

The Education – Training – Work & Employment Continuum in Development cooperation

FIVE CASE STUDIES UNDER SCRUTINY:

DOES THE NOTION OF CONTINUUM OPEN TRANSFORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE RE-INTEGRATION OF THE EXCLUDED FROM EDUCATION, TRAINING, WORK & EMPLOYMENT? FIRST EVIDENCE FROM THE FIELD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1. Introduction

Using the notion of continuum implies discontinuities between constituting entities. This Study hypothesizes that these discontinuities create all kinds of problems in the fields of Education, Training and Work & Employment - the assumption being that these discontinuities create and reinforce Exclusion and Inequality for the concerned actors. This reflection is timely, as similar themes appear in the SDGs with intended interactions between Goals 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 10 (Reduced Inequality).

The objective of this Study is to generate evidence around a Continuum perspective, through the presentation and analysis of five selected development cooperation projects run by RECI members, that might be considered to qualify as an Education-Training-Work & Employment Continuum. To this aim, the projects serve as case studies, analysed in order to develop interactions between action and reflection, draw lessons that might be used for further assessment and/or development of the presented project, and offer food for thought to actors interested in these fields.

RECI members know from experience that implementing a vision like the Education-Training-Work & Employment Continuum is difficult. Each of its constituting fields is embedded in institutions, norms and processes that tend to enclose it behind the walls of a silo with its own financial, political and technical constraints, and which is itself inclined to become a self-protecting bureaucracy.

The presented case studies aim to:

- identify discontinuities between the Education, Training and Work & Employment fields, each field being formal or non-formal;
- Point out the steps towards achieving a Continuum;
- Identify potential paths to reach the main objective of the Continuum, i.e. the socio-economic re-integration of children, youth and adults;
- Open a reflection on the evolution of the notion of Continuum in the context of the debates on the future of Work, Training and Work & Employment.

2. Methodology

This study may be considered as an experiment: the exercise proposed that RECI members' open a debate on the missing links/interactions between the Education, Training and Work & Employment silos, which often prevent the development of a Continuum, by tapping into their own experiences and knowledge. This study will primarily focus on exploring the innovative and transformative potential of developing interactions between these areas.

Given the complexity and diversity of the case studies, it is out of scope to build a "model" that would identify the concrete objectives, strategies and policies that should be put in place. In a bottom-up perspective, it aims at sharing experience and knowledge between the RECI members and partners.

The selection of the case studies was based on the more or less extended degree of proximity of the RECI members' projects with an "ideal" Continuum, as provisionally defined by the Project team. The main criteria consisted of the presence of a minimum of two of the three fields (Education, Training, Work & Employment) in the project, and the potential presence of further concrete socio-economic (re-)integration instruments. A strong potential innovative/transformative dimension was an additional subjective criterion, added in the project for its own sake or as a complement to other ones (E.g. professional orientation, income generating activities). The elaboration of the case studies was based on a written questionnaire filled in by the NGOs, followed by face to face interviews.

Three Northern- and two South-based projects were selected, under the idea that a knowledge and skill cross-fertilization process could develop from the blurring of the "North-South" divide, for instance in terms of the development of Exclusion and Inequality all around the world.

The first work phase ran from September 2018 to March 2019 and focused on building the case studies as well as reflecting on these experiences (Volume I). In parallel, a separate Volume II was produced as a Tool Box, detailing the methodological and conceptual perspectives used for the analysis of the case studies in Volume I.

The second phase (June 2019) consists of a broader consultation with stakeholders in Switzerland - such as development cooperation organizations active in the fields of Basic Education and Vocational Skill Development, representatives from the worlds of Education, Training, Work and Employment, IOs, think tanks and academia.

Rising from these consultations and analyses, a progressive cross-fertilization-based process for capacity development could then contribute to the creation of a core knowledge and skills package about the Continuum. However, this objective has to be put in a broader perspective, as the information, opinions and analysis developed in this Study mostly reflect the approach of a specific category of stakeholders, i.e. the ones based in the North involved in development cooperation in the South.

The presentation of each case study is followed by a list of key features that resonate with some of the key characteristics of an Education-Training-Work & Employment Continuum that are presented in Volume II (Tool Box).

3. Five Case Studies

3.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina. Inclusion of Roma via Education, Employment/ Employability and Socio-economic Support (2017-2019). Caritas Switzerland

The project “Inclusion of Roma via Education, Employment / Employability and Socio-Economic Support, 2017-2019” is the continuation of a project launched in 2010 to improve the educational situation of Roma in the country. It builds upon a well-established approach for the inclusion of Roma and other vulnerable groups in BiH through the provision of quality primary and secondary education, vocational education and training (VET), employment and socio-economic support. The overall goal of the project is to enhance the socio-economic inclusion of Roma into the Bosniak society. To this aim, the project is looking to reduce the gap between Roma (and other vulnerable groups) and the non-Roma majority population through the promotion of equal access to quality education and employment opportunities. The project is directed to three target groups: the schooling part of the project targets pupils from elementary (aged 6-15) and secondary schools (aged 15-19), while the VET part of the project targets adults. Additionally, the project builds capacities of teaching staff, Roma mediators and social workers involved in the project’s activities.

Caritas implements the project with two local NGOs. Additionally, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees as well as authorities on Cantonal and Municipality level are involved. This basis of stakeholders and especially the relationship with the ministry as the co-founder of the project strengthens perspectives of sustainability.

The continuum specific aspects include a specific focus on drop outs in order to find solutions for re-enrolment of children and catch up support for students. A second layer looks at improving the employability of the target group by e.g. facilitating the transition between education, professional training and employment. Finally, the notion of Continuum includes an integrated approach that interacts with income generating projects.

3.2. Colombia: Education, Work and Peace: Promising opportunities for young adults in Soacha. Vivamos Mejor

The project is aimed at IDPs living in the municipality of Soacha, neighbouring the capital city of Bogotá, in a highly violent environment. It targets vulnerable young adults aged between 18 and 25 who do not work at all, or work informally. Its objective is to enable beneficiaries to access formal vocational education and training (VET), and then to help them get a job in the formal market.

The project provides beneficiaries with one-year, tailor-made VET complemented by soft-skills trainings (SST), psychosocial support (PS) and integration into the formal labour market. It takes advantage of the existing well-functioning Colombian VET system, which allows private institutions to issue state-recognized professional certificates. The offerings are defined and adapted each year to match with local labour market needs.

In order to be eligible for the programme, beneficiaries must have completed secondary school. Once they have completed the VET training, they receive a nationally recognized diploma and are directed to ASOCEDT, the local partner employment agency that will connect them with employers and support them into entering their first formal employment experience.

The project is implemented by Fundación Apoyar, the direct partner of Vivamos Mejor in Colombia and delivered in cooperation with a variety of local, national and international private partners in the area of VET and business. Official bodies and governmental institutions are involved in the project.

The continuum specific aspects include the connection between education and training by bringing teachers from the VET institute Bogota to the project area and thus offer the beneficiaries the opportunity to overcome access barriers (high travelling costs, dangerous travelling routes). Furthermore, it connects VET to the formal job market (1) by offering a selected range of trainings and (2) by placing beneficiaries in companies through the intermediate of ASOCEDT.

3.3. Niger. Alternative education program for <young people (Programme d'éducation alternative des jeunes – PEAJ). Enfants du Monde (in Consortium with Swiss Contact).

The Alternative Education Programme for young People (PEAJ) aims at providing quality education to children and youth with no schooling at all, and early school leavers aged 9 to 14. The project is implemented in the areas of Maradi and Dosso, where 200 Community Centres for Alternative Education for young People (CCEAJ) were established. The main objective is to offer second chance education that fits with the social and economic realities of the beneficiaries, in order to facilitate pathways towards further schooling in formal education, access to vocational and training centres or entry to the job market. The duration of schooling within the CCEAJ varies according to the beneficiaries' background and their previous schooling experience.

Enfants du Monde and Swisscontact, the two organizations driving this project, are associated in a Consortium. The developing connections between them enhance their ability to develop a project based on the quality of the pedagogical approach and on community mobilization and appropriation, as preconditions to facilitate these pathways.

The project is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The PEAJ is included in the National Education Sector Plan 2014-2024 and the project cooperates closely with the Government on national level and with the respective authorities on regional and local level.

The project illustrates an original “intra educational” approach to the Continuum. The first element is spatial: the CCEAJ are located within the premises of formal schools. The centres use existing infrastructure and logistics; also, the actors in charge of administrative and pedagogical monitoring of formal schools and CCEAJ are the same, thus building bridges between formal and non-formal education. The second element relates to the educational methodology and textbooks. The project uses pedagogical methods fostering the active participation of learners, developing critical skills like problem solving, which are instrumental in building their professional future. The project also develops innovative textbooks, responding to both educational and pre-vocational objectives, in which learners acquire literacy and numeracy through the study of themes related to a selection of jobs.

3.4. Romania. Job Orientation Training in Businesses and Schools (JOBS). Zürich University of Teacher Education (PHZH) Department of International Projects in Education (IPE).

The Job Orientation Training in Businesses and Schools (JOBS) project started in Romania in a period of transition which called for a modernization of the country's education and training system. The accession of Romania to the EU (2007) has increased the demand for skilled workers and so changed the job-related perspectives of students.

One important goal of the JOBS project is to show students that technical high school represents a valid alternative to the more classical and prestigious pathways. Students can learn a profession that could not only provide a regular income but also give them access to the European labour market.

The JOBS approach links basic education with the world of work by developing the skills needed for today's labour market. It is preparing students for life and the jobs world by helping them learn how to gather information, gain and share experiences and explore the labour market.

The project is implemented at the level of basic education, targeting in particular youth aged 14 - 16 years, and at the level of secondary education; 180 schools participated in four regions of Romania.

The project implemented by IPE is financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The Romanian partners are the governmental Institutions (Ministry of National Education MNE and others), two universities, schools and teachers.

The Continuum approach is tackled through preparing students for their future training and job orientation choices. The JOBS project seeks to develop specific knowledge and competences that can be linked to the needs of the labour market. A second entry to the Continuum is the connection with the local job market. Businesses are considered as key actors and students are required to explore jobs in their local environment.

Sustainability is strengthened through cooperation with governmental and official actors: The Ministry of national Education MNE has integrated the JOBS approach into the national curricula of compulsory education and of the technical gymnasia. The university of Brasov and other institutions engaged in teacher training and / or in the extension of JOBS to other regions of Romania.

3.5. Switzerland. ON-D-GO – Developing the Employability Skills of displaced Persons. Swiss Federation for adult Learning (SVEB).

ON-D-GO is a transnational project addressing the question of economic integration of migrants in European societies. While the project is implemented in seven European countries, the present case study focuses on the activities developed in Switzerland.

The ON-D-GO project is in line with SVEB's main focuses of work, namely training of trainers and basic skills promotion. Thus, the direct beneficiaries of the project are Swiss education providers working with refugees and migrants; their target groups are mostly literate adult migrants and refugees eager to start their own business.

The objective for SVEB is the development of modules and the identification of education providers that will use these resources as part of their training programmes.

The novelty of the ON-D-GO project is the focus on entrepreneurship and employability, and the modular learning resources supporting self-directed learning. Migrant and refugees will be able to choose the modules based on their own needs.

The curriculum combines basic education and vocational training (VET) components. In terms of basic education, modules will address different levels of basic skills such as financial literacy or learning and organizational skills. VET is considered in the broader sense of “employability education”, which is to say promoting skills preparing migrants and refugees for the labour market. The curriculum will also foster entrepreneurial skills.

The project through the continuum lenses: One of the main issues faced by migrants and refugees relates to the recognition of academic or vocational qualifications acquired in their country of origin. The project appreciates that migrants and refugees come with a potential and builds on their aptitudes. So, the training material starts with the assessment of existing competences and the learning needs of the participants.

The curriculum is flexible: modules do not follow a linear progression. The project fosters self-assessment and recognition in the sense that participants can pick and choose what they need to learn. At the end of the training, they will receive a certificate to recognize their learning achievements.

4. Key Features

The report reflects key features and lessons learnt specifically for each case study. Nevertheless, there is a number of common characteristics that can be cited:

The continuum is the approach where the promotion of equal access to education and training goes along with access to work and employment.

Multi-stakeholder approach: The continuum is a multi-stakeholder approach bringing together actors from the three axes of education, training and world of work. This includes public and private actors.

Migration and mobility: A majority of the presented programs intervene in a precarious or fragile context where migration and / or internal displacement is a reality. In a wider sense mobility is a global challenge to which the Continuum perspective with its specific orientations is a potential answer.

Inclusion: Related to the above-mentioned context, programs often address people who normally would not have access to education, training and work: Refugees, migrants, IDPs but also members of discriminated minorities or early school leavers. A Continuum approach therefore is based on the notion of inclusion by promoting access to education, training and work for specific groups of people and – if necessary – on the integration of “do no harm - approaches”.

Program or project: The progressive qualitative and quantitative development of interactions between the components of a multifaceted continuum can better be introduced in a program with a wider approach and timeline than a project usually has. Programs with a multi-year pre-investment and building on former programs (or phases) usually have a stronger potential towards sustainability.

Spatial aspects have an important impact on the realisation of the continuum perspectives by bringing the offers into the proximity of the target group and / or by sharing infrastructures and expertise e.g. of formal and non-formal education or basic education and training.

Recognition: Continuum programs integrate people with different backgrounds and learning biographies. Therefore, these programs always are concerned with the issue or challenge of recognition of former learning achievements in order to allow continuation for the education / training pathway and to foster access to the world of work.

The Intra-Education continuum can be a subcomponent of a continuum and facilitate transition between non-formal and / or between formal education and training.

Curricula and learning issues: A holistic continuum approach in fact combines different learning objectives such as basic competencies, technical skills and live skills.

5. Cross-fertilization between cases: can the Continuum be the key to unlock integration for under privileged populations?

Following the presentation and cross-analysis of the case studies, the notion of Continuum appears as one potential pragmatic answer to challenges of today's learning and working needs and to adjust to multi-faceted global transformations. Three cross fertilization-based considerations can be extracted:

Temporalities

The analysis of the case studies underlines the importance of the multiple temporalities (short / mid / long term) of the projects. At the same time, all that happens in the context of short temporalities is defined by globalization performance's urgency and has to be articulated with the long temporalities linked to personal and professional development.

The common challenge for the studied projects is trying to combine these diversified temporalities. If they can be mastered in the context of relatively small/middle size projects/programmes, they demand a costly high level of management and support staff. Consequently, all projects are faced to the challenge of a multi-faceted sustainability that consists of a choice between either:

- the multiplication of small, multi-objectives, high quality and costly projects that cannot be upscaled and articulated in a coherent policy, or
- the limitation of the Continuum to binary combination between 2 components, the emphasis being put on one of the two components (E.g.: Education and Work....)

These two scenarios can be combined in the case of decentralized societies where decentralized programmes can be articulated with centralized policies.

Linearities

The case studies are all in a tension between the “traditional” perspective of temporality and linearity between the Education-Training-Work worlds, and today’s crisis of this perspective reflected by rising discontinuities. The increasing breaking of linearities and temporalities between Education, Training and Work & Employment leads to a progressive feeling of the uselessness of inherited stable patterns and models. All the Continuum stakeholders are then faced with a simultaneous need to clarify their visions and objectives as well as to answer the concerns of the respective actors (parents, administration, pupils, enterprises...) — all of them exposed to the disordering effects of discontinuities. A rigorous knowledge background in different facets of Education, Training, Work & Employment in the context of globalization, is then needed and would allow to co-organize with the potential actors of a project some meaningful transition stages to face step by step the consequences of discontinued temporalities and linearities.

Recognition

Faced with discontinued temporalities and linearities all projects have, in different ways, started to take into account the consequences of this situation by introducing the notion of recognition of different types of learning and working experiences. The validation and recognition of prior learning is a matter of respect, fairness and solidarity towards groups at risk. That is why, for example, the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is crucial for formally low-qualified youth (informal sector) and adults (unemployed). This approach, which can be extended to working experience, is a way to by-pass the difficulties stemming from discontinued temporalities and linearities.

These issues raise finally a question about the opportunity to revisit the notion of Continuum. That would lead to a redefinition of the “old time” Temporalities and Linearities, through the notion of open access to systemic Life Long Learning non-linear Connectivities between the worlds of Education, Training and Work & Employment. Such an approach would have an impact on the Exclusion and Inequality situations that the case studies have underlined, as well as on the re-emergence of a three elements social continuum based on the recognition of the knowledge and skills acquired by passing through multifaceted Education, Training, Work & Employment activities.

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