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**8th Strategy Forum of the EUSBSR in Berlin 13 – 14 June**

**Summary report**

**Seminar: “Powerful Connections for a Holistic School to Work Transition”**

**Time:** Tuesday, 13 June, 15:15 to 16:45 hours, Adenauer-Saal

Seminar invited actors who represented policy makers and practitioners in fields of education, social affairs and labour market.

In total seven interactions were organized in order to provide a wider outline of activities addressing of one of challenges in the Baltic Sea Region. The challenge in field of education in the region is early school leaving and successful school to work transition that results in a placement in the labour market or continuous studies.

During the seminar it was outlined several times that evidence suggests that individuals without completed upper secondary education are at much higher risk of unemployment. For example, in Sweden the risk of a young person to become unemployed by the age of 25 years, increases by 60% if he or she has left school too early. Early school leaving is also a likely cause for individuals to apply for social benefits. The likeliness increases up to four times for a person who has dropped out from school and has reached the age of 24 in Sweden. A similar situation is evident across other countries of the Baltic Sea Region. These and other arguments for closer cooperation among various stakeholders who run activities for young adults to ensure their integration into the labour market, and an organized exchange of practices and methods between countries, were presented by Anna Liljeström, process Leader and researcher at the Pluginnovation from Sweden.

Seminar´s keynote speaker was Anna Ekström, Minister for Upper Secondary School and Adult Education and Training from Sweden. Ms. Ekström underlined that efforts to reduce early school leaving and to foster school to work transition, are important activities to be carried out not only at schools and by pedagogues but also in cooperation with other specialists at schools and at the local level. The minister pointed out Sweden´s efforts of proceeding with matchmaking of needs of the labour market and the desired professions of young adults by outlining the importance of attractiveness of vocational education system.

Different aspects were brought up by Imbi Henno, Chief Expert of General Education Department at the Ministry of Education and Research from Estonia. Ms. Henno presented reasons behind Estonia´s success to high PISA ranking results in 2015. She pointed out that PISA studies have revealed that:

* Estonian students were in PISA 2015  1st in Europe and 3rd in the world after Singapore and Japan with an average result of 534 points (OECD average is 493);
* There are no differences between boys and girls when it comes to knowledge in science and mathematics. We have the lowest level of low-performers in Europe in reading math, science;
* The Estonian educational system has been successful in supporting the learning of all students; the student’s home socio-economic background has less impact on performance than it does in other countries. Situation at home affects learning results very little, only 8%;
* Good results are achieved with lesser financial resources and shorter learning period than in other OECD countries.

Ms. Imbi also highlighted that there are differences between socio-economically disadvantaged and advantaged schools, urban and rural schools, Estonian and Russian language instruction schools, according to the report “Students’ Well-Being: PISA Results 2015 (volume 3)”, that analyses students’ performance in school, their relationships with peers and teachers, their home life, and how they spend their time outside of school.

Moreover, additional input was provided by guests at a panel discussion. The guests were:

* Anu Parantainen, Division of Education, City of Turku, Finland
* Susanne Bäckman, Senior Manager of Project Plug In 2.0 in Bromölla, Sweden
* Susanne von Bonin, Integrational Couch in the Project “Come In”, Germany, and
* Gunnar Anderzon, Division of Employment, Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions, Flagship´s “School to Work” Leader, Sweden.

Main findings that were highlighted during the panel discussion are:

1. Municipalities should change methods if youth unemployment remains high and school to work transition does not bring encouraging results. Therefore, projects are good grounds to develop methods and test them, and in case of successful results – incorporate methods in daily life activities.

A successful approach was presented by a municipality in south west Sweden, called Bromölla. For many years - Bromölla had the highest unemployment ratings among young people in Sweden – 34%. Municipality started a project within a national ESF project Plug In 2.0 in October 2015, and created a One-stop-shop center with a range of different services. They started with building a team and recruited four Youth Recreation Leaders that worked at the local Youth Center, and two teachers that worked at Introduction program (a program for all young people that have not completed their secondary education). The whole team was trained in Student Information and Counselling, knowledge of the labor market and Motivational interviewing.

Another encouraging example was brought up by city of Turku from Finland, in case of attractiveness of the vocation education and training system. As in many countries, attractiveness of the VET has been a struggling issue also in Turku but only until the moment when young people were invited to communicate the offer of the local VET offers. Inclusion of young people was a great success that has contributed to the attractiveness of the VET in Turku, dropping numbers of young adults who choose to leave school early, increasing numbers of youngsters who choose to learn a profession.

1. Cross-sectoral cooperation among various actors is a vital preventative measure of early school leaving to succeed with attainment to upper secondary school and it involves pedagogues, special pedagogues, coaches, health professionals (mental health and primary health), professional counselors, social workers and others.
2. Transnational cooperation provides a space for mutual learning among professionals and it fosters adaptation of methods and measures to local situations. Young people who are at risk of early school leaving or find themselves in a NEET situation, also benefit from more intensified cooperation at transnational level in the Baltic Sea Region as they find it very encouraging. Short-term trips to another country in the BSR prove to be not only boosting for one´s self-esteem but they also have a positive impact on pupils´ academic results both in English, and as well as other subjects, like for example history (depends on the subject that the trip is related to).
3. Statistics of number of young people in NEET situation display the need to invest in activities and run measures that foster school to work transition, engage people in labour market activities, and carry these activities by involving the youngsters in planning and implementation processes. Young people who are engaged in labour market activities, are also engaged in societal happenings and possess higher level of trust in public affairs.
4. Evidence shows that better results for school to work transition are provided by initiatives that mobilize public and private services in a one-stop-shop manner and offer tailor-made services as they prevent early school leaving and promote longer placement at work.

The seminar was organized by the Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions that is the Flagship School to Work leader within policy area Education of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.