

Małgorzata Dziembala
Department of International Economic Relations
The Karol Adamiecki University of Economics in Katowice
md@ae.katowice.pl

INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION IN POLAND AND IN THE EU COUNTRIES - AS AN ELEMENT OF BUILDING MODERN LABOUR RESOURCES AND ENSURING SOCIAL COHESION

Abstract

Improvement of the level of education and of employees' qualifications and adjusting them to the requirements of today's economy – these are the basic actions that must be undertaken in order to enhance the competitiveness of labour resources. This paper analyses the education level of people in the EU countries, including Poland, as well as the level of unemployment in the context of the education of those who do not have a job. The regional differences in the scope of Poland's unemployed while taking into account their education level, was also indicated. However, the actions undertaken in order to improve the competitiveness of labour resources require relevant financial outlays. The volume of expenditures on education in the EU countries was also pointed out. In Poland, the source of financing education and of improving skills concerns also financial means coming from the European Social Fund.

Key words: Economic Integration, Educational Finance, Unemployment: Models, Duration, Incidence, and Job Search

Introduction

The requirements of today's economy enforce improvement in the competitiveness of labour resources on the European market through the improvement of their skills and qualifications. In relation to the above, the financial outlays on education shall go up and there should be some activity undertaken aiming at the improvement of the quality of education, as the education level of employees also determines their situation on the labour market. The important issues cover: enhancement of qualifications, updating of knowledge and obtaining of such skills by employees as to address the challenges of the European labour market as created by the global economy. Education and training constitute the core of the renewed Lisbon strategy (Modernizacja systemów..., 2006, p. 1). Education policy of particular EU countries including Poland, has to meet these challenges, however it is necessary to increase financial outlays in this sphere, as well as in the improvement of the quality of education. The financial means on the supporting of modernisation of education system and training also come from the European Social Fund that constitutes a significant instrument of financing the European Employment Strategy.

The aim of this paper is to present chosen indicators concerning education level of people in the European Union countries, as well as the volume of outlays and the financing sources of education in those countries and in their regions. In this context, there is discussed the meaning of the financial support granted under the European Social Fund for the improvement of human resources in Poland.

The level of education and the perspectives of employees on the labour market

The education level of employees determines their competitiveness. The higher it is, and the longer the education period, the greater are their chances for employment. In relation to the above, there are actions being initiated at the European level which are directed at constant improvement of knowledge, education, and at ensuring social cohesion.

The improvement of the quality and of the efficiency of education and of training systems, the facilitation of access as well as the opening up of the systems to the world, constitute the basic strategic goals that in 2001 the Education Ministers assumed for the coming decade (Report from the Education Council..., 2001). It is important to intensify the implementation of the actions (strategies) specified in the programme "Education and training 2010"¹ (Detailed work programme..., 2002, p. 3). It is indicated that the education and training system have both, social, and economic role to fulfil, and "*education and training are decisive elements that determine the potential of each country in relation to excellence, innovativeness and competitiveness. At the same time, they are an integral part of social dimension of Europe as they are intermediaries in transferring such values such as solidarity, equality of opportunities and social participation, and have positive impact on health, crime level, the level of entrepreneurship, natural environment, democracy and a general quality of life*" (Modernizacja systemów..., 2006, p. 1)².

Upon the enlargement of the EU, Poland has contributed significantly in terms of human resources, as in 2005 (according to the situation as of 1st January) the population of our country constituted 8,3% of the EU-25 population (and it was the sixth country in the EU with the highest number of inhabitants), and in our country there was a significant percentage of employable people, including young people, above the EU average value. In 2005, the young people, i.e. those under the age of 20 constituted 24,8% of Poland's population (the average for EU-25³: was 23,5%), those in the 20-59 age interval constituted 58,4% (for EU⁴-25: 55,7%)⁵ (Living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 10, p. 12).

However, the level of education varies according to sex as well as age. It shall be indicated that among young people, the highest percentage has got upper secondary education. In 2005, in Poland, 92% of women in the 25-34 age gap, had, at least, upper secondary education, whereas the percentage of men with the same education level was 91%, which represented a higher figure than the relevant figure for the EU-25 (Table 1).

¹ The programme endorsed in 2002, as a programme for the coming decade; it specified the most important challenges in the scope of education and training. Vocational training and training were also included in its scope according to the Copenhagen process (http://www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html, 29.06.2007). See the programme: Detailed work programme..., 2002).

² See also: Modernising education and training: a vital contribution to the prosperity and social cohesion in Europe (<http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11091.htm>, 29.06.2007).

³ Data for EU-25 for 2004.

⁴ Data for EU-25 for 2004.

⁵ Statistical data in this paper, if no other source is provided, it shall come from: The living conditions in Europe..., 2007.

Table 1. The percentage share of the population with upper secondary education (ISCED 3-6), according to specific age groups, in the EU countries, in the year 2005

Age,sex Countries	25-34 year olds		35-44 year olds		45-54 year olds		55-64 year olds	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
EU-25	79	76	72	73	63	70	50	62
Czech Republic	93	94	91	95	83	94	76	91
Cyprus	80	79	75	76	55	61	32	48
Estonia	92	85	97	93	93	89	81	78
Latvia	84	75	95	92	90	86	74	66
Lithuania	90	85	97	93	93	91	68	70
Hungary	85	84	79	83	70	82	54	68
Malta	38	48	23	38	11	23	9	19
Poland	92	91	89	90	83	84	66	74
Slovenia	92	90	84	83	71	78	60	79
Slovakia	92	93	91	94	81	90	69	84
Bulgaria	77	77	81	79	75	73	58	57
Romania	78	80	84	87	63	80	37	60

A word of explanation:

The EU-25 incorporates those countries that became members of the EU in the year 2004.

Source: The living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 28.

However, the existing human potential is not used properly, which is revealed in a relatively high unemployment rate in Poland. In 2005, the unemployment rate in the EU amounted to 8,8%, and Poland was at the top with a figure of 17,7%, and then came Slovakia (16,3%). The lowest unemployment rate was observed in Ireland (4,3%), and then in Luxembourg (4,5%), the United Kingdom (4,7%), the Netherlands (4,7%) and in Denmark (4,8%)⁶. On the other hand, in 2005, the employment rate in Poland amounted to 52,8% (for the population aged 15-64) and it was the lowest among the member countries of the EU-25 - the employment rate for the EU-25 amounted to 63,8%. If we considered the employment rate in 2005 in Poland among the persons in the 55-64 age gap, it amounted to 27,2%, whereas for the EU-25 it was 42,5% (Living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 44)⁷.

The situation of individual people on the labour market is determined by the level of their education and this fact is confirmed by statistical data. The lowest unemployment level can be observed among the people with higher education⁸. In 2005, the unemployment rate in the EU-25 countries among the people with higher education amounted to 5%, among the

⁶ It shall be indicated that unemployed people in Poland constituted 15,9% of all unemployed people in the EU-25 in 2005 and it was one of the highest values. A high number of unemployed people was also observed in Germany i.e. 3 892,7 thousand which constituted 20,4% of all the unemployed in EU-25 countries (calculations based on: Living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 52).

⁷ Employment rates represent persons in employment aged 15-64 as a percentage of the population of the same age. Quoted following: Living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 44.

⁸ In this paper particular education levels are related to the following classification ISCED97:

- less than upper secondary – corresponds to primary level (ISCED 1) and lower secondary (ISCED 2) education. Upper secondary education – refers to ISCED 3 as well as post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4). Tertiary education (university and non-university programmes) refers to ISCED 5-6. Quoted from: Living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 8.

people with upper secondary education it was 9,3%, and among people with less than upper secondary education it was 12,1%. In Poland, the unemployment rate among people with higher/tertiary education amounted to 7,1%. Relevant data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The unemployment rate (in %) – according to the level of education in the EU-25 and in Bulgaria and Romania

Countries	Unemployment rate	Unemployment rate among people with the following level of education:		
		less than upper secondary	upper secondary	tertiary
Belgium	8,4	13,9	8,5	4,4
Czech Republic	7,9	26,7	7,2	2,3
Denmark	4,8	7,4	4,5	3,7
Germany	9,5	19,2	11,1	5,5
Estonia	7,9	14,5*	9,2	4,0*
Greece	9,8	8,8	11,8	7,8
Spain	9,2	11,0	8,8	6,8
France	9,7	13,2	8,2	6,4
Ireland	4,3	7,0	4,0	2,5
Italy	7,7	9,1	7,0	6,0
Cyprus	5,3	6,0	5,5	4,4
Latvia	8,9	15,1	9,1	4,2
Lithuania	8,3	14,5*	9,3	4,0*
Luxemburg	4,5	6,4	3,8	3,5
Hungary	7,2	14,3	6,9	2,7
Malta	7,3	9,6	:	:
The Netherlands	4,7	7,3	4,3	2,9
Austria	5,2	10,2	4,4	2,7
Poland	17,7	26,9	19,1	7,1
Portugal	7,6	7,8	8,0	6,3
Slovenia	6,5	9,3	6,9	3,2*
Slovakia	16,3	53,2	14,4	5,1
Finland	8,4	14,3	8,8	4,4
Sweden	7,8	14,0	7,1	4,8
United Kingdom	4,7	8,0	4,5	2,5
Bulgaria	10,1	19,4	9,2	4,3
Romania	7,7	6,7	8,0	3,9

A word of explanation:

* unsure or unreliable data

: no data provided

In the UK, the GCSE „0” levels are included under the ISCED 3.

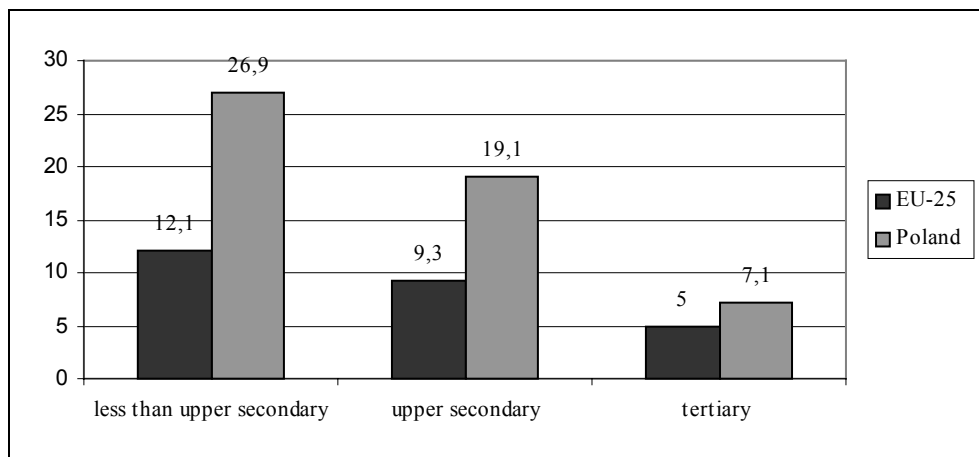
Source: the list compiled on the basis of: The living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 52, p. 56.

As the above data clearly shows, in 2005, the lowest rate of unemployment amongst the people with higher education was observed in the Czech Republic: 2,3%, and the highest one was in Greece and it amounted to 7,8%. The highest unemployment rate was observed in

the EU-25 among the people not having upper secondary education, however this tends to vary among the individual countries. The lowest unemployment rate among the people with this type of education was recorded in 2005 in Cyprus (6%), and the highest was in Slovakia 53,2%. In Poland, the unemployment level amongst the people not having upper secondary education, amounted to 26,9%, similarly, as in the Czech Republic (26,7%). The situation on the labour market in Germany requires special attention, where the unemployment rate amounted to 9,5%, and among the group having poorest education it constituted as much as 19,2%. There are relatively substantial differences in the unemployment rate between the people with the highest and the lowest education level in the Czech Republic and Slovakia⁹. In the context of the groups analysed according to the education level, the unemployment rate in Poland, was higher than average for the EU-25 countries. The high unemployment rate among the people not having upper secondary education draws our attention, as it amounts to 26,9% (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The unemployment rate (in %) in the EU-25 countries and in Poland according to obtained level of education (2005)

%



Source: own compilation on the basis of: *The living conditions in Europe...*, 2007, p. 56.

If we considered the unemployment rate in the context of sex, then some significant differences could be pointed out. In 2005, the unemployment rate among women for the EU-25 amounted to 9,9%, whereas among men it amounted to 7,9%. However, we can see that this did not represent a trend, when we examine the examples of the individual countries¹⁰. Relevant data can be found in Table 3.

⁹ See also: *The living conditions in Europe...*, 2007, p. 57.

¹⁰ In some EU countries the unemployment rate among men was higher than among women and this concerned the following countries: Sweden - the unemployment rate among women was lower (7,7%) than among men (7,9%); the Czech Republic (unemployment rate among women: 4,3%, men: 5,1%), Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Bulgaria and Romania, 2005 (*The living conditions in Europe...*, 2007, p. 52).

Table 3. The unemployment rate (in %) according to achieved education level among women and men in the EU-25 countries (2005), and in Bulgaria and Romania

Countries	Unemployment rate - men		Unemployment rate - women	
	Less than upper secondary	Tertiary	Less than upper secondary	Tertiary
EU-25	11,1	4,5	13,5	5,6
Belgium	11,9	4,3	17,1	4,6
Czech Republic	30,0	2,1	24,4	2,7
Denmark	7,3	3,5	7,5	3,8
Germany	20,9	5,2	17,2	6,0
Estonia	:	:	:	:
Greece	5,9	4,6	14,1	11,6
Spain	8,3	5,3	16,0	8,3
France	12,5	6,2	13,9	6,6
Ireland	7,1	2,5	6,6	2,5
Italy	7,3	4,4	12,8	7,7
Cyprus	5,2	3,3	7,2	5,6
Latvia	14,5	:	16,4	4,2*
Lithuania	14,8*	4,2*	14,1*	3,9*
Luxemburg	5,3	3,0*	7,7	4,2*
Hungary	15,6	2,3	12,9	3,0
Malta	8,7	:	12,1	:
Netherlands	6,4	3,0	8,4	2,8
Austria	10,6	2,5	9,8	3,1
Poland	26,6	6,0	27,2	8,0
Portugal	6,8	5,6	9,0	6,8
Slovenia	9,9*	3,2*	8,7*	3,2*
Slovakia	58,4	4,5	48,4	5,7
Finland	13,2	3,9	15,9	4,8
Sweden	12,6	5,1	16,0	4,5
United Kingdom	9,5	2,8	6,5	2,3
Bulgaria	18,8	4,4	20,3	4,2
Romania	8,4	3,5	4,9	4,2

A word of explanation:

* unsure or unreliable data

: no data provided

In the UK, the GCSE „0” levels are included under the ISCED 3.

Source: The living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 56.

As the Table 3 clearly shows, in 2005, the unemployment rate among women with tertiary education was higher than among men with the same education. Only in Ireland no difference was observed in the rate of unemployment in the context of sex. In the following countries: the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, the unemployment rate was higher among men than was among women with higher education¹¹.

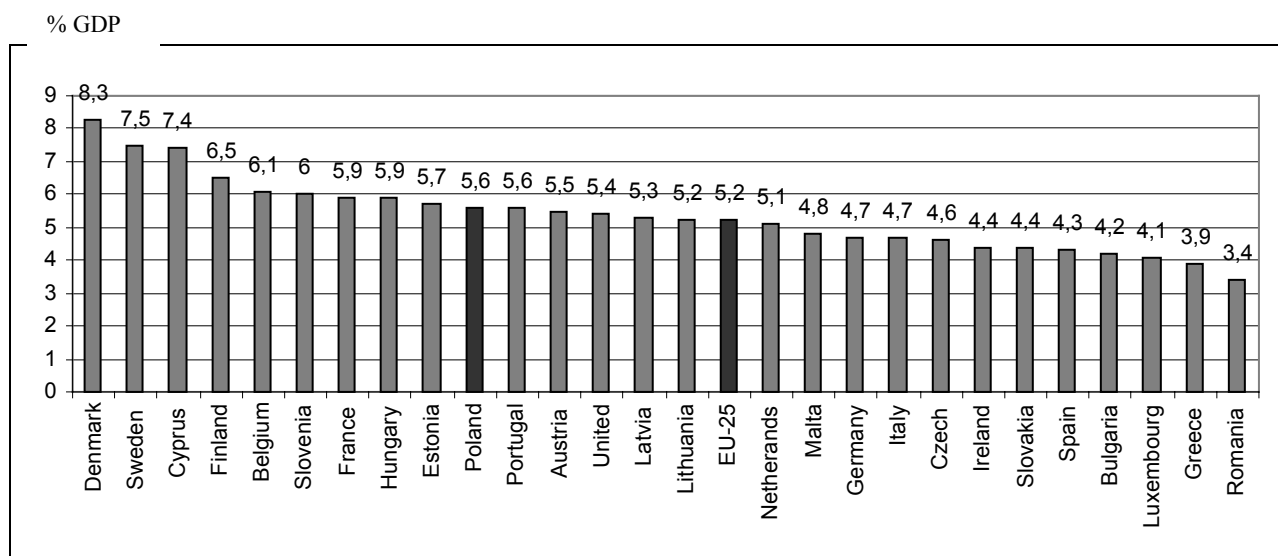
¹¹ The countries for which the data is not reliable were not considered.

The action aiming at the improvement of workers' qualifications and at their updating shall be undertaken as it may protect the workers from being excluded from the labour market. In Poland, the unemployed are mainly the people with poor education and with qualifications not adjusted to the requirements of the labour market. The unemployment particularly affects the people with vocational education or with poorer education. Those people do not have sufficient qualifications, and on top of that, the said qualifications are being lowered – as a result of economic transformation, low ability to adjust to the requirements of the labour market on the part of workers with poor qualifications, poor participation in lifelong learning, and also the mobility problems of those people. Then, along the activation of certain actions for the unemployed, there shall be undertaken those actions aiming at the improvement of the level of education (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki..., 2007, p. 15) (Sektorowy Program Operacyjny Rozwój ..., 2004, p. 100, pp. 108-109).

The expenditure on education in the European Union countries

The undertaking of action directed at education and at the improvement of the quality of education shall also result in the enhancement of labour resources. However, relevant financial expenditure has to be made and well distributed. The volume of financial outlays on education incurred by specific member countries of the EU is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Total (the ISCED 0-6) public expenditure on education as a percentage of the GDP (2003)

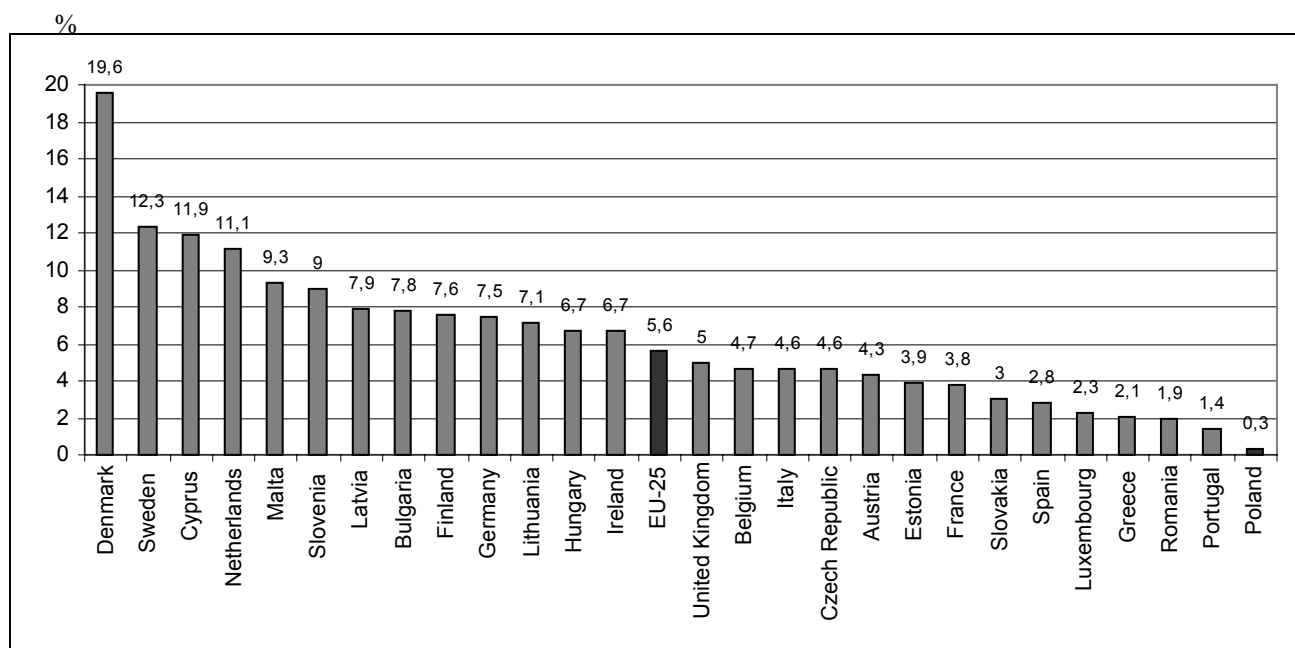


Source: compiled on the basis of: The living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 40.

The volume of public expenditure on education varies across the countries. In 2003, the highest spending of this type, (in terms of the share in country's GDP) was made in Denmark, and then in Sweden and Cyprus, where it exceeded 7%, and the lowest was in Romania as it amounted to 3,4% of the GDP of that country. In Poland, the expenditure on education amounted to 5,6% of the GDP.

However, when we consider the volume of support for students in 2003, Denmark, Sweden, Cyprus and the Netherlands were also at the top, as the spending constituted over 11% of these countries' public spending on education, and Poland was at the bottom, as the spending amounted to just 0,3% (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Financial aid for students as a percentage of total public spending on education (total ISCED 0-6), 2003



Source: compiled on the basis of: The living conditions in Europe..., 2007, p. 40.

Nonetheless, it is important to increase the level of outlays on education. It is important to obtain financial means for this purpose, the involvement of individuals, households and employers in the investment on education (Modernizacja systemów..., 2006, pp. 2-3). However, the financing may come from various administrative levels: from the central, regional as well as the local level¹² (Table 4).

Table 4. The sources of public funding on education according to administrative levels before and after fund transfers in 2001 (the ISCED 0 to 6) in the EU countries as well as in Bulgaria and Romania

Countries	Central level		Regional level		Local level	
	Initial funding	Final funding	Initial funding	Final funding	Initial funding	Final funding
EU-25	50,3	46,7	25,3	25,6	24,4	27,8
Belgium	17,1	17,1	79,1	79,1	3,8	3,8
Czech Republic	30,6	30,6	11,8	11,8	57,7	57,7
Denmark	45,4	47,9	6,7	7,7	47,9	44,4
Germany	9,7	8,0	72,6	70,2	17,7	21,8
Estonia	62,2	35,2	(-)	(-)	37,8	64,8
Greece	95,7	91,7	4,3	6,3	0,0	2,0
Spain	15,8	15,8	79,6	79,6	4,6	4,6
France	75,2	73,9	8,8	10,0	15,9	16,0
Ireland	99,8	84,9	(-)	(-)	0,2	15,1
Italy	82,5	81,9	6,2	5,6	11,4	12,4

¹² See: Key data on education in Europe 2005..., 2005, pp. 179-181.

Cyprus	100	100	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)
Latvia	31,4	31,4	(-)	(-)	68,6	68,6
Lithuania	37,9	37,9	(-)	(-)	62,1	62,1
Luxemburg	74,8	71,9	(-)	(-)	25,2	28,1
Hungary	74,1	37,4	(:)	(:)	25,9	62,6
Malta	100	100	(-)	(-)	(-)	(-)
Netherlands	92,6	78,8	0,0	0,0	7,4	21,2
Austria	72,7	49,8	7,6	29,0	19,7	21,2
Poland	24,4	23,2	1,2	1,3	74,4	75,6
Portugal	95,1	95,1	4,9	4,9	(:)	(:)
Slovenia	(:)	(:)	(:)	(:)	(:)	(:)
Slovakia	99,8	99,8	(-)	(-)	0,2	0,2
Finland	56,9	31,8	(-)	(-)	43,1	68,2
Sweden	(:)	(:)	(:)	(:)	(:)	(:)
United Kingdom	39,1	34,1	(-)	(-)	60,9	65,9
Bulgaria	41,0	41,0	(-)	(-)	59,0	59,0
Romania	30,7	30,7	(-)	(-)	69,3	69,3

A word of explanation:

(:) data not available

(-) not applicable

Initial funding represents the share of total educational resources made available by each administrative level. Final funding represents the share of total expenditure directly undertaken at each level. The two types of funding cover direct public expenditure and the transfers to the private sector.

Source: The key data on education in Europe 2005..., 2005, pp.180-181.

Nevertheless, the situation among the individual countries varies with the financing of education at the various administrative levels. The regional level has a significant role in the financing of education only in the following countries: Belgium, Germany and Spain, where in 2001 the volume of initial funding, as well as the final funding was higher than 70%. However, in Poland, as well as in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Romania - to a large extent, it is the local level that tends to transfer and use up the funds for education.

The situation of Poland in the scope of education is favourable if we take into account the results of the analysis prepared by the World Bank. According to *Knowledge Assessment Methodology*¹³, in the field of: education and human resources Poland was highly evaluated, and it was ranked 14th among the 26 EU countries¹⁴. As compared with 1995, the situation of Poland in the field of education and in human resources has improved. The best country among the analysed EU countries was Denmark, then Finland, and Sweden. After Poland were ranked, among others, Germany, Austria and from the new members: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Cyprus and Romania. Therefore, the position of Poland shall be strengthened, with the awaited increases in the expenditure on education, on implementation and on the spreading of lifelong learning. In the context of developing knowledge

¹³ 2006 (KAM). More info: http://info.worldbank.org/etools/kam2/KAM_page5.asp , 27.06.2007. The World Bank prepared indexes: Knowledge Index and Knowledge Economy Index in which education area is an integral element of elaborated indexes. The analysis covered 132 countries i.e. most of OECD countries and over 90 developing countries.

¹⁴ Lack of value in the education are for Malta. Education area and human resources are: the average of the normalized scores of the variables: adult literacy rate, secondary enrolment, tertiary enrolment. (http://info.worldbank.org/etools/kam2/KAM_page7.asp , 27.06.2007).

economy there is lot to make in Poland and the investment in education is only one of the elements.

Differentiation of educational activity at the regional level

The improvement of education level of workers, as well as the promoting of lifelong learning becomes a significant step on the way of the development of competitiveness at the regional level. The new economy requires workers to have new qualifications and skills. If we consider the United States (50 States and the Washington District) and the EU-27 regions, then in the 18 states more than 30% of the inhabitants had university education, whereas in the case of the 264 NUTS2 EU¹⁵ regions the same factor was achieved by just 3 regions, as is indicated in the recent Report on economic and social cohesion (Growing regions, growing Europe..., 2007, p. 83). The regions with the lowest GDP/per capita are also the ones in which a relatively low percentage of people have higher education. In 2005, in the least favoured regions, 14% of people had higher education (in the 25-64 age group), whereas in the other regions – more than 25%. There are regional differences within the member countries in the scope of the obtained education level of its inhabitants. However, they are more visible in the new member countries, where there are observed differences between respective capital cities, where educated people tend to concentrate, and other regions of the countries (Growing regions, growing Europe..., 2007, pp. 83-86).

There are some differences observed in the obtained education level between individual age groups. In 2006, In Poland, in the cities, the percentage of the people with higher education amounted to 19,3%, and in the rural areas it constituted 6,7% (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki..., 2007, p. 49). If we considered the education level of the unemployed, then, the highest percentage of the unemployed had basic vocational and lower secondary education, and the biggest share of the unemployed with basic vocational education, i.e. over 32%, was recorded at the end of the IV quarter of the year 2006 in the following voivodeships: kujawsko-pomorskie, lubuskie, małopolskie, podkarpackie, pomorskie, wielkopolskie (Bezrobocie rejestrowane..., 2007) (Table 5).

Table 5. Share of the unemployed persons according to their education level in the total number of the unemployed (situation at the end of the IV quarter of 2006, in percentage, in individual voivodeships)

Voivodeships	With the following education				
	Tertiary	Secondary		Basic vocational	Lower secondary, primary and incomplete primary
		vocational*	general		
Poland	6,1	22,0	8,4	30,9	32,5
Dolnośląskie	5,4	22,0	7,4	30,0	35,2
Kujawsko-pomorskie	3,9	18,6	7,6	33,4	36,7
Lubelskie	8,8	25,2	10,2	28,5	27,4
Lubuskie	4,5	21,4	7,3	32,1	34,6
Łódzkie	6,3	20,8	9,3	28,1	35,5
Małopolskie	7,0	25,7	9,6	33,0	24,6
Mazowieckie	6,8	22,5	8,5	30,2	32,1
Opolskie	5,3	20,6	7,8	30,4	35,8

¹⁵ Not taking into account overseas departments of France.

Podkarpackie	6,9	24,4	8,3	33,9	26,7
Podlaskie	7,9	23,9	9,5	26,7	31,7
Pomorskie	5,0	20,6	8,9	32,1	33,4
Śląskie	6,4	21,9	7,6	30,9	33,2
Świętokrzyskie	8,1	24,7	9,4	31,9	25,9
Warmińsko-mazurskie	4,3	19,9	8,2	29,9	37,8
Wielkopolskie	5,4	22,4	7,8	33,1	31,2
Zachodniopomorskie	5,0	18,4	8,7	29,1	38,7

A word of explanation: * including post secondary schools

Source: own calculations on the basis of: Bezrobocie rejestrowane ..., 2007, pp. 48-49.

Differences among the local labour markets in Poland do exist, and they tend to be significant. The situation of the people living in the country and living in the city is also different and it is influenced by the education level obtained by those people. In order to temper the regional disproportions mobility needs to be increased, i.e. geographical mobility of the labour force, however the level of internal migration is very low. There is very little geographical mobility of people in the provinces: 10-11%. The reason for low internal migration in Poland is the high share of people employed in the agriculture sector. The mobility of people with low education level is also low – they are reluctant to change work, and the regional migration in Poland is hardly ever related to the taking up of a job by people who are unemployed. The low level of migration is also influenced by exogenous factors, such as the housing problems. Circular migration is poorly developed, sometimes travelling abroad prevails. The young people with highest qualifications tend to migrate abroad. (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki ..., 2007, pp.16-17) (Sektorowy Program Operacyjny Rozwój ..., 2004, p. 100, pp. 108-109).

Actions aiming at the improvement of qualifications of people shall also contribute to the increasing of the regional cohesion. However, it is important to ensure proper access to knowledge through, among others, various programmes, also facilitating youth exchange (Growing regions, growing Europe..., 2007, p. 171). The inequality in the access to education shall also be decreased; this concerns the inequality in the context of a place of residence, social groups, disabilities, and minority groups (Sektorowy Program Operacyjny Rozwój ..., 2004, p.125).

Due to there being an insufficient progress in education, the following point was made: *The member countries shall strive to make education and training a significant part of their national reform programmes in the context of the Lisbon strategy, and of the national strategic framework relating to structural funds and to the national strategies related to inclusion and social integration*” (Modernizacja systemów..., 2006, p. 9). The European Social Fund (ESF) is such a fund directed at the development of education and training.

The European Social Fund and its actions geared at the supporting of education and development of human resources

The actions aiming at the improvement of the human capital quality and the improvement of qualifications are supported by financial means coming from the European Social Fund. Between 2000-2006, the European Social Fund supported the following areas (Growing regions, growing Europe..., 2007, pp.111-112):

- improvement of the access of women to the labour market, to which 6% of funds' allo-

cation was directed,

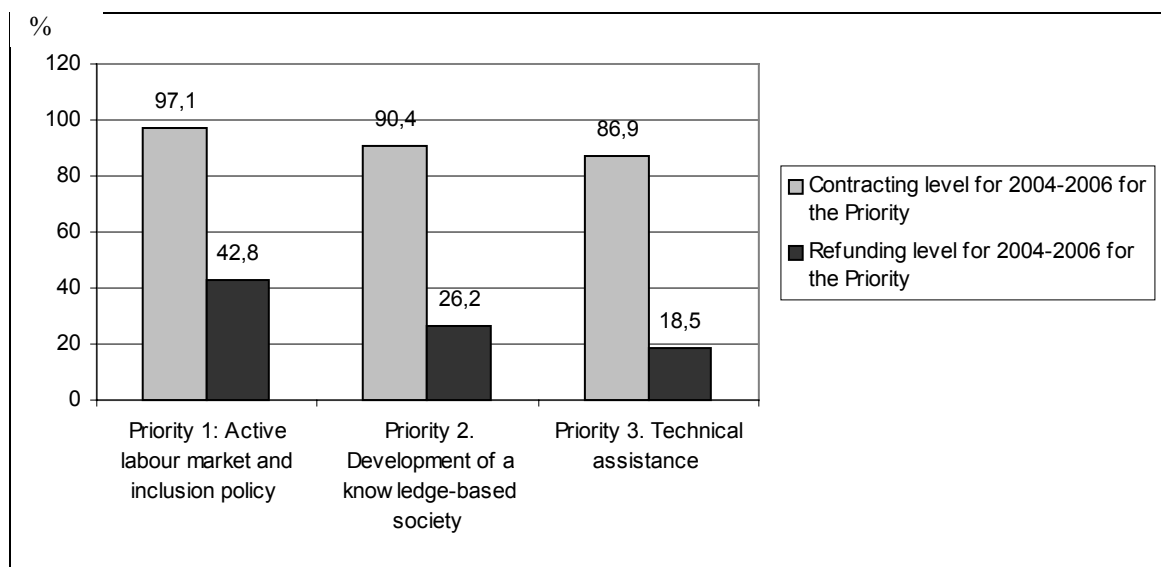
- adaptation – to which 22% of the Fund's means were directed,
- lifelong learning – 23% of the ESF's means,
- equal opportunities and social inclusion (18%),
- active labour market policies (30%).

In Poland, the means under the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), Integrated Regional Operational Programme (IROP), as well as the Community Initiative EQUAL are geared at the improvement of the qualifications of the people. Under the IROP, for the Priority concerning the development of human capital, EUR 598 655 828 was allocated, and the structural funds provided EUR 438 469 535 (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki ..., 2007, p. 97). The measures implemented under the IROP are coherent and complementing the implemented measures, as well as the ones realized under the SOP HRD.

The SOP HRD priority 2, called the Development of a knowledge-based society is co-financed from the Community funds in the amount of EUR 741 400 000, and including state funds. The total co-financing of the projects amounts to EUR 988 566 943 (Program Operacyjny Kapitał Ludzki ..., 2007, p. 96). The priority's goals include: the increasing of the access to education by raising education level, increasing the participation in lifelong learning, developing entrepreneurs' skills, facilitating knowledge transfer and cooperation among universities and entrepreneurs, and the strengthening of administrative capacity (Sektorowy Program Operacyjny Rozwój..., 2004, pp.182-183).

Under the Priority 2, there are promoted the actions related to the adjusting of the society and of people to knowledge society, as well as those connected with the improving of the qualifications of people. The 2006 performance of the SOP HRD presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Contracting and refunding level since the beginning of the implementation of the SOP HRD for the individual SOP HRD priorities (in percentage), according to the situation as at the end of 2006



Source: Raport z postępu wdrażania..., p. 20.

As can be shown, the level of funds contracting, since the beginning of the programme initiation is relatively high for the Priority 2 of this programme, as it amounted to 90,4% (according to data at the end of 2006), and 773 projects were realized (Raport z postępu

wdrażania..., p. 20, p. 37).

Conclusion

In the EU, there are promoted activities aiming at the lowering of unemployment, at activating the jobless persons, and, at the same time, at improving their employability - by making the people more active as far as education is concerned. The educational potential of Poland is significant, however it is necessary to increase the education quality, adjust it to the existing requirements, and to increase the attractiveness of education. This objective is also supported out of the European funds. As it has been illustrated, in effect of European funds' transfer to Poland, between the years 2004-2006, there were developed some 319 thousand work places (A.Cieślak-Wróblewska, 2007), and some 873 thousand people took advantage of the assistance (Europejski Fundusz Społeczny..., 2007).

The efficiency of the reform actions in the scope of education and training systems shall be improved, and as it is pointed out by the Commission it shall consist of: *„improvement in the sphere of management by cooperation in the field of education, in particular, at the regional and local levels, as due to it, the division of responsibility and of costs among relevant participants of the process is made possible (i.e. the individual institutions, public authorities, social partners, companies, sectorial organizations, social organizations etc.)”* (Modernizacja systemów..., 2006, p. 9).

The investing in training and education shall be undertaken on continuous basis, *„however in the mid-term, as well as in the long run, the individual, economic and social benefits significantly exceed the costs. As regards the individual reforms, there shall be continued the actions aiming at the achieving of the synergy effect among the goals of economic and social policy – i.e. those, that in real life tend to reinforce each other-”* (Modernizacja systemów..., 2006, p. 1). The investments in education may contribute towards the improvement of the competitiveness of labour and to the adjusting of the existing demand as reported by the employers; they shall also influence the improvement in the quality of the human resources, and as a result, they shall contribute to greater social cohesion. This action area shall be treated by the government and self-government of Poland as a priority issue.

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