

# **The national plan for the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Romania: reviving up the action toward better implementation**

**Reflection by Eurochild member, Hope and Homes for  
Children Romania**



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## The national plan for the implementation of the Child Guarantee in Romania: reviving the action toward better implementation

The Romanian Government adopted on the 31st of October 2023 the National Plan for the Implementation of the Child Guarantee. Following a long delay (of almost one year and a half), which the authorities motivated by the need to include measures regarding refugee children from Ukraine, the plan was published on the website of the European Commission, being accessible [here](#), while its annex is available [here](#). It is also worth mentioning that the coordinator for the National Plan has changed during the process, once the political changes in Romania resulted in the establishment of a new ministry – The Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities, which took over the mission to regulate child protection in Romania.

### 1. Consultation process

The National Plan was produced by representatives of the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights, **without a proper consultation of the civil society**. While the plan has been put up for public consultation (a mandatory legal stage), there haven't been actual meaningful consultations with representatives of the civil society. According to their own statement, the authorities used the consultations organised for the National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Children's Rights 2023-2027 and the feedback received was (partly) incorporated in the National Plan. However, we believe that, while some of the priorities and measures in the two documents do overlap, **they are essentially two different documents and they should be treated as such**. Thereupon, the consultation processes should have been separated, as they were essentially looking for a different type of feedback on different issues. The public debate organised on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2022 was used by the authorities **mostly to present the National Plan**, whereas the discussions and the feedback were not taken into account for future incorporation in the document.

We believe that a meaningful consultation process would have brought about important contributions to the National Plan, with valuable feedback from professionals working in grassroots organisations for child protection and with priorities to be funded that would have made a difference in medium and long term.

### 2. Priorities, objectives and measures in the National Plan

#### Overview

The priorities of the plan **are in accordance with the recommendations of the European Council** and each of the five priority areas is addressed, in that there are objectives and measures for it.

The National Plan has 7 general objectives and 12 specific objectives, with a set of measures for each of the objectives, respectively for their sub-objectives. While it is a positive aspect that they are correlated with the National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Children's Rights 2023-2027, a **significant part of the measures are copied from the National Strategy**. As we previously stated, these are essentially two different documents that **need to respond to different issues** (while some may overlap), and simply taking measures from the Strategy and using them in the National Plan

causes funding, actions and human resources to overlap, while **creating gaps in other areas**. One of the aspects where the plan should have better correlated measures with existing strategies is the one regarding **housing**, where the **measures** (M.2.2.1, M.2.1.8 and M.2.1.14) **are too general and vague**.

An important number of measures refer to mapping, establishing the legal frame for interventions or creating public policies for vulnerable categories and they are funded from the national budget, while other measures, stating more concrete interventions are funded by EU funds. We believe that funding interventions and concrete actions exclusively with EU funds **could lead to lack of sustainability on medium and long term** and, due to the reimbursement mechanisms and allocation of funds, challenges may appear even during the implementation of the interventions if a constant and a carefully planned cash flow is not ensured.

The National Plan in itself or its Annex **do not include two important aspects that need to be detailed** for a better understanding of the way the measures will be applied and of the effects that the measures will have:

- **The way the state authorities and agencies will cooperate and work towards implementing measures and achieving the targets.** The responsible agencies and authorities are indeed mentioned, but there is no detailing of the way they will work together and how the responsibilities will be shared.
- **The way sustainability will be ensured.** The Annex of the National Plan does include a section called *2028-2030 Budget* in which the costs for the implementation of *all* measures are transferred to the state budget, but we feel that a long-term vision would be needed both in terms of supporting the vulnerable categories after the completion of the Child Guarantee and in terms of further developing support means for these categories.

### Indicators and targets

Some of the targets in the National Plan are not related to baseline indicators (e.g. M.2.1.2 regarding number of children benefitting from the minimum package of services, M.2.1.4 regarding local services who have at least one social worker or M.2.2.3 regarding the number of young people leaving the child protection system), while other targets are **too low in our opinion compared to the magnitude of the problem tackled**. For example, M.2.1.2 regarding the children benefitting from the minimum package of services sets a target of 500,000 children at the end of the implementation period. Considering the fact that around 40% of Romania's children (approximately 1.5 million children) are at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and that around 30% of the children under 16 live in material and social deprivation, one can see that the target is too low to address the issue. There is another aspect that may appear here, linked to **discrimination** – how will one decide which children will be included among the beneficiaries of this measure? Another example is M.2.1.9, which speaks about a target of 390,000 children in school benefitting from one hot school meal at the end of the implementation period, which is far less than the actual number of vulnerable children attending education who need a hot school meal. Regarding education, M.4.1.7 sets a target of 800 schools to provide Second Chance type programmes by the end of the implementation programme. With a school abandonment rate of 16% in Romania in 2022 and with a total of 6,715 schools in the country, one can notice that slightly over 10% of the existing schools will provide this kind of programme by 2030, which is in our opinion **far from the actual needs of the target group**. Last, but certainly not

least, M.2.2.2. speaks about one research to be carried out on the reason of long-term placement of children in state care and to be completed by 2030. We believe that such research – if needed – should run for less time than 2030 so that the findings can actually be used during the implementation period to decrease the number of children in state care.

### **Vulnerable categories**

The vulnerable categories identified by the National Plan include, for the most part, **children and young adults at risk of poverty and social exclusion or those already living in poverty and economic deprivation**. However, one needs to make a few **comments**, as follows:

- **Children in state care**. They are seen and **treated “in bulk”** in terms of measures taken, with no difference made between their needs. But, as the experience of Hope and Homes for Children Romania shows, closing down institutions with children with special needs is more challenging than closing down institutions for typical children. We believe that measures should be particularised and tailored to the needs of specific categories of children, with particular attention paid to children with special needs.
- **Children benefitting of the services of Day Centres**. There is no difference between the categories of children who benefit from these services and, consequently, no details regarding the types/breakdown of the Day Centres to be set up.
- **Migrant children**. While one of the reasons for the delay of the Action Plan was the inclusion of measures regarding refugees from Ukraine, there are no such provisions. The category of migrant children is referred to “in bulk” and will benefit of an “integrated package of services”, without any details being provided as to what types of services will be provided and how. We believe that such a **silos type of approach** is not beneficial, because there are specific groups of migrant children with specific group of needs.
- **Children at risk of being separated from their parents**. While they are included (presumably) in the category of children who will benefit from food vouchers and/or various benefits such as a hot school meal or minimum package of services, these children are not a category per se. We believe that they **should be a separate and well-defined category**, as they have a set of specific needs that cannot be met by including them in various other groups. Also, from our experience, the **main reason for family breakdown in Romania is the economic one** – poverty, lack of a home (due to lack of money to afford rent) or lack of a steady income – and there are **no measures in the National Plan regarding access of adults to the labour market**.  
**Young mothers**. Romania has one of the **highest rates of young mothers** (under 18) in the European Union. However, they are not properly considered in the National Action Plan. Indeed, although they are addressed as being a vulnerable category, there are no specific provisions and measures answering to their needs – starting from education to avoid unwanted pregnancy, to free birth control measures, and monitoring of the new mother. Moreover, children to be and newly born are not approached as vulnerable, when they should be. All in all, the NAP identifies only vulnerable children, when indeed there are two.

The National Plan looks at the issue of poverty and at vulnerable categories with a global approach and while using this type of approach is useful up to a certain point (in order to provide a continuum of services for these categories), the **vulnerable categories are not perfectly homogenous, they have varied issues and need particularised solutions**. Also, the **territorial dimension of poverty is not**

**taken into consideration**, there are different causes for poverty depending on the regions of the country and there need to be particularised approaches for this issue. At the same time, the measures in the National Plan need to be supported by a consistent information and awareness raising campaign.

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