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Education and Training Monitor 2015

Slovenia

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

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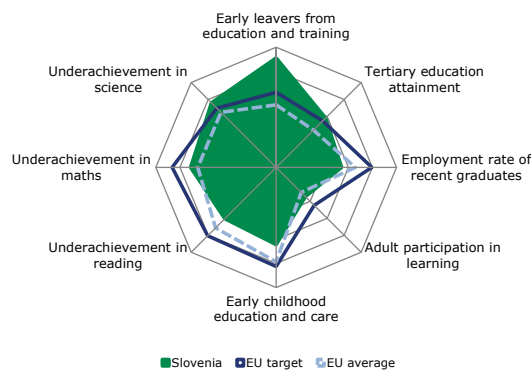
SLOVENIA

1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Slovenia		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	•	: 21.1% ¹²	:	17.8% ¹²	
	Maths	•	: 20.1% ¹²	:	22.1% ¹²	
	Science	•	: 12.9% ¹²	:	16.6% ¹²	
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		6.6%	6.5% ¹³	5.1%	5.0% ¹³
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure		13.2%	10.9% ¹³	10.5%	10.3% ¹³
Education attainment levels of young people across Europe						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men		5.7%	6.0%	15.2%	12.7%
	Women		2.5%	2.7% ^u	11.5%	9.5%
	Total	•	4.2%	4.4%	13.4%	11.1%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men		29.4%	30.0%	31.0%	33.6%
	Women		47.3%	53.7%	38.7%	42.3%
	Total	•	37.9%	41.0%	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)		•	89.8%	89.8% ¹³	93.2%	93.9% ¹³
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)		:	: ¹³	:	84.6% ¹³
	Special needs education		:	: ¹³	:	32.4% ¹³
	Multicultural settings		:	: ¹³	:	13.2% ¹³
	ICT skills for teaching		:	: ¹³	:	51.0% ¹³
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		50.4%	48.6% ¹²	63.0%	: ¹²
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)			65.4%	65.9% 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		68.7%	62.5%	71.3%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8		80.3%	74.3%	82.5%	80.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total)	•	76.0%	70.1%	77.1%	76.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)		:	1.5% ¹³	:	: ¹³
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)		:	2.6% ¹³	:	: ¹³
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	•	15.9%	11.9%	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

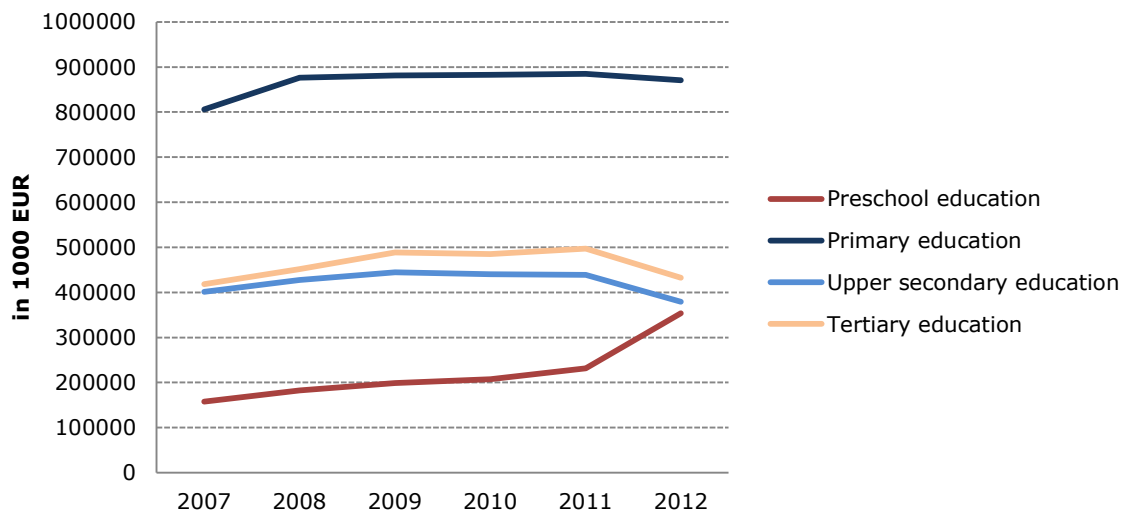
Slovenia has reached the national targets set by the Europe 2020 strategy. Early school leaving is the second lowest in the EU and tertiary education attainment is above the EU average. Basic skills performance of 9-year-olds and 15-year-olds is satisfactory, especially in maths and science. Also the proportion of upper-secondary students following vocational education and training remains above the EU average.

Despite these achievements in terms of quantity, there is room for improvement in the quality of education and training in Slovenia. In particular, the higher education system is marked by a disproportionately high number of study programmes, a high drop-out rate and problems with fictitious enrolment. In addition, the higher education sector is underfunded and as a result, the quality of teaching and resources is unsustainable. In upper secondary education, the reversing demographic trends and the drop in student numbers have caused schools across the country to function beneath their capacity. Finally, there are very marked regional differences in results in national examinations, indicating that socio-economic background has a strong effect on educational achievement.

3. Investing in education and training

Slovenia ranks alongside the Scandinavian countries when it comes to overall investment in education. After a dip in 2012 (6.4% of GDP), in 2013 the percentage of GDP Slovenia spent on education was 6.5%, well above the EU average of 5%.¹ National data differs slightly and puts this figure at 5.5% of GDP (EUR 1.97 billion), down from 5.7% in 2012 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2015a). In 2013, 74% of expenditure by educational institutions went to pay staff salaries and 12% went to investment.

Figure 2. Public expenditure on formal education 2007-2012



Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia

Nevertheless, education and training have been hit by austerity measures, with higher education in particular experiencing budget cuts and their consequences. Recent political attempts to reduce the education budget by more than EUR 65 million in 2015 caused revolt among educators, unions, students' organisations and the general public. Higher education spending was reduced by 13% between 2011 and 2012 and by 5% between 2008 and 2012.

The developments are graphically presented in Figure 2, where all sectors except pre-school education show a decrease in public expenditure. Even the growth of public expenditure for pre-

¹ Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.

school education is the result of the change of the definition of ISCED levels according to the ISCED 2011 classification which, unlike before, includes early childhood education and care of children aged 1-3 years.

4. Tackling inequalities

The figure for early school leaving in Slovenia is the second lowest in the EU (4.4% in 2014). Children born to foreign parents, however, do comparatively worse than native Slovenes. Nevertheless, Slovenia considers that its preventive measures and capacity to detect early those at risk of dropping out of education have been successful and that for this reason no explicit strategy to combat early school leaving in line with the Council Recommendation on policies against early school leaving is required. The preventive measures in Slovenia include early detection of vulnerable students, immediate assistance or advice and, where appropriate, learning assistance. For example, since 1999, around 180 people have been participating in a publicly-funded programme entitled 'Project learning for young adults' (PLYA) where, with the help of mentors, young people solve the problems that contributed to their decision to leave school. After completing the programme, mentors verify for six months whether the school leavers have re-entered education or have found a job. 2014 saw the start of a three-year Erasmus + financed pilot project entitled 'CroCoos' involving 15 vocational schools. The aim is to identify the most effective means of preventing early leaving in Slovene vocational education and training schools, with emphasis on cross-sectoral cooperation and early warning systems.

The basic skills performance of Slovenian 15-year-olds has been constant but relatively stronger in mathematics and science and relatively weaker in reading. The 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed that the percentages of low achievers in Slovenia were lower than the EU average in mathematics (20.1% compared to 22.1% in the EU) and science (12.9% compared to 16.6%) and worse than the EU average in reading (21.1% compared to 17.8%) (OECD 2013). Both the 2011 TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy) surveys assessing reading literacy and mathematics of younger 9-year-old students showed average overall results compared to other participating countries but significant gaps between Slovenian regions, with the regions in the east of the country outperforming the western regions.² The reason for this performance gap is not the difference in the quality of the schools but the impact of factors related to families' socio-economic status, as measured by parents' education, their employment status, and the number of books they own. This regional gap has been repeatedly observed over the last two decades and there is awareness of it among education policymakers. However, a long-term strategy to address this problem at the national level has not materialised.

The Slovenian pre-school education system performs relatively well, both in terms of participation levels and the overall quality. The children-staff ratio is very favourable. In 2012, for the age group 1-2 years, the ratio was 6.3 and for the age group 3-5-years it was 9.3, which is a better ratio than the 11.2 in the EU-21 (OECD 2014). Data available for 2011 showed that the average number of hours per week spent in ECEC was 35.7, which is above the EU average and comparable to the situation in countries such as Denmark, Portugal and Sweden (European Commission 2014a). However, participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a percentage of the age group between 4-years-old and the starting age of compulsory education is with 89.8% in 2013 still below the EU average of 93.1%. It is expected that the figure for 2014 will not be significantly higher, when available, because according to national sources, the number of children enrolled in kindergartens in the 2014/15 school year increased by a smaller

² For instance, in PIRLS 2011, the average score achieved by students in the eastern *Pomurska* region was 506 points, while their peers from the central *Osrednjeslovenska* region scored 541 points. In TIMSS 2011, the average score of 4th graders from the eastern *Pomurska* region was 487 points, while students from the central *Osrednjeslovenska* region scored on average 524 points.

margin than in previous years, i.e. by 1.3% (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia 2015b).

In terms of access to ECEC, data shows that the participation of children with immigrant status in ECEC is low. In the 2011/12 school year, only 6.5% of immigrant children aged 1 to 2 and 12.7% of those aged 3 to 5 participated in ECEC programmes (Čelebič 2012). At the same time, due to the worsening economic situation, the rise in unemployment and the general increase in the number of enrolments into ECEC, the number of children from families classified as socially deprived increased by 11.4% between 2001 and 2011 (Čelebič 2012).

Quality assurance in the basic school³ is strong. The National Examinations Centre⁴ carries out a mandatory external assessment of students in sixth and ninth grades (12 and 15-year-olds). In the sixth grade, pupils are assessed in the mother tongue, mathematics and foreign language, whereas in the ninth grade the language is replaced by a subject determined by the Minister. The results are distributed to each individual and aggregated results are made available in anonymised form to head teachers and teachers. The school results are comparable only with national averages, not with other individual schools, as the main aim of the measure is school self-evaluation and self-improvement rather than performance ranking.

New performance criteria for pre-school education have been adopted and will enter into force for the 2014/15 school year. These criteria aim to ensure quality curricula and decent working conditions by providing greater flexibility on group sizes. Municipalities are also given more freedom to determine specific conditions. On the other hand, the draft amendments to the Kindergarten Act, which were intended to simplify the establishment of kindergartens within companies, have so far not been adopted. Finally, the state *matura* exams at the end of upper secondary education have been made more inclusive thanks to new legislation in 2015 guaranteeing special conditions for children with autistic spectrum disorders and visual impairments.

5. Modernising school education

In the European Survey on Language Competences in 2011, Slovenian ninth grade students (14-year-olds) achieved above average results in listening and writing skills in their first foreign language (English) and average results in reading comprehension. The results were satisfactory, although the national report (Rutar Leban et al. 2012) emphasised that 41% of students did not achieve the expected skills level in reading comprehension in English as a first foreign language, as determined by the national English language syllabus. Reading comprehension in German as a first foreign language showed better results. Slovenia was below average for the proportion of students learning two or more foreign languages, in particular in vocational upper secondary education.

Slovenia performed relatively well in the 2013 International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS). Students scored significantly higher than the ICILS 2013 average (IEA 2014). The ICT skills of people living in Slovenia are above the EU average, but the proportion of students using computers in school is below average.⁵ Slovenes appear very confident about their entrepreneurship abilities: the country is among the Member States scoring highest in the relevant surveys. The ongoing 'Opening my door to new opportunities' (*Vrata odpiram sam*) project encourages young people to become self-employed and promotes an entrepreneurial mind-set and innovation among young people and their teachers.

³ Slovenia has an integrated model of primary and lower secondary schools called 'basic schools' in which the first nine years of schooling form a single, integrated unit and are usually taught within a single school.

⁴ This is a state-funded institution responsible for external evaluation of the education outcomes of school pupils, students and adults in Slovenia. See: http://www.ric.si/ric_eng/general_information/.

⁵ The percentage of individuals aged 18-64 with high computer skills increased in 2013 to 31%, compared with the EU average of 26%. Use of computers among 15-year-olds (ISCED 2) increased strongly from 33.3% in 2010 to 45.3% in 2013 but remains substantially below the EU average of 64.7%.

Slovenia is continuing to work on the 'Opening up Slovenia' initiative, launched in April 2014. The goal of the initiative is to complement or redesign existing education practices with innovative, dynamic and open learning approaches and set up a mechanism for quality assurance of open education services and content. The initiative is supported by a wide range of stakeholders and includes research and development of new concepts, models and methods in open education and setting up a nation-wide test bed for open learning environments.

A further update of the rules on the approval of digital textbooks was adopted in May 2015. It determines the procedure for approval of textbooks more clearly and provides definitions of the types of e-textbooks. 'D-textbooks' are electronic versions of hard copies that include only texts and pictures, and 'i-textbooks' include interactive elements, constructions and assignments with feedback options including a 'save' function for answers and for observing the user. The process has been very prolific: 40 i-textbooks are being developed and 32 of them have already been approved in subjects like maths, chemistry, English, Slovenian language, physics and others. Prior to the approval, they have been tested in at least one classroom of 72 different pilot schools. Also a complete technical platform for designing and publishing e-material (including e-textbooks) has been developed as well as compatibility with different devices and operating systems.

According to OECD data, in 2012, 97% of teachers in primary education and 79% of those in lower secondary education were female (OECD 2014). This is the highest percentage of female teachers among all the OECD and EU countries, indicating that the teaching profession, at least at the primary and lower secondary levels, is highly feminised. The reasons for the low rate of males entering the teaching profession are currently not being investigated. Teacher salaries decreased by nearly 17% in the period between 2009 and 2014 (European Commission 2014c). Teacher statutory salaries in Slovenia are low in comparison with the EU average and there is a relatively smaller difference between starting and top salaries.⁶ Statutory salaries are also lower than those of other workers with tertiary education (OECD 2014).

6. Modernising higher education

Slovenia has reached its Europe 2020 national target for tertiary education attainment, with 41% of the population aged 30-34 in 2014 having a tertiary qualification. Women are well ahead of men in terms of tertiary education attainment in 2014, with 53.7% of women and only 30% of men having graduated from higher education. The challenge now shifts to the drop-out rate, which is estimated to be as high as 35% (European Commission 2014b). In addition, faulty student record systems and an attractive social benefits package for students have resulted in fictitious enrolments. This is especially acute in post-secondary vocational education, where fictitious enrolments are estimated to account for more than half of all first-year students. The Slovenian Government has recognised the problem and is tackling it via a new electronic student data register called eVŠ (see Box 1 below).

Tertiary education graduates in Slovenia (25-34 year-olds) earn 42% more than those with only upper secondary education in the same age group (OECD 2014). The employment rates of recent tertiary graduates,⁷ however, are less favourable. From 85% in 2007, the rate fell consistently to 74.3% in 2014, below the EU average of 80.5%. Slovenia has the highest proportion of young people (15-24 years) in temporary employment in the EU (73.2% in 2013). Half of all students hold a regular paid job during the academic year (Eurostudent). This has a negative effect on performance and prolongs the duration of studies. There is a high reliance on occasional student work, accounting for almost 80% of the temporary jobs occupied by young people. This can help explain decreased performance, as students who work more than 15

⁶ The starting statutory salaries of teachers in Slovenia are the same, regardless of the level of education at which the teacher is teaching because the same level of university degree qualification is required for primary, lower and upper secondary education.

⁷ People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

hours a week devote considerably less time to studying (Eurostudent 2015). A large number of young people (aged 15-24) in temporary employment was the first to be made unemployed, as companies shed their labour force during the period of low activity caused by the economic crisis.

In response, a reform of student work entered into force in February 2015.⁸ The reform has made employing students less attractive to employers by introducing a minimum hourly wage and social security contributions for student work, while allowing student contracts to remain the cheapest form of employment for employers. The measure was expected to yield an additional EUR 15 million which was planned to be diverted towards scholarships for students in need, with the aim of better fulfilling the original purpose of student work as a social corrective.

The proposed new Higher Education Act was expected to further reform the status of students. However, although the draft was prepared in October 2013, numerous changes in the country's political leadership have delayed its adoption. The government had originally planned to adopt the law in 2015, with entry into force in the 2017/18 academic year, but the current timetable for its adoption is unknown. The principal objective of the amendments is to introduce a sustainable, transparent and efficient funding system; increase the responsibility of higher education institutions for the quality of their study programmes by shifting the focus of quality assurance system to institutions; and support the internationalisation process of higher education.

Box 1. Analytical information system for higher education (eVŠ)

In July 2012, a Records and analytical information system for higher education in the Republic of Slovenia was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. As it contains a complete record of student data and can be used to record, track and analyse student records, it serve evidence-based policy making in higher education. The system is fed with the following types of data:

- higher education institution records;
- study programme records;
- student and graduate records;
- records of calls for enrolment;
- records of people registered for enrolment;
- records of people who have applied for subsidised student accommodation;
- higher education provider records (higher education teaching staff).

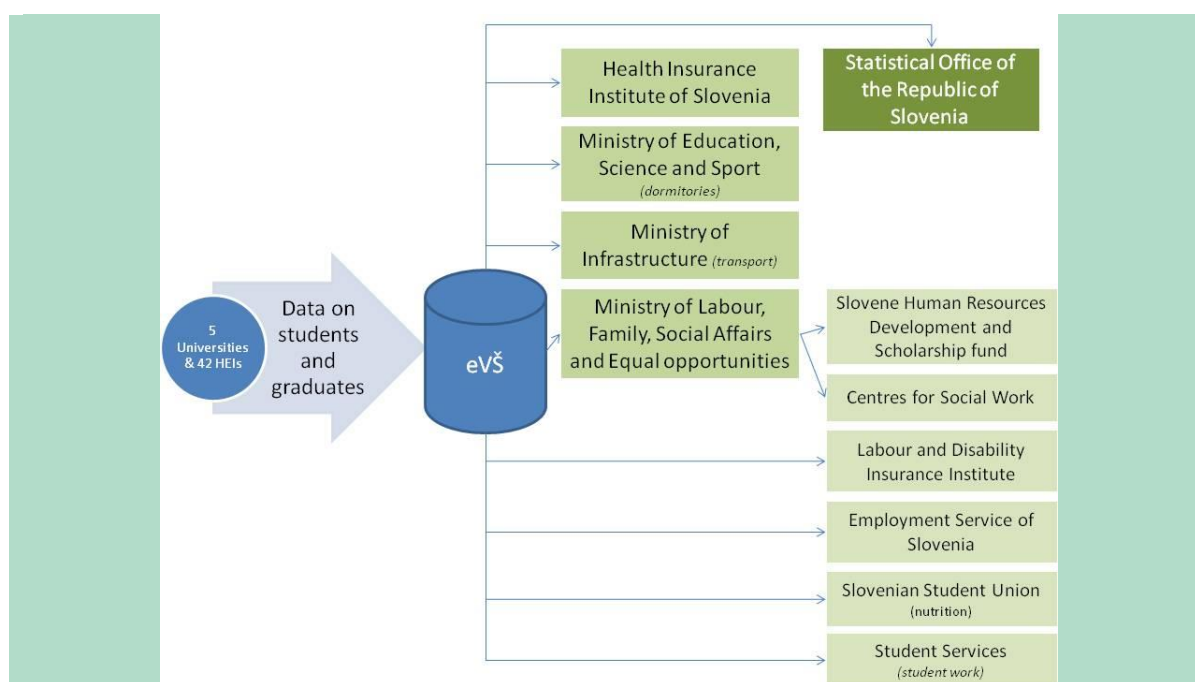
The system also supports an online application system for enrolment into study programmes and as an application system for subsidised student accommodation places. In 2014 users filled 48 595 online applications via this system.

The purpose of eVŠ is to:

- monitor the higher education system and inform policy planning;
- monitor the network of higher education institutions and study programmes;
- electronically determine students' eligibility to enrol in studies;
- provide a dataset for analytical and statistical purposes;
- improve the transparency of data for the public.

The system has become an official source of information on student status and is used by other public institutions to grant scholarships, transport and food subsidies, dormitory places, health insurance and student work, as presented in the diagram below. In 2014 eVŠ registered 1 466 429 views into student data.

⁸ Act on Occasional Student Work was incorporated into the Public Finance Balance Act in December 2014.



The in-built controls in the enrolment application have already been successful in preventing some fictitious enrolment into higher education. Student and graduate records were used to prevent fictitious enrolment into post-secondary vocational education and training. By the end of 2017, the aim is for the eVS to become an analytical tool to support evidence-based policy making in higher education available also to higher education institutions and to connect eVS data with data from other public records. In this way, it will be possible to analyse the path of students from secondary to tertiary education and on to the labour market.

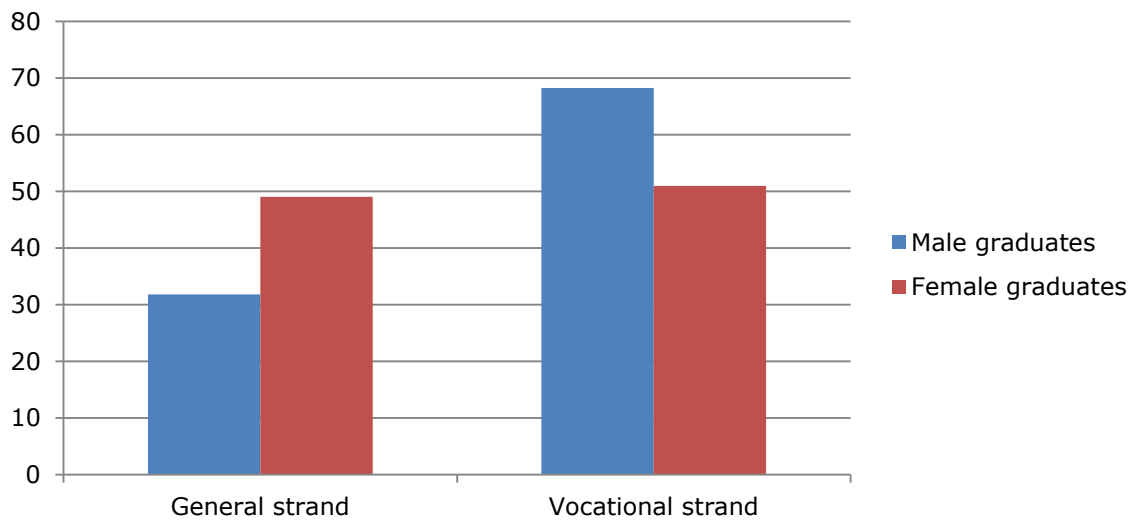
7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning

Participation of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) remains above the EU average (65.9% compared to 48.9% in 2013), and the unemployment rate of vocational graduates (aged 25-64) is more than 5 percentage points lower than for those from a general programme (7.8% versus 12.9%) (OECD 2014). Recent upper secondary graduates⁹, however, have an employment rate below EU average (see section 1). There is a gender dimension to the participation and graduation from vocational programmes (Figure 3). The 11.9% of Slovenes who in 2014 participated in adult learning in the last 4 weeks prior to the survey was higher than the EU average of 10.7%, but the proportion has been gradually declining since 2010 when it was 16.2%.

Currently, the demand for medium-skilled workers is higher than the supply. However the projections show a large increase in the demand for high-skilled workers. The demand for some VET occupations (locksmiths, welders, electricians, pharmaceutical technicians, assistant educators and health technicians) exceeded supply in 2012, while similar professions are also forecast to be in demand in the coming months (workers for simple jobs in manufacturing, salesmen, welders, HGV drivers). Employment opportunities for educated people have diminished sharply during the crisis, which has led to emigration. However, longer term projections (Cedefop 2015) show that the demand for high-skilled workers will increase the most in Slovenia (+13% in 2010-20 period), while the demand for low qualifications will substantially decrease (-12.9% in the same period).

⁹ People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

Figure 3. Gender imbalances among graduates from upper secondary education in 2013 (%)



Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (Graduates by sex, age and type of education, Slovenia, annually)

The Government plans to introduce apprenticeships via a new law, which will primarily define the role of the apprentice as an employee and clarify the role of the social partners. A coordinating body for vocational education has been set up with the aim to discuss new projects and the strategic direction for vocational education and training with stakeholders. Subsidies for apprenticeships will play and coordination among different ministries will play an important role in setting up the system. Finally, based on learning outcomes, a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF) is being successfully implemented in Slovenia covering all types and levels of national qualifications. The allocation of major national qualifications to NQF levels has been agreed, but the NQF legislation is awaiting formal adoption, expected in 2015.

The 2013-20 Adult Education Master Plan adopted in 2013 is a strategic document that defines national policy in the field of adult education and training based on the principle of equal access for all to quality education. It is implemented via annual action plans and provides regulation, a financing framework and a definition of priorities for the development of this sector in cooperation with six ministries and coordinated by Ministry of Education, Science and Sport.¹⁰

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¹⁰ In addition to the ministries in charge of education and labour (primarily competent for adult education), ministries of health, agriculture, culture and internal affairs are involved.

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Comments and questions on this report are welcome and can be sent by email to:
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