

Education and training in a period of economic crisis.

Day 2 (1 June 2010; 10.30 – 11.00 h): Input from education councils.

Input from the Estonian Forum of Education (Ene-Silvia Sarv)

How the economical crisis has an impact on education and training in Estonia and how we deal with that

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With regard to the budget debates and economical crisis the trust has declined drastically in government, parties and politicians. Faith in democracy and education was little affected but still.

As educational reforms (state curriculum, new law of school, structural changes in general education, vocational and Higher Education) are in the state of development, they are affected

- by the demographic processes (rapid decline in the number of children and young people, a rapid increase in the number of pensioners),
- by decrease of education funding, management and training costs, which also affects the quality of management;
- by the drop of parents 'and teachers' incomes, which reduces their performance and commitment, increases workload, also are students increasingly forced to work instead of learning.

The Estonians are less worried and did not experienced so deep depression as Lithuanians and Latvians, but around 15-20% of unemployment, mostly for long period has been experienced last year.

However, there has been the demand in Estonia that the government should reduce income differences, and support low-income groups, but the aid in this direction has even declined. Current statistics has shown, that from all economic aid about 60% goes to those 40% who are anyway coping better. The most influenced are families who have children, especially 2 and more children. So more than 30% of children live below the poverty line and the % is increasing despite first signs of the decline of unemployment. As a result far too many children are deprived of the opportunity to receive quality education, participate in interesting activities and sports or have to stop those activities, that has profound social consequences.

In general satisfaction toward education and health services has slightly increased, increasing is the number of users of the Internet and e-mail in all age groups. The economic crisis has not stopped the internetisation, but has reduced the number of social contacts.

The increasing social stress, which further enhances the already unprecedented high alcoholism and drug addiction, depression and suicide risk, as well as trends in violence and aggression in schools, in families, at the streets.

Human Development Report - 2009

During the economic upturn there was the focus of human development gap, which demonstrated the need to contribute more resources to social development. Now there is much more reasons to discuss the education and human development from another perspective – as a resource that allows (or does not allow) the society to cope with difficulties

The Crises has affected broadly the values, lifestyles, human relations, education and culture. Therefore, the danger zone is that of young people's lifestyles and values, quality of life of the young generation. Human Development Report shows the increase of facts of drug addiction, alcoholism, school and street violence. Research has shown that more than half of school-students in general education experience their school climate as cold or indifferent towards them: so we see, that there is the lack of contact between youth and the older generation, students and teachers, in general there is the lack of positive socialisation environment (which includes family, school, extracurricular, leisure environment and the media). However, international education studies also show that the current educational system in Estonia ensures that the majority of young people are good in subject-field, but does not provide enough opportunities for young people in personal development and values education.

Human Development Report (2009) concludes the resources and obstacles to overcome the economic crisis

Resources	Obstacles
The high average level of education and training and involvement.	Large dropout rates; non-compliance of the content and structure of education with labor market needs.
Growing integration between Estonian and Russian speaking younger generations, better job-opportunities and increasing social inclusiveness.	Higher unemployment and economic vulnerability of Russian-speaking population, especially among low language proficiency of non-citizens, the Russian population increased distrust and dissatisfaction with government institutions and policies of the Estonian state and the country at the same time, heightened expectations of security and prosperity of the countryside. Social exclusion and alienation syndrome.
The overall improvements of life quality, including improvements in living conditions, families of non-food expenditure growth, active travel, etc.; increased participation in NGOs.	Increasing difference in the quality of life between young and older, and wealthier and less wealthy population groups
Overall Internet access and Internet services from the spread of all nation as an important factor in the quality of life, widespread use of the Internet will increase citizens' opportunities to interact with the public, public authorities and other agencies via the Internet will increase the transparency of the operation of the public trust and participation opportunities, and public control over policy making.	The varying levels of Internet usage according to nationality or language or age increases the risk of social inequality and exclusion, where the Internet will become the sole or dominant power in the public service or as information resource. Low awareness of Internet-related risks in society, particularly children, parents, generation, including widening chasm between

<p>Open access to relevant information increases people's ability to cope with the crisis alone; internet-communities are able to smooth the social risks and crises, increase the expression of solidarity and mutual aid recovery.</p>	<p>the students and teachers internet-competencies. Internet – arena of social expressions of hatred and other negative emotions, which can amplify a crisis to panic or to increase the risk of social and ethnic conflicts, the Internet makes it possible to manipulate the public.</p>
<p>A low unemployment rate; relatively high activity of older workers at labor market; labor market flexibility guaranteed at the level the company.</p>	<p>lack of active labor market policies; lack of opportunities of re-training to allow labor market flexibility ; shortage of childcare facilities;</p>

Some aspects/examples of coping to economic crises

- Organised re-training of unemployed people (free of charge, during the first unemployment year), project based..
- In Vocational education:
 - o Increasing number of students choose or return to professional schools.
 - o Teachers` salaries are made more competitive (because of overall drop of salaries).
 - o Concern about number of the dropping out children (because of economic reasons) began to increase, so the school decided to start offering a free lunch (Haapsalu vocational education centre), morning-mash (Viljandi Joint Vocational high school).
 - o The amount of students getting special allowance has increased from 5% to 20% (maximum rate by law).
- Informal and hobby-education for children has been depressed - centres for music, arts, sports etc have lost about half of the children. Previously, the main motive for leaving was sickness or lost of interest. Last year for 50-60% of leavers the problem was economical. Often, children do not want to admit that the family`s money is limited, it is embarrassing to them. The state and municipality support is rare or missing at all.
- Teachers in many municipalities are forced for unpaid vacation.
- In higher education
 - o A significant reduction of pay-per-student,
 - o Shortage in salaries and work-trips (conferences etc), shortage in research funding for teaching staff.
 - o State-financed students - the growth of competition and the rapid increase in the number of students.
- Some tendencies
 - o To increase the number of students in higher education and especially in certain needed specialities - project “Return to college-university” – possibility to continue studies for free (university-leavers who had previously completed ½ of studies).
 - o To make universities and high schools more competitive – to cut down the numbers of schools/higher education institutions and parallelisms in specialtys.

Finally:

Employers are looking, above all, at the experience or the education of people. Often the misdoings of general (or higher) education are underlined:

Job-seekers have difficulty in writing CVs and other needed documents; self-expression is lost both in spelling, as well as in representing or "selling" himself .

Applicants have non-relevant self-picture (competences, professional skills) and salary-hopes are still unreasonably high and so on.