

Adapting to Future Challenges to Education

HUNGARY, POLAND, ROMANIA,
SERBIA, AND SLOVAKIA

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Studies developed and published as working papers in the Future challenges to education systems in Central Eastern European context project of CEU

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Ágnes Kende, a sociologist, has worked on various EU-funded research projects at the CEU Center for Policy Studies since 2008, such as EDUMIGROM, a research project entitled *Ethnic Differences in Education and Diverging Prospects for Urban Youth in an Enlarged Europe, and Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU (RESL.eu)* (2013–2018), a research project dedicated to reducing early school leaving in Europe. She has also worked on the research project *ETHOS—Towards a European Theory of Justice and Fairness* (2017–2020), which is aimed at creating a new integrative perspective on justice and fairness at the School of Public Policy, as well as at the Departments of International Relations and Legal Studies of Central European University, and in the EDUC project *Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context* (2019–2021), which aims to assess the ability of the education systems of five Central-Eastern European countries to respond to various ongoing changes.

In the past 25 years she has participated in several international and domestic research projects on Roma issues related to the topics of education, poverty, and the protection of children. Lately, she has also been involved in numerous project evaluations, both in Hungarian and in English, concerning the situation of Roma people, local programs against child poverty, housing poverty, and the impact of programs financed by the European Union on Roma integration.

INTRODUCTION

Péter RADÓ

Introduction

Contemporary education systems are operating under the growing pressure of many disruptive global changes. There are eight ongoing changes that are already having a great impact on how education is designed and serves its fundamental purposes. These are rapid changes in technology; the transformation of the structure of job demand and workplaces; various demographic changes, including ageing and migration; the recent tide of populist politics and the increasing number of new types of autocratic regimes; the tenacious survival of old forms of social inequalities and the emergence of new ones; changing gender roles; climate change; and globalization itself. From the perspective of education, all these processes of change are disruptive in the sense that each one of them—but especially their combination—compels a reconsideration of the goals that education systems serve, how the core functions of schools are implemented, and how education systems are governed. All these various elements that create the pressure for adjustment add up to a general crisis of the prevailing educational paradigm. Failure to adapt is already resulting in the declining relevance of schooling, which may lead to the emergence of a de-schooling scenario; not one that is based on the radical transformation of schools associated with a strong role played in individual learning environments, but one based on the potential exodus or exclusion of great masses of pupils from formal education.

Interpreting the profound changes that are taking place in the environment of schools—that is, translating them into educational goals to be pursued, into desirable ways of teaching, or into an understanding of how schools should be operated and school systems should be governed—is not an easy task. With regard to some external challenges, such as the development of various forms of digital literacy, the strengthening of environmental awareness, and gender sensitivity, the work has started already and its results are presently affecting a limited number of schools. However, a highly fragmented discourse about these very diverse challenges still prevails. What we need to understand in a more holistic way is how these ongoing disruptive changes combine to generate growing pressure for adaptation by all actors in education.

The authors of the studies in this book do not attempt to undertake the impossible by accomplishing this huge task. As a preliminary step, they rather aim to contribute to the creation of two very important preconditions for adapting to external challenges. The first one is exploring the very different contexts in which educational adaptation should occur. The current challenges facing education are all global processes, but their relevance in different regions and countries can vary enormously. The first task is therefore to consider the contextual weight of each challenge, which the authors of this book attempt to do by applying a Central Eastern European geographical focus. The countries that are selected for comparative analysis in this volume are Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. Due to the large number of contextual similarities, the following comparative studies may offer many important lessons for other Central European and South East European countries, too. The second important preliminary contribution is reflection on the institutional preconditions for adaptation. From the literature of the last decade a provisional concept of the kind of adaptation that is required can be extracted. On this basis, it is possible to consider which institutional conditions for adaptation should be present in relation to the functioning of schools and the governance of education systems. Taking

these into account allows for a comparative institutional analysis to be undertaken, again on the basis of a Central Eastern European regional focus.

This volume includes the first findings of the “Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context” project of the Center for Policy Studies (Democracy Institute) at Central European University. The initial two-year project was designed to lay the foundations for further systematic and future-oriented research with a focus on the Central Eastern European region. In line with the above-mentioned considerations, the research focused on two key tasks. The first was to form a picture about the relative contextual weight of the various challenges, both in terms of the severity of each challenge in each country, and in terms of the actual preparedness of these education systems to deliver the necessary skills and competencies. This analysis is designed to create solid ground for the assessment of educational policy and development priorities. The second basic task addressed in the following pages of this book is increasing understanding of institutional preparedness to change and adapt. The underlying analytical framework of the research considered institutional preparedness at the level of the operation of schools, and at the level of governance. The point of departure for this analysis is the knowledge that adaptation at a systemic scale is determined by the interplay between schools and their systemic environment, which is created by the various functional sub-systems of governance. The key analytical concepts applied here—partly developed for the purposes of this research—are briefly summarized at the beginning of each chapter.

The primary sources for the summary studies in this book are the working papers that were written by the project research team. On the basis of a common analytical framework, country studies were developed about Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. In addition to these, as a kind of litmus test of the actual preparedness of these educational systems, three thematic comparative papers were written about the preparedness of the five education systems. These appraise i) the development of digital skills, ii) the provision of quality education for Roma pupils, and iii) gender equity in education. The writing of the working papers and the summary studies in this publication were supported by the statistical analysis of various data sets. (All working papers published in relation to this research project are available online and listed in the Annex.)

The lead researcher of the project, as well as the author of the concept paper and the Hungarian case study, was Péter Radó. The research project at CEU greatly benefited from the contributions of an excellent international team of researchers. The members of the team were: Ágnes Kende (literature review, thematic study on Roma), Vitomir Jovanović (country study on Serbia), Maciej Jakubowski (country study on Poland), Ondrej Kaščák (country study on Slovakia), Lucian Ion Ciolan, Mihaela Stîngu and Simona Iftimescu (country study on Romania), Nina Begičević Ređep (thematic study on digital competencies), and Dorottya Rédei (thematic study on gender). The statistical background analysis was carried out by Dániel Horn.

The authors of the studies in this book are under no illusion that they provide ready and reassuring answers to the questions that guided the research. In many cases, the results of research raise many more new questions than they answer. However, we all hope that the findings will contribute to a more informed and evidence-based debate about the future of education systems and the direction of education policies that should be followed.

CHAPTER 1

The Relevance of Future Challenges to Education in Five Central Eastern European Countries

Balázs MUNKÁCSY and Ágota SCHARLE

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SECTION 1. ▲

Introduction

Post-socialist Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries face similar challenges with their education systems. The similarities stem partly from the shared legacy of Soviet-style education, and, more broadly, the economic and social consequences of their transition to market economies and democracies. Their inherited features (being small, open economies with immature democratic institutions) also make them similarly vulnerable to more recent global economic, political, and social challenges. However, as this study will show, their paths have also diverged in several, important aspects.

This synthesis study is part of the Future Challenges to Education project of the Democracy Institute of Central European University. It is designed to explore the regional aspects of eight future challenges to education (defined by Radó, 2020) and the adaptive capacities of CEE education systems. It translates these eight challenges into direct challenges for education, demonstrates their relevance in the East-Central and Eastern European context, and summarizes desired policy directions for overcoming these challenges. The study draws on other papers from the project: country-level analyses of Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia, thematic reviews about gender, ethnicity, and information technologies in education, and a review of comparative statistics.¹

The study is structured as follows. Section 1 outlines the analytical framework and provides context through a brief summary of the history of Soviet and post-Soviet educational tradition and reforms. Section 2 focuses on how the eight external challenges translate into direct challenges to educational actors and assesses the magnitude and preparedness to respond to direct challenges in the five countries based on statistics and the project's country reports. Section 3 contains regional and country-specific policy recommendations based on the discussion in Section 2. Finally, Section 4 outlines some areas where further empirical research is needed for a better understanding of the related problems and policies of public education in the CEE region.

1.1 Legacy of the socialist system

CEE education systems share some features that are the legacy of the structures established during the 1950s following the Soviet example (Silova 2009, Mincu 2016, Gawlicz and Starnawski 2018). Despite several reforms before and after the regime change in 1989, this legacy can still be traced in the mindset of policy makers, teachers, and parents, and also in the institutional setup and day-to-day practice of these systems.

1. The country reports and thematic papers are available at <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/educ>. The statistical review was prepared by Dániel Horn. The paper also benefitted from valuable comments from Ágnes Kende, Péter Radó, Dorottya Rédei, Márton Csillag, Lucian Ciolan, and Mihaela Stîngu. Section 4 draws on informal discussions with Márton Csillag, Daniel Horn and Balázs Váradi.

Under a Soviet-style educational regime, the activities of schools were subordinated to the goals of the Communist state (or more precisely, the Communist party). This implied a commitment to equal access for all, but also strong state control over curricula, teaching methods, the institutional setup, and school choice. Curricula focused on socialist ideology and skills related to the needs of the economy, while teaching was teacher-centred. The pre-war system, in which schools were run by the state, local governments, or the church, and enjoyed considerable autonomy, was replaced by a hyper-centralized system of public schools. Though CEE countries followed diverging paths during the Socialist era and especially after the regime change in 1989 (Mincu 2016), they still seem to share some attributes that permeate their current systems. First, the notion that schools are meant to turn children into useful subjects, rather than enable children to develop, even when not explicitly imposed by central curricula, continues to guide policy makers, teaching practices, and to some extent, parents' expectations. Second, though the ownership structure of public education has become more mixed in some countries, state control and public management/funding has remained almost complete in the region, as opposed to in many Western countries where private schools make up a notable share of the total. In most countries, the near monopoly of the state on primary and secondary education is also coupled with highly centralized and bureaucratic governance and the limited autonomy of schools.

A further, more general legacy of the Socialist era is the relative inefficiency of public administrations and the weakness of civil society and democratic attitudes, which reduce the incentive and ability of governments to undertake and implement successful reforms in public education. Public administration tends to be over-politicised and unstable, which decreases the general quality of decision making and especially the capacity to implement complex reforms spanning several years. The weakness of civil society in post-socialist countries reduces their potential to hold their governments accountable and press them to improve the quality of decision making. With little pressure from civil society, and considering the fact that the benefits of educational reforms can seldom be reaped within a four-year political cycle, CEE governments typically launch reforms at the initiative of highly committed experts-turned-politicians.

Attitudes towards gender roles are also shaped by the Socialist legacy, which granted equality in the workplace, and established care facilities to support working mothers, but did not promote the empowerment of women nor confront the traditional division of roles within the household (Szikra 2010).

1.2 Education reforms of the Post-Soviet era

The following paragraphs will attempt to give a concise overview of trends in education reforms in the region following 1989. This text should be taken only as a rough outline—the case of each country is complex, and will surely not closely follow the structure of reforms described below.

After the regime change, education reforms in post-Soviet countries typically came in three waves.

The first wave started in the 1990s, and brought about mostly macro-level changes concerning decentralization and the independence of educational management and administration, while also introducing new, national curricula. The exception is Serbia, where decentralization only started a decade later, in 2003 (about three years after Milošević was removed from office).

The second wave of reforms (~2000s) introduced regulatory institutions for the decentralized systems with the expansion (or establishment) of national testing, school and teacher evaluation (usually in the form of self-evaluation), and the better availability of public data on education (both nationally and internationally through OECD and EU assessment initiatives). This second wave was also typically accompanied by attempts to make education more inclusive, and a shift of focus in the national curriculum away from teaching materials towards learning outcomes. In these reforms, Poland led the way with the most ambitious and also most effective policy changes: delayed tracking led to greater inclusivity and an increase in school autonomy, while the strengthening of pedagogy as a profession enabled teachers to improve themselves and focus on the development of children. The Hungarian initiative of promoting integrated education for disadvantaged children, though short-lived, also achieved measurable positive impacts.

The third wave started at varying times during the 2010s when making progress with education policy mostly fell off governments' and the public's radar. Policy makers and governments generally started to show signs of a lack of clear vision concerning how they wanted to improve the education system, and evidence-based policy making basically disappeared from politics. In Hungary and Serbia, the past decade has led to drastic centralization that has threatened or destroyed the integrity and autonomy of schools. In the other three countries, the education system has stayed decentralized (despite the Polish government's efforts to increase its power over schools).

1.3 Four spheres of external challenge to education systems

In the conceptual paper for this project, Radó (2020) defines eight disruptive changes (sometimes called 'future challenges') to education systems. These challenges may be sorted into four broader categories (Table 1), based on their potential impact on education. Challenges belonging to the same category are similar in the sense that they require the same kinds of responses from schools and educators. For instance, students who are taught how to learn and improve themselves will be able to adjust more easily to technological changes, new forms of work, or working in international environments as adults. Similarly, more inclusive schools where pupils are taught to accept and embrace dissimilarity will prepare pupils for the consequences of all manners of inequalities.

The eight challenges are still important to keep in mind, especially when their impacts overlap, as these are precisely the areas where the pressure on public education systems may be the strongest. For a more detailed overview of how the eight challenges affect schools and teachers, see the 'Challenge Matrix' (Table A1) in the Appendix.

Table 1 ▲ Generalization of the eight challenges to education systems

Sphere	Challenge
Political	Populism, autocratic regimes
Economic	Technological changes
	Transformation of labor markets
	Globalization,* internationalization
Demographic and social	Demographic changes, migration
	Old and new inequalities
	Changing gender roles
Climate change	Climate change

* Globalization has impacts that go beyond the economic sphere, such as migration or the standardization of cultural expressions around the world. These are either included in other spheres (such as migration in the demographic sphere) or were considered to have a relatively small impact on public education in CEE.

The nature of these challenges is likely to be similar across CEE countries. The new political elites of CEE countries may be more tempted to take a populist turn, while their new-born democratic institutions and weak civil societies may be less able to fight back compared to in more mature democracies. CEE countries are small, open economies with a relatively highly skilled labor force, but a low level of capital: these features make them similarly vulnerable to global economic trends and technological change. They all went through the transition experience, which involved a rapid rise in wage returns on education and reduced fertility for at least a decade.

The next section discusses cross-country variation in these four broad spheres of challenges, considering both the magnitude of each external challenge and the status-quo in the relevant parameters of the education system (i.e. the distance between current and ideal states).

SECTION 2. ▲

Direct Challenges to Education and Their Importance for CEE Education Systems

The challenges identified in the previous section may impact various aspects of education systems. Five such aspects are distinguished: the accessibility of public education, skills to be acquired, knowledge to be taught, teaching methods, and governance—while the latter could be further split into school-level, local-level, and country- or international-level governance. For each of the four main spheres of external challenge, this paper shows how it may impact education, and then presents the actual trends observed in the selected CEE countries.

This section will translate the four challenge categories introduced in Table 1 into direct challenges for teaching professionals, for school management, and for governmental education management institutions. The aim is to make these challenges palpable for all actors of education. Each challenge category is also evaluated in terms of its relative weight for each country, and the countries' preparedness to deal with them. The discussion cumulates into a rating that highlights the relative overall importance of the direct challenges to each country.

To give some context to these comparisons, two benchmark countries are used. First, Estonia is used as a point of reference: the latter is a post-Soviet country that started from a similar historical and economic position as CEE countries in 1989, but which ultimately achieved a Scandinavian level of education outcomes by the second half of the 2010s. The second benchmark is Austria: a country with a similarly structured education system to Hungary or Slovakia, but typically somewhat better educational outcomes and more stable democratic and other social institutions.

2.1 Political challenges

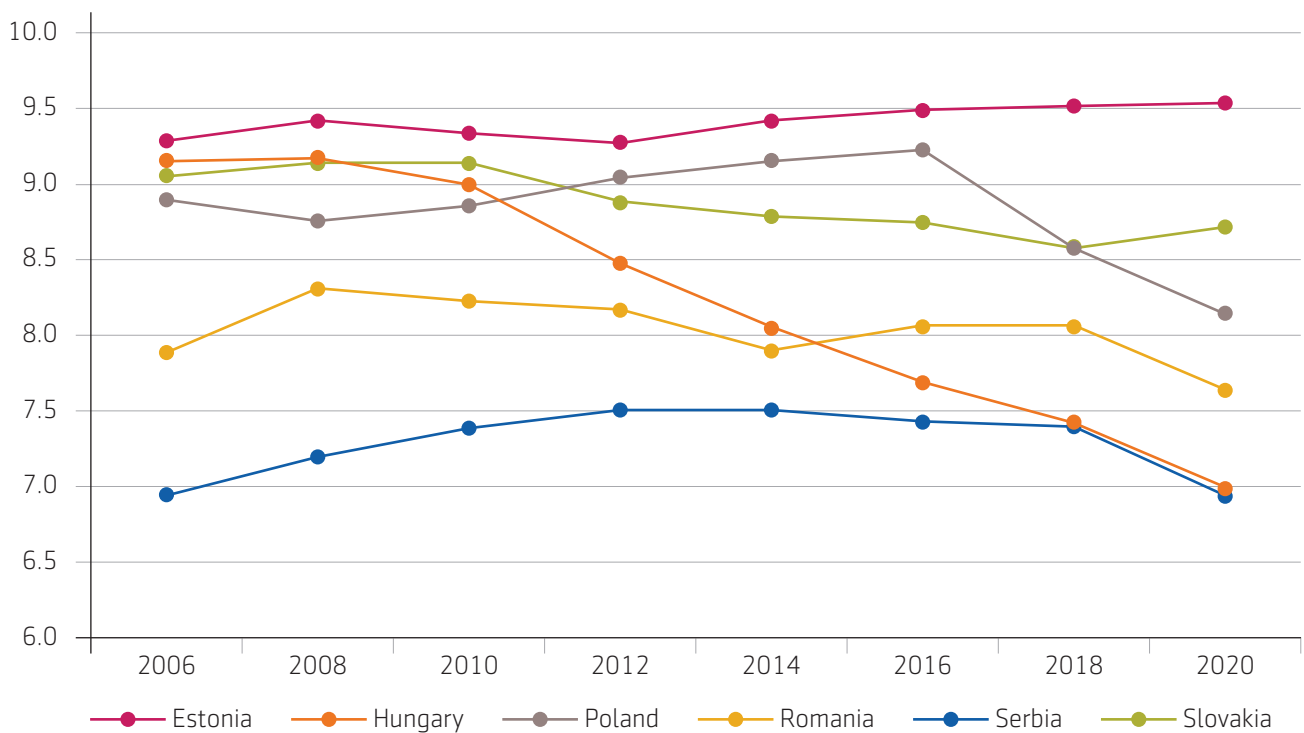
The rise of populist-autocratic regimes in the region puts schools and educators in a key but vulnerable position. These regimes tend to make attempts to (further) centralize education systems (as happened in Hungary, Poland, and Serbia). This, combined with the fact that in the region schools traditionally have low levels of fiscal autonomy, makes them very susceptible to governmental pressure. This is highly problematic, since in the region's deeply flawed democracies evidence-based policy making is substituted by symbolic, ideology-based or populist politics that prioritizes short-term popularity over long-term solutions. This means that unpopular policies (for example, the integration of minority groups, or increasing the access to education of children from poorer families, etc.) are swept under the

rug by default. In more severe cases, this kind of politics can turn education into a cultural battlefield for ideological indoctrination, increasing the pressure on schools and teachers to give up their institutional and professional integrity, and simultaneously undermining the education of democratic values and civic knowledge.

The existence of these regimes increases the need for critical thinking and media literacy to counter the “large amount of communication-related background noise through which facts are replaced by the pretense of the day” (Radó, 2020; Pomerantsev, 2019). This puts conscientious teachers in a precarious situation where they (righteously) feel strong responsibility to help students acquire the aforementioned skills but are also pressured by the government, the school, or even by their peers, to stick to delivering the narrowly defined educational material on the (national) curriculum.

Three indices are used to capture the severity of this political issue in our sample of CEE countries. First, according to Freedom House Index (Figure A1, Appendix), which comprises multiple indices (concerning Electoral Process, Political Pluralism and Participation, the Functioning of Government, Freedom of Expression and Belief, Associational and Organizational Rights, Rule of Law, and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights), Hungary and Serbia have seen a steep decline in political rights and civil liberties in the past decade, while Poland has experienced a moderate one. As of 2020, Hungary and Serbia are considered only ‘Partly Free’ (i.e. have a score of 70 or less).

Figure 1 ▲ Democracy Status Index (Bertelsmann Stiftung)



Source: <https://bti-project.org/en/home>

Next up is the Bertelsmann Stiftung Democracy Status Index (Figure 1), which is also a summary of other indices (covering stateness [e.g. monopoly of force, interference of religious dogma], political participation, rule of law, the stability of democratic institutions, and political and social integration), and is measured on a scale of 1 to 10.² Currently, all of the countries in consideration are labelled ‘defective democracies’ except for Slovakia. It should be also mentioned that the situation has been worrying in Hungary and Serbia for a while now (see Figure 1), while Poland and Romania are more recent members of the ‘defective democracy’ club.

Another way to approach this issue is to look at the political landscape of each country. The Populism Tracker (Figure A3, Appendix; created by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies) is an index (and a yearly report) that tracks the popularity of populist parties among likely voters in the EU based on national opinion polls.³ The tracker shows that Hungary has the highest potential populist vote share, but Poland is catching up quickly. Slovakia has a comparatively small share of potential populist votes and Romania has none (as none of the parties are considered populist in the country by the experts of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies).⁴ Though the Foundation for European Progressive Studies focuses solely on EU countries, the Serbian Progressive Party (which won 60.65% of the popular vote in 2020) is also widely considered to be populist.

The preparedness of national education systems for this particular challenge manifests in the resilience of schools and a tendency for education systems to make rushed, forced policies. This resilience is fuelled by financial and professional independence. The OECD’s TALIS questionnaire asks principals about their school’s autonomy in relation to determining salary increases or bonuses for teachers. In Romania, 8% of schools have a say over the wages of teaching staff, while this number is 19% in Hungary. These results are both lower than the OECD average (32%). In Slovakia, however, 44% of principals reported having this kind of autonomy. The Slovakian EDUC report identifies weak fiscal autonomy as a potential problem, but only because all other aspects of school autonomy are better established in the country, and autonomy in relation to salary increases has diminished since 2013. The Polish report emphasizes the issue that school principals in the country do not have a pool of finances that they may freely allocate to staff expansion (which ended up being a huge issue during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools could not hire technical coordinators or IT professionals), and the fact that Polish schools are ‘cost-efficient’ to the extent that one could easily argue that they are in fact underfunded. The Serbian report also highlights the almost total lack of fiscal autonomy of school management, who have no influence on teachers’ salaries.

Considering professional independence, in Slovakia and Hungary the state-defined mandatory curriculum framework is so detailed and extensive that it virtually eliminates autonomy related to teaching material. Besides this, Slovakian schools are more autonomous (and therefore resilient) than

2. A country with a score of 8–10 would be considered a consolidated democracy, while a score of 6–8 indicates that the country is a defective democracy. Countries scoring less than 6 are considered highly defective (or outright autocratic).

3. Of course, this categorization of parties is somewhat arbitrary (check The Progressive Post’s website for documentation).




4. The data does not show the emergence of the AUR party (Alliance for the Union of Romanians), a populist party that gained appr. 9% of the votes in the 2020 Romanian Parliamentary elections.

other OECD countries. In Hungary, however, the current education system is highly centralized (the most centralized in the region, if centralization is measured by the percentage of decisions made at the central or regional level), and organizational and professional autonomy is mostly reduced to symbolic functions. The Serbian system is also centralized, but principals have a relatively high degree of autonomy over the recruitment and dismissal of teachers compared to in the other four countries. Romania’s case is somewhat unique in the sense that the country’s education system tries (or has tried) to grant schools more autonomy on multiple levels, but these attempts have not succeeded so far. The Romanian report states that school boards (composed of the representatives of stakeholders, including teachers, administrative staff, parents, and the local government) have failed to take on responsibilities outlined by the Education Law of 2011, such as the recruitment of the principal and disciplinary action related to teaching staff. Meanwhile, schools do not take advantage of the regulation which allows them to choose up to one-third of the curriculum. Finally, Polish teachers have a high degree of professional autonomy and are basically free to determine how they want to teach children—as long as the latter perform well on the national examinations at the end of their studies. The school system is decentralized, and while there have been some attempts by the current government to limit school autonomy, they so far have not had a considerable impact.

To sum up, the political challenge will be the most difficult to overcome in Hungary and Serbia, where democracy is in a poor condition, there is high exposure to populist policies, and the financial and professional autonomy of schools and teachers is low. The situation is somewhat better in Romania, where political rights and civil liberties are less damaged and populist parties are not represented in politics, but there are some worrying trends in terms of the state of democracy. Romanian schools’ fiscal autonomy is extremely small, and attempts to establish greater professional autonomy have not been successful. Poland and Slovakia seem to be the most resilient to authoritarian and populist pressures due to the high professional autonomy of schools (in Poland), or their strong fiscal independence (in Slovakia).

Table 2 ▲ The relative weight of political challenges for each country

Challenge aspect/measure	Hungary	Poland	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia
State of democracy	Very severe	Severe	Moderate	Very severe	Moderate
Populist policies	Very severe	Severe	Moderate	Very severe	Moderate
School resilience	Very severe	Moderate	Severe	Very severe	Severe

The colors indicate  very severe challenges,  severe challenges, and  moderate challenges considering how prepared countries’ education systems are, and how severe the challenge is expected to be for them. See details in the preceding paragraphs.

2.2 Economic challenges

Three of the disruptive changes defined by Radó (2020) can be labelled as some sort of transformation of global markets impacting teaching content and the way educators have to teach. These are: the second wave of globalization, the emergence of digital technologies, and shifts in the labor market resulting (mainly) from automation. Schools must prepare students for multilingual workplaces where work takes place in online environments (potentially as often as in office spaces), with positions and tasks that might not even exist today and that continue to change. These challenges have been with us for a couple of decades now, highlighting that the adaptation of education systems is much slower than desired.

The globalization of work and trade requires cooperation on an international level. There is an increasing need for foreign language skills and high intercultural competence. Students could benefit not only from learning foreign languages but from becoming familiar with local, regional, and global cultures, heritage, and traditions. This includes skills such as having empathy towards people of different cultures, the ability to express one's self through international (social) media, etc.

Labour market researchers agree on the notion that automatization/robotization does not endanger entire occupations, but rather certain types of work-related tasks. More precisely, only some tasks can be automated (or programmed): these are typically routine tasks conducted by semi-skilled workers who receive moderate wages (who are usually women). Therefore, a decline in the demand for routinized work is to be expected. This means that low-skilled workers in the service sector whose work-related tasks require a high level of soft skills (e.g. bartenders and hairdressers), and highly skilled workers who undertake creative and abstract tasks requiring good basic competencies (e.g. programmers and educators) will have a relatively more stable position in the labor market. Education will therefore have to focus on widely applicable key competencies, with a special emphasis on the personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence.⁵ Noteworthy teaching practices that allow students to develop their personal, social, and learning-to-learn competence include learning-by-doing-style tasks, group work, case studies, flipping the classroom, long-term projects, peer editing/feedback, and so on. Students need opportunities to work in small groups to come up with joint solutions to problems, to work on projects that require at least one week to complete, be asked to decide on their own procedures for solving complex tasks, and be presented with tasks for which there are no obvious solutions. These are all teaching practices accounted for by the OECD's TALIS assessment.

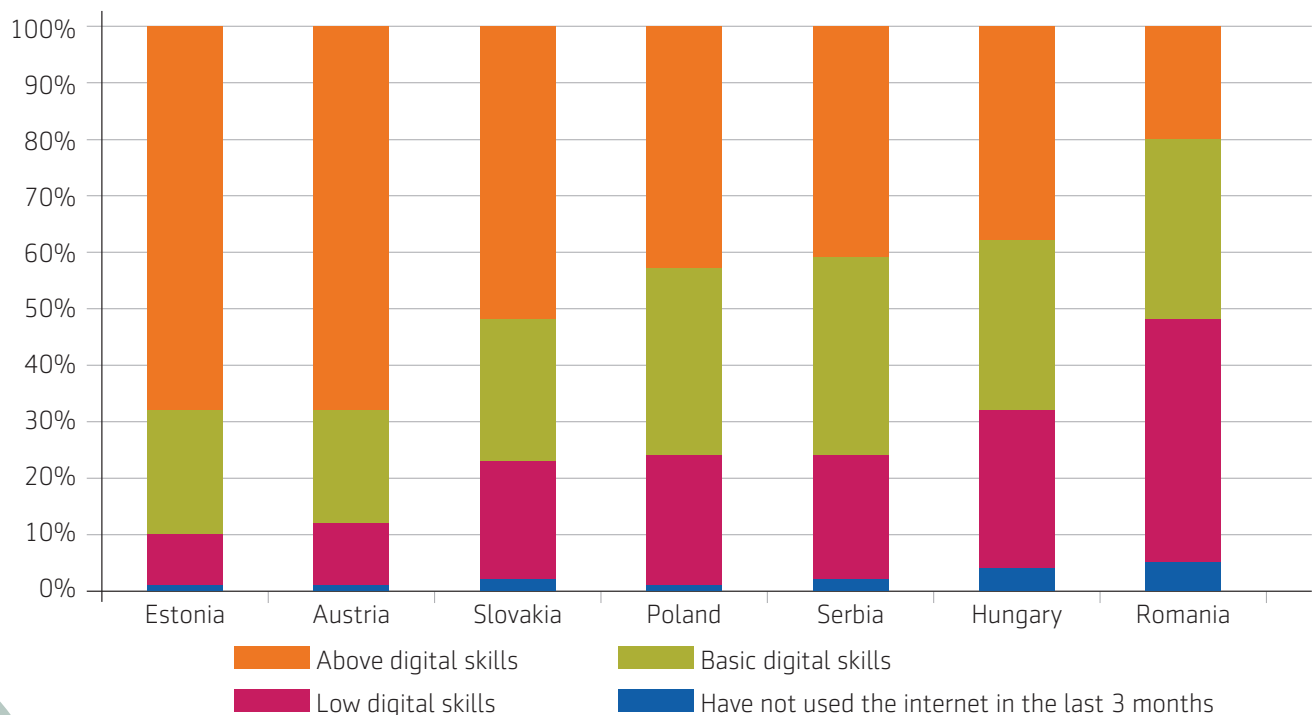
These challenges may be coupled with central pressure for suboptimal policies. Even non-populist governments can be lobbied into focusing resources on pure vocational training, as companies often frame short-term vocational labor shortages (a short-term problem) as the primary obstacle to further development. While the need for skilled blue-collar workers is real and should be addressed, governments should think further in the future and aim to solve long-term, more fundamental challenges (such as the ones discussed in this study) when it comes to educational development.

5. The other areas of key competence include: literacy, multilingual competence, mathematical and scientific competence, digital competence, competence in citizenship, entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression.

A variety of data sources⁶ will provide the basis of the evaluation of the preparedness and exposure of CEE education systems to these changes in global markets.

Starting with digital skills, the European Social Survey has a regular ICT use element which shows that in 2019 all the studied countries fell behind both benchmark countries in terms of digital skills (Figure 2), with Slovakia performing the best and Romania the worst. This means that East-Central and Eastern European societies are probably not well-prepared to switch to a more digitalized style of work, or, to put it differently, the weight of the digital challenge is relatively high in all countries (though a little less so in Slovakia, and more so in Romania and in Hungary). Meanwhile, the OECD's TALIS questionnaire shows that Romanian and Hungarian teachers need to improve their ICT skills more than Austrian or Estonian teachers (Figure A3, Appendix), and schools report a shortage or inadequacy of digital equipment more frequently in Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania than in the benchmark countries. The COVID-19 pandemic can be regarded as a case study for the digital preparedness of education systems. Generally, the pandemic has revealed that the digital competence of teachers and students is severely lacking, that teachers do not want to / know how to apply effective digital teaching methods, and that education management has no idea how online education might work and what kind of support it requires. The EDUC country reports describe insufficient or inappropriate reactions on the part of central management, with the main types of support being lessons broadcast on TV (in Serbia and Poland), the provision of access to often insufficient or not user-friendly online educational platforms (such as the Hungarian E-Chalk system), and teaching guidelines on how to adapt to the situation (e.g. in Slovakia). However, the kind of flexible financial aid that most schools would have needed to adopt quickly to the changes was not provided.

Figure 2 ▲ 16–29-year-olds' level of digital skills, ESS 2019

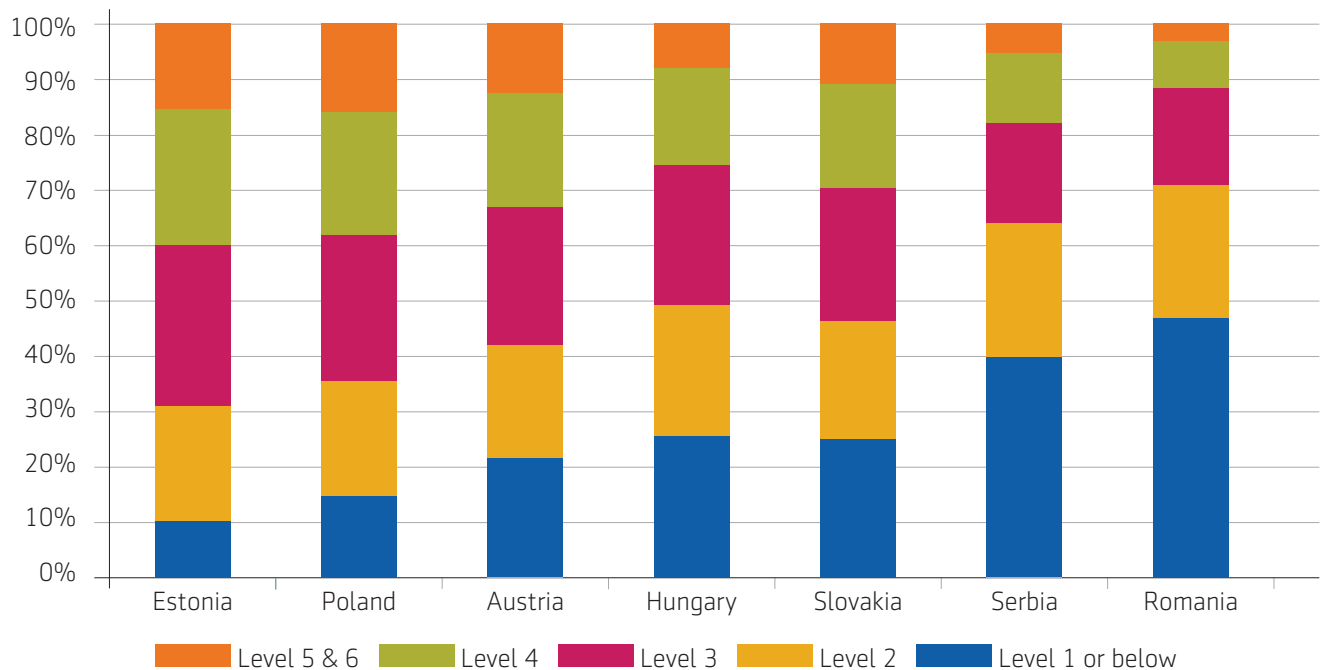


Source: European Social Survey (2019)

6. European Social Survey, the Adult Education Survey, the European Skill and Jobs Survey and the TALIS questionnaire.

Moving on from ICT skills, there are some basic competencies that will continue to be relevant for a wide range of jobs. These include reading and mathematical competence. Based on the 2018 PISA results (see Figure 3 for results in Mathematics), test countries can be sorted into three categories: the best performing countries consistently score above 500 points in the test (one of these is Poland, for instance), mid-performing countries have average scores of between 500 and 450 (these are Hungary and Slovakia in the region), while countries with mean scores below 450 can be regarded as low-performing (Romania and Serbia).⁷ Looking at the distribution of scores within each country, one can see that the average PISA score in these low-performing countries is dragged down by a large share of low achievers (those below level 3 on Figure A4 in the Appendix).⁸

Figure 3 ▲ Results from PISA 2018: Mathematics



Source: Program for International Student Assessment (2018)

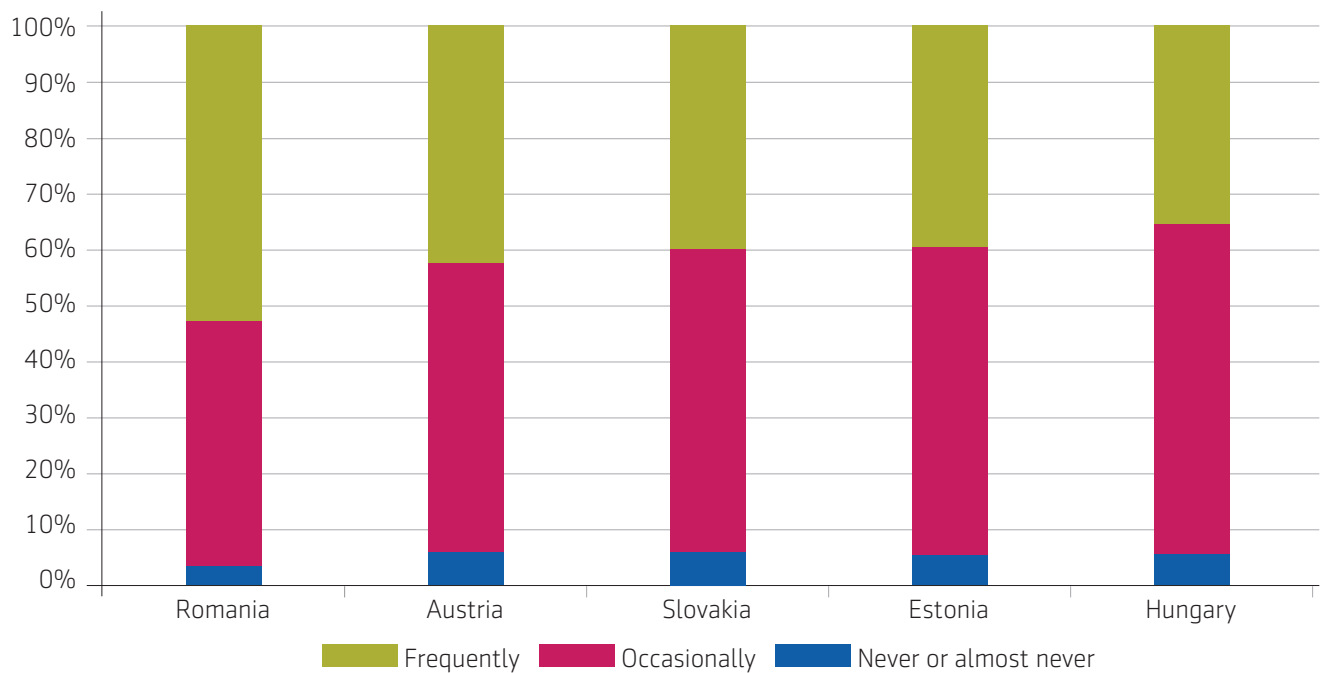
The TALIS questionnaire also reveals that teachers in Hungary and Slovakia are less likely to assign long-term projects or group exercises to students than the OECD average, while teachers in Romania perform somewhat better than average in this aspect (in 2018, and around the avg. in 2013). (These data refer to a randomly chosen class from the weekly timetable of each teacher.) Similar TALIS data

7. It should be noted that this categorization is widespread but arbitrary, and one might easily argue that performing, for example, at around 450–470 points on average is a terrible result for a country’s education system, and should not be labelled mid-level.

8. In the case of mathematics, for instance, one can define low achievers as those who do not reach Level 3 (482 points). These people are typically unable to draw indirect inferences and are incapable of solving problems with sequential decisions. They usually have trouble extracting information from more than a single source and generally do not know how to work with percentages, fractions, decimal numbers, and proportional relationships. High achievers, on the other hand, are those at Level 5 and 6 (606+ points). These students can work with models for complex situations, identifying constraints and specifying assumptions. They work independently: decide on the appropriate ways to solve a task, and they are also good at presenting their results, interpretation and reasoning.

from 2013 are available for Poland and Serbia as well: they show that both Polish and Serbian teachers use fewer of these techniques than the OECD average. This shows that there could be potential to improve the preparedness of CEE education systems for the shift away from routinized work on labor markets. However, in these dimensions the benchmark countries perform similarly to the studied countries, indicating that good practices for group and project-based learning might be more difficult to establish in post-socialist or post-Austro-Hungarian-Empire countries (see Figures 4 and A5 & A6 in the Appendix). Romania may be in a slightly better position than the other countries; however, this advantage cannot be exploited while basic skills education remains insufficient.

Figure 4 ▲ Students work in small groups to come up with joint solutions

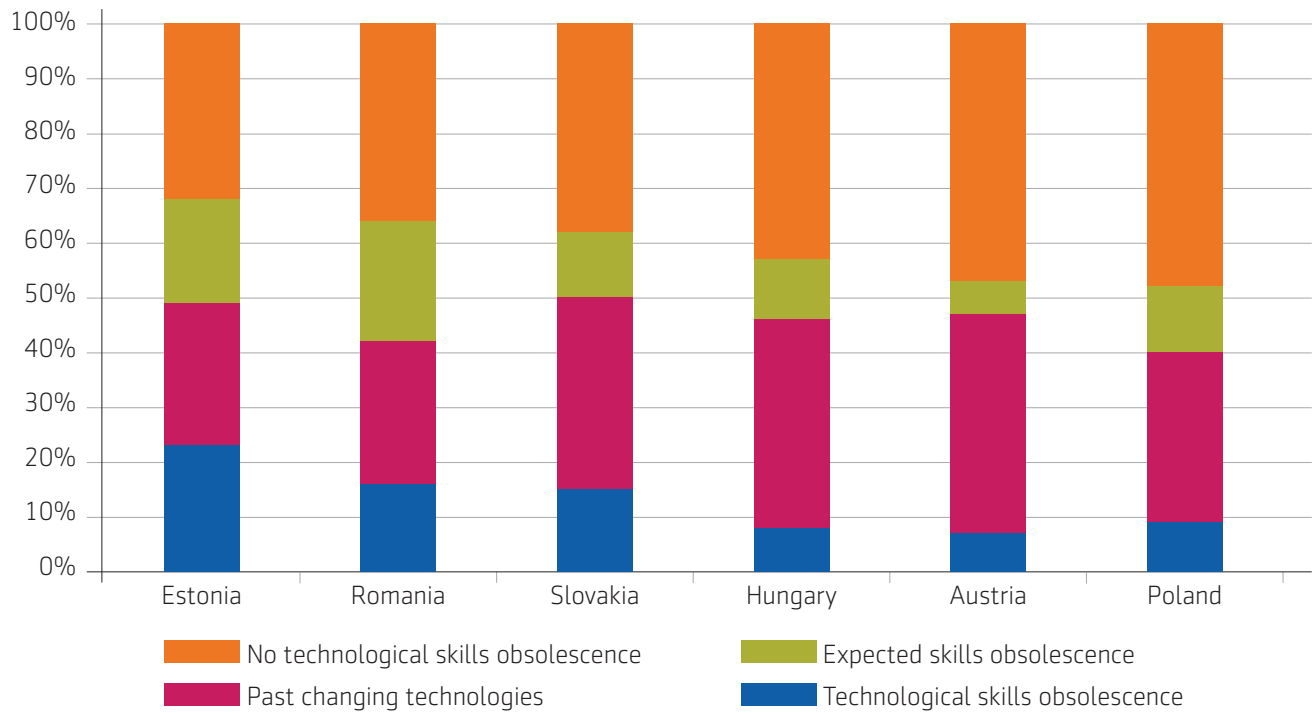


Source: Teaching and Learning International Survey (2018)

It is not straightforward assessing the weight of the challenge of automatization for a given country, and data on this topic is scarce. What one can derive from the few studies that try to assess this problem on a country-by-country basis is that the countries in the region are impacted very similarly. In an analysis of the 2014 European Skills and Jobs Survey, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training concluded that—among other countries—Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania have a working adult population with technological skills that will become obsolete due to expected or occurring technological changes (Figure 5). In a more recent study from 2018, McKinsey & Company labelled Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland countries with very high automation potential within the EU (Figure A7, Appendix);⁹ however, they also highlight that public attitudes towards automation are much less accepting than with digital front-runners such as Denmark or the Netherlands, and that low labor costs decrease the economic incentive for automation.

9. The study did not include Romania or Serbia.

Figure 5 ▲ Share of adult employees at risk of technological skills obsolescence, 2014



Source: European Skills and Jobs Survey (2014)

The final challenge from the changes in the global markets that requires some country-level assessment is the globalization of trade and work. These countries all have small and open economies in which lots of foreign companies are present on the labor market. These firms generally offer higher wages but demand foreign-language skills and intercultural openness. One easy (if perhaps overly simplistic) way to assess countries' preparedness for this challenge is to compare the proportion of citizens who speak at least one foreign language. Here, the analysis focuses on 25-to-35-year-olds who were educated after the regime change. Data from the 2016 Adult Education Survey (Figure A8, Appendix) indicates that Hungary and Romania are among the countries with the smallest share of young foreign language speakers in Europe. This indicator shows a brighter picture for Poland and an even brighter one for Serbia and Slovakia. There is reason to believe, however, that the language situation is not as good as the data suggests. Most statistics about language for these countries are distorted by the fact that the Slavic languages usually have very close relatives (such as Slovak and Czech, or the Croatian and Serb languages) that are so similar to each other that learning one while being a native speaker of the other might not increase one's language skills noticeably.

Table 3 ▲ Relative weight of economic challenges for each country

Challenge aspect/measure	Hungary	Poland	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia
Basic skills (reading, mathematics)					
Digital skills					
Personal and learning to learn competencies (~flexibility skills)					
Foreign-language education					

The colors indicate ■ very severe challenges, ■ severe challenges, and ■ moderate challenges considering how prepared countries' education systems are, and how severe the challenge is expected to be for them. See details in the preceding paragraphs.

2.3 Social challenges

The next block of disruptive changes outlined in Radó (2020) could be labelled challenges arising from (changing) societal structures. This includes the problem of an aging society and the emigration of young people, regional differences, changing gender roles, and differences in ethnicity, language, sexuality, religion, wealth and social status. These issues are often difficult to deal with as they tend to be divisive, highly politicized, structural problems.

The (over)reaction of political actors to these challenges can lead to regressive or outright disastrous consequences. For instance, a decline in pupil numbers could be regarded as a threat to teachers' jobs or schools' existence and lead to defensive, conservationist policies, limiting the scope of adaptation for both schools and the education system as a whole (Radó, 2020). However, this should not be the only possible outcome. Central educational management could also see this as an opportunity to reduce the pupil-to-teacher ratio, to train teachers, and enable them to teach collaboratively, helping them practice differentiation in the classroom.

The EUROPOP2019 prediction (Figure A9, Appendix) shows that all five of the countries under analysis are likely to witness a great drop in their population by 2100. Poland and Romania are projected to be impacted the most relative to their populations. Due to these demographic trends, the pupil-teacher ratio (Figure A10, Appendix) is expected to decline in every country, but most prominently in Poland and Romania. If teacher numbers do not decrease significantly, this will mean that Romanian primary schools will have a pupil-teacher ratio that is closer to the current OECD average (~13). However, this number in Poland is already quite low (~10 in 2014, no data since), which makes this demographic challenge extremely relevant for the Polish education system.

One way to look at the equitability¹⁰ of an education system is to assess how inclusive it is regarding younger (3–6 years) and older (14–20 years) students. An education system that fails to enrol and keep children in school punishes families with disadvantaged backgrounds by not allowing family members (typically, mothers) to work (as they have to look after their children), and by not giving children the education necessary for obtaining higher-paying, more motivating jobs. In terms of early childhood education, the Hungarian system performs the best, with >85% coverage in 2018, even for three-year-olds (see Figure A11, Appendix). Serbia has the most serious problem with early childhood education with less than 60% of six-year-olds enrolled. The case of older students more-or-less mirrors the compulsory schooling age in each country. In Poland, schooling age is 18, hence the drop in the proportion of those enrolled at 19. Romania has problems keeping children in school (or enrolling them in the first place), and student numbers clearly start to decline after 14 (which is the compulsory schooling age in the country).

Table 4 ▲ Compulsory schooling age in the five CEE countries and two comparison countries

Austria	Estonia	Hungary	Poland	Romania	Slovakia	Serbia
15	17	16	18	14	16	14.5

Other indicators suggest that the problem of education inequalities induced by differences in wealth, social status, and ethnicity (especially in the case of Roma) are severe in CEE countries. The proportion of disadvantaged students who score in the top quarter for reading performance in their own country (aka. academic resilience; see Figure A12, Appendix) is small in all countries in the region except for in Serbia (which performed slightly above the OECD average). Low academic resilience among disadvantaged students is an especially prominent issue in Hungary, Romania, and the Slovak Republic. In Serbia, the literacy performance of students from disadvantaged backgrounds is around two years behind other students in their cohort, and this number is similar for other countries in the region as well (PISA, 2018). The capacity of schools to compensate for a disadvantaged family background is typically very low in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (Figure 6). In Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia the impact of a disadvantaged background is transmitted through the social status of schools, meaning that students with a less advantageous family background are more likely to get into less prestigious schools, which also has a negative impact on their levels of competencies (see the PISA 2018 results for proof).

Not only did the COVID-19 crisis indicate the lack of digital preparedness of schools in CEE countries, but it also put the digital divide in society into the spotlight. Preliminary (local) research suggests that in each country a significant share of students lacked sufficient access to education during the first year of the pandemic. In Serbia and Hungary, a substantive portion of pupils with multiple disadvantages, students with special education needs, and Roma students were either not included in distance learning or were delivered paper materials to their homes and received no further tutoring.

10. Education equity (i.e. making sure that every student gets the support necessary to achieve a minimal level of educational success) is an important issue not only from a social justice point of view but also because it increases social efficiency by allowing talented students from low- and mid-income families to use their skills in occupations where they can be both happier and more productive.

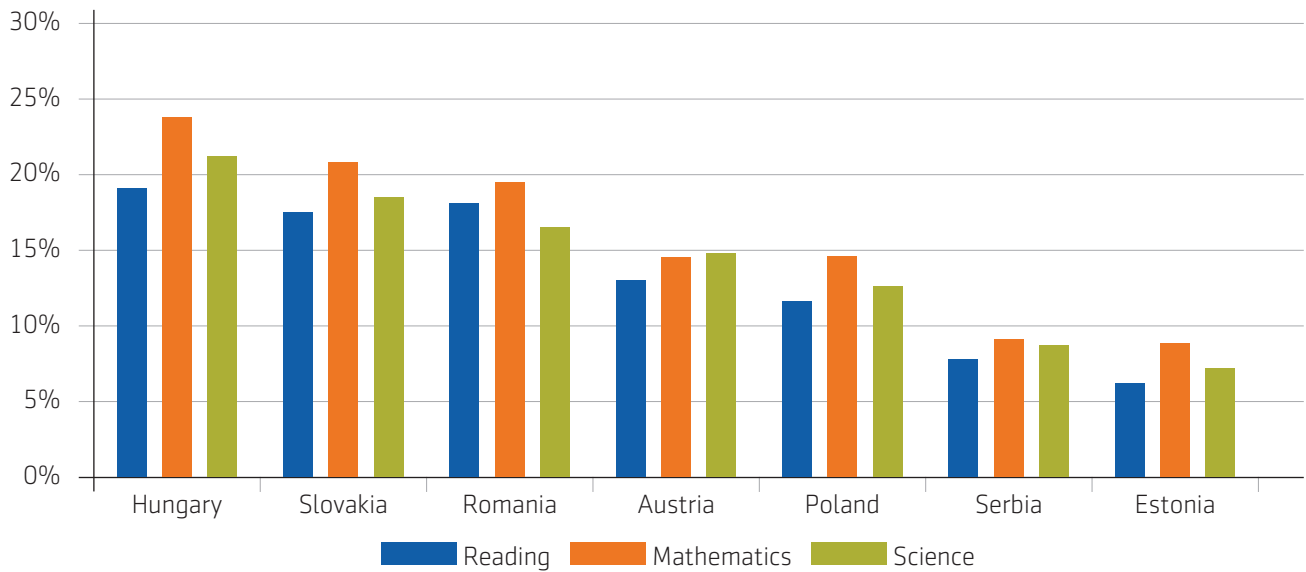
In Warsaw, optimistic estimates suggest that 15% of students did not participate in most online lessons during the first and second waves of the pandemic, and there is some evidence that it was a widespread practice to overload children with homework-like independent work without sufficient support from teachers. The same type of homework-based teaching practice was reported for the first wave in Slovakia as well, with an estimated 7.5% of students not receiving distance learning nationally.

Ethnic inequalities are often interwoven with inequalities in social status and wealth. The most obvious example of this interconnectedness is the case of Roma people in most of East-Central and Eastern Europe. Roma students usually come from low-SES families, are overrepresented in special education schools/classes, and are usually far less likely to enrol in secondary education than their peers.

These social status-based, wealth-based, and ethnic inequalities are correlated with regional differences, but they are not the same thing. Typically, rural schools are smaller, with lower student-teacher ratios, fewer socio-economically advantaged students, are more likely to experience staff shortages, and usually have less talented / qualified teachers than those in urban areas (OECD, 2013a). The rural-urban educational divide is especially prominent in Romania, where 25% of students in the countryside aged 18–24 leave school early (compared to 15% in towns and 4.2% in cities), and in Serbia, where in 2013 the dropout rate from primary education was a whopping 14.25% in rural and only 1% in urban areas, while students who attended schools in cities scored 122.3 points higher on average than those in rural schools. There are three main challenges to overcome in rural schools: *distance*—schools may be far away from students' homes both in terms of kilometres and in commuting time; *the smaller pool of teachers* leads to less qualified teachers; and a *shrinking number of students* caused mainly by migration to urban areas. Echazarra & Radinger (2019) propose context-specific policies for ensuring high quality learning for rural students. For example, creating rural-context-specific training and professional environments for spreading good practices for rural education are both crucial for keeping teachers in schools and helping them develop and be more effective in classrooms. Also, policies that promote ICT use in schools and distance learning can ensure the involvement of students who live far away from their schools—while also helping them live healthier lifestyles and sleep more. Students should be enabled and encouraged to take part in secondary and tertiary education through a variety of support services such as “scholarships, allowances, social and emotional support, career guidance and counselling, and boarding and housing” (Echazarra & Radinger, 2019). Finally, these and all other education policies should be adjusted to local features such as the type of rurality, teaching capacity, and school leadership capabilities.

These alarming symptoms of different, interconnected inequities and the digital divide do not suggest much optimism about the ability of CEE education systems to create paths for mobility. There is one exception—which is also the main source of hope: Poland, where two waves of comprehensive education reforms (1997–2001 & 2007–2011) increased learning outcomes for low-achievers substantially. These reforms, among other things, delayed entry to tracked education (specialization) to the age of 15, extended the period of comprehensive schooling, introduced vocational education reform, and increased both school and teacher autonomy.

Figure 6 ▲ Variation in reading, mathematics and science score explained by ESCS, PISA 2018 (%)

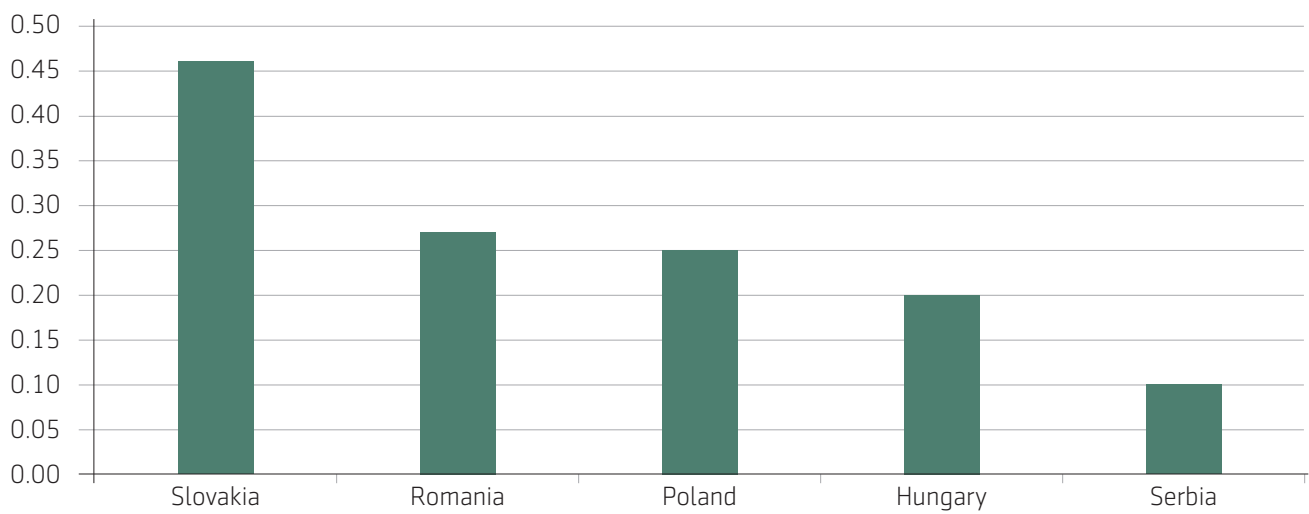


Source: Program for International Student Assessment (2018)

From a gender perspective, there are three major facets of inequalities (based on Kende, 2020a): learning performance differences (measured by standardized tests), differences in learning pathways, and socialization. These issues are of course interconnected, and they require adequate responses from both teachers and institutions. Some major differences in learning performance can be measured by data from PISA: country-level gender differences from 2018 show that girls have better reading skills than boys (Figure A13, Appendix), while boys have better mathematics skills than girls (Figure A14, Appendix). The difference in reading skills is most pronounced in Serbia and least in Hungary. In mathematics, there is a negligible gender difference among Polish students, while Hungary has the most substantial one. Such differences between countries show that these differences between girls and boys are not due to inherent cognitive factors but are related to cultural and socialization factors. Moving on to learning pathways, measuring the differences between the education tracks of boys and girls is not straightforward. One common comparison is that of the number of students of both genders attending STEM education (natural sciences, mathematics and statistics, information and communication technologies, engineering, manufacturing and construction). The difference is largest in Hungary (see Figure A15), where in 2018 for each woman there were nearly three men in STEM occupations. The ratio is around 1.5–2 for other countries. Finally, gender-related-attitudes (measured by the European Value Survey, 2017) are useful for assessing the necessity of (a change in) socialization. The composite index presented in Figure 7 shows the proportion of various responses to statements like “the child suffers when women work,” “women really want a home and children,” “family life suffers when women have a full-time job,” “a man’s job is to earn money, a woman’s job is to look after home and family,” “men make better political leaders than women,” “university education is more important for boys than girls,” and “men make better business executives than women.” All countries received a much higher score than the EVS average, which means that these countries are more ‘conservative’ when it comes to gender roles. Serbia came out as the most ‘progressive’, while Slovakia proved to be the most ‘conservative’ on this scale.

In an EDUC working paper, Rédai (2021) looked at the institutional and legal aspect of gender equality in the studied countries and concluded that “Serbia seems to be the most progressive country in terms of gender equality goals” but this is mainly due to the fact that Serbia wants to become an EU Member State, “and one of the conditions for accession is the improvement of gender equality in the country”. The other four states had similar preconditions for EU accession, “but after joining the EU, and after conservative governments came to power, this progress slowed down, stopped, or even reversed”. This implies that the challenge of gender differences and changing gender goals could become more severe in Serbia after (if) they join the European Union.

Figure 7 ▲ Agreement with conservative gender-related statements in the European Value Study (2017)



Source: data from the European Values Survey (2017), calculation by Horn (2020).

Note: A higher number means more “conservative.” The indicator is constructed as the country average of the first principal component factor of the seven variables (i.e. the linear combination of the seven variables that has maximum variance among all linear combinations. It accounts for as much variation in the data as possible.)

Table 5 ▲ Relative weight of social challenges for each country

Challenge aspect/measure	Hungary	Poland	Romania	Serbia	Slovakia
Decline in student population	Severe	Severe	Severe	Severe	Severe
Ability of schools to compensate for socioeconomic disadvantages	Severe	Moderate	Severe	Severe	Severe
Compulsory schooling, early education, and dropout rates	Severe	Moderate	Severe	Severe	Severe
Gender attitudes and study perspectives	Severe	Severe	Severe	Moderate	Severe
Differences in the skills of boys and girls	Severe	Severe	Severe	Severe	Severe

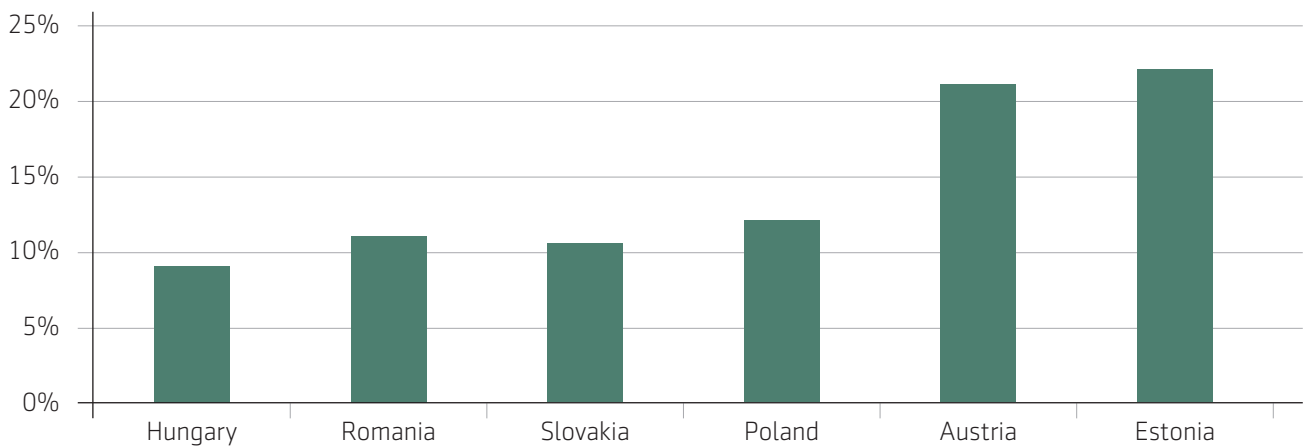
The colors indicate ■ very severe challenges, ■ severe challenges, and ■ moderate challenges considering how prepared countries’ education systems are, and how severe the challenge is expected to be for them. See details in the preceding paragraphs.

2.4 Climate change

The last challenge considered in Radó’s (2020) paper is climate change. The climate-related attitudes of all, but especially the younger generations, will be crucial determinants of the social changes necessary for mitigation and adaptation. A more climate-change-aware society has a better chance to prepare for the consequences and is more likely to commit to the changes necessary to mitigate effects.

According to a 2019–20 climate survey from the European Investment Bank, individuals from countries in East-Central Europe are less likely to deny climate change and are more likely to believe that it is mainly caused by human activity than the EU average (Figures 8 & A17). This could be connected to the fact that people in these countries are more likely to report that they feel the impact of climate change (Figure A16, Appendix). People in Hungary and Poland are also somewhat pessimistic, as they are more likely to believe that climate change is irreversible, while Slovaks are more likely to believe that it is still reversible. Overall, the data suggest that climate-change-related attitudes pose only a minor-moderate challenge to schools in the region.

Figure 8 ▲ Ratio of respondents who do NOT believe that humans and human activity are the main cause of climate change (EIB, 2019/2020)



Source: <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/the-eib-climate-survey-2020-2021.htm>

SECTION 3. ▲

Directions for Education Policy and Teaching Practices

This section outlines some desirable policy directions for overcoming the eight future challenges of education in CEE countries. The proposed directions are divided along two dimensions: the challenges they are meant to address, and the actors in the education system who are affected by them. The latter dimension contains two levels: the governing level, and the school level. The governing level refers to policy makers, school owners, employees of ministries, school district bureaucrats, and other people who set the educational agenda either on an international, a national, or a municipal level. The school level refers to the school's management and staff (including but not limited to teachers). These directions are mainly derived from the policy guidelines of the OECD and other international institutions: to save space, the underlying empirical and theoretical grounds are not presented here, but the sources are included in the bibliography.

3.1 General recommendations

3.1.1 Data availability and monitoring

There are three main recommendations concerning data and education that are advocated by international organizations that are highly relevant for CEE countries. These can be regarded as three pillars of effective monitoring and policy evaluations.

First, all countries in the region are advised to participate in every relevant international assessment that generates publicly available data. These assessments provide a good basis for international comparison and help researchers contextualize the problems and reforms associated with education systems by comparing them to those of more and less successful countries. Those referred to in this study (e.g. PISA and TALIS) are good examples of such assessments.

Second, it is extremely beneficial for education management to use regular, standardized tests for all students within the country. These tests can measure the primary output of the system: the actual competencies of children. In order to measure competency, these tests have to be low stakes (as much as possible): i.e. they should not be graded, and they should not be made available to the public so teachers cannot use the findings to prepare their pupils for the specific types of tasks regularly found in them. Both Poland and Hungary use systems that are somewhat similar to this idea. Hungary's system is especially outstanding, with relatively low-stakes testing in the sixth, eighth, and tenth grade, a variety of background variables, and the option to link this data to other administrative datasets

(anonymously) such as the PES unemployment register or the labor market and firm database of the tax office.

Finally, and this is an issue present in most European countries, there is a severe lack of data about ethnicity. The Open Society Foundations recommends that in order to become better equipped to deal with systematic discrimination, governments should carefully collect data on peoples' ethnic background as long as they maintain the ethical and legal boundaries defined by the EU. These are: anonymity, confidentiality, data collection on a voluntary basis, and restricting the use of data to the purpose for which it was collected. For more information on how to collect ethnic data ethically and other important considerations, read Hermanin (2013).

3.1.2 Teacher education, training, and the integration of novice teachers

Teacher education is one of the greatest barriers to pedagogical change in the region. This subsection will give some general suggestions regarding how to improve teacher education in any country of the region, based on OECD (2019a) and OECD (2019b). These recommendations will be sorted into three categories: potential improvements to teacher education, to teacher training, and to the integration of new, young teachers into the school environment.

Let us start with teacher education. Teacher education should be grounded in the profession from the very beginning. It is important to let teacher trainees observe classes of practicing teachers from the beginning of their education, and to provide them with multiple opportunities to practice teaching in actual classrooms. Visits to diverse classrooms with teachers experienced in 'differentiated instruction' should also be an integral part of the program. Certain cornerstones of modern education should be integrated into the curricula of teacher education programs, such as the use of ICT in class and the issue of classroom diversity. This means that these issues should not be treated simply as separate subjects in the curriculum but rather as an integral part of the pedagogy that should be considered in every class. Basic teacher education should also ensure that every teacher speaks at least one foreign language well—preferably English—as this enables them to improve their teaching techniques based on a wider knowledge of the international community.

The main way to improve teacher training is by involving teachers in every step of the process. They can help with the design of training programs, ensuring that the professional development opportunities that are provided are in line with teachers' needs. They can also become teachers of other teachers, thereby spreading good practices and strengthening the national network of teachers (serving as central nodes in a web, and connecting teachers looking for ways to develop good practices they might consider adopting). On top of classic training programs, governments should facilitate peer learning both within and between schools. This is an area with a great deal of potential: it is clear from TALIS (2013 & 2018) that teachers in the region are not likely to observe each other's classes, or to learn new teaching methods collaboratively on a regular basis. There is also evidence that peer learning can improve students' test scores substantially (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). However, teacher training—be this classic classroom training or peer learning—needs time. Teachers' contracts should include paid time that is specifically allocated to self-development. Not incorporating this element into teachers'

salary plans will force teachers to participate in training in their free time and during school breaks: potentially to a lesser extent than is desirable, or maybe even not at all.

Finally, TALIS also tells us that there should be greater emphasis on the proper introduction of novice teachers to the profession. The goal every school should strive for is to establish “a nurturing environment that allows for enough flexibility to try different approaches to teaching and provides enough support to guide novice teachers in their daily tasks” OECD (2019b).¹¹ Unfortunately, TALIS (2013 & 2018) shows us that schools in the region have a lot to improve in this respect. The OECD (2019b) recommends helping novice teachers enter less challenging working environments for their first placements, while encouraging experienced teachers to work in more disadvantaged schools. They also recommend incentivizing schools leaders to make the transition of recent graduates into the profession smoother through mentoring and introduction activities. Further, they advise lowering the teaching load of new teachers and offering additional support for young teachers with a minority background. These measures could make novice teachers more confident in their profession and lessen the risk of early attrition.

3.2 Adapting to political challenges

There are two situations CEE countries may find themselves in in the first part of the twenty-first century when it comes to populistic policies. There are countries where autocratic-populist parties have seized control (Hungary, Serbia, and Poland), and others where they might become a major political issue in the future (Romania, and Slovakia). Countries in the latter group are arguably in a better position to change as, at least in theory, the leaders of these countries may be convinced to implement comprehensive educational reforms. This subsection primarily focuses on what local, school-level actors can do to ensure quality education for their pupils who are under pressure from these regimes, as well as on the policy directions democratic governments can take to preventively make schools and education system more resilient to bad or destructive governance.

Let us begin with how to make education more resilient. First, the country reports identified a common regional problem: schools in the region are generally underfunded and, more importantly, they lack financial flexibility. This makes schools more susceptible towards political pressure, but is also a source of outright inefficiency. During the COVID-19 crisis, public schools in the region were unable to adapt to online teaching as fast as private schools partially because they lacked the resources to cover the cost of school coordinators who could support teachers by solving technical difficulties and managing schedules. Had governments permitted some flexibility in school budgets (i.e. money that schools can spend either completely freely, or freely but on certain types of things) schools would have had the opportunity to adapt quicker to the new circumstances. Of course, a flexible budget is useful outside times of crisis as well: it allows educators to allocate resources to further training, the implementation of new teaching methods, to modernize classrooms, or any other goal that the given institution finds desirable for pedagogical development.

11. Quote from the connected blog post: <https://oecdeditoday.com/talis-support-novice-teachers/>

Second, the country reports also highlight the need for more professional autonomy of schools and teachers. This primarily means greater autonomy over what is taught and how students are assessed. Poland is the only country in the region where the government introduced educational reforms centred on increasing professional pedagogical and institutional autonomy. The fact that even though the current, populist government has reversed a lot of these policies, the professional autonomy of schools remains strong and mostly unaffected by politics—especially compared to in Hungary, where similar government efforts have succeeded—shows the lasting impact of these kinds of reforms.

There are some general directions schools and teachers can follow even if they are under pressure from populist-autocratic regimes. For instance, there are some fundamental skills and knowledge educators can focus on to counter the influence of populist-autocratic regimes on their pupils. It goes without saying that classroom activities should nudge students to develop a high level of critical thinking, defined by McPeck (1981) as the propensity and skill to engage in an activity with reflective scepticism. These activities could include in-class brainstorming, organized debates, critical content analysis of text or media, opinion essays, and so on. It is a good idea to mix these exercises with ones that improve fact-checking skills and information fluency, so students learn to use the internet for their own benefit without being misled by scam sites or fake news. Furthermore, teachers should seize every opportunity to increase students' knowledge and awareness of the media and economic or social issues. These topics are typically under-taught in the region—even though basic knowledge in these subject areas is fundamental for understanding simple policy discussions.

If students can experience and practice democracy in school, they will understand democratic processes and might be more likely to protect democratic institutions. They will also notice when these institutions are threatened or under pressure. Student organizations can serve as democratic playgrounds if students feel that through these institutions they have an actual impact on student life at their schools. For example, student parliaments that include representatives of all classes could have the right to suggest changes to school policies or to form committees about student matters and negotiate with principals about these issues. Vitally, teaching staff must take these suggestions and negotiations seriously, as these processes are part of the democratic education of children, and thus count as one of their pedagogical obligations.

3.3 Adapting to economic and social challenges

While economic and social challenges to education are fairly easy to tell apart, it is not so straightforward to split potential responses to these challenges into two groups. Policies that make education more accessible and equitable also create pathways of mobility for talented children, and for pupils who master the ability to learn. The policy directions outlined in this subsection all contribute to three major goals at the same time:

1. Reducing dropout rates and other forms of failure of the education system.
2. Making education more equitable and hence society fairer.
3. Reducing the large societal cost of having adults with inadequate skills.

There are eight areas of improvement highlighted in this subsection: basic skills, language learning, ICT use, soft skills, vocational education and tracking, supporting families and teachers of low-SES students, intercultural education, and gender equality. Let us consider them in this order.

3.3.1 Teach basic skills

This policy direction is probably the most straightforward: all courses in the curriculum should in one way or the other improve the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils. Naturally, mathematics and native language and literature classes play a bigger role in learning these competencies, so students should encounter the need for these skills and knowledge in a lot of different settings so they learn how to apply them under new and different circumstances.

3.3.2 Facilitate language learning

Language has very high “enabling-power” in today’s labor market in CEE countries. It enables workers to apply to positions at firms that offer higher salaries (usually owned by foreign investors and selling goods or services abroad). It opens up a whole new avenue of training and self-improvement classes both online and in the form of international education programs or work exchange programs. It is also a crucial basic skill for those who want to start a business: foreign language skills can open channels to new suppliers or customers. They also lower the barrier to better financial literacy (as most material on financial education is in English) and help people make better investments (by enabling them to read news from other countries directly). Also, being able to use a lesser-known language is also a great asset in the labor market that could lead to unique job opportunities. The list of arguments for the importance of language skills could go on forever.

At the very least, governments should set the goal of ensuring every capable child attains at least a B2 level of proficiency in one language by the time they become 16. A more ambitious but also more beneficial goal would be for pupils to reach a C1 level before they become adults. Besides direct language education, student exchange programs, international summer schools, and distance (online) language learning partnerships are also great ways to motivate students and increase their language proficiency at the same time.

3.3.3 Promote the use of ICT skills in education

At the school level, there is an urgent need to increase the digital preparedness of teaching staff. School management must incentivize teachers’ (self-)development and provide or suggest opportunities to acquire new digital teaching methods. It is vital to make sure that teachers have access to functioning and sufficiently modern equipment (laptops, smart boards, etc.), and support staff. Most importantly, as the heads of teaching staff, school directors and managers can and should promote a working environment in which teachers are encouraged and given the flexibility to experiment with these new technologies. New teaching methods using ICT software and skills should be welcomed (e.g. flipping

the classroom, where watching the lectures in video format is the homework, and classroom time is reserved for discussion and interactive tasks), but should also be examined closely to determine the extent to which they are suitable for the school's social environment.

Obviously, these changes are only possible with state support. Education management should provide the necessary finances and financial flexibility, while it can also provide platforms for spreading good practices (for the use of digital technologies in class). For further information on what governance-level actors can do to improve ICT skill learning, see the subsection on teacher training.

3.3.4 Cover soft skills and skills of adaptation

The shift away from routine, “algorithmic” tasks at work pushes workers to focus on more abstract tasks that often require good interpersonal competence. For this reason, it is the duty of schools to prepare students for collaborative work that often also requires constant self-improvement. This means that schools and educators should focus on helping students acquire high levels of personal and social skills and learning-to-learn competences. That is, “the ability to reflect upon oneself, effectively manage time and information, work with others in a constructive way, remain resilient, manage one’s own learning and career [...] cope with uncertainty and complexity, learn to learn, support one’s physical and emotional well-being, empathize, and manage conflict” (European Council, 2018, p. 10). For further details on the concept and effective teaching of this key competence area, see Caena & Punie (2019) and Letina (2020).

3.3.5 Reform vocational education, extend comprehensive schooling, and delay tracking

Csillag (2015) recommends that countries in the region should look to the reforms in Poland (1997–2001 & 2007–2011) as a source of inspiration. Some of these reforms have been reversed in the past six years, but this was despite the overwhelming consensus of experts that these reforms were successful.

The Polish reforms extended comprehensive schooling (and delayed the tracking procedure) through “policies that prevent the concentration of low socio-economic background students in some schools, e.g. establishing larger schools, or [cautiously] limiting free school choice” (Csillag, 2015). The OECD (2015) recommends these kinds of reforms and suggests limiting early tracking and the postponement of academic selection.

Csillag (2015) also highlights the integration of basic vocational education into vocational secondary education that enables all students to conclude their studies with a secondary-school-leaving certificate (matura / baccalaureate / final exam) as a reason why the reforms in Poland worked so well. This also ensures that vocational students also receive the necessary education in basic skills and languages alongside (and incorporated into) technical subjects. This is also in line with the recommendation of the OECD that higher-level vocational education and pathways to tertiary qualifications should be promoted, but also highlights that these policies should be accompanied by efforts to minimize dropout.

Another desirable reform direction would be to open pathways between tracks, enabling students from a vocational background to enter university if they want to. This can be facilitated by several policies: ensuring compatibility between educational structures, retention policies, fiscal or educational study aid, etc.

A state-of-the-art vocational education program should also provide students with managerial, entrepreneurial, and teaching skills so they can improve their businesses, themselves, and their (novice) colleagues in the future. These skills can also come in handy if the government decides to promote German-style apprenticeship programs or other work-based learning programs in which schools and industry partners work together, and the government provides quality assurance systems.

The OECD also recommends working with stakeholders from the labor market to design a measurement framework for the output of vocational programs. The current practices—not just in the region but in the whole of Europe—are either of low quality and not sufficient for output monitoring, or are (in most cases) non-existent.

A final thing to point out is that a responsible government should be aware of the present-biased thinking of labor market stakeholders. Leaders or representatives of firms and companies sometimes tend to overstate their short-term needs and propose lessening the emphasis on non-vocational courses and skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT, and language) in the curriculum. These propositions should be handled with caution and the voice of pedagogical experts and social science advisors should also be considered.

3.3.6 Support families and teachers of low-SES students

The main ways to help teachers of low-SES students are addressed in the subsection of policy directions related to teacher training, above. One aspect that has not been covered yet is school financing. There are multiple financing strategies governments can choose to compensate for the disadvantages of low-SES students. One example would be allocating school budgets from a central source on the NUTS-4 level based on a formula that considers—for example—regional development and the number of students per teacher. The important thing is that budgets should incentivize and help the education of low-SES students, and direct resources to the teachers of students with the greatest needs.

The rest of the policy directions detailed in this subsection are borrowed from the OECD's "Ten Steps to Equity in Education" policy brief from 2008:

1. Offer second chances to benefit from education.
2. Identify and provide systematic help to those who fall behind at school and reduce year repetition.
3. Strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.
4. Set concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to low school attainment and dropouts.

3.3.7 Educate children about dissimilarity

The policy changes mentioned in the previous two subsections would undoubtedly benefit Roma and other children of ethnic background as well, but there are further policies that could alleviate their situation and open up paths for social integration and mobility. These policies often require educators to rethink how they approach education: the now-traditional nationalistic view of history, literature, and general world view can and should be replaced by inclusive but locally still relevant alternatives. These could range from outright intercultural education to simply taking the time to educate children about dissimilarity. For instance, national education in CEE countries does not leave space for studying the historical perspective and literature of neighbouring nations (with shared histories) and the minorities within these countries. Major national events such as the revolutions of 1848 or democratic rebellions during the Soviet era could be presented from a cross-national, multi-ethnic point of view, wherein students learn about the perspectives of different national and ethnic groups involved in these events.

Meanwhile, ethnic/national subjects in school (such as Roma languages, history, literature, etc.) could be presented as an option (at the very least until and including the first stage of basic education, but preferably further) to both children from both Roma and non-Roma families. These changes, in the right environments, would make education more children-focused and allow Roma students to feel included in their own education, in turn making them motivated to learn and think more about their place in the world. For a detailed overview of the preparedness of the education systems of CEE countries to provide inclusive education for Roma pupils, see Kende (2020b).

3.3.8 Mitigate gender-related inequalities

There are a couple of practices teachers and schools can apply to mitigate gender-related inequities. First, educators need to be reflective about how they evaluate their students: it is important to measure “achievement” on the same scale for the members of both sexes—there is evidence of gender bias in teachers’ individual evaluations of boys and girls (Lavy & Sand, 2018; Jones & Myhill, 2004), whereas standardized testing is argued to play a role in reducing gender-based performance differences (Hadjar & Buchmann 2016). Teachers and schools should support pupils to pick learning pathways based on their abilities, not on their gender (e.g. STEM subjects). Second, gender segregation is more prominent in education systems with early tracking and vocational orientation (Smyth, 2005), which provides yet another argument for delayed specialization. Finally, schools should allocate time for discussing topics like the history and status of gender differences and discrimination, gender diversity, and concepts such as social justice, equity, and inequality. However, this should be the responsibility of teachers who have been trained to discuss sensitive topics such as these: initial teacher training for pre-service teachers at universities should include gender-related topics in pedagogical and psychological areas, and further in-service training should later be offered on the same topics.

3.3.9 Inform and involve parents

In theory, parents may be important stakeholders in school reforms: they may put pressure on schools to improve performance or adjust their goals using formal or informal channels, acting via established parent organizations or individually (OECD, 2013b). In reality, the role of parents tends to be limited in CEE countries, partly due to institutional frameworks that allow little room for parent involvement and partly due to the inherited attitudes of both teachers and parents that frame their relationship in terms of authority and responsibilities rather than the mutual cooperation of equal partners. At the same time,, in a political context where there is little external pressure for school reform, parents have some potential to push for improvements—however, this depends on their understanding of what sort of change is needed, and also on the financial and other costs of securing good education for a select few within or outside the public education system. Reform-minded policy makers, professional organizations for teachers (or external donors), and NGOs that promote equal opportunities should work towards empowering parents. In fact, informing parents about the new ideals of teaching methods and content is useful even when there is sufficient political will for reform, so that parents understand the need for change, and are not used by opponents who push for their reversal.

3.4 Climate change

The approaching climate disaster will undoubtedly have a serious impact on the lives of today's children. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness among students, "to help [them] understand the science of climate change and its social consequences, and to prepare them to cope with its impact" (Radó, 2020). It is also vital to give them the ability to assess the validity of information that is available on the subject (i.e. to tell fake science from real science). Pupils should learn the primary ways to reduce the climate footprint of individuals and societies, and connect to the topic by changing their own and their families' habits into more climate-friendly routines.

SECTION 4. ▲

Recommendations for Further Research

This section outlines eight areas where further academic research on existing CEE education systems would be especially useful in relation to future challenges. These are areas where well-designed policies have significant potential to steer education systems towards better performance, but the scarcity of empirical evidence seriously constrains the design of such policies. To identify these areas, the authors of this paper drew on previous sections and informal discussions with Márton Csillag, Dániel Horn, and Balázs Váradi, as well as comments from Péter Radó and Dorottya Rédei.

4.1 Teacher's labor market

Teachers are arguably the most important actors in the education process. However—at least in CEE countries—there is a severe lack of research (and available micro-level data) about teachers' compensation, teacher-student ratios, and teacher supply and demand. Research that reveals regional and between-school patterns associated with the labor market for teachers would help with formulating well-targeted teacher-centric education policies.

4.2 School effectiveness and learning environments

This research area concerns the potential of school autonomy as a policy lever. Can effective school leadership improve the learning environment, and ultimately learning outcomes, in schools where most teachers are unmotivated and/or poorly trained? If so, what are the good practices of such leaders that could be disseminated to other schools?

4.3 Vocational education: effectiveness and lobbying

There is no standard measurement of vocational learning outcomes. To establish such measurements, researchers should propose a framework for identifying what makes vocational education effective. Another way researchers can facilitate the formation of these assessments is through an analysis of the extent/types and reasons for the apparent bias of labor market actors. The latter analysis can aid decision makers in their attempts to cooperate with representatives of firms concerning the establishment of these tests, and to understand where they come from, through having the necessary background knowledge.

4.4 Solutions for quality assurance applicable in CEE countries

The present operational solutions for quality assurance in public education were typically developed within a favourable institutional setup—in mature democracies with an efficient governance structure. In the CEE context, these solutions may not work effectively, while some second-best solutions may prove more effective. There is need for more research on how the institutional context (broadly defined as covering stakeholder attitudes and social norms as well as financing, autonomy, and regulation) may limit the functioning of quality assurance tools and mechanisms in CEE and how these limitations may be overcome or circumvented by adjusting the assurance system. One line of investigation may be the interplay of municipal systems and the inherited governance structure of public education: the political costs (and their deterring effect) of limiting school autonomy may vary significantly depending on this initial setup. Cross-country analysis of the outcome of attempts to increase or curb school autonomy may also shed some light on the role of the institutional context.

4.5 CEE best practices for mitigating the effects of segregation

There are a variety of small but successful initiatives throughout CEE countries that try to tackle the issue of segregated schools. These include schools or networks of schools owned by independent foundations, religious institutions, or sometimes even the government. However, as yet there has been no attempt to summarize the experience and practices of these schools in a way that makes their knowledge accessible to educators and policy makers in other countries. In an education system that is well-adapted to the challenges discussed in this working paper series, segregated schools would be replaced by (or dissolved into) mixed-ability schools with mixed-ability classes. Nevertheless, knowledge of these initiatives could be useful from at least two perspectives. First, knowing which practices may be scaled up from the school level and adopted by the national education system (i.e., are there any teaching methods, financial allocation mechanisms, class compositions, etc. that could be implemented in every school—as mixed ability schools will face similar challenges to segregated schools but to a much smaller extent)? Second, are there examples of segregated schools with a motivated teaching staff and innovative teaching practices with high value added—i.e. if abolishing segregation is not an option in the short run, are there any second-best alternatives?

4.6 Subliminal messages in teaching materials and their role in reinforcing or changing social norms

Many of the new challenges can only be tackled if new generations are able to change pre-existing social norms and attitudes—for example, about climate change, gender roles, or tolerance for ethnic and other minorities. Textbooks are a vehicle for transferring social norms, but this role may pass unnoticed unless systematically wired into the professional review process. As a result, textbooks may unknowingly reinforce outdated norms even if this runs counter to the intention of educational authorities. Although there is a growing body of research on textbook content in CEE, it tends to

focus on outcomes (i.e. the norms reflected in particular texts), rather than the institutional process that generates them. The latter is needed for developing viable policies for making systematic and profound changes in teaching materials.

4.7 Democratic education and the cost of no change

Teaching in CEE countries is often perceived as teacher-centric (as opposed to student-centric). It is characterized by frontal teaching, weak student participation in class, rigid course structure, and a lack of self-governing student bodies. In practice, teacher-centric education can also amplify the effects of teachers' innate biases and (latent) bigotry. These characteristics make today's schools in CEE countries fundamentally undemocratic. More democratic schools would encourage student participation at all levels of the education process, maintain self-governing (and democratic) student organizations, allow students to contribute to discussions about school-level decisions, and strive to ensure equal opportunities for all pupils regardless of their gender or ethnicity (both in class and regarding every other school-related matter).

One could argue that school democratization represents value on its own, as it helps students learn how to practice democracy and helps them become better citizens. Nevertheless, it would be interesting and policy-relevant to conduct research on the cost of undemocratic schools (as opposed to more democratic ones). Some areas of research where the two types of schools could be compared are: basic skills, soft skills and the learning-to-learn competence, the socialization processes, school-related gender and ethnicity-based violence, ethnic and gendered classroom management practices, and the effectiveness of school management and leadership. By looking at these aspects of both school types and the expected costs of switching to more democratic policies from currently undemocratic ones, researchers could identify the most efficient policies that should be implemented first in order to make CEE schools more efficient, equitable, and democratic.

4.8 Content-sharing practices

Online platforms have great potential for reducing the cost of accessing teaching materials and generating ideas for individual teachers, especially in resource-stricken education systems. Such platforms may be used by central education agencies or professional associations to share centrally developed materials, and may also support horizontal cooperation and sharing between teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic has given a boost to such initiatives, but there is yet little systematic research on the role of such platforms in improving teaching quality and possibly in magnifying inequalities. Research should explore who uses these platforms and who does not (and why), what the quality of materials that are shared is, how intensively these shared materials are actually used in the classroom, and how schools, agencies, and formal or informal professional groups may facilitate (or hinder) their use.

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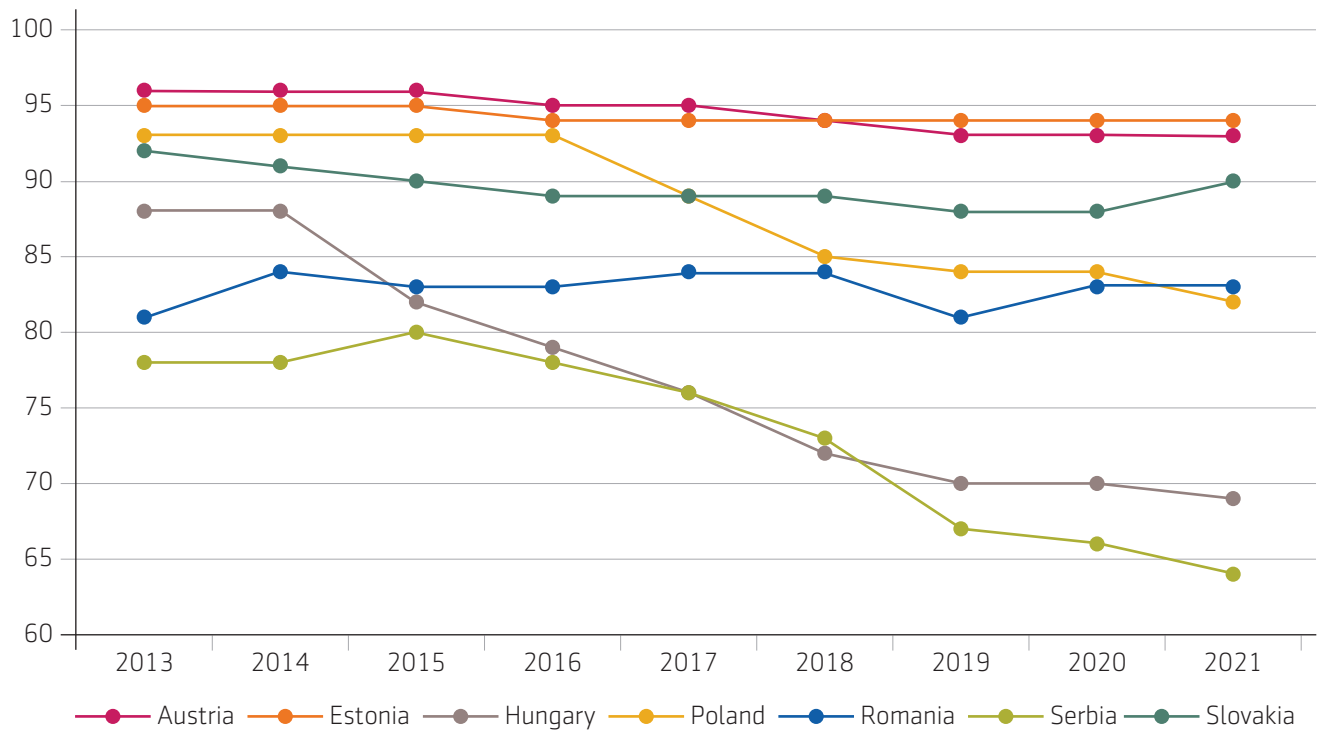
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Appendix

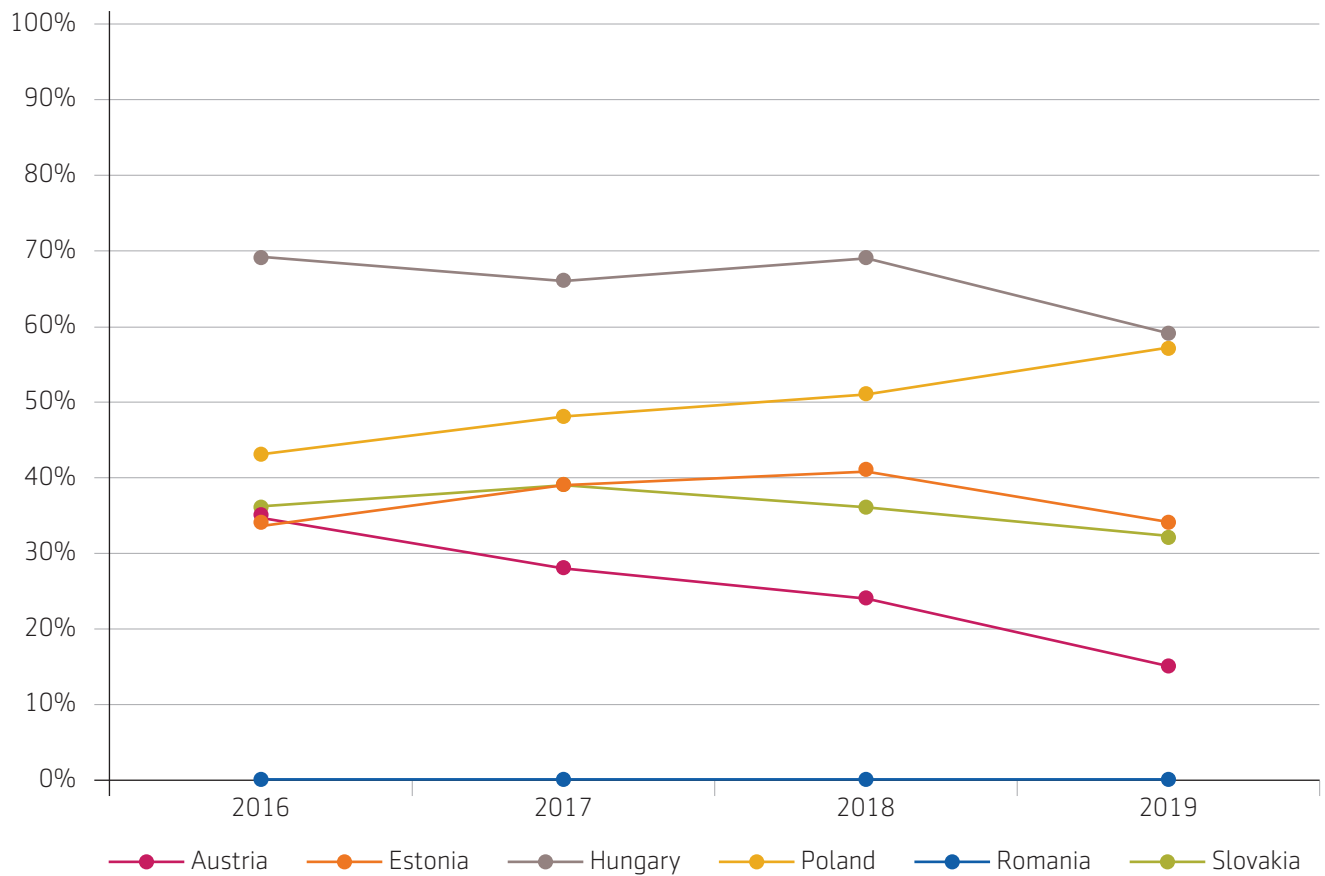
Figures

Figure A1 ▲ Freedom House Index



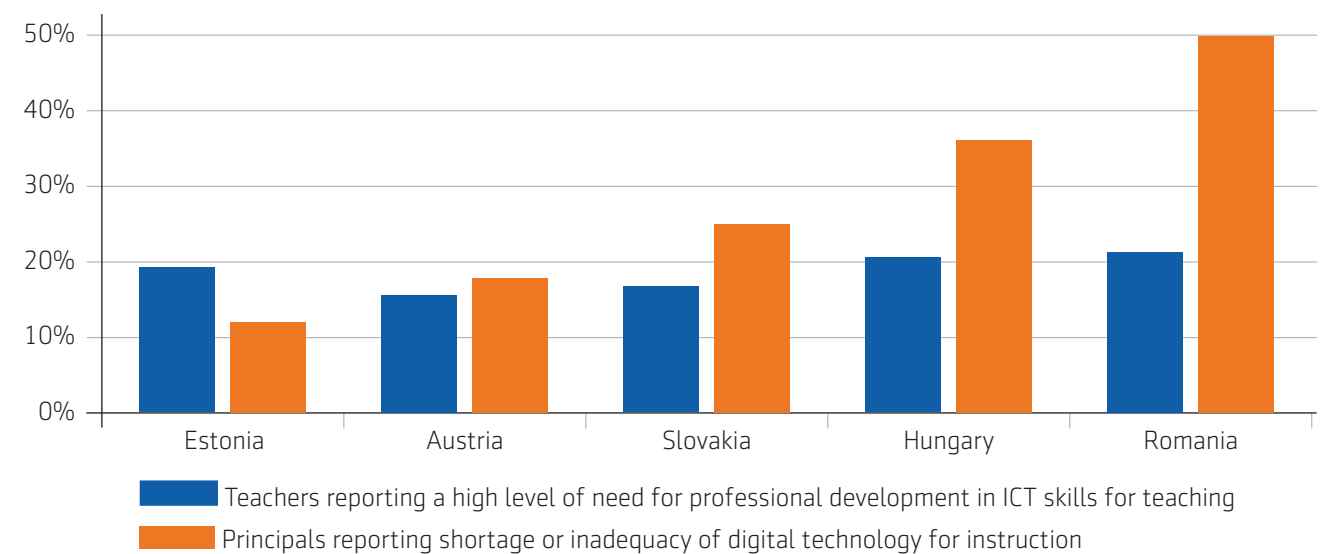
Source: <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

Figure A2 ▲ Predicted share of vote for populist parties (Populism Tracker, %)



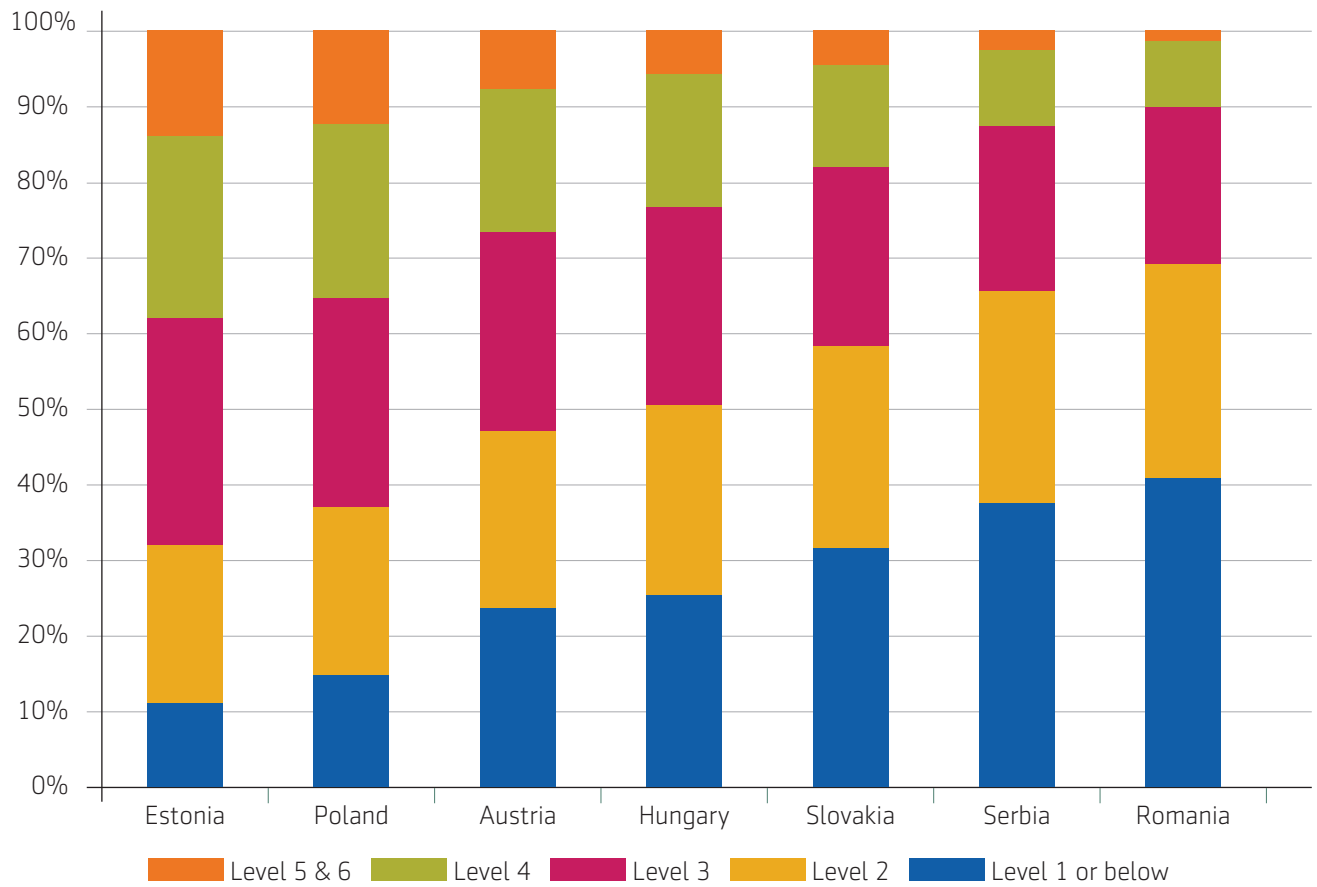
Source: <https://progressivepost.eu/spotlights/populism-tracker>

Figure A3 ▲ ICT preparedness of schools, TALIS 2018



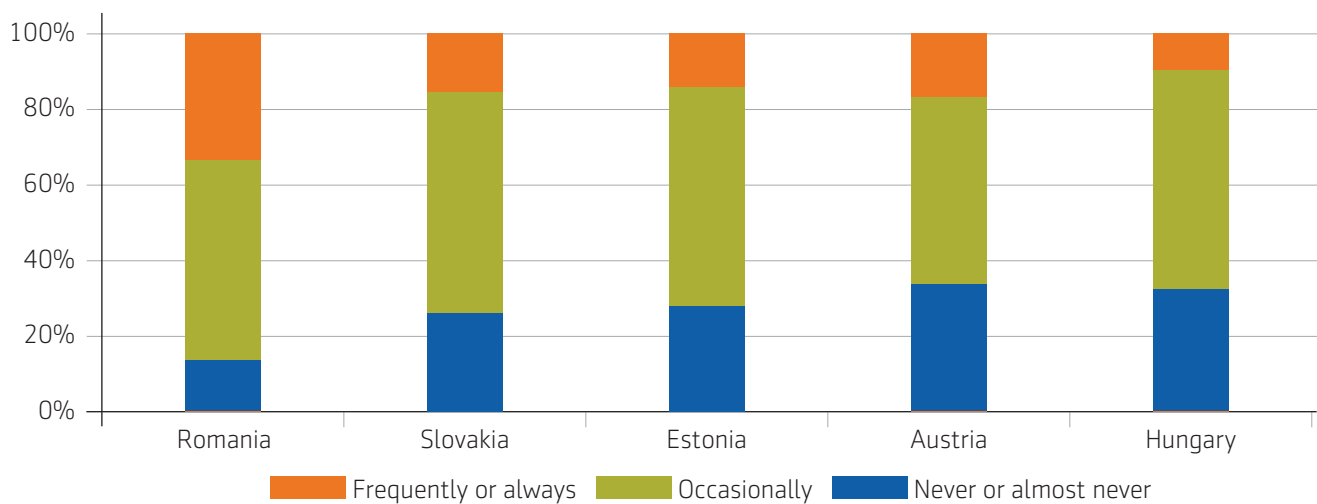
Source: Teaching and Learning International Survey (2018)

Figure A4 ▲ Results from PISA 2018: Reading



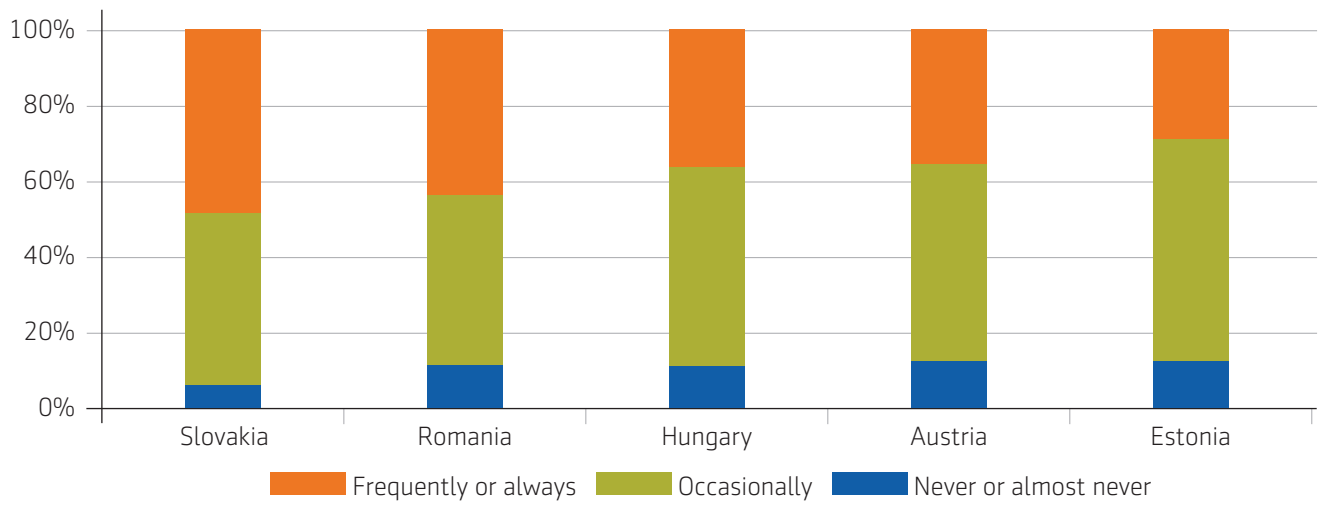
Source: Program for International Student Assessment (2018)

Figure A5 ▲ Projects that require at least one week to complete



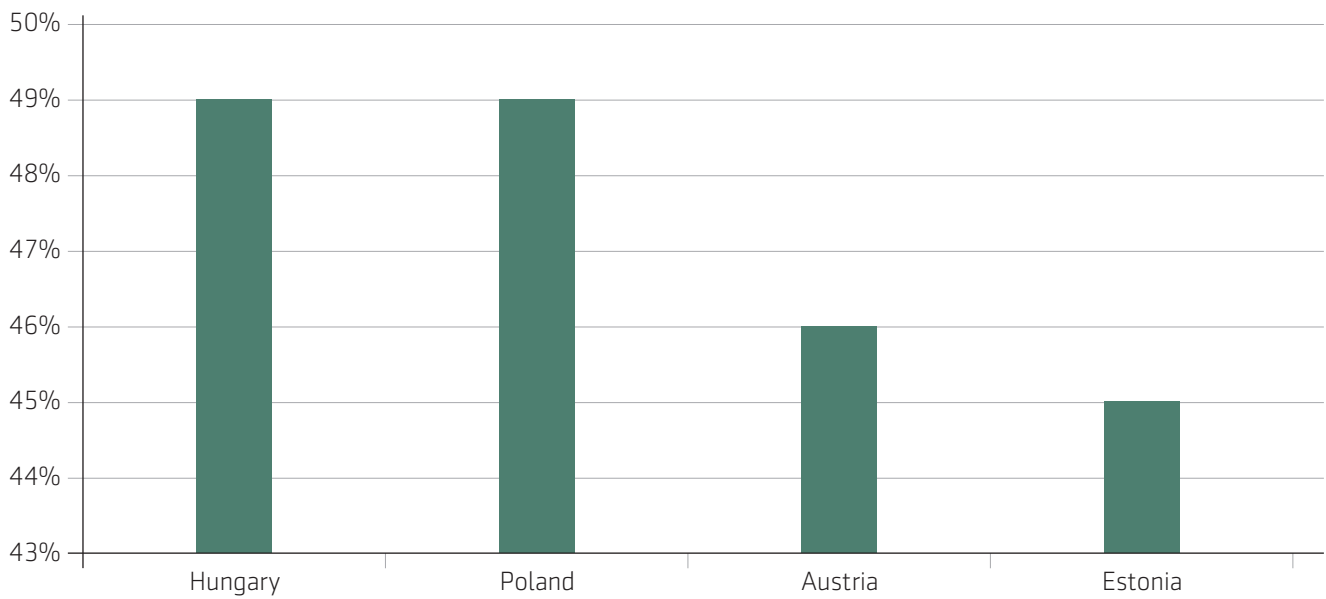
Source: Teaching and Learning International Survey (2018)

Figure A6 ▲ Students decide on own procedures for solving complex tasks



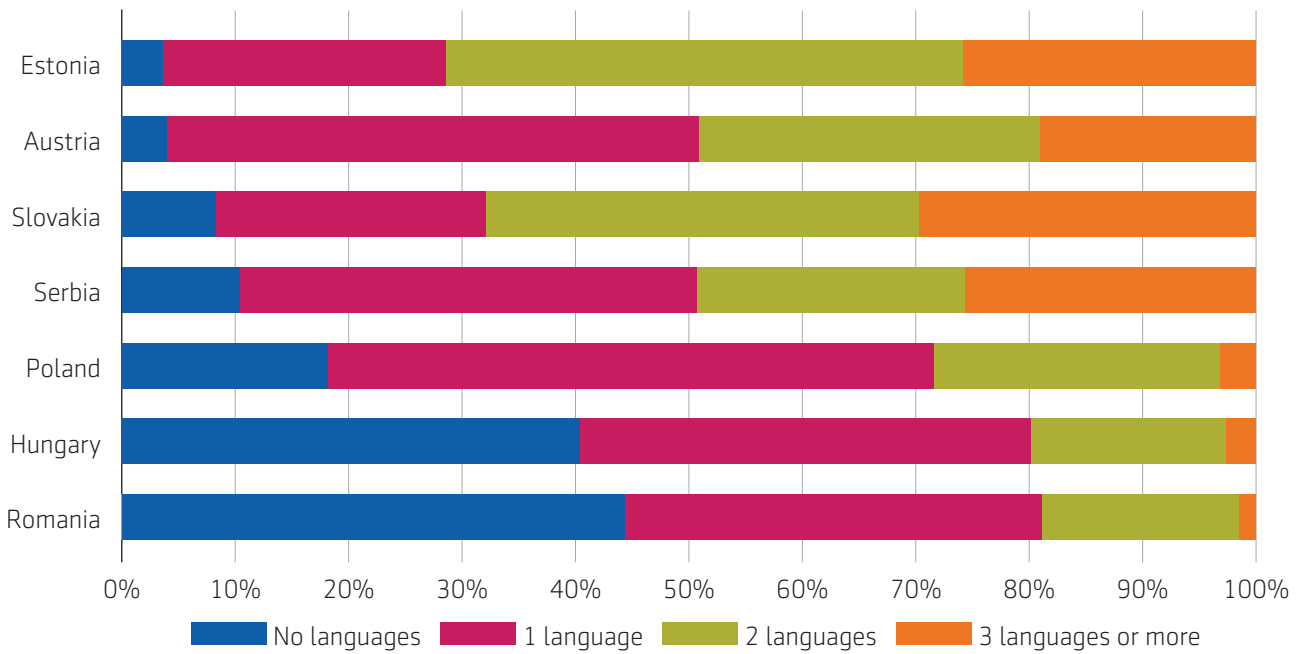
Source: Teaching and Learning International Survey (2018)

Figure A7 ▲ Aggregated technical automation potential of countries, % of working hours (2016)



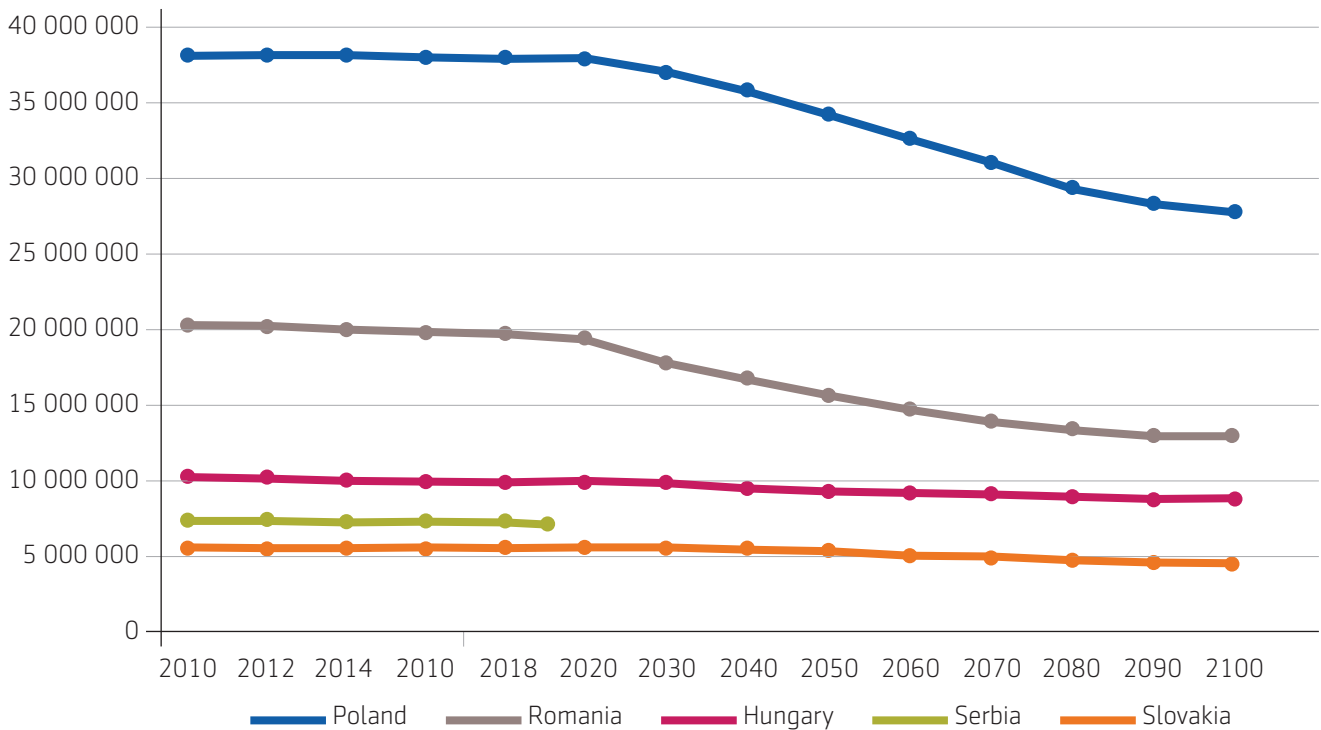
Source: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Locations/Europe%20and%20Middle%20East/Hungary/Our%20Insights/Transforming%20our%20jobs%20automation%20in%20Hungary/Automation-report-on-Hungary-EN-May24.ashx>

Figure A8 ▲ Number of foreign languages known (self-reported) among 25 to 34-year-olds, 2016



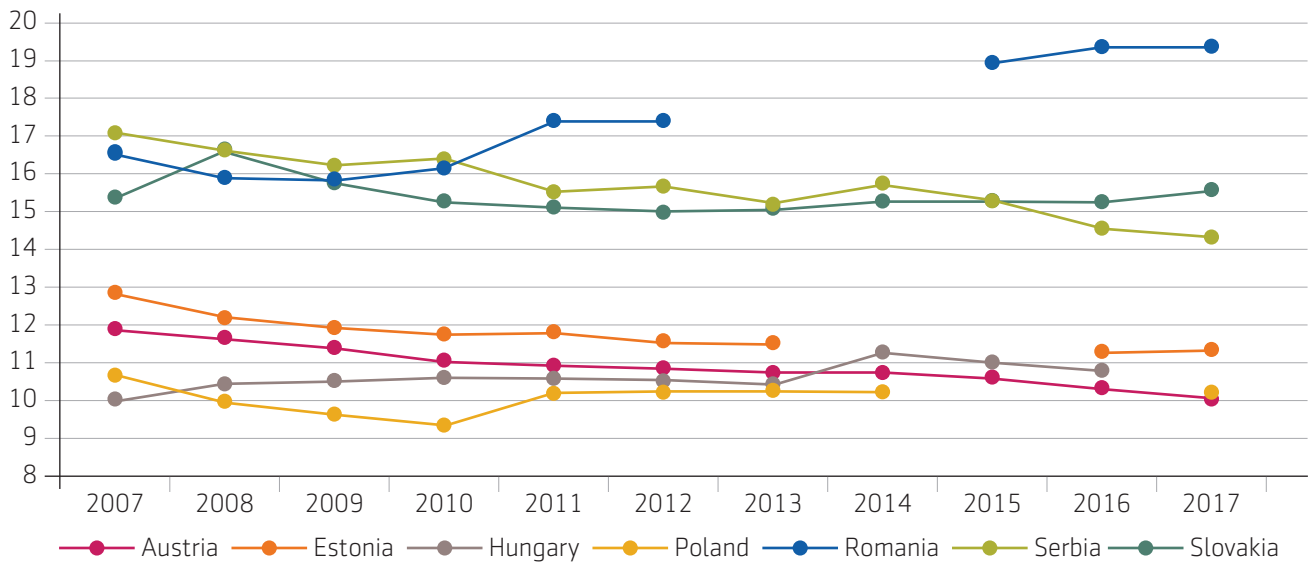
Source: Adult Education Survey (2016)

Figure A9 ▲ Population of countries—prediction



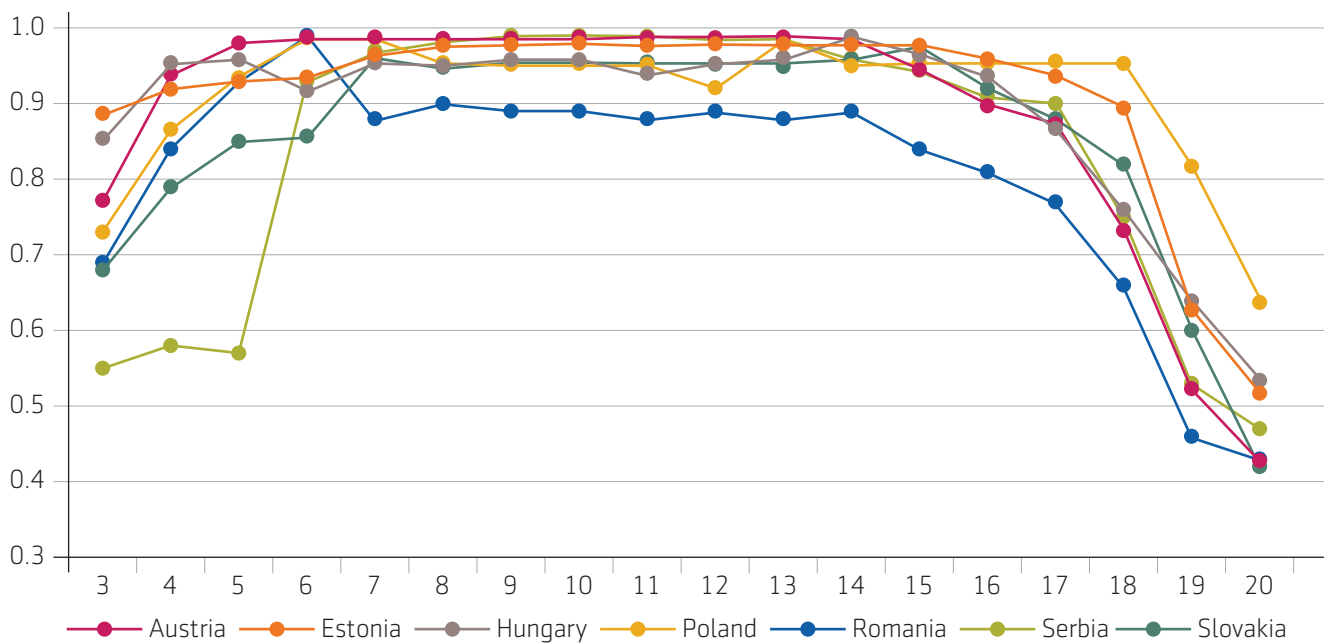
Source: Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00002/default/table?lang=en>

Figure A10 ▲ Pupil-reacher ratio in primary education (World Bank)



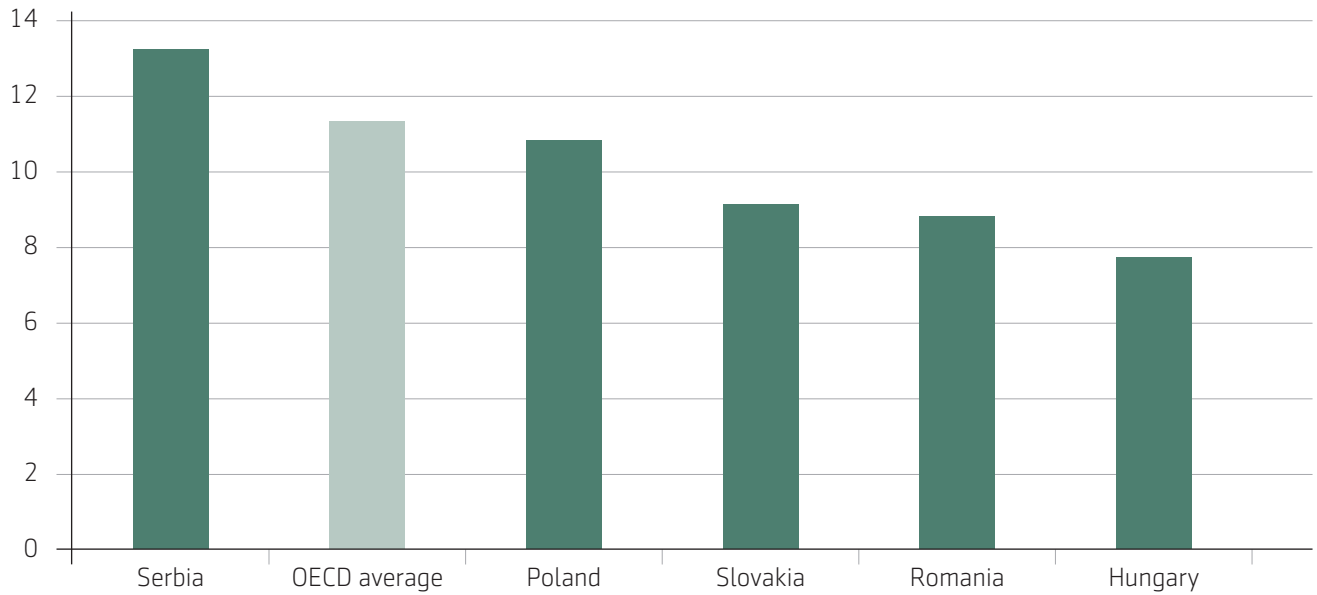
Source: The World Bank's public database: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRM.ENRL.TC.ZS>

Figure A11 ▲ Population in formal education by age in 2018 (%)



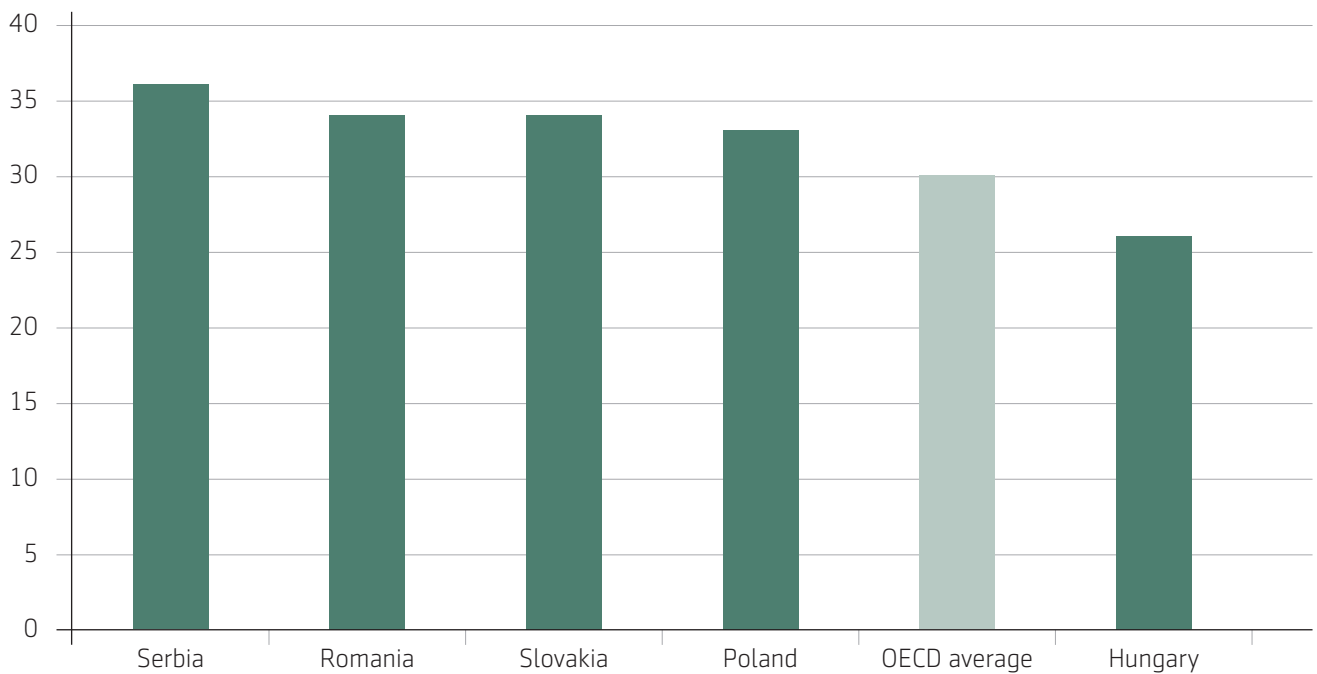
Source: Eurostat (2021)

Figure A12 ▲ Resilient students (students in the bottom quarter of the ESCS index who perform in the top quarter of students internationally at reading), PISA 2018



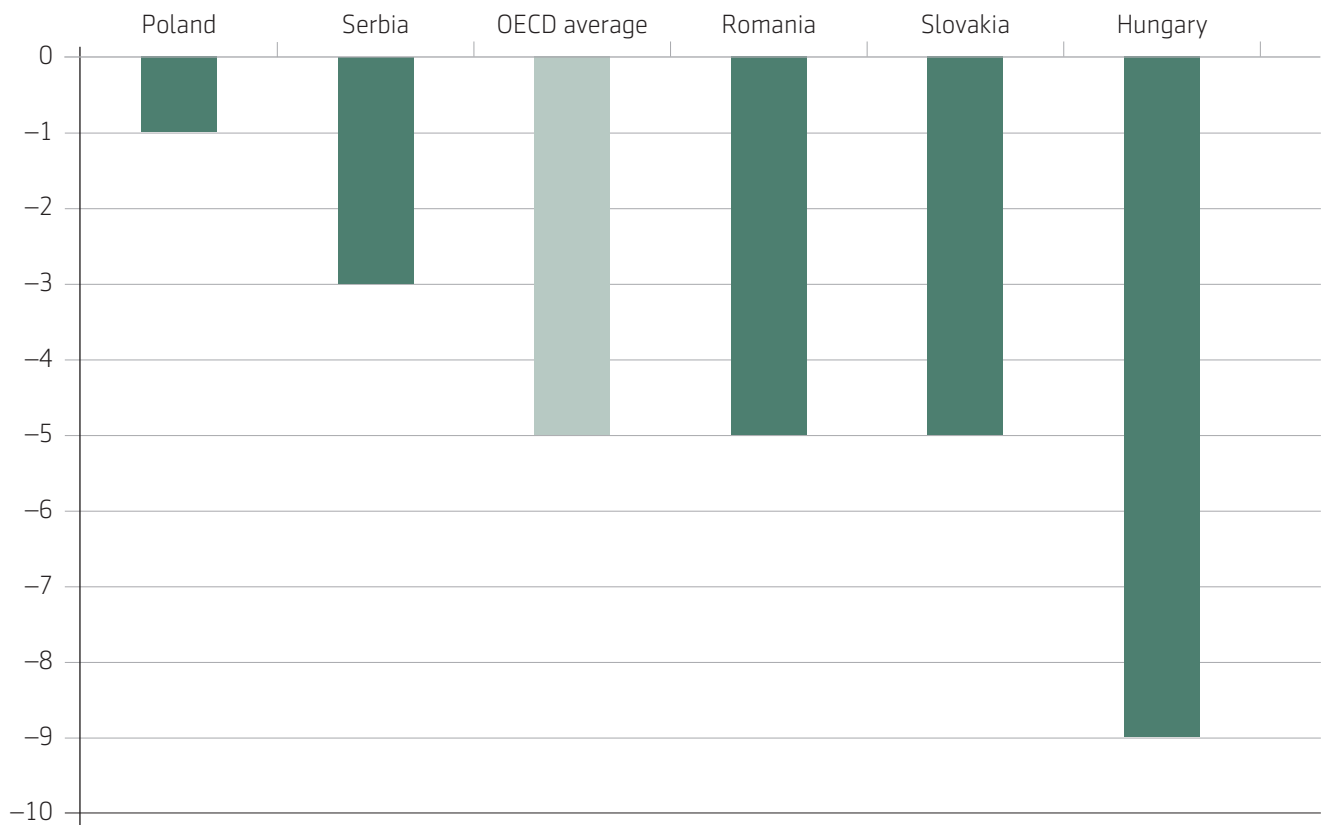
Source: Program for International Student Assessment (2018)

Figure A13 ▲ Gender difference in reading (female–male), PISA 2018



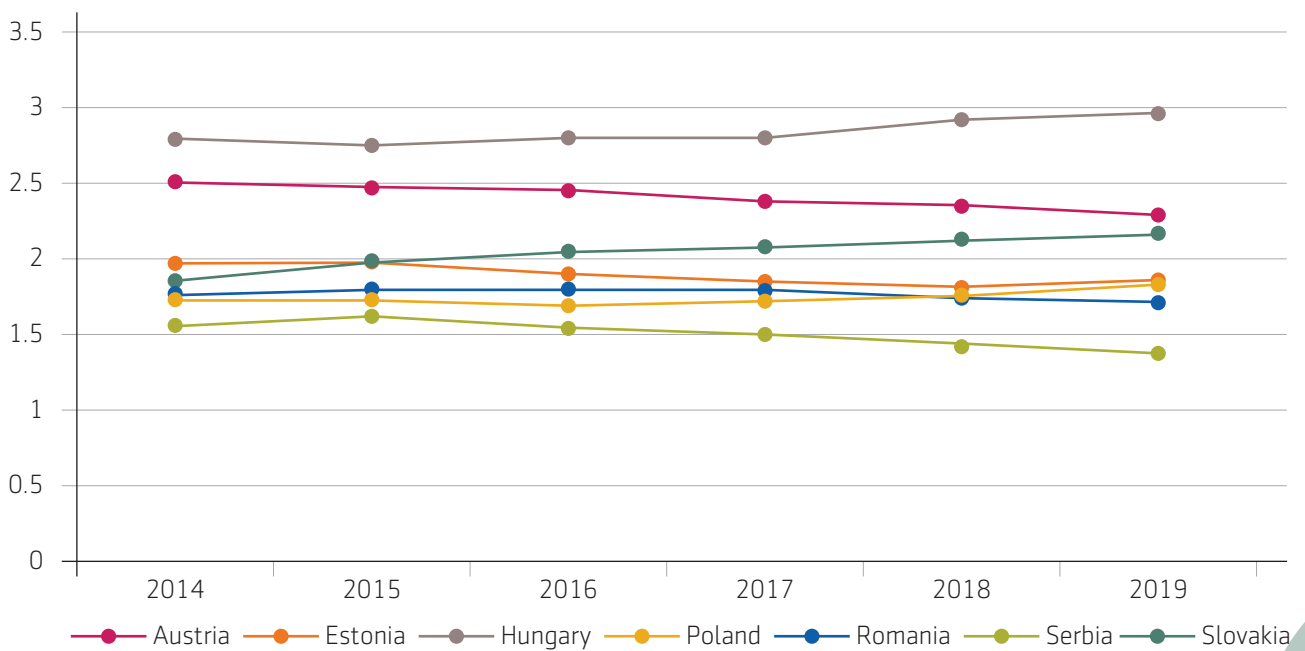
Source: Program for International Student Assessment (2018)

Figure A14 ▲ Gender difference in mathematics (female–male), PISA 2018



Source: Program for International Student Assessment (2018)

Figure A15 ▲ Ratio of men (compared to women) in STEM education (ISCED 5–8)



Source: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uoe_enrt04&lang=en

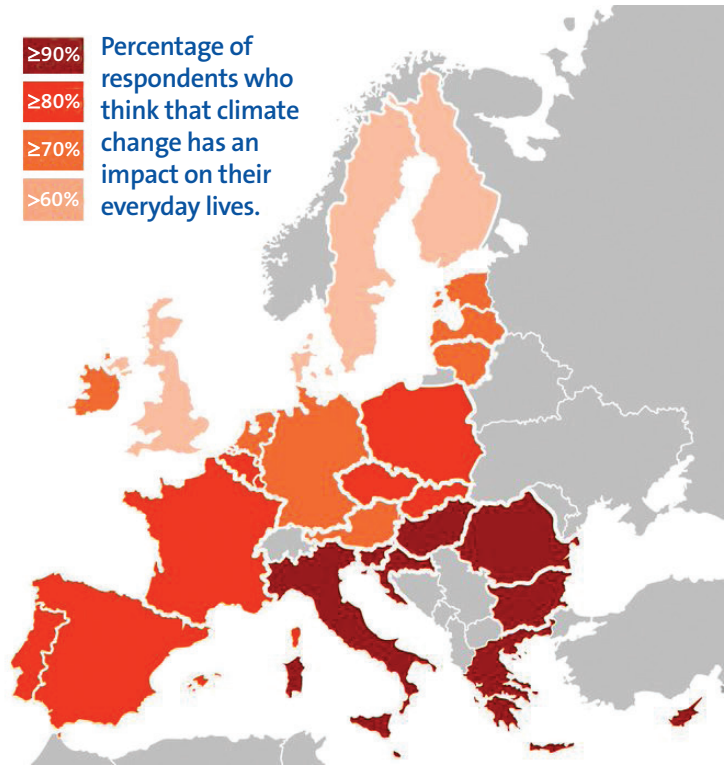
Figure A16 ▲ Impact of climate change on peoples' lives by country

EIB Climate Survey

In Eastern and Southern Europe, more people feel the impact of climate change on their everyday lives.

Percentage of respondents who think that climate change has an impact on their everyday lives.

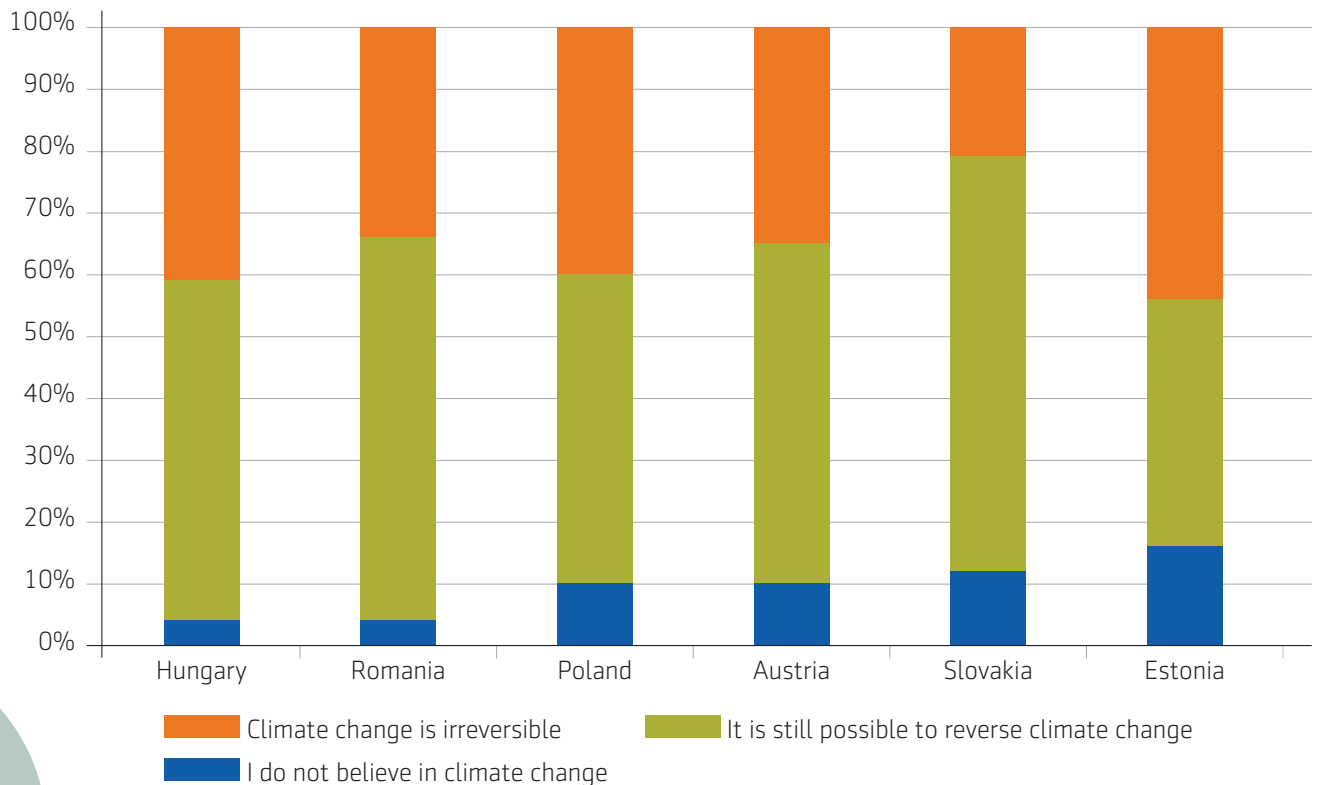
- ≥90%
- ≥80%
- ≥70%
- >60%



Source: BVA for the European Investment Bank

Source: <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/the-eib-climate-survey-2020-2021.htm>

Figure A17 ▲ Beliefs about climate change



Source: <https://www.eib.org/en/publications/the-eib-climate-survey-2020-2021.htm>

Table A1 ▲ Challenge Matrix: how are schools and educators affected

	access	skills	knowledge	teaching method	institutional organization
Populism, autocratic regimes	exclusion, segregation, political control	critical thinking, fact checking, rhetoric, debating	media, economic and social studies, manipulation and rhetoric	critical content analysis during class and home activities, debate, classroom participation (forum of ideas), opinion essays	practice democracy, strengthen professional leadership and (financial) independence of schools
Technological change	digital +/-	IT, info management, learning skills	interpretation, big picture vs. facts	flipped classrooms and the presence of digital technologies in class	digital preparedness of schools and teachers (culture, technology, and competence): opportunities to learn and develop, direction and leadership, functioning digital equipment, an environment that gives teachers the flexibility to experiment, IT professionals at school
Globalization, internationalization, (migration)		languages, social skills, IT skills	global history, macroeconomic trends, cultures		student exchange programs, summer schools, etc.
The transformation of labor markets	LLL	soft skills, language, IT, learning skills	effective study methods	learning-by-doing, group work, case studies, flipping the classroom, long-term projects, peer editing/ feedback, differentiated teaching strategies, etc.	mobility, school adaptation ("shooting at an accelerating target"), central pressure of suboptimal policies (especially: demand for vocational skills)
Demographic changes (migration)	LLL parents' education	ageing → care, language diversity	tolerance (of atypical families)		parents' education, fewer students per school → school mergers vs. more versatile teaching staff, what to do with school conservation policies, financing rules
Old and new inequalities + regional differences	exclusion, segregation		concepts of social justice, equity and inequality, social responsibility	differentiated teaching strategies	goal: more mixed-ability, mixed-ethnicity schools and classes (e.g. the admission system) learning material (textbook) check for equality and tolerance
Changing gender roles	vocational training and STEM subjects	critical thinking	history and current status of gender differences, concepts of social justice, equity and inequality		promote all kinds of learning pathways (e.g. STEM) for both genders, delay specialization (both within and between schools) learning material (textbook) check for gender equality
Climate change		fact checking, changing (and sticking to new) habits	the science of climate change and its social impacts, social responsibility, ways to reduce one's climate footprint		green schools

CHAPTER 2

The Institutional Conditions of School-level Adaptation

HUNGARY, POLAND, ROMANIA,
SERBIA, AND SLOVAKIA

Ágnes KENDE

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SECTION 1. ▲

Introduction

Education systems around the world are expected to be affected by changes in the societal, economic, technological, demographic, and political environment in the following decades. These coming changes are already imposing serious adaptation-related challenges on individual schools and school systems. These challenges include the impact of new technologies on the labor market, demographic changes, new patterns of migration, the impact of populist and authoritarian politics, established and emerging new societal inequalities, the impact of the globalization of learning environments, and the internationalization of education. Considering their potential impact on education, these factors may be sorted into broader categories that include political, economic, demographic, and social changes, in addition to climate change. Challenges that belong in the same category are similar in the sense that they require the same kinds of responses from schools and educators. For instance, students who are taught how to learn and improve themselves will be able to adjust more easily to technological changes, new forms of work, or working in international environments as adults. Similarly, more inclusive schools at which pupils are taught to accept and embrace dissimilarity will be prepared for the consequences of all kinds of inequalities (Munkácsy & Scharle., 2021). Many of the education systems of the most developed countries are responding to these challenges by reconsidering the goals of learning, by attempting to personalize education more, by emphasizing the need for ever lengthier periods of general education, by introducing a new wave of expansion of higher education, and by experimenting with new methods of educational governance (Radó, 2020).

The following book chapter is based on the main findings of the “Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context” (EDUC)¹ research by CEU DI that focused on the adaptability of education systems that is determined by the interplay between governance and the institutional operation of schools in Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. EDUC research seeks answers to two major questions: what the major incentives and main obstacles are to shifting to a form of education that is more personalized, more oriented towards the development of adaptive skills, and more equitable; and how much the various future challenges are reflected in the educational policy discourse and the education modernization strategies of the aforementioned CEE countries. The present chapter focuses on and synthesizes the issues of autonomy, evaluation, and school development, which are closely linked to governance at the school level in the five countries. The school-level governance analysis and synthesis study is based on the related literature review (Kende, 2020), the EDUC research concept paper (Radó, 2020), and the completed country studies (Radó, 2021; Jakubowski, 2021; Ciolan et al., 2021; Jovanovic, 2021; Kaščák, 2021) that were carried out within the EDUC research program.

The concept of the study is based on the analytical framework related to the adaptability of education systems to future challenges that was developed by Péter Radó (2020), and explores the school-level adaption of the five selected countries. The main problems with school-level adaptation are that most

1. See the website for details of the EDUC research: <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/educ>

schools are designed, organized, and operate according to the physical, organizational, and logistical needs of teaching, leaving very limited space for active, effective, and personalized learning. School programs determine the same learning targets for all; learning is organized along the division of labor among teachers; assessment is based on standard expectations applied to all; and instruction is very much driven by content. The inflexibility and closed nature of traditional schools create a contradiction in contemporary education systems: the growing diversity of perceived learning needs of students on the one hand, and the standardized 'mass production' logic of school operations on the other. This contradiction increases the proportion of students who are 'not compatible' with schools (Radó, 2020). In contrast, schools are expected to become able to equip learners with the skills that at later stages of their life-course will enable them to adapt to any changes—especially to the largely unpredictable outcomes of future challenges—and to make learning more personalized. School systems should allow for longer periods of participation in general education and for the greater diversification of learning pathways.

Radó argues that in many Central Eastern European countries where populism has led to a way of wielding power that is autocratic the impact of populism on schools is much stronger and more substantial: it has led to the centralization of governance, along with the imposition of restraints on school autonomy and the tearing down of the institutions that normally ensure the effective functioning of education. The magnitude of this change from one extreme to another can be demonstrated through regional international comparison. Eastern European former communist countries in the period 1990–1993 established the major structural characteristics of their education systems with the communist past in mind—when schools were operated under central political and administrative control. Also, they did so during a period of time when school autonomy was already widely considered one of the preconditions of educational development. Therefore, these countries allocated more decision-making competencies to schools than in many Western European countries (Radó, 2020).

The book chapter analyses the extent of school autonomy in the five selected countries, examining the organizational autonomy of schools (e.g. decision-making competences deployed to the school level, the actors involved in decision-making, etc.); the professional autonomy of schools (e.g. their latitude to define school programs; the way that autonomous space is defined, etc.); and the financial autonomy of schools. Accountability to parents means involving parents in the life of schools, or the influence of parents on school-related issues by which the former can transmit and strengthen external expectations towards the former. The latitude for adaptation is also determined by various organizational processes, such as self-evaluation in schools (whether mandatory, and whether associated with standards). Regarding the use of the results of evaluations and examinations (i.e. self-evaluation and school-improvement-related processes), it is relevant whether schools have access to such information so they can compare themselves with other schools (benchmarking); where schools stand in relation to the average; and how this information can be used. The issue of teacher appraisal is related to whether the evaluation of some teachers is an internal institutional task and related to self-evaluation, or whether the state evaluates teachers, etc. Finally, the paper analyses the situation of school development in the five countries concerning whether it is mandatory for them to draw up plans for development built on self-evaluation processes.

SECTION 2. ▲

Conceptual Foundations

According to Fan and Zhang, education governance and school autonomy are a pair of mutually linked concepts that involve various relationships, including the relationship between schools and the government and society, and the complex relationship between school administrations (including school leaders, teachers, and other staff) and students, and even their parents. The essence of best-practice education governance is building a modern school system that operates in compliance with the law; that is autonomous and under democratic supervision; and which engages other stakeholders in society. At the core of the concept are two goals: the first is to free schools from their overdependence on the government and promote their autonomy; the second is to gradually implement shared governance that involves the full involvement of stakeholders (such as teachers, students, and parents, as well as professional educational organizations), and consequently to highlight the agency of schools, to increase the level of professionalism in their operations, and to better meet students' educational needs and facilitate their development (Fan-Zhang, 2020). With this attention on making sure that education caters to individual needs, debate regarding the governance and decision-making authority of education centres on who can best provide such services, and who should be responsible for funding them. Morgan states that proponents of free market and public choice argue that market demands should drive who is responsible for providing for and funding education, while opponents argue that government intervention is necessary for increasing equity and access. School governance may be classified based on varying criteria that help with examining the amount of decision-making authority retained at the local and state governmental level. The application of categories such as 'centralized' and 'decentralized' in the areas of political, administrative, and fiscal management creates a taxonomy of school governance. Centralized states typically have a few, large school districts, while decentralized states have more districts that are smaller in size. The financing of education also has a role in the governance of education. The decision-making process of determining how school funds are spent and which entities are responsible for providing those funds affects fiscal accountability, and therefore how schools are governed. Advocates for local school governance argue that large, centralized governance structures are more susceptible to being 'captured' by politicians aligned with special interest groups. It is seemingly easier for local citizens to be watchdogs of local decision-making than attempting to watch over and hold accountable state-level government leaders that are distantly located. The argument for local control also perceives the benefit of the involvement of parents and local citizens as a means of fostering the investment of the public. If local citizens feel they have a say in local school governance, they are more likely to meet the needs of schools and pay attention to what is going on at the local level (Morgan, 2017).

As summarized in the *OECD Report 2013: PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful* (OECD, 2013A), increasing school autonomy is based on the premise that local school actors are the best judges of their students' learning needs, and leads to the most effective use of resources to meet those needs. Granting schools freedom from the control of higher administrative bodies should contribute to improvements in student performance. As a result, schools have become increasingly responsible

for curricular and instructional decisions, as well as for managing financial and material resources and personnel. School leaders often play an important role in managing tasks that have been delegated to the school level. At the same time, the influence of central authorities in defining standards, curricula, and assessments has strengthened in many countries through the loosening of central control over 'processes' and financial regulations that is often accompanied by growing control of 'outputs' by central levels of the system (Radó, 2021b)

Greater autonomy for schools means that principals, school boards, and teachers can assume more responsibility for policies related to resources, curricula, assessments, school admissions, and discipline. If the state sets clear expectations for students, school autonomy in terms of defining the details of curricula and assessments can be positively associated with the system's overall performance. Another argument in favour of autonomy for education systems is that it can create stronger incentives for innovation. Successful schools will be places where people want to work, and where they find that they can implement good ideas. In contrast, innovative change can be more difficult to achieve in hierarchical and bureaucratic structures that are geared towards rewarding compliance with rules and regulations.

With greater autonomy come new forms of accountability. The school-excellence model means that each school sets its own goals and annually assesses its progress towards those goals, including academic performance. Greater autonomy also can lead to a laser-like focus on identifying and developing highly effective school leaders who can lead school transformations (OECD, 2013a). Schleicher argues that it is also important to combine professional autonomy with a collaborative culture, both among teachers and schools. This collaborative culture needs to be carefully crafted through policy and practice. For school leaders to take on this larger, system-level role, leadership should be shared, with leadership teams assuming some of the school leaders' tasks. The result will be that school leaders regularly meet with their peers, which means that they no longer work under a local school administration, but they become the local school administration. In school systems where knowledge is shared among teachers, autonomy is a positive advantage; but in school systems without a culture of peer learning and accountability, autonomy may adversely affect student performance. If autonomy can be combined with a culture of collaboration, not only will schools benefit, but also individual teachers (Schleicher, 2018).

Increasing demands for quality and equity in education, the growing pressure for public accountability and transparency, a trend towards more decentralization and school autonomy, and greater capacity for knowledge management have resulted in an increasing interest in evaluation and assessment in education. Many countries have introduced a wide range of measures for evaluating students, teachers, school leaders, schools, and education systems. The former is essential for improving understanding of how well students are learning, providing information to parents and society at large, and improving schools, school leadership, and teaching practices (OECD, 2016a).

School self-evaluation is a key mechanism for supporting school development and diagnosing school needs, as well as generating insight and understanding, followed by actions aimed at making improvements, and reviews of these. School self-evaluation can lead to greater sensitivity to areas in

need of improvement. The process of school self-evaluation allows teachers to develop a perspective beyond their own classroom, particularly when they are involved in decision-making. Schools can implement a range of improvement strategies based on priorities identified through school self-evaluation. Approaches such as schools as learning organizations, professional learning communities, lesson and learning study, joint practice development, classroom-based action research, data-informed instruction and data teams, and peer review—when teachers analyse and discuss student achievement data systematically and/or observe each other’s lessons—may lead to changes in teachers’ instructional practices and knowledge of pedagogical content. School self-evaluation supports school improvement and planning activities, which may in turn support student achievement and improve planning, but can also lead to improvements in areas such as safe learning environments that benefit students’ social-emotional learning and well-being (Chapman & Sammons, 2013).

The term ‘school effectiveness’ has been applied to explore differences within and between schools, with the aim of generating knowledge about the relationship between ‘explanatory’ and ‘outcome’ factors using appropriate models. The related studies are interested in phenomena such as the relative scale of differences in schools, and the extent to which other factors (such as student social background, curriculum organization, teaching methods, and school management) may explain these differences; they can be seen as a helpful starting point for school self-evaluation and review. Scheerens (2002) argues that proper evaluation is a prerequisite for effectiveness-enhancing measures at all levels. Evaluating school improvement programs is particularly important. Evaluation provides a basis for monitoring how effectively education is being delivered to students and for assessing the performance of systems, schools, school leaders, teachers and students, among other areas (OECD, 2013A). It may be concluded that routinely incorporating feedback and monitoring and evaluation information into decision-making procedures in schools ensures that such information is used actively (Capperucci, 2015).

In clarifying how school-level autonomy is related to the institutional preparedness of education systems to promote active, personalized, and active learning, and may be assessed thus, this chapter presents the main concepts of the ‘new school’ and explores the new approach to the design of school programs. The ‘new school’ ensures the following: the personalization of learning; a new way of organizing learning in schools that integrates formal, non-formal, and informal learning; the development of teaching praxis (instruction, evaluation, and collaboration with other teachers) that makes the former more differentiated, personalized, and able to integrate offline and online learning; and the opening up of schools to cooperation with out-of-school agents that may generate opportunities and support for personalized learning and the creation of local learning networks (Radó, 2020). Expanding personalization to all students calls for a school program that contains all the institutional competences (i.e. professional support competences and all sorts of learning experiences) that schools are able to provide that create the basis for further development and enrichment. The basis of evaluation has to be the progress of individual students, and students should participate in establishing the underlying criteria for this. Regarding the problem of organizational change in schools, two main themes must be addressed: the scope of school autonomy, and the organizational preparedness of schools to initiate and implement organizational changes. School autonomy is not a right, but, according to Radó, it is one of the most important preconditions of the quality

of educational services (Radó, 2020). School autonomy includes three overlapping and mutually reinforcing elements: (1) professional autonomy; that is, the space to interpret externally defined goals, and for the design and operation of core educational functions in a way that is adjusted to local needs and to the very diverse needs of children schools enrol; (2) organizational autonomy; that is, the appropriate set of decision-making competences deployed to the management and staff of schools that is required to solve problems that emerge within schools on the one hand, and the latitude to manage key organizational processes in a way that fits the institutional context on the other; and, (3) financial autonomy; namely, the flexibility required to manage externally determined annual budgets in order to adjust the internal allocation of resources to actual educational needs. In helping understand the actual space for school autonomy in the selected five countries, the present study analyses their capacity to change the form of organizational learning in schools, which is the most important driver of educational change. The first step is mapping those regular and mandatory tasks that are deployed to schools that can ensure continuous organizational efforts to improve the quality of the services they provide. The second step is examining the most important instrument for improving quality, which is the regular institutional self-evaluation of schools. The learning organization model is based on the premise that those school characteristics that may enable schools to adapt to external challenges on their own depend on the organizational culture of schools, which is determined by the intensity and quality of personal relationships, as well as by how schools implement their core functions—hence the concept of organizational architecture seems to be applicable here.

As summarized in Kende's literature review (2020) on the preconditions for institutional change in schools, many countries incorporate evaluations that are both external and internal to schools that are mutually complementary and reinforcing. School education systems that support the synergy of external and internal quality assurance mechanisms will have more resilience throughout the complex process of change.

The different country-level approaches to quality assurance are apparent not only in how individual countries integrate external and internal mechanisms, but also in how they balance their accountability and improvement functions. There are concerns that 'high-stakes' approaches to accountability may undermine school development. High stakes may include the denial of accreditation to schools that do not meet quality assurance standards, financial sanctions for schools, or impacts on teachers' careers or salaries. Both accountability and improvement are important for ensuring the quality of processes, as well as outcomes. Mechanisms that include a focus on accountability typically include incentives that focus teachers' attention on centralized performance standards and the need to help all students succeed. Additionally, a focus on improvement ensures that data are used to identify needs, adjust school strategies, and motivate improvements in instruction. While there are concerns that high-stakes approaches may inhibit development and innovation and demotivate staff, countries have engaged in a variety of approaches to moderating the impact of the former and have placed greater emphasis on making improvements. For example, a number of countries have highlighted the importance of moving away from quality assurance in the form of 'control' to more open and 'trust-based' approaches.

The balance of accountability and improvement is also relevant to internal quality assurance. At the school level there is some evidence that strong teacher-to-teacher trust, a collective focus on

improving instruction and learning, and teacher experience are associated with higher levels of student attainment. In turn, teachers in more successful schools have higher levels of trust, which indicates strong internal control and accountability. Internal quality assurance mechanisms are most effective when they support collective teacher work, and are focused on improving instruction.

Teacher appraisal, which may be conducted externally (inspectors or local administrators) and/or internally (school management or peers), is another area where it is important to balance accountability and improvement. It is important to clearly differentiate between appraisal that is meant to help teachers improve classroom teaching, and appraisal related to high-stakes decisions related to performance awards and/or career advancement. If teachers feel that there are career-related consequences attached to an appraisal process, they are less likely to be open about areas where they feel they need to improve, thus missing out on an important opportunity for feedback and support.

Internal quality assurance, including school self-evaluation and teacher appraisal, supports teachers to take collective responsibility for student learning. While schools may have access to central guidelines about school self-evaluation, staff may need to develop a consensus about the goals and criteria related to such evaluations. Staff may also need training on how to gather and analyse data (ET 2020 Working Groups, 2017).

Evaluation and assessment are integral parts of the innovation process. The implementation of educational innovation requires an assessment of the innovation's effectiveness that enables decision-makers to make the necessary adaptations. Evaluation and assessment can be a means of validating innovation, and evidence about the impact of new approaches is essential for disseminating and sharing innovation successfully across the wider education system. Furthermore, evaluation and assessment can be a lever for driving innovation in education by signalling the types of learning that are valued. Developing curriculum innovation and innovative approaches to evaluation and assessment is likely to benefit from some discretion at the local and school level. Given the strong retrogressive effect of assessment on learning, evaluation and assessment also need to be brought in line with changes in expectations about what students should achieve, and innovations in curricula, programs, and pedagogy. Innovative programs will be subject to additional barriers if the assessment systems that are in place do not capture their innovative features (i.e. the latter fail to integrate the important learning goals that are emphasized in such programs). The use of ICT in evaluation and assessment may improve the response to pedagogical innovation (OECD, 2013b).

SECTION 3. ▲

The Extent of School Autonomy

3.1 The organizational autonomy of schools

Hungary and Serbia have the most centralized systems and the least autonomy among the five countries under investigation. After 2010, Hungary became the only country that, in structural terms, returned to the communist period in terms of the rather symbolic or non-existent weight awarded to institutional-local educational autonomy. The organizational and professional autonomy of schools was terminated, or its scope for autonomy reduced to a symbolic function. This has had major implications for the latitude actors have to implement the core educational functions of schools; that is, for the creation and implementation of school programs, determining the organization of teaching and learning, managing institutional pedagogical evaluation and instruction, as well as in relation to organizational functions such as the management of organizational processes, the internal allocation of financial resources, the management of human resources, the management of school facilities, and the procurement of teaching materials and equipment (Radó, 2021a). Serbian schools have some autonomy in relation to school budget allocation, although this is more limited than in most OECD countries. Schools in Serbia have some autonomy in terms of how they allocate their budgets and manage instruction compared to schools in OECD countries. On paper, school boards play an important role in overseeing the quality of schools and school principals are responsible for both managerial and instructional leadership. However, while there has been progress in making appointments more merit based, the capacity of school leaders remains limited. School principals and school boards receive very little training or technical guidance on how to steer school improvement and provide oversight. Schools also receive very little public funding to implement improvement plans. As a result, most schools must rely on external impetus and support if they are to change the quality of their practices in a meaningful way (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

In contrast, the educational system in Poland and Slovakia is much more decentralized at the school level. The decentralization of school ownership and finances, together with increased school and teacher pedagogical autonomy, is a key feature of Polish reforms, and even the current government, while seeking to increase its power over schools, was not able to pass regulations that seriously limited the rights of local governments and teachers (Jakubowski, 2021). More decisions are made at the school level in Poland than in other OECD countries. For example, Polish schools decide on teaching practices, assessment policies, course content, the hiring of teaching staff, and the distribution of merit-based and needs-based scholarships (OECD, 2015). In Slovakia, the funding system enables a high degree of financial, professional, and organizational autonomy of schools—to a larger extent than is the case in most OECD countries. An important element of organizational autonomy in Slovakia is the power of in-school actors (principal, school bodies, and teachers), as contrasted with outside actors (sponsors, the state, and so on). The index of school autonomy in Slovakia, calculated as the percentage of tasks for which principals, teachers, or school governing boards have considerable responsibility, is considerably above the OECD average (Kaščák, 2021).

In relation to the scope of school autonomy, Romania is located in the middle, between more centralized and more decentralized systems. Despite recent reforms that have increased school autonomy, their decision-making authority continues to be limited. Over the past decade, various reforms have sought to increase the autonomy of schools and the engagement of local authorities. The 2011 Education Law reinforced school boards, which previously had a limited decision-making role, thus taking a major step towards decentralizing the management of schools, which process started in 2010. The governance of schools in Romania is basically regulated by the Education Law of 2011, which made schools publicly responsible for their performance (the latter as embodied in the form of the school board and the principal). Basically, school boards are responsible for the current management of schools, but also for strategic planning and development, including all of its aspects: staffing, management selection, and procedures, financing, schooling, etc. At the level of each school we find the Methodical Commissions, which include all the teachers of specific curriculum subjects, which are in charge of a range of teaching and learning matters.

3.2 Decision-making competences and related actors at the school level

In **Hungary**, school principals had considerably less autonomy in 2015 than in 2009 in relation to tasks associated with resources. According to school principals, these responsibilities appear to have been transferred mostly to local and regional authorities (OECD, 2016a). Strong fiscal and organizational autonomy for schools had existed in Hungary since the early 1990s. The instruments for governing a highly decentralized system were gradually developed by successive governments between 1996 and 2003. These institutional frameworks were radically altered in 2011 by the Orbán (Christian-conservative) government in the opposite direction, and to the extreme. As of January 2013, all public educational institutions—with the exception of kindergartens—were taken over from municipal self-governments and placed under the mandate of the newly established Klebelsberg School Maintaining Authority (KLIK). All school principals are now personally appointed by the minister for education himself. School district directors have taken over all employment-related decision-making competencies from school directors, and all teachers are now employees of KLIK, not of their schools. The National Education Act does not mandate the establishment of school governing boards, and school boards have traditionally played a minor role in Hungary.

School boards in **Serbia** are responsible for monitoring the quality of school management, but they lack the capacity to play a steering role in school governance. Each school board includes nine members appointed by their respective professional body or council for four years, comprising three school employee representatives, three parents, and three members chosen by the local self-government. The school board adopts the school program, development plan, and annual work plan. It is also responsible for validating the school's budget proposal that is submitted to and validated by the Regional School Authorities (RSA). Following the reform of school principal appointment, boards now pre-select candidates to lead schools and submit their proposals to the minister for a final decision. Despite these extensive responsibilities, the members of school boards receive no training on how to fulfil their roles. There are also no guidelines or manuals for school boards to follow (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

Moreover, school principals in Serbia receive very limited training in their core areas of responsibility. Serbia has taken action to reduce the politicisation of school principal appointment and dismissal. Prior to 2017, the latter were selected by school boards based on a recommendation from the teacher council. While school boards should theoretically base their decisions on the competency standards for school principals introduced in 2013, it is unclear whether these standards are systematically adhered to. School boards receive no training or guidance on how to ensure the integrity of the process, and are susceptible to political interference from local authorities. This has resulted in many principals being appointed based on political affiliation and personal relationships with school staff or local government rather than on merit, creating concerns that some school principals are more focused on serving the interests of individuals rather than the broader interests of students and schools as a whole. In 2017, the ministry changed the selection process in an attempt to increase its transparency and independence.

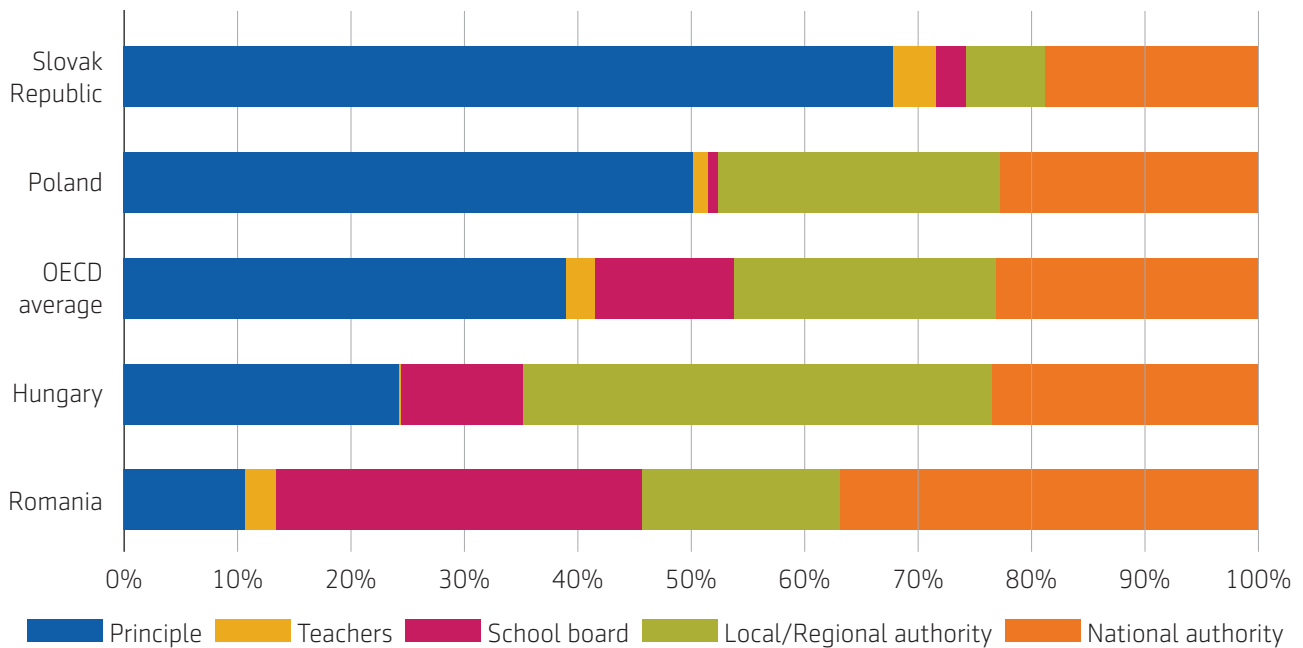
Principals have no influence on teachers' salaries, but schools have significant responsibility in terms of recruiting and dismissing teachers, because school principals in Serbia select teachers through an open call for recruitment, according to PISA data (Maghnouj et al., 2020). The greater centralization of the educational system has started being justified by the need for greater efficacy and stricter adherence to rules. The majority of principals never attend any kind of continuous professional training, but recently the process of obtaining a licence implies that training has started and become a mandatory and legal prerequisite for obtaining a school position (Jovanovic, 2021).

Principals and teachers in **Romania** have among the least levels of responsibility for the distribution of school resources and determining school assessment policies of all countries that participate in PISA (OECD, 2016). As mentioned above, despite recent reforms designed to increase autonomy, schools' decision-making authority continues to be limited in Romania. Amendments to the 2011 Education Law subsequently transferred responsibility for human resource decisions back to the County School Inspectorates (CSIs). This may reflect school boards' limited capacity to assume these responsibilities, taking into consideration the fact that half of their members have no expertise or experience in education, and they receive limited training in relation to their roles. School boards are composed of teaching staff, including the principal and deputy principal(s), but are also representative of the local council and mayor. Parents also have representatives on school boards. School boards validate school self-evaluation reports (the "Yearly Report on Internal Evaluation"), promote improvement measures, and approve schools' strategic planning documents, budget plans, and curricula. Principals (and their deputies) ensure the executive management and administration of schools, represent schools, and manage budgets. They also develop the organizational, operational, and budgetary plans for their schools, and are responsible for assessing, training, and motivating staff. At the local and school level, many managerial roles have historically been politicized. Inspectors and school principals are often appointed mainly based on their political affiliation or connections with local officials (Kitchen, 2017). This raises concerns about schools' independence and integrity and the quality of leadership, while increasing instability, as key school actors may change with the government. In 2011, the Ministry of Education introduced merit-based open contests to appoint school leaders and school inspectors, but this practice was not implemented until 2016.

Decision-making opportunities at the school level are the weakest part of the governance system in **Poland** and are related to school governance; namely, to the relatively weak position of school principals. The selection of school principals is a competitive process with local governments, trade unions, and inspectorates playing major roles. However, principals receive only a small increase in their salaries compared to regular teachers, while their obligations and responsibilities are much greater. They also have limited say in employment decisions, as teachers are protected by a special national law called the Teachers Charter. This law makes the firing of teachers practically impossible, and the decision-making power of principals regarding remuneration or teaching hours is also limited. Thus, in some places (mostly in large cities) there is currently little competition for the position of principal, and weak governance at the school level demonstrates the limited coordination of professional development or instructional approaches. The current COVID crisis shows how weak the position of principals is, the latter who in many cases have not been able to coordinate the efforts of teachers regarding online teaching.

The **Slovak** education system promotes the professional and organizational autonomy of schools, and to a larger extent than is the case in most OECD countries. An important element of organizational autonomy is the power of in-school actors (principal, school bodies, and teachers) as contrasted with outside actors (sponsors, the state, and so on) in **Slovakia** (as captured in Figure 1). A key element of this organizational autonomy is the degree of autonomy the school principal has in relation to the sponsor (the owner of school). School principals have relatively wide-ranging responsibilities in Slovakia. They can decide on a broad range of issues related to education and teaching, student admittance, budgeting and finances, recruitment, remuneration, and the dismissal of teaching staff, and school development. On the other hand, school principals have limited autonomy in relation to deciding teachers' starting salaries, including the pay scale and salary increases. However, this high degree of autonomy can also be viewed negatively—as reflecting a declining interest in education among school sponsors (mainly public ones). Most sponsors focus on funding, commercial, and supervisory activities. Few school principals can rely on their sponsor to help them manage every day operational issues or those related to staffing, finances, or economic matters, such as organizing tenders. Many sponsors lack financial resources and staff support and offer little guidance or assistance with anything that falls outside their legal responsibilities. Some of the latter are not interested in or lack the skills to provide assistance. The school boards in Slovakia are independent bodies and have no influence on the running of schools. Their only key responsibility is overseeing the recruitment of new principals and recommending suitable candidates to the sponsor. The challenge for Slovakia is therefore to professionalize sponsor support in education (Kaščák, 2021).

Figure 1 ▲ Distribution throughout the education system of responsibility for school resources (Assuming the responsibilities of the five actors combined amount to 100%)



Source: PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools—© OECD 2016

Note: Serbia was not part of PISA 2015

3.3 The professional autonomy of schools

The concept of professional autonomy refers to the professional independence of the teaching staff of schools and individual teachers, especially the degree to which they can make autonomous decisions about what they teach to students, and how they teach it.

Hungary and Serbia have the least professional autonomy at the school level, while Romania has more professional autonomy in theory, but this is limited in practice. Polish and Slovak schools are the freest to decide what they teach, and from what resources and how, but in the latter two countries there are critiques about professional autonomy at the school level.

Slovakian, Romanian, and Polish schools enjoy more institutional autonomy than those in Hungary and Serbia. In Hungary before 2011 schools enjoyed full autonomy in a decentralized education system, but there was an extreme turnaround after 2011 when schools' organizational and professional autonomy was completely terminated and its scope for autonomy reduced to a symbolic function. Schools also lack influence over other important dimensions of teaching and learning. In Serbia, schools do not have any autonomy in terms of creating and adapting curricula, because this is centrally determined. Schools can specify how they will adapt curricula to individual school needs but receive limited guidance about how to do this. As a result, the majority of schools that use the national curriculum do not address the local context or school-specific student needs. In contrast, in Slovakia (for example), responsibility is taken for human resource management, and schools are encouraged to adapt the national curriculum to their own specific educational context through school education programs. At the same time, the

national ministry maintains strong regulatory power, having strengthened accountability frameworks. Legally, schools in Romania also have some autonomy over the curriculum, but in practice this flexibility is reportedly rarely used. Finally, the Polish education system is built on teacher autonomy regarding pedagogical issues, while decisions regarding curriculum, examinations, and teacher contracts are in the hands of the ministry.

The professional autonomy of schools was terminated in **Hungary** after 2011, or its scope for autonomy reduced to a symbolic function. As far as core educational functions are concerned, the most important change is a return to a single-layer central curriculum-regulation system that constrains professional school autonomy to a theoretical 10 percent of teaching time, and to extracurricular activities. Formally, teaching staff have the right to approve the pedagogical program, but due to central curricular over-regulation this has no financial implications, thus any changes are rather symbolic. Also, the introduction of a single textbook regime with a centralized textbook distribution system has basically restricted the role of schools in textbook selection to annually reporting the number of enrolled pupils (Radó, 2021a).

Schools in **Serbia** have a very low level of professional autonomy as curricula are centralized. Teachers often report that they feel controlled and that they have to adhere to strict rules and a prescribed curriculum. In Serbia, schools do not have any autonomy in relation to creating and adapting curricula because this is centrally determined. Schools can specify how they will adapt curricula to individual school needs but receive limited guidance concerning how to do this. As a result, the majority of schools that use the national curriculum do not address local contexts or school-specific student needs. Schools have limited flexibility to adapt curricula to their needs but extensive autonomy over assessment. Ongoing curriculum reform places greater emphasis on competency development than content. It has led to the introduction of extensive teaching and learning plans that list what subjects should be taught, and how often they should be taught each week. Curricular programs also provide detailed instructions on content and desired learning outcomes by subject and grade level. Schools are required to use these teaching and learning plans and programs every four years to develop their own school-level programs, in accordance with the law (MoESTD, 2018).

Romanian schools have some autonomy over the curriculum and can choose up to one-third of the curriculum that is taught—called ‘optional subjects’. However, in practice this flexibility is apparently rarely used. Principals and teachers in Romania have among the lowest levels of responsibility for the distribution of school resources and determining school assessment policies of all the countries participating in PISA (OECD, 2016). In general, school-based curricula and the autonomy of schools and students to design/adapt personalized learning pathways is very limited—even more limited than according to the provisions of the first National Curriculum Framework (1998). External pressures on curricula have basically been converted into less autonomy and self-determination (Ciolan et al., 2021). Schools enjoy the autonomy to develop a school education program in **Slovakia** but are accountable to requirements defined in the national education programs; that is, the central framework. This means that schools must implement a shared core of educational content (the national education programs) but have the ability to adapt this to the needs of their particular student groups (the school education program). At the same time, school inspectors are legally empowered to examine school education programs and observe the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom (Shewbridge et al., 2014).

While this autonomy can be seen in both the wide-ranging powers of school principals and teachers and the wide scope of curricular autonomy, in practice this autonomy is largely fictitious in that school principals are hampered by incompetent sponsors and lack the additional resources that would enable them to exploit their autonomy. The same is true of curricula. Content-heavy state curricula prevent schools from making use of their allocated lessons or from designing new and innovative subjects that could enable them to improve student adaptability to new education-related demands (Kaščák, 2021).

The **Polish** education system is built on teacher autonomy regarding pedagogical issues and local government autonomy regarding the organization of teaching, while decisions regarding curricula, examinations, and teacher contracts are in the hands of the ministry. The textbook market was liberalized as early as in the 1990s, and the ministry currently only plays the role of accepting textbooks, but teachers can choose from all the resources that are available, including those available online or a combination of different resources. The reform of 1999 allowed teachers to decide themselves which textbooks and teaching methods to use in their classrooms. The 2008 curriculum reform further increased teacher autonomy in pedagogical terms, as it emphasized only the main learning goals that should be achieved without specifying how this should be done. The latest curriculum reform in 2016 was a step backwards as it is more prescriptive in terms of how material should be covered within particular grades, but teachers still enjoy significant autonomy in terms of what they teach and how they can teach it.

3.4 The financial autonomy of schools

Resource autonomy at the school level is required for manoeuvres related to developing and shaping the latter's own profiles and improving the efficiency of resource management. School autonomy over budgetary matters can provide schools with the flexibility to use allocated resources in line with institutional needs and priorities. However, this also needs to be accompanied by adequate transparency, leadership capacity and support, and mechanisms that avoid widening inequities. While school autonomy in relation to generating funds can help promote local efforts to complement school revenues, there are concerns about the inequities this creates, as schools in challenging socio-economic circumstances may be less able to complement their budgets with parental or other local contributions (OECD, 2017).

None of the schools in the selected countries enjoy full fiscal autonomy, but Hungary stands out especially in this respect, as principals have practically no room for manoeuvre. Hungary is the only country in which schools do not have independent annual budgets or bank accounts as they are not registered organizations. Interestingly, while schools enjoy relatively high levels of autonomy in almost all areas at the school level in Poland, this is not the case with regard to financing programs or teacher salaries. Serbia has fiscal autonomy in theory, but in practice schools receive so little by way of resources that they cannot rely on them. Romania also enjoys a relatively high level of fiscal autonomy at the school level, but the budgets allocated to schools are strongly related to the socio-economic/local background of individual schools. Slovak schools enjoy the greatest fiscal autonomy, and a much greater proportion of principals perceive that they have freedom of action there than in other OECD

countries, but due to financial scarcity even in the former schools there are serious limitations. It is also typical of countries with greater autonomy that although regulation in theory allows for autonomy at the school level, central rules concerning spending or the underfunding of education in general do not allow educational actors to take advantage of the positive opportunities offered by the flexible use of financial resources.

In **Hungary**, the most important structural characteristics of the new system established by the new legislation in 2011 are all-pervasive centralization, a shift to administrative, bureaucratic, and political control, and the termination of the organizational, fiscal, and professional autonomy of schools. The introduction of direct central funding (involving the termination of the budgets and bank accounts of schools) and depriving school principals of all formal human-resource-management-related decision-making authority has effectively eliminated the institutional and financial management space for autonomous school operation (Radó, 2021a).

School principals have only limited financial resources at their disposal in **Poland**. The ownership of schools was transferred to local governments and a new per-student formula for distributing resources was introduced after 1999. Currently, local governments are partly responsible for financing education, although most funds are still transferred from the central budget. While the Polish system relies on decentralized decision making and teacher autonomy within classrooms, it has limited capacity to deal with additional demands. Financial stress and organizational inflexibilities—mainly related to teachers' contracts—create an environment of constant organizational crisis. Thus, it might be said that the decentralization of school ownership and finances, together with increased school and teacher pedagogical autonomy, is a key feature of the Polish reforms, and even the current government, while seeking to increase its power over schools, was not able to pass regulations that would seriously limit the rights of local governments and teachers. Schools have limited say in relation to allocating additional teaching hours—for example, to struggling students, or for providing time for professional collaboration or meetings with parents. With few additional financial or time resources, schools focus on their primary role (obligatory teaching) and rarely go beyond this (Jakubowski, 2021).

Romania took a major step toward decentralizing the management of schools by introducing per student financing, starting in January 2010. Principals received a lump sum amount based on the number of students, with adjustments for the geographical location of the school, the type of school, the number of students per class, and the level of education (Fartușnic et al., 2014). This formula replaced a historical system of cost-based funding and was intended to improve transparency and ensure greater predictability and equity in allocation of resources. While schools' budgets were previously determined mainly by the number of staff on the payroll, the new financing model provides schools with a lump sum and in principle should give school principals the ability to allocate funds depending on school needs (World Bank, 2011). In the new system, principals are empowered and incentivized to make sure that salary costs match what the school receives according to the per-student formula. Now principals (together with school boards) can weigh the trade-offs between pedagogical needs vs. financial needs vs. the desires of parents and teachers to have smaller classes (OECD, 2017). Money is distributed at the level of every locality, in line with the general directions of public finance, with technical assistance from county school inspectorates. However, budgetary allocations are not really based on projections from schools, and have limited orientation regarding performance and results, which seriously diminishes

the advantages of formula-based financing. The autonomy of schools to really manage their budgets is very limited due to heavy bureaucracy and regulations, as well as by a lack of flexibility in resource allocation, although the most worrying situation is that of poor communities for whom no money or very limited additional amounts are invested for education. The most vulnerable schools in terms of financing are those with a small number of students (below 300) that are located in economically disadvantaged areas. Schools basically function on survival budgets, which hardly cover daily needs. As long as decision makers both at central and local levels continue to distribute financial resources based almost exclusively on inputs, with insufficient correction mechanisms and flexibility, and with very limited direct decision-making input from schools regarding the use of their own budgets, the real needs of schools and their local environment will not be reflected in resource management (Fartuşnic et al., 2014). The flexibility and autonomy available at the institutional level to operate, for instance, with a system of incentives and disincentives, is rather limited. Not being fully able to make decisions about people and money, the position of school directors is in reality questionable in terms of their real management capacity. They are affected by many restrictions and control mechanisms, and have very limited autonomy and capacity to prove their managerial skills (Ciolan et al., 2021).

School principals, who are nominated by the local self-government, have very little autonomy in terms of administering their school budgets in **Serbia**. The fiscal autonomy of schools is quite high, but schools usually lack the budget to support different activities. Some autonomy over resource allocation is possible, but only with very small amounts of the budget—typically less than in schools in other OECD countries (OECD, 2013). The former do not have the local freedom to manage their own budgets, but they have the opportunity to use local funding for specific purposes, if local self-governments allow such kinds of mini projects. In practice, some municipalities and schools which have very good relations with central authorities receive relatively large amount of funding, while some other schools and municipalities do not have enough resources to meet their basic needs (such as for heating and toilets, etc.). Principals have no influence over teachers' salaries, as the Serbian ministry is solely responsible for establishing teacher salaries, as well as determining any salary increases (Jovanovic, 2021).

In **Slovakia**, school principals have limited autonomy to decide teachers' starting salaries, including the pay scale and teachers' salary increases. There is a centrally determined pay scale based on entitlement and a flexible element that is not based on entitlement that can be used to motivate staff, but schools often lack the financial resources for this. The Slovak education system promotes the professional and organizational autonomy of schools, and to a larger extent than is the case in most OECD countries. Problems mainly concern fiscal and pay-related autonomy, especially in relation to the potential use of flexible salary elements. In relation to some key issues, such as staff remuneration, investment, and determining the number of student admissions, school principals feel restricted by law or by the school sponsor or state administration. Schools receive a specific sum of money from the sponsor to cover salary costs and school running costs. In public schools, salary allocations generally reflect the pay scale, so heads have little opportunity to award specific staff bonuses. However, the opportunity may arise if the head has managed to save on staff overheads, but there is no guarantee of this, and in any case such surpluses represent tiny amounts. Only the running costs budget can be spent on school development, and this is tariff-based (Kaščák, 2021).

3.5 Accountability to parents

Parents are a key constituency when it comes to holding schools accountable for children’s learning. The former may put pressure on schools to achieve at a high standard, take up leadership roles, and influence schools and policy, both informally (by communicating with principals, school leaders, and other parents) and formally (by taking on advisory roles in governing bodies, sitting on governing bodies, and getting organized through parents’ associations).

Most countries make available to parents a range of opportunities for participating in schools and policy making (their presence on school governing boards is required in some countries), as well as have regulations and mechanisms that facilitate them to voice their concern in case of matters related to the quality of education their children receive. There are formal processes in place for filing complaints, and an ombudsman or a designated agency for complaints and grievances. Typical barriers to increasing parental involvement in schools are time constraints among parents; a lack of awareness of opportunities to engage; and a lack of communication between school staff and parents. The extent of involvement may also differ between parents depending on their background, potentially increasing inequities in education.²

In none of the five countries are schools accountable to parents at the school level in a real, democratic, participatory, and transparent way. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the five countries. In Hungary, parents have only a formal role in the life of schools. In Poland, the role of parents at the school level is also formalized and the involvement of parents in school life is not typical. In contrast, in Serbia and Romania the role of parents is more important as they are members of school boards that are responsible for different autonomous decisions; however, they are strongly politicized in many cases. Among the five countries, parents in Slovakia, where school-level autonomy is relatively strong in different areas, have the most powerful role in decision making.

Due to the termination of institutionalized consultation mechanisms in Hungary, parental and pupil organizations have lost their ability to influence policy decisions, while their former organizational frameworks have been rendered ineffective. As far as the first set of conditions are concerned, according to the traditions of Hungarian primary and secondary education, parents were ‘socialized’ by schools to occupy supporting roles rather than to act as ‘clients’ or ‘partners.’ Teachers’ expectations towards parents in terms of supporting the learning of pupils at home and supporting the operation of schools were high, while their involvement in the core educational tasks of schools has been always relatively weak. This contradiction survived in spite of the formally ensured organizational representation of parents within the institutional operation of schools. This pattern gradually but slowly changed after the turn of the century due to the introduction of quality management systems that considered the satisfaction of parents to be one of the key outcome requirements of educational quality. Still, the influence of parents on the goals determined by the pedagogical programs of schools remained rather weak. In this respect, the radical change of institutional context since 2011 has had a strong negative effect. While the formal frameworks of traditional parental participation have been left untouched by

2. Education GPS—Parental involvement. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41727&filter=all>

the new legislation of 2011, due to their extremely narrow scope of organizational and professional autonomy schools have become very closed institutions. Although in 2010 the large majority of schools stopped operating quality management systems, a limited number of institutions continued to administer regular surveys of satisfaction among parents. The standard school self-evaluation instrument implemented from 2015 onwards, however, no longer contained parental satisfaction among the standard evaluation criteria. The takeover of key decision-making competencies from schools by the school-maintaining authorities narrowed the space within which schools were able to comply with parental expectations (Radó, 2021a).

Schools are typically not open to professional exchanges with other teachers, and they are also closed to cooperation with parents and other external stakeholders in **Poland**. The role of parents, local employers, and NGOs is very limited unless principals or individual teachers are willing to make extra effort to develop such forms of cooperation. Formally, parents are part of the decision-making process at the school level, but their opinions do not have to be considered when final choices are being made and, in practice, parents are often not even consulted in relation to important decisions regarding teaching. Parents have the right to form a school advisory council, but while principals are obliged to consult them about decisions, they do not have to respond to their opinions. Attempts to formalize their role (e.g. through parents' councils in schools) did not succeed, and the latter still mainly play an advisory role. Similarly, students do not influence school decisions. This lack of representation of key stakeholders at the local and national level is often criticized and results in harmful tension (Jakubowski, 2021).

So-called 'democratic changes' in society were also reflected in the field of education in **Serbia**, involving the provision of more autonomy for schools, and bringing in more participative processes of school governance. The selection of school principals became decentralized, but was still influenced by political parties at the local level. Self-governments chose and elected the members (three parents, three teachers, and three local self-government representatives) of the school boards that elected school principals. Although the process was still influenced by politics, it was now influenced by local politics, which slightly differed in different regions and municipalities. This solution gave the illusion that the election process was more democratic and decentralized, but in practice political parties, through the local self-government, elected parents, teachers, and its own representatives to school boards who were better connected, or even members of the governing political party, thereby influencing the election of school principals. Parents and students formally and legally participate in the decision-making process through student parliaments and councils of parents, but in practice the political party selects principals, and in some cases even teachers (Jovanovic, 2021).

Over the past decade, various reforms have sought to increase the autonomy of schools and the engagement of local authorities in **Romania**. The 2011 Education Law reinforced school boards, which previously had a limited decision-making role. School boards are composed of school principals and their deputies, teaching and administrative staff, and representatives of the mayor, local council, and parents. Basically, school boards are responsible for the current management of schools, but also for strategic planning and development, with all its aspects: staffing, management selection, and procedures, financing, schooling, etc. Boards are composed of teaching staff, including principal and deputy principal(s), but are also representative of the local council and mayor. Parents also have their

representatives on school boards. In Romania, internal evaluation is mandatory, and schools must undertake such evaluations on an annual basis according to specific responsibilities related to the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance—CEQA (at the school level), and results must be made public and decisions about improvement substantiated by school management. The CEQA of each school must be composed of representatives of teachers, parents, students (starting with the lower secondary level), the local government and ethnic minorities, as well as other stakeholders considered important for the school (Ciolan et al., 2021).

In **Slovakia**, an important body in school management is the school board. While this is mostly an advisory body, it takes part in key decisions at the school level. School boards were introduced to ensure the promotion of the public interest in schools. School boards are established by school founders and are made up of the following members: four founder representatives, four parent representatives, two teacher representatives, and one non-teaching staff representative. In state schools, the school board selects the school leader through an open recruitment process and the founder is required to acquiesce to the school board's nomination. School leaders are also required to consult the school board on a range of issues, including the draft school budget, the school development plan, the number of students to be admitted, the establishment of new educational programs, the school activity report, and specific human resources issues. Parent-teacher associations are also common in Slovak schools, but their role is informal. They organize elections to appoint parents' representatives to the school board (Kascak, 2021).

SECTION 4. ▲

Latitude for Adaptation to External Challenges in the Five Countries

4.1 Self-evaluation at the school level

Contemporary educational systems are characterized by the increase in demand for effectiveness and quality as a result of two main social trends: (a) the increase in investment in education, and (b) the increase in accountability demanded by parents and society. It is argued that the above conditions require schools to be involved in a continuous process of improvement. In addition, major ongoing social, economic, and technological changes impose ever bigger adaptation expectations on schools. Successful schools need continuously learning employees, which means the entire staff, not just teachers. For this to occur, school self-evaluation can play a major role, it is argued. Although since 2001 in most European countries self-evaluation that follows the guidelines recommended by the EU has become common practice, in the five observed countries this self-evaluation is rather formal and does not affect school improvement.

The school systems of Serbia and Romania have introduced mandatory self-evaluation systems at the school level, while this mechanism is not mandatory in Hungary, Poland, or Slovakia. In Serbia, self-evaluation is mandatory for schools and is based on the same principles as external evaluation. In Romania, schools can also choose the means they consider appropriate for self-assessment processes, and they have at their disposal a special manual dedicated to internal assessment and an online application supports this process. In Hungary, according to current regulations, schools themselves may decide how such evaluations are carried out. The former system of quality management in schools has been eliminated and replaced by centralized external professional supervision, but in theory schools have full autonomy to decide who should participate in the internal evaluation process, and there are no central requirements or recommendations. In practice, undertaking self-evaluation has ceased to be a regular process in the large majority of Hungarian schools. School evaluations in Slovakia are highly formalized and there is no official requirement to have self-evaluation processes and strategies. Self-evaluation is only a formal part of the organizational culture of Slovak schools. Teachers should be regularly evaluated by school principals in Poland, although incentives for conducting such evaluations are weak. Principals are usually not willing to conduct serious evaluations of their staff.

In **Romania**, internal evaluation can cover any aspect of school life in order to assess the quality of education provided by the institution itself, being a process initiated and conducted by schools with the help of its members, in some cases in collaboration with other stakeholders (students, parents, or members of the local community). Such internal evaluation covers exactly the same aspects as

external evaluation. Internal evaluation is mandatory, being established in national legislation since 2006. Schools are free to choose the tools or documents they consider most appropriate for internal evaluation processes, and have at their disposal a wide variety of virtual (platforms, online forums, and databases) and non-virtual tools (textbooks, guides, analyses, questionnaires, and interviews) for analysing and comparing their own data with that of other schools. At the same time, self-evaluation has not taken root as a meaningful developmental process, in part because of limited capacity and understanding, but also because of schools' weak autonomy in a system that remains highly centralized and focused on control (Ciolan et al., 2021).

In **Serbia**, self-evaluation is mandatory for schools and is based on the same principles as external evaluation by pedagogical advisors, and assesses same areas and indicators in every area of quality. The relevant comprehensive set of school quality standards, which are development-oriented and draw upon the experience of long-established European inspection systems, represent a good, strong framework for self-evaluation. The language of the standards has also been improved by specifying which actors' behaviours or outcomes will be looked at in relation to each indicator (e.g. teachers, school principals, or students, etc.) However, due to the lack of systemic investment (projects, and capacity building) in school self-evaluation, this powerful improvement tool does not fulfil its potential in Serbian schools. It is usually formally applied. Time delays in the production of important handbooks for self-evaluation may imply that schools have to some extent been abandoned in the process, and that the system does not prioritize this area, or that the system does not have the capacity for the timely and efficient production of important materials and tools for school improvement. The impact of evaluation is hindered by several factors: the weak national capacity to provide constructive feedback and support to schools, and the limited understanding of schools related to how to conduct meaningful self-evaluation (Jovanovic, 2021).

The current professional supervision system in force in **Hungary** was introduced in 2015. The new professional supervision regime connects various functions in a unified and highly standardized system. These functions are: (1) the external supervision of schools, school principals, and teachers, (2) the external qualification of teachers for career progression through a teachers' career scheme, and (3) the self-evaluation of schools, school principals, and teachers. The self-evaluation elements of this system are not autonomous school functions; they are administrative preconditions, and one of the sources of external supervision. Thus, the underlying detailed standards for self-evaluation are identical with those for external supervision, and the results are uploaded to the same online platform of the Central Educational Authority to which the results of external supervision are registered. In the very rare cases when schools undertake any sort of self-evaluation for any purpose (such as for developing an application for an EU-funded thematic development project), views and data are collected on an ad-hoc basis, independent of the mandatory self-evaluation duties embedded into external supervision. Among these circumstances, most of the staff of schools consider self-evaluation to be a meaningless administrative task, in relation to which revealing real problems and challenges is highly counter-productive, or even dangerous (Radó, 2021a).

School self-evaluation, while encouraged, is not mandatory in **Poland** and is often only formal. Teachers should be regularly evaluated by school principals, but the incentives for conducting such evaluations are weak. Principals are typically also teachers, often from the same school. Their positions depend on

local governments and can change quite often. Thus, they are usually not willing to conduct serious evaluations of their staff or to make attempts to change teachers who do not show enough effort (which change is theoretically possible but requires several well-documented negative evaluations and is usually attacked by trade union lawyers). Thus, principals commonly choose to conduct evaluations without any real attempt at the professional assessment of teaching, and cases when principals use their rights to fire teachers are limited to serious incidences of harassment or crime. It may be said that Polish teachers are the kings of their classrooms and have a strong preference for keeping their kingdoms to themselves. Polish teachers very rarely allow others into their classrooms, and only 1 in 10 teachers reported that they invite other teachers to observe their lessons and exchange ideas (one may realistically expect that this proportion is even smaller) (Jakubowski, 2021).

In **Slovakia**, school evaluations are undertaken not through a process of self-evaluation but on a hierarchical basis. If we exclude teacher assessments of students, school processes are evaluated by managers who are expected to formalize these processes in accordance with the law. School principals are assessed once a year by the sponsor. School evaluations in Slovakia are highly formalized. There is no official requirement to have self-evaluation processes and strategies. Schools are not legally required to undertake self-evaluations, thus despite this process being one of the State School Inspectorate's inspection criteria, the former cannot be classified as compulsory. Information on self-evaluations and the effectiveness of self-evaluation-based school development procedures is provided in the inspection reports issued by the school inspectorate in relation to these and other areas. The current report (ŠŠI, 2019:22) states that primary schools (primary and lower secondary combined) 'have not implemented [...] full self-evaluation[s] in accordance with a plan for improving the quality of education processes'. A State School Inspectorate questionnaire found that primary school principals considered self-evaluation to be a useful tool for improving quality of schooling, but had not produced their own self-evaluation strategies. Self-evaluation is thus not practised widely across Slovakia and only in rare instances is self-evaluation a real part of the organizational culture of Slovak schools (Kaščák, 2021).

As self-evaluation at the school level is rather formal in all the five countries, regardless of whether it is mandatory, it is no coincidence that in none of the countries can school development build on the results of self-evaluation.

The purely administrative self-evaluation of teachers, school principals, and schools is based on remotely defined standards that leave no space for any school-based reflection on special institutional circumstances or on the very diverse societal environments within which schools are operating in **Hungary**. Apart from the high level of standardization, the most important shortcoming of this system of self-evaluation is the fact that it serves an exclusively administrative control function, as the results are not fed back into any school development activities (Radó, 2021a).

In **Poland**, as school self-evaluation is not mandatory (similarly to the conclusions of the external school evaluation reports), results thereof do not oblige schools to implement changes, except for in the case of schools that fail key requirements, but this is extremely rare. Initially, schools were graded according to requirements, but that practice was quickly abandoned and now reports only describe how schools meet requirements (Jakubowki, 2021).

In **Romania**, in order to support schools' use of the results of internal evaluation, experts from the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance (CEQA) in Pre-University Education drew up a guidebook on how to plan, implement, and use the results of internal evaluation. The results of the evaluation are used to fulfil the main functions of the evaluation. Schools must undertake internal evaluation on an annual basis and the results must be made public and substantiate improvement-related decisions made by school management. At the same time, principals and teachers have among the lowest levels of responsibility for determining school assessment policies of all countries participating in PISA (Ciolan et al., 2021).

In **Slovakia**, general acceptance of the essence of self-evaluation at the school level is not sufficient for implementing a culture based on the 'plan-develop-check-act' cycle that would ensure the evaluation and planning of new measures or actions, the execution of plans, or the evaluation of their impact. While secured funding for national and regional-level projects is available to further stimulate a culture of self-evaluation in schools, this is not linked to a national strategic plan, and lacks coordination (Shewbridge et al. 2014).

In **Poland**, schools are evaluated in relation to school improvement, as introduced in 2009 to replace the old system of school inspections. The related reports are publicly available and only schools that have failed in all areas are obliged to prepare an improvement program. The system for most schools thus has no consequences; however, as it is centrally managed it is still seen as a means of control. Even those who implemented the system believed that it represented just a first step towards creating a culture of self-evaluation among schools (Mazurkiewicz et al., 2014). The new government tried to shut down the new system, claiming it was an EU-funded project that had finished, but as the EU requires the continuation of the project it is still functioning, but without much support from the current ministry (Jakubowski, 2021).

4.2 The use of assessment and examination results at the school level

Assessment is a process that helps focus attention on what matters most in education, beyond only access and participation: the actual learning outcomes of each student. Gathering information on where students stand in their learning and the progress that they have made is key to designing strategies for the further improvement of teaching and learning. Sharing such information with stakeholders across the education system is essential for meeting information needs and supporting decision making at the classroom, school, and education-system level (OECD, 2013b).

In **Hungary**, the regular assessment system (*National Assessment of Competences—Országos Kompetenciamérés*) was established in 2001 to test the reading literacy and mathematical competences of all pupils in grades 6, 8, and 10 on an annual basis. The external standardized testing results have been used exclusively for formative purposes and to inform self-evaluation in schools without any impact on accountability, and the regular testing of pupils' performance has no real function in the overall system of governance (Radó, 2010).

The actual function of similar assessment systems in Slovakia and Romania are harder to grasp. In **Slovakia**, tests are intended to serve two distinct functions: a school-leaving exam, the results of which are included in pupil's certificates that create the basis for selection to upper secondary education; and for the assessment of the performance of schools (rankings created on the basis of the results are published). These two functions make the test a high-stakes instrument. In 2015, this approach was supplemented with an entry test in grade 5 to facilitate the measurement of added value. What is unique to this system is the fact that administering the grade 5 entry test is mandatory only for those schools that are undergoing external evaluation by the inspectorate. (As mentioned earlier, the inspectorate is allowed to develop and administer its own assessment instruments) (Kaščák, 2021). High-stakes inspection and high-stakes testing together create a very strong accountability regime in Slovakia. However, there is rather little emphasis on providing support for the autonomous improvement efforts of schools, rendering this strong accountability regime rather ineffective.

Regarding all these differences, it can be observed that the overall situation is rather similar in **Romania**, where diagnostic testing was introduced in grades 2, 4 and 6 in 2011, followed by high-stakes school-leaving exams at the end of lower-secondary and upper-secondary education (Ciolan et al., 2021). Again, the combination of high-stakes exams and a dual—but asymmetrical—external school evaluation system has created a counter-productive accountability system because the actual governance regime effectively imposes a 'paper-based' annual reporting duty on schools instead of inciting, informing, and supporting their medium-term autonomous improvement efforts.

In **Poland**, national examinations provide key information about student achievements that can be used to monitor the performance of schools or local governments. The results are publicly available at the school level. However, as exams are not comparable across years, and trends are not monitored, it is hard to hold the education ministry accountable for student outcomes. Several government-dependent agencies are responsible for system development, research, and evaluation. National and regional examination boards conduct examinations, which are the major source of information about school performance, while they provide limited insight into how student performance evolves over time. The results of national examinations are the only means of evaluating school performance. However, these results are not available to the public at the classroom or teacher level. Also, they are not easy to compare across time or subject. In fact, for several years they have been published in percentages, thereby providing a ranking of students and schools. However, they do not say much about the objective performance of a school over time and the results are available at the whole-school level only. Individual teachers learn the results of their students and these results are available to principals, but this information is not made public (Jakubowski, 2021).

National data on student learning outcomes in **Serbia** is limited. Serbia is working to reform school-based assessment practices and centralized examinations. For example, learning standards and new curricular plans use competency-based and student-centred approaches to modernise teaching and learning. In addition, there are plans to introduce a new centralized State Matura examination in June 2021. This exam will certify the completion of secondary school and become the main criterion for selection into tertiary education through a new admissions system. However, the success of these reforms will require improvements in their design and plans for implementation. There is a marked imbalance between school-based assessment for learning (formative assessment) and the assessment

of learning (summative assessment). On the one hand, there are frequent summative assessments because teachers must assign a minimum number of numerical marks to all students each year. In contrast, formative assessment in Serbia is underdeveloped, largely because summative assessment is weighted so heavily, but also because the purposes of formative assessment are poorly understood, valued, and practised. For example, while a law mandates that teachers administer initial diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the school year to all students, it is unclear whether teachers are using these results to adapt their instructional practices and focus on individual student needs. This imbalance can have negative consequences as it generates pressure on students and parents to focus on getting good marks rather than authentic learning. Moreover, some teachers and schools may respond to this pressure by inflating student grades. Serbian teachers also receive little guidance and training on how to use assessment to inform teaching and learning, although this would be especially important if the ministry would like teachers to align their assessment practices with the new competency-based curriculum—which requires teachers to evaluate complex outcomes that are hard to visualise and judge reliably (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

4.3 Teacher appraisal systems

Monitoring and appraising teachers to ensure internal accountability and generate demand for development is central to improving schools and the learning environments they represent. If well designed, teacher appraisal and feedback systems can be used as a tool for increasing teacher effectiveness and achieving better student learning outcomes. Appraisal can help to increase the focus on teaching and teachers' professional learning. Teachers need feedback on their performance to help them identify how to improve their teaching practice and, with the support of effective school leadership, to develop schools as professional learning communities. Appraisal and feedback systems can also help to build better school organizations by allowing teachers to progress in their careers and to take on new roles and responsibilities based on a solid evaluation of their performance. They also represent an opportunity to recognise and reward effective teaching.³

What is common to all the five countries is that, similarly to school-level self-evaluation, the teacher appraisal systems are not linked to school development, and they are often formal.

While **Romania** uses different appraisal practices, it does not use teacher appraisal as a developmental tool. Annual appraisal processes are summative and have high-stakes consequences for teachers' remuneration and careers. This may negatively influence teaching practices and inhibit the potential of appraisal to enhance student outcomes. Romania lacks professional teaching standards that would provide a national definition of what teachers should know and be able to do. As a result, each teacher appraisal process uses different evaluation criteria, and relies heavily on other assessment material such as job descriptions and tests, without evaluating the full range of knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that are important to good teaching. The developmental function of regular teacher appraisals in

3. Education GPS—Teacher appraisal. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41742&filter=all>

Romania is currently underdeveloped. The methodology does not include classroom observations or timely, formative feedback, which processes are essential for teacher development. Regular appraisals are closely connected to high-stakes consequences such as salary bonuses and career progression, which puts pressure on teachers to demonstrate achievements rather than to treat appraisals as a learning opportunity. The developmental function of appraisals is also undermined by the involvement of school boards as an appraising body, given that a number of their members are external to the school and do not have educational experience, in addition to the lack of opportunities for one-to-one appraisals, and the limited role played by principals. The appraisal of teachers starting their teaching careers is particularly critical in Romania because entry requirements for initial teacher education are low, and preparations for becoming a teacher are minimal. The merit-based grade assessment that rewards teachers with a salary bonus may promote competition rather than collaboration among teachers, and may disadvantage teachers who work in challenging school contexts. Although positive changes have recently been made to the assessment criteria to acknowledge teachers' work with struggling students, the process still rewards teachers for having students that achieve high marks in examinations. These risks influencing teaching practice by focusing teachers' attention on preparing students for tests and academic competitions, and on high-achieving students (Kitchen et al., 2017b).

School principals are responsible for teacher appraisal in **Poland**. The Education Superintendent Offices assess teachers only when a teacher disagrees with the principal's evaluation. Systematic assessment and appraisal of teachers contribute to the design of teachers' professional development. The evaluation, which is seen by many experts as a cornerstone of professional development and teacher professionalism, is rare and unwelcomed by Polish teachers. Classroom visits are required by law, so teachers have to open their classrooms once or twice a year. Otherwise, they keep their teaching to themselves and their students, without opening up to professional discussion with other colleagues. This limited openness to professional exchange and demonstrates the weak capacity of Polish teachers and principals to learn from each other. As a result, it is more difficult for Polish teachers to respond to challenges or to innovate. Professional networks rely on individual teachers who rarely exchange ideas with colleagues in their own schools (Jakubowski, 2021).

While **Serbia** has taken important steps to professionalise the teaching workforce, notably through the introduction of a merit-based career structure in 2004, the use of teacher appraisal to inform promotion and professional development remains nascent. For example, schools receive no guidance on how to use appraisal to encourage professional development, and the merit-based career structure does not bring gains in terms of salary or professional recognition, weakening its potential to incentivize teachers to develop professionally and take on new roles. While Serbia has guidelines on the key functions of school leaders, such as appraising teachers or conducting school self-evaluation, these are outdated and not fully aligned with recent education policies. Without sufficient training and guidance, it is not surprising that the country's school principals are not using evaluation and assessment to define clear strategies for teaching and learning in their schools. For example, regular teacher appraisal does not systematically inform the professional development plans of individual teachers; student assessment results do not guide instruction; and school self-evaluation is not an embedded part of the school planning cycle. Chronic underfunding and little external support (i.e. the lack of coaching opportunities or participation in peer learning) further exacerbate these issues, limiting the capacity of schools to enact meaningful changes in their policies and practices. Serbian schools have a lot of flexibility in

how they organize and use the results of regular teacher appraisals, with each school being required to set up its own classroom observation strategy as part of its annual professional development plan. However, there is no national framework for this process, which often leaves Serbian schools without a clear sense of purpose or appropriate methods for developing teacher appraisal. As a result, the quality of teacher appraisal varies significantly among schools. Another factor that contributes to the lack of consistency in the quality of the regular appraisal process is that school principals and pedagogues have limited initial training and continuous professional development related to how to conduct appraisals and how to provide constructive feedback on teaching practices. This undermines the legitimacy and value of the appraisal process and leads some teachers to perceive classroom observation by the school principal as a control mechanism instead of a formative process. The results of regular teacher appraisals do not systematically inform professional development. Instead, teacher councils determine development areas and there is no expectation that teachers should receive training to help address gaps in the skills and knowledge identified through the appraisal process (Maghnouj, et al., 2020).

In **Hungary**, from the perspective of teachers and schools, the only high-stakes element of the system is the individual qualification of teachers, because according to the newly established career scheme teacher salaries are strongly differentiated according to the five categories of advancement. The teacher career model was introduced in 2013: the first two years involve a compulsory inception period, and end with an evaluating exam. Following a successful examination, the pedagogue is defined as having reached Teacher 1 level. The next level is Teacher 2, which is also obligatory for teachers to obtain. The two top levels of the career model are Master Teacher and Researcher Teacher grades, whose attainment is optional. In spite of the heavy administrative control of the new system, its weak accountability assurance potential stems from the lack of institutionalization. The government did not establish a professional inspection system with relative professional autonomy that employs qualified evaluators. Instead, those practicing teachers who are promoted to the 'Master Teacher' grade are nominated by the Educational Authority to be evaluators in other schools. They are compensated by a significantly higher salary and a substantial reduction in their weekly mandatory classes. These practicing teachers are trained for their roles as evaluators through 30 hours of in-service training only. Not surprisingly, due to the solidarity among teachers, the results of the professional audits for teachers and school principals are evaluated as less than 90 percent only in extremely rare cases. Overall, due to the lack of institutionalization that would allow for the professionalization of the external evaluation system, it is not able to meet any of the general aims of educational inspection: it does not ensure professional accountability; does not provide external references for self-evaluation; and does not generate demand for professional development. Therefore, even if the underlying standards for evaluation contain various requirements that are in line with our contemporary understanding of good teaching and schooling, the system is capable only of administrative control and creating the appearance of inspection; it does not have the potential to effectively convey external professional expectations to schools (Radó, 2021a).

Professional responsibility is primarily regulated by the law on teaching staff in **Slovakia**. The latter was most recently amended in 2019 following general criticism of the previous law, especially its effects. The previous law (2009) introduced a credit system for professional development according to which teachers taking further education courses could obtain a number of credits entitling them to a 'credit

bonus' of 6% or 12% of the applicable pay grade. Over the next five years, the number of teachers receiving credit bonuses increased fivefold. Two-thirds of staff who received credit bonuses did so at the 12% rate. However, the system design was ineffective at motivating staff and encouraging them to engage in ongoing education. Although the intention had been to encourage teachers to update or innovate their professional teaching skills, in practice the primary motivation for taking such courses was to obtain credits for bonuses or to become registered teachers. This fixation with credits even affected teachers' choice of continual education course—the primary criterion was not the content or relevance of the course, but the number of credits awarded. As Slovakia has national entry and exit tests at the lower secondary level, there has been debate about whether teacher accountability should be linked to students' test results. This has not been formally introduced into the system of professional accountability; nonetheless, informally, school principals in particular are likely to take results into account when, for example, reviewing the flexible portion of teachers' pay. Unofficially, school sponsors also bear test results in mind when, for example, allocating additional funding to schools at the end of the year. Therefore, outside the official system, teachers and schools are frequently held accountable for test results (Kaščák, 2021).

4.4 Self-evaluation-based school development

The effective monitoring and evaluation of schools is central to continuous improvement. It can provide individual schools—which have been increasingly recognised as the key agent for improving learning outcomes—with essential feedback about how to improve their practices. School evaluation is, furthermore, increasingly considered a potential lever of change that can assist with decision making and resource allocation. The preconditions for school development are already insufficient, as self-evaluation and monitoring as the basis of development are inadequate at the school level in all five countries, apart from in Poland where teachers enjoy a high level of individual autonomy and are fully responsible for what happens in the classroom—but even the latter rarely form teams with a common approach at the school level, hence the preconditions of school development barely exist in that country either. In the other four countries, the main problem is that school development documents have become so formalized that they are not suitable for purpose.

After 2004, the introduction of mandatory quality management in schools was not supplemented with professional support for self-evaluation and school development, and no regular supplementary funds were allocated to schools for the implementation of their school development plans in **Hungary**. Therefore, instead of identifying their own problems and defining their own development priorities, schools focused on matters for which the central government development programs made resources and professional support available. As a negative side-effect of the abundance of resources for externally determined purposes, the largely supply-driven system of educational development smothered the gradual build-up of the practice of autonomous institutional development. After 2011, the discrepancy between school-level mandates and the governance environment that existed before 2011 was eliminated by the Orbán government, which systematically extinguished the basic conditions for institutional adaptation: the role of the pedagogical programs of schools has since become marginal and quality management has been erased from the list of mandatory tasks that schools undertake. The

new mechanism serves only to enforce administrative compliance with remotely defined standards. Due to the elimination of the revision and improvement of school programs, as well as self-evaluation-based school development, and due to the deprivation of school principals of the large majority of their former decision-making competencies, the organizational operation of schools is limited to traditional institutional rituals. Therefore, meaningful cooperation among teachers in most schools has become very poor. As a consequence, the basic conditions for school development are no longer in place (Radó, 2021a).

In **Poland**, instructional leadership in schools hardly exists, with individual teachers being almost fully responsible for what happens in their classrooms. In this context, schools do not focus on school development, although individual teachers might change their teaching content and methods to accommodate new challenges, but these efforts are not coordinated. This lack of capacity and leadership at the school level is a major obstacle to the further development of Polish schools. Also, schools rarely cooperate with each other and professional development activities and exchanges are highly individualized, which further limits opportunities for organizational learning and innovation. Although evaluations conducted by professional evaluators should encourage school development, only the element of taking part in the process of evaluation is obligatory. As mentioned earlier, school self-evaluation, while encouraged, is not mandatory. Similarly, the conclusions of the external school evaluation reports do not oblige schools to implement changes, except for schools that fail to meet key requirements, but this is extremely rare (Jakubowski, 2021).

In **Romania**, school boards are basically responsible for the management of schools and also for strategic planning and development, but school self-evaluation has not taken root as a meaningful developmental process, in part because of limited capacity and understanding, but also because of the weak autonomy of schools in a system that remains highly centralized and focused on control. The professionalization of school management will remain a target to be reached as long as there is no fair and open competition for the position of principal, and the management of key resources (money and staff) is seriously hampered by the restrictions, regulations, and influence of higher administrative levels. School principals focus primarily on administration rather than pedagogical leadership and school improvement. The lack of objective criteria for guiding selection, principal appraisal, and the conditions for dismissal to date have created an instability of roles and have not ensured that principals have the skills and capacity that school leadership requires (Ciolan et al., 2021).

Serbian schools often lack the capacity to use evaluation exercises to define and implement improvement plans on their own. The results that are monitored in school development plans are not used for any kind of systematic appraisal, which makes them more of a formal requirement than an essential obligation for school governors. This leads to other difficulties. Some important steps that are embedded in these plans (such as schools availing themselves of the offers of various external professional support services, especially with regard to service training and consulting, etc.) that should respond to the needs generated by school development and quality assurance demands are seen more through the lens of addressing the needs of individual teachers than schools as a wider system. School governance usually sees external support as useful for improving new or less competent teachers rather than as a means of externally supporting schools as a system, or a challenge-oriented approach. With regard to this, the means of funding of additional school activities must be understood in order to more fully

interpret why schools lack the autonomy and freedom to implement their school development plans (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

In **Slovakia**, a legal framework is in place to stimulate school self-evaluation that contains the requirement that schools produce annual school reports. However, many schools do not yet use these for school development and improvement, but rather see them as bureaucratic exercise. Similarly, there is no explicit research on how schools follow up on the results of and feedback from school inspections. Thus annual school reporting is a bureaucratic exercise that is not of value for school development or improvement. Most annual school reports seem to be restricted to detailing only financial, statistical, and administrative issues, and do not report about students' educational results and outcomes—except rather generally about national examination (upper secondary school graduation) or assessment results, with no detailed analysis or links to schools' educational planning. Typically, schools do not report the results of planned developments and innovation related to teaching and learning and school organization. The national culture promoted during the former communist period means that schools still struggle with the idea of openly publishing a list of their strengths and weaknesses in annual school reports. The former government aimed to address this cultural resistance by allowing schools to restrict the more analytical parts of their annual school reports for internal purposes (Kaščák, 2021).

SECTION 5. ▲

Conclusions

The degree of autonomy granted to schools and the domains in which autonomy is awarded to schools vary from country to country throughout the region. Although decentralization efforts are attracting considerable attention in policy debates, many countries have strengthened the influence of central authorities in setting standards, and defining curricula and assessments. For example, a loosening of central control over ‘processes’ and financial regulations has often been accompanied by the growing control of ‘outputs’ by central levels of the system. This may be due to heightened interest in measures of accountability that involve national assessments and examinations based on centralized curricula or frameworks. Critics of increased school autonomy maintain that granting more freedom to schools tends to politicise staffing decisions, increase inequality between regions, and atomise standards.⁴

While in Serbia and Romania school boards exercise both school management and maintainer (ownership) functions, in Slovakia and Poland the most important decision-makers are principals, despite their lack of a strong mandate. In Hungary, on the other hand, roles are mixed and the central state (‘KLIK’) manages schools from the outside—the latter organization simultaneously fulfils school management, ownership, and national education management functions.

In Hungary, due to the elimination of the two most important institutional procedures for reflection, problem solving, and institutional adaptation, (i.e. the revision and improvement of school programs, as well as self-evaluation-based school development), and due to the deprivation of school principals of the large majority of their former decision-making competencies, the organizational operation of schools is limited to traditional institutional rituals. Therefore, meaningful cooperation among teachers in most schools has become very poor. In Poland, schools rarely cooperate with each other, and professional development and exchanges are highly individualized, further limiting opportunities for organizational learning and innovation. School principals in Romania focus primarily on administration rather than pedagogical leadership and school improvement. Due to the high degree of centralization in Serbia, schools have lost their ability to adapt to future challenges. Schools are not in a position to adapt or reconsider their programs to more strongly personalize teaching and learning; they are not able to diversify how learning is organized; they are not able to accumulate those institutional professional capacities that would be required for the individual development of pupils; and they have lost their ability to cooperate with key out-of-school actors in relation to promoting the individual learning environment of pupils. Professional collaboration in schools in Slovakia is clearly unsatisfactory and it does not seem to be improving. The internal flexibility and openness of schools could theoretically compensate for the rigidity and uncoordinated nature of the system by ensuring dynamic, productive, inclusive learning cultures. But there is not much evidence of this in Slovakia. In comparison with teachers in other countries, a smaller proportion of Slovak teachers place very strong emphasis on academic success.

4. Education GPS—School autonomy. <https://gpseducation.oecd.org/revieweducationpolicies/#!node=41701&filter=all>

Table 1 ▲ School-level autonomy in the five countries

Autonomy (non-existent/ low/medium/high) – centralized/decentralized	Fiscal	Professional	Organizational
Hungary	non-existent – centralized	low – centralized	low – centralized
Poland	low – decentralized	high – decentralized	high – decentralized
Romania	medium – decentralized	low – decentralized	low – decentralized
Serbia	low – centralized	low – centralized	low – centralized
Slovakia	high – decentralized	high – decentralized	high – decentralized

Although in Hungary before 2010 the formal institutional conditions for school-level adaptation were gradually established, there were very significant discrepancies between the institutional settings in schools and the external governance conditions of school-level change. The creation of a highly centralized system in 2011 weakened the basic institutional conditions of school-level adaptation and change, especially in the remaining publicly owned schools. As a consequence, most schools have lost their ability to adapt to contemporary challenges. Similarly to in Hungary, the Serbian educational system is also highly centralized, with various instruments for monitoring school quality and climate (e.g. external evaluation, and an inspectorate), but with weak capacity for adequate monitoring of implementation (due to the small number of employees). Schools have a very low level of autonomy, both fiscal and educational, and curricula are centralized. Teachers often report that they feel controlled, that they have to adhere to strict rules, and keep to a prescribed curriculum. Limited autonomy leads to poor adaptability and no consistent commitment to accountability mechanisms in Romania. Although successive regulations have in theory given more power and responsibility to schools, the fragmented and inconsistent approach has left room for keeping up ‘old practices’ in an apparently new system. School management is not professionalized, school boards are rather formal and ‘decorative’ in terms of making decisions, and the empowerment of schools as autonomous learning organizations is a target that is yet to be reached. In contrast to in Hungary and Serbia, schools and teachers in Poland enjoy significant autonomy, which has partly been limited by recent changes in curricula that are more prescriptive, but still leave major decisions regarding content and methods to teachers. On the other hand, the institutional capacity of schools to adapt to new challenges is restricted by their lack of resources and deficient leadership. School principals have only limited financial resources at their disposal. Instructional leadership in schools does not exist, with individual teachers being almost fully responsible for what happens in their classrooms. This lack of capacity and leadership at the school level is a major obstacle to the further development of Polish schools and in relation to adapting to meet future challenges. The most autonomous system among the five observed countries exists in Slovakia. However, uncoordinated and non-transparent communication between the central and local levels of education governance represents a threat to the functionality, adaptability, and flexibility of the education system. This is particularly evident with regard to the degree of autonomy wielded by Slovak schools, which is unusual both in terms of legislation and in international comparison. This autonomy can be seen in both the wide-ranging powers of school principals and teachers, and the fairly wide scope of curricular autonomy. One might assume that the latter could act as one of the drivers of adaptability to future challenges; in practice, however, autonomy is largely fictitious in that

school principals are hampered by incompetent sponsors and lack the resources that would enable them to exploit their autonomy.

In summary, Poland and Slovakia have limited institutional capacity for school-level adaptation, while other countries lack the conditions for school-level adaptation to external expectations. This is a significant constraint, not only because schools should not be expected to adapt to the challenges of their environment on their own, but also because they are unable to meet expectations associated with modernization due to the weakness or complete lack of institutional conditions for adaptation.

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CHAPTER 3

Governing Education for Adaptive Change in Five Central Eastern European Countries

Péter RADÓ

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SECTION 1. ▲

Introduction

Many say that the quality of an education system is largely determined by the quality of governance, but few understand the importance of this. Let's start by justifying this claim with a simple analogy: if a steam engine is left alone by the engineer, it will either slowly stall and stop or explode because no one intervenes if the steam pressure becomes too low or too high. In general, if a system lacks feedback, it will eventually enter one of these extreme states. This applies to complex systems such as education, too. Governance provides the feedback that allows a system to continue functioning at a given level. In its absence, the functioning of the system will be determined partly by internal inertia and partly by uncontrolled external influences. In short, the effectiveness of governance matters. Beyond these rather general considerations, however, the importance of future-oriented effective governance is further amplified due to the extremely heightened pressure to adapt generated by rapid disruptive changes in the technological, economic, social, demographic, and environmental context of education (Schwab, 2016).

The question that is the focus of this comparative study is the extent to which the institutional conditions of governance allow for educational adaptation to these broader challenges. Therefore, this study is intended to serve two connected purposes. The first is contextualization: digging deeper into the rather specific regional contexts that determine the applicability of certain contemporary governance instruments. The second is supporting informed discourse about the latitude for designing and implementing educational policies aimed at making schools better able to develop the skills that are essential for individual adaptability in the near future.

The analysis on the following pages is based on a detailed analytical framework (Radó, 2020/a) and a literature review (Kende, 2020/a). The primary source of the analysis in this summary study is the large amount of input that was produced between 2019 and 2021 by the members of the research team associated with the "Future Challenges to Education System in Central Eastern European context" project of the CEU Center for Policy Studies (from 2020: Democracy Institute). In the project, five country studies (Kaščák, 2021; Jovanović, 2021; Ciolan et al.; Jakubowski, 2021; Radó, 2021), and three thematic comparative studies (Rédai, 2021; Begičević Ređep, 2021; Kende, 2021/a) were developed. The work of the research team was supported by a great deal of statistical analysis (Horn, 2021).

Section 2 of this summary study outlines the most important conceptual considerations that guide the institutional analysis presented in the subsequent sections. Section 3 provides a description of the direction of change in the evolution of the educational governance systems of the five countries during the last three decades, and identifies the most important similarities and differences. The main body of the institutional analysis in Section 4 contains a comparative analysis of the operation of the four most important functional governance sub-systems that represent the terrain on which potential instruments for promoting school-level change (management, curriculum regulation, quality evaluation, and financing) can be applied. Finally, the last section summarizes the most important conclusions *vis-à-vis* the questions underlying the study.

SECTION 2. ▲

Conceptual Foundations (Points of Departure and Analytical Instruments)

It is widely accepted that the ideal educational development paradigm is that of the Scandinavian countries, which is often referred to as the “Finnish model”. As far as the essence of the model is concerned (i.e. extensive individual development based on differentiated, increasingly personalized education, the professionalism of teachers, full institutional autonomy for schools, etc.), this is the case indeed. This is why a great number of Eastern-European educationalists link this educational ideal with the characteristics of the actual governance system of Finland, which serves as a reference when questioning the meaningfulness of any professional accountability systems, for example. As we move southward in the European continent, however, the contextual relevance of this model declines rapidly for many different reasons. For example, in most European countries school systems operate under the strong pressure of various societal and ethnic inequalities that in comparison are almost non-existent in Scandinavian countries. This pressure results in most Central- and South-East European countries in a high level of social selection and ethnic segregation, which makes it almost impossible to operate nine or ten grades of comprehensive schooling. Also, the professional capacities and preparedness of teachers and schools required for successful differentiation, personalization, and widespread supplementary individual development are not in place in most countries. In addition to this, this “Finnish” educational model is expensive; due to the relative scarcity of resources, most Central-Eastern European countries cannot afford to introduce certain elements of this model, even with an increase in funding for education. We may also add that certain cultural differences may play a role, such as the strong culture of trust-based cooperation in the Scandinavian societies as opposed to the mistrust that prevails among the actors of education in most Eastern-European countries. The list of reasons why Slovakia, Hungary, and Serbia are not “Scandinavian” is infinitely expandable. Therefore, the bottom-up school improvement approach of mainstream educational policy-making (Kende, 2021/b) constructed on the basis of the characteristics of successful Scandinavian countries encounters serious limitations in the Central-Eastern region of Europe.

Nevertheless, there is a widely shared consensus about the most important precondition of moving educational practices towards a more ideal status: the professional, institutional, and financial autonomy of schools. No school can be “developed” from outside; it is the organized, systematic, and sustained effort of the management and staff of schools that has the potential to achieve the desired changes. There are many different approaches to managing change in schools. Most of them revolve around terms such as school effectiveness, school improvement, quality management, and learning organizations. The element common to these diverse approaches and the methods they introduce is the “trivial” assumption that the professional community of schools should be ensured. School autonomy is not a “freedom right”; it is an institutional arrangement that creates the latitude

within which schools can reflect on the quality of their work, are able to set goals for themselves in an autonomous way, and can design and implement projects for improvement—in line with legitimate external expectations. This latitude includes the autonomous exercise of the schools' basic functions (programs, the organization of teaching and learning, and evaluation and instruction), the autonomous operation of various organizational functions that schools undertake on a regular basis, and considerable fiscal management autonomy. As was seen in the previous study of this volume, the fundamental importance of school autonomy is not a triviality in many Central-Eastern European countries (Kende, 2021/b).

However, when emphasizing the outstanding importance of school autonomy, we should not assume that when it is granted, schools will start adapting to external expectations—such as those related to the ongoing and serious disruptive changes in the wider environment of schools—on their own. The typical organizational characteristics of the functioning of schools in the region are summarized by the concept paper that defines the analytical framework for the analysis in this volume (Radó, 2020/a). The cumulative effect of the various elements of the organizational architecture of schools in the Central-Eastern European countries under investigation is that the schools are very much occupied with themselves. In other words, from the perspective of adaptation, schools have a very strong tendency to operate with a strong internal focus that very often leads to isolation from the school environment and, typically, a closed operating logic. Due to the phenomenon of internal focus inertia, the direction of changes in schools—or the complete failure to change—is determined much more by internal path dependencies that are created by a legacy of old institutional routines than by the drive to meet external expectations.

The evergreen question of educational policies thus re-emerges: how to incite, urge, and motivate teachers and schools to make an effort to change? In the specific regional context, this question is more precisely formulated by asking the following: how can a balance be created between the emphasis on internal and external focal areas (i.e. one that counterbalances internal focus inertia) in the functioning of schools in order to ensure that the staff of schools invest systematic effort into adaptation? This is when we need to turn to an examination of the potential of various educational governance instruments (especially to those “governance drivers” that may convey external expectations in a way that is capable of defeating path-dependencies by overwriting old institutional routines), if the former are properly connected to established mechanisms of institutional reflection and development. The underlying analytical framework for this study identified multiple potential governance drivers, such as the various standards underlying professional accountability systems, financial incentives built into the allocation of financial resources, procedural school management settings for strengthening the participation of clients and external partners of schools, developmental goals set by national curricula, national qualification frameworks, learning outcomes determined by separate standards, and the underlying evaluation frameworks for the regular external assessment of the performance of students or quality standards for external school evaluation (Radó, 2020/a).

As ensuring the appropriate extent of school autonomy is the structural precondition of school-level change, the effective use of these drivers also requires certain structural developments. First and foremost, it is governance decentralization that creates the regulatory mechanism for school autonomy, and which at the same time allows for adjusting to the diversity revealed by the autonomy of

schools. Thus, decentralization is both a precondition and a logical consequence of the empowerment of schools. Since the turn of the century, there has been growing emphasis in education on creating “intelligent” governance instruments that are able to adapt to the huge diversity that has been created by growing school autonomy (e.g. flexible two-tier financing systems, and supportive risk-based quality evaluation systems, etc.), and which are also able to preserve the unity of school systems (e.g. various educational outcome standards). Therefore, when assessing the institutional capacity of governance systems to apply various governance drivers in the five Central-Eastern European countries covered by the comparative analysis in this study, the most important underlying criterion will be how far they have come in decentralizing their governance systems.

The basis against which we can assess the development of education governance in the five Eastern European countries is the “Zeitgeist”—the prevailing international mainstream discourse on the effective governance of school systems at different periods of time. We can identify several stages of prevailing governance doctrines. Without digging deep into the history of educational policy, and taking the mild risk of oversimplification, we can identify focal educational governance problems and developments associated with each former decade. In the 1960s and 1970s, this was external quality assurance for accountability; this was the period of the establishment of external quality assurance agencies and quality standards, and the prevailing approach was very much teacher centred. New Public Management in the 1980s brought about the beginning of decentralization measures aimed at strengthening the short route of accountability and simulating market relationships in education. Also, this was the period when the shift from a teacher-centred approach to a whole-school centred approach occurred. The 1990s can be characterized by a backlash against New Public Management-type reforms: “education-is-different-” type change movements, New Public Service, and the franchising of change model brands by the prophets and gurus of educational change. The period witnessed a reformulation of the very “organizational” whole school approach to a softer one that emphasized the role of teams of change agents and school principals. As mentioned already, the period after the turn of century can be characterized by institutional adaptation to the growing diversity and complexity unleashed by the previous waves of decentralization. The topical issues of the decade were “intelligent accountability systems,” such as risk-based inspection, standardized assessments of pupil performance, and—not independent of the gradual reconsideration of learning outcome targets—the reinforcement of the whole school approach. The discourse in the previous decade was already heavily influenced by the pressure of many disruptive changes. The focus of mainstream international discourse became significantly influenced by matters such as horizontal open networks, the desire to enrich individual learning environments, and attempts to assess transversal skills, etc. (Radó, 2010; Saguin, 2019).

The evolution of educational governance systems indicated by this concise summary allowed for the creation of a taxonomy that is summarized in the table below. Obviously, the degree to which governance is decentralized is at the heart of this taxonomy that has been created for the purpose of this analysis. It is designed to represent an instrument for determining where the different countries are in the process of transforming their governance systems. What is important to keep in mind is that the transition from one model to another rarely occurs due to major institutional reforms. Management decentralization (i.e. deploying decision-making competencies to lower levels and opening it up to lay actors) and the subsequent process of building the institutional instruments of decentralized governance are typically long change processes that occur through limited institutional changes and

involve a process of proceeding stage by stage. The “governing by learning outcomes” model that is the prevailing mainstream concept of educational policies incorporates the key elements of the decentralized professional governance model.

Table 1 ▲ Evolution of educational governance models (Radó, 2020/a)

Governance models	Primary means of governance	Primary target of governance	Professional Accountability
Centralized-bureaucratic	All-pervasive regulation, centralized (deconcentrated) administrative management	Teachers	Long route of accountability, administrative professional control
Centralized professional	All-pervasive regulation, standards, partly decentralized management	Teachers and schools	Long process of accountability, external professional evaluation
Decentralized professional	Procedural regulation, quality standards, decentralization and full school autonomy	Schools	Long and short processes of accountability, external professional evaluation
Highly decentralized	Procedural regulation, learning outcome standards, indirect strategic steering	Schools and owners of schools	Short process of accountability, assessment of learning outcomes informing risk-based external evaluation

In most European countries, decentralization to institutional and local levels and the adjustment of governance instruments to fit the new structural frameworks is a thing of the past, or at least an advanced process. The development curve of the previous decades and the latest developments are already pointing towards some new government models of the future that are based on the gradual replacement of vertical management structures with horizontal cooperation networks. In particular, there are two models in the literature with the potential to grasp the essence of the direction of change. The first is the “Network Governance Model,” according to which governments secede from the management of local educational services and are replaced by various public, civil, and business actors associate to operate schools. The second is the “Societal Resilience Model,” in which active, self-reliant groups of citizens organize to establish and maintain schools in line with their own priorities and preferences. For this purpose, citizens create informal networks or co-operatives and draw in educational professionals (Frankowski et al., 2018). Both models represent the local-institutional de-governmentalization of educational management. This comparative study will definitely avoid searching for such experiments in the five Central-Eastern European countries. However, the extent to which the structural characteristics of the institutional environments allow for experimenting with future-oriented models of school governance (i.e. where the former are in the process of the gradual build-up of the instruments of decentralized governance) will be assessed.

The purpose of this comparative institutional analysis about the interplay between school-level changes and governance would be poorly served by an isolated analysis of various educational governance sub-systems, such as management, financing, curricular regulation, quality evaluation, etc. These elements

together compose the “systemic environment” of schools that is constructed by various functional governance instruments that together determine the latitude within which schools carry out their core and organizational functions (Radó, 2010). This analytical framework facilitates the application of a dynamic method of analysis that takes into account the interactions of the individual elements. Therefore, it allows for consideration of their interplay, which in fact determines the real function of each individual subsystem (without sticking exclusively to their internal professional logic), as well as the interplay between the systemic environment as a whole and the operation of schools.

Finally, a warning has to be advanced: this comparative analysis will not be oriented towards the identification of “good practices”. The typical problem with the diligent collection of “good practices” is their often questionable contextual relevance. In the vast majority of cases, practices that work well in their original environment do so not only because of their “technological” sophistication and creative, innovative nature, but because the organizational, professional, cultural, and financial environment in which they are created allows for it. The dissemination of good practices often creates the illusion that successful know-how is easily transferred from its original habitat to a rather different one. In our perception, however, failure is always contextual. “Governance failure” occurs when the institutional dimensions of a public service do not effectively take into account the needs of citizens—in our case, those of pupils (Bakker-Kooy, 2008). Identifying governance failures—for which the five countries included in this study provide an almost inexhaustible pool of examples—is much more instructive because it facilitates an assessment of both the underlying institutional and contextual reasons.

SECTION 3. ▲

The Direction of Institutional Change in the Five Countries

Prior to the more in-depth institutional analysis of those governance instruments that have the potential to serve as drivers of systemic adaptation to external challenges, this section provides a brief outline of the direction of institutional changes in the five countries. For this purpose, the changes in the political context will be described, a country-by-country overview will be provided about the direction of change in the education governance systems, and certain similarities and differences will be highlighted.

3.1 The changing political context of governance

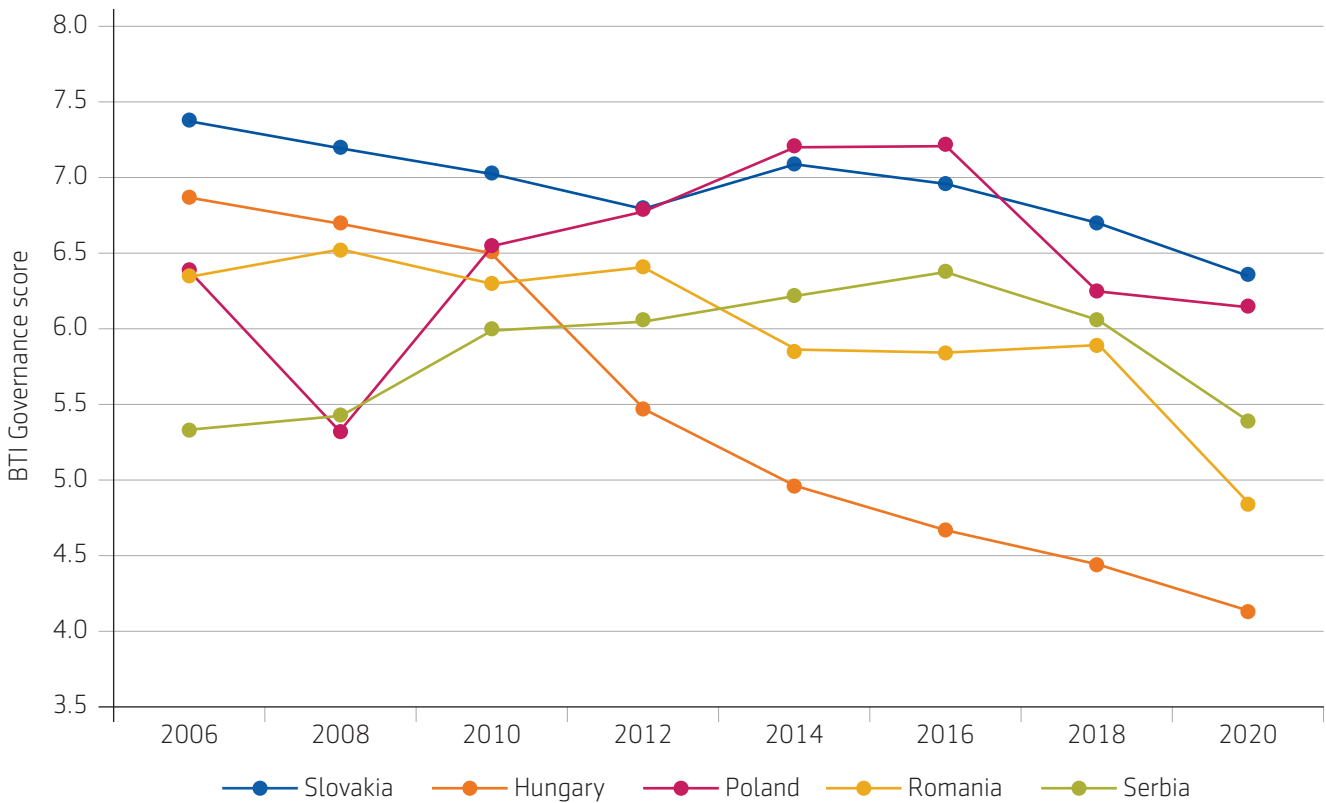
As emphasized in the previous section of this study, decentralized governance is the precondition of effective educational adaptation. However, it is important to make the distinction between building the basic structural framework of decentralized governance (i.e. deploying key decision-making competences to institutional and local management actors) and developing and fine-tuning the institutional instruments that allow for effective decentralized governance. The former can be achieved even within a single government term by new legislation and its implementation, but the latter always takes much more time and sustained developmental effort. In other words, the creation of an effective governance toolbox that fits with decentralized educational governance is always a long, controversial, and rarely one-way process, with distinct periods of change and backtracking. Since the traditional question of “how much is a system decentralized?” is too static to assess the future adaptability of individual education systems, the key question addressed in this study is where each country stands in the process of the gradual build-up of the instruments of decentralized governance.

This process of change in educational governance is largely determined by changes in overall political and governance regimes. During the previous decade, the political context of educational policy-making has changed radically in the majority of the Central-Eastern European countries under analysis (Munkácsy-Scharle, 2021). Due to the fact that populist extreme-conservative parties came to power in Hungary (FIDESZ) in 2010, in Poland (PiS) in 2015, and in Serbia (SNS) in 2012, there have been anti-democratic turns in all three countries. While the turn in an autocratic direction was immediate in Hungary and Poland, it involved a more gradual process in Serbia, where the clearly autocratic turnaround occurred only in 2017, and culminated in SNS’s landslide victory in 2020. According to the change in the democracy scores detailed in the “Nations in Transit” reports of Freedom House, after the turn of the century all of the Visegrad countries still had democracy scores high enough for them to be labelled consolidated democracies, while Romania and Serbia were semi-consolidated democracies. More than a decade later, out of the five countries included in this comparative analysis only Slovakia

remains a consolidated democracy. Due to the decline in the democracy index score, Poland became a semi-consolidated democracy in 2020. Hungary became a semi-consolidated democracy as early as in 2015, and from 2020 it qualified as a hybrid (in fact: autocratic) regime. Since 2005 both Romania and Serbia have been semi-consolidated democracies; Serbia, however, became a hybrid regime—that is, ceased to be a democracy—in 2019 (Freedom House, 2020).

The false but popular impression that highly centralized autocratic political systems can govern more effectively even in the European context is rebutted by the strong connection between the state of democracy and the quality of governance. The governance of complex systems such as education requires institutional capabilities that can only be developed and exercised in open, transparent systems that effectively operate the frameworks of cooperation among different actors. This requires political accountability, openness, and legal certainty. The negative impact of increasingly autocratic political systems on the quality of governance is clearly indicated by the change in the BTI governance index. The governance component of the Bertelsmann Transformation Index measures the political management of transformation processes and is constructed on the basis of an assessment of performance in four areas: steering capability, resource efficiency, consensus-building, and international cooperation. (In order to make the results comparable across larger regions, they are multiplied by a factor that is determined by a country's individual level of difficulty.) These four underlying assessment criteria are obviously essential government capabilities that are required for the effective governance of complex, therefore decentralized, systems. Although the quality of governance has declined in all five countries during the last 15 years, it may clearly be observed that the autocratic turn had an almost immediate and radical deleterious effect in Hungary after 2010, in Poland after 2015, and in Serbia after 2017. Not independent of the more-than-a-decade-long process of the systematic dismantling of the institutions of democracy in Hungary, in this country the decline of the quality of governance is most apparent; Hungary's ranking among the 138 countries covered by the BTI governance index has plummeted from 14 to 93 (Sikk, 2020). In comparison to Hungary, Slovakia and Poland remained relatively well governed countries. Since 2012, BTI governance scores have been higher in Serbia and Romania than in Hungary, too.

Figure 1 ▲ Changes in the BTI governance transformation index in the five countries (2006–2020)



Source: Bertelsmann Nations in Transition index <https://www.bti-project.org/en/index/governance.html>

3.2 Country-by-country overview

The deterioration in the quality of democracy and, consequently, the overall quality of governance did not necessarily lead immediately to the elimination of the conditions for the effective governance of education everywhere. In this respect, the consequences are wide ranging, with Hungary at one end of the scale, and Serbia on the other.

Hungary

The only obvious case where the autocratic turn in politics and governance has resulted in an immediate and extremely radical negative U-turn in the governance of education, which has completely erased all the achievements of more than two decades of institutional adaptation and development, is that of Hungary.

The systemic transformation of the Hungarian education system started as early as in the last years of the communist regime. The underlying intention of the new legislation in 1985 was to supersede direct political control over the operation of schools and replace it with a system of professional self-management exercised basically through the collective decisions of teaching staff. Further educational decentralization in the years following the regime change in 1990 was driven by adaptation to a

radically changing constitutional and public administration environment. The 1993 Act on Public Education served for the coherent regulation of educational service provisions already deployed to the level of local self-governments, and was funded on a normative basis from 1991 onwards. In order to adjust to the new management structure, the law introduced a two-tier curriculum regulation system (i.e. a pedagogical program of schools developed within the overall framework of a National Core Curriculum). The pedagogical programs of schools were approved by the owners of the schools (typically municipalities) and the evaluation of schools became the task of owners, too. This initial phase of structural decentralization was concluded by the approval of the National Core Curriculum in 1995. During the period 1995–2003 almost all major systemic changes served to support the development of the institutional conditions for operating the decentralized system on the basis of the 1995 comprehensive education development strategy. Between 1995 and 1998—in parallel with managing the three-year implementation process of the two-tier curriculum regulation system—the socialist-liberal coalition government introduced mandatory mid-term planning at the county level (in 1996). Also, the state accreditation of school evaluation experts working for self-governments (as a substitute for government-operated school inspection) and the quality assurance (program accreditation) of in-service teacher training programs was introduced in 1997. The following conservative coalition government further enriched the toolkit of decentralized governance by initiating a large-scale program for introducing quality management systems into schools in 1999, and by introducing standardized annual mandatory assessments of the literacy and math competences of all pupils in grades six, eight, and ten in 2001. The initial measures of the next socialist-liberal government from 2002 fitted the same pattern: an amendment to the Act on Public Education made the operation of a quality management system in all schools mandatory. Due to Hungary gaining access to relatively sizable EU funding for educational development since her accession in 2004, however, the nature of policy-making changed: the pattern of implementing policy intentions mainly through institutional changes was replaced by the launch of large-scale central development programs that were supported by connected minor incremental institutional changes. As a consequence, the further institutional development of the system of governance in line with decentralization was essentially interrupted in 2003 (Radó, 2021).

The coming to power of the Orbán government in 2010 brought immediate and radical change to the system of education governance that had evolved over the previous two decades. In 2011, the conservative majority in parliament behind the government enacted an “Act on National Upbringing” (replacing the Act on Public Education), and a new Act on Vocational Training. The most important structural characteristics of the new system established by the new legislation were all-pervasive centralization, a shift to administrative bureaucratic and political control, and the termination of the organizational, fiscal, and professional autonomy of schools. As a consequence, the regulatory instruments fitted to the formerly decentralized system (especially those standards that oriented the work of actors operating with a great deal of autonomy) either disappeared, or became geared to the centralized system. The former were typically replaced by discretionary administrative decision-making competencies attached to the heads of newly established deconcentrated educational management authorities—the local departments of the Klebelsberg School Maintaining Authority (KLIK).

The organizational, fiscal, and professional autonomy of schools was terminated. School principals are presently appointed by the minister responsible for education, while school district directors have

taken over all employment-related decision-making competencies from school principals. All teachers of public schools have become employees of KLIK. Parallel to the “nationalization” of self-government owned schools, between 2012 and 2014 a major government-supported wave of privatization took place, and the larger Christian churches took over a large number of public schools. Since 2013, a new financing system has been applied that is based on centrally managed input financing on a “historical basis”. Although in a transitional period recurring operational costs were paid by local self-governments, since 2015 the responsibility for covering these expenses has also been moved to KLIK, thereby completely eliminating any self-government responsibility in relation to primary and secondary education. As part of the full education system reshuffle, and in line with the highly centralized systems of management and financing, a new National Curriculum and supplementary mandatory framework curricula were issued by the government in 2012, and introduced in 2013. Another aspect of the disappearing autonomy of schools is the fact that from 2012 onwards the operation of self-evaluation-based quality management systems ceased to be a mandatory task of schools. The former demand-driven and sector-neutral system of all sorts of pedagogical services was also nationalized and all private and non-profit service-provider organizations were excluded. Instead, a network of Pedagogical Educational Centers was established under the supervision of the central Educational Authority. By 2015, all the major systemic changes that completely alter the structural characteristics of educational governance in Hungary, based on the governance patterns of the 1960s and 1970s, had been fully implemented (Radó, 2019; Radó, 2020/a).

Poland

As far as the impact of the decline of democracy on the governance of education in Poland is concerned, it is surprisingly moderate. The direction of Poland’s development is interesting because the dramatic change of alignment in education policy, the government’s ideological rampage, and the elimination of certain elements of previous reforms makes it seem as if a dramatic backward step—similar to the radical turnaround in Hungary in 2011—has taken place. However, when digging deeper into the institutional changes it becomes evident that the elements of governance that have contributed to the outstanding success of the Polish education system remained intact; as will be seen later in a more detailed institutional analysis, the autonomy of schools and municipalities remained free of serious restrictions, and the governance tools previously developed and adjusted to the decentralized system remained essentially unchanged after 2015.

In Poland, the gradual build-up of the institutional conditions of decentralized governance involved a longer process than even in Hungary. The first phase of transformation between 1989 and 1999 was mainly driven by political considerations; namely, by the goal of dismantling all communist structures. This included the establishment of local governments and transferring the responsibility for pre-school education to them, thereby establishing the foundations for management and fiscal decentralization later. Also, the regional level of inspection (Kuratoria) was established and the professional autonomy of teachers and schools was strengthened, etc. The second phase was initiated by a major education reform in 1999 with various governance-related elements. The reform contained a large number of genuine educational changes, such as comprehensive school structure reform, the expansion of mandatory schooling until the age of 18, the introduction of the freedom of textbook choice, and a new

teacher qualification system. However, other key elements of the reform have created the structural skeleton of decentralized governance. The most important changes were connected to an extensive reform package of health, pension, education, and administrative reforms. Administrative reform was closely linked with education reform as it established a new mid-level tier of local governments (now responsible for upper secondary education) and introduced fiscal decentralization on the basis of a new per capita-based formula. Ownership of most schools has been transferred to local self-governments. Most primary and lower secondary schools were taken over by the *gmina* (the lowest tier) and most upper secondary and vocational schools by the *powiats* (the new middle tier). In addition to these, examinations boards were established to conduct standardized national examinations at the end of primary, lower-, and upper-secondary school. The first version of the core curriculum was issued, creating space for the curricular autonomy of schools, and teacher training institutions were decentralized or privatized. After a few years of stalling, the rest of the period until 2014 can be characterized primarily by the series of changes designed to strengthen the system established by the 1999 reform. The second wave of significant changes in 2009 included the introduction of a standards-based core curriculum. This describes the expected learning outcomes for each stage as part of an overall national qualification framework, determines the examination requirements for school leaving exams, and is connected to new qualification requirements for VET. In addition to these elements, a new school evaluation system was introduced that replaced the old inspection system. In line with these changes, reform of national examinations was implemented in 2012 for the lower secondary and in 2015 for the Matura upper secondary exam. Also, a new data collection and management system for schools was introduced with information collected at the student level.

The third major phase in the evolution of the Polish institutional framework started in 2015 with the PiS government coming to power. The rule of the new far-right conservative government seems to have involved as radical a political turnaround as the election victory of the Orbán government in 2010 in Hungary. However, as already mentioned, from an educational perspective, the overall picture is much less harsh. Indeed, the PiS government revoked certain iconic elements of the 1999 reform, such as the school structure reform that automatically reduced the number of school-leaving exams to two. Also, similarly to the Hungarian extreme-right government, the Polish government engaged in a culture war in education in the name of the “protection” of Christian, conservative, and national values. However, apart from minor changes—such as the strengthening of the role of the Kuratoria at the regional level—all those institutional settings that allow for the rather successful decentralized governance of the Polish education system remained in place. In terms of the quality of education governance, therefore, the political change towards illiberal autocracy has not led to a major turnaround, with the PiS government showing much more restraint than the FIDESZ government in Hungary (Jakubowski, 2021).

Serbia

The third country that has witnessed an obvious autocratic turn in its political system is Serbia. When assessing the institutional changes in Serbia, it is important to keep in mind that in the countries of the former Yugoslavia, decentralization has special connotations; it is widely associated with the controversial self-management reforms of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1970s that constitute

the most recent and vigorous tradition of self-governance. Not surprisingly, the Milošević era during the 1990s implemented tough centralization measures in education that still influence the way of thinking of many educationalists in Serbia. As opposed to the Central-European Countries (i.e. Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary) that have strong historical traditions of local and regional self-governance, and for which—beyond adjusting to the international mainstream trend—decentralization represented turning away from the communist past, in Serbia decentralization efforts have always been accompanied by a degree of ambiguity. This is the reason why, in spite of the almost constant educational policy communication in favour of decentralization, the two waves of reform in education focused much more on the “software” of education (content, teaching, professional development, school improvement, quality standards, etc.) than on the “hardware” (management, financing, institutionalized support services, etc.).

The first wave of education reform initiated by the Djindjić government from 2000 onwards included a large number of changes that addressed the renewal of teaching and learning, and very few aimed at reorganizing the institutional conditions of governance. Most genuine pedagogical goals are designed to be met within the existing centralized system. For example, attempts at improving the quality of education were being made by standardizing conditions, the characteristics of the educational process, and the outcomes of learning. Certain governance-related measures have been introduced, however, to strengthen the school-level absorption of pedagogical modernization changes. For example, this was the period when the foundations of self-evaluation-based school improvement were laid and supported by the training of a network of pedagogical advisors. Also, to open the schools up to major partners in the name of the “democratization” of education, school boards were established with the representation of municipalities without establishing self-government ownership over schools. Also, for developing and managing professional development and various quality assurance mechanisms, two new government-owned institutions were established, but without any major investment into the development of a network of professional support services with appropriate outreach to all schools. The period between the first and second wave of reforms (2004–2008) also brought some institutional changes, such as an attempt to strengthen the supporting role of inspection—still within the institutional framework of deconcentrated regional ministry departments—as well as the introduction of pupil performance standards at the end of primary education (Jovanović, 2021).

The second wave of reforms, initiated in 2009, focused very much on creating the conditions for inclusive education, again with very little emphasis on the renewal of governance instruments. All the incremental or major changes of inclusion policy were implemented within and through existing institutional settings. These changes were the expansion of mandatory pre-school enrolment, a new integrated enrolment regime for special needs children, the introduction of elements of formative pedagogical assessment, the introduction of the position of Roma pedagogical assistants and personal assistants for SEN children, the introduction of individual education plans, and the creation of a network of inclusion experts. The only exception to this pattern is the reform of the external institutional assessment system that started in 2012 (Radó et al., 2016).

The first years of the SNS government made likely the continuation of the previous cautious institutional reforms using small, not necessarily well harmonized steps. An amendment to the education act, for example, prescribed the gradual introduction of a decentralized, formula-based financing system

(as will be discussed later, this has not yet been implemented). In addition to this, new pupil performance standards were defined for the end of upper-secondary education in 2013. Also, the school-leaving exam at the end of primary education was modernized. However, the changes introduced by the SNS government after 2016—no longer focused on inclusion, but much more on improving vocational education and training—are more controversial. While the stronger ministry involvement in the appointment of school principals from 2017 served to strengthen central political control, the 2018 curriculum reform had the clear purpose of modernization by defining new competences as learning outcome targets and by increasing the number of elective subjects (Jovanović, 2021).

The dichotomy in Serbian education policies of a strong focus on changing teaching-learning practices while neglecting the development of governance tools that would allow the government to achieve its goals remained the same during the SNS government. Also, disregarding some minor changes and a strengthening of political control over the actors of education, the shift to a more autocratic political regime in Serbia did not lead to a complete system transformation similar to that which occurred in Hungary. The most plausible explanation for this is that the still highly centralized character of the educational governance system was considered convenient by the government in power since 2012.

Slovakia

The situation of Slovakia, the third Visegrad country, involves a slow but steady institutional development pattern with many stop-and-go periods. The transformation of the educational governance system started relatively late—only after the replacement of the second Meciar government in 1998. (The Meciar government implemented certain organizational changes within the highly centralized system without altering its major structural characteristics.) The first and most important steps towards decentralization were implemented by the two consecutive Dzurinda governments between 1998 and 2006. These steps included the gradual widening of school autonomy, management decentralization to the local (municipal) level with a focus on the conditions of managing local school networks, fiscal decentralization, and the introduction of a normative and sector-neutral financing system in two phases, as well as the introduction of the first external pupil performance testing in grade 9. The following Fico government supplemented the process of decentralization by introducing a two-tier curricular regulation system that left space for the development of programs by each school. As far as governance-related changes during the last decade are concerned, they were basically limited to the expansion of the system of external standardized assessment and the further improvement of the information system. As a consequence, in spite of the fast-changing educational priorities that are attributed to the rather frequent replacement of ministers responsible for education, the actual institutional settings of educational governance appear to be quite stable in Slovakia (Kaščák, 2021).

Romania

In contrast to in Serbia, where educational policy is characterized by a reluctance to invest in institutional conditions, almost the only stable feature of governance in Romania is the permanent change in institutional frameworks. However, digging deeper into the changes reveals that the skeleton of the system of governance in the education sector that was already in place at the end of the 1990s, in terms

of its structural characteristics has not changed much. (Of course, this is not the way that education actors in Romania perceive the situation, as every government revises the education policy priorities of the previous one and reorganizes institutions on this basis.) The transformation of the governance system basically started in 1997 with the introduction of national exams, and continued with the approval of the first National Core Curriculum, as well as the establishment of school-based curricula in 1998, along with partial management decentralization and the introduction of school evaluations in 1999. During the following two decades, four important institutional changes were implemented: the creation of a parallel external school evaluation system in 2005, an examination reform in 2007, the introduction of a per-capita based financing system in 2010, and new curriculum reform after 2013. However, these later changes did not alter the most important characteristics of the Romanian governance system—that is, the dispersion of various decision-making competencies among different management actors at different levels without endangering the overwhelming influence of the central government, and without creating unambiguous roles at any level of management. As will be seen later in the more detailed institutional analysis, the actual division of labor among various actors in Romania is determined more by the informal weight of certain agencies than by their formal responsibilities. Overall, the Romanian governance system is best described as seemingly and superficially partially decentralized (Ciolan et al., 2021).

3.3 Similarities and differences

Since the early 1990s, most of the countries under analysis have taken strong or half-hearted steps to widen school autonomy and adjust their various instruments to a more indirect approach to steering education systems. However, the gradual build-up of the institutional conditions of decentralized governance is an unfinished business in all of the four countries in which the process has not been completely interrupted by a complete autocratic system reshuffle, as happened in Hungary. Thus, in all four countries—despite frequent retrenchment and partial withdrawals—the overall direction of change is decentralization. Although at the moment the process appears to be stalling because the political climate is not favourable to further institutional reform, there is little chance of a return to the governance patterns of half a century-ago in any of the four countries, unlike the case in Hungary.

However, there are big differences between the countries in terms of how far they have come in creating an effective decentralized educational governance system. Hungary after the system change in 1990, as well as Poland and Slovakia later in the 1990s, implemented comprehensive governance reforms that included the realignment of most important governance sub-systems. The arc of change is rather different in the two South-East European countries. Instead of engaging in systematic transformation, Serbia and Romania implemented a limited number of piecemeal institutional changes in a much less coherent and systematic way. In other words, certain elements widely associated with decentralized governance were introduced without having a decisive effect on the still centralized character of the overall system. In addition to this, these elements are rarely connected properly. Of course, there are many examples of the lack of coherence within the rather complex system of governance in the three other countries, too. Still, what may be considered a list of various dysfunctions in Poland and Slovakia seems to represent the distinct character of governance in Serbia and Romania. Surprisingly, the only education system that has achieved a high level of coherence among the functions of management,

financing, curricular regulation, quality evaluation, professional services, etc. is Hungary since 2015, after the very fast implementation of the complete system reshuffle. This coherence is ensured by all-encompassing and oppressive centralization, bureaucratic administrative management, and political control at a very primitive level.

In most countries, the new institutional settings of governance seem to be rather fragile. This may be attributed to many different factors, of which a large number of examples can be provided from all five countries. For example, due to the (political) time constraints that are created by the limited window for action within government terms, major changes are typically introduced without proper preparation. In other cases, the implementation (and even the design) of major institutional interventions is hampered by insufficient financial and human resources. In many cases, due to the lack of appropriate feedback mechanisms (i.e. monitoring, evaluation, and stakeholder consultation), the necessary corrections have not been made, thus accumulated dysfunctions have discredited the whole development process. In other words, the successful and effective management of change processes that target the improvement of various governance sub-systems is also a litmus test of the maturity of the governance systems.

Another very often mentioned characteristic of the institutional changes common to the five countries is their stop-and-go nature. Repeated cycles of initiation and stalling of multiple waves of reform in all countries are perceived as a chaotic process. However, there is also surprising continuity in the key structural characteristics of governance that is more a consequence of inertia within institutions than consensus about the desirable structural features of governance everywhere. Having said that, one should observe the effects of this inertia in a neutral way; while it contributes to the stability of governance systems in Poland and—to a lesser extent—in Slovakia, it can hardly be seen as a positive trait in the cases of Serbia and Romania, where the inertia of old institutional frameworks and routines are the primary obstacles to institutional modernization. What the Hungarian example suggests is that a complete reversal of the decentralization process requires a combination of two things: a particularly aggressive autocratic government with the political leeway to change the constitutional framework, and the astonishingly weak resilience of the various actors within the education system. Therefore, in spite of some minor re-centralization measures during the last years in Serbia and Romania, the Hungarian U-turn seems to be the exception, not the rule.

SECTION 4. ▲

The Untapped Potential of Governance Drivers

4.1 Educational management and school-level change

The structural construct of educational management is a key factor that determines the ability of school systems to adapt to external changes for various reasons. First of all, highly centralized management always goes hand in hand with standardized central regulations that set rigid limits on the adaptability of schools. Therefore, the latitude for institutional changes is always greater in an educational management system in which decision-making competencies related to the operation of schools (i.e. recurring ownership-related decisions) are deployed to local actors (typically to local self-governments or to the private owners of the respective institutions). In second place, beyond the very diverse pupil compositions that are the most important rationale for greater school autonomy, the actual relevance of various external challenges may vary greatly from one municipality to another. Therefore, leaving space for addressing this diversity, when making strategic decisions that shape the operation of local school networks, is an essential condition for meaningful change. The third, typically rarely considered reason for regarding management decentralization as a *sine qua non* condition for successful adaptation is the fact that all other functional governance sub-systems are almost automatically aligned with the structural features of management (Radó, 2010). Thus, creating intelligent—that is, flexible and responsive—financial allocation and human resource management systems, curricular regulation regimes, quality evaluation systems, and professional support services requires a decentralized governance framework.

As discussed earlier, in line with the international mainstream, the main direction of change in the Central-Eastern European region in the 1990s and in the decade after the turn of century was decentralization. The self-governments of municipalities became the owners of schools in 1991 in Hungary, in 1999 in Poland, and in 2002 in Slovakia (Radó, 2021; Jakubowski, 2021; Kaščák, 2021). In these three countries this change entailed the full local ownership of schools; municipalities became responsible for opening or closing schools, for the selection and appointment of school principals, for covering all educational costs, and for the approval of school programs, including school curricula. Although in Poland the role of municipal self-governments is much stronger than in Slovakia, education management has retained its basically decentralized character to date in both countries.

Decentralization to the municipal level established the quite clear division of labor among management actors at the institutional, local, and central levels in these three countries. However, it has created issues related to economies of scale, because—especially in Hungary and Slovakia—the population size of local self-governments is relatively small, resulting in a large number of municipalities that own a single kindergarten and primary school, instead of having local management actors in place

that manage local school networks from preschool education onwards, with a full offer of all types of upper-secondary education. This fragmentation of educational management that is the side effect of decentralization has been always an obstacle to solving various educational policy challenges (e.g. combatting social selection and ethnic segregation) and to various modernization efforts that require the networking of schools within a specific territorial unit. This problem is much less relevant to Poland, Romania, and Serbia, where the average size of local self-governments is relatively bigger.

In Romania and Serbia, however, after the turn of the century—in spite of the prevailing decentralization rhetoric of almost all consecutive governments—management decentralization to the municipal level was only partial, leaving very limited space for substantial local self-government responsibility in education. In both countries, apart from their contribution to the funding of the recurring operational costs of schools, local self-governments obtained a stake in the management of school in an indirect way through their representatives in the school boards. The most important reason for the retrenchment of the decentralization process in Romania, Serbia, and other South-East European countries was a fear of losing control. Education was seen by conservative governments as a “national” (i.e. central government) responsibility, while rather leftist or liberal-aligned governments strived to preserve their direct management channels to schools in order to ease the implementation of their modernization efforts. As a consequence, the most important obstacle to further decentralization in Romania and Serbia became the persistence of the educational management role of county-level (Romania) or regional-level (Serbia) deconcentrated government agencies. In both countries, these agencies have diverse and contradictory functions. For example, the regional educational departments in Serbia—part of the organization of the ministry of education—are in charge of external inspection and providing professional support to schools and teachers at the same time (Jovanovic, 2021). The list of tasks undertaken by the Romanian county school inspectorates is even more impressive and contradictory; the latter are involved in making management decisions (such as the appointment of school principals); they take part in the implementation of government policies—that is, in overseeing school-level implementation; they appraise teachers and inspect schools; they provide in-service training for teachers; and they define enrolment quotas for individual schools issued by the minister, etc. (Ciolan et alia, 2021). The operation of these multifunctional deconcentrated agencies—beyond strengthening direct central government control over schools—is highly dysfunctional. The fact that in these systems educational management, quality assessment, and professional service functions are concentrated in a single institution imposes limits on the professionalization of these functions and—as will be further discussed later—their conflicting nature seriously weakens their effectiveness.

This situation has created a duality in educational management in both countries: some decision-making competencies have been integrated into the main line of public administration by being devolved to local self-governments, while others have been retained under a separate and direct central-government-controlled educational management mechanism. From the perspective of schools, this dual form of subordination has preserved the dependence on central government, which has always been the more dominant actor. From the perspective of general public administration, the strong role of separate, government-controlled deconcentrated agencies in Romania and Serbia without the unambiguous division of labor between government and local self-government actors, or the complete removal of

educational management from local self-governance-based mainstream lines of public administration in Hungary after 2011, disconnects educational provisions from other public services and from the real, specific needs of local communities.

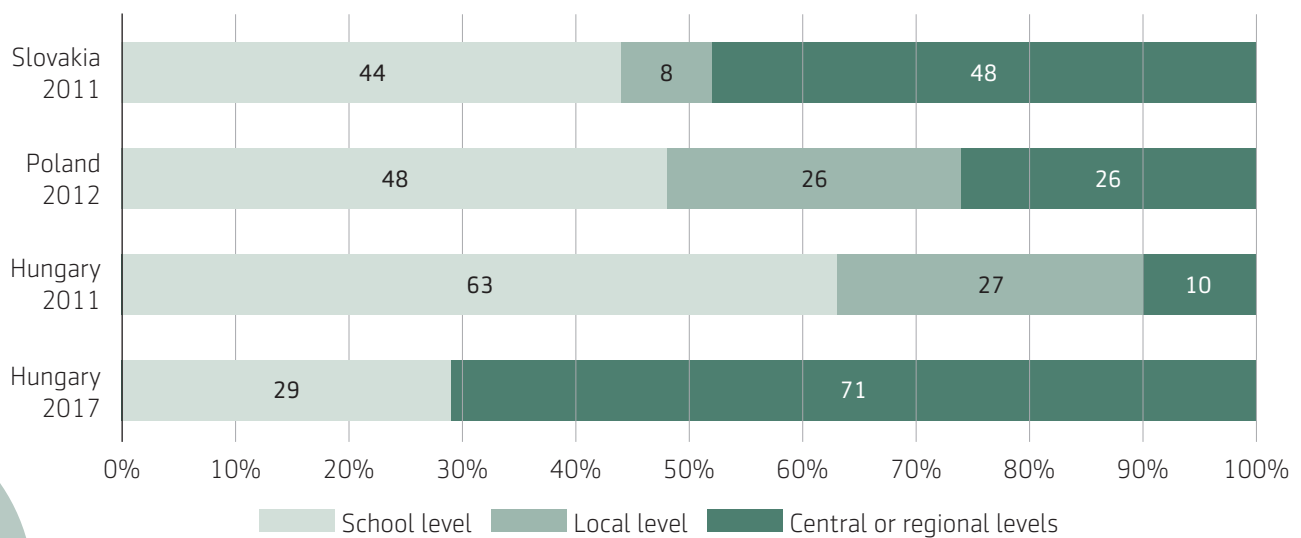
Since the early creation of dual educational management systems in Romania and Serbia, the matter of decentralization or (re)centralization has become identical to the matter of the division of labor between deconcentrated government agencies (county inspectorates or regional education departments) and local education management actors (municipal self-governments). This is ostensibly a problem of the division of responsibilities between different levels of governance, but in reality it is a question of direct separate government management versus decentralized and integrated local government management. This dual educational management regime in the two countries is the source of a wide range of dysfunctions that flow from the lack of the unambiguous division of labor among the various actors involved, especially in relation to financing and quality evaluation. In the course of decentralization in Poland, Slovakia, and in pre-2010 Hungary, the distinct management cycles at the institutional, local, and national levels became clearly separated. In contrast, due to a combination of prevailing over-regulation and the strong interference of deconcentrated government agencies in Romania and Serbia the dominance of the national level has not really been mitigated by any of the cautious decentralization measures. Over-regulation is especially peculiar in Serbia, where all aspects of the operation of schools are regulated by extremely detailed, centrally issued “rulebooks”.

The responsibility of municipal self-governments is further reduced in Serbia and Romania by the fact that, in connection with numerous matters, they are able to influence institutional-level decisions mainly through their representatives on school boards (Ciolan et alia, 2021; Jovanović, 2021). In addition to this, the right-wing government of Serbia gave up its decentralization ambitions and implemented minor but relevant recentralization steps in 2017 to strengthen central government control over education. For example, the new school principals who used to be selected and nominated by municipal self-governments are now appointed by the minister of education and all school board decisions have become subject to government approval (Jovanović, 2021)

The duality of educational management in Romania and Serbia is associated with extremely strong inertia. Beyond the already mentioned reasons for this, a great deal of path dependency is caused by the widely shared lack of trust in municipal self-governments, especially due to the political spoil system that also prevails at the local level. For example, a recurring phenomenon in Romania and Serbia is the practice of selecting school principals on the basis of political party affiliation, which factor overwrites professional-preparedness-related criteria. This is very obvious, for example, in the case of Serbia, where the “licensing” of school principals since 2018 has opened space for their selection on a political basis. Also, the selection of school boards by local self-governments leaves latitude for the appointment of members on the basis of party affiliation (Ciolan et al., 2021; Jovanović, 2021). Although some political influence on local decision-making exists in Poland and Slovakia, and existed in Hungary prior to the complete takeover of schools by the second Orbán government in 2011, it was always much more moderate than in the South-East European countries. Since 2011, however, school principals have typically been selected on the basis of political considerations in Hungary, too.

In relation to educational management decentralization, the most clear-cut case among the five countries is that of Hungary. As was discussed earlier, due to legislation passed in 1991 and 1993, the most rapid and consistent education decentralization occurred in Hungary, involving the deployment of all recurring decision-making competences to institutions, or,—in a sector-neutral way—to the “maintainers” of schools; typically to local self-governments. As the data in the following figure show, at the very beginning of the previous decade the weight of local decision-making was equally large in Poland and Hungary, while—due to the extended institutional autonomy of Hungarian schools—the role of central government agencies in operating schools in Hungary was marginal. On the basis of the new legislation on education in 2011, a complete education system reshuffle was implemented by 2015 that has created the most centralized education management system in Europe. This change, referred to in Hungary as the “nationalization” of schools, is characterized by all-pervasive bureaucratic centralization aimed at establishing political control of all publicly owned schools and each individual teacher (Radó, 2021). Schools in Hungary were merged into a single school-maintaining government authority, which for technical reasons was split up into a further 60 local school-maintaining authorities in 2015 without changing the role of any of the actors of education. At the same time, municipal self-governments were excluded from educational management. Ever since, the newly established authority has been in control of three sets of decision-making competencies: (1) the large majority of decisions formerly made by school principals prior to reorganization (such as the appointment of teachers); (2) all the ownership-related decisions made earlier by municipal self-government councils, with the exception of those that were concentrated at the central government level (such as the appointment of school principals by the minister responsible for education); (3) education-related administrative decisions traditionally deployed to government-level agencies. Overall, this rapid and unprecedented complete institutional reorganization process turned the most decentralized education management system in the region into a highly centralized one that is much more under the control of a single decision-making centre than any other South-East European one (Radó, 2021).

Figure 2 ▲ Proportion (%) of decisions associated with public lower secondary education taken at each level of government in Slovakia and Poland in 2011/12, and Hungary before and after the (Hungarian) system reshuffle (OECD 2012, OECD 2018)



One of the most important management instruments for generating and guiding educational adaptation is mid-term and long-term planning. Mid-term planning generates reflection and demand for data; it opens up consultation among the various actors and stakeholders; makes management actors think about longer-term goals; and generates demand for working solutions. In centralized management systems, however, which operate mainly by means of daily administrative decisions, the prevailing pattern of planning basically involves the short-term (annual) planning of the fiscal and/or academic year. Annual planning is strictly linked to the implementation of regulated annual tasks or to the use of the annual budget. In such systems, even if mid-term planning exercises are prescribed to various educational management actors, these plans are typically “revised” on an annual basis according to frequent changes in centrally issued regulations, or to the latitude of new annual budgets. Obviously, this is the case with the newer Hungarian system, in which bureaucratic deconcentrated government authorities—not capable of meaningful professional reflection and planning—micro-manage schools. In this respect, the institutional conditions for mid-term planning are not much more favourable in Romania and Serbia. Mid-term planning concerns the use of financial, human, and professional resources in educational change that solves perceived problems. Due to the above-mentioned duality of management responsibilities, there is no single management actor in the two education systems that is in control of all the necessary resources, has access to all the necessary information, and is empowered with the required decision-making authority. In theory, with an extremely intensive level of inter-agency cooperation effective mid-term planning would not be impossible, but the prevailing culture of shifting responsibility caused by the lack of clearly defined decision-making competences does not allow for this.

The centralized character of educational management systems in general, especially the weaknesses of (or in the case of Hungary, the complete lack of) a connected institutional, local, and regional mid-term strategic planning system, has major consequences for strategic planning at the government level. In a very complex system like that of education, beyond the technical functions (i.e. the planning of the allocation of various resources, and the timing of various interventions), government-level strategic planning serves various purposes: it is a communication instrument by which governments attempt to convince a wider audience about their priorities; it also represents a significant reference for the planning of educational actors at lower levels of management. In a highly centralized system, government strategies have the tendency to plan on behalf of lower level actors, instead of planning *for* them, in order to provide input for their own autonomous planning activities. This pattern of planning does not leave space for schools and for local management actors to adjust their priorities and developmental activities to the actual context they are working in. As a consequence, the ever-present gap between “intended strategies” and actually “implemented strategies” widens, creating the illusion of governance without actually altering the behaviour of the actors of education.

This weakness of government-level planning can easily be observed by analysing the strategies targeting the improvement of the education of Roma pupils, or those aimed at promoting gender equality in education. As the comparative analysis of Ágnes Kende demonstrates, government strategies aimed at determining the interventions required to ensure equal educational opportunities for Roma pupils involve easily implemented supplementary measures according to the path of least resistance in all of the five countries. However, they do not even attempt to address the complex underlying equity-related problems that lead to the serious underperformance of Roma pupils, such as extremely

strong social selection and the poor professional preparedness of schools and teachers to engage in successful inclusive education (Kende, 2021). The comparative study of Dorottya Rédei on education for gender equality in the five countries draws a very similar picture (Rédei, 2021). The specificity of this terrain is due to the fact that gender inequalities are mainly caused by attitudinal problems, which only teachers and schools have the means to alter. Beyond futile attempts at indoctrination, central planning may only apply measures that attempt to improve the readiness and preparedness of teachers and schools to effectively address attitude-related development issues. Therefore, although most education legislation includes the principle of gender equality in one way or another, central government strategies almost never address the related problems beyond empty declarations. Since four countries out of the five are EU members, it is important to see that the related governments are producing a large volume of sectoral, sub-sectoral, or thematic education strategies in order to satisfy the various EU mechanisms that are loosely connected to the allocation of EU funds. However, such planning obligations do not include requirements related to the quality of planning, which is very much determined by the quality of the overall governance system.

To sum up, at the time being, of the five countries only Poland—and with certain limitations, Slovakia—operate an educational management system that is (in terms of structural characteristics) able to build on the potential of decentralization: i.e., involves greater responsiveness, fosters potential connections among various public services (education, health, labor market intervention, social allowances, cultural services, etc.) that helps to solve complex local societal and economic problems, has more flexibility for adjusting to the diversity of institutional and local contexts, and enhances cooperation among various professional and lay actors of education. At the other end of this spectrum is the extremely centralized and rigid new Hungarian education management system that is designed for control instead of adaptive change, and by which the educational governance system of the country has almost completely disarmed itself. In-between are the dual and only partially decentralized management systems of Romania and Serbia, the former which are the primary sources of a large number of dysfunctions—as further discussed in the sections on curricula, quality evaluation, and financing—that largely prevent these governments from applying governance drivers for educational change.

4.2 Performance management in education

In the selective education systems of the Central-Eastern European countries in which the professional and institutional preparedness of schools to cope with the background differences of pupils is relatively poor, performance management systems have the greatest potential for generating adaptive change. Of course, performance management alone does not ensure that schools adapt to external societal, technological, and economic needs. This potential lies in the capacity of an intelligent performance management system to generate demand for institutional development by overcoming path dependency (internal focus inertia) in schools. Therefore, when assessing the institutional conditions for adapting to future challenges in the Central-Eastern European countries, performance management has to be considered as one of the most important potential drivers for change that is at the disposal of governments.

The three key elements that—if connected properly—add up to a performance management system are: (1) the instruments for setting goals for schools in terms of expected learning outcomes; (2) a quality evaluation system that provides feedback to schools and to other actors of education on successes and failures related to meeting the former goals; and, (3) various instruments for intervention in the case of poor school performance, typically referred to as professional accountability mechanisms (Radó, 2007; Radó, 2010).

4.2.1 Setting educational goals for schools

There is a widely shared conviction that curricula and learning outcome standards are the main drivers of adaptive educational change at the disposal of governments. Indeed, there are certain countries, not necessarily Central-Eastern European ones, in which the prevailing culture of educational practice allows regulatory instruments to have an impact on teaching and learning practice in classrooms. However, this impact is rarely direct; it works only if curricula and standards are properly located in the coherent overall regulatory and governance framework, and if their “modernization messages” are easily interpreted by schools and teachers and easily transformed into school programs and individual teaching strategies. Therefore, there are many conditions that must be met to ensure that the objectives set out in curricula and standards are put into practice in schools through a chain of interpretation in which autonomous actors set goals for themselves. Some of these conditions are professional, and some of them are rarely considered institutional ones. Although (in line with the focus of this comparative analysis) this section mainly addresses the institutional ones, it is important, bearing in mind all the professional aspects of effective curriculum design, to consider school program development and pedagogical practice, too.

From the perspective of an aligned performance management system—that is, in relation to the associated quality evaluation and professional accountability mechanisms—the key curriculum-related matters are: (1) the structural characteristics of the regulatory framework; (2) the extent to which the fragmentation of educational targets has been dealt with by mainstreaming and integrating externally determined learning outcome expectations for schools; (3) the procedures by which learning outcome targets are regularly adapted to changes in the wider social, technological, and economic environment of schools; and, (4) the impact of other connected governance instruments on the actual application of curricula and standards.

The most important question in relation to the regulatory frameworks by which governments determine expected learning outcomes for schools is the extent to which curricular systems are decentralized and leave space for schools and lower-level management actors to channel in their own priorities and specific educational objectives. A decentralized curricular regulation system is a multi-layered regulation regime within which schools develop their own specific programs within the framework established by national core curricula, and in which the approval of school programs enables the owners of schools to assert their own goals and to control the costs of the services that their schools provide. In order to guide the institutional interpretation of the national curriculum, governments very often apply a – mandatory or optional—additional intermediary instrument: framework curricula. It is important to

see that the degree of curricular decentralization is not simply a free choice; it is largely determined by the extent to which public management systems are decentralized: i.e. curricular regulation is simply adjusted to the allocation of management decision-making competences. Therefore, management decentralization (i.e. wider school autonomy and the empowerment of municipal self-governments with full ownership responsibilities over schools) entails curricular decentralization, as is the case in Poland and Slovakia (Jakubowski, 2021; Kaščák, 2021).

In contrast, at the other end of the spectrum, the highly centralized management system of Hungary goes hand in hand with a de facto single-level curricular system that directly regulates content, processes, and the allocation of teaching time in schools. The very unique feature of the Hungarian system is the use of a particular kind of “word-magic,” by which nothing means what it supposed to. The so called “National Core Curriculum” (*Nemzeti Alaptanterv*) is in fact an extremely detailed framework curriculum overloaded with factual knowledge requirements, while the mandatory framework curricula (*kerettanterv*) issued for each pedagogical level, school type, and subject are in fact even more detailed syllabi. These two regulatory instruments practically take up all of the teaching time in schools, risking the very serious overload of teachers and pupils. Also, the development of the programs of schools means nothing more than schools determining the subjects for which they are free to allocate a symbolic number of weekly classes. The “autonomous space” for schools is thus so small that it does not generate any cost differences among schools at all. As a consequence, school programs do not even require any approval by authorities (Radó, 2021).

The two difficult-to-grasp cases are Romania and Serbia, which are positioned between the two ends of the spectrum, and where there is a gap between formal curricular regulation and the actual latitude for actors situated hierarchically lower than the government to set goals in an autonomous way. In Romania, the 2011 law on education has created a distinction between mandatory and optional subjects; the latter comprising approximately one-third of the school curriculum. However, as with most centrally issued curricula that contain mandatory factual knowledge, it is very much overloaded, and has increased the learning time of pupils. In 2020, the ministry supplemented the national curriculum with framework curricula, adding a new administrative regulatory layer regarding time and content allocation. Therefore, in spite of the theoretically significant autonomous space for school programs, the overwhelming amount of government-issued expectations render the latter very limited (Ciolan et al., 2021). Very similarly, in Serbia, in spite of the autonomous space for school programs also determined as elective subjects, the central curriculum is so overloaded that the majority of schools teach according to the latter without any amendments or supplementary classes. Although the ongoing curriculum reform for secondary schools initiated in 2018 increased the number of elective subjects, this did not change the situation much (Jovanović 2021). Overall, in these two countries the formal regulatory frameworks allow for a certain degree of professional school autonomy—much more than that in Hungarian schools—but the combination of determining this in terms of elective subjects and the curriculum overload at the national level makes the former illusory. Due to this governance failure, schools that reflect on the objectives they serve in an autonomous way are very rare in both countries (Kende, 2021).

Another important structural matter in relation to the mechanisms through which governments define goals for schools is the actual balance between process regulation (curriculum) and outcome

regulation (standards). For several decades the mainstream trend in educational policy has been shifting from regulating the content and time allocation of the teaching-learning process to regulation by determining learning outcomes at the end of educational stages. This shift is part of the trend to overall educational decentralization. The prevailing pattern of “governing by learning outcomes” involves the gradual withdrawal of central governments from the regulation of the teaching-learning process, which is widely referred to as curriculum liberalization. The most important issue in relation to the effectiveness of the composition of this regulatory toolkit is the actual balance between process regulation and outcome regulation; the application of detailed, prescriptive centrally issued curricula *and* learning outcome standards at the same time results in overregulation that chokes the chain of interpretation of externally defined goals, while having liberalized curricula without standards leaves school systems to operate without unambiguous external expectations, making it impossible to operate a performance management system.

The actual toolkit applied in this shift is basically determined by the consequences attached to the associated quality evaluation system that is in place. Education systems with rather soft accountability regimes typically apply standard(s)-based curricula (i.e. learning outcome objectives incorporated into national curricula related to the end of various educational cycles), while other countries with a stronger accountability approach define separate sets of learning outcome standards for the last year of various types of schools. These standards often serve as requirements for school-leaving examinations. It is important to keep in mind that, in a standard-based curriculum, the list of competence targets that are supposed to—at least, to a certain extent—replace factual learning requirements. However, this is not the case in most Central-Eastern European countries.

The shift to a learning outcomes-based approach has been managed by the introduction of standard-based curricula in Poland in 2007, and in Romania in 2011. Serbia represents a special case of regulatory frameworks. A 2009 law on education contains a list of general learning outcomes that in theory create the underlying basis for government-issued curricula. The curricula for primary and secondary education are supplemented by separate sets of standards determined for the end of grades 4 and 8. Slovakia has also defined separate standards that contain performance and content standards and separate, centrally issued detailed process regulation curricula. In contrast, since 2011 Hungary has almost completely relied on process regulation; central curricula and the connected framework curricula are clearly process-regulation instruments. No performance regulation standards are determined for primary schools; the only learning outcome standards in use are the Matura examination requirements for the end of upper-secondary general education. Thus, the only country in which there has been a rather unambiguous shift toward governance by learning-outcomes is Poland. Why Hungary under the Orbán government clearly returned to rigid process regulation was to increase government control of schools; the other countries invented various regulatory solutions for inserting contemporary learning outcomes into their still centralized systems for process regulation. Since these standards that serve the purpose of modernization have not been accompanied by the bolder liberalization of curricula in the majority of countries, process control—which has a much stronger influence on school practice due to its easy application to school programs—still prevails. Therefore, the fragmentation of educational targets caused by the strong isolation of subjects has not been dealt with by the mainstreaming and integration of externally determined learning outcome expectations towards schools. As a consequence, in most of the Central-Eastern European countries, governments’ ability to use curricula

and standards to generate positive changes in the aims served by the pedagogical practice of schools is severely limited; in the case of Hungary, it has been almost completely eliminated. The traditional gap between intended and implemented curricula remains; overall educational goals have been defined by governments in terms of competences and transversal skills, while educational practice still involves making serious efforts to “transmit” factual knowledge of declining relevance.

Finally, there is the question of how uniform regulation is: that is, whether the regulations in place offer a way out of the central curriculum regulation system. This is a particularly important question in the countries we studied, where the selection pressures caused by social and ethnic inequalities are extremely strong. Of course, in the case of schools with special programs (such as art schools), or in the case of the education of special needs children, allowing deviation from the central curriculum is very much necessary. For example, the education of pupils taught on the basis of individual educational plans does not fully follow the curriculum in Serbia and elsewhere. However, there are two countries where governments have abandoned efforts to maintain the unity of a national curricular basis: Slovakia, and Hungary—not surprisingly, the two countries in which social selection and ethnic segregation are the strongest in the whole of Europe. Slovakia introduced a system involving the “experimental verification” of deviations from central curricular regulations. However, in practice these approved deviations typically affected single-subject programs only, thus they did not entail the reconsideration of the programs of whole schools (Kaščák, 2021). In contrast, as part of government efforts in Hungary to actively support the expansion of the school networks owned by traditional churches, separate framework curricula were approved for church-owned schools, according to which church schools were granted much greater professional autonomy than publicly owned ones. Also, other non-church-owned private schools have the theoretical possibility of submitting their own framework curricula for approval. However, due to the high fees required for such approval procedures, only those private schools can afford to take this opportunity that collect tuition fees from well-off parents. Overall, together with other government measures that disable the sector-level neutrality of regulation and financing, the regime is significantly contributing to further social selection and ethnic segregation within the Hungarian education system (Radó, 2019; Radó, 2021).

Incomplete curriculum decentralization and only partial moves towards governance-by-learning outcomes have another consequence: education policy in all five countries has remained strongly teacher-centred. Since whole schools can adapt to different external challenges, but individual teachers cannot, teacher-centeredness remains a barrier to modernization in Central-Eastern Europe.

4.2.2 Quality evaluation systems

Quality evaluation is the heart of an intelligent government-operated performance management system—that is, one that can enable adaptation to the diversity of school contexts. A fully developed system of quality evaluation is based on three pillars: (1) the external evaluation of schools; (2) the regular, standardized assessment of pupils’ performance; and, (3) the operation of an educational management information system (Radó, 2010). In the European quality evaluation model, the three pillars of this system are integrated primarily by the external evaluation (inspection) of schools. If professional accountability measures were connected mainly to school evaluation results, the most

important aim of the regular standardized assessment of the performance of pupils by tests, and that of the operation of the education information system, would be informing both self-evaluation in schools and external whole-school evaluation undertaken by inspectorates. Since the turn of the century, the development of increasingly sophisticated and well-connected assessment and information systems that are based on individual pupil-related data and allow for benchmarking at any aggregation level has occurred. Also, these instruments have made possible the introduction of risk-based inspection, through which full-school evaluation is administered only if data indicate that there is likely to be a problem. Although the indicators generated by these data sets can signal the existence of potential quality-related problems, only full self-evaluation and external quality evaluation are able to identify the causes of these problems.

To put it simply, the purpose of quality evaluation is making the successes and failures of schools visible to all interested parties. Within this process, collecting and feeding back information through quality evaluation systems serve two basic aims: supporting organizational learning in schools by informing school-based self-evaluation, and ensuring professional accountability by providing information to policy-makers and decision-makers at various levels of public management, and to the “clients” of schools, primarily to parents. Undertaking these two (support and accountability) functions may sometimes be contradictory. In certain institutional settings, one of them may become dominant, rendering the other rather ineffective. In the most developed education systems, however, there has been a palpable shift away from an emphasis on accountability to an emphasis on support during the last few decades. Nevertheless, there always exists a delicate balance between the two that can be maintained only through the appropriate mix of various instruments (A single quality evaluation instrument serves either support or accountability purposes.)

Despite the sometimes significant developments over the past two decades, no fully developed risk-based quality evaluation systems are in place in any of the five countries that are oriented towards the external evaluation of whole schools, and are supported by an effective student performance assessment and information system. The only country out of the five that successfully transformed its old inspection process is Poland. The regional “Kuratoria” were originally multifunctional organizations that undertook both management and quality evaluation functions. In parallel with the process of decentralization, from 1989 onwards they underwent a series of re-profiling interventions. Their management functions were taken over by municipalities, which, as owners of schools, assumed primary responsibility for the quality of public education services. Until 2009, this network of regional inspectorates operated a rather fragmented quality evaluation system (each inspectorate determined the underlying quality standards separately), which was very much oriented towards maintaining administrative control over compliance with regulations. This system was oriented towards ensuring legal accountability with very little focus on supporting school development. In 2009, however, a new nationally uniform external evaluation system was introduced that—in line with the 2001 EU guidelines—was established on the basis of a combination of school-based self-evaluation and external whole school evaluation (EU Parliament, 2001). Therefore, with a strong emphasis on providing quality evaluation feedback to inform schools, the 2009 inspection reform represented a strong shift away from a focus on accountability, and the separation of legal and professional inspection. At the same time, professional support services were detached from any forms of external inspection. (This systematic separation of distinct functions did not take place in any of the other four countries.) Also,

the new system has a strong participatory approach that effectively channels in the expectations of school users, leaving space for institutional and parental priorities. The actual underlying standards place emphasis on getting to know learners, which is the first precondition of providing personalized education. Overall, the new system in Poland, which allows for the updating of evaluation standards from time to time, may make quality evaluation a potential instrument of modernization (Mazurkiewicz et al., 2014; Jakubowski, 2021).

The transformation of the Slovakian external quality evaluation system involved a much weaker shift from accountability to support. The recent evaluation system is operated by the State School Inspectorate, which was established in 2000. The Slovakian Inspectorate undertakes the evaluation tasks and operates the procedures typically applied by other inspectorates in most European countries. In spite of this, the work of the inspectorate is described as rather bureaucratic, thus it is seen by schools more as more of a controlling authority than a partner (Kaščák, 2021). In addition to this, since its establishment the number of administrative sanctions it may apply has grown. For example, since 2020 the Inspectorate has had the power to initiate the removal of school principals. A rather specific feature of the Slovakian inspectorate is that it is entitled to develop its own performance assessment tests and to administer them in schools.

The other country that has engaged in a major transformation of its external evaluation system is Serbia. The new inspection mechanism that has operated since 2012 is also a classic whole-school evaluation regime implemented on the basis of unified quality standards that were developed in line with a contemporary understanding of the aspects and criteria associated with the quality of school education, with—due to the specific educational and policy context of the period—a special emphasis on promoting inclusive education. At the same time, due to the very centralized governance context and to the inertia of the rather traditional attitudes of advisors of the regional departments of the ministry of education, the new system works much more as a normative supervisory procedure than a professional support mechanism. There are a few elements in the Serbian system that also contribute to the fact that traditional legal accountability-oriented practices remain dominant in the new evaluation system. First of all, while due to the small number of evaluators (“advisors”) external evaluation is undertaken only rarely, the legal auditing of schools is administered on an annual basis. (Since 2018, an annual legal inspection has been mandatory for all schools.) Bearing in mind that within the Serbian education system all professional aspects of the operation of schools are extremely over-regulated, legal control almost completely suppresses external institutional evaluation (Jovanovic, 2021). In addition to this, the external evaluation system, even at the beginning of its application, was supplemented with a score-based form of assessment (“grading”) in order to give the impression of “objectivity” and strengthen the accountability-oriented character of inspection. As a consequence, similarly to in Slovakia, in spite of serious efforts to modernize external evaluation in Serbia, the whole system remains very much control- and accountability-oriented, thus provides rather limited support for schools to change.

As far as external school evaluation is concerned, Romania has gone through a rather unique process of institutional transformation. The original system of inspection was undertaken by the County School Inspectorates (CSIs), which are multifunctional agencies subordinated to the Ministry of Education, and—beyond external evaluation tasks—are in charge of certain management- and financing-related

tasks, too. Instead of transforming this old, very much legalistic and administrative-control-oriented mechanism into a contemporary form of support-oriented whole school evaluation, in 2005 the Romanian government decided to double up on the system by establishing the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP) to supervise quality assurance in schools. However, unlike the Serbian system, in which the national agency responsible for external evaluation (Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation) works through a network of advisors in the regions, the new Romanian agency carries out external evaluation in schools directly, independent of the County School Inspectorates. The question, therefore, is which of the two parallel systems has a stronger influence on the latitude within which schools are working? It is obviously the old system operated by CSIs, for several reasons. The most important of the latter is the fact that while CSIs administer inspections in each school on an annual basis, ARACIP lacks the staff to do so even on a several-year cycle. The other reason is that, in spite of this dual system, no national quality standards have been determined for any types of inspection in Romania. Schools are evaluated by ARACIP on the basis of their own annual self-evaluation reports that they prepare for their school boards, which contain planned improvement measures, too. However, because of the unusual frequency of self-evaluation, the whole system focuses much more on operational activities than on the medium-term performance of the core educational functions of the schools. As such, this system does not really establish the ground for medium-term school improvement (Kitchen et al., 2017; Ciolan et al., 2021). The common feature of the Serbian and Romanian external evaluation systems is the extremely strong inertia of old institutional routines and cultures, which is undermining institutional change for the sake of modernizing quality evaluation systems.

While during the last two decades the other four countries have made more or less successful efforts to transform their educational quality evaluation systems, in 2011 Hungary—which has not had a state education inspectorate since 1985—opted to establish a very outdated system from scratch, which was gradually set up by 2015. (The full operation of the new system generated large-scale teacher resistance in 2015 and 2016.) The new professional supervision system has clearly been designed with professional accountability purposes in mind. On the basis of a common set of standards, the new system connects the external evaluation of individual teachers with advancement through a career scheme, along with the external supervision of school principals and schools, and the self-evaluation of teachers, school principals, and schools. In line with the highly centralized character of the overall governance system, the underlying standards are extremely detailed; they are organized into eight areas of teacher competences, five areas of school principal competences, and seven areas of institutional operation. The standards also contain a large number of specific requirements and indicators for each area of supervision, leaving no space for considering the special circumstances of individual schools. The methods of external evaluation are document analysis, observation, interviews, and surveys. Disregarding the preliminary screening of a large number of documents, the professional supervision of teachers, principals, and schools is basically a single-day event.

It is important to see that from the perspective of teachers and schools, the only high-stakes element of the Hungarian system is the individual qualification of teachers, because, according to the newly established career scheme, teachers' salaries are strongly differentiated along the five categories of advancement. In spite of the nature of the heavy administrative control of the new system, its weak accountability assurance potential stems from the lack of institutionalization. The government did not

establish a professional inspection system with relative professional autonomy that employs qualified evaluators. Instead, those practicing teachers who are promoted to the “master teacher” grade are dispatched by the Educational Authority to be evaluators in other schools. They are compensated by a significantly higher salary and a substantial reduction in their weekly mandatory classes. These practicing teachers are trained for their roles as evaluators through 30 hours of in-service training only. Not surprisingly, due to the solidarity among teachers, the evaluation results of the professional supervision for teachers and schools principals are poorer than 90 percent only in extremely rare cases. Overall, due to the lack of institutionalization that would allow for the professionalization of the external evaluation system, it is not able to meet any of the general aims of educational inspection: it does not ensure professional accountability, does not provide external references for self-evaluation, and does not generate demand for professional development. Therefore, even if the underlying standards for evaluation contain various requirements that are in line with our contemporary understanding of good teaching and schooling, the system is capable only of administrative control and for creating the appearance of inspection; it does not have the potential to effectively convey external professional expectations to actually working schools (Radó, 2021).

In line with the prevailing learning outcomes-based approach, the systematic collection and feedback of information on learner performance through external and standardized assessments is an increasingly valued tool in quality assessment systems. Since the turn of the century, some form of external assessment has been created in all five countries. In Poland and Serbia, this is based exclusively on school-leaving examinations at the end of lower-secondary and upper-secondary education. In Poland, a competence test was introduced in grade 6 for diagnostic purposes, but abolished by the PiS government in 2016. Therefore, in both countries the only available assessment survey data that serve for system analysis are provided by international assessment projects of the OECD and the IEA. In Poland—especially after the reform of the Matura examination in 2005—change was achieved by moving from school-based examinations to standardized test-based examinations that provide much more reliable information on the performance of schools and the education system as a whole. The individual consequences connected to examination results make this a high-stakes assessment instrument in both countries (Jakubowski, 2021; Jovanovic, 2021). However, due to the very different systemic environment in the two countries, the actual function of examinations is very different. In Poland, due to the decentralization of the overall governance regime, and especially because of the pre-existing, more support-oriented external school evaluation system, school-leaving exams are the most important, and practically the only effective professional accountability mechanism. This is made possible by the fact that these exams are based on standardized tests, so their results can be used to monitor the performance not only of pupils but also of schools. In contrast, in Serbia, where strong governance centralization still prevails and the culture of external quality evaluation has remained rather control oriented, school-leaving exams play a different role. The primary function of the school-leaving exam at the end of grade 8 (introduced in 2014), as well as that of the recently introduced Matura exam, is to reinforce the regulatory power of the underlying separate sets of standards; that is, to support the more effective regulation of the teaching-learning process in the years leading up to the exams. The combination of this still rather centralized curricular regulation and the introduction of outcome regulation (standards) contribute significantly to the sustained presence of heavy over-regulation in the Serbian educational governance system.

In Hungary, the only governance instrument that (surprisingly) survived the all-encompassing reshuffle of the governance system after 2011 was the regular assessment system (National Assessment of Competences—*Országos Kompetenciamérés*), which was established in 2001 to test the reading literacy and mathematical competences of all pupils in grades 6, 8, and 10 on an annual basis. This system was improved in 2008 when the introduction of individual pupil IDs made connecting the performance of individual pupils in different tests possible (thereby allowing for the calculation of added value at all aggregation levels). The original underlying intention was to create an assessment system for purely formative purposes. The first and rather weak attempt to use the test results for accountability purposes was introduced in 2007. Therefore, external standardized test results were used exclusively for formative purposes, and to inform self-evaluation in schools without any intention to improve accountability. This might be the reason why the shift to extreme centralization and administrative control between 2011 and 2015 that resulted in the building of the above-described new system of professional supervision of teachers did not render the inherited assessment mechanism a target-conflicted device. Nevertheless, although schools are still well served with student performance assessment data, due to the abolition of mandatory self-evaluation neither schools nor external supervisory agents use the measurement data. In other words, although a few researchers who obtain access to the assessment data can do some secondary analysis, the regular testing of pupils' performance has no real function in the overall system of governance. As far as examinations are concerned, in Hungary no school-leaving exam is administered at the end of lower-secondary education. The 2005 Matura examination reform partly standardized the latter and oriented it more towards the assessment of key competences. The organization of the exam remained basically the same after 2011, but the government revised the underlying standards multiple times in order to orient it towards the assessment of factual knowledge. Overall, the whole governance system, due to its very strong administrative control-oriented character, creates a paradoxical situation: the combined effect of all the accountability mechanisms is the almost complete lack of professional accountability in the education system (Radó, 2011).

The actual function of the assessment system in Slovakia and Romania is harder to grasp. In Slovakia, the Matura exam was reformed in very similar way as it was in Poland and Hungary a year later. The measurement system was extended in 2009 when the "Monitor 9" assessment system was introduced. This is a standardized test that measures the performance of pupils in mathematics and the language of instruction at the end of lower secondary education. The test is intended to serve three distinct functions: to act as a school-leaving exam, the results of which are included in the certificate of pupils, for creating the basis for selection to upper secondary education, and for assisting in the assessment of the performance of schools (school rankings are created and published on the basis of the results). These three functions combined make the test an extremely high-stakes instrument. In 2015, it was supplemented with an entry test in grade 5 to allow the measurement of added value. What is unique to this system is the fact that administering the grade 5 entry test is mandatory only for those schools that are undergoing external evaluation by the inspectorate (as mentioned earlier, the inspectorate is allowed to develop and administer its own assessment instruments) (Kaščák, 2021). High-stakes inspection and high-stakes testing together create a very strong accountability regime in Slovakia. At the same time, there is rather little emphasis on providing support for the autonomous improvement efforts of schools, rendering this strong accountability regime rather ineffective. With all these differences in mind, it can be observed that the overall situation is rather similar in Romania, where diagnostic testing was introduced in grades 2, 4 and 6 in 2011, followed by high-stakes school leaving

exams at the end of lower-secondary and upper-secondary education (Ciolan et al., 2021). Again, the combination of high-stakes exams and a dual—but asymmetrical—external school evaluation system creates a counter-productive accountability system, because the actual governance regime imposes a rather “paper-based” annual reporting duty on schools, instead of inciting, informing, and supporting their medium-term efforts at autonomous improvement.

Overall, a cursory glance at the quality evaluation systems of the five countries suggests that they all fit neatly into the classification of quality-oriented accountability systems common to continental Europe. These systems differ from performance-oriented systems that—due to their very different constitutional and governance frameworks—have become common in the US. The most important difference is that the European systems typically assign developmental consequences to external quality evaluation results, while the accountability systems of the US assign consequences directly to the results of student-performance-related measurement (Hamilton, 2003; Radó, 2007).

Table 2 ▲ Algorithms of performance- and quality-oriented accountability systems (Radó, 2007)

Performance-oriented accountability systems	Quality-oriented accountability systems
Setting performance standards	Determining quality criteria and setting performance standards
External assessment of the performance of students	External quality evaluation and external assessment informs evaluation
Publicized feedback of assessment results	Publicized feedback of evaluation results (in certain countries, also assessment results)
Setting benchmarks associated with the expected performance improvement	Identifying schools that provide poor quality service
Punishing or rewarding consequences attached to performance	Mandatory development of schools with poor quality (developmental intervention)

However, the deeper institutional analysis outlined in this section proves that the real situation is much more complex. Poland, for example, while operating a European-type external evaluation system, basically connects its rather weak professional accountability regime much more to its standardized test-based examination system than to inspection, which has been realigned to fulfil support functions. Three other countries (Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia) have created systems which cannot be fully described as accountability models; they mix the tools of the two types of system in a rather inconsistent and counterproductive way. And finally there is Hungary, which by returning to the governance models of the 1960s and 1970s of the previous century lacks even the ambition to create an effective and contemporary system of professional accountability. From the perspective of the underlying question that inspired this study—whether the performance management systems currently in place in each country are suitable for use by governments as drivers of school adaptation to external expectations—the answer is fairly straightforward. While the Polish system—in spite of lacking certain elements, such as a stronger connection to school improvement—has the potential for this, the governments in the other four countries are rather powerless. Therefore, the direction of change in schools in Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia is basically determined by the strong inertia inherent to their traditional style of functioning.

4.3 Financing and the use of incentives

Because of the generally low level of funding, schools in Central and Eastern European countries have traditionally been very sensitive to financial incentives. Incentives embedded in mainstream fiscal allocation mechanisms can create vested interests in adapting to external expectations and thus have the potential to override the internal orientation and resulting inertia that characterizes schools.

However, not all education funding systems are well suited to using financial incentives to reinforce expectations about external adaptation. This requires an allocation mechanism that meets two conditions: (1) it should be flexible enough to adapt to the very different funding needs that the curricula and development programs of individual schools generate, while (2) it should create the funding stability needed for longer-term planning. Only two-tier, decentralized and normative (formula-based) allocation systems can meet these two conditions at the same time. It can therefore be said that fiscal decentralization is a structural prerequisite of the use of financial incentives to support institutional adjustment. Beyond these considerations, due to the scarcity of state budget resources for education, countries are particularly interested in fiscal decentralization because it increases spending for all locally provided public services, such as education (Busemeyer, 2008).

It is important to keep in mind that financial incentives embedded in short- or medium-term central development projects do not necessarily have the same effect. Even in the case of successful project implementation, such projects all too often do not lead to sustained change in the organizational behaviour of schools, as indicated by the important distinction between project adaptation and institutional adaptation (McLaughlin, M. W., 1981). In addition to this, central government development programs tend to be poorly targeted, and their scale is typically very limited; they reach out to a limited number of schools only, thus they might generate good practices, but do not necessarily have a system-level effect.

Decentralized normative education funding systems operate in only three out of the five countries under investigation: in Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. In Serbia, a 2009 legislative amendment prescribed the move to a decentralized formula-based funding system, but—basically due to its additional costs—this has not been implemented by consecutive governments. Therefore, the system is still based on the direct funding of inputs on the basis of the unambiguous division of labor between the central budget and municipalities. Salaries of teaching staff (i.e. the large majority of allocated funds) are directly funded by the central budget and calculated on the basis of a rigid salary scale. Also, central budget funds are allocated to schools for development programs and capital investment. Municipalities are in charge of funding early childhood education, recurring operational costs of schools, supplementary support for the education of special needs children, and the professional development of teachers (Maghnouj, S. et al., 2020). This division of labor creates a great deal of uncertainty in relation to the costs of many different tasks that schools undertake, especially when educational policy priorities define expectations for special programs or supplementary activities. This rigid and not easily manageable financing system does not allow for the use of incentives for school development. The instrument is only available to the government through the EU-funded tender schemes of central development programs that are not targeted enough, and for which funding is not sustainable.

The other country operating with an old-fashioned centralized input financing system in education is Hungary. A completely unique feature of the current Hungarian funding system is that it replaced a sophisticated decentralized system in 2013 that had operated for two decades (since 1991) and was characterized by the widespread and often successful use of financial incentives. These incentives were supplementary per-capita grants provided to the owners of the schools for various purposes, and significantly contributed to reducing the dropout rates in primary education in the 1990s and to the integration of the education of special needs children after the turn of the century. Financial incentives were also part of the government toolbox of less successful policy for reversing the segregation of Roma pupils. These supplementary grants were applied for many other purposes, too, such as for covering the costs of teacher participation in in-service training. (The number of types of supplementary grants continuously grew throughout the two decades of normative financing.) As of 1 January 2013, however, schools ceased to have budgets of their own; all minor expenses are covered directly by the school district school-maintaining authorities. In 2015, responsibility for funding recurrent operational costs was taken away from the self-governments, too, and was given to the central school maintenance authorities, thereby completely eliminating any remaining responsibility for schools on the part of municipal self-governments. Teachers' salaries, which comprise the largest element of educational financing, are transferred directly from the state treasury. Payment of salaries is carried out by the authorities to each individual school on the basis of headcount. Due to the vagueness of the underlying rules and the wide discretion this has given to local authorities, the new system is in fact input financing on a 'historical basis' (i.e. on a simple, previous-year-spending basis). Non-government schools, however, are funded in a different way. The recurrent operational costs of schools maintained by churches and the national self-governments of minorities are still funded on a per-capita basis by the state budget. The salaries of teachers working in these schools are financed from the national budget on equal terms with those of teachers in state schools. Although the financing of VET schools is sector neutral, the number of pupils permitted to enrol per school and per vocation is determined by the authorities, giving an advantage to government and church-owned schools.

At the time being, there are six parallel financing systems in place in Hungary, each with a different level of centralization, with different underlying allocation mechanisms, and each using different methods to calculate funding. Some of these are completely decentralized and normative systems that survived the 2011 system reshuffle (e.g. the funding of early childhood education, which is still provided by municipal self-governments). Others are fully direct input financing regimes (e.g. the financing of government schools that are under the school-maintaining authorities). Certain systems, such as the financing of church-owned primary and secondary schools, combine the direct financing of teachers' salaries with the normative (per capita-based) funding of recurring operational costs. The state budget provides funding for the operational costs of all schools except for non-church private schools (Radó, 2021). In the new financing system of Hungary, space for the use of financial incentives for influencing the "behaviour" of teachers, school principals, schools, or any other actors of education has been completely eliminated. The removal of this policy instrument has significantly reduced the ability of the government to encourage school-level adaptation to external expectations of any sort.

While in theory the structural preconditions for applying financial incentives as drivers of school-level adaptation are in place in Poland, Slovakia, and Romania, the actual operation of their educational funding mechanisms does not necessarily allow for this. In this respect, the best case is that of Poland.

This system employs a classic two-tier allocation mechanism with two distinct funding relationships. The first involves formula-based, lump-sum grant funding for municipalities that provide educational services. Grants are calculated on the basis of the number of pupils and teachers, as well as on certain additional other factors such as the needs of particular age groups, for specific courses provided in schools, or to schools located in remote areas. (The funding system is sector-neutral; the owners of non-public schools are funded on equal terms with municipalities.) The second financial relationship is the local funding scheme created by municipalities that has a high degree of autonomy. This allows for considering many different locally relevant criteria and may open up the space for school-level financial planning (OECD, 2015). Considering this background, the Polish financing system involves ample scope for the use of effective financial incentives: the central budget allocation to municipalities—beyond unconditional lump-sum grants—includes earmarked (“conditional”) grants for specific purposes. However, these earmarked additional grants are used by the Polish government to fund a rather narrow range of potential priorities, such as supporting municipalities with low income-generating capacity to run rural schools, improving school equipment, or supporting the education of talented children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hybka–Kaczyńska, 2016). A system similar to the Hungarian practice before 2011, in which a wide range of additional subsidies were granted to local governments, linked to specific objectives and in line with the respective education policy priorities (such as those creating incentives for the integration of Roma and special needs children), was not established in Poland.

In Slovakia, the financing system is much less favourable in terms of applying incentives. The 2002 overall decentralization reform incorporated fiscal decentralization, too. However, in 2012 this was partially revoked by making the central budget responsible for the direct normative funding of salaries, as calculated on the basis of a salary scale. Municipalities retained responsibility for the funding of the recurring operational costs of primary schools. Upper-secondary schools receive their operational budgets from higher territorial units that are funded by the state budget on the basis of a per-capita formula. Therefore, in spite of its normative and partly decentralized character, this multi-channel Slovakian system does not create the appropriate latitude for applying financial incentives according to the modernization priorities of the government. Only a limited part of the operational budget provided for primary schools by municipalities can be used for funding the costs of school development. In this respect, the situation is somewhat similar in Romania, where fiscal decentralization was implemented in 2009. The new central allocation mechanism is basically a per-capita-based normative system that is differentiated by levels and school profiles, and adjusted by a number of correction coefficients. Funds are further allocated to schools by municipalities, but their autonomy to determine the budget of schools is limited by the “technical assistance” of County School Inspectorates that define enrolment quotas for each individual school. Also, the autonomy of schools to manage their budgets is extremely limited. In spite of these constraints, this system would still allow some technical space for using financial incentives through the correction coefficients. However, due to the underfunding of education—similarly to in Slovakia—the necessary budgetary latitude is not available, and almost all funding is deployed on basic educational expenditure.

SECTION 5. ▲

Conclusions: The Consequences of Governance Failures

As anticipated in the conceptual framework that creates the basis for the analysis in this paper, the degree of the decentralization of governance determines the extent to which a system has the institutional conditions in place to promote adaptation. Therefore, when summarizing the larger picture revealed so far, it is worth returning to the taxonomy offered in the first section of this paper. On the basis of this, Hungary can be classified as a centralized-bureaucratic system, Serbia and Romania fit into the category of centralized-professional governance systems, while Poland clearly and Slovakia with limitations may be classified as countries that operate decentralized professional governance systems. (Just as the first category describes the distant past of European education governance systems, the last category—that is, the category of highly decentralized systems—is a model that indicates the direction of change that has not yet occurred anywhere.)

The table below provides a somewhat simplistic but clear and concise summary of the results of the institutional analysis in the previous chapter. The basic question we asked in our research in connection with educational governance was whether the institutional systems of the five countries are capable of applying “drivers” that can help schools overcome the inertia caused by path dependency and an internal focus to permit them to adapt to ongoing social, technological, environmental, and other changes. Our findings reveal a rather mixed picture overall. On one end of the spectrum is Poland, with an educational governance system that is evolving towards becoming fully capable of applying such drivers, even if this potential has not been fully exploited so far. On the other end is Hungary, where this evolution was progressing well, but in 2010 was disrupted; its governance systems have (been) reverted to the state they were in half a century earlier. In the three countries with systems located somewhere in between the two ends of the scale, there are some governance sub-systems which, with deliberate improvements, could be made suitable for this purpose, while others require major institutional reform. Overall, the institutional systems of Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia do not seem to be able to provide their governments with all the means required to effectively stimulate the process of institutional adaptation in schools.

Table 3 ▲ Applicability of the selected governance drivers in the five countries

Country	Management instruments	Learning outcome standards	Quality evaluation and accountability	Financial incentives
Hungary	non-applicable	non-applicable	non-applicable	non-applicable
Poland	applicable	applicable	applicable	applicable
Romania	non-applicable	partly	non-applicable	non-applicable
Serbia	non-applicable	partly	partly	non-applicable
Slovakia	partly	applicable	partly	non-applicable

With all this in mind, the question is what adaptation pressures are schools under? In the four countries that are less prepared than Poland in terms of institutional conditions, the systemic environments in which schools are operating are certainly applying some kind of adaptation pressure. However, in those countries where governance is fully (Hungary) or to a large extent (Serbia and Romania) centralized, the adaptive institutional strategy is to comply with regulations and formal governmental expectations; this means complying with administrative rules, with regulated teaching content, or with remotely defined, highly standardized quality requirements—but definitely not adapting to perceived modernization challenges. Even if the policy narratives and strategies of governments appear to press for real adaptation, schools that are governed basically by how they routinely operate over a long period of time will undergo only formal “mimetic” processes of adaptation (Caravella, 2011).

All this leads to a specific governance paradox: the more a government centralizes, the less it becomes able to influence change in schools. As is clearly demonstrated by the Hungarian case following 2010, the country’s education administration has almost completely disarmed itself through its radical turn towards extreme centralization. In relation to this very special situation, it does not appear to be a problem that the Hungarian government has no ambition to promote the creation of an education system that allows for personalized active learning and the successful development of basic learning competencies and transversal skills. However, it is a problem in Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia, where governments—at least in the light of their approved development strategies—do have such ambitions. Overall, in light of the institutional conditions that are in place, the dominant pattern of governing by learning outcomes is clearly applicable only in Poland, because the latter requires a shift from regulating processes and content by curricula to regulating learning outcomes expectations by standards. Also, it requires an intelligent quality evaluation system that supports school improvement and a professional accountability regime that is well-connected to learning-outcome-related expectations, and that avoids the shortcut between test results and overly strong consequences attached to testing. In the rest of the countries, the realignment of educational practices to serve the development of transversal skills according to prescriptive curricula overloaded with content is unlikely to happen.

Beyond the specific question at the centre of this analysis, the overall picture that emerges so far raises a great deal of concern about the effectiveness of governance in general. The specific problem in Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia stems from the fragmentation and internal imbalance of their systems. First of all, due to the fact that in the practice of these governments the “software” and “hardware” of education are not well connected, most investments into their governance instruments are incremental and constructed within the narrow logic of the respective sub-systems. In addition to this, when governments attempt to implement inclusive education or any other modernization measures, they still rarely consider the institutional conditions of their implementation in a coherent and strategic way. The effect of this fragmentation is the lack of coherence within the systemic environment of schools; the various governance instruments convey sometimes contradictory messages, and expectations towards schools transmitted through curricula, quality evaluation, and financing very often cancel each other out (Radó, 2010). Even in a single sub-system, half-hearted transformation efforts may have target-conflicting side effects that eventually weaken government influence on school-level change. For example, the incomplete transformation of quality evaluation in Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia may strengthen resistance to professional accountability systems of any kind.

Another concern is the widespread political—in certain countries, ideological—pollution of the discourse about genuine educational matters. This may involve distortions that go beyond direct political influence, such as the selection and appointment of school directors on the basis of political party affiliation, which is widespread in Hungary, Serbia, and Romania, and occasionally happens in Slovakia and Poland. (Political spoils systems are not only specific to the national level; they also tend to spread to the local-institutional level.) For example, in more and more autocratic regimes that are dragging education into a “culture war,” resistance to the introduction of mandatory religious education in schools may lead to the questioning of the prominent role of municipal self-governments in managing education. The most extreme example of this, although not followed by other countries, has occurred in Hungary, where the total concentration of power has been accompanied by the complete squeezing out of local self-governments from the management of education. Likewise, a well-known phenomenon in the countries of the region is the launching of major institutional reorganizations for which the only real reason is replacing a group of people that hold management positions and are linked to opposition political parties. This practice obviously further weakens the stability of institutional systems.

In terms of the perspective of the latitude for governments to incite and support school-level adaptation, the implications of the nature of the actual institutional framework of governance for policy-making have to be considered, too. The prevailing pattern of policy-making in Europe is an incremental approach: instead of large-scale systemic reforms, most governments operate using targeted and isolated problem-solving interventions that serve limited objectives (even if the packages of some incremental changes are often communicated as educational reforms). However, since most policy measures are implemented through the various sub-systems of governance, the policy implementation capacity of governments largely depends on the maturity and effectiveness of these institutional settings. In this respect, the main problem of Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia is that their management, financing, and other systems are not developed and stable enough to allow for successful implementation. The majority of the many examples of poorly implemented policies are connected to the contradiction between ambitious goals and rather poor—and in the case of Hungary, almost non-existent—institutional implementation capacity.

This constraint may be observed in relation to many of the actors of policy planning and decision-making in all of the countries under investigation. This has resulted in a specific change in the pattern of policy-making in almost all of the Central-Eastern European countries: the shift to policy-substituting development that was already mentioned in relation to the stalling of institutional transformation in Hungary after 2003. After accession to the EU, the relative abundance of EU funds deployed for educational development led to a situation in which the path of least resistance was followed when launching large-scale central development programs, which in many cases have displaced the use of the traditional instruments of policy making. This phenomenon—beyond eliminating the main rationale for further improving the institutional conditions of governance—has had many negative side-effects. The most important one is the phenomenon called the “resource curse”; the impact of oil revenues on the economy and institutions of Russia and Venezuela is very similar to that created by EU funds on the quality of institutions in the new Member States. Easily accessible EU resources have generated rent-seeking behaviour among actors in the bloated education development service sector; they have increased corruption and waste; disconnected the use of development funds from the very diverse improvement needs of different schools; and had a destructive effect on the whole

institutional system of governance. In the most extreme case, since 2010 EU funds have provided the resources for establishing all the mechanisms by which the Hungarian government has systematically eliminated all of the institutional conditions of effective governance. The pattern of policy-substituting development programs has had an additional side-effect: innovation and change in most countries has been ghettoized into school experiments (e.g. experimental verification in Slovakia), into private schools in Hungary, or into government-initiated development programs in a limited number of pilot schools. In the rather rare cases during the last decade when a government has applied a more systemic approach, such as the inclusive education reform in Serbia, implementation had limited success because of the poor implementation capacity of the government. In most countries, this has created isolated islands of innovation without the conditions necessary for systemic scaling up.

Finally, the governance regimes of the five countries should be assessed in line with their potential to allow experimentation and change that may lead to their gradual transformation into even more open—that is, more decentralized—and ultimately more adaptive governance models, such as the Network Governance Model and the Societal Resilience Model (Frankowski et al., 2018; Radó, 2020/a). In this respect, the most important finding of the analysis in these pages is that in the majority of the five countries the structural conditions for future-oriented further improvements are absent. The lack of intelligent decentralized governance sub-systems leads to the maintenance of hierarchical links within the education system that hamper the development of horizontal networks around schools. Therefore, dysfunctional governance is an obstacle to the emergence of schools that are open to their environment and can adapt through intensive horizontal cooperation. This assessment is reinforced by the fact that examples of future-oriented horizontal governance models are extremely rarely applied, even among private schools, because the latter are subject to the same hierarchical governance systems as all other schools. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that the ambiguity caused by the poorly defined roles of different institutional actors (most salient in the educational management systems of Romania and Serbia) results in widespread mistrust and permanent responsibility-shifting. However, without trust among the growing number of actors involved in the governance of school networks, the shift to further decentralization is impossible.

The summary of the final conclusions that can be drawn from the above is that, with probably the only exception of Poland, the conditions for the future-oriented further development of education are not in place in the countries that have been studied; especially not in relation to two aspects. First, the latter are to varying degrees essentially ill-equipped to encourage schools to adapt to the external challenges of the present, which will become increasingly severe in the near future. Second, the structural preconditions (primarily, wider school autonomy and intelligent decentralized governance instruments) for helping create the education governance models of the future are not in place, thus these education systems remain stuck in a highly hierarchical and closed mode of operation.

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ANNEX

Studies developed and published
as working papers
in the Future challenges
to education systems
in Central Eastern European
context project of CEU



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- ***Péter Radó***
**The Adaptability of Education Systems to Future Challenges in Context:
An Analytical Framework**
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2020/1
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3209/cps-working-paper-educ-future-challenges-context-2020.pdf>
- ***Ágnes Kende***
The Preconditions of Institutional Change in Schools
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2020/3
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3254/cps-working-paper-educ-schools-institutional-change-preconditions-2020.pdf>
- ***Péter Radó***
Social Selection in Education: the Wider Context of the Segregation of Roma Pupils in Hungary
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2020/4
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3258/cps-working-paper-educ-social-selection-education-hungary-2020.pdf>
- ***Péter Radó***
The Institutional Conditions of Adapting to Future Challenges in the Hungarian Education System
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<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3300/cps-working-paper-educ-institutional-conditions-hungary-2021-corr.pdf>
- ***Ondrej Kaščák***
The Institutional Conditions of Adapting to Future Challenges in the Slovak Education System
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/2
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3302/cps-working-paper-educ-institutional-conditions-slovakia-2021-corr.pdf>
- ***Ágnes Kende***
Comparative Overview of the Capacity of the Education Systems of the CEE Countries to Provide Inclusive Education for Roma Pupils – Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/3
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3306/cps-working-paper-educ-comparative-overview-roma-2021-corr.pdf>

- ***Dorottya Rédei***
Comparative Overview of the Capacity of the Education Systems of Five Central Eastern European Countries to Adapt to Changing Gender Roles
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/4
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3308/cps-working-paper-educ-comparative-overview-gender-2021-corr.pdf>
- ***Maciej Jakubowski***
The Institutional Conditions of Adapting to Future Challenges in the Polish Education System
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/5
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3310/cps-working-paper-educ-institutional-conditions-poland-2021-corr.pdf>
- ***Lucian Ciolan, Simona Iftimescu, & Mihaela Stîngu***
The Institutional Conditions of Adapting to Future Challenges in the Romanian Education System
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/6
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3312/cps-working-paper-educ-institutional-conditions-romania-2021-corr.pdf>
- ***Vitomir Jovanović***
The Institutional Conditions of Adapting to Future Challenges in the Serbian Education System
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/7
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3314/cps-working-paper-educ-institutional-conditions-serbia-2021-corr.pdf>
- ***Nina Begičević Ređep***
Comparative Overview of the Digital Preparedness of Education Systems in Selected CEE Countries
CEU CPS Working Paper Series 2021/8
<https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/publication/3316/cps-working-paper-educ-digital-preparedness-2021.pdf>

This volume includes studies about the first findings of the “Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context” project of the Center for Policy Studies (Democracy Institute) at Central European University. The research project was designed to assess the ability of the education systems of Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia to adapt to various ongoing disruptive changes, such as technological change and its impact on labor markets, various demographic changes, populist politics and autocratic governance, old and new inequalities, changing gender roles, and globalization. The summary studies in this book, which are based on the contributions of an extended international research team, address three focal areas. The first, written by Balázs Munkácsy and Ágota Scharle, provides an assessment of the relative regional contextual relevance of various global challenges to education systems. The second study, by Ágnes Kende, looks at the institutional preparedness of schools in the five countries to adapt and change. The last study, by Péter Radó, is a comparative institutional analysis of the preparedness of the five educational governance systems to encourage schools to adapt by effectively conveying clear external expectations.