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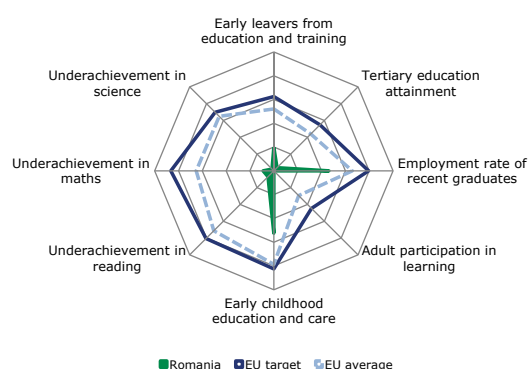
# ROMANIA

## 1. Key Indicators and Benchmarks

		Romania		EU average		
		2011	2014	2011	2014	
<b>Educational poverty and spending cuts: challenges for the education sector</b>						
Share of 15 year-olds with underachievement in:	Reading	•	: 37.3% <sup>12</sup>	:	17.8% <sup>12</sup>	
	Maths	•	: 40.8% <sup>12</sup>	:	22.1% <sup>12</sup>	
	Science	•	: 37.3% <sup>12</sup>	:	16.6% <sup>12</sup>	
Education investment	Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP		4.1%	2.8% <sup>13</sup>	5.1%	5.0% <sup>13</sup>
	Public expenditure on education as a share of total public expenditure		10.5%	8.1% <sup>13</sup>	10.5%	10.3% <sup>13</sup>
<b>Education attainment levels of young people across Europe</b>						
Early leavers from education and training (age 18-24)	Men		19.1%	19.5%	15.2%	12.7%
	Women		17.2%	16.7%	11.5%	9.5%
	Total	•	18.1%	18.1%	13.4%	11.1%
Tertiary education attainment (age 30-34)	Men		20.1%	22.9%	31.0%	33.6%
	Women		20.6%	27.2%	38.7%	42.3%
	Total	•	20.3%	25.0%	34.8%	37.9%
<b>Policy levers for inclusiveness, quality and relevance</b>						
Early childhood education and care (participation from age 4 to starting age of compulsory education)		•	86.4%	86.4% <sup>13</sup>	93.2%	93.9% <sup>13</sup>
Teachers' participation in training	Any topic (total)		:	83.3% <sup>13</sup>	:	84.6% <sup>13</sup>
	Special needs education		:	23.6% <sup>13</sup>	:	32.4% <sup>13</sup>
	Multicultural settings		:	18.2% <sup>13</sup>	:	13.2% <sup>13</sup>
	ICT skills for teaching		:	60.5% <sup>13</sup>	:	51.0% <sup>13</sup>
Foreign language learning	Share of ISCED 2 students learning two or more foreign languages		95.5%	95.4% <sup>12</sup>	63.0%	: <sup>12</sup>
Share of ISCED 3 students in vocational education and training (VET)			63.1%	60.0% <sup>13</sup>	50.4%	48.9% <sup>13</sup>
Employment rate of recent graduates by education attainment (age 20-34 having left education 1-3 years before reference year)	ISCED 3-4		58.9%	57.2%	71.3%	70.8%
	ISCED 5-8		81.4%	74.2%	82.5%	80.5%
	ISCED 3-8 (total)	•	70.8%	66.2%	77.1%	76.1%
Learning mobility	Inbound graduates mobility (bachelor)		:	1.6% <sup>13</sup>	:	: <sup>13</sup>
	Inbound graduates mobility (master)		:	2.5% <sup>13</sup>	:	: <sup>13</sup>
Adult participation in lifelong learning (age 25-64)	ISCED 0-8 (total)	•	1.4%	1.5%	8.9%	10.7%

Sources: Eurostat (LFS, UOE, GFS); OECD (PISA, TALIS). Notes: • ET 2020 benchmark; data refer to weighted EU average, covering a different number of Member States depending on the source; b= break in time series, d= definition differs, p= provisional, u= low reliability, <sup>12</sup>= 2012, <sup>13</sup>= 2013. Further information is found in the respective section of Volume 1 ([ec.europa.eu/education/monitor](http://ec.europa.eu/education/monitor)).

**Figure 1. Position in relation to highest (outer ring) and lowest performers (centre)**



Source: DG Education and Culture calculations, based on data from Eurostat (LFS 2014 and UOE 2013) and OECD (PISA 2012, TALIS 2013). Note: all scores are set between a maximum (the highest performers visualised by the outer ring) and a minimum (the lowest performers visualised by the centre of the figure).

## 2. Main strengths and challenges

Romania's tertiary education attainment rate has risen consistently in recent years. The Romanian Government has adopted a strategy on tertiary education, which has two overarching aims: to make higher education more relevant by aligning it more closely with labour market needs; and to improve the accessibility of higher education for disadvantaged groups. It also adopted strategy for reducing early school leaving in June 2015. The early school leaving rate remains well above the EU average. The availability and access of early childhood education and care services is limited, especially in rural areas and for the Roma community. The tertiary education attainment rate remains the second lowest in the EU. Adult participation in lifelong learning remains far below the EU average. General government expenditure on education as a share of GDP is the lowest in the EU.

### Box 1. The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendation on education and training

The 2015 European Semester country-specific recommendations (CSRs) to Romania (Council of the European Union 2015) included a recommendation on education and training:

CSR 3: Increase the provision and quality of early childhood education and care, in particular for Roma. Take action to implement the national strategy to reduce early school leaving.

## 3. Investing in education and training

General government expenditure on education as a share of GDP fell from 3.0% in 2012 to 2.8% in 2013, making it the lowest in the EU-28 and just over half the EU average of 5.0%.<sup>1</sup> According to Romania's 2015-2018 Convergence Programme published in April 2015, the wages of teaching and support staff in education will be increased in 2015 and 2016 by 5% in March and 5% in September (Government of Romania 2015).

A study on school budgetary allocation (Fartuşnic et al. 2014) found that schools in disadvantaged communities have limited resources and usually fail to carry out any additional support activities targeting students at risk of school failure (repetition, absenteeism, drop-out, etc.). According to the study, the core financial resource of these schools is state funding and in some cases it constitutes their entire annual budget. Under these circumstances, schools can only cover their basic needs (i.e. administrative costs and teachers' salaries), and clearly have insufficient resources to initiate specific activities to help students at risk of dropping out of school. The conclusions of the research were also relevant for schools in areas with a Roma population, as Roma children accounted for more than 10% of children in most of the schools included in the sample.

## 4. Tackling inequalities

Romania's early school leaving rate reached 18.1% in 2014, having increased from 2013. This was in contrast with previous years, when the rate had been falling. Romania has the third-highest early school leaving rate in the EU-28 and is still far from its Europe 2020 national target of 11.3%. According to the data on early school leaving provided by Romania's National Institute for Statistics, the proportion of early school leavers in rural areas is three times higher than in urban areas. Regional disparities in early school leaving rates are highly dependent on the socioeconomic development level of the regions. The highest rates were recorded in the North-East, South-East and South Muntenia regions, while the lowest were in the Bucharest-Ilfov and West regions. According to European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2012), the early school leaving rate for Roma is almost twice as high as for the non-Roma population. About 14% of Roma older than 10 are illiterate and about 20% of Roma have not attended school.

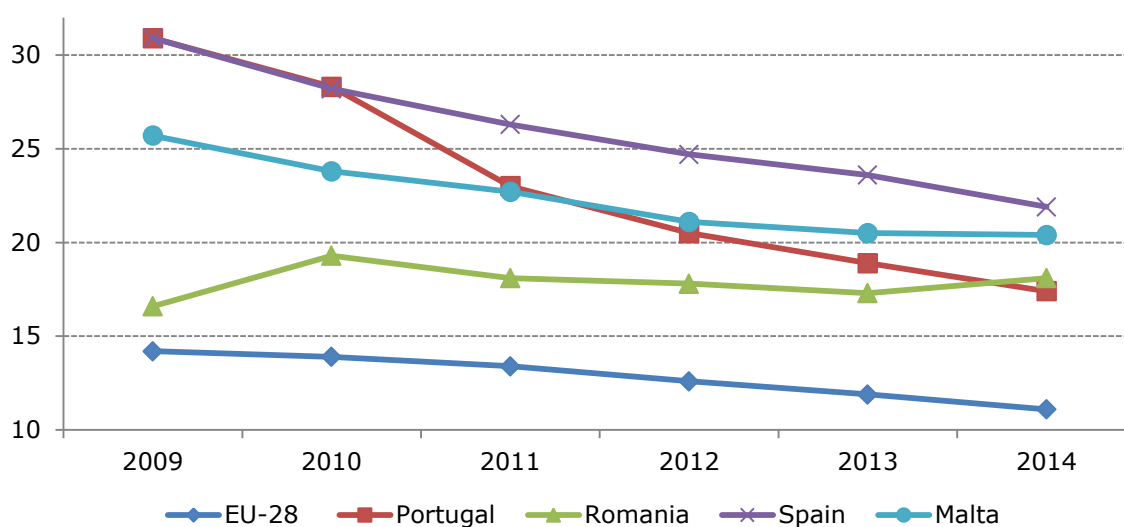
<sup>1</sup> Source: Eurostat, General government expenditure by function (COFOG) database.

The challenge of tackling early school leaving is made harder by the following factors:

- the lack of evaluation of measures for early school leavers;
- the lack of data collection;
- insufficient initial and continuing training for teachers to instil in them new teaching skills and practices for working with students at risk.

Integration of Roma children in schools is difficult, with 26% of Roma children attending ethnically-separated school classes (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2014, p.45).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2. Early school leaving rate (18-24 year-olds)**



Source: Eurostat

Participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Romania has been slowly decreasing in recent years and is below the EU average (86.4% in 2014, compared to 93.9% in 2012 and 86.4% in 2011). Participation in ECEC is characterised by major disparities in access for the most disadvantaged children, such as children from rural areas, children from Roma communities and children with disabilities. According to data from the National Institute of Statistics, the enrolment rate in pre-school (i.e. the last year of ECEC before the start of primary education) in rural areas in 2013/14 was about seven percentage points lower than in urban areas (83.9% compared to 90.3%). This is caused by access barriers to pre-school enrolment, such as large distances between home and pre-school, poor quality or absence of pre-school infrastructure in some isolated, small rural communities. According to European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2012), the pre-school enrolment rate in 2011 of non-Roma children was almost twice as high as for Roma children from the same community (63% for non-Roma children and 37% for Roma children).

The 2012 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey on the mathematics, science and reading skills of 15-year-olds (OECD 2013) found that Romania falls far short of the EU average:

- 37.3% are low achievers in reading (EU average: 17.8%);
- 40.8% are low achievers in maths (EU average: 22.1%);
- 37.3% are low achievers in science (EU average: 16.6%).

<sup>2</sup> Given that the survey covered areas where Roma lived in higher density than the country average, the answers are likely to reveal a higher share of Roma children at school.

PISA 2012 also shows major disparities in learning outcomes between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

After significant delays in adopting the national strategy for reducing early school leaving, this was finally adopted in June 2015 (Box 2). The Romanian Government is currently putting in place the institutional and administrative capacity and mechanisms to implement the strategy. These include an integrated data collection system on early school leaving that has been designed based on a new set of national indicators.

Annual social programmes continue to support students in disadvantaged areas. These include providing school supplies and day classes for students enrolled in primary and secondary education who come from families where the average net income per family household member accounts for maximum 50% of the minimum gross salary at national level. Financial support is granted to encourage the purchase of personal computers for school and university students from a disadvantaged economic background and to reimburse transportation expenses.

The Romanian Government has revised the rules on how nurseries and other pre-preschool early education services are organised and operate, including changes in educational content. Both the pre-preschool curriculum and the evaluation standards for pre-preschool education services have been drawn up. To overcome the lack of any preschool experience for children in some communities, the Ministry of Education brought in a compulsory preparatory school year, starting from 2012. The measure has improved the school integration of children who had not previously attended preschool. A number of European Social Fund (ESF)- and World Bank-funded strategic projects in ECEC, including an important focus on Roma children, are currently being implemented.<sup>3</sup>

An ESF-funded project was carried out in the context of the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) tests (IEA 2012). This involved training in which teachers were given a range of examples of good practice in mathematics, science and reading and invited to adapt, develop and contextualise new problems to ensure more effective learning. The teachers implemented new approaches in their classes while being coached online.

### Box 2. Strategy for reducing early school leaving

The current level of early school leaving in Romania is the result of a complex set of causes. These include:

- structural causes relating to the socioeconomic situation of families and children with limited resources, and negative expectations and attitudes towards education in general;
- systemic causes relating to malfunctions in the way education is organised and governed, which result in a failure to offer appropriate, inclusive and quality educational support for all children irrespective of their socioeconomic and cultural background and personal characteristics;
- cultural causes within the education system and in society as a whole.

A strategic framework for reducing early school leaving in Romania was drafted with the support of the World Bank. The strategy is built on existing practices, giving priority to social support measures. Although the strategy includes an assessment of existing policies and measures on early school leaving, there is no clear evidence indicating whether these measures are effective or not. The strategy is based on four main pillars:

- Pillar I: ensure that all children go to school and receive quality education;
- Pillar II: ensure that all children complete compulsory education;

<sup>3</sup> 'National Programmes for early childhood education reform', 'All in kindergarten, all in the first class', 'Roma children and parents want to go to school', 'Educational integrated services for the Roma communities', 'All Families get involved'.

- Pillar III: get early school leavers back in school;
- Pillar IV: develop appropriate institutional support.

Each pillar covers a number of programmes and measures, including a programme on early childhood education. The strategy also includes specific priorities on inclusion and institutional capacity and the monitoring system, which apply to, and are clearly stated under, each of the four pillars.

The strategic framework document provides for a clearly-defined monitoring and evaluation system. The system makes provision for:

- a specific timetable;
- the reports to be drawn up;
- the types of information to be collected;
- a clear division of responsibilities for the different key institutions and stakeholders in the process.

If the strategy is to be implemented successfully, tackling the following challenges is vital:

a) Developing a relevant data collection and monitoring system — there are difficulties in school system coverage. The causes for these include a lack of coherent information campaigns, the lack of a training strategy and no incentives to input and report data. A number of significant steps have been taken in this respect. These include gathering all existing initiatives on how to design data collection systems for education; and planning an integrated data collection and analysis system at national, county and school level.

Romania's 'Integrated Information System of Education' (SIIE) has already been designed, based on a new set of national indicators for education, including early school leaving. Although the primary education module is already up and running, the system is not yet fully operational and does not yet provide reliable data. Moreover, there are significant inconsistencies compared with other data collection systems of the National Institute for Statistics.

b) Consultation and awareness-raising among stakeholders — in order to get school staff and local stakeholders behind the strategy, a coherent information and training strategy is needed, plus incentives.

c) Financing system at central level and at school level — in order to effectively implement the early school leaving strategy, providing adequate financial resources is key, in particular for the most disadvantaged schools.

The strategic framework for reducing early school leaving offers appropriate, comprehensive and relevant support for future policies in this area. Putting the necessary institutional and financial mechanisms in place, in particular a reliable data collection system, is crucial for the successful implementation of the strategy. Another policy that could contribute to the success of the strategy is the reform of initial teacher training.

## 5. Modernising school education

The 2013 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) found that a high proportion of teachers (58%, as compared with the EU average of 36%) worked in schools where head teachers reported a shortage of qualified staff and that only 26% of teachers used ICT for students' projects or class work (EU average: 34%) (OECD 2014).

Initial training for future primary teachers does not pay enough attention to integrating children with special needs and Roma children or dealing with students' learning difficulties. Training for teachers who are going to be working in lower secondary education is highly theory-based and its quality varies from one university to another, depending on their capacity to attract highly professional pedagogical staff with relevant experience in modern teaching methodologies.

Teaching is not a financially attractive profession in Romania for top graduates. Although teachers' maximum gross income per year as a proportion of GDP per capita is not extremely



low compared to other countries in Europe, Romania has the highest gap between the salaries of newly-qualified and experienced teachers. A newly-qualified teacher, who starts from the minimum salary level, must spend 40 years in the system before reaching the maximum salary.

In November 2014, Romania's national strategy on digital agenda was officially launched. The strategy aims to set out the key enabling role that the use of ICT will play in achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. Three of the seven pillars of the strategy are of relevance here:

- improving the ICT skills of children, young people and adults;
- supporting innovation and research;
- responding to social challenges by using ICT.

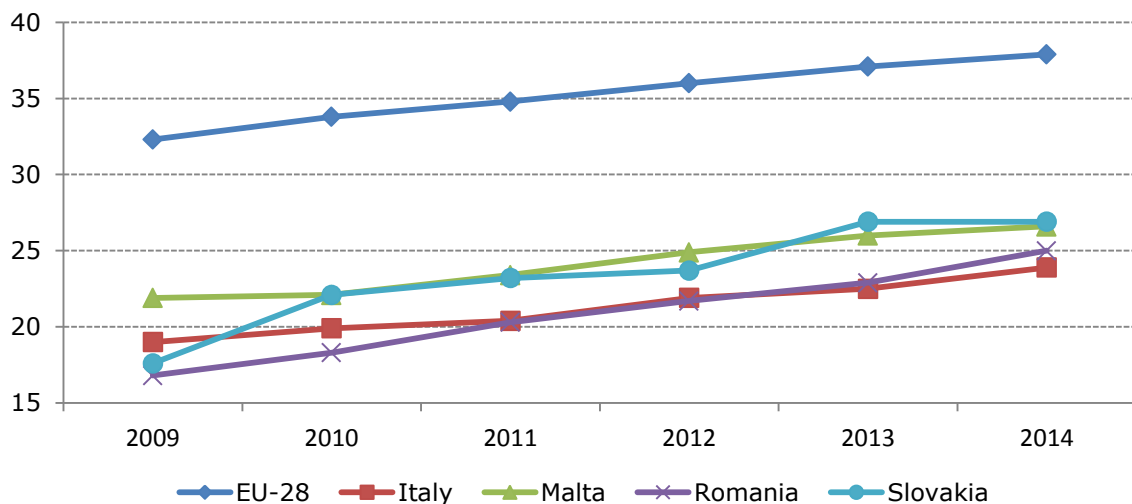
As part of this initiative, a series of campaigns were developed recently to increase public awareness of the new digital society challenges in Romania.

Since 2012, ICT has been an optional subject in the national curriculum for primary education. Using ICT in education and training has become a priority for teacher training programmes in Romania and large-scale ICT infrastructure has recently been installed. ESF-funded projects have been particularly addressing the large amount of teachers involved in ICT-related training.

## 6. Modernising higher education

Romania's tertiary education attainment rate has been steadily increasing over the past four years and reached 25% in 2014, on track to reach the Europe 2020 national target of 26.7%. Women outperform men, with rates of 27.2% and 22.9% respectively in 2014. However, as shown by the national 'State of the Education System' annual report for 2014, enrolment rates among people aged 19-23 in academic higher education courses recently dropped from 28.4% in the 2011/12 academic year to 26.6% in the 2013/14 academic year for people aged 19-23.

**Figure 3. Tertiary education attainment rate (30-34 year-olds)**



Source: Eurostat

Several factors influenced this trend: emigration, a growing interest in other forms of tertiary education (especially professionally oriented options), and a reduction in the number of educational programmes provided by private universities. Large disparities in enrolment between students from rural and urban areas continue to be a real challenge. According to the latest data from the National Institute of Statistics for the year 2011/2012, the enrolment rate

of students from urban areas was 43.4%, while for students from rural areas the rate was only 16%.

The relevance of university education to the labour market is a major concern. The employment rate of recent tertiary graduates<sup>4</sup> has been decreasing since 2009. In 2014 the figure was 74.2%, which is around 6 percentage points less than the EU-28 average, while there are also concerns about universities' limited connections with the most innovative sectors of the economy. At the same time, adapting university curricula and teaching practices to help students better develop the kind of skills they need on the labour market is a slow process. The strategy on tertiary education adopted in July 2015<sup>5</sup> aims to make higher education more relevant to labour market needs and more accessible to disadvantaged groups. In the meantime, a database integrated into the management systems of 50 public universities has been completed to enable monitoring of higher education graduates' entry onto the labour market. Work has continued on aligning occupational standards with labour market requirements and updating the educational offer, with 36 new standards developed. All universities are expected to establish career guidance and counselling centres in 2015.

The most recent policy developments in the field of higher education include:

- granting access to non-university programmes for students who did not pass their baccalaureate exam;
- the provision by all universities of career counselling through a university counselling centre;
- the reinforcement of the six-month compulsory practical internships in companies for all university graduates.

Romania's 2015 National Reform Programme (NRP) action plan on tertiary education proposes new measures. These include drafting a strategic document on equity and access in higher education in Romania, and measures on monitoring and the development of a strategic information system.

The Ministry of Education and Scientific Research continued to run social programmes for students. These focused on support for students from rural areas, disadvantaged groups and non-traditional students in order to increase their participation rate in tertiary education.

## **7. Modernising vocational education and training and promoting adult learning**

The participation of upper secondary students in vocational education and training (VET) in Romania remains above the EU average (60% compared with 48.9% in 2013). However, the drop-out rate in VET high schools was twice as high compared to general upper secondary education in 2012. Since the 2014/15 academic year, schools have been receiving incentives to offer second chance programmes to young adults who left education and training early.

Romania has not made significant progress in recent years on the participation of adults aged 25-64 in lifelong learning. The 2014 rate of 1.5% is the lowest in the EU and falls significantly short of the EU average of 10.7%. The lowest rate of participation in training is recorded among employees with low levels of education and professional qualifications, working in companies with less than 10 employees and aged over 40. Training participation rates are also lower in rural areas than in urban areas and lower for women than men.

Measures have been implemented with the aim of reinforcing vocational education and training in general and apprenticeships schemes in particular. Government Order No 117/2013 created

<sup>4</sup> People aged 20-34 who left education between one and three years before the reference year.

<sup>5</sup> Government Decision 565 of 15.07.2015.

the legal framework for a new initial vocational education and training (IVET) strand in the education system (Cedefop 2013). The new three-year VET programmes were introduced for the 2014/15 school year, with curricula covering the learning objectives and involving teaching hours for students in the ninth and tenth years of school. This was necessary for the VET strand to be considered part of the compulsory education system and to enable students graduating from the VET schools to continue their education in grades 11 and 12 of high school. The proportion of work-based learning increases in each year of the training, up to 72% of the total number of hours in the third year of training. Signed agreements with companies for work-based learning are a requirement for VET schools that want to provide the vocational type of these three-year courses. 2014 Ministry of Education rules require the student, the school and the company to sign a contract before the beginning of the programme.

Changes in the apprenticeship system since 2013 include:

- a subsidy for companies participating in the apprenticeship programme;
- a link between the duration of studies and acquiring corresponding qualifications (levels 2-3 of the European qualifications framework (EQF));
- opportunities for transition to higher VET programmes if the apprenticeships programme is followed by studies at EQF level 4 in general or technological programmes (Cedefop 2015).

In December 2014, the Government approved the introduction of the two-year dual-system vocational programmes, as part of the initial VET system. Currently, the Governmental Decision is subject of Parliament approval, prior to its adoption by law. This pathway, which is going to be introduced in parallel with the current initial VET programmes, is expected to provide new opportunities for better matching companies needs as well as for increasing VET attractiveness, also for students at risk of early school leaving.

Starting from the 2015/16 academic year, universities can also organise 'vocational education and training colleges' by enabling a form of tertiary vocational training giving access to the labour market. So far, 'higher VET programmes' have been offered only by initial VET schools at post-secondary level and have included work-based learning. For continuing vocational education and training, the number of apprenticeships started increasing after the change in the law, but remains limited. Apprenticeship schemes have been expanded to cover a broader age group (over the age of 24) and make it easier for employers to participate through partnerships with vocational training providers. A number of measures planned under Romania's new education law were implemented as pilot schemes (e.g. the work-based learning vocational training scheme) and will be further rolled out.

A new strategic framework for VET has been developed and is currently in the approval process. The main objectives of the VET strategy, drafted with involvement of social partners, are to make VET programmes more relevant to the labour market and improve the quality of VET.<sup>6</sup> The training standards and occupational standards in place offer the basis for strengthening VET graduates' and apprentices' prospects on the labour market. Recently, a set of new training standards and occupational standards in VET have been drafted in this respect.

With the support of the World Bank, the Romanian Government has developed a national lifelong learning strategy and a methodology for the organisation and operation of community lifelong learning centres. The strategy, which was adopted in June 2015, aims to diversify the provision of VET. With that aim in mind, it has identified a number of priority target groups, including:

<sup>6</sup> The VET strategy has four strategic objectives: (i) fostering the labour market relevance of VET; (ii) improving participation and facilitating access to VET programmes; (iii) improving VET quality; (iv) fostering innovation and cooperation in VET. For each strategic objective, a set of measures are foreseen.

- early school leavers;
- graduates with formal qualifications no longer relevant on the labour market;
- individuals returning to the country after period of working abroad;
- low-skilled adults over the age of 40.

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