



APPLE- eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from dropping out of school Education

National report: Key findings of desk research and interviews with educators and stakeholders in Romania

IO1 – Capacity Building Seminars for Educators



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National report Romania

1 Introduction: the national context

In Romania early school leaving remains a high phenomenon, with repercussions for the labour market and the economy.

In 2018, the rate of early leavers from education and training (age group 18-24) decreased for the second consecutive year to 16.4%. Although well below its peak of 19.1% in 2016, the rate remains one of the highest in the EU (EU average: 10.6%). Therefore, reaching the national target of 11.3% by 2020 is unlikely. Early school leaving persists due to a combination of factors, including socio-economic aspects and gaps in the provision of quality education. In rural areas — where poverty is highest, and the quality of education tends to be lower — one in four people aged 18-24 has left school too early. By contrast, the rate is 15% in towns and only 4.2% in cities.

Authorities are currently developing an early warning mechanism that could help improve data collection and strengthen coordination between schools, inspectorates and other relevant institutions (social assistance, NGOs, the police, the church, etc.). Through the ESF calls recently launched, the availability of second chance programmes is improving. However, the need remains to adapt programmes to the needs of adult learners.

The acquisition of basic and digital skills is still problematic. PISA 2015 shows that about 40% of Romanian 15 year-olds lack basic competences in either reading, mathematics or sciences (OECD, 2016). Implementation of the new school curriculum continues alongside the retraining of teachers. However, individualised approaches for students remain insufficiently developed. The percentage of young people (ages 16-19) who assess their digital skills as basic or above basic is below the EU average (52% compared to 83% in 2017). There are substantially fewer highly digitally equipped and connected schools in Romania than the EU average (European Commission, 2019b).

Improving equity in education remains a major challenge, alongside raising quality. An analysis of 2015 PISA scores shows that most of the gap in performance between Romania and high performing EU countries is explained by the clustering of students in schools with students of similar socioeconomic background; poorer students are not only socially segregated together, but they also attend lower quality schools (World Bank, 2018). Apart from socioeconomic background, equity challenges disproportionately affect Roma and students from rural areas, who tend to have lower educational outcomes. The percentage of Roma children attending kindergarten is less than half the national average; young Roma are more likely to drop out early from education (FRA, 2016). The monitoring methodology to tackle school segregation is

delayed but expected to be piloted in the school year 2019/2020. Taking account of these challenges, the 2019 European Semester country-specific recommendations call on Romania to 'improve the quality and inclusiveness of education, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups' (Council of the European Union, 2019).

2 Methodology

The purpose of the research was to identify training needs of educators, based on which capacity building guidelines are developed for a series of seminars to be implemented in the partner countries. The capacity building seminars would help educators enhance their knowledge and acquire or develop new skills on innovative pedagogical methods to deal with young dropouts.

The research carried out in Romania consisted in desk review of existing official data and literature, as well as empirical research carried out with educators and educational stakeholders.

A number of 10 interviews were carried out with educators, respectively education stakeholders. The participants were selected from local schools in Timisoara, all public. The profile of participants is detailed below.

a) Educators/teachers

- ▶ Female, English teacher aged 29, teaching upper secondary education
- ▶ Female, Romanian Literature teacher aged 35, teaching both lower and upper secondary education
- ▶ Female, Math teacher aged 40, teaching upper secondary education
- ▶ Female, school counsellor aged 43, also teaching social disciplines at upper secondary level
- ▶ Male, Sports teacher aged 50, teaching both lower and upper secondary education

All interviewed participants are qualified teachers and have 5 or more years of experience as permanent staff in their schools.

b) Education stakeholders

- ▶ Female, aged 40, school inspector from the County Inspectorate
- ▶ Male, aged 35, education coordinator from local NGO offering remedial educational programmes for disadvantaged children
- ▶ Female, aged 30, president of local foundation working with young people
- ▶ Female, aged 28, social worker representing community center for roma people

- ▶ Female, aged 38, psychologist at the County Center for Psychoeducational assistance

Due to the pandemic situation, the interviews were not possible to be carried out face to face. Instead, the interview grids were sent via email in advance and further discussions were carried over the phone.

3 Key findings of the desk research

3.1 Existing practices and tools for the prevention of early school leaving

Romanian Secondary Education Project – ROSE is a project having as objectives to reduce dropout in upper secondary and tertiary education and increase the rate of success at the baccalaureate exam in project-supported institutions.

The project is financed through a loan in the amount of 200 million EUR from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to Romania and is to be implemented over a period of seven years, between 2015 and 2022. The Loan Agreement was signed between the World Bank and the Government of Romania on April 17, 2015 and was ratified through Law no. 234/2015 approved by the Romanian Parliament and published in the Official Journal of Romania, Part I, no. 757/2015.

The implementation body is the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research (MNESR), through the Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects (UMEFP).

The project includes three components, the first two components aiming to address the academic and social factors leading to low school and academic performance of the Romanian students in upper secondary and tertiary education. The third component includes the day-to-day ROSE's management activities, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, as well as an analysis of existing demand-side programs that are currently under implementation, addressing the needs of disadvantaged upper secondary students.

Component 1 - School-based and Systemic Interventions

Sub-component 1.1 – School-based Interventions will finance grants to low performing public high schools, with a total value of EUR 127.3 million. The grants will be implemented for a period of 4 years, with medium size grant of EUR 100,000.

The objectives of the grants are to reduce dropout rate in the respective high schools, to increase graduation rate and improve rate of success in the baccalaureate exam.

In order to achieve the abovementioned objectives, the high schools will implement activities such as:

- (i) Undertake remedial classes, tutoring, vocational counseling and orientation, coaching, mediation with Roma communities and personal development (at least 50% of direct costs);
- (ii) Carry out extracurricular and outreach activities, such as documentary trips/visits, internships, participation in different competitions, and school networking activities (up to 30 % of direct costs);
- (iii) Contract minor civil works for renovation of internal spaces/rooms (e.g. laboratories) with minimal or no adverse environmental impacts, and purchase of goods (up to 20 % of direct costs).

The project will support about 1160 low performing public high schools, representing around 80% of the total number of public high schools.

The grant scheme will start in 2016 with aprox. 25% of the eligible high schools and will continue in 2017 with the rest of the eligible high schools.

Sub-component 1.2 – Systemic Interventions is meant to support high schools to increase the transition rate to higher education, with a total value of EUR 17.2 million, through activities such as:

- ▶ Revision of the upper secondary education curriculum;
- ▶ Training of teachers and public school directors on implementing the revised curriculum, on adapting the curriculum to the needs and abilities of different students;
- ▶ Improving teaching conditions within Teachers Houses (*Casa Corpului Didactic*);
- ▶ Revising and updating Grade 8 and Baccalaureate exam banks of items, providing training for teachers in the area of assessment and improvement of existing information and technologies platform;
- ▶ Development of digital teaching and learning materials meant to improve teaching and learning processes.

Component 2 – University-Level Interventions and Bridge Programs aiming to support the needs of students at risk of dropping out of public faculties through grants with a total value of EUR 49.1 million.

This component would finance two grant schemes – one non-competitive and one competitive.

The noncompetitive grants scheme will prioritize faculties that teach in fields of potential economic growth in Romania, such as agriculture, engineering, science and medicine.

Eligible activities to be supported by the non-competitive grant scheme, include, but are not limited to remedial programs, tutoring, counseling, guidance and support services, coaching services, workshops in specific areas, and awareness raising campaigns.

The project aims to support about 60,000 at-risk students in 300 faculties, representing about 85% of all the public faculties. The grants will be implemented for a period of 3 years, with medium size grant of EUR 100,000.

The competitive grants scheme would finance:

- A. the development of summer bridge programs, to be implemented by faculties, which may include activities such as:
 - I. summer courses for high school students, to offer these students an early university experience;
 - II. partnerships between high schools, universities and the labour market, to promote the benefits of higher education and professional insertion;
 - III. tutoring programs in campus, developed and managed by faculties for high school students, with the help of academics or students in the last years of their studies.
- B. the establishment of learning centers, for the benefit of the whole university, meant to increase the retention rate in higher education of at-risk students, by developing specific competencies and ensuring academic support services, in line with the students needs.

Around 160 bridge programs will be offered for approximately 8,000 secondary education students. Faculties may apply for more than one grant.

The second intervention to be financed by the competitive grant scheme is the establishment of learning centres in 24 public universities in Romania, with the aim to improve social and academic mechanisms available for at-risk students. Each learning center would be designed based on the main factors contributing to student under-achievement and dropout from university: underdeveloped study skills, limited exposure to new academic subjects, and lack of familiarity with pedagogical norms at the university level.

Component 3 – Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, with an estimated value of EUR 6.4 million

This component is aiming to finance the general management activities, monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the other 2 components on the upper secondary and tertiary education systems. At the same time, it will include an analysis of existing demand-side programs that are currently under implementation, addressing the needs of disadvantaged upper secondary students, such as: Money for high school program, payment for students transportation to school, different subventions and conditional social support schemes, as well as the revision of the students loan scheme in higher education etc.

The ROSE project is the biggest governmental initiative for combating early school leaving in the past years. However, no results, data or impact assessment is of yet available to measure the success of this programme. Also, no public information is available on the projects granted to schools and universities.

In addition to the ROSE project, there are other smaller initiatives that are meant to support the education of disadvantaged children and youngsters, such as “School after school” and “Second Chance” implemented by Save the Children Romania, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

School after School implemented by Save the Children in educational centers, aims to prevent school dropout for children from vulnerable groups. Through the program, children are supported by qualified teachers to complete their school assignments, receive additional support in difficult subjects and are encouraged to participate in leisure activities aimed at developing independent life skills.

The integration into the School after School program has a clear positive impact on children's school success:

- ▶ 92% of the over 27,100 children benefiting from the Save the School program run by Save the Children have made school progress compared to the situation prior to participating in the program;
- ▶ on average 45% of the beneficiary children had good and very good school results;
- ▶ 20% of the beneficiary children obtained school prizes.

Under the program, parents receive social and legal counseling and services and material support, depending on the needs identified. Information and awareness actions on the child's right to education are carried out in schools, and specialists from partner institutions are involved

in working groups aimed at strengthening local inter-institutional networks that provide complementary and quality services to children and families.

The Second Chance, carried out by Save the Children in collaboration with schools, is addressed to children / young people who have dropped out of school or have never attended it.

For such a child or young person, school integration requires support both in terms of education and socially. Therefore, through the Save the Children Educational Centers, we offer educational services (additional school training), social and legal services to children and their families. Also, depending on the identified needs, children / young people benefit from material support (food, supplies, hygiene products).

According to the National Education Law 1/2011, in the Second Chance type programs can be enrolled the persons who have never been enrolled in the education system and those who have dropped out of school and have exceeded at least 4 years the age corresponding to the class.

Save Children supports the participation and school integration / reintegration of children in this situation by running complex programs in which educational intervention is accompanied by social intervention. In the 2018-2019 school year, 220 children were included in the "Second Chance" type programs carried out by the organization in partnership with schools that carry out this program.

3.2 Needs of educators

There is little research and data on what what are the needs of educators in terms of better skills in dealing with students who are at risk of dropout and we can only rely on generic data on teacher training. According to TALIS 2018, developing advanced ICT skills is one area in which teachers say that they need more training, along with teaching in multicultural/multilingual settings and teaching students with special needs. Among these three areas, teachers in Romania expressed a particularly high need for training in teaching students with special needs.

On average in Romania, 12% of teachers work in classes with at least 10% of students with special needs (i.e. those for whom a special learning need has been formally identified because they are mentally, physically, or emotionally disadvantaged), which is lower than the average of OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS (27%).

In Romania, 80% of teachers were trained to teach in mixed-ability settings as part of their formal teacher education or training, at the same time 77% of teachers on average felt prepared to teach in such settings when they finished their studies.

Furthermore, although 33% of teachers on average participated in professional development activities including teaching students with special needs in the 12 months prior to the survey, training in teaching special needs students is the professional development topic with the highest

percentage of teachers reporting a high need for it – 35% in Romania (compared to 22% across the OECD).

On average in Romania, 45% of school principals report that delivery of quality instruction in their school is hindered by a shortage of teachers with competence in teaching students with special needs (compared to 32% across the OECD).

The shortage of staff with proper qualifications in rural areas and the availability of support specialists remains a challenge. Shortages are reported for qualified primary school teachers and for lower secondary school teachers in ICT, sciences, foreign languages and the arts.

The number of candidates in the national competition for teaching positions (i.e. titularizare) would normally be sufficient to fill vacancies, but less than 50% of candidates obtain the required mark.

In addition, the relatively high number of positions filled by staff without proper qualifications remains a challenge, particularly in schools in rural and remote areas. The number of support specialists (e.g. special education teachers, school counsellors, Roma mediators, etc.) is often insufficient. For example, a school counsellor is expected to work with 800 students, but in practice the student/counsellor ratio is 2.5 times higher.

Initial teacher education offers very little preparation and practical training, particularly in modern teaching techniques or inclusive pedagogy; in practice, the certification exam and the tenure exam are used as the main method to screen candidates entering the profession (OECD, 2017). However, this has proved to be less effective than having high entry standards and comprehensive initial teacher education; in itself, the certification exam tends to assess theoretical knowledge without being an authentic measure of on-the-job competence (ibid). Merit-based allowance tends to encourage teachers to focus narrowly on preparing pupils for tests and academic competitions, rather than encouraging them to improve the outcomes of low achieving students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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3.3 Needs of education stakeholders

Investment in education remains low in EU comparison, and funding mechanisms to support equity are weak. In 2017, general government spending on education was equivalent to only 2.8% of GDP, significantly below the EU average of 4.6% and the lowest percentage in the EU. This low level of funding reflects both the underfunding of education policies at national and local levels and Romania's strong GDP growth in 2017. Traditionally, underinvestment is particularly felt in pre-university education⁶. Basic funding and existing correction coefficients are insufficient to meet schools' needs. As a result, excessive enrolment leading to overcrowding is often used as a solution by schools in rich urban areas to hire top teachers. Because schools in small cities and in rural areas tend to have less students and smaller classes, they are not able to attract highly qualified teachers even if they receive more funding per student. In any case, the attractiveness of schools in rural and disadvantaged areas for highly qualified staff is usually limited. The system of complementary funding by local authorities tends to favour schools in richer municipalities, thus reinforcing inequalities in the system (World Bank, 2018). Nevertheless, it should be said that the initial 2019 state budget envisaged a significant increase for education and training policies compared to 2018.

The school network is lagging behind demographic trends, and the need for modernisation is high. Since 2010, the number of students in pre-university education fell by a quarter. Faced with demographic decline, between 2000 and 2016 Romania closed down 25% of its schools with legal personality and 17% of satellite schools (World Bank, 2018). However, 58% of schools, providing education for 34% of students, still have a surplus of building space given the number of students enrolled (MEN, 2018). The situation is particularly striking in rural areas, but some urban areas also face similar challenges. In contrast, 22% of students study in overcrowded schools (which account for 10% of total). The need to improve sanitary conditions and provide students with modern learning spaces (e.g. science laboratories, gym halls, libraries) is also high. With declining demographic trends likely to persist, and given the poor state of physical learning environments in many schools, redesigning the school network could help improve efficiency and free up resources for quality improvements. However, any plans to reorganise the school network need to take account of the already high equity challenges. These are echoed in low enrolment rates in early education and care for children from lower socio-economic groups, high early school leaving and large gaps in educational outcomes between schools with legal personality and satellite schools. Already, long walking distances to kindergartens in rural areas and commuting costs are barriers to accessing quality education, while school transportation services are insufficient, particularly in rural areas.

Early school leaving is high, with repercussions for the labour market and the economy.

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The acquisition of basic and digital skills is still problematic. PISA 2015 shows that about 40% of Romanian 15 year-olds lack basic competences in either reading, mathematics or sciences (OECD, 2016). Implementation of the new school curriculum continues alongside the retraining of teachers. However, individualised approaches for students remain insufficiently developed. The percentage of young people (ages 16-19) who assess their digital skills as basic or above basic is below the EU average (52% compared to 83% in 2017). There are substantially fewer highly digitally equipped and connected schools in Romania than the EU average (European Commission, 2019b).

Improving equity in education remains a major challenge, alongside raising quality. An

analysis of 2015 PISA scores shows that most of the gap in performance between Romania and high performing EU countries is explained by the clustering of students in schools with students of similar socioeconomic background; poorer students are not only socially segregated together, but they also attend lower quality schools (World Bank, 2018). Apart from socioeconomic background, equity challenges disproportionately affect Roma and students from rural areas, who tend to have lower educational outcomes. The percentage of Roma children attending kindergarten is less than half the national average; young Roma are more likely to drop out early from education (FRA, 2016). The monitoring methodology to tackle school segregation is delayed but expected to be piloted in the school year 2019/2020. Taking account of these challenges, the 2019 European Semester country-specific recommendations call on Romania to 'improve the quality and inclusiveness of education, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups' (Council of the European Union, 2019).

4 Key findings of the empirical research

4.1 Findings of the interviews with educators

4.1.1 Difficulties faced by the educators

The most stringent problem of teachers is the lack of support from the Ministry of Education and the lack of policies in dealing with school drop out. “Everybody knows that Romania has one of the highest drop out rates in the EU, everybody says we should do this and that, but nobody does it. There is no coherence and consistency at national level”.

And the main issue pointed out by the teachers is the lack of training in dealing with disadvantaged students, from curricula adaptation to knowledge and understanding of the fact that teacher him/herself shares a huge part in the system’s responsibility for a student’s success or failure. “Our initial training usually involves a degree in the subject specific matter (i.e. Maths, Geography etc.) and a psychopedagogical module that runs over the course of two academic years. But this is not enough to teach one how to be a good teacher and moreover to deal with students who are at risk of school failure”. The schools counsellor who is a graduate in Educational Sciences – Pedagogy says that there is also a huge attitude and perception problem among school teachers, in general and she believes this is, again, related to the lack of appropriate training. “Unfortunately, there is a significant amount of teachers who in the year of 2020 still blame the student, the family etc. for the school situation, while they believe they have no responsibility for this – *Students should learn, they say* – but I still remember what one of my pedagogy teachers from university used to say – *without teaching, there is no learning* – and – *you as a teacher should never leave the classroom satisfied of the work you have done as there is always room to do better. Otherwise there is no way to reach the student’s maximum potential* – and I believe this pretty much summarises what the main problem of Romanian teachers is: they miss the pedagogy of teaching”.

4.1.2 Methods used to prevent early school leaving

There is no agreed systematic intervention at the school where the interviewed teachers work. They do what they think can work and with limited time and resources. The school counsellor is trying to discuss both with the teachers and parents, where problematic situations appear, and she identifies students at risk of dropout.

In terms of teaching and curriculum adaptation, the interviewed teachers again say that they adapt and do as they see fit, as no additional training on the subject has been given to them. In

some cases the school counsellor can help teacher with adapting contents, but school counsellors are usually overwhelmed with a lot of tasks and the time allocation for teacher counselling is very little.

Teachers also say that in general they try to discuss with the parents and involve them in the educational process, but this proves to be rather difficult, especially when dealing with Roma people. They say that, in the cases of this particular group, the only person who can influence parents in a certain way, is the community mediator.

4.1.3 Existing practices and tools that contribute to the prevention of the phenomenon

Even though there is a national strategy for reducing early school leaving in Romania, no concrete and consistent policy is being implemented at national level. There are initiatives such as the ones described in the previous chapter, together with other smaller initiatives (usually private – EU projects and NGO activities), but data about these interventions are not being centralised.

Financial support and financial incentives from the government solve very little of the problem, in terms of participation to education, but the issue of access, quality of teaching and support for students and their families remains a big issue. It is a matter of willingness and how much do teachers and the school engage in supporting these students and finding solutions to help them.

4.1.4 Training needs and necessary skills

None of the teachers interviewed had participated in any additional training on how to deal with early school leaving and support students who are at risk of dropout. The school counsellor, who is a graduate of Pedagogy, says that during university she had a one semester discipline called “Student centered educational strategies” but she does not recall gaining a lot of knowledge, in addition to the fact that it touched very little the subject of school dropout.

In the past years, a lot of training courses teachers were organised within ESF funded projects, but participation and engagement of teachers was rather a chase in obtaining CPD credit points. Teachers also claimed that the courses were too theoretical and the trainers not well prepared, so they gained little knowledge and skills.

It was difficult for teachers to point out specific skills, but they all agreed they need more pedagogical training as this is the basis for building targeted strategies for working with disadvantaged categories of students. Among others, teacher’s attitudes and quality of teaching is an important determinant when it comes to early school leaving.

4.1.5 Training recommendations

The teachers interviewed were positive about participating in dedicated training, either offered within the APPLE project or in other contexts. They say such training should be very well focused on ESL and delivered by specialised staff.

They also pointed out that training on ESL should be a mandatory discipline in the initial training of teachers, with all that implies in terms of teacher's responsibilities in dealing with this matter. Teachers should not only be capable to adapt their contents to the needs of the target group, but approach the issue from a broader perspective, including moral support, communication with the family and the community,

4.2 Findings of the interviews with education stakeholders

All the interviewed stakeholders have had previous direct or indirect contact with teachers who are working with students at risk of early school leaving. The school inspector as a representative of the Ministry at regional level, the president of the youth foundation has worked with teachers in an Erasmus+ project on ESL, the education coordinator is working directly with teachers to deliver the remedial programmes offered by the NGO, the social worker in the Roma community mediates the relationship between the school and the student's families, the psychologist at the resource center offers guidance and training for school teachers.

All stakeholders are very well aware of the existing tools and practices to prevent early school leaving, but same as the teachers, they criticise the lack of consistency in ESL policies and the lack of support or political will at Ministry level. In terms of practices used by teachers, stakeholders felt it was difficult to generalise since no central policies exist and each school and teachers adapt according to their own knowledge and resources. Most of the teachers offer additional pedagogical support for students, adapt the teaching contents, discussions with parents and activities that are meant to strengthen the partnership between schools and the student families.

Among the interviewed participants, training is offered by the County Center for Psychoeducational Assistance and the NGO that provides remedial educational programmes to young people at risk of early school leaving. The youth foundation organises workshops with teachers, but no ESL structured training as such. The County School Inspectorate has a control and monitoring role over the educational system at regional level, but in some cases they also implement ESF funded projects that might also involve a training component for teachers.

In terms of supporting teachers in preventing early school leaving, there is agreement amongs the interviewed stakeholders that more multi agency cooperation is needed. The ESL phenomenom is such a complex issue that requires a more strategic thinking and approach. Amongs their recommendations can be found the following:

- ▶ Advocate for the integration of mandatory ESL related training in the initial education of teachers
- ▶ Involve parent association and relevant civil society organisations in the decision-making process
- ▶ Allocation of funds for research and data collection on early school leaving
- ▶ Impact assessment of already implemented remedial programmes and teacher training programmes
- ▶ Growing a body of expertise on ESL at school level, through the school counsellor or specialised support teacher

4.3 Characteristics of young people at risk of early school leaving

Interviewed educators and stakeholders seemed to be aware of the general early school leaving rate for Romania and where we are situated at European level, but they were unable to give details on the gender and age of the young dropouts.

Participants stated they read the EU data when it is published but could not point out any specific numbers. Also, it seems that no specific data is collected at school/organisation level and it was mentioned that the lack of data collection at national level is reflected also in the schools motivation and engagement to track the early school leaving phenomenom.

When asked whether students belonging to minorities are more prone to school dropout, respondents believe that yes, this is the case in general and the situation can get worse if other factors are involved, such as poverty, disorganised families etc. In Romania, the highest drop out rates are amongst the Roma population.

In terms of characteristics and drivers of early school leaving, we can draw the following conclusions:

- ▶ C1.: economic factors and school qualitiesd were selected by most of the respondents. Poverty creates a problem of access to education, while school qualities shows that the quality of teaching, infrastructure, content adaptation etc. plays a crucial role in retaining students who are at risk of dropout.

- ▶ C2.: they were all selected by participants and most of them are consequences of how the education system is failing in granting children the right to education – weak reading and writing skills, low interest in school, low educational achievement etc.
- ▶ C3.: teacher performance is by far the most influencing determinant in early school leaving. Standards of conduct was not selected by any respondent
- ▶ C4.: social class and ethnic background seem to be the factors that are most influencing early school leaving
- ▶ C5.: all response options were selected by participants, however the most frequent dropout factors are related to economic background, traumatic experiences (including school related) and the lack of family encouragement
- ▶ C.6: children from Roma communities seem to have the higher drop out risk, but only due to their ethnicity, but also because these children are often confronted with poverty and they come from disadvantaged rural areas

5 Conclusions

The early school leaving rate, calculated as a monitored indicator for the 2020 Strategy, has dropped to an all-time low in Romania in 2019 – 15.7% (from 16.4% in 2018 and 18.1% in 2017). However, the rate in Romania is still higher than the EU average and well below the 11.3% target assumed for 2020, while the European Union average was 10.3% in 2019.

The lack of progress in preventing early school leaving continues to be a big issue in Romanian educational policies. This is worrying but on the same time explainable due to the lack of political will and commitment, which is reflected in the system as whole, at all levels. Only if we look at the Ministry of Education website, we will see no public data about the subject or any link to a resource, study, publication, policy etc.

The ROSE project provides a framework for high schools and universities to access funding and implement remedial programmes to prevent early school leaving, but no data concerning its performance and success is yet available. This adds on the lack of data and evidence to build policies for the prevention of early school leaving. Other programmes, such as “School after school” or “Second Chance” have good results but they provide limited access to young people from rural areas and smaller cities.

Teachers in general lack the pedagogy of teaching students who are at risk of drop out and in many cases the quality of teaching itself is a determinant for early school leaving. The issue of early school leaving is barely approached in the initial training of teachers and continuing professional development opportunities do not satisfy this need either. Teachers in general show interest in tackling the issue and participating in specific ESL training, but do not necessarily have an appropriate understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon.

Stakeholders who have a role in dealing with early school leaving claim the lack of support, commitment, and clear policies at central level, from the Ministry of Education. In terms of supporting teachers in preventing early school leaving, there is agreement amongs the interviewed stakeholders that more multi agency cooperation is needed. The ESL phenomenon is such a complex issue that requires a more strategic thinking and approach.

In terms of how the APPLE project can contribute to tackling the issue of early school leaving, the feedback received from the participants to the research was highly positive. The capacity building seminars for educators and the APPLE platform are concrete examples of tools and interventions needed in the educational system.

6 References

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