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A study of the impact of Erasmus+
mobility and strategic partnership projects
in school education
on reducing early school leaving



Erasmus+

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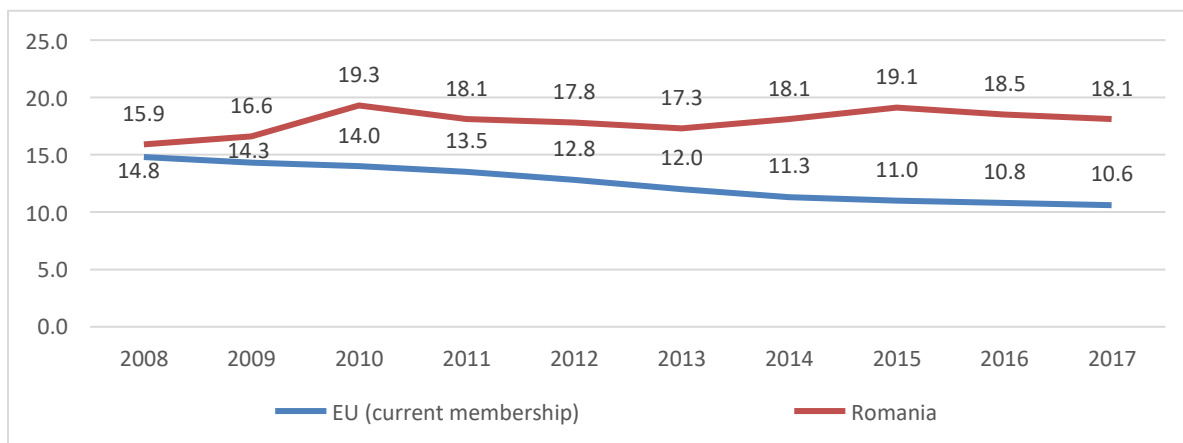
1. Context

1.1 Statistics and the European context

Early school leaving (ESL) is an important phenomenon on the public agenda and for education policies in Romania and the European Union. Reducing the early school leaving rate¹ is one of the two priorities set by the Europe 2020 Strategy for the field of education. The threshold pursued by the Union, by 2020, is a share of 10 %.

In recent years, the early school leaving rate in the European Union has been on a downward trend. According to the European Commission's Education and Training Monitor, published in 2018, the European average share was in 2017 at only 6 p.p. away from the target intended for 2020. The report shows that 18 Member States have reached their national targets, other three are very closed to it, while Romania is one of other three Member States (Romania, Spain, Malta) that are still far away from the assumed threshold. Spain, despite not having reached a decrease as intended for this indicator, is one of the countries that made a lot of progress, while Malta saw an average decrease and Romania is the only country that, compared to 2011, remained stationary at around 18 % in 2017. Over the last 10 years, the highest early school leaving rates were in 2010 (19.3 %) and 2015 (19.1 %), while the lowest was in 2013 (17.3 %).

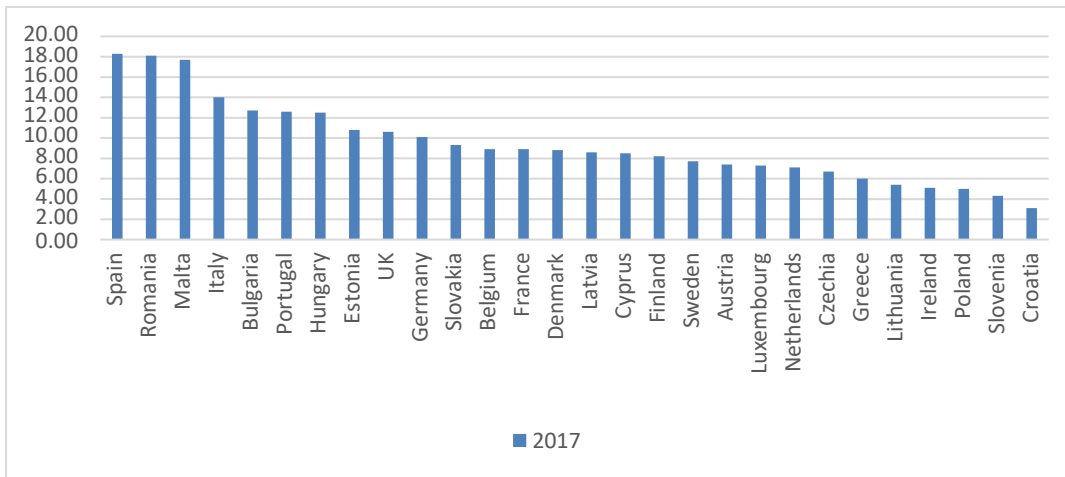
Figure 1. Evolution of the indicator in Romania and the European Union (%)



Data source: EUROSTAT, 2018

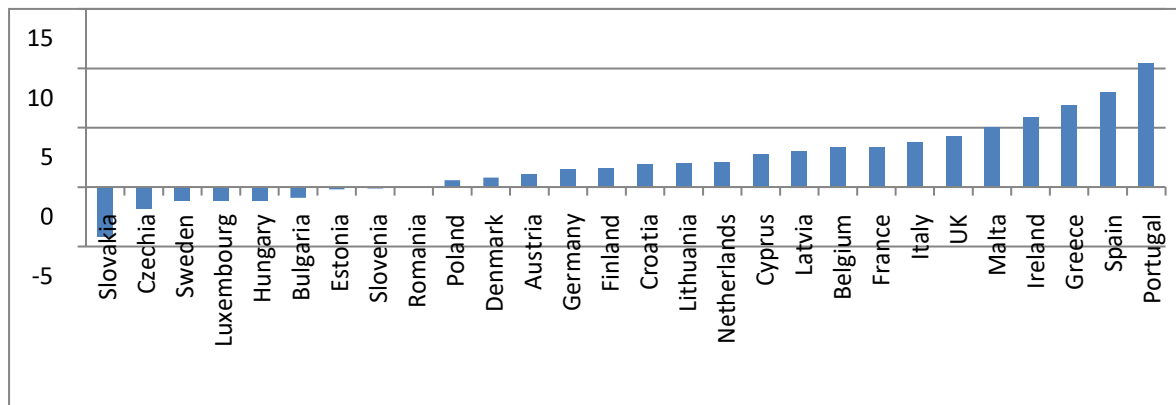
¹ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01)&from=EN)

Figure 2. Early school leaving rate, EU Member States, 2017 (%)



Data source: EUROSTAT, 2018

Figure 3. Difference between the values of the indicator in 2011 and 2017 (percentage points)



Data source: EUROSTAT, 2018

Therefore, it is noticeable that the gap between Romania and the average of European countries has widened recently. Romania has little time left for meeting the target of 11.3 % as foreseen for 2020 in the National Reform Plan. Detailed data shows that the early school leaving rate is higher among the male population compared to the female population. The data also correlates directly with the gender differences in other relevant indicators for early school leaving (e.g. the gross enrolment rate, the school dropout rate, etc.), which show an advantage for women compared to men.

1.2 Causes of early school leaving

The causes leading to early school leaving in Romania are diverse. International data and various national studies² show that there is usually more than one factor determining young people to leave school early. According to the conclusions of these studies, the main factors causing early school leaving in Romania are as follows:

- factors related to students/families and the demand for education: low family income, which determines difficulties in covering the collateral costs of education, especially among poor and disadvantaged families; limited territorial accessibility of education services; child involvement in labour activities; parents' migration abroad; parents' low educational attainment; families' deficient valorisation of school; precarious health conditions; disability/SEN etc.;
- factors related to the education provision: poor provision of support programmes ("A second chance", "School after school") in rural areas and needy communities, insufficient correlation between the educational provision and the local economic specificity, aspects related to the school environment (educational climate, teachers' attitude towards students, etc.), insufficient educational support for students at risk of school dropout, grade retention, defective aspects in the implemented curriculum, lack of support staff to help children at risk of early school leaving.

Depending on the influence of the causes indicated above, early school leaving is manifest, in Romania, especially among some groups at risk, such as young people from rural communities, young people from a low-income background, Roma and other minorities, and students who repeated at least one grade or who dropped out of school.

² National studies: Voicu, B. (coord.) (2010). *Renunțarea timpurie la educație: posibile căi de prevenire*. Ed. Vanemonde, Bucharest, available at: <http://www.unicef.ro/wp-content/uploads/Renuntarea-timpurie-la-educatie.pdf>;
Jurcan, D.M. (2011). *Studiu-diagnostic privind situația abandonului școlar și părăsirea timpurie a școlii*. Soros Foundation, a POSDRU/91/2.2/S/60294 project, available at: <http://www.fundatia.ro/sites/default/files/Parte%20de%20Carte-Raport%20de%20Cercetare.pdf>;
Fartușnic, C. (coord.). (2012). *Studiu Național – România. Analiza situației copiilor aflați în afara sistemului de educație în România*. Institute of Education Sciences, UNICEF, available at: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/OOSCI%20Reports/romania-oss-ci-report-2012-rm.pdf>;
Ivan, C., Rostas, I. (2013). *Părăsirea timpurie a școlii, cauze și efecte. Raport de cercetare*, available at: <http://romaeducationfund.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Parasirea-timpurie-a-scolii-cauze-si-efecte-studiu-OE20132.pdf>.

1.3 Specific policies at national level

At national level, a “Strategy for reducing early school leaving” has been developed. The Strategy includes intervention areas for the period 2015-2020. It targets the groups that are most at risk of early school leaving: children and young people who will be in the age group 18-24 years in the 2020s, children and young people from families with a low socio-economic status/poor families, children and young people from rural areas, Roma children and young people, and children and young people belonging to other marginalized or underrepresented groups.

The Strategy sets forth four pillars and six intervention programmes: ensuring access to education and to quality education for all children, ensuring that all children complete compulsory education, reintegrating early school leavers into the education system and developing appropriate institutional support.

The prevention measures included in the Strategy aim to lower the early school leaving risk by improving the quality of the education provision and through educational support measures for students to help them improve their performance. The purpose of intervention measures is to implement school policies or individual measures by providing support to students at risk of early school leaving in response to early warning signals that have been received. The purpose of compensation measures is to support the reintegration of early school leavers into the education and training system and the acquisition of necessary qualifications for access to the labour market.

2. Methodological aspects

This study was intended to explore the impact of projects funded under the Erasmus+ programme, in the area of school education, on reducing early school leaving. To conduct this study, we have selected those projects funded in the area of school education in the period 2014-2016, under the Key Action 1 (KA1) and Key Action 2 (KA2), which selected “reducing early school leaving” as a horizontal or sectoral priority.

The study used the following quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- a survey based on an online questionnaire, self-applied by the project coordinators;
- a case study of several projects that have been selected as good practice; and
- individual interviews with the implementation team from several projects selected as good practice.

The questionnaire-based survey collected information about the projects and the coordinators’ opinions on how the projects went on and their impact. The questionnaire was distributed online (link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8N28WXZ>) to beneficiaries’ representatives: 55 projects under Key Action 1 (KA1) and 187 projects under Key Action 2 (KA2).

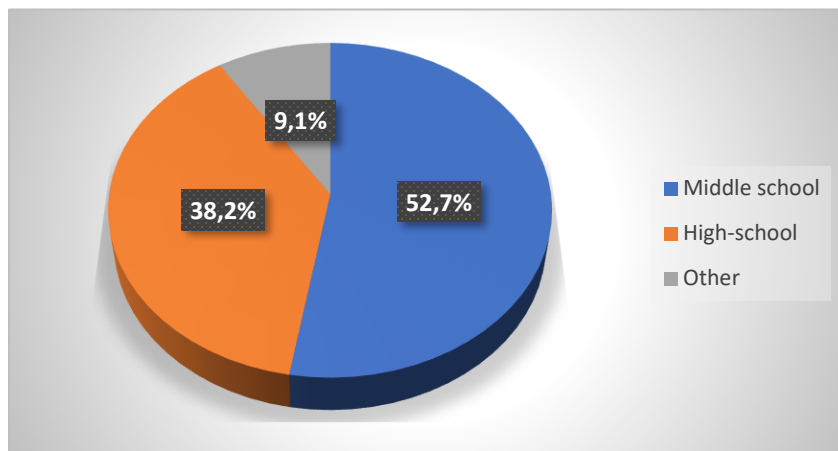
For case studies and individual interviews, we chose those projects that had been selected as good practice examples by ANPCDEFP, as well as some projects with a primary focus on the issue of early school leaving. Their list is available in the chapter dedicated to case studies.

- **Data on projects funded in the area of school education in the period 2014-2016, under KA1, which selected “reducing early school leaving” as a horizontal or sectoral priority**

In the period 2014 – 2016, there were 55 Erasmus+ mobility projects that received funding under Key Action 1 (KA1) in the area of school education and selected “reducing early school leaving” as a horizontal or sectoral priority. Out of them, 92.7 % have been completed, and 7.3 % are under implementation.

As regards the type of applicant organisation, slightly above half (52.7 %) of the projects were initiated by middle schools (lower secondary education), 38.2 % by high-schools (upper secondary education) and the least numerous by other organisations (school inspectorates, associations, etc.).

Figure 4. Distribution of KA1 school education projects by the type of organisation



Most projects (43.6 %) were implemented by organisations from Macro Region 2 (North-East and South-East), and the least numerous of them (18.2 %) by organisations from Macro Region 4 (South-West and West). The distribution by development regions shows that more than a quarter of the projects (30.9 %) were implemented in the North-East region, compared to the regions of Bucharest-Ilfov, West and North-West, where less than 10 % of the projects were implemented.

Figure 5. Distribution of KA1 school education projects by macro regions

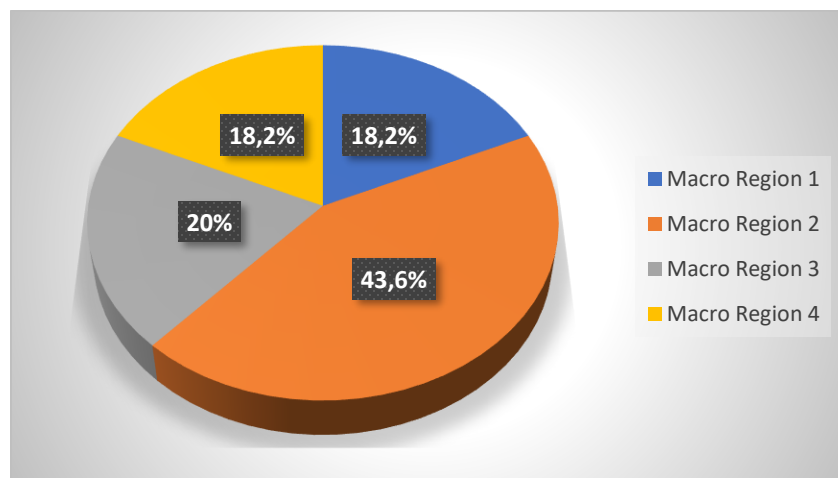
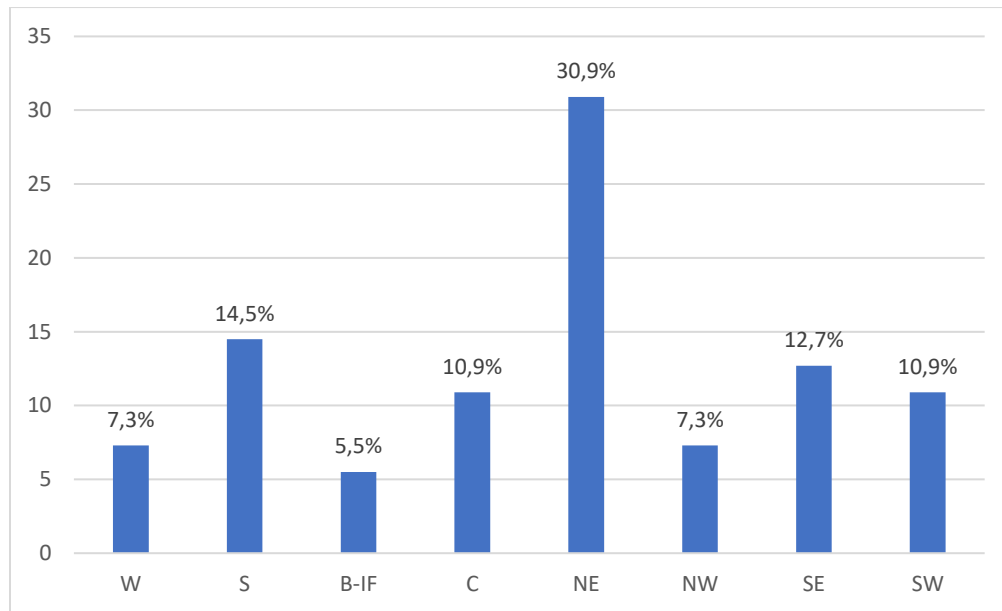
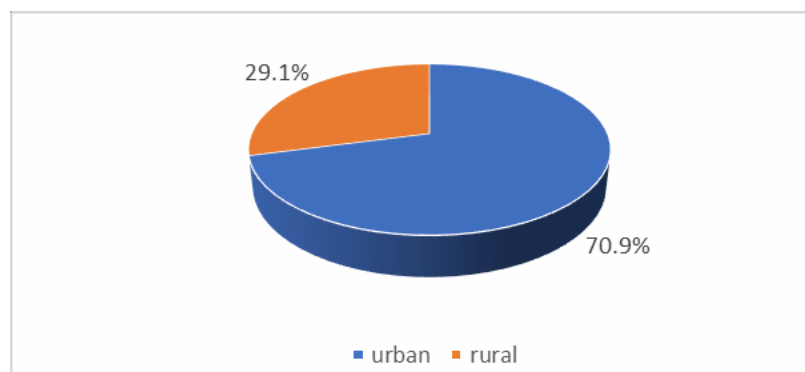


Figure 6. Distribution of KA1 school education projects by development regions



The distribution by residential areas shows that most applicant organisations for Erasmus+ projects that addressed the priority of reducing early school leaving come from rural areas and only 29.1 % of the projects are implemented by organisations from urban areas. The data bears a positive significance in a double perspective: on one hand, it supports the national priorities of the Erasmus+ programme in Romania (KA1 projects have reached out to their intended primary beneficiaries); on the other hand, it shows an improvement in the skills of rural schools/NGOs working with rural schools related to writing project proposals and implementing projects which meet the educational needs of their students.

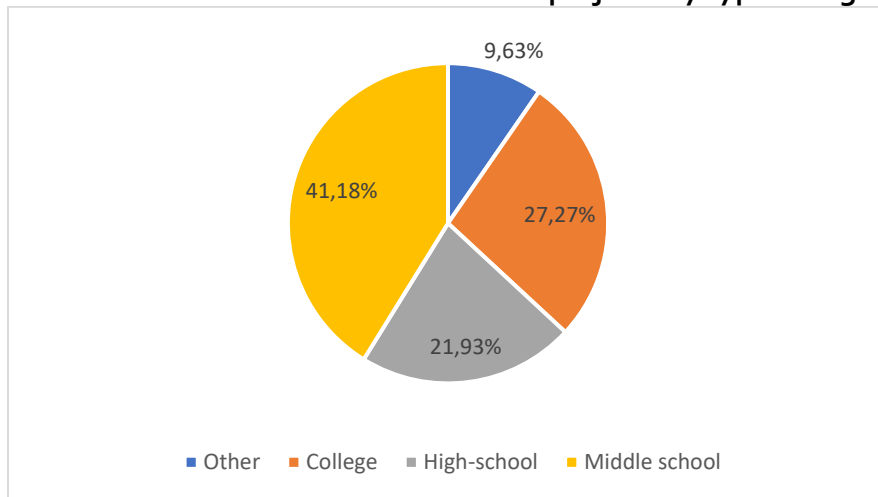
Figure 7. Distribution of KA1 school education projects by residential areas



- **Data on projects funded in the area of school education in the period 2014-2016, under KA2, which selected “reducing early school leaving” as a horizontal or sectoral priority**

In the period 2014-2016, 187 Erasmus+ projects were initiated as strategic partnerships in school education having early school leaving as a priority. Of these projects, 41.18 % have been completed and 58.82 % are under implementation. Most projects were initiated by middle schools (lower secondary education) (41.18 %) and colleges (secondary education) (27.27%), and the least numerous of them by other organisations like kindergartens, VET schools, associations, foundations, etc.

Figure 8. Distribution of KA2 school education projects by type of organisation



The distribution by macro regions is quite balanced but still dominated by the North and South-East, where 36.36 % of the projects were initiated. The distribution by regions is more conclusive showing that the lowest share of projects (7.49 %) was implemented in the Centre region and the highest (20.86 %) in the North-East region.

Figure 9. Distribution of KA2 school education projects by macro regions

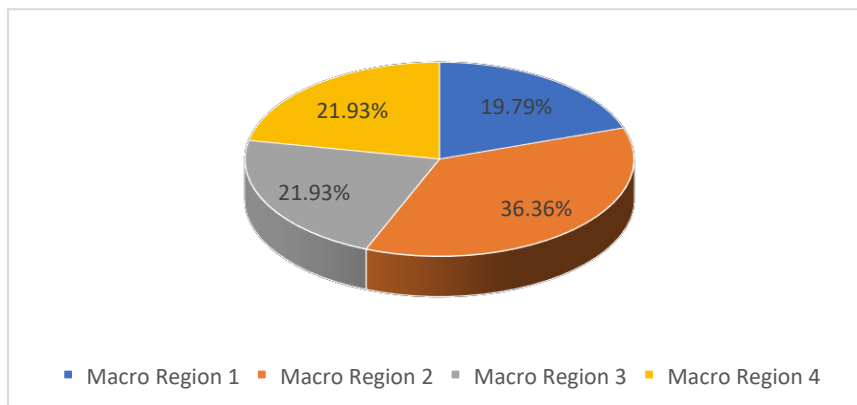
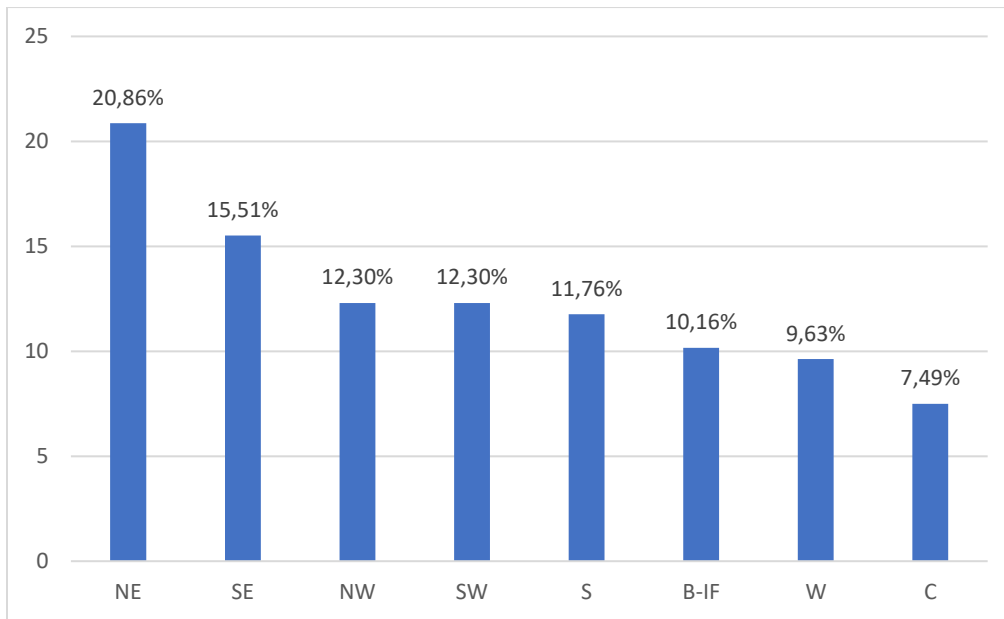


Figure 10. Distribution of KA2 school education projects by development regions



3. Research outcomes

3.1 Project target groups that are relevant to early school leaving

There is ongoing interest within the Erasmus+ programme in encouraging applicant organisations to meet the needs of those from disadvantaged backgrounds and the needs of their communities. Particularly, the principles of equity and inclusion underlie the Erasmus+ programme aiming to facilitate access to different transnational learning contexts for participants from disadvantaged groups³, such as people with disabilities, people with educational difficulties (learning difficulties, early leavers from education, people low qualification levels, low achievers, etc.), economic obstacles (low standard of living, low income, poverty, unemployment, etc.), cultural differences (immigrants or refugees, national or ethnic minorities, difficulties related to linguistic adjustment and cultural inclusion, etc.), health issues (chronic diseases, serious diseases or psychiatric conditions), social obstacles (discrimination, risky behaviour, young and/or single parents, orphans, etc.) and geographic obstacles (remote areas, rural areas, peripheral regions, troublesome urban areas etc.).

Naturally, those projects that selected “reducing early school leaving” as a horizontal or sectoral priority should target groups falling into the category of disadvantaged groups with an early school leaving risk.

The research carried out on projects that received funding in the area of school education in the period 2014-2016 (KA1 and KA2) revealed their focus on specific categories of target groups – some categories overlap those suggested in the Erasmus+ programme, while others have the specificity of a social and economic reality that is typical of the Romanian context. Therefore, research data shows that the majority of applicant organisations work with disadvantaged groups of students on a current basis.

³ In accordance with *Erasmus+. Programme Guide*, 2018, <https://www.erasmusplus.ro/>.

Table 1. Distribution of projects by categories of students the applicant organisations work with on a current basis

Vulnerable groups of students	%
Students whose parents are abroad for work purposes for an indefinite period of time	90.0
Students from socially-economically disadvantaged communities	86.7
Students residing in rural areas	70.0
Students with disabilities/special educational needs, whether or not certified	61.7
Students belonging to ethnic minorities	51.7
Students who repeated at least one grade	35.0
Young mothers (student girls who are or were pregnant)	13.3
Students with different addictions (drug and/or alcohol addicts, gambling addicts, video game addicts, etc.)	8.3
Students in the preparatory year for learning Romanian (e.g. refugees, returning emigrants, etc.)	6.7
Students with a criminal history or in other situations involving serious violence	6.7
We do not work with vulnerable groups	1.7

The percentage of applicant organisations working with **students whose parents are abroad for work purposes for an indefinite period of time** is 90 %. Although this group is not found explicitly in one of the situations set out in the Erasmus+ Guide, it is a group with a high early school leaving risk in many Romanian schools. Various research data – some dating back to the beginning of this phenomenon, other more recent⁴ – reveal the multiple negative effects which missing parents have on children in terms of socio-emotional development, participation in school and achievement, as well as for their motivation to continue their education.

More than 85 % of the applicant organisations stated that they worked with **students from a disadvantaged socio-economic background** – the economic causes being often determiners of early school leaving. Correlated with this category, 70 % of the applicant organisations work with students from rural areas.

⁴ UNICEF Romania (2008). *Analiză la nivel național asupra fenomenului copiilor rămași acasă prin plecarea părinților la muncă în străinătate* [A national analysis of the phenomenon of children left at home after their parents had gone abroad for work purposes]. Buzău, Alpha MDN, 2008.

Save the Children (2007). *Impactul migrației părinților asupra copiilor rămași acasă* [Impact of parents' migration on children left at home]; Soros Foundation Romania (2007).

Efectele migrației: copiii rămași acasă [Effects of migration: Children left at home].

Other recent data made available by ANPDCA at <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/protectie/copii-cu-parinti-plecati-la-munca-in-strainatate>

A noticeable share (more than 60 %) of the applicant organisations declared that they had **students with disabilities/special educational needs**, whether or not these disabilities/needs were certified. Including children with disabilities and/or special educational needs in mainstream education without providing – in many cases – appropriate support measures (adequate services for an early identification of needs, support teachers, accessible areas and learning material, etc.) has led to a high risk of early school leaving for this group of students.

Half of the interviewed organisations said they worked with **students belonging to different ethnic minorities**. Belonging to an ethnic minority is not an early school leaving risk in itself. However, the absence of educational support measures to ensure equal opportunities at the time of entry into the education system and throughout schooling may lead to early school leaving situations among this group of students.

One third of the applicant organisations work with **students who were in a grade retention situation**. These cases also have a school dropout risk and, subsequently, of early school leaving, given that, in school practice, grade retention is a way to sanction poor achievement rather than to compensate for it.

Other categories of students at educational risk the applicant organisations worked with were: young mothers, students with different addictions (drug and/or alcohol addicts, gambling addicts, video game addicts, etc.), students in the preparatory year for learning Romanian (e.g. refugees, returning emigrants, etc.) and students with a criminal history or in other situations involving serious violence. Although their shares are small, these groups need specific educational interventions. Transnational cooperation within the Erasmus+ projects may produce added value through the exchange/transfer of practices between education systems with specific intervention strategies for these groups and other systems that do not have such experiences.

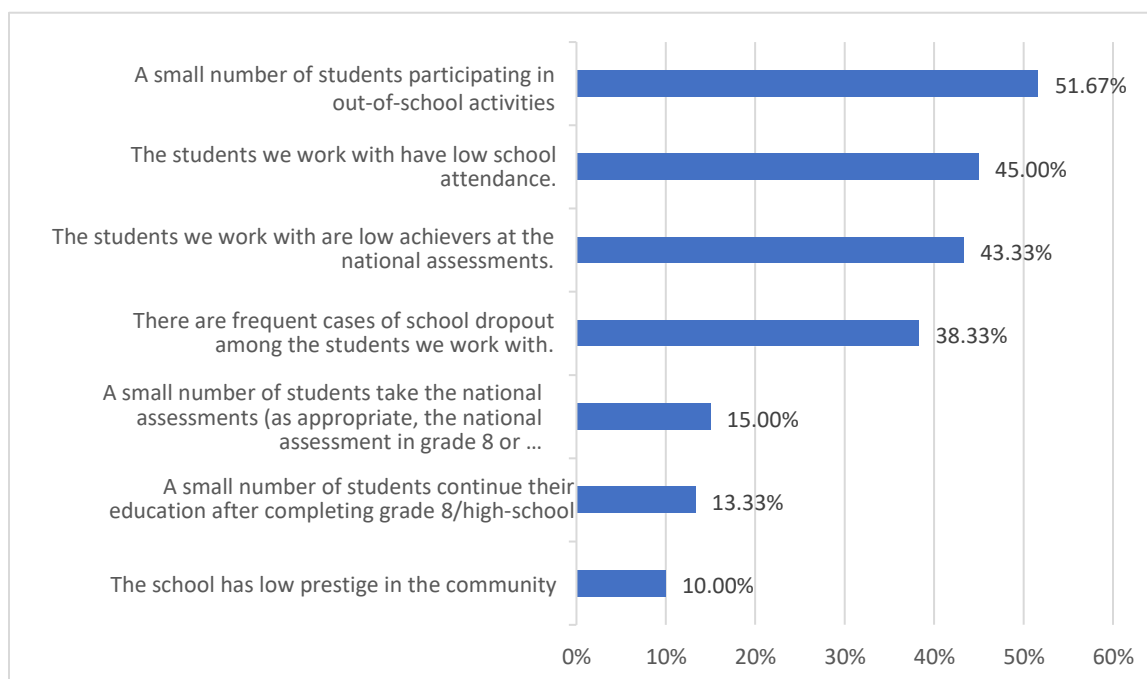
3.2 Relevant needs for reducing early school leaving addressed by the Erasmus+ projects

Any Erasmus+ project should be based on a clear and relevant analysis of needs, which helps applicant organisations identify the needs of the project target groups, their organisational needs and the needs of local communities. Based on these need analyses, designs for the activities proposed by the projects are then built.

The needs underlying most of the projects inquired in this research have direct relevance for the issue of early school leaving:

- More than half of the projects mentioned that students were not involved in out-of-school activities. This is due, on one hand, to a lack of motivation for active engagement in learning and, on the other hand, to a lack of organisational resources for organising such activities which involve all students and offer them various learning and cooperation contexts.
- A reality which 45 % of schools face is students' low school attendance. This phenomenon is directly correlated with the early school leaving risk.
- Low achievement at national assessments is another need underlying the decision to write a proposal for an Erasmus+ project, as the involvement in these projects is considered a possibility of motivation for successful learning.
- Other needs addressed by the applicant organisations were: the small number of students taking the national assessments, the low proportion of students who complete grades 8 /12 and continue their education and the low prestige of schools in communities.

Figure 11. Needs addressed by the Erasmus+ projects



3.3 Relevant project objectives for early school leaving

Among the goals pursued by different projects in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme, reducing early school leaving within vulnerable groups is a central aspect. The objectives proposed by the school education projects that selected “reducing early school leaving” as a priority were concerned both with organisational aspects and with aspects that are specific to the project target groups. From the collection of project objectives, those with direct relevance for the issue of early school leaving proposed the following:

- Concerning the students at risk of school leaving:
 - increasing motivation for learning, developing efficient learning techniques;
 - developing cognitive skills that may foster participation in school and a more active involvement in one’s learning;
 - developing transversal key competences, which are important for a holistic development of students’ personalities (entrepreneurship, language skills, learning to learn, etc.);
 - efficient educational and career guidance as appropriate for students’ needs and interests;
 - developing socio-emotional skills and citizenship skills that support the school inclusion of students at risk of school dropout and ensure good social insertion (increasing self-esteem, communication skills, empowerment, decision-making, citizenship skills, etc.).

- Concerning teachers:
 - developing overall professional skills;
 - developing teaching and methodological skills leading to the implementation of teaching-learning-assessment activities that are efficient, attractive and motivating for students;
 - developing efficient class management skills and skills fostering a school climate focused on inclusion;
 - developing skills related to the early identification of causes which may lead to school dropout;
 - developing intervention strategies for improving the situations of school dropout risk;
 - emphasising the teacher’s complementary roles as a facilitator of learning and counsellor for students at risk of school dropout;
 - developing skills related to a customized application of school curriculum, directly linked to the needs of students at risk of school dropout.

- Concerning the organisation:
 - developing an inclusive school climate;
 - developing organisational strategies to prevent situations of early school leaving risk;

- developing tools for monitoring and intervention in cases of educational risk;
- improving the strategies for monitoring students who left school early, including through better cooperation with their parents;
- developing strategies that promote the importance of participation in education/further education and the access to education/the labour market for students at risk of dropout;
- engagement in partnerships to prevent school dropout and early school leaving both with educational institutions and with other categories of organisations at community level;
- improving the school's prestige in the community, increasing the community's involvement in school life.

3.4 Activities developed by the Erasmus+ projects that are relevant to early school leaving

Another aspect the organisations involved in school projects which intended to reduce early school leaving were inquired about was an analysis of activities which helped the participating organisations achieve this.

An inventory of the types of activities carried out in the Erasmus+ projects underlines the projects' focus both on teacher and student mobility and on the creation of products with a teaching/educational role.

Table 2. Types of activities carried out in the Erasmus+ projects with a role related to reducing early school leaving

Activities	%
Teacher outward mobility for gaining knowledge of other education systems and developing skills related to the prevention of and fight against school dropout/early school leaving	78.3 %
Student outward mobility for gaining knowledge of other education systems and increasing motivation for participation in school	66.7 %
Creation of resources (guides, kits, etc.) for teachers, in printed or online version, with potential impact on reducing early school leaving	56.7 %
Creation of learning kits for students, in printed or online version, to increase motivation for learning, facilitate learning, etc.	30.0 %
Development of online learning platforms (for teachers, for students)	16.7 %
Development of training programmes for teachers (curriculum, training methodologies, etc.)	10.0 %

More than three quarters of the researched projects (78.3 %) organised **teacher outward mobility** activities for gaining knowledge of other education systems and developing skills related to the prevention of and fight against school dropout/early school leaving. Therefore, the exchange of experience between teachers and equipping them with specific skills are the ways most frequently used by Erasmus+ projects for mitigating the risk of dropout. Therefore, in relation to the school as an organisation and to the other educational actors (students, parents), the teacher plays the main role in this respect. The interviews organised in the framework of this research showed that the transnational mobility activities offered teachers:

- contexts where they could acquire practical knowledge of other education systems,
- development of teaching skills (new teaching strategies, new teaching-learning-assessment methods),
- new skills related to class management and ameliorative intervention in situations of early school leaving risk, and
- opportunities to rethink and re-plan the management of their own teaching career.

About two thirds of the projects (66.7 %) organised **student outward mobility** activities for gaining knowledge of other education systems and increasing motivation for participation in school. The respondents considered that putting students in new learning contexts, together with peers from other education systems, brings added value by:

- providing information opportunities with regard to other educational experiences (What is it like to be a student in another country?),
- developing collaboration and group work skills,
- developing foreign language communication skills,
- acquiring knowledge and developing skills which are specific to the fields/topics approached by the projects.

A share of 56.7 % of the inquired projects declared that they created **resources for teachers** (guides, kits, etc.), in printed or online version, with potential impact on reducing early school leaving. Whether they were KA1 mobility projects or KA2 structural projects, the activities involved were often used to create products for teachers.

Almost a third of the projects (30 %) developed **learning kits for students**, in printed or online version, their role being to increase motivation for learning, facilitate learning, etc.

Online learning platforms are other type of outputs developed in almost 17 % of the projects.

The details of the activities organised in the projects and the information collected through interviews and examples of good practice highlight a wide range of activities organised with teachers and students in these projects. Next, we present a few **concrete examples of activities**.

- **Development of publications** on topics that are relevant to the issue of reducing early school leaving (e.g. books, project volumes, brochures, magazines, etc.)

Examples:

- the volume *Restart for quality education in rural areas*, which also includes a good practice guide about education in rural areas, inclusion and quality assurance in education;
- collections of life stories on various topics;
- *Poster Gallery* – putting together a collection of posters to promote the personal and professional experiences of the teachers involved in the project, with motivational messages for participation in education;
- the book *Books Friendly* – an activity involving writing and re-interpreting stories accompanied by drawings, then editing and printing them in a book.

- **Development of methodological guides, kits** for teachers and/or students

Examples:

- a brochure with good practice examples from partner countries related to the topic of teaching strategies for the integration of SEN students in mainstream education;
- a set of tools used by schools/teachers to remedy school dropout risk situations, etc.;
- the set *Teaching Toolkit – Innovative use of mobile devices in the educational process*; its role is to support teachers for the innovative use of mobile devices in the education process;
- a student book on the topic of students' socio-emotional maturity;
- development of sets of customized worksheets/subjects for students, with different degrees of difficulty.

- Using experiences from the projects to **make products offered as Open Educational Resources**

Examples:

- creating documentaries with images and footage taken during the mobility activities;
- creating educational/topical short films proposed by students within international teams;
- making videos with different local personalities/family members, etc., with relevance for the project themes, e.g. life stories about parents who went to work abroad.

- **Diversifying learning contexts in the classroom** through the application of methods practised during transnational training activities and the contextualisation of learning depending on the local/national/international specificity

Examples:

- a reading activity and the analysis of various motifs, literature myths, on topics related to socio-emotional development; "Re-writing the myth of Dracula, starting with the study of old myths, pursued an understanding of ancestral fears and, through rationalisation, it was possible to overcome contemporary phobias; re-writing the myth this way, by bringing it into the present, they found solutions for dealing with current problems", said a teacher involved in Erasmus+ projects;
- the activity "Local myths and legends" intended to motivate learning related to the local context; the students researched the dwarf dinosaurs that lived in the territory of the Land of Hateg (*Tara Hategului*) based on several information sources, a visit to the Geopark Museum and a trip to the places where traces of dinosaurs were discovered; presentations, drawings and an exhibition;
- implementation of specific strategies in the classroom – "democratic pedagogy" and "GRIT methodology" – so to motivate students for active engagement in their own learning;
- use of strategies for cross-curricular approaches and valorising students' emotional intelligence, which support individualised learning;
- cross-curricular thematic activities, for example, "Nature: where art meets science";
- involving the teachers participating in transnational mobility in the development of the provision for the school-based curriculum (examples of topics: "Us, in Romania – for Europe", "Traditions in Romania", "Europe – Culture and Tradition", "Romania – Places and People", "Personal development", etc.)

- **Development of organisational strategies for reducing early school leaving**

Examples:

- preparing teachers to work in multidisciplinary teams that get involved in actions intended to prevent early school leaving; teachers became aware of their important role for this purpose and applied tools and methodologies used at school level for preventing early school leaving and developing an inclusive school;
- giving open lessons, exchanges of experience between schools, which promoted methods learned during the projects playing a role in reducing early school leaving;
- developing innovative strategies for collaboration between teachers and the families of students in an educational risk situation;
- development of partnerships between schools and other organisations at local level that may support the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies in cases of early school leaving.

- **Diversification of non-formal learning contexts** through the application of methods practised during transnational training activities

Examples:

- enhancing the programme "Knowing more, being better!", in the framework of the programme "Different kind of school", which included a common activity at school level involving all students in grades 1-8; the activity was based on the method "treasure hunting", learned during the course; later, this activity was organised every year in the period of the programme "A different kind of school";
- the method "living library" is a non-formal activity that brought together current and former students of the school with people who were successful in their careers because they assigned due importance to school;
- the outdoor activity "treasure hunt", where the topic was the influence of communism in the social and historical life of the town Brăila; a lecture given at the Brăila History Museum by a representative of the anti-communist fight, about the communist period and how he was influenced by his time in prison; a diary with impressions; a photo exhibition;
- the activity "a healthy and balanced lifestyle" – studying and making a healthy eating pyramid and a sports pyramid; there were sports activities and also a visit at a green farm in the area; a healthy menu and a video on the topic "A day with a healthy lifestyle";
- "treasure hunt" activities on various topics;
- artistic activities (learning to play the flute, to make musical instruments, to sing traditional songs specific to different nationalities, role-playing);
- an activity where students identify an issue in their school and develop a plan for an ameliorative intervention, for example, the lack of a place where students can recreate during breaks; creating a model of a recreation place in the school yard: a pavilion, wooden benches, etc.; identifying possible support sources for carrying out the plan;
- kitchen workshops for students and parents;
- workshops for learning to manage anger so as to help students overcome their emotions;
- organisation of topical trips to motivate students for relevant learning in their everyday life;
- activities to encourage reading among students; organisation of story-telling contexts between students in different classes, while involving students at educational risk;
- organisation of drama festivals on relevant topics to promote the importance of education.

- **Organisation of entrepreneurship activities and school and career guidance activities, which promoted the importance of further education**

Examples:

- organisation of Christmas/Easter Fairs with support from local businesses/companies; the children laid the basis of their own business and worked with specific economic terms and documents;
- activity for setting up and managing a "DEFRI-Soap+" mini-enterprise within transnational teams: organizing production, business presentation, chemistry lessons, production workshops, sale, etc.;
- the activity "My future job" – students collected information about different professions, presented the profession they like using various creative means; they conducted some thorough research on the profession they like, using IT resources during the research phase; and they built models, made drawings and sketches as illustrative material;
- the activity "Occupations in the field of constructions" – it involved students in their final years, who were asked to identify professions in the field of constructions, outline the occupational profile of those professions, steps to take, salaries, the demand for that profession in the labour market;
- job shadowing – visit lessons at various organisations/companies, etc.;
- the activity "S.I.C. Mini Company" to promote a healthy lifestyle through components linked to food, stress factors, personal hygiene and work space hygiene, all these being implemented in a simulated company.

- **Organisation of activities at community level, where the topic was the necessary support for children's participation in school or students' involvement in the community life**

Examples:

- public activities for the dissemination of information on school trauma based on the project outputs (support material: the book *Lilly, Ben and Omid* and the brochure *Trauma and School*); the participants were experts in psychology, guests from mainstream education and special education, social workers, representatives of the local community, representatives of some NGOs that aim to help disadvantaged people recover and integrate;
- activity "Respect" – volunteering in an eldercare centre; students prepared their own material, told stories, discussed various topics, including the role of school in people's lives;
- organisation of donations for disadvantaged families/groups/students at socio-economic risk, etc.;
- research activity on the topic "Rich man, poor man", aiming to capture different lifestyles and the impact of socio-economic conditions on participation in education;
- conducting interviews with refugees/migrants/ethnic groups, etc. on the importance of education, participation in education and the obstacles they face with relation to social, educational and professional integration; students interviewed their parents;
- conducting interviews with representatives of some ethnic and religious minorities for a

better understanding of the barriers related to participation in education;
- the campaign “Go to school!” – a campaign for participation in education with motivational short films and video clips; the campaign was addressed to children and parents from a disadvantaged background for participating in education, as well as to organisations for supporting disadvantaged communities.

3.5 The impact of Erasmus+ projects; aspects specific to reducing early school leaving

The implementation of projects in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme aims to produce effects in the involved organisations, for the beneficiaries, as well as for the communities to which the involved organisations belong. It is preferable that the changes brought about by the implementation of projects are visible and active as from the period of project implementation and, moreover, they should be sustainable and bring about new changes in the long term, in accordance with the priorities and the objectives of the Erasmus+ programme.

One specific aspect pursued in the survey of beneficiaries of Erasmus+ projects was an inquiry into their opinions of the impact which the projects they were involved in had at different levels, with relevance for the issue of early school leaving. The levels considered were: organisational level, teachers’ level and students’ level, as well as the level of the community in which the concerned organisation is based.

- **Impact at organisational level**

The implementation of the Erasmus+ projects is concerned not only with the development of professional and/or personal skills but also with the development of organisational skills that may facilitate or support the implementation of new projects depending on the organisational profile and the needs of the target groups which the organisations work with. In the case of school education projects focused on the prevention of and the fight against early school leaving, the main changes brought about could be identified at the following levels: the organisational capacity to identify the early school leaving risk, the intervention capacity in case of early school leaving, the capacity for developing partnerships with relevant institutions and organisations working in the field of education/support for disadvantaged groups and raising the school’s prestige in the local community.

All these types of impact at organisational level were considered relevant by the respondents. However, if we include in our analysis the extent of the impact at organisational level, there are several aspects which need detailing.

Table 3. The impact of the Erasmus+ projects at organisational level

	Insignificant impact	Less significant impact	Significant impact	Very significant impact	Don't know/Haven't monitored these aspects
Development of the organisational capacity to identify, among students, the risk and the causes of early school leaving	-	-	43.3%	55.0%	1.7%
Development of the organisational capacity to implement activities for preventing school dropout	-	8.3%	31.7%	58.3%	1.7%
Development of the organisational capacity to implement intervention activities in cases of school dropout	-	15.0%	45.0%	36.7%	3.3%
Development of transnational partnerships on the topic of early school leaving	6.7%	15.0%	28.3%	46.7%	3.3%
Development of partnerships at local level (with various other organisations) with the theme of early school leaving	1.7%	11.7%	31.7%	51.7%	3.3%
More prestige for the school/organisation in the community	1.7%	1.7%	15.0%	73.3%	8.3%

The development of the organisational capacity **to identify the risk and the causes of early school leaving** is considered a change with significant (and very significant) effects by most respondents (98%). The implementation of projects in the field of school education with a focus on the prevention of and the fight against early school leaving seems to have effects on the development by the concerned organisations of some skills related to the identification of students at risk, their monitoring and differentiated work so as to keep them in the education system for a longer period of time. The development of a capacity to identify the risk and the causes of early school leaving equals, on one hand, to a better understanding of the factors contributing to the risk of early leaving, and, on the other hand, to accepting the existence of this risk among school students. Understanding and accepting a reality are the main attitudes which a school organisation should adopt so as to be able to build intervention strategies that are adapted to the specific needs of teachers and of the students they work with respectively.

The development of the organisational capacity **to implement activities for preventing school dropout/intervention on risk situations** is considered a significant change in the organisations that implemented Erasmus+ projects. Therefore, 90 % of the respondents acknowledge this change, which can be seen both with regard to activities organised in school (which make take various forms, from awareness raising campaigns to actions to increase students' motivation and engagement in learning), and with regard to activities organised at classroom level or even individually with students at risk of school dropout.

More prestige for the school in the community is the third type of impact at organisational level based on the importance assigned by the respondents (88 % of the respondents consider that this category has some significant and very significant impact in the organisation). The implementation of projects has led to an increased visibility of schools in communities, through means and actions designed to promote and disseminate the projects. Moreover, many of the surveyed projects involved relevant actors at community level, which determined some better mutual knowledge between the school actors and other actors at community level, various interactions, discovering new contexts and possibilities for cooperation, benefitting all those involved and the local community as a whole. This statement is also supported by the high percentage of respondents affirming that the projects had some significant effects on the **development of new partnerships at local level** (83 %). Thus, applicant organisations promoted the activities they conducted, proved their efficiency in the actions undertaken and have demonstrated therefore their capacity for action to prevent early school leaving and, implicitly, have increased their capital of trust in the local community.

- **Impact for teachers**

As for teachers, the effects are various and they are mainly concerned with the development of professional skills. An in-depth analysis underlines the effects of the Erasmus+ project activities on some specific dimensions of professional development, among which there are the development of capacities to adjust teaching strategies to the profile of the student groups they work with; the development of skills related to their subject to make learning more attractive; the development of the capacity to promote and achieve an inclusive school climate, which encourages and supports the participation in school of students in educational risk situations.

Table 4. The impact of the Erasmus+ projects for teachers

	Insignificant impact	Less significant impact	Significant impact	Very significant impact	Don't know/Haven't monitored these aspects
Development of professional skills related to the subject they teach	-	5.0%	40.0%	51.7%	1.7%
Development of teaching skills related to the use of innovative teaching-learning-assessment strategies to promote inclusion and efficient learning	-	3.3%	23.3%	71.7%	1.7%
Development of skills related to working with students with disabilities/special educational needs	-	18.3%	31.7%	41.7%	8.3%
Development of skills for promoting an inclusive school climate for students at risk of school dropout	1.7%	6.7%	36.7%	53.3%	1.7%
Improved communication with the parents or guardians of students from disadvantaged groups	-	10.0%	40.0%	46.7%	3.3%
Improved cooperation with other relevant/key actors (e.g. school counsellors, social workers, school mediators, etc.) in order to support students from vulnerable groups	1.7%	6.7%	38.3%	48.3%	5.0%

The development of professional skills related to the use of innovative teaching strategies to promote inclusion and efficient learning is – in the opinion of 95 % of the respondents – the main effect of the Erasmus+ project on teachers from beneficiary schools. Whether they participated in training programmes or in exchanges of experience, mobility activities for students or the creation of intellectual products, the respondents think that teachers developed useful skills for choosing learning methods and means which are adapted to the needs and learning possibilities of their students. Teachers acknowledge some significant impact related to the use of innovative strategies on the risk of early school leaving: “The implementation of non-formal methods during classes actually resulted in a progressive increase in participation

for some groups of students who generally do not stand out during classes with a traditional format. Therefore, the concrete outcomes in our school are a decrease in the number of absences by 6 % and a reduction of school dropout by 3 %. These outcomes are more frequent as teachers continue to employ such methods, and their regular exercise attracts positive effects for both sides, students and teachers alike”, said a teacher.

The development of professional skills related to the subject they teach is other type of significant impact indicated by 92 % of the respondents. The development contexts are similar to those which also facilitated the development of teaching skills, and as far as students are concerned, such skills will act convergently and simultaneously to ensure that teaching is focused on elements of novelty, topicality, relevant to students’ life experiences.

In line with the two types of impact previously mentioned, which may make the teaching-learning-assessment more attractive, more comprehensive for students, the respondents also signalled another type of impact for teachers: the **development of teachers’ capacity to promote an inclusive school climate** that encourages the participation in school of students at risk and their active engagement in learning, supports the development of skills appealing to contexts that are familiar to students and planning learning in accordance with their needs, interests and learning possibilities. Therefore, 90 % of the respondents said that the Erasmus+ projects implemented in the field of school education, and focused on early school leaving, brought about significant and very significant changes in teachers’ capacity to promote and sustain an inclusive school climate which supports students at risk of school dropout.

In correlation with the impact which was previously mentioned, there is also the **development of skills related to working with students with disabilities/special educational needs** – an important aspect for more than 70 % of the respondents. This aspect is a priority in the Romanian education system, where the actual inclusion of this category of students in mainstream education needs a wide range of support measures (educational, pedagogical, logistic, financial, etc.).

Other types of impact for teachers were concerned with the development of skills related to establishing relations with other actors at school level, with whom they can act together as a team to support the participation in school of students at risk of early school leaving; the development of contexts for cooperation with families of students at risk, so as to act convergently in order to support participation in education and training.

- **Impact for the school population as a whole**

The projects proposed and implemented by schools are done for the benefit of their students, irrespective of the activities carried out and the outcomes achieved. The projects aiming to prevent and fight early school leaving pursued activities adapted to students' needs and interests, so that they support motivation for learning and participation in school. Many times, the activities conducted for this purpose exceeded the usual framework of the classroom and of the formal curriculum. It is significant that, with these activities, the applicant organisations succeeded in attracting students at risk of school dropout and bring them closer to the school environment, to learning. As a matter of fact, the role of non-formal activities in reducing early school leaving has been supported by a range of studies in the area of education, which have been already mentioned in this study.

Table 5. Impact of the Erasmus+ projects for the school population as a whole

	Insignificant impact	Less significant impact	Significant impact	Very significant impact	Don' t know/Haven' t monitored these aspects
Improved school attendance among students	1.7%	10.0%	53.3%	30.0%	5.0%
A smaller number of students who drop out of school	3.3%	10.0%	51.7%	28.3%	5.0%
Increased percentage of students taking the national assessments (as appropriate, the national assessment for grade 8 or the Bacallaureate)	5.0%	21.7%	35.0%	28.3%	10.0%
Improved student achievement at national assessments	3.3%	26.7%	26.7%	33.3%	10.0%
A larger number of students continuing their education after completing grade 8/ high-school (as appropriate)	1.7%	25.0%	20.0%	41.7%	11.7%
Increased participation in extracurricular/ out-of-school activities	1.7%	5.0%	20.0%	66.7%	6.7%

Increased participation in extracurricular/out-of-school activities is the most significant of the changes which the Erasmus+ projects focusing on the prevention of early school leaving brought about for the school population. A share of 87 % of the respondents acknowledge the significant contribution of the projects on students' involvement in extracurricular/out-of-school activities. This aspect should be analysed in a double perspective. On one hand, the Erasmus+ programme explicitly promotes non-formal learning; therefore, all the projects include such activities. On the other hand, the research data upholds the importance of these activities for keeping the students at risk of early school leaving into the system, because they are learning contexts where students may acquire competences which they can later use in formal activities, where they can make use of their personal skills, develop self-esteem, socio-emotional skills and life skills, which are hardly pursued by the formal curriculum.

Another impact element for the school population as a whole is the **increased school attendance for students at risk of dropout**. A share of 83 % of the respondents consider that the implementation of the Erasmus+ projects has significant and very significant effects on school attendance. The analysis of activities carried out in the projects covered by this research underlined the role of projects in making learning more attractive, more adapted to students' needs and interests in knowledge. So, the creation of a student-focused learning environment has most likely led to sustained motivation for learning and increased school attendance.

Linked to the previous aspect, another impact element was a **smaller number of students who drop out of school**, mentioned by 80 % of the respondents. The reduction of the school dropout rate is a direct relevant indicator of the efficiency of a project focused on reducing early school leaving.

Other effects of projects were measured by improved student achievement at national assessments (the national assessment at the end of grade 8 and the Baccalaureate Examination), as well as by a larger number of students who continued their education after having completed grade 8/high-school. Together with the previous aspect, these effects are actually quantitative indicators of the extent of the projects' contribution to reducing early school leaving.

- **Impact on students at risk of school dropout**

The applicant organisations were invited to identify several specific effects produced by the projects with regard to students at risk of school dropout. The aspects considered were concerned with changes brought about by the learning contexts created in the projects in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation for this category of students.

Table 6. The impact of the Erasmus+ projects for students at risk of school dropout

	Insignificant impact	Less significant impact	Significant impact	Very significant impact	Don't know/Haven't monitored these aspects
Increasing motivation for learning and active participation in class activities	1.7 %	8.3 %	41.7 %	46.7 %	1.7 %
Development of skills related to different fields/subjects of study	1.7 %	6.7 %	45.0 %	43.3 %	3.3 %
Development of techniques for more efficient learning	0.0 %	15.0 %	48.3 %	33.3 %	3.3 %
Development of skills related to socialising, relations and team work	0.0 %	6.7 %	30.0 %	61.7 %	1.7 %
Enhanced intercultural/interethnic cooperation and communication	0.0 %	6.7 %	30.0 %	58.3 %	3.3 %
Development of self-esteem	0.0 %	3.3 %	25.0 %	70.0 %	1.7 %

According to the respondents, the main effect of projects for students at risk of school dropout was **the development of their self-esteem** (95 % of the respondents). The risk of early school leaving is often constituted as a judgemental evaluation, a labelling associated with a negative self-image, the lack of self-confidence and a difficult insertion into a group of peers. It is therefore explicable why the growth of self-esteem was the most indicated impact in the projects addressing students at educational risk. Consequently, we can conclude that with activities adapted to the needs and interests of these students, and sometimes with positive discrimination activities, students at risk may be positively valued in a group.

Development of skills related to socialising, relations and team work is another effect of the Erasmus+ projects for students at risk of school dropout (92 %). The school education projects focusing on early school leaving propose various activities for this specific group, the students at risk being supported to participate in activities (teaching-learning activities, extracurricular/ out-of-school activities). All this involves interaction, communication, socialising, cooperation with other students in the school, with teachers and other relevant actors.

Not last, the Erasmus+ projects were contexts for **the development of intercultural and interethnic cooperation and communication** – important skills for mitigating the risk of early

school leaving for students belonging to different cultural, ethnic or religious minorities.

- **Impact for the local community**

Beyond the effects seen for organisations and educational actors, the Erasmus+ projects that focused on the prevention of and the fight against early school leaving also had effects for local communities. The relevant aspects in this respect were the involvement of public authorities in the school life through contributions and support for conducting quality activities in schools and the involvement of parents in activities carried out by schools.

4. Conclusions

- Organisations from rural areas are more and more present among the initiators of Erasmus+ projects dedicated to early school leaving. On one hand, it seems that KA1 projects reached out to the beneficiaries targeted with priority by the Erasmus+ programme in Romania. On the other hand, the data shows an improvement in the skills of rural schools/NGOs working with rural schools related to writing project proposals and implementing projects which meet the educational needs of their students.
- Most applicant organisations work with **disadvantaged groups of students** on a current basis. The most frequent situations are those of schools with children from a disadvantaged socio-economic background, from rural areas or whose parents left to work abroad. Therefore, it seems that the issue of reducing early school leaving is a priority for such schools. These are groups at risk that have also been targeted by other grant programmes and a priority focus on such groups is also expected from and confirmed by the projects funded under the Erasmus+ programme.
- The main **needs** underlying the implementation of Erasmus+ projects with relevance for the issue of early school leaving were: poor student achievement at national assessments, low school attendance, frequent cases of school dropout and little student involvement in out-of-school activities. Other answers underlined a significant drop in these students' confidence that school is a factor of successful social and professional insertion. Consequently, we may say that these situations outline a particular profile of the student at risk of early school leaving. Furthermore, applicant organisations indicated the lack of teachers' skills related to an early alarm of school dropout, as well as the lack of skills and tools for intervening to prevent this phenomenon.
- The projects that selected "reducing early school leaving" as a priority also pursued specific objectives focused on this issue. As far as students are concerned, the emphasis was on developing positive attitudes and motivations in relation to learning and further education. For teachers, the projects mainly aimed to develop skills related to the use of various, innovative, motivating and inclusive strategies. For organisations, the main goal of the projects was to develop their organisational capacity to prevent, identify, manage and resolve the situations of early school leaving risk.

- The main types of **activities** carried out in the inquired projects were: teacher outward mobility for gaining knowledge of other education systems and developing skills related to the prevention of and fight against school dropout/early school leaving; student outward mobility for gaining knowledge of other education systems and increasing motivation for participation in school; creation of resources (guides, kits, etc.) for teachers and students, in printed or online version, with potential impact on reducing early school leaving; organising extracurricular activities to attract students to school; developing online platforms (for teachers, students); and developing training programmes for teachers.
- The concrete examples of activities offered by the applicant organisations emphasize the added value of Erasmus+ projects due to:
 - a diversification of learning contexts provided to students (most of them as extracurricular activities but directly linked to the development of skills and competences which are also promoted by the new Romanian school curriculum);
 - a familiarization with innovative teaching methods, with a main focus on experiential, hands-on learning and group learning;
 - the activities involved various categories of actors, besides students and teachers;
 - exchanges of practices and experiences, facilitated by international mobility; this aspect is also explicable because the Romanian education system does not sufficiently promote and make use of such contexts where teachers can exchange good practice, share experiences, critically reflect on their own teaching activity and find solutions for improvement together with other teachers.
- The main types of **impact** of Erasmus+ projects identified, in comparatively similar shares, the following effects:
 - at organisation level: development of the organisational capacity to identify, among students, the early school leaving risk and causes; development of the organisational capacity to implement activities for the prevention of school dropout and for intervention in such cases; and more prestige for the school/organisation in the local community;
 - for teachers: development of teaching skills related to the use of innovative teaching-learning-assessment strategies to promote inclusion and efficient learning; development of teachers' capacity to promote an inclusive school climate; improved cooperation with other relevant/key actors (e.g. school counsellors, social workers, school mediators, etc.) in order to support students from vulnerable groups; and improved communication with parents;

- for the school population as a whole: increased participation in extracurricular/ out-of-school activities; improved school attendance; less situations of school dropout on the way; a larger number of students continuing their education; and improved student achievement at national assessments;

- for students at risk of school dropout: development of self-esteem; development of skills related to socialising, relations and team work; a higher level of intercultural/interethnic cooperation and communication;

- at community level: local public authorities were motivated to support schools and get involved in school life.

5. Recommendations

- Promote **support** systems to initiate and implement Erasmus + projects in disadvantaged areas, with priority for schools/organisations working with children at risk of early school leaving.
- Intensify **information** events about the Erasmus+ programme and the opportunities it offers for reducing early school leaving, so as to involve various categories of potential applicants – schools and other organisations alike – with direct concerns and responsibilities in the area of early school leaving.
- Promote, within the applicant school organisations, the recommendation to establish **local partnerships** with institutions and research centres with competence in the area/topic of the project or in the prevention of early school leaving, playing a supportive role for the implementation of complex and relevant activities related to a given matter, as well as for following up on initiatives, their replication in other contexts and their promotion in professional networks that are directly interested.
- Implement support mechanisms for applicant organisations (including in the framework of local information/training sessions), which should help them **identify the needs** that are specific to the groups of students at risk of school dropout, the factors which may lead to early school leaving/factors which may have an effect on the increase of participation in school, and efficient ways for prevention/improvement – as a basis for designing the activities proposed in the Erasmus+ projects.
- Include, among students at educational risk, some **categories that are specific to the Romanian context** (e.g. children who are left at home alone, their parents working abroad).
- Prepare **publications/guides with good practice examples** on reducing early school leaving, developed with support from organisations that have already implemented projects with this priority – so as to support future applicants to propose relevant activities in this area.
- Promote, among potential beneficiaries, recommendations to plan specific activities to **transfer to/try out in the classroom** things learned during Erasmus+ mobility activities; include, in the evaluation of projects, such criteria.

- Identify, in the projects, some **ways to disseminate** the outcomes within networks of actors directly involved in supporting participation in school, at school and community level; therefore, a (sub)structure/observatory could be created to handle all the actors and their experiences related to early school leaving.
- Propose a set of **quantitative and qualitative indicators** to measure the impact of Erasmus+ projects on reducing early school leaving; these indicators should be pursued by every project proposing ameliorative interventions in the area.
- Give **evaluations of the long-term impact** of the Erasmus+ projects in terms of early school leaving; the results of such studies could be used to inform and defend educational policies that are relevant to early school leaving.
- Develop a **network** of actors/beneficiaries of Erasmus+ projects, which may be accessed by those who want to do projects on similar topics; this way, the beneficiaries' expertise would not be active only in their community and it could be accessed and capitalised on in various contexts, which were not addressed in previous projects.

6. Case studies: Projects as examples of good practice

Project title: *Feed4Saving*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project number: 2016-1-RO01-KA201-024552

Applicant organisation: Colegiul Economic "Pintea Viteazul" Căvnic, Maramureş County

Project relevance to ESL:

The project involved eight schools from Romania, Italy, Portugal, Spain, France, Turkey and Greece.

The project objectives focused on aspects that are directly relevant to ESL, such as: improving students' school performance, with a focus on the development of practical skills in specific areas of the school curriculum; promoting motivation for learning and participation in school through the implementation of attractive learning methodologies; reducing the level of absenteeism; improving teachers' skills related to the use of specific strategies for intervention in situations of risk of school dropout.

The project target group included approximately 400 high-school students (aged 13-19 years) from partner schools. Three international mobility activities have been organised in the project, which consisted in: for teachers – exchange of practices on teaching methods and methods of prevention and intervention in school dropout situations (e.g. Pygmalion programme in Spain); for students – working in intercultural groups, exchanges of ideas and innovative learning experiences. Project activities have led to the development of two outputs which may support the interventions of schools for reducing ESL:

- a collection of learning resources "Boost your class!", which includes 50 examples of activities using non-formal working methods on topics like personal development, communication skills, teambuilding, developing empathy and tolerance;

- a pedagogical kit "Teaching with laboratories", which has lesson plans, pedagogical materials and resources, organised in four modules: the foreign language laboratory (it supports teachers to develop students' language skills), the mathematics laboratory, the arts laboratory ("convivium" art) and the cooking laboratory.

The outputs put an emphasis on: applied learning; the cross-curricular approach of subjects proposed to students, which capitalise on what they have learned through the formal curriculum but also bring in complementary elements; various methodologies, specific to the non-formal area, which promote student-focused learning. The material produced in the project has been piloted in each school and the results have been used in the final form of outputs.

Among the impact elements, the most important aspects, relevant to the ESL issue, were:

- for students: an awareness of the importance of participation in school for personal and professional success, a lower number of absences, increased motivation for learning and improved learning skills through their involvement in various contexts, improvement of specialised/specific skills;

- for teachers: the diversification of teaching methods, teaching material and the use of new technologies (e.g. Geogebra, Calameo, Movie Maker) for making learning more attractive; the implementation of strategies used by other countries to prevent ESL;

- for schools: improved management skills in situations of ESL risk, the integration of the project outcomes in the formal curriculum of participating schools, promoting cross-curricular activities at school level.

Other details about the project: project website www.feed4saving.com; eTwinning platform <https://live.etwinning.net/projects/project/169688>

Project title: *Non-formal activities for inclusive groups of students*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Innovation

Project no: 2016-1-RO01-KA201-024566

Applicant organisation: Scoala Gimnaziala Speciala Sf. Nicolae, Bucharest

Project relevance to ESL:

The project was developed by five schools and an NGO from Romania, Portugal, Hungary, Estonia, Turkey and Norway.

With regard to reducing ESL, the project objectives were focused mainly on promoting inclusive education and participation in education for students with special needs by developing teachers' skills related to the use of non-formal activities and inclusive approaches in working with students with special needs, developing good practice resources with inclusive non-formal activities and using innovative strategies for non-formal activities.

The project organised international mobility activities for teachers, where they learned how to organise and implement non-formal/extracurricular activities with inclusive characteristics. During the mobility activities for students, they learned and experienced different games and common activities, with no differentiation related to disability.

A training course for teachers, on the topic of inclusive education techniques/working with children with disabilities and/or special educational needs, and also a guide with examples of good practice were developed in the project.

At the same time, every partner implemented local non-formal activities, which were adapted to different categories of students they worked with: teaching activities, special competitions, other types of non-formal activities (852 local activities).

With regard to the impact of the project, the following aspects may be mentioned:

- students participants developed a range of socialising, communication and collaboration skills, which may compensate for skills that do not work so well (different skills depending on the degree of disability/educational risk);
- development of an inclusive climate in the partner schools, with more empathy and openness from students without disabilities;
- teachers working with special categories of students at educational risk have developed their skills related to both their teaching and the promotion of inclusion and group management and cross-curricular and customized approaches;
- promotion of differentiated learning at school level taking into account the characteristics of all students.

Other details about the project: project website <http://non4mal4all.com/>.

Project title: *FEEL - Finding Emotions and Equality with Literature*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2014-1-FI01-KA201-000773

Applicant organisation: Kajaanintullin koulu, Finland

Partner organisation in Romania: Școala Gimnazială Specială nr. 10, Bucharest

The project involved schools of special education from Romania, Poland, Turkey and Finland.

The project objectives addressed aspects such as developing the reading skills and motivation for reading of students in special education, promoting socio-emotional development strategies and improving teachers' skills related to the use of specific intervention strategies in situations of school dropout risk.

The project target group included students with a handicap from special education schools, children, teenagers and young adults suffering from different mental diseases and students having treatment in a hospital.

The project also organised several activities based on two approaches: the first one pursued to develop socio-emotional skills (using sets of BEAR cards), while the second approach aimed to develop an interest in reading and reading skills for the target group.

The project served as a means to promote an inclusive approach and students expressed their emotions, explored their feelings and developed their self-awareness and identity. Literature was also a tool for raising cultural awareness, with the choice of national stories from the partner countries and the meetings and visits between teachers fostering intercultural awareness.

The outcomes emphasised the enhancement of students' and teachers' language and ICT skills, as well as the use of technologies and different teaching approaches in educational practice (the use of BEAR cards, making assessments that are focused on a positive valorisation of emotions and feelings).

Among the impact elements, the most important and relevant to the ESL issue were the following:

- for students: awareness of the role of reading, advancement of inclusion and equality of opportunity by creating a feeling of group belonging;
- for teachers: diversification of teaching methods, teaching materials and the use of new technologies, in order to make learning more attractive; promoting hands-on learning contexts;
- for schools: organisation of common teacher training events, development of managerial skills inspired by inclusion.

Project title: *The Lakes in our lives*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2014-1-IS01-KA201-000162

Applicant organisation: Menntaskólinn á Egilsstöðum, Island

Partner organisation in Romania: Liceul tehnologic Aurel Vlaicu, Cluj

The project involved six schools from Island, the Czech Republic, Romania, Poland, Sweden and Turkey.

The project objectives aimed to promote students' interest in science – a field which is less valorised by students at risk of early school leaving – through various activities carried out to show its applicability in real life situations. Each project meeting was dedicated to a specific topic and offered opportunities for exchange of teaching experiences and involvement of students at risk of school leaving.

The project target group included with priority students who are exposed at the risk of school leaving (facing social, economic obstacles or with learning difficulties) and their parents.

Several activities took place in the project on topics such as: an online dictionary on science topics; information material on topics like lakes, specific flora and fauna, the role of water; sports and leisure around lakes; ecologic behaviours, etc.; a set of online lessons for science; educational videos.

Among the impact elements, the most important aspects with relevance for the ESL issue were the following:

- for students: improved students' motivation for learning, promotion of the importance of the environment protection, enhancing the feeling of citizenship, improving learning results with relevance for science;
- for teachers: new methods for teaching science, for a comprehensive approach of some fields of knowledge; development of new skills related to the use of different ICT tools, both technically and pedagogically;
- for parents: raising the level of involvement in school life;
- for organisations: creating an efficient learning environment, focused on students' needs for knowledge and the relevance for the local specificity.

Other details about the project: project website <https://slideplayer.com/slide/7785408/>

Project title: *Creativity knows no borders*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2014-1-PL01-KA201-002875

Applicant organisation: Liceum Ogólnokształcące, Poland

Partner organisation in Romania: Liceul Tehnologic nr. 1, Câmpulung Moldovenesc

The project involved ten schools from Belgium, Finland, Italy, Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland, Spain and Turkey.

The project objective was to promote learning among students through various forms of art like dance, songs, poetry, drama, movies, photography and visual arts.

The project target groups included students in school education. The project focused on students with low school achievement or students marginalised at school and/or in the community, offering them an opportunity to feel important and valorised.

Several types of activities have been organised in the project: workshops, working groups, competitions, exhibitions, cooperation with other institutions or schools from other localities and with cultural centres, music schools, cinemas, amateur theatres, choruses, dance groups, music bands, children's homes, elderly's homes and others. Student activities took place in museums, arts galleries and other cultural institutions.

The outcomes of the project were: a playscript, a poetry book, an educational film, students' artistic activities, the manual production of drama costumes made of recycled materials, a film and a photo album presenting students' birthplaces in a personal perspective, a set of audio descriptions of famous paintings from partner countries, a set of plans for learning activities that may take place in museums, art galleries, theatres, cinemas or other cultural institutions.

The main gain for students was that they worked in various contexts which promoted creativity, working together, awareness of culture and a taste in beauty. Moreover, the working contexts created by the project promoted a valorisation of every pupil, with their aptitudes, talents and interests, without any competition and through cooperation and working together.

Other details about the project: project website <http://creativityknowsnoborders.eu/>.

Project title: *Discovering Europe*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2014-1-PL01-KA201-002907

Applicant organisation: Szkoła Podstawowa Nr. 2, Poland

Partner organisation in Romania: Școala Gimnazială „Alexandru Vaida Vodă”, Cluj- Napoca

The project involved eight schools from Slovenia, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, Romania, the UK, Germany and Italy.

The project objectives were to promote European values in educational communities and to develop new means to cultivate and encourage students' motivation to learn, curiosity and creativity.

The project target group included primary school students and lower secondary students with low motivation for learning and low school achievement.

Several activities were organised in the project based on innovative WebQuest methods. They addressed topics in such areas as geography, the natural environment, history, the culture of European countries. The WebQuest website (in English) was created together with teachers from partner schools. Teachers offered their students information sources about WebQuest - in their language. Students in each school worked in teams, collected, selected and organised information and created learning materials. In each school, during a special event, the students presented the outcomes of their work to other teams and shared the knowledge they gained. Subsequently, in each school, the students participated in a contest on the WebQuest topic. The outcomes may be divided in three sets of distinct activities: Teach and Learn – activities carried out virtually (E-Twinning) and through presentations, project exhibitions; Connect and Play – strictly virtual activities (E-Twinning); Collaboration and Communication – activities carried out during mobility periods.

The main gain was the emphasis on the use of interactive teaching methods and the encouragement of teamwork by using methods like WebQuest, project-based learning, peer-learning and learning-by teaching.

Other details about the project: project website

<http://discoveringeuropevaidavoevod.weebly.com/informa538ii-generale.html>

Project title: *Once upon an Erasmus Tale (Traditional Arts and Languages across Europe) – T.A.L.E.*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2014-1-UK01-KA201-000229_6

Partner organisation in Romania: Școala Gimnazială Lunca, Pașcani

Project relevance to ESL: The T.A.L.E project involved eight schools from the UK, France, Sweden, Finland, Poland, the Netherlands, Spain, Romania; the project focused on the importance of traditional tales, language and culture in modern Europe.

The project objectives addressed aspects that are relevant to the ESL issue: reducing the learning gap among students and preventing early leaving in the education system, the use of graphic and artistic skills in early childhood education and care, developing the artistic skills of students from various cultures as a result of their interaction and promoting pan-European learning.

The project target group included 13 teachers who participated in learning activities. The project organised transnational mobility activities. The activities that have been carried out were concerned with teachers' exchanges of good practices on teaching methods, involving the use of arts and traditions/traditional products in learning; the interaction with teachers from other cultural areas; and innovative learning.

The project activities were various and consisted of preparing a drama with the contribution of local actors, organising two workshops with local artists, organising integrated activities, conducting demonstrative teaching activities and extracurricular/out-of-school activities at museums. The project activities focused on research and also on making products: 9 exhibitions, 13 research activities, the *Learning through Art* magazine, for which nine issues were edited throughout the implementation of the project. Moreover, a dictionary of words frequently used for communicating with partners, a common brochure presenting the project and a drama performance were created.

As impact elements, the most important aspects with relevance for the ESL issue were:

- for school actors: the creation of an international ethos of learning in each school, fostering and promoting a positive attitude towards lifelong learning in Europe, a reduction in the number of school absences, a larger number of children attending kindergarten;
- at organisational level: every school was recognised as an international school in the local community; every school was seen as an outstanding example of how a European project may inspire lifelong learning for all the participants at regional and national levels;
- at community level: parents trust school more, enhanced parents' interest in school and in the activities that took place (the existence of a real school-family partnership).

Other details about the project: school website

<http://scoalagimnazialaluncapascani.ro/>, and eTwinning platform

<https://twinspace.etwinning.net/2826/home>.

Project title: *L'école maternelle, levier pour l'éducation future de l'enfant*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2015-1-BE01-KA219-013219_7

Applicant organisation: Ecole Communale de Seneffe

Partner organisation in Romania: Școala Gimnazială „Vladimir Streinu”

Project relevance to ESL:

The main goal of the project is to establish a close link to school so as it acts like a lever in child development. The project objectives focused on aspects relevant to the ESL issue, such as: initiating actions which offer better opportunities for development to children from poor families, whether they have a foreign background or not; facilitating access to quality preschool education by consolidating teacher training; maximizing children's language skills; and strengthening cooperation with parents.

Transnational mobility activities took place in the project and they consisted of: for teachers – exchanges of practices on teaching methods supporting children's participation in education (preschool); for parents – activities to strengthen the family-school relation.

Project activities led to the development of outcomes that may support the interventions of schools to reduce ESL:

- workshops facilitating communication among participants (the target group of the project),
- various activities with parents and children to prevent and fight early school leaving,
- a course on parenting (completed by 15 people),
- organising professional meetings,
- creating promotional material.

The main project outcomes emphasised applied learning, parents' involvement in learning activities, creating promotional material and actions so as to encourage similar undertakings in other contexts. Professional meetings were organised to promote the project outcomes.

Among the impact elements, the most important aspects relevant to the ESL issue are:

- at organisational level: development of a professional network with a shared goal to strengthen the family-school relation at preschool level, especially for poor families; development of the capacity to implement projects in partnership with other European organisations; development of promotional tools – a website;
- for teachers: development of professional skills related to working with children's parents, development of skills related to working with peers to exchange good practice;
- at community level: better knowledge and cooperation with children's families, creating a partnership with the local community, more prestige for the school in the community and creating positive attitudes towards education in kindergarten and in school.

Other details about the project may be accessed on the project website <https://lcolematernellelevierpoureducationfuture.weebly.com/>, and on the eTwinning platform at <https://twinspace.etwinning.net/9528/pages/page/192222>.

Project title: *Sport is not only football - SNF*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2015-1-TR01-KA219-022382_3

Partner organisation in Romania: Colegiul Tehnic „Viceamiral Ioan Balanescu”

Project relevance to ESL:

The main goal of the project is to develop efficient strategies to improve basic skills. The project intends to create nice places in schools to do sports. Considering this, the project objectives aim to reduce early school leaving, to create a healthy lifestyle, to develop foreign language communication skills and personal development by increasing tolerance, cooperation and fair-play.

The project target group included 891 people (students, teachers, parents) who participated in the project activities.

The following activities have been organised in the project: for teachers – transnational meetings; for students – learning events; they involved 7 students and 3 teachers from each country.

The activities were concerned with the organisation of outdoor and indoor activities. All this encouraged the active engagement of students, parents and teachers.

The activities that have been organised led to the following outcomes: joining professional sports clubs, exercising and doing sport systematically, organisation of a conference to promote sports and raise young people’s awareness of the benefits of sports for health. The outcomes emphasised applied learning and the strengthening of the family-school relation.

Among the impact elements, the most important aspects with relevance for the ESL issue were:

- for students: becoming aware of the importance of doing sport for a healthy lifestyle, fighting violence in bleachers, increasing participation in school, increasing cooperation among students, increasing the level of socialising and interaction;
- at community level: creation of local partnerships to support physical activities, development of local partnerships to promote examples of good practice;
- for schools: development of a sustainability plan which includes sports actions supported by school and parents.

Project title: *My Future - a closed door or an open window?*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Exchange of Good Practices

Project no: 2015-1-UK01-KA219-013438_4

Applicant organisation: Gateshead College

Partner organisation in Romania: Colegiul National „Vlaicu Vodă”

Project relevance to ESL:

The project involved schools from the UK, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Romania, Norway. The main project objective was concerned with students’ attitude to learning and, therefore, the purpose was to actively involve students in their learning so as to increase their motivation and achievement, as well as to improve professional skills. Consequently, the project aimed to encourage students to become aware of their own abilities and to develop them so as to enhance their employability.

The project organised transnational teacher and student mobility activities for learning purposes.

The project activities that facilitated visits at enterprises, employers and research centres led to the development of knowledge about various areas of employment and research in the partner countries. Moreover, students understood the requirements which employers may have and the required conditions.

The outcomes underlined hands-on learning (simulation of an interview, job applications), the creation of material and promoting it through various means (websites, professional meetings).

Among the impact elements, the most important aspects relevant to the ESL issue were:

- for teachers: development of skills for disseminating, promoting the information acquired during mobility and for using it in their own organisation in activities with students; diversification of teaching methods, teaching material; understanding diversity within the student community;

- for students: awareness of differences between points of view and accepting that there is no unanimity; being aware that differences do not create difficulties; becoming aware of and assuming differences; identifying contexts, various approaches, adapted to one’s personality, for personal and professional development;

- for schools: improvement of management skills in ESL risk situations, integration of project outcomes in the formal curriculum of participating schools and promotion of cross-curricular activities at school level.

Project title: *Values -Treasure and Challenge for Europe's Youth*

Action: KA2 Strategic Partnerships for school education – Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

Project no: 2014-1-DE03-KA201-001215_1

Applicant organisation: Stadtteilschule Arheilgen, Germany

Partner organisation in Romania: Școala Primară Hansel și Gretel, Iași

The project involved five kindergartens and schools from Germany, Romania (Școala Primară Hansel și Gretel, Iași), Czechia, Bulgaria and Turkey.

The project objectives focused on enhancing students' capacity to communicate openly and respectfully with regard to others' perspectives. For this purpose, the partners intended to experiment and develop effective resources for developing European values among preschoolers and primary school and middle school students.

In the framework of the project, a "Guide for kindergarten and school" was created and two learning meetings were organised. The guide contains more than 100 activities on the topics: keeping rules, showing willingness to make efforts, showing each other respect and appreciation and act responsible. The activities included in the guide were piloted by the teachers involved in the project, in their mother tongue, and adapted to students' age. After piloting, teachers completed a report on the activities carried out, preparation, necessary material and the impact that has been noticed. In schools working with immigrants, teachers took into account children's language difficulties and tried to improve particularly their communication skills.

The two learning activities took place in Sofia and Blansko. At those meetings, the partners created mixed groups of students, who participated in activities to develop their character (perseverance, responsibility, tolerance, etc.), improve their English skills, sports and leisure activities, knowledge of the history and culture of host countries. In Blansko, students participated in a public presentation of the project, covered in the local media. The lesson learned by the partners at this meeting was that mixed groups and the participation of primary school students is beneficial for those present offering older students an opportunity to learn self-regulation in the presence of younger students.

Among the impact elements, the most important aspects relevant to the ESL issue were the following:

- for students: teachers say they follow rules more, there is a positive ethos in school, students made friends and became more motivated to learn English so as to continue to communicate with their friends from other countries; an unexpected effect was the initiative of students from Blansko and Sofia to organise a new meeting in Sofia, outside the project;

- for teachers: cooperation with teachers in their school and from other countries, broader cultural and professional horizons, increased motivation for engagement in volunteer activities;

- for schools: development of project management skills, more school notoriety and gaining the confidence of parents, identification of partners for future projects.

Other details about the project may be found on the project website: www.valuesatschool.eu.