



YOUTH GREEN SKILLS: ENSURING THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EDUCATED AND SKILLED TODAY FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Dea Elmasllari

Public Relations and Marketing Manager for Tirana European Youth Capital 2022, National Youth Congress of Albania

Introduction

The recent climate and environmental challenges, highlighting here the critical situation from heat waves and environmental degradation to high levels of water scarcity in the Mediterranean region, urge a re-thinking of the economic transformation and growth of our societies. This growth should not overlook the human dimension and capacities for sustainable development. Moreover, such growth should focus on balancing the future needs with present shifts in and approaches to how we live, how we conduct our day-to-day activities, and how we shape our education, training and employment.

There is a high level of uncertainty facing our societies in terms of its long-term and sustainable socioeconomic development that has also been highly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. This uncertainty requires strong commitment, dedication, cooperation and innovation at different levels and from different actors.

In spite of a raging debate on the need for a more sustainable economy, sustainable policies and shifts to certain organisations and practices that focus on green policies, there is little

research that can guide organisations, institutions, individuals and international communities on this uncertain and unclear path. There is also the need to understand to what extent the transition to more sustainable economies has an impact on different societies and communities, as well as how green skills work in practice.

Understanding the green skills and the extent to which they induce significant changes in our societies shines a spotlight on the bearers of and contributors to the future and prosperity of our world: young people.

Young people, the generation who suffer from the current socio-political and economic crisis the most and bear the consequences, will play a critical role in how the sustainable development processes in organisations, institutions and communities will work. If empowered and proactively focused on those matters that highly impact their lives, youths will be able to unleash their potential, act as agents of positive change and sustainable growth, and thus make their societies thrive toward sustainable development.

In 2017, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Roadmap for Action stated that reinforcing human capital is the key force for stability and security in the region. Today, this statement remains as potent as ever. The Roadmap for Action also argued that education and youth mobility are an essential part of the answers to the challenges faced by the Mediterranean (UfM, 2017).

In this light, this brief aims to bring attention to the pressing need for the identification of key guidelines for key actors, stakeholders and institutions conducive to supporting youths on their path towards green skills development in the Mediterranean.

By outlining three key recommendations, it calls for more research, more mechanisms to engage young people in green skills development through training and education, and stronger cooperation at the Mediterranean regional level.

The demand for green skills

As defined by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), green skills are the knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society (Arthur, 2021).

In an official policy blog written by Charles Arthur (2021) and published under this theme at UNIDO, there are three key ways that determine the needs arising during the transition to a more sustainable development economy and the emerging rise of green skills: 1) structural changes require the adaptation and diffusion of specific tasks and the reduction of others; 2) new economic activities and rapid changes in labour markets create new occupations and thus result in the need for new skills, profiles, qualifications and training frameworks; 3) organisations, occupations and industries that shift to a green transition need to adjust current job and skill profiles to new frameworks.

What does this mean for the Mediterranean region? The region is characterised by uneven economic development and unequal distributions of wealth (Manoli, 2021). Yet it is a region of contradictions, with lots of potential and possibilities for growth.

In terms of what the pathway to a sustainable future looks like for the region, a one-size-fits-all answer cannot be applied. Different countries and societies have different priorities over environmental agendas and issues, and while some have moved forward into applying sustainable development principles in the region, there are several disconnected places that lack concrete opportunities and mechanisms. There are big gaps between the southern and

northern shores of the Mediterranean, considering the social and political unrest in Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, in addition to huge gaps in economic, digital and technological developments throughout the entire region.

Taking the economic gaps into consideration, the mapping of regional actors and forces that can be involved in the regions' pathway towards a more sustainable future is of key importance. The Mediterranean region is sensitive, yet powerful in its resources, and these include its key human resource and potential: its young population and generation. With the median age on the southern and eastern shores being under 30 and around 40 in the northern shores, it shows that the region is dominated by a younger demographic structure (Ambrosetti, 2021).

While Mediterranean demographics are challenged by the major societal changes taking place in the region, such as constant migration, social and political unrest, women's rights and education, brain drain and young people's need for more autonomy and empowerment, its human capacities are a strong resource for the regions' pathway towards a sustainable economy.

Engaging the young generation in shaping a more sustainable economy and future will benefit the Mediterranean region and will allow the potential of young people to lead change to be tapped. Therefore, governments, educational institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs) and other stakeholders alike should ensure that young people are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to gain resilience in the midst of uncertainties and challenges, and most importantly to adapt to the needs of a clean, low carbon and sustainable economy.

Shaping a green future for youths

Meeting the challenges of transitioning into a more sustainable economy and development and thus a more sustainable future will require youth empowerment through training and education. It is important to train and educate youths in the prospects and advantages of a sustainable economy as well as the possibilities it creates.

With the rising awareness of the environmental crisis at a global level, as well as the need to adapt to the consequences of climate change, green jobs are growing quickly and the new concept of green entrepreneurship is rising (UNEP, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the way societies conduct business, day-to-day life and economics. It also added further urgency to sustainable development objectives and the interconnection between human activity and the environment (Dessi et al., 2021).

However, when it comes to shaping a greener future for youths, a one-size-fits-all strategy cannot be applied throughout the Mediterranean region, as varying aspects can influence and impact the degree and level of education and training that is needed to be shaped. In this regard, governments, institutions and relevant corporations must analyse, map and determine collaboratively the appropriate pathways that can empower youths through mentorships, apprenticeships, traineeships, youth exchanges and workshops, and other means.

Education and training remain key components to tackle the challenges and uncertainties by committing to a sustainable economy. By learning new skills and improving their capacity to detect the opportunities of green jobs, youths can develop a stronger entrepreneurial mindset and thus create more spaces for themselves and their peers where a more sustainable future is possible.

Another aspect to be considered is updating the existing curricula with new knowledge and studies on the green economy and sustainability by leveraging learning among youths.

In complementarity with non-formal education, higher education and research centres throughout the region should maximise interaction and synergies by ensuring that peer-to-peer learning and capacity-building in the field of green development offer updated and coherent educational materials and textbooks.

Even though young people make up the majority of the population in the Mediterranean region, the levels of people not in education or training remain worryingly high (Scarrone, 2021). On the other hand, schools find it hard to keep up with the dynamics of the labour market and its fast-changing demands, causing high mismatches and lack of advanced education and training for young people (ETF, 2021).

The biggest challenge remaining is to match education and skills training with the labour market and deliver results that are as applicable in the present as they are oriented to the future. In this regard, the creation of an environmentally-aware generation in terms of knowledge, skills and education will highly depend on making use of digitalisation.

The adoption of new technologies can help youths to adjust to the rapid change of how knowledge is distributed, shared, applied and stored. Technological transformations will also help youths to connect with one another across borders and share knowledge, ideas and experiences.

Complementing green and digital skills together will help societies to strengthen their sustainability agendas and shape the sustainable economy. Finally, it will bridge the existing skills gap among youths who feel unprepared and unsatisfied with their level of preparedness for the green and digital transformations.

Youth as key partners and actors for shaping a green future

Young people are the generation most affected by the crisis we face today and, at the same time, they are also the ones with great willingness, determination and capacity to bring positive change and improvements.

One of the most persistent crises our society is facing is climate change and environmental disruptions. To gain resilience and act with knowledge and power, in light of these challenges, youths should be provided with opportunities and spaces that support them in skill-building for a sustainable economy.

Even though there is no internationally unified definition of the youth age group, this policy brief, without prejudice or discrimination to any groups or other definitions, defines youth as the age group aged 18 to 30, in compliance with the Council of Europe's analytical conclusions on youth definitions in legal and policy frameworks (Perovic, 2017).

Across the Mediterranean region, young people are faced with various challenges. These range from intergenerational ones, to migration, brain drain, the need for stronger human rights and freedoms, to limited job prospects, high levels of unemployability and inadequate education and training. All these challenges have an impact on how young generations act and lead the change in their society and their potential to meet the needs of the job markets (Martín, 2009). Those with little or no opportunities for employment, personal and professional development and access to training and education are highly marginalised and distant from the rest of their peers in society.

At the same time, youths are concerned about what the COVID-19 pandemic has brought as a result, the limited access to direct participation and involvement in decision-making or other spaces as such, the lack of skills to manage certain crises and mostly those related to environmental protection and management. This underscores the need for more comprehensive

and youth-centered approaches in tackling a number of pressing issues that the pandemic has deepened (Dessi et al., 2021).

According to the World Economic Forum's Davos Labs Youth Recovery Plan 2021, more than half of young people surveyed stated they feel inadequately skilled for jobs in the next ten years. (WEF, 2021).

How can youths be empowered and relieved from feeling trapped in the midst of uncertain situations with consequences for their future?

There may be several paths to walk, but prioritising green skills in education and training, empowering youths and providing them with new avenues for engagement in these fields will be a key determinant of this vital transformation.

Activism, advocacy, research and policy analysis should also be further strengthened and prioritised. In schools and universities, promoting and raising awareness of green skills through non-formal education and workshops will be important to shaping a new generation of environmentally-aware individuals. CSOs should focus on training existing and upcoming youth leaders in sustainable development, whereas governments and corporations should keep supporting youth programmes focused on sustainability and promoting green and sustainable policies in the workplace.

Recommendations for a way forward

The structural changes that will result from shaping a more sustainable economy, which are already becoming evident due to the need for more environmental awareness and protection, are placing an added strain on the education and training systems, particularly in the context of the Mediterranean region, which this policy paper has sought to highlight.

In conclusion, it offers three key policy recommendations:

- 1. More solid research, such as skills mapping, situational analysis and reporting, is needed to analyse green skills and sustainable development within the context of the Mediterranean region.** Identifying and anticipating green skills needs and building upon them requires more solid research, and relevant stakeholders should ensure there is common ground for concrete action.

Furthermore, research is important for analysing and strengthening skills planning and a development process on how resources can be used, their costs, their benefits and their added value.

Moreover, to assess the policy coherence between environmental policy and skills development policies, empirical research is key not only for policy experts and decision-makers but can also equip youths with better illustrations of the concrete implications of a more sustainable economy for various sectors of human activity.

For all actors involved, it is of paramount importance to identify the opportunities, the demands and the way forward by making use of research in order to have a better understanding of the size and scope of these emerging phenomena and how youths can be real change-makers and key actors in this process.

- 2. More mechanisms should promote green skills and environmental awareness in formal and non-formal education and training for youths.** Governments, academia, and relevant actors should ensure there are systems and channels addressing

sustainability issues, where young people are trusted and treated as key partners while being provided with avenues for youth-led change.

Promoting green skills and environmental awareness contributes to making those fields attractive to young people and help to attract their attention and elicit a reaction. This environmental awareness does not directly lead to specific green skills but it will lead to more action and undertakings that focus on the importance of preserving and protecting the environment. By being aware of what environmental protection and preservation entails, young people will be more cautious in their actions and desire to learn more, explore, and provide new insights and shared knowledge.

It is also important that young people are provided with the opportunity to meet with other peers and cultures in the Mediterranean region and become more aware of common challenges and solutions that can help in this regard. Meeting points for achieving such objectives can be the international non-formal exchanges or learning projects in which one or a group of young people take part and learn about sustainability issues (i.e., local or international volunteering projects, youth gatherings, international youth exchanges, etc.).

Youth exchanges across the Mediterranean shores will provide young people with better glimpses of what connects them and will enable them to create stronger bonds and networks across both northern and southern shores.

Finally, encouraging young people to challenge assumptions and actions that are detrimental to a more sustainable society, through local research, conducting interviews, lobbying or campaigning against unsustainable practices at national or international level, is a prerequisite for positive long-term change to unfold. All of these activities will to change personal habits, raising more environmentally-aware and more pro-active societies.

3. A Youth Green Skills Agreement can be set out and developed, for example, within the flagship actions under the European Skills Agenda. The European Skills Agenda sets the objectives for upskilling and reskilling in a period of five years. The Mediterranean region and its countries can renovate and innovate their cooperation agreements with their partners in the European Union (EU) by unlocking their resources and potential. The Youth Green Skills Agreement can lay down the basis of joint work among Mediterranean countries towards strengthening green skills in education and training and advancing the importance of shaping a sustainable future together. Such an agreement can build the capacity of the trainers, teachers and youths to deliver the skills for sustainability required in the workplace. It can enable individuals, businesses and communities to adjust to and prosper in a sustainable environment. It can also connect schools and education centres throughout the Mediterranean area to partner and deliver on sustainability-centred education and training for youths.

This will be achieved by embedding the necessary skills for sustainability practice and teaching in vocational education and training, within the requirements of national and European regulatory frameworks; upskilling of young peer educators and teachers to deliver skills for sustainability; strategically reviewing the standards and qualifications for recognising and assessing people's skills to embed sustainability knowledge; as well as focusing on reaching out to vulnerable youths.

Such a common agreement will reflect concrete joint action and cooperation, as big networks of strong key actors and stakeholders can work together in the field, including the UfM and strategic institutional partners in the field of

economic development and research, such as the Euro-Mediterranean Economists Association (EMEA), the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), the Mediterranean World Economic Foresight Institute (IPEMED), as well as other key strategic partners and agencies in the EU working on Mediterranean and neighbourhood policies.

Conclusion

The Mediterranean region is as vulnerable as it is powerful and strong, rich in its potential and resources to shift into a more sustainable economy and development. One of its strongest assets is the young generation. However, in light of the recent crisis and challenges, this generation needs to be better equipped in order to meet the current demands better. This brief provided an overview of the importance of sustainable development and the rise of green skills for younger generations. Such skills can be taught and learned as stronger cooperation and partnerships prevail in a region where more spaces and avenues are created for young people's empowerment and engagement in matters that affect their lives.

Through more research and scientific based decision-making, more educational and training mechanisms and solid cooperation at the Mediterranean regional level among all the relevant stakeholders involved the pathways toward sustainable economy and development can be led by the real agents of change: young people.

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