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Education and Training **MONITOR 2018** Slovakia



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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Training Monitor 2018

Slovakia

Volume 2 of the Education and Training Monitor 2018 includes twenty-eight individual country reports. It builds on the most up-to-date quantitative and qualitative evidence to present and assess the main recent and ongoing policy measures in each EU Member State, with a focus on developments since mid-2017. It therefore complements other sources of information which offer descriptions of national education and training systems.

Section 1 presents a statistical overview of the main education and training indicators. Section 2 briefly identifies the main strengths and challenges of the country's education and training system. Section 3 looks at investment in education and training. Section 4 focuses on citizenship education. Section 5 deals with policies to modernise school education. Section 6 discusses measures to modernise higher education. Finally, section 7 covers vocational education and training, while section 8 covers adult learning.

The manuscript was completed on 1 September 2018.

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

1. Key indicators

		Slovakia		EU average		
		2014	2017	2014	2017	
Education and training 2020 benchmarks						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)		6.7%	9.3%	11.2%	10.6%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)		26.9%	34.3%	37.9%	39.9%	
Early childhood education and care (from age 4 to starting age of compulsory primary education)		77.4% ¹³	76.5% ¹⁶	94.2% ¹³	95.3% ¹⁶	
Proportion of 15 year-olds underachieving in:	Reading	28.2% ¹²	32.1% ¹⁵	17.8% ¹²	19.7% ¹⁵	
	Maths	27.5% ¹²	27.7% ¹⁵	22.1% ¹²	22.2% ¹⁵	
	Science	26.9% ¹²	30.7% ¹⁵	16.6% ¹²	20.6% ¹⁵	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-8 (total)	72.7%	81.5%	76.0%	80.2%	
Adult participation in learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	3.1%	3.4%	10.8%	10.9%	
Learning mobility	Degree mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	11.9% ¹⁶	:	3.1% ¹⁶	
	Credit mobile graduates (ISCED 5-8)	:	0.1% ¹⁶	:	7.6% ¹⁶	
Other contextual indicators						
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		4.1%	3.8% ¹⁶	4.9%	4.7% ¹⁶
	Expenditure on public and private institutions per student in € PPS	ISCED 1-2	€4 606	€4 960 ¹⁵	€6 494 ^d	: ¹⁵
		ISCED 3-4	€4 894	€5 379 ¹⁵	€7 741 ^d	: ¹⁵
		ISCED 5-8	€8 290	€11 987 ¹⁵	€11 187 ^d	: ¹⁵
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Native-born	6.7%	9.3%	10.4%	9.6%	
	Foreign-born	:	:	20.2%	19.4%	
Tertiary educational attainment (age 30-34)	Native-born	26.7%	34.3%	38.6%	40.6%	
	Foreign-born	:	:	34.3%	36.3%	
Employment rate of recent graduates by educational attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4	68.3%	80.7%	70.7%	74.1%	
	ISCED 5-8	76.7%	82.1%	80.5%	84.9%	

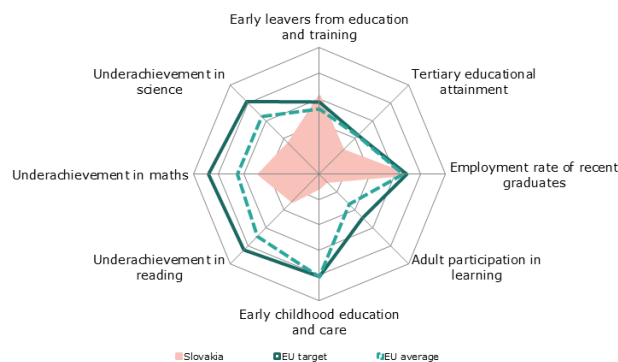
Sources: Eurostat (see section 10 for more details); OECD (PISA).

Notes: data refer to weighted EU averages, covering different numbers of Member States depending on the source; d = definition differs, 12 = 2012, 13 = 2013, 15 = 2015, 16 = 2016.

On credit graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by DG EAC on the available countries; on degree graduate mobility, the EU average is calculated by JRC over Eurostat and OECD data.

Further information can be found in the relevant section of Volume 1 (ec.europa.eu/education/monitor).

Figure 1. Position in relation to strongest (outer ring) and weakest performers (centre)



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2017, UOE 2016) and OECD (PISA 2015). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the strongest performers represented by the outer ring) and a minimum (the weakest performers represented by the centre of the figure).

2. Highlights

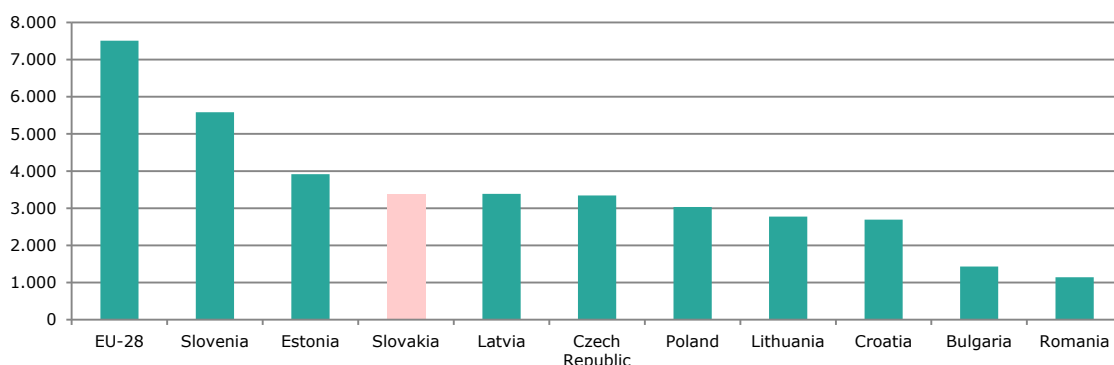
- There are big disparities in educational attainment levels: socio-economic background strongly influences students' performance.
- Despite continued economic growth, investment in education is well below OECD and EU averages. A new education strategy and an increase in financing have recently been proposed.
- Higher education needs to be modernised and acquire a more international dimension.
- Despite gradual improvement, the status of teachers and trainers is still relatively low — particularly with regard to pay.
- There is room for scaling up civics education in schools.

3. Investing in education and training

Overall spending on education remains low but per student spending is broadly comparable with other central European countries. Spending declined between 2014 and 2016 as a share of GDP, as increases in nominal education spending failed to keep pace with brisk growth in the wider economy. In 2016, according to data on general government expenditure by function (COFOG), Slovakia spent 3.8 % of its GDP on education (EU average: 4.7 %). This is lower than in Czech Republic (4.5%), Hungary (4.9%) or Poland (5.0%). Spending on education as a share of the total public budget is as well below the EU average at 9.3 %, vs 10.2 % in 2016. However, in terms of spending per pupil in purchasing power standard (PPS) for 2014 (see Figure 2 below), Slovakia's profile is very similar to other central European countries, like the Czech Republic and Poland, but is still significantly below the EU-28 average (Eurostat, 2018).

Due to sustained economic growth there is scope to substantially increase spending on education and training in the future. Although the 2018 national reform programme acknowledges the insufficient wages of Slovakia's teachers compared to their peers and the relatively low general investment in education compared to the OECD average, no substantial improvement has been proposed (Slovak Government, 2018). The Slovak economy is now strong enough to offer more resources for the remuneration of teachers. Planned pay rises of 10% in 2019 and 2020 are almost two times higher than forecasted increases of average salary across the economy. This is a positive development, but it needs to be sustained also after 2020. EU structural and investment funds (ESIF) provide considerable support for education, but their impact on their ground remains to be seen. More positively, on 11 May 2018 the government announced a new investment in student housing (EUR 50 million over 2 years), which was i.a. called for by the Supreme Audit Office of Slovakia (MoE, 2018).

Figure 2. Annual expenditure on educational institutions per pupil in EUR PPS for 2014 (total institutions, ISCED 1-2 levels).



Source: Eurostat, 2018. Online data code: [educ_uoe_fini04](#).

The current administrative set-up makes efficient coordination difficult. Education funding is very complex in Slovakia, with public education spending managed by: (i) the Education Ministry at a rate of 35.7 %; (ii) the Ministry of the Interior (Eurydice, 2018) responsible for 30.5 %; and (iii) the self-governing bodies (regions and municipalities) managing the remaining 33.8 %. In addition to funding, the Ministry of the Interior and its regional offices across the country also lays down important regulations on school life. In this context, Slovakia has recently made efforts to rationalise education spending and increase its efficiency. In 2017, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education carried out a spending review with the support of the European Commission's Structural Reform Support Service and the IMF: the government subsequently adopted a final report in October 2017 (Ministry of Finance, 2017). Implementation of the measures is supported by an independent monitoring government unit, which will prepare a monitoring report, to be published together with the 2019 state budget.

Slovakia has adopted a new 'national reform programme for education'. In accordance with the 2016 government manifesto, the Education Minister announced the '*National development programme for education*' (2018-2027), based on an inclusive and equitable educational model, which sets out clear education measures and indicates the financing needed. On 25 May 2018 the Minister presented it to the public, and later on the related two-year action plans, comprising substantial additional funding for the next budgetary period. The document the Minister presented is certainly a step in the right direction, with an increase in spending on education. However, it falls well short of the education community's expectations (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2018¹). The strategy was approved by the government on 27 June 2018.

4. Citizenship education

Comprehensive guidelines steer citizenship education. Guidelines on the content and organisation of citizenship education are set out in a policy manual addressed to schools each year by the MoE. The guidelines, which were substantially changed in 2015/2016, cover issues such as human rights, children's rights, discrimination, national minorities and foreigners, and set out detailed directions and proposals for action (MoE, 2017). The Ministry also changed the national curricula (known as 'state educational programmes'), on which schools' educational guidelines are based (MoE, 2017). The curricula aim 'to increase the attention and to ensure education ... aimed at effective and targeted prevention of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, extremism and other forms of intolerance' (MoE, 2017).

There is more evidence-based policy making for citizenship education in schools. In the 2016/2017 school year, the State School Inspection (SSI) conducted a survey in cooperation with the Slovak Academy of Science (SAS) and the Comenius University to investigate the relationship between knowledge gained in relevant secondary school subjects and secondary school students' attitudes towards democratic values (SSI, 2017). A new scientific project by the SSI and the SAS, called 'Interventions to mitigate prejudices against stigmatised minorities' is currently under way and is helping develop new instruments for teachers. Nevertheless, schools feel that teaching support measures to enhance critical thinking and cyber and media literacy are still lacking (SAS, 2018).

5. Modernising school education

The early school leaving (ESL) rate has risen gradually over the years. The latest figures show that ESL has risen to 9.3 % in 2017 up from 7.4 % in 2016. While still below the EU-2020 headline target (10 %), it is well above the national target of 6 %. While Roma-specific data is not available,, the fact that eastern Slovakia (which has a high share of Roma), has an ESL rate of 14.7 % for 2016 vs 4.7 % in western Slovakia, suggests the problem is most pronounced in the Roma population (Eurostat, 2018). In 2018 and 2019 a Spending Review is being undertaken to improve policies targeted on the inclusion of Groups at Risk of Poverty and Social Exclusion². Slovakia needs to take more targeted action to address low educational performance including ESL among disadvantaged students in general, and among the Roma in particular. A new programme combining vocational education and training (VET) and completion of ISCED 2 level is being

¹ <https://www.minedu.sk/ministerka-skolstva-predstavila-vychodiska-pre-narodny-program-rozvoja-vychovy-a-vzdelavania/>

² More on <https://goo.gl/WAERBY>

developed and should be introduced to target potential dropouts from basic schools from the next school year onwards (Slovak Government, 2018).

There are still many gaps in early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision. In 2016, the ECEC participation rate was 76.5 % — well below the EU-28 average of 95.3 % — and it has not improved since 2013. Consequently, the 2016 government manifesto mentioned above set a target of 95 % enrolment for children aged 4+ by 2020. National enrolment data also reveal a gap between the west and the east of Slovakia, with the country's lowest rates in two eastern regions: 72.84 % in Košice (lowest rate) and 81.31 % in Prešov (second lowest) (Slovak Government, 2018). However, Slovakia has further modernised its legislation on ECEC and is expanding childcare facilities. Act No 448/2008 on social services was amended again at the end of 2017. The main change is the mandatory registration of nurseries and other service providers by 30 June 2018 (Eurydice, 2018). In addition, nearly 10 000 places could be created in the current ESIF programming period, which would cover the unmet demand; between 8 000 and 10 000 children are not able to attend pre-school due to place shortages.

Enrolment in ECEC is lowest in districts with the highest share of socially disadvantaged people. To increase enrolment — particularly of children from less well-off families — free kindergarten places are being expanded to cover all children from socio-economically deprived families from September 2018 (Slovak Government, 2018). This measure is welcomed by Roma activists and by the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, who estimates that only one third of Roma children are currently enrolled in kindergartens. In 2018, Slovakia received a country-specific recommendation under the European Semester to 'Improve the quality and inclusiveness of education, including by increasing the participation of Roma children in mainstream education from early childhood onwards' (Council of the European Union, 2018³).

Insufficient results in recent national tests point to significant educational disparities. The MoE tested primary school students (fifth grade) in mathematics and Slovak language. Test results confirmed large differences between Slovakia's most and least developed regions. Students achieved a national average of 64.7 % in the mathematics test and 62.8 % in Slovak language and literature. The country's worst results were recorded in the regions of Košice, Prešov and Banská Bystrica. In contrast, students from Bratislava scored the highest. The test scores of students from disadvantaged groups were approximately half as high as their peers from socially advantaged backgrounds (MoE, 2017). Finally, Slovak pupils ranked far below the average in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) collaborative problem solving survey published recently (OECD, 2017).

There are some measures to foster equity and inclusion, but they fall short of an overall approach. Key initiatives to improve school performance include: (i) the European Social Fund (ESF) funded project 'School open to all' which aims for inclusive education and better competences of staff in primary schools and kindergartens as well as specialised institutions that offer pedagogical and psychological support to schools; (ii) the 'More successful in basic school' scheme, which aims for a greater integration of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream education; and (iii) a project supporting extra-curricular activities in primary schools (Eurydice, 2018). Finally, there is still an on-going EU-law infringement procedure over the segregation of Roma children in education.

Despite gradual salary increases, the teaching profession remains fairly unattractive. Teachers' wages, despite recent increases, remain particularly uncompetitive in western Slovakia, especially in Bratislava. Trade unions have also demanded an increase in the currently very low wages for all categories of school auxiliary and support staff. The new government manifesto commitment could ensure that wages increase gradually, but they would still remain below the original goal that teachers' should receive the equivalent of 80 % of salaries of graduates with a tertiary qualification by 2020. The 2018 national reform programme states that teacher 'wages are among the lowest in the OECD, although the gap has diminished in the years 2016 and 2017 by raising teachers' salaries'. The government is planning to increase teacher salaries by 10% in 2019 and 10% in 2020. Also, in line with the Government Manifesto, it is planned that the salary of teachers at the beginning of their career should be increased by 9.5% in 2019. Finally, the MoE is drafting a new act on teaching staff to replace the current rules on qualification requirements, career paths and continuing professional development (Eurydice, 2018).

³ More on <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9449-2018-INIT/en/pdf>

Box 1: Education in language schools – action plan for 2017-2020

The MoE of the Slovak Republic recently published an action plan (*Akčný plán*) which describes individual measures for language education.

The plan encompasses the following key strands:

- modernisation of educational programme for language schools;
- standardisation of the state language examination;
- revision of the language education certificate;
- amendment of MoE Decree No 321/2008 on language schools.

For more information: https://www.minedu.sk/data/files/7342_akcny_plan_2017_2020.pdf

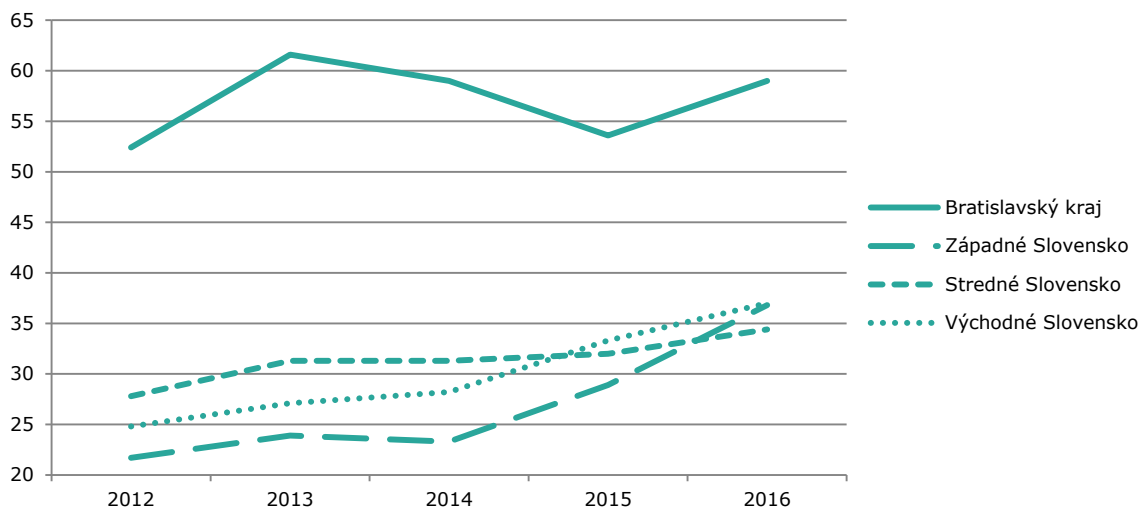
Digital education is important in light of ongoing technological changes, a lack of ICT specialists and a generally low level of digital skills. The National Union of Employers and the IT Association of Slovakia have called for better digital education. Two notable initiatives are underway:

- 1) The national ESF-supported project 'IT Academy – Education for the 21st Century' (*IT Akadémia – vzdelávanie pre 21. storočie*), which aims to prepare young people for the needs of a knowledge-based society and jobs in ICT, kicked off in November 2017. At least 300 primary schools, 200 secondary schools, and 5 universities participate. The project is a model of cooperation between schools and ICT businesses, as each activity is supported by a specialist from an IT company.
- 2) The national digital skills and jobs coalition began work in September 2017, mobilising public and private bodies as well as the non-profit sector to improve the population's digital skills (Eurydice, 2018).

6. Modernising higher education

The level of tertiary attainment is steadily growing in Slovakia and catching up fast with the rest of the EU. In 2017, the national tertiary graduation rate was 34.3 % vs the EU average of 39.3 %. The gap between Slovakia and the EU-28 average has been narrowing over time, from 15.3 pps in 2007 to only 5.6 pps a decade later. However, there are still very high regional disparities (see Figure 3), in particular between Bratislava and the rest of the country. The Supreme Audit Office found in a recent report that there was a major under funding of public higher education institutions (HEIs), in particular for infrastructure, notably student housing (NKU, 2018). Slovakia is considering a new policy initiative and in 2017-2018, with the European Commission's support, it carried out peer counselling on the possible future reform of the governance structure of HEIs, with peers from Austria, Estonia, Ireland, Poland and the European University Association. Also, the introduction of short-cycle, professionally oriented degrees is strongly advocated by business and calls from employers to implement 'professional bachelor's' programmes are growing stronger. In a related development, Volkswagen and the Slovak University of Technology completed the first semester of a newly designed 'professional' bachelor's programme specialising in the automotive industry. This is a four-year programme with 1 full year of in-company training.

Figure 3. Population aged 30-34 by educational attainment level (at ISCED 5-8) for Slovakia NUTS 2 regions in % for 2012-2016.



Source: Eurostat, 2018. Online data code: [edat_lfse_12](#).

The Slovak parliament approved an amendment to the Higher Education Act and a new law on quality assurance in higher education⁴. The law on quality assurance of HE introduces: (i) a completely new system of accreditation which will be managed by the independent Slovak Accreditation Agency for Higher Education; (ii) a simplified procedure for recruiting associate professors and foreign professors; (iii) a new system for evaluating the research and creative activities of universities; (iv) a reduction in the number of universities or university degrees; and (v) a new 'interdisciplinary studies' bachelor's programme for students who have not yet decided on their future career path. Students will also have an option to extend their fee-free study period by 1 extra year if they take part in an internship abroad or in the Erasmus+ programme (Eurydice, 2018).

7. Modernising vocational education and training

Slovakia continues to improve the quality and relevance of VET to labour market needs, notably by removing obstacles to a wider roll-out of the dual scheme. The outcomes of secondary VET continue to improve, with the employment rate of recent VET graduates reaching 81.6 % in 2017, well above the EU average of 76.6 %. The main policy development in VET was the amendment of the 2015 VET Act, which entered into force in September 2018. The amendment introduces incentives to support school-company cooperation. For example, to encourage schools and companies, including SMEs, to cooperate in the dual scheme: (i) the financial cuts to schools, resulting from the shift of practical education to companies, have been abolished; and (ii) administrative requirements related to companies' readiness (premises, equipment and staff) to offer practical education have been waived. Furthermore, curricula for dual and non-dual learners have been unified to enable companies to adjust the provision of practical skills to their needs.

Changes with regard to training staff include: (i) the introduction of a 'head instructor' position to improve instructors' performance and cooperation between school and company; (ii) a clarification of the distinction between educational counsellors and career guidance counsellors; and (iii) granting a day off to teachers working as educational counsellors to improve guidance, staff cooperation and cooperation between schools and companies. The amendment to the above-mentioned VET Act has further introduced: (i) 'entrance quotas' prescribing the number of students in individual fields of study on the basis of regional labour market needs; (ii) the right of the MoE to amend the decisions of the country's self-governing regions on quotas; and (iii) direct funding from the state budget for companies offering the requisite number of training hours.

⁴ More on <http://www.rokovania.sk/Rokovanie.aspx/RokovanieDetail/963>

Box 2: An ESF-funded project is providing students with professional experience

The National Institute of Vocational Education has set up a 'dual VET education' system to increase the chances of employment for future graduates, whereby students can take up an apprenticeship in a professional environment.

In the 2017/2018 school year, 998 students and 380 employers were involved. The aim is for 700 trained instructors to teach 12 000 students by 2020. Instructors are of key importance to the project's success as they are responsible for quality of the training given to students.

The project, which is based on a similar model used in Austria and Germany, was recommended by foreign chambers of commerce and industry associations in Slovakia. The project is co-financed by the ESF.

For more information: <http://www.dualnysystem.sk/TlacovaSprava.aspx?ArticleId=53>

8. Promoting adult learning

New evidence from the Adult Education Survey (AES) and continuing vocational training survey (CVTS) puts Slovak adult learning in a new perspective. At 56.8 % in 2015, participation in workplace training was well above the EU average of 40.8 % (CVTS) and the participation of adults in education and training in 2016 was slightly above the EU average — 46.1 % vs 45.1 % (AES). At the same time, according to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), at 3.4 % in 2017 Slovakia has one of the lowest adult learning rates in the EU. A possible explanation for this inconsistency might be that only a narrow range of activities is caught by the LFS. In addition, the reference period is shorter (4 weeks vs 1 year for AES and CVTS). In parallel with the shortage of skilled workers, Slovakia is also faced with an insufficient employment rate of low-qualified people (38.8 % in 2017 — the second lowest in the EU). However, the share of low-qualified workers was 8.6 % in 2017 — the fourth lowest in the EU. The unused potential of this group is clearly a barrier to further economic growth and inclusion. Targeted measures for upskilling and re-skilling consistent with the Council Recommendation on upskilling pathways could help to integrate low-qualified people in the labour market.

Targeted ESF funding is earmarked to support lifelong learning. A multi-million euro national project to roll out a system to recognise duly validated non-formal and informal learning achievements is currently being prepared and will be launched before the end of 2018. Its success will depend on the degree of practical cooperation between the MoE, the Ministry of Labour and Employment Offices on all key project activities. Slovakia has carried out institutional reform in the field of adult learning and has transferred the responsibilities for lifelong learning and adult learning governance from the National Lifelong Learning Institute to the State Institute of Vocational Education. A major reason for the change is to concentrate all European VET-related projects in one place.

Several measures should help increase the flexibility and responsiveness of the education and training system. The Slovak national qualification network was referenced to the EQF in October 2017 and the referencing report was approved by the government in November 2017. This sets out a comprehensive framework covering all levels (eight in total) and types of qualifications in formal education and training, including a sub-framework of occupational qualifications (Cedefop, 2018b). In addition, Cedefop is providing Slovakia with guidance and technical advice on how to improve its governance of skills, as well as anticipation and matching. This work started in 2017 and includes identifying country-specific challenges, bottlenecks and policy solutions for achieving an effective skills governance system (Cedefop, 2018a).

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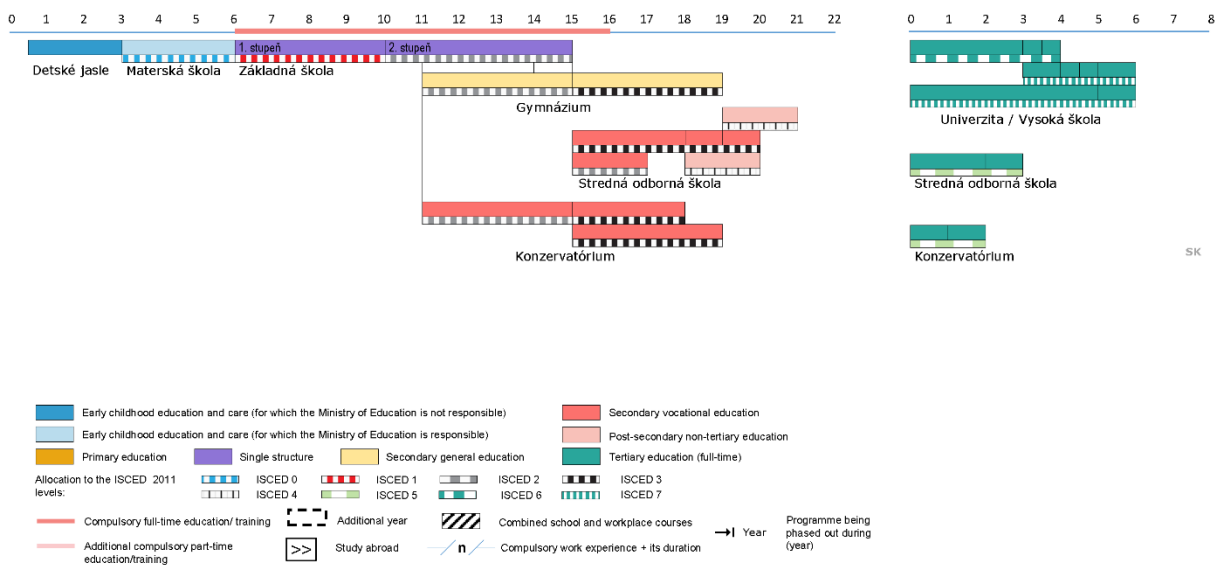
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10. Annex I: Key indicator sources

Indicator	Eurostat online data code
Early leavers from education and training	edat_lfse_14 + edat_lfse_02
Tertiary educational attainment	edat_lfse_03 + edat_lfs_9912

Early childhood education and care	educ_uoe_enra10
Underachievement in reading, maths, science	OECD (PISA)
Employment rate of recent graduates	edat_lfse_24
Adult participation in learning	trng_lfse_03
Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP	gov_10a_exp
Expenditure on public and private institutions per student	educ_uoe_fini04
Learning mobility: Degree mobile graduates	JRC computation based on Eurostat / UIS / OECD data
Credit mobile graduates	educ_uoe_mobc02

11. Annex II: Structure of the education system



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017. *The Structure of the European Education Systems 2017/18: Schematic Diagrams*. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

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

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