



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Educated Romania

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Romania

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Presidential Administration of Romania

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Through broad public consultation, the 'Educated Romania' project created a stable and coherent framework for public policy development, involving teachers along the way.

6. What makes it a best practice? *

The novel, participatory approach to policy reform brings stakeholders such as teachers to the very centre of the decision-making processes affecting the structure and nature of the education system.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

The “Educated Romania” project commenced in 2016, and was aimed at developing a vision and strategy for Romanian education. The core idea behind the project was introducing a new model of participative policy development, in order to ensure that any reforms end up having both political and grassroots support.

While the project targeted developments in the entire education system, the consultees included teachers, students, policy makers, parents, the business community and others.

The initial approach consisted of an online survey, eight major regional conferences and third-party reporting events organized by NGOs, trade unions, etc. The hundreds of participants had a chance to debate a wide range of topics. The teaching career featured prominently among these, with covered topics ranging from initial training to continuous professional development, career progression and sectorial issues – particularly for VET and early childhood education. Individual teachers were eligible to participate in both the regional conferences and in the online survey, as well as in third party events, which had to be open and non-discriminatory in order to be eligible for the “Educated Romania” label.

For further aggregative work, teachers unions were present in the working groups that developed the provisional project report, containing a vision on the future of education as well as a strategy and numerous recommendations. The report, issued in December 2018, was launched in a public consultation before a final draft was out in 2021.

The sections detailing the teaching career addressed numerous extant problems, including inadequate initial teacher training, outdated appraisal and career advancement practices, the lack of a strategic approach to continuous professional development as well as limited specific support to teachers from disadvantaged regions, the VET sector or early childhood education. The inclusive approach meant that, while some of the problems associated with the teaching career were well known, teachers themselves had an active voice in addressing said issues. The use of regional events meant to ensure adequate regional and social representation. Lastly, NGOs dealing with specific grassroots problems (such as early school leaving, inequality, etc.) were invited to be part of the process, mainstreaming the social dimension of teaching and the teaching career in discussions.

With the aid of this approach, a comprehensive document was produced by mid-2021, and has since become central to education reform in Romania. The project itself has helped galvanize the public space in tackling or at least discussing important issues facing the education system as a whole, and teaching in particular.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

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The project was organized in multiple stages, in order to meet several goals. The first was ensuring the representation of a wide array of stakeholders, while further project stages were centred on transposing early input into a proposal for a comprehensive policy overhaul. Minimal resources were involved, with several pro bono partnerships from educational institutions helping in meeting organization.

Phase 1 of the project (2016 – 2017) involved drawing up and distributing an online questionnaire, eight regional thematic consultations on the country's vision and objectives in the field of education (regional debates), a series of events planned by third parties, etc.

Phase 2 (2017 – 2018) started from the vision elements identified in the previous phase. Hence, the Presidential Administration set up seven working groups to incorporate the conclusions of the first phase into a set of detailed reports on priority themes: teaching career; equity in education; professionalisation of educational management; quality technical and vocational education; autonomy, quality and internationalisation of higher education; early childhood education accessible to all; pupil and student assessment.

In Phase 3 (2018 – 2020), we launched a public debate on preliminary results. At the same time, the Presidential Administration coordinated a project financed under the European Union's Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP), in which four policy briefs were developed, in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), on the following topics: (1) teaching career; (2) educational management; (3) equity; (4) early childhood education. In the same phase, a commitment was made to operationalise the project under the National Defence Strategy 2020-2024.

Project completion (2021) implied integrating the feedback received and updating the report with the recent developments, current data, OECD recommendations and lessons learned in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, some project measures were incorporated into the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP).

Currently, the project has started producing effects. Some of its provisions have already been transposed in secondary legislation associated with NRRP implementation, while policy directions in education have started following some of the project's provisions.

The deadline for full implementation is, de facto, Q3 2023, when a new law is slated to be implemented. Nevertheless, many provisions imply long-term work and are likely to be fully rolled out at a later date.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The “Educated Romania” project has a broad series of outcomes across multiple education policy areas. When it comes to teachers, teaching and the teaching career, some key proposals include:

- The development of a teacher competency profile, with an instrumental value, to be used for initial education, continuing training and educational management purposes
- The transformation of the initial teacher education system, with a focus on practical training, flexibility and early career support
- Improvement of the the quality of and access to continuing teacher training, with a focus on practical applicability and assessment of training impact
- The development of a flexible career management system, with differentiated paths, in order to attract and retain well-performing teachers that ensure effective learning

Some of these proposals included more explicit action lines. Among them:

- Better coordination between initial and continuous training, with the aid of the competency profiles
- Developing a set of initial education standards for teachers – including for educators and teachers from the early childhood education sector – based on the new competency profile.
- Developing solid partnerships between educational establishments and universities, partially for the practical component of teacher training.
- Fiscal incentives for teachers opting to work in schools with a large proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Changes in appraisal criteria aimed at better rewarding teachers who generate added value among students.

When it comes to overall structure and approach, the main difference between “Educated Romania” and other policy reform initiatives has been its inclusive nature. Romania has had several prior attempts at reforming its education system, with a considerable overhaul in the 1990s and an innovative education law in 2011. The latter was developed by a group of experts, but reactions from the educational and political systems saw the legal framework rolled back or modified to better suit the pre-2011 situation.

By having a “big tent” approach and by including teachers as well as other education system stakeholders, the “Educated Romania” project aimed to ensure that changes happen at a grassroots level as well, rather than strictly via a normative approach centered on the education system.

This two-pronged approach was exemplified in that “Educated Romania” has started generating effects even before a centerpiece legislative package could be adopted. For example, the inclusion of key directions in the NRRP has ensured that funding is directed towards meeting key project goals.

As the “Educated Romania” project is a long-term endeavor, a full analysis of implementation will only be undertaken after its key proposals have made their way into education system practice.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

The key trigger for the project rested in the accumulation of multiple overlapping crises in the education system. The issue of functional illiteracy, high rates of early school leaving, poor performance in PISA tests had accumulated. At the same time, there was mounting evidence of deep-seated dissatisfaction when it comes to working conditions for many school staff, especially teachers. The fact that prior reform attempts had ended up heavily modified as part of the legislative process indicated that there was a need for a more grass-roots approach. This outlook was further supported by the emergence of numerous cases of good practices involving both teachers and outreach work by sector-specific NGOs. As such, and given the poor experience with top-bottom policymaking, there was a strong incentive to approach policy reform as an inclusive process, in constant and constructive communication with key stakeholders such as teachers, students, NGOs but also public administration experts. The "Educated Romania" project has not been fully implemented at this time, but has already succeeded on several fronts. On the one hand, it has managed to put focus on several issues linked to teaching and the teaching career. For example, the plight of teachers working in disadvantaged communities, teaching staff with problematic commutes or the issue of insufficient support offered by continuous training programs. On the other hand, it has already delivered on a series of core promises, has managed to secure an uptick in key investments and has helped foster a culture of participation in education reform among stakeholders. There is renewed interest in education as a topic from even the business environment, which has decided to engage with core "Educated Romania" proposals.

There are issues with project outcomes and further implementation. The wish to be inclusive and accommodating of as many stakeholder interests as possible – itself rooted in the desire to ensure long-term support for implementation – has meant that some of the more radical proposals have had to be compromised on. The need for consensus, aimed at ensuring lasting reform, was deemed more important in several policy areas. While the move away from more radical approaches is likely to lead to less contestation within public administration or schools themselves, an open question remains on whether the former had a higher chance of delivering faster results. Another issue, within the process, was that of dissemination of information on project development. While stakeholders were represented at all stages, internal communication within stakeholder representation structures and the limits existing to media exposure might have meant that some persons did not have the chance to offer their input due to unfamiliarity.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

In conclusion, we believe that the “Educated Romania” project can be considered a source of good practice due to its inclusive nature, its multi-pronged approach and especially due to the desire of not limiting reform to the legislative agenda. By combining stakeholder mobilization, cross-sectorial support for investments and a formal legislative reform agenda, the project aims to tackle some of the problems of the Romanian education system from multiple approaches. The inclusion of stakeholders in all stages of the project denotes democratic maturity and should be a gold standard when engaging in reform proposals. We strongly believe that grassroots support by teachers is a sine qua non condition for policy reform, as communities of practice have the power to either ensure the spread of novel ideas or to generate resistance and facilitate mal-implementation. Governments need teachers as allies in any reform attempt, and the best way to cement such an alliance is to have a loyal, permanent and open dialogue. We strongly believe that other countries trying to launch a comprehensive reform of their education system should adopt a participatory approach and should include stakeholders. Other than offering an undistorted grassroots perspective, this increases the chances that policy proposals are adopted in-depth and in the long term. Should a culture of participation by stakeholders not exist, an added benefit of such an approach is giving it an impetus, with potential benefits in other policy fields.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

The website is available at <http://www.romaniaeducata.eu/>

The language is Romanian, but machine learning can be used for further translation.