

An overview of compensation measures for early leaving from education and training in Romania

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Abstract: Early leaving from education and training poses challenges for many European educational systems. Early leavers from education are more likely to experience unemployment and poverty, as well as social exclusion. Our paper aims to give a comprehensive overview of the compensation measures implemented in this field in Romania. The paper starts by analyzing the proportion of early leavers from education and training at the regional level in Romania and at the European level. It then describes the compensation measures available to tackle early leaving from education in Romania. We identified five main compensation measures: (1) the Second Chance Program, (2) evening or reduced-frequency high-school education, (3) apprenticeship at the workplace for European Qualifications Framework level 1, (4) vocational training for European Qualifications Framework level 1 and (5) vocational training courses for basic/key competencies. This article analyses the recent evolution of early leaving from a comparative perspective and simultaneously contributes to a better understanding of the existing compensation measures to reduce early leaving from education and training in Romania.

Keywords: early school leaving, compensation measures, education, training

1. Introduction

Early leaving from education and training is a cause of concern for many stakeholders in European countries, mainly because it strongly correlates with poor educational outcomes and affects transition to the labor market. Hence, early leaving from education and training can negatively impact an individual. Early leavers are more likely to be unemployed, more prone to lower wages or poverty, more likely to have a lower quality of life, and more likely to be excluded from political, social, or cultural activities (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014; Bayon-Calvo et al., 2020).

A widely accepted definition of early leaving from education does not exist, as this depends on the national context and data collection methods. In some countries, early leaving refers to leaving education before completing upper secondary education, and in other countries, it denotes leaving education before completing compulsory education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). According to the Eurostat definition, early leaving is the percentage of people between 18 and 24 with only lower secondary education or less who are no longer in the education and training system (European Commission, 2013). In the literature, terms with similar meanings are used to discuss early leaving, such as abandonment,

attrition, dropout, and withdrawal (Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2019). On the other hand, Ferguson et al. (2005) have a nuanced definition of early leaving focused on disengagement. They view it as "the result of a long process of disengagement and alienation that may be preceded by less severe types of withdrawal such as truancy and course failures" (Ferguson et al., 2005, p. 1).

Comprehensive strategies are used to reduce the rates of young people who leave education early. The European framework includes three main types of measures: prevention, intervention, and compensation. Prevention measures aim to approach the first signs or root problems that can lead to early leaving from education and training (European Commission, 2013). Therefore, these types of measures tackle the problem of early leaving even before it occurs. At the European level, some prevention measures that tackle early leaving (even not explicitly designed for it) are education and career guidance, quality early childhood education and care, flexible and permeable educational pathways, positive discrimination measures, extracurricular activities, initial and continuing teacher education, measures to restrict the practice of grade retention, and desegregation policies (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014).

Intervention measures take into account the first difficulties that arise in the school setting, targeting especially students with difficulties with a risk of early leaving (European Commission, 2013). Thus, the intervention measures are focused on individual support for students who are disengaged with learning (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Some measures from the European level include identifying groups at risk, erasing language barriers for students with difficulties, cooperating with parents and other partners outside school, monitoring absenteeism, and receiving guidance from specialists (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014).

Compensation measures have as their primary objective the reintegration of individuals into the education and professional training system after they have left it (European Commission, 2013). At the same time, these measures also aim to identify those individuals who have already left education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). The most common compensation measures in the European framework are second chance programs. Other compensation measures discussed by the European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop (2014) include education and career guidance methods such as career classes, individual sessions, group sessions, interactive activities, and work-based learning.

Regarding the causes or factors that affect early leaving, previous studies differentiate between individual and family factors, academic/school-related factors, education system-related factors, and local labor market conditions (Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al., 2019; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Among the individual factors are gender, disorders or syndromes, health issues, personality, work situation (paid or unpaid), social capital, premature relationships, and deviant behaviors (De Witte et al., 2013; Esch et al., 2014; Ekstrand, 2015; Ngwakwe, 2014). Family factors include parental financial and human capital, parental health, family structure, familial environment, and other socio-demographic family characteristics (Ngwakwe, 2014; De Witte et al., 2013; Ferguson et al., 2005). Academic and school-related factors comprise academic performance, extracurricular activities, absenteeism, satisfaction,

relationships with classmates, teachers' skills, curriculum characteristics, class size, school features, and resources (Bowers et al., 2012; De Witte et al., 2013; Ekstrand, 2015; French & Conrad, 2001). Regarding personal factors and academic performance, Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) discussed the causes and factors of early leaving through the lens of five theories: general deviance theory, deviant affiliation theory, family socialization theory, academic mediation theory, and structural strains theory.

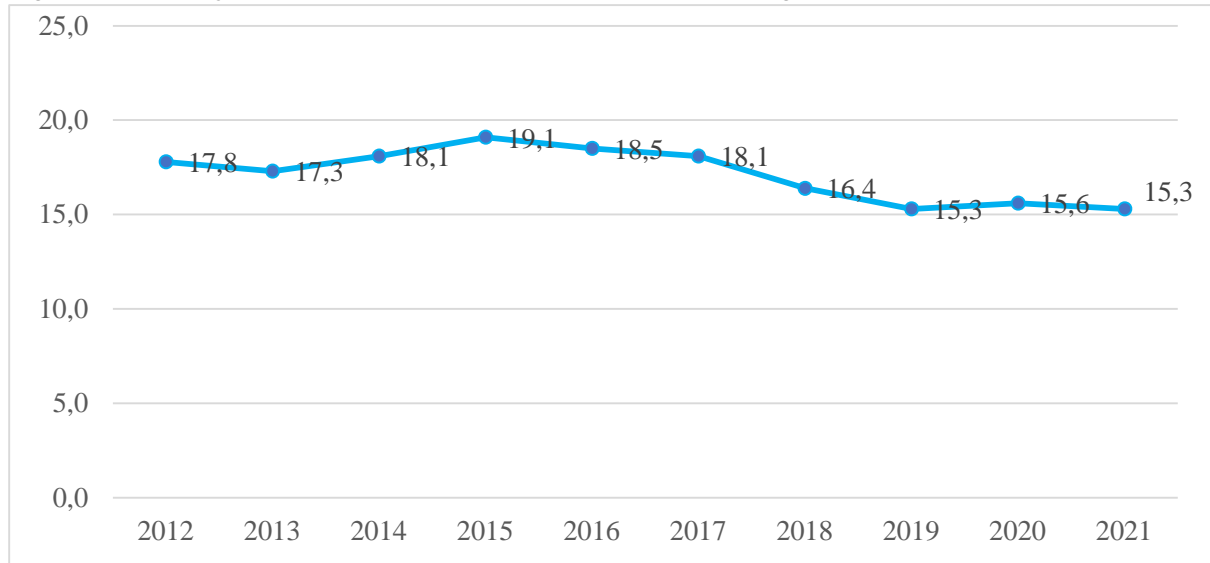
Education system-related factors and labor market characteristics can also impact students' decisions to leave education before finishing the compulsory duration. Education system-related factors include grade retention, socio-economic segregation of schools, early tracking, quality early childhood education, and smooth transition to upper secondary education and care (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009; Jimerson et al., 2002; Audas & Willms, 2001; Traag & Van der Velden, 2011, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014). Labor market factors comprise (un)employment rates, employment opportunities, and regional or seasonal labor markets (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2014).

In the present paper, we will focus on compensation measures in Romania. We aim to give a comprehensive picture of compensation measures, focusing not only on the second chance programs but also on the methods/policies that are not directly focused on early leavers. In the next section, we will examine the early leavers' rates in Romania and the European context and then describe the compensation measures for early leaving in Romania, focusing on the main objectives, target groups, the conditions of application, and their characteristics. In the concluding section, we present the main implications of these measures for stakeholders.

2. Early leaving in Romania and Europe

Figure 1 displays how the share of early leavers from education and training has evolved in Romania in the last decade, from 2012 to 2021. Thus, in 2012, a significant percentage of young people aged between 18 and 24 who completed lower secondary education at most, 17.8% respectively, were not following any education or training. This share of early leavers peaked at 19.1% in 2015 and subsequently decreased to the minimum level of 15.3% in 2019 and 2021, with a share of 15.6% of early leavers registered in 2020. Although the rate of early leavers decreased by 2.5 pp in the analysed period, the value remained relatively high. These results show the importance and urgency of applying measures to significantly reduce the rate of early leavers from education and training.

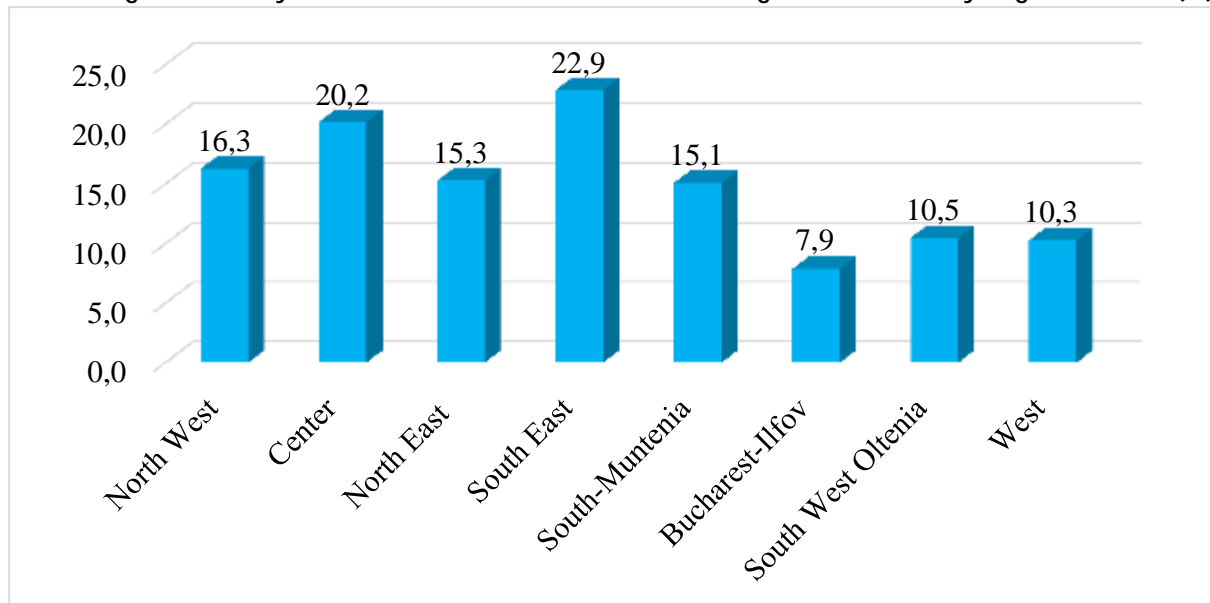
Figure 1. Early leavers from education and training in Romania, 2012-2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_ifse_16]

As seen in Figure 2, in 2021, the share of early leavers from education and training in Romania was 15.3%, the lowest recorded in the last decade. However, seeing how we can contextualise the differences between the shares in different regions is imperative. Thus, Figure 2 reveals that the region with the largest share of early leavers was the South-East Region, with 22.9%, followed by the Center Region, with 20.2%, and the North-West Region, with 16.3%. On the other hand, the region where the lowest share was recorded was the Bucharest-Ilfov Region, with only 7.9%, followed by the West Region, with 10.3%, and the South-West Oltenia Region, with 10.5%. The shares of early leavers in the North-West and South-Muntenia regions were slightly above 15%. These differences registered between Romania's eight regions mainly relate to the economic and social factors that influence the participation of young people in education and training at the regional level.

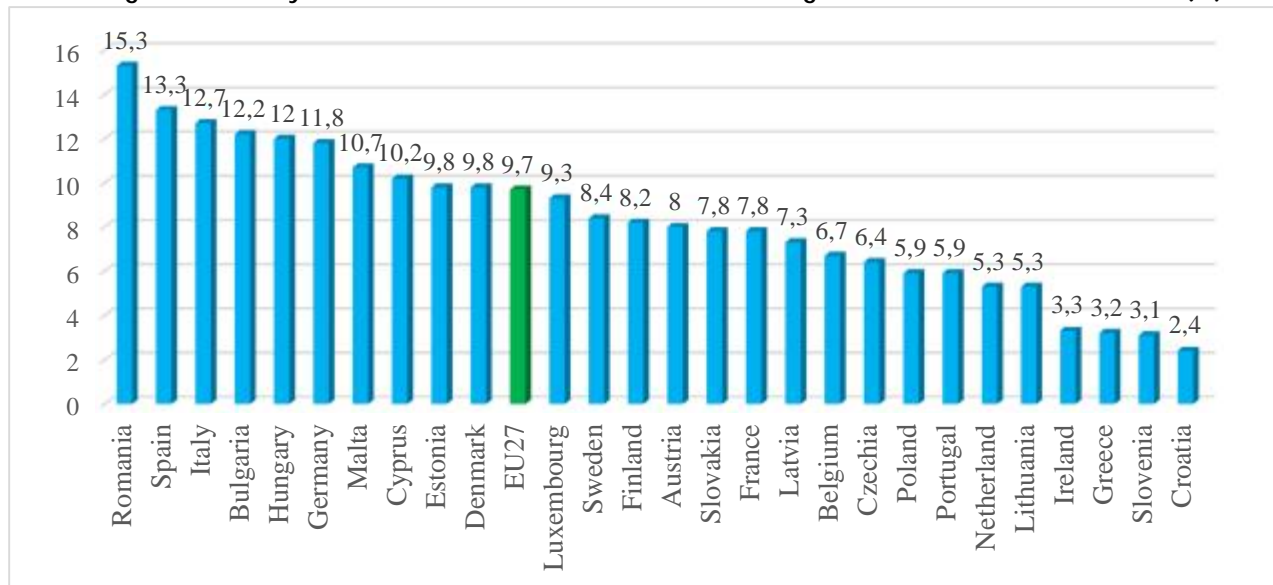
Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training in Romania, by regions, 2021 (%).



Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_16]

Regarding the early leaving from education and training at the EU27 level, in Figure 3, we can see the share of those who left education and training early in each of the 27 member states of the European Union, but also what was the EU27 average in 2021. Thus, as shown, Romania had the highest share of young people who left education and training early with a perfect of 15.3%, followed by Spain (13.3%), Italy (12.7%), Bulgaria (12.2%) and Hungary (12%). On the other hand, the countries with the lowest shares of young people who left education and training early were Croatia (2.4%), Slovenia (3.1%), Greece (3.2%) and Ireland (3.3%). Moreover, we can observe that in 2021, the EU27 average was below 10%. Given that Romania had the highest share of young people who left education and training early out of the 27 member states of the European Union in 2021, designing and implementing as many measures as possible to reduce early leaving of education and training significantly are essential for the country. Therefore, the next step in this study will be the description of some of the most important measures currently existing at the national level, which are carried out to reduce the gap between Romania and the EU27 regarding the share of those who left early education and training.

Figure 3. Early leavers from education and training in UE27 countries, 2021 (%)



Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_14]

3. Methodology

Our study objective was to describe the measures for early leaving in Romania comprehensively. To fulfil this goal, we employed document analysis. We mainly covered legislative documents published in Monitorul Oficial or by relevant ministries, as well as brochures from school institutions and reports from CEDEFOP (2019). We focused on identifying the main objectives, the target groups, the condition of application/prerequisites, and their main characteristics. The selection criteria for these documents are based on their relevance in describing the measures/programs for early leaving in Romania.

4. Results

- The Second Chance Program

The second chance program provides an opportunity for individuals from the target group to continue and complete compulsory education without interrupting their professional or family obligations. This program is designed for teenagers, young adults, and individuals from diverse social backgrounds of all ages who have not followed or completed primary and secondary education (Ministerul Educației, 2022).

The program is structured on two levels: Second chance - primary education and Second chance - lower secondary education, with the latter including a professional training component. The Second Chance - primary education program aims to support children, young people, or adults in completing their primary education. It is intended for those who are at least four years older than the age corresponding to the class and could not complete their primary education by the age of 14. The Second Chance - Secondary Education program aims to assist individuals who have exceeded the schooling age corresponding to their class by at least four years. This program

helps them complete their basic education corresponding to secondary school education or compulsory education. Additionally, they can receive training in order to obtain a professional qualification in a specific field (Ministerul Educației, 2022; OM 3062/2022, 2022).

The Second Chance Program is a flexible initiative designed to encourage and assist students in successfully completing their education. The program offers greater autonomy to schools in its implementation while also providing the necessary support for all those involved through training programs, teaching staff, and educational materials for both students and teachers. Innovative elements have been introduced in the educational process, such as the modular curriculum and credit system for basic education, the evaluation, certification, and recognition of previously acquired skills by students, and individually tailored training programs (Ministerul Educației, 2022).

The Second Chance Program allows for class sizes ranging from a minimum number of 10 students and a maximum of 16 students. The program is flexible in terms of scheduling, with courses being offered in the morning, afternoon, evening, and on weekends, including during school holidays. The final schedule is determined by the administrative board of each educational unit, after consulting with enrolled students in the program. The standard duration of the Second Chance – Primary Education program is two years. The duration of education can be adjusted (reduced or increased) based on student's individual skills (OM 3062/2022, 2022; Ministerul Educației, 2022).

In the Second Chance – Secondary Education program, students can choose from different educational paths based on their previously followed studies (OM 3062/2022, 2022):

1. Educational path without obtaining a professional qualification:
 - Secondary education track - with a standard duration of 2 years;
 - Secondary education track and the lower cycle of high school – with a standard duration of 3 years.
2. Educational path with obtaining a professional qualification:
 - Secondary education route with obtaining a level 2 professional qualification - has a standard duration of 3 years;
 - Secondary education route and the lower cycle of high school, the technological branch, in order to obtain a level 3 professional qualification – with a standard duration of 4 years.

The professional training program includes the professional qualifications provided in the National Register of Professional Qualifications for the corresponding qualification level.

There is no upper age limit for enrolment in this program. However, the minimum age requirement is that students should be at least four years older than the age corresponding to the class and meet one of the following situations (Ministerul Educației, 2022; OM 3062/2022, 2022):

- For the second chance program - primary education:
- students who have not participated in any formal school education;
 - students who were enrolled but dropped out of primary education, regardless of the time and reasons for dropping out;
 - Students who did not complete primary education until the age of 14.

For the second chance program - lower secondary education:

- students who have completed compulsory primary education (including in the Second Chance system) but have not continued their education further;
- students who graduated from some classes corresponding to secondary education (V, VI or VII), but dropped out of school during this educational cycle, regardless of the time and reasons for dropping out.

Enrollment in the Second Chance program does not require an exam. To apply for the program, the student must complete an application and choose the preferred educational path and the option for a professional qualification from the options approved by the legislation. Students can enrol in the program twice a year, in October and February. Individuals can enroll in the Second Chance - Primary Education program without any identity documents at the time of application; they can still apply as long as they submit them by the time they complete the IV level study (OM 3062/2022, 2022; Ministerul Educației, 2022).

The Second Chance - Primary Education Program is organized on four levels corresponding to the years of study in primary education. Each level of study can be organized with frequency during the day or evening, as well as intensively or combined, over a period of 16 weeks. Each level of study includes compulsory and optional modules. The didactic activities specific to a module can be done face-to-face or online, but at least 75% of the hours allocated to each module must be done face-to-face. Students can also schedule individual consultations during designated hours (OM 3062/2022, 2022; Ministerul Educației, 2022).

When enrolling in the program, the initial assessment is organized and aimed exclusively at candidates applying for enrollment at a level of study different from level I. The initial assessment involves taking written and oral or practical tests (OM 3062/2022, 2022).

The curriculum in the Second Chance Program - primary education is developed for basic education. This program is characterized by an approach focused on the learning and knowledge needs of the students. It has a practical and applicative nature, and its content is oriented towards correlating the skills to the needs of the students. The learning paths are personalized and adapted to the particularities regarding the age of the students. The skills they previously acquired in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts are valued and taken into consideration. The program also helps in transfer and mobilize knowledge and skills in new contexts. Moreover, it provides the possibility of reducing the study period (OM 3062/2022, 2022).

To pass a module, an individual must obtain at least the "Sufficient qualification" in the module evaluation. Once a module is passed, a module passing certificate is issued. A graduation certificate is issued after successfully passing all the levels corresponding to primary education. Graduates of the Second Chance program - primary education have two options: they can either continue their studies in secondary education within the Second Chance program or be integrated into secondary education in mainstream education (OM 3062/2022, 2022).

In order to successfully graduate from the Second Chance Program – secondary education, a student must pass all of the required modules and earn the necessary credits specified in the program's framework plan for their chosen educational path.

Graduates of the program benefit from all the rights of a secondary school graduate, respectively, all the rights of a compulsory education graduate, depending on their educational path (OM 3062/2022, 2022).

- Evening or reduced-frequency high school education

Secondary school graduates from previous years who turn 18 before the start of the new school year can enrol in high school education only in evening or reduced-frequency courses during the period specified in the admission calendar (Ministerul Educației și Inspectoratul Județean Cluj, 2022; Inspectoratul Școlar al Municipiului București, 2022). The program aims to reintegrate individuals who left school early back into the education and training systems, allowing them to obtain the necessary qualifications and skills for labour market insertion.

Enrollment in the evening or reduced-frequency education of candidates from the previous series who reach the age of 18 by the start of the respective school year is done at a special centre designated by the county school inspectorate (Portal Învățământ, 2022).

Places in evening classes and classes with reduced frequency are not filled by computerized allocation. Candidates are admitted through online public meetings.

Evening or reduced-frequency high school education provides classes organized on theoretical and technological pathways. Each year, a brochure for each county and the Municipality of Bucharest is made available with information regarding admission to high school education, state vocational education, and dual education, which is sent to the Ministry of Education in electronic and printed versions (Ministerul Educației și Inspectoratul Județean Cluj, 2022; Inspectoratul Școlar al Municipiului București, 2022).

According to the provisions of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, compulsory general education consists of 10 classes and is usually organized full-time for students up to the age of 18. Exceptionally, compulsory education can be organized with reduced frequency for individuals who have exceeded the class age by more than three years. Those who have completed several classes through compulsory education with frequency can enrol in the next class with reduced frequency by providing supporting documents such as original transcripts and certificate issued by the school (Anexă ORDIN 5545/2015, 2015).

The state provides basic funding for all students for compulsory education with reduced frequency.

Compulsory education with reduced frequency can be organized in educational units where compulsory education is conducted with frequency. The school year structure for mandatory reduced-frequency education complies with the legal provisions in force for full-time education (Anexă ORDIN 5545/2015, 2015).

The evaluation of students from compulsory education with reduced frequency is made through oral, written, and practical examinations. The qualifications/grades awarded to the students are entered into the school register immediately after the end of the evaluation activity. The school situation ends according to the provisions of regular education (Anexă ORDIN 5545/2015, 2015).

Students enrolled in reduced-frequency compulsory education benefit from all the rights and have the same obligations as students enrolled in full-time education. Graduates of reduced-frequency education receive the same educational documents and have the same rights as graduates of full-time courses (Anexă ORDIN 5545/2015, 2015).

- Apprenticeship at the workplace for European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 1

Apprenticeship at the workplace for EQF level 1 qualification is another measure for early leaving from education and training. An apprenticeship is vocational training at the workplace based on an apprenticeship contract. The program includes both theoretical training and practical training. At the end of the theoretical and practical activities, the apprentice takes exams and obtains a professional qualification certificate (Cedefop, 2019).

One of the aims of workplace apprenticeship for the level 1 qualification is to provide interested individuals (over the age of 16) with an opportunity to obtain a vocational training qualification for adults, that can lead to employment and/or continuing education (especially for early leavers or individuals not in education, employment, or training). The second objective is to encourage employers to hire and skilled workforce according to their specific requirements. The third goal of workplace apprenticeship is to foster the social integration of interested individuals (over the age of 16) by aligning their professional aspirations with the needs/ requirements of the labor market. The fourth aim of the workplace apprenticeship is provide adequate job security for interested persons over the age of 16, thereby solving the problem of segmented labor markets. Another objective is to contribute to economic growth by creating new jobs, social cohesion, and helping individuals achieve personal fulfillment. Finally, the program seeks to promote social dialogue and foster partnerships between social actors at the local level (LEGE nr. 279, 2013).

The target group for workplace apprenticeship is, on the one hand, interested individuals aged over 16 who want to focus on learning starting from real and practical work situations required in practice in an occupation directly at the workplace (LEGE nr. 279, 2013; Cedefop, 2019). On the other hand, another target group is employers who wish to organize apprenticeship activities at the workplace according to the fields of activity for their vacant jobs (LEGE nr. 279, 2013).

The National Agency of Employment manages workplace apprenticeship programs. These programs are part of continuing vocational education and training. The minimum duration for the level 1 qualification for the workplace apprenticeship is six months. Through workplace apprenticeship, individuals simultaneously work and obtain a qualification. This approach is suited for unemployed individuals and those dropping out of initial education and training (LEGE nr. 279, 2013; Cedefop, 2019).

Companies can organize vocational training at the workplace through apprenticeships in collaboration with authorized vocational training providers who can organize qualification exams. The employer appoints an apprenticeship coordinator who guides the apprentice to acquire the

professional skills necessary for the qualification for which the apprenticeship is organized at the workplace (LEGE nr. 279, 2013).

The funding for vocational training through workplace apprenticeships can have various sources: employers' resources, European structural and investment fund sponsorships, national public funds approved in the unemployment insurance budget, and others (such as taxes or donations) (LEGE nr. 279, 2013). Employers can benefit from a subsidy of approximately 452 euros (2250 Romanian lei) from the public employment service (Cedefop, 2019)

The workplace apprenticeship to obtain the qualification corresponding to level 1 is designed for individuals who have completed at least primary education and aims to provide basic knowledge and basic skills required to for basic tasks (ORDIN nr. 5.039/2.126/2018, 2018).

In order to sign an apprenticeship contract, a person must cumulatively fulfill the following conditions: (1) takes steps to find a job by his/her own means or by registering with the employment agency; (2) be at least 16 years old; (3) not have a qualification for the occupation in which the workplace apprenticeship is organized; and (4) have graduated from at least primary school (LEGE nr. 279, 2013).

On the other hand, foreign citizens (as well as stateless persons who obtained a work permit in Romania) and citizens of the member states of the European Union (of the signatory states of the Agreement on the EEA) and their family members can benefit from on-the-job apprenticeship training in Romania (LEGE nr. 279, 2013).

Vocational training for EQF level 1

Vocational training courses for EQF level 1 qualification (for primary school graduates) are another compensation measure for early leaving and training. Vocational training is carried out through training programs that include all theoretical and/or practical training activities to achieve the objectives of training skills tailored for a specific field (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000). Upon completion of the theoretical and practical activities, the individual takes exams to obtain a vocational qualification certificate, graduation diploma, or certificate of professional competencies (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000).

Vocational training courses are part of continuing vocational training, which is successive to the initial vocational education and ensures that adults either improve already acquired professional skills or acquire new ones (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000, Cedefop, 2019). Continuing VET (or adult vocational training) is open for learners who are 16 years old and above.

As in the case of apprenticeship, the vocational training to obtain a qualification corresponding to level 1 EQF is carried out for people who have completed at least primary education and is aimed at obtaining basic knowledge and developing the basic skills needed to perform basic tasks (ORDIN nr. 5.039/2.126/2018, 2018). These courses have a minimum duration of 180 hours, with 60 hours dedicated to theoretical training and 120 hours dedicated to practical training (Cedefop, 2019).

The vocational training of adults can be provided by individuals or legal entities, under public or private law, established in Romania, the member states of the European Union, or the states

belonging to the European Economic Area, regardless of their legal form of organization, known as vocational training providers (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000).

Vocational training providers organize vocational training programs for occupations, crafts, specializations, and professions, which are included in Romania's Classification of Occupations (COR) (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000; Cedefop, 2019).

Adult vocational training can be structured in various ways, such as initiation, qualification, retraining, improvement, and specialization programs. Initiation involves acquiring one or more skills specific to a qualification according to the occupational or vocational training standard; Qualification or requalification entails vocational training that leads to the acquisition of skills that allow a person to carry out activities specific to one or more occupations; and improvement and specialization represent the professional training that leads to developing or completing the knowledge, skills, or professional competencies of a person who already has a qualification (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000). According to Ordonanța nr. 129 (2000), there are four main forms of vocational training:

1. Courses organized by vocational training providers;
2. Courses organized by employers within their organization;
3. Internships and practicum in organizations in the country or abroad;
4. Other forms of vocational training;

Vocational training can be provided from various financial sources such as employers' funds, unemployment insurance budget, sponsorships, donations, and external sources or fees from persons participating in vocational training programs (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000).

Vocational training courses in fundamental/key competencies

The key and basic skills courses equip individuals with a set of standard and fundamental skills that are required for several types of occupations (Cedefop, 2016; Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000). At the end of the theoretical and practical activities, the individual takes exams to obtain a graduation diploma or certificate of professional competencies.

As well as for the vocational training courses for EQF level 1 qualification, the main objectives of the vocational training courses for fundamental skills development are:

1. To facilitate the social integration of individuals based on their professional aspirations and labor market requirements.
2. To train human resources that can enhance the competitiveness of the labor force.
3. To provide up to date knowledge and improve vocational training for basic and related occupations.
4. To consider the change in qualification, that may arise due to economic restructuring, social mobility, or changes in work capacity.
5. To facilitate the acquisition of advanced knowledge, modern methods, and procedures that are necessary for fulfilling work duties.
6. To encourage lifelong learning (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000).

The target groups for vocational training courses in fundamental/key competencies are adults of working age (over 16 years old), employers that want to ensure employees access to professional training, and people looking for a job (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000, Cedefop, 2016).

The courses on key-competencies courses aim to develop the following skills:

- communication skills in Romanian and mother language (in the case of national minorities);
- communication skills in foreign languages;
- fundamental math, science, and technology skills;
- digital skills for using information technology as a learning and knowledge tool.
- social and civic skills;
- entrepreneurial skills;
- Skills for cultural and awareness-raising;
- learning to learn skills (Ordin nr. 1149/2020, 2020).

The fundamental/key competencies courses are available for learners aged 16 and over.

Vocational training providers and employers can organize the key competencies courses within their organization as internships and specializations in an organization in the country or abroad or through other forms of vocational training (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000).

The training courses can be funded from the following financial sources: (1) employers' own funds; (2) unemployment insurance budget; (3) sponsorships, donations, or other external sources; (4) fees from persons participating in vocational training programs (Ordonanța nr. 129, 2000).

5. Conclusions

In the present study, we described some of the most important compensation measures currently existing at the national level in Romania while also mapping the present situation regarding early leaving from education in Romania and at the European level. We have identified five principal strategies to counteract this phenomenon of early leaving through compensation measures: (1) the Second Chance Program, (2) evening or reduced-frequency high-school education, (3) apprenticeship at the workplace for EQF level 1, (4) vocational training for EQF level 1 and (5) vocational training courses in fundamental/key competencies.

The educational measures can have implications for beneficiaries within the educational system. Besides addressing the early leaving rates, these alternatives to conventional full-time school secondary education for early leavers from education and training comprising such as second chance program and evening and reduced-frequency high-school as well as apprenticeship and vocational training can contribute to a more inclusive and flexible educational arrangement. These measures can also indirectly have implications for the reduction of unemployment rates and social exclusion rates. Considering demographic changes, occupational shifts in the labor market, and economic transformations, keeping a close watch on and adapting programs and policies to these ongoing changes is essential. Therefore, it is crucial to establish cooperation among stakeholders from educational institutions, policymakers, and labor market participants.

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