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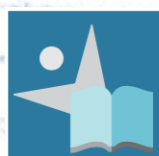
Strategic Partnerships for School Education  
Cooperation for innovation and  
the exchange of good practices

## **Reading Early School leaving signals - RESCUE**

# **Country Report**

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**RESCUE**  
READING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING SIGNALS

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# Introduction

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## *Early School Leaving: a continuous challenge for Europe*

In the last few years, European Union has making a great effort to maximise the educational attainment of young people, identifying the reduction of early school leaving as a main priority for EU countries. Lower the number of early school leavers is a pivotal aim of both the Education and Training 2020 and the Europe 2020 programme. The commitment to tackling ESL as part of the Europe 2020 agenda is strongly connected to the role lifelong learning education has taken on within the Lisbon strategy. Recognising the need for Europe's education and training systems “to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment” the Lisbon Council in 2000 gave high priority to lifelong learning “as a basic component of the European social model, including by encouraging agreements between the social partners on innovation and lifelong learning” (European Parliament, 2000). In a world increasingly characterized by the quick expansion of the “knowledge economy”, the Council meant to guarantee systematic growth and employment by promoting the education of a highly competent and dynamic workforce. However, this way it also ended up by especially advocating for skills required with direct reference to the economic expansion. This trend has been recently confirmed by the EU Commission document “Rethinking Education”, which on the one hand acknowledges that “the broad mission of education and training encompasses objectives such as active citizenship, personal development and well-being”, on the other stresses the importance of “delivering the right skills for employment, increasing the efficiency and inclusiveness of our education and training institutions and on working collaboratively with all relevant stakeholders” (Commission Communication, 2012: 2).

In accordance with that, a wide body of research literature emphasises the benefits of extended participation in education and its role in increasing chances for students to access the labour market and develop better opportunities for a greater quality of life. Investigation shows that a higher degree of education allows young people to achieve a number of positive results with reference to employment and salary level, higher productivity and growth, better health conditions, social cohesion and participation. Contrariwise, poor level of education due to early leaving leads to higher individual, societal, and economic costs in terms of public and social charges (Belfield, Levin, 2008; Psacharopoulos, 2007; Nevala et al., 2011). More specifically, European reports indicates that individuals leaving education and training early are exposed to a higher risk of

unemployment, acquire jobs with less employment security, tend to do more part-time work, and receive lower earnings (NESSE, 2010; European Commission, 2011a). Beyond those individual consequences, as we said early leaving from education and training has a deep influence as well on the social and economic dimensions. Young people with poor or limited education do not own a skill level appropriate for more knowledge-intensive economies (Nevala et al., 2011). In turn, higher rates of unemployment not only depress economic growth and tax revenues, but also boost welfare payments, so increasing the costs of health care and social services (Nesse, 2010).

It is not surprising then that large efforts have been made by EU in recent years to tackle early school leaving (ESL). Nevertheless, ESL still remains one of the main issues currently faced by European countries (Education and Training Monitor, 2016; European Commission, 2013). Today, 1 out of every 7 European students leaves the education system without having acquired the essential competences or qualifications that ensure a smooth transition to the labour market and enable effective participation in different societal domains as social status, health, participation in culture, and citizenship. Additionally, next generations will undergo the negative impact of a low qualification level. In fact, a great share of the economic and social poverty caused by the current crisis relapses mainly on less-trained young people, as the crisis amplifies the unemployment gap between well-educated individuals and early school leavers. To emphasise the importance of educational attainment, in 2011 EU countries agreed that by 2020 the share of early school leavers should to be reduced to maximum 10% (Council of the European Union, 2011). Face to the different social and economic conditions of each Member State, such EU headline targets have been tailored into specific national targets. Moreover, wide disparities emerge across European countries. Concerning this, it should be taken in account that the way ESL is defined and measured differs in many EU countries. As a consequence, the way early leaving is specified in each country affects the data collection management and, in turn, the development of policies to counter or lower it. So, depending on the Member State ESL may refer to leaving education systems before completing upper secondary education or before the end of compulsory schooling, or even before reaching a minimum qualification. The European description of ESL relies on the first, more comprehensive, definition, indicating youngster beyond compulsory schooling age who have not concluded upper secondary education.

The Eurostat report for 2016 confirms that most of EU Member States have made progress on the targets to reduce the rate of ESL to below this threshold. However, data shows that 11.1% of eighteen to twenty-four year olds still have left education and training without completing an upper secondary programme, down from 13.5% in 2011. In 2015, 17 out of 28 EU countries recorded ESL rates below 10%. This means that more than five million of young people 18 to 24 year olds in Europe had not completed upper secondary education and were no longer in education or training. Belgium and Germany, which were below 10 % in 2014, are now just above (10.1 %). The ESL rate in 2015 was almost twice the headline target in Spain, Malta, and Romania, whereas 5 countries - Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and Slovenia - had rates below or around 5 %. It is worth to note that countries participating to the RESCUE project (Bulgaria, Italy, Malta, and Romania) are all part of a group that displayed the highest levels of ESL in 2005 (between 38.3 % and 15.7 %,

corresponding to the EU average). Ten years after, even though still presenting ESL high rates, those countries show a significant reduction in the ratio of ESL population, with the only exception of Romania, which ESL proportion has remained fairly stable.

### *The roots of ESL: evidences from research*

To find out the reasons behind the phenomenon of students' early school leaving, ESL should be considered not as an accident or an output of the educational path, but as a process of disengagement that arises over time (Lyche, 2010). ESL is a multidimensional issue that arises from a number of intertwined factors related to personal experiences and family situation, as well as social and economic context and school environment. The complexity and multi-faceted dimension of ESL is generally acknowledged, as well as the need for a correspondingly multi-dimensional approach to effectively address its diverse reasons. There are different reasons for young people's disconnection from school, which commonly happens as a cumulative progression prompted by several factors rather than as an abrupt decision to leave. Consequently, even though information about at-risk groups and causes of ESL can support the implementation of targeted measures, it is hard to define a single profile of early school leavers, as depending on the specific area and countries some groups appear to be more at risk than others. ESL roots may be tracked in early years, where the process of gradual disengagement from education begins, leading to further underachievement. However, warning signs of ESL can be often detected starting from primary school. Furthermore, ESL origin cannot be attributed to the sole education system, as it is also connected to broader factors, as a result of a mix of social, economic, personal, family-related, and educational aspects, usually interwoven in producing a cumulative disadvantage effect. Issues triggering ESL can be linked to the course of study or the school, as well as to health or emotional difficulties students deal with. At the same time, a connection can be established to the socio-economic or family environment of children. Research indicates that ESL may refer both to individual features, as attitudes, behaviour, and educational performance, and to external factors connected to the family, school, and community background of students (Rumberger and Lim, 2008). People living in rural or disadvantaged areas are at risk too, as they may have limited access to quality education or to a desired choice of study. Consequently, developing specific and effective measures to prevent ESL requires working at the same time on interpreting it as a complex process, spotting early signals of disaffection, and identifying students that are more at risk of leaving education early.

Looking more in deepen to individual and family factors, they are commonly attributed to socio-economic status, migrant (or minority) background, and gender. Social disadvantage and a low level of parental education are a well-recognised pattern that leads students to give up education and training in advance (European Commission, 2011b). In addition, other family-related aspects such as poor living conditions, single-parenthood, family instability and lifestyle, physical and mental

health, and domestic violence can further hinder young peoples' ability to complete education. Parent-child relationships and parental involvement in children's education are also considered as family-related conditions that may favour ESL (European Parliament, 2011). On average in Europe, 6 out of 10 children whose parents have a poor level of education are considered at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and consequently exposed to the risk of educational disadvantage.

In many European countries, children from a migrant and minority backgrounds represent a large share of students that leave school early. Ethno-cultural minority groups as Roma and Irish Travellers are considered as especially disadvantaged groups in education, so more at risk of dropping school ahead of time (Luciak, 2006; Jugović and Doolan, 2013). However, student born abroad are not automatically more at risk of early leaving. In fact, research confirms that, spite of the 'migrant' or 'non-migrant' condition, socio-economic and family background together with the provision of adequate learning support plays a key role in successful educational results (European Commission, 2013b).

As for gender, it proves to be an important factor for ESL. Boys are almost twice as likely to leave school with low or no qualifications compared to girls (Traag and van der Velden, 2011). On several education indicators (ESL, tertiary educational attainment, and underachievement in basic skills) young women perform on average better than young men.

As we anticipated, education system related factors, such as grade retention, socio-economic segregation and early tracking also play a pivotal role in generating ESL. Investigation shows that, instead of improving academic performance, grade retention produces negative consequences on the ability of students to pursue their studies, so becoming a good predictor of school early leaving (Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple, 2002). Low achieving students, a category already highly exposed to failure, are especially damaged by grade retention (Jacob and Lefgren, 2009).

Another important dimension in defining ESL is the level of socio-economic segregation of schools. School environments with a high degree of segregation produce worse achievement results in educational terms. Additionally, behavioural problems are more common in such schools, so leading to increase ESL rates (Hugh, 2010; Lyche, 2010; Traag and van der Velden, 2011; Nevala et al., 2011). Conversely, schools with a blend of students coming from different backgrounds are able to promote a positive educational climate that benefits not only disadvantaged children or those whose parents have a low level of education, but all students (ibid.).

Early tracking is also a critical factor in ESL. School systems in which students and their families are required to make obligatory choices between different educational tracks at an early age create a highly negative impact on those placed in tracks that do not match to their potential and/or aspirations (Hattie, 2009). As a consequence, early tracking tends to increase disparities and inequalities in student achievement (Hanushek and Wößmann, 2006; OECD, 2012). Being usually placed in the least academically oriented tracks at an early phase, before they have had the opportunity to acquire the linguistic, cultural, and social competences to realise their potential, underprivileged learners such as those from migrant or minority backgrounds are especially affected by early tracking (Spinath and Spinath, 2005; OECD, 2010).

Finally, research highlights that early childhood education and care can play a major role in easing

successful completion of school pathway (Dumčius et al., 2014; Mullis et al., 2012; OECD, 2011). As the first introduction to the lifelong learning process, attending high quality early childhood services highly increases children opportunity to success in future education, so helping prevent early leaving and low achievement. Children from socially disadvantaged environments especially benefit from attending high quality early childhood services, which represents a fundamental first educational level for developing fair educational systems.

### *Working through a 'whole-school approach'*

Beyond identifying the reasons behind the ESL phenomenon, starting from 2011 European Union also approved a recommendation on policies addressed to reduce the number of learners who leave education and training early. The recommendation emphasised that measures should be based on targeted and effective evidence-based policies linked to the national settings. It also suggested that EU Member States should develop a comprehensive strategy to tackle the issue. Policies addressed to minimise ESL should promote an inclusive view of education student-centred, that enable access to high quality education for all. In such a vision. To this aim, schools play a key role guarantee that all learners can achieve their full potential for learning and participation, regardless of individual and family-related dynamics, life experiences, and socio-economic conditions. Schools must be structured as secure, welcoming, and sensitive environments, able to promote young people growth and development both as individuals and as members of the community. When schools do their utmost for learners' engagement, students feel their needs are respected and their specific skills valued.

Besides, due to the complex features of ESL, it cannot be tackled by schools alone. Educational systems should develop alliances inside and outside the schools with services and stakeholders in order to combine efforts and cooperate. Accordingly, this 'whole-school approach' recognises schools as the natural promoters of such a community collaboration endeavour (European Commission, 2015). Five intertwined areas can be identified as playing a key role in supporting the 'whole-school approach': school governance, learner support, teachers, parents and families, and stakeholder involvement.

School governance should operate to ensure greater flexibility and autonomy to schools, provide regular selection, support and training for school heads, build distributed leadership, sustain whole-school improvement processes, adopt external monitoring and assessment (quality assurance) mechanisms, and expand networking between schools.

Better support for learners can be acquired by offering students stimulating curricula and effective teaching methods, caring for learners' well-being, putting in place early detection schemes, developing systemic support framework, providing specific support for non-native speakers, ensuring that the learners' voice and participation in school life is listened to, offering career education and guidance, and promoting extra-curricular activities.

As for teachers, a whole-school approach requires to develop a better understanding of ESL, improve teachers' competences and leadership skills, offer additional support to teachers, increase work-experience and peer learning, and embrace diversity.

Parents and community involvement is a pillar too of tackling ESL. It entails a common view of education as a shared responsibility, promoting trust and cooperation by enhancing participation in school life and decision-making, and providing opportunities for communication with parents and access to information for stakeholders.

### *Strategies for overcoming ESL*

Over recent years, the EU bodies have issued a number of recommendations addressed to overcome ESL. They include prevention, intervention, and compensation measures. The first are aimed at counteracting the root problems that usually lead to ESL; the second are designed to improve the quality of education and training by offering targeted support in order to help students cope with the difficulties they could face in schools; the latter are meant to devise new opportunities for young people that have prematurely left the educational path.

Below we summarise the main measures that should be adopted on the three areas according to the EU:

#### *Prevention*

- Improving access to and quality of early childhood education and care
- Reducing grade retention
- Desegregation policies
- Positive discrimination measures
- Developing extra-curricular activities
- Increasing flexibility and permeability of educational pathways
- Inclusion of early leavers from education and training in initial teacher education and professional training
- Education and career guidance

#### *Intervention*

- Providing individual support
- Support for low achievers
- Language support for students with a different mother tongue
- Specialist staff supporting teachers and students
- Identification of groups at risk of early leavers from education and training



- Developing early warning systems for students at risk of early leavers from education and training
- Absenteeism management
- Networking with parents and other actors outside school

### *Compensation*

- Reform of the second chance education system
- Identification of early leavers and measures to help them re-enter education and training
- Accessibility and relevance
- Recognition
- Commitment and governance
- Personalised and holistic approach
- Distinctive learning experience
- Flexibility in curricula
- Teacher involvement and support
- Links to mainstream education

It has to be noted that prevention measures are addressed on initiatives at system level, interventions are focused on the individual school level, while compensation entails the design of second chance schemes of education. However, all measures share some comprehensive principles, namely:

- students should be always put at the centre of the educational projects on the basis of the recognition of their specific strengths and abilities;
- schools should commit to systematically provide welcoming, friendly, safe, and open learning environments, where learners can feel empowered and acquire a sense of ownership towards education and community;
- all school practitioner and stakeholders should pay special attention to the multiple possible causes and signs of ESL. They should contribute as well on developing a shared community of practices addressed to tackling ESL at any school level.

### *An overview on ESL in Bulgaria, Malta, Romania, and Italia*

According to the structure and specific features of their education and training system, any country should devise the most effective mix of measures, at the same time ensuring appropriate coordination among different school levels and location as to favour development and dissemination of good practices achieved.

To this aim, through this report we want to provide a focus on the current situation of ESL in four

countries – Bulgaria, Malta, Romania, and Italia - that are especially affected by the phenomenon of ESL. Through this, it will be possible to analyse and compare the ESL situation in each country, so depicting the educational background on which the actions related to the RESCUE project will be developed.

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## Country Report: Bulgaria

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### *The Education system in Bulgaria*

Education in Bulgaria is mainly supported by the state through the Ministry of Education and Science. Preschool education is compulsory from the age of five. School education is compulsory for children from seven to sixteen years of age. The financing system is from the type per student or “money follows the student”

The main types of secondary schools are: general educational, vocational, language schools and foreign schools. Private schools are also being established and they are beginning to compete successfully with state schools. Private schools are mainly language schools.

All academic courses receive grades of 2-6 according to the following standards:

- 6 – Excellent
- 5 – Very Good
- 4 – Good
- 3 – Sufficient
- 2 – Poor

The structure of the system is the following:

#### *Pre-Primary Education*

Pre-primary education (preschool education) embraces children between 3 and 6/7 years old, who attend kindergarten optionally, with the requirement that prior to starting school, and children must attend a one-year pre-school program.

#### *Elementary Education*

Elementary education (grades 1 - 8) includes primary school (grades 1 - 4) and junior high school/ middle school (grades 5 - 8). Children usually start primary education at age 7, but may be start from age 6 upon their parents' request. Certificate for Primary Education and Certificate for Elementary Education are obtained upon successful completion of grade 4 and 7 respectively. High schools use grades from the Certificate for Elementary Education as a major admissions criterion.



### *Secondary Education*

Secondary education comprises selective/comprehensive high schools and vocational school. The admission to comprehensive schools is based upon grades from entry exams, usually in literature and/or mathematics as well as grades in junior high school. Students can enroll in high school after the successful completion of grades 7 or 8. Usually, those who want to study languages, mathematics, or informatics in-depth apply to high school in 7th grade in the so-called prestigious or better schools. Students graduating from high-school must take high school State exams in Bulgarian language and mathematics.

### *Higher Education*

The types of higher education institutions are Universities, Colleges and Specialized Higher Schools. Universities, as in most countries worldwide, have three stages: Bachelor's (undergraduate), Master's (graduate), and Doctoral degrees. Undergraduate stage lasts for at least four years and graduate stage lasts for five years after completion of secondary education or one year after obtaining a Bachelor's Degree. The third stage of higher education results in obtaining a Ph.D. Degree. Specialized higher schools offer degrees in one or more areas of science, arts, sports, and defense. Usually, the names of these institutions indicate the area of specialization. Colleges are former semi-higher institutes. Some of them are part of universities and use their equipment and facilities.

Since August 01 2016 a new preschool and school education law entered into force. Along with the law there are 19 state educational standards, some of which are still to be finished and adopted like the standard for the financing of the institutions. The standard for inclusive education was adopted, but will enter into force since 2017. The standards are concerning the teaching of Bulgarian language, the grading system, the career development of teachers, the preschool education, the documentation, the evaluation of the students' performance, the civic councils at school, civil and multicultural education, monitoring and evaluation etc.

### *Factors contributing to students leaving the education system early in Bulgaria*

Prevention and reduction of school dropouts are subject to special focused public policies and measures since 2003. The dropout rate is an important social and economic problem. It reduces the likelihood of realization in life and in the labor market leads to unsatisfactory return on public money invested in education. In individuals who have primary or lower education, increase the risk of social exclusion. Last but not least, this phenomenon creates preconditions for deterioration of quality of life and well-being of present and future generations. Research conducted among teachers and social workers to determine the causes and conditions of dropping out of school have shown that one third of children dropped out of school, live in families with one or two unemployed. Half of the families of school dropouts rely on welfare. According to the opinions of teachers, more than

50% of parents of children out of school are usually with little or no education, unemployed and in general - very poor.

In the National Reform Programme 2012-2020, the share of early school leavers by 2020 should not exceed 11%. The results of the "Labour Force Survey" conducted by Eurostat show a steady increase in this share from 2013 onwards, when it rose from 12.5% to 12.9% in 2014 and 13.4% in 2015

In terms of dropping out of school numbers, students in the three educational levels (elementary, primary and secondary) for the 2014/15 academic year were 749,094, and 21,146 have left the education system. NSI divides the reasons for dropping out of school into three main types: "due to reluctance", "family reasons" and "gone abroad". It is seen that the first two categories can be broken down into many other subcategories, depending on the individual, family, economic and social factors which result to dropping out of school. The most indisputable, but most uncontrolled, it seems the third type - "go abroad". It makes the assumption that the majority of students continue their education in countries where their family is settling, but it remains unclear with the NSI criteria whether labor migration of families, which includes school-age children, belongs to "go abroad" or refers to school leaving "for family reasons".

Students in primary education stage for the academic year 2014/15 were 261,793, of which 6320 have left the school. In the lower secondary level (grades 5-8) students are 217 155 and school leavers - 8 132. In high school (grades 9-12) students are 270,146 of which left 6 694. In the initial stage and in junior high school leavers due to departure abroad are respectively 3386 and 3264, this is the category with the highest number left. In high school most students leave for family reasons - 3178.

The figures show that the most serious is the phenomenon of leaving school in junior high school stage (secondary school). There leave because of unwillingness 1003 students, but for family reasons - 3008.

Dropping out of school is a complex and complicated phenomenon to which the relevant number of factors and assumptions. Family environment, ethno-cultural characteristics, social and economic situation in the family and community are variables that have a serious impact on the ability, motivation and support for children to attend school. Not least important are purely educational reasons.

The National statistical institute (NSI) uses two measuring instruments to describe the school leaving problem:

*1. Out of the education system*, which in some documents could be "left the education":

It covers all state, municipal and created by the established legal order private schools. Measures the number of pupils leaving education during the school year, they are divided by gender, class groups (I - IV, V - VIII, IX - XII) and reasons for leaving.

The index does not include:

- prolonged illness, failed to resume in a hospital or rehabilitation school;
- moved to another school to the age of 16, for which no confirmation that they have signed;
- left because of unwillingness to

study, total and including the age of '16 .; • leave for family reasons; • gone abroad. Leavers on those reasons are not considered dropouts as they can continue their education in the next school year, and the age of 16 are required to continue their education.

## *2. Net enrollment rate of the population in the educational system*

Measured by:

2.1. Level of education - the coefficient is calculated as a percentage of the number of students by grade in the age groups 3-6, 7-10, 11-14, 15-18, 19-20, 19-21 and 19-23 years for the number of the population in the same age groups.

### *2.2. Age groups*

The ratio is calculated as a percentage of the number of students in the relevant age groups, regardless of level of education to the population in the same age groups. The number of students and the population was calculated at 31.12. of the year.

For the purposes of this analysis, the reasons for dropping out of school are divided in the following categories:

#### *Family reasons*

- Discontinued studies due to marriage, childbirth;
- Discontinued studies due to family problems / between parents (divorce, drunkenness, assault, etc.);
- Reluctance of parents, child to go to school, afraid of theft, fear of sending in another settlement, etc .;
- The need for care in the home of relatives, friends, etc .;
- Lack of parental supervision and involvement of parents;
- Negative attitude towards education by parents and / or child;
- Other family reasons.

#### *Departure abroad*

- Discontinued studies due to migration of the family outside Bulgaria.
- This principle should fall and students who study "self" secondary education abroad (less than 100 per year).

#### *Socio-economic reasons*

- Discontinued studies due to the need to take up employment in the household or elsewhere;
- Discontinued studies due to financial problems of the family (lack of funds for maintenance of the family and providing the necessary school clothes, shoes, textbooks, etc.);
- Interrupted their training for other economic reasons.

#### *Educational reasons*

- Discontinued studies due to poor performance;
- Discontinued education due to a large number of unexcused absences;
- Discontinued studies after penalty on art. 139 of the Education Act (transfer to another school or expulsion from school);
- Interrupted their training, repeating students (Repeaters);
- Discontinued studies due to difficulty understanding and speaking in Bulgarian;
- Interrupted their training for other educational reasons.

These reasons are used in different ways in different groupings and even in different formulations as in “ADMIN” the system of the Ministry of Education, and the data collected by the NSI. These differences again demonstrate the need for synchronization of the causes, indicators and data so that they can make analyzes for geographical regions, types of school, types of causes and can be taken at regional and local level that are most appropriate.

**FIG. 1: STUDENTS AND DROP-OUTS BY REASONS AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
<b>Total</b>						
<b>Students</b>	<b>797036</b>	<b>781665</b>	<b>758962</b>	<b>751393</b>	<b>751001</b>	<b>749094</b>
<b>Drop-outs</b>	<b>19583</b>	<b>18766</b>	<b>18450</b>	<b>17571</b>	<b>17794</b>	<b>21146</b>
<b>I - IV grade</b>						
Students	260340	255086	252372	253675	258840	261793
Drop-outs	5928	5596	5678	5268	5418	6320
of which:						
Unwillingness	533	371	324	231	173	278
Family reasons	2959	2658	2630	2491	2289	2098
Went abroad	2010	2237	2362	2206	2598	3386
<b>V - VIII grade</b>						
Students	225055	219980	221274	221839	220934	217155
Drop-outs	7578	6994	6749	6530	6679	8132
of which:						
Unwillingness	1412	1177	1018	839	889	1003
Family reasons	3660	3418	3169	3188	2840	3008
Went abroad	1967	1939	2093	2050	2343	3264
<b>IX - XII grade</b>						
Students	306140	302684	281671	272487	268395	267540

Drop-outs	5987	6084	5978	5708	5587	6632
of which:						
Unwillingness	1638	1897	1641	1495	1424	1672
Family reasons	3183	3026	3162	3040	2750	3148
Went abroad	825	876	910	965	1152	1335

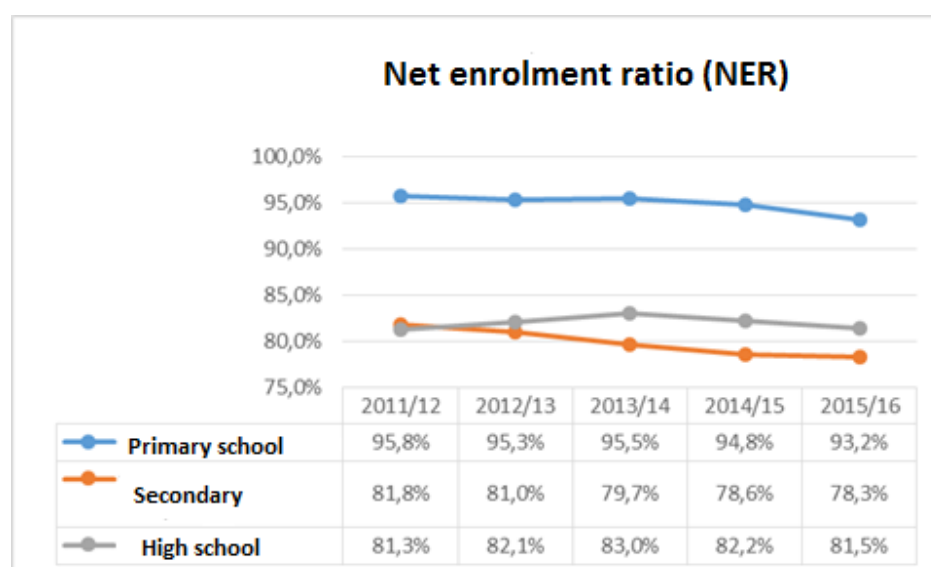
*The methodology nowhere notes who decide which student has dropped out for what cause. The assumption is that this is done by a teacher, but there is no data on this issue. There are reasons to doubt how many are real and so the figures presented in the categories, ie except synchronization needs greater thoroughness and transparency in the presentation of results. Important for NGOs who also addressed the topic of dropout is to have as clear data for making informed decisions.*

### *Vulnerable groups of student identifiable as at risk in Bulgarian schools: facts and figures*

#### *General facts and figures*

In our opinion the toughest problem for the Bulgarian educational system are the children “out of education”. Each school year we have a reduction of the total number of students, (e.g. 751000 students in 2013/2014 and 749000 students in 2014/2015) but we have an ever increasing total number of school dropouts - achieving its highest value in 2014/2015 - 21146 (17794 for 2013/2014). This leads to a further decrease in the net enrolment rate (Figure 2). We have a decreased enrolment in all the three age groups with the Secondary education being most concerning and showing worst results and strongest negative trend. There are various reasons leading to those results but as you’ll see in the next paragraph there aren’t any recent researches showing the correlation between the factors from II. and the stated facts here.

**FIG. 2 NET ENROLMENT RATIO**



*Vulnerable groups*



The lack of recent information on that issue is another big problem. A study made in the early 2000s shows that only 10% of Roma minority pupils and between 35 and 40% of the Turkish minority pupils finish high school. But there is no recent data on that question. Another problem is that every student is free to state his ethnic origin (some Roma pupils consider themselves part of the Turkish minority and some don't want to state their origin. While this freedom of choice is a good thing it further troubles statistical researches)

The 2015 PISA results show that 41.5% of the Bulgarians 9<sup>th</sup> graders are functionally illiterate and 30% of all nine graders don't achieve the basic minimum in all three mathematics, reading and science.

Bulgarians also have much lower resilience shares 2-3% and a much greater impact of the social background on the school performance in comparison to the OECD, *but there is no study showing the impact of these factors on the school dropout rates in Bulgaria.*

### *Conclusion*

When we speak about vulnerable groups we generally include the Roma and the Turkish minority (especially those for which the Bulgarian is a second language) and students coming from poor social background. But there is no clear data showing the current situation and relations.

### *Strategies, policies and measures against early leaving adopted in Bulgaria*

Given that the phenomenon of early school leaving and all the negative effects of this is the focus of attention of the state of more than 10 years already taken a number of measures to address this problem. One of the measures is to register the movement of children and students, allowing to monitor the development of each child or student at risk of dropping out. Unfortunately, it is not yet efficient enough and fails to coordinate the best efforts of all involved institutions. A huge problem in this respect have children of emigrants, some of whom accompany their parents abroad for a certain period of time (such as children of seasonal workers), others remain with relatives in Bulgaria, and a third permanently leave the country. There are currently no working system to track these children, as well as guaranteed custody and guardianship over them when their parents leave the country temporarily or long term. This leads to a number of complex legal issues that require the presence of parents as well as the serious deterioration of academic success and health and social status of children. The percentage of students who drop out due to go abroad should not be underestimated, as the NSI data show that this is the main reason for leaving school in primary and secondary school. The data show that younger students often travel with their parents abroad, since many host countries ensure education in primary and lower secondary level, while pupils at secondary level it is much more difficult. For this reason they remain in Bulgaria insufficiently

cared for and supported, leading to reduced motivation and a number of negative factors and as a result - and dropping out of school. It is the creation of mechanisms for working with parents and families of these children, and efficient method of training, assimilation of knowledge and catching the educational gap of children who are absent from school for a period of time due to residence abroad.

Particularly problematic in high school turns out to be preserving the interests of students to the educational process and the point of getting an education. Educational environment, particularly curricula still remain unattractive to older students and continue to be inadequate and irrelevant to their lives. Although MES efforts to improve school life and extracurricular activities through various projects, they remain inaccessible to the majority of students or when they are wide open to all - not attractive enough to warrant the attention and efforts to support the learning process. While younger students programs like SUCCESS (Project "To make school attractive to young people") have enjoyed great popularity in the upper implementation is partial and is accepted by many students as a more formal obligation, not more extracurricular activities, aiming to diversify their everyday life, provide access to opportunities and support learning. The students themselves identified as a problem the lack of a clear link between education they receive and their career development after graduation.

Another serious problem appears to be lack of overall sense of support among the older students. The expectations for them to graduate and continue their education and / or to succeed in the labor market are constant and real economic situation - too complicated. Stated desire in the Implementation Plan for 2016-2017 on the Strategy for the implementation of partnership programs between business organizations and vocational schools is encouraging, but to happen, need targeted policies at national level to convince businesses of the benefits of early familiarizing students with various career opportunities to allow a growing share of companies to actively engage in partnerships with schools. So students will be able to develop a number of jurisdictions in a real working environment and gain a structured overview of the opportunities that will reveal to them post-secondary education. Currently students from vocational schools are included in the programs working practices, but this need faced by all graduating students, regardless of the type of school in which to train. To ensure lasting retention of students in school, it needs a complete change of the educational environment and the prospects that it gives students - especially those who are in the final level of training.

Among the systemic problems that can be identified as a major obstacle to the policies and measures to curb school dropout are:

1. Changes in the law on pre-school and school education (ZPUO), which do not have impact assessment. These include changes in curricula and programs that put teachers under additional stress, and parents to inability to purchase appropriate books for their children. In both cases, the effect can be negative on children and students and their motivation for learning and retention in school. Another major change in ZPUO whose impact has not been the subject of analysis is the change in stages and levels of education. Under the new law,

the basic level of education will finish in seventh grade, not eighth, as hitherto. Many practitioners and professionals, this carries risks of even dropping out of the educational system for children and students, whose village has no school. Thus, to enroll in eighth grade, these students will have to travel to larger village or town, which loaded them and their families with the additional stress of financial and emotional character and is a major prerequisite for early departure.

The optimization of the school network and anticipation before the start of each school year, school closures also leads to serious risk of dropping out of students, and how to structure a national external assessment, the results of which are linked to the budgets of school.

2. Insufficient links between systems working for and with children - education, health, social, justice. Centers supporting personal development provided in ZPUO will apply an integrated approach in organizing activities that support inclusive education and upbringing of children and students, as well as activities to develop their interests and abilities. These centers, however, are not yet earned and cannot be assessed their activity. Past experience shows that the implementation of relations and integration between systems is a key challenge. There are no established mechanisms and best practices through which children who for some reason come into contact or conflict with the law, obtain mental, emotional and educational support and be retained in school. Such cases, of course, exist, but they are due to the efforts and goodwill of class teachers, principals or school counselors and school psychologists.

3. Lack of purposeful work to support bilingual children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian. These may be children of Roma or Turkish origin, refugee children, children from families foreigners migrated in Bulgaria and others. Positive step here is recognizing this deficit in strategic documents of the Ministry and it's intended it to be addressed in a new position - assistant teacher.

From 30.10.2013, Bulgaria has a *strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers (2013-2020)*. The stated 2020 goal is: "Taking in 100 % of the children from the primary school stage, 95 % of the children from the pre-secondary school stage, 90 % of the children finishing high". The presence of such a strategy is the first step towards addressing one of the most serious problems of Bulgarian education - lowest net enrollment rate of the population (in EU) and the high percentage of pupils leaving education. A goal looking unachievable at the moment.

One reason for the lack of visible positive results from the adopted strategy can be found in the fact that the plan for its implementation for the period 2014-2015 was adopted on 29.10.2014 on by the actual occurrence of that most of the measures launched in beginning of 2015. The plan was set continuation or expansion of various existing programs. It should be noted however best results "Let's make school attractive to young people", a project known as "luck" in the implementation of which, despite reduced funding for 2014-2015, the were involved 185,325 students from 1252

schools. During increase and the scope of day organization of the learning process for students grades 1-8. One of the main targets by day organization of the educational process is to allow for a seamless transition to the next class, limiting the danger of dropping out. During the 2015-16 school year created conditions for the introduction of all-day organization of the school day and six graders from all schools in the country.

By modules of the National Programme "Caring for each student" in the school year 2014-2015, at additional training covered 22,819 children of preparatory groups and students from elementary, junior high and high school and in the school year 2015/2016 the number it is 28,209.

On 5 May 2015 the Council of Ministers was approved the National Programme "of school without absence" measure "Without free time" aimed at reducing the number of absences in school. Program is to improve accountability and control over the registration of absences, and taking early and effective measures to prevent future absence from school. Directors and pedagogical team executed their school programs to reduce absenteeism of students.

Nearly 400,000 students were enrolled in different degree programs for career guidance being created and web portal for students with the same purpose: <http://orientirane.mon.bg/>. During applied another 20 steps and 6 are underway aimed at preventing dropping provide additional support for children and students with special educational needs of professionals from resource centres, increasing the scope for additional training in Bulgarian language, implementing partner programs between businesses and vocational schools attract dropouts to return to education, increase learning opportunities in the workplace and more.

Another practice, the financing and administration remains too limited, case discussions with students and their parents about the risks of dropping out of school and teenage pregnancy. This is the only measure directly aimed at parents and the relations between the family and early school leaving. Leaving education for family reasons, although declining in importance in recent years, remains the leading factor (Figure 2).

According to the Interim Report on the implementation of the Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers (2013-2020), plans to implement the strategy is drawn up every two years and are intended to support key policy measures for prevention, intervention and compensation dropping and ESL. According to the report, the main elements of the strategy are:

- Predominantly develop measures on prevention of school drop-out;
- Enhanced information activities among stakeholders on the role of education and training in the development of the individual and society;
- Start the process of development and testing of early warning system.

According to the report, among the achievements in prevention policies are:

1. Increased role of municipalities in the coverage of the children and students in school.
2. Improve communication and interaction between communities and REI.

Among the deficiencies in prevention policies are listed:

1. The lack of reliable information and failure to identify children at the address at which they are enrolled.
2. Need for systematic analysis and electronic register link between municipalities and educational institutions.
3. Strengthening the role of kindergarten.
4. Information on the role of education aimed at parents.
5. Need for attracting and retaining assistant teacher anywhere she needs one.

### *Governance and cross-sector cooperation in the area of early leaving in Bulgaria*

#### *Student Practices (internships)*

Project “Students practices” was launched on January 18, 2012 and was aimed at improving the quality of vocational education and training (VET) and facilitating access to practical training of vocational education nationwide through more and better opportunities for practice in a real working environment. At the beginning of the project the challenge was to attract businesses as partners and convince them that practical training is very important. For this purpose were conducted 16,700 meetings with business representatives.

The project aims at facilitating the transition from school to the labor market or higher education by increasing the quality of vocational education and training, active involvement of business in the development of programs for practical training in various professions, improving the relationship between the results of vocational education and training needs changing labor market, training of students in vocational education and training with specific competencies for the organization of practical training in a real work environment and in terms of operational partnership with employers partners.

The project aimed to provide quality preparation for successful practical training in a real working environment for 46,000 students aged over 16 years. After the successful launch (at schools throughout Bulgaria) in February 2013, in “School practices” were involved and have successfully completed their 240-hour practical training in a real working environment 47,681 students. All of them have been certified for the training and received 300 BGN (150 EUR) scholarship. The project budget was 24.5 million BGN.

Successful project outcomes may indicate the involvement of 5882 mentors from the business, 1658 supervising teachers, 486 consultants, 407 schools and 4,300 employers. As employers in the project have included small, medium and large enterprises, artisans, municipal and public administration, universities, theaters, museum and the even the National Opera.



Thanks to the project, 1680 students have started a permanent job at the same place, where was held their internship and 3345 students have started part-time and seasonal work. The project provided practice and pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Practical training in a real working environment. This had a positive impact on confidence and self-esteem of these students.

Employers have shown initiative for various measures to support students by providing free lunch reimbursement of transportation expenses for students with financial difficulties etc.

The project is discontinued from the end of 2015 but the Government plans to restart it in 2017. Although not directly related to ESL, this is on the most successful educational project of the Government having great impact on the good relations between schools and local business and furthermore improving students' motivation to study and find realization in their community.

### *Monitoring system tracking the early school leaving signs.*

After several years (at least 3) of consultations with other Institutions, NGOs, foreign experts software development etc. The application of the Pilot of the Monitoring system started in 48 schools in two neighboring regions. The first results of the application are still not present and the Ministry of Education is not revealing the details.

The basics of the system are each student to be monitored and his risk of ESL to be assessed on six main parameters - ethno-cultural reasons, economic reasons, institutional reasons, educational reasons, health status and social reasons. The assessment is done by teachers in each school. If the student is defined with high risk, he is being "prescribed" with an improvement plan which should be executed by his teachers and local government.

### *Final Notes*

A major disadvantage of the measures taken to prevent the early school leaving in Bulgaria is their insufficient focus on the problem and the lack of real monitoring of their effectiveness- the number of participating students is being monitored but for the time being there is no data on the measures taken-favorable results correlation, leading to the achievement of the Millennium Goals and the strategy to reduce the share of early school leavers. The formal assessment of the plan implementation effectiveness is not yet released, which is further hindering the full understanding of the benefits of the measures taken. Despite the efforts to improve the register of the movement of children and students, the follow up of children at risk of dropping out is not efficient enough, thus failing to coordinate to the highest degree the prevention and intervention activities of all institutions involved. The development and testing of the early warning system for children at risk of dropping out is also still at the level of launching a pilot project. At the end of the year the new Pre-school and School Education Act was adopted, which at the moment is causing more problems to the schools than offering the solutions. The frequent change in the ministry of Education (in 3

years Bulgaria had 3 different Ministers of Education, in January new early government elections are on the way and a 4<sup>th</sup> ministers) are also causing inconsistencies and uncertainties.

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Used public information from the National Statistical Institute and the Ministry of education

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Strategy for reducing the share of early school leavers (2013-2020).

## Country Report: Italy

*Elena Caneva, Gabriella Patriziano, Sabrina Vincenti (WeWorld)*

### *The education system structure in Italy: short description*

In Italy education is compulsory from 6 to 16 years of age, and it is divided into five stages: *pre-primary school* (scuola dell'infanzia), *primary school* (scuola primaria or scuola elementare), *lower secondary school* (scuola secondaria di primo grado or scuola media inferiore), *upper secondary school* (scuola secondaria di secondo grado or scuola media superiore) and *university* (università). Italy has both public and private education systems.

*Pre-primary school* (scuola dell'infanzia) is for children between 3 and 6 years of age and it is not compulsory.

The first cycle of education lasts 8 years, it is compulsory and made up of:

- *primary education* (scuola primaria), lasting 5 years, for children between 6 and 11 years of age;
- *lower secondary school* (scuola secondaria di I grado), lasting 3 years, for children between 11 and 14 years of age.

After completion of the first cycle of education, the final two years of compulsory education (from 14 to 16 years of age) can be undertaken at a State *upper secondary school* (liceo, technical institute or vocational institute), or on *vocational education and training course* which is within the jurisdiction of the Regions. State upper secondary school lasts 5 years for students from 14 to 19 years of age, whereas vocational training course lasts three or four years.

Higher education is offered by *universities*, polytechnics included, and institutes of the Higher Education in Art and Music system (Alta Formazione Artistica e Musicale, AFAM).

Compulsory education refers to both enrolment and attendance. It can be undertaken at either a State school or a non-State, publicly subsidized school (scuola paritaria) or even, subject to certain conditions, through home education or private schools. Regional three-year vocational training courses are offered by the relevant training agencies.

## *Factors contributing to students leaving the education system early in Italy*

Italy is one of the EU-28 countries where the phenomenon of early school leavers is most severe: about 15% of Italian young adults (18-24 years old) do not hold an upper-secondary degree, lagging behind the average European value of 10% and being still a long way from the European targets set by the 2030 Agenda.

In addition to this, the amount of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) has increased in Italy in the last few years, partly because of the economic crisis: in 2015 the 31,1% of the whole population aged 20-24 doesn't work and doesn't study (vs an European average of 14,6%).

Individual and family factors contribute to students leaving the education system early. National and international surveys and statistical data show that ESL is associated to gender, national origin, family's economic and social status.

As regard *gender*, male students tend to leave the education system earlier than female students. This is a common tendency in the EU28, but it is particularly evident in Italy: 20,2% of male students are drop-out vs 13,7% of female students, whereas the European average percentage is respectively 13,6% for male and 10,2% for female students.

*National origin* is another factor associated to ESL. Students who were born abroad tend to leave the education system more frequently than Italian students: 34,4% vs 14,8%. Again, Italy lags behind the rest of Europe, where the differences among foreign students and nationals are smaller (22,7% vs 11%). Nevertheless, a distinction has to be made among students with a foreign background who were born in Italy (the so-called second generations) and those who were born abroad: the former have a smaller risk to drop out than the latter. Therefore, the differences among Italian and foreign-born students (but also among second generations and foreign-born students) can be partly explained by language barriers (Eurydice 2014, Ismu 2016). In fact immigrant background alone is not the determining factor of ESL.

Disparities depend also on *socio-economic background* of students and their families. ESL is also associated with low household income, parental unemployment, and low level of parental education.

Living in a family affected by poverty coupled with parental low educational levels has a negative effect on children school performances and outcomes, thus on their risk of drop-out.

In Italy 6 children (0-17 years old) out of 10 whose parental level of education is low are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, thus they are at risk of educational disadvantage.

The risk of social exclusion is higher for Italian children than for their European peers, and this is partly due to the economic crisis, which made the families' economic conditions worse, and particularly affected those families which already were the most disadvantaged (European Union 2016).

In addition to the economic disadvantage, parents with low levels of education are less likely to help children study and do homework, encourage their children's attendance and investments in education, and develop their cultural capital. They are likely to have unskilled or semi-skilled labor, and they earn less money than those with high levels of education and skilled labors, consequently

their children are deprived economically and materially and they do not have enough resources to study. The economic and social exclusion of parents influences the educational paths and outcomes of children, their future job opportunities and their risk to become NEETs. This is also highlighted by data: in Europe nearly a third of low-skilled NEET's live in a jobless household (OECD, 2016).

*Tab.1 Early schools leavers in Italy (18-24 years old), by sex and national origin (percent) (2014).*

		2014		
		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Area</i>	<i>National origin</i>			
Italy	Italian	15,8	10,2	13,1
	Foreign	37,4	32,4	34,9
	Total	17,7	12,2	15
North	Italian	11,6	6,6	9,1
	Foreign	32,5	27,8	30,1
	Total	14,3	9,5	12
North-West	Italian	13	7,1	10,2
	Foreign	34,8	30,1	32,4
	Total	15,7	10	12,9
North-East	Italian	9,5	5,8	7,7
	Foreign	29,7	25,1	27,4
	Total	12,4	8,8	10,6
Centre	Italian	10,5	6,5	8,6
	Foreign	38,6	39	38,8
	Total	14,1	10,7	12,4
South	Italian	21,8	15	18,5
	Foreign	57	43,2	50,9
	Total	22,8	15,7	19,4

*Source:* Istat (2016a).

*Family-related factors* influence the chance of leaving the education system early. For example living in a large family or in single-parent family affects the disposable income for family members, the availability of parents (or the only one parent) to support children' education in terms of



economic investments and time to participate in their school life (e.g. help them do homework, meet teachers, make sure they attend school, and so on).

In addition to individual and family factors, the chance to leave school early in Italy is associated to the *geographical area* where students live. In most regions, particularly in the South of Italy and Islands, the rates of ESL are very high and far from the target of 10% proposed by the 2030 Agenda. In Sicily and Sardinia one young person out of four does not complete any study/training after the lower-secondary school, in Campania and Puglia the rates are respectively 18,8% and 16,7%. The phenomenon is also present in regions situated in the North of Italy (e.g. in Valle d'Aosta the percentage of ESL is 16,3%) but the progress in reducing rates has been greater here than in the South of Italy (Bes, 2016). The Southern regions and Islands are the most deprived areas in Italy, which mostly suffered the economic crisis: in 2015 the incident rate of absolute poverty for families is 9% in the South, 4,2% in the Centre and 5% in the North; the incident rate of relative poverty for families is 20,4% in the South, 6,5% in the Centre, and 5,4% in the North (Istat, 2016b).

*Tab. 2 Early school leavers in Italy (18-24 years old), by year and region (percent).*

<b>Regions</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Piedmont	22,5	12,7	12,6
Valle d'Aosta/Vallée d'Aoste	21,5	16,2	16,3
Liguria	17,7	13,6	12
Lombardy	22,1	12,9	13,1
Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol	21,6	10,9	10,9
<i>Bolzano/Bozen</i>	<i>30,2</i>	<i>13,1</i>	<i>13,1</i>
<i>Trento</i>	<i>12,1</i>	<i>8,5</i>	<i>8,7</i>
Veneto	18,1	8,4	8,1
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	13,6	11,1	6,9
Emilia-Romagna	20,1	13,2	13,3
Tuscany	20,6	13,8	13,4
Umbria	13,1	9,1	8,1
Marche	16,9	10,9	10
Lazio	15,4	12,5	11,3
Abruzzo	15,7	9,6	14,2
Molise	14,9	12,1	10,1
Campania	27,6	19,6	18,8

Puglia	29,1	16,9	16,7
Basilicata	16,3	12,2	10,3
Calabria	21,4	16,8	16,1
Sicily	29,5	24	24,3
Sardinia	29,5	23,4	22,9
North	20,5	12	11,7
Centre	17	12,4	11,5
South	26,7	19,3	19,2
<b>Italy</b>	<b>22,6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14,7</b>

Source: Bes (2016).

### *Vulnerable groups of student identifiable as at risk in Italy: schools: facts and figures*

The most recent PISA survey (2015) reveals that Italian students' performances are below the average. Although Italian students improved their performances in math getting closer to the mean, they score 12 points lower the average in science and 8 points lower in reading.

*Tab. 3 Performances in Science, Reading and Mathematics (OECD average, Italy, first and last country) (2016).*

	<i>Science</i>		<i>Reading</i>		<i>Mathematics</i>	
	Mean score	Score diff. OECD average	Mean score	Score diff. OECD average	Mean score	Score diff. OECD average
OECD average	493		493		490	
Singapore (1°)	556	63	535	42	564	74
<b>Italy (34°)</b>	<b>481</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>-8</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>0</b>
Dominican Republic (72°)	332	-161	358	-135	328	-162

Source: OECD (2016).

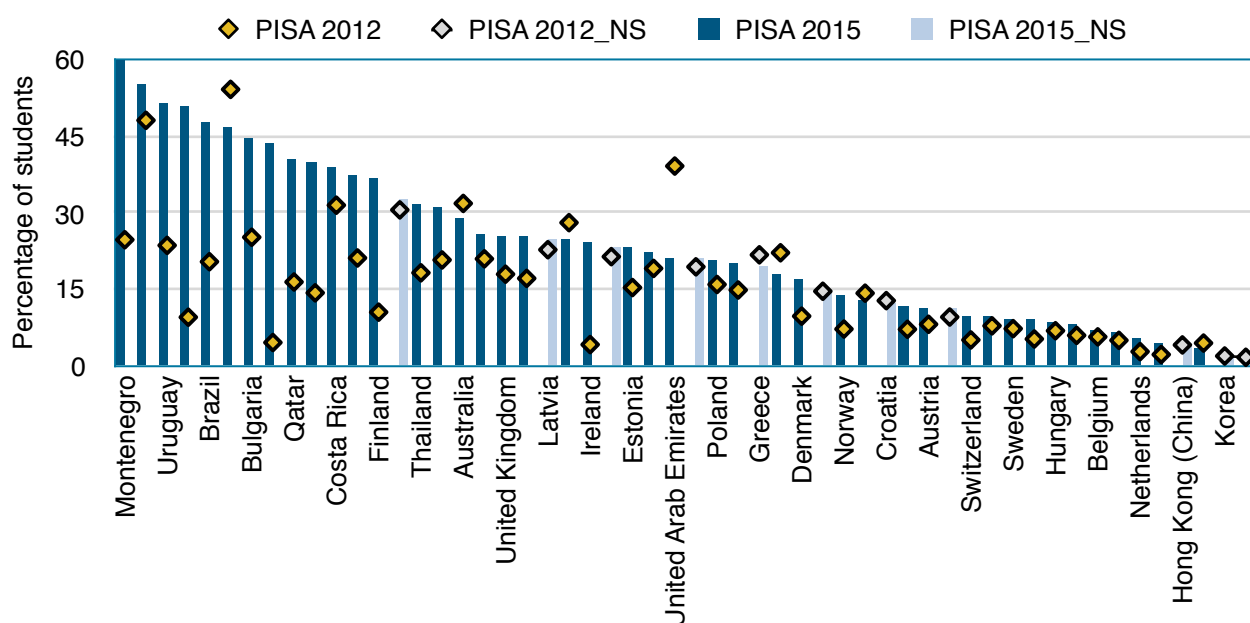
PISA survey confirms differences among students in performances based on gender, nationality, region where they live , socio-economic status.

Male students, students of foreign origin (and particularly those who were born abroad), young people who live in the southern regions, socio-economically disadvantaged students obtain lower performances, and they risk to leave school early.

The PISA survey also reveals that among the 72 countries participating in the survey, Italian students are the most truant. About 55% of Italian students said that they had been absent from school with permission for a day or more in the two weeks prior to PISA test, and 41% said they had been absent a few hours of lesson. In addition, in Italy one student (15 years old) out of 10 has repeated a grade and 10% has repeated a grade at the secondary school.

Thus, PISA survey outlines some issues which could help identify the vulnerable groups and predict drop-out: low performances, irregular attendance at school, repeated grades influence students performances, their school career and their investments in education. These factors are often intertwined with low socio-economic status, immigrant background, gender, place of residence, so that the likelihood to leave the educational system becomes higher.

*Figure 1. Change between 2012 and 2015 in student truancy.*



Source: Avvisati F. (2016), OECD (2016).

### *Strategies, policies and measures against early leaving adopted in Italy*

After the Recommendation adopted by the European Education Council in 2011, some European countries (e.g. Malta, Austria, Belgium) adopted a comprehensive strategy to reduce ESL. Some countries already had a strategy, and others were in the process (Eurydice, 2014).

By contrast, Italy has never implemented a comprehensive strategy to reduce ESL. Some strategies, policies and measures already existed in Italy, but they were part of a broad approach aimed at offering equal opportunities to all students. The core of this approach is universalism, which dates back to '70 and it is based on egalitarian and inclusive principles. Universalism ensures equal opportunities for all students regardless of their citizenship, gender, religion, etc. It concerns access to the educational system, academic performances and curriculum guidance.

In addition to the principle of universalism, some other measures were adopted in the following decades. In 2006 education became compulsory until age 16 and for at least 10 years (Law 27 Dec. 2006, n. 296). By next policies (Ministerial Decree 22 Agosto 2007, n. 139 and Circular Letter 30/12/2010, n. 101) compulsory education was further improved. Now compulsory education has to be until at least 10 years, and it covers the age group between 6 and 16 years old; it is aimed at obtaining a diploma of higher secondary school or a professional qualification lasting at least 3 years by age 18. Compulsory education is free of charge.

Even though this measure does not necessarily lead to the reduction of ESL, it contributes to the expansion of educational opportunities and influences behaviors of family and students, contributing to a decrease in ESL (European Commission, 2011).

Another important measure introduced in 2006 was the methodology called “alternanza scuola-lavoro” (trad. Alternation School- Work (ASW) – Italian approach to Work-Related Learning), that allows students aged 16 to 18 to continue education, alternating school and work periods. The aim is to introduce flexibility in students’ educational paths and promote the development of personal interests and practical skills.

This methodology could also support students’ motivations and aspirations, avoiding their drop-out and offering them the opportunity to enter the labor market.

Other strategies which could be quoted here are those regarding students of foreign origins. These measures are not directed to prevent immigrant students’ drop out, but they focus on their integration according to an approach that valorizes intercultural education. In line with the universalistic approach of the Italian educational system, intercultural education is a mean to promote dialogue and exchange between people who are culturally different, and offer an inclusive school context. The principles of this intercultural approach are contained in the “Guidelines for the reception and integration of foreign students” (Circular letter 24/2006) and in the document “The Italian strategy for the intercultural school and the integration of students of foreign origin” (2007). The two documents provide an overview of actions, measures and recommendations for the integration of foreign students, paying particular attention to language learning.

As regards this aspect, another Circular Letter was enacted in 2008, i.e. the “National Plan for teaching Italian as a second language” (n. 807/2008), aimed at teaching Italian to foreign students who have been in Italy for 2 years (or less). Also these policies have been not directly issued to prevent ESL, but they promote several actions and recommendations in order to help foreign students, particularly as regards their language learning. Besides these measures, every year the Ministry of Education gives funds to schools which are located in high-risk areas or areas where immigrants are concentrated, to avoid students’ marginalization. With reference to this issue, in

2010 a Circular Letter (n.2/2010) was enacted by the Ministry of Education, with the scope of avoiding foreign students' concentration in certain schools and/or classes. In particular the Circular Letter made Italian school rearrange classes so that foreign students would represent no more than 30% of all students. Actually, the Circular Letter provoked arguments and disagreements among politicians, civil society actors and teaching staff. It had also been unfeasible in many schools where the percentage of foreign students was 50% or more.

The main interventions specifically enacted against early leaving in the last few years were realized thanks to the National Operational Programmes (PON) of the Ministry of Education, financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds.

The 2002-2006 Operational Programme on Education implemented some actions against drop-out, whereas the 2007-2013 Programme provided some specific investments to prevent and reduce early leaving, promoting collaboration between school and civil society actors. The 2014-2020 Operational Programme, building on the experience of the period 2007-2013, will pursue the fight to reduce drop-out and increase the quality of education.

Except from the Operational Programmes, in Italy a comprehensive national action plan to prevent students from leaving the education system early was never implemented.

The recent Law n. 13 July 2015, n. 107, called "Buona Scuola" (trad. Good School), introduced several measures which could contribute to prevent and reduce early leaving. The Law gives more funds to schools and support schools' autonomy in planning educational programmes; it promotes an extraordinary plan to employ additional teachers; it offers diversified educational pathways, paying attention to developing digital competences, knowledge of different languages, new subjects as economy or sport sciences, etc.). The Law is very recent, therefore we will wait for a few years to evaluate the benefits of the Law in terms of reducing early school leaving.

### *Governance and cross-sector cooperation in the area of early leaving*

As highlighted by the recent study *LOST- Early School Leaving: the cost for the community and the role of Third Sector organizations* (2014) carried out by WeWorld, Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli e Ass. Bruno Trentin, it's hard to find in Italy cross sector cooperation concerning ESL interventions. Third sector organizations have been tackling ESL for decades, but interventions are mainly based on singular initiatives, with very diverse backgrounds, as far as organizational structure and economic dimensions of associations are concerned.

Voluntary work is also largely widespread. Throughout Italy, the kind of intervention significantly differs from North to South, depending on different contexts and thus approaches: focus in the north is on activities supporting study and individual tutoring, whereas in the south after- school activities are mainly conceived as social and recreational opportunities.

Schools develop apparently independent projects from Third Sector, based on government or local funds, with the risk of implementing "emergency" or short-term similar initiatives leading to a far

lower impact. Furthermore, another emerging issue is that of the lack of acceptance and acknowledgment of mutual roles and expertise between school staff and educational workers.

Nevertheless, in the last few years there was an effort, both from public and private sector, to promote projects on ESL aimed at building a cooperative network among different agencies located in the same territories, so as to strive for a unique goal, thus strengthening the so-called educational community and empowering each single actor involved towards a common good.

The most recent and representative example is a new experimental initiative planned in the last Italian financial law, concerning the establishment of a fund against educational poverty (150 million euros per year, for 3 years), fueled by payments made by banking foundations. Early school leaving becomes an issue included in a larger and multidimensional context to be tackled: educational poverty is defined as “the impossibility for children and teenagers to learn, experiment, develop and freely foster their capacities, talents and aspirations”. This deprivation implies a serious limit to the development of cognitive, social and relational skills which are fundamental for future wellness, for working success and for permitting an active participation in the economy and more generally speaking, in new generations’ society.

Educational poverty is seen as a responsibility of the whole community, including families, teachers, institutions and third sector organizations. Regional and national multi-stakeholders networks are fostered, in order to cooperate and coordinate each other for the creation of inclusive environments. Indeed, priority is given to projects promoting the involvement of schools and families already in the preliminary phase of project planning, through active participation.

Another action linked to the crucial role of schools as core hub of the community is the “Open schools” initiative promoted by the Italian Ministry of Education with a call for tender launched in September 2016, investing €240 million. The objective is to provide schools with funding allowing them to keep open in the afternoon for extracurricular activities mostly aimed at improving the so-called “soft-skills” through alternative learning: creative labs based on sport, theatre, music, art, digital skills and foreign languages. Schools are thus supposed to renovate their essential role not only concerning education, but also, in a bigger picture, as reference points for the community, able to respond to local stakeholders’ needs.

### *The role of education in tackling early leaving: examples of good practices and case analysis*

*Frequenza200* is a national programme promoted by WeWorld, aimed at preventing and fighting ESL, carried out across 7 regions throughout Italy, mainly in urban areas. It is targeted to children and teen-agers aged 8-13 (primary and lower secondary school) and it is based on a common model, then tailored to each local context, implying 4 levels of intervention, basically in line with the idea

of giving value to each individual educational agency in the neighborhood: students at risk of dropping out, school, family and community at large.

Core activities, carried out within an after-school hub serving also as the territorial point of reference, mainly consist of tutoring and study support, a wide variety of social and recreational activities improving soft skills, school and vocational guidance. At school, focus is set on global education and non-formal education, with a particular attention to teachers, concerning common planning and training on inclusive methodologies. Families are involved and engaged in activities at *Frequenza200* centres, but they also receive tutoring, psychological support and counselling on parental skills. In a wider perspective, the aim is that to make the whole neighborhood (including both citizens and organizations) become sensitized and aware of the project's goals, thus taking in charge the promotion of education, as far as each can do that within the territory.

*Frequenza200* started in 2012, up to now it has involved 5.335 students, 1.700 families and 1.308 school teachers.

It proved to be a good practice, thanks to steady monitoring of results and activities through both quantitative and qualitative indicators. The majority of children and teenagers enrolled (more than 90%) regularly participate to *Frequenza200* activities, turning out an improvement of motivation, self-esteem and social skills.

School results validate individual cases: 92% of students attending the centres successfully moved up to the next year, whereas the rate of students with more than 3 “below average” marks decreased from 32% to 13%.

Cost-effectiveness of the project is confirmed by its cost, that is an average of € 4 per each youngster involved.

Another example of good practice is provided by *Survived* - a survey on elements which are predictive of early school leaving - carried out in 2016 by WeWorld, together with two partner organizations which implemented action research on children attending 4th grade of primary school in two cities with similar local contexts in the North of Italy, e.g. Milan and Turin.

Best practice to be undertaken, in relation to each single condition that highlights potential dropping out, can be summarized as follows:

Predictor of ESL	Actions that turned out to be successful
Learning difficulties	Workshops based on alternative teaching Cooperative learning methodology
Behaviour problems	Class workshops with support both from educator and school teacher. It helps improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the child's self-esteem</li> <li>- informal relationship with the teacher is encouraged, thus reducing school pressure</li> <li>- the child's self-awareness and the relationship with the class group</li> </ul>
Problems in socialization	Cooperative learning methodology Mediation between school and family supported by a tutor. It helps improve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- internal cohesion of the class group thanks to a stronger alliance between parents</li> <li>- the child wellbeing at school, as relationships between teachers and parents become more relaxed</li> </ul>
Socio-cultural and socio-economic background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Periodic meetings between tutor and families and mediation with the teachers: particularly useful for foreign parents, enhance families 'approach to shared educational and cultural models of school</li> <li>- The role of tutor: supports parents, strengthening parental skills</li> <li>- Socialization events involving families, encourage cultural exchange and good practice sharing</li> <li>- Creation of a mutual support network: enables exchange of information and access to external resources</li> </ul>

### *Final remarks*

Reducing the early school leaving rate to below 10 percent is one of the targets set by the *Europe 2020 Strategy* to be reached by the end of the decade in the field of education and training.



Although the phenomenon is steadily decreasing in Italy, it is still a long way from the European targets: in 2015 the percentage of young people who gave up their studies early was 15%.

Several factors influence the phenomenon: gender, national origin, socio-economic background of students and their families, parents' level of education, territory of residence. The economic recession may contribute to the widespread of ESL: high unemployment rates can discourage young people from engaging in education and training, parents' unemployment increase the risk of youth leaving education prematurely, families' poverty encourage children to leave from school and contribute to the household income.

Italian governments have never adopted a structured programme to combat ESL for many years, and interventions have been implemented mainly by third sectors organizations, voluntary organizations or by single schools which enforced short term projects on their own.

Only the last few years there was an effort, both from public and private sector, to promote projects on ESL aimed at building a cooperative network among different agencies and construct an educational community aimed at support the education of young people, especially those at risk of dropping out.

Nevertheless, Italy is still far from the European target and the efforts are not enough. The initiatives of the third sectors organizations and voluntary organizations are important and they have had a crucial role in combat ESL until now. But a significant economic investment in education is also needed in Italy, where funds in education and training are very few, especially compared to other European countries.

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## Country Report: Malta

*Maryrose Francica, Kerry Freeman (AcrossLimits)*

### *The education system structure in Malta: short description*

The Constitution of the Republic of Malta and the Education Act (CAP 327) provide the constitutional and legal framework and the main aims for the Maltese Educational System. The Education Act acknowledges the right of every citizen of Malta to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, belief or economic means.

The Education Act which was enacted in 1988 has undergone a number of amendments over the years to reflect the developments in national education. Chronologically, the latest major amendments took place in 2006 by means of Act XIII. These amendments laid the groundwork for the implementation of a major reform in Maltese education. The reform included the change in role of the central education authority (the Education Division) from a provider of education to a regulator of education.

Two directorates were established; the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). For the first time, quality assurance and the setting of standards were given a central position and a legislative framework. The Act also provided for a decentralisation process by which decisions which were previously taken at central level could now be taken at management levels closer to the schools.

In this regard, the Act also established the College Networks whereby schools were grouped into Colleges. The Act states that it is the duty of the State to promote education and instruction, to ensure the existence of a system of schools and institutions accessible to all Maltese citizens catering for the full development of the whole personality including the ability of every person to work and to provide for such schools and institutions where these do not exist. Currently, it is the right of the State to establish a national minimum curriculum of studies for all schools, to establish the national minimum conditions for all schools and to secure compliance with the national minimum curriculum of studies and the national minimum conditions for all schools.

In Malta, all children between 3 -16 years old have the right to free education in all state schools, regardless of age, sex and belief. The standard of education in Malta is high and exams are introduced to pupils at an early age. School uniforms are a norm in Malta and each school has a

different uniform with unique colours and logo. Some schools still enforce a separation between boys and girl schools while some other schools are mixed.

#### *Pre-school / kindergarten*

Children in Malta attend kindergartens from 3-4 years old completely free of charge. During this period learning is informal, through a lot of games and playing as well as through interaction with other children.

#### *Primary school*

At 5 years old the child becomes a student and starts Primary School which last for 6 years, until they are 10 years old. Attendance at Primary School is compulsory for all children and there is a school roughly in each town. Until 2010 streaming was practiced during the last two years of Primary School to determine which school the students would move on to after primary school, however this is no longer practised for more inclusion. In Malta the goal is to place students with special needs in mainstream schools, however specialized schools are available too.

#### *Secondary school*

After primary school students move on to start secondary school which last for 5 years, from 11-16 years of age. These are larger schools where students from several primary schools join together.

When completing secondary school, compulsory education is over, however students can opt to sit for their O-levels on their own which will help them get into high school and higher education. There are 5 compulsory O-levels to pass, English, Maltese, Maths, a science subject and a foreign Language. There many more O-levels to choose from and students can sit for as many as they like as long as they do the compulsory ones. People of all ages can sit for the O-levels. Approximately 60% of Maltese students continue education after completing compulsory studies.

#### *High School / Post Secondary Education*

As students turn 16 years old they can opt to go to Sixth Form which lasts for two years until they are 18 years of age. Which school they go to depend on how well they did in their O-level exams and there are three schools to choose from, MCAST (skills school), Junior College and Higher Secondary School which is for the students who did less well in their O-levels. At High School the students study different topics and are being prepared to sit for their A-levels which is needed to get into University.

#### *University / Tertiary Education*

After students pass their A-levels, (2 A-levels and 4 intermediate) they are free to start at the University of Malta or MCAST. Usually students start when they are around 18 years old, and graduate accordingly depending on how long their chosen courses are.

The University of Malta is the highest form of educational institution in Malta, and it is also the oldest University in Europe being over 400 years old. The University of Malta offers undergraduate

and postgraduate level degrees and it is entirely financed by the Government. Courses of studies last between one and six years, and then there is the possibility of also doing a PhD program.

In a nutshell, Malta's educational system is structured in four stages: pre-primary (ages 3–5), primary (ages 5–11), secondary (ages 11–16) and tertiary. Pre-primary education is optional but fully funded by the state. In their last two years of primary education, students are placed on tracks based on educational attainment, and at the age of eleven, students sit an eleven plus examination to determine a student's secondary schooling direction. Success in the eleven plus exam places a student in a junior lyceum - a prestigious secondary school - while mediocre performance or not sitting the examination places a student in a less competitive secondary school. Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examinations are taken at age 16, and matriculation examinations are taken at age 18 to determine university entrance eligibility.

**Fig. 1 Enrolment at different levels of education**

Level	Pre-primary	Primary	Special schools	Secondary	Post-secondary	Vocational <sup>1</sup>	Tertiary
<b>2009/2010 Total</b>	<b>8,515</b>	<b>24,724</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>24,988</b>	<b>5,809</b>	<b>5,535</b>	<b>10,004</b>
Males	4,434	12,583	156	12,984	2,573	3,361	4,184
Females	4,081	12,141	81	12,004	3,236	2,174	5,820
<b>2010/2011 Total</b>	<b>8,457</b>	<b>24,054</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>23,962</b>	<b>5,983</b>	<b>6,169</b>	<b>10,188</b>
Males	4,442	12,256	139	12,367	2,694	3,734	4,233
Females	4,015	11,798	67	11,595	3,289	2,435	5,955
<b>2011/2012 Total</b>	<b>8,803</b>	<b>23,532</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>23,358</b>	<b>5,960</b>	<b>6,217</b>	<b>10,674</b>
Males	4,610	12,069	145	11,953	2,651	3,784	4,450
Females	4,193	11,463	82	11,405	3,309	2,433	6,224

<sup>1</sup> Includes the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS)

Source: NSO Education Statistics.

### *Factors contributing to students leaving the education system Early in Malta*

As a phenomenon, Early School Leaving depends very much on the socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics of a country. The Maltese economy is highly dependent on the Tourism sector, generating the need for low-skilled or semi-skilled workers. Additionally, our economy is highly driven by family run Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs), leading to inheritance of businesses irrespective of the level of education. Together with various other factors, the rate of Early School Leaving is highly affected. (NCHE, 2012)

Early School Leaving is a process. It is the consequence of a lot of factors particularly related to the education system itself, the labour market, characteristics of individual nature, family factors and other aspects related to gender and spatial distribution.

One of the aspects which contribute to the number of Early School Leavers is the education system itself. Existing research suggests that a displeasing relationship between an educator and a student is one of the main reasons that can lead students to leave school early.

Another reason that students quit education is because, in Malta, people with low qualifications are still provided with labour opportunities. In fact, the vast majority of young people that left school early with qualification do find employment. People in the industry admit that they do sometimes need people with a low level of education to do some of the work that they provide.

Family factors also appear to be of significance where early school leaving is concerned. Experts on the subject categorize family support, family structure and the relationship between students and their parents as being highly significant in terms of Early School Leaving. Parents who do not value education can have a substantial and negative influence on a young person's educational career. Studies show that more guidance from home, such as help and supervision in homework, will encourage the majority of school leavers to continue with their Studies.

Individual characteristics also emerge as an important contribution towards the decision of leaving school early. However, such characteristics are sometimes difficult to distinguish from family related factors, since they would be related to a young person's upbringing and to the importance given to education within the family. Even though a high percentage of the school leavers claimed that they attended school on a regular basis, the high rate of absenteeism is also one of the main pull out factors from school. Lack of interest in the subjects provided and in education also featured as a significant matter that contributes to ESL. Last but not least, a factor to be considered is that the majority of the early school leavers come from the South Eastern District which is considered of lower socioeconomic strata.

Early School Leaving is a symptom of a wider range of issues affecting the lives of children, their families and their communities and the structure and content of the school system. Given the complex range of issues contributing to Early School Leaving efforts to address the issue should be sustained and based on a critical mass that allows for a coordinated collaborative holistic approach that is multi-level and includes parents, families and support networks.

**Fig. 2 ESL rates for Malta**

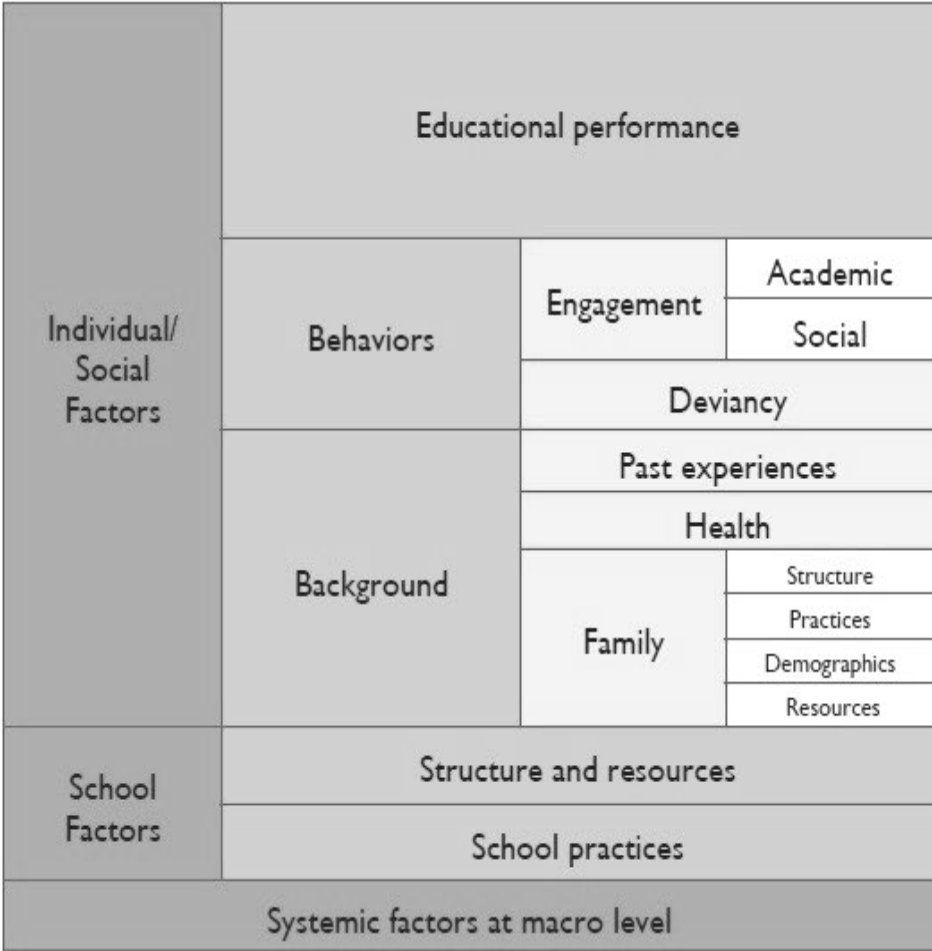
ESL rate for Malta						
Year	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Males	30.1%	29.9%	28.8%	25.2%	23.2%	22.2%
Females	21.1%	17.4%	16.3%	16.8%	17.7%	18.3%
Total	25.7%	23.8%	22.7%	21.1%	20.5%	20.3%

Source: Eurostat

The ESL percentage is measured by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) through quarterly samplings by the National Statistics Office (NSO). The European Union (EU) has set the reducing of ESL to less than 10% as one of its headline targets for 2020. In November 2013 Malta had set the same target. The rate of ESL in the EU has gone down from 14.2% to 11.1% between 2009 and 2014. In Malta, the ESL rate dropped from 25.7% in 2009 to 20.3% in 2014. Although it decreased at a higher rate than it has across the EU, ESL in Malta is still the second highest in Europe. Breaking down the percentages according to sex shows that while the rate of ESL in Malta is higher among

males, it is also true that the rate of ESL is on the decrease among males and on the increase among females.

**Fig. 3 Factors that may lead to Early School Leaving**



*Vulnerable groups of student identifiable as at risk in Malta schools: facts and figures*

The presence of violence, anti-social behaviour, bullying, and other forms of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) in schools impacts a child’s or youth’s perception to schooling and can lead to ESL both with regard to the student suffering from SEBD or students that are impacted by the behaviour (for example bully) of a student who has a SEBD condition. To date, whilst Malta has not experienced the extreme forms of disaffection, violence, and anti-social behaviour seen in other countries issues related to SEBD prevail.

According to the ‘Malta Early School leaving strategy’ document, in a study carried out secondary school students identified as having SEBD, students referred to a number of school factors contributing to their academic and behaviour difficulties. They attributed their poor performance and misbehaviour to negative attitudes by teachers and peers and to a system that failed to address their needs. They particularly found it difficult to interact with teachers who did not respect them and who did not understand them.

In a similar study with 20 students with a SEBD condition, most of the reasons given by the students for their behaviour difficulties were directly related to the school, teachers, and peers, particularly unfairness and unsupportive and unresponsive teachers. Most of the students stated that they had very little say in decisions related to school and classroom regulations, classroom management or teaching and learning. They thought that such a situation exacerbated their difficulties, but they believed that if they were more involved in the decisions affecting them, their behaviour would improve.

It is pertinent to underline that more recently research carried out on behalf of the National Commission for Persons with a Disability (KNPD) suggests that situations occur where the school or the education professionals across the three sectors of education “do not understand or treat well” children or youths who are “labelled” to have a challenging behaviour condition – such as ignoring the youth or child or always pinning the blame on him or her when behaviour issues arise within the school. It was underlined that there is “limited feedback between the parents of a child or youth who has a challenging behaviour condition and the teacher and at times a lack of understanding from the school”. In one particular instance, the family had felt that they had no alternative but not to send the child to school.

Malta has developed a comprehensive and deep rooted framework directed to assist children and youths with disabilities to follow compulsory education. Whilst disabled people are accessing better quality education, they still tend to have a lower educational level, less qualification and a lower literacy level than the rest of the population. One of the key issues that impact the progression of persons with disability in participating in further education and vocational training is the fact that the inclusive education support system targets only disabled students in compulsory education.

**Fig. 4 Educational Participation Level Achieved by Disabled Persons**

Educational Level	10 - 19	20-29	30-39	National Average
	%	%	%	%
No schooling	-	-	4.4	2.4
Special school for persons with a disability	19.7	25.7	15.3	0.3
Pre-primary	-	-	0.3	0.4
Primary level	13.8	6.3	7.7	25.5
Secondary level	54.8	45.1	54.2	45.3
Post-secondary level	10.8	14.3	9.8	13.8
Non-tertiary level	0.9	1.9	2.8	2.7
Tertiary level	-	6.7	6.9	9.6
Total	100	100	100	100



In order to address the needs of students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), they attend Nurture Classes in State primary schools and Learning Support Zones in State secondary schools. In the scholastic year 2015-2016, there are 33 Nurture Classes and 22 Learning Support Zones in Maltese State schools.

**Fig. 5**

<b>Students given a service by Nurture Classes and Learning Support Zones</b>		
	<b>2014 – 2015</b>	<b>2015 – 2016</b>
<b>Nurture Classes</b>	801	779
<b>Learning Support Zones</b>	676	492
Source: DSS		

Both Nurture Classes and Learning Support Zones have reached out to hundreds of students during the scholastic year 2014-2015. For the scholastic year 2015-2016, new Nurture Classes were set up at St Paul's Bay, Tarxien and Valletta primary schools. Similarly, new Learning Support Zones were set up at Naxxar middle school, Rabat middle school and St Venera secondary school.

If students who have received support in Nurture Classes or Learning Support Zones still manifest behavioural difficulties, they are referred to an SEBD specialist who uses practical strategies and liaises with all professionals while supporting the school. If the behaviour persists, students are referred to a temporary programme at a *Learning Support Centre* which aims at giving them a more focused and personalised service and coping strategies. The medium to long term aim is always to re-integrate participating students into mainstream schools. Students remain registered within their college and constant feedback about their behaviour is given to the school.

There are four such Learning Support Centres, one in Birgu and another in Hamrun for secondary school boys, one in Naxxar for secondary school girls, and a co-ed one in Marsa which caters for primary school students. An Education Hub was also opened at Msida in September 2015, in order to provide tailor-made programmes for students who were finding it very difficult to fit in mainstream secondary schools and had serious emotional and behavioural difficulties.

**Fig. 6**

<b>Students in Learning Support Centres in 2015-2016</b>	
Learning Support Centre	Number of students
Hamrun	10
Marsa	7
Birgu	7
Naxxar	7
Source: DSS	

**Fig, 7**

<b>Students at the Education Hub, Hamrun, in 2015-2016</b>	
Year	Number of students
Year 9	10
Year 10	12
Total	22
Source: Education Hub	

Servizz Ghożża provides a support service and an educational programme to pregnant minors, leading them to adopt a positive attitude towards motherhood, while empowering them to pursue their educational path beyond childbirth. The service is run by an officer in charge and three guidance teachers in a unit at Qormi. During the scholastic year 2014-2015, 17 students were following programmes offered by Servizz Ghożża.

This unit acquires greater relevance within the perspective of NEET statistics that show that more females than males are inactive in the age bracket of 15 to 24. Unplanned pregnancies might be one of the causes and young mothers would need a lot of support to positively fulfil their roles as mothers and learners. Out of the 17 students who availed themselves of the service last year, 3 students returned to secondary school and 2 students enrolled at MCAST. Another 5 have just given birth, but are aiming to go back to school. The other 7 remained at home.

Servizz Ghożża also delivers a prevention programme aimed at teenage boys called *Bandiera Bajda*. Groups of boys from secondary schools attend three hour seminars focused on sexual

education and teenage pregnancy with specific attention to the role and responsibilities of teenage fathers. A similar project called *Jien ser Inbennen?! aimed at teenage girls, is also being offered.*

### *Strategies, policies and measures against early leaving adopted in Malta*

Through the implementation of the ‘Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta 2014’ certain initiatives, schemes and provisions are emerging to combat ESL.

Preventive measures were taken to ensure that schooling responds to student diversity and addresses student needs as from a very young age. In 2015, more than 90 childcare centres were registered with the Free Childcare Scheme. These include the 13 centres run by the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) which already provides the service for free for less privileged families.

Foreign students need to feel a sense of belonging in order to be able to benefit from the schooling experience. In line with this, the Cultural Integration Unit within the Ministry for Education and Employment set up induction, cultural orientation and inclusion programmes for migrant students and their parents.

Gifted and talented students are also prone to school disengagement. For this reason, the Directorate for Curriculum Management (DCM) organises regular activities to target such students through initiatives such as the High 5 Junior Mathematicians Challenge, the Malta Junior Science Olympiad and the Maths Olympiad. Another initiative, Setting the Stage for Budding Rockstars, is organised by the Department for Student Services (DSS) in order to promote entrepreneurship skills amongst youth.

A relevant reform in curriculum implementation is the introduction of the Learning Outcomes Framework which identifies learning outcomes for all cycles of compulsory education. Learning outcomes are explicit indicators of what learners should achieve from their schooling. This pedagogical strategy is meant to move away from traditional approaches towards learner-centred ones, leading to equal access for all learners.

With regards to co-education, by September 2015 every State college had its own co-educational middle school. As from September 2016 every college will phase in its own co-educational senior secondary school.

There has also been a huge investment in digital infrastructure including interactive whiteboards and a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) platform. The VLE platform is also hosting a Parental Portal in order to maximize home-school communication. This service was officially launched in the Gozo College in 2015 and will be rolled out in all colleges throughout 2015-2016. Furthermore, computer tablets were distributed to students in various state and non-state primary schools as part of the *One Tablet per Child* pilot project. Once this is implemented, tablets will be used to promote numeracy and digital literacy skills.

Regarding school-based approaches to tackling ESL, an incentive of EUR 500 per College was given to college representatives within the ESL Compulsory Education Working Group.

Participating schools were asked to come up with projects and to provide an overview of how such initiatives would help students at risk of becoming early school leavers.

During the scholastic year 2015-16, all State senior secondary schools as well as some Church and Independent schools offered the following vocational subjects as electives to Year 9 students: Agribusiness, Engineering Technology, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Information Technology.

Transition programmes are held at various levels coinciding with students' educational milestones. Year 6 students and their parents are taken on orientation visits to middle schools which they will be attending in the following academic year. This is now part of the normal calendar of every State college. Year 8 Options exercises are carried out to support students, as well as their parents, in their educational pathways by offering information through initiatives including the dissemination of the subject option booklets, career fairs and information sessions about the optional subjects available for students going into Year 9. In all colleges, meetings were organised during which students and parents were informed by college career advisors, guidance teachers, trainee career advisors and subject teachers about the possible subject choices.

Talks and visits to post-secondary institutions are organised for Year 11 students with the aim of giving students and their parents information on opportunities available for students moving into post-secondary education and in order to provide a better transition for students. In order to promote career education, the Career Portfolio exercise and the Employability Skills sessions held by the career advisors and guidance teams are finalised in Year 11. Group and one-to-one interventions with students are held to further facilitate the transition of students from compulsory to post-compulsory education or employment. In July 2015 a Careers Fair, I Choose, was held with the involvement of all State, and some Independent further education providers as well as the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and ESL.

At the end of Year 11, following the publication of the SEC examination results, students are given the opportunity to discuss their career path and possible options with career advisors. This walk-in service is offered both in the State colleges as well as at the Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) Gozo campus organised an open day for parents and the general public.

Career Education is now an integrated component of Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD). The main focus of Career Education is to develop students' career management skills and to help them reflect on their education, training and career paths.

As from the scholastic year 2014-15, the Secondary School Certificate and Profile has been pegged to Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) level 3 at individual subject level and as a general certificate of educational attainment. This means that learners will now be accredited for the mark obtained in each subject at the end of the Year 11 examination.

In January 2015, the Maltese Association of Parents of State School Students (MAPSSS) was set up on the initiative of a number of parents. Representatives of the central committee of the association met the Educational Leadership Council (ELC), which brings together all college principals,

directors general and directors within the different education directorates to explain their aims and the way they perceive their role as complementary to that of the school.

The valuable contribution which parents can make to education and towards tackling Early School Leaving (ESL) can be seen in the *NWAR (Late Blossoms)* programme, currently under the aegis of the National Literacy Agency (NLA). Here, students experiencing difficulties in literacy skills are given intensive basic literacy training in which parents or guardians are always present so that they can learn, together with their children, in order to be able to support their children's learning all along.

Legal Notice 140 of 2015 provides for the establishment of an Institute for Education, which shall be autonomous, shall carry out functions related to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of educators, and shall also serve as a principal driver in these fields. The Chief Executive Officer has been appointed and developments are being implemented. Furthermore, Erasmus+ funding is being tapped in order to build CPD programmes for educators. Focused teacher CPD can be gained from initiatives being taken by the National Literacy Agency (NLA). This agency, in collaboration with the DCM, offered a number of training courses for teachers and educators. Concurrently, Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers is organising a Diploma in Teaching Adults. This course is aimed at raising the professional profile of adult educators and, consequently, also improving the quality of adult education in Malta.

### *Governance and cross-sector cooperation in the area of early leaving (Government, Third sector organisations and volunteers activities and networking)*

Tackling ESL entails a sustained long-term effort that brings together all the stakeholders, from policy makers to school administrators, teachers, parents, trade unions, employers, as well as researchers and third sector organisations. Actions need also to be informed by continuous research that informs policy makers by giving feedback on implementation processes.

The strategic plan recommends that whilst the Ministry for Education and Employment acts as the lead agency in tackling ESL, an Inter-Ministerial Committee is set up to address ESL across sectors and Ministries. The Inter-Ministerial Committee is to be chaired by the Director for Early School Leavers under the aegis of the Permanent Secretary within Ministry for Education and Employment. It will be made up of senior officials of appropriate Government Ministries. It will invite relevant stakeholders from civil society, employers and trade unions for consultation meetings from time to time.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee will:

- (i) assess and propose strategies, policies and actions directed to address the challenge of Early School Leaving across Government Ministries;

(ii) ensure that ESL and inter-related issues and proposed actions include all the relevant stakeholders both in drafting policies and in implementing and monitoring them.

This strategic plan also recommends the setting up of an Early School Leaving Unit under the aegis of the Office of the Permanent Secretary of Ministry for Education and Employment by the end of 2014 with the mandate to own and steward responses to the ESL challenge. It will also be strategically placed to keep ESL high on the Ministry's and the Government's agenda.

The Early School Leaving Unit would ensure that a sustained resource base is in place and that it will:

- be a leading partner and work with relevant entities within and out with Ministry for Education and Employment to set up a comprehensive framework for the collecting of national, regional and local data related to ESL, while ensuring that high quality analysis and monitoring is carried out in order to guide future policy making and implementation;
- carry out on-going monitoring of strategies, policies and programmes emanating from this strategic plan; analyse their impact and performance, and on the basis of empirical evidence submit recommendations for their improvement;
- be responsible for the monitoring of education provision for children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging from school;
- provide consultation and assistance to schools across the state, church and independent sectors in developing ESL prevention programmes;
- work with the agencies and schools to ensure that teachers and support staff are well equipped to occupy centre stage in the drafting and implementation of strategic responses to educational disadvantage, as well as develop mechanisms that facilitate teacher and support staff involvement taking into account the demands of their job;
- work with schools, education and training institutions, NGOs, parents, persons with a disability, members of minority groups, local communities, civil society organisations, trade unions and the business community in order to develop structured mechanisms to tackle the challenge of ESL;
- seek to promote partnership between parents, teachers and the community in order to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote students' engagement in the education system. Ensure that effective ESL prevention programmes implemented by schools are identified, given visibility and support, and that their results are disseminated through properly structured cooperation networks across schools from the various sectors;
- establish networks with overseas entities involved in ESL prevention programmes with the aim of providing schools' staff and relevant stakeholders with formal and informal training opportunities in

- the area of ESL prevention including the continuous professional development of staff;
- seek funding for ESL prevention programmes under the 2014-2020 ESF financing instrument amongst others.

Setting up an ESL working group within the Ministry for Education and Employment It is further proposed that the ESLU establishes an Early School Leaving Working Group by the end of 2014, to be chaired by the Director for Early School Leavers or his/her delegate. It will be comprised of representatives of entities within Ministry for Education and Employment that have a direct contribution to make towards reducing ESL.

These entities include among others:

- College Principals;
- the Department for Student Services;
- the Department for Research and Development;
- the Directorate for Lifelong Learning;
- the Directorate for Educational Services;
- the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education;
- the Malta College for Art, Science and Technology;
- the Employment and Training Corporation;
- the Foundation for Educational Services;
- Aġenzija Żgħażaġh;
- the National Commission for Further and Higher Education;
- The University of Malta;

### *Setting up an Early School Leaving Working Group*

This strategic plan recommends the constitution of an Early School Leaving Working Group that will work with schools and other entities to assist them in determining the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging, and to help them develop preventive measures that are specific to local conditions. The ultimate aim of the Early School Leaving Working Group is to see that this is done in a cohesive, coordinated and focused way.

The Department for Research and Development that falls under the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education and Employment should be the main driver behind a project that would aim at:

- taking stock of all the data being presently gathered by the different Departments and agencies within the Ministry for Education and Employment as well as by University, NSO and other agencies outside Ministry for Education and Employment such as the Ministry for

the Family and Social Solidarity, the Kummissjoni Nazzjonali għal Persuni b'Diżabilità and agencies working with minority groups;

- constructing a robust data collection framework that conforms to methodological standards set by NSO and Eurostat, for the on-going collation of key data sets within the education sector. A collaborative, inter-ministerial approach to the collection and sharing of data would make this research framework more comprehensive and effective. It would inform future policy making and implementation at 18 national, college or school level. It would entail an on-going process of monitoring for progress and effectiveness. It would also lay the basis for a better collaborative and more focused approach towards reducing ESL at both the national and the local level.

### *Constructing a comprehensive data collection framework*

This strategic plan recommends empowering the Department for Research and Development within the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education and Employment to network with other departments and agencies within and outside Ministry for Education and Employment in order to take stock of all the relevant data collection systems that are presently in place and construct a robust and structured data collection framework that conforms to methodological standards set by NSO and Eurostat, for the on-going collation of key data sets within the education sector. This is necessary to gauge the real situation with regards to ESL and to formulate effective policies that help Malta to reduce its ESL rate.

### *The role of education in tackling early leaving: examples of good practices and case analysis*

In Malta there are at least five institutions that offer full-time second chance education to students who do not have the necessary qualifications to progress to MQF level 4 academic or vocational education programmes and who need to catch up with programmes that range from MQF level 1 to level 3. Other institutions offer more flexible, part-time education and training.

At MCAST, all the eight Institutes that make up the College offer foundation courses at MQF level 1, 2 and 3. The basic entry level into level 1 is a secondary school education certificate that shows that the student has finished compulsory education. The course would typically include a mixture of key skills (literacy, numeracy and ICT) and a vocational hands-on component. Students can then



progress from one level to the other within MCAST and also across institutes, allowing flexible progression pathways up to MQF level 6.

Similarly the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) is developing its own foundation course that enables students who have completed compulsory school without an MQF level 3 qualification to enrol in a three-year course that goes from level 1 to level 3 and that combines basic skills with a VET component related to the tourism industry. Students have the possibility to progress up to MQF level 5 within the Institute in areas related to the industry.

Foundation for Educational Services runs the Youth.Inc programme for young people who have completed compulsory education without the basic qualifications. It offers participants a mixture of basic skills, life skills and a variety of hands-on, employment related learning opportunities. It is a full time course that includes also a work placement. Successful participants will acquire a general certificate of education at MQF level 1 and would be able to proceed to a second full-time course leading to MQF level 2.

The Higher Secondary school at Naxxar offers a revision course for students who have not acquired the necessary qualifications to proceed to an academically oriented further education programme but who at least have a pass in two SEC subjects. This is aimed at enabling participating students to gain enough passes in SEC subjects to be able to join a matriculation course in the following year.

Besides these in the academic year 2013-2014, a total of 1,458 students aged 17 to 24 enrolled for a number of part-time, morning or evening courses organised by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLL) in one of the various adult learning centres that the directorate has spread over Malta and Gozo. 27 These courses include SEC courses that would enable students to further their education and enhance their job opportunities, as well as a variety of MQF level 1 academic and VET courses.

For its part, ETC offers training to persons who are either in unemployment or want to up-skill themselves for upward job mobility. In 2011 ETC trained 15,072 persons of all ages; 3,000 young people were assisted through the Youth Employment Programme while 3,059 personal action plans were developed jointly by employment advisors and job seekers of all ages.

Students who have completed compulsory schooling and are following full-time programmes receive a stipend, based on regular school attendance. This is in line with recommendations made in the Commission Staff Working Paper, Reducing early school leaving which is an accompanying document to the Proposal for a Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving. All these measures contribute to lower Malta's ESL rate. We do, however, need to address the problem of student drop-out in full-time further education programmes.

## *Final remarks*

In Malta, early school leavers are defined as 18 to 24-year-olds who have not obtained a grade between 1 and 7 in at least five Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) exams or equivalent and who are not in education or training. At present, the ESL rate in Malta is 20.3%.

A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta was launched in June 2014 after a consultation process with stakeholders. In order to monitor the implementation of this strategy an Early School Leaving Unit was set up within the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers. Moreover, an Inter-Ministerial Committee as well as two working groups were formed to help the ESLU in its monitoring function. This report aims at providing an overview of the progress in tackling early school leaving in Malta.

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# Country Report: Romania

*Mariana Arnautu, Cosmin Gregorescu (World Vision Romania)*

## *The education system structure in Romania: short description*

### *Overview of Romanian Education System<sup>1</sup>*

The education system in Romania is managed at national level by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MENCS), at *central level*, in cooperation with other ministries and institutional structures subordinated to the Government, and at *local level* by the county school inspectorates, as subordinated local institutions. Basic principles with regard to the education in Romania are established by the Constitution, Chapter II “Fundamental rights and liberties”, Article 32 “Right to education”.

Law of Education N° 1/2011<sup>2</sup> provides the legal framework for the exercise of the basic right to lifetime an education under the authority of the Romanian state. These law regulates the structure, the functions, the organization and functioning of the national state, private and confessional educational system. Compulsory education (ISCED 1-4) in Romania is generalized and free. According with the Law of Education, compulsory education consists of 11-years of school that includes primary education (5 years), lower secondary education (4 years), upper secondary education or vocational education (2 years). Compulsory education is a daytime type of education. The obligation to attend the 11-years of education ceases at 18 years old. In order to fulfill the objectives of education and vocational training through the national education system, state high school education is generalized and free. The forms of organization of pre-university education are: daytime and evening education. The higher education (ISCED 5-8) is ensured by universities, academies, institutes, higher education schools, and other such, named higher education institutions or universities. The structure of the higher education reflects the principles of the Bologna process: Bachelor studies, Master studies and PhD studies.

The national educational system:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Romania:Overview>

<sup>2</sup> [http://keszei.chem.elte.hu/Bologna/Romania\\_Law\\_of\\_National\\_Education.pdf](http://keszei.chem.elte.hu/Bologna/Romania_Law_of_National_Education.pdf)

- *has an open character*, allowing the mobility of pupils, by transfer from a school unit to another school unit, from a class to another class, from a field of study to another field of study and from a pathway to another pathway.
- *has a pluralistic character* (public or private schools, in educational alternative system) and it provides schooling methods in the official state language (the Romanian language), in the native languages of the pupils belonging to the national minorities or in languages of international circulation.

The state ensures equal rights of access to all levels and forms of pre-university and higher education, as well as to lifelong learning, without any form of discrimination, to Romanian citizens, as well as to the citizens of the other European Union member states, of the states belonging to the European Economic Area and of the Swiss Confederation. In accordance with the Law of Education N° 1/2011, the pre-university education system is undergoing a curricular reform, currently at the level of secondary school education. The Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research defines the national curriculum at all levels of education and sets the studies certification procedures.

National pre-university<sup>3</sup> educational system includes the following levels:

Type of education	Type of institution	Age	Grades	<i>Compulsory Education</i> Non-Compulsory Education
<b>Early childhood education and care - International Standard Classification on Education – ISCED 0</b>				
MENCS is not responsible	Nursery Care	0-3 years	-	Non-Compulsory Education
MENCS is responsible	Kindergartens	3-6 years	-	Non-Compulsory Education
<b>Primary education - International Standard Classification on Education – ISCED 1 - MoE is responsible</b>				
	<b>School</b>	6-11 years	Preparatory class 1 <sup>st</sup> -4 <sup>th</sup> Grades	<b>Compulsory Education</b> 5 years
<b>Secondary education -International Standard Classification on Education -ISCED 2+ISCED 3,MoE is responsible</b>				
<b>Lower secondary education - ISCED 2</b>	<b>School</b>	11-15 years	5 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> Grades	<b>Compulsory Education</b> 4 years
<b>Upper secondary education - ISCED 3</b>	<b>High school</b> 4/5 years	15-19 years	9 <sup>th</sup> -12/13 <sup>th</sup> Grades	<b>Compulsory Education</b> 2 years 9-10 <sup>th</sup> Grades
<b>Vocational secondary education - ISCED 3</b>	<b>Vocational School - 3 years</b>	15-18 years	9 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup> Grades	<b>Compulsory Education</b> 2 years 9-10 <sup>th</sup> Grades
<b>Post-secondary non-tertiary education - International Standard Classification on Education -ISCED 4- MoE is responsible</b>				
Post-secondary education	Post-secondary schools/colleges	19-22 years	1-3 years of qualifications routes	Non-Compulsory Education

<sup>3</sup> <http://edu.ro/descriere>

<b>Special Education and special integrated education</b> – part of Romanian national education system- MoE is responsible	
<i>It is organized at all levels of school education, depending on the type of child /youth disability, such as: mental, hearing, vision, physical associated. Special education provides to all children, students and youth educational programs adapted to the degree of deficiency and their development needs.</i>	<b>Compulsory Education</b> 11 years
<b>National Minority Education</b> - part of Romanian national education system - MoE is responsible	
<i>Through education with teaching in minority languages means: the type of education in which all disciplines are studying their mother tongue, except discipline Romanian language and literature, that type of education for pupils belonging to national minorities who attend schools with tuition in Romanian or in a language other than their mother tongue.</i>	<b>Compulsory Education</b> 11 years

Please see the inserted document **Annex 1** with the structure of Education System in Romania:



Structure of the  
Romania education sy

### *Factors contributing to students leaving the education system early in Romania*

According with EU definition, *early leaver from education and training*, previously named **early school leaver**<sup>4</sup>, refers to a person aged 18 to 24 who has completed at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training; the indicator 'early leavers from education and training' is expressed as a percentage of the people aged 18 to 24 with such criteria out of the total population aged 18 to 24. Most countries have developed their own national definition of early leavers, in addition to the EU definition, that frames the policy debate of the country in this area and forms the basis of specific national data collections. The Czech Republic, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Malta, *Romania* and Slovakia are the only countries where the EU definition is the main one used to describe ELET - Early Leaving from Education and Training.

The early school leaving <sup>5</sup>rate in Romania remains well above the EU average, 19.1% in 2015, with a higher degree of likely occurrence between the primary and secondary school; 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 labor market relevance of higher education is inadequate; and the tertiary attainment rate remains the second lowest in the Union. Early school leaving is an obvious problem for Romania, especially in rural areas; over 25% of people in rural areas complete primary education or have not completed any formal education cycle. According with the data provided by Eurostat on National Europe 2020 indicators, for tertiary education the percentage of 1.1 points it was below target in 2015, however Romania made strong progress towards its target by raising the tertiary educational

<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early\\_school\\_leaver&redirect=no](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Early_school_leaver&redirect=no)

<sup>5</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe\\_2020\\_indicators\\_-\\_education#Early\\_leaving\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_is\\_declining](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Europe_2020_indicators_-_education#Early_leaving_from_education_and_training_is_declining)

attainment rate by 9.6 percentage points between 2008 and 2015. In contrast, the share of early leavers from education and training increased to 19.1 % in the same time period, widening the distance to the national target to 7.8 percentage points. Early school leaving has important social and economic implications, and is a major contributing factor to social exclusion later in life for young people and maintain the circle of poverty

**Figure: National Europe 2020 indicators most recent data and targets -Romania**

	Data	Year	Target
Employment rate age group 20–64 (%)	66.0	2015	70
Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (% of GDP)	0.38	2014	2
Greenhouse gas emissions in non-ETS sectors (% change since ESD base year)	– 6.5	2012	19
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption (%)	24.9	2014	24
Primary energy consumption (million tonnes of oil equivalent)	30.8	2014	43.0
Early leavers from education and training (% of population aged 18–24)	19.1	2015	11.3
Tertiary educational attainment (% of population aged 30–34)	25.6	2015	26.7
People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (thousands)	8 397	2014	8 838

Data presented in the Romanian National Strategy for Children Right 2014-2020 shows that more than 170,000 children of compulsory education age were not attending school (excluding preparatory class), many of them now having the prospect of not never return to school.

School dropout and functional illiteracy may be considered two major education problems with implications in many other areas (economy, social protection, serious consequences such as unemployment, social exclusion and poverty) as reflected by the national statistics and researches<sup>6</sup> led by World Vision Romania. Every year, nearly 40,000 children dropout of school (the dropout rate is higher in rural areas). In Romania, the dropout rate is increasing over 18%, about 12,000 primary school pupils and more than 28,000 enrolled in lower secondary quit the system each year. The National Institute of Statistics shows that in 2013, almost 366,000 children aged 3-17 years were not enrolled in any form of education, although they had reached the minimum age to attend school.

The main factors<sup>7</sup> that is contributing to early school leaving in Romania are:

*1. Socio-economic status of family – including a high rate of poverty at household level, especially for children and youth living at risk of poverty or social exclusion.*

The main explanations for early school leaving, identified both by schools and families, are economic.

Even through the Law of Education N° 1/2011 and the Constitution guarantees the right of every child to education, and says that compulsory education is free of cost, many families in Romania

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.worldvision.ro/bunastare2014.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Leaving education and training early is acknowledged to be the result of factors which belong to two main categories that interact with each other: school-based factors and factors related to the individual, family and social background (Thibert, 2013).

starting from preschool level of education until at higher level bear the hidden costs of supporting their children's education, excepting the payment of the school staff and school maintenance, the parents have to spend a sum that is one and a half higher than the one allocated by the State for a child. Parents have to pay for supplementary tuition, school supplies, transportation to school, sport and school equipment for child, and occasionally for refurbishment and maintenance of the school-buildings, payment of private security staff when local budget can not cover these costs, etc. The existence of these "hidden costs" of education creates major disadvantages for children coming from poorer families who cannot afford such contributions, and can cause non-enrolment, school dropout and finally early leaving of school due to additional costs.

In a ranking conducted at EU level, the poverty rate<sup>8</sup> in Romania continues to be among the highest in the EU, 51 % of children living in a household at risk of poverty or social exclusion (compared to the EU-28 average of 27.7%), which is almost half of the whole cohort. Furthermore, the share among families with children living in poverty is almost twice as high as the share of people living in poverty in the childless population. That why, poor students lag behind most wealthy and their access to upper secondary and post-secondary is limited. This discrepancy contains an important spatial factor, since a large proportion of poor families come from two of the poorest regions: north-eastern and south-western of Romania.

**Table 1: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by age group, 2014 (% of specified population) Source: Eurostat ([ilc\\_peps01](#)).**

	Total	Children (0–17)	Adults (18–64)	Elderly (65 years and over)
EU-28	24.4	27.8	25.4	17.8
EA-18	23.5	25.6	25.1	16.0
Belgium	21.2	23.2	21.6	17.3
Bulgaria (*)	40.1	45.2	36.4	47.8
Czech Republic	14.8	19.5	14.6	10.7
Denmark	17.9	14.5	21.3	10.8
Germany	20.6	19.6	22.0	17.4
Estonia (*)	26.0	23.8	24.0	35.0
Ireland	27.4	30.3	29.2	13.0
Greece	36.0	36.7	40.1	23.0
Spain	29.2	35.8	31.8	12.9
France	18.5	21.6	19.9	10.1
Croatia	29.3	29.0	29.3	29.7
Italy	28.3	32.1	30.0	20.2
Cyprus	27.4	24.7	28.3	27.2
Latvia	32.7	35.3	30.0	39.3
Lithuania	27.3	28.9	25.6	31.9
Luxembourg	19.0	26.4	19.4	6.4
Hungary	31.1	41.4	31.5	18.1
Malta	23.8	31.3	21.8	23.3
Netherlands	16.5	17.1	18.9	6.9
Austria	19.2	23.3	18.9	15.7
Poland	24.7	28.2	25.2	18.2
Portugal	27.5	31.4	28.3	21.1
Romania	40.2	51.0	38.7	34.0
Slovenia	20.4	17.7	21.3	20.1
Slovakia	18.4	23.6	18.1	13.4
Finland	17.3	15.6	17.9	17.0
Sweden	16.9	16.7	17.2	16.5
United Kingdom	24.1	31.3	23.2	19.3
Iceland	11.2	13.7	11.0	7.3
Norway	13.5	11.9	15.0	9.9
Switzerland (*)	16.3	17.2	12.7	29.6
FYR of Macedonia	43.2	46.9	43.1	38.4
Serbia	43.1	43.4	44.8	36.6

(\*) 2014 Break in time series.  
 (\*) 2014 data not available; 2013 data instead.

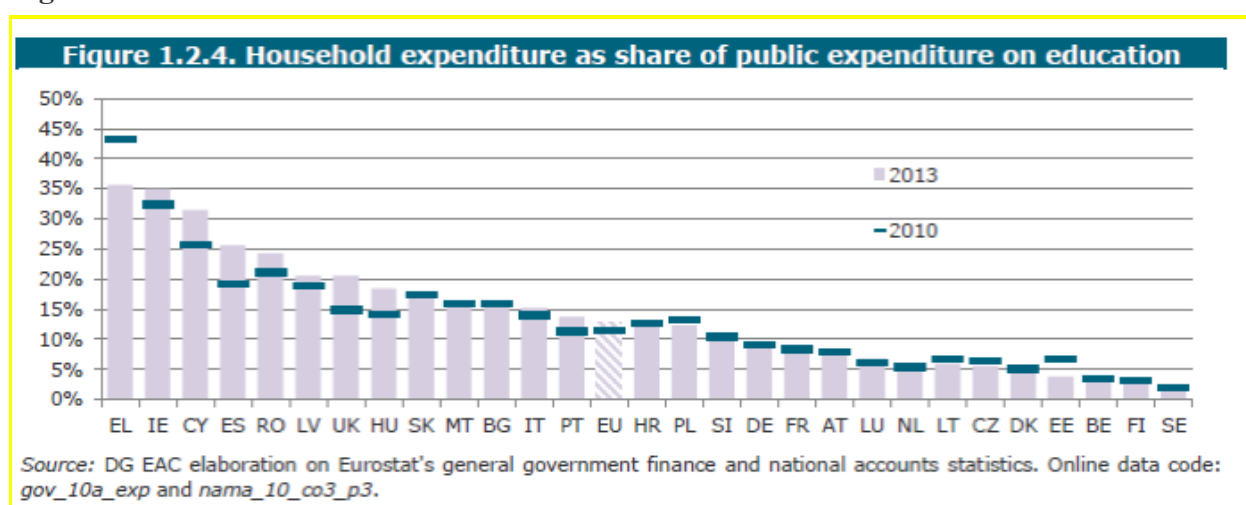
<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion)

According with data provided by the Education and Training Monitor 2015, *Household expenditure and student expenses*<sup>9</sup> plays a pivotal role in financing the education and training system, has increased in importance in recent years.

Figure 1.2.4 shows the aggregate expenditure by households on education, as a proportion of public expenditure on education. This indicator covers spending on all levels of education, as well as expenditure that is not linked to a specific education level.

The household share of education expenditure provides a rough measure of the burden borne by households as a whole, as opposed to the burden on the public sector, in financing the education and training system<sup>10</sup>.

**Figure 1.2.4**



In 2013, the share of household spending in the EU was about 13% on average, and fluctuated considerably across the EU Member States: from 36% in EL to no more than 2% in SE. Besides EL, also IE, CY, ES, RO, LV and UK recorded high levels of household contributions (higher than 20%). For Romania has a higher percentage, almost 25% household contribution share of education expenditures, in the conditions that 51% of people under 18 years are at risk of poverty. On the other hand, in EE, BE, FI and SE, household contributions were below 5%. In higher education, household expenditure generally means costs paid by students and their families.

Due to the lack of resources and opportunities, parents often leave the country and look for work abroad. In Romania, the children left behind when their parents go to work abroad is already a phenomenon. (In March 2016, according to the data provided by National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption, 91.400<sup>11</sup> children had at least one parent who migrated for work.). World

<sup>9</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/publications/monitor15\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/monitor15_en.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The indicator is, however, to some extent biased, as data are not consolidated and include transfers between the public and private sectors.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.copii.ro/statistici/>



Vision Romania study (2014) – “Welfare of the child in rural area”<sup>12</sup> point the situations where one or more children in the family have stopped, temporarily or permanently school were due to the following reasons:

- 45% of adults who reported cases of interruption of school in their family and explained the reasons for the interruption indicated lack of possibilities for the family to cover child expenses for continuing education.
- 37% of adults who reported poor school performance results of school children have been the reason of school interruption.
- 18% of adults who reported a variety of reasons for school interruption, including: child health (illness or disability), leaving it with parents abroad, repetition and child refusal of going to school. In isolated cases, the reasons were related to marriage or child engaging in various jobs in the household family or neighbours.

The National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving (ESL) adopted by Romanian Government in 2015, identified more factors that are related with the family status that determine ESL:

<b>Factors influencing student / family demand on education</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low level of income per family, as a financial burden to support the collateral costs of education, especially among poor families and disadvantaged</li> <li>2. Low accessibility of education services in remote rural areas</li> <li>3. Involving children in seasonal employment activities and care for younger siblings</li> <li>4. Migration parents in some communities' abroad (leading to temporary withdrawal from school)</li> <li>5. The education level of parents, particularly the mother's education</li> <li>6. How to perceive the benefits of schooling in the family</li> <li>7. Children with disabilities and special educational needs</li> <li>8. Health, early marriage and / or pregnancy, other personal reasons</li> <li>9. Poverty, limited employment opportunities and low participation in parent education in many rural communities / suburban; high rate of Roma children is also associated with poverty and, in some cases, cultural factors</li> </ol>

## *2. Lack of Public Investement and Expenditure in Education and Continuous professional training of teachers*

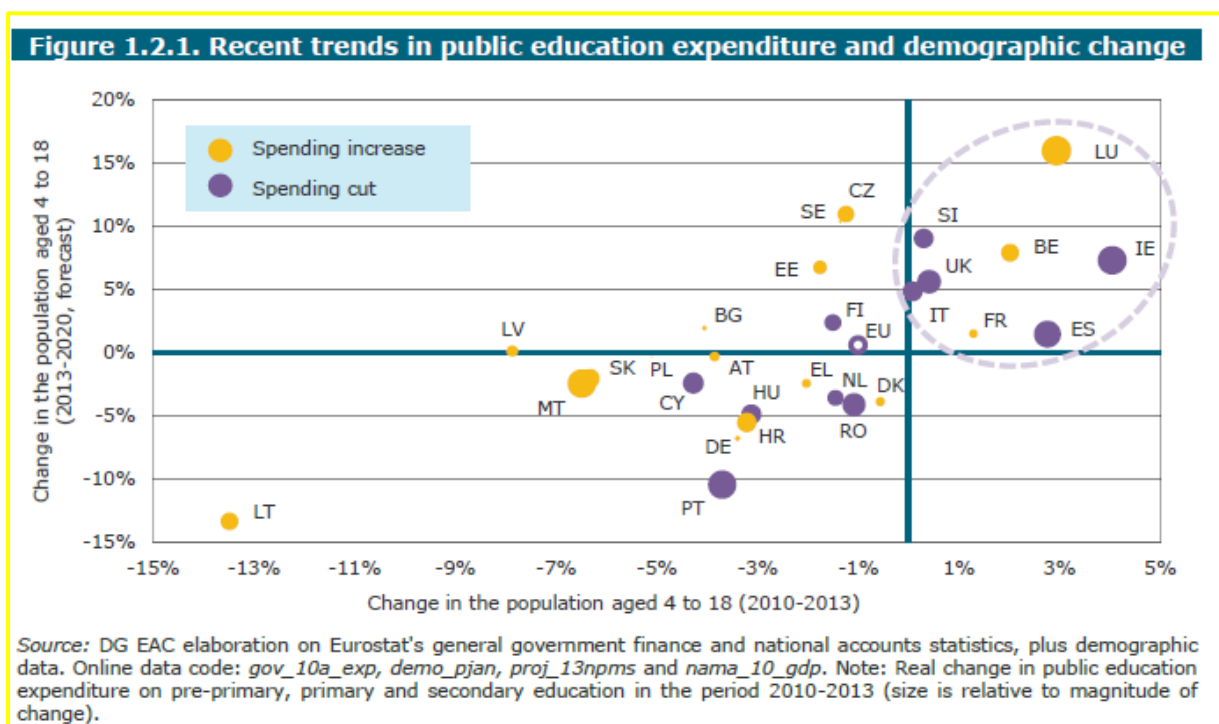
Romanian education system is severely underfinanced. Despite that the Law of Education N° 1/2011 introduces positive changes, the implementation of its provisions is hampered by Government's decision to postpone for two years (2014) the application of the article guaranteeing that the education should receive 6% of the GDP and to allocate a much lower percent. Romania is the European Member State with the smallest annual expenditure per student.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.worldvision.ro/bunastare2014.pdf>

Romania as an Eastern European country, passed through many changes occurred with the end of the communist era, so the education system has undergone many transformations, which started with the removal of political education in 1990. During the past 26 years, it was a lack of stability or consensus on how education should be run, Romania had 22 ministers of Education, each of them with a different approach and those frequently changes in the Ministry structure and leadership, which have not led to finalize of a good reform in education.

Romania is at the bottom of the list when it comes to public spending on education as a percentage of GDP. This in turn makes it difficult for the most vulnerable groups to access education and also causes inequalities between different regions. The educational infrastructure also lacks the capacity to support a decent standard of living.

According with data provided by the Education and Training Monitor 2015<sup>13</sup>, in the EU as a whole, public expenditure on education started declining in real terms in 2011. With a third consecutive drop in 2013 (-0.5%), public expenditure on education has now recorded a 3.2% fall since 2010 (Table 1.2.1). A closer look at country performance reveals that the most recent drop of 2013 is due to expenditure decreases in eleven Member States (DK, EE, IE, ES, IT, NL, PL, PT, **RO**, FI, UK).<sup>14</sup> The persistence of this negative trend is not due to one-off cuts all across Europe, but rather to consecutive reductions in the same group of Member States. Romania has recorded a decrease of its education budget for two consecutive years (since 2008).



<sup>13</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/publications/monitor15\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/monitor15_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Four of them (IE, ES, IT, RO) recorded a level of education expenditure below the EU average, when measured as a share of both GDP and total public expenditure, for all four years covered in Table 1.2.1.

At the EU level, whereas expenditure on primary and pre-primary education decreased in 2013, the secondary education budget barely changed, and expenditure on tertiary education actually increased. Despite these differences across education levels, no less than seven Member States, including **Romania** cut their spending *at all three levels* (EE, IE, ES, IT, PL, RO, FI)<sup>15</sup>.

According to the National Statistics Institute Data in 2013 public education systems in Romania have reached the equivalent money only the 2.5% of GDP, in 2014 received 3.2% of GDP and in 2015 received 3.7% of GDP equivalent, according to the budget law. The largest investor in education in the world is Sweden, which grants public education institutions, budgets which represents 7% of its GDP, followed closely by Finland and Belgium. However, Romania is the first country in the top of the weakest investments in education, with annual budgets twice as small as those in Germany, Spain or Poland.

The National Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving (ESL) adopted by Romanian Government in 2015, identified more factors that are related with the educational offer that determine ESL:

<b>Factors influencing educational offer</b>	
1.	Insufficient number of places and the limited availability of Second-chance programs, Initial Vocational and Technical Education (IVTE) and After school complementary program in rural and poor communities
2.	Insufficient number of places for apprenticeships and traineeship
3.	Lack of infrastructure at nurseries, especially in rural areas
4.	Insufficient infrastructure at IVTE
5.	Poor quality of the IVTE current system of in some schools
6.	Insufficient correlation between education and local economic specifics
7.	Quality, processes and educational practices: behavioral problems at school, especially in terms of teachers attitude towards students (and each other) or teachers' attitude towards parents
8.	Insufficient support for students from minority groups
9.	The quality of teaching and learning: skills and teaching methods teachers are not correlated with modern methods and are inadequate to meet the needs of groups at risk; teaching methods are inadequate; lack of learning resources available in schools; students are unable to promote national exam at the end of class VIII; teachers are not motivated
10.	The school environment - lack of communication between the various levels of the education system and parents / community and other relevant institutions locally
11.	The lack of availability of additional financial resources at MENCS: budgetary allocations and personnel were insufficient to address ESL; conditions in schools are inadequate
12.	Lack of school counselors or psychologists to help children with special educational needs; students with disabilities do not receive adequate support
13.	Lack of reliable, transparent and timely hinder the sector's ability to adequately monitor trends early school leaving
14.	Weak correlation between the education system and the skills and knowledge needs of the labor market
15.	Limited financial allocation per pupil from the school budget (for the number of students is small) covering only basic administrative costs and teacher salaries with no funds available for specific measures on ESL.

### 3. Poor coordination among key stakeholders at national and local level

<sup>15</sup> Note, however, that spending in PL and FI remains above the EU average and in EE *significantly* above the EU average (as a share of public expenditure).

Education is a fundamental child right, the educational system and child protection system operate with different concepts, approaches and instruments to achieve it. The ESL is determined both by social causes and by educational system's dynamics. The ESL rates are influenced by the lack of a socio-educational and holistic approach of child and youth participation in school. The educational system lacks a mechanism of multi-disciplinary intervention on ESL, both at local and regional/national level. There is a lack of cooperation and knowledge sharing between the specialists from the social and the educational field for early identification of ESL. The specialists from education and child protection could work together to design an action plan for the children that is at risk of ESL. To accomplish a good cooperation, it is necessary to have public policies to ensure the coherence between the two systems educational and social protection, so that every child has his rights protected. Another connected problem would be the lack of social assistants specialized to be case managers (in rural areas, the social protection payments) insufficient human resources in the social field, community advisory councils are not functional (activated only on paper, there is no coordination and a system for reporting or accountability of members who are working voluntarily).

### *Vulnerable groups of student identifiable as at risk in Romania: schools: facts and figures*

According with data provided by National Institute of Statistic, at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, Romania's total population is about 19,870,647 inhabitants. Among them:

- Children under 18 years: 3.734.667
- Children in the system of special protection of children: 57.279

In Romania, early school leaving is prevalent especially among certain groups in risk, children and young people in rural communities, children from families with modest incomes, children with disabilities, Roma and other minorities, and students who have repeated at least one year or abandoned.

- ✓ *Children and young people in rural communities* - UNICEF Romania study from 2014 - School participation in upper secondary education<sup>16</sup>, showed that children in rural areas represent the population of upper secondary education age most at risk of school nonattendance. Even though almost half of school-age children living in rural areas, they represent only about 24% of students in upper secondary education. The dropout rate was 1.5 times higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Over 25% of people in rural areas complete primary education or have not completed any formal education cycle, while in urban areas, only 2.6% had similar levels of education.

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<sup>16</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/romania/Participarea\\_la\\_edu\\_inv\\_sec\\_en\\_site.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/romania/Participarea_la_edu_inv_sec_en_site.pdf)

- ✓ *Children left behind* (children had at least one parent who migrated for work) when their parents go to work abroad is already a phenomenon. These children being left under the care of a tutor or grandparents drastically decrease school performance and school participation (frequency, dropout). The low school performance and potentially school dropout is due to lack of oversight from their caregivers. Parents are no longer interested in their child school situation and no longer communicate with school.
- ✓ *Children from families with modest incomes and Roma children* - according to recent studies, the main reasons for ESL, identified as educational actors, and families are directly associated financial difficulties. The Roma population is the most vulnerable to them, and the situation is even worse for Roma girls because of poor living conditions and traditions. The proportion<sup>17</sup> of almost 20% of Roma children in the population segment 15-18 years are outside the education system, this reflects their disadvantaged situation in terms of education.
- ✓ *Children and youth with special educational needs*. Romania held traditionally, special education services in specialized schools (special education). Since 1998, they implemented a series of measures to integrate these children into mainstream education. Therefore, the total number of students enrolled in special education dropped by 60%, from 55 237 in 1998 to 25 902 in 2012.
- ✓ *Students who repeat or drop out of school* - According to INS statistics on enrolments in 2012, 1,970,916 students were enrolled in compulsory education up to Grade X. However, the same statistics also indicate that 173 356 pupils age appropriate going through compulsory education are not enrolled in the education system, which is 16.1% of the total population of students;

### *Strategies, policies and measures against early leaving adopted in Romania*

Measures aimed at reducing early school leaving have been introduced by all Member States, but do not always add up to comprehensive strategies, as required by the 2011 Council Recommendation<sup>18</sup>, or to equivalent evidence-based policies. A successful response requires longterm commitment and cross-sectoral cooperation, focusing on the right mix of prevention, early intervention and compensation measures. School-based early school leaving policies should include collaborative approaches, the active involvement of parents, partnerships with external stakeholders and the community, measures to support the well-being of pupils and high-quality guidance and counselling, ensuring that each pupil has an equal chance to access, participate in and benefit from high-quality education and enabling all learners to reach their full potential.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.unicef.ro/wp-content/uploads/Raport-OOSC-Invatamant-Secundar-Superior\\_final.pdf](http://www.unicef.ro/wp-content/uploads/Raport-OOSC-Invatamant-Secundar-Superior_final.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> The United Kingdom voted against this Recommendation.

Education system in Romania has been reinforced repeatedly over recent decade and taken significant steps to implement the reform. National Education Law (no. 1/2011)<sup>19</sup> provides the legal framework for the exercise of the basic right to lifetime an education under the authority of the Romanian state. These Law with subsequent amendments introduced changes with emphasis on new cycles of education and early childhood education, transition to a competency-based curriculum; new systems of professional development, assessment strategies; Pre-university education funding reforms in decentralized context.

During the period 2013-2016, Romania adopted a national a set of national strategies on education that are correlated with the Strategy Europa 2020<sup>20</sup> which has set up five ambitious objectives on employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and climate/energy to be reached by 2020.

For education the goal is to reduce the ESL rates at 11.3 %, with at least 40 % of 30–34-year-olds completing tertiary education. Also a national program for early childhood education and care that was designed for the period 2014-2019, comes into effect in the 2016 school year.

**Table: Major intervention policies implemented in 2013 – 2014**

*(translated from national strategy for reducing early school leaving)*

<i>Policy / Program</i>	<i>Individual Allocation/ years</i>	<i>Number of beneficiary</i>	<i>Budget sources</i>
<b>Prevention Policies/program</b>			
Providing school buses	N/A	500 school buses	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration
Extension of compulsory education to 10 years	N/A	-	Ministry of Education
The provision of free of charge textbooks = <i>(the textbooks from students are taught by one generation on to another).</i>	N/A	Children from 1 <sup>st</sup> to 10th Grades	Ministry of Education
Rehabilitation of school infrastructure	N/A	320 location	Ministry of Education
Project reform of early childhood education	N/A	13.000 kindergartens	Ministry of Education
After School Program	N/A	-	-
Inclusive Early Childhood Education Program	N/A	5.000 children	Ministry of Education
Project - For your health, reduce school abandonment in your school.	N/A	150 villages	Ministry of Education (ESF)
Key competencies for virtual games in kindergartens		3.120 children, 700 parents ,156 teachers	
Integrated educational program to facilitate the transition from primary to secondary education.	N/A	Children from 4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grades	Ministry of Education (ESF)

<sup>19</sup> [http://keszei.chem.elte.hu/Bologna/Romania\\_Law\\_of\\_National\\_Education.pdf](http://keszei.chem.elte.hu/Bologna/Romania_Law_of_National_Education.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/europe\\_2020\\_explained.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/europe_2020_explained.pdf)



<b>Compensation Program</b>			
Second Chance Program – <i>developed in primary and secondary schools</i>	Primary and secondary schools	8.143 students	Ministry of Education/ ESF.
<b>Intervention Program</b>			
Assistance for students with special educational needs – <i>provided by County Resource Educational and Assistances Centers</i>	-	16.609 students	Ministry of Education and Local Budgets.
Organize and extend the after-school program including remedial education	-	5.550 students	Ministry of Education/ ESF.
Minimum Insertion Income - social inclusion program for poor families.	204 RON (45euro) / month/average per family	2.197.928 families	Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection
Family support allowance paid to families with incomes up to 530 lei per family member. The benefit is conditioned on school attendance by children of school age	40 RON-1 child 80 RON-2children 120 RON-3 children 160 RON-4 children+	260.567 families	Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection
Providing free school supplies to prepare children with low income for the school year. The program targets children from families with a net monthly income per family member not exceeding 50% of the national gross minimum wage.	24 RON- per primary student 28 RON-per secondary student	<u>722.198 students</u>	Ministry of Education
"Milk and Bread" government program and Fruit program for children in kindergarten, primary and lower secondary education (public and private)	0.7 RON/per child/per school day/primary education 1.17 RON/ per child/ per school day/ secondary education. 0.37 RON / per child/ per school day/ primary and secondary education.	2.150.000 students	<u>Ministry of Agriculture</u> (EU funds)
"Money for High School" Program for 4.1% beneficiaries of all students enrolled IX grade, of which 50% of the students are from families with no income.	150 RON /per student/ per month	115.142 students	Ministry of Education
"EURO 200" program for the purchase of a computer - for poor children (maximum income of 150 RON per family) with presence and good school results (for 2% <u>beneficiaries from</u> of all students enrolled)	900 RON /per <u>student</u>	21.091 students	Ministry of Education
Participation in national examinations - quality assurance program for Human Resources	177 RON /per <u>student</u> /	238.100 students	Ministry of Education
Support for all students enrolled in Secondary Vocational Education: recognition, facilities, scholarships, training allowances.	200 RON /per student/ per month	19.734 students	Ministry of Education

In 2015, Romanian Government adopted *three national strategies* for the next five years in education area:

- *Strategy for Lifelong Learning*<sup>21</sup> - the objectives are to increased participation in lifelong learning, and increasing the relevance of education and training for the labor market.

<sup>21</sup> <http://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/sedinte-guvern/strategia-nationala-de-invatare-pe-tot-parcursul-vietii>

- *Strategy for Reducing Early School Leaving (ESL)*<sup>22</sup> - the objective is to reduce early school leaving rate by six percentage points, from 17.3% in 2013 to 11.3% in 2020, reaching the target assumed by Romania in the Europe 2020 strategy.
- *Strategy for Tertiary Education*<sup>23</sup> - the objective is to increase the relevance of higher education by aligning it more closely with labor market needs and to improve the accessibility of higher education for disadvantaged groups. Measures have been implemented to improve vocational education and training and apprenticeships schemes due to the same reason.

National Strategy to reduce ESL it is the first concrete strategic action plan that Romania developed since join to EU, due to ex ante condition impose by EU comission. The ESL strategy was developed with the support of the World Bank and validated through a working group from Ministry of Education which included all representative institutions in the education system, , social partners. World Vision Romania participated and contributes to the strategy with data from WVR researches, studies, information from field and best practices. The national strategy on reducing early school leaving is a condition imposed by Brussels validates the Structural Funds for 2014-2020 (POCU). The strategy brings together a set of measures proposed for implementation by reducing PTS targeting (early school leaving) from 18.1% in 2014 to 11.3% 2020.

National Strategy to reduce ESL for period 2015-2020 is based on four pillars and six representative programs that include prevention, intervention and compensation, which were identified on evidence-based and best practice examples from Romania and other countries, that have proven their effectiveness in preventing early school leaving. A summary of the main measures implemented by the Government in education area is presented in table below; many of the preventive measures listed correspond to pilot projects in order to prevent and reduce ESL. A significant part of the current public expenditure is allocated to interventions at the individual level (all social assistance programs). However, there are some compensatory measures that are successful, but these measures operate on a small scale.

National ESL strategy also aims to provide every child access to an education or training until at least age 16 and graduating from the 10th. Pillars and representative programs under this strategy are:

1. Pillar 1 - Providing access to education and quality education for all children. Two representatives programs:
  1. *Increase access to early childhood care and education - program that aims mainly to strengthen early education of children for the completion of pre-school (3-6 years), but and expanding the provision of early education for children under 3 years.*

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<sup>22</sup> <http://gov.ro/ro/stiri/guvernul-a-aprobat-strategia-privind-reducerea-parasirii-timpurii-a-colii>

<sup>23</sup> <http://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/sedinte-guvern/guvernul-a-aprobat-strategia-nationala-pentru-invatamantul-tertiar-2015-2020>



2. *Ensuring quality primary and secondary education - program that will focus on the development of functional literacy and key competencies of students and strengthening the ongoing training of teachers.*
2. Pillar II - Ensure completion of compulsory education to all children. Two representative programs:
  - 2.1 *Developing early warning systems and early intervention to identify children at risk of leaving school, and strengthening and expanding preventive and remedial measures, including the program "School after school".*
  - 2.2 *Enhancing the attractiveness, quality and relevance of technical and vocational education, including expanding learning opportunities in the workplace. The program will also support, curricular reform of vocational and technical education and teacher training.*
3. Pillar III - reintegration into the education system of people who left school early. For this pillar is considered a program to help early school leavers, by providing access and participation in the program "Second Chance", but also improve the quality itself the "Second Chance".
4. Pillar IV - Development of appropriate institutional support. Program representative for this pillar aims to help create a favorable environment for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategy.

Each of the above pillars is further operationalized through specific programs.<sup>24</sup> For example, Pillar 2 focuses on the development of *early warning systems* and the growth of programs that target children at risk of dropout before completing the compulsory education. Such tools are meant to assist teachers in identifying the students who, for various reasons, are likely to distance from school and ultimately dropout. The program "School after School" address the deficient financial sustainability of other relevant initiatives (counselling services, school mediators, and training of teachers) the implementation of which is threatened by insufficient funding. Regarding "School after School", the Strategy provides for the development of the program "through the design and implementation of an integrated scheme of grants available to schools, local NGOs, community organizations and parents/teachers associations."

### *Governance and cross-sector cooperation in the area of early leaving*

An important starting point in the process to reduce and prevent ESL *is to cultivate an inter-institutional collaboration and cross-sector cooperation as most necessary need* for the

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<sup>24</sup> For details, see Strategy regarding the reduction of early school leaving, table at page 8 and the full description of programs, pages 53-62.

implementation of National ESL strategy. Cooperation between key government entities is essential to succeed in the process of reducing/preventing ESL multi-sectors effort.

A special attention should be accorded to the collaboration between educational authorities, social and employment services to ensure the effectiveness of reforms in education and social assistance in order to reduce the ESL. An enhanced collaboration between education and youth policies is required before they can be made, to give a coherent approach, to facilitate the development of effective government policies to reduce ESL. In addition, a coordinated governmental response from Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, and Ministry of Health is necessary for Early Care and Education of Children. This type of collaboration and cross-sector cooperation may take the form of "inclusive government" - Whole of Government (WOG) approach, already adopted in other countries, including the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, UK and Singapore.

Whole of Government (WOG) - inclusive government approach it's related with the public service agencies acting beyond their portfolio to achieve a common goal and an integrated government response

to address specific issues, as ESL. Approaches can be formal and informal. They may focus on policy development, program management and service providers.

A good cooperation and collaboration within each of the three categories of stakeholders at central government agencies, government regional agencies and local level institution - schools (including school principals and teachers), parents and the general public, community groups, NGOs and private service providers, determined the success of the strategy and policy implementation on ESL in Romania.

Ministry of Education in Romania assume the role of the coordinator structure – a special unit for national cooperation and transversal integration of sectors, which facilitate the cooperation between the interesting parts, to increase the awareness level and political involvement on long term on the ESL reduction, and promote training opportunities in the area of ESL.

### *Resource Allocation for the ESL*

The strategy for ESL in Romania provides significant funding for projects and programs to reduce the rate of ESL: promoting projects and programs which operate transversely to the levels of government (local, county and central) and within each of the categories can be a good incentive for cooperation and collaboration. ESL is not a local or individual educational problem, it is a problem of Romania, and therefore, addressing the budgetary allocation to Ministry of Education, limited input from other ministries because their budgets are set based on sector-specific issues. To respond at this issue Romanian Government adopted in 2016, an Integrated Package<sup>25</sup> to reduce the poverty

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2016/05/31/romania-development-and-anti-poverty-policies>

in Romania with 47 integrated measures and action on different sectors, and allocate more funds for key measures, including increasing the employment rate, reducing early school leaving rate, scaling-up of national health programs and others will strongly contribute to narrowing the urban-rural poverty gaps. Promote this type of collaboration at all level, it will improve services to the final beneficiary – students, it will increase transparency in the design, funding and implementation of ESL program, and increase efficiency, reducing waste of using the funds in a incoherent manner.

*The cooperation and directly involvement of school staff* in activities that should inform policy makers, about ESL process is mandatory in order to influence and succeed with the ESL intervention and strategy implementation. Inspectorates and school representatives (directors) must be involved in the process of implementing initiatives to reduce the ESL as active partners in the design, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. School Principle plays an important role in communicating the concerns and experiences to the teaching and counseling staff. In addition, an important role will be played locally by the School Council which includes representatives of teachers, students, parents and local authorities. Instruments such as school development plans are critical in addressing the ESL challenges. Schools and local actors know closely the problems facing communities with the ability to identify and develop solutions locally.

### *The role of education in tackling early leaving: examples of good practices and case analysis*

In Romania, *NGOs* play an important role in the concerted efforts to increase children participation to education and fight early school leaving. Recently, UNICEF acknowledged the progress in reaching an agreement among relevant actors, including NGOs, that “integrated approaches at school, family and community levels are relevant, effective and efficient for the prevention and reduction of school dropout and absenteeism.”<sup>26</sup> . UNICEF partners with local NGOs (or the local branches of international NGOs) in the implementation of educational programs, providing both financial and technical support. One of its most successful programs targeting absenteeism and early school leaving is Come to school! “Hai la Scoala!”<sup>27</sup> - Come to school! a complex campaign launched in 2010 that includes interventions at the level of schools, families and communities.<sup>28</sup> The campaign also prompted the establishment of a *National Education Platform*<sup>29</sup> that seeks to

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<sup>26</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Romania\\_COAR\\_2013.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Romania_COAR_2013.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.unicef.ro/ce-facem/initiative/hai-la-scoala/>

<sup>28</sup> The program attracted recently the interest and financial support of Romgaz. As part of Romgaz’ s CSR strategy, a partnership with UNICEF has been perfected in 2014 for the implementation of “Hai la Scoala!” in five disadvantaged communities from Buzau, Dambovită, Neamț, Prahova and Suceava. <http://www.csrmedia.ro/romgaz-spriijina-copiii-sa-mearga-la-scoala-prin-intermediul-unicef/>

<sup>29</sup> National Platform for Education. The project is supported by: FONPC, the two relevant ministries (M. of Education; M. of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly), UNICEF Romania, Embassy of France, and World Vision Romania.

translate the strategic partnership between the public, private and NGO sector into specific directions of actions, including the harmonization of common strategies and interventions.<sup>30</sup>

A preliminary mapping of the NGOs sector reveal at least two types of *profiles of organizations* active in the educational area with a specific component targeting access to education of vulnerable children and prevention of early school leaving.

*Organizations that develop educational programs and specifically target vulnerable children (e.g. World Vision Romania, Save the Children, Ovidiu Ro, Roma Education Fund).*

This category of organizations often add to their educational programs and community interventions a substantial component of reporting and impact research. Examples of initiatives:

*World Vision Romania (WVR):* In reaction to these realities, WVR advocate since 2010 at local and national level, in order to prevent school dropout at the community level and directly support families with children at risk, by counseling, material support, implement remedial education, after school and scholarship program, provide support to schools in rural area to develop action plan for ESL. Later in 2014, add Parents' school intervention to increase parental awareness on the long-life effects of lack of education, and the children's rights, including support needed by children who experience a hard time integrating in school. Another area of work was to increase the quality of education, through Citizen Voice Action<sup>31</sup> for education project and resources for non-formal education activities for children.

Type of current interventions developed by WVR in the area of ELS was developed during the last 3 years through strenght local and national partnerships in order to reduce and prevent ESL at community level, educate parents, capacitate teachers, schools and communities to respond at children and youth needs. The area of intervention in the last thre years was extented at national level, due to the acces of EU funds to implement project in education. Please see the table with detailed intervention and best practices:

Type of WVR intervention in education area 2013-2016	Children	Funds
Education extracurricular projects, including life skills programs and summer school.	3-18 years	WVR – international funds
Remedial Education (tutoring) projects with volunteer's teacher's.	6-14 years	WVR – international funds
Parental School Education (parents of children)	Parents	WVR – international funds
After School Programs - <a href="http://www.painesimaine.ro/">http://www.painesimaine.ro/</a>	6-11 years	WVR Local funds
Educational Centers "Choose School"- <a href="http://alegescoala.ro">http://alegescoala.ro</a>	6-18 years	EU – ESF funds
Scholarship Program - <a href="http://www.worldvision.ro/vreau-in-clasa-a-noua/">www.worldvision.ro/vreau-in-clasa-a-noua/</a>	14-18 years	WVR Local funds

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.pentrueducatie.ro/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.wvi.org/local-advocacy/publication/citizen-voice-and-action-project-model>

Life Skills projects: EDI Student <a href="https://sites.google.com/site/elevuledi/">https://sites.google.com/site/elevuledi/</a> Student today, Farmer Tomorrow- <a href="http://fermierdeviitor.ro/">http://fermierdeviitor.ro/</a>	14-18 years	EU funds
<i>Capacity Building programs for schools and local structures - Pupils Councils and Parents Committee and Associations</i>	Community level	WVR – international funds
<i>Community based intervention program with local authorities to reduce the school dropout</i>	Community level	WVR – international funds
<i>Awareness Campaigns on Education &amp; Children Rights and Local Level Advocacy- Citizen Voice Action for education.</i>	Community and National level	WVR – international funds
<i>Research and studies on education- used in National advocacy activities- <a href="http://www.worldvision.ro/studii-i-rapoarte-a119.html">http://www.worldvision.ro/studii-i-rapoarte-a119.html</a></i>	National level	WVR – international funds and EU funds

*Save the Children*: Educational Centers established in schools via partnerships in Bucharest and eight other big cities. The Centers target children at risk from disadvantaged families and host programs of the type School after School and Second Chance.<sup>32</sup> For preschool children, the organization carried in 2013 a program that sought an improved integration of pupils Equal opportunities for all children in a non-discriminatory society<sup>33</sup>

*Ovidiu Ro*: focused on preschool education, under the premise that early education lowers the risk to later school dropout. Its main program: Fiecare Copil in Gradinita/Every Child in Preschool and Kindergarten. Main directions of actions: local action groups, with local authorities; identification of children at risk of dropout; parent engagement and training of teachers).<sup>34</sup>

*Roma Education Fund Romania* with educational programs for Roma children (Intensive Educational Support Project for 800 students grades 5-8, the program is meant to prevent dropout; A Second Chance Program in 43 schools in three areas of Romania)<sup>35</sup>, supported from EU structural funds.

Most of the above interventions include a multifaceted range of activities, in accordance with the complexity of factors that together generate the risk for early school leaving. This translates in supplementing the actual educational content of programs with creating connections and dialogue with schools, families, and local authorities. The availability of the structural funds component “*Prevention and correction of early school leaving*” for 2007-13 provided NGOs and public bodies with significant opportunities to access resources for targeted educational projects.

*Organizations with broader range of activities that include educational programs or interventions.*

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/?id2=000200020000#Educație școlară.html>

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/upload/p00060005\\_Raport%20anual%202013%20EN.pdf](http://www.salvaticopiii.ro/upload/p00060005_Raport%20anual%202013%20EN.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.ovid.ro/en/our-work/fcg-program/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://romaeducationfund.ro/lansarea-activitatilor-de-sprijin-educational-intensiv-si-a-doua-sansa-in-43-de-scoli-din-tara/>

Example: *Foundation for an Open Society*: 2011-2014: “Get the book!” /Second Chance in Education – program of early school leaving prevention targeting 21 rural communities from seven counties in Romania, financed through European Social Fund<sup>36</sup>

Another important key actor in education it is the Business sector in Romania which provide a source of initiatives in the ESL prevention consists of campaigns implemented as part of *companies' Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) strategies*. For example: Vodafone, Orange and Telekom foundation all they have target child education in the last three year, BRD & Junior Achievement - Education offers you worth – in 2014, Kaufland initiative – Olimpiads K develop in partnership with Ministry of Education and The School of Values Association, OMV Petrom initiatives CSR in education – Performance in education, Andrew country<sup>37</sup>, and other companies initiatives that support the local community to reduce and prevent ESL.

### *Final remarks*

In response to ESL situation, Romania initiated a systematic process reform from in all areas of the education and training system, placing an important role to building up the administrative capacity and policy making, promoting effective quality assurance mechanisms and improving the skills and competences of graduates for the labour market (LM) needs. However, this major reform that set a long-term agenda for upgrading the quality of education at all levels is not yet fully operational. Reflecting the educational reforms and the overall national priorities promoted by the Law of Education and objectives of the EU2020 Strategy, Romania has assumed the following targets.

Objective 2020	UE 27 targets (%)	Romania assumed targets through National Reform Programs (%)	Romania current situation (2015) (%)
<b>Early School Leaving</b>	10%	11,3%	19,1%
Tertiary Education	40%	26,7	25,6%
Country Specific Recommendations 2013: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ to speed up the education reform, including the building up of administrative capacity at both central and local level and evaluate the impact of the reforms;</li> <li>✓ to step up the reforms in VET;</li> <li>✓ to align further tertiary education with the needs of the Labor Market and to improve the access for disadvantaged people;</li> <li>✓ to implement a national strategy on Early School Leaving focusing on better access to quality early childhood education, including for Roma children</li> </ul>			

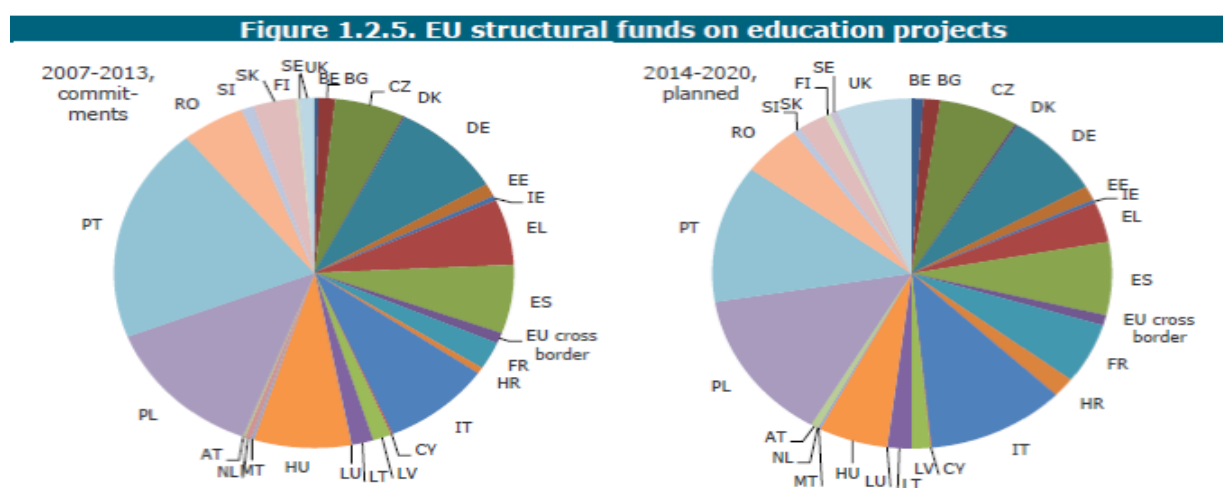
<sup>36</sup> <http://www.fundatia.ro/parte-de-carte-prevenirea-si-corectarea-parasirii-timpurii-scolii> and <http://www.fundatia.ro/en/second-chance-education-project>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.taraluiandrei.ro/>

Romania has also a major opportunity as beneficiary of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)<sup>38</sup> and can receive up to EUR 31 billion for the period 2014-2020. This is equivalent to 2.6% of GDP annually and 53% of the expected national public investment in areas supported by the ESIF. Romania will receive EUR 106 million from the Youth Employment Initiative (matched by the same amount from the European Social Fund) to implement measures targeting young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), in line with the country specific recommendations to support unregistered young people.

The EU is already supporting the education and training systems of the Member States through the ESIF and in particular through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), which finance a broad range of projects on education.

In the programming cycle 2007-2013, these projects aimed at supporting reforms of the education and training systems, increasing participation in education, developing human potential in research and innovation, as well as improving education and childcare infrastructures. The total budget committed for all these projects amounted to 36.8 billion EUR, and the Member States which benefited more from them (Figure 1.2.5) were PT (20%), PL (13%), DE (9%) and IT (9%).



Source: DG EAC elaboration on infoview data 2015. Note: 2007-2013 commitments include all the objectives under the heading *Improving human capital* and the objective *Education infrastructure and Childcare infrastructure*. 2014-2020 planned funds are provisional (pending the approval of a number of Operational Programmes), and include the intervention fields relevant to education: 115, 116, 117, 118, 049, 050, 051, 052 and (only for HR) 048.

Despite all these policies, national strategies, programs and reforms, education in Romania, according with EU, remain poor regarding the quality and equity for all children; this is completed by the fact that Romania has also one of the highest risks of poverty or social exclusion in the EU. Even several strategies cover lifelong learning, vocational education and training, tertiary education and early school leaving. However, the early school leaving rate remains well above the EU average, in part due to significant implementation delays of the measures approved in 2015.

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