

„Qualifications in construction industry”

There is just one way in which construction developers can assess the skills of a new man: they have to check them out at the construction site, as there is no efficient system to validate quality of building workers' education and training.

“Unfortunately, there is no other way to confirm the skills of a new worker but a practical check,” says Jakub Kus, a secretary of the “Budowlani” Trade Union. “People are employed upon references, on the basis of their CVs, documents, qualification certificates (sadly, this happens less and less often), while the actual skills and knowledge are verified at the construction site.”

For a couple of years now, the Trade Union “Budowlani” has been engaged in the programmes and projects, primarily international ones, to develop standards of vocational education and qualifications for construction workers. The Trade Union has co-operated with the Educational Research Institute for some time now in the development and preliminary allocation of qualifications necessary for construction workers to the Framework. The qualifications were defined for over 30 professions (over 50 qualifications altogether). “Before that, we worked on competence standards in the construction industry and on the new core curricula. Today, the key point is to ensure coherence of the entire system, at all the educational legs and, ultimately, to provide entrepreneurs with reliable information about employees' competencies,” explains the expert.

“The Polish construction market is atomised, most of the businesses (over 96 per cent) are micro and small enterprises, employing a couple or dozen of people. On top of that, many of these people have no formal confirmation of their qualifications. And even if they present a diploma or a course certificate along with their CVs, we do not really know anything about the standard or quality of this training. A diploma of a bricklayer who attended a vocational school and a diploma of a bricklayer who attended a course organized by the labour office do not really mean that these people have the same knowledge and skills,” says Jakub Kus and adds, resolutely: “Poland misses a coherent system of ensuring and confirming the quality of education of the construction workers.”

According to labour market analyses, the construction industry employs at least 25-30 thousand experienced employees (workers) with high, yet formally unconfirmed qualifications. Other workers with foreign experience find it hard to confirm new and valuable qualifications. Over the years of reforms, we completely forgot about the mechanisms of confirming qualifications acquired during the working processes, outside the formal education.

“Chaos in employment impacts the work quality. There is no coherence between the work position and the method of education,” concludes Jakub Kus.

The experience gained in international projects run by social partners (employers' and employees' organisations) and other organisations in the construction industry as well as the experience of European construction industry organisations such as EFBWW and FIEC show that it is necessary to develop an industrial qualifications framework, specifically to describe the Levels Three through Seven, i.e. those that require qualifications to be confirmed.

“So far Poland has commenced pilot works on the Competence Board for Construction Industry, which shall group the social partners, other industrial organisations, the educational environment and administration representatives. The Confederation of Construction and Real Estate and the “Budowlani” Trade Union have already started preliminary works on the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for the Construction Industry and they hope it to be one of the major tasks of the Board. We are trying to structure the questions of qualifications and professional competencies in the building industry. This is the expectation of the employers and the employees of the construction labour market,” adds Jakub Kus.