

## ASPECTS OF YOUTH COMPETENCIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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**Abstract:** The aim of this article is to present the youth unemployment problem that the European Union countries are facing nowadays. To this end, we investigate the competencies and skills considered necessary in the 21 Century. We do this by presenting the competencies considered important by European employers versus Romanian employers. Not least, we reveal future directions in terms of skills required by employers.

**Key words:** youth unemployment, 21 Century competencies, required skills

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### Introduction

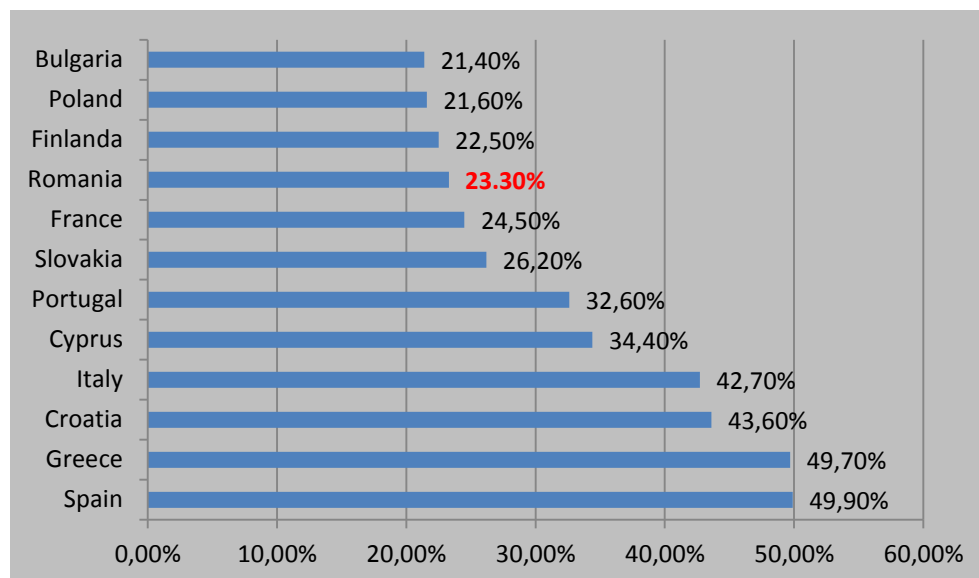
Over the past 30 years, major changes have taken place in countries around the world in the political, economic and social spheres. Moreover, the technology has exploded, has developed rapidly, expanded worldwide and nowadays it plays an important role in all fields.

At the same time, we should ask ourselves what has happened to people in the last 30 years. The people who grew up with these changes are integrated into this "new society," and the others who lived in another era, some have adapted, while others are still behind. The question is: What does society do for the latter? And have all the young people really been integrated in the scroll of our day?

The recent financial crisis has destabilized the global economies and its effects are still felt in some sectors of activity. A major effect of the crisis was the increase in the number of unemployed in all areas of activity, but especially in the case of young people without experience. Thus, a major problem for our society is the number of the unemployed, which in some countries is at a low level, and in others

it is high. These unemployed also refer to young unemployed people, who according to Figure 1.1 are at a worrying level. What are the causes of youth unemployment, which seems to exist in several European countries, but especially how we can combat this, is the theme of this article. Are employers or employees guilty of this? Who is the problem and how can it be solved?

As depicted in Figure 1.1, we can affirm that the Romanian youth unemployment rate is lower than in Spain or Greece.



**Figure 1.1 Youth unemployment in 21 Century**

Source: Eurostat

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The first part presents theoretical aspect regarding competencies and skills, while the second part analyses the competencies required by employers in the European Union and Romania. The third part reveals some future directions in terms of skills required by employers and the fourth part concludes.

### 1. Theoretical aspects regarding competencies and skills

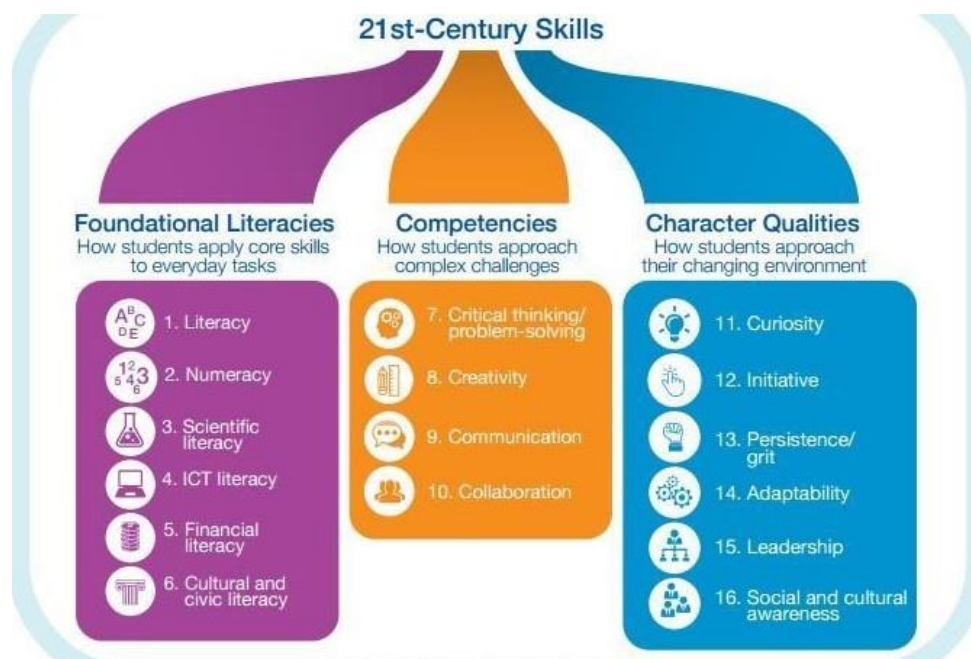
According to Smarttree the skills required for the 21st Century people can be divided into three main groups (Figure 1.2):

- a) Fundamental (study areas during school years)
- b) Skills that are acquired during school years but which relate to communication

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c) The qualities of each person's character (which makes us unique) - social skills.



**Figure 1.2 Competencies**

Source: [www.smarttree.com](http://www.smarttree.com)

Another recent way to see the skills required nowadays is revealed in Table 1.1, namely by taking into consideration the professional – personal dimension and the conceptual – operational dimension.

**Table 1.1 Skills types of the 21th Century**

	Professional	Personal
Conceptual	Cognitive skills (knowledge)	Meta-competence (Facilitating learning)
Operational	Functional competence (Skills)	Social competence (Attitudes and behaviors)

Source: [www.red-seal.ca](http://www.red-seal.ca)

An important factor that influences the competencies and skills acquired by youth people is the structure and quality of educational standards in each country. It can

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easily be observed in Table 1.2 that only Romania, Belgium, Slovenia and Spain have all the criteria that are part of the EU education system. Is this a good thing for these countries or not?

**Table no. 1.2**

**Structure and quality of educational standards in the European Union countries**

EU Countries	Occupational Standards		Education and assessment related standards			
	Tasks, activities functions	Competences	Learning Outcomes	Assessment criteria and methods	Subject-based framework curriculum	Syllabus
Austria	•	•	•	•	•	
Belgium	•	•	•	•	•	•
Bulgaria	•	•	•	•	•	
Czech Republic			•		•	
Denmark			•	•	•	
Estonia	•	•			•	
Finland			•	•	•	
France	•	•	•	•		
Germany			•	•	•	
Greece	•	•			•	•
Hungary	•	•	•	•	•	
Ireland			•	•		
Italy	•		•	•	•	•
Latvia	•	•		•	•	
Lithuania	•	•				
Luxembourg		•	•	•	•	•
Malta		•	•	•		
Netherlands			•	•		
Poland			•	•	•	•
Portugal	•	•	•	•		
Romania	•	•	•	•	•	•
Slovenia	•	•	•	•	•	•
Spain	•	•	•	•	•	•
United Kingdom	•	•		•		
Switzerland		•	•	•		
Norway			•	•	•	•
Sweden			•	•	•	•

Source: [www.red-seal.ca](http://www.red-seal.ca)

Possible consequences of the fact that young people acquire more skills and young people have a certain level of education are:

- several young people finish school;
- low crime rate among young people;

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- 
- less drug abuse among young people;
  - more young people who work voluntarily;
  - more young people participating in the elections.
- (Quality Youth Work – European Commission, 2015)

Examples of qualitative effects on young people which have a certain level of education include:

- Perceived experiences/ feelings (e.g. better self-esteem)
- Changed attitudes (e.g. to immigrants)
- Developed soft skills (e.g. ability to cooperate)
- Developed skills (e.g. ability to cook)
- Gained knowledge (e.g. about the European Union).

(Quality Youth Work – European Commission, 2015)

Qualitative effects are what actually happens to young people, how they develop, as a result of their taking part in education. So, a good education/ education about their real needs is very important for young people.

## 2. Methodology

To analyse the theme presented in this article we started from the statistical data provided by Eurostat. Then we analysed some theoretical aspects regarding education (information provided by different institutions).

Starting from the data obtained within the project financed by European funds, SOPHRD, we analysed at the level of Romania and the European Union the competencies required by employers of young people looking for a job.

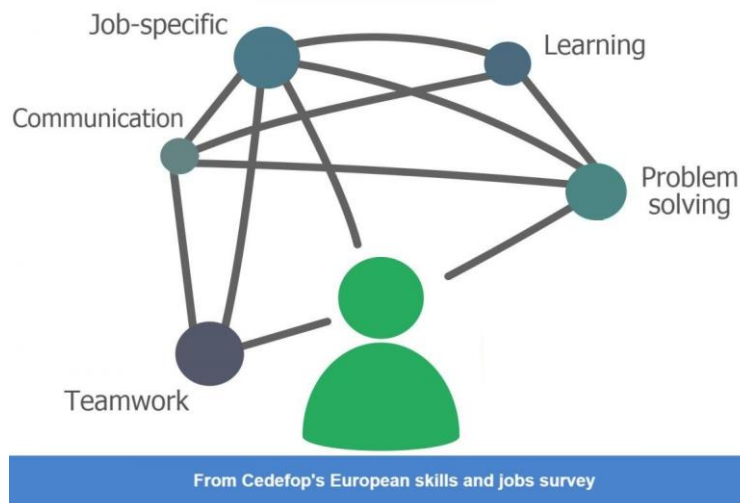
Then we analysed the data provided by hiring sites. Finally, we presented the future trend regarding the skills that young people have to acquire when finishing the university, because when they go to work, employers are satisfied, and there is no longer a high unemployment rate among young people.

## 3. Competencies required by employers in the European Union versus Romania. CVs sent versus vacant jobs in Romania.

Following a study made by Cedefop Europe (Figure 3.1.), European employers is searching for people who combine the following skills: specific knowledge required for the workplace, communication skills, open to learning, team work and problem resolving skills.

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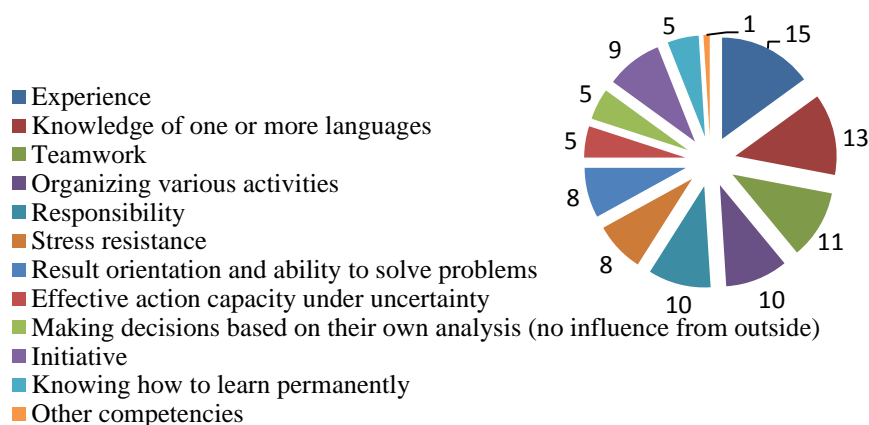
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**Figure 3.1. Competencies required in Europe**

Source: [www.cedefop.europa.eu](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu)

In what concerns Romania, a study realized through a SOPHRD (Figure 3.2) project revealed that the Romanian employers search for 12 competencies when they want to hire a person.



**Figure 3.2 Competencies required in Romanian**

Source: Project "O carieră pentru viața ta! Oportunități de carieră prin orientare și consiliere profesională" - SOPHRD 161/2.1/G/132792

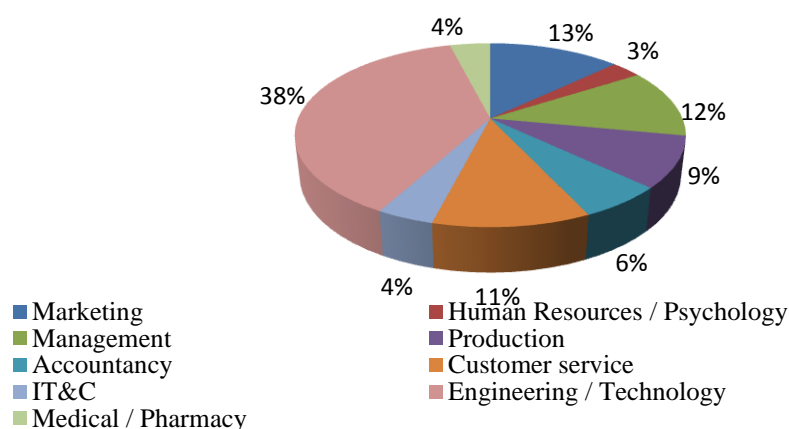
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As presented in the above studies on the required skills by entrepreneurs nowadays, we can see that what is being requested at European level is also requested in Romania. An explanation could be that Romania has begun to comply with international requirements or/and standards, or perhaps the large number of multinationals companies in Romania influenced this. To be more precise, in the multinationals that activates in Romania the standards required are the same as in the company home country, thus, gradually the Romanian employers have started to take on certain requirements regarding the skills of their employees.

Annex reveals at national level, the fields of activity where Romania has vacant jobs in the last period. The domain with the largest job offer is sales, followed by the call center field, and at a great distance are the areas: transportation, translation or production. Therefore, if Romania has unemployed among young people, it is also due to the fact that they do not have the necessary skills to fill these vacancies. Looking from a different perspective, we can see that CVs sent to recruitment sites are as depicted in figure 3.3.: engineering, customer service, accounting, marketing and medical. We can easily conclude that they do not meet the job offer that is nowadays on the market. It can be seen that there is a discrepancy and a lack of synchronization between areas where young people are studying and employers' job offers.

This problem can be solved only at national level through cooperation between state institutions, universities and the business area.



**Figure 3.3 CVs sent to recruitment sites in Romania in 2016**

Source: bestjobs, ejobs

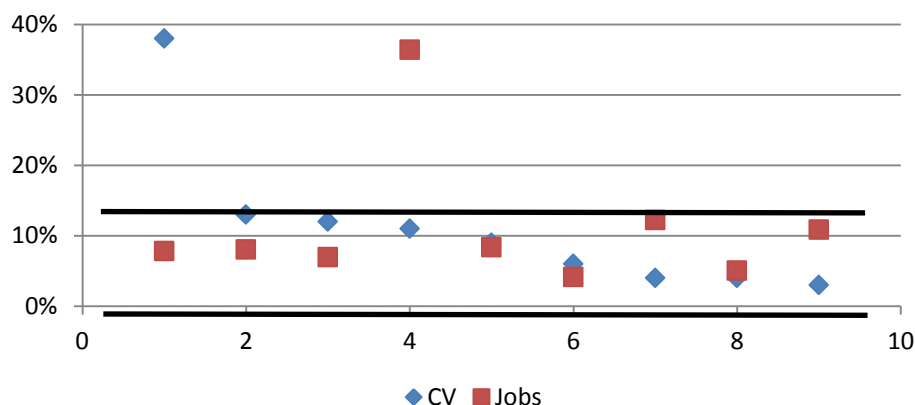


Figure 3.4 The relationship between CV sent and vacant jobs (I)

Source: own work

From the data provided by specialized websites, the following aspects are emerging: the number of young people who finish an engineering / technology specialization is far too high compared to the demand on the market (vacant jobs), and the opposite is the service field (here included all kinds of services) where the number of young people with a specialization in the field is small. The most balanced areas were Production and Accounting.

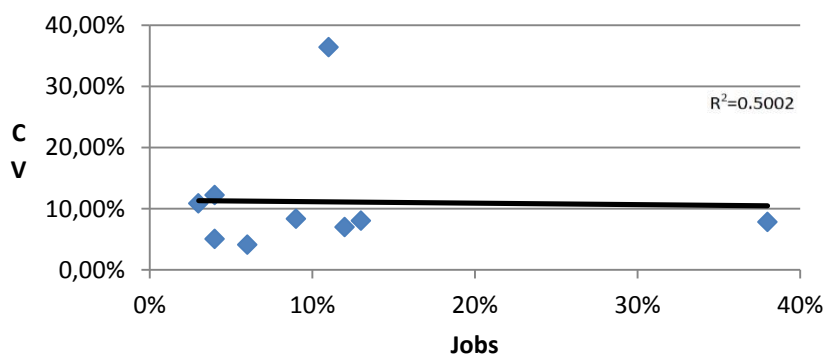


Figure 3.5 The relationship between CV sent and vacant jobs (II)

Source: own work

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Between the two indicators there is a statistical correlation, but unfortunately the demand and job offer on the Romanian market does not fit in most of the analysed domains.

#### 4. Future directions in terms of skills required by employers

As depicted by Figure 4.1 we also consider that in the 21st century society, there are 6 directions of change, which can be transposed in the skills considered vital in the future for all people who want to engage in a company.



Figure 4.1 Required competencies

In this context, the educational systems need to take into consideration and to adopt rapidly the changes in society, namely to take into consideration the new employers requirements in order to recruit graduates. To be more precise, Figure 4.2 reveals what education institutions should provide to students in order to be able to produce hireable people nowadays.

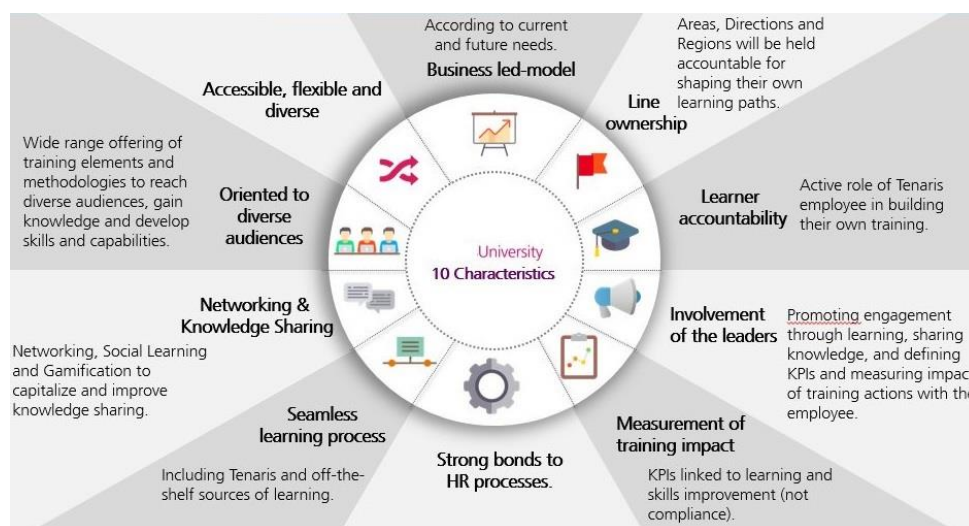


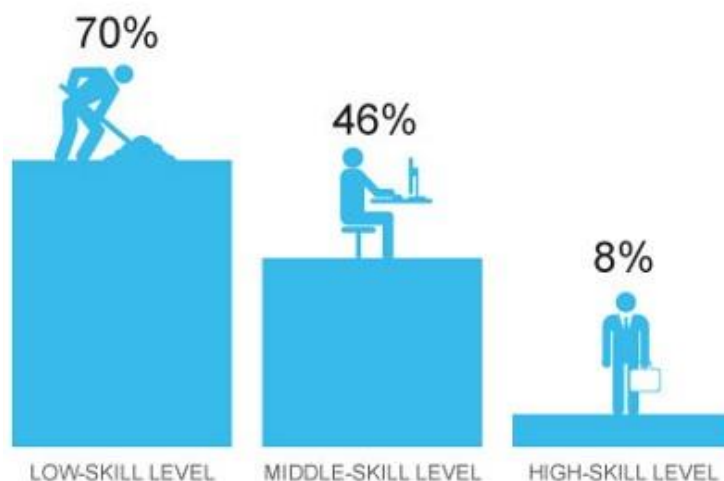
Figure 4.2 What education institutions should provide to students

Source: author's adaptation of [www.tenaris.com](http://www.tenaris.com)

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As depicted by Figure 4.3, the future predicts a major turning point for the people with minimal skills and education. Turning work that requires minimal skills into a mechanical process (within 20 years) leads to the disappearance of the profession. The 70% of people with only minimal skills will be replaced by performing machines, thus the demand for people with medium and higher education and skills will increase in the same rate as the decrease in profession areas.



**Figure 4.3 Required competencies level in the future**

Source: USA Today

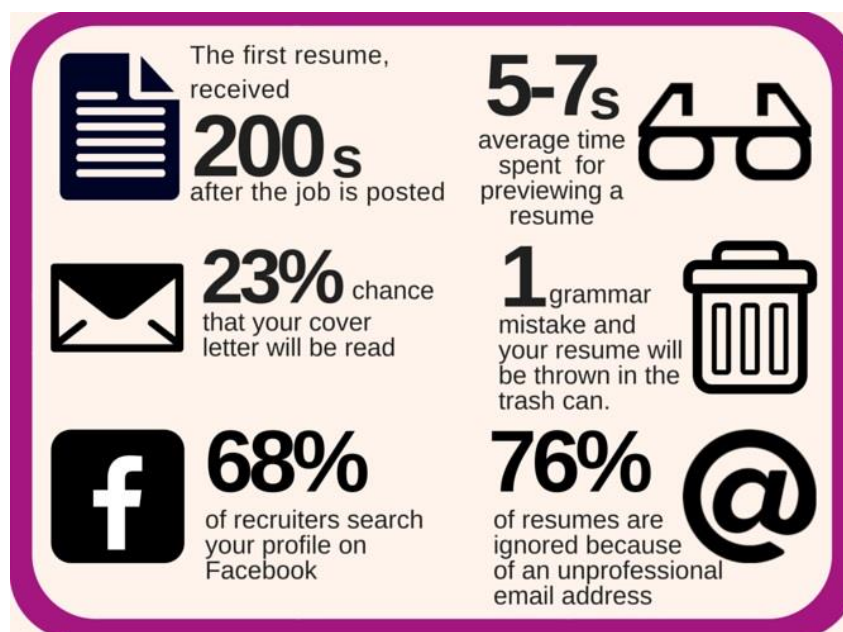
In book "The future of the professions" (2015), the authors say that: the professions in their current form will no longer be the best answer to the actual needs, because we progress into a technology-based Internet society. We, as a society, are constantly changing, evolving, so our jobs are changing, so also the skills that we have if we have a certain profession. For example, online courses are the most modern and sought-after way to acquire skills by young people. (Susskind, Susskind, 2015)

Therefore, young people, and not only them, need to adapt quickly to the changes that relate to the skills required in a particular job, if they want to have a job in the future. On the other hand, employers are very attentive to the skills and know-how of a potential employee, because it also counts on the value that the young man will give to his company.

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Studies reveal (Figure 4.4) that the recruitment process changed drastically in the past years, namely that nowadays the employers look around 5 to 7 seconds on a candidate CV, pay more attention to details (grammatical mistakes, or the candidate email address) and more important the candidate public profile available on social websites in order to obtain an extended characterisation of that candidate.



**Figure 4.4 21<sup>st</sup> Century employers**

Source: [www.smarttree.com](http://www.smarttree.com)

Present and future imply that: you need to be careful about the details, you have to have a complex CV and you have to be ready to accept the changes that take place in the field in which you work.

### Conclusion

The recent financial crisis that broke out in 2008 and affected economies worldwide has generated stagnation in economic growth in most countries and, on the other hand, a high number of unemployed. Thus the young population has it difficult nowadays to find a good job. Moreover, the employers' requirements have change to a large extent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century all around the world. Maybe an explanation can be considerate the globalization process. To be more precise, the

simple presence of multinational companies in different countries, in time changes the requirements of local employers. This is happening due to the fact that multinationals follow the same procedure of recruitment process in all countries as the one practice in the home country.

The main result of this study can be summarizing as follows. First, we observed that young people unemployment in Romania is almost at half of the situation in Spain or Greece. Second, the employers required competencies changed over the last years, and can be divided in three main groups: fundamental, skills that are acquired during school years but which relate to communication, social skills. Furthermore, we observed that the required skills of European employers are encountered also at the Romanian employers in recent years. Thirdly, we detected a discrepancy between the job offer on the Romanian market and the domains where people are looking for a job. To this end we encourage cooperation, between the government, universities and the business area. To be more precise, when the government establish the list of actions in order to resolve the unemployment problem a dialog with the business environment and universities should take place in order to provide candidates that fulfill the employers' requirements. Fourthly, we reveal some future directions on this topic. It is important to mention that the educational system need to keep up to the changes in the society in order to produce hireable graduates nowadays. Furthermore, the trend is to replace the jobs that require minimal skills by machines, thus generating an increase in the demand for medium and higher skilled people in the future. Another important observation is that nowadays employers pay less attention to a candidate CV and more attention to his personality (thorough details like errors on CVs or the candidate profile on social websites).

This topic is very ample and necessitates further studies in order to encounter the perfect solution for the discrepancies in the job offer and demand in the European Union, but also in Romania. Further research of the authors will try to identify the specific characteristics of the Romanian market, in order to improve the unemployment situation of young people.

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## Annex

## Vacant Jobs in Romania

Source: Project "O carieră pentru viața ta! Oportunități de carieră prin orientare și consiliere profesională" - SOPHRD 161/2.1/G/132792

