**UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS TO EARLY LEAVING: EXPLORING THE RISK AND SUPPORT FACTORS IN ROMANIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Early School Leaving (EL) is one of the issues considered top priorities or matters of concern for the Romanian education system. Studies show that Romania experiences unpreparedness of school and community to embrace the whole spectrum of early school leaving (ANPCDEFP, 2019; Voicu, 2010). The present study is drawn from 9 individual interviews of members of school leadership team and administration, and focus groups with 63 teachers/ trainers from general and vocational secondary schools and high schools and 91 young people representatives.

Carried out as part of a broader European project (ORIENTA4YEL), 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.