

INITIAL AND CONTINUING ADULT EDUCATION, A REQUIREMENT FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

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Abstract: *School dropout is a global problem because economic and social development can be achieved only if it is sustained by people with a solid education. Lately, many young people aged between 18-24 years end up choosing a university specialization without knowing clearly what their professional expectations are for the future. At the European and national level, measures are constantly being taken to prevent university dropout. Although the average number of students dropping out between 18-24 years from 2005 to 2019 show a tendency to decrease, we can still see the lack of trust from young people in educational programs. In 27 of the studied countries, the number of men leaving the university programmes is higher than that of women. The increasing presence of women in university programs is possible due to the opportunities to combine successfully, family, professional and university life. Efforts to encourage lifelong learning are significant, in addition to national institutions and the European Council, organizations such as the European Association for Adult Education; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); International Education; the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have joined forces with a well-defined agenda. The average number of adults participating in the learning process aged between 25-64 years in 28 European countries from 2005 to 2019 grow with 2.79%. The highest values are recorded in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and the United Kingdom because education for them is a landmark. Countries such as Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovakia and Croatia need to review their educational policies because the low values show a lack of trust in the system. The confidence of Austrian adults in the quality of university education is demonstrated by the high number of participants. With a rich educational history nowadays, Italy is struggling to engage adults in the educational process. Although 2019 has been beneficial for lifelong learning, we must not forget that it is an ongoing process. European countries want that in the XXI century adult education became an integral part of people's lives.*

Keywords: *school dropout; knowledge society; higher education; lifelong learning.*

JEL Classification: *I23; I25.*

1. Introduction

Because education has the power to transform people's lives, the European Council promotes lifelong learning. The first large-scale European initiative was the Lisbon Strategy, adopted on 23-24 March 2000 and renewed in Brussels on

22-23 March 2005. The Strategy objectives were designed to make the European Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy. In the three cycles of implementation, it was understood that human preparation is a strong asset, so European countries every day trying to increase the general level of education and reduce dropout rates. (Rodriguez et al., 2010, p.11) Efforts have continued through the Europe 2020 Strategy, which proposes that 40% of people aged between 30-34 by 2020 have at least a bachelor's degree. (Europe 2020, p.1). Although education is constantly on the agenda of The European Commission, the success of national initiatives is limited, due to the lack of a complex platform for good practices. Lately, European countries have been relying on an economy of professionals with a solid education. So, Education is a long-term and advantageous investment that slowly but surely controls the future of nations. Despite the Bologna system adopted by European universities, in the last few years, university education has been increasingly criticized for not responding effectively to the needs of the labour market. (Stiburek, 2007, p.p. 44 - 45)

2. Literature review

Economists such as Adam Smith, John S. Mill, Alfred Marshall, George J. Stigler, and Gary Becker proved the link between a national level of development and education. Friedrich List was convinced that national wealth is the result of investment in education. Irving Fisher, in his studies, showed that education is an investment that has the capability to influence future income levels. Lester C. Thurow was firmly convinced that investment in education is long-lasting. (Badea, 2012, pp.123 - 125) F. H. Harbison and C. A. Myers in their study developed a system of indicators on human capital, built to highlight the importance of secondary and tertiary education in economic development. (Harbison, 1964, p.9) Published in 2015, the HEDOCE study initiated by The European Commission, conducted by the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) in the Netherlands, and the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) in Norway offers a large-scale comparative study of dropout policies. (Vossensteyn, 2015) There is a relevant number of researches concerning University drop-out in European countries: in Germany - Georg W., Heublein U., in the United Kingdom - Yorke M., Longden B., in Italy – Belloc F., Maruotti A., Petrella L., in Spain - Lassibille G., Navarro G., in France - Gury N., and in Belgium - Ortiz Arias E., Dehon C.. (Zajac, 2019, p. 2) Severiens S. and Dam ten G. in their research tried to explain gender differences in higher education programs. (Severiens, 2012)

3. Dropping out of university study between 18–24 years

In the last 14 years, despite the efforts of the European Council and the Ministry of National Education of the 28 analyzed countries, the much-desired knowledge society is facing the loss of confidence from the population. Dropping out of the educational process often leads to social exclusion and marginalization. The transition from the first to the second year of study is a crucial step.

The most common causes indicated by those who drop out of university study between 18-24 years are the wrong choice of specialization, financial problems related to participation in higher education, family problems, and health problems. (Andreu, 2008, p.101) In the period 2005 (14.41%) - 2019 (9.01%) we can observe a decrease of 5.4%. In the context of a continuous process, this decrease is an important achievement. As we see in figure 1, the decrease from 2005 to 2019 is gradual.

France in part with the help of the Plan to Successfully Obtain a Bachelor degree, between 2005 (12.5%) - 2019 (8.2%) manages to decrease the number of student dropout. Portugal from 2005 (38.3%) to 2019 (10.6%) with a decrease of 27.7%, preferred to create short degree programs, which allow the student to later complete their studies to a Bachelor degree program validating the studied courses. Then students can make more informed decisions about future studies. The same policy was applied in the Netherlands, where the percentage of 14,3 in 2005 dropped to 7,5% in 2019. The situation in Austria is balanced 2005 (9.3%) - 2010 (8.3%) - 2015 (7.3%) - 2018 (7.3%), to which contributed the introductory orientation phase offered to students before enrolling in a bachelor's degree program. (Vossensteyn, 2015, p.9) Although Spain has the highest dropout rate, retention programs showed utility in 2019 with a percentage of 17.3, which is 7.49% lower than the average percentage between 2005-2019. Malta managed to reduce the result from 2005 (33%) by 2019 to 17.2%. Romania since 2005 (19.6%) has tried to reduce methodically the abandonment as reflected in numbers: 2010 (19.3%) - 2015 (19.1%) - 2019 (15.3%). Over the years, Italy tries to find a balance between national policies, institutional structures, teaching and learning, curriculum design and student background. This was rewarded by a decrease from 2005 (22.1%) to 2019 (13.5%). For Bulgaria, the most beneficial period was between 2010 (12.6%) - 2013 (12.5%). The flexibility of educational programs between 2007 (12.9%) - 2010 (11.5%) in Denmark did not help to reduce the number of dropouts below 10% proposed by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science. Values like 2007 (16.6%), 2008 (16.9%), 2009 (15.7%) in Estonia can be attributed to the fact that 61% of students work and this is harming their academic progress. (Beerens, 2011, p.682) Although the United

Kingdom attaches great importance to the prevention of university dropouts through several facilities such as pastoral support, counselling, budget planning, health services, study skills development and career guidance, it has failed to reduce significantly dropout rates: 2005 (11.5%) - 2010 (14.8%) - 2015 (10.8%) - 2019 (10.9%). V4 countries or countries from the Visegrad region (Hungary 2005 (12.5%) - 2019 (11.8%), Poland 2005 (5.2%) - 2019 (5.3%), Czech Republic 2005 (6.2%) - 2019 (6.5%) and Slovakia) 2005 (6.3%) - 2019 (8.3%) face similar problems: extensive amounts of public funds spent on financing university studies not leading to graduation and an increasing number of study extension. (Stiburek, 2007, p. 46)

Latvia managed to reduce the dropout rate with 6.7% from 2005 (15.4%) to 2019 (8.7%). Cyprus, thanks to effective collaboration between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities, who are responsible for their educational problems, manages to gradually reduce abandonment 2005 (18.2%) - 2010 (12.7%) - 2013 (9.1%) - 2018 (7.8%). Between 2005 (13.3%) - 2009 (14.2%) Greece failed to prevent the increase of dropout, but starting with 2010 (13.5%) begins a favourable period so in 2019 the number of those who leave without a certificate reaches 4.1%. As we can see in figure 2 Croatia has the lowest average percent: 4.1%.

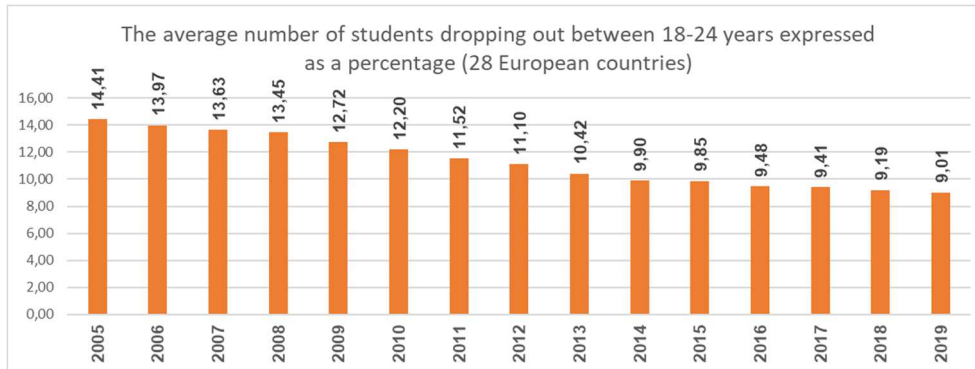


Figure 1: The average number of students dropping out between 18-24 years expressed as a percentage (28 European countries)

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from Eurostat

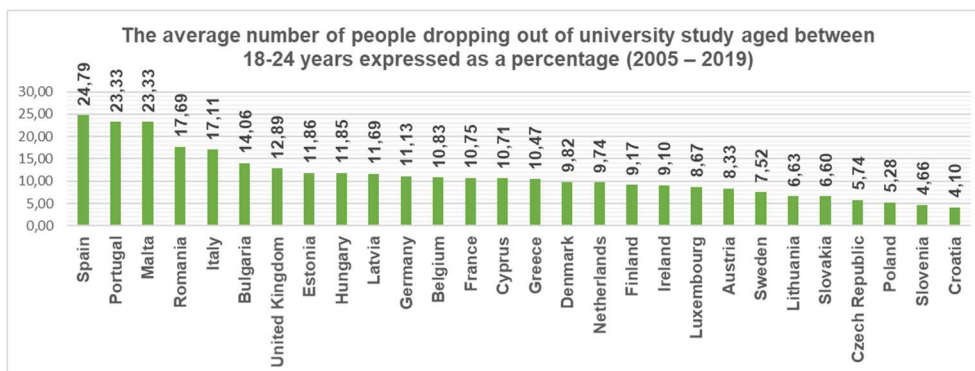


Figure 2: The average number of people dropping out of university study aged between 18-24 years expressed as a percentage in 28 countries (2005 - 2019)

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from Eurostat

Men and women dropping out of university study aged between 18-24 years

In the time of an economic decline, people with a low level of education are more affected than those with higher education. Women see in University studies the way to increase their chances of getting a job where they earn as much as men. We know very well that in many European countries men for the same work get more money than women. Women work harder and more consistently, have better time management and find academic goals very important. (Severiens, 2012, p.455) The percentage of women who leave the educational process over the years shows a slight variation: 2005 (11.93%) - 2010 (10.14%) - 2015 (8.33%) - 2019 (7.55%). In fourteen-year it's a moderate but sure decrease of 4.37%. In 27 countries the average number of female dropout is lower than that of men.

The percentage of men leaving the learning process shows a declining trend: 2005 (16.9%) - 2010 (14.23%) - 2015 (11.31%) - 2019 (10.43%). It takes place a decrease of 6.47% in fourteen years. The largest differences are recorded in Cyprus (8.17%), Portugal (9.67%) and Spain (9.71%), and the lowest on the Czech Republic (0.36%), Romania (0.61%) and Slovakia (0.63%). Only in Bulgaria, the number of women dropout is on average 0.41% higher than the number of men, as we can see in figure 3.

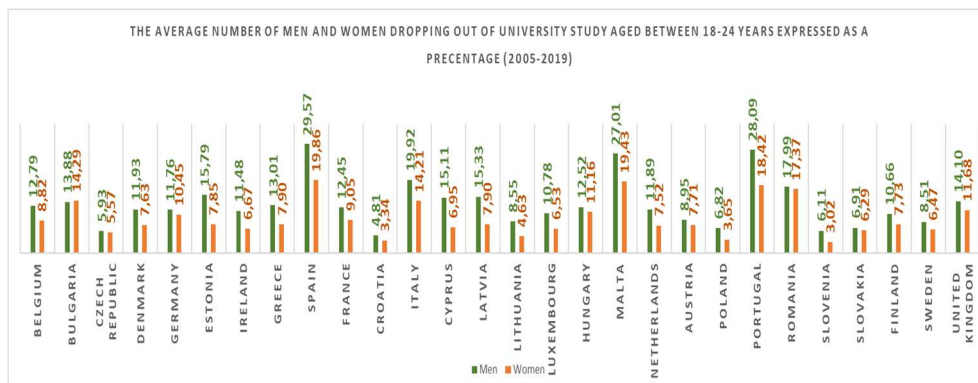


Figure 3: The average number of men and women dropping out of university study aged between 18-24 years expressed as a percentage in 28 European countries between 2005-2019

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from Eurostat

4. Adults aged between 25 - 64 years participating in the learning process in 28 European countries

Efforts to encourage lifelong learning are significant. In addition to national institutions and the European Council, organizations such as the European Association for Adult Education, UNESCO, International Education, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and UNICEF have joined forces with a well-defined agenda. The success of these efforts is reflected in the growing number of adults trained in educational programs, as we can see in figure 4.

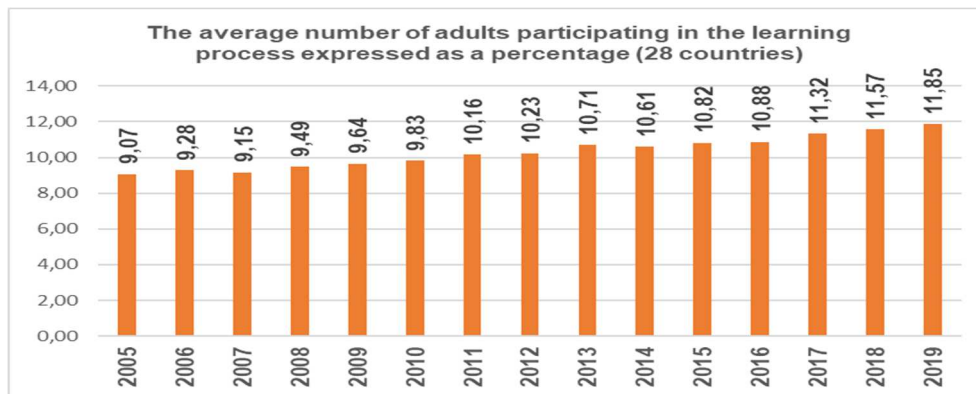


Figure 4: The average number of adults participating in the learning process aged between 25-64 years expressed as a percentage (28 European countries)

Source: created by the author, based on information collected from Eurostat

In Belgium, the highest values are recorded between 2014 (7.4%) - 2018 (8.5%), which is due to cohesion among the educational system of the Flemish community ("M-decree"), French community ("Pacte pour un enseignement d'excellence"), and German-speaking community. (OECD,2017, p.4) In Bulgaria, for low values between 2006 (1.6%) - 2011 (1.6%) can be blamed the insufficient financial and legislative support from the Government. Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP is steadily declining 4.1% in 2014 and reaching 3% in 2019. For the Czech Republic, the best year was 2011 (11.6%), after which there is a steady decline, despite the well-defined objectives there was a problem between theory and practice. The percentage for 2019 is 8.1. Denmark manages to reach the highest values, the best year being 2010 (32.7%), thanks to the efforts of the Danish Adult Education Association and the funding scheme that allocates 1/3 of capital for adult education. With the largest economy in Europe, Germany has an average of 8% because lifelong learning is supported by the governmental initiative named, National Strategy for Continuing Education. (EAEA, 2019, p.28) Estonia, in order to promote development, adopts the Lifelong Learning Strategy, which provides material support to those aged 25-64 who wish to participate in educational programs. Most participants were registered between 2015 (12.4%) - 2019 (20.2%).

The participation in Ireland between 2005 (7.4%) - 2017 (9%) is under the sign of education for employability. Starting with 2018 the interest of the population for knowledge and social welfare increases as shown by the values: 2018 (12.5%), 2019 (12.6%). In Greece due to the lack of state strategies, adult education is becoming less and less a priority: 2017 (4.5%), 2018 (4.5%), 2019 (3.9%). In Spain, whose economy recently returned to health after many years of recession the situation is relatively stable with an average of 10.61%. France, the second-largest economy in Europe is part of initiatives such as Europe 2020, Education and Training 2020. Adult education is permanently on the agenda of the French Government, which is reflected in numbers: 2013 (17.8%) - 2019 (19.5%). Despite the Strategy on Education, Science, and Technology adopted in 2014, Croatia continues to face the challenge of being one of the lowest participation rates in adult education: 2014 (2.8%) - 2019 (3.5%) (EAEA,2019, p.18) Italy, the eighth-largest exporter in the world is experiencing steady growth due to the interest of the population for personal development through education, 2005 (5.8%) - 2019 (8.1%). For Cyprus, the most beneficial years were 2007 (8.7%), 2008 (8.8%), 2009 (8.3%), and 2010 (8.1%). Despite the efforts, Latvia fails to reach the value of 2005 (7.8%) by 2019 (7.4%). In Lithuania, thanks to the efforts of the authorities through the National Education Strategy 2013-2022 and the Lithuanian Association of Adult Education with the Baltic Summer School, participation is increasing, 2014 (5.1%), 2019 (7.8%). Education reforms has contributed to the steady growth of values in Luxembourg: 2005 (8.5%) - 2012 (14.2%) - 2019 (19.1%). In Hungary, the best year was 2015 (7.1%), and the most negative 2012 (2.9%). For the United Kingdom, the best years were 2005 (27.6%), 2006 (27.4%), and 2007 (20.5%). The increase registered in Malta from 2015 (5.2%) until 2019 (11.9%) is due to the accessible programs offered by the International schools present in the country.

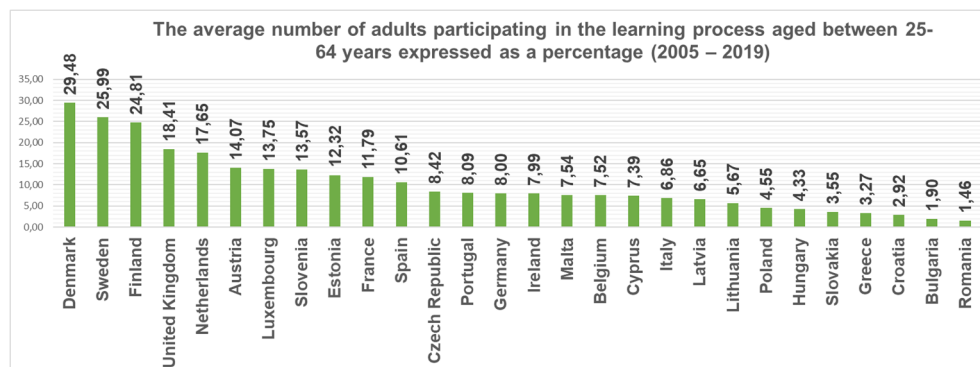


Figure 5: The average number of adults participating in the learning process aged between 25-64 years expressed as a percentage in 28 countries (2005 – 2019)
Source: created by the author, based on information collected from Eurostat

In Dutch society, education is constantly on the agenda of state and non-governmental institutions. The success of the program like “Tel mee met Taal” is mirrored by the growing values: 2005 (15.4%) - 2019 (19.5%). Values such as 2017 (15.8%), 2018 (5.1%) in Austria are the result of cooperation between the Association of Austrian Adult Education Centers and the Democracy Center Vienna. (EAEA,2019, p.44) In figure 5 we can see the situation in the 28 analyzed countries. Values in Poland do not increase significantly because the Upskilling Pathways initiative is not well implemented. In Portugal, the period 2005 (4.1%) - 2010 (5.7%) is characterized by insufficient funding from the authorities, but after 2011 (11.5%) the values do not fall below 9% due to National Plan on Adult Literacy. Romania has the lowest values, 2005 (1.6%), 2010 (1.4%), 2015 (1.3%), 2019 (1.3%). The country still faces the challenge of convincing people that economic development can only be achieved through a solid education. In Slovenia, the period 2005 (15.3%) - 2011 (16%) is the most beneficial. Finland is experiencing systematic and stable growth from 2005 (22.5%) to 2019 (29%). Sweden demonstrates the quality of education through the growing values 2005 (17.4%) - 2019 (34.3%) which bears the mark of The Swedish National Council of Adult Education.

5. Conclusions

Efforts to encourage lifelong learning are significant, but due to the lack of a complex platform for good practices, 15 of the 28 analyzed country facing challenges implementing national strategies. The average number of students dropping out between 18-24 years from 2005 to 2019 show a tendency to decrease. In 27 countries the average number of female dropout is lower than that of men. The number of adults participating in the learning process aged between 25-64 in the period 2005-2019 shows an upward trend.

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