for 2018 shows that the early school-leaving is 18.1% in Romania, while de EU rate is 10.6%[12]. At the same time, the rate of NEETs in Romania is 18.1%[13], one of the highest rates in the European Union. Third, the low absorption capacity of EU funds remained a long-term problem in Romania that hinders the implementation of EU programmes targeting the young people and the disadvantaged subgroups. This law abpsortion capacity is considered to be connected to the incapacity of the local and national staff to obtain the required skills for seizing funding opportunities, but could be also regarded as an inadvertence between the EU programs and the Romanian context.

This paper it is structured as follows: This short introduction establishes the European and national context in what concerns youth policies and participation and the main objectives of the paper. The main part is composed of two parts. The first part takes into account the current situation of youth policies at the European and national Romanian level and the second part questions the future development of youth policies at the national and European level. The paper finishes with a summary of the main contributions of the paper and with brief recommendations. From a methodological point of view, this paper relies on the analysis of national documents, policy papers, European surveys and on 7 interviews conducted with coordinators of Erasmus+ projects in Suceava, one of the poorest counties of Romania. The Erasmus+ coordinators were questions to what extent did the Erasmus+ programme create the conditions to reach young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and weather it opened meaningful opportunities for the participation of youth.

1. The current situation

1.1. The disadvantaced youth. Defining a social cathegory

The existence of various subgroups at risk of poverty and social exclusion is not a new problem in Europe. Nevertheless, it became a worrisome and widespread phenomenon in the context of the economic crisis that emerged in 2008 affecting mostly the young people and disadvantaged categories. During the last years, EU youth-oriented policies on education, training, social inclusion and employment have been concentrated on the concept of NEETs.

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[12] Education and Training Monitor (2018), first volume, ec.europa.eu/education/monitor.
[13] Eurofound (2016), Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, p. 11.

This concept, defining the young people aged between 15 and 24 that are not in education, employment or training, is largely used at the national and European level to define a precarious social category that is at risk of being marginalized and socially excluded. Nevertheless, as we will see in the case of Romania, the NEETs is a heterogeneous social categories including various subgroups with diverse needs and problems. At the same time, many subgroups of young people having a vulnerable condition or that are at risk of social exclusion don't necessarily integrate into the category of NEETs and many of them can't be enrolled in the programmes and projects that are targeting the NEETs. Therefore, while using the concept of NEETs, we should take into account that young people's vulnerabilities are multifaced in the contemporary world and that, in many cases, these heterogeneous vulnerabilities can't be all reduced to the concept of NEETs.

The political participation of youth coming from disadvantaged backgrounds is a difficult process due to the numerous barriers that condition the social integration of this youth and to their lack of economic opportunities and social security. The young people that experience marginalization and social exclusion are restrained from actively participating in their society. Usually, the youth coming from disadvantaged backgrounds tend not to achieve in education and employment and become „invisible" in the sense of "disappearing from the view of their families, communities, societies, governments, donors, civil society, the media"[14]. At the same time, social inequalities tend to pass from one generation to another[15], preventing the young people to emancipate from their initial condition. More exactly, Peall and Piron stresses that social exclusion is "a process and a state that prevents individuals or groups from full participation in social, economic and political life and from asserting their rights."[16] Deprived of their rights, disadvantaged young people can't make their voices heard in the institutional field at the local, national and European level. While the feelings of discriminatory experiences and the causes of social exclusion differ (parental neglect, living in informal care settings or within a family at risks of loosing care, financial difficulties and poverty leading to the isolation of vulnerable youth, disconnection from society, disempowerment), they all influence the young people's capacity to actively participate at the institutional level. Apart from their non-participation, the vulnerable youth might often experience drug-use, homelessness, crime. All these contribute even more to their social

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[14] UNICEF (2006), The State of the World's Children, New York, p. 36.
[15] Susinos, T. (2008), 'Tell me in your own words': disabling barriers and social exclusion in young persons. Disability and Society 22(2), pp. 117 – 127.
[16] Beall, J. & Piron, L. (2005), DFID Social Exclusion Review, London: Department of International Development.

exclusion and marginality. For the vulnerable youth, the transition from childhood to adulthood and from education to employment is a more difficult process than in the case of young people with more opportunities, often being followed by psychological damages, self blame, mistrust towards the institutional political realm and the feeling of not being socially accepted. Even if these young people that are in particular vulnerable situations require special attention within youth policies, at the European institutional level, there is often little knowledge about the most vulnerable youth that sometimes live in informal settings. In many cases, these vulnerable young people are left away from European statistics.

The access to education of young people is one of the main factors that condition their active political participation. The development of the concept of "equal access to education", widely used in the EU, has led to various debates among policy makers, researchers, teachers and youth workers[17]. The literature stresses that the initial participation to different forms of education and training creates opportunities for each individual to be able to participate throughout their lives in different forms of education and training in close connection with their skills and aspirations, the requirements of the labor market, the need of strengthening social cohesion in the perspective of active European citizenship[18]. In this way, access to one or another level of education may be directly related to a measurable outcome, qualification, profession, or a specific skill, since the probability of becoming NEETs and of being socially excluded decreases as education level increases[19]. Therefore, the "access to an institutionalized" formal or non-formal education at the end of which the individuals receive a diploma or a certificate of competency by virtue of which they can access a job or higher forms of education condition the transition from education to employment of youth and their participation to the democratic and civic life. From another point of view, it is already well known that the implementation of education and training policies has a significant positive impact on economic growth and sustainable development. On the contrary, inequities and inequalities that persist within and outside school have negative consequences, not only because they condition the individual opportunities that are being offered to students, but also because they produce long-term effects in the economic, cultural, educational, family and

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[17] Otero M. S. and McCoshan A. (2010), Study on Access to Education and Training , Tender no. EAC/38.04, Lot 1, by, Final Report for the European Commission, (2010) „ Access to Education and Training in the Context of Europe 2010 ; c h.3. Conceptual Framework, pp.8 - 20.
[18] *Idem.*
[19] Eurofound (2016), Exploring the diversity of NEETs, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

individual sectors. At the heart of these considerations, education plays an important role and can be regarded as a key actor in poverty reduction, or as a mere promoter of social justice.

In all policy documents, the European Parliament has consistently maintained that education is essential, not only as a manner to create opportunities for young people, but also to prepare them become active citizens of complex societies. The right to education is a recognized principle both at the national level and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union[20]. In spite of these institutional guarantees, evidence shows that current education and training systems are also strongly connected to the existing inequalities and inequity. Most of the specialists that are conducting research on the access of young people to the education and training systems consider that it is determined by a set of interfering variables: economic, sociological, political and administrative[21]. Each of these variable intervenes with an oscillating weight in the access to the education system, which - so far - is still strongly segmented. These factors are real pitfalls, obstacles to social inclusion, access to social rights and political participation. Among these factors, we could remind low family income, incomplete support for single-parent families, urban-rural gaps, immigrant backgrounds. For instance, the highest percentage of early leavers from education and training systems in Europe are encountered in the immigrant population of Western Europe, in certain ethnic and religions minorities[22]. At the same time, the transition to higher education of immigrant youth in Europe is comparatively lower[23]. Considering the transmission of educational attitudes through the intergenerational chain, the immigrants that don't pursue education have high risks of being socially excluded and their decision to leave school will have consequences on the social integration on their children. In the literature, economists have tried to highlight and test the extent to which the influence of parents and family in general it is the foundation for the access to education of their children. Cohen, for example, states that parents have an increased influence in forming their children's attitudes and in determining their educational aspirations[24]. Due to the levels of personal education acquired

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[20] The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000), Article 14, http://www.right-to-education.org/resource/charter-fundamental-rights-european-union.
[21] EU cooperation in education and training (ET 2020), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:ef0016&from=RO.
[22] Eurydice (2004), Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools; CCE, *Promoting Language Learning and Lingvistic Diversity* COM (2003) 449. CCE (2007), Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, Brussels.
[23] *Idem.*
[24] Cohen, J., (2006) Social, Emotional, Ethical, and Academic Education: Creating a Climate for Learning, Participation in Democracy, and Well-Being, Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 76, No. 2, pp. 201-237.

and the expression of their own standards of what a desirable level of education means, parents are in this respect real models to follow for their children. Consequently, children whose parents have completed higher education will be tempted to attach greater importance to personal education and to invest more in their training.

While young people in Europe are facing similar problems and challenges in the contemporary world, the (un)equal access to education of young people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds are context-sensitive and differ for each country. While disabilities, economic, social and geographic obstacles tend to prevent the young people to fully participate in all European societies, in Romania exist some subgroups or social categories that have less opportunities in terms of access to education, employment and channels of participation. Roma youth, young people coming from emigrated families, young people coming from the rural area, immigrant young people are the subgroups that are confronted to particular difficulties. In many cases, these subgroups are interconnected. For instance, many people that chose to emigrate to Western Europe come from the rural area and from low-income families and many isolated Roma communities are placed in the rural area.

- Youth coming from emigrated families

Many experts have been emphasizing in the recent years that the school population in the EU member states reflects the migration of the population. Migration has managed to have a great influence on Romanian society, especially on high school education. Migration of the young population leads to the crisis of the labor market, of social services and insurance, but also to early school-leaving, to the decomposition of the families. Children often remain in the care of their relatives or are even left alone in Romania by their parents that work in the cleaning or construction sector in Western Europe. Many of these young people left alone in Romania are confronted to depression, drug-use, criminality, or forced to drop off school in order to take care of their younger brothers and sisters. More exactly, between 12,000 and 70,000 high school students drop off school every year. In 2017, the number of students attending secondary education in Romanian decreased by 52 thousand compared to the previous year[25]. This is due, first of all, to the labor migration to the Western European countries. In many cases, this leads to long-term consequences that are not favorable to the

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[25] According to the National Institute of Statistics retrieved at the link: http://www.insse.ro/cms/ro/content/statistica-educatiei.

participation of young people to the education system, but also to the democratic and civic life, rising school dropout rates, absenteeism and increasing crime rates.

- Young people living in the rural area

The fact of living in the rural area, in specially in the most isolated rural communities influence the access of young people to education, employment and training programmes. These young people have the highest risk of unemployment, poverty, social exclusion; it is estimated that 1 out of 3 young people in these categories are threatened by economic and social risks[26]. In some cases, even when these young people residing in the rural areas are officially enrolled in schools, they are not attending. Therefore, their situation continues to be precarious, even if they are visible to the school officials. The access to schools of these young people is sometimes hindered by the inefficient infrastructure like insufficient buses. At the same time, most of the job offers are concentrated on the big cities, forcing the young from the rural area, that have low access to jobs and fewer employability skills, to register to unemployment offices or move to the urban areas.

One feature that should be taken into account is that many young people having few to no opportunities have never benefited of youth work services because of the particular situation of youth work in Romania. Youth work in Romania is relying on external funds and volunteering because the Romanian state is funding only 34 youth clubs all across the country and no youth specialist is employed on a long-term based by the Romanian authorities[27]. In this context, youth workers develop their activities in informal and non-formal education settings and work on themes like youth participation, community organization, education for citizenship. Since youth work is not considered a stable career choice and since it is not supported by the state or by local authorities, there is little expertise in the field, little social recognition and even little cooperation between formal schools situated in the rural area and youth workers. Therefore, in many cases, the activities that target the youth with fewer opportunities have little visibility or social impact. If unemployment benefits and social aid make these categories visible to the local and national authorities and cover their very basic needs, these instruments are not efficient to empower these youth having few or no opportunities and to stimulate their political participation. Without additional interventions,

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[26] *Idem.*

[27] Călăfăteanu A.M, Lonean, I. (2016) The invisible youth in rural Romania and development perspectives.
http://pjpeu.coe.int/documents/1017981/9000853/The+invisible+youth+in+rural+Romania.pdf/3d5df7 0a-4b9c-4f38-93b8-7ce4ea39b7ce.

the unemployment benefits might even prevent the development of these vulnerable youth and lead to their isolation[28]. Even if the county's unemployment offices are offering counseling services, these young people are often reluctant, not informed or not interested to use this tools.

- Roma youth

The access to education, social integration of Roma young people and their participation to the broader society triggered long-term debates among researchers, youth workers and policymakers. If migration raised new challenges concerning the access to education and the participation of vulnerable groups in Romania, the Roma remained the subgroup with the lowest levels of education, difficult access to education and training programmes, social services, labour market and fair working conditions[29], but also with a limited access to institutional forms of participation. Usually, Roma youth are engaged in various forms of undeclared work and are not supported by their families to pursue a long-term formal education, many of them becoming integrated in the social security system. At the same time, Roma youth are facing ethnic stereotypes and discrimination and many of them live in isolated communities. If the common perception is that the law level of education and the early school drop off of Roma youth are triggered by cultural factors and cultural and ethnic particularities, recent studies show that 85,7% of the children interrupting school declare that financial difficulties and the need to participate in household activities determine the early school drop and not the lack of interest of Roma families in formal and non-formal education[30].

Recent studies highlight the fact that many Roma families are forced, because of poverty, to keep their children at home without participating in any form of learning and training. This fact presents unfavorable implications in the further development of these young people as complete beings and limits their contribution to the development of society. More importantly, the long-term disengagement from formal and non-formal education leads to the increasing feeling of social exclusion of these non-participating young people. The likelihood that these children, who are limited to primary education, will be able to acquire in

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[28]*Idem.*

[29] For the year 2017, 63% of Roma youth were not in work, education or further training, even if the EU average is 12%.

[30] Cace S., Toader R., Vizireanu A. (2013) Roma from Romania – from scapegoat to development engine, G.Duminica and A.Ivasiuc, Impreuna Agency, p. 6.

the future higher levels of education is very low in the Romanian case, resulting in long-term non-participation.

- Refugees and immigrant youth

Globalization is opening new challenges to the participation of young people in Romania. The political participation of newly arrived immigrant youth in Romania is a rather recent concern and doesn't trigger important debates or polarizations in the policy field or in private and public schools. Unlike in the case of Western Europe, the involvement of immigrant young people in organizations and associations that could promote their rights and social integration is rather a recent process. Most of the immigrants in Romania come from countries like the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, China, Syria. Apart from the Romanian NGOs that work on integrative projects and that work occasionally with community workers or mediators that come from migrant communities, in Romania exist about sixty immigrant associations that provide legal support for newly arrived immigrants, create connections between the immigrants and Romanian authorities, promote the culture of a certain country and organize information campaigns[31]. Some of these associations have started as informal support groups created within immigrant communities. If there is little concern in the Romanian public space on the situation of refugees and immigrants, researchers have shown that young immigrants don't have the same opportunities to participate as the rest of the population since issues concerning citizenship, stigmatization in the host society, lack of financial resources often become barriers of immigrant youth participation[32]. This challenges are being strengthen in a country like Romania, where conservative attitudes are often connected to anti-immigrants feelings.

1.2. European programs promoting the participation of disadvantaged youth

In this broader local and national context, the participation of young people having few or no socioeconomic opportunities depend on the development of skills for participation, the possibility of learning about democracy and citizenship. Participation occurs through formal, and non-formal education (NGO, youth clubs, civic associations, cultural

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[31] As shown in the Migrant.ro database: http://www.migrant.ro/results.php?offset=400&expr=&localitate=&tip=&domeniu=&grup.

[32] Zani, B., Cicognani, E. and Albanesi, C. (2011), La partecipazione civica e politica dei giovani. Bologna: Clueb.

organizations). The development of competences and motivation for participation depend on the educators in these formal and non-formal settings and on the use of democratic and participatory pedagogies. During the last years, the EU programmes concerning education and training started to have a major role in promoting youth participation, social inclusion and citizenship. The implementation of European programmes among peoples with different histories, cultural values and mentalities was possible by addressing education systems from two points of view. The first focused on identifying models capable of harmonizing European education systems in different states and the second one is centered on the possibility of ensuring that each geographical region or country adopts general EU recommendations and principles to its specific needs, depending on ideological and social factors, on the economic and technological development differences and on the particularities of human capital.

Education, training and sport have been recognized as key factors in the EU's growth strategy for the next decade in order to overcome the socioeconomic crisis affecting the countries of Europe in order to stimulate economic growth and promote equity and social inclusion. More precisely, the EU's long-term strategic objectives in the field of education and training, as established by the Council, are: - implementing lifelong learning and mobility in learning; - improving the quality and efficiency of education and training, - promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; - enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training. Education and training policies have been particularly stimulated with the adoption of Europe 2020, the EU's fundamental strategy for growth and jobs that imposes as one of the main objectives the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the need to reduce the number of people suffering or at risk of suffering from poverty and social exclusion[33]. If education and training systems are within the competence of the Member States, the EU plays an important role in supporting and complementing efforts to improve and modernize them. Under the Europe 2020 strategy, Member States are given specific guidance on priority reforms each year in the form of specific recommendations. The focus has been changed to reflect the importance of education and training for the labor market and the promotion of fundamental values and active citizenship. This change is reflected in the six priority areas: - relevant and high-quality skills and competences, with emphasis on learning outcomes, to increase employability and stimulate innovation and active

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[33] Dijkstra L., Athanasoglou S. (2015), The Europe 2020 Index: The Progress of EU Countries, Regions and Cities to the 2020 Targets, European Comission, Regional and Urban Policy, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/romania/progress-towards-2020-targets/index_en.htm.

citizenship; - inclusive education, equality, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences; - open and innovative education and training, including by using digital skills in the learning process; - solid support for trainers; - transparency and recognition of skills and qualifications to facilitate learning mobility and labor mobility, - sustainable investment, performance and efficiency for education and training systems[34].

Erasmus + Programme

In this broader context, the Erasmus+ Programme was established as the EU programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. The Programme builds on the older initiatives of the Union to promote exchanges and develop education and training systems and work for young people, being based on the achievements of over 25 years of European programs in the fields of education, training and youth, covering a range of intra-European and international cooperation. Erasmus + seeks to support countries's efforts to make effective use of Europe's human and social potential, while asserting the principle of lifelong learning by associating support for formal, non-formal and informal learning in the fields of education, training and youth. Here are the specific objectives pursued by the Erasmus + program: - improve basic skills and abilities, with particular emphasis on their relevance to the labor market and their contribution to the cohesion of society; - Promote quality growth, excellence in innovation and internationalization at educational and training institutions; - to promote the creation and popularization of a European Lifelong Learning system designed to complement national policy reforms and to support the modernization of education and training systems; - strengthen the international dimension of education and training; - improve language teaching and learning and promote the Union's linguistic diversity and awareness of the intercultural dimension[35]. At the same time, Erasmus + has the goal of moving beyond these programs by creating connections across different education, training and youth sectors, promoting new ideas, attracting new actors from the professional world and civil society in order to stimulate new forms of cooperation. In the education sector, these objectives are pursued through a series of key actions: Key action 1 focuses on the mobility of students in higher education and vocational and technical education, key action 2 focuses on partnerships, and key action 3 supports educational policy reform.

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[34] *Idem*.
[35] Regulamentul UE) nr. 1938/2017 al Parlamentului European și al Consiliului din 25 octombrie 2017 de instituire a acțiunii „Erasmus +": Programul Uniunii pentru educație, formare, tineret și sport (http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0050:0073:EN:PDF)

In the context of the implementation of Erasmus+, education, training and youth activities are considered key elements in preventing the political radicalization of young people, including of the young people that were the most affected by the economic crisis and in promoting social inclusion, interculturality and empowerment of the youth[36]. More exactly, the Erasmus + programme is considered an important tool to promote the integration of people from disadvantaged backgrounds as refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities. Another challenge concerns the development of young people's social capital and the capacity to participate actively in society, in line with the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon, to encourage the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. This aspect may also be targeted through formal learning activities aimed at improving the skills and competences of young people, as well as promoting active citizenship. Education and training systems and youth performance policies can help address these challenges by giving citizens the necessary skills in the labor market and in the economy, enabling them to play an active role in the society and to achieve them personally. The Erasmus + program aims to help countries participating in the program to use Europe's talent and capital in a lifelong learning perspective by linking support to formal, non-formal and informal learning in the fields of education, training and youth. Enhanced cooperation produces positive effects, mainly in the development of Europe's human capital potential, contributing to reducing the social and economic costs of social marginalization and non-participation of the young people. According to the Erasmus + guide, the program supports actions, cooperation and instruments that are compatible with the Europe 2020 goals and its flagship initiatives such as Youth on the Move and Agenda for New Skills and Jobs[37]. The program contributes to achieving the objectives of the Strategic Framework for Education and Training and the EU Youth Strategy through open method of coordination.

In Romania, various projects within the Erasmus+ programme had the purpose of strengthening the citizenship competences of the young people and informing them on how democratic institutions function. At the same time, various approved projects targeting the disadvantaged young people in Romania and aiming for the empowerment of subgroups (Roma, immigrants, young people in the rural area, youth with special needs, young people coming from emigrated families) are currently ongoing. We could give the following examples: 2018-2-RO01-KA125-049727, NON FORMAL enlights RURAL,

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[36] *Idem.*
[37] European Commission (2018), Erasmus+ Programme Guide, file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf.

AsociatiaAsociatia "Ajutam, Integram, Dezvoltam si Evoluam, Ramnicu Valcea, 2018-2-RO01-KA105-04991, Empowering Roma Women, Asociatia Allons-Y, Craiova, 2018-2-RO01-KA105-049891, Rural youth with better opportunities, Asociatia Culturala si de Comunitate Dobolii de Sus - Feldoboly Kulturalis es Kozossegi, Dobolii de Sus, 2018-1-RO01-KA101-047426, Strategii de obtinere a performantei cu elevii proveniti din medii dezavantajate, Liceul Teoretic "Al. I. Cuza", Iasi, 2018-1-RO01-KA101-047434, Prevenirea abandonului școlar al copiilor remigraţi, Scoala Gimnaziala Vinatori, 018-1-RO01-KA101-048017, Prevenirea abandonului școlar în context multicultural, Scoala Gimnaziala "Benko Jozsef" Bradut. Non-formal activities were organized or will be organized within these projects. Even if until now no non-formal education curricula was written and none is used in schools, some projects have the creation of new non-formal education curricula among their objectives. Until now, recent studies confirm that the Erasmus projects helped pupils, students and professors to acquire digital, language and intercultural skills[38]. A part of the coordinators of Erasmus+ projects that we interviewed emphasizes that raising awareness in the broader society of the specific needs of the vulnerable population, raising awareness among decision-makers, creating inclusive educational policies and in some cases developing new participatory curricula were the main objectives of the projects that they coordinated in Romania. At the same time, at the level of the beneficiaries, the coordinators stressed that the projects helped the young people at risk of marginalization in accessing a range of tools to facilitate their social inclusion.

In spite of the positive outcomes, the national coordinators of Erasmus+ projects were confronted to a series of difficulties in the process of implementation. First, the project coordinators that we interviewed emphasize that one of the main problems is the lack of interest and motivation for participating in Erasmus + programmes of the vulnerable young people. Our interviews confirm that it is difficult to reach out to young people especially when the target audience is represented by children and young people that are exposed to difficulties like poverty, unemployment, health problems. These targeted youth often had a feeling of shame when taking about their socio-economic and emotional difficulties and refused to give too many details. For instance, in the PSIWELL project aiming at the social

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[38] Stoica L. M (2018), Impactul fondurilor europene asupra resursei umane din învățământul preuniversitar românesc, teză de doctorat susținută la Universitatea Ștefan cel Mare, Suceava, România, iunie 2018.

integration of families with children with special needs[39], it was difficult to involve these disadvantaged subgroups in answering questionnaires investigating the stress in relation to well-being, parent / child interaction, coping strategies used, emotional regulation difficulties. Nevertheless, Erasmus+ coordinators emphasize that the cooperation between universities, institutions specialized in special education, NGOs in the county and neighboring counties and the support of volunteers, special school teachers, social workers from NGOs were helpful in accessing these subgroups and in gaining their confidence. Another particular difficulty was derived from different partners' views on the strategy of implementing of some activities (ie the tools used in research, the involvement in tasks that were not financially supported).

In the case of the Erasmus+ projects implemented in Romanian high schools and that don't target particularly the disadvantaged youth, various difficulties should be taken into account. In many cases, high school students that participate to learning mobilities abroad come from rather wealthy families since the costs might not be completely covered through the projects. Therefore, in many cases, the high school students that apply for learning mobilities offered through the Erasmus+ projects come from rather advantaged backgrounds. In Suceava county, most of the Erasmus+projects are initiated in high schools situated in the central and urban areas that are known for being „elite schols". In this particular situation, the selection of the high school students participating to the Erasmus+ projects should not be exclusively based on the school performances of the students, as is often the case, but the objective should also be to get involved in the Erasmus+ projects of young people coming from different socio-economic backgrounds and of less advantaged subgroups. At the same time, a problem that sometimes appeared is the lack of access to information on the Erasmus+ projects of some subgroups, for instance of high school students that come from disadvantaged backgrounds, that in many cases are forced to work, even if they are officially registered in schools, but don't attend classes.

Youth Guarantee Programme

The Youth Guarantee Programme was established in 2013 as part of the strategy of the EU to improve the situation of youth aged 16-24 that are nor in education nor in employment (NEETs) focusing mainly on vulnerable youth as people with disabilities, Roma etc. The

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[39] Erasmus+/KA2- Building Bridges: Promoting Social Inclusion and Wellbeing for Families of Children with Special Needs, http://www.psiwell.eu/index.php/en/.

programme includes a series of internships, financial incentives, mobility bonuses, professional guidance etc. The national implementation of the Youth Guarantee Programme is regarded as an opportunity to better understand the links between the education and the labour market systems in Europe. Even if the Youth Guarantee Programme's plans rely mostly on traineeships and temporary job supplies, that could be considered a false or a short-term solution, evidence shows that it improved the situation of the NEETs in Europe. More exactly, since 2014, 9 million young people accepted an employment, education or training proposal. In Romania, EU policies stimulated a political concern and public debate about the situation of the NEETs that was largely neglected and understudied. The implementation of the Youth Guarantee Programme was made in two phases: between 2014 and 2015, on the one hand and between 2016 and 2020 on the second hand. The Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly Persons, the National Agency for Employment and, in various occasions, trade unions and NGOs are the main national actors in charge of the implementation of Youth Guarantee Programme in Romania.

In spite of some positive outcomes in terms of youth employment and participation to training and education programs and in terms of decreasing early school leaving rates, some weaknesses and ambiguities should also be taken into account. For instance, reaching the young people that are nor registers at PES (Public Employment Services) and especially of the non-organized young people that live in the rural area or in marginalized communities and are not in contact with any education and labour market institution was one of the main difficulties that appeared in the process of implementation. The fact that the PES is considered to be an access point to YG pose a barrier to the young people coming from marginalized communities that sometimes don't have access or aren't interested in the services provided by PES. Even when vulnerable youth were registered under the YG umbrella, the programme failed to reach large numbers of NEETs in Romania. For instance, YG has reached only 17.1% of NEETs for the years 2014 and 2015, while 65% of the NEETs did not receive any offer within four months after becoming unemployed or leaving education[40]. Even if a strategy for the prevention of early school drop off has been adopted (*Strategia privind reducerea părăsirii timpurii a școlii în România*) based on the Youth Guarantee Programme, its implementation in the Romanian schools remain rather isolated. In most of the schools of Suceava doesn't exist any initiative to address early school leaving and drop off. Second, the

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[40] European Commission (2018), The Youth Guarantee country by country – Romania, file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/YG_country_fiche_RO_updated%202018(1).pdf.

programme failed to offer individualized support and personalized approaches for various disadvantaged subgroups. For instance, the situation and needs of Roma youth in terms of education, training, employment, participation is addressed only in general terms and are mentioned once in the implementation plan without suggesting particular measures to improve the situation of Roma youth. In most of the cases, the authorities involved in the implementation of YG failed to reach and collaborate with the Roma youth, in providing packages of personalized services targeting Roma youth, in monitoring their evolution within YG after the training programme and in establishing follow-up mechanisms[41]. At the same time, in many cases, the training offers are not visible among Roma beneficiaries, many Roma communities don't have access to information concerning the opportunities that are being offered to them. The distrust of Roma youth in training programmes and in their utility is also preventing them to fully take advantage of them.

Third, the YG doesn't take into account the heterogeneity of the NEETs. Therefore, it doesn't' target all the categories of disadvantaged young people, all the subgroups that are at risk of social exclusion. For instance, the young people that are officially registered to schools and that are not really attending school are not eligible to benefit of projects targeting NEETs and funded by European Social Fund and Youth Employment Initiative. Fourth, registration procedures require that the potential beneficiaries have basic IT or literacy skills[42]. This might become an obstacle in the implementation process, since many young people coming from the rural area or from marginalized Roma communities are illiterate. At the same time, there are few projects and funds targeting illiterate young people and the development of literacy skills. Therefore, the illiterate young NEETs could be easily excluded from the projects that could also be addresses to them. One solution to this problem is to simplify the registration process, to make it more accessible to the subgroups that encounter more difficulties.

2. Future development

At the EU level, the concern for youth participation is likely to continue to be an important topic. The Commission is currently working towards the European Education Area

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[41] Meirosu C. (2018), Tackling Roma youth unemployment in Romania: the role of Youth Guarantee Programme, Trans European Policy Studies Associations, TEPSA Briefs.
[42] Youth Guarantee – opportunities for young Roma Findings of a small scale field research in six EU countries, Synthesis note – February 2016, ERGO Network, p. 4.

by 2025 that is including a new Youth Strategy for the period 2019-2027 and further initiatives to stimulate youth participation through developing vocational education, digital skills, inclusive education[43]. In spite of these ambitious future objectives, in the process of building future youth policies it is important to take into account the weaknesses and lessons of previous programmes, as we had summed it up in the previous part of this article since many EU programmes will be continued after the year 2020 (as is the case of Erasmus+ Programme). Therefore, we can't think about the future development of youth policies in Europe without taking into account what has been already done until now.

Reaching out to young people remains the main problem of the implementation of EU programmes and tools at the national level. In order to reduce the so-called participation gap, the European Union and the national governments need to use new tools that could (re)create the connection between the European institutions and the European youth. The use of alternative channels and particularly of online tools like social media is a more efficient way to reach to theis youth because the ICT play an increasingly role in the young people's lives. At the same time, the use of online tools is affecting the learning processes of young people. Therefore, digital platforms should be used more in the learning process. The online communication tools (mostly the low cost tools) could be used to create new instruments for social inclusion, participation and access to resources. The e-participation is a way of promoting the involvement of youth in politics and society, in helping them have access to information, get engaged, express themselves and share ideas. Some studies were already conducted on the challenges of e-participation tools at the EU level and on the involvement of young people in policy making through technology[44]. Nevertheless, even if the use of online mechanisms in the citizenship education and as a means for reaching to the non-organized youth appear as innovative solutions of addressing the problem of youth participation, there are few EU initatives to integrate new technologies into youth policies.

In spite of this opening created by new technologies for youth policies, the researchers have recently noticed that the access to online tools among young people in Europe is still

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[43] European Commission - Press release (May 2018), Building a stronger Europe: new initiatives to further boost role of youth, education and culture policies, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-3704_en.htm.

[44] European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs (2016), Potential and Challenges of E-Participation in the European Union, file:///C:/Users/admin/Downloads/IPOL_STU(2016)556949_EN.pdf.

unequal and depend on socio-economic opportunities[45]. The processes of marginalization, discrimination and even segregation still influence the situation of young people in Romania and prevent their online and offline participation. At the same time, the online space is also opening new challenges to youth participation, sometimes exposing young people to discrimination and hate speech. In this context, non-formal activities, citizenship education and initiatives against hate and far right should be organized in the marginalized communities of Romania since the experienced social exclusion of youth might fuel discriminatory and anti-migrants attitudes. Young people from the rural area should be informed by their teachers, counselors and volunteers of the No Hate Speech Campaing[46] that is currently organized in the online sphere and on other similar initiatives. The organization of more non-formal activities targeting the young people from the rural area or from isolated communities like the organization of workshops on human rights (children rights, women rights, health and reproductive health, LGBT rights) could be a manner to prevent far right radicalization and discriminatory attitudes. If in Belgium citizenship education is introduced since primary school, Romanian children that come from poor regions and families are largely non informed on their rights as citizens. The fact that citizenship education is not provided in vocational education of Romania hinders some subgroups to acquire basic citizenship skills. Therefore, a better harmonization between formal and non-formal education could contribute in stimulating the participation of youth coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially of the non-organized youth.

Various initiatives that promote youth participation will soon be adopted in Romania. Currently, Romania is preparing a strategy to better guide EU funds and address unequal spending in education, an early warning mechanism to identify the young people that are at risk of dropping off school, ESF- projects for disadvantaged schools[47]. At the same time, the current adoption of the National Strategy for Parental Education that should be implemented between 2018 and 2025 triggered many political debates and society's negative responses. Starting from the idea that the educational systems in Europe should be better harmonized, the Strategy relies on examples of parental education in various countries of Western Europe. It aims at answering to the challenges that are changing the educational needs of families in the

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[45] Wyn, J., Cuervo, H., Woodman, D., Stokes, H. (2005) Young people, wellbeing and communication technologies, Mental Health and Wellbeing Unit Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, available at: http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/young_people_and_technology_report_2.pdf.
[46] https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign.
[47] European Commission (2018), Education and Training MONITOR Country Repport, second volume, p. 243.

contemporary world, provides services and non-formal activities to the concerned parents with the objective to develop parental skills, to strengthen the participation of children and young people to the decisions that concern them and to promote tolerance and a redefinition of the familiy[48]. For the parents with lower levels of education and facing social and economic problems, the use of an interactive approach in parental education programs has been shown to have beneficial effects on strengthening new parenting practices[49]. This parental strategy triggered negative reactions from trade unions and (religious) NGOs that criticized the top-down vision of the strategy, the imposition of a redefinition of the concept of family and the contradiction between the "gender and LGBT ideology promoted in the Strategy", one the one hand and orthodoxy, on the second hand[50].

The case of the National Strategy for Parental Education in Romania proves that without non-formal activities and community organizing, the policy initiatives that promote further youth participation could easily trigger negative responses. In this context, further clarification is needed on the relation between youth workers and national agencies. Youth organizations and youth workers are considered to play an important role in the citizenship education and in reaching hard to reach young people like youth from isolated communities. A cleared coordination between all the actors that can outreach the targeted disadvantaged subgroups and disseminate the information is needed because it is important that the targeted young people wouldn't perceive the activities as a top-down intrusion. The distrust of the vulnerable categories towards the EU programmes should strengthen the importance of the work done by the NGOs and the cooperation between NGOs, policy-makers, schools and universities. Youth work and a stronger coordination between NGOs and public schools are needed in order to bring the vulnerable young people back to school, to activate them or to register them to training programmes. Nevertheless, on the one hand, the lack of financial stability, public support and public investment, experienced staff hinder the process of reaching out the disadvantaged young people. Second, in Romania, all the policy initiatives

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[48] Strategia națională de educație parentală 2018-2025, (2018), http://www.educatieparentala.ro/fr/noutati/1-ultimele-stiri/915-proiect-strategia-naional-de-educaie-parental-2018-2025.html.
[49] Cotter, K.L., Bacallao, M., Smokowski, P.R., Robertson, C.I.B., (2013), Parenting Interventions Implementation Science: How Delivery format Impacts the Parenting Wisely Program, Research on Social Work Practice, 23(6), 639-650.
[50] HotNews (2018), Strategia de educație parentală, în centrul unui scandal. Părinții și sindicatele cer Ministerului Educației să o anuleze: Pentru noi, conceptul de familie este definit în Constituția României, nimic mai mult, https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-educatie-22550399-strategia-educa-parental-centrul-unui-scandal-rin-sindicatele-cer-ministerului-educa-iei-anuleze.htm#self.

concerning youth participation are affected by broader phenomena like the low spending in education, the rural-urban gap, Roma inclusion that influence early schools leaving. Particularly problematic is the low spending in primary education compared to the EU rates (0.7 % vs 1.5 % of GDP in the EU-28) that explains the unequal start of the children at an age when socio-cognitive competences are formed, the reproduction of these inequalities during the life course[51] and the appeal of young people to emigrate in countries that spend more on their education system. Third, national policy initiatives concerning the participation of vulnerable youth should start from the main priorities that exist in a particular country. Romanian young people are facing a restructuring of their families and life course due to migration. Policy initiatives offering counseling and monitoring services to the young people that come from emigrated families and a change of the curricula in order to include democratic and participatory pedagogies, would help in facilitating the participation of young people in Romania.

Brief conclusions

The European institutions and the Council of Europe progressively integrated the concern for youth participation among the EU political priorities. In spite of the attempts of the EU and of the Council of Europe to promote youth participation, a gap remains between the EU and its citizens. This gap is more pregnant in the case in which young people come from vulnerable or disadvantaged backgrounds because these categories tend to distrust institutional actors and the political field. Roma youth, youth living in the rural area, immigrant youth, young people with special needs, young people coming from emigrated families are disadvantaged in terms of participation, employment, education, training, social integration, self-esteem. Therefore, defining the future trajectories of youth policies depends on the identification of the problems that are facing the different subgroups that constitute de broader concept of NEETs or of „disadvantaged youth". The fact of taking into account that

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[51] WB (2018), World Bank, From Uneven Growth to Inclusive Development Romania's Path to Shared Prosperity, Romania Systematic Country Diagnostic, Systematic Country Diagnostic, Washington.
https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29864/9781464813177.pdf?sequence=2&isAllo wed=y 10.

young people with fewer opportunities are not an homogenous group and non-formal education activities would facilitate the interaction with this youth.

Even if, in most of the cases, the EU policied relied on the experiences and problems rooted at the local and national level and then adapted for the European application, various problems continue to exist in the process of implementation of EU programmes. For instance, we could highlight a certain inadvertence between EU policies and programmes targeting the young people and the difficulties of applying all those to the local and national context where the situation is more complex, as we have shown in the case of Erasmus+ and of Youth Guarantee. The implementation of any programme concerning the vulnerable young people should be followed by targeted and personalized interventions addressed to the various subgroups and adapted to their particular situations and problems. At the same time, the sharp disparities that continue to exist between the young people in Europe should be addressed to a higher extent at the EU level.

In building new youth policies, we need to take into account the ways in which young people in Europe think, participate, their lifestyles, the informal networks in which they engage and we need to start from the evidence that youth participation is not reduced to voting and to the membership in formal organizations. The use of new technologies in creating competences for participation and the articulation between (academic) research conducted on new forms of participation in Europe, youth work and policy-making could facilitate the creation of youth policies at the European and national levels that correspond to the needs of the most vulnerable young people.