

**Проф. д-р БЬОРН ПААПЕ,
Д-р ИВОНА КИЕРЕТА
РВТУ – ААХЕН – ГЕРМАНИЯ**

EDUCATION AND MIGRATION IN POLAND: CUTBACKS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR POLAND'S MIGRATION PROBLEM

Part II

*Prof. Dr. BJÖRN PAAPE,
Dr. IWONA KIERETA*
RWTH AACHEN UNIVERSITY,
INSTITUTE OF DIDACTICS OF ECONOMICS*

Abstract: Since 1997, in anticipation of Poland's planned entry into the EU, the European Commission has assessed candidate countries' progress with regard to their adopting the *acquis communautaire*. In November 1998, the European Commission was already pointing out that significant further efforts are also required in the field of vocational training.

An examination of the development tendencies in the field of vocational training during the last few years allows the provocative conclusion that the Polish "further efforts" consisted of systematically lowering the share of vocational training in the education sector.

The consequence of this marginalization of vocational education, and in particular basic vocational education, will be demonstrated via a comparison between the structure of labour demand and the corresponding supply.

Key words: Education, Migration, Vocational Education

* Prof. Dr. Dr. Bjoern Paape / Dr. Iwona Kiereta, RWTH Aachen University, Institute of Didactics of Economics. Templergraben 64, D – 52056 Aachen (www.wd.rwth-aachen.de).

Since 1997, in anticipation of Poland's planned entry into the EU, the European Commission has assessed candidate countries' progress with regard to their adopting the *acquis communautaire*. In November 1998, the European Commission was already pointing out that "Significant further efforts are also required in the field of vocational training".¹

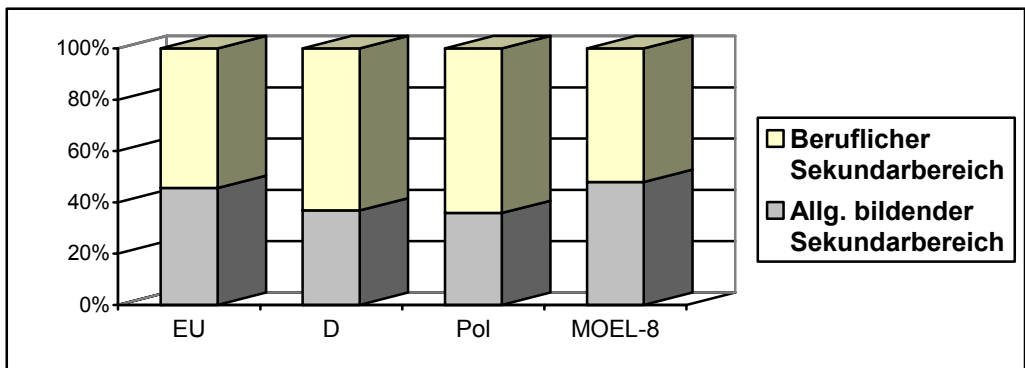
¹ European Commission (Ed.): Regular report 1998 by the Commission on Poland's progress towards accession, in: http://europa.int/comm/enlargement/report_11_98/pdf/de/poland_de.pdf, p. 32. Also, subsequent reports speak out particularly about the field of vocational training. In the October 1999 report, reference is made to the significance of continuing vocational training, particularly with regard to rural and far-flung areas. See: European Commission (Ed.): Regular report 1999 by the Commission on Poland's progress towards accession, in: http://europa.int/comm/enlargement/report_10_99/pdf/de/poland_de.pdf, p. 37. In the November 2001 report, it was stated that Poland should continue to elaborate an appropriate system for vocational education and training. The current system was lacking, amongst other things, a corresponding flexibility of the measures involved with regard to the requirements of the labour market. See: European Commission (Ed.): Regular report 2001 by the Commission on Poland's progress towards accession, in: http://europa.int/comm/enlargement/report2001/pl_de.pdf, p. 86. The 2002 report indicates that more attention must be given to the area of vocational further training and also

An examination of the development tendencies in the field of vocational training during the last few years allows the provocative conclusion that the Polish "further efforts" consisted of systematically lowering the share of vocational training in the education sector. As the following diagram shows, in 1999/2000, Poland was still one of the countries in which vocational education – at around 68% of the total number of students, had still quantitatively the largest share, corresponding to the vocational education level in Germany².

to the concept of lifelong learning. These were not yet sufficiently anchored in the social awareness. See: European Commission (Ed.): Regular report 2002 by the Commission on Poland's progress towards accession, in: http://europa.int/comm/enlargement/report2002/pl_de.pdf, p. 117.

² For an interesting survey on Education between Image and Identity see Vukovic, G., Ferjan, M.: Educational Institutions: Between Image and Identity, in Florjancic, J., Paape, B., (eds), Organisation and Management, Frankfurt, 2003, p.87ff; see also the exemplary articles in on the necessary education in tourism management in Ovsenik, R., Kiereta, I. Destination Management, Frankfurt 2006.

Diagram: Students at Secondary Level II according to general education and vocational education in percentage in 1999/2000.



Beruflicher Sekundarbereich = Vocational education secondary level
Allgemeinbildender Bereich = General education secondary level

Source: Own representation based on Europäische Kommission/Eurydice/Eurostat (Ed.): Schlüsselzahlen zum Bildungswesen in Europa 2002, Luxembourg 2002, in: http://www.eurydice.org/Doc_intermediaires/indicators/de/frameset_key_data.html, Chapter E, p. E18.

In the following years, the percentage of students undertaking vocational training was considerably reduced. In 2000/2001, it was around 62.3%, but in 2002/2003, it was only 51.5%.³ These development tendencies indicate that, in Poland, the educational structures are increasingly diverging from those of most of the EU countries.

The lowering of the share of vocational education was mainly a consequence of the continuous drop in the number of basic vocational schools – which has been observed as being particularly dynamic since 2000. Whereas between 1990/1991 and 2000/2001, the number of basic vocational schools dropped from 2995 thousand to 2372 thousand, within only 2 years, i.e. up to 2002/2003, it had dropped down to 587 thousand. The number of students who were being educated at these schools correspondingly dropped from

814.5 thousand in 1990/91 to 542.0 thousand in 2000/01 and down further to 171.1 thousand in 2002/03.⁴ A decreasing tendency was also noted for students at technical schools, but to a slighter extent.

The consequence of this marginalization of vocational education, and in particular basic vocational education, will be demonstrated via a comparison between the structure of labour demand and the corresponding supply. Demand for employees with a basic vocational training was, in 2002, around 62.5% of the total demand. Although this was a drop compared to 1998 (73.8%), it can still be regarded as high. In contrast, however, the percentage of school leavers from basic vocational schools was only 17% of the total figures for school leavers who had at least completed secondary level II schooling. On the basis of the diagram, it can be seen that, for 154 thousand school leavers, around 441 thousand persons with the basic vocational school certificate found a job (i.e., existing unemployment was dismantled). It also demonstrates that the share of unemployed persons with vocational schooling is continuously falling, i.e. it is exactly those persons who have the

³ Cf. Kabaj, M.: Strategie i programy przeciwdziałania bezrobociu w Unii Europejskiej i w Polsce, Warszawa 2004, p. 217.

⁴ Own calculations based on Kabaj, M.: idem, 2004, p. 217.

best opportunities on the job market. This contradicts the generally adopted view that basic vocational schools generate even more unemployment.⁵ Since the high rate of unemployment is being lowered by the currently prevailing "mismatch" between demand and educational supply, the consequences are not noticeable. However, the discrepancy between demand and supply is likely to increase since, in the educational structure of 2002, the share of students in basic vocational schools was only 7.3%. This would create a shortage of skilled workers in the future.⁶

The reduction of the percentage of vocational schools took place within the framework of decentralization, which caused decision-making powers regarding the school network at secondary level to be shifted over to self-governing bodies (county districts). This was intended to – as already pointed out – allow education to be better adapted to the requirements of the local job markets. However, the current or even future labour demand (according to general and vocational qualifications) hardly provides the self-governing bodies with a basis for decision-making regarding the establishing of a school network. Three factors are substantially significant here; firstly, the coordination system between education policy and the requirements of industry is poor. There is a lack of monitoring of the labour market regarding the deficient and "over-supplied" occupations, and also a lack of information flow between the self-governing bodies and schools, job centers and companies.⁷

⁵ The growth dynamic for unemployment of vocational school leavers is significantly lower than for general unemployment and people with university degrees. Cf. Kabaj, M.: *Optymalizacja struktur kształcenia zawodowego i popytu na prace. Czy grozi nam masowe bezrobocie absolwentów szkół wyższych?*, in: Jeruszka, U. (Ed.), *Optymalizacja kształcenia zawodowego z punktu widzenia potrzeb rynku pracy*, Warszawa 2002, p. 29.

⁶ Cf. Kabaj, M.: *idem*, 2004, p. 218f.

⁷ Cf. Kabaj, M.: *idem*, 2002, p. 33. Jeruszka points out that the general statistics for the labour market (e.g. provided by employment centres) are insufficient for the requirements of vocational training, since they use

Secondly, it should be emphasized that vocational training incurs higher costs than does a general education. In the light of the financial bottlenecks in many communities and rural areas, it can be claimed that, with regard to decisions on the local school network, this cost aspect is likely to be increasingly taken into consideration.⁸ Thirdly, in his studies, Kabaj indicates that a large part of the decision making with regard to the continuation or closure of educational facilities is based on surveys conducted with school leavers from *Gymnasium* schools, where these had to indicate their preferred choice of school for further education or subject choice. Here, the conclusion pushes its way to the fore that any revisions of the future school network are subordinated to the educational aspirations of young people.⁹ In light of the low status of vocational education, it is easy to comprehend the mass closure of vocational schools. It remains to be concluded that the structural reforms "from above" which reduce the number of students at basic vocational schools, and simultaneously expand the educational capacities of schools for general education, will serve to increase the "drifting apart" of the educational structures of Poland and the other EU countries.¹⁰ As the secondary level "deprofessionalization", which was implemented in the last decade, is being continued, and even increasingly implemented, this means, from a

aggregate data and divide the unemployed up only according to their level of education (e.g. university level). Employers, on the other hand, do not want this abstract level of education but rather people with specific vocational qualifications or occupations. See: Jeruszka, U.: *Elementy programu dostosowywania kształcenia zawodowego do popytu gospodarki na kadry kwalifikowane*, in: Jeruszka, U. (Ed.), *Optymalizacja kształcenia zawodowe z punktu widzenia potrzeb rynku pracy*, Warszawa 2002, p. 90f.

⁸ Cf. Kabaj, M.: *idem*, 2002, p. 25.

⁹ Cf. Kabaj, M. *idem*, 2002, p. 21ff. The studies have also shown that the real demand for labour has hardly any significance for the decisions of young people regarding their choice of school.

¹⁰ Cf. Kabaj, M.: *idem*, 2004, p. 336

quantitative viewpoint, that vocational training will be even further marginalized.¹¹

Furthermore, the comparison of the strategic goals of the EU and of Poland with regard to vocational training shows that Poland, from a qualitative viewpoint, is taking a different path from the recommendations contained in officially documented EU recommendations. For instance, when the Polish reforms were in preparation, it was "blacked out" that the before-mentioned White Book of the European Commission contained particular recommendations regarding the "building up of abilities for employment and economic life".¹² This is supposed to ensue by supporting the mobility of young people and employees as well as by expanding all forms of the dual educational system. It is explicitly stated that

*"Schools and businesses mutually complement one another as places of learning and they should be brought close together.[...] [This] is a priority in which the social partners must play their role. [...] Firstly, education must be opened up to the world of work. [...] Secondly, companies must be involved in the training drive, not only as regards workers but also young people and adults. [...] Thirdly, cooperation must be developed between schools and firms".*¹³ Generally, then, the focus is on a practical-oriented vocational training, whereby vocational internships are emphasized as an effective instrument for smoothing over the transition from the world of education to the world of work.¹⁴

In the Polish reform documents, the postulate was raised that vocational education should be more closely bound up

with the labour market and the expectations of local employers.¹⁵ But at the same time, the vocational training – as long as it does not require any expensive techno-didactical facilities – should take place in the schools' own workshops. Any training that requires expensive facilities should take place in the centers for practical training. The possibility is assumed of a practical vocational training in companies or in technical facilities.¹⁶ This formulation presents several problems: what form is access to the world of work going to take if the vocational practical training is meant to take place in a school's own - very often antiquated - workshops? The better-equipped centers for practical training are only able to help to some degree because they are not located evenly around the country, and there is a lack of them particularly in the far-flung areas on the periphery. Furthermore, the question arises as to how the intensifying of cooperation between the educational institutions and the companies is to take place, since the new reform did not create any legal framework for binding companies into the educational process, let alone introducing a dual educational system. As long as the problem of cooperation between "schools and businesses" is not legally regulated, it has to be feared that school leavers will continue to be trained in the companies, disassociated from practical experience, i.e. with no corresponding job experience in handling machinery or dealing with technologies in the "real" world of work. This challenges the postulated "building up of abilities for employment and economic life", not only with regard to the Polish labour market but even more so with regard to the European labour market.¹⁷

¹¹ Cf. Gesicki, J.: Przemiany w edukacji, in: Marody, M. (Ed.), Wymiary życia społecznego. Polska na przełomie XXI wieku, Warszawa 2002, p. 103.; Kabaj, M.: idem, 2002, p. 31.

¹² Cf. N.N.: White book on general and vocational education, in: <http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/de/ca/c11028htm>, p. 2.

¹³ European Commission, idem, 1996, p. 52f.

¹⁴ Cf. Kabaj, M.: idem, 2004, p. 224ff.

¹⁵ Cf. N.N.: Reforma 2002. Szkoła zawodowa, in: <http://www.zsr.dzierzoniow.pl/reforma/zawodowa.html>, p.1, Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej (MEN) (Ed.) (c): idem, p. 10.

¹⁶ Cf. Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej (MEN) (Ed.) (a): idem, p. 5.

¹⁷ Cf. Symela, K.: Rola klasyfikacji zawodów i specjalności w modelowaniu szkolnictwa zawodowego, in: Kwaitkowski, S. (Ed): Kształcenie zawodowe. Rynek pracy. Pracodawcy (Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych), Warszawa 2000, p. 169f.

A certain amount of criticism must also be directed at the conception of a broadly profiled vocational education. Although there is still consensus on this, it cannot be ignored that the idea of a broad occupational profile can be interpreted in different ways. This leads to the significant question of how far the expansion of the occupational profiles can go- and thus the establishing of the corresponding occupations that require training – which is of enormous relevance for the actual building up of abilities for employment.¹⁸

As Symela emphasizes, in extreme cases, school leavers could be trained so that they "learn something about everything but at the end of the day can do nothing".¹⁹ Aleksander²⁰ takes this further when he indicates in this context the existing discrepancy between the "number of registered jobs, the filling of which the school system should be preparing for" and the valid classification of occupations requiring training. The general economic classification for the year 1995 contains about 2,392 occupations and specializations. The classification of occupations requiring training, which are taught in all the vocational schools, was down to 179 occupations at the end of 1999. It becomes apparent then that an occupational training should provide a student with the theoretical and practical basics for taking up a trade in an average of 10 occupations. This can lead to the conclusion that, basically, a school leaver from a vocational school will have been prepared for none of these occupations. The resulting training deficits imply that "the

school leaver must, at least at the beginning, undergo a very intensive occupational training.²¹ These requirements are diametrically opposed to the expectations of the employers, who are explicitly seeking people with particular qualifications and job experience. Additionally, on-the-job further education is bound up with extra costs, which means that employers are even less interested in bearing the costs of training for the starting phase in a new job.²²

The lack of practical experience and the (too)-broad profiling involved in vocational education are seen as barriers which are considerably

hindering young people in being integrated into the labour process and are considerably making it more difficult for them to transfer from school into the world of work.

The problem of the building up of abilities for employment and economic life gains, with regard to the concept of the profiled lyceum school and the post-lyceum schools which build on it, even more weight. This is significant, because it is this particular construction of the Polish reforms which is regarded highly. With regard to the fact that the profiled lyceums do not train for any occupation, and that the post-lyceum schools only expect a maximum of 2 years' vocational training, doubts arise as to whether students educated in this manner can demonstrate adequate vocational qualifications for meeting the requirements of the Polish labor market.²² Comparisons between the lengths of vocational training in other EU countries (e.g. the dual system in Germany) show up the lack of competitive

¹⁸ With decisions of this kind in Poland, intuition is applied on the basis of general presumptions and not on the basis of corresponding studies. Cf. Symela, K.:idem, p. 170.

¹⁹ Cf. Symela, K.: idem, p. 170.

²⁰ Cf. Aleksander, T.: Phasen und Hauptformen der beruflichen Entwicklung des Menschen, in: Paape, B.; Pütz, K. (Ed.), Die Zukunft des lebenslangen Lernens. Festschrift zum 75. Geburtstag von Franz Pöggeler, Frankfurt am Main 2002, p. 397.

²¹ Aleksander, T.: idem, p. 397.

²² Cf. Kwiatkowski, S.: System edukacji zawodowej w kontekście rynku pracy i procesów integracyjnych w Europie, in: Jeruszka, U. (Ed.), Optymalizacja kształcenia zawodowege z punktu widzenia potrzeb rynku pracy, Warszawa 2002, p. 56.

²² This is even more so the case since the a.m. problem of insufficient practical experience and a broadly profiled education is also relevant to the new type of post-lyceum schools.

ability of the so-called "trained" Polish students on the European job market.²³

The above mentioned facts might allow the conclusion that the qualifications of vocational school leavers are "insufficient" for them to get an adequate job on the Polish labour market and even less so on the labour markets in other EU countries.²⁴ According to the "intervening opportunities" approach of Stouffer, the migratory tendencies of young people ought, then, to be low. However, the latest studies²⁵ with regard to the attitude of young Polish people towards job migration show that they are in fact very interested in working in the "old" EU countries. Around 76% of the vocational school students surveyed are interested in working in the "old" EU countries. 19% of them said they would definitely attempt to do so, and 34% said that it was very likely that they would.²⁶ In this context, it should be pointed out that a total of 66% of those surveyed regarded their chances at best on the Polish labour market as "not good" (48% not good, 13% bad, 5% hopeless). The low estimation of their own job opportunities together with the vocational qualification gained and the low pay²⁷ coupled with the resulting negative evaluation of life perspectives in Poland all have an impact on the intention to emigrate.

Of those surveyed, potential countries to emigrate to were mainly Germany and United Kingdom (i.e. countries which, in the

students' opinions, offer the best pay). Frequently, a formal dequalification or possibly a changing of career direction is accepted as part of the deal²⁸.

This confirms the findings of the human capital approach to the migration problems, which forecasts exactly this type of adaptation to the different qualification requirements in target countries.

²³ Cf. Kabaj, M.: idem, 2002, p. 28.

²⁴ Cf. Kabaj, M.: idem, 2004, p. 336.

²⁵ This refers to a survey in June 2004 which was carried out for the UKIE (Committee for European Integration). In 4 different Polish Voivodships, 252 students from 8 "intermediate vocational schools" were surveyed. The results are not representative, but are still valid for reflecting tendencies. See: Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej (Ed): Gotowosc i potencjal migracyjny mlodziezy, Warszawa 2004, in: <http://www2.ukie.gov.pl/WWW/news.nsf/0/A5B997CDA B41F96>. (Power Point presentation on migratory potential of vocational school students), p. 1ff.

²⁶ A further 23% were interested in working in the EU but did not want to check it out for themselves.

²⁷ Out of a total of 257 students who were interested in working abroad, 31% of them cited the poor labour market in Poland and a further 37% the lower pay as reasons.

²⁸ Cf. Urząd Komitetu Integracji Europejskiej (Ed.): Gotowosc i potencjal migracyjny mlodziezy, Warszawa 2004, in: <http://www2.ukie.gov.pl/WWW/news.nsf/0/A5B997CDA B41F96>, 2004, p.2.

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