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Access, quality and efficiency of tertiary education in Slovenia post-2000

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Summary

The document you have in your hands is working paper on tertiary education. Its purpose is to present selected topics in the field of tertiary education (expansion of the network of vocational colleges and higher education institutions, access to tertiary education, quality of study, efficiency of study, trends in enrolment and graduation in different fields, and higher education financing methods). The working paper analyses trends after the year 2000, offering an international comparison with the other EU-27 Member States. In some cases, because of lack of data, only the trends for Slovenia are shown, without an international comparison.

Some of the main findings of the analysis of the statistical data and indicators are represented below.

In Slovenia, the number of the vocational colleges and higher education institutions has been expanding. Although the number of vocational colleges expanded at a fast rate in the period 2000/2001 to 2006/2007, there was still in 2006/2007 one statistical region (Zasavska) without a vocational college. The number of higher education institutions and universities has been increasing too, but the study programmes on offer need to be tied in more closely to the needs of the national and regional economy.

In Slovenia, participation in tertiary education is high and still growing. This is a result of creating specialised vocational higher education colleges and higher education institutions, increasing the number of enrolment places and augmenting the share of young people enrolled on secondary education programmes enabling enrolment in tertiary education. In the 2007/2008 academic year, students accounted for 39.9% of the population in the 20–29 age group. According to this criterion, Slovenia ranked among the leading European countries. In 2006, the share of students aged 20–24 in tertiary education was, in Slovenia, one of the highest among European countries, and has further increased since. Access to tertiary education is significantly influenced by various forms of aid to students (social transfers to individuals in the form of scholarships and child allowances and subsidies on transport, food and accommodation). Although it has declined since 2000, financial aid to students as a percentage of total public expenditure on education at tertiary level in Slovenia is well above the European average. As in other European countries, the participation of young people in higher education is influenced by the educational level and occupation of the parents. Access for individuals from lower social strata to tertiary education has been stimulated by national scholarships. The number of national scholarships has been on the rise and this trend is expected to continue in future years too, in line with the Scholarship Act (2007).

Economic development is influenced not only by the population's participation in tertiary education, but also by the quality of such education. In the 2006/2007 academic year, the student/teaching faculty ratio and the student/faculty assistant ratio in Slovenia approached the standards set out in the Resolution on the National Programme of Higher Education of the Republic of Slovenia 2007-2010 (*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu visokega šolstva Republike Slovenije 2007-2010*), although there are considerable differences between individual higher education institutions. The ratio of the number of students to the number of teaching staff in tertiary education is widely used in international comparative tables as an indicator of the quality of tertiary education. In terms of the student/teaching staff ratio in tertiary education, Slovenia still lags behind the majority of European countries (including OECD members), the main factor in this being the relatively low annual expenditure on tertiary education institutions per student in EUR PPS. The tutoring system is gradually being introduced in higher education institutions in Slovenia and career centres are being developed, as well as certain other areas of quality. In the 2006/2007 academic year, one Slovenian university was listed on the Shanghai academic ranking of the world's top 500 universities. There is still, however, a need to pay attention to the employability of graduates and other areas of quality.

The low efficiency of study is one problem. The number of students repeating academic years in their later undergraduate studies has been declining, but in some higher education institutions is still relatively high. The average length of study is another problem. Study time could be reduced by introducing deferred tuition payment, extra fees for students who do not graduate within a prescribed time and by transformation of the student work system. Greater efficiency of study could be achieved through the introduction of tuition fees, although this would necessitate the introduction of student loans. In certain European and other countries, the system of deferred repayments has proved effective and has not had an adverse impact on access to tertiary education.

In the 2007 the number of graduates declined, mostly because of the decline of the number of graduates in the health and welfare field. The number of graduates declined also in the field of engineering, manufacturing and construction. Enrolment trends in the different fields are more encouraging, between the academic years 2006/2007 and 2007/2008, growth in the number of engineering, manufacturing and construction students was the highest in absolute and relative term. Also the number of science, mathematics and computing students and the number of health and welfare students grew up. Still, in Slovenia, the share of social sciences, business and law students and graduates among the tertiary graduates is one of the highest among the European countries.

Goals in tertiary education could also be achieved by modifying the system of financing higher education institutions from public resources. A share of the public funding allocated to higher education institutions could be tied to the fulfilment of targets relating to, for example, the quality of study, the number of scientific articles published, the international mobility of students and academic staff, etc., on the model of some other European countries.