Programme 2007-2013, Submeasure 1.3.7, comprises projects addressed to migrant workers related to: development and implementation of projects to support labour market integration of migrant workers,

which include in particular: language training; advisory and legal services to counteract labour market discrimination and facilitating contacts with administrative bodies; implementation of social activation and vocational insertion programmes, including training in the field of labour law, work culture, work standards, etc., with a view to preparing them to taking up employment in Poland; organisation of information and promotional campaigns addressed to people who have emigrated to return home, and take up education or work in Poland.

A factor which facilitates mobility and labour migration as part of vocational education and training is the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training - ECVET. Social consultations on ECVET were organised (in the period from November 2006 to 31 March 2007) by the Ministry of National Education – Vocational and Continuing Education Department. They led to the commencement of specific activities related to the dissemination of information about the system, exchanges of views on the proposals submitted by the European Commission, with ministries, institutions, organisations and other authorities involved in the process, and mobilised large numbers of people to participate. ECVET is scheduled to be implemented in vocational education and training at the pre-tertiary and tertiary education level and in all sectors. The consultation process revealed that in the majority of cases ECVET was regarded by the respondents as an innovative idea which promised many benefits for the society, but not sufficiently well understood. In the respondents' opinion, ECVET should effectively help enhance the mobility of individuals and recognition of their competences. ECVET is also perceived as a tool facilitating cooperation between VET practitioners not only at the European, but also at the national level. This seems easier in the case of evaluation or certification of qualifications than in other countries as the Polish system of education is strongly centralised. There are no divisions between regions and thereby no differences in the evaluation of similar qualifications from one region to another. The Ministry engaged all the stakeholders in the consultation process, particularly social and economic actors at the national level, organisations representing social partners, higher education network, VET providers, research institutes and VET experts. Conclusions concerning potential improvements of the ECVET system obtained in the course of the consultation process are based on observations, comments, queries and proposals which should be taken into account while developing the system further. These are mainly related to the clarification and interpretation of certain terms (such as "units", "validation", "competent authorities", "120 ECVET credit points"), elucidation of the system's main tenets (presentation of specific ECVET applications for learners and training providers, outlining possibilities of ECVET application in validation of non-formal and informal learning), defining the role of ECVET credit points in the system and methods for allocating credit points to units), describing the linkages between ECVET and ECTS, and between ECVET and EQF. The success indicators for the ECVET implementation include: supporting the lifelong learning initiatives; enhancing transparency and comparability of qualifications and competences – via a shared approach to the description of qualifications and references to the European Qualifications Framework – EQF and linking to the Europass Certificate Supplement; facilitating mobility (educational, career and geographical) – ECVET proposes

an approach whereby the learning outcomes of an individual are taken into account while confirming qualifications in the country of origin. Currently, no additional surveys or studies on ECVET and its potential future implementation are under way.

In case of university students, there has been an increase in international mobility as part of the Socrates-Erasmus programme, both with regard to the number of participating higher education institutions and the number of students. This observable increase was possible not only due to a widespread interest of students in the possibility to take some of their courses in partner universities abroad, but also due to a better understanding of the mechanisms for recognition of education and training and an improved quality of services offered to both outgoing and incoming students. This can also be viewed as a result of decisions taken by Polish universities which came to appreciate the significance of an internalised learning process and the role played in this by the mobility of students and academic teachers. In 2005, 8,388 students left abroad for a period of study, as compared to 12,854 in 2008. As for academic teachers, 1,394 left abroad in 2005 and 2,462 in 2008. As we can see, a strong interest in the programme can be observed.

In 2006, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy acted as a coordinator of activities pursued by the central Polish administration as part of the European Year of Workers' Mobility. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science and the Office for Foreigners, an action plan for the Mobility Year was prepared. It involved such initiatives as: organisation of an international conference to evaluate interim arrangements in the access to the Polish labour market in their first year of operation, and other projects to increase awareness of benefits and costs involved in spatial and vocational mobility: information campaigns, competitions, promotion of voluntary activity among young people. Further to that, in September 2006 an European labour fair was organised, parallel to similar events organised in several dozen cities across Europe. The programme is international in character, and is coordinated by the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE). In 2001-2006, 2792 teachers (including 253 men) took part in teacher in-service programmes. The number of men who took part in Comenius professional development projects reflects the feminisation of the teaching profession in Poland. The programme beneficiaries were mostly young people aged 26 to 34. The highest number of applicants came from the following voivodships (provinces): Mazowieckie (553), Śląskie (543), Małopolskie (242) and Pomorskie, and the smallest - from Lubuskie (36). The beneficiaries were in their majority residents of cities: 2216 institutions which provided recommendations for course participants were located in urban or suburban areas. The dominant professional groups were upper secondary school teachers (1067), lower secondary school teachers (716) and primary school teachers (537). Beneficiaries chose their courses from a Comenius catalogue published on the Commission's website and from the free-market offer. The second category of courses enjoyed great popularity, with 1985 ultimately selected. The remaining 807 courses came from the Comenius catalogue. Free-market courses were usually language or teaching methodology courses mostly addressed to teachers of bilingual courses. The most frequent course choices were language and language and methodological courses – they were chosen by 81% of the beneficiaries, whereas 6%

were interested in thematic courses in new technologies. The main languages of instruction during courses were English (2031 responses), German (366) and French (351). In very few cases, courses were taught in Spanish (29) and Italian (9). In 2007, 681 projects obtained approval.

As we can see, a range of projects and research studies have been conducted on ways of making the finding of employment easier for Polish workers abroad. Unfortunately, one of the results is that currently Poland is suffering from a shortage of qualified personnel. Emigration has a negative impact on the number of the population remaining in Poland (Waligórska, 2009). GUS forecasts indicate that by 2030 the population of Poland will have reached some 35.5 million. Given such a situation, a further opening of the Polish market to foreign workers is inevitable (Jarzyński, 2009). When analysing the brain drain phenomenon, we should look at it in a broader context. Although undoubtedly problematic from the Polish perspective, it is certainly beneficiary for the host countries. When seen in the context of the whole society, people with higher education are over-represented in the populace of migrants (ca 20% as compared 11% in the Polish society at large), which shows the scale of the brain drain. A similar situation could be observed in the case of the Irish emigration, where people with higher education accounted for 18-30% of all emigrants. In addition to that 22% of Polish emigrants work at positions inferior to their qualifications, which could invalidate the thesis that emigrants, once they return home, may hope for a bonus due to their experience gained abroad (Jarzyński, 2009).

2.3. Migrants in Poland

After the EU borders had been opened, Poland did not experience any large influx of immigrants. This could be due to the fact that Poland is not viewed as an attractive country for potential immigrants. In 2006, Ukrainian citizens received 3,533 individual and group work permits, which made it the ethnic community with the highest number of legally employed foreign nationals in Poland, and Vietnamese citizens – 999 permits (Kaczmarczyk et al., 2008). The business sectors employing Ukrainian workers include in particular trade, agriculture, construction and household services, and in case of illegal work – industry, education (mostly foreign language teachers). On the other hand, the Vietnamese workers have dominated – regardless of their legal status – only two sectors: trade and catering (restaurants and bars serving Vietnamese cuisine). Ukrainians are a group which is not as well organised as the Vietnamese, and they most frequently find work as hired workers of Polish employers, whereas most Vietnamese cooperate with other Vietnamese: their families and other compatriots. They conduct business activity much more frequently than members of the Ukrainian community. Research carried out by the Centre of Migration Research of the University of Warsaw on Ukrainian and Vietnamese nationals residing in Poland and holding residence permits, the employment rate for both these groups is high and reaches ca 80%. Among Ukrainians, women are usually economically passive, being confined to home, whereas in Vietnamese families it is mostly pupils and students who are passive, followed by housekeeping women. In general terms, women find themselves in a difficult labour situation

and are affected by unemployment more frequently than men. Foreign nationals do not “steal” jobs from Poles as they do not assimilate with the indigenous population. This is the reason why the Polish society does not feel threatened by the inflow of the Ukrainians or the Vietnamese.

As regards foreign students studying in Poland, in 2005 there were 2,332 Erasmus students who came to Poland, and 4,446 in 2008.

3. Conclusions for further research on VET

On the basis of the research, the following measures in the field of VET may be proposed:

- Incorporation of VET curricula which may be helpful in finding a better job in all types of vocational schools;
- Using vocational qualifications standards also by foreigners working in Poland. The standards can help verify qualifications and knowledge acquired by the candidates (Kwiatkowski et al., 2007). As such, they are mostly intended to be used by employers, but could also be employed by future employees to check whether they fulfil the specific job requirements;
- Continuing the research on ECVET. The credit points system will help verify the level at which qualifications in a given field have been gained;
- Validation of competences acquired in non-formal and informal learning (Narwojsz et al., 2008). Confirming qualifications acquired through experience is extremely important as not all competences are gained in the course of formal learning. Currently, research on non-formal and informal competences is conducted on a very limited scale (by the Ministry of Education’s team working on the National Qualifications Framework) because these are very difficult issues to tackle. Nevertheless, such research is needed because validation of such competences will greatly enhance vocational mobility of employees in the labour market.

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Theme 3: Correspondence between VET Programmes and the Labour Market

1. Objectives of research and problems to be solved

The Polish VET system is strongly centralised and formalised. The prevalence of formal vocational education paths, lack of a system for validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes or a system for forecasting future demand for occupations and qualifications – all these are important reasons for difficulties with ensuring correspondence or coherence between VET programmes and the needs of the labour market and the economy. In addition, the formal education system is suffering from a great deal of inertia and lags behind technical and technological changes, and as a result cannot keep pace with the development of the services sector and the needs of knowledge-based society and economy

The Polish system of vocational education and training is regulated by the Education System Act of 7 September 1991 (*Dziennik Ustaw* 2004 no. 256, item 2572 as amended) and the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act of 20 April 2004 (*Dziennik Ustaw* no. 99 item 1001 as amended). The resultant division of competencies between the two governmental departments: Ministry of National Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy calls for a special kind of cooperation. A comparative analysis of the Polish VET system with similar systems in other European countries (e.g. England, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria) and the guidelines laid down in EU documents help to identify problem areas which need to be studied in more depth, viz.:

- (c) How to modify obsolete vocational training programmes based on occupations which reflect industrial relations from the period of the dominance of heavy and mining industry?
- (d) How serious is the shortage of service and business occupations and occupations which are useful for knowledge-based society and economy?
- (e) How to make flexible the VET system which is currently based on too long periods of instruction?
- (f) Is vocational education and training based on modular curricula effective in the Polish context?
- (g) What needs to be changed in the legal and organisational system of the Polish education to make modular education and training bring the VET outcomes closer to the requirements of the labour market and of the economy?
- (h) How to increase the transparency of the system of qualifications in order to facilitate free flow of labour?

- (i) How to strengthen the poor correlation between VET occupations vis-à-vis the labour market and the economy, both nationally and regionally?
- (j) How to make an effective use of the vocational qualifications standards developed by social partners in the sphere of education (sectoral organisations, trade unions, employer associations) in VET planning?
- (k) Is the system of evaluating quality and effectiveness of vocational education and training effective?
- (l) What system for validation and recognition of non-formal and informal qualifications should be adopted to enhance educational mobility without affecting the quality of the qualifications awarded?
- (m) How many levels should the National Qualifications Framework have to accurately describe the society's educational activity and the Polish system of qualifications?

These issues and at the same time research objectives reflect the disturbed equilibrium between labour demand and labour supply. This, in turn, generates structural unemployment which also affects vocational school leavers (GUS, 2007).

The issue of unemployment is correlated with the issue of VET quality. Studies suggest that one in two vocational school leavers demonstrates lack of ability to perform work for which they have been trained, not through their fault, but due to the detachment of vocational education from the realities of the workplace (Kabaj, 2004).

Measures to address this situation should aim to update learning and educational contents in order to link them with the actual job requirements, and to plan anew a quality system for VET, based on external certification and validation of vocational qualifications obtained in different settings, also through work experience.

2. Results of educational activities and research findings

Coordination of VET and the labour market using a classification of occupations

In Poland, there are two classifications which describe the structure of occupations. One reflects the situation on the labour market, and the other is used for purposes of school-based vocational education. The VET Classification of Occupations (*Klasyfikacja Zawodów Szkolnictwa Zawodowego*) (Ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 26 June 2007 on the VET classification of occupations), *Dziennik Ustaw* 2007 no. 124 item 860) was not always consistent with the Classification of Occupations and Specialties (*Klasyfikacja Zawodów i Specjalności*) for labour market needs (Ordinance of the Minister of Economy and Labour of Social Policy of 8 December 2004 on the Classification of Occupations and Specialties for the needs of the labour market and the scope of its application, *Dziennik Ustaw*

2004 no. 265 item 2644). Until 2002, the two classifications were not harmonised with each other, which could be seen as an epitome of the chasm between the world of work and the world of education.

Based on the European ISCO-88(COM) standard, the Classification of Occupations and Specialties is a document which classifies all occupations and specialties which are performed in Poland (over 1700). It is used inter alia to compile labour market statistics in the field of employment, unemployment, level of vocational qualifications, and allows for drawing international comparisons. The Classification is also employed in labour market analyses and forecasts, and thereby informs long-term VET planning activity (Gruza i Lelińska, 2003).

The Ministry of National Education uses the Classification of Occupations and Specialties only indirectly, via the VET Classification of Occupations (the so-called “school classification”). This is a classification which now contains 208 occupations taught in the formal, school-based VET system. Owing to records concerning school leavers and their labour market careers, which are now compulsory and must be kept by vocational schools, a national database has been developed with information on learned occupations and numbers of school leavers. Information from the database is used in analyses of workforce supply to the labour market and, in consequence, when set against analyses of demand for qualified workforce in the economy, helps shape the relationships between the education system and the labour market.

In 2006, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) was disbanded, together with its Interdepartmental Team for Labour Forecasting, which had prepared forecasts concerning demands for individual occupations based on the Classification of Occupations and Specialties. As a result, there is an acute need for a system of monitoring and long-term planning of labour market demand for specific occupations, both nationally and on a regional scale.

Short-term forecasts for occupations and qualifications needed for the society and the economy are made when the National Action Plan for Employment is prepared and approved. The Plan is stipulated by the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act of 20 April 2004. On the other hand, the diagnostic function is discharged by the monitoring of surplus and deficit occupations based on the Classification of Occupations and Specialties as well as statistics kept by the labour offices which register the unemployed and collect information on job vacancies. Under the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act of 20 April 2004, running the monitoring of surplus and deficit occupations rests with the provincial (voivodship) and district (powiat) governments. The national data are compiled and analysed by the Labour Market Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The data are collected for individual occupations, groups of occupations and sections of the Polish Classification of Activities (PKD) as well as for individual voivodships and poviats. For instance, on the basis of the 2007 data, we can see that there are several occupations which are characterised by a high level of unemployment and a large scale of supply. These occupations include in particular: shop assistant, general worker, bricklayer,

locksmith, tailor as well as occupations related to economics and administration. In most voivodships, the list of deficit occupations included: telemarketer, administration worker, general worker, as well as carers in educational establishments and nursing homes, child carers, truck drivers and tax officers. The surplus occupations in most regions included agriculture and horticulture occupations, economic assistants, economists and educators. It should be observed that although the monitoring of deficit and surplus occupations, which is mostly based on the statistics for registered unemployment, does not fully reflect the demand-supply relationship in the labour market, it can nevertheless provide the basis for defining the directions of training for the unemployed, in tune with the demand reported by employers in the local labour markets (Zawody..., 2008).

In the near future, the labour market statistics will be aided by an IT tool, the so-called National System for Labour Market Monitoring, which will make it possible to accumulate data from individual district and provincial labour offices.

Unfortunately, the system of monitoring surplus and deficit occupations operated by labour offices is not used by the education system. The mechanism whereby ministers competent for individual occupations propose changes in the VET Classification of Occupations proved to be inefficient as there are no objective studies or surveys concerning anticipated demand for qualifications in individual sectors of the economy.

Adaptation of VET learning contents to labour market needs through centrally-developed modular curricula

In Poland, there is a long-established tradition to use centrally-developed curricula, prepared under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education. The Education System Act of 7 September 1991 decentralised programming down to the level of individual schools, and allowed for adopting individual curricula on one condition: that local curricula must be consistent with the national core curriculum for general education and with core curricula for individual occupations included in the VET Classification of Occupations. Even though freedom regarding programming in education is a fact, very many schools continue to choose curricula which have been centrally prepared.

The years 2004-2008 saw the implementation of the project entitled: “Developing innovative VET curricula”. The project was supervised by the Department of Vocational and Continuing Education of the Ministry of National Education and the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education (KOWEZiU) in Warsaw; it was delivered by a consortium composed of: Institute for Sustainable Technologies – National Research Institute in Radom and the Teacher In-service Training Centre in Łódź, and co-financed from the European Social Fund and the Sectoral Operational Programme – Human Resources Development. As part of the project, modular curricula were prepared for 131 occupations included in the VET Classification of Occupations, in addition to 3438 educational packages intended for modular education and training. Altogether, these modular curricula cover 185 of occupations taught in the school system of a total of 208 identified in the Classification.

Unfortunately, as yet there have been no studies to evaluate the impact of new modular curricula on employability and the situation of school leavers in the labour market. Particularly, there are no statistics showing the situation of vocational school leavers after they complete school.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is introducing modern modular curricula for non-school based settings and continuing education. In 2002-2004, the PHARE 2000 project entitled “National System of Vocational Training”, which inter alia included work aimed to develop and disseminate “modular vocational curricula based on the Modular Skills approach of ILO”, was implemented. As part of this exercise, 89 vocational modular curricula for occupations identified in the Classification of Occupations and Specialties were developed. They are available from the Internet database at: www.standardyiszkolenia.praca.gov.pl.

This initiative to introduce modular curricula into VET is important in view of the fact that, over time, the Polish VET model will probably change, and will shift from being theory-based to skills-based. Its consequences will only be known in the medium-term period (10 years); after such a lapse of time, we can also expect that research will be conducted to find out whether modular curricula have helped to improve the linkages between VET and the labour market or not.

The current labour market situation of school leavers and youth is difficult, due to a number of reasons. Studies on youth are based on registered unemployment statistics, supplemented by the results of the BAEL survey, published by GUS. For instance, the study entitled “Youth on the labour market in 2008” provides information on the unemployment among young people up to 25 years of age, unemployed graduates up to 27 years of age and the unemployed within the first 12 months after completing education. These data indirectly inform about the insufficient adaptation of VET curricula to the labour market and an unsatisfactory use of the modern curriculum offer by vocational schools and continuing education centres. For instance, the study concludes that the activity of youth has remained low for years, with merely one in three young people active in the labour market and nearly 3.6 million people aged 15-24 economically passive, most often due to learning or upgrading qualifications. It can be said therefore that an increased educational activity of youth is a way to escape unemployment as improving vocational qualifications is a viable alternative for unemployed youth. This is facilitated by a dynamic development of the educational sector, especially higher education. It should be observed, however, that unemployment also affects university graduates. At the end of 1999 only some 2% unemployed had higher education, as compared to 8.5% at the end of 2008 (Młodzież..., 2009).

Studies on occupational contents and development of national vocational qualifications standards

Work is currently under way to prepare the National Vocational Qualifications Standards, which can tangibly strengthen the ties between job requirements and the programme offer of

the VET system. The legal basis for this is the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act of 20 April 2004.

The finalised standards are documents recommended by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and may be used by individuals and institutions for various purposes, e.g. preparing examination requirement standards for VET, core curricula for individual occupations, curricula for vocational education and further education, adaptation of job offers to the qualifications of job seekers, evaluation of the “skills gap” of job seekers and the unemployed or preparing programmes for vocational mobility and placements events as part of vocational training.

In 2006-2007, the SOP HRD project entitled: “Development and dissemination of national vocational qualifications standards” was implemented. The aim of the project was to explore qualifications for performing specific occupations/specialties as required by employers, and to prepare 200 national vocational qualifications standards (Kwiatkowski i inni, 2007).

A total set of 253 national vocational qualifications standards is made available via the Internet database at the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (at: <http://www.standardyiskolenia.praca.gov.pl>).

The only study conducted in connection with vocational qualifications standards coincided with the implementation of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy project entitled “The development and popularisation of national vocational qualifications standards” in the years 2006-2007. The results of opinion polls among employers and representatives of the educational community confirmed the potential usefulness of the qualifications standards for employment policy and coordination of the labour market and the education sector (Kramek and Jeruszka, 2007). Unfortunately, two years after the project completion it can only be subjectively concluded that due to the lack of research the potential inherent in the qualifications standards is not fully used.

Efforts aimed to develop the National Qualifications Framework

In October 2008, the Ministry of National Education commenced work on the development and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. This is done as part of the project entitled: “Stocktaking of competences and qualifications for the Polish labour market and the development of the National Qualifications Framework model”, Measure 3.4, Submeasure 3.4.1., Priority III “A high-quality education system”, Operational Programme Human Capital. In 2009, substantial assumptions for the draft Polish qualifications framework along with a plan of further conceptual and implementation work were finalised. These assumptions include (Chmielecka, 2009):

- (a) proposed definitions of the qualifications levels along with descriptors;
- (b) analysis of references to the European Qualifications Framework;

- (c) analysis of methods for validation of learning outcomes;
- (d) methodology of an empirical study of the national stocktaking of qualifications and competences;
- (e) preliminary identification of changes needed in the regulations to introduce the National Qualifications Framework;
- (f) assumptions concerning organisational arrangements involved in the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework.

International cooperation related to the project has been established with Austria, Scotland and Croatia. The project will continue up to 2012.

A full-range empirical study of the national stocktaking of qualifications and competences is planned at the second stage of project implementation, in 2010-2011 (Sitek et al., 2009).

Efforts aimed to develop the a new model of core curriculum for vocational education

In autumn 2008, the National Centre for Supporting Vocational and Continuing Education started the project entitled “Improving core curricula as the key to modernisation of the VET system”. The project is systemic in nature and its implementation is envisaged until 2013. It is implemented as part of the OP HC programme, Priority III, A high-quality educational system, Measure 3.3. Improving quality of education, Submeasure 3.3.3. Modernisation of learning content and teaching methods.

The overriding goal of the project is to improve the quality of VET through modernisation and verification of core curricula for individual occupations with a view to adapting them to the needs of knowledge-based economy. To achieve this, it is necessary to update and modernise learning contents included in core curricula. The preliminary work will take account of the employers’ expectations vis-à-vis vocational school leavers. Improving the core curricula will help ensure the coherence of VET with the requirements of the economy and enhance the quality of vocational training. As part of the project, the following tasks will be implemented (<http://pokl.koweziu.edu.pl>):

- (a) preparing methodologies for evaluation of the compliance of core curricula for individual occupations with VET legislation and pilot implementation of methodologies;
- (b) preparing methodologies for examination of core curricula in terms of qualifications gained in groups of occupations, and defining qualifications specific to individual occupations and those which make up an occupation;
- (c) surveying qualifications and competences expected from vocational school leavers by employers;

- (d) developing a new methodology for designing core curricula and modernising core curricula for individual occupations in line with the requirements of knowledge-based economy;
- (e) developing modernised curricula for individual occupations and sample curricula for specialties.

The task related to the survey of qualifications and competences expected from vocational school leavers by employers is currently under way and its results as yet are not known.

Efforts aimed to develop a new model of external vocational exam

The new model of the external vocational exam is being prepared as part of the project entitled “External vocational exam. Analysis, diagnosis and prospects for change”, Operational Programme Human Capital, Priority III, Measure 3.2., Development of external examinations system. The project, commissioned by the Central Examination Board of the Ministry of National Education, is implemented by the Centre for Science Policy and Higher Education Studies of Warsaw University. It was commenced in 2008 and will continue until 2013. In 2008–2009, preliminary studies were carried out, which included the following issues (Białecki i Drogosz-Zabłocka, 2009):

- (a) group interviews and in-depth interviews on the topic: “Vocational exam. Opinions of employers, teachers, examiners and representatives of the ministries”;
- (b) survey questionnaires “My vocational exam” addressed to pupils of the final years of basic vocational, technical secondary and post-secondary schools;
- (c) expert’s study “Grouping of occupations” – with the aim of creating groups of related occupations;
- (d) expert’s study “Occupations in vocational education. Grouping of occupations at the level of technician in the context of vocational qualifications standards” – with the aim of identifying common vocational qualifications in a group of related occupations;
- (e) expert’s study “Statistical analysis of pupils’ achievements in lower secondary, upper secondary school and vocational exams” – looking for linkages between achievements at the lower secondary and upper secondary (maturity) exams and the vocational exam.

As regards correspondence between VET curricula and the requirements of the labour market and the economy, interesting information can be found in the last listed expert’s study, “Statistical analysis of pupils’ achievements in lower secondary, upper secondary school and vocational exams”. The authors set out to find answers to the following questions (Minkiewicz, 2009):

- Do the results of the vocational exam depend on the knowledge and skills of lower secondary school leavers?

- Is there a close correlation between the results of the vocational exam and the maturity exam?
- Do the results of the vocational exam depend on the type of the completed vocational school?
- Do the results of the vocational exam depend on the learned occupation?
- Do the results of the vocational exam vary from region to region?

The data obtained indicate that the results of the vocational exam are affected by choices concerning the actual progress of an individual's educational path as well as earlier educational attainment measured by the results of the lower secondary school and maturity exams. There is also a correlation between the results of the exam and the occupation learned. It has been proved that there are substantial disparities between the pass rate of the written part of the vocational exam and the pass rate of the practical part, to the disadvantage of the practical part. In the latter case, we can see the reasons for the difficulties that school leavers experience in the transition from the world of school to that of work. Deficiencies in practical skills decide about the candidates' low usefulness for work. Research has shown that there is a negative selection of youth for vocational schools: poorer results in the lower secondary school determine the choice of the vocational school, and later underpin poor results at the vocational exam.

3. Conclusions and premises for further research

The results of most of the activities described above, aimed to increase linkages between VET and the requirements of the economy and the labour market, will be known in the future. These are important efforts in view of the fact that the Polish vocational education system is strongly criticised for training which does not match the existing demand. The key objections raised in the report prepared by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Sztanderska, Wojciechowski, 2008) are the following:

- secondary vocational education the least corresponds with demand for labour;
- nearly 70% of secondary vocational school leavers negatively assess the competences they have acquired at school vis-à-vis their workplace tasks;
- teaching practical skills is the weakest link in the Polish vocational schools;
- local governments lack the tools to control the quality of vocational schools that they are in charge of, and local education authorities are not prepared to assess programme implementation from the labour market perspective;
- vocational training is expensive and therefore local governments prefer to focus on, and develop general education, which is cheaper;
- the professional knowledge of teachers in vocational schools is in many cases outdated.

Future research on ensuring correspondence of VET curricula should fill in gaps in the knowledge concerning such issues as: effectiveness of new curricula, especially modular ones; the quality of the teaching process and the vocational exam; coordination of the labour market sphere and education using such tools as vocational qualifications standards; forecasting demand for vocational qualifications to be able to reliably plan a network of schools and directions of vocational education.

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Theme 4: Transitions

The paper has been divided into three parts, based on most recent research findings concerning different types of transitions, viz.: (1) from secondary and higher education to the labour market, (2) labour market re-entry, e.g. following a maternity leave, and (3) from the labour market to retirement.

1. Secondary and higher education

At the national level, VET policy and secondary education is coordinated and formulated by the Minister of National Education, whereas responsibility for tertiary education rests with the Minister of Science and Higher Education. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy provides varied supports to the vocational education system as it considers modernisation of the training offer as a pre-condition for effective vocational insertion and social activation of citizens, in particular vocational school leavers. The basic statistics concerning the number of leavers from individual educational establishments are regularly published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS).

Various voivodships (provinces) conduct regular surveys concerning labour market entry of secondary school leavers; they also conduct ad-hoc analyses on how to ensure flexible school-labour market transition of upper secondary school pupils. The report entitled: “Migration trajectories in the Podkarpackie province – report from a survey of upper secondary school students” published in August 2009 reveals that nearly one in two pupils in the surveyed schools admitted taking up employment during the previous year (48%). The number of boys who had worked during the year preceding the survey was definitely higher than that of girls (nearly twice as high) (65.6% and 32.8%, respectively). Pupils of basic vocational schools and technical secondary schools were more active (63.6% and 60.6% of all working youth, respectively) than pupils in specialised secondary schools (39.5%) and general education secondary schools (36.3%). The curricula in vocational schools and technical secondary schools, intended mainly to provide occupation-oriented training, offered better conditions for finding jobs more quickly, also during the period of school instruction. This allowed learners to acquire experiences even before they left school, and to find work more easily than general secondary school leavers. Nearly three in four pupils stated that the work they did was not connected in any way with what they had learnt at school (70.1%). One pupil in ten said that their work was loosely connected with the skills acquired at school (11,8%), and one in five – that this connection was strong or very strong (8.9% and 9.2% respectively). The strongest correlation between the type of work performed and the knowledge acquired at school was visible among basic vocational school pupils. This correlation was “high” for one in four pupils from this type of school (23.9%). It should be noted however that nearly a half of this group took up work unrelated to their school specialisation (48.8%). This shows why so many school leavers have problems with finding work after they finish school: what they learnt at school was a far cry from what employers are looking for. Nearly a half of the surveyed

pupils had already had some work experiences, with twice as many boys as girls. One in two pupils had already taken up work in their place of residence, one in three – in their district (powiat), and one in four had worked abroad. The work they had performed was very rarely connected with their skills or qualifications. Pupils whose work did not match in any way the knowledge they acquired at school prevailed in all of the groups. Nevertheless, the largest number of those whose work had no or little correlation with their school specialisation were pupils of general and specialised secondary schools, whilst pupils of basic vocational schools performed work aligned with their future occupations the most frequently.

In 2009, the District Labour Office (PUP) in Poznań published its tenth annual “Report on the unemployment of upper secondary school leavers from Poznań and the Poznań district”, which covered nearly 48,000 school leavers from 302 secondary schools for youth and adults. In the 2007/2008 school year, only 89 persons of the pool of basic vocational school leavers were registered with the labour office. Technical and vocational schools produced 132 unemployed, general secondary schools – 179, specialised secondary schools – 53, post-secondary vocational colleges – 65, and higher education institutions – 911. As of 2004, the overall number of school leavers from upper secondary schools registered as unemployed gradually decreased. By the end of February 2009, 1,429 school leavers from the 2007/2008 class registered with the District Labour Office (PUP) in Poznań. As compared with 2006/2007, this is a similar number (1,497 people). It should be observed that over the recent years covered by the analysis, the number of registered school leavers from individual levels of education fell by: over 90% for basic vocational school leavers; over 77% for technical secondary school leavers; over 63% - for specialised secondary school leavers; over 62% for graduates from post-secondary vocational colleges and over 34% for vocational secondary school leavers. For individual levels of education, the unemployment rates are the following: 8.44% for basic vocational schools; 7.29% for technical secondary schools and equivalent; 2.50% for general secondary schools; 7.56% for specialised secondary schools; 2.94% for post-secondary vocational colleges and 2.61% for higher education institutions. According to the PUP’s Report, mismatches between vocational specialisations offered and the local market needs as well as low flexibility of schools’ educational offer are a serious problem. There is also a pressing need to improve the quality of instruction (particularly with regard to vocational subjects), to provide opportunities for gaining additional qualifications during school-based instruction and for acquiring vocational experiences through placements and mobility.

In May 2007, a survey entitled “Educational and vocational plans and preferences of upper secondary school pupils in the Zachodniopomorskie province” was carried out. In order to be able to find employment after completion of secondary school, pupils took up various additional forms of instruction outside school. Most pupils took private lessons (56.5%) and/or attended: courses (50.4%), training programmes (19.8%) and work placements in enterprises (8.4%). Work placements which were most frequently chosen by upper secondary school pupils in the Zachodniopomorskie province were: placements in schools (68.4%) and enterprises (60.9%). Much less frequently, pupils took part in practical activities organised by

Practical Training Centres and other institutions across the country (13.5%), and very seldom – in placements abroad (9.6%). Those pupils who took part in placements organised by schools thought very highly about their usefulness. In their opinion, placements abroad were the most useful (with 80.6% of “rather useful” and “very useful” replies), and the least useful were placements in other types of institutions (64.8% of responses). Notably, placements abroad were very well assessed (64.5%); this can be regarded as pupils’ summative evaluation of both usefulness and attractiveness of such placements and a statement of preferences concerning the future shape of out-of-school practical activities, the organisation of which rests with the school. Also, a survey was carried out to determine the extent to which pupils used vocational counselling services. Young people from the surveyed upper secondary schools very seldom made use of vocational guidance services: less than one in ten students consulted school vocational guidance counsellors (8.9% of the respondents), labour office advisors (8.2% of the respondents) or the school counselling service (6.3% of the respondents). Pupils from basic vocational and general secondary schools used the services of school advisors most frequently, and students of post-secondary schools most often sought the assistance of labour office advisors, whereas pupils of general secondary schools most frequently made use of school counselling (psychologist’s) services. The most frequently listed reasons why pupils sought advisors’ and counsellors’ assistance were: help in choosing school to attend at the next stage of education; help in finding work; better labour market orientation (about district labour office advisors). The reasons why pupils chose not to seek such help included lack of knowledge about such advisors and counsellors and that they could offer valuable advice); the respondents did not seek work and therefore saw no need to seek this type of advice; they were doubtful about the knowledge and qualifications of labour market advisors or were looking for work on their own.

In the period from January 2006 to December 2007, as part of the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development, the Department of Labour Market of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy conducted a research project entitled: “A survey of career activity among school leavers in the context of the ‘First job’ programme”. The study showed that the level of educational attainment substantially determined the respondents’ employability.

The survey revealed that over 71% of working youth had at least secondary education, including 25.7% with higher education and 22% with vocational education. Similarly to previous years, the study showed that working women have a much higher level of educational attainment than men. Among men, more than one in three respondents had less than secondary education, as compared to twice as few women in this category of educational attainment. There have always been marked differences in the level of education of working youth between urban and rural areas. In 2006, 80.6% of urban dwellers and 57.3% of rural dwellers had at least secondary education, while the share of people with higher education was 33.2% for urban youth and 14.5% for rural youth. These figures can be viewed as proofs of the persisting backwardness of the rural areas in Poland. The level of education of those who work in this age category substantially affects both the level and qualification structure

of the entire population of economically active population. In 2006, the aggregate employment rate for youth aged 15-29 was 41.3%. The highest such rates were recorded in the group with the highest level of educational attainment – 76.2%, and the lowest, predictably, in the group with lower secondary or lower education – 8.7%. As compared with employment figures from 1998, these figures were lower for all levels of education with the exception of general secondary education.

The surveys show that young people with basic vocational and technical secondary education are in a better situation regarding employment than young people with general secondary education, which may be seen as a proof that these types of schools offer valuable education. The labour market forces young people to develop skills which enable them to cope in a job seeking situation. Emphasis should be placed on developing a positive attitude to work and the job-seeking process in young people. They should familiarise themselves with the services offered by District Labour Offices and opportunities offered by job brokerage and vocational counselling services (Gawrońska E., 2005).

2. Labour market re-entry

Research studies concerning re-entering the labour market mostly focus on the so-called risk groups, e.g. parents returning to work after maternity or child care leave, the elderly, people with low qualifications, people with disabilities and members of ethnic minorities, particularly the Roma community.

According to a Millward Brown report *Mama w pracy* [Mummy at work], one in four women (23%) returned to work directly after their maternity leave, while others most often did so during the several months that followed (a half of them – before the 7th or 8th month). Mothers aged 36 or more, well-educated and holding higher positions at work were the first to return to work. Among mothers who had been working prior to having a child, 60% returned to the same workplace, whereas 16% were made redundant immediately after the expiry of their maternity leave or were forced to resign. At the same time, 24% of women working before having a child declared that they quit work on their own initiative. After their return to work, mothers would nearly always get the same (85%) or comparable (12%) job; the cases of either promotion or degradation at that moment were extremely rare (Kordasiewicz A., 2007). These data cannot be regarded as fully satisfactory because the 2006 *Mama w pracy* survey revealed that one in five women postponed having a child fearing that this would mean a loss of job, one third of the respondents claimed that they would have problems at work if they got pregnant and one in seven delayed with informing the employer about her pregnancy. Even though the survey was conducted in 2006, its findings remain valid as they were quoted by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister in February 2009.

Studies were also carried out on the situation of people aged 50+ wishing to return to the labour market. The report “The labour market and the unemployed aged 50+. Barriers and opportunities” (Rysz – Kowalczyk et al., 2007) indicates that the group in question has a very pessimistic outlook at its employment prospects, and see their age (63%), poor health, lack of job offers in their place of residence (8%) and lack of required education (6%) as the main

obstacles. The long-term unemployed (84%) are of the opinion that employers have a strongly negative approach to people who are past 50 and look for a job. Two thirds of the respondents experiences turning down their job application specifically on account of their age. This in turn indicates that age is formally the actual criterion of individual's usefulness for work. Employers themselves are little involved in social activation of the unemployed aged 50+. As few as 16% of private companies and 36% of state enterprises employed older-aged unemployed as part of intervention measured. In 2008, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy conducted a survey entitled "Labour market situation of young people and people in older age groups". The increasing share of people in the working age (revealed in the survey) was mostly the effect of a highly dynamic growth in the number of the population in an immobile age (i.e. aged 45-59/64). In 2007, the immobile age population accounted for 24.3% of the population at large (as compared to 21% in 2000), while the mobile age population represented 40.1% (as compared to 39.8%). The worst figures were revealed for young people and those in the pre-retirement age. In the second quarter of 2008, one in three persons aged 15-24 (activity ratio of 32.2%, i.e. 0.2pp less than a year earlier) and as few as 6% of persons in the post-working age (60+/65+) remained active. Over the recent years, there has been a dynamic increase in the percentage of the unemployed in older age groups, coupled with a visible decrease in the number of young unemployed. From year to year, both the number and the share of the unemployed in older age groups are on the increase, even in those periods when a decrease can be observed in younger age groups. Despite the anticipated demographic changes and the need to step up efforts to increase activation of people in older age groups, smooth school-labour market transition still remains a challenge in a situation of persistently high unemployment. On the other hand, even though they lack job experience, young people find employment faster (Ministry of Labour, 2008).

The programme "Solidarity of generations – measures to increase economic activity of people aged 50+" revealed that in 2007 the number of people aged 50-64 in Poland totalled nearly 6.4 million, with another 6 million people in the retirement age. Even though the population of Poland is relatively young demographically by comparison with a majority of EU countries, due to the low economic activity and employment of people aged 55-64, the problem of age dependency is much more acute than in most EU countries. The survey of economic activity of the population indicates that people aged 50+ who are economically inactive and/or unemployed experience the most problems with finding employment as they are characterised by a very low mobility from inactivity/unemployment to employment. A mere 3.7% of people who declared they had been economically inactive a year prior to the survey found a job, while nearly 95% of them still remained inactive. In most cases, being unemployed several years before gaining retirement rights is associated with inactivity until the moment of gaining pension rights. Only almost 19% of people aged 50-64 who declared that they had been unemployed a year prior to the survey were working when the survey was conducted. Returning to work of people who have already been out of work is much more difficult. Likewise, participation in continuing professional development of employees aged 50+ is also low. In general terms, participation levels in adult education are extremely low in Poland. In 2007, only about 5% of people aged 25-64 were receiving formal or non-formal

education or training, with people aged 50+ accounting for only 7.6% of this group. Although the problem of low economic activity of people aged 50+ is present in various strategic documents and in legislation, the directions for action that they indicate are rather imprecise and usually incorporated into measures targeted at a broader group of addressees. Activation measures addressed to people aged 50–64 are conducted on a relatively limited scale and usually target the unemployed rather than people in work. However, there are no support measures for people in this age group who would return to the labour market following a period of inactivity (caused e.g. by illness). Social activation of people in this age group is primarily effected through the poviats (district labour offices), based on the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions Act.

The labour market situation of the unemployed is also unsettling. In the first quarter of 2008, people economically inactive accounted for 75.7% of people with disabilities, people in work – 21.5%, and the unemployed – 2.8%. The labour market situation of people with disabilities is much more difficult than that of non-disabled people. A high level of inactivity of people with disabilities – particularly significant in case of those in working age – is a major social problem. Disabled people living in rural areas, not connected with a farm, are in the most difficult situation – although it is agriculture which gives employment to many disabled people, especially the elderly and those poorly educated. The majority of people with disabilities are employees (72%), self-employed and employers (19.4%). There is also a small group of people who assist family members (8.6%). (Duda J., 2008).

As regards ethnic minorities, the level of unemployment among the Roma population in Poland reaches 90%. The lack of work is accompanied by difficult living conditions and social isolation. Therefore, comprehensive measures are needed to equalise the educational opportunities of both adult Roma and their children, in addition to promotion and information activities aimed to change the negative image in the society and increase confidence in this ethnic group (Bogdanowicz J., 2009). The aims of the project entitled: “The Roma among others. Popularising a positive image of the Roma community in Radom” included: improving vocational competences, increasing participation of members of the Roma community living in the city of Radom in social and civic life through involving them in the implementation of activities intended to promote the Roma culture among the local society; improving the educational opportunities of the Roma children as part of non-formal education; organising a workshop on vocational insertion, as well as many other courses, including an intensive course in English, a driving course, a basic computer course, as well as starting a course for hairdressers and forklift truck operators.

Even though policy makers do initiate activities to make the aforementioned disadvantaged groups more economically active, the implemented policies do not seem to produce any tangible results.

3. Transition to retirement

The ageing of the workforce raises some concerns about the collapse of the pension system and shortage of labour in the near future. Traditionally, salaries and compensation are connected with age and length of service, and with the early retirement during restructuring, which is quite popular. Giving consent to the earlier retirement of older employees, which is not preceded by an analysis of the pool of skills of the remaining staff, may have adverse consequences for the future of the enterprise or for the present or future employees. Every system which allows for an earlier retirement should be connected with long-term corporate strategy, to avoid a situation in which the “outflow of skills” leaves the company with insufficiently skilled staff for a long period of time. Some of the employers are already aware of the potential inherent in the 50+ group, and note such strengths as experience and general sagacity, reliability, availability, ability to work in a team, accuracy and communication skills, acquired during the many years of work (Mól D., 2008). In the recent years, various kinds of innovative projects have been implemented in Poland as part of the EQUAL Community Initiative addressed to the 50+ group. As a result of these activities, social awareness related to the labour market for elderly people is increasing; partnerships including employees, employers, trade unions, as well as public and private organisations and institutions are formed. These partnerships organise training and other programmes allowing those in the 50+ age group to acquire new vocational skills and – even more importantly – gain self-confidence and trust in their capabilities. The Development Partnership in the Warmia and Mazury province, comprising the “INFO” National News Agency, “Nowe Media” Foundation for Building a Knowledge-Based Society, Warmia and Mazury Private Employers Association and the “Olsztyn” Electronic Computing Technology Company completed a project entitled “Mentoring through IT”. The aim of the project was to work out an effective model for mutual transfer of knowledge between the 50+ age group and people entering the labour market for the first time, using IT tools, especially the computer and computer applications. In 2008, the Academy for the Development of Philanthropy in Poland (ARFP) was implementing the project entitled “Benefits of Maturity”, which promotes the benefits of employing staff aged 50+ among employers and the society at large by media campaigns, training programmes and seminars organised practically throughout the year. An important component of the project is promoting the idea of age management, including examples and implementation practices, as these issues are still not very well known among Polish enterprises (large, medium-sized and small alike). Experts, employers and policy makers do not have any doubts that the 50+ group represents a sizeable and serious potential in the labour market. In addition to that, the current 50-year-olds and those who will join this age group soon are people with completely different features than their counterparts 15 years ago – they have more experience in working in the conditions of market economy, are better educated and ready for change, contrary to popular opinions about this age group. For this reason, the Government, employers and social organisations should undertake large-scale and diverse activities to allow the 50+ generation to maintain economically active for the longest period possible.

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