

Romania Country Report

General condition of the child population in the nation

Romania's total population is around 22,4 million, out of which around 5 million are children under 18 years of age. Less than 2% of the total population of children are registered as beneficiaries of protective measures, both in residential care and in alternative services.

Table 1 in the Appendix shows the distribution of children between the rural and urban areas, and Table 2 gives the figures for child mortality.

The following statistics on refugee children are based on the number of applications for refugee status. Between 1999 and 2001, 935 applications for refugee status were submitted by children and young people up to 20 years of age (mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Yugoslavia).

Children at risk of needing care outside the family. Other risk groups. Trends during 1998-2001.

According to current Romanian legislation, a child is called 'in difficulty' if his/her physical or moral integrity or development is endangered. The Governmental Strategy on the Protection of Children in Difficulty (2001) set up the following priority target groups of children at risk of needing special protection: children in residential care; children being cared for in the family, both their own (to reduce the risk of their abandonment) and in substitute families or in family-type alternative services; children who are subject to maltreatment, neglect or abuse in their own family; children with special needs; children with HIV/AIDS; delinquent children; street children and children/young people coming of age in long-term residential care. In compliance with the Romanian Government's Strategy for the improvement of the situation of the Roma people, adopted also in 2001, particular attention is given to children belonging to this ethnic minority. In fact, these children are included in all the priority target groups enumerated above.

National policies and specific strategies targeted at children at risk

Since 1997, child protection works as a de-centralised system in which all services for children are provided at the county level (there are 41 counties in Romania, and 6 administrative sectors in the Capital city of Bucharest). De-centralisation was – and, in some respects, continues to be – a challenge for a society and a culture that traditionally functioned in a very centralised way. Decentralisation has shifted the services for children from the direct administration by various government ministries to the county councils. At the same time, alternative public services for residential care were created through the law. Before 1997 almost all services for children represented residential institutions addressing up to several hundred clients each. These institutions were transferred to the county councils in a series of waves. First in 1997 there were the children homes, formerly subordinated to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, where children were placed according to the age

criterion. Later, beginning in 2000, the child protection institutions subordinated to the State Secretariat for Persons with Handicap, the residential facilities attached to the special schools and some long-term hospitalisation units were also transferred to the county councils.

At the central level, a specialised structure was created to co-ordinate the field of care regarding children in difficulty. According to the political agenda of each of the successive Cabinets, this specialised body had various administrative location and subordination within the government administration. Since January 2001 this structure is called the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption (NACPA) and operates under the co-ordination of the General Secretary of the Government – a key figure in the Romanian Cabinet.

The current main policy document regarding children at risk is the Governmental Strategy on the Protection of Children in Difficulty, adopted by Government Decision in 2001. This document followed and up-dated an earlier strategy in this field adopted by the previous Cabinet in 2000. This action line has to be regarded as a prime indication of the major political interest that consecutive Cabinets have had for this issue.

The policies in the child protection field emphasise the importance for the child to be raised in his/her natural family or, as the case may be, in another family-type environment. The major role that the community must have *vis-à-vis* its own children is also a major policy requirement.

The Strategy starts out from the principles underlying the government's policy in this field; it lays out the general directions and the specific objectives that need to be considered, the path to reach the expected results, as well as the resources necessary for the system, having in view the priority target groups of beneficiaries.

The principles that the Strategy is built on are the best interest of the child, non-discrimination and equal opportunities, a secure a family environment, decentralisation and community responsibility and accountability for its own children, solidarity, inter-sectorial and multi-disciplinary intervention, and partnership in addressing the needs of children in difficult circumstances.

One of the main objectives of the national strategy is to develop and diversify services for preventing child abandonment and reducing institutionalisation. The efforts made for the achievement of this objective have been focused on the identification of significant expertise and resources for the system. Various Programmes of National Interest have therefore been initiated and funded by the central budget. Action was also taken through externally funded programmes (Phare, BIRD and BDCE, USAID), each of them designed to provide complementary support to local/county authorities. The NGO community is making a significant contribution to the care system.

Children in residential care. Trends during 1998–2001

In 1999, 33,356 children were in residential institutions (30,069 children in placement centres subordinated to specialised public services and 3,287 children in placement centres run by authorised private organisations); in addition to these numbers, some 25,000 children were living in institutions subordinated to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the State Secretariat for Handicapped Persons.

In 2000, because of the newly transferred institutions to the county councils, the statistics show 53,335 children in placement centres subordinated to specialised public services and 3,846 children in institutions run by NGOs. In 2001, there were 45,422 children in publicly run institutions and 4,543 in NGO-run institutions. Of these, 1,469 children were under one year of age; 1,857 were in the 1-2 year-old age group; 3,549 in the 3-6 age group;

5,166 in the 7-9 age group; 13,999 in the 10-13 age group; 18,544 in the 14-17 age group; and there were 5,381 institutionalised children above the age of 18 years.

The number of children with disabilities in residential institutions subordinated to the State Secretariat for Persons with Handicap is shown in Table 3 in the Appendix.

The decrease of the number of children with disabilities registered in 2000 followed the reorganisation of the institutions of child protection by their transfer to the county councils' public services. Thus, 1,982 children have been transferred to the county level. Further, compared with 2000, the decrease in the number of children protected in these institutions in 2001 reflects the transfer of some of the clients to the institutions for adults, after 18 years of age.

According to the law, there are special detention facilities for minors within each police arrest unit. The law prohibits their detention together with adult prisoners. The numbers of minors in preventive custody detained in police arrest units in the period 1999-2001 were as follows:

- 1999 – 2,040 minors, representing 8.82% from the total of 23,125 detained persons;
- 2000 – 2,090 minors, representing 9.05% from the total of 23,077 detained persons;
- 2001 – 2,285 minors, representing 8.90% from the total of 25,416 detained persons.

Alternatives to residential care. Trends during 1998–2001

In 1998 the status of foster parent was regulated, and in 1999, 3,058 children were placed in foster families. The figures for 2000 and 2001 are 5,157 and 8,370 children, respectively.

The situation of children adopted domestically or through inter-country adoptions (definitive adoption) are the following:

- 1999 – 4,285 children (domestically – 1,710 and inter-country – 2,575)
- 2000 – 4,326 children (domestically – 1,291 and inter-country – 3,035)
- 2001 – 2,795 children (domestically – 1,274 and inter-country – 1,521)

The de-institutionalisation of children is an ongoing process. The number of institutionalised children decreased by 24.39 % between January 2001 and December 2002. At the same time, the number of large institutions (accommodating more than 100 children) decreased from 205 at the beginning of 2001 to 131 at the end of 2002. The percentage of children looked after in a family environment (extended family, foster parents, other persons/families) increased from 20% of the total number of protected children in 1997 to approximately 50% at the end of 2002.

Closing down the old style institutions represents one of the main challenges for the child protection system. The identified solutions are child reintegration into his/her natural family, child protection through family-type alternatives (professional foster care, relatives, other families/ individuals), and child protection in family-type group homes or apartments. At the same time, specific support services are provided for children and families depending on their needs, such as counselling, services for the rehabilitation of children with handicap, etc.

A major public awareness campaign was started in November 2001 by NACPA through Phare assistance in order to reduce the number of children in residential care and to prevent abandonment and institutionalisation of children. This campaign's slogan is 'A Children's Home is not a Home'.

Good examples

NACPA is currently developing standards for various types of services addressing children in difficulty, through a collaborative and multi-disciplinary process based on examples of good practice in the field. Such good practice examples were presented to the Children and Residential Care conference by some other members of the Romanian delegation, professionals who are a lot closer to children and the services for them.

Financing, Internal and external donor involvement and influence

Most of the financial resources for the system come from the central budget. However, child protection is one of the areas where reforms were implemented, and this includes the setting up of new financing systems. Thus, since year 2000 public funds are available for the public services' development on a project-based scheme, through the 'National Interest Programmes'. These monies complement the traditional budgetary resource allocations for services and aim to better support solutions for some priority areas of concern defined every year by NACPA. In 2002, the National Interest Programmes were designed in such a way as to specifically allow the NGOs to tender for these funds, as important partners of the authorities.

Since 2002 the ordinary allocations from the state budget are transferred directly to the counties, so that these sums no longer appear more in NACPA budget files. Also since 2002, county and local authorities are requested to contribute directly with 50% of the estimated budgetary needs for child services. However, the practice of the last year showed that in some areas of Romania, the poor economic situation and problems in connection with taxation – such as the insufficient tax-raising capacity at the county and local levels – could have a significant negative impact when moving from intentions to practice. In principle, such results were expected; the useful new information obtained regards the difference between planning and finally obtaining. This information is important for further adjustments of the policies. However, it should be underlined that under the circumstances described above, the central budget's allocation was supplemented in 2002 so that children and services did not suffer. Table 4 shows the expenditures in 2001.

Items 1 and 3 in the table represent sums from the central budget. Item 5 represents future central budget allocation. Item 4 shows non-reimbursable foreign assistance. The table does not contain information about the private (NGO) sources' budget allocated for children services. Also, information on annual expenditures by some partners such as UNICEF, USAID and DFID is not included.

Conclusion

The Romanian system of services for children in difficult circumstances is undergoing a thorough reform. The reform started in 1997 with de-centralisation and initial regulations on alternative service to the residential institutions. Thus, the number of children in institutions has decreased, particularly after 2001. From an almost 100% residential-type oriented system in 1997, the end of 2002 found more than half of the beneficiary children registered in alternative services. Simultaneously, the remaining institutions underwent major change in order to bring this type of protection closer to the family environment. Thus, the institutions started to open up towards the community; they became smaller; and the children in these institutions are more actively involved in all the housing-type activities that are going on in

these institutions. Institutions for children with medium and severe disabilities are a special case, and this is one of the main current priorities of the government.

Besides its own political will and efforts to improve the situation of the children in difficulty, Romania was constantly supported in this very important activity by a number of serious and dedicated partners from abroad.

Appendix

Table 1. Distribution of the child population in urban and rural areas.

Year	Total population	Number of children (% of total population)	Urban	Rural
1999	22.458.022	5.167.389 (23 %)	53,5 %	46,2 %
2000	22.435.205	5.049.835 (22,5 %)	52,4 %	47,5 %
2001	22.408.393	4.965.044 (22,2 %)	51,8 %	50,9 %

Table 2. Rates of infant and child mortality.

Year	Age	Total			Urban			Rural		
		M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F	M+F	M	F
1999	Under 1	18.6	20.3	16.8	15.2	16.8	3.5	21.5	23.2	19.7
	0-17	1.5	1.7	1.3	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.9	2.1	1.6
2000	Under 1	18.6	20.6	16.6	16.1	17.7	14.4	20.8	23.0	18.4
	0-17	1.4	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.8	2.0	1.5
2001	Under 1	18,4	20.5	16.2	15.6	17.9	13.1	20.9	22.7	18.9
	0-17	1.4	1.5	1.2	1.1	1.2	0.9	1.7	1.9	1.4

Table 3. Children with disabilities in residential institutions subordinated to the State Secretariat for Persons with Handicap.

Age	1999	2000	Age	2001
0-3	37	4	0-4	51
3-7	335	7	5-9	179
7-11	823	102	10-14	440
11-15	1,107	451	15-17	388
15-18	884	640	Total	1,058
Total	3,186	1,204		

Romania

Table 4. Expenditures on child welfare in 2001.

	Source	Amount (billion ROL)	% of Total
1	Central (State) Budget direct transfer	1,668	38.40
2	County and local budgets	1,522	35.04
3	NACPA budget (National Interest Programmes)	251	5.78
4	Phare 1999&2001 programmes	723	16.64
5	Foreign loans (IBRD, CEDB)	180	4.14
	TOTAL	4,344	100.00