

## Desk Review on Learning

This review covers a selection of recent publications that tackle the challenges faced by the educational system in Romania.

The first half of 2020 - marked by the global coronavirus pandemic - reaffirmed several difficulties already recognized in the context of the Romanian educational system. Specifically, the discrepancies between rural and urban areas and the learning disadvantages associated with lower economic resources resurfaced once more, as the teaching activities transferred in the online milieu. Many children and youth were challenged by these new and unexpected developments, due to unequal access to technology and inadequate availability of internet connection. In addition, the pandemic-driven changes revealed the need for widespread ITC proficiency among teachers, themselves challenged by the sudden transition to online teaching and evaluation.

The sources used in this review include:

- International reports, studies and official statistics related to education
- Reports issued by public institutions from Romania
- Research reports and academic studies on education
- Studies issued by non-governmental organizations with activities in the realm of education

Where possible, we offer details about the educational context from Cluj county; however, since on many issues the county-level information is scarce, some of the highlights included in this review offer a general picture of challenges encountered by Romanian schools and students.

## Characteristics of Romanian education system reflected in international studies and comparisons

The 2019 edition of the **Education and Training Monitor** (a periodical comparative assessment published by the European Union) provides the following description of the current shortcomings in the Romanian context:

“Public spending on education is low in EU comparison, while the sector’s investment needs are high. Any major reform is likely to require additional funding linked to stronger equity and efficiency mechanisms. Better support for teachers, in particular by redesigning initial teacher education and strengthening continuing professional development – could help improve quality and equity.”<sup>1</sup>

**TALIS** is an international study coordinated by OECD, which covers a wide range of topics related to school environment and the professional trajectories of teachers. Several highlights from the 2018 edition<sup>2</sup> are outlined below:

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<sup>1</sup> European Union. (2019). *Education and Training Monitor 2019. Volume 1*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2019a) “Romania- Country Note – TALIS 2018 Results”, *Volume I – Teachers and School Leaders as Lifelong Learners*.

“Across the OECD, 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.”<sup>3</sup>

“In terms of classroom environments, relations between students and teachers are positive overall, with 97% of teachers in Romania agreeing that students and teachers usually get on well with each other. However, 13% of principals report regular acts of intimidation or bullying among their students, which is not significantly different from the OECD average (14%).”<sup>4</sup>

Percentages of school principals who mention the following aspects to represent obstacles to quality instruction – TALIS 2018 edition, comparison between the EU average and Romania.<sup>5</sup>

	Shortage of qualified teachers	Shortage of teachers with competence in teaching students with special needs	Shortage of vocational teachers	Shortage of teachers with competence in teaching students in multicultural or multilingual settings	Shortage of teachers with competence in teaching students from socio-economically disadvantaged homes
EU average	24.6 %	37.8 %	16.4 %	23.5 %	24.2 %
Romania	32.6 %	45.1 %	33.4 %	21.9 %	27 %

**Eurostat** is a useful resource for EU-level comparative data on various aspects of education. The following section is built on recent data made available by Eurostat on early school leaving and indicators regarding youth transition from education to the labor market.

In EU context, Romania is still in an unfavorable situation with regard to the rate of early school leaving (the percentage of young people aged **18-24** having completed at most lower secondary education and no longer in education or training). Below the values from 2018 and 2019 are shown in comparison with the EU average.<sup>6</sup>

	Romania	EU
2018	16.4%	10.6 %
2019	15.3%	10.2%

[http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TALIS2018\\_CN\\_ROU.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TALIS2018_CN_ROU.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> OECD 2019a, p.4.

<sup>4</sup> OECD, 2019a, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> European Union. (2019). *Education and Training Monitor 2019. Volume 1*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Data sources

For 2018: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:2018data\\_Early\\_school\\_leavers-02.jpg](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:2018data_Early_school_leavers-02.jpg) (accessed 02.06.2020).

For 2019: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training#Overview](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training#Overview) (accessed 02.06.2020).

More detailed information is also available in relation to the rate of early school leaving by gender and degree of urbanization, data for 2019 (see table below).<sup>7</sup>

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>EU average</b>
% of school leavers among young men	14.9%	11.9%
% of school leavers among young women	15.8%	8.4%
% of school leavers in cities	4.3%	9.1%
% of school leavers in towns and suburbs	15.7%	11.2%
% of school leavers in rural areas	22.%	10.7%

What stands out in the data above is the comparative disadvantage of Romanian rural areas in terms of early school leaving. While in the EU the rate of school leaving among the 18-24 is more uniformly distributed along different size localities, the Romanian context provides an illustration of sharp differences between the large urban centers and the rural localities.

Further relevant indicators refer to the transition between education and employment. Below we have synthesized recent data from Eurostat that places Romania in a comparative European context, data for 2019.<sup>8</sup>

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>EU average</b>
Young people aged <b>20-34</b> neither in employment, nor in education or training	19.4 %	16.4 %
Young people aged <b>20-24</b> neither in employment, nor in education or training	18.9 %	14.5 %
Young people aged <b>25-29</b> neither in employment, nor in education or training	20.8 %	17.2 %
Young people aged <b>30-34</b> neither in employment, nor in education or training	18.6 %	17.4 %
<b>Men</b> aged <b>20-34</b> neither in employment, nor in education or training	11.5 %	12.2 %
<b>Women</b> aged <b>20-34</b> neither in employment, nor in education or training	27.8 %	20.8 %

As shown, Romania records higher percentages of *youth neither employed nor in some form of education/training* for all age sub-categories, compared to the EU average. An important observation concerns the gender discrepancies: for the overall interval 20-34 years, the percentage of women neither in employment nor in education/training is more than double compared to the that of men. Data reveals additional discrepancies related to the level of urbanization.

<sup>7</sup> Data sources:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Distribution\\_of\\_early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_aged\\_18-24\\_by\\_labour\\_status,\\_2019\\_\(%25\\_of\\_population\\_aged\\_18-24\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Distribution_of_early_leavers_from_education_and_training_aged_18-24_by_labour_status,_2019_(%25_of_population_aged_18-24).png) (accessed 05.06.2020) and "Early leavers from education and training by sex and degree of urbanization", [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_lfse\\_30&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_30&lang=en) (accessed 05.06.2020).

<sup>8</sup> Data source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Young\\_people\\_\(aged\\_20%E2%80%9334\)\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_by\\_sex\\_and\\_age,\\_2019\\_\(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Young_people_(aged_20%E2%80%9334)_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_by_sex_and_age,_2019_(%25).png) (accessed 06.06.2020).

The rate of youth 24-30 neither in employment nor in education/training is more than 10% higher in rural areas, compared to cities.<sup>9</sup>

Last but not least, Eurostat provides information on the *employment rate of recent graduates (aged 20-34) not in education and training*. Below a comparison between Romania and EU is outlined.<sup>10</sup>

	Romania	EU
Employment rate of recent graduates (20-34) not in education and training -total	76.1%	80.9%
.....men	80.6%	83.2%
.....women	71.5%	78.6%
.....upper secondary & post-secondary non-tertiary education - general	63.6%	62.8%
.....upper secondary & post-secondary non-tertiary education - vocational	67.7%	79.1%
.....tertiary education	87.6%	85%

In Romania, there is a higher gender gap in employment of recent graduates than in EU, with men having a higher rate of employment than women by approximately 9%. The impact of educational attainment on employment is clear both in Romania and in the EU in general. In Romania, the employment rate of tertiary education recent graduates is higher by 20 to 25% than that of young graduates with upper secondary or post-secondary educational levels.

**PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment)** is the well-known evaluation program coordinated by OECD, in which 15-year-old students' abilities in reading, mathematics and science are periodically examined. Selected highlights from the 2018 test results are summarized below:

“Amongst high-performing students in mathematics or science, one in eight boys in Romania expect to work as an engineer or science professional at the age of 30, while one in nine girls expects to do so (the difference is not statistically significant). About one in three high-performing girls expects to work in health-related professions, while fewer than one in ten high-performing boys expect to do so. Some 14% of boys and 2% of girls in Romania expect to work in ICT-related professions.”<sup>11</sup>

“Many students, especially disadvantaged students, hold lower ambitions than would be expected given their academic achievement. In Romania, about one in four high-achieving disadvantaged students – but about 1 in 30 high-achieving advantaged students – do not expect to complete tertiary education.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Data source: Eurostat, “Young people (aged 20-34) neither in employment, nor in education or training, by degree of urbanization, 2019”, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Young\\_people\\_\(aged\\_20%E2%80%9334\)\\_neither\\_in\\_employment\\_nor\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_by\\_degree\\_of\\_urbanisation,\\_2019\\_\(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Young_people_(aged_20%E2%80%9334)_neither_in_employment_nor_in_education_and_training_by_degree_of_urbanisation,_2019_(%25).png) (accessed 06.06.2020).

<sup>10</sup> Data source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment\\_rates\\_of\\_recent\\_graduates\\_\(aged\\_20%E2%80%9334\)\\_not\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training,\\_2019\\_\(%25\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment_rates_of_recent_graduates_(aged_20%E2%80%9334)_not_in_education_and_training,_2019_(%25).png) (accessed 06.06.2020).

<sup>11</sup> OECD (2019b). Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Results from PISA 2018. Country Note: Romania, p.6. [https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018\\_CN\\_ROU.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_ROU.pdf) (accessed 03.06.2020).

<sup>12</sup> OECD, 2019b, p.5.

The tables below are constructed on the basis of the information covered in the briefing PISA Country Note Romania.

**Students' performance at 2018 PISA test - comparison Romania - OECD<sup>13</sup>**

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>OECD</b>
Percentage of students attaining at least level 2 proficiency in reading	59%	77%
Percentage of students attaining at least level 2 proficiency in mathematics	53%	76%
Percentage of students attaining at least level 2 proficiency in science	56%	78%
Percentage of top performers (level 5 or 6) in reading	1%	9%
Percentage of top performers (level 5 or 6) in mathematics	3%	11%
Percentage of top performers (level 5 or 6) in science	1%	7%

**The impact of socio-economic status on students' test performance – comparison Romania - OECD<sup>14</sup>**

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>OECD</b>
Score points difference between socio-economically advantaged students and disadvantaged students	109	89
Predictive strength of socio-economic status for explaining students' performance in math test	19%	14%
Predictive strength of socio-economic status for explaining students' performance in science test	16%	13%
Percentage of disadvantaged students able to score in the top quarter of reading performance	9%	11%

**Gender and PISA test performance - comparison Romania - OECD<sup>15</sup>**

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>OECD</b>
Score points difference between girls' and boys' results in the 2018 reading test	34 pts.	30 pts.

**School climate - comparison Romania - OECD<sup>16</sup>**

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>OECD</b>
Students who report having been bullied at least a few times a month	34%	23%
Students who skipped a day of school in the two weeks prior to PISA test	50%	21%
Students who arrived late for school in the two weeks prior to the PISA test	58%	48%

**Handling difficult situations - comparison Romania - OECD<sup>17</sup>**

	<b>Romania</b>	<b>OECD</b>
Students who report they are satisfied with their lives	80%	67%
Students who report they usually find a way out of difficult situations	91%	84%
Students who worry about what others think of them when they fail	46%	56%

<sup>13</sup> OECD, 2019b, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> OECD, 2019b, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> OECD, 2019b, p.6.

<sup>16</sup> OECD, 2019b, p.7.

<sup>17</sup> OECD, 2019b, p.8.

## Data on education from reports issued by public institutions from Romania

According to the **Cluj County School Inspectorate**, in the school-year 2018-2019, the rate of absenteeism at county level was lower by 1,24% compared to the previous year<sup>18</sup>.

Situations and underlying causes of students' absenteeism in Cluj County, school year 2018-2019, according to the County School Inspectorate's Report<sup>19</sup>:

- Medical reasons
- Some students are kept at home by their families, for helping with household chores or agricultural work
- Some children are left home unattended by parents who left abroad for work
- Overwhelming school schedules
- Unfitting school schedules (classes in the morning / some classes during afternoons)
- Students' (students' families) lack of interest in school
- The existence of non-restrictive regulations in some schools
- Students from families with low socio economic status
- Commuting
- Negative influence of students' peer groups
- Fear of school; fear of punishment
- Fear of poor results

In 2018, the Cluj County Inspectorate carried a survey among 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, with a total of 4570 respondents from Cluj-Napoca, Turda, Campia Turzii, Dej, Gherla, Huedin and rural localities (3403 students from urban area, 1167 students from rural areas). From the total number of surveyed students, 80% would opt to further pursue a general secondary education (high school), 13% would choose a vocational school, 6% were yet not fully decided, and 1% would go to a school in a different county. The option for vocational schools is more visible among 8<sup>th</sup> graders from rural areas (29%), compared to those from towns and cities (8%).<sup>20</sup>

**The National Statistics Institute** collects data at national and county level concerning a wide range of attributes of the educational system. However, the data is made available with some delay; a full synthetic report for the school year 2018-2019 is due towards the end of June 2020.

The available data for the school year 2017-2018 shows a persisting discrepancy regarding the rate of school dropout <sup>21</sup> between rural and urban areas. Gender does not seem to significantly influence drop-out (boys 1.8%, girls 1.5%).<sup>22</sup>

School dropout for primary and lower secondary levels in the school year 2017-2018.

	Rural areas	Urban areas
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<sup>18</sup> Inspectoratul Scolar Judetean Cluj. "Starea si Calitatea Invatamantului Preuniversitar Clujean. Raport Anual 2018-2018." [www.isjci.ro](http://www.isjci.ro).

<sup>19</sup> Inspectoratul Scolar Judetean Cluj, pages 282-283.

<sup>20</sup> Inspectoratul Scolar Judetean Cluj, pages 216-218.

<sup>21</sup> Institutul National de Statistica. 2019. "Sistemul educational din Romania. Date sintetice. Anul scolar/universitar 2017-2018". <https://insse.ro/cms/> (accessed 27.05.2020).

<sup>22</sup> Institutul National de Statistica, 2019, p. 26.

Primary	2.2%	1.2%
Lower secondary (gymnasium)	2.6%	1.1%

In the aforementioned report, Cluj is listed among the counties that registered, during the 2017-18 school year, the lowest rates of school dropout for the levels of education described in the above table (1%).

The drop-out rate among students from high schools and vocational schools in the year 2017-2018 has been 2.6%.<sup>23</sup>

**A joint report by World Bank and the Romanian Ministry of Education** provides an analysis of various aspects of Romanian school system, ranging from available school infrastructure to school performance.<sup>24</sup> Several highlights below:

- Although the problem of overcrowding in Romanian schools is partially solved by organizing teaching shifts/slots, (22% of Romanian children study in overcrowded schools), Cluj county performs well (4 categories of school capacity index, Cluj ranks in the third – where 1 st means serious overcrowding). (SIIR)
- In terms of availability of access ramps, Cluj county ranks poorly (the 6<sup>th</sup> out of 41 counties, in terms of number of schools without an access ramp; more than 60% of schools do not have an access ramp) (SIIR)
- Cluj county ranks in the top 25% counties in Romania by the percentage of schools that have a library (SIIR), but in the lowest 25% by the percentage of schools that have science labs (SIIR). In only 17 counties less than 10% of children learn in schools heated by furnaces (Cluj is among them). In Giurgiu and Mehedinti counties the percentage is above 30. (SIIR) Cluj is in the bottom 25% of counties in terms of schools without toilets – as in, few schools are without toilets. In Cluj county there are about 20% of schools that function without sanitary authorization (SIIR). Cluj county ranks in the middle in terms of student teacher ratio at all levels of education (SIIR and EDUSAL). Cluj ranks in the middle in terms of beneficiaries for the second chance program (slightly lower than median) (SIIR and EDUSAL).
- Cluj county is among the 25% of counties where there are rather small problems of accessibility of transport to go to school (ARACIP 2013-2014)
- Cluj county is in the upper half by number of students that re-enroll/repeat a year (SIIR)
- Cluj county is among the few counties with the lowest rates of school dropout, at all levels of education (SIIR). It also among only a handful of counties where school dropout is higher in urban contexts (usually, it is the other way around) (SIIR).
- Proportion of those graduating high school is 84% nationally, and for those graduating from vocational school is 81%. Proportion of female graduates is higher than that of male graduates. High-school graduation is uniform across urban rural divide; differences are recorded in terms of vocational schools, with smaller proportions in the rural areas. (SIIR 2014 2015)
- Performance for 8<sup>th</sup> grade capacity exam, Cluj county is in top 4 counties in the country. Girls perform better, but in Cluj county differences are not important. Urban rural divide plays a key role, with performance in rural areas being, at times, much lower than in urban areas. (SIIR 2014 2015)
- For high school final exams (Baccalaureate), cities in Cluj county had the highest national average, and rural areas of Cluj county were in top 3. (SIIR 2014 2015)

<sup>23</sup> Institutul National de Statistica, 2019, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank / Ministry of National Education (unspecified year). "Analiza multidimensională a educației și formării profesionale din perspectiva utilizării datelor în luarea deciziilor strategice privind investițiile în infrastructură"  
[https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Anexa%201\\_Analiza%20functionala\\_0.pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/Anexa%201_Analiza%20functionala_0.pdf).

- Study shows that in Romania, school infrastructure (school libraries, labs and sports facilities) correlate positively with performance
- Babes-Bolyai University has more than 50% students from rural areas (UEFISCDI 2015/2016) – highest in the country
- Babes-Bolyai University has the highest number of applications for dorm accommodation in the country – almost 10,000 (UEFISCDI 2015/2016)
- Employers consider that competences are not well acquired among university graduates; they agree that theoretical background is sufficient, but graduates lack basic notions of business, do not possess analytical and problem solving skills, and do not have socio-emotional skills allowing them to adapt to the work place. (world bank survey 2017 among employers) 40% totally disagree that universities offer practical skills that can be applied at work place and 26% partially disagree. 61% total and partial disagreement – vis a vis personal competences of time management, confidence, team work abilities
- Cluj Napoca is given as an example of universities reaching out to corporate players – a PhD program at Babes Bolyai University is implemented in partnership with several IT companies

## Research reports and academic studies on education

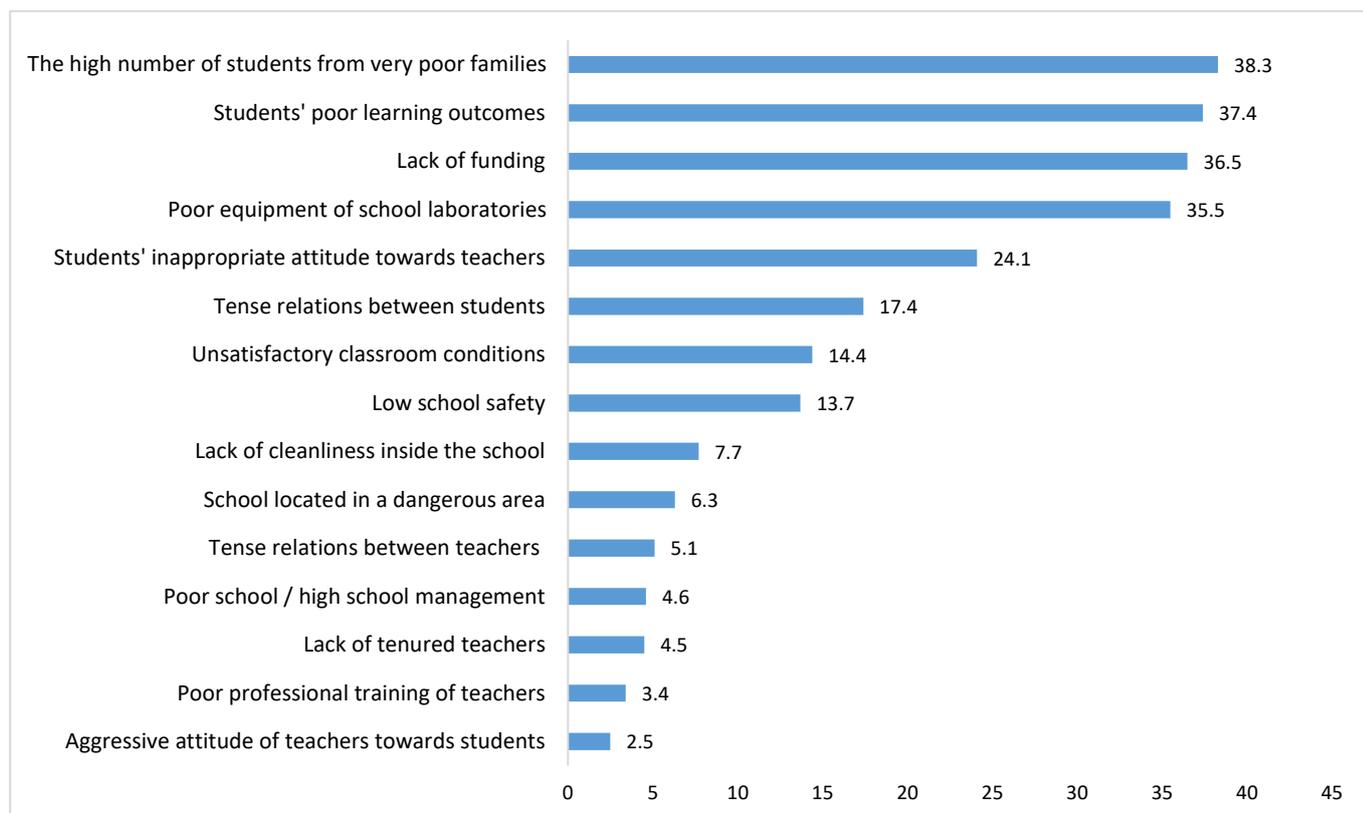
The study '**Educatie pentru democratie in scolile din Romania**' (Democratic education in Romanian schools)<sup>25</sup> from 2018 captures Romanian teachers' assessment of a wide range of issues related to the educational system and the teaching profession. The study is based on a survey with school teachers from Romania (1427 respondents) and focus-groups with teachers from different areas of the country.

Selected highlights:

- 13% of school teachers would endorse an approach where Roma students are placed in separate classrooms
- Teachers' perception on schools' ability to offer equal chances to all students: about 73% of respondents argue that Romanian schools succeed to deliver equal chances to all students; there is certain regional variation in teacher's perceptions: West and North West of Romania are the regions with the highest percentages of teachers in whose opinion schools are able to ensure equal chances for all students (81% and 77.4% respectively). The same study shows that teachers are aware of the disadvantages faced by students from rural areas. Such disadvantages are generated by the comparatively limited resources of schools and families.<sup>26</sup>
- The ranking of school-level problems identified by teachers who took part in the survey (the values in the graph represent the cumulated percentages of teachers who chose the answers 'to a large extent' or 'to a very large extent' for the question 'In your school, to what extent do you face the following problems?')

<sup>25</sup> Badescu, G., Ivan, C., Angi, D., Negru-Subtirica, O. (2018). "Educatie pentru democratie in scolile din Romania", Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bucuresti.

<sup>26</sup> Badescu et al, 2018, pp. 31-32.



Graph constructed with data from Badescu et al. 2018, p. 32.

While data is not specifically reported in relation to counties or cities, the teachers from the North West region, to which Cluj-Napoca belongs, reported the following two issues as being the most serious in their school (by percentage of respondents who mentioned the problem from the available list of issues): Students' poor learning outcomes (27.1% of respondents), Poor equipment of school laboratories (27% of respondents).

The same study reveals comparative disadvantages of rural schools in terms of human resources: schools from villages tend to have less qualified teachers, as well as teachers with less experience in the didactic profession.<sup>27</sup>

The study also included a component covering teachers' assessment on the ability of schools to contribute to students' civic skills. The wide agreement on the usefulness of civic education and the need for schools to nourish good citizenship skills among students is accompanied by the observation that schools can only build on prerequisites already shaped within family.

The **Youth Study Romania 2018/2019** is part of an international research based on representative samples of youth ages 14 to 29 with respondents from 10 countries from South East Europe.<sup>28</sup>

Highlights on education on the Romanian youth sample:

- Most respondents (57.5%) aspire to higher education levels (BA, MA or PhD);
- Young peoples' educational aspirations are influenced by parents' educational capital (youth with parents with tertiary education aspire themselves for a higher education degree) and gender (young women more likely to seek higher education degrees);

<sup>27</sup> Badescu et al 2018, pp. 41-42.

<sup>28</sup> Badescu, G., Sandu, D., Angi, D., Greab. C. (2019). *Youth Study Romania. 2018/2019*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bucuresti.

- Family's educational and financial resources matter for students' school/academic performance: "a large percentage of youth from families in which both parents have degrees higher than high school report having average scores of 9 to 10. Moreover, a greater percentage of students who assess the financial status of their household in negative terms report that their annual results are in the lowest score interval (5 – 6)."<sup>29</sup>
- 33% of Romanian respondents evaluate the educational system as being adapted to the requirements of the labor market;
- 24% of Romanian respondents who are still active in the educational system are confident that they will find a job after graduation (the highest percentage among the 10 participating countries).

A study that examines the **particularities and the impact of the current school financing system in Romania** reveals the vulnerabilities of schools from socio-economically disadvantaged communities.<sup>30</sup>

- There are many imbalances in the current financing system of schools in Romania, and the most alarming situations are those found in schools from socio-economically disadvantaged areas.
- As expected, schools from the rural areas are exceptionally vulnerable: "schools from the rural areas are disadvantaged by the current funding mechanism, because the standard costs per students for goods and services (which could cover remedial education programs or extra-curricular activities for students with high drop-out risk) are lower than those allocated to urban schools."<sup>31</sup>
- Specific issues faced by these under-financed schools from vulnerable communities include: drop-out and absenteeism, student's school results, teachers' professional development.
- A particularly difficult situation is that of schools that lost their autonomy due to the drastic decrease in the number of students; as they are no longer independent school units, they receive their funds from the budget allocated to the schools that incorporated them as sub-units.

## Studies issued by non-governmental organizations with activities in the realm of education

A study commissioned by **World Vision Romania**, with data collected in 2014 from parents and students (primary and lower secondary levels) from 6 counties (Cluj, Dolj, Ialomița, Valcea, Vaslui, Suceava) focuses on *specific issues faced by children from rural schools*.<sup>32</sup>

Selected Cluj county level highlights:

- Low usage of existing informatics labs within schools
- Students from Cluj county reported, comparatively, the most favorable context regarding teachers' openness towards explaining criteria of evaluations
- Students have been asked about the reasons why they skipped school without a clear justification ("absente nemotivate"). For the Cluj county sub-sample, the answers point to the following preeminent reasons: 'personal problems' (16,8%); 'I don't like the class' (10,1%); 'activities in the household' (8,1%), 'I don't understand the content of what is being taught' (4%); 'the teacher is severe' (4%).

<sup>29</sup> Badescu et al (2019), p. 41

<sup>30</sup> Fartusnic, C., Florian, B., Iosifescu, S., Mantaluta, O. (2014). *Finantarea sistemului de invatamant pre-universitar pe baza standardelor de cost: o evaluare curenta din perspectiva echitatii*, Bucuresti: Vanemonde.

<sup>31</sup> Fartusnic et al, 2014, p.79.

<sup>32</sup> Iosifescu, S., Novak, C. (2014). *Cercetare cu privire la calitatea educatiei in mediul rural*, Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint.

A further **study focused on rural areas, under the coordination of World Vision Romania** captures the perspectives of children and parents from rural households in six counties (Cluj, Dolj, Ialomița, Valcea, Vaslui, Suceava), on a wide range of topics: education, child protection, health, community participation.<sup>33</sup> The data used in the study reflects the situation from 2018.

Highlights on education (general results; the results are not reported on county-level subsamples)

- The study reveals a relationship between the financial status of families (self-evaluation) and the kind of advices that parents offer their children regarding their future educational tracks: higher percentages of parents from families that evaluate positively their financial situation encourage their children to follow a high school track; conversely, higher percentages of parents from families with a negative assessment of their financial status encourage their children to follow a vocational education track;
- Most children report that, when needed, they receive help with their homework: 42% from parents; 15% - older siblings; 4% - relatives; 3% - meditators; 9% - teachers. At the same time, 26% of children say no one helps them with the homework when they cannot themselves do it.<sup>34</sup>
- Most frequently mentioned reasons for school drop-out: high costs of schooling (families cannot support the costs); children' poor school results; teenagers willing to start a job, so they can have an income;
- Schools are not a friendly environment for all; the study reveals that some children do not feel at ease at school, feeling that they are treated differently by their colleagues or by the teachers; most such children have a disadvantaged family background;
- The time that some children spend for doing various chores around the household has a bearing on the energy they can invest in school: 6.3% of children feel tired at school because of the work they do at home and 5,5% skip school for the same reason.<sup>35</sup>

A study jointly co-ordinated by **Save the Children Romania and The Ombudsman** critically reviews the observance of child rights in Romania.<sup>36</sup>

- Between 2008 and 2017 430.000 children migrated with their families, and 91% are registered as temporary migrants. During the same interval 245.000 children migrated to Romania. Between 92000 and 16000 children have at least one parent working abroad. There is a decreasing number of children left without both parents or without the single parent: in 2008 there were 42-43%, and in 2017-2018 there are 32% (out of the number of children with at least one parent working abroad).
- Romania, together with Hungary, registers the highest difference between children at risk of poverty and social exclusion and the overall population at the same risk (6%). Most important factors increasing risk of poverty: capacity to draw income at the level of the family (strongly correlated with the parents' education), family structure/number of family members, efficiency of public services (benefits, social services). Number of people at risk of poverty in rural areas is twice as high as in urban settings. Percentage of young people not working and not employed or in training (NEET) 14.5%, in comparison to EU average 10.5%.
- Law 1/2011, Law on education: Education is national priority. Out of the 4 principles of the UN Convention, only one is integrated in the law – nondiscrimination. RE the right to life and survival, the law does not include any regulation that would assert the obligation to offer standards of safety and security to children (there is the example about lack of fire proof authorization for 4000 buildings, or sanitary verifications not existing for 20% of school spaces, considered as a consequence of the law not talking

<sup>33</sup> Petrescu, C., Negrut, A., Stanila. G. (2018). *Bunastarea copilului din mediul rural 2018*, World Vision Romania.

<sup>34</sup> Petrescu, C., Negrut, A., Stanila. G. (2018)., p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Petrescu, C., Negrut, A., Stanila. G. (2018)., p. 160.

<sup>36</sup> Onu, D., Pop, I., Chiriacescu, D., Preda, F., Roman, G. (2019). *Raport privind respectarea drepturilor copilului in Romania*, Avocatul Poporului, Salvati Copiii Romania.

about safety and security). Child participation is also not realized, except for the right of opinion, and, in the case of school children, there can be one representative, older than 18 (which means that by the time he learns the ropes of representation, he will be out of school). Also, the law does not have the principle of child's best interest (principiul interesului superior al copilului).

- Information about education budgeting available at page 49.

A study by **Save the Children Romania** examines the various costs of education, by looking at how families cope with schooling expenses and how schools administer their budgets.<sup>37</sup>

- Survey face to face 903 respondents, national sample, on parents older than 18 years of age; theoretical sampling/snowballing, stratified, quotas on being parent and the cycle of education the child is enrolled in (including class "0", primary, secondary and high school).
- On average, a family spends about 3000 lei/year annually for the free education of a child (approx. 600 euros), higher in urban areas. Also, the amount is higher in the case of older students. In comparison with a similar study conducted in 2010, the cost doubled.
- Private lessons have become more expensive, and the percentage of those paying for private lessons increased from 24% to 40%. Fondul clasei (class fund) is less popular/fewer parents pay into it than in 2010, but children or parents are still not really consulted about how the money should be spent.
- Corruption decreased in comparison to 2010 (money asked for enrolling the child in school, higher grades, passing exams, or "protocol" for exam commissions) from 5% to 1%.
- The two highest categories of costs come from private lessons and after school programs (although after school programs themselves are only found for a minority of parents 10%), followed somewhat distantly by food (in school).
- About 40% do not participate in extracurricular recreation activities, such as trips or attending cultural events.

A study by **Save the Children Romania** on the use of internet by children outlines the latest developments regarding the online behavior of children and the associated challenges.<sup>38</sup>

- Online poll, 1156 children between 12 and 17 years of age non probabilistic sampling among internet users
- In Romania, the age when children first start using the Internet sees a descending trend (in the youngest cohort that the study uses, the average age was 7.4). Most of them access the Internet from their mobile phones, and a staggering 99.3% have a social media profile.
- More than 20% of children spend more than 6 hours online in a school day (or they are constantly checking their social media accounts), and almost 50% spend more than 6 hours a day during the weekend. About 40% mention going on the internet without a specific purpose, and about 13% have not eaten in order to stay online.
- About 40% mention that they have been upset/annoyed by either known or unknown people in online interaction, and the incidence is higher in the case of girls and high-school students. The internet is the most popular source of information for children, with almost half of them not double-checking the truth behind certain data. Although about 60% mentioned feeling uncomfortable by some types of information found online (mostly violent and/or sexual content), less than 2 in every 10 children say they did

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<sup>37</sup> Salvati Copiii (2018). *Costurile educatiei gratuite. De ce invatamantul gratuit costa?* Bucuresti

<sup>38</sup> Gradinaru, C. & Stoica, T. (2018). *Studiu privind utilizarea internetului de catre copii*, Salvati copiii/Save the Children Romania.

something about it, like talking to someone. 22% mention having received a sexually charged message at least once a week.

- About half of the children who had access to sexual content messages said that they received those in a personalized matter, and 20% were asked to either record themselves or send photos of their sexual organs. The incidence of such instances is much higher among girls.
- Although more than 70% mention that they use Internet in school, less than half of those use it in class, but rather for checking their online media accounts in during breaks or even classes; moreover, almost 40% say that teachers do not encourage them to use internet.
- More than 60% play games online, and the proportion is significantly higher in the case of boys and secondary school children; they are gaming online for relaxation or out of boredom.
- Children in single parent families spend more time online, and are also engaged in/subjected to sexual messages. There is a direct inverse relationship between the amount of time spent online and general wellbeing: children spending more than 6 hours a day online are less optimistic about their present or future, less happy with their interaction with family, friends or teachers, and feel less relaxed.
- Children that are somewhat addicted to the internet have, in general, lower emotional wellbeing scores.
- Being subjected to sexting or cyberbullying correlated negatively with emotional wellbeing, while gaming correlated positively.
- Lack of emotional support and not feeling appreciated correlate negatively with emotional wellbeing.

### Highlights on nonformal education

Nonformal education has seen significant progress and developments in the last 10-15 years, especially through the projects implemented by various nongovernmental organizations and, often, with strong support from the European Commission's Life Long Learning Programs.

In Cluj, the New-Horizons Foundation is one of the major players in nonformal education (<https://www.noi-orienturi.ro/en/>). The IMPACT clubs are probably their most successful project, focused on the creation of youth groups working on solving real life problems, with a special emphasis on leadership. The program offers seed grants for starting projects. There are more than 600 IMPACT clubs in the world, and, in Romania there are 183 IMPACT clubs that work on community problem solving through youth engagement (<https://www.noi-orienturi.ro/tineri/cluburile-impact/>). Another problem focusing on teachers' needs is Education Architects through which educators are trained to offer tailored solutions to students' needs, especially centered upon sustainability and the incorporation of practical skills and competences (<https://www.noi-orienturi.ro/arhitectii-educatiei/>). Community schools is a project that creates better schools by bringing together all important community partners/stakeholders, aiming to improve educational performance and students' connection with the communities they live in (<https://www.noi-orienturi.ro/profesorii-scoli-comunitare/scoli-conectate-la-comunitate/>). The LIFE summer camp has been constantly organized for the last 20 years, and more than 10,000 young people participated in intensive training programs aiming to create personal development through adventure (<https://www.noi-orienturi.ro/tineri/tabara-viata/>). The New Horizons organization has also implemented a EEA funded project – Nonformal education. It is education – through which they aim to raise the profile of nonformal education within the Romanian traditional educational system (<https://www.noi-orienturi.ro/portofoliu/incheiate/educatia-nonformala-tot-educatie/>).

“Go Free – the Association for the Support of Civil Society” is another major player offering projects to young people in Cluj, by especially focusing on youth socialization within democratic contexts; as such they have been involved in nonformal education programs as well, and they pay special attention to minority integration and reducing inequality and discrimination (Roma, LGBTQ, etc.) (<http://www.gofree.ro/asociatia-go-free/>).

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