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Education and Training Monitor 2015

Slovakia

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Additional contextual data can be found online (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)

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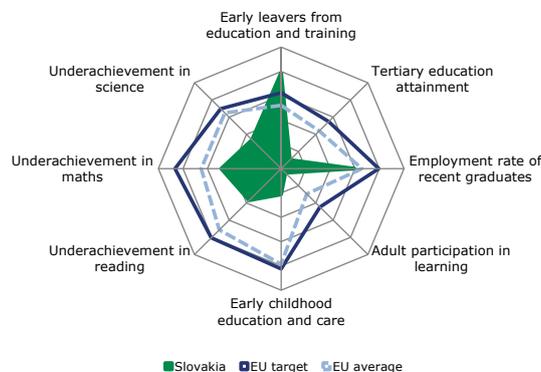
SLOVAKIA

1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Slovakia		EU average		
		2011	2014	2011	2014	
Educational poverty and spending cuts: challenges for the education sector						
Share of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading	•	: 28.2% ¹²	:	17.8% ¹²	
	Maths	•	: 27.5% ¹²	:	22.1% ¹²	
	Science	•	: 26.9% ¹²	:	16.6% ¹²	
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		4.6%	5.0% ¹³	5.1%	5.0% ¹³
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure		11.3%	12.2% ¹³	10.5%	10.3% ¹³
Education attainment levels of young people across Europe						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men		5.4%	6.9%	15.2%	12.7%
	Women		4.6%	6.6%	11.5%	9.5%
	Total	•	5.1%	6.7%	13.4%	11.1%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men		19.4%	22.5%	31.0%	33.6%
	Women		27.3%	31.5%	38.7%	42.3%
	Total	•	23.2%	26.9%	34.8%	37.9%
Policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance						
Early childhood education and care (participation from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)		•	76.9%	77.5% ¹³	93.2%	93.9% ¹³
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)		:	73.3% ¹³	:	84.6% ¹³
	Special needs education		:	22.3% ¹³	:	32.4% ¹³
	Multicultural settings		:	13.2% ¹³	:	13.2% ¹³
	ICT skills for teaching		:	60.4% ¹³	:	51.0% ¹³
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		52.2%	66.5% ¹²	63.0%	: ¹²
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)			70.9%	68.1% ¹³	50.4%	48.9% ¹³
Employment rate of recent graduates by education attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4		61.6%	68.3%	71.3%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8		79.3%	76.7%	82.5%	80.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total)	•	70.1%	72.7%	77.1%	76.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)		:	4.2% ¹³	:	: ¹³
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)		:	3.5% ¹³	:	: ¹³
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	•	3.9%	3.0%	8.9%	10.7%

Sources: Eurostat (LFS, UOE, GFS); OECD (PISA, TALIS). Notes: • ET 2020 benchmark; data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different number of Member States depending on the source; b= break in time series, d= definition differs, p= provisional, u= low reliability, ¹²= 2012, ¹³= 2013. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2014 and UOE 2013) and OECD (PISA 2012, TALIS 2013). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

2. Main strengths and challenges

The early school leaving rate in Slovakia remains low in comparison with other countries. Nevertheless, the increase in recent years calls for targeted measures. The new Vocational Education and Training (VET) Act, which is intended to encourage practical work experience in companies, is likely to improve graduates' preparedness for the labour market. Capacities for early childhood education and care are being strengthened in order to boost the participation rate. If these are well targeted, they could also lead to a higher rate of participation by children from marginalised communities, which could in turn contribute to better educational outcomes for disadvantaged students. The Slovak Ministry of Education is strengthening its analytical capacities and the country is participating in a number of international reviews, which should improve evidence-based policy-making.

Educational inequalities remain high and educational outcomes have deteriorated over recent years. Participation of Roma children in mainstream education and in high-quality early childhood education needs to increase. The attractiveness of the teaching profession to talented young people is low. Initial teacher education and continuous professional development need to be improved. The quality of higher education and cooperation with employers need to be strengthened. Deeper knowledge of the labour market needs would contribute to fewer skills and qualifications mismatches. Reforms often do not always reach their full potential partly because stakeholders are not always fully on-board with the reforms and due to weaknesses in the implementation phase.

Box 1. The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendation on education and training

The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendations (CSRs) to Slovakia (Council of the European Union 2015) included a recommendation on education and training:

CSR 3: Improve teacher training and the attractiveness of teaching as a profession to stem the decline in educational outcomes. Increase the participation of Roma children in mainstream education and in high-quality early childhood education.

3. Investing in education and training

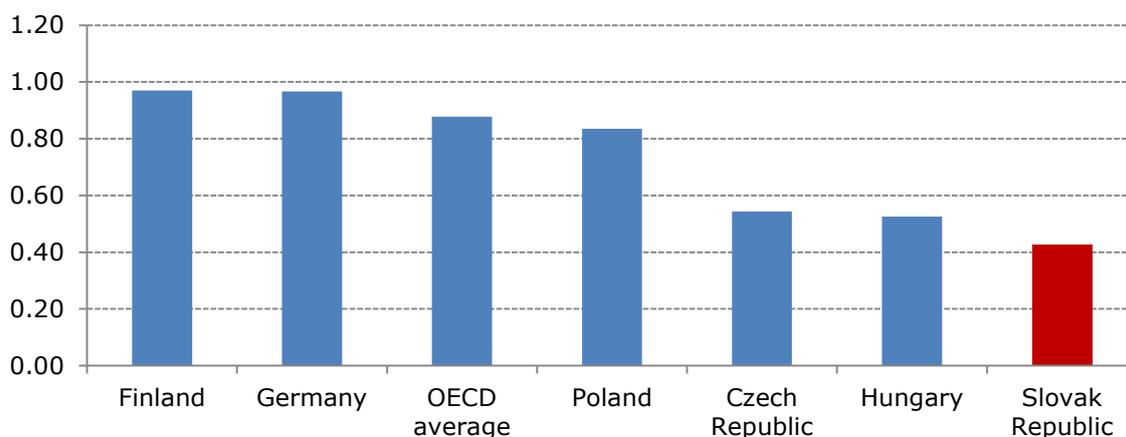
Slovakia's general government expenditure on education rose to 5% of GDP in 2013, which is in line with the EU average.¹ The increase in 2013 followed a decrease over the previous three years. Part of the increase from 2013 is linked to a 5% rise in teachers' pay, which has continued in 2014 and 2015. However, teachers' pay remains low compared with other countries and with the salaries of other Slovak workers with equivalent levels of qualifications (Figure 2). Slovakia's 2015 National Reform Programme (NRP) reiterates the government's intention to continue increasing teachers' salaries in the coming years (Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic 2015). It is hoped that Slovakia will continue to make up for earlier gaps in funding, e.g. for learning materials (textbooks, equipment) or supporting underperforming students and schools.

European Structural and Investment Funds will continue to support the education sector in Slovakia in the 2014-2020 period. Not all the available funds were used between 2007 and 2013, owing to weak project management. As part of the 2015 NRP, the Slovak Government intends to improve its management of EU funds. In particular, the long-term impact of projects could be improved through better evaluation and mainstreaming of positive results.

¹ Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database. A new European System of National and Regional Accounts was implemented from September 2014, affecting (among other things) the figures for Slovakia from previous years.

Slovakia is reviewing its funding system for regional education (upper secondary level) in order to make it more efficient. Smaller intakes of students call for optimising the network. From September 2015, funding for VET programmes will be partly linked to needs on the labour market. As part of its drive towards improved efficiency, Slovakia took part in an OECD review on the efficiency of the use of school resources (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic 2015). More generally, the education sector will be impacted by a wide-reaching ongoing reform of state administration entitled 'Effective, Reliable and Open state administration' (ESO reform). On funding, Slovakia's NRP states that savings are expected in education as a result of greater efficiency.

Figure 2. Teachers' salaries relative to earnings for tertiary-educated workers aged 25-64 (2012)
Lower secondary teachers' salaries, in public institutions



Source: OECD (2014a)

4. Tackling inequalities

Slovakia's early school leaving rate remains among the lowest in the EU at 6.7% in 2014, compared to the EU average of 11.1%. However, from 4.7% in 2010, the rate has been rising constantly, surpassing the Europe 2020 national target of 6%. Regional differences are high: in particular, areas with a high proportion of Roma in the population show high rates of early school leaving; it is estimated that 83% of Roma leave school early (European Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). Since Slovakia has the lowest employment rate in the EU for those not having attained upper secondary education, the impact of leaving school early is particularly strong.

The OECD 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) pointed to a significant deterioration in all areas tested and in all types of schools (OECD 2013). What is more, among the countries surveyed, Slovakia recorded the strongest impact of socioeconomic background on academic performance in mathematics. Dividing students into different streams from the age of 11 (one of the earliest among OECD countries) is likely to contribute to inequalities. The PISA results also found that there is a teacher shortage in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools and in schools located in rural areas. Incentives to attract good teachers to disadvantaged schools could contribute to improved learning outcomes while grants to encourage disadvantaged students to attend upper secondary school could raise attainment. Truancy and grade repetition are on the rise among disadvantaged students.

According to Slovakia's Public Defender of Rights, the way in which Slovakia assesses the school-readiness of children is discriminatory: Roma children are over-represented in special schools with lower learning standards, reducing their chances of completing upper secondary

education and hampering their opportunities on the labour market.² The low number of Roma students in upper secondary or higher education levels also means that there are few Roma teachers, while Roma children would probably benefit from being taught by Roma teachers who would also offer positive role models.

PISA results for Slovakia confirmed the strong relationship between participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and learning outcomes. Participation in ECEC is low (77.5% in 2013, compared with the EU average of 93.1%). For children from marginalised Roma communities, the estimated rate is extremely low (28% in 2011) (European Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014). This is partly due to insufficient ECEC capacities.

The 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) showed that the proportion of teachers in Slovakia who reported having participated in professional development related to teaching students with special needs was among the lowest among countries surveyed (22.3%, compared with the OECD average of 31.7%). The same holds for participation in training for teaching in multicultural or multilingual settings (OECD 2014c), which would be beneficial among others when teaching classes with Roma students.

Although Slovakia does not have a national strategy on early school leaving, some measures targeting vulnerable groups are in place and have secured EU funding. The measures include all-day programmes, teacher training towards inclusive education, the EU-funded 'PRINED' project to prevent disadvantaged students from being placed in special schools due to misdiagnosis.

Desegregation legislation was adopted mid-2015 to eliminate the placement of socially disadvantaged students in special classes or schools and ensure their direct placement in mainstream classes. Extra contribution by public funds for socially disadvantaged pupils will be allocated only for children in mainstream schools and classes. The placement in catching-up classes cannot exceed one year and the School Inspection will control diagnosis more strictly. The latter actively cooperates with human rights organisations on finding effective ways to eliminate segregation and stakeholders exchange practical information, experiences and activities. Specific support to systematically address Slovak language deficiencies would be desirable. It is not clear if increased numbers of teacher assistants for Roma students are planned. Efforts will be needed to ensure that EU-funded projects with good results are mainstreamed towards systemic, sustainable measures that will also benefit national funding.

The expansion of early childhood education and care capacities has been allocated EUR 14.5 million for 2015; special attention will be given to capacities in kindergartens in places with higher numbers of children from marginalised Roma communities. In order to achieve substantial increases in ECEC participation for disadvantaged children, further action is most likely needed, such as extending the entitlement to a place.

To work in early childhood education and care in Slovakia, teachers need only an upper secondary level qualification (specialised 4-year education programme from a pedagogical school), whereas in most EU countries a bachelor's degree is required. Previously envisaged tougher qualification requirements are not on the agenda anymore at this stage. A new curriculum at pre-primary level is being pilot tested since September 2015, as well as a new online diagnostic tool, which, among other things, can detect learning or behavioural difficulties.

² The European Commission has launched infringement proceedings against Slovakia for discriminating against Roma children by placing them in special schools with a reduced curriculum, intended for children with mild mental disabilities.

5. Modernising school education

Low pay is one of the factors making teaching unattractive as a profession to talented young people. It contributes to teacher shortages in certain fields. Initial teacher training does not include a high proportion of time dedicated to practical training. The proportion of teachers reporting participation in professional development to improve ICT skills for teaching is high (60.4%) and this is reflected in the high proportion of teachers using information and communication technology for students' projects or class work (OECD 2014c). However, the proportion of teachers who have participated in professional development in student career guidance and counselling is among the lowest of the countries surveyed. Overall, the proportion of teachers who took part in some professional development activities in the last 12 months (73%) is the lowest in the EU.

To attract more higher education students to science, technology, engineering and mathematics including future science teachers, motivational scholarships were continued in 2015. The availability of new textbooks needed further to the curricular reform launched in 2008 in schools substantially improved since the 2014/15 school year. Authorities aim at making the production, procurement and distribution of textbooks more effective. Together with the low attractiveness of the teaching profession, a lack of funds to buy the necessary teaching materials is harming the quality of teaching.

Research on teaching methods aimed at directing reforms and delivering results to be used in the classroom seems insufficient. Primary education was identified as a priority field of action in the 2015 NRP. An EU-supported project is to issue recommendations to higher education institutions preparing future teachers. The recommendations relate to how to achieve better initial training in line with new professional standards for teachers. They cover among others practical training, foreign languages and ICT. It is not clear how much progress has been made on announced improvements to continuous professional development of teachers, intended to make supply better match the actual needs of teachers. The individual needs of teachers may be better met if participants' feedback is examined closely and if a strict evaluation is carried out of the accreditation procedures for the courses.

Legislation was amended in early 2015 to prevent recruiting regular staff only for the active teaching period (i.e. excluding during the summer holidays), which is a positive step. If the new teacher standards are to be implemented properly, they will need adequate support measures. The OECD suggests that it would be helpful to combine the many existing tools for assessing teachers and classrooms into a single set of standards. This will provide a better understanding of what makes a good teacher. Furthermore, schools could benefit from clearer guidance for schools on evaluation criteria and quality indicators (OECD 2014b).

A revised curriculum for primary and general secondary education is to enter into force in September 2015. This will increase teaching in the sciences and technical subjects. Contrary to EU recommendations, learning a second foreign language will be made optional for students rather than compulsory, as was the case until now. However, schools must offer students the possibility to learn a second foreign language. With English the only compulsory foreign language, the relatively high proportion (2012 figures) of ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education) level 2 students learning two or more foreign languages may fall.

The Education Act was amended at the end of 2014 to enable schools to purchase some textbooks directly. However, at present limited amounts of money are available for this initiative. Cooperation between the authorities and the private sector on opening up the market for textbooks is still in its early stages.

The national tests at different educational levels are also being used as a means of gathering evidence and feedback on the performance of individual schools. If supported by sufficient

learning materials and accompanied by appropriate support measures for underperforming schools/teachers/students, these tests might be a useful tool to help improve outcomes. Teachers' competences for 'formative assessment' (i.e. assessment to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback to improve teaching and learning) could also usefully be improved to complement 'summative assessment' practices (i.e. assessment to evaluate student learning at certain points of the education process by comparing it against standards or benchmarks).

Slovakia's 2020 Strategy for Digitalisation of the Education sector, adopted at the end of 2014, aims to improve ICT usage in classes and teachers' skills in this field. Developing quality digital learning content could help modernise education while also helping solving the continuing problem of textbook shortages in classrooms.

6. Modernising higher education

Slovakia is one of the few EU countries where the tertiary education attainment rate – that had risen rapidly over the last decade – did not increase in 2014 compared to 2013, remaining at 26.9%, compared to the EU average of 37.9%. The rate is among the lowest and the Europe 2020 national target of 40% is at risk of not being met. Slovakia is one of the countries with the strongest correlation between tertiary education attainment and the educational attainment of parents: less than 5% of 20-34 year-olds in tertiary education have parents with a level of educational attainment below the upper secondary level (OECD 2014a). The employment rate of recent tertiary education graduates³ remained at 76.7% in 2014, i.e. lower than the EU average of 80.5%.

Slovakia remains among the few countries that do not have a quality assurance agency operating independently of the Ministry of Education and where neither completion nor drop-out rates are calculated and monitored systematically. The Accreditation Committee, which carries out quality evaluation, is not a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Supporting its membership could possibly contribute to improving the work of the Committee.

Slovakia lacks professionally-oriented bachelor's programmes: the vast majority of students continue on to master's programmes (European Commission 2015 and Figure 3). Between 2010 and 2013, Slovakia was the EU Member State with the highest increase in the number of people with a tertiary degree working in a job below their level of qualification (European Commission 2015). This state of affairs is not helping to achieve a higher attainment rate or to use resources in the most efficient manner.

Higher education institutions are also under pressure because of the demographic decline, which is lowering the number of young people entering higher education and forcing institutions to fight to fill their courses. Employers – particularly employers in the automotive sector – point out that graduates do not have the right kinds of qualifications: too many at the master's level, too many from the social sciences and not enough from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This may be partly linked to the fact that the largely per capita funding system does not favour technical universities, whereas the labour market needs more graduates precisely from the technical fields. Various sources (the Academic Ranking and Rating Agency, Eurostat, Eurydice, the National Reform Programme) point to a severe brain drain affecting students, teachers and researchers. Many students prefer to study in the Czech Republic rather than in Slovakia.

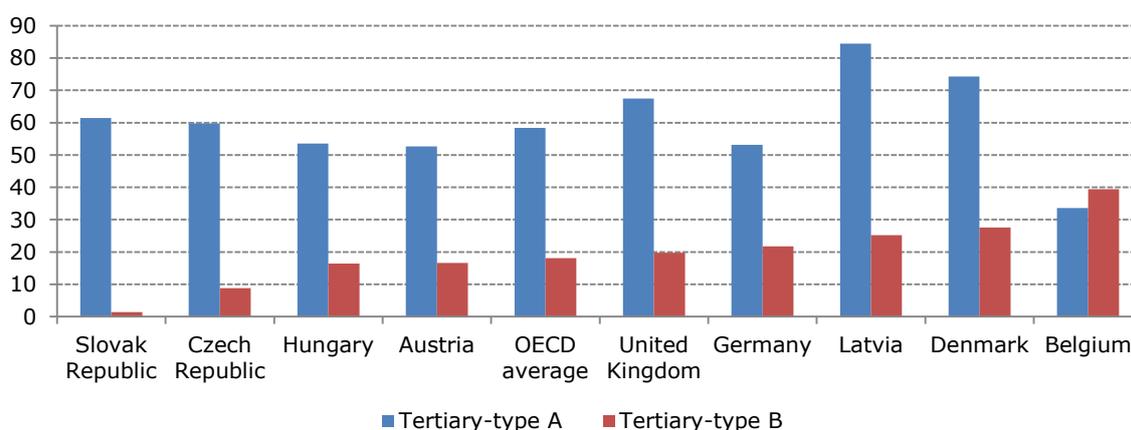
Work on a new Higher Education Act has been postponed until after the next general elections in 2016. The new Act was supposed to simplify the accreditation process and encourage cooperation with employers, something currently being explored through an ongoing EU-funded

³ People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

project. One of the project's results is a recently-launched portal which helps future students to choose where to study by providing employment rates and wages for graduates from individual universities and programmes.

By the end of 2015, the ongoing complex (re)accreditation round following the entry into force of stricter rules for quality assurance in 2013 will come to an end, hopefully bringing qualitative improvements. Funds from the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds will support the creation of profession-oriented bachelor's programmes. The Ministry of Education has also launched grants to encourage Slovak graduates of prestigious universities to come back to Slovakia and work in public administration.

Figure 3. Entry rates into vocationally-oriented tertiary education (type B) in 2012



Source: OECD (2014a)

7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

Participation of upper secondary students in Slovakia in vocational education and training is far above the EU average (68.1% in 2013, compared to the EU average of 48.9%). The employment rate of recent upper secondary education graduates⁴ has increased over the last four years but remains below the EU average (68.3% in 2014, compared to the EU average of 70.8%). However, the figure has now surpassed the 2009 level. Participation of adults in lifelong learning also remains low: 3.1% in 2014, with only two other Member States recording lower participation rates.

Sufficient investment and the quality of graduates remain challenges, both for initial VET (IVET) and continuous VET (CVET). Employers complain about skills mismatches and there is a lack of data collection, such as individual tracking, to ensure that adequate skills are developed. The lack of appropriate data on future skills needs has hampered the development of quality career guidance and counselling for pupils, students and adults. However, such services are being developed through EU-supported projects. To ensure the long-term employability of VET graduates, initial VET needs to be made more relevant to the labour market and a sufficient number of transversal skills need to be taught.

To increase the quality of adult learning, further education programmes are to be accredited using the same qualification standards as in IVET. These standards are based on the National Qualifications System (NQS), an ongoing project of the State Institute of Vocational Education (see below). The current system of information on existing further education programmes could

⁴ People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

be improved by implementing the NQS qualification standards and linking qualifications with corresponding professions that are facing labour market skills shortages.

Legislative changes were adopted in 2015. These provide financial incentives to employers to invest in further learning and will also improve the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. There is currently no system of tax breaks for people who want to take part in CVET. This is one of the main objectives in the national strategy on lifelong learning still not translated into concrete action. The national 'Further education and guidance for adults as a better competitiveness at the labour market tool'⁵ project funded by the European Social Fund (EUR 28 million) creates short-term (2013–15) financial support for individual learners who want to re-skill or up-skill by gaining a qualification required by several sectors of the labour market.⁶

The National Qualifications System⁷ developed by the European Social Fund-funded project 'Development of National Qualifications System' (EUR 24 million), intends to include all qualifications: general education, VET, higher education, qualifications gained through validation of learning, outcomes gained outside formal education. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) will be learning outcome-based, with revised descriptors covering knowledge, skills and competence. Linking the NQF to the European Qualifications Framework is planned for mid-2015.

Box 2. The VET reform

A new Act on VET was adopted by the Slovak Parliament in March 2015.⁸ It aims to improve the labour market relevance of VET by introducing elements of a dual system that includes apprenticeships from September 2015 onwards. The Act also introduces incentives for enterprises to provide training by making costs for practical training provision tax deductible. Furthermore, an additional tax deductible incentive is offered on a per capita principle depending on the number of offered practical training hours.⁹

The Act will also allow for data collection on graduates' employability (broken down by regions, individual schools and programmes) and the extent to which they find work that corresponds to their field of study. The data, which will be published on a dedicated web portal once a year, will complement the current practice of using data on unemployment from VET programmes to determine the success of transition from school to work.

This will be made possible thanks to closer cooperation between the Ministries of Labour and Education, which was formalised in 2014. This will enable a more specific analysis of the labour market relevance of programmes offered.

The VET reform is supported by cooperation with employers and with German, Austrian and Swiss partners. EU-funded projects are also feeding into the reform. Public campaigns have been launched, with the support of EU funds, to encourage enterprises to invest in VET and to make VET more attractive to students in primary education.¹⁰

The initial response by employers to the reform has been very positive. In April 2015, 130 employers, offering a total of 1 800 apprenticeships, signed up for the 'dual education' programme starting from the 2015/16 school year. Companies employing between 20 and 100 employees and active in retail and tourism, in the car manufacturing industry and in electrical

⁵ Project implemented since 2013 by the National Institute for Lifelong Learning — original name: 'Ďalšie vzdelávanie a poradenstvo pre dospelých ako nástroj lepšej uplatniteľnosti na trhu práce.', which is an agency operating under the Ministry of Education.

⁶ Electrical, mechanical, automotive, construction, metallurgy, wood processing, agriculture, crafts and services, stationery and printing and mining industry.

⁷ The national ESF-funded project 'Development of the National Qualifications System', to develop qualification standards (1 000 by 2015) is ongoing. As social partners are taking part in developing qualification and assessment standards, it is hoped that CVET qualifications aligned with qualification standards will be recognised by the labour market.

⁸ Zákon č. 61/2015 Z.z. o odbornom vzdelávaní a príprave a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov.

⁹ EUR 3 200 per trainee for 400 hours of practical training per year or EUR 1 600 per trainee for 200 hours of practical training per year. Pay for productive work that accounts for 50% to 100% of the minimum wage is also tax-deductible.

¹⁰ The 'ZENIT' VET competition is helping attract students educated to lower secondary level onto VET courses.

engineering have shown most interest in the programme so far. Interested companies will be screened for suitability and subsequently sign contracts with schools and interested students. For the VET reform to be successful, employers, in particular SMEs, must be helped to build up their capacity to offer in-company training.

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