

Could Adult Education Become a Means of Active Participatory Citizenship for Young People in the EU?

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The research and policy reports show that adult education policies and practices are designed and carried out in ways and using means which are not always appropriate to groups of young citizens between the ages 16-30. In the Horizon 2020's EduMAP (Adult Education as a Means for Active Participatory Citizenship) Project the diversity of societal participation and the wide range of cultural contexts and practices among learners is examined. In particular, Hungarian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Croatian and Slovenian adult educations are in the focus of this article. Available statistical data were collected and analysed concerning young people with low educational level, who have dropped out of adult education or who are otherwise in a vulnerable position. We came to the conclusion that this region of five adjacent states can be divided into two models: Slovenia and Croatia have similar parameters while Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria are converging in education, literacy, skilled persons and budget efforts on education. The fundamental aim of the analysis is to help policymakers and educational agencies to ensure that vulnerable young generations are able to obtain the skills needed to fully participate in European and national societies, and the labour market.

Keywords: Citizenship, societal participation, low levels of education, vulnerable young adults, gender issues, evidence-based policies, Horizon 2020, EduMAP

1. Introduction

The article describes how adult learning would improve social inclusion and the acceptance of the Union citizenship status in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovenia. The joint research of Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP) in the frame of Horizon 2020 assists to compare certain social statistics, institutional specificities in adult education and the most disadvantaged groups in accession to basic and special skills in order to become active citizens of the EU in the future.¹ The question is raised how active citizenship may be enhanced in a diverse region.

¹ The project is funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (No. 693388). The research consortium is led by the University of Tampere, who is coordinating the work of nine partner institutions. More

The European Union has a ten-year long jobs and growth strategy (2010–2020): the Europe 2020² strategy set up certain priorities and integrated guidelines on economic policies of the Member States for a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Among the priorities can be found the improvement of employment rate, the reducing of early school leavers, to increase the rate of the young population having completed tertiary education, and reduction of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion. From among the selected five countries, only Slovenia has a chance to meet the European average in four priorities and Croatia in three, while the others intend to fulfil two priority requirements each. It means that neighbours in the region are differing in the size of the social inequalities.

Four priorities in the Europe 2020	EU average 2012	EU target 2020	National rate 2012	National target 2020
Employment rate <i>(share of people employed 20-64 age group)</i>	68.4%	75%	Hungary: 62% Romania: 64% Bulgaria: 63% Croatia: 55% Slovenia: 68%	75% 70% 75.5% 63% 75%
Share of early school leavers	12.7%	Below 10%	Hungary: 12% Romania: 18% Bulgaria: 12% Croatia: 4% Slovenia: 4%	10% 11% 11% 4-5% 4-5%
Share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education <i>(ISCED 5 and 6)</i>	35.7%	At least 40%	Hungary: 30% Romania: 24% Bulgaria: 28% Croatia: 26% Slovenia: 40%	30.3% 26.7% 36% 36% 40%
Share of population at risk of poverty and social exclusion <i>(income poverty, material poverty and living in households with low work intensity)</i>	25% (124 million people)	20% (100 million people)	Hungary: 33% Romania: 40% Bulgaria: 50% Croatia: 32% Slovenia: 20%	24% 40% 38% 28% 18%

information about the project could be read on its website: <http://www.uta.fi/edu/en/research/projects/edumap/index.html> (14 November 2016).

² The priorities of the strategy to 2016–2020 was defined in the *COM (2014) 130 final, Taking Stock of the Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth* (3 May 2014) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. This communication contains the statistical data to the first table.

Also, the upgraded economic competitiveness and improvement of the labour force in the EU represents the leading principle in adult education policy. The European Agenda for Adult Education³ endorses the increasing participation in all kinds of adult learning (formal, non-formal and informal) whether to acquire new work skills, for active citizenship, or for personal development and fulfilment through extended coordination by public administrators, NGOs or labour organisations. Despite the great diversity in participation rate of adults aged 25–64 (between 1.4 and 31.6 percent) from the average (9 percent in 2012) it would be extended to 15 percent in general to 2020. Overcoming the economic crisis, inequalities and keeping the aging workforce productive, it defines the following targets:

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality, which covers the accession to job-specific skills, adult education for disadvantaged groups, and second chance opportunities for early school leavers, young people neither in education nor in employment or training (NEETs);
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; this includes a transparent system funding of adult learning and meeting the market needs;
- Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship through adult learning; the Agenda aims to improve traditional and digital literacy, basic skills, accession to adult education for disabilities and migrants, and intergeneration learning;
- Enhancing the creativity and innovation of adults and their learning environment, for instance, using the ICT in education;
- Improving the knowledge base on the field of adult learning and monitoring the adult learning sector; this entails data collection from states, regions and local municipalities, data exchange and analysis through the Adult Education Survey or Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competitiveness.

Taking into account the high unemployment rate in youth and Roma communities, special programmes may guide also the implementation of the mentioned adult education agenda.⁴

The progressive management of adult education is required for the reduction of poverty of low-waged workers because their income level has been limited in the recent two decades in the developed world.⁵ The growing inequalities – including its severe increase among minors – may hinder economic growth and competitiveness. The last UNICEF report⁶ proves the high risk of poverty for children in the five analysed states as well. The children’s well-being rank of the surveyed 41 countries also differs in these adjacent states in four aspects.

³ 2011/C 372/1, *Council Resolution on a Renewed European Agenda for Adult Learning* (20 December 2012) and its Annex explains the priorities of the policy to 2012–2014, and the recent 2009/C 119/02, *Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020)* (28 May 2009) determines the work programme and the working groups and the 2012/C 70/05, *2012 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the Implementation of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020) – ‘Education and Training in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Europe’* (8 March 2012) is giving more insights to this question.

⁴ See for instance: COM/2012/727 final, *Moving Youth into Employment* (5 December 2012) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, and COM/2011/173 final, *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (5 April 2011) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

⁵ OECD, *OECD Employment Outlook 2012*, OECD Publishing, Paris 2012, pp. 109–161.

⁶ J. Hudson & S. Kühner, *Innocenti Report Card 13: Fairness for Children*, UNICEF, Florence 2016.

Inequalities of children ranking in (average)	Inequalities in income	Inequalities in education (e.g. shortages in PISA test, rate of acceptable results)	Inequalities in health (e.g. daily complains for health conditions, for disease)	Inequalities in life satisfaction
Hungary (18)	21	17	18	15
Romania (26)	41	n.d.	32	5
Bulgaria (28)	40	32	26	16
Croatia (16.5)	26	5	12	23
Slovenia (14.5)	19	11	16	12

2. Inequalities and Adult Education

The *EduMAP* project aims to map the possibilities of young adults', aged 16–30, access adult education and how partly or totally excluded social groups can be involved into the adult learning in order to become active citizens in the EU. The disadvantaged, vulnerable groups need effective communication with the education environment and specific programmes to participate in lifelong learning. The researchers and IT experts in the frame of Horizon 2020 must propose direct (such as development of a decision making supporting system) and indirect measures (such as free accession to internet, second-chance training for low-educated persons or early schooling leavers) in adult education policy in the EU.

However, the target group in *EduMAP* differs from the existing data collection. For instance, the Adult Education Survey (AES) of the Eurostat (2007, 2011) covers the population aged 25 to 64.⁷ The age division of sectoral statistics, or the mandatory school age, or the public funding of adult education supports the comparison of available data in a limited extent. The involvement of tertiary education is also problematic while the part-time education attracts mainly (young) adults. Numerical information on job-specific training and learning is hardly available. For these reasons an operative adult education policy based on data analysis at European level is almost impossible.

The definition of adult education determined by the UNESCO Recommendation⁸ shall be implemented during the research as a common basis. Accordingly, adult education and learning

- is a core component of the lifelong learning;
- it comprises all forms of education and learning (formal, non-formal and informal);

⁷ Eurostat, *Adult Education Survey (AES) 2007 and 2011*, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey> (10 October 2016).

⁸ Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education is passed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on its meeting in Paris from 3rd to 18th November 2015, at its 38th session. It replaced the prior Recommendation adopted in 1976. The recommendation is available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002451/245119M.pdf#page=3> (29 September 2016).

- its aim to ensure that all adults (regardless the legal age of maturity) participate in their societies and the world of work, both in their own sake and their communities, organizations and societies interests;
- it involves sustained activities and processes of acquiring, recognizing, exchanging, and adapting capabilities using ICT as much as possible;
- it covers various types of learning and education for equipping adults with digital and other literacy and basic skills to continue training and professional development for active citizenship, including second chance programs to make up for lack of initial schooling, or for early school leavers and dropouts;
- it empowers people to actively engage in social issues, such as poverty, gender, intergenerational solidarity, social mobility, justice, equity, exclusion, violence, unemployment, environmental protection and climate change;
- its objectives are to develop the capacity of individuals to think critically and to act with autonomy and a sense of responsibility; to reinforce the capacity to deal with and shape the developments taking place in the economy and the world of work; to learn and fully participate in sustainable development, environment protection and human rights.

Two further components of the definition shall be underlined. First, states should mobilize and allocate sufficient resources to adult education in accordance with national needs, using the required resources in a sustainable, effective, efficient, democratic and accountable way. Second, the learning outcomes from participation should be recognized, validated and accredited as equivalent values to those granted by formal education (for instance, in accordance with National Qualification Frameworks) in order to allow continuous education and access to the labour market, without facing discrimination barriers.

Can tertiary education be separated from adult education? Part-time learning (evening courses, distance and e-learning) is strongly connected to adult education as it has been proved recently.⁹ The involvement of the 'working class' into the tertiary education was the priority in many CEE states, setting up non-regular learning courses at universities and colleges in 1947–49. For instance, in Hungary the number of these students was ten times more up to 1952, because the forced industrialisation and agricultural modernisation as well as the administrative staff required more and more qualified (and politically reliable) workers. Up to the late '80s the quarter of all students in tertiary education belonged to the non-regular students. This type of learning has started to reduce since 2005 due to demographic and financial reasons (about half of these students have to cover their own tuition fees and learning expenditures which are growing). The law on tertiary education determines that 30–50 percent of frontal (contact) lectures of regular (full-time) education shall be ensured in non-regular education. According to the survey, part-time learning that is mainly self-financed, is accompanied with work (the state financed places are limited). This form of tertiary education means an alternative of non-applicable full-time learning for adults below 21 (in 16–22 percent) rather than for those over 30. The part-time students have jobs (at least 20 working hours per week), their own wage and household living with a partner. This chance for social equality is accompanied with more innovation in teaching methods (non-frontal lectures, e-books, practical trainings). For these reasons, at least part-time learning in tertiary education should be considered as an important part of lifelong learning and adult education of employees in this

⁹ The Eurostudent V database gives more insights on the topic: <http://database.eurostudent.eu> (28 September 2016). The summaries of Hungarian results are also supporting the above mentioned statement: http://www.felvi.hu/pub_bin/dload/eurostudent/eurostudent_tanulmany_hu_VEGLEGES_web.pdf (10 October 2016).

region. The following table demonstrates that enrolled students in tertiary education in Hungary and Romania are below the proportion of the country's population of the EU, while students' rate in Slovenia is higher. This result is strongly determined by access to secondary education and the budget resources used on education.

Number of enrolled regular students in tertiary education ¹⁰		% from the total students	The country's population % from the EU population
EU28 total	19 623 000	100.00	
Hungary	359 000	1.83	1.95
Romania	618 200	3.15	3.99
Bulgaria	284 000	1.44	1.43
Croatia	164 000	0.83	0.84
Slovenia	97 700	0.49	0.41

The absence of proper national statistics and public data on disadvantaged groups with regard to access to adult education (for instance, the size and number of disabled persons, Roma, migrants, persons facing cumulative discrimination and poverty) makes the analysis dubious. These uncertainties could be reduced with field research. Similarly, the data on (public and students') finance in adult education is fragmented, hindering the assessment of efficiency and democratic operation.

3. Specificities in Five Member States¹¹

3.1. Hungary

Hungary has adopted several national strategies in 2014–15 to improve the equality of its education and training system: on early school leaving, public education development, vocational and training system, higher education and lifelong learning. The education and training system faces a number of issues: the proportion of underachievement in basic skills is increasing and the socio-economic gaps in performance

¹⁰ Eurostat, *Number of tertiary education students, 2013*. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_tertiary_education_students,_2013_\(thousands\)_ET15.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_tertiary_education_students,_2013_(thousands)_ET15.png) (10 October 2016).

¹¹ Data in this section is used from OECD, *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris 2015, www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance-19991487.htm (1 October 2016); European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *Adult Education and Training in Europe: Widening Access to Learning Opportunities, Eurydice Report*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2015; Eurostat, *European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS)*. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-labour-force-survey> (10 September 2016); Eurostat, *Number of tertiary education students, 2013*. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_tertiary_education_students,_2013_\(thousands\)_ET15.png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Number_of_tertiary_education_students,_2013_(thousands)_ET15.png) (10 October 2016); Eurostat, *Adult Education Survey (AES) 2007 and 2011*, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/adult-education-survey> (10 October 2016); European Commission, *Education and Training Monitor 2015*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg 2015. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/monitor15_en.pdf (15 September 2016). Other sources are indicated separately.

are still among the highest in the EU. Increasing the participation of disadvantaged students, in particular Roma, in mainstream inclusive education and improving support through targeted teacher training represents a challenge. Vocational schools are not attractive to young people, due to the high dropout rate and lack of flexible career opportunities. Many dropout students participation in higher and/or adult education remain low.

General government expenditure on education as a share of GDP is among the lowest in the EU: it was 5.6 per cent in 2010, 5.1 in 2011, 4.7 in 2012 and in 2013. While in the *OECD* member states spend on average 10 220 USD per year from primary through tertiary education (8,247 per primary student, 9,518 per secondary student and 15028 per tertiary student), Hungary has no data since 2006. Students receive an average of 7,570 hours of compulsory education at primary and lower secondary level in *OECD* states in 2015, but for students in Hungary it is less than 6,000 hours.

These measures in fact deny that education holds key potential for long-term growth and tackling the root causes of the social crisis. The reduction of public investment in education limits the availability of a properly skilled, competent labour force that is needed for economic entrepreneurship. The Hungarian society is not prepared for changes while the employment rate of people with below upper-secondary education is among the lowest in the *OECD*. The average rate in the EU is 52 percent, in the *OECD* is 55 percent, while in Hungary it is 45 percent. Inequalities still persist in education, causing serious consequences for labour markets and economies. In 2014, less than 60 percent of adults without an upper secondary education were employed, compared to over 80 percent of tertiary-educated adults.¹² Moreover, the rapid technological changes require flexible adaptation to new tasks and job specificities, but adult education (specific skills, ICT or basic skills) is neglected in the frame of the publicly financed community work for long-term unemployed persons. For this reason, only 14 percent of community workers can access jobs in the market economy.

The rate of graduated persons in tertiary education is low, although the number of enrolled students is growing. Rapid progress has been made in expanding education over the past 25 years, and around 41 percent of 25–34 year-olds now have a tertiary qualification in *OECD* countries. The budget contribution to tertiary education should be upgraded and in parallel, the cooperation between the universities and entrepreneurs shall be improved in order to offer more and proper jobs for newly graduated young workers and to avoid further emigration of qualified persons. Despite the structural and territorial unemployment, an absence of skilled labour force appears. As the *OECD* projects, this shortage could cause economic concerns. In Hungary, more than half of the companies indicate vacancies and labour shortages, while this rate is 20 percent in Poland and 10 percent in Slovakia. The data below proves the high shortages of skilled workers in Hungary, as they have the biggest chance to be employed there.

Employment rate of recent graduates (within 3 years in ISCED 3-6) in age 20–34¹³	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU 28 average
	80.4%	68.1%	74.6%	62.6%	71.5%	76.9%

¹² OECD, *OECD Economic Surveys: Hungary*, OECD Publishing, Paris 2016. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eco_surveys-hun-2016-en (25 September 2016).

¹³ Eurostat, *Employment rates of recent graduates (aged 20–34) not in education and training, 2015*. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates_\(aged_20%E2%80%9334\)_not_in_education_and_trainin g,_2015_\(%C2%B9\)_\(%25\).png](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates_(aged_20%E2%80%9334)_not_in_education_and_trainin_g,_2015_(%C2%B9)_(%25).png) (30 August 2016).

The *OECD* statistics reveal the difficulties that governments face in financing education. Between 2010 and 2012, GDP began to rise again in most countries, but public spending on primary to tertiary educational institutions fell in more than one in three *OECD* countries, including Hungary and Slovenia.

In Hungary, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (2013), 17.5 percent of adults (aged 25–64) have completed lower secondary education at most, while only 1.3 percent has a lower level of educational attainment. According to the Adult Education Survey (2011), 24.7 percent of low-qualified adults (i.e. those with lower secondary education at most) participate in lifelong learning, which is above the EU average (21.8 percent). Hungary did not participate in the Survey of Adult Skills. There is no specific policy framework for adult literacy and basic skills. However, there are publicly funded programmes that support adults acquiring or improving their basic skills.

Persons living in poverty or handicapped, disabled are the most vulnerable. 14% of Hungary’s total population can be considered to be living in relative income poverty. Within the age group 18–24, the proportion is 19.8%, which is lower than those, who are under 18 years of age, but higher than those, who are over 24. The risk of poverty decreases with aging and is influenced primarily by economic activity and the number of children, while the primary influence on economic activity is educational attainment. The risk of poverty is especially high in households with a single parent. In 2011, Hungary had the fifth lowest poverty line within the European Union (227 EUR/month).¹⁴ Young adults coming from child protection system form are also usual “candidates” of early school leaving, low education and living in poverty. We find it significant to consider individuals under child protection as disadvantaged regarding education. Those children and youth, who are under temporary or permanent child protection (living in an orphanage, foster care, or receiving aftercare), do not get enough support for their studies. The number of those, who are under child protection was 23,000 in 2014, 6,000 of which belonged to age group 15–17, while 3,000 were 18 years of age or older.

In summary, Hungary demonstrates controversial public education measures and a diluted adult learning policy that cannot diminish social inequalities, frictions in labour demands and supplies, the high rate of low educated persons and their unemployment.

3.2. Romania

In Romania, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (2013), 23.7 percent of adults (aged 25–64) have completed lower secondary education at most, while 3.7 percent have a lower level of educational attainment. In June 2015, the Government adopted a strategy for reducing early school leaving, because the early school leaving rate remained above the EU average. The availability and access to nursery and pre-schooling services is limited, especially in rural areas and for the Roma community.

Not only the high rate of early school leavers comparing with neighbour states, but the relatively weak results in secondary educational attainments in young and in the active aged population of Romania is observable.

Shortages in secondary education	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU average

¹⁴ KSH, *A relatív jövedelmi szegénység és a társadalmi kirekesztődés (Laeken-i indikátorok)*, 2012, Statisztikai Tükör, Vol. 7, No. 66, September 2013, pp. 1–4.

At most lower secondary educational attainment (ISCED 1-3) by age 25-64 (Eurostat, 2015)	16.8%	25.0%	18.1%	17.7%	13.2%	23.5%
At least upper secondary educational attainment (ISCED 4) in age 20-24 (2015)	84.2%	79.7%	85.1%	95.7%	90.9%	82.7%
Early leavers from education and training, age 18-24 (2015)	11.6%	19.1%	13.4%	2.8%	5.0%	11%

Romania's tertiary education attainment rate has risen consistently in recent years, but remains the second lowest in the EU. The Government has adopted a strategy on tertiary education, which has two overarching aims: to make higher education more relevant by aligning it more closely with labour market needs; and to improve the accessibility of higher education for disadvantaged groups.

Romania has not participated in any international surveys on adult competences. There is no specific policy framework for adult literacy and basic skills. However, there are publicly funded programmes that support adults acquiring or improving their basic skills: mature learners, who have not completed primary or lower secondary education can follow 'second chance' programmes.¹⁵ These were developed in 1999 within a PHARE project and revised in 2009. At present, the programme is part of the national education system and its curriculum, which is modular, falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. The programme leading to the completion of primary education has a standard duration of two years. However, this is flexible and can be adapted to suit the individual needs of learners. Students who completed primary education can continue their studies at lower secondary level. This combines general and vocational elements (the vocational education and training component starts in the second year of the programme). The standard duration of the lower secondary level programme is four years. Yet, here again, it can be adapted to the learners' needs. At the end of the lower secondary 'second chance' programme, students are considered as having completed compulsory education and can continue their studies at upper secondary level. If graduates continue practical vocational education sessions for six months and succeed in their final exam, they receive a certificate. It is financed from national sources and is free for all participants. According to the Statistical Office, in 2011/12, 9,202 learners enrolled in this type of education (3,079 in primary education and 6,123 in lower-secondary education). Other types of learning also contribute to the development of basic skills in the adult population within the framework of active labour market policies using European funding.

Due to the mentioned weaknesses in attainment in primary and secondary education, the rate of young persons who are neither employed nor in education or vocational professional training (NEET) in ages 15–24 has been high in Romania. Between 2006 and 2015 the NEET rate in age 20–24 could decrease only in Bulgaria (5 percent) and in Hungary (2 percent), while it was growing in Slovenia (3 percent), Romania (5 percent) and Croatia (5.55 percent). Furthermore, in Romania it is over 24 percent and in

¹⁵ The programme of 'A doua șansă' (Second Chance), more information at: <https://www.edu.ro/a%20doua%20sansa> (24 September 2016).

Hungary 16.5 percent.¹⁶ Using the *Eurostat* data it can be said that the NEET rate in age 20–24 is higher than in ages 15–24 in whole Europe: for instance, in Poland (17 percent), in Slovakia (19 percent), and the EU 28 average was 17.3 percent in 2015. On the other hand, the rate of young persons in ages 20–24 that are working and studying on average in the EU28 is 17%.

Young people neither in employment nor in education or training (<i>NEET</i>) in ages 15-24 comparing to the total population in the same age group (2015)	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU28 average
	13.6 %	18.1%	19.3%	18.5%	9.5%	11.6%

Adult participation in learning remains far below the EU average and general government expenditure on education as a share of GDP is the lowest in the EU. According to the Adult Education Survey (2011), 1.4 percent of low-qualified adults (i.e. those with lower secondary education at most) participate in lifelong learning, which is below the EU average (21.8 percent).

In Romania, the youth itself is a very vulnerable group, as in 2011, the poverty rate was 5 percent for the total population, 8.4 percent for young people aged 15–19, 7.6 percent for 20–24 year-olds, 6.0 percent for 25–29 year-olds, and 4.6 percent for 30–34 year-olds. The child poverty rate was 6.1 percent for the age group 0–5 and 7.7 percent for 6–14 year-olds.¹⁷ Romania's employment rate among the population aged 20–64 (63.9 percent in 2013) is much lower than the EU average (68.5 percent in 2012), with a national target of 70% by 2020. The age group 30–34 registers an employment rate which is close to the European level (77.1 percent vs. 77.5 percent), while all other age groups (15–29) are well below the EU28 average. Major discrepancies can be seen at regional level. Therefore, the lowest employment rates for 15–24 year-olds are reported in the West (27.9 percent) and North-West (27.6 percent) Regions, while other regions like North-East (36.4 percent) and South-Muntenia (34.5 percent) perform much better. It has to be mentioned that in the West and North-West the 15–24 year-olds group is mainly still attending secondary or tertiary education on a full time basis. In these regions there are several university centres with 57,000¹⁸ students, like Timisoara or with more than 80,000 students like Cluj-Napoca.¹⁹ So this does not mean that in these regions have more NEET youth, it means that they are generally still studying. Based on the National Youth Policy Strategy 2015–2020 in Romania, edited by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and UNICEF, the Strategy tackles the situation of and policies for young people aged 14 to 35, including the most disadvantaged Roma youth, young people from pockets of poverty;

¹⁶ Eurostat, *Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training*. Available: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Statistics_on_young_people_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_or_training (29 September 2016).

¹⁷ Data from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly of Romania: <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/> (9 September 2016).

¹⁸ See: Timpolis, *Pretul chiriilor, in aer din cauza aglomeratiei din campusul universitar*. Available at: <http://timpolis.ro/print.php?id=11697> (9 September 2016).

¹⁹ Campus Cluj, *80 000 studenti aduc la Cluj anual 400 de milioane de euro*. Available at: <http://www.campuscluj.ro/stiri/218-80-000-de-studenti-aduc-la-cluj-anual-400-de-milioane-de-euro.html> (6 September 2016).

youth with special educational needs; young victims of exploitation; youth with HIV/AIDS; and young victims of discrimination.²⁰

3.3. Bulgaria

Without repeating the details above, there are many shortages in education and adult learning system, including the financial resources.

Low reading literacy performed pupils in age 15 (PISA Scale, 2012)	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia
	19.7%	37.3%	39.4%	18.7%	21.1%

Bulgaria has recently improved its performance with regard to basic skills and tertiary education attainment. However, it still needs to improve the overall quality and efficiency of its school education system and the capacity of higher education to respond to the labour market needs. Access to education for disadvantaged children, in particular Roma, is an ongoing challenge. The quality of vocational training in Bulgaria is insufficient, including in terms of its integration in the general education system. Following table proves that Bulgaria provides vocational and upper secondary education at European size for youth at the age of 18. This rate is more limited in Croatia and Romania.

18 year-olds in education from the total population from the same age group (2012)	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU 28 average
	86.0%	77.7%	80.6%	70.6%	92.1%	80.4%

The rate of adult participation in learning is among the lowest of the EU, although the rate of attainment of secondary education would be upgraded. In Bulgaria, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (2013), 18.2 percent of adults (aged 25–64) have completed lower secondary education at most, while 3.5 percent have a lower level of educational attainment. According to the Adult Education Survey (2011), 12.3 percent of low-qualified adults (i.e. those with lower secondary education at most) participate in lifelong learning, which is below the EU average (21.8 percent).

Bulgaria has not participated in any international surveys on adult competences, and there is no specific policy framework for adult literacy and basic skills. However, there are EU funded programmes that support adults acquiring or improving their basic skills. In the school year 2014/15, adult education in Bulgaria was provided by 294 general and professional secondary schools, professional colleges and 362 non-formal Centres for Professional Training. The number of adults who participate in LLL is 1.8% from the population of 25–64 year old which is quite below the national goal for 2020, which is 5%. Having in mind that according to the National Statistics the growth rate is about 0.1–0.15% annually there is a relatively small chance to realize the national goal of 5% participation by 2020.

From the most potential audience in adult education the vulnerable groups are present to a great extent in Bulgaria. Beyond the huge groups of low educated and unskilled people, among NEET predominated young people (19.3 percent in the age of 15–24) are from ethnic minorities, those who live in small

²⁰ C. Briciu & O. Marcovici & S. Mitulescu & A. Popa & I. Tomus, *National Youth Policy Strategy 2015–2020*, Alpha MDN Publishing House Bucharest 2015. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/romania/Strategia_pt_tineret_en.pdf (2 September 2016).

villages, who have low-education and who are economically non-active.²¹ According to the data from the census of 2011, where people had to define their own ethnic affiliation, the second ethnic group includes people who define themselves as Turkish minority (10.9 percent). The third group represents Roma people (8 percent). All other ethnic groups are relatively small and altogether they represent about 1.3 percent from the total population in the age of 10–29. The population of Turkish and Roma minorities increases among the youth of 10–19 years old, slightly for Turkish with 1.4 percent and more rapidly for Roma with 3 percent.

According to the LLL Strategy adopted by the Bulgarian government in 2014 there are some special measures to be taken to increase the participation of adults in LLL like re-integration into formal education, additional classes of Bulgarian language for children of the ethnic minority groups, and ensuring the opportunity for formal learning for children and adults who are in correctional facilities.

3.4. Croatia

The main strengths of Croatia's education and training system are the low early school leaving rate and the high proportion of secondary vocational school graduates continuing into higher education. In Croatia, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (2013), 20.3 percent of adults (aged 25–64) have completed lower secondary education at most, while 3 percent have a lower level of educational attainment. However, the following table represents the outstanding position of Croatia with high percentage of attendance in upper secondary education, but mainly for males: its rate in Croatia is far above the EU average and other four states' ratio.

Pupils in upper secondary education (<i>ISCED 3</i>) enrolled in vocational system by gender (<i>males in 2012</i>)	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU 28 average
	32.2%	69.9%	58.5%	78.2%	73.1%	55.7%

Positive developments in the country include the adoption of a comprehensive strategy for education, science and technology, which will be the main driver of reform in the coming years. On the other hand, the Croatian education and training system faces a significant number of challenges, including improving education outcomes in mathematics in primary and secondary schools, modernising initial vocational education and training curricula in line with the needs of the labour market, and increasing access and completion rates in higher education.

There are relatively low participation rates in adult learning partly due to the under-regulated and under-funded system. Croatia has not participated in any international surveys on adult competences. There is no specific policy framework for adult literacy and basic skills. However, there are publicly funded programmes that support adults acquiring or improving their basic skills.

The participation rate of persons in active age in lifelong learning of the five examined countries is far from the European average with the exception of Slovenia. Moreover, the number of participants is stable or diminished in three countries, while Hungary and Bulgaria extended the ratio of participation somewhat in the recent years. It means that job-specific or other professional training within four weeks

²¹ UNICEF, Изгубено бъдеще? Изследване на феномените на необхващане в училище, UNICEF, Sofia 2013, p 16. Available at: http://www.unicef.bg/assets/PDFs/Izgubeno_budeshte_bg.pdf (28 August 2016).

from the questioning are covering a small circle. The absent data on LLL expenditures can be explained by certain derogations to Regulation 452/2008/EC up to 2013.²²

LLL participation rate in active aged persons (2012–2015)	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU 28 average
Lifelong learning participation rate in aged 25–64 (Eurostat, 2012)	2.9%	1.4%	1.7%	3.3%	13.8%	9.2%
(Eurostat, 2015)	7.1%	1.3%	2.0%	3.1%	11.9%	10.7%

From the context of vulnerable groups, the 7 percent of minority population is divers, including 2.51 percent Serbians, 0.72 percent Bosnians and 0.6% Roma. Moreover, active measures for minors are usually implemented within the compulsory education system, when a certain pupil is considered a risk of dropping out of elementary school. In this case the school informs the Centre for Social Welfare, and subsequently the two institutions cooperate to find the best possible solution. For adults, implementation of these measures depends on the personal engagement of the individual. However, there is absence of data that would clearly show the needs of young adults in the target group (ages 16–30) and the research, which defines that whose goal would be to determine the specific needs of the young adults and the need for their involvement in the labour market.

3.5. Slovenia

Slovenia has the second lowest early school leaving rate in the EU. Average basic skills proficiency is satisfactory, especially in mathematics and science. The proportion of upper secondary students in vocational education and training remains above the EU average. In upper secondary education, reversing demographic trends and the drop in student numbers have caused schools across the country to function below their capacity. Around 85 percent of young people in 2015 completed upper secondary education over their lifetimes. In all *OECD* countries, young women are now more likely to do so than men. The largest gender gap is in Slovenia, where 95 percent of young women are expected to graduate from upper secondary level, compared to only 76 percent of young men.

Tertiary education attainment in ages 30–34 is above the EU average. However, the higher education system is marked by a disproportionately high number of study programmes, a high drop-out rate and problems with fictitious enrolment. Moreover, it is under-funded, and as a result, the quality of teaching and resources is unsustainable. Despite these criticisms the rate of GDP and annually financed expenditure per student from the budget is the highest among the investigated countries and over the average of the EU28. Finally, there are very marked regional differences in national examinations, indicating that socio-economic status has a strong effect on educational achievement.

²² Regulation (EC) No 452/2008 of the European Parliament and the Council concerning the production and development of statistics on education and lifelong learning (23 April 2008).

Budget contribution to education and attainment in tertiary education	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU 28 average
Tertiary educational attainment (ISCED 5-6) in ages 30-34 (2015)	34.3%	25.6%	32.1%	30.9%	43.4%	23.5%
Public expenditure in broad meaning on education from the GDP (2011)	4.71%	3.07%	3.82%	4.21%	5.68%	5.25%
Annual expenditure on public and private educational institutions per pupil/student (by level of education in 2011)	n.d. (last data in 2006: 3987)	2075	2713	3902	6782	6846 EUR

In Slovenia, according to the EU Labour Force Survey (2013), 14.5 percent of adults (aged 25-64) have completed lower secondary education at most, while only 1.1 percent has a lower level of educational attainment. According to the Adult Education Survey (2011), 13.2 percent of low qualified adults (i.e. those with lower secondary education at most) participate in lifelong learning, which is below the EU average (21.8 percent). Slovenia participated in the second round of the Survey of Adult Skills (2012), but these results are not yet available.

While there is no actual policy framework for adult literacy and basic skills,²³ this area is also referred to in the Strategic Plan for Adult Education in Slovenia 2013–2020, and there are publicly funded programmes that support adults acquiring or improving their basic skills.²⁴

Mature learners, who have not completed single-structure education (i.e. education covering primary and lower secondary level), can follow a programme allowing them to finish this stage.²⁵ It is provided by various public education organisations, mainly those focusing specifically on adult learners. The programme includes around 2 000 teaching periods and is fully publicly funded (i.e. free for participants). During the school year 2013/14, 1,088 learners participated in the programme. In addition, there is a range of short programmes providing education in a range of basic skills. Central authorities have been involved in the development of the curriculum and some of the programmes have been adopted by the minister responsible for education based on the recommendations of the Council of Experts for Adult Education. The sources of funding include national and European sources as well. The provision is generally free for participants, except for ICT courses, for which fees may be charged.

The target groups identified by the Annual Adult Education Program (2015) are the unemployed persons as a priority group over the age of 50, who have no vocational or professional education or less professional ability. The other target group represents those employees, who are over the age of 45 and

²³ E. Možina & J. Mirčeva & P. Beltram & L. Knaflič & A. Ivančič & V. Mohorčič Špolar, *Strategija za dvigovanje ravni pismenosti v Sloveniji in strokovne podlage*, Ljubljana, 2003. Available at: http://arhiv.acs.si/programi/Strategija_razvoja_pismenosti_ODRASLI_2003.pdf (15 September 2016).

²⁴ RS, 90/13, *Resolucija o Nacionalnem programu izobraževanja odraslih v Republiki Sloveniji za obdobje 2013–2020 (ReNPIO13–20)* [30 October 2013] Republic of Slovenia.

²⁵ See: *Program osnovne šole za odrasle (2003)*. Available at: http://www.mizs.gov.si/fileadmin/mizs.gov.si/pageuploads/podrocje/odrasli/Programi/Program_odrasli_OS_za_odrasle.pdf (4 September 2016).

having completed less than four years of secondary school or worse career prospects, and young people, who leave school at different stages. The less educated people and other vulnerable groups, such as early school leavers, socially disadvantaged, immigrants, Roma, older adults, migrants, people with disabilities and prisoners or other groups of adults, who have limited ability to access social, cultural and economic goods, such as farmers and the population of the less developed regions are also designated in the Program.

4. Conclusions

A recent Eurobarometer survey has focused on the public awareness and benefits of the EU citizenship in Member States.²⁶ Adult education can draw some conclusions from its results, because the share of answers reflects the social background of the respondents. Furthermore, the knowledge about Union citizenship is close or is over the level of the EU28 average in the analysed five countries. Regardless of the inconsistencies of the answers (for instance, one may be familiar with Union citizenship, but its acquisition, duality with national citizenship and main rights as Union citizen are not in harmony with one another), this region is rather homogeneous in this context.

Awareness level on Union citizenship (2015)	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Croatia	Slovenia	EU 28 average
Are you familiar with the term of citizen of the Union? Yes (% of the respondent)	96%	93%	91%	86%	83%	87%
Do you have to ask to become a citizen of the European Union? No because it is false (% of the respondent)	88%	60%	50%	82%	75%	78%
Are you both a citizen of the EU and the national of your country? Yes (% of the respondent)	87%	94%	88%	94%	90%	91%
Are you informed about your rights as a citizen of the EU? Yes (% of the respondent)	47%	42%	43%	25%	36%	42%

The respondents being familiar with the Union citizenship including its term, substance and method of acquisition are people aged over 25 that completed full-time education in age over 20; they are employees or self-employed persons living in a large town. The majority of respondents lack relevant information on Union citizenship and are manual workers, who completed full-time education before the age 15 or 20 and living in rural villages.

²⁶ European Commission, *Flash Eurobarometer 430: Report on European Union Citizenship*, DG COMM, Brussels 2016, p. 96. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/document/files/2016-flash-eurobarometer-430-citizenship_en.pdf (14 September 2016).

Looking at the relevant statistics, this region of the five adjacent states can be divided into two models: Slovenia and Croatia have similar parameters, while Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria is converging in education, literacy, skilled persons and budget efforts on education. For all that, diversity is revealed in this area as follows:

- Till 2020 the improvement of the employment rate, cutting of the share of early school leavers, increasing the rate of the young population having completed tertiary education and the reduction of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is planned to put into practice only in Slovenia meeting the European average in four priorities and Croatia in three, while Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria intend to fulfil two priority requirements each.
- The high risk of poverty for children can be expressed by certain aspects of inequalities. According to their average ranking in four types of inequalities Slovenia and Croatia provide much more results than Romania and Bulgaria do (Slovenia: 14.5; Croatia: 16.5; Hungary: 18; Romania: 26 and Bulgaria: 28). The gender inequality can be detected in upper secondary education. The high percentage of attendance in upper secondary education for males in Croatia is far over the EU average and the other four states' ratios.
- Not only the high rate of early school leavers comparing with neighbour states, but the relatively weak results in secondary educational attainments in young and also in the active aged population of Romania and Bulgaria can be observed. Bulgaria and Romania is facing high proportion of pupils in the age of 15 with limited competence in literacy.
- Due to these mentioned weaknesses in attainment in primary and secondary education the rate of non-active (NEET) young persons in the age of 15–24 has been high in Romania and Bulgaria, but also in Hungary and Croatia is over the EU28 average. Between 2006 and 2015 the NEET rate in the age of 20–24 decreased only in Bulgaria and in Hungary. Furthermore, in Romania it is over 24 percent and 16.5 percent in Hungary. The NEET rate in the age of 20–24 is higher than in 15–24. The EU28 average was 17.3 percent in 2015.
- On the other hand, the rate of young persons in the ages of 20–24, who are working and studying in average in EU28, is 17 percent, in Hungary this ratio grew from 4.5 percent in 2006 to 6.4 percent in 2015.
- The number of enrolled regular students in tertiary education in Hungary and Romania is below the proportion of the country's population of the EU, while this student rate in Slovenia is higher, which is strongly determined by access to secondary education and used budget resources on education. Tertiary education attainment in the ages of 30–34 is above the EU average in each analysed country and this rate in Slovenia is two times higher than the EU28 average. Furthermore, the rate of GDP and annually financed expenditure per student from the budget is the highest in Slovenia among the investigated countries and it is over the average of the EU28.
- The shortage in skilled workers could cause economic concerns. In Hungary, more than half of the companies indicate vacancies and labour shortages, while this rate in Poland shows 20 percent and 10 percent in Slovakia. On the other hand, strong absence of qualified workers improves the chances of employment for newly graduated youth (see the data from Hungary and Bulgaria).
- The participation rate of persons in active age in lifelong learning is far from the European average with the exception of Slovenia. Moreover, the number of participants is stable or diminished in three countries, while in Hungary and Bulgaria the ratio of participation grew somewhat in recent

years. This means that job-specific or other professional training within four weeks from the questioning cover a small circle.

- The youth living in rural areas, the social strata in poverty, early school leavers, Roma, minorities, persons completed full-time education below the age 18, youth in NEET, disabled young adults as well as minors and young adults, who are under temporary or permanent child protection shall be the target audience of adult education and second-chance education programmes.

A stagnant adult learning rate and the lack of policy commitment demand the reconsideration of adult learning policies. Among the set of policy levers likely to impact adults' disposition towards further learning, the provision of targeted guidance stands out as one of the most effective ones. Stronger still among the policy actions linked to employer investment in learning is the effect of the co-financing of employers' investment on the amount of work-related training. Among the more important policy tasks is the need to improve access to learning for disadvantaged groups, the most meaningful intervention being actual financing (or direct provision) of learning opportunities. Other effective measures, including targeted guidance, recognition of prior learning, embedding basic skills development in adult education programmes, and the assistance of intermediary organisations (e.g. NGOs and social services) engaging in socio-economic groups, are harder to reach.

The minimal enthusiasm in participation in adult education and a less respected LLL is common in these five countries, although new professions with challenging responsibilities, tasks and job-classifications (such as online marketing coordinator, drug-safety specialist, and technical-commercial advisor) are born in Europe. Such opportunities can only be fulfilled with stable basic or specific competences. Adult education must adjust to the changes of labour demand and technology. Adult education could be the second chance for many segregated, unskilled and poor people to reduce harsh inequalities and represents a key component to create a less manipulated, a bit autonomous and integrated Union citizens. Despite Brexit or governmentally fuelled Euro-scepticism, the recent representative public opinion survey conducted by Závecz Research proves that 68 percent of respondents in Hungary support membership in the EU.²⁷ Why? The answer is simple, because citizens can work and study lawfully in any member state (82 percent), the membership is better for the economy than being out of the Union (68 percent), the EU means guarantee for peaceful life (64 percent) and EU law and membership can frame the actions of the national governments (56 percent). These points should be important drivers for future adult learning programs in Europe.

²⁷ Á Kolozsi, *Tíz év múlva már nem biztos, hogy bent leszünk az EU-ban*, Index.hu, 16 August 2016. Available at: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/08/16/ok_akarnak_itthon_kilepni_az_eu-bol/ (30 August 2016).