



LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education
One Student at a Time

EQUITY, ACCESS TO AND DEMOCRATIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

REPORT OF CURRENT POLICIES IN PRACTICES IN ROMANIA

INTRODUCTION

Introduction of the Higher Education System in the Program Country. *To what extent are different institutional types (public, proprietary, sectarian, research universities, liberal arts colleges, community colleges, vocational-technical colleges) represented in the country?*

The National Education System of Romania is organized, operated and supervised through a “general legal framework” comprising of 3 entities, as referenced by [1]: the Romanian Constitution¹ (specific: Title.2 – Chapter 32), the Law of National Education² and in-force laws and governmental ordinances, according to regulations and procedures initiated through Government Decisions the Ministry of National Education. According to the Law of National Education [2], the Education System (2018/2019) is structured on 6 levels, referencing the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED)³ as follows:

The Early Education Stage corresponding to ISCED 0 (level 1: the a priori preschool level or childhood education (0–3 years); level 2: the preschool level (3–6 years));

- the Primary Education Stage corresponding to ISCED 1 (level 1: the preparatory grade; level 2: 1st – 4th grades);
- the Secondary Education stage (level 1: Gymnasium as secondary lower education corresponding to ISCED 2 – grades 5th–/8th; level 2: the secondary higher education corresponding to ISCED 3, divided in high school education (theoretic, vocational and technological profile) – grades 9–12th /13th or alternatively, professional education for a minimum period of 3 years;
- the Tertiary Non-University Education stage corresponding to ISCED 4, represented by professional, technical and post-secondary education
- the Tertiary University or Higher Education (level 1: Bachelor studies – ISCED 5; level 2: Master studies – ISCED 6, level 3: Doctoral studies – ISCED 7–8)
- the Post – University or Adult Education stage

From a social responsibility perspective and in terms of funding, the education between 1st – 11th grades is full-time compulsory, where both public Primary, public Secondary and public Tertiary Higher Education, are supported by governmental funds, ensuring a free-of charge enrolment and participation.

¹ <https://www.presidency.ro/en/the-constitution-of-romania>

² <https://edu.ro/>

³ <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/international-standard-classification-education-isced>

LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education
One Student at a Time

METHODS

Methods used, statistics consulted, information retrieved from national agencies, etc

AFFORDABILITY:

What are the different, major forms of higher education financing (e.g. higher education as a public investment—public financing versus higher education as a private in the country? What are the implications of these different policies and economic models? Can students apply for public scholarships? Are there housing facilities available for students?

ACCESSIBILITY

To what extent can citizens access higher education? Do all citizens have the opportunity to access higher education or is higher education only accessible to certain segments of society and, if so, who decides who has access and who does not? Is there a national method for application? Are there specific/regional enrollments for people with specific characteristics?

PARTICIPATION

To what extent are citizens participating in higher education? Equal opportunity of access does not automatically equate to equitable participation. What is the national and local data on enrolment evolution? How about the evolution in terms of percentages of the population with Bachelor, Master or PhD level?

TBD

With respect to gender quality, the process of developing a strong basis for nation-wide efforts that could improve the state of gender equality in the society and academia is under focus, where despite having a legislation that is clearly aimed towards achieving gender equality, some challenges remain with practical implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which can all be addressed by the development and implementation of the institutional Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Gender equality is enshrined in the constitutions of Romania, and also integrated in the countries' Labor Law and in the law no. 229 of 6 October 2015 Part I, no. 749 of 7 October 2015⁴. All of these regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender and have some provisions on

⁴ <https://anes.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/LEGE-Nr-229-din-2015-modificare-si-completare-Legea-202-din-2002.pdf>

LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education
One Student at a Time

equal opportunities in education and the labour market. The GEPs will draw upon and refer to the existing legislation citing the relevant policy to emphasize the GEPs significance and legitimacy. Unfortunately, the existence of an equal opportunities law does not in itself guarantee positive results in achieving equality, as evidenced by Romania whose Gender Equality Index 2019 score is 12.9 points lower than the EU average, leaving it in the 25th place among the 28 countries evaluated by EIGE⁵. The existing national policies have general implications of responsibility towards ensuring gender equality for the academia throughout the application of the Labor Law or its equivalents, creating a legislative incentive or responsibility to ensure equal pay and to protect job opportunities with relation to child rearing as within the Law no. 202/2002⁶ regarding the equality of chances and treatment between women and men in Romania.

However, there is no detailed inclusion of gender dimension in the Education Law in Romania, where there is mention of gender equality on a superficial level in the Law, but no such specific provisions that would truly ensure equal opportunities, as women still do not have equal access to research, funding and publication posts and as there is still a gender pay gap in science and academia, as well as an observable segregation in study and research areas, with STEM dominated by men. Several ongoing projects at national level aim at gender equality within Academia, most representative being: "Quality and Leadership for Romanian Higher Education: Charting the Future of our Society" or "Quality and diversity in Romanian Universities", which are tasked with diagnostic analysis in the field of gender equality. [3]

The TUCN has had very limited previous efforts to improve gender equality at the institution. There has been a project related to gender equality among other aspects aimed at democratization of higher education, exploring opportunities for remote and digital participation of students, professors and researchers, which has resulted in increased capacity for more flexible and distance work. Although there is an Ethics commission at the level of the university, who analyzes all the aspects of different ethics issues, there are no specific guidelines or support for situations involving discrimination or violence. There are part-time working opportunities and a project for a kindergarten for the TUCN staff to be built is in the works currently. It is necessary to carry out a thorough gender needs analysis and to ensure compliance with the national and European policies and regulations.

It is planned that within the Project the TUCN will make efforts to create an impactful, coherent, sustainable and monitored system with implications at all levels of work. In order to achieve that, it will review the relevant policy documents, organize gender awareness training for the staff as well as implement practical discrimination and sexism prevention measures. Some specific currently identified preliminary priority dispositions and goals for the GEP that will be developed and implemented are as follows:

⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/legislative-policy-backgrounds/romania>

⁶ <https://anes.gov.ro/legislatie-nationala-egalitatea-de-sanse/>

In the area of participation of women in research and innovation, and improvement of their career prospects:

- to offer child-care, people with disabilities and elder care opportunities, job safety measures for maternity and paternity leave, flexible working hours, measures to improve equal pay;
- to consider gender aspect in evaluating previous work experience, in recruitment and other HR policies;
- to provide mentoring and coaching programmes for female researchers.

In the area of gender balance in the decision-making bodies:

- to promote gender equality and the affirmation of women to be seen as a precondition for achieving equality at all levels of education and in all fields of activity by awareness-raising activities;
- to ensure full and effective participation of women and equal leadership opportunities at all levels of decision-making in research and innovation projects by setting requirements or quotas.

In the area of gender dimension in research content and increase the quality and societal relevance of produced knowledge, technologies and innovations:

- to integrate equal opportunities and equal treatment objective as a requirement within the research projects, thus expressing the commitment to implement the legal provisions and guidelines contained in the relevant strategies, that can improve gender equality, non-discrimination, accessibility and demographic change

QUALITY

To what extent does the quality of teaching and learning exist in the country? Is quality assurance accomplished via peer-based accreditation agencies or government agencies or other models?

From a key actions' perspective, "assuring a continuous professional development" for the teaching staff is considered to be one of the major opportunities in Romania [4], where having an age composition of less than 30% for the school teachers over 50 years old, represents a strength [5].

Several institutional bodies and laws regulate the legislative framework for assuring quality assessment in Romanian HEIs as defined by [3]: the Law 88/1993 amended through Law 144/1999 for diplomas recognition, the National Council on Academic Evaluation and Accreditation (CNEAA) – as a precursor of the Agency for Quality Assurance in Romania (ARACIS)⁷ – which currently is the main body providing national accreditation standards for HEIs, quality assurance and quality review and the generic Law 87/2006 on quality assurance in education which defines "methodological principles for quality assurance/accreditation in higher education;

⁷ https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/parte_a_I_-_acredita_re_programe_li-centa_si_master_Aprilie_2010.pdf

external quality review procedures and criteria for institutions and programmes level; Quality assurance at institutional level (Internal QA guidelines) and Institutional arrangements involved in quality assurance”.

Quality assurance mechanisms for adult education in such communities requires further effort and have not yet been standardized, with already specific interventions required for establishing: a comprehensive data collection system, clearer institutional arrangements and a reliable coordination body [4]. One challenge that has been addressed by the Institute of Educational Sciences⁸ and requires to be assessed in the context of the Romania Academia refers to the IT&C integration while maintaining quality standards and ethics [8].

ICT

Are there specific regulation on the use of ICT in Higher education? How about in your university?

One major milestone in the development of ICT support in the Romanian Education is considered to be the proposal of a governmental programme applicable at national level, abbreviated as SEI (Educational IT-based System) with its scope “to computerize the Romanian educational system by endowing schools with the necessary equipment, by creating a wide range of custom software to facilitate the interaction between the learners and the subject syllabi, by psycho-pedagogically retraining teaching staff with a view embedded in the learner-centered approach and by laying the foundation of a computerized network as support for modern management”[6], where the final Evaluation Report published in 2008 revealed the following outcomes and progress of indicators:

- a significantly increased number of teachers that adopted ICT in the teaching process
- a significantly higher number of lessons taught using ICT tools
- a reduced number of students using the same PC in a classroom
- an increased number of students that used home-based computer access in educational or knowledge purpose

An in-depth investigation on the use of ICT in Education at national level has been surveyed in 2012 by [7] and augmented by [4] in 2019 - TBD. At TUCN level, the development of tech-enabled Education through ICT support is a key objective achieved through initiatives, where most are sustained in collaboration with the Department of Continuous Education, Distance and Low Frequency Learning (DECIDFR)⁹. Although no rigorous centralized policies have been proposed at institutional level, several key implementations funded through national and institutional grants are of high relevance:

⁸ <http://www.eunec.eu/member/institute-educational-sciences-ies-romania>

⁹ <http://decidfr.utcluj.ro/>

LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education
One Student at a Time

- 2010 – 2013: “DidaTec – Lifelong learning and training for higher education teachers in the technical sciences and engineering fields”, project POSDRU/86/1.3/S/60891 co-financed by the partner universities (9 Romanian Public Higher Education Institutions) and by the European Social Fund through the Sectorial Operational. The project’s aim was to develop a relevant education programme in accordance with the specific needs of the economy through competencies and interactive techniques of IT&C enabled teaching and learning achieved through the following key actions: 1. a pilot programme consisting of 6 courses on modern educational instruments and the use of IT&C for over 800 higher education higher teachers; 2. a mentorship program for over 200 young specialist/professionals starting a career in the field of engineering education; 3. Offering assistance and technical guidance for structuring over 900 courses taught in universities throughout Romania and impacting over 20000 students, in the field of engineering education. One project deliverable, the DidaTEC Learning Management System, has been used as means of deploying the content delivery process, communication and collaboration.
- 2018 – 2021: “CeSTI – TUCN’s Integrative Study and Learning Center”, project 99/SGU/CI/II funded through the Secondary Education Scheme Fund – ROSE, aiming at improving students’ access to the educational resources and mechanisms in order to overcome socio-emotional difficulties mainly encountered in the 1st year of study and to lower the dropout rate. One of the key actions targets higher quality of the teaching-learning processes supported through the CeSTI Learning Platform, as part of the TUCN’s Digital Campus.
- 2020: “eCAMPUS – Academic Excellence through the Integrated Use of Educational Technologies and Transition towards a Virtual Campus”, project CNFIS-FDI-2020-0064 funded through the institutional FDI grant scheme, proposing the following key actions: 1. Deployment of a cloud-based integrated LMS for teaching-learning and evaluation in the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca that allows high-availability access to resources and allows a continuous development of evaluation mechanisms 2. Continuous skills improvement for the academic staff through modern IT&C practice sharing applied in teaching activities 3. Improvement of the learning support available to students to lower the industry gaps between academic and industry competencies, including anti-plagiarism support.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- [1] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/romania_en
- [2] https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20nr.%201_2011_actualizata2018.pdf

LOVE.DIST@NCE

Improving Access and Quality of Inclusive Higher Education
One Student at a Time

- [3] Curaj, A., Deca, L., & Hâj, C. M. (2015). Romanian higher education in 2009–2013. The Bologna process and Romanian priorities in the search for an active European and global presence. In *Higher Education Reforms in Romania* (pp. 1–24). Springer, Cham.
- [4] https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-report-2019-romania_en.pdf
- [5] OECD. (2019). *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume I): Teachers and school leaders as lifelong learners*. OECD Publishing.
- [6] Popa, O., & Bucur, F. (2012, November). ICT in the Romanian Compulsory Educational System. Expectations vs Reality. In *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Virtual Learning* (pp. 213–219). Editura Universității din București București.
- [7] https://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-3/romania_country_profile_2FF7F1D0-0398-745A-5F22D2271FBD96DA_49452.pdf
- [8] Pellegrini, S., Becattelli, M., & Iannis, G. (2013). *New technologies for career guidance and mobility: Handbook for practitioners*.