

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Is It an Attitude Issue?

A think-tank analysis shows that young people in BiH greatly lack career building ambitions

A few weeks ago, some 7,000 fresh graduates were promoted at the University of Sarajevo.

"Welcome to the ninth joint promotion and the first joint graduation ceremony of the University of Sarajevo. Only big cities have big halls for top class ceremonies. And only big universities have entire cities attending their graduation ceremonies. You - recipients of bachelor's and master's degrees and doctorates from the University of Sarajevo in the 2012/2013 academic year - you are a city with more than 7,000 inhabitants! All of us gathered for this festive event in the biggest hall there is in Sarajevo as academic community [...]. The academic community is composed of citizens, academic citizens." These were the initial words of the University of Sarajevo Rector Muharem Avdispahic's address on 14 November 2013.

A new policy brief by Populari think-tank is a small contribution towards the public debate on youth unemployment, including these 7,000 young people, and graduates of other BiH universities.

The Reasons behind Youth Unemployment

In the current social and economic environment of Bosnia and Herzegovina, almost certainly many of them will play their role in the increase of unemployment statistics, which already reach beyond 27% for general population and even 58% for youth. To date, these statistics have become almost common knowledge. But the reasons behind them are debatable; most frequently, the causes are found in the great lack of governmental action or a lack of opportunities arising at the job market. Analyses dealing with youth unemployment nowadays for the most part focus on the bad economic environment. They look at the demand side of the labor market in terms of its low level of job-seekers absorption, and neglect the supply side of the chain. Thus, competences of the human resources that are available - and especially young, highly educated newcomers to the job world - are rarely questioned. Knowledge, skills and behavior combined are rarely emphasized. Behavior especially is hardly ever discussed, as it includes difficult to pin down aspects such as preparedness, attitude or

mind set of the fresh workforce to enter and participate in the job market.

Education system, educational and labor policies, a creative and inspiring environment are all relevant, but Populari decided to focus on one overlapping segment of it - the attitude. By definition, attitude means "a relatively stable overt behavior of a person which affects his status". In other words, the way one feels and approaches the future, will affect the fruits it bears.

In the past 15 years, the number of students in BiH has doubled. While in the 1999/2000 academic year around 58,000 students were enrolled, by the 2012/2013 academic year this number has increased to more than 115,000. The current ratio of students per 100,000 inhabitants is thus double the average during Yugoslavia. Each year, almost 20,000 people graduate in BiH. Along with an increased production of university graduates in general, came also a hyper-production of certain profiles. For instance, there are large numbers of criminologists, psychologists and social workers who have difficulties finding a job, but at the same time there seems to be a lack of people educated in IT, pharmacy or tourism sector.

Even though many of these graduates along

with other young people in BiH initially end up being unemployed, they are generally considered as knowledgeable, skilled and willing to work. But how many of them in fact gained any work experience prior to finishing their studies, either through volunteering, internships or other placements? And how often are they willing to step out of their comfort zone and take up a less than ideal job that would get them by? Have you ever wondered how many of the highly educated young people would be willing to temporarily bartend or working in a car wash in order not to be dependent on their parents? How do they understand the value of money in relation to the quantity and quality of work it requires?

Looking for Posts, Not Actual Work

Populari analysis shows that young people in BiH greatly lack career building ambitions. Jasmin Besic, Director at the Institute for Youth Development KULT, said: "Nowadays, young people are looking for job posts, but not for actual work. Seeing how the public administration in BiH functions, and not being willing to progress or do a lot of work, everyone wants to join the administration because it spells security to them. But honestly, I don't understand how someone in their 20s or 30s would want to work in the same position for 1000 KM per month for the rest of their lives. Where is the

ambition?"

However, it is not only career building ambitions that are missing; in a competitive environment, in which finding a job is difficult especially for certain profiles, it would be reasonable to expect of young job-seekers to strive to stand out and to be different from the mass. It would be reasonable to expect of them to not study for the sake of a diploma but for the sake of gaining knowledge, being competent and actually representing what is termed "academic citizens".



Are young people willing to step out of their comfort zone and take up a less than ideal job?