

QUALITY EDUCATION AND REDUCING SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE AMONGST YOUTH – EU PRIORITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: *Ensuring quality education is one of the Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN, in the 2020 Agenda. In this regard, the issue of poor education of children and young people is a priority on the EU agenda in the next multi-annual framework (2021-2027). Access to education is essential for the proper functioning of a sustainable society. Education is a process that takes place throughout life, regardless of age. To reach this goal, school dropout has to be reduced and improvement of the educational system is necessary, regardless of geographical location and domain, respectively origin. This is why the EU's goal is to reduce early school dropout rates in the EU to below 10%. Increasing the number of young people going towards higher education, as well as improving the quality of education, are very important for sustainable and inclusive growth. Sustainable development means ensuring good conditions on this planet for future generations.*

Key words: *sustainable development, education expenses, school dropout, quality education, education system.*

JEL Classification: *A20, F15.*

1. Introduction

The European Union is an integration group which, through cohesion policy, plans to reduce disparities between the 27 member states and the European region. Uneven developments are obstacles to the integration process (Șerbănică et al, 2016).

The education system is represented by all the school and educational institutions of a society that are organized and function in a correlated way, according to certain principles, in order to achieve certain purposes of education, specific to a historical period. Thus, abandoning the education system early has major social and economic implications. Young people who leave school prematurely are more prone to the risk associated with unemployment or earning less once they find a job. At the level of the European Union, we are looking for viable solutions for keeping young people in school, for transforming them into the superior qualified human capital so necessary for the evolution of European states.

2. Reducing school dropout among young people aged between 18 and 24

In the actual context of the rapidly declining population at EU level, early school dropout will compromise member states' future growth prospects.

The causes of early school leaving are many and varied: lack of access to education and reasonable accommodation in education, lack of access technologies and devices needed in the education process, lack of support services, lack of transportation, poor family awareness of the importance of development the young person's potential, discriminatory or negative attitudes regarding the school inclusion of young people with disabilities and / or special educational needs, etc. Evidently, the financial support from governments is also a must, as it is essential that every young person can enjoy free education. At EU level, there are major differences in education spending.

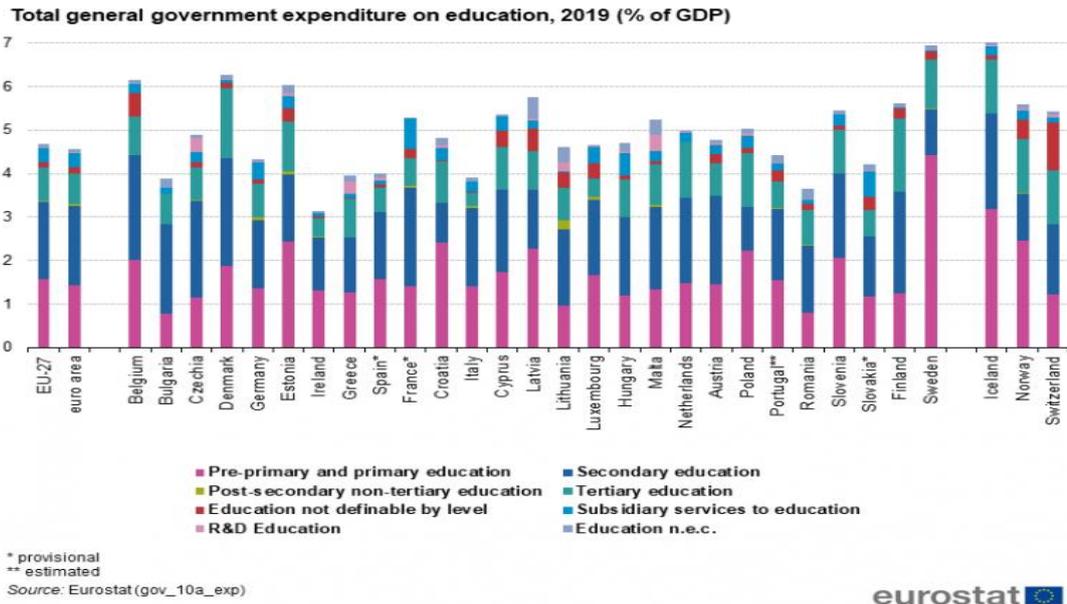


Figure no. 1

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_expenditure_on_education#Expenditure_on_.27education.27
[accessed 9 March 2021]

EU spending on education has risen to EUR 654 billion, or 4.7% of GDP in 2019. According to the European Commission, spending on education in Romania remains among the lowest in the EU (3.6% of GDP compared to EU average), outstanding achievements in quality education are likely to be made over time.

| Total general government expenditure on education, 2019, % of GDP | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|--|
| | Education | Pre-primary and primary education | Secondary education | Post-secondary non-tertiary education | Tertiary education | Education not definable by level | Subsidiary services to education | R&D Education | Education n.e.c. | |
| EU-27 | 4.7 | 1.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| euro area | 4.6 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Belgium | 6.2 | 2.0 | 2.4 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Bulgaria | 3.9 | 0.8 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.2 | |
| Czechia | 4.9 | 1.1 | 2.2 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.1 | |
| Denmark | 6.3 | 1.9 | 2.5 | 0.0 | 1.6 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Germany | 4.3 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 0.1 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Estonia | 6.0 | 2.4 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 1.1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.2 | |
| Ireland | 3.1 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 0.0 | 0.4 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| Greece | 4.0 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | |
| Spain* | 4.0 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | |
| France** | 5.3 | 1.4 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| Croatia | 4.8 | 2.4 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.2 | |
| Italy | 3.9 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Cyprus | 5.4 | 1.7 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| Latvia | 5.8 | 2.3 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.5 | |
| Lithuania | 4.6 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 0.2 | 0.7 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.3 | |
| Luxembourg | 4.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| Hungary | 4.2 | 1.2 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 0.1 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.2 | |
| Malta | 5.3 | 1.3 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 | 0.4 | |
| Netherlands | 5.0 | 1.5 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| Austria | 4.8 | 1.5 | 2.0 | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Poland | 5.0 | 2.2 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.1 | |
| Portugal** | 4.4 | 1.5 | 1.6 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Romania | 3.6 | 0.8 | 1.5 | 0.0 | 0.8 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.3 | |
| Slovenia | 5.5 | 2.1 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Slovakia* | 4.2 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 0.0 | 0.6 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Finland | 5.6 | 1.2 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 1.7 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Sweden | 6.9 | 4.4 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 1.1 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Iceland | 7.1 | 3.2 | 2.2 | 0.0 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Norway | 5.6 | 2.5 | 1.1 | 0.0 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | |
| Switzerland | 5.4 | 1.2 | 1.6 | 0.0 | 1.2 | 1.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | |

(.) data not available
* provisional
** estimated
Source: Eurostat (online data code: gov_10a_exp)

Figure no. 2

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Government_expenditure_on_education#Expenditure_on_.27education.27
[accessed 9 March 2021]

Of the total EU spending on education, spendings on pre-school and primary education accounts represent 1.6% of GDP, for secondary education 1.8% of GDP, and for tertiary education, the EU has reported it being 0.8% of GDP.

There are big differences at the level of EU Member States. As a percentage of GDP, the highest amounts were reported by Sweden (6.9% of GDP), Denmark (6.3% of GDP), followed by Belgium (6.2% of GDP) and Estonia (6.0 % of GDP).

In 2019, at EU level, education expenditure was broken down into chapters as follows: approximately 64% were in the form of "employee compensation", such as salaries, social contributions of employers, 14% were in the form of "intermediate consumption", such as purchases of goods and services, 6% were in the form of social benefits, such as school transport, 6% were in the form of other expenses (eg payments to private schools). Capital investment (eg for buildings) accounted for about 7% of education expenditure. Between 1995 and 2019, at EU level, government spending on education, relative to GDP, ranged from 4.7% of GDP to 5.1% of GDP. In 1995, they amounted to 4.9% of GDP, followed by a downward trend in 2008, 2009 (largely due to GDP declines in the financial crisis). In 2019, they registered a slight increase from 4.6% to 4.7%. Given the fact that the EU aims to reduce disparities between its regions (Șerbănică et al, 2016), the issue of educating children and young people is a priority on the EU's agenda in the next multiannual framework (2021-2027).

Increasing the number of young people moving towards high education, as well as improving the quality of education, are important for sustainable and inclusive growth.

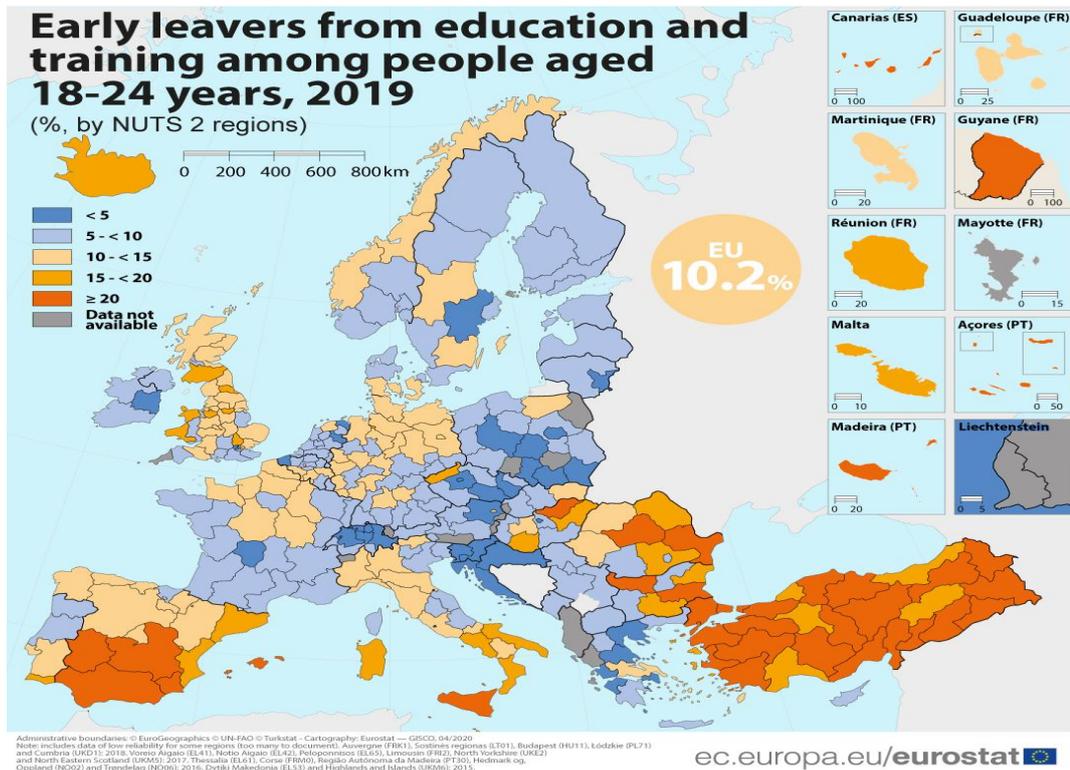


Figure no. 3

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20201007-1>
 [accessed 9 March 2021]

This promotes increased productivity, innovation and competitiveness. Given the rapid pace of technological progress and the intensification of global competition, adapting to the globalized labor market requires increasing skills. By contrast, persistent inequalities and geographical disparities lead to a differentiated development between EU regions (see Figure 3 – NUTS2 are regions with 800.000 – 3 million inhabitants, which form the basis

for the implementation of European regional policies). That is why the EU aims to increase the percentage of young graduates.

In 2019, at EU level, the share of young people aged between 18 and 24, who left education and training early, stood at 10.2%. In other words, one in ten young people between the ages of 18 and 24 was not engaged in any further education and training.

The EU's goal is to reduce early school leaving rates in the EU to below 10%. In 2019, this share was below 10% in a large majority of regions. Among the EU regions, the lowest share of early school leaving (1.7%) was recorded in the coastal region of Jadranska Hrvatska (Croatia).

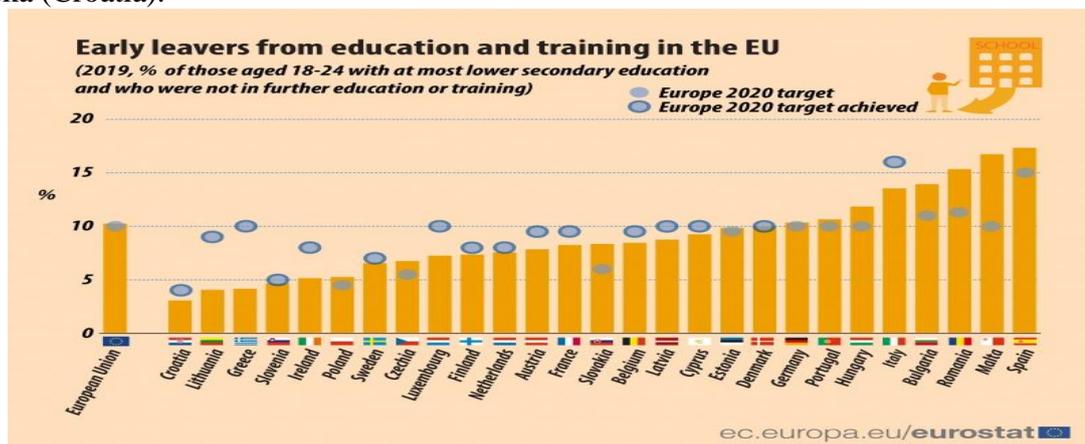


Figure no. 4

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Early_leavers_2019-01.jpg [accessed 9 March 2021]

The largest regional share of early school dropouts is often concentrated in the island and / or peripheral regions of the EU, where a large proportion of young people are likely to want to leave home and intend to take a course. or tertiary education program, eventually leading to school dropout, according to EUROSTAT data. The share of early school leaving and education was also relatively high in most of Bulgaria and Romania.

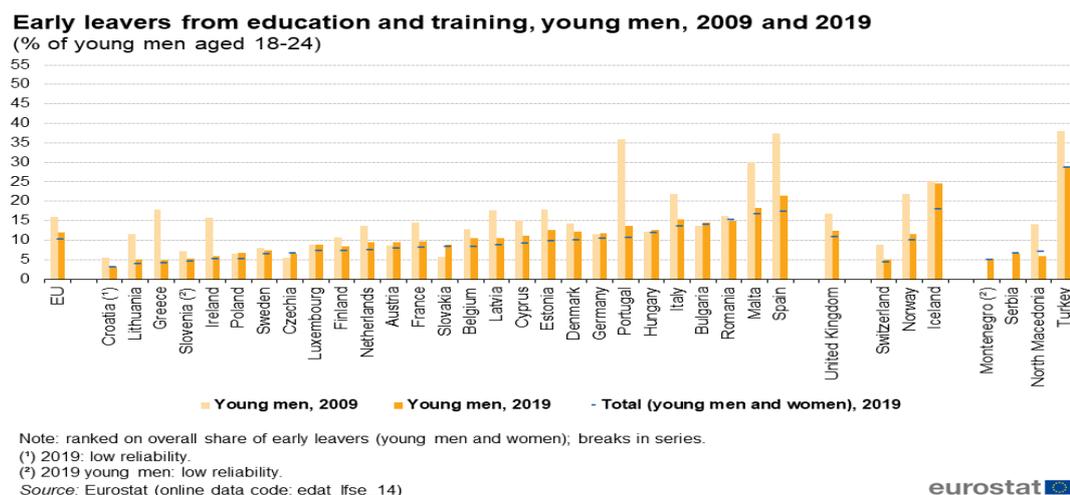


Figure no. 5

Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/3/3e/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training%2C_young_men%2C_2009_and_2019_%28%25_of_young_men_aged_18-24%29.png [accessed 9 March 2021]

The proportion of early school leaving in 2019 in the EU was with 3.5 percent higher for young men (11.9%) than for young women (8.4%).

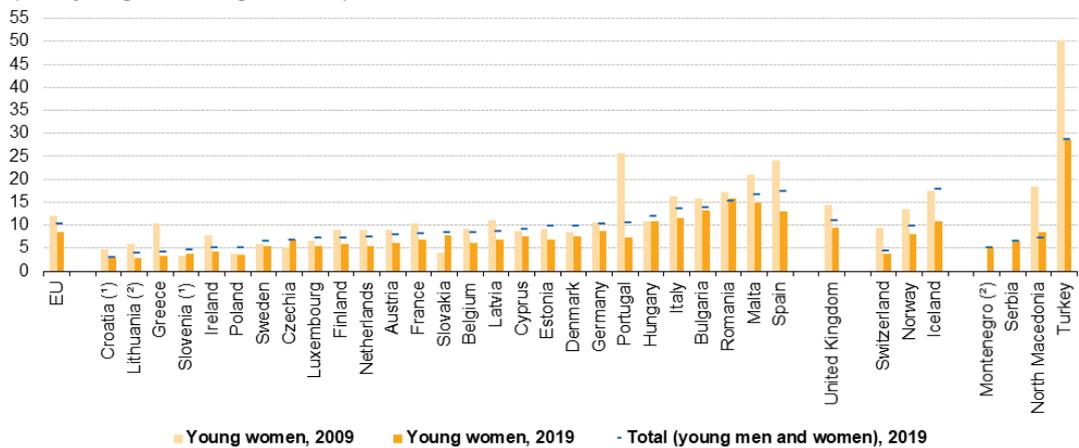
In 2019, 11.9% of young men and 8.4% of young women in the EU left education and training early.

The proportion of early school leaving in the EU in 2019 ranged from 3.0% in Croatia to 17.3% in Spain. In Romania, the dropout rate for young people aged 18-24 was, in 2019, over 15%.

There were two exceptions between member states, as the proportion of early leaving was lower for young men than for young women in Romania (0.9% difference) and the Czech Republic (0.2%).

Early leavers from education and training, young women, 2009 and 2019

(% of young women aged 18-24)



Note: ranked on overall share of early leavers (young men and women); breaks in series.
 (*) low reliability.
 (*) 2019 young women: low reliability.
 Source: Eurostat (online data code: edat_ifse_14)



Figure no. 6

Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/f/f6/Early leavers from education and training%2C young women%2C 2009 and 2019 %28%25 of young women aged 18-24%29.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/f/f6/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training%2C_young_women%2C_2009_and_2019_%28%25_of_young_women_aged_18-24%29.png)
 [accessed 9 March 2021]

Four EU Member States - Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Hungary - reported a higher proportion of young women leaving the education system earlier in 2019 than in 2009.

Early abandonment of education systems causes difficulties in the labor market. That is why, at EU level, cohesion policy aims to ensure that young people under the age of 25 "NEET" who do not have a job, are registered as jobseekers and do not find themselves in any education system to receive financial support for entering the labor market.

According to EU data, in 2019, the lowest proportion of early school leaving was reported in cities (9.1%); this quota is in line with the benchmark set in the strategic framework for European cooperation in vocational education and training. In Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania and Sweden, the highest proportion of early abandonment was reported in rural areas.

Germany has the lowest proportion of early abandonment in rural areas. France has the lowest share in both urban and rural areas.

3. Conclusions

Education has and will be one of the most important areas of society. That is why the states of the world make efforts to invest in the most efficient education systems possible, systems that contribute to the formation of human capital, the most important resource needed in a globalized economy. Dropping out of school can have extremely long-term effects on the labor market and society. Young people, including those in Romania, leave school early for various reasons, personal, school, family and social. European governments must find solutions to reduce school dropout, in the context of transforming sustainable development into a priority strategy of the 21st century, because we want to ensure good conditions on this planet for future generations.

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