



COUNTRY STUDY

ROMANIA

Country Monitoring Report

Romania faces several challenges in the area of education: the early school leaving rate remains well above the EU average; the availability and access of early childhood education and care services is limited, especially in rural areas and for the Roma community; participation in lifelong learning remains far below the EU average; the quality and labour market relevance of higher education is inadequate; and the tertiary attainment rate remains the second lowest in the Union.

Recommendations

- Increase the provision and quality of early childhood education and care, in particular for Roma.
- Take action to implement the national strategy to reduce early school leaving and the lifelong learning national strategy.
- Complete and improve the quality of lifelong learning (particularly for certain socio-economical groups).
- Improve the development of sectoral Committees in non-formal and informal learning.





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1. Promoting access and participation in LLL

The participation in lifelong learning continues to be among the lowest in the European Union. Despite a slight increase, participation in lifelong learning activities remained with 2 % far below the EU average of 10.5 % in 2013. The lowest participation to training is recorded among employees with low levels of education and professional qualification, working in companies with less than 10 employees and aged over 40 (National Observatory for Permanent Learning Development). Training participation rates are also lower in rural areas than in urban areas and for men,

compared to women.

There are several causes that could explain the low participation rate in LLL in Romania. It may be generated by a series of dysfunctions between Romanian employers, employees and educational and vocational training providers, who simply act independently and don't interact enough. Educational and vocational training providers offer programs and competencies that do not mirror the needs of employers. Moreover, employees often don't have access to information about educational and vocational training, and the employers don't benefit from enough incentives to offer their employees educational and vocational training.

Another major setback for the improvement of LLL is the incomplete and inferior quality of the offered education, particularly for certain socio-economical groups. This in return blocks the development of basic competencies for LLL. For instance, according to PISA data, many of the 15-year-old teenagers cannot read or count (37,3% and 40,8% respectively). Additionally, almost every fifth pupil leaves school before obtaining the basic competencies for LLL. This risk is even greater among the pupils from rural communities, those whose parents have low incomes, or are from Roma communities or other disadvantaged groups.

However, Romania has made some progress and efforts. Priority target groups have been identified, among which early school leavers, graduates with formal qualifications that are no more relevant on the labour market, individuals returning to the country after period of working abroad, and low-skilled adults over 40¹. The Romanian government adopted the national lifelong learning strategy 2015-2020, which was developed with the support of the World Bank, as well as complementary strategy on the reduction

¹ European Commission (2015). *Commission Staff Working Document, Country Report Romania 2015 Including an In-Depth Review on the prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances.*



of early school leaving. Both of these two strategies have been harmonized with the ambitious objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy and the National Program for Reform. Furthermore, in the meantime, a national strategy on VET is also currently in public debate and its adoption is awaited for this year.

Although Romania has a solid legal framework for LLL (national educational law from 2011, with subsequent amendments and additions), its major problem is that in practice there is no systematic coordination with these ministries and other relevant stakeholders in place yet (as LLL does not only involve central public authorities, but also regional and local authorities, social partners and NGOs). It is clear that the Romanian government as well as the stakeholders need time and willingness to implement all the measures.

2. Vocational Education and Training

The participation of upper-secondary students in vocational education and training remains above the EU average (61.9% as against 50.4% in 2012). However, vocational education and training high schools have the lowest pass rate in the final national examination (38 % as compared to 76 % in general education in 2013, Institute of Educational Sciences). Also, the dropout rate in 2012 was twice as high compared with general upper-secondary education.

After the introduction of the new education law, the number of apprenticeships has started increasing but remains limited. A number of measures planned were implemented as well as pilot schemes (e.g. the work-based learning vocational training scheme), and will be further rolled-out. Several projects aiming to revise the curricula and to strengthen partnerships with schools and social partners in vocational education and training were implemented, but their mainstreaming still remains to be done².

² European Commission (2014). *Education and Training Monitoring Report – Romania*.

A new vocational education and training strategic framework has been prepared by the former government, which is currently waiting to be adopted. The strategy is complementary to the LLL strategy and aims at improving the relevance of the VET systems on the labour market, increasing and facilitating access to VET programs, improving the quality of VET and developing national and international cooperation and innovation in VET.

In order to achieve these objectives, VET providers have to permanently adapt and update their VET offer, so as to respond effectively to the needs of stakeholders. The development and reform of the VET system also involves a process of decentralization to ensure the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources, in decision making and general and financial management issues, to schools and local community, in order to be closer to the real needs located at regional and local level and it is necessary to involve local stakeholders in defining the VET offer. Inter-institutional cooperation at various levels is also a key element in developing and implementing correctly this VET strategy, as well as the LLL one.

3. Validation of NFIL

Romania's validation system of non-formal and informal learning is based on the Governmental Ordinance 76/2004. It laid down the foundation for the validation centers as accredited institutions (by Romania's current National Authority for Qualification) to conduct assessments for the recognition of a professional competence based on occupational standards. Between 2004 and 2014, this authority accredited about 159 validation centers for 150 professions. These centers are responsible for assessing competences in various fields, such as: social assistance, agriculture, construction, administration and public services, information and communication technologies, tourism, hotels and restaurants, retail, the food industry, forestry and wood processing, and



welding.

The number of people participating in the validation of NFIL has increased in the last years. This may be explained by the fact that people could benefit from informational activities, adequate guidance and from mediation in the internal labour market, and this free of charge. However, this is not enough and more needs to be done. There are still many excluded people such as Roma minorities, young people from rural areas etc, who simply cannot participate because they do not fulfil the required conditions. As the requested level of education is usually secondary level, many people from disadvantaged groups who do not have reached this level are left out. A telling example are the Roma, since over the majority of this group has not the required compulsory level of education.

The flaws in the VNFIL come from a poor development of sectoral Committees (social dialogue structure, whose main role is to validate qualifications and associated operational standards and to participate in the development of the framework for training, evaluation and certification). They need to be improved and to become a real partner of the current National Authority for Qualification. Furthermore, they have to help revising, updating the occupational standards, in order to make them compatible with the labour market necessities and the European occupations. Also, the administrative capacity of the responsible agency for the development of the National Qualification Framework has to be improved.

4. Early-school Leaving

The phenomenon of early school leaving (ESL) is prevalent in Romania among certain groups at risk, such as young people in rural communities, young people from families with modest incomes, Roma and other minorities, and pupils who have repeated at least one year or simply abandoned school. Of all the groups at risk mentioned above, the rural population is the most affected. Approximately 46% of Romanian young people live in rural areas. At lower secondary

level, the dropout rate is 1.5 times higher in rural schools than in urban ones.

In June 2015, the government approved the strategy on reducing ESL, a programmatic document containing mechanisms and measures to be implemented by 2020 in order to reduce the percentage of young people aged 18-24 who have completed at most the eighth grade and do not follow any other form of education or training. The objective of the Strategy is to reduce the ESL rate by 6 %, from 17.3% in 2013 to 11.3% in 2020.

The strategy contains four pillars and six representative programs that include prevention, intervention and compensation measures. These four pillars are ensuring access to education and quality education for all the children; ensuring the completion of compulsory education for all children, reintegrating the early school leavers in the educational system; and developing appropriate institutional support. The strategy also aims to ensure that every child has access to education until the age of 16 at least and graduation of the 10th grade.

5. NEETs

The proportion of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) was 16.8%, 0.4 percentage points down from 2011 (17.2%) and was 3.6 percentage points above the EU average. The NEET rate for young women was higher: 18.6%, as compared with 13.5% in the EU-28.

According to data from the National Institute of Statistics, it is estimated that the number of young unidentified NEETs was 441,000 people in 2013. Currently, the National employment agency is carrying out a project which has aims to create a database including all the NEETs from Romania by the end of 2015. As many NEET's are not registered at Public Employment Services or other youth centres, they are not eligible for projects under the Operational Programme Human Capital 2014- 2020 which finances



projects supporting apprenticeships and traineeships.

As for the 2014-15 Youth Guarantee, so far 27 youth guarantee centres (currently supported by the European Social Fund) were created. These centres aim at identifying young NEETs and offering them integrated packages of personalised services.

With regards to the results, 182 094 young people have so far accessed the programme through the National Employment Agency services, out of which 71 893 young people (almost 40%) have been employed, since the Youth Guarantee programme has started. 163 227 young people have benefited from counseling and guidance; 4,847 employers have been subsidized to provide jobs for young graduates; 6411 microenterprises have been established with the help of the grants offered to young entrepreneurs, thus creating 3205 new jobs; and 177 young entrepreneurs have established a start-up and created 440 new jobs.

6. Citizenship education

The official policy of our Educational Ministry regarding citizenship education is reflected in some documents which orient the teaching of the discipline called civic education/culture (citizenship education) in their country: the framework plan for education, the curriculum, the catalogue for approved handbooks and assessment standards³.

Citizenship education in Romania is available as a separate subject, at primary and secondary level, and as an integrated one, at upper secondary level. The compulsory number of years for the teaching of citizenship education is about 4 years in Romania.

With regards to citizenship education at the secondary level, at least one hour to two hours per week are provided, but in reality the classes are opting for the minimum number of hours. In high school, citizenship education as an independent subject is optional. The responsibility for stimulating civic skills is mainly

³ Alexandru Climescu, "Sfera Politicii" magazine. *Is tolerance learned? Evaluation of civic education in Romania.*

attributed to teachers of history, philosophy or sociology.

There are also a number of programmes for encouraging student participation in activities related to citizenship education outside school which promote projects between schools and the local community. For example, during the 2011/12 school year, all schools provided a week's after-school activities devoted to citizenship education in partnership with the local community. The programme was called 'Other Kind of School'.

The marks obtained in citizenship (delivered as a separate subject) are not taken into account in the decision to award end-of-level certificates or to determine whether pupils have successfully completed primary or lower secondary education.

7. Council recommendations

The country specific recommendations highlighted Romania's need to increase the provision and quality of early childhood education and care, in particular for Roma. Furthermore, as Romania recently adopted the lifelong learning national strategy and the national strategy for reducing early school leaving, in June 2015, it is now important that it takes action for their swift implementation. Moreover, the Romanian government needs to increase the overall participation in and financing for active labour market measures remain for vocational training, schemes leading to the recognition of prior learning, mobility incentives, and measures targeting the long-term unemployed⁴.

⁴ European Council (2015). *Council Recommendation of 14 July 2015 on the 2015 National Reform Programme of Romania and delivering a Council opinion on the 2015 Convergence Programme of Romania.*







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SOLIDAR, together with our national members and partners, has developed 15 case studies in 2014, presenting innovative, effective, sustainable and tailor made models to promote social inclusion, the social economy and quality job creation by adapting a social investment approach. In their daily work, SOLIDAR members and partners anticipate new or unmet needs of socio-economically vulnerable people and empower them to actively participate in society and to access the labour market.

These case studies gather strong evidence of the social impact of the activities undertaken by our members and partners to help Member States making progress towards the achievement of the social and employment objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the implementation of the Social Investment Package.

SOLIDAR Foundation in cooperation with national members and partners has gathered an examples of national programmes and initiatives that present the innovative and successful approaches that contribute to the process of building inclusive learning societies. The case studies are centred on themes of lifelong learning, civic and citizenship education, the validation of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, and NEETs (young people Not in Employment, Education or Training).

