

SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS - EMPLOYMENT PLANNING, DIBRA'S DISTRICT CASE (ALBANIA)

Denis Lushi¹

¹PhD candidate at Tirana University, History - Philology Faculty, Geography Department

Address: Lagjia "Nazmi Rushiti" Peshkopi, Dibër, Shqipëri

Contact: Email: ccf_denislushi@yahoo.com Mob. 00355 69 24 64 173

Abstract

Albania has reached epidemic increase in number of young people attending university, at home and abroad. This had positive social and economic impacts, such as professional human resources, improvement of living conditions, social growth, etc. However there are also shown the socio-economic issues related to unemployment of students. Statistics show an inverse proportion between the very large number of graduate students and the very small number of jobs positions, in national level. Study aimed at identifying the socio-economic issues related to graduate student - employment planning process, to achieve his object in finding regulatory mechanisms for this situation. The Dibra's district is taken as a case study. Started by the economic poverty, the youth of Dibra and other northern districts have more than three years that can be educated in Peshkopia Faculty, University of Durrës. Graduation of the first generation of students in 2012 resulted in 34 graduate students. After one year it has been observed that only 7-8 students are employed, 10 students pursuing master studies, and others are unemployed. This situation is seen as a social and economic problem for this target group of students, and others after them. Using the method of observation and interviewing, analysis of official statistics and employment policy, labor market survey, etc., the study has brought concrete results and suggestions to balance the graduate students - employment proportion, in long-terms, enabling a structured planning of this report, with the aim to minimize this socio-economic problems in the future.

Keywords: *student, planning, employment policy, socio-economic issues*

Introduction

Albania is considered as a country with a relatively young population and in fast growth. Population growth in a country is supposed to be accompanied by a right ratio of the population's number and its needs to be employed. In the case of Albania, after the 90s until today, there is a high level of unemployment. In 1992 the unemployment rate was around 26%, but in 2012 we have two conflicting values of the unemployment rate. According to INSTAT, the unemployment rate is estimated around 12.8%¹, while according to a study of EMA² with the data of Labor Ministry³ and the Progress Reports of the European Commission, results of unemployment rate is 13,32%.

¹ *The official value of 12.8% (2012) or 141.755 registered unemployed persons is unrealistic and paradoxical. In 2009 the unemployment rate was 13.6% or 141,310 registered unemployed persons. So for the period 2009 - 2012 there was an increase of 445 unemployed individuals, therefore the unemployment rate is not 12.8%. The table of "Labour Force Balance" www.instat.gov.al.*

² *European Movement in Albania – EMA (2012): Research, p.12, Tirana, Albania.*

³ *Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities – MPÇSSHB.*

The high value of unemployment in 1992 was result of the communist system collapse that was associated with the closure of many state enterprises. By the need for restructuring the country's economy became mass privatization of state assets and gave birth the phenomenon of self-employment of the population. Countrywide, about 63% of those that are considered in work, are self-employed and only 37% are employed with payment⁴. After 1995, the unemployment rate begun to decrease because a large number of registered unemployed came out from the unemployment scheme, because they benefited land under the land law no. 7.501, and another part of them have emigrated abroad. Some of the factors that have contributed to fluctuations of unemployment in Albania are: the new jobs requests for the formal - public sector; the existence of uncontrolled informal sector; the qualification and education of human resources; the information rate⁵ etc.

It is a real fact that Albania has made modest progress to solve the problem of unemployment. Initially was approved Law no. 7.995 / 1995 "To promote employment"⁶ which supports the implementation of programs for the development of employment through the National Employment Service (NES) and the National Employment Fund (NEP). NES is a national public service that report to the minister of labor. This service has a network of 12 regional offices and 24 local offices and deal with the applicability of state employment policies: the passive policies and the active policies of labor market (APLM). The passive policies take care to unemployment payment and the economic aid, while the APLM have in their focus the programs of employment promotion. Currently, five APLMs are implemented as part of the Sectorial Strategy of Employment 2007-2013⁷. With these programs are supported the employers who create new jobs, employing in them the job seekers offered by employment offices. State support is realized through subsidizing in certain percentage of the costs for the obligatory insurance and salary. But these programs have low budget in their voices of costs and financing.

The budget allocated to them in 2009 was 0.016% of GDP, or about 28 times lower than the EU average in 2008 of 0,46%. In 2012 this budget results lower, about 40% lower than in 2010⁸, which has further limited the number of beneficiaries and the impact of these programs, for example the general budget of NES still represent 0,14% of the Albanian GDP⁹. Sometimes, the programs are drafted and approved by the Council of Ministers after the budget approval and funds were not defined, so hindering their applicability. Following the modest progress, Albania has ratified in 1999 the Convention no. 181 of ILO¹⁰ allowing the creation and function of Private Employment Agencies - PEA. The difference between PEA and NES is that PEA try to find jobs for the job seekers not only in the country but also abroad.

For years in coming Albanian government is drafting the Crosscutting Strategy of Employment 2013-2020, financially supported by the EU through the Instrument of Pre-Accession – IPA with his 5 components. This strategy differs from the previous strategy and is supposed to be more efficient as it includes all the important ministries which they policies generate employment.

⁴ *MPÇSSH: Strategy of Employment Services, p.3:12, www.mpcs.gov.al, Tirana, Albania.*

⁵ *Center for Research and Development (2003): Research on the integration of youth into the labor market, obstacles and difficulties, p.21, Tirana, Albania.*

⁶ *Amended by Law no. 8444/1999, Law no. 8862/2002 and Law no. 9570/2006.*

⁷ *MPÇSSH (2007): The Sectorial Strategy of Employment 2007-2013, p.17:22, Tirana, Albania.*

⁸ *European Movement in Albania – EMA (2012): Research, p.12, Tirana, Albania.*

⁹ *MPÇSSH e ILO (2010): Albania: The action plan for youth employment 2010-2013, p.56, Tirana, Albania.*

¹⁰ *International Labor Organization*

The policies of youth employment

Given by the relatively young population, Albania has made efforts in developing and implementing policies for youth employment. Three policy areas are influential in this regard: macroeconomic and sectorial policies, education and training policies and their compliance with the labor market requests, and labor market policies that reflect the relationship between labor demand and offer¹¹. In the legal framework the youth employment initially was arranged by the employment law. Then based on the data of the Strategy of Employment Services (2005) of Labor Ministry, where results that the unemployed with higher education account only 1.8% of registered unemployed, was alluded that university education helps more to come out of unemployment. For this reason and to adapt to EU criteria for employment of youth, was launched the National Strategy of Youth 2007-2013, focused on objectives such as: the youth representation and participation, youth employment, health and social protection, etc. This strategy was designed in harmony with objectives of Sectorial Strategy of Employment 2007-2013, where innovation was the launch of the 5th program of APLM: “Program of professional practice for unemployed job seekers who have completed higher education, inside or outside country”¹². By the program benefits the youth graduates less than 24 months and who were parts of the list of unemployed job seekers by employment offices. The list drafted based on the list of graduates send from rectorates and the list of foreign diplomas recognized by the Ministry of Education and Science. Public institutions are required by law to offer for free these practices, while private partner employers benefit 100% monthly funding of unemployment payment for every month practice of job seekers. The youth involved in this program receive financial

support also. In support of this program was designed the Action Plan for Youth Employment 2010-2013. According to the plan are about 65,000 of youth that could benefit employment. The cost of the plan is about 17.5 million dollars, with co-financing of Albanian government and technical cooperation programs by donors.

Despite these efforts reality shows a lower effective implementation of this program. Official data from the NES, results that till in the end of 2011 only 43 subjects have offered professional practice in public and private environments for 132 young unemployed job seekers, who make up 3.7% of the total of young graduates. Also by economic sector and education level shows that the young people with higher education make up 16% of the total of young employed, from which 1.6% are employed in agriculture, 1.3% in industry and 13% in the services sector¹³. There are several reasons why this target group of young people do not registered at employment offices as: the information lack for the existence and the service provided by the NES and its offices; the youth employment in the informal economy; the youth self-employment by opening private businesses; the young people migration after discouraging to find a job; misallocation of information between NES and PEA's for the number of young graduates registered as unemployed job seekers; the informal job seeking through friends and acquaintances¹⁴, in some cases versus the payment in cash so stimulating the phenomenon of corruption etc.

¹¹ *MPÇSSHB e ILO (2010): Albania: The action plan for youth employment 2010-2013, p.40, Tirana, Albania.*

¹² *Decision of the Council of Ministers, no.873/2006: "On the amount of funding, criteria and implementation procedures on the programs of professional practices for unemployed job seekers, who have completed higher education, inside or outside the country".*

¹³ *MPÇSSHB e ILO (2010): Albania: The action plan for youth employment 2010-2013, p.28, Tirana, Albania.*

¹⁴ *According to data over 70% of young people seeking jobs through friends and acquaintances versus about 20% of youth registered in NES, and over 10% within direct contact to a public or private employer.*

By these problems in this research was obtained for analysis the target group of young people studying at the Faculty of Peshkopi, University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës, in Dibra's district (Albania). The reason for choosing this location is the difficult economic and social situation facing its population, hence the youth of this area, which impedes socio-economic and territorial development of area in question. One of the factors of this situation is the issue of youth employment as part of human resources offered, where workplaces are limited in relation to the large number of young people who perform studies in this faculty, and not only. Therefore, it is attempted to analyze the socio-economic problems of students – employment planning, to see the ways and means of intervention that can ameliorate this ratio in the long terms. Human resources serve as development instruments of a territory and only their effective management can achieve a sustainable development, in this case to the area in question.

The methodology used

In the study are used the methods of survey, interview / questionnaire and empirical analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. As literature source is used the legal basis for employment and are analyzed in integrated way the policies and strategies governing the employment process in Albania. The statistical data resulting from official sources of UAMD's, INSTAT and line Ministries which coordinate the performance of employment.

As part of interviews were randomly selected 20 young people (10 males and 10 females).
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females), aged 18-30 years, with students status of Faculty of Peshkopia, who study in full-time system. The questionnaire contains 12 questions and has maintained the anonymity of the interviewees. The student's questions are focused around financial and economic issues, the measure of their information about the employment by the local government and managerial structure of the faculty/University, the social problems that they pass by the unemployment etc.

Short history of Peshkopia Faculty creation, UAMD

The Affiliate of Peshkopia is opened on 2009¹⁵ into city of Peshkopia, Dibra district, as a secondary unit of the University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës – UAMD¹⁶, among many technical and human difficulties¹⁷. For the first academic year 2009-2010 began studies the first 369 students on the full-time system in 14 bachelor study programs. In most part the origin of students were and is by the Dibra region, but there are also students from other districts as Kukës, Fier, Mirdita, Lezha, Tirana, Durrës etc. In 2010 the affiliate received the Faculty's status¹⁸ by transforming the unit's main of UAMD. Faculty of Peshkopia - FP opened for the academic year 2010-2011 and the cycle of part-time bachelor studies which initially were registered 296 students.

¹⁵ Decision of the Council of Ministers 05/08/2009: "For opening in the Peshkopia city, of affiliates and programs of studies, of economics and administration faculties, of education and professional high school, of University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës, and for the approval of the admission quota and tuition fees in these programs of study, in academic year 2009-2010".

¹⁶ Public institution of higher education established by the decision of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, no. 801/2005: "For the opening of the University "Aleksandër Moisiu" in Durrës".

¹⁷ Lushi D., Murrja D. (2010): "The first steps of an institution of high education", publicist article, the newspaper "Rruga e Arbërit", no. 8 (52) p.3, Tirana, Albania.

¹⁸ Decision of the Council of Ministers no.685/2010 "For the reorganization of the University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durrës".

Currently for the academic year 2012-2013, in faculty are studying 2,369 students of which 1,747 students are in full-time system and 622 students are in the part-time system. In total in seven years activity UAMD counts 15.880 students in all cycles of study. On 2012 in FP are graduated 34 students (11 males and 23 females), who represent the first generation of students graduated from this university (Photo 1). While the total of graduates' students in UAMD for the period 2006-2012 is 2,351 graduates.



Photo 1. The graduation ceremony at the Faculty of Peshkopia, 2012

According to data collected individually (not officially), results that from 34 graduates in FP, about 7-8 of them are employed in the private sector (family) and less at public, about 10 of them are attending Master studies at the universities of Tirana and Durrës. For the remainder of graduates is not disposed information.

Analysis of the questionnaires

The goal of this study is to analyze the employment situation of young graduates in district of Dibra, by the relationship between demand and offer of labor market. For subjective reasons, as case study are taken the students of full-time system in FP. Currently the number of graduates is small. But from the perspective of the constantly growing number of students registered in the FP, and by the increased efforts of managerial structure of UAMD and governance to transform faculty to a near future in a University of Dibra, then should see very seriously the graduate students - employment planning for this district. According to questionnaires completed by different students and by secondary data, during the study have come out interesting facts that should be valued according to their importance. By the small number of interviewees, the survey results are only seen as signals for identification of problems and not as definitive results, so for this should needed a wider study that included more students. Following after the analysis of the questionnaires results that:

In economic and financial aspects students spend an average of 150-200 thousand lek a month (100-140 euro), mainly for payment of rents (where about 40% of them have rent rooms), food and operating expenses for university books and lectures. According to approximate estimates from 1,747 current students are circulated into local economy of the district about 350 million lek a month or about 4.2 milliard per year (4.2 million euro). This is a highly significant financial income for the fragile economy of Dibra's district. However for students (70% of interviewees) is difficult to cope university expenses, including here payment of registration¹⁹, because most students comes from rural areas and from families with low incomes, up and poor families. These students have begun studies exactly to assist help their familiar economy. This shows the fact that 20% of interviewees are already employed, mainly in the informal private sector, and less in public sector²⁰. This is in fact a violation of the law and of the procedure of

public sector employment, where is required by law, the high school diploma, public open competition, as well as work experience. Also about 55% of the interviewees, aiming to be prepared for the labor market, are engaged in voluntary community projects, mainly in NGOs that operate in Peshkopia. World Vision Albania –WVA Dibra branch, shows very well this engagement of students. For the period 2011-2012 the organization has periodically engaged volunteer students²¹ for its projects. In 2012 by WVA are engaged about 15 volunteer students in organizing of some summer camps for children, which has given for students a two monthly salary. After camps three of students are already full-time employed to the organization, even that these students were not graduated yet.

An interesting fact has emerged from the desire of students in which localities and sectors they want to be employed after graduation. Results that almost 60% of interviewees want to be employed in the district of Dibra (this applies more to students originating from Dibra's district), versus 25% who seek other districts like Tirana, Durrës, etc., and 15% who wish to emigrate for work abroad Albania. Of these, 70% want to be employed in the public sector, and for that about 70% of the interviewees are against the restricting work experience 3-5 years required when competed for a public function. First these facts show the strong connection of students (mainly they from Dibra) with their territory of origin and the desire to give their contribution to the development of this territory. Secondary, their desire to work in state employment is justified by the employment guarantee there and career increase (small salary but the least secure employment), despite threats of dismissal for political reasons in the case of power rotation. However there has been a further interesting fact that 75% of interviewees have no information that after their graduation they are considered unemployed by the NES and could benefit from unemployment payment and social assistance. This evidence the misallocation information fact on students by NES (Regional Employment Office) and FP.

Another important aspect that emerged from the questionnaire is the information rate to students about professional practices, trainings, and internship programs etc., applied by UAMD. With these deals the Branch Counseling of Students and Alumni - BCSA, serves as a connecting bridge between the UAMD graduates (alumni) and current students, with the subjects to provide jobs, training opportunities and internships. Based on internal regulation of UAMD²², FP itself currently has four agreements with Regional Hospital, District Court of Dibra, Education Directory of Dibra and Altelecom Company, to perform professional practice by students.

¹⁹ In the academic year 2009-2010 annual tuition fees for students who register in the first year was 100 thousand lek (70 euro), while today this fee has increased to 150 thousand lek (110 euro), an amount that will grow further in the coming years.

²⁰ By the confidential sources results that these young people have managed to secure work in the state based on acquaintances and friends, as well by political support.

²¹ A part of the students was proposed to be volunteers and to engage in this organization from the author itself of this study, with the aim to serve as work experience and increase the chances for employment within the organization or other NGOs.

²² Regulation of the University "Aleksandër Moisiu" Durres, approved by Decision no. 35/2012 by the Academic Senate of UAMD, chapter II, article 70, paragraph 1 and 2, where the students have obligatory to perform professional practice in public or private institutions, when it is included in the curricula of their program of study.

However, not all programs of study have obligation the performing of practice, so many students do not practice (70% of interviewees) and have no information about them. This

expresses the survey where 90% of interviewees have no information about the news and activity of BCSA, for more don't recognize even the term internship or practice meaning. From a monitoring of the Announcements Table in the FP environments is found that it contains only data about teaching schedule, information for the change of lectures schedules, information about the dates of exams and internal regulations of UAMD. While on the environments of UAMD have a variety of information and notifications from BCSA. This highlights the anomaly of the lack distribution and coordination of information between UAMD and FP, which directly affects student itself²³. FP itself does not possess an information office on BCSA updates.

One last fact came out from questionnaires related to self-employment of students as private entrepreneurs in different businesses. From policies and employment law is offered help and support by the government on young people seeking to self-employed in new businesses created by them or youth businesses. The assistance consists of tax cuts, subsidies, technical assistance etc. But according to the survey 80% of interviewees have no information about such support. In this case has seen as a problem the lack of information distribution from the local government.

Conclusions and recommendations

The opening and function of FP in Dibra is seen as a very good opportunity in the context of economic, social and territorial development of the area in question. The FP's perspective is that within a few years to get the physiognomy of University of Dibra. This indicates the continued growth of student's numbers in each academic year, addition and qualified increase of academic – administrative staff, as well as the diversity of branches of studies. In four years of function and till now the impact of FP has been positive. So have increase of financial incomes that circulate in local fragile economy from student life; addition of new jobs as part of academic and administrative staff; increase in the quantity and quality of human resources with higher education; application of new infrastructure projects in objects and services for the activity of higher education institutions; addition of private business for needs of student life; increase of real estate activity namely financial benefit from granting of rental housing; strengthening the tourism sector etc.

However, based on goal of study, as a result of the survey conducted several problems of socio-economic character emerged about the graduate students-employment planning, problems that affect and the territorial development of area. Reality shows a small number of jobs in relation to young people with higher education, because this category do not includes only young graduates in FP, but also young people who return after finishing studies in other districts, or abroad Albania. This brings the phenomenon of youth unemployment with higher education. Having not found a job after studies, the young people begin to discourage and to see themselves unrecognized by labor market. Economic problems increase with the lack of a salary enabling that for the young people to deepen the financial crisis. These problems are added those of social character, where as unemployed the young people feel as are not positioned in society, consequently find themselves unable to move in this direction.

²³ From the author of this study (ex-lecturer of FP), in random order is received information about a training seminar "Let's discuss for Higher Education in Albania" organized by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung organization, UAMD and the Ministry of Education and Science, on May 24-25, 2011. This notice was posted individually in FP and this enabled that of three students, The 1st International Conference on "Research and Education – Challenges Towards the Future" (ICRAE2013), 24-25 May 2013

three lecturers and two administrative staff to participate in this seminar.

In aspect of territorial development, the youth unemployment brings their not ability in the practical application of knowledge gained in university studies. As longer duress the period of unemployment, as much young people were leaving the concepts and the new rhythms of development. In this case we have a depreciation of human capital in development aspect, and also a waste of time and capacity of real specialists, which in the future could affect the economic and social growth, hence the development of territory.

The orientation of youth for employment is mostly towards public sector as a safer employment, despite the fluctuations of rotations of power. So many young people do not apply for a job into state in official way, but they turn to friends and acquaintances for help in this aspect. Private sector of employment is seen as very insecure, low-paid, and usually are not paid the social insurance, so a rather informal sector. Also the private businesses tend to employ people close or family, watching in disbelief the ability of youth work. Young people (especially those who do not practice) find themselves without work experience so this limits them to apply in private businesses.

In terms of self-employment, the young people lack the financial means to open a youth business and have no information for state assistance offered to young entrepreneurs. This prevents them on doing business despite the desire. One problem here is the lack of trainings and technical assistance offered to young people who want to open youth businesses.

Another problem is seen to information available on the labor market for young people from local government and managerial structures of FP. Till now no study has been done for seeing the report of number of human resources (young people) - employment, so there is no information that how much jobs can be offered for the young graduates every year. Agreements for youth employment in the private sector are in level to zero. However there are some agreements with several NGOs that operate mainly in Peshkopia city, and much less in rural areas.

Another problem is encountered with the study programs of FP. Some of the programs are not in accordance with the requirements of the labor market in Dibra district. For some professions, such as teachers, the priorities to be employed have the young graduates in Tirana, and fewer the young people of FP. Several times has been discussed with the FP's managerial structures to make requests for opening programs of study such fruit-culture, agribusiness, aquaculture, hydro technique, tourism etc., programs which completes the needs of the labor market with specialists of agricultural and livestock sector, because the area of Dibra itself is considered as a territory dominated by agricultural and livestock economy. However for the academic year 2013-2014 finally the FP took the initiative to approve three new programs of study as agribusiness, agriculture and livestock.

These issues but also other problems that exist, highlight the need for the proposal and application of means and ways to minimize their size, with the aim of improving the question of youth employment and their adaptation to the requirements of the labor market. For this study are given some recommendations that can fix this situation.

First, should be taken initiative of entering into agreements with labor market actors to carry out professional practices for all students, so not only for students who have obligatory to carry the practice. This suggestion was given to FP's administration clerks before 2 years from the author of this study. The idea consists in organizing a roundtable discussion between

representatives of FP (UAMD), local government, labor office, private businesses, farmers and NGOs. From this table needed to reach an agreement for the practice of students in respective fields of study, from the first year until their graduation. Each student can engaged 2-4 times a week, according to a schedule defined in specific agreements, to the above actors. In addition to practical training, students should be required to describe and analyze their work (practice) carried out in the form of a course project, as a condition prior to their admission exams. This idea can be applied initially as a pilot project. This will bring youth training for the labor market in the early phases of university studies, and their forming in writing reports, scientific papers, etc., thus helping the young people in the process of graduation.

Second, in FP should open a coordinating office for information and updates of BCSA. Besides the BCSA's news, the office should provide information of the same character for the district of Dibra itself. That information should be given to students in time and updated.

Third, from the Student Council of FP should be undertaken voluntary community activities. For this needed to work by the actors of the labor market to provide assistance and technical and logistical support this council for the organization of these activities. These initiatives will have impact not only for the local community where carried out, but can professionally train the students themselves.

Fourth, should be created a portal website with updated information on the labor market in Dibra district. Sources of information about job vacancies in Dibra are limited so the job research is conducted mostly individually, for the public sector are also violations of law where young people are employed on basis of the acquaintances, without an open public competition. Opening the portal will limit these negative aspects of employment forms.

Fifth, from labor market actors should organize periodic training and seminars with thematic object the opening of new businesses by the young people or their self-employment. These trainings should offered information about the procedures of opening a business; how is drafted up a business plan; the importance of private enterprise; the benefits and risks of new businesses; the ways of individual funding and assistance offered by the programs of employment promotion, etc.

Sixth, the regional offices of employment and local government should periodically inform private businesses about programs of employment promotion (APLMs), especially for the 5th APLM, and to implement cooperation agreement for the introduction of Dibra businesses in these programs. It is in interest of private businesses and local government too, to create the liaising Public-Private Partnership or PPP, especially in terms of support and financial facilities for business partners in the program.

Seventh, it needs to give importance to the cooperation on regional level. The aim is to exchange the experiences of professional practice for students of FP, not only locally, but also at regional and cross-border. These initiatives should be undertaken by FP (UAMD) and local government.

These are some of the recommendations that impact positively on the issue of youth employment. Their application will impact on improvement of the socio-economic situation to students – employment planning. Economic development based on professional work of educated young people will also bring a sustainable territorial development. This is shown already on the implementation of the pilot project Territorial Pact of Young Employment, applied in prefectures of Kukës, Shkodra and Lezha.

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