

## Realization of the social goals of the Europe 2020 strategy in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc

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**Abstract:** *The Europe 2020 Strategy has Social goals for the present decade. In order to measure progress in their implementation, the European Union has developed, inter alia, A set of synthetic indicators that make it possible to compare achievements both at national and at Community level. The aim of the study is to the evaluation of these targets by the countries of the former Eastern bloc based on synthetic indexes established for their measurements. The research period are years 2010-2015. In the article, the method for analysis of legal acts, statistical data, index method, comparative analysis and the scale of “positive” ratings determining the level of achievements were applied. It allowed to determine which countries in which area and to what extent they achieved the set social goals.*

**Keywords:** *social goals, strategy Europe 2020, countries of the former Eastern bloc, achievements.*

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** *socialiniai tikslai, strategija Europa 2020, buvusio Rytų bloko šalys, pasiekimai.*

### Introduction

The Union *Lisbon Strategy* from years 2000-2010, despites its primacy of the treaty's principle of sustainable and balanced development was not at all a sustainable development strategy. It had a too big orientation on economy/business (which, paradoxically caused inefficiency also in this area), and a too small orientation on social and environmental issues. It was emphasized that the economy is not only

business, but also normal citizens, a complex multi-dimensional agenda. Due to this, it was postulated that there is a need to change proportions between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the strategy through strengthening the last two, so as to ensure benefits to all the citizens from its implementation. For this reason, it was taken care of that the strategy *Europe2020* (2010) chooses three mutually connected and supporting priority areas (smart growth, sustainable growth, inclusive growth) and that they fit well into the idea of a durable and balanced development basing on these three pillars (Sulmicka, 2011).

The subject of research in this article are social goals of this strategy specified for the current decade. Wanting to evaluate the progress in their completion, the European Union has elaborated among all a set on synthetic indexes, enabling the comparison of achievements in this scope, both on a national level, as well as on a union level. The results of the measurements provide the basis for formulating recommendations for individual member states for the follow-up needed to achieve the targets. Hence their conduct is so important. This has determined the purpose of the article, which is to evaluate the achievement of the objectives of the *Europe 2020 Strategy* by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (the so-called former Eastern Bloc; there are 11 of them) in the background of the EU. These countries, in the moment of joining the EU, have distinguished from the current member states not only with the economic level of development, but social as well, which is why it is worth to examine if the situation has become better for them in this area. In addition, among the available scientific publications on the implementation of social EU objectives, there are no such (Staničková 2017, Staničková 2017a, Stec, Grzebyk 2016, Balcerzak 2015, Balcerzak 2015a, Łatuszyńska, Fate 2016), which refer strictly to these countries in such a wide range and research period, as made in this article. Therefore, this article complements the research gap that has been identified and the applied method of evaluation extends the spectrum of research methods. Wanting to present the achievements of these countries in this field, the chosen indexes (derived from official statistics) corresponding to social goals in the years 2010-2015 have been analyzed. This made it possible to formulate conclusions about the extent to which they were able to meet their EU commitments and to pursue their own goals in this area.

### **Social indexes of the Europe 2020 strategy**

As mentioned above, one of the priority areas is inclusive growth, a growth driven by a high level of employment, ensuring economic, social and territorial cohesion. Such growth requires aiming to professionally activate the biggest number of people possible. Employment is treated as the most demanded way counteracting social exclusion. However, as not everyone is able to work and obtain income allowing for a worthy life, this is why a program to combat poverty based on a social solidarity is targeted at such groups (Strategy indicators Europe 2020, Kawiorska, Witoń 2017, Levitas 2011).



The inclusive growth area has been assigned integrated guidelines of a social character. Namely: increasing the labor force participation rate and limiting structural unemployment; developing the resources of a skilled workforce matching the needs of the labor market, promoting the quality of employment and lifelong learning; improving the efficiency of education systems and training on all levels and fighting poverty (Council Decision ..., 2010, Kryk 2016, Kryk 2016a). The guidelines have been assigned targets that are monitored periodically to check progress in their implementation. For these needs, a group of synthetic indexes was acquired with reference levels indicating the average European result. It should be reached in year 2020 (table 1).

*Table 1. Primary social goals and indicators to measure them in the Europe 2020 strategy*

No.	Goals	Main indicators	European reference level
1.	Increase in employment of people of age 20-64	Employment rate of people aged 20-64	75,0%
2.	Raising the level of education by reducing the percentage of early school leavers and increasing the proportion of people aged 30-34 with higher education or equivalent	Young people not continuing education	below 10,0%
		People aged 30-34 with a higher or equivalent education	At least up to 40,0%
3.	Fighting with poverty	Poverty risk indicator or social exclusion indicator (summary of the three below):	Reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million
		Very low labor intensity index in the household	Reduction
		Poverty risk indicator (after taking into account social transfers)	Reduction
		Deepened material deprivation indicator	Reduction

*Note.* Own elaboration based on (Europe 2020, 2010).

The reference levels have been partially based on former establishments included in the *Lisbon Strategy* with certain complementation and modifications (this regards the first two goals), the third goal has been added as a new one. At the same time, EU members, taking into account common goals, had the opportunity to set national levels of reference for social achievements properly to their own possibilities and conditions. Part of the countries used this possibility and adopted other levels of reference than European, sometimes they are more ambitious than the European ones,



sometimes it is in contrary. Independently, the indicators will help to measure both overall and progress at national and European level and show the achievements.

### Discharging of social obligations of the examined countries in reference to the Europe 2020 Strategy

In the face of contemporary challenges of the market, the priority aim of the European Union is increasing the indicator of employment of people at the age 20-64 up to 75% in year 2020. In 2010 – adopted as the base year – the average value of this indicator for 28 countries of the Union amounted to 68,8% (table 2). Up to 2015, it increased by only 1,4 percentage points. This small growth was most probably connected with the economy decrease of the EU caused by former acceptance of new countries with a worse social and economic condition, from the Eastern Block, and by the effects of the economic crisis which was at that time ongoing and had begun in year 2008.

Table 2. Overall employment rate for people aged 20-64 - changes and achievements (%)

Country	Starting level in 2010 r.	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change in pp.	Achievements in relation to the EU benchmark (75%)	National target - achievement
EU 28	68,6	68,6	68,4	68,4	69,2	70,0	1,4	↑Trend positive, target?	-
Bulgaria	64,7	62,9	63,9	63,5	65,1	67,1	2,4	↑target?	76% -?
Croatia	62,1	59,8	58,1	57,2	59,2	60,5	-1,6	↓target?	59% - achieved
Czech Republic	70,4	70,9	71,5	72,5	73,5	74,8	4,4	↑close to the target	75% - close to the target
Estonia	66,8	70,6	72,2	73,3	74,3	76,5	9,7	↑target achieved	76% - achieved
Hungary	59,9	60,4	61,6	63,0	66,7	68,9	9,0	↑target?	75% - ?
Lithuania	64,3	66,9	68,5	69,9	71,8	73,3	9,0	↑chance of achieving	72,8% – as above
Latvia	64,3	66,3	68,1	69,7	70,7	72,5	8,2	↑as above	73% - close to the target
Poland	64,3	64,5	64,7	64,9	66,5	67,8	3,5	↑target?	71% - ?
Romania	64,8	63,8	64,8	64,7	65,7	66,0	1,2	↑target?	70% - ?
Slovakia	64,6	65,0	65,1	65,0	65,0	67,7	3,1	↑target?	72% - ?
Slovenia	70,3	68,4	68,3	67,2	67,7	69,1	-1,2	↓target?	75% - ?

pp. – percentage point

Note. Own elaboration based on (stat.gov.pl).



In 2010, the overall employment rate in Central and Eastern European countries ranged from 59.9% in Hungary to 70.4% in the Czech Republic. Only in two countries (Slovenia and the Czech Republic), it exceeded the EU average (68.6%), the others were lower. Over the past 6 years, in the countries surveyed, the index has risen by an average of 4.47 pp, with two countries (Croatia and Slovenia) having a decline and the other an increase. The biggest rise of this indicator took place in Estonia (by 9,7 pp. – due to which it already achieved the Union goal), Lithuania (by 9 pp. – it is close to reaching the goal) and in Hungary (by 9 pp., achieving the goal would also require a rapid increase in employment, as has been the case so far). The average growth of the indicator occurred in the Czech Republic, but because it was characterized by the highest level in the base year, in 2015 it was only missing 0,2 pp. to the Union reference point. On the other hand, the employment rate grew by the smallest amount in Romania (by 1,2 pp.), which causes it to be a member in the group of states in which the completion of the EU goal remains under question. Analyzing the influence of changes on the completion of national goals in this cope, it can be observed that in three countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Croatia<sup>7</sup>) the national goals have been achieved, two countries (Czech Republic and Latvia) are close to realizing their goals, and in the remaining ones, they might not be achieved. In this situation, there is a threat that in seven countries the EU benchmark for this indicator will not be achieved

An important development challenge for the economy of Europe is the quality of education. By 2020, the key task in this area is to reduce the proportion of young people who are finishing school too early at least to 10%. This is possible in the EU scale, since it was 11% in 2015, so there is a good chance of achieving the target (table 3). On the other hand, in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc it is no longer so obvious. Among them are countries where already in 2015, the rate of young non-continuing students was lower than the EU benchmark (Croatia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). These countries, with the exception of Poland, have already achieved their own goals, which are more stringent than those of the EU.

*Table 3. Youth not continuing education - changes and achievements (%)*

Country	Starting level in 2010 r	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change in pp	Achievements in relation to reference level (<10%)	National target - achievement
EU 28	13,9	13,4	12,7	11,9	11,2	11,0	-2,9	Positive trend, the chance to reach the goal	-

7 The case of Croatia is specific because it adopted a national target at a level far below the EU level.



Country	Starting level in 2010 r	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change in pp	Achievements in relation to reference level (<10%)	National target - achievement
Bulgaria	12,6	11,8	12,5	12,5	12,9	13,4	0,8	Zn	11% - ?
Croatia	5,2	5,0	5,1	4,5	2,7	2,8	-2,4	↓Zk	4% - achieved
Czech Republic	4,9	4,9	5,5	5,4	5,5	6,2	1,3	↑Zn	5,5% - as above
Estonia	11,0	10,6	10,3	7,7	11,4	11,2	0,2	↑Zn	9,5% - ?
Hungary	10,8	11,4	11,8	11,9	11,4	11,6	0,8	↑Zn	10% - ?
Lithuania	7,4	7,4	6,5	6,3	5,9	5,5	-2,4	↓Zk	9% - as above
Latvia	12,9	11,6	10,6	9,8	8,5	9,9	3,0	↑Zn	13,4% - as above
Poland	5,4	5,6	5,7	5,6	5,4	5,3	-0,1	↓Zk	4,5% - ?
Romania	19,3	18,1	17,8	17,3	18,1	19,1	-0,2	↓Zk	11,3% - ?
Slovakia	4,7	5,1	5,3	6,4	6,7	6,9	2,2	↑Zn	6% -close
Slovenia	5,0	4,2	4,4	3,9	4,4	5,0	0,0	constans	5% - achieved

Zn – unfavorable change, Zk – favorable change

Note. As above.

In the remaining studies, there was an increase of this indicator by 0,3 pp. On average, which is not beneficial for the completion of the union or national targets. Countries with the highest level of this indicator are Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Estonia. In their case, even the completion of the national target, which is less ambitious than the union one, remains questionable. If these countries do not reach satisfactory effect, it will have a negative impact on the completion of union targets. It is necessary to lead further actions, which will make the effects of countries in this area better.

The level of education of people, as well as achieving new qualifications and developing them in the context of changing needs on the labor market are a very important element of a properly functioning economy. The indicator of people aged 30-34 with higher education is the measure of achievement in this field, which in the EU scale in 2015 was only 1.3 pp. Less than the planned level (40%) for 2020 (table 4). So, there is big probability of competition of the union target. In the examined period in all countries of the former Eastern Bloc, the given indicator increased by 4,3 pp. on average, which is a very beneficial phenomenon. The biggest increase of this indicator took place in Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic and in Poland, Slovenia and Hungary, whereas the smallest increase was in Bulgaria and Croatia. An exception was Estonia, which despite a relatively smaller increase of this



indicator, achieved its union as well as national goal. As an effect, five examined countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia) completed their union goals before the period of validity of the Europe 2020 strategy, and in six remaining countries, it remains questionable. What is more, if the Czech Republic and Hungary keep the current rate of changes in this range, there is a chance of reaching the union reference level (Kryk 2016).

Table 4. People aged 30-34 with higher education - changes and achievements (%)

Country	Starting level in 2010 r	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change in pp.	Achievements in relation to reference level (40%)	National target - achievement
EU 28	33,8	34,8	36,0	37,1	37,9	38,7	4,9	↑Positive trend, the chance to reach the target	-
Bulgaria	28,0	27,3	26,9	29,4	30,9	32,1	4,1	↑target?	36%chance
Croatia	24,5	23,9	23,1	25,6	32,2	30,9	6,4	↑as above	35% as above
Czech Republic	20,4	23,7	25,6	26,7	28,2	30,1	9,7	↑as above ↑target achieved	32%as above 40% - achieved
Estonia	40,2	40,2	39,5	42,5	43,2	45,3	5,1	↑target?	30,3% achieved
Hungary	26,1	28,2	29,8	32,3	34,1	34,3	8,2	↑target achieved	40% achieved
Lithuania	43,8	45,7	48,6	51,3	53,3	57,6	3,8	↑ as above	34%achieved
Latvia	32,6	35,9	37,2	40,7	39,9	41,3	8,7	↑ as above	45%close to the target
Poland	34,8	36,5	39,1	40,5	42,1	43,4	8,6	↑target?	26,7%close to the target
Romania	18,3	20,3	21,7	22,9	25,0	25,6	7,3	↑target?	40%no chance
Slovakia	22,1	23,2	23,7	26,9	26,9	28,4	6,3	↑target achieved	40% - achieved
Slovenia	34,8	37,9	39,2	40,1	41,0	43,4	8,6		

Note. As above.

Analyzing the completion of the established targets of specific countries, it can be noted that 5 of them have reached the established national level of the age of 30-34 with higher education (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia and Hungary), 2 (Poland and Romania) - are close to their achievement, 3 (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic) - have a chance of dynamic change and Slovakia will not reach its goal,



judging by the current rate of growth. In general, however, the states of the former Eastern bloc in the field of education have been very successful, both in comparison with the EU average and with other non-members.

An important priority of the *Europe 2020* strategy is also the matters of social integration. Actions performed by the European Union are aiming to prevent poverty and promote social inclusion. For the measurement of achievements in this scope, the overall indicator of the risk of poverty or social exclusion, which as it has already been mentioned, includes 3 indicators (table 1) is used. However, due to publishing constraints, only the given indicator will be analyzed here (table 5).

**Table 5. An overall indicator of the risk of poverty or social exclusion - changes and achievements (%)**

Country	Starting level in 2010 r.	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Changes in pp.	Achievements in relation to reference level
EU 28	23,7	24,3	24,7	24,6	24,4	23,7	0,0	constans
Bulgaria	49,2	49,1	49,3	48,0	40,1	41,3	-7,9	↓Zk
Croatia	31,1	32,6	32,6	29,9	29,3	29,1	2,0	↑Zn
Czech Republic	14,4	15,3	15,4	14,6	14,8	14,0	-0,4	↓Zk
Estonia	21,7	23,1	23,4	23,5	26,0	24,2	-2,5	↓Zk
Hungary	29,9	31,5	33,5	34,8	31,8	28,2	-1,7	↓Zk
Lithuania	34,0	33,1	32,5	30,8	27,3	29,3	-4,7	↓Zk
Latvia	38,2	40,1	36,2	35,1	32,7	30,9	-7,3	↓Zk
Poland	27,8	27,2	26,7	25,8	24,7	23,4	-4,4	↓Zk
Romania	41,5	40,9	43,2	41,9	40,3	37,3	-4,2	↓Zk
Slovakia	20,6	20,6	20,5	19,8	18,4	18,4	-2,2	↓Zk
Slovenia	18,3	19,3	19,6	20,4	20,4	19,2	0,9	↑Zn

*Note.* Own elaboration based on (Eurostat, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/database>).

In 2015 r. more than 1/5 of people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion and unfortunately have not achieved a positive change in the past six years, which is very unfavorable. This may be related to the difficult economic situation affecting the labor market and the income of citizens among the older members of the community (among all Greece, Spain or Portugal), and not only the newest member states. However, on a national level of the Middle-East countries, there have been some beneficial changes. The overall poverty risk or social exclusion index decreased on average by 2.9 pp. The biggest decrease of the index took place in Bulgaria (-7,9 pp.) and in Latvia (-7,3 pp.), and the smallest in the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, in two countries the index increased – in Croatia (by 2pp.) and Slovenia (0,9 pp.). The achieved results are not impressive, but it must be remembered that changes in this range are a derivative of the situations and actions





in other parts of the economy and a consequence of the carried out internal politics. The effects appear with some time delay in relation to the effort being made. It can certainly be said, that in most of the countries surveyed, the need to strive to meet EU commitments and structural aid to implement the priority in the area of inclusive growth positively affects the situation of their citizens.

The analysis of the level of social indicators achieved by individual countries in relation to the volumes planned in the Europe 2020 strategy and the pace of changes in this area is the basis for a synthetic assessment of the achievements of the Eastern bloc countries in the implementation of strategic objectives. The following score scale was used for its performance: unsatisfactory (+), fairly satisfactory (++), pretty satisfactory (+++), satisfactory (++++). The higher the level of indicators achieved and the faster the rate of change, the more (+) were awarded. Table 6 shows the number of (+) achievable in each area and by country.

Table 6. Number of pluses that can be reached

Type of evaluation	In the examined area by 11 countries	By country
unsatisfactory	11	4
fairly satisfactory	22	8
pretty satisfactory	33	12
satisfactory	44	16

Note. Own elaboration.

Table 7. Synthetic assessment of achievements in the completion of targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy

Country	Overall employment rate for people aged 20-64	Indicator of youth not continuing education	Indicator of people aged 30-34 with higher education	Overall risk of poverty or social exclusion indicator	Number of (+) of a country - rating
1	2	3	4	5	6
EU 28	+	+++	+++	+	8
Bulgaria	+	+	+	++	5
Croatia	+	++++	+	+	7
Czech Republic	++++	++++	++	++	12
Estonia	++++	++	++++	++	12
Lithuania	++++	++++	++++	++	14
Latvia	+++	+++	++++	++	12
Poland	+	++++	++++	++	13
Romania	+	+	+	+	4
Slovakia	+	++++	+	++	8



Country	Overall employment rate for people aged 20-64	Indicator of youth not continuing education	Indicator of people aged 30-34 with higher education	Overall risk of poverty or social exclusion indicator	Number of (+) of a country - rating
Slovenia	+	++++	++++	+	10
Hungary	+	++	++	+	6
Total number (+) in the area of the surveyed countries – evaluation rating	22	33	28	18	101

*Note.* Own elaboration.

Taking the above into account the conclusions, which are presented below.

## Conclusions

1. In 2015, total assessment of the achievement of social goals on a EU scale (average values for 28 countries) was fairly satisfactory, and the achievements in the area of education (column 3 and 4 in table 7, i.e. target two from table 7) was pretty satisfactory, in two remaining areas (column 2 and 5) they were not satisfactory.
2. Common countries of the former Easter Block have achieved a pretty satisfactory rating in the area of youth not studying education (column 2 in table 7), a fairly satisfactory rate in employment areas and people with higher education (column 1 and 3). In the areas, they even achieved a higher grade in relations to the union average. While the unsatisfactory grades for achieving EU objectives have been received in the area of risk of poverty or social exclusion.
3. Taking into account individual countries, it can be seen that the six examined countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, and Slovenia) received pretty satisfactory results for the achievement of EU objectives, Slovakia - fairly satisfactory, while the remaining four (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Hungary) were unsatisfactory. The highest number (+) was given to Lithuania and the smallest to Romania (table 7).
4. The national target for the employment rate has been achieved by three countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Croatia), two countries (the Czech Republic and Latvia) are close to its implementation. In others, it may not be reached (table 2).
5. The national target in the field of the rate of youth not continuing education was reached by 6 countries (Croatia, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia), in the remaining countries studied it has not yet been achieved (table 3).



6. The planned national level of the indicator of people aged 30-34 with higher education has reached 5 countries studied (Estonia Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia), while in the others it has not yet been reached (table 4).
7. An unfavorable increase in the general indicator of risk of poverty or social exclusion occurred in 2 countries (Bulgaria and Slovenia), in the others the indicator dropped by an average of 2.9 pp. The achieved restriction of this indicator is too small to meet the EU target in this respect (table 5).
8. Summarizing, in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, the completion of union goals in the area of employment (first union goal in table 1) and limiting poverty (third union goal) is rather unprobeable. There is however a big chance achieving goals in the area of education (second goal in table 1) which requires intensification of actions in the member states.

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## Strategijos „Europa 2020“ socialinių tikslų įgyvendinimas buvusio Rytų bloko šalyse

Santrauka

Strategijoje „Europa 2020 yra numatyti socialiniai tikslai dabartiniam dešimtmėčiui. Siekdama įvertinti jų įgyvendinimo pažangą, Europos Sąjunga sukūrė sintetinių rodiklių rinkinį, leidžiantį palyginti pasiekimus tiek nacionaliniu, tiek ir Bendrijos lygiu. Straipsnio tikslas - įvertinti šių tikslų įgyvendinimą buvusio Rytų bloko šalyse, remiantis jų matavimų sintetiniais rodikliais. Tyrimo laikotarpis yra 2010–2015 m. Straipsnyje buvo naudojamas teisės aktų analizės metodas, statistiniai duomenys, indekso metodas, lyginamoji analizė ir „teigiamų“ vertinimų skalė, apibrėžianti pasiekimų lygį. Tai leido nustatyti, kokiose šalyse ir kokių mastu yra pasiekti numatyti socialiniai tikslai.

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