

Romania

Working Paper

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Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship





Adult Education as a Means to Active Participatory Citizenship (EduMAP)

EduMAP is a Horizon 2020 research project focusing on adult education among young adults at risk of social exclusion. Particular attention is paid to educational policies and practices needed to foster active citizenship among vulnerable young people.

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1. Challenges in AE provision and access

Challenges in AE provision and access in Romania have been documented from the viewpoint of AE practitioners, policy-makers, and young people in vulnerable situations.

Challenges in AE provision¹

Funding. To maintain a continuous AE offer, AE organisations depend on funding, which for many is sourced from various streams: competitive project funding, governmental or local subsidies, sponsors, and student fees among others. Most organisations that are not in the formal education system struggle with challenges for ensuring steady funding streams. AE programmes focused on social and cultural elements are most disadvantaged, given the governmental strategy to direct funds mainly to Vocational Education and Training (VET) and remedial education.

Challenges in organisational positioning in between AE, social care and Active Participatory Citizenship (APC): Crossroads between AE and APC are not well represented in Romania, whilst models that blend AE and social care are more common. Thus, organisations that offer programmes for young people in vulnerable positions may come either from the AE or the social care sector. This hybrid model blending educational and social care elements is still met with issues in positioning and public perception, as demonstrated for example by the example of RO_GP2, a vocational education centre evolving from a social care organisation that continues to be perceived mainly in terms of its social care rather than its educational mission.

Challenges in recruitment: The most vulnerable young people are also the most difficult to reach out to; even when information is provided, young people may lack the motivation and drive to enrol in such programmes or see the long-term benefit.

Challenges in programme delivery: Several issues are encountered, among which we highlight: balancing a general and individualised education and support programme; keeping students motivated and tackling drop-out; ensuring enduring competence development and change beyond programme completion.

Challenges in AE access

Four barriers to accessing AE have been identified:

1. Not affording to attend AE due to lack of money, time and resources
2. Lack of necessary credentials, qualifications and basic competences
3. Lack of timely information about suitable courses
4. Child care and family duties

¹The two AE programmes studied in Romania referred in this working paper are: A VET programme offered by a vocational training organisation that aims to support the social and economic (re)integration of young people in vulnerable situations, through vocational education and social care services (RO_GP1). It includes training modules for young people over 18 and for high school students. Each 18+ course is structured in two parts: (1) Domain-focused vocational training delivered in a practice-intensive way (75% practice, and 25% theory), with internships in profile organisations; and (2) The School for Life, where young people acquire a range of life skills for everyday personal, social and professional life. A labour insertion programme offered by a social enterprise that aims to support the socio-economic integration of adults in difficult and vulnerable situations (RO_GP2). The model is based on integration through work, based on a progressive learning pathway that tackles social, emotional, professional and technical competences. The model was adopted from France, and adjusted to the local context. On the job training takes place in insertion workshops focused on IT refurbishing and reuse, Socialware and Eco-gardening. The formative approach is progressive, tackling gradual competence development along three stages: Adaptation (2 months); Stabilisation (12 months); and Professionalisation (up to 24 months).

The first three challenges and barriers are experienced by young people with diverse conditions of vulnerability, and in particular by those living in poverty or are coming from disenfranchised communities. Many young people experience several or all of these challenges, which reinforce each other, often trapping them in a vicious circle. For instance, many young people who lack the minimum scholarly qualifications to be eligible for AE (such as completion of lower secondary education) are also those who dropped out of school due to poverty; in their twenties many have to work to maintain themselves and their families, often in low-paid, unqualified seasonal or day jobs. Their only option to get a better job is to get better qualifications, for instance through AE programmes; however they are not eligible for upskilling or VET courses until they complete compulsory education through programmes such as Second Chance. On the other hand, attending Second Chance is usually difficult due to lack of time and money to sustain themselves during their studies, while young mothers need to care as well for their children. Thus, potential solutions to overcome these barriers should consider each challenge on its own, but also how they reinforce and condition each other.

2. Gender and diversity aspects tackled in the studied programmes

The most wide-spread gender-related challenges regard access to AE: women who would benefit from AE are often overwhelmed with family and child care responsibilities, especially when coming from poor families and communities, or when patriarchal models are endorsed. Thus, it is essential to consider the needs of these women as a particular impediment to AE access, and cater for supportive services such as childcare support.

Another, somewhat more subtle consideration, regards the role of women in families and communities run by patriarchal models, which can happen in Roma communities or disadvantaged communities that endorse traditional views with respect to gender roles. For women, this may mean that they are not encouraged to attend education and to work, and are rather driven to fulfil the role of mother and householder. In theory, AE could make women more aware of their rights – which may mean encouraging them to upgrade their studies or live more independent lives. However, these aspects are entrenched with questions of culture and value. For instance, it is questionable whether a Roma woman from a community where she has been encouraged to become a mother and a wife, and dropped school in early years, should be instead encouraged to go to school, complete her education and get qualifications to enhance chances of getting a job and becoming independent. Questions of value systems, individual and community choice, and relations between the individual and the group are important and have to be accounted for. Thus, no generic lessons can be offered; however, we suggest that AE could organise and offer women courses that impart notions of citizenship and gender roles, leaving however open and considering women's views and their agency when it comes to applying these notions to their own situations.

The labour insertion programme GP2 offers some good practice lessons for considering gender and diversity in programme design and recruitment strategies. As a general principle, they wanted to ensure a diverse environment for training and work, including gender diversity. As a first step, they realised that the initial productivity line – on IT refurbishing – appealed mainly to men, and they launched a new line on social ware, which attracted a mainly female target. Second, they sought to promote diversity by selecting new programme participants considering not only their individual assets, but also how they would complement the workplace so that a supportive environment, with diversity of interests and opinions, was maintained. This example drives attention to the importance of considering the overall student intake and its diversity in recruitment and selection processes.

3. The concept of APC as it is defined, understood or approached in the context of the study by different respondent groups

Policy-makers' views

All policy-makers and educational authorities interviewed were familiar with the APC concept, even if they did not apply it in their day to day work. As components of APC, two aspects stood out:

1. First, 'active citizen' implies being aware and informed about citizen rights and responsibilities.
2. Second, it is about citizen initiative and civic spirit. A policy-maker (Parliament member) remarked that APC is about putting the citizen in the centre; any policies or programmes for encouraging APC can only serve to "activate citizens", to encourage them to take initiative.

Policy-makers remarked that the concept is not so easy to implement, and Romanian citizens are "quite poorly informed about their rights, obligations, and sources [of information], because everything is tabloidised in here" (Local educational authority, Pol3, Romania).

AE practitioners' views

What is common to the different conceptions and definitions put forth is the relation to a context. No strictly generalised definitions were put through, though in some cases and in relation to a contextualised definition, some respondents pointed to more general level features, such as the 'active vs. passive' dichotomy. Active citizenship is related to having initiative, problem-solving, taking action when there is a need for it. It is about "moving from passive to active" (Director, Roma empowerment NGO).

Some definitions maintained a dual focus on the citizenship component and on personal self-development. For instance, one of the senior managers of the labour insertion programme GP2 remarked that in first instance, active citizenship is something that should be promoted by the state, as it is in the interest of the state to have "active, responsible citizens". Thus, being an active citizen is firstly about assuming responsibilities and duties as citizen – for the state, but also for the environment and the planet (such as recycling). Second, it means being the main actor in one's own life, being autonomous, independent, taking initiative.

Despite different nuances, most respondents agreed that one can only be an active citizen as a member of society, or one's closer community. A community and collective frame also enables to see active citizens as change agents – they give an example and are able to mobilise the community when there is a need to take initiative (Project manager, NGO for minority inclusion). On top of that, like in the case ethnic and cultural minorities, APC involves group affirmation of cultural identity, which further strengthens self-esteem and inner acceptance of one's identity as a member of that community. (Director, Roma empowerment NGO).

For the AE practitioners in the two AE programmes studied, the focus is on encouraging youth to have initiative and to take responsibility for their actions. The

socio-economic dimension of APC prevails and is an opening for social inclusion: once young people have relevant skills and a job, they are included in the economic exchange as equal, contributing citizens, which further opens the route to social inclusion.

Young people's views

The data on young people's APC views is partial, mainly due to the difficulty to arrive at a common understanding of the concept with the interviewees. The strongest theme emerging from young people's accounts is about being autonomous and in control of one's life, which includes as well securing a stable job to be financially independent. RO_GP1 participants expressed these ideas insisting on the importance of personal responsibility, taking agency over their lives. These were all young people coming from the state child protection system. It could contribute to this view the fact that they knew they did not rely on a caring family, and had to put all their trust in their own forces. At RO_GP2, accounts were focused as well on the importance of being independent and financially autonomous. They emphasised as well the discrimination they encountered, the jobs they did not get because of their disability (two of the interviewees had special educational needs, and one a mild physical disability). This was one more reason to put trust in their own forces in order to succeed.

One key element of APC not mentioned in young people's account has to do with the relational, collective and reciprocity dimension of APC, that of being responsible towards society, towards the others. Data is not sufficient to draw a general conclusion, but it can at least open up an important question: Considering the discrimination and marginalisation many vulnerable groups suffer, how can the relational, civic responsibility dimension of APC be cultivated?

A partial answer comes from the research involving Roma young people, and the answer is the community. While most Roma interviewed did not claim to feel responsible for society at large, they did feel tied and connected and oftentimes responsible for their family and community. The community was also an element of force and security, a support structure that other groups such as young people who have been under state care, lacked.

4. Elements that are critical and or significant for enabling learners to become active citizens, or to develop APC competencies in the studied programmes

Three higher-level considerations shape the educational, training and social care approach of the **VET programme GP1**:

1. A dual focus on the social care and the educational side. RO_GP1 is not concerned unilaterally with developing a range of competences in their students, but considers also their personal, emotional and social needs. To this end, RO_GP1 offers supportive services such as free housing and meals, some pocket money, and the services of a social assistant and a counselling psychologist.
2. The focus on each individual young person, their needs, and their training and development goals. Education does not start from pre-defined recipes, but from considering the needs, issues, goals, and potential of each student.
3. RO_GP1 positions itself as a mediator among young people and the broader society, particularly the job market. The programme considers the requirements of employers, and uses those considerations to revise the educational and training offer. From here derive the focus on job coaching, internships, and a performance assessment system aligned to employer requirements (PIIC, standing for Punctuality, Hygiene, Initiative and Behaviour).
4. A fluid internal structure for communication and circulation of information, systematised in the case management system.

Based on these features, what characterises the educational approach of RO_GP1 is flexibility, personalisation, and adaptiveness depending on context and individual learner needs. However, it is important to note that this does not mean a fragmented educational offering. On the contrary, RO_GP1 has created a comprehensive, systematic methodology that sees to the constant improvement of the educational approach and the synchronisation and convergence of educator and staff efforts towards student training. This is achieved through case management: when joining a RO_GP1 course, a learner develops plans and objectives, based on which personalised activities, or areas of higher intensity in training are devised. Progress is monitored and objectives revised according to this progress.

The elements that drive the successful educational approach of the **labour insertion programme GP2** can be synthesized as follows:

- Holistic, learner-centred approach attending to the needs of each learner: this implies attending to technical as well as emotional and social competences, an approach implemented through case management – assisting each learner to develop a life and professional project and carry it forth.
- The transformational element is the work contract: through the work contract the participant becomes an actor, s/he works, s/he is paid, s/he contributes taxes, and thus is put in the position of acting like a responsible citizen. Programme participants understand how to position themselves in

relation with the employer, and take part in the economic exchange through work.

- Progressive approach to professional re-insertion, with initial coverage of key competences, from punctuality to concentration on tasks.
- Centrality of values: First, there are values inherent in the founding principles, related to respect, social responsibility and trust. Second, RO_GP2 chose value-based productive activities focused on social solidarity and environment protection. This brings satisfaction in insertion employees as they can see the positive impact of their work (e.g. children using their computers in schools). They learn notions of circular economy, environmental protection etc. which is part of being an active citizen. In sum, the result is that participants become proud they are filling a place in society, that the work they do is valued.
- Socialisation and team work: This is the most appreciated element by most learners interviewed, feeling appreciated, protected, in a friendly and caring environment.
- Collaboration with external agencies enables RO_GP2 to conduct their work from recruitment to productive activities. Cooperation with mediating agencies is essential for reaching out to young people in situations of vulnerability. The social enterprise collaborates as well with other institutions for organising charity events, donating refurbished computers, or for opening up internships and job opportunities for programme participants.

5. Competencies and qualifications possessed, represented and/or cultivated through by the AE practitioners who contribute to the design, development and delivery of APC programmes for Participants

The teams in both AE programmes studied are multidisciplinary. In the VET programme GP1 the team includes coordinators of educational programmes, a job coach, a case manager, a counselling psychologist, social assistants, educators and managerial roles. The role of the educator is polyvalent. On the one hand, there are the specialised educators that teach the vocational disciplines covered, such as cooking and bakery. Then, there are the educators in the School for Life, who teach disciplines ranging from personal self-development to applied mathematics. Competences and qualifications covered by educators encompass generally three layers:

1. Specialised domain knowledge and skills, specific to the domain covered, such as bakery, or subject matters in School for Life.
2. Pedagogy, referring to competences necessary in order to impart knowledge or teach.
3. Competences and experience of working with young people in situations of vulnerability.

RO_GP2 team includes counsellors, workshop coordinators and educators, a psychotherapist and a coordinator for job market mediation, and managerial roles. The team responsible with training does not only attend to technical skills, but also to emotional and social competences. For instance, one of the workshop coordinators remarked that their role is not only to build technical competences, but to help people develop their social competences, good manners, team work competences and knowledge about their employee rights and responsibilities.

6. Critical factors and conditions (favourable and unfavourable) that affect the potential of AE policies to cultivate APC for Participants

The development of AE policy in Romania in the past three decades cannot be disentangled from the massive socio-economic restructuring that occurred after the 1989 revolution that marked the fall of the communist regime. AE reforms were integrated as part of a massive-scale programme of reforms, including the reform of the national education system. A critical set of factors are associated with the development of AE throughout:

- The role of AE in serving immediate market and labour market needs and pressing skills gaps, which determined a focus on remedial and vocational education and little concern for general AE;
- Instability of the political system, which resulted in broken lines of policy conception, adoption, implementation and monitoring of impacts from one mandate to the other;
- Silo organisation and silo thinking in policy-making. There are not enough ties, dialogues and joint action lines for areas that require synergetic actions between different state departments and agencies in the same fields (such as tackling Roma inclusion, which involves transversal actions on areas from housing to education and employment);
- The still immature culture of citizenship in Romanian society, associated with a very young democracy;
- Associated with the above is a poor culture of adult education, considering that Romania's rate of participation in AE (1,2% in 2016) is well below EU average (10,8% in 2016) and that the categories that could most benefit from AE are the ones whose participation lags behind: low qualified adults have a participation of 0,3% (compared to EU's 4,3%), and the unemployed of 2,1%, compared to EU 4,3%(EC GDEC 2017);
- The gaps left by formal education, to name just a few: high school drop-out among the most vulnerable groups; persistent discrimination against groups such as the Roma; scarcity of resources and qualified personnel for special needs education; high levels of illiteracy and functional illiteracy.
- Low investment in education. Romania's budget for education is the lowest in the EU, 3.1% in 2015 compared to the EU average of 4.9% (EC GDEC 2017).

Moreover, the APC or AC sector is not well developed in Romania. Some studies see the consolidation of APC – as active, engaged citizen participation – as part of a process of democratisation that is not fully matured in Romania (Matiuta et al, 2008). Several laws have been passed that establish the legal framework for civic engagement, which apart from the state Constitution put forth provisions on:

- Free access to public interest information (Law 544/2001)
- Transparency of decisions in public administration (Law 52/2003)
- Young people, including provisions on stimulating youth initiative and the role of youth associations and the National Agency for Supporting Youth

Initiative (Law 350/2006, revised 12/2017)

- Citizen initiative, in the law on local public administration (Law 215/2011)
- Social dialogue (Law 62/2011)
- Voluntary activities (Law 78/2014)

However, extant studies argue that despite progress, Romania does not yet offer a systematic, consistent and coherent policy framework for stimulating active citizenship and civic engagement (Matiuta et al, 2008; Mitulescu et al., 2013).

Other critical influencing factors that shaped AE policy and mediated its effects are associated with Romania's joining the EU in 2007. This meant that it sought to align its (lifelong learning) LLL and AE policies and strategies with the EU. The lifelong learning direction endorsed by the European Commission² was meant to ensure a common line and direction for the implementation of LLL across EU member states. However, in practice the local context in member states, including Romania, dictated specific directions of the LLL strategies, corresponding to their unique history and contemporary conditions (Institute for International and Social Studies et al, 2007; Popescu, 2012). The EU influence is reflected in the way laws and policies are formulated, however oftentimes there is a huge gap between the content of the laws and their implementation in practice. For instance, the focus on a more holistic personal, social, and professional development of the citizen can be found in Romanian LLL and AE policies and strategies at least at the level of principles (echoing the EU influence), however these are reflected inadequately or completely missing in actually implemented measures.

² Through documents such as *A Memorandum of Lifelong Learning* (2000) and *Making the European Lifelong Learning Area A Reality* (2001).

7. Lessons learnt from laws and policies that contribute effectively to cultivating APC for Participants

Any answers regarding the effectiveness of policies require us to look not only at the policy framework that circumscribes the triangle AE – APC – vulnerability, but more importantly at how this has been and is implemented in practice and its impacts on Romania's most vulnerable populations. The most important take away from the analysis of the policy framework and its impacts is that positive steps have been taken in the past three decades, good laws have been passed, and the vulnerability cause is high on the agenda of policy and law makers. However, the effects in promoting APC among vulnerable groups are low or barely seen. Discrimination against the most vulnerable groups such as the Roma continues to persist, the education and access to labour market of severely disadvantaged groups such as young people with special needs are lagging behind, and overall the targets set with respect to increasing participation in AE are consistently failing to be met.

The positive steps made with respect to policy can be summarised as follows:

- Recognition of the fundamental role of AE in including vulnerable youth and preparing a qualified workforce, as demonstrated to attention given to remedial, professional education and VET in policies and laws;
- Attention to Romania's most vulnerable groups – including the Roma, people with special needs, youth leaving care – in laws, policies and strategic actions plans;
- Increasing attention given to the importance of financial support and incentives for encouraging participation in AE, professional education and inclusion on the labour market (such as incentives for employers);
- Iterative improvements of some laws and policies, with addition or improvement of methodologies, action plans, and monitoring processes such as for instance the Strategy for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens of Roma Ethnic Origin, which has been improved throughout several editions since 2001.

In short, the policies and laws passed until now demonstrate that Romania is aware of the situation of vulnerable groups, and the potential of adult education (at least in what professional education is concerned). Some ways forward and strategies with potentially significant impacts have also been adopted, as outlined above. However, and given the gaps between policy adoption and implementation, it is difficult to name AE and related policies that contributed effectively to promoting APC among vulnerable groups. Some good directions can be outlined, but these are still to be improved.

An example is the National Strategy for Employment 2014-2020. One of the provisions stipulates that the National Agency for Employment (RO. Agentia nationala pentru ocupare a fortei de munca) is responsible every year for drafting the National professional training plan, according to principles that align with strategic objectives of the European Union and the Europe 2020 vision. The Plan is meant to develop human resources, encourage the participation of the unemployed in professional training, and raise the capacity for professional insertion through apprenticeship programmes. It targets specifically disadvantaged groups such as

women, the Roma, the long-term unemployed and persons with disabilities. Professional training programmes and courses are proposed by the Agency branches in each county, following a rigorous process for identifying the most appropriate course offering. On this basis, every year the county and local branches of the Agency organise qualification, re-qualification and specialisation courses, as well as professional insertion and apprenticeship programmes.

The Plan does have good results, at least in terms of numbers; for instance, a press release by the Agency for Employment mentioned that 28,112 trainees benefitted from professional training during 2018³. However, data from the primary research and other published studies point that these programmes do not reach out to or exclude some of the most disadvantaged. Young Roma people interviewed for this research did not know about the free courses available in the city. Even more, most of them were excluded from these courses, since one of the enrolment requirements was to have completed compulsory education, or even high school. This means that young adults who have dropped out of school, as is the case for many Roma, cannot access these courses. It then becomes evident that there is a mismatch between the stated objectives of the programme (labour market insertion for people in situations of vulnerability) and the conditions imposed for accessing the programme.

³<https://www.anofm.ro/post.html?id=4847&agentie=>

8. Existing practices of information access and communication (emerging patterns and tendencies; people/social networks; media/platforms/channels; content/messages) about adult education in the studied programmes

Communication for student recruitment for the two AE programmes studied relies on a network of state and non-governmental organisations that work directly with or protect the rights of young people at risk of social exclusion, including the offices of the General Direction for Social Assistance and Child Protection, NGOs and foundations that mediate access to young people, social assistants, and local City Halls. These agencies are also responsible with passing on information about the programme and the benefits of attending to potential students. Learners interviewed in both programmes emphasised how important it was for them to understand the benefits they would derive from attending and the opportunities opened after programme completion.

Communication during programme delivery: In both AE programmes, face to face communication prevails during the delivery of the programme, as RO_GP1 is a residential programme, and RO_GP2 functions as a workplace. In RO_GP1, communication between learners and AE practitioners is structured around the case management process. A systematic plan is drawn up for each learner, starting from their aptitudes, current skills and objectives for the future, to identify priority areas to work on, constantly monitor progress and take appropriate action where needed. For RO_GP2, the take away theme for communication during course is the articulation of formal and informal communication spaces as means to instil soft skills and professional attitudes for the workplace. There is a formalised space of communication, marked by the working schedule, with rules and protocols that are introduced and mastered during the first two months of the programme. Informal moments of communication take place during breaks and in organised socialisation events.

Communication after programme completion. Given that many students cannot rely on a supportive environment such as a family, a support structure in the months after programme completion can make the difference for them, and help them cope with difficulties, gain useful advice or simply feel comforted and sustained. In RO_GP1, the job coach keeps in touch with young people and their employer for at least six months after programme completion. This is part of the services that RO_GP1 offers, as most participants are also liaised with an employer and start a job after programme completion. RO_GP2 participants are monitored as well for six months after programme completion by the support team. This six-month monitoring involves regular phone calls, availability to intervene or help when needed, visits or contacts with the new employer. Apart from this, many participants in both programmes keep in touch with educators and tutors informally.

Institutional communication. Both programmes maintain relationships and cooperation with a network of external stakeholders for various activities: For recruitment, they rely on mediating agencies including state social assistance centres, social care foundations, and agencies for the protection of vulnerable

groups. RO_GP1 maintains constant communication with employers in relevant fields, such as restaurants, hotels and bakeries, which helps them ensure good internship and job placement opportunities for their students.

Other collaborations are maintained for special projects with diverse local actors. For instance, RO_GP2 partners regularly with varied civil society, private and governmental organisations for increasing the impacts and outreach of its IT donation projects, to find internship and job opportunities for its participants, but also to influence policy and practice, enhance the advancement of the social inclusion cause and the success of the social enterprise model. These collaborations enable RO_GP2 not only to conduct better their activities and maximise positive impact on their direct beneficiaries, but also to have an impact on the socio-economic and political environment and contribute to macro-scale, systemic change that benefits the most vulnerable.

9. Leveraging on VYA's information access and communication practices about adult education

The following leverage points for improving the capacity of AE to reach out to young people in situations of risk have been identified:

Social networks: Young people in situations of risk and vulnerability rarely search for AE opportunities out of their own initiative, even if they need or could benefit greatly from programmes such as Second Chance or from gaining VET qualifications. If they do, it is usually when driven by a strong desire or goal, when information and programmes are readily available in the neighbourhood, when information is communicated convincingly by people they trust, or they are exposed to positive examples of young people from their own circles who followed AE and benefitted from it. From these, the role of social networks they trust stands out as most important. The likelihood of receiving and following up on AE-related information is greater when this reaches young people through networks they know and are familiar with, in particular local support/mediating agencies that have been in touch for long with young people or have a presence in their proximity.

Content: It is important to communicate the added value of AE tailored for the needs of young people and their specific situation. Content should be customised, it should echo their needs and their life conditions. AE content should also communicate solutions to tackle barriers to AE access that may deter young people from even considering AE. Young people are often discouraged to attend because of factors that are not accounted for in AE communication, such as lack of money, lack of time for those in employment and childcare responsibilities for young mothers. To cater for this, AE programme communication should be informed by research in the targeted community or communities. One size fits all recipes are not likely to work, as the conditions, stories, needs and drives covered under the umbrella 'vulnerability' concept are in reality very varied.

Media: There is a leverage in using digital media to reach out to young people in situations of vulnerability. However, findings indicate that to be effective, this has to be complemented by the involvement of social networks and trusted professionals and organisations, which can encourage interest and engagement in young people. Blended models by which information is circulated through organisations/contacts/word of mouth and then complemented by information on digital and social media (such as social media pages and groups on various platforms) could work best. It is also important to research the platforms most used in a context or community. Facebook was the most used platform among the young people interviewed in Romania, however this should not be taken for granted, as other studies point to wide use of other platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, and patterns of use and platforms choice change and evolve.

10. Information accessed and used during the design of AE for APC programmes

The two AE programmes studied have been initially designed and rolled out with a similar goal, but under very different contexts: both programmes intend to enable the acquisition of skills for people in situations of vulnerability and enhance their insertion on the job market. However, The VET programme GP1 set up a VET curricular programme that follows the structure required for the courses to be accredited according to national standards. While RO_GP2 introduced a labour insertion model from Western Europe and adapted it to local conditions through successive editions. The two programmes constantly assess the performance and improve the design of their programmes, a process in which information is essential. RO_GP1 assesses and improves the curriculum every year. There are three sources of information for ensuring that the programmes are both aligned to national accreditation standards and offer a quality, engaging experience for students:

- Information regarding standards and content for accredited VET courses, regulated by the National Authority for Qualifications.
- Information about student needs and the assessment of their learning experience. This is derived from internal evaluation (student satisfaction surveys) and teachers' observations on what has good results and what needs to be revised.
- Information and tools for improving educational approaches and methods, drawn particularly from regular exchanges and cooperation with Austrian profile institutions, and visits from Austrian instructors who contribute to innovating teaching approaches.

The challenge encountered by RO_GP1 is to liaise with organisations running similar programmes, for exchange of good practice and constant updating of their educational offer and approach to integrate new trends and effective approaches.

The labour insertion programme GP2 has been constantly working to refine the original French model and adapt it to local structural conditions and the needs of people in vulnerable situations in Romania. During the first years, the original French model did not give the expected results, and the drop-out rate was high. One of the changes was to make the formative path more transparent, with clear landmarks; this helped participants better position themselves in the work environment and with respect to their goals and plans. The programme continues to be assessed and improved every year. Information is drawn from the assessment of the participants' experience; and by maintaining regular contact with local associations, foundations and NGOs that work closely with people in situations of risk and vulnerability. RO_GP2 experiences as well challenges in accessing needed information. In particular, the map of social services in Romania is not well drawn, and it is difficult to retrieve fast information about who does what for specific intervention areas and issues, and who has the right expertise and contacts in a field.



<http://blogs.uta.fi/edumap/>