



SARA Law Research Center

International Journal of Legal and Social Order, <https://www.ccdsara.ro/ijlso>

ISSN 2821 – 4161 (Online), ISSN 2810-4188 (Print), ISSN-L 2810-4188

N^o. 1 (2023), pp. 501-519

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

E. TUȘA

Received 18.06.2023; accepted 14.07.2023

<https://doi.org/10.55516/ijlso.v3i1.114>

Enache TUȘA

„Ovidius” University of Constanța, RO

E-mail : enachetusa@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4703-1763>

Abstract

We live in the information age, where people have access to information in a way that was simply impossible in the past. In this era everything is moving and changing, and the need for readaptation is constantly appearing. The design of human development is based on education and culture, aiming at social inclusion, spiritual, moral and material fulfillment of graduates. With Romania's accession to the European Union, education is in a continuous transformation according to the models and criteria imposed by the Union, and our educational institutions try to keep up with everything that represents the European norm. In this paper we will address the importance of projects funded by European funds aimed at integrating the education system within the European Union model. We will also present the path that education in Romania has had since joining the Union in 2007, but also the role of Erasmus type programs in the evolution and adaptation of education to European requirements. The article is structured in three parts. The first part analyzes the features of the European context, the areas of the activity of the European Union, Romania's situation against the most important problems signaled by the European Commission, but also the educational policies at the level of the Union. Part two describes in the first part approaches to project management, what means a project financed by European funds as well as the main cross-cutting development issues. The third part presents two examples of best practices carried out under the most extensive program, namely Erasmus.

Key words: Educational policies, European Union, Erasmus+, school dropout, skills.

INTRODUCTION

No matter what country we come from or what language we speak, the European continent can be considered the country of all of us. Michel Foucher (2000) argued that “Europe is an invented tradition, being the foundation of an identity built and rebuilt according to the circumstances”¹. The idea of a United States of Europe, as Adrian Liviu Ivan calls them, has been promoted throughout history by intellectuals and emperors, being considered, exactly, both a challenge and an opportunity to expand the European identity².

The European Union as a socio-political organization, in addition to institutions and treaties, constitutes a set of “values, attitudes, democratic, multicultural and pro-integration behaviors, a model for the young generation of students today, the future European leaders of tomorrow, promoters of European democracy and socio-cultural diversity”³.

The European Union is an economic and political union between 27 European countries, including as of January 1, 2007, according to the European Commission and the Directorate-General for Communications and Romania. The predecessor of the European Union was created after World War II. The first step is to strengthen economic cooperation: The aim is to make countries involved in trade economically interdependent and thus avoid conflict. Thus, in 1958, the European Economic Community was established, with the initial aim of strengthening economic cooperation between the six countries of Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Since then, 22 more countries have joined (the UK leaves the EU in 2020), creating a huge single market (also known as the "internal" market) that continues to grow to its full potential. What began as a purely economic union gradually evolved into an organization operating in many different policy areas, from climate policy, environment and health to external relations, security, justice and immigration. This change was reflected in the decision to shape the European Union in 1992.

This political project called the European Union takes multiple actions in different areas, showing a real interest in solving problems, fighting the shortcomings and improving life in all its aspects. The European Commission lists 35 different policy areas on which it operates. We summarized the content of several areas to highlight the most important activities undertaken by the EU.

I. EDUCATIONAL REPORTS AND PHILOSOPHIES IN THE EU CONTEXT

Through its youth policies and programs, the EU aims to ensure that young people can participate fully in all social categories and to provide them with

¹ Michel Foucher, *La République Européenne*. Paris, Belin 2000, p. 78.

² Adrian Liviu Ivan, *Sub zodia „Statelor Unite ale Europei” De la Ideea și Planurile de Unitate Europeană la Europa Supranațională*. Cluj-Napoca: Ecoo, 2006, p.43.

³ Claudia Anamaria Iov, Raluca Luțai, Adrian Liviu Ivan, *Ghidul Uniunii Europene pentru elevi și profesori Educație pentru Cetățenie, Democrație și Diversitate într-o Europă a tinerilor*. Cluj-Napoca: CA Publishing, 2018, p.7.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

greater opportunities in education and the labor market. The EU has a number of programs and initiatives to help young people in Europe take a more active role in society and gain experience in other countries.

These include in particular: **Erasmus+** *is the European Union program to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe, providing opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills through foreign experiences such as studies, internships, apprenticeships, youth exchanges; teaching, training, youth and sport activities.*⁴ European Solidarity (European Union) is an EU initiative that gives young people the opportunity to express their solidarity by participating in activities in their country or abroad that benefit the entire European community and people. **The Youth guarantee** - *8.8 billion, supports the employment of young people by ensuring that all young people under 25 have access to specific and quality jobs, apprenticeships, traineeships or further studies within 4 months of completion of formal or professional education upon entry into unemployment.*⁵

Research and innovation are vital to our economy and society. They are at the heart of creating quality jobs, stimulating growth and investment in Europe. The European Union is the world's largest cercetation laboratory, generating one third of the world's scientific and technological production. All EU Member States have their own research policies and funding systems, but many important issues are best addressed by supporting collaboration between researchers and innovators from different countries. For this reason, research and innovation are supported at EU level, in particular through Horizon 2020⁶. The program is the largest research and innovation program in the history of the European Union, with 80 billion allocated to research funding over a period of 7 years (2014-2020), as well as other public and private investments.

Investing in education and training is essential for the future of people, especially when they are young. There are, however, more than 4.4 million people in the EU still leaving school early, according to a 2015 report⁷. 15% of adults have low intellectual skills, making it difficult for them to go to school. They enter the labor market and participate fully in society. The EU contributes to improving the quality of education by encouraging cooperation between Member

⁴ European Commission, *Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport*. Accessed on <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/ro/despre-erasmus/despre-erasmus>, to date 14.03.2023

⁵ European Commission, *Economic and Monetary Union*, accessed on https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/economic-and-monetary-union_en, to date de 14.12.2022

⁶ European Commission, *What is Horizon 2020?*, accessed on <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20220124080448/https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020>, to 15.12.2022.

⁷ European Commission, *European Green Deal*, 2020, p.22, accessed on https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal_en, to date 14.12.2022.

States and complementing national action. Erasmus+ offers opportunities for people of all ages, in particular by enabling young people to study, train, gain work experience or volunteer abroad.

The European Union states are responsible for their own education and training systems, but the Union budget helps states achieve a certain level of quality education through the exchange of best practices, setting benchmarks and objectives, allocating funding and expertise. The EU Strategy for Education and Training aims to: Make lifelong learning and mobility a reality; to improve the quality and efficiency of education and training; to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; to stimulate creativity at all levels of education and training and innovation, including entrepreneurship.

Erasmus+ is the EU program for education, training, youth and sport, which helps fight youth unemployment by stimulating personal development, skills and employment of young people. With a total budget of 14.7 billion, it has supported over 4 million people, mainly young people, to study, train, gain work experience or volunteer in another country. Erasmus+ expands the employment and personal development prospects of young people by providing them with the skills they need in the labor market and in society now and in the future. The European Commission has set itself the objective of doubling Erasmus funding to nearly 30 billion under the current long-term EU budget (2021-2027). There are many other initiatives in the EU to facilitate study, training or work abroad. European countries, trade unions and employers are working together to improve education and training through the Copenhagen process.

The results include the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training and a quality assurance network that supports people working and studying abroad. The Bologna process and the European higher Education Area facilitate mobility between European education systems by promoting mutual recognition of study durations, comparable qualifications and harmonized quality standards. The Europass document set helps workers apply for jobs abroad by presenting their skills and qualifications in a European standard format that is easier for employers to understand.

II. EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AT EU LEVEL

The issue of education has been, is and always will be, a major interest of societies and their elites. In the modern age, since the industrial revolution, when access to education has become widespread, education has been imposed on all social classes.

Given Romania's integration into the European Union as a basis and reference for the modernization and decentralization of the Romanian educational system, we try to observe the touch of European educational policies on the Romanian education system and on education at all levels. This is the expression of legislative and mentality changes since the moment of integration. Building on

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

European education legislation, changes in the education system and, implicitly, in school management take different forms, from focusing on student training rather than information, cooperative learning, skills focus, lifelong learning to integrate communication technology into the teaching process.

The European context calls for strategic decisions to streamline, streamline and improve the performance of pre-university education by reassessing its internal structures, in particular the human resources involved in the activity. Changes in structure and function find their ultimate goal in terms of optimization and specialization only when they are related to the diversity of human factors. Two researchers Huber and Hallinger⁸ discussed the European dimension as a mandatory presence on the educational agenda, arguing that today's educational analysis must be linked to the current context at European level and within European countries. Those considerations are based on issues related to changes in the operating environment, whether at international, global, regional, continental or domestic level: National, regional and local. The presence of the international dimension can be felt by including the United States and Asian countries in the comparative analysis. The establishment of an alliance of European countries, as an objective need to deal with the vitality and competitiveness of the United States, is also an objective need of Asian countries to enter the stage of the economic game, forcing the governments of the EU Member States to reorganize themselves political and social systems.

In pre-university institutions, the importance of human resources has multiplied, and the engine of affirmation and development is innovation at the spiritual and material level, opening up new areas of research, addressing emerging phenomena and processes, formulating theories and hypotheses, measures and solutions. The program becomes a condition of performance and respectability due to the need for immediate practice. The performance of the mission of a public preparatory education institution shall take into account the quality and activities of teachers and administrators. The active and continuous involvement of human resources in Romanian pre-university education has always stimulated Romania's economic growth and plays an important role in the development of modern and post-modern societies. The continuous training of teachers determines the improvement of the quality of education at all levels, as well as the implementation of new projects that attract as many students as possible in the educational act. Therefore, the development of education is the

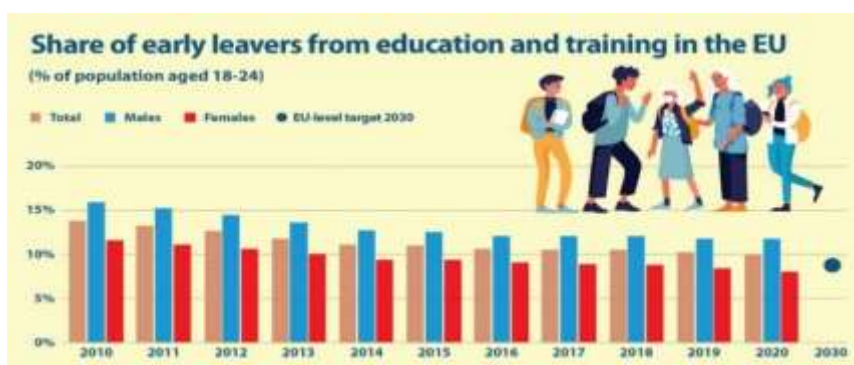
⁸ Hallinger, P., Huber, S., *School leadership that makes a difference: international perspectives*, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*. London: Routledge2012, accessed on https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239787062_School_leadership_that_makes_a_difference_international_perspectives, on date 08.12.2022

result of socio-economic changes, and later education becomes a catalyst for economic development.

The main problems that arise at the level of education, which are the targets of the European Union, relate to early school leaving, lifelong learning, digital skills, green skills, education and vocational training, but also to the modernization and adaptation of the school and university curriculum to the requirements of the labor market. In order to better understand what the problems at the level of education consist and to highlight the current state in Romania compared to the European Union average, we will debate each of the targets listed above.

The share of „early school leaving”, a term referring to early school leavers (aged 18 to 24), has steadily declined, according to Eurostat⁹, in the European Union over the past 10 years (from 13.8% in 2010 to 9.9% in 2020). The same source shows that more young men left education and training earlier than women in 2020 - 11.8% of men, compared to 8.0% of women. Compared to 2019, the share of early school leaving for men remained the same, while the share of women decreased slightly (by 0.4 percentage points). EU Member States have set themselves a target of reducing the early school leaving rate to below 9% at EU level by 2030.

Compared to 2010, almost all EU Member States reported a lower proportion of people who left early in 2020, with the exception of Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Sweden, the Czech Republic and the Czech Republic. Luxembourg and Bulgaria, which all reported a small increase (below 3 percentage points).



School dropout rate in the European Union by gender (source Eurostat, 2021)

⁹ Eurostat, *Continued decline in early school leavers in the UE*, 2021, acc<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210624-2>, on date 16.03.2023.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

In 2020, according to the idiclic Eurostat¹⁰ statistics, the Member States that reported the lowest percentages of early school leaving were Croatia (2.2%), Greece (3.8%), Slovenia (4.1%), Ireland (5.0%) and Poland (5.4%). By contrast, the highest shares were recorded in Malta (16.7%), Spain (16.0%), Italy (13.1%) and Bulgaria (12.8%), among which Romania with a percentage of 15.6%, while the European Union rate was 9.9%, Thus occupying the third position among the countries with the highest degree of early school leaving, but we can say that it is a good percentage compared to 2010 when Romania registered a school drop-out rate of 19.3%. Eighteen Member States have already met the 2030 EU-wide target for this indicator: Belgium (8.1%), the Czech Republic (7.6%), Estonia (8.5%), Ireland (5%), Greece (3.8%), France (8%), Croatia (2.2%), Latvia (7.2%), Lithuania (5.6%), Luxembourg (8.2%), The Netherlands (7%), Austria (8.1%), Poland (5.4%), Portugal (8.9%), Slovenia 4.1%), Slovakia (7.6%), Finland (8.2%) and Sweden (7.7%). In 2020, the share of early abandonment from education and training was lower for young women than for young men from all EU Member States except Romania and the Czech Republic.



Early school leaving rate in 2020 (source Eurostat, 2021)

Denmark, Finland and Sweden stood out from the other EU Member States as they reported considerably higher proportions of their adult populations participating in lifelong learning in the four weeks prior to the interview, ranging from 20.0% to 28.6%. Estonia, the Netherlands and Luxembourg were the only Member States in which the participation rate in 2020 exceeded the 15 % threshold. By contrast, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia and Poland reported adult

¹⁰ Eurostat, *Early leavers from education and training by sex and labour status*, 2021, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_14_custom_1052523/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=8cadd261-d35a-4be6-9162-89f6d8d85d08, on date 11.01.2023.

learning rates below 4.0%, while Romania missed the target assumed to the European Commission, with the 2020 indicator (1%) being comparatively lower than in 2010 (1.3%)¹¹.

According to Eurostat statistics, the proportion of the population that participated in adult learning was higher among women (10.0% in 2020) in the EU than among men (8.3%). The share for men and women was lower in 2020 than it was five years earlier. The participation rate of women and men increased continuously until 2019 and decreased only in 2020, i.e. with the onset of the COVID-2019 pandemic. In 2020, women recorded higher participation rates than men in all EU Member States except the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece and Cyprus (where the rates for men were higher), while Romania reported the same rate for both sexes. The largest gender gap in percentage points was in Sweden, where the participation rate for women was 13.6 percentage points higher than for men.

	Total		Male		Female	
	2010	2020	2010	2020	2010	2020
EU	10.1	9.2	9.2	8.3	10.0	10.0
Belgium (*)	6.9	7.4	6.2	7.1	7.3	7.7
Bulgaria	2.0	1.6	1.9	1.4	2.1	1.7
Croatia	6.5	6.6	6.3	6.6	6.6	6.6
Czechia (*)	31.5	29.9	29.8	19.4	31.0	23.8
Germany (*)	6.1	7.7	6.2	7.8	6.0	7.6
Estonia	12.4	17.1	10.9	13.1	14.1	21.1
Finland (*)	6.5	11.0	6.0	6.2	7.1	12.0
France	7.5	4.1	7.3	3.3	7.3	4.8
Greece	0.9	11.0	0.2	0.9	10.7	12.0
Ireland	18.9	13.0	16.8	11.2	11.2	14.8
Italy	3.1	3.2	2.7	2.9	3.6	3.8
Latvia	7.1	7.2	6.8	7.0	7.4	7.4
Lithuania	7.6	4.7	6.9	4.9	7.8	4.6
Luxembourg	6.7	6.6	4.1	4.9	7.2	6.4
Malta	6.6	7.2	6.1	6.6	6.6	6.7
Netherlands	10.0	10.9	10.2	10.3	11.0	11.3
Poland (*)	7.1	3.1	6.2	4.4	7.6	5.2
Portugal (*)	7.4	11.0	6.8	10.0	7.9	12.7
Romania	16.0	16.8	16.4	17.0	16.4	16.8
Slovakia	14.4	11.7	13.3	10.8	11.4	12.7
Slovenia (*)	3.5	3.7	3.3	3.5	3.8	4.3
Spain	9.7	10.0	9.7	9.9	9.8	10.4
Sweden (*)	1.3	1.0	1.3	1.0	1.3	1.0
Switzerland	11.0	8.4	10.7	7.4	11.3	9.5
Turkey	3.1	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.6
United Kingdom	20.4	27.3	21.8	23.0	20.1	31.7
USA	20.4	22.2	22.3	21.9	20.7	23.6
OECD (*)	20.1	20.3	19.8	19.0	20.4	21.1
OECD	20.1	18.4	18.3	16.6	18.0	17.9
Switzerland	10.0	27.8	31.2	20.1	20.2	20.7
Montenegro	3.0	2.7	3.4	2.8	2.6	2.8
North Macedonia	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.7
Serbia	4.5	2.7	4.5	3.1	4.1	4.0
Turkey	6.5	6.8	6.0	6.0	6.3	6.8

Lifelong learning in the states of the European Union (source - Eurostat, 2021)

In the framework of the Porto Social engagement of 7 May 2021, the European Parliament, the Council of the EU, the European social partners and civil society organizations endorsed the objective of at least 60% of all adults taking part in training each year by 2030. The European skills Agenda sets out a five-year plan to help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills and implement them. The actions of the skills Agenda also relate to tools and initiatives to support people in their lifelong learning pathways.

¹¹ Eurostat, *Participation rate in education and training, last 4 weeks – 2020*. Statistics to 2021, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics, on date 14.01.2023.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

Vocational education and training is a key element of lifelong learning systems. The Copenhagen process, established in 2002, establishes the basis for cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) between 33 European countries. The overall goal is to encourage more people to make wider use of professional learning opportunities, whether at school, in higher education, at work or through private courses. The actions and tools developed as part of the process aim to enable users to connect and rely on learning acquired at different times, both in formal and non-formal contexts. More recently, on 24 November 2020, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social equity and resilience. The Recommendation defines key principles to ensure that vocational education and training are agile by adapting quickly to labor market needs and providing quality learning opportunities for both young and adult learners. Strong emphasis is placed on increased flexibility in vocational education and training, enhanced opportunities for learning and apprenticeships at work, and improved quality assurance¹².

There are various definitions for *digital skills or competences* and several terms, such as „digital literacy”, „digital competence”, „ICT-related skills” and „computer skills”, are often used as synonyms. In May 2018, the Council defined digital competence as “involving the confident, critical and responsible use of digital technologies, as well as their use for learning, in the workplace, and for participation in society”¹³. These include information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, media education, digital content creation (including programming), security (including digital well-being and cybersecurity skills), intellectual property issues, and problem-solving and critical thinking.

According to the European Commission, in terms of digital skills, 56% of people in the EU have at least basic digital skills¹⁴. The data show a slight increase in the number of ICT specialists in employment: In 2020, the EU had 8.4 million ICT specialists, compared to 7.8 million a year ago. With 55% of businesses reporting difficulties in recruiting ICT specialists in 2020, this lack of employees with advanced digital skills is also a contributing factor to the slower digital transformation of businesses in many Member States. The data indicate a

¹² Eurostat, *Glossary: Vocational education and training (VET)*, 2021 accessed to [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational_education_and_training_\(VE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational_education_and_training_(VE)), on date 15.01.2023.

¹³ *European Court of Auditory, EU actions aimed at raising the level of basic digital skills-analysis document nr.02/2021, p.7* accessed to https://www.eca.europa.eu/lists/ecadocuments/rw21_02/rw_digital_skills_ro.pdf, on date 15.01.2023.

¹⁴ European Commission, *Digital Economy and Society Index 2021: overall progress in digital transition but need for new EU-wide efforts*. Brussels, 2021, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5481, on date 15.01.2023.

clear need to increase training opportunities and opportunities to achieve the Digital decade skills goals (80% of the population have basic digital skills and 20 million ICT specialists).

Significant improvements are expected in the coming years, partly because 17% of digital investment in the RRP adopted so far by the Council is dedicated to digital skills (around 20 billion out of a total of 117 billion).



Digitization in the European Union (Source European Commission, 2021)

On 9 March 2021, the European Commission presented a vision and pathways for Europe’s digital transformation by 2030. The Commission is proposing a digital compass for the EU’s digital decade, evolving around four cardinal points: Skills, governance, infrastructure, business¹⁵. The Commission will follow the EU’s digital ambitions for 2030 with concrete targets and expected trajectories, a solid common governance framework to monitor progress and address the shortcomings of multinational projects combining EU, Member State and private sector investment.

THE CRED project has also produced a number of studies and reports related to updating the curricular approach, such as the report on the state of the curriculum to the school decision and the current regulatory framework and the comparative analysis of European recommendations on key competences. Also through THE PROJECT, DURING 2021-2022, the activities will be completed: Revision of the second chance Program methodology (ads); Development of specific school curricula for the ads primary and secondary education program (including related framework plans); development and publication of

¹⁵ European Commission, *Europe’s Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030*. Statistics 2022, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en#international-partnerships-for-the-digital-decade, on date 15.03.2023

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

methodological guides for the different study disciplines in primary and secondary education (18 completed guides); Development of Open Educational resources (OER) and other related resources to support the classroom implementation of new school programs (7,200 OER completed by 14 August 2022, the date of completion of the project); 20 model school programs for integrated optional subjects (including ads); a base-line study on the assessment of the skills of 4th grade graduates from the perspective of key skills acquisition, especially for students in disadvantaged categories. In order to assess the impact of the curriculum, Romania will participate in THE PISA 2022 study, an international program to assess the literacy level of 15-year-olds in the fields of mathematics, science and reading, in the period 2021-2022. For the first time in Romania, THE PISA administration will adopt computerized Administration (CBA type - computer-based assessment). The Pisa 2022 administration will be carried out by the National Center for Educational evaluation and Policy - Research Department.

In order to improve the quality of higher education and to link it to the labor market, the POCA project entitled “improving public policy in higher education and improving the quality of regulations by updating quality standards – QAFIN (budget: 16.073 billion lei). In the period 2014-2020, within the POCU project, a request for support of a pilot project for initial training of teachers in pre-university education was launched, of which, at the end of March 2021, a pilot project for the initial training of teachers in pre-university education was launched. A financing contract for the start in career project was signed by the Master of teaching by MED, worth EUR 15.9 million.

The project specifically aims to develop an institutional and operational framework for the organization and piloting of master programs by diversifying the educational offers of the university education and improving the competences of the teachers from the eight universities chosen by Omen no. 4524/2020 regarding the establishment and conduct of the university master programs. Education is designed to address these challenges by developing strategies to adapt to a changing world, while providing students with the tools of professional and social guidance as they discover their career or aspirations in certain areas of activity. In this context, schools have new approaches to education arising from the diversity of social issues and the diversity of areas of educational intervention.

III. SPECIAL FEATURES OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY EUROPEAN FUNDS

Approaches to project management the modernization and development of Romania since 2000 largely depends on the continuous status of our country in the European Union. All stages have a direct impact on the development of the economic environment. Development projects can vary significantly in terms of their objectives, scope and scale. Smaller projects could involve modest financial resources and could take only a few months, while a large project could involve

many millions of euros and take many years to adapt to this kind of diversity, it is important that project cycle management systems support the application of standard working arrangements or rules in a flexible way.

Project Cycle Management is an integrated approach to project planning, design and management. This integrated approach is a guarantor of the fact that the major principles and policy of each project funder or of each interested factor are systematically taken into account, at each stage, throughout the duration of the project¹⁶. The PCM helps to ensure that projects are relevant to an agreed strategy and to the problems of the target groups. Projects should also be feasible, which means that objectives can be achieved within the limits of the operating environment and within the framework of the implementing organization's competences. Projects should also generate sustainable benefits. Project management methodologies (PM) used worldwide are definitions of project management processes aimed at standardizing and improving the quality of the life cycle of project management. The quality of projects can be defined in terms of the relevance, feasibility and effectiveness of the investment impact, including how well they are managed. Regardless of the orientation of the sector, the delivery method (budget aid or projects) or the geographical location of the European Commission's development assistance, there are a number of cross-cutting critical development issues that need to be properly addressed throughout the project management cycle. The main cross-cutting development problems are described as follows:

Gender equality. The Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, established gender equality as a basic principle in development cooperation.

Gender equality refers to equal opportunities, rights, distribution of resources and benefits, responsibilities for women and men in private and public life, and the value accorded to male and female characteristics. Promoting gender equality does not only concern women's issues, but also covers broader actions to be taken by both women and men. A key requirement for gender equality is that women participate in decision-making and political processes on an equal footing with men. Gender disparities are deeply rooted in policies, institutional and legal practices, households and social relations. Gender is therefore a cross-cutting issue that needs to be integrated into all aspects of policy formulation, program and project planning, institutional structures and decision-making procedures. The process of integrating gender equality concerns into all these areas is known as gender mainstreaming. The financing of such projects is done through the Regional Operational Program (ROP) 2021-2027. This is a continuation of the

¹⁶ European Commission, *Aid Delivery Methods Project Cycle Management Guidelines*. Brussels. Accesat pe https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/methodology-aid-delivery-methods-project-cycle-management-200403_en.pdf, la data 16.04.2022

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

program implemented during 2014-2021, through which Romania has access to European Structural Funds, but also to investments from the European Regional Development Fund between 2014-2020.

Regional Operational Program 2021–2027 has five priority investment axes¹⁷:

-A *smarter Europe* through innovation, digitalisation, economic transformation and support for small and medium-sized enterprises

-A *greener, carbon-free Europe*, implementation of the Paris Agreement and investment in energy transition, renewable energy and climate change

-A *connected Europe*, with strategic transport and digital networks

-A *more social Europe*, to achieve the European Pillar of Social Rights and to support the quality of jobs, education, skills, social inclusion and equal access to the health system

-A *Europe closer to its citizens*, By supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development in the EU.

The main problems in Romania led to the elaboration of a strategic vision for the project, based on social analysis, and on the economic situation of the society. The problems identified come from different areas, namely: Research, development and innovation, SMEs, energy efficiency, environment, urban development, heritage resources, tourism, road infrastructure, cadastre, administrative capacity and social and educational infrastructure.

The country report on Romania¹⁸, prepared by the European Council in 2020, identified the main problems in the education sector as: Low levels of training in basic, digital and non-technical skills; low participation in education and early care; high rates of school dropout; low labor market relevance for vocational education and training and higher education; shortage of teachers, especially in rural areas, and difficulty in obtaining vocational training. The report highlights that “Romania is performing particularly poorly compared to the EU average, with a large number of children leaving school early and young people not in employment or in any educational, training or qualification program.”

A major problem identified in this assessment was the underfunding of the system. The petition (2021) states that Romania is the country with the lowest funding for education in the EU, well below the EU average (2.8% compared to the EU average of 4.6%), the funding cycle is disproportionate and the lowest funding for preparatory education - school and primary education (It allocated 21.8% of the EU average 32% of the budget) and the highest in higher education (according to the European average).

¹⁷ Fonduri Structurale, *EU Budget for the Future*, 2021, accessed to <https://www.fonduri-structurale.ro/2021-2027>, on date 16.01.2023

¹⁸ European Commission, *Public Health*, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/public-health_en, on date 15.02.2023.

„It is not a very difficult process, the local public administration sets investment priorities, schools show their interest, present their situation, start with small steps, with technical and economic documentation, then we see what needs the investment objective has, where we can frame that objective, next is the writing of the project, the evaluation and the obtaining of funding. We need to be strong, strong, and strong.”¹⁹ European funds are poorly absorbed! Romania has 15 years of experience in the EU, and in the third fiscal cycle, plus the experience from the pre-accession period, Romania still fails to take advantage of EU funding according to our needs, as the data officer from the European Commission pointed out²⁰.

According to Cătălin Zamfir²¹, the absorption rate that Romania attracted from the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) during the planning period 2014-2022, according to its performance on 31 December, which represents the absorption rate of European capital in Romania in 2021, is 59%. In terms of currency, the same source mentions that Romania attracted 19.8 billion euros, of which the FESI offered the country a total of 33.4 billion euros through the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020. As of 31 December 2021, around 14 billion euros, representing the difference, are in the EU budget and are waiting to be attracted to them. Romania could attract these funds by the end of 2023.

Here we are talking about the European funds provided by THE EC to Romania through 8 European sources, including the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Rural Development Fund.

At national level, this funding is administered by the management bodies of the European Ministry of investments and projects (MIPE), the Ministry of Development, public works and Administration (MDLPA) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR).

Practically, all the development needs of Romania are met with European funds: National road and rail infrastructure, wastewater treatment, water supply, landfills, village development, schools, hospitals, small private enterprises in

¹⁹ Euractiv, *Educație la puterea viitorului: ajută fondurile europene modernizarea învățământului românesc*, 2020, accessed to <https://www.euractiv.ro/fonduri-ue-politica-de-coeziune/educatie-la-puterea-viitorului-prin-fonduri-europene-13343>, on date 21.01.2023.

²⁰ European Commission, *State of execution of payments for 2014-2020 ESIF Operational Programmes and the level of the „rest a liquider” (RAL) for 2007-2013 Heading 2a (former Heading 1b) programmes (Status as of 31st December 2021)*. Brussels, 2022, accessed to https://www.scribd.com/document/554250870/EU-Funds-2014-2020#download&from_embed, on date 3.02.2023.

²¹ Claudiu Zamfir, *Greu la fondurile UE: România, la coada absorbției banilor europeni 2014-2020. Mai sunt 14 miliarde de euro la care ne uim lung*, Startup Café/21.01.2022 accessed to <https://www.startupcafe.ro/fonduri-europene/romania-absorbție-fonduri-europene-miliarde-euro.htm>, on date 3.02.2023.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

localities and more. In addition to direct payments per hectare to agriculture from the EU's separate Agricultural guarantee Fund. According to the website of the Ministry of European investments and projects, Romania has an absorption rate of 56.71% compared to the European Union average of 63%.

CONCLUSION

Programs and implicitly modernization and development projects financed by European funds are necessary in education, as humanity is in continuous progress, and the education system must keep up with the current, technology being increasingly advanced and demand on the labor market increasingly demanding.

At the level of education in Romania, several projects with European funding have been implemented, but perhaps the most important and tender program within which these projects have been implemented is Erasmus+. Because we believe that this program plays a major role in the modernization, development and integration of the Romanian education system in the European context, we have chosen to debate the most important aspects and to exemplify some projects in which Romania was either a coordinating state or a partner state in their implementation.

Erasmus+ is the European Union program for education, training, youth and sport, both in and outside the EU Member States and outside the European continent. It takes its name from the philosopher, theologian and humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. With an estimated budget of EUR 26.2 billion²², which is close to double the funding acquired under the previous program, which ran from 2014 to 2020, of which 30% will be allocated to cooperation projects and policy-making activities. For Romania, the allocated budget is about 90 million euros. The 2021-2027 program has as main objectives, according to the Erasmus Plus website, social inclusion, the green and digital transition, as well as supporting the participation of young people in democratic life.

The types of activities carried out under Erasmus+ projects consist of:

Student mobility – have as main objectives the help of students to Benefit from an educational, linguistic and cultural study experience in other countries in Europe, but also facilitate credit transfer.

Student mobility – aims to ensure full recognition by the higher education institution of their membership of the period during which they have carried out activities abroad.

²² European Commission, *The new Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027 has launched!*, 2021, accessed pe https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-erasmus-programme-2021-2027-has-launched-2021-03-25_en, on date 20.02.2023.

Mobility teachers – promote the exchange of expertise and experience on teaching methodology and encourage universities to enrich and extend the courses they provide. Training of teachers and teaching staff – aims at the mobility of teachers between the higher education institution they represent and certain companies, partner institutions or other partner higher education institutions.

The Erasmus+ program has been addressing topics such as: New and innovative curriculum, educational methods and development through training courses; teaching and learning of foreign languages; digital skills, intercultural, intergenerational lifelong education; international relations and cooperation; pedagogy and didactics since 2014; improving the quality of institutions and/or methods; combating school dropout; climate and environmental change; entrepreneurial education; disabilities – special needs; research and innovation; inclusion and equity.

Applicants under the mentioned program are mostly non-governmental organizations, on the Erasmus+ website noting that over the last 8 years 25 063 such organizations have carried out projects, followed by higher education institutions in a number of 22 412, schools/institutions or educational centers with 20 232, as well as centers for adult education in a number of 2 856.

The program has been implemented in 60 coordinating countries, of which 27 EU members, among the top countries being Germany with 22 504 coordinated projects, followed closely by Spain (22 387), France (16 814), Poland (16 063), Italy (12 336) and Romania with only 6 282 projects, A small number compared to Germany, but quite large compared to Luxembourg, which has only 700 projects carried out under the Erasmus+ program, if we do not take into account the number of inhabitants of these states. Regarding the situation in which states were partners in the implementation of projects carried out under the Erasmus+ program, we note that Italy was partner in 39 883 projects, Spain in 35 651, Germany ranks third with 22 924 partnerships, Romania is ranked 8 with 20 209 partnership projects.

*Regarding the activity of Erasmus+ in Romania, among the most important projects coordinated by institutions in our country we mention **Feed4Saving**²³, a project framed by the Erasmus students in success stories and good practices, carried out between 2016 – 2018, With EU funding of 129 985 euros. As can be seen, Erasmus+, as a European Union program, addresses the main issues of EU Member States and beyond, paying particular attention to early school leaving, lifelong learning, curriculum modernization, but also experiential learning, As stated in an article Nada and Legtuko²⁴, thus facilitating the*

²³ European Commission, *Feed4Saving*. Accesat pe <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2016-1-RO01-KA201-024552>, on date 2.02.2023

²⁴ Cosmin Nada, Justyna Legutko, *Maybe we did not learn that much academically, but we learn more from experience – Erasmus mobility and its potential for transformative learning.*

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

exchange of experience between participants and providing them with a positive, enriched and very valuable learning experience.

*The Erasmus+ program brings together seven other European funding programs as follows: **Life Long Learning, Youth in Action, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink** and the cooperation program with industrialized countries.*

*We conclude by stating that **Erasmus+** is not only a program financed by European funds, but rather the path toward the modernization and emancipation of participants, the creation of intercultural and interracial links, the binder toward the integration of the Romanian education system in the context of the European Union.*

BIBLIOGRAFIE

1. Adrian Liviu Ivan, *Sub zodia „Statelor Unite ale Europei” De la Ideea și Planurile de Unitate Europeană la Europa Supranațională*. Cluj-Napoca: Ecoo, 2006;
2. Claudiu Zamfir, (2022). *Greu la fondurile UE: România, la coada absorbției banilor europeni 2014-2020. Mai sunt 14 miliarde de euro la care ne uim lung*, Startup Café/21.01.2022 accessed to <https://www.startupcafe.ro/fonduri-europene/romania-absorbtie-fonduri-europene-miliarde-euro.htm>, on date 3.02.2023;
3. Claudia Anamaria Iov, Raluca Luțai, Adrian Liviu Ivan, *Ghidul Uniunii Europene pentru elevi și profesori Educație pentru Cetățenie, Democrație și Diversitate într-o Europă a tinerilor*. Cluj-Napoca: CA Publishing, 2018;
4. Cosmin Nada, Justyna Legutko, *Maybe we did not learn that much academically, but we learn more from experience – Erasmus mobility and its potential for transformative learning*. „International Journal of Intercultural Relations”, nr.87/2022, accessed to <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176722000281>, on date 3.03.2023;
5. Michel Foucher, *La Republique Europeenne*. Paris, Belin 2000;
6. Phillip Hallinger, Stephan Huber, *School leadership that makes a difference: international perspectives*, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice*. London: Routledge2012, accessed on https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239787062_School_leadership_that_makes_a_difference_international_perspectives, on date 08.12.2022

„International Journal of Intercultural Relations”,nr.87/2022,p.189accessed to <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176722000281>, on date 3.03.2023.

7. European Commission, *Economic and Monetary Union*, accessed on https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/economic-and-monetary-union_en, to date de 14.12.2022;
8. European Commission, *Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport*. Accessed on <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/ro/despre-erasmus/despre-erasmus>, to date 14.03.2023;
9. European Commission, *What is Horizon 2020?*, accessed on <https://wayback.archive-it.org/12090/20220124080448/https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/what-horizon-2020>, to 15.12.2022;
10. European Commission, *European Green Deal*, 2020, p.22, accessed on https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal_en, to date 14.12.2022.
11. Eurostat, *Continued decline in early school leavers in the UE*, 2021, acc<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210624-2>, on date 16.03.2023;
12. Eurostat, *Early leavers from education and training by sex and labour status*, 2021, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/EDAT_LFSE_14_custom_1052523/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=8cadd261-d35a-4be6-9162-89f6d8d85d08, on date 11.01.2023;
13. Eurostat, *Participation rate in education and training, last 4 weeks – 2020*. Statistics to 2021, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_learning_statistics, on date 14.01.2023;
14. Eurostat, *Glossary: Vocational education and training (VET)*, 2021 accessed to [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Glossary: Vocational_education_and_training_\(VE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php?title=Glossary:Vocational_education_and_training_(VE)), on date 15.01.2023;
15. European Court of Auditory, *EU actions aimed at raising the level of basic digital skills-analissis document nr.02/2021*, p.7 accessed to https://www.eca.europa.eu/lists/ecadocuments/rw21_02/rw_digital_skills_ro.pdf, on date 15.01.2023;
16. European Commission, *Digital Economy and Society Index 2021: overall progress in digital transition but need for new EU-wide efforts*. Brussels, 2021, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5481, on date 15.01.2023;
17. European Commission, *Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030*. Statistics 2022, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en#international-partnerships-for-the-digital-decade, on date 15.03.2023;
18. European Commission, *Aid Delivery Methods Porject Cycle Management Guidelines*. Brussels. Accesat pe https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/methodology-aid-delivery-methods-project-cycle-management-200403_en.pdf, la data 16.03.2023;

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING POLICIES AND EUROPEAN FUNDS

19. Fonduri Structurale, *EU Budget for the Future*, 2021, accessed to <https://www.fonduri-structurale.ro/2021-2027>, on date 16.01.2023;
20. European Commission, *Public Health*, accessed to https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/public-health_en, on date 15.02.2023;
21. Euractiv, *Educație la puterea viitorului: ajută fondurile europene modernizarea învățământului românesc*, 2020, accessed to <https://www.euractiv.ro/fonduri-ue-politica-de-coeziune/educatie-la-puterea-viitorului-prin-fonduri-europene-13343>, on date 21.01.2023;
22. European Commission, *State of execution of payments for 2014-2020 ESIF Operational Programmes and the level of the „rest a liquider” (RAL) for 2007-2013 Heading 2a (former Heading 1b) programmes (Status as of 31st December 2021)*. Brussels, 2022, accessed to https://www.scribd.com/document/554250870/EU-Funds-2014-2020#download&from_embed, on date 3.02.2023;
23. European Commission, *The new Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027 has launched!*, 2021, accessed pe https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/new-erasmus-programme-2021-2027-has-launched-2021-03-25_en, on date 20.02.2023;
24. European Commission, *Feed4Saving*. Accesat pe <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2016-1-RO01-KA201-024552>, on date 2.02.2023.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.