

15th Steering Group Meeting **Priority Area 9 “Investing in People and Skills” (PA9)**

Date: 30 November 2018

Venue: Otto-Wagner-Schützenhaus, Vienna, Austria

Participants: see annex I

Minutes by Ulrike Sedlmayr, KulturKontakt Austria and Barbara Willsberger, L&R Social Research

Chair:

Roland Hanak; Federal Ministry of Labour, Health, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, Austria

Jürgen Schick; Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research, Austria

Anna Gherganova; Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, Republic of Moldova

Ludmila Pavlov, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, Republic of Moldova

Welcome and Introduction

Hanak, Schick, Gherganova and Pavlov opened the Steering Group Meeting and welcomed the participants as Priority Area Coordinators of PA 9. Hanak shortly reflected on the preceding PA9 Stakeholder Conference and the constructive discussions and high quality input of the participating stakeholders that will feed into the PA9 proposal for a revision of the EUSDR action plan. He also expressed his delight about the high number of participants from diverse backgrounds and the representation of nearly all countries of the Danube Region at the Stakeholder Conference. As another positive feature he mentioned the participation of so many new steering group members at this 15th PA9 Steering Group Meeting, apart from the familiar members, that already attend the meetings regularly. Hanak and Schick invited the SG members to host one of the following Steering Group Meetings in their respective countries.

Jader Cané, DG Employment also welcomed the participants and emphasized that it is important to introduce the EUSDR to the relevant funding instruments, like the ESF, in each country, because now there is the consultation phase.

Adoption of Agenda

The Agenda was adopted unanimously.

Reform Priorities in Education & Labour Market Policy in each Country

UA (Labour market): A new law against unemployment was developed; wider information technologies, professional training support, a LLL-concept and a Joint Action Plan.

SK (Education): Auxtova talked in detail about the National Programme for the Development of Education (NPDE) that defines the orientation of the Slovak school system for the next 10 years (2018-2027). NPDE has 3 strategic objectives, 12 specific objectives (6 for pre-primary, primary and secondary education and 6 for tertiary education) and 106 measures. The measures are detailed in the implementation plan, which consists of 5 two-year interlinked action plans.

NPDE Strategic Objectives: Quality (e.g. quality improvement through the new system of management, financing and evaluation), Availability (e.g. increasing the availability of quality education for all by supporting integration and inclusion), Modernization (e.g. modernization of the education content and its harmonization with international standards – for instance, the EQF, modernization of testing methods, diagnostics, etc., and creating links to the needs of society and labour market).

Auxtova also stated that the government of the Slovak Republic approved (November 2018) the introduction of compulsory pre-primary education for all children at the age of 5. It will come into effect at the beginning of September 2020. The obligation to attend pre-school education should be established a year before the start of compulsory education. Enforcing this change will require an amendment to the relevant legislation. This step would provide better involvement into schooling system especially for children from marginalized Roma communities and socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and better results in international testing is expected.

Further the Slovak Republic was hosting 5th PIAAC (International Assessment of Competencies for Adults) International Conference (28 – 29 November 2018). This event was a unique opportunity for researchers, analysts, policy-makers, as well as practitioners from all over the world to discuss how to build effectively on available analytical data in order to address relevant policy issues. The Slovak Republic will hold the presidency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (in 2019). Auxtova stated that the Slovak Republic was eagerly participating in the preparations for the second cycle of the Survey of Adult Skills. SK was engaged in CEDEFOP's project on „Governance of EU skills anticipation and matching systems: in-depth country reviews with the aim to support mutual learning on effective skills anticipation and skill matching, and the exchange of good practices across EU Member States.

Auxtova said that they were working closely with OECD on developing National Skills Strategy, which is a longer-term project for the upcoming two years. Slovakia was also taking some little, but steady steps towards recognition of prior learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning in the form of ESF funded national project called System of Validation of Qualifications.

SK (labour market): Kalmanová stated that at the end of October Labour offices registered 174 171 job seekers. The positive trend of the decline in the number of unemployed and the increase of workers would continue. There was a significantly decrease of jobseekers registered for more than four years. But despite the positive results of employment policy it would still be necessary to continue to work intensively with disadvantaged unemployed persons. Closer cooperation with employers is needed. It is necessary to make individual projects for individual companies especially in areas with higher unemployment and where more Roma people live.

Kalmanová said that current problem for employers in Slovakia is the lack of qualified workforce and it is starting to pose a serious threat to the further growth of Slovak enterprises.

Therefore, the Ministry of Labour has worked up a Strategy of the Labour Mobility, which should temporarily solve this problem. This strategic document is supposed to regulate the employment of third-country nationals in Slovakia. One of the solution would be to speed up the process of recruiting of third country national for short(-supply) positions (skills gap positions) but only in districts where unemployment rate is below 5%. The strategy includes 23 short-term measures and 27 long-term measures with a view to 2030.

These measures were temporary measures to address the current shortage of qualified labour force in the Slovak labour market. Short-term measures would include, for example, shorten period for deciding whether to grant a temporary residence in the case of a shortage of employment.

The Government of the Slovak Republic approved the Strategy on the Labour Mobility of Aliens in the Slovak Republic on 10 October 10, 2018.

CZ (Education): Lukavský stated that during the last half of 2018 the partial assessment of the Strategy of Educational Policy in Czech Republic till 2020 has been made. This was the final assessment before the expiration of the strategy. This strategy is a main conceptual document which should set the direction of education in the Czech Republic till 2020. The Strategy has three key priorities: 1. To decrease the inequalities in education, 2. To promote the quality education and teachers as its main prerequisite, 3. To manage the education effectively and responsibly. The assessment came to following conclusions: During the period of 2014 – 2018 the objectives of the first priority “to decrease the inequalities in education” were quite well met, especially thanks to the implementation of many reforms e.g. inclusive reform which was adopted in 2016, and the reform which made the last year of pre-primary education obligatory (adopted in 2017). The objectives of the second priority “to promote the quality education and teachers as its main prerequisites” were partially met mainly thanks to the increase of the wages of teachers, the stabilisation of curricula and planning of the revision of curricula. However, the career system of teachers has not been implemented. At least part of this career system SYPO (methodical cabinets) has been maintained. Objectives of the third priority “to manage the education effectively and responsibly” were also partially met thanks to the implementation of many documents linked to the strategy.”

The MEYCS has been also focusing on quality of higher education. The ministry organised the international conference called „Towards Better University Teaching“. This conference was mainly organized for pedagogical staff of universities. The topics of the conference were progressive attitudes to teaching and good practice in higher education.

Regarding the social policy, CZ has a new minister at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs as of July. Her main priorities are the increase of the minimum wage, reform of the pension system and introduction of shared jobs for mothers.

RO (Education): At first Stroie and Clapan thanked the PACs for the constructive and stimulating Stakeholder Conference that took place the day before. Stroie then talked about the implementation of the digitalisation strategy for education. Romania has introduced a qualification standard to revise the qualification and standards in terms of training outcomes and also the methodology assessment. RO has introduced measures to support the attractiveness and inclusiveness of VET by offering scholarships and other supporting measures. Among other measures they were intensely trying to promote successful graduates as role models and strengthen the network of learning providers. Stroie said that these VET schools were very heterogeneous in terms of capacity and context, that would make the mutual support and learning between these providers so important. RO has developed measures to develop entrepreneurial skills and creativity among students and supporting mobility among students. For the future RO is putting the focus on further developing work based learning pathways. Further develop the qualifications for higher VET and post-secondary education, to introduce quality insurance mechanisms for work based learning and to foster the transversal skills of young students.

Concerning the labour market Stroie mentioned that the main developments in RO are fully aligned with the European objectives on upskilling and reskilling and we are one of the countries that are piloting upskilling and reskilling EC initiative.

Major theme concerning VET under the Romanian presidency will be ‘Excellence and key competences in VET’ and it is planned to further develop the concept and methodology for these centres for excellence for VET.

RS (Labour Market): Stojanovic stated the engagement in active employment policies in Serbia, according to the national employment action plan 2011 – 2019. Her ministry focuses on the improvement of labour market institutions, the support on local employment policy and the conditions of employers, as well as the inclusion of vulnerable groups, and the topic of mobility and employment. Another focus lies on the improvement of the human capital and training measures. RS has a high rate of youth employment and will focus on measures against it. RS is implementing national labour market measures through labour service. RS supports measures to foster entrepreneurship through training, subsidies and mentorship. In 2018 1000 people had the opportunity to participate on special IT Trainings. The Ministry of Education has adopted a new national qualification framework and Stojanovic stated that she was in the working group on higher education together with representatives of the Ministry of Education. In 2016 gender budgeting was introduced for active labour market measures and special supporting measures for Roma people and people with disabilities were foreseen. She was looking forward to a successful cooperation within PA9.

HU (labour market): Tölgyes stated that the level of employment in Hungary was very high at the moment. Some new instruments on the labour market was the development of worker's accommodation, because the willingness for labour mobility was very low in Hungary. Job creation was supported, more 3000 SMEs were able to create new work places because of these measures. The public work programme, state is offering jobs for unemployed persons was successful. Now there is a new programme to try to support the transition from the second to the primary labour market. There was made an agreement to increase the wages.

Tölgyes also talked about changes in policies for VET in Hungary. In the dual VET system so called student-contracts can be signed to train in companies. The Chambers are entitled to provide training for persons who carry out practical training by companies taking part in VET. After the training certification will be provided about finalizing the training. The Sectoral Skill Councils (SSCs) from now on are allowed to formulate recommendations with special regard to content and content development of IVET and CVET courses.

HR (education): Reiner stated that in Croatia Regional Competences Centres for Excellence in VET are being developed. VET schools will turn to regional competence centres to provide for excellence in VET. There are two acts waiting for public counselling, new act on adult education and an act about quality assurance in science and higher education. An important project in higher education is enhancing quality of traineeships in public higher education institutions. Reiner also talked about program financing of higher education and a workshop about this type of funding that took place in November with the EC. She specifically talked about the comprehensive reform of school education, including the reform of school curricula reform in primary and secondary schools. Currently 74 schools participate in the experimental phase of the curricula reform. Another measure going hand in hand with this measure is the digitalisation reform, raising digital skills of students and providing schools with digital equipment.

ME (education): Đurišić talked especially about adult educations and lifelong learning education. The government has just adopted a national action plan for career guidance and lifelong learning and the next four years for adult education. At the moment there are more than 1000 public and private adult learning providers in ME and there is a lot of data about the learners and the learning programmes provided by those providers. Several institutions also give basic skill programmes

especially for the Roma population in ME. Her sector is now coordinating the Euroguidance Network within the Erasmus+ programme, a separate office is promoting mobility programmes that are available for ME students and also improving career guidance systems in ME. All the primary and secondary school in ME have their own career and counselling school teams (3-5 persons per school), that are implementing career guidance strategy in schools. There is no specific subjective for career guidance in secondary school, it is more seen as a transversal topic. Priority one of the ministry of last year was the launching of the dual education and the cooperation between VET schools and employers has improved. This has been funded by the government budget, only the third year is being funded by the employers at this stage. Employers are foreseen to receive tax concessions. There is a professional training programme available for all graduates in ME, they have the opportunity to work for 9 months immediately after graduation. More than 40% of these graduates stay in this job also after this period. Further ME is now in the process of finalising the adoption of new curricula for VET.

MD (Education): Pavlov presented the current education reform of general education of the Republic of Moldova. At first a reference framework of early education and child education development standards for 0-7 year-olds has been elaborated and approved. Further the methodology for child monitoring and assessment based on these standards has been elaborated. In primary education 26 new curricula have been approved for all subjects at this level. Also guidelines for curricula implementation have developed and approved. Curricula have also been developed for new school subjects like 'personal development' for 1 – 12. graders and the new subject 'education for society' for 5 – 12 graders, that will both replace the subject 'civic education'. Also for this academic school year a new model for digital education was developed, starting from 1st grade and robotics starting from 4th grade. Concerning VET education, one of the main goals are the establishment of centers for excellence and national authority units are being developed to bridge the education system with the labour market. Concerning VET, Pavlov also mentioned other work areas like inclusive education in VET and the development of qualification framework and revision of the curricula.

Further the legal framework for the development of Dual VET has been created. The chamber of commerce has got a new function and responsibilities concerning Dual VET. Due to the promotion of the Dual VET education, the number of companies, pupils and schools participating at the implementation of the Dual system has increased. (200 students 2016, 1000 students 2018, 15 companies 2016, 70 companies in 2018). All these activities were set up in their education strategy 2020 and at the moment the strategy 2030 is being elaborated. All the processes, especially the curricula reforms, are being made under the consultation of the Council of Europe and the EC.

MD (labour market): Gherganova stated that the Republic of Moldova is now in the process of reorganisation of the national employment agency. The deadline for these reorganisations will be in February 2019. This national employment agency will have as a task to implement new employment laws with a new package of active labour market measures. Further also a labour market observatory is being established, especially the capacity of people working in this observatory has to be built. Support is given by the ETF and International Labour market organisations. Partnership and communication on the labour market on a sectoral level is being developed. In the Republic of Moldova sectoral committees are being established sectoral, 5 institutions founded by employers and trade unions receive financing of state budget. The main objective of this project is to establish a functioning platform for communication between labour market and education system on a sectoral

level. These activities are all implemented within the national employment strategy of the Republic of Moldova, which has been approved in 2016 and will last until 2021.

AT (education): Schick stated that the new Austrian government has a wide-ranging reform agenda in education. The governmental programme contains about 115 measures specifically on education. A particular focus is set on a greater use of standardised testing, the use of tracking and also there is a change to the approach of inclusion. The government programme announces a comprehensive review of all legislation related to education and all school curricula. Schick focused in his presentation on some examples of new measures for this school year 2018/19. There is a new approach concerning the acquisition of German language skills for newcomers (school beginners and newly arrived pupils). Students who have inadequate language skills in German and are not able to follow lessons are now taught in German language support classes focussing on the rapid acquisition of German language skills. After one semester the language level of the pupils is tested again and if the language skills have improved sufficiently, the students leave the German support class and take part in regular lessons. Children who are not yet able to follow lessons remain in the German Support Class and are tested again at the end of the school year. New and stricter rules concerning truancy have been adopted. If a student misses 3 days of school without an excuse, is has to be reported and leads to administrative penalties).

There is also a new binding uniform catalogue of criteria that applies to school enrolment throughout Austria. Starting in the school year 2019/2020, "talent checks" will be introduced for the 3rd and 7th grade with the idea that future pathways will be better promoted. As part of last year educational reform act, a big and comprehensive reform concerning school autonomy is now in implementation. What is new as of this school year is for instance that school administration is able to select new teachers by themselves.

In September the government has announced a new master plan concerning digitization in education with 3 main areas of intervention: 1. pedagogy, teaching and learning content, 2. infrastructure and 3. training of teachers. A new subject 'digital basic education' has been introduced for lower secondary level with different options for schools how it can be implement, e.g. as a separate subject or integrated in regular classes).

Austria is also implementing an initiative for adult education, that has now entered its 3rd cycle and is co-funded by federal funds, provincial funds and also ESF. The main goal of this initiative is to reduce the share of low-skilled people. It offers free courses in basic education and the possibility to acquire compulsory school degrees in retrospect.

AT (labour market): In the last month there were an increase of employed persons and a decrease of unemployed people. In October 2018 there were 3.766.902 persons employed in Austria - the highest number of employees Austria ever had. These number shows that there is no job reduction because of the digitization, quite the contrary there are as many jobs as never before, but there is an change in the job profiles and there are more higher qualified jobs and less lower qualified jobs.

On the other side the unemployment rate decrease (-0,5 percent points) and was 4,9% (EURORSTAT). Nevertheless, especially for elderly, low qualified and long term unemployed it is still difficult to find a job and therefore the emphasis of the active labour market policy is on these groups. The Public Employment Service Act obliges the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection to issue labour market policy targets to the Public Employment Service. The currently applicable targets include promoting equal opportunities for women, young people, older people, migrants and persons with health-related limitations.



In regard to these developments we suggest to put the focus of our future PA9 work on the following topics:

- Labour market policy cooperation (know how exchange)
- Digitization of work
- Integration of vulnerable groups
- Social Inclusion and fight poverty

State of Play PA9: Recent Projects and Events

Schick informed the participants about:

- The Joint meeting of the EUSDR National Coordinators and Priority Area Coordinators with the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs Corina Crețu took place on 26 June 2018 in Brussels. She expressed worries about the current state of implementation, which could be significantly enhanced in terms of political commitment and development of joint transnational projects. She said that the level of importance the EUSDR is given at national level could be enhanced, as it is in the Baltic Strategy, where Prime Ministers regularly attend the Annual events. She pointed at the importance of the EUSDR for non-EU countries, as the only platform where they are on equal footing with Member States. The revision of the Action Plan would be a good occasion for re-boosting the EUSDR politically. Non-EC countries could be involved more strongly.
- The 7th Annual Forum of the EUSDR took place on 18 - 19 October 2018 in Sofia, organised by Bulgaria, European Commission. Main focus of the event was on tourism development as a precondition to economic growth and territorial cohesion. Covered topics of particular importance for the Danube region related to: preservation of cultural and historical heritage, new technologies and digitalization in tourism sector, ensuring safety and security in tourism, transport connectivity and mobility. (thematic sessions on sustainable tourism mobility and security in public spaces) PA9 topics were represented more on a horizontal level. PA9 had the opportunity to enter into dialogue and discussions with the stakeholders in the form of a PA9 meeting corner, where we were able to present our projects and ideas.

State of Play: DTP Project – PA9

Sedlmayr presented the PA9 brochure and specifically talked about the planned projects, that have also been included in the new version of the work programme. Sedlmayr also asked the SG members to please inform the PA9 team about further projects in their country that can be added to the work programme. The new PA9 projects:

“Effective Quality Assurance through Successful Change Management – Capacity Building for School Directors” (KKA-Project: Quality Assurance in VET Schools: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia): As part of the regional project a modular course is being developed to strengthen the leadership and change management competence of school leaders in the school QA work. The course will train around 130 school principals from vocational schools in the three partner countries.

CODES – Competence Oriented Education for Elementary Schooling in Cross – Border Regions: Is developing and implementing a package of measures for teachers regarding: Information & mentoring, teaching materials, training.

Systematic Development of vocational education and training: The project is aiming to address issues related to the development, at system level, of the Romanian initial VET, according to the socio-economic development needs at national, regional and local level.

CODE - Competence Opportunities for Digital Employment: A 6 month training programme for specialized digital competences such as digital design, graphics, 3D animation is being developed for vulnerable young people at poverty risk, with the long term goal to provide opportunities for a quality employment

SMF: reaching for inclusiveness and improved skills through ICT enabled education: Project proposal is being prepared with the idea to develop a Danube Compass information platform with information designed specifically for migrants and public authorities working with migrants in the region and develop a strategy for effective information sharing for migrants in the Danube Region

SMF: support to national policies for inclusion of Roma and marginalized groups in education and labour market: Project Proposal is being developed to identify and tackle the obstacles to inclusive education systems, it is being planned to develop innovative systems to increase the outreach and the efficiency of the state policies through integrating mainstream measures with community development approach

Willsberger presented some selected new project from the labour market side, that have been implemented in the last year:

The funding project "**Labour foundations in South-East Europe - needs and implementation options**" consists essentially of a feasibility study to check the conditions for the practical use of labour foundations in companies that are about to privatize or bankrupt. The main goal of the project is the basic work for the development of concepts for the establishment of work foundations as pilot projects in South-East Europe. Important destination countries are states that are integrated into the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Based on the initial survey results, the second phase of concept development focused on possible work foundations or foundation-like projects in Serbia and Croatia.

The project "**Moldova Labour Market Policy Support Program**" should contribute to continuing the already existing cooperation between Austria and the Republic of Moldova in the area of active labour market policy, but at the same time adding new emphasis to the needs of the Moldovan labour market institutions and the priorities of the Austrian Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection in this country to support.

Changing Discourses, Changing Practices: The Roma as Human Resource (RARE): RARE aims to enhance the capacities of and cooperation among actors having a stake in the labour market participation of the Roma in order to better exploit their economic potential. RARE will result in equipping partner institutions with new opportunities for synergies and innovation to effectively tackle labour market inclusion of the Roma in the Danube Region and monitor the efficiency of interventions.

STEM Summer Orientation Camp (GirlsGoIT): 100 girls, between the ages of 14 to 20 year, from 17 regions in Moldova trained in software development, engineering and electronics to prepare them

for STEM studies and employment in the ICT labour market. As a result of the training 50 girls were trained in software development built an app for note-keeping and 50 girls trained in engineering and electronics built a smart city using 3D printing, robotics and drone.

Etwinning Danube Region Conference

Schick informed about the highly successful initiative of annual eTwinning Danube Region Conferences, that PA organises together with the Austrian National Agency for Erasmus+. It is planned to hold the next event on June 13 – 14, 2019 under the topic „School cooperation in the Danube Region: Experiences and future actions“. The event will serve for eTwinning project development and also include reflection sessions with former participants and project leaders. Furthermore, a panel discussion with SG members and eTwinning Agencies from other countries national support services is envisaged. A call for nominations with further detailed information concerning this conference will take place in spring 2019. Schick also mentioned the last eTwinning Danube Region Conference that took place on 14th and 15th of June 2018, where 50 teachers from 11 countries were participating and elaborated 12 new eTwinning projects.

4th Network-Meeting of ESF-Managing Authorities in the Danube Region

Willsberger then talked about the 4th Network-Meeting of ESF-Managing Authorities in the Danube Region that took place on September 19 – 20, 2018 in Bratislava. 29 participants (representatives of the Managing Authorities of the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Commission (DG EMP), Interact as well as of the ESF Baltic Sea Network, Alpine Strategy and the EUSDR) focused their discussion on transnational cooperation in the European Social Fund including the cooperation between operational programmes in the Danube Region and the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Furthermore, the participants discussed opportunities for the up-coming funding period.

Danube Region Monitor

Since the last SG meeting the contracting phase of the study “Danube Region Monitor” was finished. KKA and L&R invited different research institutions to send their proposals and the monitoring of the proposals showed that the öibf (Austrian Institute for Research on Vocational Training) had the best one. Therefore the contract has been set up with the öibf and after a first meeting in September they started their research. The results should be available in April and will be discussed in a common workshop with the SG members and nominated experts.

DTP-Call

Schick stated that the 3rd call will be launched anytime soon. All the relevant documents are already online on the Interreg Danube Website (www.interreg-danube.eu), for PA9 the DTP Specific Objective 4.1 is specifically relevant. A Thematic Seminar for the 3rd Call for Proposal will take place on the 15th of January in Bratislava, Slovakia. The objectives of this workshop are: - To provide potential applicants with the content information needed to develop a proposal in line with the call and programme requirements, - To provide potential applicants with the possibility to find interested partners and to facilitate project idea generation. A side-event (SK National Info Day) will inform stakeholders interested in the 3rd CfP in general or in a Specific Objective different than S.O. 4.1. Schick asked the SG members to spread the news about the seminar among stakeholders.

DSP New

Hanak shortly introduced Mihela Florea, the pillar officer (Pillar 2 and 3) of the Danube Strategy Point (DSP) in Bucharest, responsible for PA9. Florea then presented the Danube Strategy Point new and its purpose and goals.

The DSP has been set up in Vienna and Bucharest, to support EUSDR stakeholders wherever needed, in cooperation with funding instruments, in communication to the public, for capacity building for EUSDR in non-EU countries and in the processes of monitoring and evaluation of the strategy. The first NC-PAC Meeting organised by the DSP will take place on 6 / 7 December 2018 in Vienna.

Workshop ESL & NEETs, December 17 – 18, 2018

Sedlmayr announced, that there will be a workshop taking place in December 17 – 18 in Vienna on the topic 'Early School Leaving and NEETs across the Danube Region – towards new regional perspectives'. It will be an exchange of experts and platform for project development. There has been a Call for Nominations and nomination of experts for NEETs and ESL have been received from Bulgaria, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, Czech Republic and Montenegro. Sedlmayr asked the SG members if it was possible to still nominate experts for the workshop, if they haven't done so.

Workshop Empowering people with disabilities through employment support, Oct. 23 – 24, 2018

Gherganova informed about the workshop on **International workshop Empowering people with disabilities through employment support. The Objectives had the objectives to facilitate** exchange of good practice examples, projects related to empowering people with disabilities through providing employment support; establishing of platforms of different relevant stakeholders (experts, project promoters, policy-makers) facilitating collaboration to increase participation of people with disabilities in the labor market; facilitating developing of initiatives and/or projects aiming at increasing of people with disabilities' participation in the labor market in the Danube region. As conclusion, participants mentioned following challenges/problems in the Danube Region in regard with people with disabilities:

- lack of services for inclusive vocational education;
- lack of support services for labor inclusion;
- low employers awareness or willingness to hire people with disabilities;

Participants agreed on following policy interventions:

- development of social enterprises in the Danube region;
- improving networking of NGOs in the field of labor inclusion;
- inclusive vocational education for people with disabilities;
- strengthening cooperation between employers and NGOs working with people with disabilities

Revision of the Action Plan

Schick shortly described the current steps of the revision process within PA9. The results of the written contributions and feedback received from the SG members were used as the main elements for preparations of the 6th International Stakeholder Conference. The first results of the Stakeholder Conference confirm that the chosen topics/actions are the main challenges of the future. These topics are:

Education and Training:

- Quality and Efficiency of Education and Training Systems
- Relevant and High-Quality Knowledge, Skills and Competences
- Lifelong Learning and Learning Mobility
- Inclusive Education, Equity, Common Values and Sustainable Development

Labour Market und Social Inclusion

- Know-How-Exchange / Cooperation in Labour Market Policies
- Digitalization and Innovation in the World of Work
- Integration of Vulnerable Groups into the Labour Market
- Fighting Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion for All

The SG concluded that PACs prepare a written contribution to the RO Presidency and EC.

Adoption of the Work Programme

The update of the Work Programme was unanimously adopted by the SG.