

General Report

on the institutional framework for
lifelong learning in Romania

Study prepared by the **Centre for the Study of Democracy**
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01.

1. Lifelong learning – conceptualisation

The term **"lifelong learning"** ("career-long learning", "continuous learning") is an important concept in European Union (EU) education and training policy. It derives from the idea that learning should take place throughout an individual's life, not just during initial schooling or initial vocational training, and is seen as a key element in ensuring a just transition for workers in the context of the green and digital transitions.

In line with the Eurostat operationalisation, lifelong learning encompasses :

all learning activities undertaken throughout life with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences, within personal, civic, social or employment-related perspectives. The intention or aim to learn is the critical point that distinguishes these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sporting activities.¹

¹[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Lifelong_learning_\(LLL\)&action=statexp--seat&lang=ro](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Lifelong_learning_(LLL)&action=statexp--seat&lang=ro)



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Eurostat measures the participation rate in lifelong learning based on the data gathered from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as well as from the Adult Education Survey (AES). The adult learning is labelled as the participation in education and training of adults aged 25 to 64, also called lifelong learning.



In general, the adult learning encompasses all intentional learning activities, either formal, non-formal or informal. Such learning is undertaken continuously, with the aim of improving the participants' knowledge, skills and competences. The intention or aim to learn is the critical point distinguishing these activities from non-learning activities, such as cultural or sporting activities. Contrary to this general definition, the adult learning indicators presented in this report refer to the participation in formal and non-formal education and training because it is very challenging to statistically record informal learning. Data on informal learning are only gathered in the AES.

Adult learning is a significant aspect when it comes to the digitalisation and automation in the labour market. Employees need to adapt and, for example, to learn new digital skills and - in some cases - to reskill as some jobs will be eliminated due to technical development. Adult learning should improve employability, boost innovation, ensure social fairness and reduce the digital skills gap. The importance of adult learning is reflected in the EU-level target according to which at least 60 % of all adults should be participating in training every year by 2030. LFS and AES use different reference periods for measuring the participation in education and training. LFS records the participation in education and training in the previous 4 weeks while AES covers the learning activities in the previous 12 months. A measure with a reference period of 12 months is considered to be a more comprehensive measure of participation in education and training. Nevertheless, the AES data with a reference period of 12 months are only available every 5-6 years. Therefore, annual 4-week LFS data were chosen for policy monitoring. Since 2022 there have been changes, and LFS also collects data on the participation in formal and non-formal education and training for the previous 12 months biennially. These new LFS data are undergoing an in-depth quality review. Hence, this report presents the available LFS data regarding the participation in education and training in the previous 4 weeks,



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along with the 2016 AES data on the participation in the previous 12 months. The 2022 AES data are expected to become available towards the end of 023.²

According to Eurostat statistics, in 2021 the adult participation rate in lifelong learning was 11% in the EU. This is an increase as compared to 2020 (9 %) and it is the same share as registered in 2019 (the question refers to the participation in the last four weeks).³

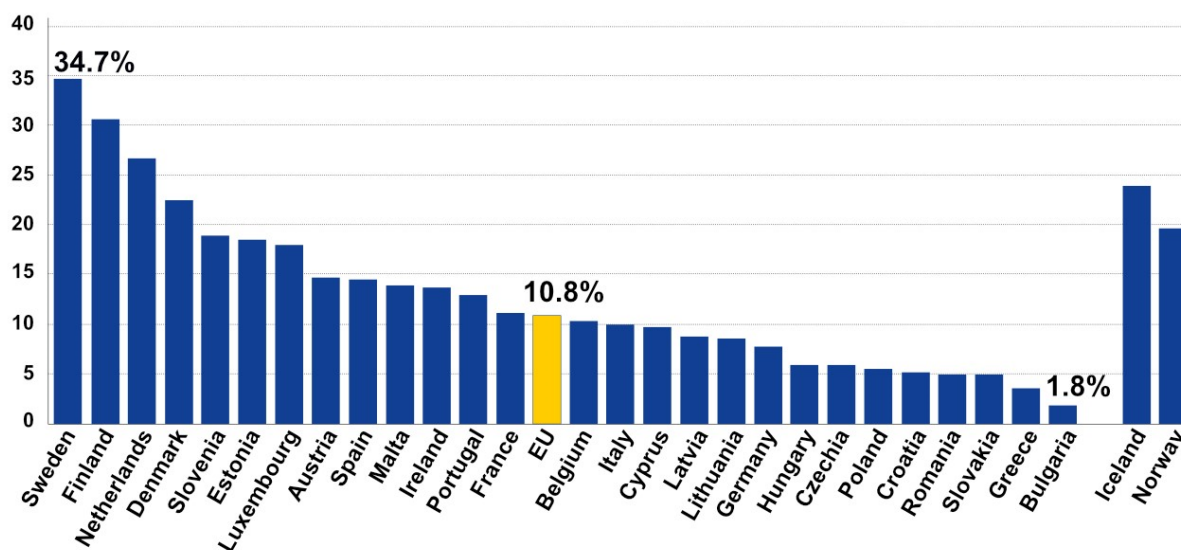
11%

Adult participation in lifelong learning in EU, in 2021

As reported by the cited source, the rates of adult participation in lifelong learning increased steadily between 2011 and 2021 in almost all the EU countries, with the exceptions of Denmark (-10 percentage points or pp) and Czechia (-6 pp). The largest increases were registered in the Netherlands (+10 pp), Sweden (+9 pp) and Finland (+7 pp). Romania records some of the

Adult participation in learning (last 4 weeks), 2021

(% of population aged 25 to 64)



² Ibidem

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20230130-1>



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lowest shares with a 4.9% rate of adult participation in learning, followed only by Slovakia, Greece and Bulgaria.

Source of data: [trng lfse 01](#)

To be able to explain Romania's stand in European statistics and to be able to improve it, we should also resort to an analysis of the legal norms which lifelong learning is based on, as well as to an attempt to map the participants involved in the implementation of the strategy designed to this type of learning, of their relationships and of their performance as to the mentioned strategy. The regulations and policies related to the continuous learning are specific for each EU member state, but they are inspired and shaped by the European legislative framework. Each country has its own national legislation in this area, adapted to its needs and particularities. However, there are certain common standards and principles defined at European level, which are displayed in the EU policies and directives. Therefore, the continuous learning-related legislation and policies can vary by country, but there is a general reference framework at the European Union level, which promotes lifelong personal and professional development. They make sure that all member states aim at offering long-term learning and training opportunities adapted to individual needs and labour market requirements in a broader European context.



In the specific context of Romania, one can notice that **the perspective on the lifelong learning covers mainly the drafting of a vision and a general framework rather than of operational and specific terms,** as it would be needed. Nevertheless, mention should be made that Romania has targets defined by the European Union as regards lifelong learning, targets which our country must align to.



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02.

Reference measures and programmes at European level

The European Union set specific objectives and goals in the adult learning area with the aim of promoting lifelong learning and improving adults' competencies and skills.

Here are the main objectives to this end:

Securing a quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities

One of the most important objectives of the European Union is to secure the participation of at least 60% of the adults aged 25 - 64 in training and education every year by 2030, in accordance with the European Skills Agenda.

Promoting digital skills

Another important target is the development of adults' digital competencies. This should secure the adults' getting the required skills to make use of digital technologies, to understand digital information and to actively participate in the digital society.



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This target is in accordance with the Digital Agenda for Europe, and it takes into account the need to cope with the challenges posed by the digital transformation of the economy and of the society.

Improving key competencies

The EU plans to improve the adults' skills in various key areas, such as literacy, linguistic competencies, mathematics and scientific skills, digital skills, inter-personal and civic skills. The development of these competencies is essential in securing social inclusion, employability, and active participation in society.

Promoting continuous and non-formal training

Another important target is to facilitate the adult access to continuous and non-formal training with the aim of lifelong personal and professional development. This means to create flexible learning opportunities, to acknowledge and validate the skills obtained outside the formal education system and to promote a training system adapted to individual needs and to the labour market requirements

These are among the main targets the EU and member states set with the aim of promoting adult training. Specific objectives and targets may vary by country and by national priorities, but they are part of a common European framework aimed at promoting lifelong learning and developing adults' skills.

The European Union does not have a unique law or a set of specific laws governing lifelong learning exclusively. Alternatively, the EU makes use of a vast legislative framework and a series of public policies which support and promote continuous learning within member states, either transversally, or specifically incorporated in other theme areas. Here are some worthwhile key documents and initiatives having shaped the development of lifelong learning within the European Union:

European Skills Agenda - launched in July 2020 as a 5-year strategy, it identifies the EU target of 60% of adults participating in training programmes each year by 2030. According to this vision, having a solid set of skills is essential for professional development and enables easier career transitions to meet the changing demands of the labour market





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It also improves social inclusion, and it is good for the competitiveness of the economy.⁴ The presentation of the European Skills Agenda contains clearly defined objectives and the monitoring of progress, and it is essentially measurable.



Thus, it is expected that in the next 5 years, **230 million European citizens will have basic digital skills** (an increase of 25%), and 2 million jobseekers will have had a recent learning experience (an increase of 82%). In this respect, the agenda includes 12 actions as follows:

- 1. The Pact for Skills** – The mobilisation of all partners (central and local authorities, companies, social partners, sectoral and trans-sectoral organisations, education and training providers, occupational services) for more and better opportunities for people to learn, by identifying new public and private funding sources included. The Pact also plans to support public and private organisations with regard to the upskilling and reskilling programmes so that they could develop during the ecological and digital transition. The members of the Pact have access to knowledge of the upskilling and reskilling needs, advice on the relevant funding instruments to boost the skills of adults in their regions and countries, and partnership opportunities within the community.
- 2. Strengthening skills intelligence** – the setting-up of an updated database regarding the skills demand on the labour market (as this is a dynamic area) and the use of big data to present job vacancies.

⁴ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, COM(2020)274 din 01.07.2020



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3. Closer partnership between EU and member states

(employment agencies in particular) to create national skills-related strategies (migration is here formulated as an opportunity for skills transfer and upgrading thereof, in the sense that these strategies would facilitate the employability of migrants in destination countries).

4. **New approach on vocational education** – especially by including digital and green transition-related skills into all programmes.
5. **Building of an alliance between European universities**, from the perspective of creating a common set of skills characterising the research sector.
6. **Encouraging women's involvement in STEM fields** (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), fostering entrepreneurship, focusing on transversal skills such as cooperation and critical thinking.
7. **Supporting lifelong learning beyond the labour market**, by focusing on issues such as media literacy, civic competencies, and financial, environmental and health literacy.
8. **Exploring how training opportunities can be transferred** or adapted in different contexts or situations.
9. **Creating a European standards system recognising the participation in/graduating from short and online training courses** in view of the changing trends thereof (digitalisation).
10. **Improving the Europass Platform** (which offers tools and guidance on CV-writing).
11. **Improving the financing platform** (which benefits from a higher European budget), which catalyses Member States and private actors in invest in skills.⁵
12. **Erasmus+ Programme** (2021-2027): This extended programme continues to provide opportunities for mobility, cooperation and innovation in the field of education, training, youth and sport. Erasmus+ promotes lifelong learning through actions such as student and academic staff exchanges, strategic partnerships and innovation projects in higher education and adult learning⁶
13. **Digital Education Action Plan** (2021-2027): This plan focuses on the development of European citizens' digital skills and on the promotion of using digital technology in education and training. The action plan recognises the importance of lifelong learning in

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9723&furtherNews=yes#navItem-1>

⁶ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/about-erasmus/what-is-erasmus>



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meeting the requirements of digital society and economy.⁷
Here are some of the actions set out by the Plan in Member States:

- 14. Accessibility and flexibility of digital learning.** Diversification and expansion of digital learning are promoted, priority being given to the accessibility and flexibility for all individuals no matter their age or context.
- 15. Enhancing digital skills.** The Plan fosters the development and consolidation of citizens' digital skills, also by means of lifelong training programmes and professional reconversion initiatives.
- 16. Acknowledgment and validation of prior learning.** The Plan promotes the acknowledgment and validation of the skills and knowledge obtained outside the formal learning environment, thus facilitating the transition and adaptation of lifelong learning.
- 17. Development of digital skills in the educational sector.** Special attention is paid to the development of teachers' and trainers' digital skills in order to secure the provision of high-quality educational services and to promote innovation in the learning process.

18. Cooperation and partnerships.

The Plan promotes the cooperation between various interested parties, including learning institutions, business environment, civil society and public authorities, with the aim of developing and implementing efficient lifelong learning policies and practices.

These are just a few examples of the policies in the Digital Education Action Plan of the European Union, which aim overtly at promoting and supporting lifelong learning. The overall objective of the Plan is to create a favourable environment in which European citizens can get and develop the skills

⁷ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>



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needed to cope with the challenges and opportunities of the ever-evolving digital society.

19. Horizon Europe (2021-2027) - it is the new framework-programme for research and innovation of the European Union for the 2021-2027 period. This programme replaces the Horizon 2020 Programme, and its main objective is to assist research and innovation in Europe in various areas. Horizon Europe will continue to promote lifelong learning engagement through various initiatives and projects. Furthermore, Horizon Europe will promote partnerships and cooperation between higher education institutions, research organisations, industry and other interested parties. This may include initiatives to transfer knowledge and good practice in lifelong learning, as well as the development and testing of innovative methods and tools for learning and training.



It can be seen that, at European level, the discussion on lifelong learning is complex and embedded in other main themes related to development, education, partnerships and inclusion.

- 1. Firstly, there is a significant focus on partnerships**, whether public-private, between EU Member States, the EU and these states, or between universities. Partnerships are seen as the solution to developing a sustainable lifelong learning strategy, where resources are identified across sectors and needs take into account the diversity of the population
- 2. Secondly, the European Union emphasises the importance of acquiring skills that transcend vocational training**, such as media, financial or health education, which become important for any segment of the population, regardless of age group.



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3. **Thirdly, higher education institutions are important actors in innovation and research**, in particular in identifying and standardising the skills required in the highly dynamic context of the labour market requirements at European level.
4. **Fourthly, the standardisation of the skills acquired** through lifelong learning programmes and their portability are seen as aspects that could increase the popularity of such programmes.

Notwithstanding the higher emphasis on lifelong learning put at European level, namely on a varied set of actions supporting this type of learning, we reiterate the fact that Member States have their own national legislation and own education and training institutions and systems. Therefore, the performance of lifelong learning in each Member State differs depending upon the national and local public policies which they are implementing.





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03.

3. Lifelong learning in Romania - legislative framework, measures, actions, involved actors

3.1. Normative framework - The "Educated Romania" package of laws, the Education Law 1/2011, complementary normative acts, relevant actors

The main legislative framework on lifelong learning with which Romania has operated over the last decade is found in the Education Law, i.e. Law no. 1/2011.⁸

Mention should be made that a new package of education bills was under endorsement over May – June. The "Educated Romania" education bills, namely the Secondary Education Bill and the Higher Education Bill, were approved on May 22, 2023 by the plenum of Romania's Senate which is the decision-making chamber. As a controversial package of laws, it has been challenged before the Constitutional Court as part of the procedure for reviewing the constitutionality of laws before promulgation.¹⁰

On June 21, 2023 the Constitutional Court debated the complaint and concluded that the Education Laws are constitutional. The package of "Educated Romania" education laws (the Secondary Education Law and the Higher Education Law) was published in the July 5, 2023 issue of the Official Gazette and came into force on September 3, 2023. There is a number of changes between the two generic legislative frameworks and the previous legislative framework, which in our opinion need to be highlighted in relation to their practical usefulness.

⁸ Law no. 1/2011, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, issue no. 18 dated January 10, 2011, with subsequent amendments and supplementations.

⁹ https://www.edu.ro/proiecte_legi_educatie_Romania_Educata

¹⁰ <https://www.cdep.ro/proiecte/2023/200/50/4/ses254.pdf>



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3.1.2 The package of "Educated Romania" education laws

As regards the "Educated Romania" education bills, namely the Secondary Education Bill¹¹ and the Higher Education Bill¹², they are now part of the national legislation regulating the lifelong learning segment. The two laws are supplemented nationally by a large number of special laws, government ordinances and resolutions, as well as orders and implementation norms.

The two laws are supplemented nationally by a large number of special laws, government ordinances and resolutions, as well as orders and implementation norms. A list of the legislation on lifelong learning can be seen on the ANC website. Moreover, the two endorsed normative acts include provisions on the lifelong learning

Central to the lifelong learning and training system (from the perspective of the Higher Education Law) is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This is a system of classifying qualifications according to the level of learning achieved. The NQF has 8 qualification levels and facilitates the recognition and comparability of learning outcomes achieved in different contexts, the formal, non-formal and informal ones included.



The NQF contributes to securing the quality of the education and vocational training system and facilitates the trainees' and graduates' mobility.

The recognition and certification of learning outcomes achieved in non-formal and informal contexts are made by means of methodologies developed by the National Qualifications Agency and approved by the Ministry of Education

¹¹ Secondary Education Law no. 198/2023, published in the Official Gazette, Part I issue no. 613 dated July 05, 2023

¹² Higher Education Law no. 199/2023, published in the Official Gazette, Part I issue no. 614 dated July 05, 2023.



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Such recognition is meant to offer citizens the opportunity to capitalise and certify the skills achieved outside the formal learning system.

Therefore, with regard to the Secondary Education Law, it regulates the lifelong learning system related to the 1-5 qualification levels, while the Higher Education Law regulates the lifelong learning system related to the 5-8 qualification levels.

3.1.3. Secondary Education Law

Title II of the Law focuses on the lifelong learning and sets a general integrating framework for this type of learning. It expands the learning concept beyond traditional education stages and allows for the recognition of the skills achieved in non-formal and informal contexts.

As regards the responsibility of ensuring the access to lifelong learning, the Ministry of Education is responsible for securing the legislative framework for the organisation and operation of the lifelong learning system related to the 1-5 qualification levels. It sets the lifelong learning policies and strategies and participates in the monitoring, evaluation and verification of how the system works. The Ministry may act directly or through the competent bodies in their field of competence. Moreover, it also asserts that monitoring and evaluation are necessary to ensure the quality of the learning processes and to identify potential improvements to the system.

As regards the assurance of quality, the National Quality Assurance System for Lifelong Learning is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of learning processes and outcomes. This system includes the assurance of quality in the secondary education system, the higher education system as well as in the initial and lifelong vocational training. The goal of this system is to ensure transparency, comparability and recognition of the skills achieved in various learning contexts. Reference is also made to the National Group for Quality Assurance in Education and Vocational Training, named GNACEFP in the law, the main role of which is to coordinate and harmonise the quality assurance systems in education and vocational training. GNACEFP consists of representatives appointed by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the ANC (National Qualification Authority), the CNITTD (National Centre for Technological and Dual Technological Education), the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Secondary Education (ARACIP), its structure being established by joint order of the minister of education and the minister of labour and social solidarity.





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According to art. 161, “the Ministry of Education together with the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, with the Ministry of Culture and with the National Qualifications Authority establishes the methodological norms for the elaboration of the professionalisation statute and route of the staff working in the lifelong education area, norms approved by Government resolution.”

Also, Title II of the law stipulates that the provisions in the law on the National Qualifications Framework apply to lifelong learning as well. The outcomes of the learning carried out in non-formal and informal contexts are validated in accordance with the provisions in the higher education law, and such provisions are complementary to those in Title II “Lifelong Learning” stipulated by the Higher Education Law.

3.1.4 Higher Education Law

Title II of the law regulates the general integrating framework of the lifelong learning programmes in higher education institutions and for the 5-8 qualification levels. Chapter I includes general provisions, while Chapter II regulates the lifelong learning responsibilities. We notice a unitary approach in the two laws, and the Ministry of Education has a central role in developing national strategies and policies on education and vocational training. It is responsible for the drafting and implementation of the national curriculum, for the monitoring and evaluation of the higher education and for the lifelong learning.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is involved in developing national policies and strategies on adult vocational training. It is responsible for regulating and promoting on-the-job vocational training as well as for coordinating and monitoring vocational reconversion and reskilling programmes.

The Ministry of Culture is responsible for facilitating the public’s access and participation in cultural activities. Moreover, it coordinates and controls the authorisation of the providers of adult vocational training in the cultural area. The Ministry of Culture also contributes to regulating the quality assurance system in vocational training. As regards this aspect, it is difficult to understand why this demarcation of powers is made only between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, but it is not made between the Ministry of Education and other ministries. The practical usefulness of such demarcation is difficult to understand.

Besides these ministries, there are also other entities involved in adult education and vocational training in Romania. For instance, the public institutions in the defence, public order and national





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security areas have their own rules and instructions regarding their staff's lifelong training.

The lifelong learning in higher education is achieved mainly in formal contexts, but higher education institutions may organise learning activities in non-formal contexts as well, with trans-sectoral cooperation and flexible means. Adult education is part of lifelong learning and can be formal, non-formal or informal.

According to the current regulation, lifelong learning may involve the recognition and certification of the skills achieved in non-formal and informal contexts. This can be made by certified bodies, by higher education institutions included, as stipulated by the law. Formal learning is carried out in higher education institutions or other education-providing organisations, while non-formal and informal learning is carried out outside the formal education and training system.

Therefore, according to this regulation, the lifelong learning and vocational training system in Romania involves a number of entities and responsibilities, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Culture and the National Qualifications Authority. These entities cooperate for developing national strategies and policies, for regulating and ensuring the quality of education and vocational training, and for facilitating the recognition and certification of the skills achieved in various contexts.

In fact, this legislative framework brings a number of changes to lifelong learning, by separating – by levels – the involvement of pre-university and university settings in their participation in lifelong learning and beyond. In theory, the present package of laws has a more well-defined description of the actors responsible for lifelong learning and of the compulsory responsibilities thereof.

It remains to be seen whether on a practical level these entities will develop clear mechanisms to materialise a comprehensive vision and the need for cooperation in lifelong learning.

Furthermore, mention should be made that the package of "Educated Romania" laws is completed by the provisions of the relevant special laws.

3.1.5 The Education Law no. 1/2011 (Law 1/2011)

This law was, until recently, the main legal framework governing the learning system in Romania as well as the lifelong learning. During the course of this project, the legislative framework was amended as presented by the analysis in this chapter.





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Once the new Education Laws were endorsed (September 3, 2023), the Education Law no. 1/2011 was annulled. Therefore, as the previous legislative framework is no longer in force, the detailed analysis thereof is no longer necessary because the information provided relates to a law which is no longer of practical use.



3.2. National lifelong learning strategies

3.2.1 National lifelong learning strategy (2015-2020)¹³

In recent years Romania has implemented national strategies both for lifelong vocational training (by means of the Ministry of Labour, between 2005-2010)¹⁴ and for lifelong learning. The national lifelong learning strategy (2015-2020)¹⁵ aimed to expand the guidance services available, particularly for adults, who currently only have the option of accessing public employment offices. Until 2021, the opening of over 100 lifelong learning centres was envisaged (objective that was not achieved), guidance being among the key services to be offered.



However, there is no guidance forum at national level for the time being. Each segment of the guidance and counselling services tends to shape its own development path, whereas occasional meetings are arranged between the representatives of various services.¹⁶

The strategy has not been renewed, so an analysis of the regulation is out of place in the context of this report. However, the strategy maps the actors involved in lifelong learning at the time when it was in force. According to the Strategy, lifelong learning includes the Ministries of Education and Scientific Research, of Public Finance,

¹³ [https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20(1).pdf)

¹⁴ Lifelong vocational training Strategy on short and medium term 2005-2010 | Resolution 875/2005,

¹⁵ [https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategie%20LLL%20(1).pdf)

¹⁶ <https://www.euroguidance.eu/resources/publications/euroguidance-highlights/euroguidance-highlights-2022>



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of Labour and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, the Ministry of European Funds and others, together with employers, social partners and civil society organisations, at national and local level.

3.2.2 The 2023-2027 national strategy on adult training

Romania is preparing the 2023-2027 National Strategy on adult

training¹⁷. Romania is facing many competencies-related challenges, and the strategy plans to tackle these very aspects. The overall objective of the strategy is to increase adult participation in learning from the current 4.9% to 12% by 2027, by intensifying and improving formal, non-formal and informal learning offers. The overall objective is backed by five specific objectives, which include a various range of measures and actions:

- » **Stronger involvement of partners in drafting the strategic framework for the adult vocational training.** Of course, the strategic framework should be formulated by substantial consultations with the actors involved. These are not only public institutions, employers or civil society actors running lifelong learning programmes, but also those who have expertise in the field, from Romania or from other countries. Moreover, trans-national consultations may be a valuable resource, as some countries have efficient lifelong training programmes, and certain successful strategies may be adapted to the local context.
- » **Improvement of the customised, specific offer for formal, non-formal and informal learning.** In this respect, identifying needs is the essential process. In order to offer lifelong learning programmes, it is necessary to know, firstly, what the learning needs are (both for active persons and for youngsters, pensioners, etc) and, secondly, what types/forms of programmes ensure increased participation of potential beneficiaries.
- » **Creation of a learning culture to facilitate the adult access to lifelong learning.** This objective is highly significant and - equally - the most difficult to attain. The learning culture is a complex problem in Romania even in the classical context of mandatory education. Pisa test results, the school dropout situation, the high rate of functional illiteracy, all point to a rather instrumental approach to education.

¹⁷ ReferNet Romania; Cedefop (2023). Romania: Adult National Training Strategy in preparation. National news on VET



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» **Assurance of quality in adult vocational training and promotion of social inclusion and equity in lifelong learning.**

The assurance of quality in vocational training is a problem even in the education system, and it persists in lifelong learning as well. But the prioritisation of the education quality in a context dominated by such values like social inclusion and equity is an important

aspect which brings Romania closer to other European states. It is important to understand and accept that many skills and competencies do not exist in a value vacuum and that any social system is built around them. The mention of inclusion and equity in the context of lifelong learning is extremely important in a situation where education does not seem to resolve these differences, with examples of bullying, discrimination and abuse still unfortunately frequent.

» **Development of adults' green and digital skills.** As with the previous bullet, the emphasis placed on the skills related to environmental protection and digital skills is a recognition of the rapid rhythm of social changes. Representing a clear influence of the European agenda, mentioning these types of competencies is an assumption of the European trajectory, where green and digital skills are relevant both in vocational training and in the broader context of lifelong learning of all socio-economic categories, including those that are not active on the labour market.

The measures and actions of the future strategy were devised on the basis of the five main priority areas set in the Council Resolution on a New European Agenda for Adult Learning (2021-2030).

The drafting of the 2023-2027 National Adult Training Strategy¹⁸ involved broad consultations, including seven regional meetings attended by local authorities, public employment services, employers, training providers and social partners. The strategy benefits from the assistance of national coordination and inter-ministerial groups. In order to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy, it is intended to develop indicators that will allow progress to be tracked in a flexible way that is adaptable to geopolitical and economic developments. However, although this strategy should have replaced the one in force by 2020, for the time being this instrument is not yet in force.

¹⁸ ReferNet Romania; Cedefop (2023). Romania: Adult National Training Strategy in preparation. National news on VET



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3.3. Other relevant actors

According to the newly endorsed national legislation on education, ANC (National Qualification Authority)¹⁹ has a significant role in lifelong learning. It is a public institution with legal personality, a specialty body under the coordination of the Ministry of Education. The mission taken by ANC is to secure the general framework for achieving lifelong vocational training and for developing the qualifications required in supporting a national competitive human resource that can act efficiently and as part of a learning community (Government Resolution 556/2011 with subsequent amendments and supplementations). *The ANC duties were amended in 2016 in accordance with the Emergency Ordinance no. 96/2016 on the amendment and supplementation of normative acts on education, research, vocational training and health, corrected, with subsequent amendments and supplementations, which has not been disseminated sufficiently to the general public, which is why there is still confusion about its duties related to the accreditation, authorisation activity.* ANC has several relevant duties for lifelong learning, among which:

- 💡 **ANC acts as a National Coordination Point for the EQF (European Qualification Framework), Contact Point for the ESCo (European Skills and Competence portal), National Europass Centre and National Assistance Service for the EPALE (Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe).**
- 💡 **ANC manages the National Qualifications Registry (RNC) and harmonises European regulations with national ones in the area of qualifications and of the recognition thereof aimed at increasing the mobility of national labour force on the European market, in accordance with the Treaty of Accession to the Union.**
- 💡 **As regards vocational standards, they represent detailed descriptions of the competencies and responsibilities required to exercise certain professions. These standards are developed by ANC and are used to guide vocational training and competencies evaluation process.**

¹⁹ Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, issue no. 435 dated June 22, 2011 published the Government Resolution no. 556/2011 on the organisation and operation of the National Qualifications Authority



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Sectoral committees, regulated by Law no. 279/2005 on apprenticeship at work, are consultative bodies involved in developing and updating occupational standards. These committees consist of experts in specific areas and represent various economic sectors. They bring expertise and perspective in defining occupational requirements and ensure the relevance of standards for the labour market demands.

ANC issues resolutions and guidebooks on the organisation and operation of sectoral committees, setting their cooperation and working means and procedures.

Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR)²⁰ is an occupation classification system used in the country. This is developed and updated by ANC and provides a hierarchical structure for the existing occupations. COR serves as a reference framework for identifying and comparing occupations, and facilitates the management of the information about labour market and workforce.

Thus, the connection between the ANC, vocational standards, sectoral committees and the Classification of Occupations in Romania (COR) consists in the fact that the ANC is responsible for the development, updating and coordination of these key aspects within the National Qualifications Registry. The ANC cooperates with sectoral committees and uses vocational standards and the COR in order to secure the coherence and relevance of lifelong learning and of recognising vocational skills in Romania.

Employers are also highlighted as relevant actors in individuals' lifelong learning. As regards the employers' situation, they are urged to offer learning programmes and opportunities within their organisations, either by providing internal training or by partnerships with education institutions or vocational training providers. They have the responsibility to promote and assist the employees' participation in learning activities and to offer resources and assistance for the development of their skills.

Furthermore, employers can benefit from various funding and assisting mechanisms for the implementation of lifelong learning programmes, such as public and private funds, public-private partnerships, non-reimbursable funds from European programmes and lifelong education accounts.

²⁰ <https://mmuncii.ro/f33/index.php/ro/legislatie/munca2/2012-10-30-legislatie-munca-cor>





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It is important that employers should observe the legal requirements and regulations on lifelong learning and should promote a learning culture within their organisations, thus contributing to the development and growth of employees' long-term competencies.

As regards employers, the relevant legislative framework for vocational training of Romanian employees includes the following normative acts:

- » **Labour Code (Law no. 53/2003, updated)** - it stipulates the employers' obligation to carry out their employees' vocational training at least every two years (if the employer has at least 21 employees) or every three years (if there are less than 21 employees). (Title VI, Article 194)
- » **Fiscal Code (Law no. 227/2015, updated)** - it stipulates that the expenses for their employees' vocational training and upskilling are deductible when calculating the taxable profit of companies (Article 21 par. (2) letter h)
- » **Government Ordinance no. 129/2000 on adult vocational training** (republished) - it defines adult vocational training as consisting of initial vocational training and lifelong vocational training, organised outside the national learning system (art. 4)
- » **The methodological implementation norms of the Governance Ordinance no. 129/2000 on adult vocational training** include specific rules and procedures for the implementation of adult vocational training, including the registration of unauthorised vocational training providers and the reporting of the data about training programmes.

Therefore, employers are bound to ensure their employees' vocational training at regular intervals, in keeping with the Labour Code. Such training can be fiscally deducted as expense when calculating the income tax according to the Fiscal Code. Vocational training includes both initial training, which prepares the employees for getting a job, and lifelong training, which contributes to the development and improvement of existing vocational competencies. Such training may be achieved by authorised providers or may be linked to the activity carried out in the company. Moreover, companies may organise vocational training and skilling with internal recognition, with the observance of legal provisions. The expenses with the evaluation and certification of the employees' vocational skills are also deductible from profit tax.





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Non-governmental organisations are also relevant actors described in the analysed legislation and strategies. Emphasis is placed on the role of non-governmental organisations in facilitating the access to lifelong learning, and of employers in contributing to this type of training, but without concrete details of this role and without being supported by concrete instruments and mechanisms.

As regards Romania's legislative framework in relation to lifelong learning, it is of course influenced by the direction, legislation and implementation strategies of European policies in this area, also being correlated with the EU objectives. Romania's not very honourable position in the context of the European Union on lifelong learning may be a motivating factor for better legislative and practical performance in the future.

In accordance with the new legislative changes analysed, respectively with the multitude of normative acts and instruments that refer to lifelong learning, an attempt to map the relevant actors in this area could take the following form:

- »» **the State**
- »» **the Ministry of Education** - it has the role of coordinating and managing the education system, lifelong learning included, in accordance with the provisions of the law.
- »» **the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity** - the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity is involved in developing national policies and strategies on adult vocational training. It deals with the regulation and promotion of vocational training at the workplace, as well as with the coordination and monitoring of professional reconversion and reskilling programmes. It is also responsible for authorising the providers of adult vocational training services.
- »» **the Ministry of Culture** - it is responsible for facilitating the public's access and participation in cultural activities. Moreover, it coordinates and controls the authorisation of the providers of adult vocational training in the cultural area. The Ministry of Culture also contributes to regulating the quality assurance system in vocational training.
- »» **the National Qualifications Authority** - it manages the National Qualifications Registry (RNC) and harmonises national regulations with European ones in the area of qualifications and of the recognition thereof aimed at increasing the mobility of national labour force on the European market, in accordance with the Treaty of Accession to the Union.
- »» **the National Group for Quality Assurance in Education and Vocational Training**, hereinafter called GNACEFP, is an informal structure acting as national reference point





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of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Education and Vocational Training (consisting of representatives appointed by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, the ANC, the CNITTD, the ARACIP, its structure being established by joint order of the minister of education and the minister of labour and social solidarity

- »» **the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)**, having the role of externally evaluating the quality of the education offered by higher education institutions and by other organisations that provide higher education studies.
- »» **the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Secondary Education (ARACIP)** having the role of externally evaluating the quality of the education for secondary education units.
- »» **the National Centre for Technological and Dual Technological Education (CNITTD)** has as objective the development of secondary technological, post-secondary and technological-dual education, in accordance with the local, regional and national socio-economic development needs identified in strategic documents.
- »» **the secondary and higher education institutions and organisations** - they are responsible for organising and providing education in formal context.
- »» **the guidance services developed in schools and universities**
- »» **the Education and Vocational Training Centres** - subordinated to ministries or to local public authorities, they are involved in providing adult vocational training.
- »» **the County Centres for Psychopedagogical Assistance (CJAP)** in secondary education coordinated by the County Centres for Resources and Educational Assistance (CJRAE).
- »» **the Euroguidance Romania Centre** - Euroguidance is a network of national resource and information centres for guidance. It is a co-operation of centres throughout European countries which link together the Careers Guidance systems in Europe. The main target group of Euroguidance is guidance practitioners and policy makers from both the educational and employment sectors in EU and EEA member states and in candidate countries.
- »» **the Institute of Education Sciences (ISE)** - it is a national research, development, innovation and training institution in the fields of education and youth, which actively contributes to innovation in education through expertise, training, studies and research.





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- »» **Public and private providers of education and vocational training** - they are authorised/accredited under the law and offer educational and vocational training programmes for adults.
- »» **Non-governmental and governmental organisations** - they can offer authorised educational programmes and can be involved in the provision of lifelong learning - such as the Association of Psychologists in Romania (APR), the Association of Romanian Counsellors (ACROM) etc.
- »» **Social partners** - indicate leaders and employees represented by employers' associations and trade unions. These actors have a specific role in addressing socio-economic issues, dealing with various aspects related to the field of work, such as working conditions, lifelong vocational training and wage levels. They are specialised in dialogue with their members and are competent to participate in negotiations that may result in the conclusion of collective agreements.
- »» **Sectoral committees** - social dialogue institutions of public utility, with legal personality, organised under the law at the level of the branches of activity defined by the National Overall Labour Agreement in force.
- »» **Employers** - they are responsible for contributing to the vocational training and development of their employees by offering vocational training programmes.





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04.

Conclusions

The legislative and institutional framework in Romania wants to get much closer to the European one, emphasising partnerships, formal, informal and non-formal education, the culture of learning, the understanding of lifelong learning in correlation with inclusion, social equity, and adequacy thereof to the digital and environmental needs, which are increasingly important. It remains to be seen whether this will materialise at the level of institutional partnerships and practical applicability of the legislative framework.

Institutional partnerships create a complex vision according to which public institutions cooperate with private institutions and civil society organisations both for accurately identifying the population's needs in terms of lifelong learning, and for formulating solutions that would lead to increased participation in such programmes. However, the mechanisms to materialise this vision are missing.

Nevertheless, it is not yet clear how the vision of lifelong learning will be translated into concrete measures and into an operational work plan. In order for the new strategy to work, it is necessary that each actor involved knows his role, which means that implicitly he must have a role, which should be more substantial than attending occasional consultations. According to the new legislative instruments, the role of each actor is not very well defined.

The current legal framework presents a high level of difficulty in going through it, which can be a challenge even for specialists in the field, even more so for employers or people involved in the continuous process of lifelong learning.

A significant aspect is the volatility of legislation, visible both in terms of the general legislative framework and of special laws, generating a complexity that imposes difficulties in keeping those involved in complying with and understanding this legislative evolution up to date.

The transition from one legislative framework to another leads to changes in the composition of the actors involved or in their duties. As a result of these changes, achieving an accurate representation of the actors involved in lifelong learning becomes a particularly complex task.



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05.

Recommendations

Considering the analysis of the legislative framework in Romania relevant to the lifelong learning elaborated in chapter 3, the following recommendations can be formulated to improve the entire lifelong learning system, as well as the access to such opportunities, for vulnerable categories in particular:

1. It is very important that both the Lifelong Learning Strategy and its implementation are carried out by a single institution which should ensure that the public institution – private actors – civil society partnership works and produces results.
2. Employers' obligations regarding their financial contribution to the employees' continuous learning requires more precise tax legislation, which avoids subjective individual interpretations by tax inspectors. This would provide clarity on the eligibility for tax deductions of the training programmes chosen by employers. In practice, in the case of a tax audit, the deductibility of lifelong learning programmes for employers remains at the discretion of the tax inspector, who will have to establish the link between the programme subject to deductibility and the company's activity and the actual eligibility of the expenditure. If the employer does not agree with the classification of the expense as offered by the tax inspector, he can only go to court.



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3. The main directions for the development of lifelong learning must be established and modified according to the needs of potential beneficiaries. It is essential to accept that both the needs of the labour market and the lifelong learning skills required in its context, and beyond, are constantly changing, and any lifelong learning development strategy must have the ability to adapt to them in an agile manner.
4. The expertise existing in universities and other research centres/think tanks is an important resource for the development of lifelong education, which the legislator / ministries must access in order to formulate sustainable strategies.
5. The lifelong learning strategy must be substantially correlated with the education policy and with the employment-related ones, because the needs for lifelong education have their origins both in the way the educational policy is implemented and in the realities existing on the labour market. So, it is more about an integrated approach than a distinct one that only looks at the skills needed in the labour market.
6. The cooperation with international actors, public or private, is essential. Romania's membership in the European Union offers significant opportunities for cooperation in this area, and the exchange of experience and the adaptation of solutions to the national/local context are important development strategies. The intensification of these trans- / international partnerships at all levels is necessary.
7. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the entire society, highlighting in particular the vulnerabilities of specific professions and professional sectors.
8. Among the most affected were HoReCa and sales employees, many of whom lost their jobs as a result of the restrictions imposed and the drop in demand. From this perspective, a lifelong learning strategy, adapted to the needs of the labour market as well as of the employee, could contribute to ameliorating the impact of future crises and to increasing the resilience of the economy as a whole. Increased digitisation efforts play a key role in this approach and provide increased competitiveness in the global labour market by developing skills that facilitate job mobility.
9. The lifelong learning strategy must include specific measures for the most vulnerable categories (poverty / social exclusion); the access to training / skilling programmes is often limited for the people at risk of social exclusion. If those who work in large companies, especially in management positions, have at their disposal a high number of opportunities for professional development, those with lower education and without skills valued by the labour



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market remain in vulnerable situations. Thus, a strategy to promote lifelong learning must address especially those in less favourable situations.²¹ Of course, this recommendation does not exclude the general need to target the entire population through lifelong learning programmes in the context of technological development, artificial intelligence technology, labour market development and reconfiguration.

10. Recognition of learning in an informal / non-formal context through certifications and validations of skills developed in various programmes.²²
11. Establishing long-term partnerships between authorities (central and local) and civil society organisations or private actors providing training / education so that there is continuity and predictability in the existing offer on certain dimensions.²³

²¹ This recommendation was taken and adapted from the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL), 2011, Social Inclusion in Education and Training, Best Practices – Lifelong Learning (<http://lllplatform.eu/lll/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/EUCIS-LLL-Publication-Social-Dimension.pdf>)

²² Ibidem

²³ Ibidem