

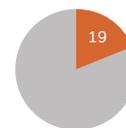
“Country recommendation

Romania should set up a coherent plan that will contribute to reduce child poverty and to avoid family separation through public prevention and gatekeeping policies, ring-fenced funding sources for implementing measures, and a relevant set of indicators.

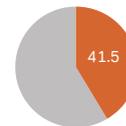
Country
Profile 2022



Romania



Child Population:
3.65 million
(19% of total population)



Child Poverty Rate:
41.5% (2021) ▲*

* [higher compared to pre-covid rates in 2019](#)

RESPONDENT ORGANISATION(S):

[Hope and Homes for Children Romania \(HHC – Romania\)](#)

European Semester Country Report and Recommendations

Overview of the country report: identification of the children in need

Although the *European Semester Country Report for Romania* mentions that **child poverty increased** from 40% in 2019 to 41.5% in 2021 and remains the highest in the EU, the report does not provide significant guidance on how to tackle child poverty.

Additionally, the country report outlines that more than 50% of Roma children aged between 6 and 15 years old attend schools where the majority of students are from the Roma community. Hope and Homes for Children (HHC – Romania) welcomes the acknowledgement that ‘segregation and socio-economic status also further affects students’ expectations of their future achievements’. Investments

in social infrastructure, including day centres for children at risk, is considered therefore as a positive development to **address the needs of most vulnerable children**, including Roma children.

Concerning early childhood education and care (ECEC), the proportion of children under 3 years old in formal childcare dropped to 6.8% in 2020 (from 14.1% in 2019), revealing another **gap in the provision of care for young children**.

While children in vulnerable situations and their **needs are not sufficiently addressed** in this year’s country report, Hope and Homes for Children – Romania welcomes that the country report acknowledges the measures proposed by the government: ‘implementing the minimum inclusion income, minimum wage and pension reforms, investments in child protection and the deinstitutionalisation of people with disabilities, as

outlined in Romania’s RRP¹ could help the country achieve the 2030 EU headline target on poverty reduction’.

Needs analysis: alignment at country-level

While the *Country Specific Recommendations for Romania* are relevant, they do not correspond to the reform needs and do **not address social issues in general**. Namely, child poverty and social protection, which are the most pressing social issues in Romania. When it comes to **children experiencing alternative care**, many of them still live in old-type institutions and opportunities and support for young care leavers are lacking. Additionally, there is no support for vulnerable families in communities (at risk of separation), and **social housing for vulnerable families and access to education for children from deprived families** are urgent challenges too.

In regard to the reform of the child protection system, the implementation of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) will bring some positive results for vulnerable children and adults. However, **more should be done to enact significant progress in the reform process**. For example, the NRRP can finance concrete measures, such as supporting young care leavers, social housing in general, and measures focusing on prevention as an enabling condition for the reform process.

The second recommendation asks for the swift finalisation of the negotiations regarding the 2021-2027 operational programme on cohesion. However, for Romania there will be no direct EU funding for closing down old-type institutions, but only ‘enabling actions’ such as support for families to avoid admissions in the care system, support for young care leavers, support

1 (Editor’s Note) RRP = Recovery and Resilience Plan.

services for vulnerable families, and the development of the foster care network.

The third recommendation on **reducing reliance on fossil fuels** and increasing the use of sustainable energy sources to create the grounds for a cleaner environment is in line with Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which mentions a **clean environment as a condition for improved health of children**. HHC – Romania emphasises the fight against climate change and believes that ensuring a clean environment is crucial for future generations. However, this focus cannot overshadow urgent measures for social inclusion of the most vulnerable, especially as they brace themselves to face the energy crisis.



Poverty and Social Exclusion – experiences of children, families, and communities

Child poverty in Romania

Romania has a total child population of 3.65 million, 41.5% (approximately 1.5 million) of which live at risk of poverty and social exclusion in 2021. Behind this number, we can identify specific groups of children, namely children in old-type institutions and young care leavers.

Vulnerable categories of children include:

- **Children in deprived families and communities** who cannot cover their basic needs. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the surge in prices for energy and gas and the consequent cost of living crisis, there are many families that now find it very difficult or impossible to cover their basic needs. The risk of school drop-out is also increasing, as this is the area where parents find it

easier to cut costs, especially in rural areas where children are generally involved in agricultural work or other types of work that generate income.

- **Children in old-type institutions.** There are still 3,300 children growing up in 131 old-type institutions, accommodating on average between 50 and 70 children each. They are vulnerable because of their placement in institutions that infringes their rights to develop to their full potential.
- **Young care leavers.** They lack opportunities to transition in a meaningful way into independent living. Accommodation (especially state-provided accommodation, with affordable rent) is not available, nor are the employment opportunities, as there are still prejudices and stereotypes against these youngsters in some communities.

While there is a legal provision that all **old-type institutions in Romania need to be closed**

or have a closure programme by the end of October 2022 (and this has been observed nationwide), there is the important **issue of how the process will be carried out**. There are at least two policies that are needed as soon as possible to provide support to vulnerable children:

- **A public policy on preventing family breakdown.** A national policy can regulate the cooperation and the way interventions are implemented, as well as the funding sources and the way the funds are distributed, and cooperation between local and country child protection authorities.
- **A public policy on housing.** Romania does not currently have a public policy on housing, including social housing. The local authorities receive requests for social housing and analyse them, but the eligibility criteria are different from one authority to another. Eurochild members would welcome a public policy 'with targeted measures regarding access to housing, assessments of

needs and prioritisation of beneficiaries, as well as clear funding lines and a relevant set of indicators to track the progress of the policy implementation’.

Good practices

Hope and Homes for Children Romania implements a long-standing national prevention programme, in cooperation with the local and county authorities in Romania. During the implementation of this programme, they have **supported over 35,000 children to remain with their families, in more than 25 counties of Romania.** This initiative is part of the wider programme of supporting the reform of the child protection system at national level and it is important because:

- it supports families to remain together and overcome vulnerability;
- it prevents children from being admitted into state care (and old-type institutions in particular), supporting the wider

objective of closing down old-type institutions.

All families supported through the programme are assessed using a tool developed by HHC – Romania. The intervention plan to support them is drawn up based on the specific needs discovered during the assessment, to avoid redundancies in allocating resources or targeting other areas, where families do not need support. This initiative helps provide sustainable interventions, thanks to the involvement of local and county authorities in the assessment, implementation and monitoring of the interventions. The programme also provides up to date status of families’ situations, while empowering families themselves to take the lead in overcoming their own vulnerability.

European Child Guarantee

Romania National Action Plan

The [Council Recommendation on a European Child Guarantee](#) asked Member States to submit a National Action Plan (NAP) that would outline how the Child Guarantee would be implemented at national level by 15 March 2022. These Action Plans should indicate the children most in need, the planned and existing policy actions, and measures to support them, and a monitoring and evaluation framework. The plans should also be drafted in consultation with children, civil society, and national authorities.

The Romanian NAP has been published for consultation at the time of writing this report, namely in early November 2022.

Hope and Homes for Children – Romania would like to see included **specific measures regarding young care leavers and children with disabilities** and

the way the deinstitutionalisation process for these children will be implemented.

HHC – Romania notes that they could have supported the development of the NAP by offering recommendations on:

- Setting the NAP priorities and providing input from the field, bringing the perspective of the lived experience of vulnerable children to contribute to the real picture of the current needs.
- Establishing a monitoring system for the implementation of the NAP. Since the Child Guarantee will be implemented by the a public authority, the National Authority for the Protection of Children’s Rights and Adoptions, accountability mechanisms are crucial for the success of the NAP’s implementation.

No child has been involved in the drafting of the NAP so far.

EU Funding

Civil Society engagement in the implementation of EU funds

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) can be used in Romania to further the reform of the childcare system and to reduce poverty in general. The child protection system reform can be supported by a specific operational programme called *Inclusion and Social Dignity*.

Projects funded by the EU in Romania

All programmes funded by EU funds are implemented and monitored by two ministries in Romania: the Ministry of Investment and European Projects, and the Ministry of Public Works, Development and Administration.

Hope and Homes for Children – Romania is currently involved

in implementing a EU-funded project aiming **to support the participation of children to education, prevent school abandonment and support young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs)** to further their education and get access to the labour market.

HHC – Romania carries out the identification of children, families, and NEETs as well as the assessment of their needs. Experts then provide counselling regarding prevention of school abandonment, as well as regarding enrolment in education for children and NEETs. They also provide support for parents through parenting courses.

Some of the achievements of the projects are:

- None of the children included in the project have dropped out of school so far.
- The schools involved in the

project are more aware of the needs of the children and they are offering several after-school activities and workshops addressed at vulnerable children, so that they can also enjoy school.

- Parents involved in the project are now better informed of the needs of their children, the challenges regarding education and the education support their children may need.
- NEETs are currently pursuing education and counselling sessions, which will increase their chances of being integrated in the labour market.

Priorities for EU funding in Romania

On 28 January 2021, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached an agreement that compels Member States with a level of child poverty above the EU average (23.4% - AROPE 2017 – 2019) to allocate

5% of ESF+ resources to tackle child poverty.² Romania is one of the countries bound by this agreement. With this in mind, HHC – Romania calls on the government to allocate ESF+ resources to combat child poverty in order to:

- **Prevent family separation** through a set of measures following an ‘envelope’ type of intervention (for example covering the cost of rent and living costs for families at risk; clothing items for children and food), with a greater freedom to allocate money towards various resources (being responsive to the specific needs of various parts of Romania), and a unitary and in-depth analysis of the needs of the families.
- **Ensure social housing for families at risk**, which would eliminate, among other things, the risk of family separation, while providing them with decent living conditions.

² Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013.