



Lifelong learning in Romania

Research Summary

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Adult learning, a priority of the European Union’s strategy on education, commonly refers to learning activities taking place after the end of initial education. Countries in the European Union rally around this strategy, with mixed results. This report provides an overview of lifelong learning in Romania, based on a critical review of the legislative and institutional national infrastructure and data gathered through a national survey and interviews with employers and employees. The analysis focuses on exploring the rate of participation in lifelong learning programs and the factors that facilitate and inhibit more sustained participation in such programs, respectively.

Institutional and legislative infrastructure governing lifelong learning in Romania

The two recent laws on education (Law 198/2023 on primary and secondary education and Law 199/2023 on tertiary education respectively) recognize the fundamental right to continuous education: the state needs to offer access for everyone without discrimination. In general, lifelong learning is formulated in a context circumscribed by fairness, relevance, efficiency, equality of access, academic freedom, or sustainable development. The laws also mention formal, nonformal and informal education as the three major approaches to lifelong learning. The most important actors involved in offering lifelong learning programs are: public and private institutions offering education/formation services, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, employers or other entities. While most of the principles of lifelong learning are presented in the laws on education, other laws such as the Labor Code, the Fiscal Code and other government issued ordinances specify particular aspects relating to



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the activities subsumed to it. Among those, there are the employers' obligation to offer training courses with a certain regularity and the applicable tax exemptions for companies that organize training workshops. The legislator also recognizes the important role of nongovernmental organizations in the process of implementing lifelong learning projects.

The two laws also create the legal background for the activity of the National Framework of Qualifications (CNC), an institution in charge with classifying qualifications based on the level of education attained by an individual, while also facilitating the recognition of competences obtained through nonformal and information education, through the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC). The Ministry of Education is the governmental unit in charge of creating equal access to lifelong learning for everyone, while it also monitors, evaluates, and checks how the system works. The Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity, the Ministry of Culture and the Romanian National Authority for Qualifications are also involved in the process. While the two 2023 laws on education lay a solid ground for the regulation of life-long learning, the much-anticipated National Strategy for Adult Education 2023-2027¹ will bring further clarifications.

The overall objective of the strategy is to increase the adult participation rate in lifelong learning programs, by intensifying and improving formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities. The general objective is supported by five specific objectives, which include a diverse range of measures and actions:

- » Stronger involvement of partners in developing the strategic framework for adult vocational training.
- » Improving the personalized and specific offer of formal, non-formal and informal learning.
- » Creating a culture of learning to facilitate adults' access to lifelong learning.
- » Ensuring quality in adult vocational training and promoting inclusion and social equity in lifelong learning.
- » Developing green and digital skills of adults.

The development of the National Strategy for Adult Education 2023-27² implied extensive consultation, including seven regional meetings involving local authorities, public employment services, employers, training providers and social partners. The strategy benefits from the support of national and inter-ministerial coordination groups.

¹ReferNet Romania; Cedefop (2023). Romania: Adult National Training Strategy in preparation. National news on VET

²ReferNet Romania; Cedefop (2023). Romania: Adult National Training Strategy in preparation. National news on VET



In order to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the strategy, indicators will be developed that will allow tracking progress in a flexible and adaptable way to geopolitical and economic developments.

Lifelong learning in Romania according to employers and employees

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Statistical analyses were carried out on a representative sample of adults in Romania from which retired persons, pupils and students were excluded. The data were collected through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI); the sample has 1000 respondents, which provides a maximum margin of error of 3.1% for a 95% confidence level. Moreover, almost 20 interviews with employers and employees were also conducted (mostly from the hospitality, energy and retail sectors).

Survey data collected in this research indicates higher proportions of participants than those usually existing in official statistical data (eg Eurostat). Among respondents under the age of 65 years, 28.5% state that they participated in the past 12 months in professional training courses at the workplace, and 21.5% in training courses organized in their spare time. Cumulative 38% of respondents say they have attended vocational training at work or in their free time in the past 12 months (the result suggests that about 11% participated in such programs both in their spare time and during work hours).

Participation in lifelong learning programs in Romania (2023)

		In the past 12 months, have you attended vocational training courses organized in your spare time?		Total
		Yes	Not	
In the past 12 months, have you participated in on-the-job training during the program?	Yes	11.5%	17.0%	28.5%
	Not	10.0%	61.6%	71.5%
Total		21.4%	78.6%	100.0%

Data also shows that people with higher socio-economic status participate more in continuous learning programs, regardless of the geographical area they come from. Respondents between the ages of 35 and 55 participate in such programs the most. If three quarters of the respondents consider that participating in such courses is useful



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on a personal level, much fewer relate it to increasing income (36%), or to finding a job (26%). Most courses were offered by the employer or an employer organization (almost 60%), with educational institutions accounting for only 9%. Although lack of time is considered an inhibiting factor from the point of view of participation (more than 60%), some respondents would consider participating in such programs if they were free of charge, if they issue certification, or would lead to promotions within the current job or to finding another one.

According to employers and employees, the following factors that facilitate participation in continuous learning programs are relevant: offering courses that are free and take place during work hours, include both fundamental and transversal skills (digital, for example), contribute to better integration and social interaction at the workplace, and include employees from all levels, and not just from the management segment.

Among the factors that inhibit participation in continuous learning programs, there are: the long duration of some training courses, the lack of clear definitions of professional standards in Romania, the mismatch between the needs of the employee and the training courses offered by different recognized entities, the organization of courses exclusively online, the lack of interest and time, and a passive attitude towards learning, in general, in Romania. When referring to inhibiting factors, the data also indicates a gender dimension. For example, for women, the cost of (some) lifelong learning programs is more prohibitive than it is for men. Furthermore, the proportion of men who found a better job or received a pay raise after participating in lifelong learning programs is higher.

Based on the analysis of the quantitative data and the interviews conducted with employers and employees and also the review of the legislative and institutional framework governing lifelong learning in Romania, the following **recommendations** are outlined for increasing participation in training/professional training programs in Romania.

R1. The development of recognition mechanisms for prior completed courses. They should allow recognition of participation in post-secondary programs (IPS), micro-certificates, BA level courses and lifelong learning programs.

R2. We recommend the elaboration of mechanisms through which professional experience can be recognized and applied for obtaining professional certifications (procedures for recognizing learning in non-formal contexts).



R3. The implementation of a mechanism by which the offer of trainings and/or professional development courses is correlated with the needs of employees. Such a mechanism could be created by the state, by offering support to programs that, following evaluations, have higher employability rates and higher levels of satisfaction from former trainees. Moreover, it is important to study what the employees consider their professional needs are.

R4. Lifelong learning programs pay more attention to vulnerable groups, as they are often the ones who face difficulties in participating. Thus, the state should prioritize financial support/scholarships for people with a precarious socio-economic status, people who have been out of work for a while, or older people who want to participate in lifelong learning programs.

R5. Currently, data related to lifelong learning are fragmented, use different definitions, and do not allow for detailed analysis of the sector. To inform public policy, existing data need to be centralized and harmonized. Where available, both individual and aggregate data should be made available for analysis. The collection of statistical data should include information on the educational background of adults relating to formal education, post-secondary education (IPS), microcredits and lifelong learning, as well as socio-economic profile. In addition, more detailed information is needed about the content of lifelong learning programs as well as on their evaluation by participants.

R6. The state should assume an increased role in regulating and promoting lifelong vocational education/training programs. Thus, we recommend:

- 1. Providing scholarships. The awarding criteria should consider the applicants' belonging to vulnerable categories and the importance of the targeted programs (field of national interest, quality indicators).**
- 2. Providing tax incentives for companies that offer training programs or offer scholarships to employees (beyond already existing tax-deductions).**
- 3. Promoting pro-learning attitudes throughout life through information campaigns on the personal benefits of education at any age.**

R7. From several interviews but also from the analysis of survey data, the idea emerged that many employees are not willing to participate in training programs if they require a significant sacrifice of personal time, or if they are financially burdensome. Thus, we recommend that those on-the-job training/training courses to be free of charge and take place during the program, even if this means that some courses will run over a longer period, but with a number of fewer hours per day.



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R8. The idea that training programs have more support and appreciation from employees if they have at least one face-to-face component emerged from the interviews. We recommend that continuing learning programs to be organized either face-to-face or in a hybrid format, whenever possible.

R9. Corporate mentoring programs make a notable contribution to developing intrinsic motivation for professional development. We recommend the development of such programs.

R10. Digital skills are undoubtedly necessary for any type of employee, in the context of the accelerated transition to a digital economy. We recommend that training programs developing digital skills are addressed to a higher extent to those who are not part of the management structures.