

Measures to improve effective access to primary and secondary education for all children

A. General notes on financing the education system

Table illustrating the evolution of the percentage of the annual GDP allocated to education

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	%GDP	Billion lei	%GDP	Billion lei	%GDP	Billion lei	%GDP	Billion lei	%GDP	Billion lei	%GDP	Billion lei
	3.1	20.64	3.2	23.03	2.8	21.67	2.9	24.07	3,1	28,9	3.5	36,9

The funding is made on the basis of the standard cost per pupil/ pre-school child, which is determined for each level of education, route and specialization/field. The standard cost per pupil/preschool child corresponding to each of the two types of expenses is determined based on the value of the cost corresponding to coefficient 1, which is calculated using a specific calculation methodology and whose value has constantly increased during the reference period.

Illustrating the evolution of the standard cost per pupil/ preschool child between 2014-2019

Year	The value of coefficient 1 corresponding to the standard cost per pupil/ preschool child for expenses on salaries and amounts of other benefits	The value of coefficient 1 corresponding to the standard cost per pupil/ preschool child for expenses on training, regular assessment of pupils and the expenses with goods and services
2014	2,492 lei	306 lei
2016	2,520 lei	312 lei
2017	3,043 lei	321 lei
2018	4,413 lei	355 lei
2019	5,384 lei	370 lei

The basic funding of a certain pre-university educational establishment results from multiplying the standard cost per student/ preschool child by the coefficients specific to the respective educational establishment and by the number of enrolled children.

The complementary funding covers the capital expenditures (investments, capital repairs, consolidations), the social expenditures (grants for boarding schools and canteens, expenditures on pupils' scholarships, pupils' transport or teachers' commuting expenses, etc.) and other expenditures associated with the state pre-university education process which are not covered by the basic financing of school units (expenses for pupils' regular national evaluation, expenses for school competitions and extracurricular educational activities, etc.).

The complementary funding is provided from the local budgets of the administrative-territorial units to which the pre-university educational establishment belongs to and from the amounts deducted from the value added tax, approved annually by the state budget law for this purpose.

The additional funding is granted as a fixed global amount from the budget of the MoER for awarding state pre-university educational establishments with outstanding results in the field of inclusion or in the field of education performance. The local and county councils and the General Council of the Municipality of Bucharest, respectively, contribute to the additional financing, offering grants to the educational establishments, based on their own methodology.

B. Access to education

B.1. Law no. 1/2011 provides at article 58 that the education establishments may extend the educational activities for pupils through *School after school* programmes. The activities offered through this type of services include activities for strengthening the acquired competences or for accelerating learning, as well as remedial teaching activities. In support of the educational establishments, the MoER issued in 2011 the order no. 5349 on the approval of the Methodology on the organization of the *School after school* program, subsequently amended and supplemented by order no. 4802/2017.

The *School after school* program is a complementary program to the compulsory school schedule whose aim is to prevent school dropout and early school leaving, boost pupils' performances, offer remedial and/or accelerated learning by means of integrated support measures, including both educational and leisure activities, personal development and social integration. It also provides pupils with a safe space as an alternative to spending their free time in environments with harmful potential.

The activities provided to primary school pupils include among other the supervision of children, support with homework, remedial teaching and support for children with cognitive difficulties or emotional or speech disorders, activities for pupils capable of higher educational performances.

Similarly, secondary school pupils can benefit of support with homework and remedial teaching, psycho-pedagogical support for overcoming learning gaps, activities for accelerating learning and higher educational achievements (including preparation for competitions and school Olympiads, sports or artistic contests), activities preparing pupils for life, thematic activities and workshops etc.

The funding of this program can be ensured from multiple sources, including from local authorities' budgets, and in the case of pupils from disadvantaged groups, from the State budget.

At upper secondary education level, the Romanian Secondary Education (ROSE) Project contributes, through its components and activities (remedial, counselling, guidance, and vocational orientation activities), to increasing the completion rate and improving the academic performance at the Bacalaureate exam. More details of this Project are below.

B.2. With a view to improving the quality of pre-school education and of developing the corresponding necessary infrastructure, in 2009 MoER started the implementation of the *Project on the Reform of the Early Childhood Education in Romania* (PRET), which is to be completed in December 2021. The Project's objectives include the training of pre-school teachers and staff, and the provision with education materials and the building of new establishments for 400 kindergartens. The initial estimated cost of the project amounts to 105 million EUR and is funded by the Romanian Government with the support of the Council of Europe Development Bank.

The components concerned with the training and improvement of kindergarten staff and the enhancement of the system's capacity to provide quality services, respectively, were completed in March 2019. The outcomes achieved within these components include the training of over 39,000 pre-school teachers, 18,000 carers/ assistants/ medical personnel and 3,000 directors, the elaboration and distribution of 7 specific modules for the improvement of kindergarten staff in the education system, the setting up of a network of 325 Resource Centres for Education and Development, the provision of 12,500 kindergartens and schools where the preparatory class is carried out with teaching materials, educational games and other materials needed in the early childhood education process for children aged 3 to 6/7 years old. The component concerning the infrastructure rehabilitation and the development is to be completed by 31 December 2021. At present, 229

kindergartens have been finalized, while 139 are under construction. The construction offers for 17 kindergartens are in evaluation process and shortly, the awarding and construction procedures for the 15 remaining kindergartens will be initiated.

B.3. Another important moment in one's educational path is the graduation of secondary school. In order to further support the pupils from vulnerable groups, the MoER implements, during 2015-2022, the *Romania Secondary Education Project (ROSE)* (with an estimated cost of 200 million euros, financed entirely through a loan from IBRD). The project aims at reducing the school drop-out in secondary and tertiary education and at increasing the passing rate of the Baccalaureate exam and covers two types of interventions: i. Systemic and school level interventions and ii. University level interventions (for public higher education institutions).

Within the first component, one sub-component (subcomponent 1.1) supports students' transition from upper secondary to tertiary education, targeting the increase of school attendance and graduation rate, increase of the baccalaureate passing rate, as well as the improvement of educational performances, by means of grants awarded to the less performant high schools. These high schools are entitled to 100,000 euros grants on average, which can be used over a 4 years' timeframe.

The eligible activities include: pedagogic and support activities, such as remedial activities, counselling, guidance/ coaching and vocational guidance, mediation in the Roma communities and personal development activities (at least 50% of the direct costs); extracurricular and information activities, such as visits / documentation trips, training courses, participation in competitions and the formation of inter-school networks (up to 30% of the direct costs); minor civil works such as small interior renovation/ repairing of school spaces (for example: laboratories), without negative impact on the environment, and purchases of goods for education purposes (up to 20% of the direct costs).

The implementation of the high school grants was scheduled in 3 batches, out of which 2 are under implementation, with a total number of 728 grants - batch 1 starting the activities in June 2017, batch 2 in October 2018. The total value of the high school signed grants is 333,530 mil lei.

Around 155 projects included in the 3rd batch are expected to be signed in September 2020, with a total value of 73,171 million lei.

Starting 2017, over 143,653 students (out of which 74,801 girls) from the beneficiary high schools participated in the pedagogical, support and extracurricular activities organized in the project financed through the ROSE grants.

The analysis of the project development indicators collected at the end of academic year 2018-2019, 2nd year of grants implementation, shows progress in many of the project supported institutions.

Overall, the project development indicators for the high schools and universities benefitting from grants have improved as compared to the baseline and, in some cases exceeded the final targets.

The dropout rate in the project-supported schools diminished from the baseline 6.5% to 3%, better than the end target of 3.5%.

The percentage of high schools with dropout rate above 7 percent diminished from a baseline of 23.1% to 15.52% in project-supported schools, which is better than the result expected for the 4th year of ROSE Project implementation. The end target of 10% seems possible to achieve.

The average graduation rate increased from the baseline of 86.9% to 95.57% in project-supported schools, better than the end target – 93%.

The average Baccalaureate passing rate, with a baseline of 49.6%, increased to 62.93% in project-supported high schools, better than the end target - 59%.

The sub-component targeting systemic interventions (component 1.2) supports all high schools in improving the transition rate to higher education, by reviewing the upper secondary school curriculum, training teachers and directors in the implementation of the new curriculum and in the field of evaluation, improving the quality of training activities provided by the Teacher Training Houses, reviewing the pool of exam items (tests), updating the online assessment and exam platform, developing digital resources in view of improving the teaching-learning- assessment process.

Within this sub-component, the participation of Romanian pupils to the international assessment TIMSS was financed, the testing being carried in April-June 2019. The component will also support participation of Romanian students in PISA 2022.

With respect to the activities on curriculum revision, in June 2019 two seminars were organised: *Curricular development in international contexts- recommendations for the elaboration of curriculum in Romania*, which was aimed at specialists on curriculum and assessment from relevant institutions and national projects (ROSE included), non-governmental organizations active in education and implementing major projects targeting pupils and/ or teachers.

As part of the activities on the assessment of pupils' results, a series of training seminars in the field of standardized assessment based on Item Response Theory was carried out for the test development committees involved in development of assessment items for national exams, for specialists coming from the MoER and its subordinated relevant institutions.

The component dedicated to university level interventions supports activities that respond to the needs of students at high risk of dropping out of university during their first year of study, especially those from disadvantaged groups. One non-competitive and three competitive grant schemes are financed through this component.

Within the non-competitive scheme, all eligible universities can participate and its aim is to support public higher education institutions in developing and carrying out programmes for improving students' academic performances, tutoring programmes, professional counselling and career guidance programmes, support and guidance services, coaching services or for the development of socio-emotional competences, workshops in specific fields as well as awareness campaigns targeting students at risk of dropping out etc. The competitive Student Support grant scheme proposes the same type of activities as the non- competitive grants.

The competitive grant schemes include:

- Summer bridge programs, during which the high school students may participate in courses, seminars, counselling activities, sports competitions or social and cultural activities etc., in the university campuses;
- Learning centres, developed to improve the academic and social support mechanisms for students at high risk of dropout.

Starting with the academic year 2017-2018, within the grant schemes for universities, 298 grant agreements were signed, in total amount of 168,168 million lei: 201 grants within the non-competitive grant scheme, 59 grants for summer bridge programmes and 38 grants for learning centres. In total, 5,426 high school pupils benefited of summer bridge programmes implemented between 2017 and 2019. With respect to gender, the number of female participants has been higher, amounting to 3,331 girls, of which 1549 were in risk situations.

Between 2017 and 2019, 13,467 higher education students, out of which 7,187 girls, benefitted from grant activities within the universities grant schemes.

C. Preventing dropout and combating its negative effects

The call for projects “*Motivated teachers in disadvantaged schools*”, dedicated to highly disadvantaged schools, having large numbers of pupils in risk of school dropout and who fail to attract and retain qualified teachers. A number of 27 projects have been admitted for financing, benefitting from a EUR 28,56 million budget, who will provide 6,977 beneficiaries (teachers and support staff from disadvantaged schools) with trainings and exchange of good practices for developing the necessary competences for working with children in educational risk situations (children at high risk of school dropout - the majority being children from poor families, children with disabilities, Roma children, children from remote areas etc; hospitalized children; children in detention juvenile delinquency).

Another call for projects, “*School for all*”, launched in 2016 as well, targets the children from disadvantaged schools, those in risk of school dropout, the youth and adults that prematurely quit school and who would like to continue their studies, as well as the teachers and other specialists that need support for adapting their activity to the needs of the children. The call aims at facilitating the participation of 27,593 young children and pre-school children aged 0 to 5 years old to early childhood education and care; supporting 63,268 pupils (primary and secondary level) to attend school and lowering the risk of school dropout; bringing 8,653 youngster age 12 to 16 back to school; ensuring that 8,210 young people and adults, who have not completed the compulsory education, acquire a qualification upon graduating from a *Second chance* programme; ensuring the participation of 15,548 teachers and support staff (school mediators, school counsellors, principals and educational specialists) to training programmes and exchange of good practices; facilitating the improvement of competency for 15,709 teachers and support staff. A number of 127 projects have been selected and are under implementation, benefiting from a total funding of EUR 164,662,306.71.

D. The main outcomes and outputs of the implementation of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Early School Leaving until 2019

The Strategy is based on four pillars and six representative programs (mentioned in the table below), which include prevention, intervention and compensation measures, some of which are achieved through specific projects.

PILLAR 1: Ensuring access to education and quality education for all children

Representative programme 1.1: Increasing access to early childhood education and care

This program aims to strengthen and consolidate the successful expansion of early childhood education, based on the completion of pre-school education (3-6 years) and the initiation of a rapid expansion ECEC services provision for children under 3 years of age (especially for children aged between 2-3 years).

Representative programme 1.2: Ensuring quality primary and secondary education for all

This program focuses on two main areas of intervention: the development of functional literacy and key competences and the strengthening of on-the-job teacher training.

PILLAR 2: Ensuring the completion of compulsory education by all children

Representative programme 2.1: Development of early warning systems and strengthening of remedial and support programs for pupils at risk in compulsory education

The program develops early warning and early intervention systems to detect children at risk of dropping out of school. The program also supports, strengthens and expands the various prevention and remediation programs, including the School after School program.

Representative programme 2.2: Improving the attractiveness, inclusion, quality and relevance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET)

This program aims to redesign TVET routes to increase the attractiveness and relevance of TVET, including by expanding learning opportunities in the workplace. The program also supports TVET curriculum reform and teacher training.

PILLAR 3: Reintegration into the educational system of persons who left school early

Representative programme 3.1: Ensuring an adequate offer for *Second Chance* educational programs

*This program aims to support, in the short term, early school leavers by ensuring access to and participation in the *Second Chance* programs, taking into consideration that the prevention and intervention programs are implemented in the medium and long term. The program also aims to improve the quality of the *Second Chance* programs.*

PILLAR 4: Developing appropriate institutional support

Representative programme 4.1: Strengthen the government's capacity to implement, monitor and evaluate the ESL reduction strategy

This program supports the creation of an enabling environment for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy, focusing on consolidating the government's capacity and ability of adopting a comprehensive approach for addressing the challenges of ESL.

Outcomes achieved within Pillar 1

At Pillar 1, within the Representative program 1.1, the project *Inclusive and Quality Early Childhood Education* is implemented, having as main objective the development of the national operational framework in the field of pre-school education, in order to facilitate access to education in nurseries and / or kindergartens for children under 3 years old. Its implementation had a delayed start, in August 2019, the implementation of the Representative program 1.1 being influenced by the financing of this project.

The outcome achieved so far under Pillar 1 include:

- the finalization, piloting and adoption by order of the Minister of the *Curriculum for early childhood education*, mentioned in section II.19.3.4 of the report;
- the steps taken in order to revise *Government's Decision no. /2012 on approving the Methodology for organizing and functioning of nurseries and other early childhood education educational establishments*, which will be continued in parallel with the activities within the non-competitive project *Inclusive and quality early childhood education*;
- the continuation of the provision of additional financial support to children (and their families) at risk of early school leaving through the annual implementation of support programs such as: *Romanian School Program, Euro 200, School Supplies, Hot Meal, Money for high school, Professional scholarship*.

The project *Relevant Curriculum, Open Education for All (CRED)*, presented in section II.19.4.2 of the report, is a very relevant element for the realization of the Representative program 1.2.

In important part of this Project is devoted to the training of 55,000 teachers in order to support the successful implementation of the new curriculum, using a learner centred approach and the focusing on the development of key competencies (the third strategic objective).

In 2018 the *Study on the analysis of the training needs of primary and secondary school teachers* was completed, within the Project's research component.

The evaluation of key competencies held by children at the end of the 4th grade was carried out for the first time, in the school year 2018-2019. This evaluation was also carried out prior to initiation of teacher training activities and it will contribute to impact assessment, by giving the possibility to compare the results obtained with those to be achieved at the end of the training activities.

At the same time, the CRED educational online platform was created, dedicated to teachers (with over 8,000,000 hits during the training sessions).

In 2019, the train the trainer's program was accredited, which was a prerequisite for preparing the training activities for the 55,000 teachers targeted by the Project and for this purpose, the training of 442 trainers was carried out. Also, 16 continuous training programmes were accredited for teachers in primary and secondary education, and 8,597 teachers were trained (6594 primary school teachers and 2003 secondary school teachers).

CRED's forth strategic objective addresses the urgent need to systematically and effectively reduce and prevent the phenomenon of early school leaving, a phenomenon that manifests itself mainly in disadvantaged communities. The viable intervention actions provided under this component include:

1. the piloting of complementary support interventions for pupils from vulnerable groups which focus on preventing school dropout by means of information, counselling and mentoring, as well as by means of extracurricular activities, and

2. the development and piloting of curricular adaptation strategies in order to respond to the needs of pupils from vulnerable groups, a measure to be achieved by elaborating and piloting a framework document on curricular adaptation strategies in schools in disadvantaged communities, faced with an increased early school leaving risk.

In addition, a range of relevant documents have been prepared within the CRED project, such as: the policy document *Benchmarks for designing and updating the National Curriculum; Methodology regarding the development of the Curriculum at School's Decision* - focused on the development of key competencies; methodological guides for the different school subjects in primary and secondary education.

In order to implement the measure aimed at ensuring a curriculum that takes into account all types and degrees of disabilities and / or special needs, another specific measure within the Representative programme 1.2, in 2018 the study plans for special preschool, primary and secondary school education were approved. The progressive implementation of these plans started in the school year 2019-2020. At the same time, in order to ensure adequate conditions for candidates with deficiencies allowing them to enjoy equal chances during exams, MoER elaborated the normative framework regulating the sitting for national exams by pupils with visual or hearing impairments or suffering from autism spectrum disorder or specific learning disorders for the school year 2018-2019.

Outcomes achieved within Pillar 2

Within the Representative programme 2.1 of Pillar 2, two very important elements of progress were represented by the contracting of a technical assistance project in 2017, having as aim the assessment of early school leaving risks and the extension / connection of prevention tools in view of developing early school leaving warning mechanism and the contracting of a new technical assistance project, in 2018, with the aims of developing an early warning system for the prevention of early school leaving, including the development of a multi-annual action plan and a methodology for data collection and use, respectively.

In 2019, the Early Warning Mechanism in Education (MATE) was developed to prevent and reduce early school leaving. This Mechanism includes a complete package of measures and actions structured on three components: prevention, intervention and compensation, which addresses the following target groups: students at risk of dropout / early school leaving; school-age children (6-17 years old) never enrolled in school; school-age children (6-17 years old) who dropped out of school; young people aged 18-24 who have graduated at most eight grades and are not enrolled in other form of education or training, and migrant children.

Regarding the consolidation and extension of remedial and support programmes for pupils at risk of early school leaving attending compulsory education, the monitoring of the activities carried out by schools within the School after school Programmes has shown that in the school year this type of programmes were organized in 629 primary and secondary schools, which represents an increase by 27% compared to the 2017-2018 school year. Relative to the number of beneficiaries, 49,737 pupils benefited from the programmes (an increase of 43.74%), and the educational staff involved in the program totalized 5,438 persons - teaching, auxiliary teaching and non-teaching staff (an increase of 56.75%). The progress made was also due to the revision, in 2017, of the normative framework on the Methodology for organizing the School after school program, as a result of the identification of problematic issues schools confronted with when implementing this type of programmes.

The impact study conducted on the financing and implementation of the *School after School Programme* revealed that the measure represented by this type of program can be adopted to reduce in time, the dropout rates and the early school leaving. The impact study will be the basis for the elaboration of a public policy document, allowing the program to be financed from the state budget for children from disadvantaged categories, in line with the provisions of art. 58, point (4), of the Law of National Education no. 1/2011.

A defining project for the implementation of the Representative programme 2.2 was the implementation of the *National Program "2017 - the year of technical and vocational education in Romania"*. In this context, during 2017, the methodological steps needed for organizing the initial vocational training through dual vocational education were finalized.

In 2018, 400 study plans and 400 school syllabi respectively, were developed / revised, approved by minister's order 3500/29.03.2018 and minister's order 3501/29.03.2018. The new study plans and school syllabi are relevant for the labour market, mainly for the green economy and are correlated with the development of priority sectors at national level.

During the implementation of the Strategy, the activities aimed at increasing the attractiveness of TVET played an important role: the specific counselling and guidance activities carried out with 8th grade pupils, integrated information measures organized at county or local level such as the *Week of jobs* and fairs for educational offers (which provided information on the conditions of access to TVET, tuitions, benefits, provision of counselling activities, etc.), expanding the implementation of

the JOBS project (project that prepares gymnasium pupils in their final grade and secondary pupils on what the labour market is about).

In this context it is worth mentioning the online platform www.alegetidrumul.ro (choose your path), which is an essential information point on initial vocational training, both for pupils and their families, as well as for teachers and businesses.

The social inclusion component was facilitated by the continued implementation of the National Social Protection Programs *High School Money* and the *Professional Scholarship*.

In 2018, campaigns were carried out to disseminate examples of good practice and to present examples of successful careers of TVET graduates within the events registered for the European Vocational Skills Week.

At the same time, the *Compendium of good practices for increasing TVET visibility and attractiveness - Success Stories*, Volume II has been elaborated, which can be used for counselling and career guidance, especially at gymnasium (lower secondary education).

Strategy's Pillar 2 is also supported by the implementation of the Romanian Secondary Education Project (ROSE). The actions implemented at the level of educational establishments are aimed at reducing the dropout rate in high schools, increasing the graduation rate and improving performance in the baccalaureate exam. The project is presented in section II. 19.3.4.

Outcomes achieved within Pillar 3

Under Pillar 3, 13,102 pupils (4,883 primary school pupils and 8,219 lower secondary school pupils) participated in the Second Chance programs in the school year 2016-2017. In the following two school years, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, respectively, the Program was implemented in all counties of Romania and the total number of participants reached 15,909 in 2018 (5,832 pupils for primary education and 10,077 for lower secondary education), and 16,711 in 2019 (5,218 students for primary education and 11,493 for lower secondary education), respectively.

The projects contracted in 2017, within the Human Capital Operational Program 2014 - 2020, which target those who left school early are expected to have a significant contribution to the implementation of the Representative programme 3.1., namely the 127 projects selected under the *School for all* Program, presented in section II.19.4.2 and the INTESPO project - Registration of young people at the Public Employment Service, respectively, which is a project carried out by the National Employment Agency, in partnership with the MoER, the MoLSP, having a specific objective aiming at identifying at least 200,000 NEET's young people, and registering 160,000 of them at the Employment Service.

Within the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020, two calls were launched during 2019 for Second Chance type projects, targeting young NEETs (*Second chance education measures for NEET¹ young people*) and other categories of people who have not completed / did not participate in compulsory education (*Second chance education measures*). More details on these projects are provided in section II.19.4.2.

At the same time, through the CRED Project, improved projects of the Second Chance Programme methodologies for primary school and for lower secondary education have been elaborated.

¹ Not in Education, Employment or Training.

Outcomes achieved within Pillar 4

Within the Pillar 4 of the Strategy's and the corresponding Representative programme, in 2018, the Technical Group (WG) was created having as main responsibility to coordinate the implementation of the Strategy, according to MoER Order no. 3080 / 18.01.2018 on the attributions and composition of the Technical Groups for coordinating the implementation of the sectorial strategies.

At the same time, in the first semester of 2019, a training program was implemented for employees of the MoER and of the school inspectorates, as well as employees from establishments and institutions subordinated to or under the coordination of MoER. The training program targeted the use of sectoral strategies monitoring and evaluation tools. The 225 beneficiaries were trained on topics such as: elements of strategic planning and elaboration of public policies, the planning and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities, theory of change, evaluation techniques, the use of conclusions / recommendations resulted from studies and reports, impact evaluations etc.