

Short analysis of performance of Slovakia in ESI 2020

Although Slovakia performed significantly lower (rank 19) compared to Czechia (best country) common roots of education and skills systems of both countries are manifested in system-relevant indicators, such as at least upper secondary attainment (89, rank 4, compared to 95, rank 2) and a share of students in VET (91, rank 5 compared to 96, rank 1). A very strong secondary VET stream with a variety of VET programmes inherited from former Czechoslovakia created also preconditions for matching labour market needs as measured by qualification mismatch indicator (86, rank 2 compared to 96, rank 1). On the other hand, low scores of both countries in recent training (10, rank 28 compared to 26, rank 18/19) reflects again variability of secondary VET and comparably underdeveloped adult learning.

Despite the similarity of education systems, the performance of the system in Slovakia deteriorated strongly compared to 1990s. Permanently low investment in education, unrealistic 2020 national targets (e.g. 505 points in PISA), and slow response to challenges heavily contributed to low scores; reading, maths & science (27, rank 27) and early leavers from education and training (49, rank 26). On the other hand, an extremely low score in activity rate (aged 20-24) visible in both countries also reflects common features: secondary VET supplying the labour market with graduates with skills comparable with the bachelors in some other countries, and still a low share of bachelors entering the labour market. Despite fulfilling the EU2020 benchmark of 40% of tertiary educated 30-34 year-olds, a dominant share of graduates is from second cycle programmes. This also translates into a very high over-qualification of tertiary graduates (39, rank 24 compared to 70, rank 8), as the economy in Slovakia offers less jobs for tertiary educated compared to Czechia. Some indicators are indeed very sensitive to national economy performance and the structure of labour market demand. Favourable data on underemployed part-time workers, also visible in other post-communist countries, are a result of low attractiveness of part-time jobs due to insufficient remuneration. An extremely low share of part-time jobs in Slovakia is in contrast with an extremely high share of overtime work and night work. Favourable score in this indicator (90 and rank 9/10) also masks out a low score in long-term unemployment (67, rank 28 compared to best performing Czechia in both indicators of the sub-pillar skills utilisation). Similarly, favourable data on ISCED 5-8 educated low-wage workers reflects that Slovakia is the low-income country with the EU lowest income variety (as measured by the GINI coefficient). This indicator is not sensitive to low remuneration of tertiary educated professionals in the public sector.

To summarise, in indicators related to the education system structure inherited from the past, Slovakia scores significantly better compared to the system performance. Urgent interventions are needed concerning basic skills (as measured by PISA), early leaving and adult learning. Structural reform in higher education is progressing slow, hampered also by the non-existence of universities of applied sciences. The national economy with a strong focus on industry and exporting slow-moving products does not create enough jobs attractive for young professionals. Despite favourable performance in the skills matching pillar (rank 7), brain drain of young professionals is warning for the future development of the economy in times of Industry 4.0. Although still not visible in the score, improving digital skills is a strong challenge.