

***PARTICIPATION OF ADULTS FROM THE COUNTRIES WHICH JOINED THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2004 IN LIFELONG LEARNING AND THE COMPARISON WITH THE SITUATION IN ROMANIA***

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*Abstract: The vocational training is the key to success in all sector policies, with direct effects on the quality of workforce, because it has a double objective: on one hand it must modernise and answer promptly to the immediate requirements, on the other hand it must be proactive so that to anticipate the evolutions of the labor market and form valid competences in a European context.*

*The study presents an analysis of the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning from the countries which joined the European Union in 2004. The data were taken from the official site of the EU (Eurostat) and from the country Reports for years 2012 and 2013 presented by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). In this context, it is presented the situation in Romania within the period 2005-2013.*

**Keywords:** *vocational training of adults, lifelong learning, continuous education, quality of education, human capital.*

## INTRODUCTION

„The human capital is the fundamental factor of the general progress of society, and the investment in the human capital, in the long run, is more efficient, having strong effects on training- extension at the individual, sectorial, regional, societal, national and international level. That is why vocational training of human resources is unanimously appreciated, at the moment, as a key component of EU growth, of national development strategies of EU member states and in growing measure of candidates and partner countries, being in a creation process of the minimum necessary conditions for their joining the EU. It represents a major factor for the healthy economy growth, the increase of competitiveness and employment. The human capital is appreciated today as being the most valuable asset of the EU”(1).

EU is one of the world's main economic entities: with only 7.3% of the world's population, it creates 20% of the world's total production. Despite its economic power, EU didn't succeed in reaching one of its key objectives, that of generating employment opportunities for all members of the society who are fit for work and who request jobs.

The abolition of the communist regimes from the Central and Eastern Europe, and the EU intentions to found an European market of great dimensions, were two important reasons for the beginning of the extension wave in 2004, when ten states joined the EU: Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary.

Analysing the data presented by Eurostat concerning the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning, we extracted the numbers regarding the 10 countries that joined EU in 2004, related to the period 2005-2013.

The data came from the workforce Survey within the EU and refer to all forms of education or vocational training relevant or not for the present or future job of the respondent.

## DATA ANALYSIS

We propose to further analyse the participation rate in lifelong learning in the countries from the fifth wave of joining, comparing the data with the EU average from the years **2006 (9.5%)**, **2010(9.1%)** and **2012 (9%)**.

The table 1 synthetizes the data provided by Eurostat for the period 1992-2013 and presents the situation from the 10 states mentioned, together with Romania, for the period 2005-2013.

*Table 1. Participation of adults from the countries which joined EU in 2004 in lifelong learning and from Romania, within the period 2005- 2013*

EU wave 2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Czech Republic	5,6	5,6	5,7	7,8	6,8	7,5	11,4	10,8	9,7
Cyprus	5,9	7,1	8,4	8,5	7,8	7,7	7,5	7,4	6,9
Estonia	6	6,5	7	9,7	10,5	10,9	11,9	12,7	12,6
Latvia	7,9	6,9	6,9	6,6	5,4	5,1	5,1	6,9	6,5
Lithuania	6,1	4,7	5,2	4,8	4,4	3,9	5,7	5,2	5,7
Malta	5,5	5,5	5,9	6,2	6,1	6	6,4	6,9	7,5
Poland	4,9	4,7	5,1	4,7	4,7	5,2	4,4	4,5	4,3
Slovakia	4,6	4,1	3,9	3,3	2,8	2,8	3,9	3,1	2,9
Slovenia	15,3	15	14,8	13,9	14,6	16,2	15,9	13,8	12,4
Hungary	3,9	3,8	3,6	3,1	2,7	2,8	2,7	2,8	3
<b>Romania</b>	<b>1,6</b>	<b>1,3</b>	<b>1,3</b>	<b>1,5</b>	<b>1,5</b>	<b>1,3</b>	<b>1,6</b>	<b>1,4</b>	<b>2</b>

Source: Eurostat <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc440&plugin=1>

**CZECH REPUBLIC.** In 2002 in Czech Republic was defined the Plan in the long run for the Development of Education and the Education System, which, periodically updated, (2004, 2008, 2012), traces the education system. In 2007 the government of the Czech Republic adopted "The national strategy for lifelong learning". The document refers to the initial and continuing training and has as implementation term the year 2015.

The continuing vocational training carries out within the institutions which provide courses for adults, the quality of the vocational training is situated within the responsibility of the provider, but the activity is not regulated by a specific legislation (2).



*Figure 1. The participation rate of the adults to lifelong learning in the Czech Republic within the period 2005-*

*2013*

If we look at Figure 1, we can see that, within the period 2005-2013, Czech Republic registers an increasing trend concerning the participation of adults in lifelong learning, with three increase outbursts in the years 2008 (7.8%), 2011 (11.4) and 2012 (10.8%). For the years 2006 and 2010 the figures compared to EU average (9.5% and 9.1%, respectively) are smaller by 3.9% and 1.6% respectively, which underlines the low level of interest in this form of education.

The lack of motivation in the participation in lifelong education manifests itself at the level of individuals and at the level of the employers. The increase of the involvement of the social partners in the continuing training and that of financing the education of adults by the participants in percentage of 45%, have as a consequence, beginning with 2011, the registration of a bigger rate by 2.7% of the indicator compared with the EU average (9%) (3).

**CYPRUS.** In Cyprus, in March 2012, was based a proposal for the constitution of a national Committee of lifelong orientation which was submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval, and in 2013 was adopted the Strategy for the improvement of the workforce competence in order to consolidate the occupational mobility. Progress is registered regarding the constitution of a System for evaluation and certification of the training providers, including for the providers, in order to improve the quality of the training offer (4).

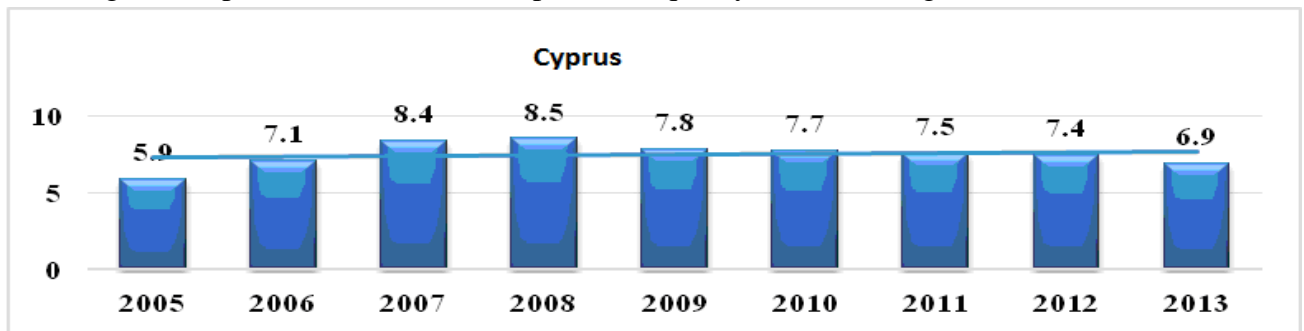


Figure 2. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Cyprus, within 2005- 2013

Figure 2 reflects the evolution of the participation rate of adults to lifelong learning within the period 2005-2013. One can observe a linear activity in this field, with slight increases in 2007 (8.4%) and 2008 (8.5%). Cyprus is situated below the average rate of the indicator registered by the EU in the years 2006, 2010 and 2012 by 2.4%, 1.4% and 0.4%.

In June 2014, the Council of Ministers approved the Strategy for lifelong learning for the period 2014- 2020, document which contains the main priorities of policy in the field and sets the main actions to be promoted by the Government of Cyprus.

**ESTONIA.** In Estonia the concept of adult is related to the age. According to the Estonian legislation, an adult student is a person whose main occupation is not to study; for example, the person may work or may look after children and may study at the same time. Nevertheless, most frequently are considered adults the persons with ages between 25 and 64.

The continuing education is regulated in Estonia from 1993 through the Law on the education of adults. The document provides that every person has the right to develop constantly his/her knowledge and abilities and also presents the obligations of the public and local authorities and also of the employers concerning the lifelong education, including the financing of this field of education from the state budget.

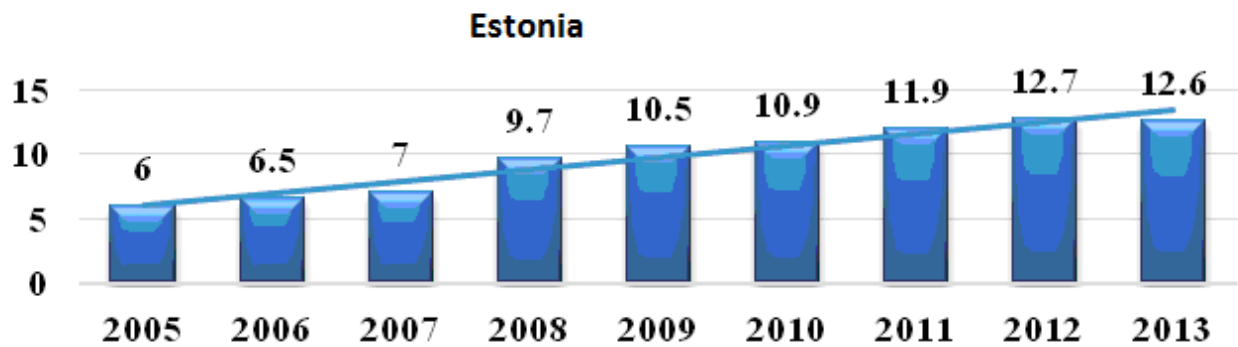


Figure 3. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Estonia, within 2005- 2013

Analysing the data presented in Figure 3, we observe that Estonia didn't succeed in reaching its objective set for 2013 (13.5% participation rate), registering a participation rate to lifelong learning of 12.6%. Nevertheless, one can see the growing trend of learning participation of adults and that in 2010 the rate is above the average registered by the EU by 1,8% and in 2012 by 3.6%.

**LATVIA.** The Law on the Vocational Education in Latvia governs the initial education and the continuing vocational training. The legal frame mentions two formal types of continuing education: continuing vocational education (completed with certificates on levels of qualification) and vocational refresher courses of 160- 320 hours.

The private vocational training providers (education centers) are represented in all the regions of the country and in order to apply the programs of formal, informal/non-formal education it cooperates with the National Employment Agency through a network of 28 regional offices.

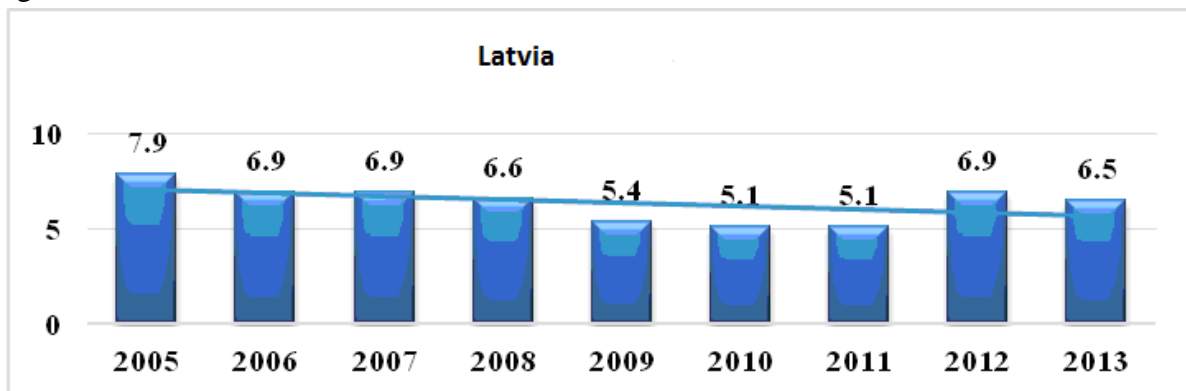


Figure 4. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Latvia within 2005- 2013

In Latvia, the participation of adults in education is lower than in the EU, as one can observe in Figure 4. The objective to increase the participation rate to education of adults from 5.4% in 2009 to 12,5% in 2013 was not reached (5). The descending trend of the indicator, from 7.9% in 2005 to 6.5 in 2013 determined the Ministry of Education in Latvia to adopt the guidelines of the lifelong learning policy 2007 -2013, which refer to sustaining the development of orientation in education and career and assuring the availability of education for the groups excluded from a social point of view.

**LITHUANIA.** Lithuania registers a quite big level of education of population. On the basis of the data of the workforce Survey, in 2013, 93% of the persons with ages between 25 and 64 reached at least the upper secondary education and 34% reached the tertiary level. This is one of the biggest education rates in Europe. (6)

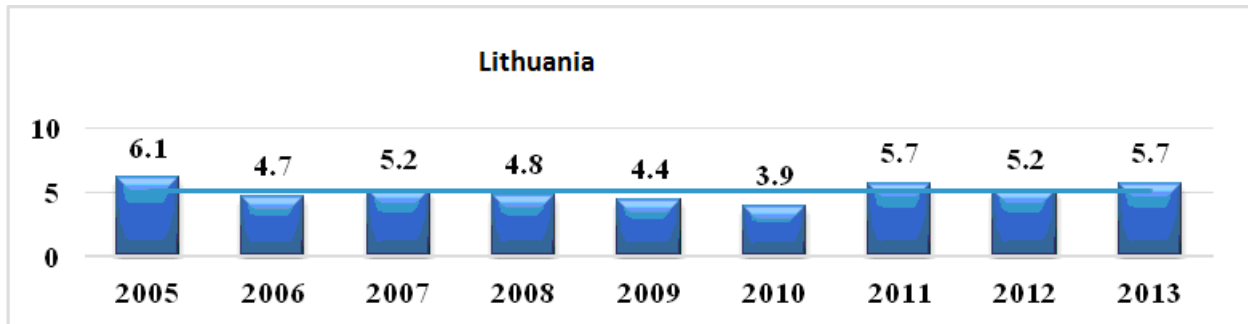


Figure 5. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Lithuania, within 2005-2013

At the same time, the participation rate to lifelong learning is quite small compared with other countries within the European area and with the EU average, as one can observe from Figure 5. The linear trend, but close to 5%, by 4% smaller than the reference, has as a consequence that the vocational training of adults is one of the biggest challenges for the educational and instruction system in Lithuania.

**MALTA.** The education and vocational training for adults is offered in Malta by public educational institutions, The National Employment Agency, the Institution of Tourism Studies. These institutions offer opportunities of investment in lifelong learning in order to obtain new qualifications, the improvement of the possibility of employment and career promotion (7).

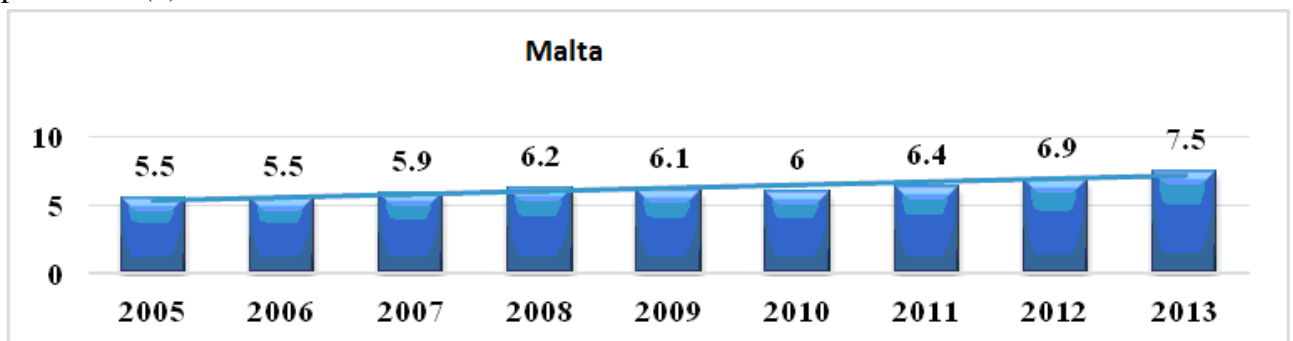


Figure 6. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Malta, within 2005-2013

Analysing the data presented in Figure 6, one can observe that Malta registers small participation rates to lifelong learning, for the entire period analysed. In the 9 years of the interval one can see an increase of only 2%. Taking into account that the average rate of the EU in 2012 was 9%, one can appreciate that a sustained effort in the long run is needed in order to develop the vocational training of adults in Malta. The extension of the economy based on knowledge and the influence of technology accelerates the importance of this measure.

**POLAND.** Beginning with September 1, 2012, Poland introduced a new reform through which schools for adults are to be combined "in vocational training and continuing

education centers”. The vocational qualification courses were introduced by the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education from January 11, 2012 on the continuing training. According to this regulation, the participation in more qualification courses leads to obtaining an entire set of qualifications that belongs to a certain job.

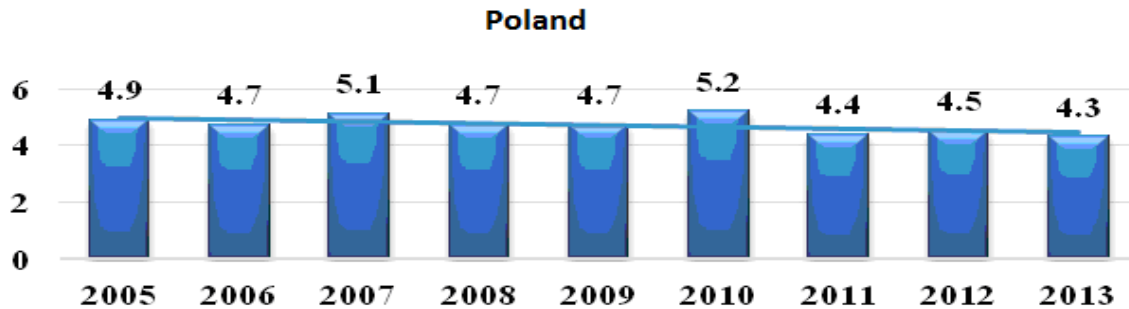


Figure 7. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Poland, within 2005-2013

Poland, like Malta, Lithuania or Latvia has a participation rate of adults to lifelong learning below that of the EU by approximately 4%. The trend presented in Figure 7 reflects that the interest for this form of education is quite reduced, and as a consequence Poland is forced to adopt urgently measures of improvement in order to reach the indicator of benchmarking set at the EU level for 2020, of 15 %.

**SLOVAKIA.** The comparison of the level of education of adults with the age between 25 and 64 with the EU, 28, in Slovakia, within the Country Report in 2012 (8), indicates a very small weight of this indicator.

The main objective of the education of adults was traditionally, less based on the aspects related to employment and more on the quality of life of the adult. It was approached as a complementary activity, especially in order to satisfy the personal and social needs and interests and not necessarily related to the job.

At present, the education and continuing vocational training and implicitly the education of adults, are considered as integrant part of lifelong learning and are included in the Strategy adopted by the Government of Slovakia in 2011. The certification of competences is the attribution of the National Institution for lifelong learning which collaborates with the Slovakian Association of Educational Institutions for adults.



Figure 8. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Slovakia, within 2005-2013

Analysing the information presented in Figure 8, one can see no substantial improvement of the interest in lifelong learning after 2011, on the contrary, the decrease is visible, Slovakia manifesting a descending trend since joining the EU, the rate being at approximately 3%, which represents an extremely low percentage. Although in 2012 the plan of bringing into action of the Strategy for lifelong learning proposed a financial instrument for the stimulation of the participation of adults within this educational system, the Government of Slovakia didn't adopt any measure in this respect. At the moment the only source of financing of continuing learning being the projects implemented through The European Social Fund.

Although in 2007 Slovakia proposed for 2015 a participation rate of 15%, value which represents the reference for ET 2020, the objective is not realistic and represents a risk in the present tendency.

**SLOVENIA.** In Slovenia all the programs of formal education from the level of the secondary education to higher education are developed for adults, too. The programs of training in continuing education follow the same curriculum as those for the young people, the criteria of access being the same as in the initial vocational training.

Although Slovenia registers a participation rate of adults to lifelong learning much bigger than the other countries from the group of 10, the indicator shows the tendencies of decrease. Figure 9 reflects the slightly decreasing trend of the rate, with an increasing peak in 2010 (16.2%). One can observe that in the entire interval, Slovenia was permanently above the reference rate in the EU and on the first place within the fifth wave countries. The situation is mainly due to the policy of the state which considers education a priority of socio-economic development. The efforts and the investments from the educational field slightly diminished due to the recession, but the specialists in the field militate in favour of maintaining the existing infrastructure and continuing the educational policies. One must observe that Slovenia has all the premises to reach and even surpass the reference rate ET 2020 of 15%.

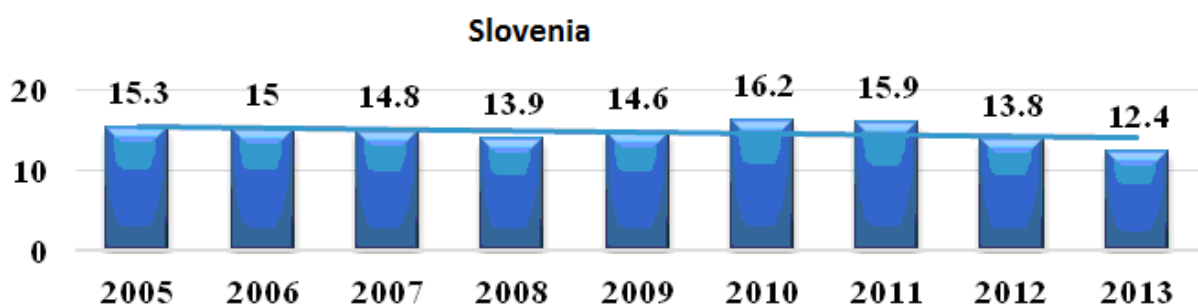


Figure 9: the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Slovenia, within 2005-2013

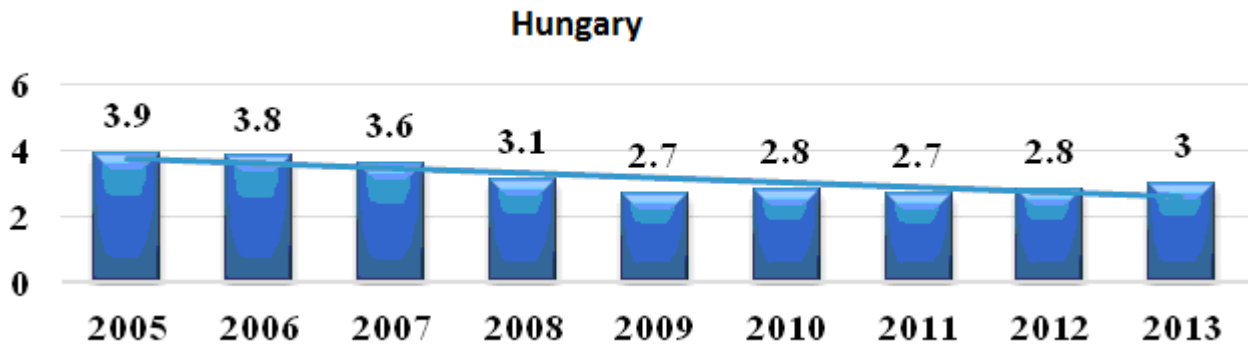
**HUNGARY.** The results registered concerning the lifelong participation beginning with 2005, places Hungary on the last places, which determined the authorities in the field to unite their forces for the elaboration of a new law of the vocational training of adults, the law in force being approved in 2001.

According to the statistics, the main types of training programs offered to adults are: vocational refresher courses, qualification, communication skills in foreign languages. The



majority of participants in continuing learning have completed primary school, and the programs have a number of 200 hours to the most.

The vocational training providers for adults consist of: public higher education institutions, other budgetary institutions or supported by the state, private training companies, NGO (non-profit organizations, professional organizations), the employers (who provide training within the company for their employees).



*Figure 10. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Hungary within 2005-2013*

The accreditation of institutions and training programs for adults is not compulsory in Hungary, but in order to receive financing from the state, a specific procedure must be complied with in which the social partners are implied.

From Figure 10 one can observe that the trend of participation rate to lifelong learning is decreasing and the values are much below the EU reference. For the years analysed: 2006, 2010 and 2012 Hungary registers smaller rates by 5.7%, 6.3% and 6,2% respectively.

**ROMANIA.** The vocational training of adults in Romania carries out according to Law n. 167/ 2013 for the modification and completing the Government Ordinance no. 129/ 2000 on the vocational training of adults and includes education and initial vocational training and continuing vocational training. The two segments represent different ways of education, other than those specific to the national educational system.

The education of adults may be formal (organized on the basis of a training program), non formal and informal. The carrying out of the training programs is assured by persons/ public or private organizations in their capacity as vocational training providers.

Law no. 1/2011, the national education Law at art. 340 provides the constitution of the National Authority for Qualifications whose assumed mission is to “assume the general frame for carrying out continuing vocational training and develop the necessary qualifications in order to support a competitive human resource, capable to function efficiently in the present society and in a community of knowledge.”



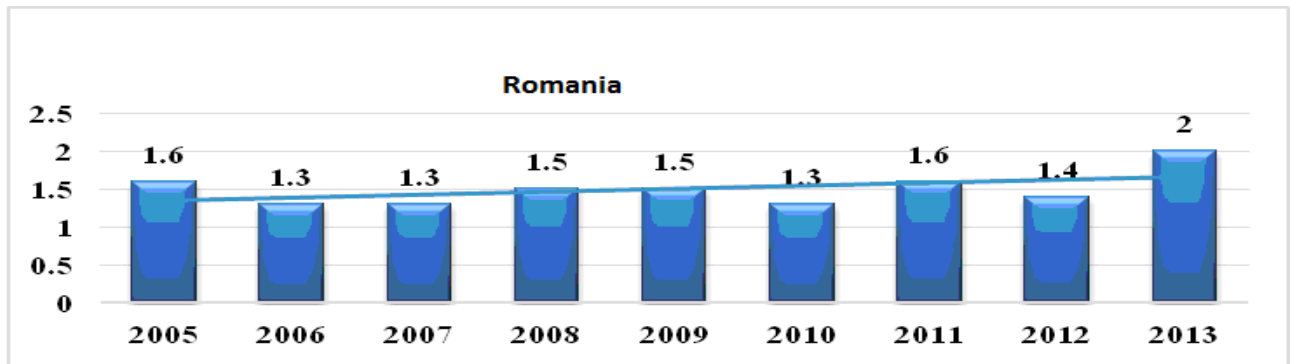


Figure 11. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in Romania, within 2005-2013

According to the data presented by Eurostat and reflected in Figure 11, one can observe that Romania is situated on the last place compared with the analysed states. Although the trend is slightly increasing, the participation rates are extremely low, the percentage of 2% registered in 2013 being in our opinion, artificially increased. The statement is sustained by the fact that within the period 2007-2013 a series of projects financed by FSE (POSDRU) was carried out within which programs with an extremely reduced number of hours were provided, that couldn't assure obtaining real competences.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The EU countries register big differences between them, concerning the participation of adults in the lifelong training programs. The rates are situated, in 2013, between 1.7% (Bulgaria) and 31.4% (Denmark), the general tendency being that of stagnation.

For the states that joined the EU in 2004, the vocational training of adults constituted a challenge, that only Estonia achieved to approach accordingly.

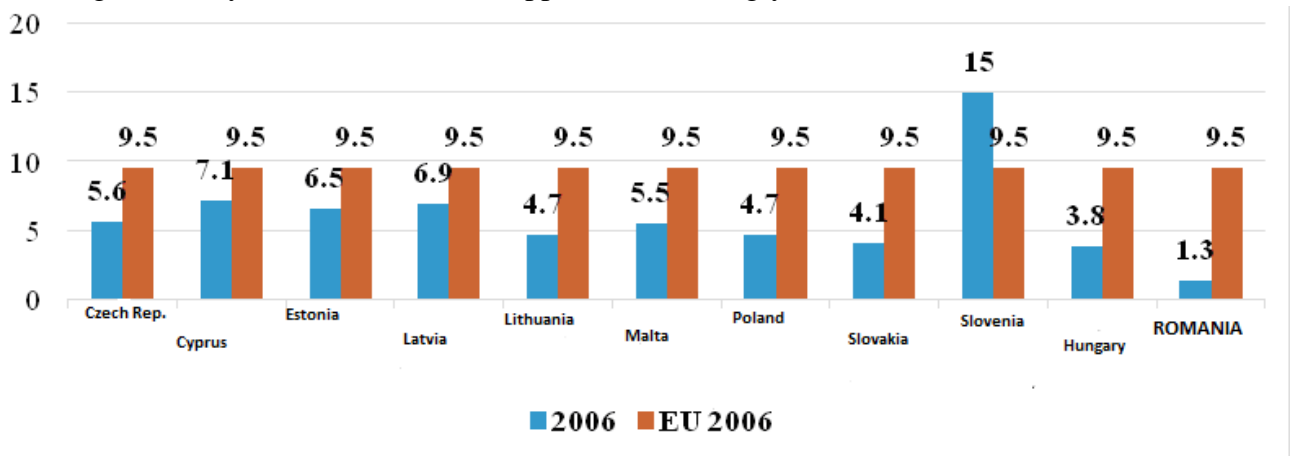


Figure 12. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in the states which joined the EU in 2004, reference year 2006

In 2006 the average participation rate at the European level was 9.5%. Slovenia, with a rate of 15% (by 5.5% bigger than the average rate in the EU) also due to the coherent policies in the educational field, is situated on the first place. The participation of adults in education and lifelong training is much behind the EU indicator in the case of other countries: Cyprus 7.1%, Latvia 6.9%, Estonia 6.5%, The Czech Republic 5.6%, Malta 5.5%, Lithuania and Poland 4.7%, Slovakia 4.1% and Hungary 3.8%. (Figure12)

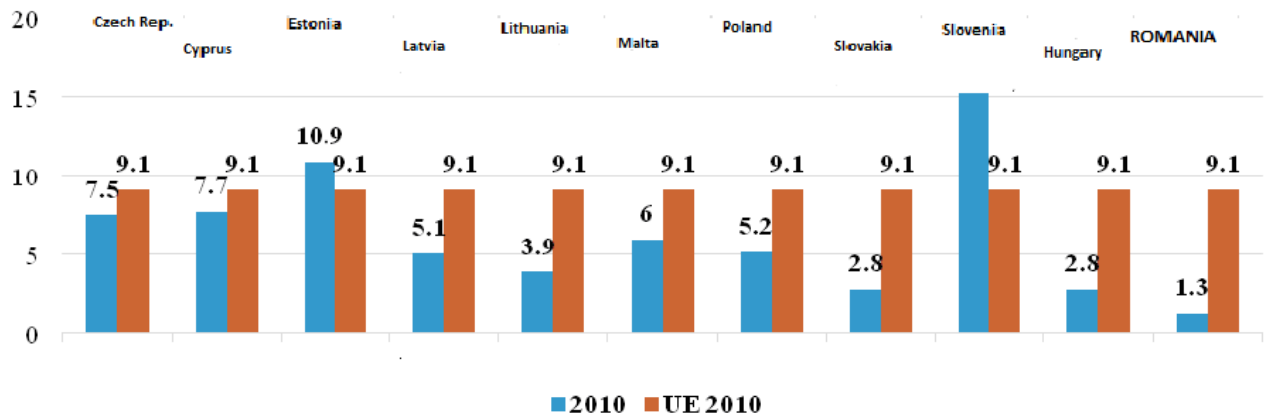


Figure 13. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in the states which joined the EU in 2004, reference year 2010

Year 2010 does not bring significant modifications concerning the participation of adults in continuing learning. Slovenia maintains its leader role with a rate of 16.2% (by 7.1% bigger than the average rate of the EU). Positive results in the field obtains, in 2010 Estonia, which surpasses the EU rate by 1.8%. One can observe that, compared with 2006, six countries register an increase of the participation rate of adults in lifelong learning: Czech Republic 1.9%, Cyprus 0.6%, Estonia 4.4%, Malta and Poland 0.5%, Slovenia 1.2% and in the other countries the rate decreased: Latvia 1.8%, Lithuania 0.8%, Slovakia 1.3%, Hungary 1%. Romania stagnates in this period, registering the lowest participation rate (1.3%) compared with the ten analysed countries. (Figure13)

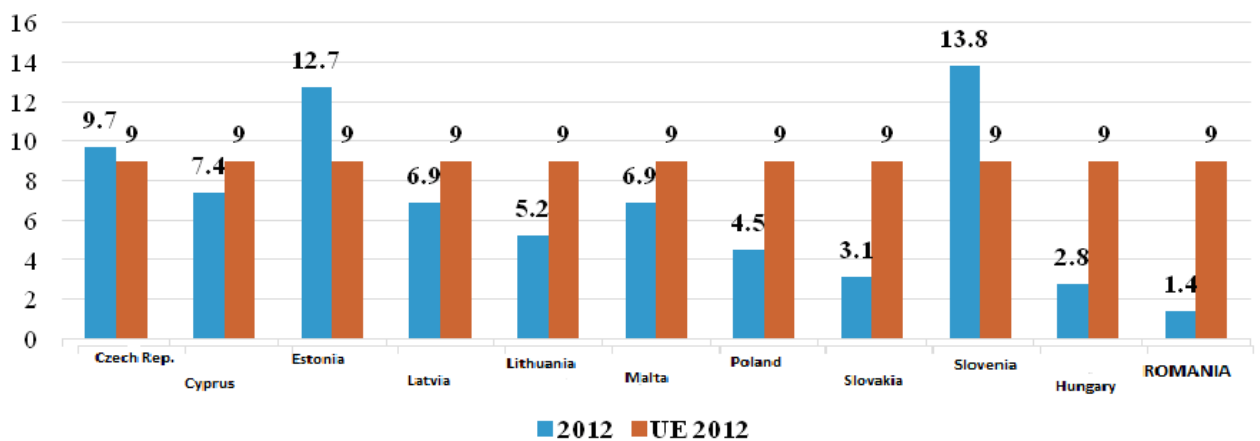


Figure 14. The participation rate of adults in lifelong learning in the states which joined the EU in 2004, reference year 2012

For 2012, the situation is: (compared to 2010): although the participation rate decreased compared to 2010 by 2.4%, Slovenia (13.8%) is on the first place, surpassing the EU average rate by 4.8%, followed by Estonia with a rate of 12.7% (by 3.7% bigger than the EU average rate). Increases compared with 2010 register: the Czech Republic 3.3%, Latvia 1.8%, Lithuania 1.3%, Malta 0.9%, Slovakia 0.3%. Hungary stagnates and Cyprus, Poland and Slovenia have smaller rates than in 2010. Romania is situated on the last place with a rate of 1.4% (with an increase of only 0.1%). (Figure14)

The development of the education of adults may constitute a real support for Europe, in order to surpass the economic crisis, Lifelong learning has as an objective satisfying the needs of new competences manifested on the labor market, and maintaining the elderly in activity. Because building a career in the long run cannot carry out only on the basis of the knowledge acquired in the initial education, the lifelong education represents the key to social insertion and for an active citizenship.

The data analysed lead to the idea that it is necessary a conjugated action at the EU level in order to popularize and strongly support the policies in the field and to favour the experience exchange between the countries.

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