CZU: 37.091.52 **https://doi.org/10.59295/sum5(175)2024_15**

THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT FELT OVER TIME

Liudmila CUROŞ,
Moldova State University

The article involves an analytical approach to the specifics of school dropout, the causes and effects produced, as well as possible suggestions for managing the large-scale phenomenon. The research methodology consisted in the study of specialized literature and the reflexive analysis of bibliographic sources, various statistical data, which allowed us to issue relevant conclusions and recommendations for its prevention and reduction at a systemic level. Being a complex phenomenon, school dropout manifests itself for various reasons, starting with personal or family problems, a difficult socioeconomic situation and continuing with important factors regarding the way the education system works. Depending on the determining factors, but also the extent of the manifestation, a series of undesirable effects are generated, with a weight on socio-professional integration difficulties. Thus, statistical data are reflected that confirm the acute need for systemic intervention on the treatment of the phenomenon in question, based on the educational actors and social institutions that have contact with the mentioned causes and effects. Systematic and orderly intervention refers in particular to the prevention of school dropout by motivating students, career guidance, carrying out attractive educational activities, involving digital technologies, but also reducing it, by establishing internal and external partnerships, analyzing the main causes, and determining the ways of reintegration into the educational process of young people who temporarily/completely left the educational institution.

Keywords: *school dropout, effects, young people, education, integration.*

CAUZELE SI EFECTELE ABANDONULUI SCOLAR S-AU REIMSIT DE-A LUNGUL TIMPULUI

Articolul presupune o abordare analitică a specificului abandonului școlar, a cauzelor și efectelor produse, precum și a posibilelor sugestii pentru gestionarea fenomenului la scară largă. Metodologia cercetării a constat în studiul literaturii de specialitate și analiza reflexivă a surselor bibliografice, diverse date statistice, care ne-au permis să emitem concluzii și recomandări relevante pentru prevenirea și reducerea acesteia la nivel sistemic. Fiind un fenomen complex, abandonul școlar se manifestă din diverse motive, începând cu probleme personale sau familiale, o situație socioeconomică dificilă și continuând cu factori importanți privind modul de funcționare a sistemului de învățământ. În funcție de factorii determinanți, dar și de amploarea manifestării, se generează o serie de efecte nedorite, cu pondere asupra dificultăților de integrare socio-profesională. Astfel, se reflectă date statistice care confirmă nevoia acută de intervenție sistemică în tratarea fenomenului în cauză, pe baza actorilor educaționali și instituțiilor sociale care au contact cu cauzele și efectele menționate. Intervenția sistematică și ordonată se referă în special la prevenirea abandonului școlar prin motivarea elevilor, orientarea în carieră, desfășurarea de activități educaționale atractive, implicând tehnologii digitale, dar și reducerea acestuia, prin stabilirea de parteneriate interne și externe, analizarea principalelor cauze și determinarea modalități de reintegrare în procesul educaţional a tinerilor care au părăsit temporar/complet instituția de învățământ.

Cuvinte-cheie: *abandon* școlar*, efecte, tineri, educație, integrare.*

Introduction

A significant issue which contemporary society is facing in the field of education is *school dropout*. Educational institutions of various levels are often neglected, due to the fact that school for many people is no longer regarded as a priority in the hierarchy of contemporary values. At the same time, a series of short-term courses (online or offline format) are launched, which sometimes gave young people faster financial remuneration than the long-term process of investing in their own development or obtaining professional skills. Although many young people manage to successfully go through the stages of the education system and continue their studies or work in specific fields, one of seven young Europeans leave education without acquiring the necessary skills or qualifications for an effective transition to the labour market and to be active in today’s knowledge-based economy [8].

Today, both direct beneficiaries (children, pupils, students) and indirect beneficiaries (parents and society) no longer perceive education as a value in itself, and training is no longer considered essential for a prosperous future and for personality development.

Research methodology consisted in the study of specialized literature and statistical data on school dropout, but also in the analysis of specific contexts in the Republic of Moldova. Bibliographic sources and statistical data collected at national and international level, accompanied by contextual observations from our country, reflexively analyzed, allowed us to determine the causes and effects of this phenomenon, to issue relevant conclusions and recommendations for its avoidance and cutting at a systemic level.

Conceptual clarifications

The notion of *school dropout*, also commonly called leaving school education, was introduced by the European Union to denote a long-term process of school disengagement, involving young people aged 14-24 who leave any type of education and vocational training without reaching a qualification (according to the ISCED scale). Unlike the dilemma of temporary dropout, which specifically involves a temporary interruption of studies, the phenomenon of school dropout matches with the final result of the young person's withdrawal from education [5].

At the same time, in other sources, a dissimilarity is made between the terms „*early school leaving*" and „*school dropout*". The term „early school leaving" includes giving up all forms of education and professional training before completing upper secondary education or the equivalent in education and professional training (upper cycle of high school, grades XI - XII/XIII, preceded, as the case may be, by the year of completion) until „school dropout" is used with a narrower meaning: it refers to the interruption of a course in progress of general studies or vocational education and training [4].

According to the definition used in the EU, early school leaving can take many forms. It includes young people who left school before the end of compulsory education, those who completed mandatory education but did not obtain a qualification in upper secondary education, and those who followed pre- vocational or vocational training courses, which did not led to a qualification equivalent at upper secondary level [ibidem].

The roots of school dropout

Young school leavers come from diverse backgrounds. Early school leaving is usually caused by a cumulative process of disengagement based on personal, social, economic, geographical, educational or family reasons. These reasons can be external or internal related to school processes and experiences, and are usually very specific to the individual. For many, dissatisfaction stems from a variety of reasons, such as: bullying, poor academic performance, unsatisfactory relationships with teachers, lack of motivation or belonging to so called 'wrong groups', and in other cases young people drop out of school because experiencing personal or family problems such as: use of illegal substances or homelessness. However, a significant part of the problem can be assigned to a lack of support and counselling, disinterest in education and post-secondary school programs, which often do not offer enough varied course options, alternative pedagogies, experiential learning opportunities or empirical or sufficient flexibility [8, p. 7].

In this context**, the causes of school dropout** can be evaluated from three perspectives [1]:

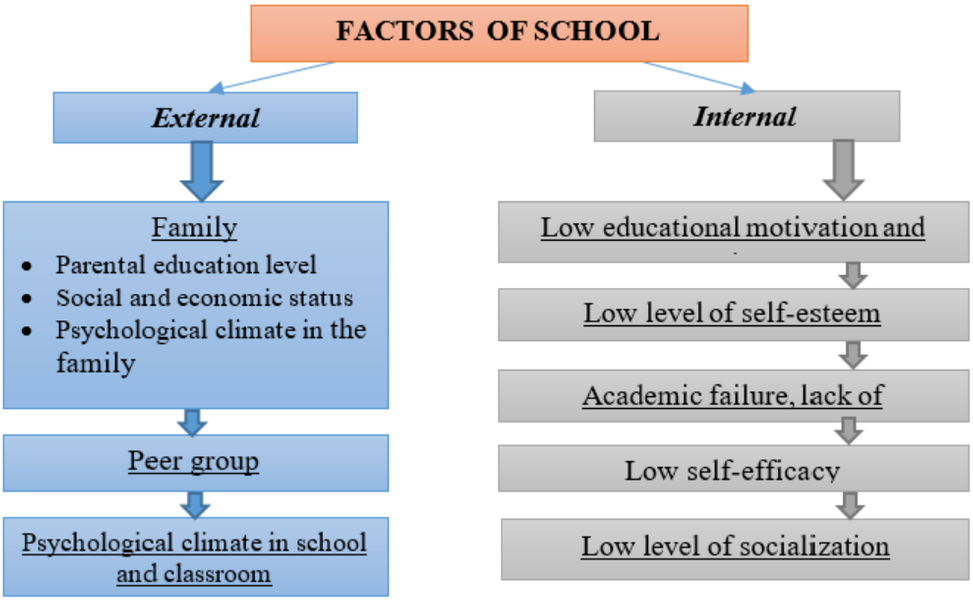
1. Psychological causes – related to the student's personality and state of health: low school motivation, lack of interest, stubby confidence in school education, fatigue, anxiety, small self-efficacy, damaged self-image, feelings of inferiority, reduced social skills, passivity; refusal to adhere to a choice made by others (reaction to the pressure exerted by the wishes of adults);

2. Social causes related to the family, the socioeconomic conditions of the family: poverty, indifferent or/oud careless parenting style, family disharmony, parents very busy or gone abroad;

3. Psycho-pedagogical causes related to the specific school context (including the teacher-student relationship): group pressure, school overload, faulty student-teacher communication (irony, humiliation of the student), subjective evaluation, fear of evaluation, conflict with colleagues, educational practices perceived by students as unfair, frustrating, incompatibility between aspirations, learning needs and the edu-

cational offer of the school; form of defense – against excessively rigid and severe discipline, pro-dropout policies of the school for students in the final grades (in „elite” schools).

Fig. 1. Taxonomy of school dropout factors.



Another approach that explains the factors that cause school dropout, focuses on a system of core factors in interconnection and intercorrelation, which have a variable character, whose influence on the cause of school dropout is determined by the real contexts, but also by the individual particularities of dropout students. Below we present the taxonomy that classifies the respective factors [2, p. 56].

Dropout rates have grown during and after the pandemic, being recognized as the most relevant aspects of education due to their long-term effects on societal development and economic growth. Dropping out of school is a complex problem and cannot be solved by education policies only, although this is where they can be most influential. Effective strategies to reduce early school leaving must target education, youth and social policies adapted to local, regional and national conditions.

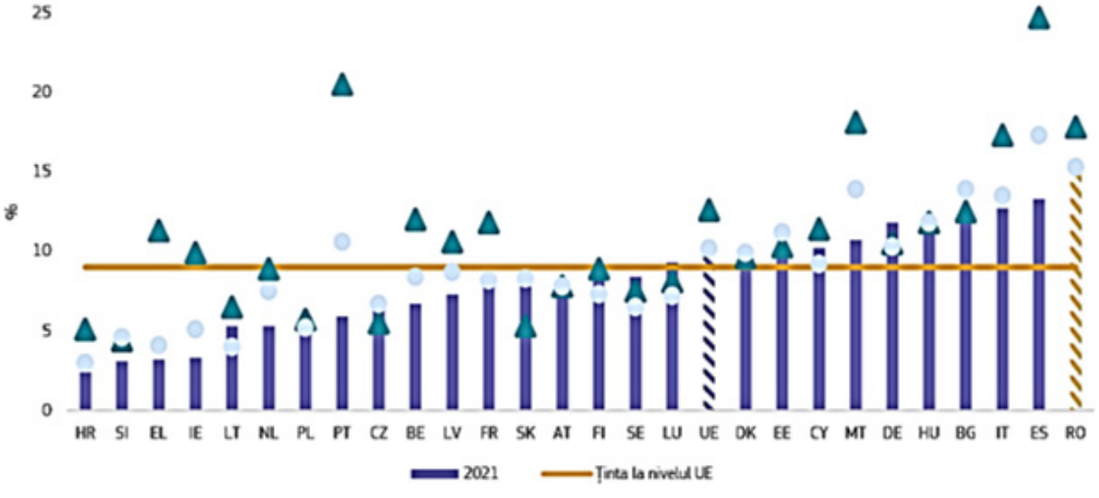
The comparative analysis of indicators on school leaving in European Union (EU) countries was carried out based on data from the Education and Training Monitor, the European Commission’s annual analysis of how education and training systems are evolving across the EU. The reports bring together the latest available data and other information, alongside updates on national policy measures. In general, for all EU countries, the target of the indicator of early leaving educational institutions (age 18-24 years) has been set to be <9% by 2030. Eurostat results for the year 2011, 2021 for the analyses countries compared to the EU average for these years, table 1.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of SA in some EU countries and the Republic of Moldova for the years 2011, 2021.

Country	Year 2011		Year 2021	
	% country	% EU	% country	% EU
Finland	9,8	13,2	8,2	9,7
Denmark	10,3	13,2	9,8	9,7
France	12,3	13,2	7,8	9,7
Austria	8,5	13,2	8,0	9,7
Romania	18,1	13,2	15,3	9,7
Moldova	20	13,2	19,0	9,7

According to Eurostat data, early school leaving continues to be a problem in Romania. According to the table below, in 2021, the rate of people aged between 18 and 24 who had not completed upper secondary education and were not following any education or training program (ELET – early exit from education and vocational training systems) improved slightly, reaching again the 2019 level of 15.3%. However, it remains significantly higher than the EU average of 9.7% [75, 112]. In order to look for solutions to reduce SA, it is necessary to analyse the reason for abandonment in Romania as follows: Students exposed at risk of dropping out tend to be more from disadvantaged schools in rural areas, which lack resources and experienced teachers (OECD, 2022). Many young Romanians leave the school system without acquiring the necessary skills to enter the labour market, with its needs rapidly changing. This makes it much harder for them to transition from school to paid employment (OECD, 2022).

Fig. 2. The share of individuals who left school early in the years 2012, 2019, 2021 [6, p.5].



In figure 2, we observe the dropout indicators for different countries, in relation to the European Union target (around 10%). For example, Romania exceeds this target by around 6%, while Finland, France, Denmark, Austria have an early school leaving rate of up to 10%. The statistical data attest to the need to involve the institutions of the Romanian state using a variety of mechanisms that would help in decreasing this rate.

Based on the secondary analysis of the data of the report of the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, regarding the transition from school to work from 2014-2015, it is shown that in the last decades among young people aged 18-24 the proportion of those who left early education system constitutes about 21-22%, holding a low level of education (at most secondary school) and not following any form of training (formal or non-formal) in the last four weeks preceding the interview. Near 20% of young people who left school early did so for economic reasons (including the inability to afford some school-related expenses or the need to earn money to support their family, etc.); about 15% stated the dropout of interest in school and 10.7% – the desire to start work, and every tenth because of learning difficulties [5].

Management of school dropouts

Each country has its own policy on how to respond regarding the approach to the phenomenon – school dropout. The reactions are based on values and perspective analysis, being influenced by the history and traditions of the respective countries. Furthermore, each early school leaver has a unique story and is within a specific context or 'ecosystem'. Therefore, approachment to school dropout must be adjusted and tailored to each individual group or individual. Based on these causes, there could not be a right and unique protocol for reducing school dropout.

EU member states have had to develop prevention and control policies to reach the target of an average school dropout rate of less than 10%. It was desired to banish the favourable factors that determine early school leaving. In this regard, there were three main lines of action as follows:

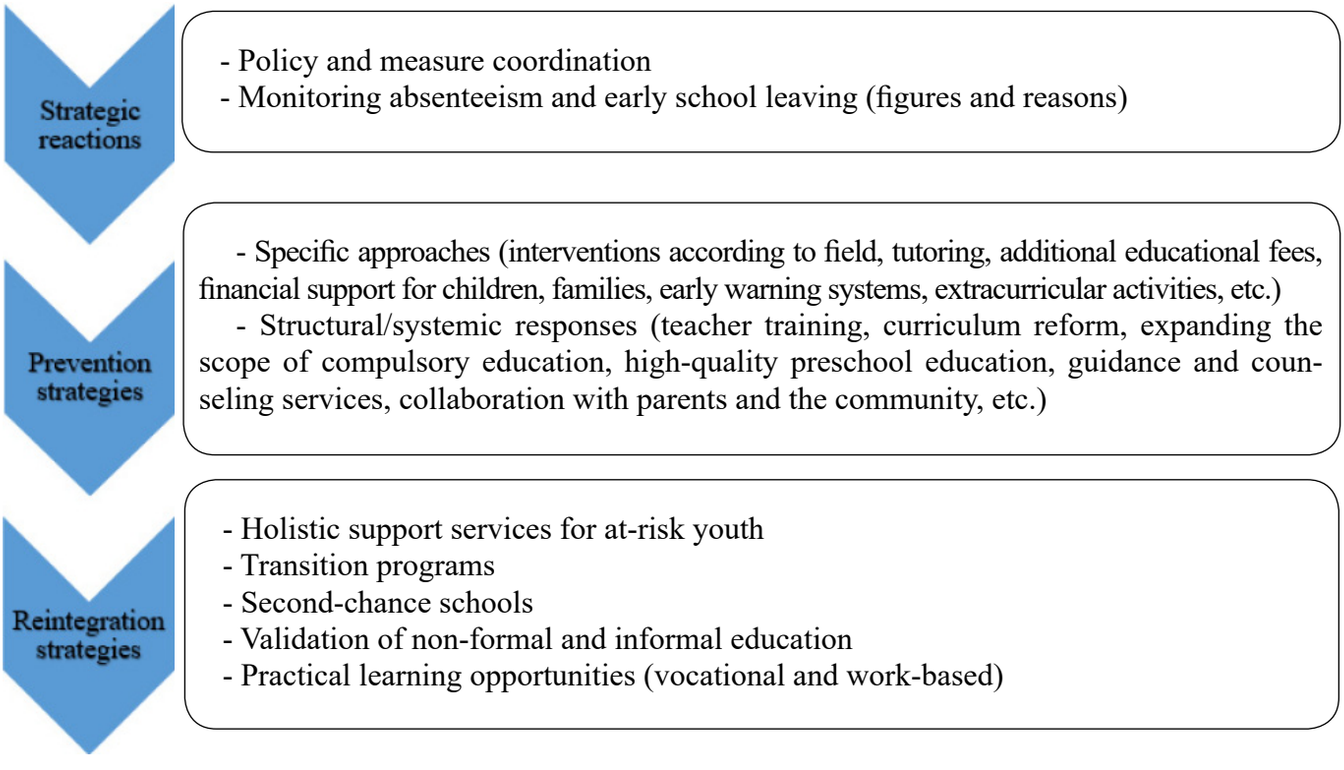
1) prevention, which consists of a set of actions aimed at improving both access and equal participation in education for all children, regardless of context or financial situation; more specific programs to identify and support students at risk of dropping out must be implemented;

2) combating, by streamlining the school network for the reintegration into education of those who have already left school;

3) developing the educational system, the appropriate endowment of schools, complying with hygiene norms, ensuring the quality standards of educational services [9].

Thus, we present a kaleidoscope of policies, programs, projects and approaches of the EU countries, which can be divided into three broad categories: strategic reactions; prevention strategies; reintegration strategies, which are represented in figure 3.

Fig. 3. Typology of the EU Member States' Approaches to AST.



Thus, the involvement of the state in educational policies, through the creation of data collection and analysis tools, can contribute to the identification of pupils/students who accumulate absences and to understand the trends of absence, their motives. Addressing unexcused absences and avoiding subsequent negative consequences, such as: school dropout, requires the identification of students exhibiting absent behavior, which requires comprehensive and integrated development in educational data systems. Such systems must not only collect relevant data (for example, when students are absent, for what period, level and the characteristics of these young people), but also present the data in an accessible way, for example through an analytical dashboard that can highlight populations at risk to provide useful information that would justify policy interventions in a reasonable time. This would be a way to quickly identify which pupil/student type are more likely to be at risk of dropping out. These tools can help educational institution administrators instantly see which pupils/students are absent and how recent dropout data compares to previous weeks and months. The development of warning systems and targeted programs to address dropout with accurate and comprehensive information management systems, allow the analysis of the data to apply appropriate measures, addressing dropout and to help prevent more negative consequences such as school dropout. A common approach is to develop early warning systems based on administrative data that can alert school staff and parents that students are exhibiting behaviours that could lead to increased absenteeism and dropout [7].

Broadly speaking, ***dropping out of school leads to short- and long-term consequences*** such as unem-

ployment, social exclusion, poverty and health problems. The long-term effects of school dropout reflect, as we said earlier, on social development and economic growth. Dropping out of school represents a failure of the individual's social integration, and with the increase in the person's qualification level, the probability of being without a job decreases. Thus, an alarming increase in the number of unskilled workers causes great pressure on the social protection system that supports the unintegrated/out-of-school people, the increase in the delinquency rate, the exploitation of minors, and implicitly moonlighting.

One of the first effects of dropping out of school is the impact on the individual's personal life. Dropping out of education could lead to a drop in self-esteem and confidence in one's ability to succeed in life. Young people who leave school early can sometimes feel that they have missed important opportunities and that they no longer have a clear path for the future.

In addition, dropping out of school can influence an individual's subsequent career decisions and professional success. Without a proper education, access to well-paying and rewarding job opportunities can be limited, leading to long-term frustration and disappointment.

Dropping out of school makes it difficult for young people and adults to get a long-term job. As a consequence the state of poverty in their own families and the model of parents without education and without perspective are spreaded further. Outcomes of dropping out of school are felt at the economic level, affecting both individuals and society as a whole. Young people who leave school early are often less likely to get well-paid jobs and contribute to economic growth. This situation can lead to an increase in unemployment and dependency on social assistance, having a negative impact on the public budget and on other resources available for development and investment.

In the same vein, the lack of adequate education can affect competitiveness and innovation within an economy, as skilled human resources are an essential element in the process of development and progress. Dropping out of school can contribute to increasing social disparities and amplifying problems of exclusion and marginalization. Young people who are excluded from the education system may be less likely to integrate into the community and build healthy social and professional relationships.

This phenomenon can have a negative impact on social cohesion and solidarity within society. Lack of access to education for all citizens can create tensions and inequities in society, affecting interpersonal relationships and community cohesion.

Respectively, the increased prevalence, negative developmental consequences, and maladaptive social and behavioral risks associated with absenteeism are issues that the educational system cannot overlook. The etiquette of refusing school can affect a significant percentage of the number of students and can accompany difficulties in the short and long term: family conflicts, delinquency or occupational problems. At the same time, the high number of absences correlates negatively with school performance, which, over time, can have negative effects on integration into society [2, p. 13].

Conclusion

To cut a long story short, we can mention that the phenomenon of school dropout is complex and affects multiple aspects of individual and collective life. There are multiple reasons that can explain the decision of some young people to give up education prematurely: personal or family problems, difficulties in the learning process or a difficult socioeconomic situation. Also important factors include the way the education system works, the atmosphere in the schools and the relationships between teachers and students. The effects of dropping out are felt over time and demonstrate that this type of behavior has serious consequences for both the individual and the community. First of all, those who leave educational institutions have neither the professional qualification indispensable for socio- economic integration, nor the moral and civic engagement necessary to fulfil the role of parent and citizen.

Secondly, not having a qualification, those who drop out of educational institutions become the future unemployed and represent, in the medium and long term, a source of difficulties for social development and economic growth, which exceed the investment required for initial training. Not the least to say that, innovation and economic growth are mostly based on the work done by competent employees. It is essential to adopt effective measures and policies to prevent and combat this phenomenon and to ensure access to

quality education for all members of society.

Recommendation

For a better intervention, the planning and rigorous implementation of a complex institutional program is proposed, which involves a set of actions deriving from the educational policy documents at the national level and adjusted at the institutional level, with the aim of identifying the factors that favour the emergence of such risk situations at the school level, the prevention and, ultimately, solving of crisis situations with the effect of school dropout.

In the same context, we propose the following suggestions for different educational actors (teachers, managers, psychology, parents, etc.), acting individually or in teams, on which the prevention or reduction of the targeted phenomenon depends, such as:

- Modernization of school equipment. Equipping all classes with modern equipment contributes to the efficiency of the educational process. Students will be more engaged in lessons if they have access to up-to-date technology and resources.
- Employment of qualified teachers. Promoting the employment of teachers with high professional training is essential. These teachers can provide a quality education and inspire students to be present and engaged.
- Absenteeism monitoring. It is important to monitor students who are frequently absent from class. Identifying the causes of absences can help prompt interventions.
- To motivate students. The involvement of students in various socio-educational actions can motivate them not to be absent from classes. Extracurricular activities and interesting projects can make school more attractive.
- Collaboration with family. Contacting the family or guardian of the frequently absent child can help clarify the situation. Effective communication with parents is crucial.
- School partnerships. The partnership between principals and school psychologists can help to choose intervention/prevention programs or activities for students with high levels of absenteeism. Parental involvement in children’s school life is also important.
- Psycho-emotional support. Socially vulnerable families need psycho-emotional support to overcome difficulties related to raising and educating children.
- Collaboration with mass media. Educational shows on various topics can help to raise awareness of problems related to school dropouts.
- Monitoring of vulnerable families. Identifying families with increased social risk and including them in social support programs can prevent school dropout.
- External partnerships. Collaboration with the police and social workers can help prevent and reduce dropout in the community.

References:

1. ARDELEAN, D. *Analysis of the school dropout phenomenon* [online]. In: *Modern Didactics Magazine*, No. 8/2013. Available: https://www.universitateaeuropeanadragan.ro/images/imguploads/site_cercetare/revista_didactica_moderna/revista_didactica_moderna_2013.pdf#page=4
2. DECEAN, M. *Psychopedagogical potentials for overcoming school absenteeism: PhD thesis in educational sciences,* 2021, 226 p.
3. GAGAUZ, O., BUCIUCEANU-VRABIE, M., PAHOMII, I. *Early leaving of the educational system: risk factors and groups.* In: *Akademos Science, Innovation, Culture, and Art Review,* 2017, no. 2(45), pp. 98-104.
4. GYONOS, E. *School dropout: causes and effects.* In: *Theoretical and Applied Economics*. Volume XVIII (2011), No. 11(564), pp. 37-47.
5. *Understanding early school leaving*. Off-Book Project. European Commission through the Lithuanian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Program. Project number: 2017-1-LT01-KA201-035235. Available: https://off-book.pixel-online.org/files/guidelines/TG01/Guideline_RO.pdf
6. *Education and Training Monitor 2021*, Romania. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union,

2021. ISBN 978-92-76-43273-9.
7. *Education and Training Monitor 2022*, Romania. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022. ISBN 978-92-76-56002-9.
8. NEVALA, A.M., HAWLEY, Jo. *Study on reducing early school leaving in the EU* . Brussels: European Parliament, 2011. Available: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/studies
9. TSENGELIDOU, E. *School dropout - ways of remediation* . In: *Acta et Commentationes, Sciences of Education,* no. 2(24), 202, p. 55-62 . Available: https://revistaust.upsc.md/index.php/acta_educatie/article/view/647/632

Data about the author:
Liudmila CUROȘ, PhD student, Doctoral School of Humanities and Education Sciences, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Sociology and Social Work.
ORCID: 0000-0002-3668-047X
E-mail: ludmilacuroz@gmail.com

Presented on 10.04.2024