

EDUCATION PERFORMANCES, STRATEGIES AND EUROPEAN COOPERATION FOR LIFELONG LEARNING: THE CASE OF ROMANIA

Son Liana

*University of the West of Timișoara Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Timișoara, 16 Pestalozzi Street, liana.son@feaa.uvt.ro, tel. 0722399300*

Carica Grațiela Georgiana

*University of the West of Timișoara Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Timișoara, 16 Pestalozzi Street, gratiela_carica@yahoo.com, tel. 0744764002*

The paper aims to analyse the synthetic indicators identified and adopted for education and the benchmarks for 2010, according to the revised Lisbon Strategy, in order to highlight the performance and the educational progress in Romania and in the EU member states. Also, the paper points out the necessity to develop a national strategy for lifelong learning, in cooperation with the European strategy and programs on education and training.

Keywords: lifelong learning, education benchmarks, education strategy

Cod JEL: I21; I28

1. The Lisbon strategy and the concept of lifelong learning

The European Union's development strategy, launched at the European Council of Lisbon on March 23-24, 2000, has defined as purpose the transformation of the EU area in the most dynamic and competitive economy, with sustainable economic growth, more and better jobs and an increased social cohesion in the next ten years. *Lifelong learning* is one of the main elements of this long-term strategy and a central component of the European social model, with goal is the improvement of skills and qualifications necessary for the integration on the labor market.

A very good general education is considered to be essential even from the early years of life and continuing with all the learning stages, from pre-primary education through primary and upper secondary education until tertiary education (university and post-university). Furthermore, the learning process doesn't end in this point, the skills achieved needing a permanent learning and a target of this process becomes *lifelong learning*. **Lifelong learning** (LLL) has become a key concept for every educational institution and a guiding principle for the development of education and training policies. After the Lisbon Summit, the European Commission has launched a series of political documents aiming that, on the one hand, based on some European debates, to induce changes in educational policies and practices and, on the other hand, to follow the progress made by the EU member and candidate states in the implementation of the lifelong strategy and to reduce the present barriers on education.²⁷⁸

The Memorandum on Lifelong Learning has adopted a work definition for lifelong learning according to The European Strategy for Labor Force Occupation, "*as a deliberated, wide activity of permanent learning in order to improve the knowledges, skills and competences*"²⁷⁹. New competences require more skills (creativity, critical view, European dimension, active civic participation²⁸⁰), with direct implications on the increase of a person's capacity to find a job. The education and lifelong training include all learning activities carried out by an individual that contributes to his personal development, to his active citizenship and /or to his capacity of

278 Lifelong learning encounters many barriers, starting from time, money and person's availability to study.

279 E.C.C. "Lifelong Learning Memorandum", Brussels, 30.10.2000 SEC(2000) 1832.

280 The EEC Communication, "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality", 21 Nov 2001 COM(2001) 678.

employability. The Conference of The European Council on 2005²⁸¹ has placed education and training on a core position in the revised Lisbon Strategy for more and better jobs and development. The European Parliament Recommendation on 2006²⁸², as well as the 2007²⁸³ Report pointed out the necessity of selecting a new set of synthetic indicators for education referred to: reading, mathematics and science skills; foreign languages skills; ITC skills; civic skills; “learning to learn” skills. According to Wim Kok²⁸⁴ Report, in the European Union about 150 million Europeans didn’t reach a fundamental level of secondary education in 2001 and only 20% of the citizens had a bachelor degree, compared to 39% in the USA. The European Council has adopted five benchmarks to be achieved at European level by 2010, in order to emphasize and evaluate the recorded progresses related to the implementation of the “Education and training 2010” Working Programme. Table 1 includes these benchmarks based on the arithmetic average of the EU member states performances in 2000 and 2006, and the reference values for 2010:

Table 1 Progress in education on the five benchmarks during 2000 – 2006 and the benchmarks set for 2010

Benchmark	2000	2006	2010
Early school leavers (18-24, %)	17,3	15,3	< 10
Low-achievers in reading (15-year-olds, %)	18,7	18,2 (2003)	Decrease with at least 20% of the % of children with low achievement in reading
Upper secondary attainment (20-24, %)	77,3	79,1	85%
MST graduates (per 1000 young people 20-29)	9,3	11,9 (2005)	15%
Lifelong Learning Participation (% of adults, 25-64)	7,1	9,9	12,5%

Source: Commission of the European Communities "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. Indicators and benchmarks 2008", publication based on document SEC (2008) 2293

2. Education levels and the progress of nonfinancial aspects

2.1. Basic competences for everyone

Problematic aspects concerning basic competences for all EU citizens are related to early school leavers, increase of the education level to upper secondary education, and fundamental skills.

a) Early school leavers represent the percent of the population aged 18-24 years old with a lower secondary education level. For 2010, EU has set the objective to reduce the number of those who leave school too early to 10% among the young population. As a tendency, if in 2000 the EU average of early school leavers was 17.6%, it reduced to 14.8% at the end of 2007. 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 2007 were: Slovenia (4.3%), Poland (5.0%), Czech Republic (5.5% in 2006), Lithuania, Slovakia (7%). Also in some states, in 2007, this level was under or close to the 10% goal: Finland (7.9%); Hungary, Austria (10.9%); Ireland (11.5%), Netherlands, Sweden (12% who registered an increase of the rate of the school abandon); Belgium, Denmark (12.3%). Unfortunately, in some states, school abandonment is high/even very high: Iberian countries (Spain, Portugal more 31%), Italy (19.3%), Romania (19.2%).

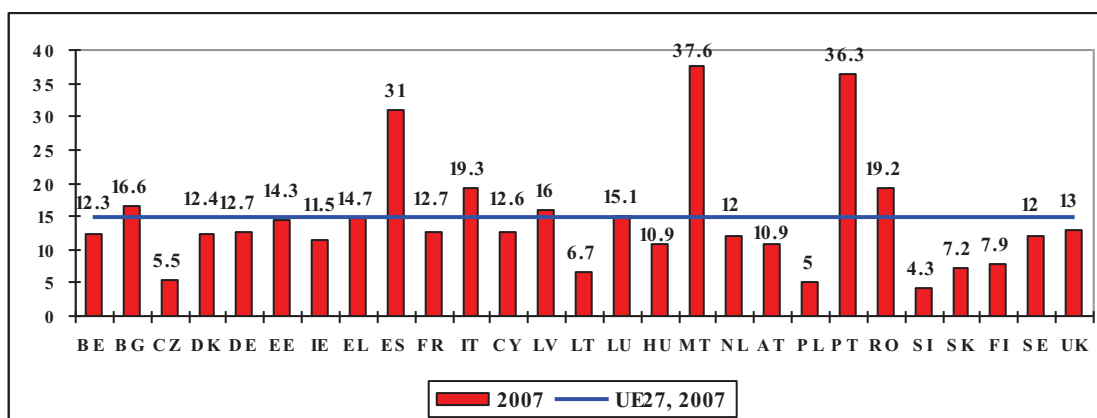
Figure 1 Early school leavers, %

281 Council of the European Union Brussels, 23.03.2005 (04.05) 7619/1/05 Rev 1 Presidency Conclusions.

282 “Recommendation of the European Parliament on key competences for lifelong learning“ 30.12.2006.

283 Council of the European Union, „Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 concerning education and formation as essential factors of Lisbon Strategy” (2007/C 300/01).

284 Wim Kok "Enlarging the European Union Achievements and Challenges", Report to the European Commission, European University Institute Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies 26 March 2003.

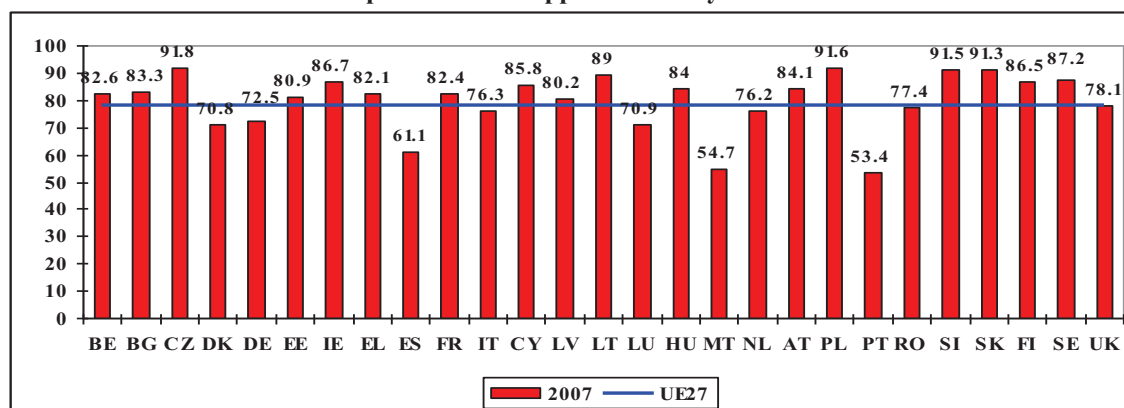


Source: Eurostat

If, at the EU level, we can talk about a progress in the decrease of the number of those who abandoned the educational system too early then it will have to be more accelerated to get closer to the target objective set for 2010.

b) The increase of the study level to upper secondary education. 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).

Figure 2 Percent of the population aged 20-24 years old having completed at least upper secondary education



Source: Eurostat

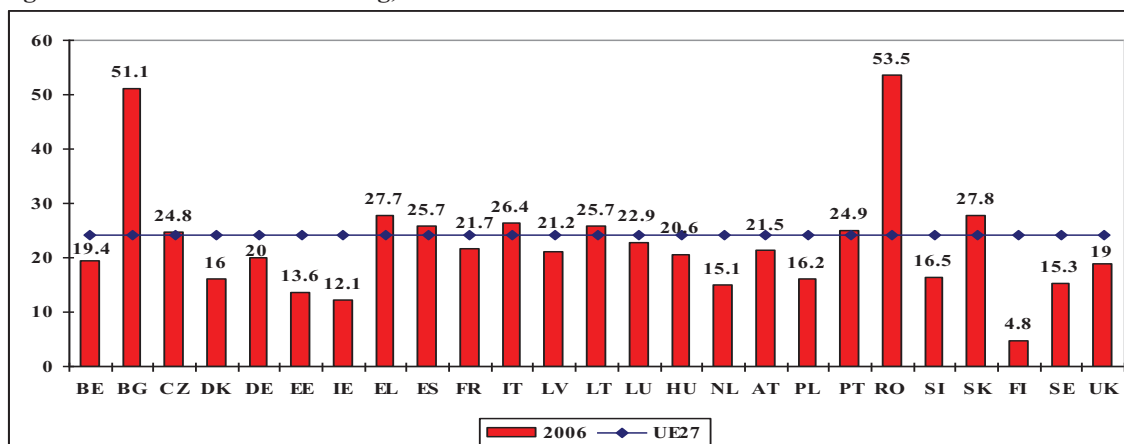
Even if in the last years they registered important progresses, Portugal and Malta are the weakest performers from this point of view, along other countries with a low percent. Although, since 2006 in many new member states, the performance has exceeded the reference level set for 2010, 4 communist countries registered 90%: Czech Republic, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia. In Romania the education level progressed slowly, the percent of the young people with secondary education increased with 1% to 77% in 2006, level that placed the country on the 20th place among the EU member states²⁸⁵, exceeding developed countries (Italy, Poland, Germany). From the point of view of young people education, in 2006 the countries with the lowest results in EU were Spain

²⁸⁵ According to Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, En vue du Conseil Eeuropeen 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.

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.

c) **Essential competences – literacy.** EU has set for 2010 that the level of the 15 years old pupils with low achievement in reading to decrease with 20% compared to 2000, reaching this way 17%. In 2000, the percent of pupils with low achievement in reading was 21.3%²⁸⁶.

Figure 3 Low-achievers in reading, %



Source: OECD, PISA 2000-2006

As tendency, the results of those with low achievement in reading haven't improved, as a matter a fact they have deteriorated²⁸⁷, growing with more than 10% between 2000-2006, to 24.1%. In the top of the performance scale we find Finland (4.8%), Ireland (12.1%). With low performances, on the last positions are Romania (53.5%); the weight of those with a high degree of illiteracy has increased with more than 10% since 2000. *In the EU, the process didn't lead to a reduction of those with a lower literacy degree; the targets advanced for 2010 were not achieved.*

2.2. Participation of adults to lifelong learning

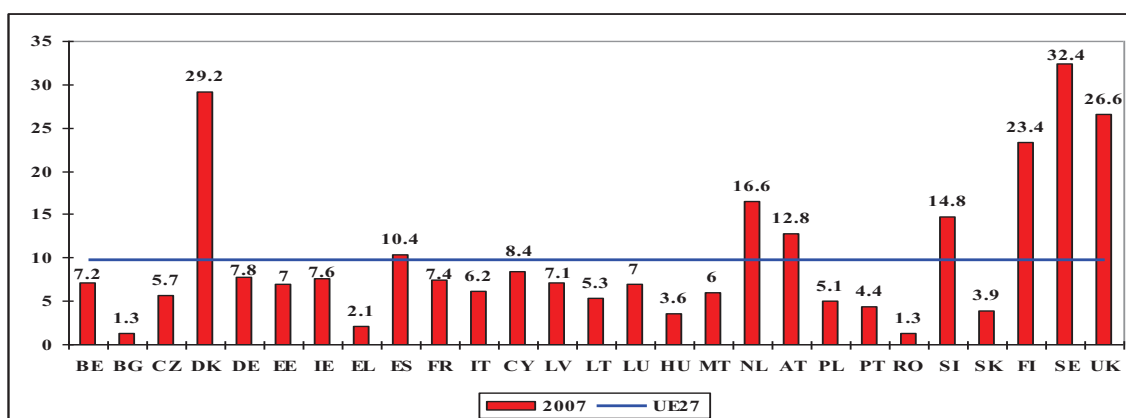
Pursuing a higher attending level of adults to permanent education, for 2010 the EU set as target a 12.5% of adult population in working age (25-64) to attend to lifelong education and training. As tendency, in the EU, this participation has increased from 7.1% in 2000 to 9.7% in 2007²⁸⁸.

Figure 4 Participation to lifelong learning (LLL), %

286 EU digit: weighted average based on the number of pupils submitted and on data gathered from 19 countries (LU, NL, UK weren't representative in 2000, their results being placed between brackets and excluded from calculations).

287 Council of the European Union, Common Project Report of the Council and Commission for 2008 according to the progresses made concerning the implementation of the „Education and training 2010” W.P., 5723/08 Bruxelles, 2008.

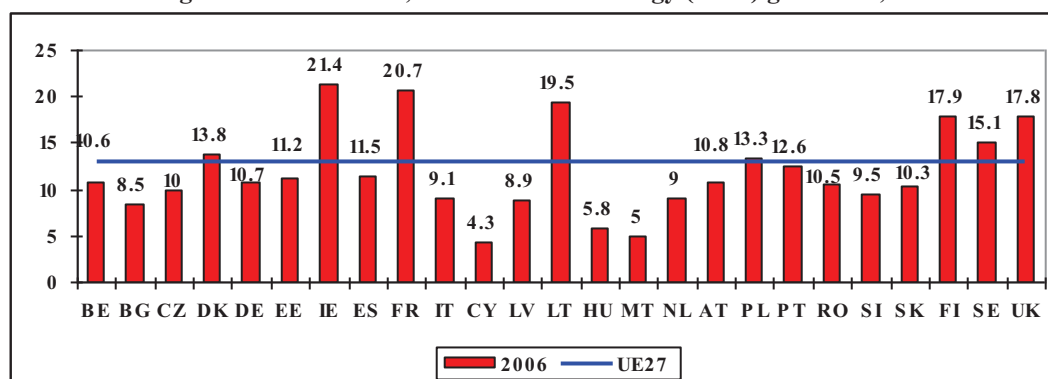
288 Commission of the European Communities. "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training". Indicators and benchmarks 2008", publication based on document SEC (2008) 2293.



2.3. Mathematics, science and technology graduates (MST)

In 2010 the total number of mathematics, science and technology (MST) graduates in the EU should increase to at least 15%, along with the simultaneous reduction of sex differences. The number of the MST graduates in the EU-27 registered an important progress with almost 200.000 in 2006 compared to 2000, which means an increase of about 29,1%, overcoming already the 15% benchmark set for 2010.

Figure 5 Mathematics, science and technology (MST) graduates, %



Source: Eurostat

In 2006, the best performances regarding graduates with diplomas (ISCED 5-6) as completion of university and post-university studies in mathematics, science and technology at 1000 people between 20 – 29 years had been registered by Ireland, France, Lithuania, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom. In states like Czech Republic, Italy, Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, the annual growth rate exceeded the growth rate of EU-27, approaching to the community average. The Slovak Republic, Portugal and Poland achieved a strong annual growth of the number of MST graduates (>12%).

2.4. The progresses made towards the benchmarks set for 2010

In 2008, the E.E.C. analyzed the progress made in achieving the objectives in education. During 2000–2007, EU states have achieved performances concerning all five benchmarks for 2010 – excepting literacy. Although, the progresses are different for the states, all of them having areas in which they have good performances or on the other side, in which they have weaknesses, being far from the benchmarks set for 2010 and where they require active recovery²⁸⁹:

289 ECC "Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training, Indicators and benchmarks" Brussels 2008.

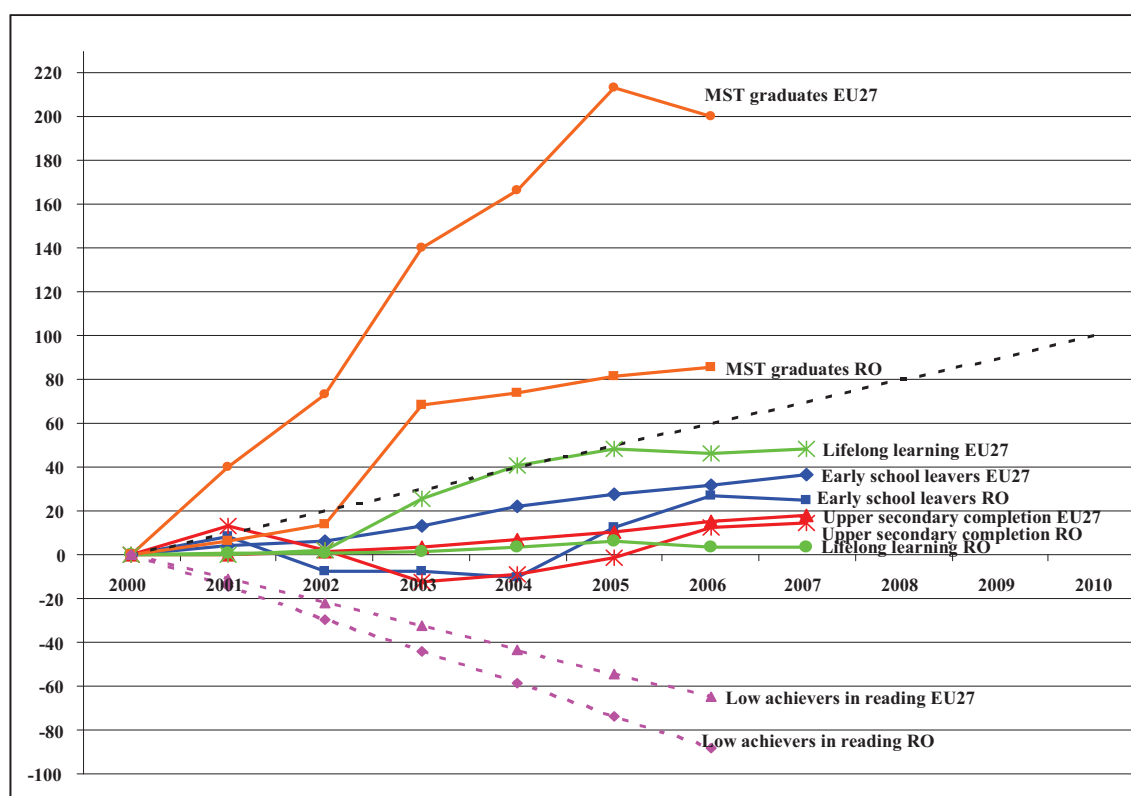
1) Most of the EU states made significant progresses in increasing the level and quality of education, for the purpose of acquiring new skills. Finland, Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom, Ireland, Poland, Slovenia are states which exceeded the compound objective of all five benchmarks set for 2010 and still progress; four states – France, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain – have an average performance below the targets set for 2010 and made no progresses.

2) The EU performance in education and training is equal to the best level in the world in states like Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and USA. The general performance of EU-27 hides differences between the member states. Thus, 60% of the persons between 5-29 years old attend schools and higher education, compared to USA and with 18% more than in Japan.

3) About 108 million people still have a low educational level, representing 1/3 of the labor force. One out of seven young people (6 million people aged 18-24) pass only compulsory education; one out of seven people aged 4 years old are excluded from the educational system (the ones with great needs, the immigrant's children, those coming from families with low social status).

4) The involvement in LLL has become a reality in Sweden, United Kingdom, Denmark as well as in other non-member EU-27 states (Norway, Iceland), *countries that have developed coherent and comprehensive strategies in lifelong learning*. Persons aged 25-64 having an upper secondary education are 3 times more ready to attend to lifelong learning.

Figure 6 Overview of progress towards the five benchmarks in EU-27



Source: own calculations based on Eurostat data, PISA 2006

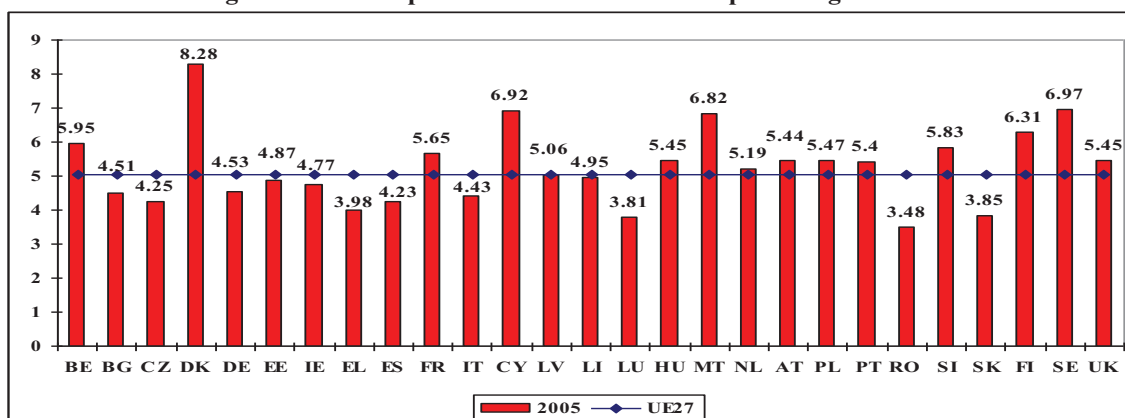
Romania (figure 6) is placed on the last positions for most of the objectives set by EU-27 through the Lisbon Agenda, these objectives being very hard to reach by the Romanians. The following figure shows the progress made by Romania, compared to the EU average, towards the five benchmarks during 2000-2006/2007. The starting point (in 2000) is set to zero and the target set for 2010 is 100. The annual results are measured compared to the benchmarks of 2010 (= 100).

The diagonal line shows the progress asked in order to achieve the average benchmark of EU. A progress of 1/10 (10%) towards the benchmark must be registered every year in order to achieve the benchmark. If one line is under the diagonal, the progress is not enough: if the line is above the diagonal the progress is stronger than it is necessary in order to achieve the benchmark. If the line is declining, there are major problems leading to a weaker situation²⁹⁰.

3. Education expenditure

The progress towards new educational benchmarks, as well as the improvement of quality of skills required on the labor market, involves a series of costs, considered to be the main block for the performance in education. These are connected mainly to the investments in education, and the indicators taken into account in this analysis concern the percentage of the expenditure (public and private) on education of GDP. The public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP highlights the proportion of the financial national accomplishment assigned by the government to educational services during a financial year. In 2005 almost 90% of the European investment in educational institutions (all levels combined) was covered from public sources, through direct support of the educational institutions expenditure, through the support of the students and their families with loans and scholarships or through the transfer of public subsidies for educational activities to private companies or non-profit organizations. There are great differences between the European countries concerning the investment in education as a percentage of GDP, if we consider the educational level and performance.

Figure 7 Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP

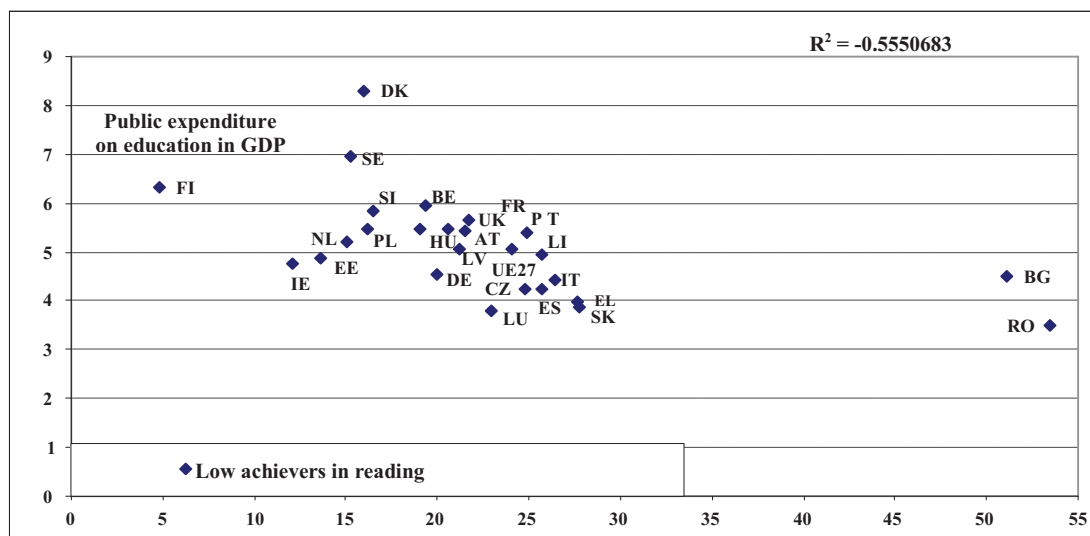


Source: Eurostat

In 2006 Romania has managed to approach the EU member states average concerning public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP. It still remains an important gap concerning the value of the budget assigned for education by the EU member states, generated by the GDP related to the number of inhabitants. For example, Romania had a five times lower budget available for education than Netherlands, a country with two time smaller population. The percentage of the public expenditure on education didn't increase at the European average of 2005, even if they reached 4.3% in 2007. In 2008, the estimated data show a slight reduction.

290 In the case of the LLL, it must be considered the fact that there were many breaks between time series (2003).

Figure 8 Correlation of the public expenditure on education and literacy in GDP, 2007



Source: Eurostat, C.E.E. "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. Indicators and benchmarks 2008", Commission staff working document, publication based on document SEC (2008) 2293

The achievements in education are correlated with the public expenditure on education. Figure 8 shows that there is a direct relation between the public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP and the degree of literacy: Romania has the most reduced percentage of GDP assigned on education and the lowest literacy degree.

4. Strategies and European cooperation in terms of education and formation

EU member states and the European Commission have reinforced the political cooperation through the "Education and formation 2010" Working Programme that integrates former actions on European education and formation, especially education and professional training within the Copenhagen process and establishes a connection with the Bologna process. The main common objectives for the EU education and formation systems are: the improvement of quality and effectiveness of education and formation systems; the facilitation of the access to education and formation and the opening of the EU education and formation systems abroad. "Education and Training Work Programme 2010"²⁹¹ sustains the actions of the EU member states in order to achieve these objectives. It is implemented through the open method of coordination, using indicators and benchmarks for monitoring the registered progress. For this purpose it is essential to develop national LLL strategies, with a comprehensive vision that cover all types of lifelong education and formation levels, to provide a strategic vision and a coherent set of priorities and to identify the resources necessary for different measures, to include a transparent system for the recognition of former education and to focus on the quality of education.

In Romania, the educational reform has begun with the organization of the educational system in order to respond to the specific needs of teaching for children, young people, adults, on their lines of interest and according to the their cognitive capacities and natural skills. At the same time, the system must respond to present and future needs (in normal and crisis condition) of the labor market, so that the obtaining of the certificates, diplomas related to the graduation of education cycles to allow the insertion of persons in labor field. The measures of administrative decentralization and funding based on performance criteria have as purpose the optimization of

²⁹¹ The Education and Training 2010 Working Programme.

integration on the labor market. Likewise, it is necessary to improve permanent formation, to expand the specific educational offer as a response to market needs. Thus, for 2009, it is being foreseen the approval of lifelong strategy that approaches also the causes leading to low achievement in education.²⁹² The current financial crisis absolutely requires a higher coordination between the skills provided by educational systems and the demand on the labor market. The purpose is to improve the adaptation capacity and professional integration of adults, both of recent graduates and those that are already active. Effective measures must take into consideration the access to a fundamental and qualitative education for all children, to improve the educational level and to prevent the abandonment of studies, in order to provide to the population essential skills and competences necessary for the future improvement of these skills²⁹³

References

1. Cohen-Tanugi L. (2008) "L'Europe dans la mondialisation", Rapport d'etape, En vue du Conseil Eeuropeen de printemps et de la Presidence Francaise du Conseil de l'Union Europeenne Mission.
2. Kok Wim (2003) "Enlarging the European Union Achievements and Challenges", Report to the European Commission, European University Institute Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.
3. E.C.C, "Memorandum asupra Învățării Permanente", Brussels, 30.10.2000 SEC (2000) 1832.
4. E.C.C. Communication (2001) "Making a European area of lifelong learning a reality".
5. "Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning", December 30, 2006.
6. E.C.C. "Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. Indicators and benchmarks 2008", Commission staff working document, publication based on document SEC (2008) 2293.
7. Commission of the European Communities "The Education and Training 2010 Work Programme.
8. Guvernul României, "Strategia Lisabona: principala platformă de promovare a reformelor structurale"
9. E.C.C. "New skills for new jobs: to anticipate and meet the needs of the labor market concerning different skills" CCE COM (2008) 868 final, Brussels, December 16, 2008.

292 Guvernul României, "Strategia Lisabona: principala platformă de promovare a reformelor structurale", 2009.

293 E.C.C. "New skills for new jobs: to anticipate and meet the needs of the labor market concerning different skills" CCE COM (2008) 868 final, Brussels, December 16, 2008.