

LONG LIFE LEARNING – A PRIORITY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: Education, and especially continuing education, is at the forefront of the European Union's (EU) policies for the first time. Due to the large number of countries that are part of the EU, due to social, cultural, political, and administrative differences, due to different needs from country to country, the progress in this field is different in the member countries. Lifelong learning or adult education refers to any form of formal, non-formal or informal learning after the adults have left the formal system of education. According to the Cambridge dictionary, "lifelong learning" is "the process of acquiring lifelong knowledge and skills, often to help you do your job properly" (Dictionary, 2022).

Keywords: lifelong learning, continuing education, correlations

1 INTRODUCTION

The EU's objectives for the next 3 years are very ambitious for the Member States: 'at least 47% of adults aged 25-64 should participate in a learning process in the last 12 months by 2025' (Union, 2021). By 2030 the percentage must reach 60%.

Romania, in 2020, was in the last place in the ranking made for the 27 EU countries regarding participation in the last 4 weeks in an education program. In the Education and Training Monitor for 2021, a document created by the The Commission's General Directorate for Education and Culture, it appears the official data of adult participation in the learning process. In 2020,

Romania was on the last place in the EU, with a percentage of 1%, down from 2019, and far behind the EU's average (of 9.1%). The data for 2021 is partially collected and will appear in the 2023 Monitor.

However, some preliminary data appear that no longer ranks Romania last, which is quite encouraging. Therefore, according to Eurostat, (Eurostat, n.d.) the percentage of participation of attendance in education and training (in the last 4 weeks) of adults between the ages 25 and 64 years for 2021 has increased to 4.9% (Figure 1. Adult participation in the learning process), an increase of almost 500%. The EU average is 10.8%, which is an increase of 18% compared to the previous year.

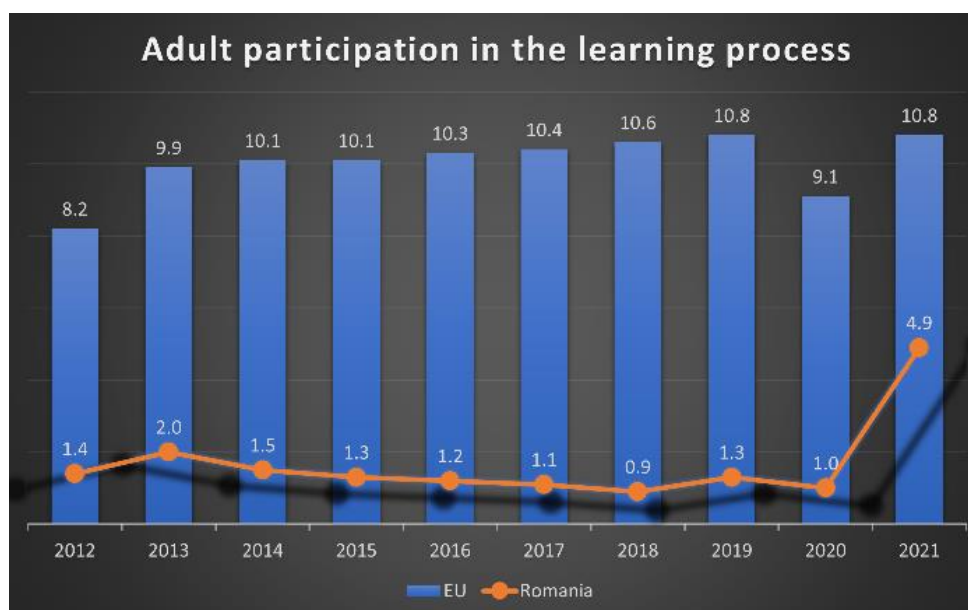


Figure 1. Adult participation in the learning process

2 MILESTONES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Since March 2002, when 'Education and training 2010' was approved in Barcelona by the European Council, it has been established that a solid framework is needed for the cooperation of member countries in the field of education.

It was to be cemented at the 2009 Council, which was previously set, and in 2015 to already set the targets for 2020.

In the Rome Declaration from 2017, EU leaders committed to creating a stronger Union where young people have better chances for their future.

EU leaders set the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Gothenburg Social Summit in 2017, and as a first principle is the right to quality, inclusive and continuing education to acquire the skills needed for the labour market.

During the European Council from December 2017, education was emphasised as the key for increasing Europe's competitiveness. (Union, 2021)

We extracted some data from the Eurydice Report of 2021 made by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency on Continuing Education: (European Commission, 2021)

- around 1 out of 5 adults living in the EU has not completed upper secondary education
- between 15% and 57% of adults from the EU have a low level of performance in terms of literacy and numeracy, and about 40% of the adults living in the EU are at risk of digital exclusion because they haven't got digital skills.
- adult participation in EU member countries in education is different depending on the country, but a common feature is that adults prefer non-formal, short-term courses
- low-skilled adults have a lower rate of participation in lifelong learning than the once that have a higher level of qualification
- distance learning is a method by which the flexibility of adult learning increases
- the validation of qualifications is different from country to country and tends towards their uniformity and standardisation at EU level

- there are initiatives to raise awareness and encourage lifelong learning at EU level (Union, 2021)

3 OBJECTIVES

By 2030 adults between the ages of 25 and 64 must participate in learning activities (in the last 12 months) at least 60%.

Table 1. Targets set for 2025 for EU member countries:

Indicators	Objective	Level
Participation of adults (aged 25-64) years in learning activities in the last 12 months	50%	38% (2016)
Participation of low-skilled adults between 25 and 64 years of age in learning activities in the past 12 months	30%	18% (2016)
Share of unemployed adults aged 25-64 with recent learning experience	20%	11% (2019)
Share of adults aged 16-74 who have at least basic digital skills	70%	56% (2019)

4 PRIORITIES AND STRATEGIES

Building on the existing data and having to achieve the ambitious targets set by the EU, it comes to the aid of the Member States with five priority strategies for the 2021-2030 period, namely:

- Enhancing the standards of excellence, equity, inclusion, and success for everyone in training and education
- making mobility and lifelong learning a reality for everyone
- improving the teaching profession's skills and motivation
- enhancing higher education in Europe
- assisting the switch to green and digital technologies through training and education (Eurostat, n.d.)

According to the European Council resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training with a view to the achievement and further development of the European Education Area (2021-2030), there should be cooperation in education and training for the next amount of

time, until 2030. There should be a strategic framework encompassing education and training systems, in an inclusive, holistic perspective and including lifelong learning.

This should be emphasised as a major principle on which to base the entire structure, which is intended to encompass teaching, training and learning in the three ways of learnings – formal, non-formal or informal – from the childhood education until the adult learning, also vocational education and higher education, including in digital media. (Union, 2021)

5 CONTINUING EDUCATION AND THE LIVING STANDARD

Gross domestic product (abbreviated GDP) is a macroeconomic indicator that reflects the sum of the market value of all goods and services intended for final consumption, produced in all branches of the economy within a country within a year. (Wikipedia, Gross Domestic Product, n.d.).

In this section, we want to show that there is a link between living standards and education.

For this, we made some graphic representations to which we added the explanations that we considered necessary for a better understanding of the situation presented. For the graphs below we have gathered the latest available data from the Education and Research Monitor, as well as the World Bank and Eurostat websites

5.1 GDP per capita in the EU and Romania

According to the World Bank Open Data for the years 1987-2021 (Bank, 2022), the GDP per capita for the EU countries and Romania had the evolution from Figure 2. GDP per capita between 1987-2021), having in 1987 the value of \$ 11,125 for the EU and \$ 1,674 for Romania and reaching in 2021 \$ 38,234 for the EU and \$ 14,862 for Romania.

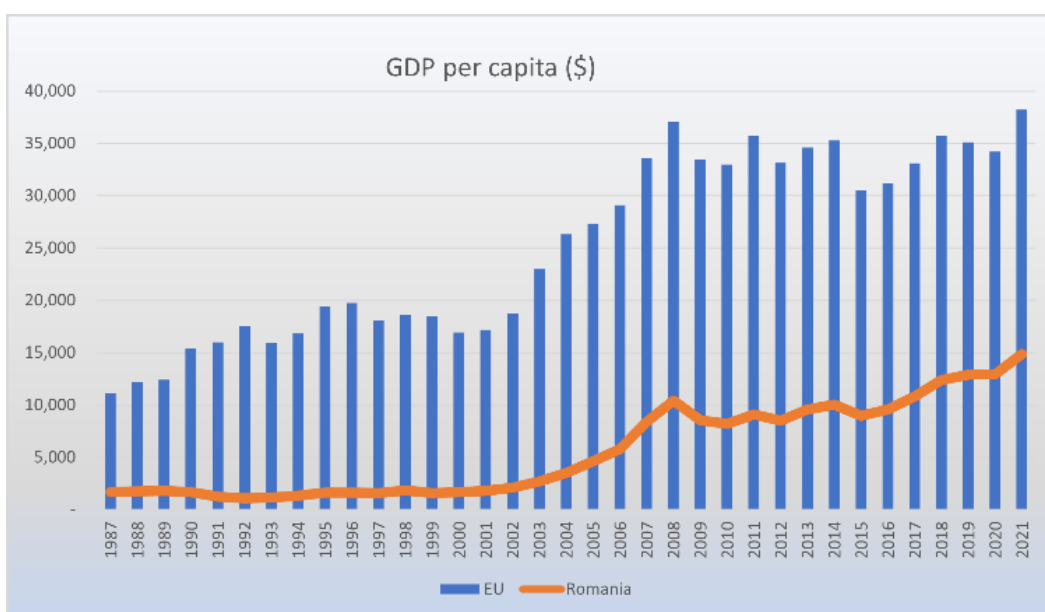


Figure 2. GDP per capita between 1987-2021

5.2 GDP per capita for EU countries

In Figure 3. GDP per capita for 2021 (\$) we represented the GDP per capita only for 2021 for all the EU countries. The country with the highest GDP per capita is Luxembourg (\$135,683), and at the opposite end is Bulgaria (\$11,635). Romania is on the penultimate place in this ranking (\$ 14,862).

5.3 Government spending on education

In Figure 4. Government spending on education (% from the GDP) we represented the percentage of the Romanian budget that was allocated for education between 2000-2018 compared to the average allocated by the rest of the EU countries. It can be noticed from the chart that the budget allocated by Romania was below the EU average throughout this period.

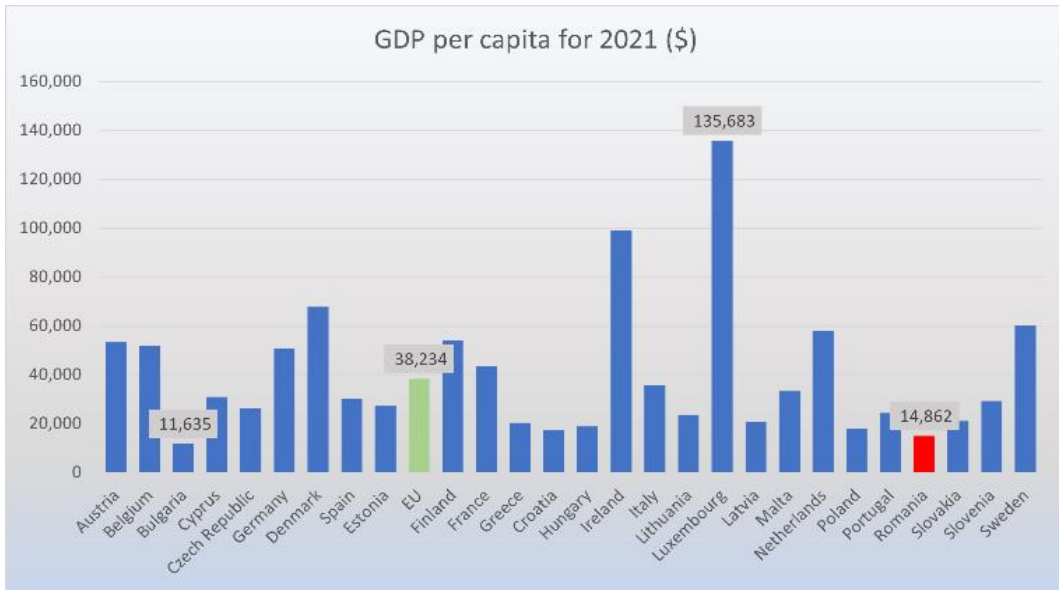


Figure 3. GDP per capita for 2021 (\$)

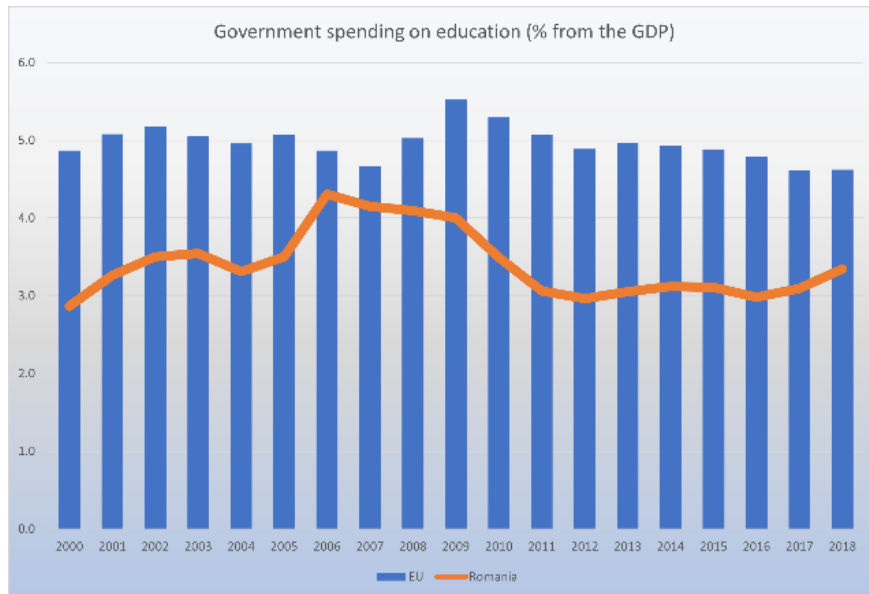


Figure 4. Government spending on education (% from the GDP)

5.4 Adult participation in a form of learning in 2021

In Figure 5. Adult participation in a form of learning in 2021 (%) we have represented graphically the percentage of adults from the EU

Member States who participated in some form of learning in the last 4 weeks prior to data collection. The collected data are provisional, the final data will appear in the Education and Training Monitor in 2023.

From this graph in Romania in 2021 one can see that 4.9% of adults aged between 25 and 64 years took part in a learning activity in the last 4 weeks preceding the data collection, compared

to the EU average which was 10.8%. At the end of the ranking are Sweden, in first place with 34.7% and Bulgaria, on the last place with 1.8%.



Figure 5. Adult participation in a form of learning in 2021 (%)

5.5 Correlations between the living standards and education

The Pearson correlation coefficient measures the power and direction of a linear relationship between two variables. It describes the direction and extent to which one variable is linearly associated with another variable. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) can take values from -1 to +1. The -1 value indicates that the variables are perfectly negatively related, +1 that they are related perfectly positively, and 0 that they are not linearly related.

A strong correlation is considered a relationship with a coefficient of more than 0.8 and a weak correlation when it is less than 0.5 (these values are questionable).

The coefficient of determination (r squared) gives us information about the proportion of variation of the dependent variable that can be considered as associated with the variation of the independent variable. (Glavan, 2013)

In Figure 6. The correlation between the allocated percentage of GDP and continuing education in 2018 we showed the correlation between the percentage of GDP allocated by EU countries and the percentage of adult participation in a learning activity in the last 4 weeks before the data collection for 2018.

The y-axes have represented the percentages of GDP allocated to education in 2018 by the EU states, while the x-axes are represented the percentages of participation of adults in the education process.

In this case Pearson's coefficient is

$$\sqrt{R^2} = \sqrt{0,578} = 0,76$$

which means that there is a strong correlation between the percentage allocated from the state budget to education and the continuous training of adults.

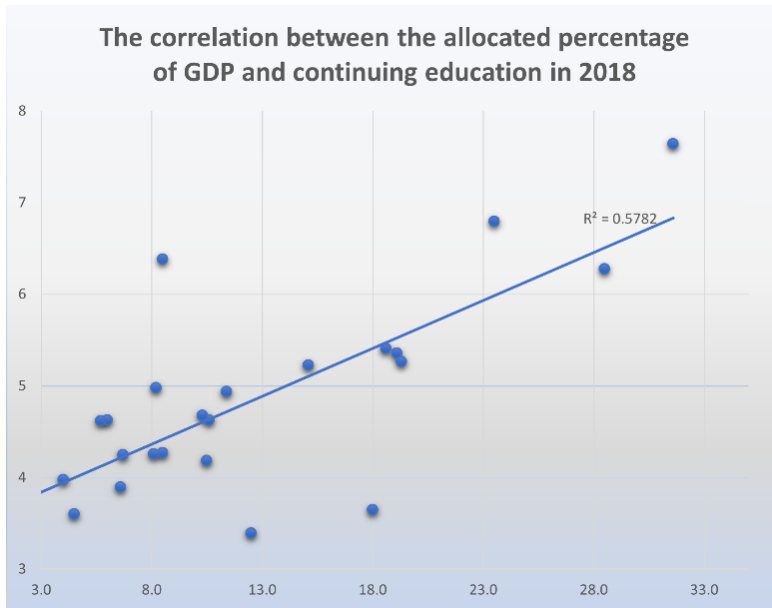


Figure 6. The correlation between the allocated percentage of GDP and continuing education in 2018

In Figure 7. The correlation between GDP/capita and continuing education in 2018 we represented the correlation between the GDP allocated per capita by EU countries and the percentage of adult participation in a learning activity in the last 4 weeks leading up to data collection for 2018.

On the y-axes are represented the amounts representing the GDP per capita in \$ in 2018 for the EU states, while on the x-axes are represented the percentages of participation of adults in the education process.

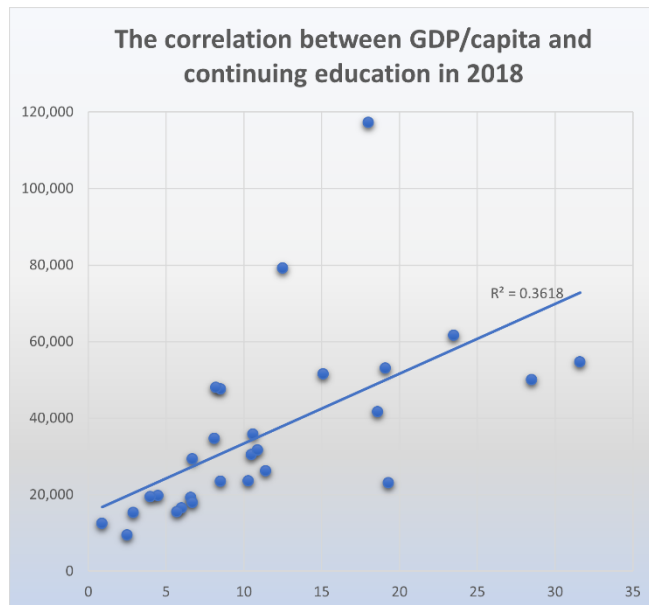


Figure 7. The correlation between GDP/capita and continuing education in 2018

In this case the Pearson coefficient is

$$\sqrt{R^2} = \sqrt{0,3618} = 0,60$$

which means that there is a strong correlation between the GDPs per capita of the EU member countries and the continuous training of adults.

The reason we've carried out the two demonstrations is that the percentages allocated to education differ from country to country, and even though there are countries that allocate a smaller percentage of GDP to education, it may be higher in absolute terms than in other countries where the allocation as a percentage is higher.

6 CONCLUSIONS

For the first time, education is part of the EU's priorities. The conclusion is that a united and strong Europe can only stand up if the emphasis is on the education of its inhabitants. Education is encouraged and stimulated at EU level through the objectives and solutions proposed for the next timeframe (until 2025 and 2030) at all levels, from school education to adult education with a particular focus on continuing adult education.

What we wanted to point out is that in countries with a high standard of living that invest in education, the number of adults participating in continuous training is high. From the study of the presented graphs, it appears that one of the certain ways for the development of education in general and of continuing education in particular is to increase the

standard of living of the society and correlated, the increase of the percentage allocation of GDP for education.

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