

# **YOUTH AT RISK OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING: EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is general agreement among scholars and policy makers that Early School Leaving (ESL) represents a serious social phenomenon that has many negative consequences on the individual, economic development, and on society as a whole. ESL is considered a serious social problem, as well as an important phenomenon on the public agenda and education policies of Romania. As part of the Erasmus+ project Orienta4YEL, a multidimensional study was conducted and the data shows that Romania also experiences unpreparedness of school and community to embrace the whole spectrum of early school leaving. The study design employed individual interviews for members of school leadership team and administration (N=9), focus groups for general and vocational secondary schools and high schools teachers/trainers (N=63), and focus groups for young people representatives (N=91) as data collection tools. The empirical findings of the study revealed that in Romania there is a convergence of opinion on the most relevant factors that cause young people to leave school before completing compulsory education. Therefore, personal challenges are the one that contribute the most to the risk of early leaving, followed closely by family reasons and institutional factors. Therefore, this paper explores the challenges that are aimed at improvements in the early school leaving rate. Specifically, the analysis will shed light on the prevention strategies that have been developed and implemented, as well as on the deficit perspective on early school leaving within institutional and national policies. By addressing the existing supporting educational actions in areas where economic and social conditions are an obstacle for pupils, this paper will furthermore particularly analyse the potential barriers which arise on the system's ways of reducing the early leaving rate in order to better identify, prepare for, and respond to this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** early school leaving, risk factors, support strategies, education policy