

STRATEGIES FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF EUROPE 2020 AGENDA

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Abstract:

The paper aims to analyse the synthetic indicators identified and adopted for education and training within the framework of the new Europe 2020 Strategy, in order to highlight the educational progress achieved by the EU member states until 2010 and the new targets and strategies adopted for 2020 by highlighting lifelong learning as a fundamental principle and a key element of these strategies.

Key words: *education strategy, education benchmarks, lifelong learning*

JEL classification: *J24, O15, I21*

1. Introduction

The Lisbon Strategy established for the first time a solid framework for European cooperation in the field of education and training, based on common objectives and aimed primarily at supporting the improvement of national education and training systems through the development of complementary EU-level tools. Within the framework of the Lisbon Agenda were made significant progresses, notably in support of national reforms of lifelong learning, the modernisation of higher education and the development of common European instruments promoting quality, transparency and mobility, although substantial challenges still remain in order for Europe to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world¹.

The new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, *Europe 2020*, emphasises that education and training have a crucial role to play in meeting socio-economic, demographic, environmental and technological challenges. At the same time, the new strategy focuses on efficient investment in human resources through education and training systems in order to deliver high levels of sustainable, knowledge-based growth and jobs that lie at the heart of the former Lisbon strategy.

Europe 2020 strategy focuses on objectives for reviving the European economy and creating *smart, sustainable, inclusive growth*. Education and training policies are key elements for the European Union in order to meet its objectives. The new Lisbon Strategy proposes several headline targets for education²: (i) to reduce the rate of early school leavers to 10% from the current 15%; (ii) to increase the number of young people with a university degree or diploma, meaning to increase the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education, from less than a third (31%) to at least 40%; (iii) to increase expenses on research and development to 3% of EU GDP, from current 1.9%.

A specific objective of the new strategy for education and training is to improve the performances and international attractiveness of higher education institutions and

¹ European Commission (2010), "Lisbon Strategy evaluation document", SEC (2010), Brussels, 2 February 2010

² Social Economische Raad (2009), "Europe 2020: The new Lisbon Strategy" Advisory Report, Hague, July 2009

raise the quality of all levels of education and training in the European Union, combining both excellence and quality. To achieve this objective, the European Union should set up the modernization of higher education, explore ways of promoting entrepreneurship through mobility programmes for young professionals and promote recognition of formal and informal learning. At the same time, in the period up to 2020, the primary goal of European cooperation is to support development of education and training systems in the Member States, which are aimed at ensuring³: (i) the personal, social and professional fulfillment of all citizens and (ii) sustainable economic prosperity and employability, whilst promoting democratic values, social cohesion, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue.

2. Education levels and the progress of nonfinancial aspects

As a mean of monitoring progress and identifying challenges, the strategic objectives outlined are supported by a series of reference levels of European average performance, called *European benchmarks*, set for the 2010 - 2020 period. These benchmarks are built on the Lisbon Agenda benchmarks, adopted under the “Education and Training 2010” work programme. On this basis, the Member States agree to the following five benchmarks⁴:

Table 1 European benchmarks for education and training set for the 2010 – 2020 period

| Benchmark | Target set for 2020 |
|---|--|
| Adult participation in lifelong learning | An average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning |
| Low achievers in basic skills | The share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15% |
| Tertiary level attainment | The share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40% |
| Early leavers from education and training | The share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10% |
| Early childhood education | At least 05% of the children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education |

Source: Council of the European Union (2010), Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme no. 5394/10, Brussels, 18 January 2010

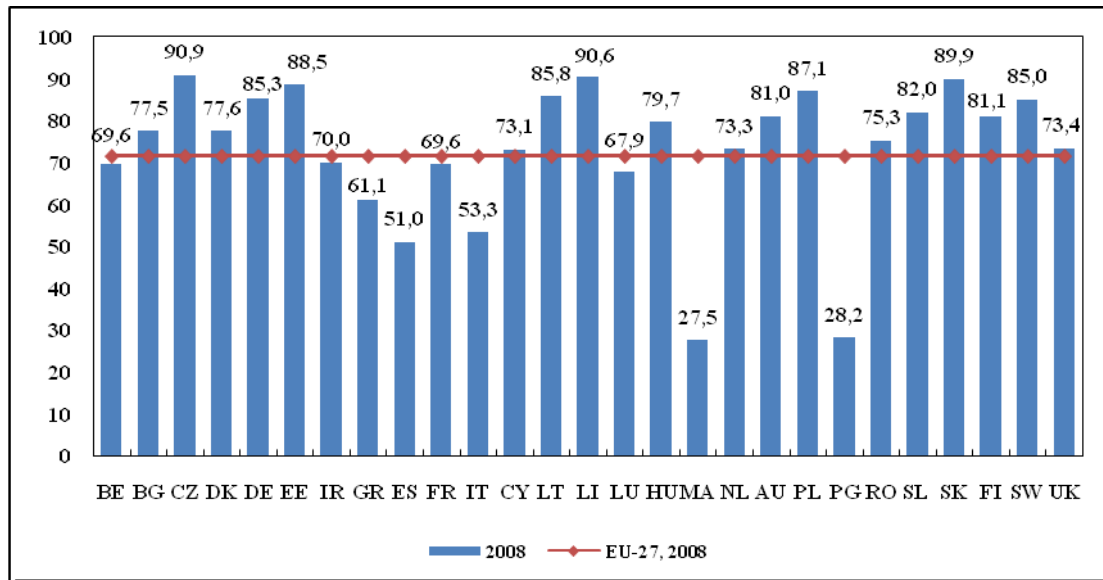
The high number of low achievers in basic skills (reading, mathematics and science) needs to be addressed urgently to enhance the employability of young people and to bring them into the world of work after school.

The percent of the young people (aged 20-24 years old) who graduated upper secondary institutions has known only a slight increase after 2000, without registering significant progresses in reaching the reference level, which forecasts that until 2010, *85% of the young people between 20-24 years who will graduate the upper level of the secondary institution (3 Long ISCED Level)*. Even if in the last years they registered important progresses, Portugal and Malta are the weakest performers from this point of view, along other countries with a low percent, like Spain, Italy or Greece.

³ Council of the European Union (2009), “Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training - Europe 2020”, Official Journal of the European Union, Conclusions no. 119/02, 12 May 2009

⁴ Council of the European Union (2010), Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme no. 5394/10, Brussels, 18 January 2010

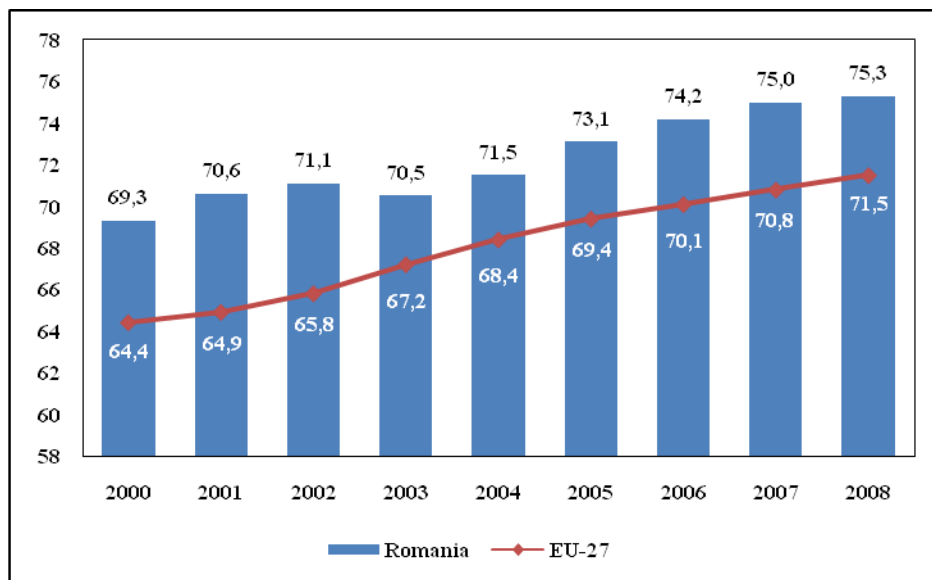
Figure 1 Educational attainment, percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 having completed at least upper secondary education



Source: Eurostat, Labour Market, Education and Training

In 2008 only Czech Republic and Lithuania registered more than 90%, while countries like Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Poland or Sweden exceeded the reference level set for 2010 of 85%, even though some of these countries had a slow downturn in progress compared to 2007.

Figure 2 Educational attainment, % of the population aged 25-64 having completed at least upper secondary education in Romania



Source: Eurostat, Labour Market, Education and Training

In Romania the education level progressed slowly, the percent of the young people with secondary education increased to 75.3% in 2008, level that placed the country on the 15th place among the EU member states⁵, exceeding developed countries

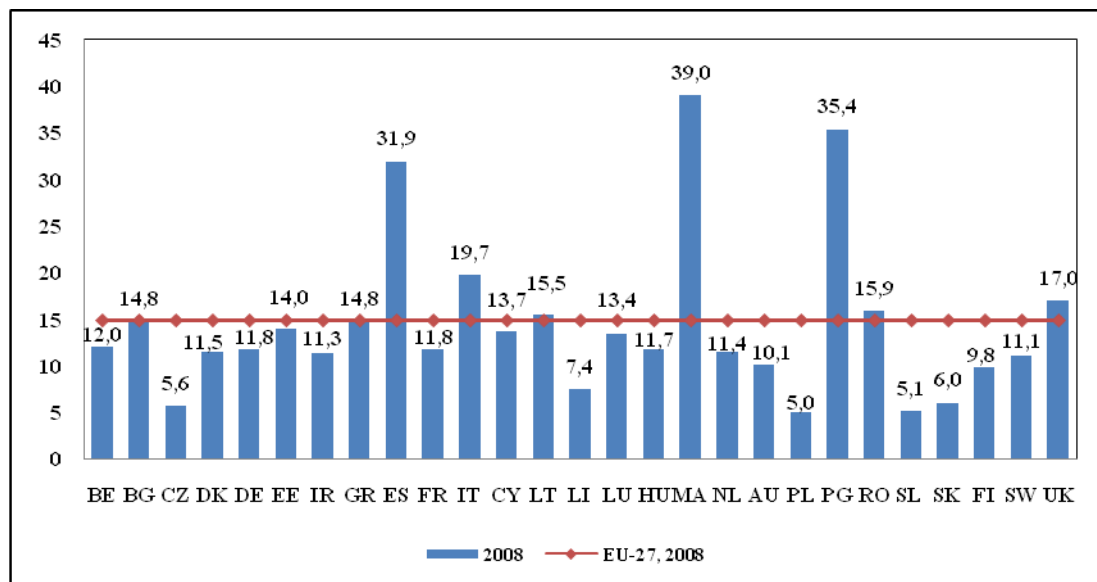
⁵ According to Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, En vue du Conseil Europeen de printemps et de la Presidence Francaise du Conseil de l'Union Europeenne, Rapport d'etape, Mission «L'Europe dans la mondialisation», 15.01.2008

(like Belgium, Netherlands or France), situation that shows an important progress compared to previous years (for example in 2007 Romania was on the 20th place).

From the point of view of young people's education, in 2008 the countries with the lowest results in EU were Spain or Portugal. *EU 27 registered progresses in the increase of the education level of young people to upper secondary education, but a more accelerated rhythm to reach the target is necessary.*

Preventing **early school leaving** reduces future exclusion from the labor market and the threat of future social exclusion. A greater emphasis on vulnerable groups, gender equality and social cohesion is needed to ensure that no one is excluded from knowledge. *Early school leavers* represent the percent of the population aged 18-24 years old with a lower secondary education level. *For 2010, EU had set the objective to reduce the number of those who leave school too early to 10% among the young population. The same target is set also for 2020⁶.* As a tendency, if in 2000 the EU average of early school leavers was 17.6%, it reduced to 14.9% at the end of 2008. Among the 27 member states, the situation is much more different. There are some performer states with a very low percent of the young population that have abandoned the school system too early. Therefore, the states with the lowest school abandonment in 2008 were: Poland (5.0%), Slovenia (5.1%), Czech Republic (5.6%), Slovakia (6%) or Lithuania (7.4%). Also in some states, in 2008, this level was under or close to the 10% goal: Finland (9.8%), Austria (10.1%); Sweden (11.1%), Ireland (11.3%), Netherlands (11.4% who registered an increase of the rate of the school abandon), Denmark (11.5%). Unfortunately, in some states, school abandonment is high/even very high: Malta (39%), Spain, Portugal more than 31%, Italy (19.7%), Romania (15.9%).

Figure 3 Early school leavers, %



Source: Eurostat, Labour Market, Education and Training

The aim for 2020 is to achieve a genuine European Knowledge Area, underpinned by a world-class knowledge *infrastructure*, in which all actors (students, teachers, researchers, education and research institutions and enterprises) benefit from the free circulation of people, knowledge and technology (the 5th freedom)⁷.

⁶ European Commission (2010), "Lisbon Strategy evaluation document", SEC (2010), Brussels, 2 February 2010

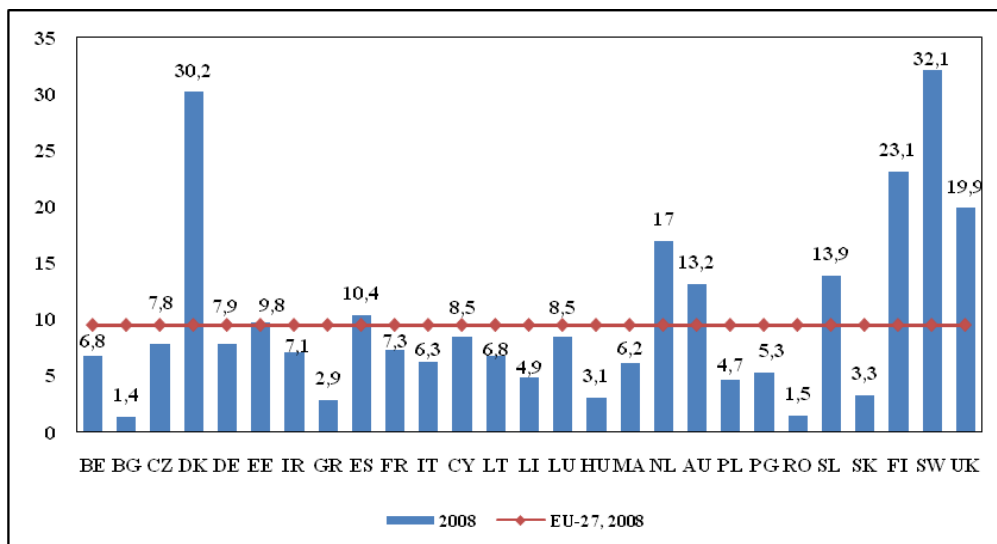
⁷ Council of the European Union (2010), Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme no. 5394/10, Brussels, 18 January 2010

European cooperation in education and training for the period up to 2020 is thus established in the context of a strategic framework spanning education and training systems as a whole in a lifelong learning perspective. The increasing challenges of globalization and knowledge economy demand the embracement of *lifelong learning* and “*employability of life*” for the individuals. Therefore, in addition to the economic and jobs creation imperatives, there are also social reasons for continuing to drive lifelong learning and for providing avenues to more and better jobs.

Lifelong learning is the key element to ensure good transition between jobs and occupations and in avoiding long-term unemployment leading to loss of human capital. At the same time, lifelong learning is regarded as the fundamental principle which is designed to cover learning in all contexts, formal, non-formal or informal, and at all levels, from early childhood education and schools through to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning. The aim of lifelong learning is to provide educational guidance and opportunities to Europeans of all ages and backgrounds. It seeks to create equal and open access to high quality learning and encourage more flexible learning outside of the traditional formal structure of education.

Lifelong learning entails learning for personal and social purposes in addition to employment-related education and so encourage active citizenship and personal development as well as fostering investment in Europe’s human capital resources. Specifically, the new framework addresses the following four strategic objectives⁸: (i) making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, (ii) improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, (iii) promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, (iv) enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. The European Framework for key competences for lifelong learning⁹, identifies and defines eight competences necessary for personal fulfillment, active citizenship, social inclusion and employability in a knowledge society: (i) communication in the mother language, (ii) communication in foreign languages, (iii) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, (iv) digital competences, (v) learning to learn, (vi) social and civic competences, (vii) sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, (viii) cultural awareness and expression.

Figure 4 Participation to lifelong learning (LLL), %



Source: Eurostat, Labour Market, Education and Training

⁸ Council of the European Union (2009), “Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (“Europe 2020””, Official Journal of the European Union, Conclusions no. 119/02, 12 May 2009

⁹ Council of the European Union (2010), Joint Progress Report on the implementation of the “Education and Training 2010” Work Programme no. 5394/10, Brussels, 18 January 2010

Pursuing a higher attending level of adults to permanent education, for 2010 the EU set as target a 12.5% of adult population in working age (25-64) to attend to lifelong education and training. As tendency, in the EU, this participation has increased from 7.1% in 2000 to 9.7% in 2007 and decreased to 9.5% in 2008.

The digital economy also offers new opportunities for distance learning as part of a lifelong approach to learning and for forms of communication that are changing the world of work, shrinking distances and making long distance work a real possibility in an increasing number of jobs.

Thus, the aim for 2020 is more jobs, higher employment rates of the working age population, better jobs, with higher quality and increased productivity, and fairness, security and opportunities, through a real chance for everyone to enter in the labor market and manage labor market transitions through modern and financially sustainable social and welfare systems.

3. Conclusions

Education and training were central to the Lisbon Agenda for growth and jobs and a key element of the new Europe 2020 Agenda. Creating a well-functioning “knowledge triangle” of education, research and innovation and improving skills and competences are crucial for growth and jobs, as well as for equity and social inclusion. The economic downturn puts these long-term challenges even more in the spotlight, therefore education and training systems should become more open and relevant to the needs of citizens, labour market and society at large. The role of education and training underpinning the knowledge triangle has been reinforced in the framework of the new Europe 2020 strategy, due to the fact that innovation and growth will be weak without a broad foundation of knowledge, skills and competences.

Education and training have made a substantial contribution towards achieving the long-term goals of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs. The new framework for European cooperation remains flexible in order to respond to both current and future challenges and to ensure that education and training remain firmly anchored in the broader strategy.

Targeted increases in investment in education and training at both national and European levels are essential as a way out of economic and financial crisis, both as part of long-term structural reforms and to lessen its social immediate social impact. Europe’s success in global competition is dependent on its skills and innovation capacity and a swift transition to knowledge based economy.

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