
CSEE-ETUCE Thematic overview of the

**Country Reports 2017 of the European Semester
in the education and training field**

March, 2017





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1. Introduction

Since the inception of the Europe 2020 Strategy, in 2010, the European Commission has identified education as a key area to achieve a “smart, inclusive and sustainable growth”. Education is widely recognised as vital to tackle persistent threats such as unemployment, slow economic growth, pressure on public finances and growing inequalities. It helps people to be equipped with knowledge, competences and skills they need to find better employment opportunities, and it is crucial to increasing social well-being and democratic participation in society.

Since the onset of the economic crisis and the introduction of a new governance architecture called “the European Semester”, the EU institutions scrutinize and guide reforms in a number of policy areas: economic, budgetary and fiscal policies, labour market policies, public sector, research and development, social protection and **education and training**, with a view to reach the Europe 2020 Strategy targets.

The Country Reports of the European Semester are a crucial element in the Semester process. They are the annual analysis of the economic and social situation in the EU Member States, including an assessment of imbalances. Following the publication of the [Annual Growth Survey 2017](#) (AGS 2017) in November 2016, which sets the European priorities for the forthcoming year, the publication of the Country Reports marks the beginning of the “national” European Semester. They should reflect the European priorities as defined in the AGS 2017, assess progress done at national level to implement the Country Specific Recommendations of 2016 and constitute the basis for the National Reform Programmes 2017 Country Specific Recommendations 2017, due to be published respectively in April and in May 2017.

In October 2017, the ETUCE has presented its priorities on the [Annual Growth Survey 2017 - ETUCE priorities](#), outlining the policy challenges and priorities for the education sector in the 2017 Annual Growth Survey (AGS). The paper presented was in line and follows on the ETUC priorities on the AGS 2017.

2. Country Reports 2017: General Overview

On 22 February 2017 the European Commission published the [Country Reports for each EU country](#) which form the basis for the dialogue ahead of the presentation of the **National Reform Programmes** in April 2017 and the preparation of the **Country Specific Recommendations** in May 2017. The Country Reports monitor reforms and point to issues that EU Member States should address. **All the Country Reports include a chapter on Education and training systems.** From the date of their publication the European Commission organises **bilateral meetings with the EU Member States** to discuss the reports. During this time the Representation of the European Commission in each country and national authorities should also discuss the Country Reports with social partners and other stakeholders. Alongside the Country Reports the European Commission has also published a [Communication on the European Semester 2017: Assessment of progress of structural reforms](#).

NB: Greece did not receive any Country Report because it is under the Economic Adjustment Programme of the EU.

The Country Reports 2017 identify eight topics of concern regarding the education sector. The Country Reports mention for each EU Member States the policy areas in which they have carried out reforms with satisfying results, in which they are implementing measures to tackle the issues identified, and the ones that need to be addressed. Two important indicators are the implementation of the 2016 Country Specific Recommendations and the countries' current situation in relation to the Europe 2020 Strategy targets.

The Country Reports 2017 in the field of education and training address:

- **Overall quality of education**

In this area, some recurring trends emerge. The Country Reports on Croatia and Slovakia call for **reforms in the education system**, while Lithuania and Malta's **infrastructure in education** does not match the countries' needs. The efforts to make the **teaching profession attractive** need to be strengthened in Lithuania, while Belgium suffers from **teacher shortages**, especially in its major cities. It is also stated that **early school leaving** remains too high in Estonia, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Slovakia and could be improved in Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland and Spain. Additionally, the **basic skills** attainment rate is an issue in Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Malta, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, and it is being improved in Sweden. Germany's **students usage of computers** is considered as not sufficient. **Educational outcomes** are to be addressed in Cyprus, Hungary, Slovakia and Spain, while **access to quality education** is to be tackled in Bulgaria and Lithuania. Finally, Belgium and Lithuania's **ratio of top/low achievers** is considered as a challenge.

- **Investment in education**

The European Commission notes that **investment in education** needs to be increased in Belgium, Bulgaria and Germany (the Country Report on Lithuania also calls for stronger public investment, but not especially linked to education). In particular, **investment in VET** is too weak in Finland. The Country Reports point at **weak (public/private) investment in research and development** in Austria, Cyprus, Croatia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. **Higher Education and Research** in Italy and Latvia still suffers from underinvestment, while in Spain it is reported as declining.

- **Quality of Higher Education and Research**

The **low tertiary education attainments** are deemed problematic in Croatia, Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Slovakia, while the **proportion of graduates in fields most related to innovation** is too low in Cyprus. Additionally, Estonia is reported to have **low attractiveness of research careers**. It is also stated that the **quality of standards and outputs** in Higher Education and Research are too low in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia.

- **Private/public developments in higher education and performance-based funding**
Countries that are reported the need to strengthen the **cooperation between higher education institutes and businesses** are Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Portugal, Slovakia, and Spain. Bulgaria is considered a country where **performance-based funding** of higher education seeks to improve quality and labour market relevance of education while in Spain, it is reported the limited progress made to increase performance-based funding for public research bodies. In Belgium, it is reported that the quality public research system has not brought about an abundance of fast-growing firms in innovative sectors, thus the technological content of exports still lags behind.
- **Research and Development (R&D)**
R&D is also facing particular challenges in Lithuania and Slovakia, where increasing investment should also be linked to a better coordination and implementation of research and innovation policies. The Country Reports on Ireland, Netherlands, Romania and Slovenia note a lack of **intensity** in R&D.
- **Inclusive education**
This topic is particularly recurring in countries with high level of social disparities, or with high numbers of migrants/refugees/minorities (the inclusion of Roma students is a recurring issue in eastern European countries). Overall, the **lack of inclusion of disadvantaged groups** into mainstream education is an issue in Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Slovakia and Sweden, while **disparities in educational outcomes of those students coming from the most disadvantaged backgrounds** remains a challenge for Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Luxembourg, Romania, Spain and Sweden.
- **Quality of Vocational Education and Training**
The overall quality of Vocation Education and Training systems in Bulgaria, France and Slovakia is evaluated as insufficient. Another issue is the **low participation** levels in adult learning, apprenticeships, lifelong learning and generally Vocational Education and Training in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Latvia and Italy. The Country Reports on Denmark, Latvia and Spain mention the **low attractiveness** of Vocational Education and Training in these countries. Finally, it is mentioned that Lithuania needs to improve its **adult learning programmes**.
- **Labour market relevance of education**
The Country Reports on Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Romania note important skills mismatches and shortages in these countries. The **digital skills** of the labour force in Austria and Portugal also need to be improved. The **labour market relevance of tertiary education** in Spain is considered insufficient given the low employability of University graduates in the country. The **labour market relevance of Vocational Education and Training** is still insufficient in Luxembourg. The **low skilled workers' participation in training** is a challenge in Malta and Lithuania, while **the proportion of high skilled workers** is insufficient in Lithuania. Finally, it is mentioned that **labour market segmentation** is too important in Poland.

2. Assessment of progress towards the Europe 2020 Strategy targets on education and training

The table below shows for each education-related topic mentioned in the Country Reports 2017 the assessment of progress made. Topics are listed for each country for their levels of “Satisfactory”, “Improving”, and the “Need to improve”. The countries/topics listed in the third column “Need to improve” might be tackled in the National Reform Programmes and Country Specific Recommendations 2017.

Theme	Satisfactory levels	Improving	Need to improve
Quality of education			
Provision of quality education		RO	BG, LT
Attractiveness of the teaching profession		CZ, SK	LT
Basic skills attainment	DK	SE	AT, HR, HU, LU, MT, RO, SK, ES
Computers usage by school students			DE
Early school leaving	AT, CY, FR, DE, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, NL, PO, PT, SI, SE	BE, HR, CZ, DK, FI, ES	EE, HU, MT, RO, SK,
Education outcomes	DK	IT, PT, SE	CY, HU, SK, ES
Education reforms		BG, DK, IT	HR, SK
Infrastructure in education			LT, MT
Measures to prevent dropout in early school		RO	
Public investment			DE
Share of top/low achievers			BE, LT
Teacher shortages			BE
Investment in education			
Investment in education	CY		BE, BG, DE
Investment in lifelong learning and Vocational Education and Training			FI

Public investment planning			LT
Public/private investment in research and development	EE		AT, CY, HR, DE, FI, HU, IE, IT, LV, LT, LU, MT, NL, PO, PT, ES, SE
Underfinancing of higher education and research			IT, LV, ES
Quality of Higher Education and Research			
Attractiveness of research careers			EE
Consolidation of research institutions		LV	
Higher education quality standards			LT
Policy measures supporting research and innovation			SK
Proportion of graduates in fields most related to innovation			CY
Public research			IE, LV
Quality of science and innovation' outputs			PO
Research and innovation system		MT	LT
Scientific excellence			EE, SK
Tertiary education attainment	AT, CY, EE, FI, DE, HU, LV, LT, LU, NL, PO, RO, SI, SE	BE, CZ, DK, IT, ES	HR, IE, MT, PT, SK
Private/public developments in higher education and performance-based funding			
Commercialisation of University research outputs			DK, EE, BE (to some extent)
Cooperation between businesses and University		DK,	CZ, EE, PT, SK, ES
Performance based funding for public research bodies and private sector investment in research and development			ES
Performance-based funding in higher education			BG
Promotion of private investment in R&D		EE	

Research and Development (R&D)			
Coordination and Implementation of research and innovation policies			LT, SK
R&D intensity		BE, CZ, DK, SK	IE, NL, RO, SI
Inclusive education			
Inclusiveness in compulsory education			CZ
Participation of disadvantaged groups or minorities and inclusion of the most disadvantaged (in particular with a migrant background) into mainstream education		BG	FR, HU, SK
Refugees and migrants' integration in education			AT, SE
Educational achievements of disadvantaged groups			AT, BE, LU, RO, ES, SE
Early childhood education		FI	
Educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged groups			HU, ES
Performance gap between non-immigrants and first or second generation immigrants			AT, DK, DE
Quality of education for disadvantaged groups			BG, RO, SE
Quality of Vocation Education and Training			
Adult learning programmes			LT
Apprenticeship system		DK, GB	
Attractiveness of Vocational education and Training		DK, LV, ES	
Dropout in Vocational Education and Training		EE	
Participation in adult learning and apprenticeships			IT
Participation in Lifelong learning	EE,	MT	BG, LV
Participation in Vocational Education and Training			CY, DK
Vocational Education and Training system		BE, LV	BG, FR, SK
Labour market relevance of education			
Digital skills of the labour force	DK		AT, PT

Employability of University graduates			ES
Labour market participation of the low skilled			MT
Labour market relevance of education		SK	
Labour market relevance of tertiary education		BG, IT	ES
Labour market relevance of Vocational education and Training			LU
Labour market segmentation			PO
Proportion of high-skilled workers			LT
Skills mismatches/shortages		GB	BE, BG, HR, LV, LT, PT, RO
Training of low-skilled workers rate			LT

Table 1 CSEE-ETUCE own elaboration, March 2017

3. Overview of the Country Reports 2017 by country

The table below quotes for each country the exact mentioning of the Country Reports 2017 on education and training issues. This is organised on the basis of the assessment of progress made on the implementation of the Country Specific Recommendations 2016 (2016 CSRs), of the efforts towards the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy targets.

Country	Country Report 2017 in the education and training field
Austria EN – AT	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Austria made some progress in improving the labour market participation of women as well as the educational achievements of disadvantaged young people.”p.1</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “Austria has already reached its targets on tertiary education attainment and limiting early school leaving. (...) However, more effort is needed to (...) increase research and development expenditure”p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “The recent inflow of migrants into Austria and the increasing number of recognised refugees makes it all the more important to integrate them into the labour market and in education successfully.”p.3</p> <p>“Basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics continue to deteriorate (...) Austria faces challenges in meeting the increasing demand for computer specialists and digitally skilled employees. Parents’ socioeconomic status and their eventual migrant background continue to have a major influence on their children’s education results. In 2015, first generation immigrant students are 3 times more likely than native born students to be low achievers in science and 3 times more likely to leave school early before completing upper secondary education.”p.3</p>
Belgium EN – FR – NL	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “There is also some progress (...) on vocational training and education reforms, also with regard to disadvantaged groups.”p.1</p>

On EU2020 targets: “Belgium is broadly on track to reach the targets for R&D intensity, reducing early school leaving, and increasing tertiary educational attainment” p.1

General remarks: “While skills mismatches represent a significant part of the overall mismatch between supply and demand in the Belgian labour market, other factors such as low geographical and job mobility and language skills may compound the issue” p.2

“key challenges are the educational inequality and the declining trend in the share of top-performing pupils. Meanwhile, the share of low-achievers is on the rise. Pupils' performance is strongly linked to their socioeconomic background, in particular for those with a migrant background. Addressing educational inequality will thus require a broad policy response going beyond the educational system. The strong demographic pressure, in particular among disadvantaged groups, risks exacerbating infrastructure deficiencies and teacher shortages, notably in major cities” p.2

“the technological content of Belgium’s exports is behind that of its peers. Its high-quality public research system has not brought about an abundance of fast-growing firms in innovative sectors. Stimulating the adoption of digital technologies and higher human capital accumulation could further underpin productivity growth” p.2

“Insufficient investment in infrastructure, in particular in(...) education (...), and a low level of public investment in general limit productivity growth” p.3

Bulgaria
[EN – BG](#)

On the 2016 CSR: “Limited progress has been achieved regarding follow-up actions in the financial sector and improving banking and non-banking supervision, increasing the provision of quality education for disadvantaged groups” p.1

General remarks: “While labour market indicators are improving, there is unused employment potential with a high rate of inactivity, long-term unemployment and young people not in employment, education or training. Active labour market policies for these groups are insufficiently targeted. (...) Labour mismatches in skills, (...) represent further challenges. In addition, insufficient provision of quality education, low participation in lifelong learning, and social disparities pose challenges” p.2

“The education system does not fully equip students with relevant skills, and access to quality education is unequal. The proportion of under-achievers in reading, mathematics and science (...) remains one of highest in the EU. Although funding for education is gradually increasing, it remains low compared with the rest of the EU. Children from families with lower socio-economic status, particularly Roma families, do not enjoy equal educational opportunities, including in early childhood. (...) However, a major educational reform has started with the implementation of the Pre-School and School Education Act. Vocational education and Training is being reformed but its quality as well as cooperation with business and social

	<p>partners are insufficient. Performance-based funding in higher education seeks to improve quality and labour market relevance” p.2</p>
<p>Croatia EN – HR</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “ It is on track in terms of (...) reducing early school leaving and reducing poverty and social exclusion. However, this is less the case for targets on tertiary education attainment and employment rates, R&D investment” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “The education and social protection systems still suffer from structural weaknesses. Lack of basic skills makes transitions into employment difficult. The awaited reform of the education system has been delayed, and efforts to equip the workforce with the skills needed in the labour market remain insufficient” p.3</p>
<p>Cyprus EN – CY</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “Cyprus has either reached or is making progress towards (...) reducing early school leaving and increasing higher education attainment levels. However, progress on (...) investment in research and development (...) remains limited” p.1</p> <p>General remarks: “While spending on education is above the EU average, education outcomes are relatively poor and participation in Vocational education and Training is low. The higher education attainment rate is very high, but there is a relatively low proportion of graduates in fields most related to innovation” p.3</p>
<p>Czech Republic EN – CZ</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Substantial progress has been achieved (...) with a new career system and salary increases for teachers, as part of efforts to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession” p.1</p> <p>“Some progress has been achieved with the reform aimed at making education more inclusive” p.1</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “the Czech Republic has either reached or is making good progress towards its targets in (...) R&D (...) and tertiary education. (...) While the early school leaving rate remains low in international comparison, it has increased slightly over the past years and there are marked regional disparities” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “Reform measures aimed at improving the inclusiveness of compulsory education started to be implemented in 2016. (...) inclusion of Roma children in mainstream education remains limited” p.2</p> <p>“still faces challenges (...) particularly in relation to cooperation between businesses and research institutes” p.3</p>
<p>Denmark EN – DK</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Some progress has also been made on incentivising cooperation between businesses and Universities” p.1</p>

On EU2020 targets: “Denmark has either reached or is making good progress (...) on (...) R&D (...) early school leaving, tertiary education” p.2

General remarks: “The growing lack of workers with a vocational education constitutes a challenge for some sectors, in particular for the construction sector. Recent reforms of active labour market policies and educational reforms seek to address this issue. In 2016, tripartite negotiations resulted in employers committing to create 8 000-10 000 additional apprenticeship places by 2025, with the overall aim of improving the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and thereby meeting the demanded skills composition of workers. Furthermore, in the area of digitally-skilled workforce, the share of ICT specialists has been steady in the last years” p.2

“The government has introduced a series of policy measures with the overall purpose of improving refugees' integration into the labour market (...). Focus is on early intervention, individual skills assessment and job-oriented integration programmes. A cash bonus scheme applies for companies that hire refugees” p.2

“School education outcomes in Denmark are above the EU average. According to the OECD PISA 2015, Danish students perform better than the OECD average in terms of reading, mathematics and science. (...) the situation of students with a migrant background continues to be of concern. There is a large performance gap between non-immigrants and first-generation immigrants. Furthermore, second-generation do not appear to be catching up with natives without a migrant background” p.2-3

“In 2014, the Productivity Commission pointed to a broad range of possible impediments to productivity growth, including (...) unexploited potential to foster the commercialisation of University research outputs due to certain regulatory barriers in the relation with businesses” p.3

Estonia
[EN – EE](#)

On EU2020 targets: “Estonia is generally performing well on education and training. Estonia has high rates of tertiary education attainment and performs well in international skills surveys. Also, participation in lifelong learning is above the EU average. However, early school leaving remains above the Europe 2020 target” p.1

“Overall, the importance for Estonia of strategic investment in research and development remains high” p.2

“Some progress was made on promoting private investment in research, development and innovation, including by strengthening cooperation between academia and businesses” p.2

“On education, Estonia has already reached its tertiary education target, although with a significant gender gap in favour of women. The early school leaving target remains a source of concern” p.2

	<p>“The drop-out in vocational education has improved” p.2</p> <p>“Still-low business investment in technological development and weak commercialisation of research achievements remain challenges for productivity growth, for increasing the value-added of exports of goods and for strengthening potential output. The volume of contract research between academia and businesses increased in 2015, but the cooperation between the two sectors remains limited. This also resulted in a still-low level of patent applications. An entrepreneurial discovery process has not yet been relaunched. The low attractiveness of research careers and the relatively low level of scientific excellence are interlinked challenges” p.3</p>
<p>Finland EN – FI – SE</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “From 2017, the incentives to accept job offers have been strengthened: (...) the fees for early childhood education have been reduced, in particular for low-income parents” p.2</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “The early school leaving rate declined slightly in 2015 but it could be challenging to meet the target. Finland’s tertiary educational attainment rate continued its improving trend in 2015 and is already above the target. However, the very ambitious R&D target is likely to be missed, as R&D investment has decreased in recent years” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “need (...) to continue to invest in life-long learning and vocational training” p.3</p>
<p>France EN – FR</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Some progress has been made in improving the system of Vocational education and Training” p.2</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “France is performing well in (...) reducing early school leaving” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “Educational inequalities remain high and the Vocational education and Training system is not sufficiently adjusted to labour market needs. (...) educational inequalities linked to socioeconomic background are among the highest in the OECD. The system of initial Vocational education and Training does not lead to a satisfactory integration of young people in the labour market. Access to the continuous vocational training system is uneven for different categories of workers” p.3</p>
<p>Germany EN – DE</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Further strengthened domestic demand, including higher public investment, would increase Germany’s actual and potential growth (...) It would have a positive impact on average inflation, not least in the context of the current expansionary monetary policy” p.1</p> <p>“progress has remained limited on increasing public expenditure on education, research and innovation” p.1-2</p>

	<p>On EU2020 targets: "Germany is performing well on (...) reducing early school leaving (...), increasing tertiary education attainment, investment in research and development (R&D)" p.2</p> <p>General remarks: "The favourable budgetary position indicates available fiscal space, inter alia for providing additional funds (...) to increase public investment at all levels of government" p.2</p> <p>"The achievement gap in education between immigrants and non-immigrants remains wide" p.3</p> <p>"Computers usage by young Germans is comparatively low and many schools lack broadband access. Performance in digital public services is below average" p.3</p>
<p>Hungary EN – HU</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: "Limited progress has also been made in improving the (...) educational outcomes and participation by disadvantaged groups, in particular Roma, in inclusive mainstream education" p.1-2</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: "Hungary is performing well in (...) increasing (...) tertiary education (...) More effort is needed to increase R&D expenditure and reduce early school leaving" p.2</p> <p>General remarks: "Performance in providing basic skills remains weak (...) and the impact of pupils' socio-economic background on education outcomes is one of the highest in the EU. The concentration of disadvantaged pupils, in particular Roma, in certain schools is becoming more pronounced" p.3</p>
<p>Ireland EN</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: "Ireland is performing well on (...) early school leaving targets. More effort is needed in R&D investment, (...) and ambitious tertiary education goal" p.2</p> <p>General remarks: "Public R&D expenditure remains low. Public R&D intensity has declined since 2009 and continues to cause concern" p.3</p>
<p>Italy EN – IT</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: "Italy has already achieved its targets related to (...) early school leaving, (...). Some progress was also made towards achieving the tertiary education target. Conversely, progress is less visible on (...) R&D investment" p.1-2</p> <p>General remarks: "Education reform is ongoing but tertiary education remains largely underfunded and participation in adult learning and apprenticeships is low. The 2015 reform, if properly and swiftly implemented, is expected to improve school outcomes. In particular, strengthened apprenticeships and work-based learning aim to raise the labour-market relevance of education. However, participation in adult learning remains a persistent concern, in particular for those needing it most. In spite of recent partial measures, the higher education system suffers from significant underinvestment" p.3</p>

<p>Latvia EN – LV</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Some progress has been made in the consolidation of research institutions, (...) in improving vocational education, with the involvement of social partners” p.1-2</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “Latvia (...) is performing well on (...) reducing early school leaving, increasing tertiary education attainment (...). More effort is needed in R&D investment” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “The attractiveness of vocational education is being improved, but the curriculum reform is progressing slowly. Vocational schools are being modernised, but the curriculum reform aligning education with contemporary skills needs takes time and little progress was made in 2016. The regulatory framework for work-based learning has been adopted, but it has not been effectively implemented yet. Participation in lifelong learning remains low” p.2</p> <p>“Investment in research and innovation remains low. Public research relies on EU funds and its effectiveness is hampered by fragmentation and low internationalisation” p.2</p>
<p>Lithuania EN – LT</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “It has reached (...) the targets regarding (...) bringing down the share of early school leavers and increasing the share of the population having attained tertiary education. (...) However, more effort is needed (...) to increase private expenditure on research and development” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “Poor research and innovation outcomes, the mediocre quality of education and ineffective adult learning programmes weigh more heavily on Lithuania's productivity performance as the country becomes richer. They are also an obstacle to future growth as productivity gains are expected to come increasingly from knowledge-based activities. Improving public investment planning, increasing transparency and competition in public procurement, better coordination and implementation of research and innovation policies, and raising the quality of education provide opportunities to spur productivity growth” p.2</p> <p>“Skills shortages are high and risk becoming an important bottleneck to Lithuania's growth. The gap between the high-skilled and the low-skilled in terms of pay and employment opportunities is high and increasing in Lithuania, pointing to a widening skills shortage. Moreover, low coverage of active labour market policies means too few of the low-skilled get the training they need. As Lithuania's growth will increasingly depend on knowledge-based activities, ensuring the supply of skilled labour will be crucial to improve its living standard” p.2-3</p> <p>“Lithuania's education system outcomes are worsening and the system is inefficient (...) the proportion of low achievers has increased significantly in recent years. Despite high tertiary education attainment rates, the reported lack of high-skilled workers is increasing. Lithuania's education system has struggled to adapt to rapidly decreasing numbers of pupils and students and hence its education</p>

	<p>system is overstaffed and burdened with maintaining infrastructure that is too large for its needs. Furthermore, low salaries and limited opportunities for professional development hinder schools to attract talented graduates to replace retiring teachers. Higher education is marred by poor quality standards and financial incentives that promote oversize and inefficiency” p.3</p>
<p>Luxembourg EN – FR</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “Luxembourg is performing well in the areas of (...) reducing early school leaving and improving tertiary education attainment. By contrast, Luxembourg is still far from reaching its targets for investment in research and developments (R&D)” p.1</p> <p>General remarks: “Despite very high rates of tertiary education attainment, performance in providing basic skills is weak by international comparison and has worsened since 2012. The impact of the students’ socioeconomic background on their performance is one of the strongest in the EU, pointing to high educational inequality. Adapting Vocational education and Training to labour market needs remains challenging” p.3</p>
<p>Malta EN – MT</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Some progress has also been made in strengthening labour supply by improving access to and participation in lifelong learning, with a focus on the low-skilled” p.1</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “There appears to remain a gap with respect to the targets for (...) raising R&D expenditure, (...) reducing early school leaving, increasing the tertiary education attainment” p.1</p> <p>General remarks: “Access and participation in lifelong learning have generally improved, but labour market participation by the low-skilled remains low. While educational attainment is increasing, the rate of early school leaving remains high and basic skills attainment among young people is still weak” p.2</p> <p>“Major steps have been taken to strengthen the research and innovation system. Nevertheless, room for progress in filling knowledge and skill gaps is significant. In addition, infrastructure in general still faces challenges” p.2</p>
<p>Netherlands EN – NL</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “With regard to the fiscal-structural part of CSR 1, no progress has been made in increasing public and private R&D expenditure” p.2</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “the Netherlands is performing well on (...) early school leaving, and tertiary education attainment, while more effort is needed on R&D investment” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “Public R&D investment and expenditure on education is low compared to the top performers” p.1</p> <p>“The well-performing education system and scientific base of the Netherlands, which is marked an 'innovation leader', provides a sound basis for boosting</p>

	<p>innovation and growth capacity via education and R&D activities. Nevertheless, spending on education is substantially below that of top performers such as the Nordic countries, and the public R&D intensity is set to decline. Higher public expenditure on growth-friendly areas such as R&D and education has the potential to unlock investment in knowledge-based capital, including private R&D, and improve long-term growth potential” p.3</p>
<p>Poland EN – PO</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “Poland is performing well in the following areas: (...) tertiary education, reducing early school leaving (...). Progress is limited in R&D investment (...)” p.1</p> <p>General remarks: “Long-term economic prospects will depend on the country's capacity to move from the production of relatively low-technology goods to more advanced products and services. This will emphasise the importance of inclusive education that provides people with adequate skills and competences, and of improving the quality of higher education and applied scientific research” p.2</p> <p>“Labour market segmentation continues to be high with negative effects on productivity and the accumulation of human capital in the longer term. With unemployment at a record low, lifelong learning becomes even more crucial” p.3</p> <p>“The quality of science and innovation' outputs are still far below EU standards. R&D investment has been gradually increasing supported by public financing with a large role of the EU structural funds” p.3</p>
<p>Portugal EN – PT</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “Portugal is performing well (...) reducing early school leaving. There are still considerable obstacles in attaining the targets on (...) R&D investment, tertiary education attainment” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “School outcomes are improving but the skill level of the labour force, including digital, remains low. Tertiary attainment has stagnated below EU average and higher education offer is scattered. In spite of efforts made, obstacles to more structured University business cooperation and knowledge transfer remain, hampering innovation and the transition to a knowledge based economy” p.3</p>
<p>Romania EN – RO</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Some progress was made in tackling early school leaving and increasing the provision of quality education, including for Roma, whilst this still needs to bear fruits on the ground” p.1</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “Romania is performing well in the areas of (...) tertiary education (...). However, (...)research and development intensity, and early school leaving remain some distance away from their respective targets” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “The unequal provision of quality education weakens human capital potential. Underachievement in basic skills and the provision of quality education to disadvantaged groups, in particular students in rural areas and Roma,</p>

	<p>remains problematic. Persistently high early school leaving and low tertiary attainment do not meet the increasing need for a skilled labour supply against the background of persistent emigration. Measures to prevent drop-out are being implemented, but the availability of second chance programmes is not yet sufficient to reduce early school leaving” p.2</p>
<p>Slovakia EN – SK</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Some progress has been made (...) on (...) raising the attractiveness of the teaching profession through pay rises (...); limited progress has been achieved in (...) improving the cost effectiveness of healthcare, including Roma children in mainstream education” p.1</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “Slovakia is currently meeting — or is on track towards meeting — the prospective targets for the (...) R&D intensity (...). While a sufficient reduction in early school leaving (...) appears to be attainable by 2020, (...) indicators have deteriorated recently and more efforts are needed to reach the targets. The distance to the targets for (...) tertiary education remains significant but is progressively narrowing” p.1</p> <p>General remarks: “Inadequate educational outcomes and inequalities linked to socioeconomic background represent major obstacles to the improvement of human capital, with potential knock-on effects for skill levels and growth potential” p.1</p> <p>“Although steps have been taken to address weaknesses in the education and training system, some challenges remain. Students’ performance in basic skills has further deteriorated and educational inequalities — both from a socioeconomic and ethnic point of view — remain strong. A reform to support socially and ethnically inclusive education entered into force in 2016 but effective implementation will require additional effort and political commitment. Initial steps have been taken to improve the attractiveness of the teaching profession and Slovakia is preparing a reform at all education levels in order to enhance their quality and labour market relevance. The dual Vocational education and Training scheme, designed to meet the needs of industry, is now in its second year of implementation” p.2</p> <p>“Meanwhile, and in spite of rising R&D intensity, Slovakia's science base is still ranked below that of most other Member States. Business R&D spending and cooperation between the public sector, research institutions and business are stagnating. Policy measures supporting research and innovation are not effective and reforms are proceeding slowly” p.2-3</p>
<p>Slovenia EN – SI</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “Slovenia has already achieved its national targets to reduce early school leaving and to increase tertiary educational attainment. (...). In 2015, Slovenia moved further away from its R&D intensity target” p.1-2</p>
<p>Spain EN – ES</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “Progress was limited in improving the labour market relevance of tertiary education and in fostering University-business cooperation, as well as in</p>

	<p>increasing performance based funding for public research bodies and private sector investment in research and innovation” p.1</p> <p>On EU2020 targets: “The tertiary education attainment target is within close reach. While the country is still far from the targets for (...) early school leaving, the gaps were reduced substantially in 2015 and 2016. By contrast, there was little progress towards the targets for R&D investment” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “Simulations show that an increase in government expenditure (e.g. for higher education and R&D support) (...) would have limited impact on the growth of other euro area countries” p.1</p> <p>“Gaps in education outcomes are set to hamper future productivity growth. The average students' performance remains stable and Spain still has the highest share of early school leavers and low basic skills among adults in the EU, despite measures to improve the attractiveness of Vocational education and Training. Wide regional disparities in the performance of students remain. The employability of University graduates is relatively low” p.3</p> <p>“Innovation performance remains weak, despite some modest improvements. Expenditure for research and development as a share of GDP and innovation performance have both continued to decline. (...) Obstacles to cooperation between Universities and businesses remain” p.3</p>
<p>Sweden EN – SE</p>	<p>On EU2020 targets: “indicators where Sweden continues to perform well are (...) the rate of early school leaving, tertiary education attainment (...). Areas where progress was relatively weak in 2016 are (...) R&D targets” p.2</p> <p>General remarks: “A major challenge for the labour market is the integration of people with a migrant background, including those with relatively weak education and skill levels” p.1</p> <p>“School education outcomes have somewhat improved after years of deteriorating performance. Basic skills of the younger generation have improved, reversing previous negative trends (...) but levels are only around the EU average. Moreover, the performance gap between different social groups has widened. Despite recent measures, the education system does not appear to promote quality for all. The integration of newly-arrived migrant pupils warrants close monitoring” p.3</p>
<p>United Kingdom EN</p>	<p>On the 2016 CSR: “There has also been some progress on skills and childcare. The government has continued to expand and reform the apprenticeship system, including by preparing for the implementation of both the Apprenticeship Levy and the Institute for Apprenticeships. Skills mismatches are being addressed by the new Post- 16 Skills Plan, which is ambitious in intention but will depend on coherent, committed and timely implementation” p.1</p>

Table 2 CSEE-ETUCE own elaboration, March 2017