

What this report is about

This report describes the main challenges related to poverty and social inclusion among young people in Romania and provides recommendations for policy makers to address these challenges. The recommendations are based on an analysis of the grass-roots experience of Caritas Romania Confederation, which is compared to official data.

About Caritas Romania Confederation

In 1994, the 10 Caritas organisations that are active in Romania united in a national network: Caritas Confederation Romania. The Confederation was created in order to promote its members' social projects and contribute to lobbying actions that could influence social policies both at a national and international level. All Caritas organisations in Romania have developed partnerships with the local authorities and provide social services to disadvantaged children and youth at risk, people with special needs, the elderly, and families with multiple children, on a low income. Our complex programmes in the field of social services answer the needs of over 70,000 beneficiaries, of whom more than 15,000 are children and youth. One of the primary aims of Caritas organisations is to promote and defend children and youth rights in order to ensure the development of future adults. Inspired by Catholic Social Learning, the Caritas Organisations' mission is supporting the poor and the socially isolated to regain the right to a decent life.

Programmes that we carry out aimed at families with children:

- Food support and other basic needs (e.g. FEAD)
- Family counselling and mediation
- Access to employment, professional guidance and training centres
- Access to education and training (VET, informal education, early school leaving, drop-outs, etc.)
- Community, volunteering and cultural activities
- Day care centres, early education and care centres
- Distance adoption programmes

Programmes that we carry out aimed at young people:

- Food support and other basic needs
- Family counselling and mediation
- Access to employment, professional training
- Access to education and training (informal education, early school leaving, drop-outs, after school programmes, anti-drug campaigns in schools, educational caravans)
- Community, volunteering and cultural activities

29% of families with children are beneficiaries of our services

21% of young people are beneficiaries of our services (women: 57%; men: 43%)

Recent publications by Caritas Romania Confederation:

[Propunere De Politica Publica Privind Finantarea Sustenabilă Si Eficientă A Serviciilor Sociale In Romania](#) 2015

[Document de pozitie privind crearea unui cadru benefic unei imbatraniri demne si active in Romania, 2017](#)

[Ghid de bune practici: ingrijiri la domiciliu, 2014](#)

[Propunerea unei politici publice în domeniul serviciilor de îngrijire la domiciliu pentru persoanele vârstnice, 2015](#)

[Inainte de a pleca, informeaza-te!, 2014](#)

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Romania's main challenges related to poverty and social exclusion among young people¹:

- ❖ **SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS:** The social protection system still needs to be improved through elaboration of a coherent and unitary legislative and methodological framework at national level. Social benefits frequently do not ensure a sufficient level of basic income for a decent living. Half of all children in Romania (51%) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- ❖ **ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT:** Qualified young people have serious problems in finding stable employment corresponding to their qualifications. This is aggravated in the rural areas. Social integration of youth with disabilities is lagging behind. Both education and labour market policies and practices do not ensure equal opportunities.
- ❖ **EDUCATION:** Parents' social status determines the educational achievements of children. Romania has not improved at all in decreasing the drop-out rate in the last ten years. In 2016, the school drop-out rate is 18.5 percent, by end 2017 the authorities aim to reduce it to 12.8%. By 2020 the authorities hope to lower it to 11.3%.
- ❖ **ROMA INTEGRATION:** Frequently young Roma have difficulties in integrating into the education system and managing the school-to-work transition. 80% of Roma children leave the education system after primary school. Only 3% of Roma youth access tertiary education.
- ❖ **EMIGRATION:** Almost half of all Romanian youth feel forced to emigrate in search of better life opportunities.

Youth population: 3.5 million
Young people: 17.8%
(EU average: 17.4%)
Young immigrants: 32.3%
Young emigrants: 46.2%
Early school leavers: 18.5%
(EU average: 10.7%)
Youth Unemployment: 13.1%
(EU average: 14.7%)
In-work poverty: 21.4%
(EU average: 9.5%)
Housing cost overburden 45.3%
(EU average: 40.4%)
NEET: 14.2%
(EU average: 8.0%)

Young people, Migration, Unemployment & School leavers: 2016; In-work poverty; Housing cost, 2013. Latest available data - accessed 18/05/2017

Policy recommendations:

1. **Encourage volunteering from an early age in order to develop educational and professional skills in young adult life.** Engaging in social life from an early age will reduce the risk of school dropout and create opportunities for future professional skills development, whilst also fostering social awareness and altruism.
2. **Develop entrepreneurship opportunities for young people in rural areas.** Strengthening agriculture and encouraging the association of young farmers could regenerate social cohesion and self-employment in rural communities.

¹ For the purpose of this report, young people are considered people aged 18 to 29, in line with the criteria of the European Commission. The source of the data in the box is from Eurostat, consulted on 12/05/2017 from the latest available data.

3. **Invest in accessible early education and care for children, by offering affordable access to pre-school education, especially in the rural areas.** Disparities between the urban and rural areas need to be narrowed. Develop new, educational, pre-school education facilities closer to each rural community, in order to reduce the school drop-out rate.
4. **Create decent living conditions for Roma communities.** Building new social houses for Roma communities will help the families in need to have access to decent living conditions, to better professional opportunities and to easy access to education for their children. Also, for those homeless Roma persons, more places should be added to the night shelters.
5. **Improve the integration of Roma children in the educational system.** Evaluation of the schooling conditions (most of the schools attended by the Roma children have poor conditions – no heating, old school furniture, no toilets) and elimination of segregation between the Roma children and Romanian children through information campaigns in schools. This will encourage more Roma children to develop their education and to finish the compulsory learning stage.

1. Poverty and social exclusion among young people in Romania: the reality behind the data

The problems of most concern in Romania

- ❖ Limited access to social protection systems
- ❖ Insufficient financial benefits

Limited access to social protection systems

In general, the problematic development of the social protection system in Romania has resulted in poor and insufficient provision of social services. Furthermore, there are insufficient funds for its sustainability. Law 34/1998 is the only basis for accessing subsidies by service-providing NGOs, in Romania. On the other hand, effective cooperation between NGOs and authorities is still to be developed, in order to create better funding opportunities for the NGOs and better provision of the social services for the beneficiaries in need.

In addition, Romanian youth at risk of social exclusion are hardly aware of their right to benefit from social services within the social protection system. In these cases, there are major risks of social exclusion, which manifests itself by the high illiteracy rate, high unemployment rate, lower life expectancy, the lack of social cohesion and discrimination, amongst other factors.

Young people in rural areas in particular face difficulties in accessing the social protection system. The provision of social services in Romania is unevenly distributed at a geographical level and along an urban-rural divide. This leads to disparities between the regions of the country. Specialised social services usually function in large cities. The lack of information, cumbersome administrative procedures or the long distance of the beneficiaries' homes often limits the access of the young population. In rural areas, the staff necessary to respond to the needs of young beneficiaries is lacking, both in terms of numbers and in terms of the respective professional and administrative capacity to provide a complex social protection system. The quality of social services is directly influenced by the ability to finance them. Even though there has been an increase in quality over the last few years, there is a need for improvement. Still, minimum standard operating costs and quality standards are not available for all social services. Regarding the minimum standard costs for child protection, the last

Testimony

Florin is 21 years old and wants a normal life and a stable job after living in several children's placement centres. "I came to the orphanage just a few days after I was born, and this has marked my life. It's very difficult when, because of your age, you are kicked out of the system. Five months before finishing The School of Arts and Crafts, it was announced that I had to leave the centre. I completed all the necessary papers, but I and five other colleagues were thrown out of the centre with only 1,000 lei, the compensation you get when you leave the system. I found a low-rent home, I also wrote to the Social Assistance Directorate, asking them to give me at least a mattress to sleep on. I received a moldy one. I filed an application for social housing at the Bals City Hall, but I did not receive an answer", says Florian.

adaptations made in December 2016 referred to maternal assistance, residential services (e.g. maternal centres), day care centres, Child's Phone, and services for homeless children.

Vulnerable young people might be eligible to benefit from the social benefits system, such as unemployment benefit, social and material aid. However, social benefits alone do not solve the long-term social problems of young people, while personalised social services help young people to overcome vulnerability. An overwhelming proportion of 18-year-olds that leave the state child-protection system find themselves in a difficult situation, such as not being able to find temporary shelter if they do not fulfil several conditions. Often, this leads to a life on the streets or in improper conditions. If they do not benefit from vocational and career-oriented support, these beneficiaries will, in all probability, remain unemployed in the long-term.

Hardly any measures are taken to prepare young people for an independent life and full participation in society before they leave the care institution, or after having left the institution. Also, the large number of years spent in the institution does not prepare them for adult life. In Romania, the law allows for a period of 2 years after reaching the age of 18, for the young person to be integrated into a free counselling and professional training programme, regardless whether he/she continues his or her studies. The National Employment Agency (ANOFM) must provide support in the development of professional skills. However, national programmes supporting deinstitutionalised children provide access only to solidarity programmes (Law 116/2002) addressed only to young people between the ages of 16-25 years old, while the county councils only provide professional counselling and training, with no guaranteed opportunities of employment. The practical application of these regulations is difficult and takes a long time. In terms of living conditions, the county council's budget guarantees rent up to 3 years or the advance payment for the purchase of a house, but the available places are limited and there is a long waiting list. Most of the living quarters provided for single deinstitutionalised young people or those who come from poor families are of the shelter type and not the assisted housing type.

Young graduates of high school, vocational schools or tertiary education can find only limited information in career orientation and on how to access the labour market. There is the need for an innovative programme, addressed to high school and university students, which can help them to develop their professional competency and also their competitive spirit on accessing good opportunities on the labour market. On the other hand, there is still little coordination between the educational curriculum and the labour market's needs, which generates a lack of job opportunities for new graduates and brings them one step closer to unemployment, or compels them to accept a job below their professional qualifications.

Insufficient income

The youngest age category most affected by the negative effects of poverty is between 18-24 years (30.2%)². There are several areas in which young people need support to overcome their vulnerability, because of the following related problems.

EDUCATION: Young people coming from low-income families risk not being able to continue their studies, and so perpetuate their poverty status within their own families. Thus, poverty is passed on to future generations. 60% percent of young adults (18-29 years) live with their parents. This indicator correlates in an aggravating manner with the fact that the early school leaving rate was 18.5% in 2016. The exposure to poverty and social exclusion is 51% for young people under 18 and 46.8% for those aged 18-24. Because of poverty, some parents do not let their children continue/complete their education. In addition, even those who enrol in college often abandon it, because they have no more money to support themselves, and the school dropout rate in 2015 was 19.1%.³ According to the National Student Alliance in Romania, 40% of university students in their final year at 20 universities across the country dropped out of university in 2013.⁴

HEALTH: Access to medical treatment and preventative care is limited by a lack of sufficient income. According to the Euro Health Consumer Index (2016), Romania has severe problems regarding its health system, which especially affects vulnerable groups (Romany families).⁵ Because of a lack of availability to the public healthcare system in rural areas or in small towns, and due to the high costs of some medical care, vulnerable groups cannot benefit from proper health care. Furthermore, long stays in hospital cannot be afforded by the vulnerable groups. As a result, the risk of health problems is higher among young families - e.g. premature births, children born with disabilities.

EMPLOYMENT and FOUNDING and SUSTAINING A FAMILY: Due to the lack of employment opportunities and insufficient income, an overwhelming percentage of Romanian young people choose other countries in which to work, where salary levels are up to ten times higher than in Romania. In 2015, almost one out of every two Romanians aged 15-29 emigrated. Thus, this creates the phenomenon of “children left at home” because one or both parents go abroad to work almost immediately after the child’s birth. This deprives the child of parental care and they most often remain in the care of older relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, or aunts.

The lack of sufficient income leads to increased social exclusion, material deprivation and extreme poverty. Young people with inadequate income cannot build a family or, if they do so, cannot ensure their long-term sustenance. Most of the young family's income goes to maintenance costs: rent, bank charges, utility bills, and food. For many young families, children are the only source of income, as they receive social benefits, such as allowances or social scholarships. Most of the poor in Romania live in

² <http://mts.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Strategia-tineret-final.pdf>

³ Eurostat, 2015.

⁴ <http://www.anosr.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Raportul-de-implementare-al-SS-2014.pdf>, page 30.

⁵ http://www.healthpowerhouse.com/files/EHCI_2016/EHCI_2016_report.pdf, page 20.

persistent poverty.⁶ In Romania, 60% of young people between 18-34 years old still live with their parents due to financial constraints (no work, low-paid jobs) and this is an indicator of poverty among young people. Romania has the highest percentage of poor young employees (18-24 years) – 30.7%.⁷

HOUSING and LIVING CONDITIONS: The lack of financial education and family planning is another problem that influences the financial conditions and living standards of young Romanians. Many young people cannot buy or rent their own home, and so the tendency is to still live with their parents and grandparents in often crowded living conditions. Many young, poor families – especially from Roma communities – have many children, sometimes up to 8-10 children per family and, as a result, they are forced to live in improper conditions and in limited space.

A COMPLEXITY OF PROBLEMS:

Insufficient income is often only one of a complex set of problems in young families, including domestic violence, irresponsible alcohol and drug use, crime.

78% of Romanian teenagers have consumed at least once alcoholic drink in their lives, according to a presentation of an ESPAD survey presented by the Anti-Drug Agency in 2015.⁸ Excessive alcohol consumption can often lead to violent behaviour in families that can determine the isolation of the victim, financial dependency of the aggressor and no/few opportunities for finding a job, and can generate mental health problems that encourage drug consumption.⁹

Regarding these aspects, the social services system needs to give support in reducing this anti-social behaviour through complex and integrated counselling programmes for families and children, anti-drug counselling, and psycho-social counselling.

Access to minimum income schemes

Currently, minimum income schemes or other related benefits that are available to young people are:

- Minimum income
- Unemployment benefit
- Scholarship support
- Disability benefit
- Child allowance

Young people have limited access to these schemes and benefits. In addition, generally speaking, these minimum income schemes are inadequate as they do not cover all the costs related to their needs. Young people (15-29), especially from rural

⁶ <http://www.unicef.ro/wp-content/uploads/Strategia-Nationala-in-domeniul-politicii-de-tineret-2015-2020.pdf>, page 14.

⁷ <http://www.unicef.ro/wp-content/uploads/Strategia-Nationala-in-domeniul-politicii-de-tineret-2015-2020.pdf>, page 16.

⁸ <http://www.dspb.ro/comunicatemedi/2016070601-ANALIZA-DE-SITUATIE-ALCOOL-2016.pdf>

⁹ <http://insp.gov.ro/sites/cnepss/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Analiza-de-situatie-2015-7.pdf>

areas, have limited access to information regarding the exact required steps needed in order to access these benefits.

Access to employment

The major problems related to young people's access to employment are:

- Inadequate or poor quality education (early school-leaving or school drop-outs)
- Lack of professional experience
- Limited employment opportunities

Current services to fight poverty and social exclusion among young people

The following services that could lift young people out of poverty and social exclusion are generally not available:

- Access to affordable housing
- Access to education and training (formal, non-formal or informal)
- Access to affordable childcare

Transmission of poverty

The transmission of poverty from childhood to young people is a problem. Half of all children in Romania (51%) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, a phenomenon that has serious long-term consequences, not only for the child but also for society as a whole. In Romania, just over 50% of children do not attend preschool education.¹⁰ A child with a vulnerable socio-economic status has restricted access to quality education. This is transformed into educational poverty that tends to perpetuate from one generation to the next. Parents' social status determines the educational achievements of children. It is a vicious circle, because material shortages can often cause educational poverty, and this latter condition frequently maintains and perpetuates material shortcomings. From this perspective, we are talking about a costly social phenomenon that can affect the whole of society and that reflects later on in young adult life.

The degree of violence in families is particularly high among young people, who are at risk of dropping out of school after compulsory education (primary school). This negatively influences the young adults, who find themselves in the situation of not having sufficient material resources to start a family. If they still decide to create one, often, in this context of economic scarcity and social exclusion, there emerges within the family deviant social patterns, which leads to vulnerability of the children.

The instability of parents' workplaces with unsteady and inadequate income, with no potential for advancement in their professional careers, influences the standard of living, education and development of children. Often, children that live in families with low work intensity (often only one parent works) tend to copy the same unsustainable life model. There is a gap between the level of education and training of low-income

¹⁰ http://salvaticopiii.ro/upload/p000600010001_Raport_saracie_2016.pdf

and middle-income parents. Poor education leads to poorly paid jobs and, implicitly, to the creation of a disadvantaged environment for child development. In addition, the economic and financial crisis in recent years has widened these gaps.

This leads to the following consequences. Half of all children do not attend preschool education, because of limited access to pre-school education in rural areas and because of lack of financial resources to pay the monthly expenses. This leads to a delayed start to a child's education. Children from poor families are often stigmatised and marginalised, and social segregation occurs from young age, which in turns affects the harmonious development of the child. All these factors, when combined, can lead to the development of health problems and anti-social survival strategies. There is a risk that the next generation will perpetuate the cycle of poverty and social marginalisation.

As a result, one recommendation is to invest in integrated educational programmes that address both children and their parents, such as psychological and social counselling, and educational activities that prevent mental health problems.

Young people at higher risk of poverty

- ❖ Young Roma
- ❖ Young people with disabilities

- Young offenders
- Young refugees/asylum seekers, victims of human trafficking, and unaccompanied minors
- Young Roma
- Young single parents
- Young people with disabilities

Young Roma

A significant part of the Roma population is trapped by a shortage of skills or assets for the labour market. Many Roma families suffer a severe lack of income, often poor living conditions, lack of education and qualifications, and are predominantly employed in grey or underground economic activities. Sometimes they possess no identity documents. The average age of the Roma population is 25 years, in comparison with the average age for the Romanian population, which is 40 years. In terms of education, there is a severe deficit in formal education. This becomes manifest at a functional level by a high degree of illiteracy. It leads to an acute shortage of professional qualifications for modern jobs that provide access to the formal labour market. The early school leaving rate is high: 80% of Roma children leave the education system after primary school. Only 3% of Roma youth access tertiary education. In terms of employment, the younger generation, due to the negative effects of the last decade, faces an even greater professional skills gap than the adult or elderly generations. Furthermore, jobs traditionally taken up by Roma are in ever decreasing demand in the modern economy. Many Roma do not have a permanent income or have very low permanent incomes. The high frequency of non-permanent income is reflected in the fact that 53.4% of Roma households declared non-permanent income in their budget. In terms of access to health services, the Roma population has limited access to the medical insurance system due to a lack of information, no proximity to a medical institution, lack of financial resources and sometimes because they do not have papers (e.g. IDs, or a digital health card). Romania has the highest rate of abortion in Europe, 485 abortions for every 1,000 births, according to the World Health Organisation.¹¹ More needs to be done in which child care policies and family planning are considered, in order to help families have healthy children and a decent living environment. In terms of living conditions, the lack of a decent home and, frequently, sub-standard housing conditions represents a problem. Only 61% of Roma live in dwellings to which they have legal ownership.¹²

¹¹ <http://www.mediafax.ro/social/romania-are-cea-mai-ridicata-rata-de-avort-din-europa-480-de-avorturi-la-1-000-de-nasteri-15875649>

¹² http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/Publicatii/Politici_publice_pentru_romi.pdf, page 20. Also, http://www.agentiaimpreuna.ro/files/publicatii/Accesul_romilor_pe_piata_muncii.pdf and http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Raport-cercetare-NEET_final_2016.pdf

Young people with disabilities

Young people with disabilities suffer severe issues with social inclusion. In terms of education, poor information is provided to parents on the possibilities offered by the community and the State. Lack of early integration at a young age in special schools, later on leads to a poor scholastic and professional orientation, for both girls and boys. Young people with disabilities are usually offered a small palette of trades and jobs from which they can choose. In terms of employment, employers tend towards a mentality of reserve towards people with severe disabilities, thus raising more barriers for young people with disabilities to access and develop a professional career. Young people with disabilities face informal obstacles too, and it is manifestly impractical to participate in job interview on an equal footing with their able-bodied peers. At national level there are disparities in awarding professional training to young people with disabilities according to their potential and the economic needs of the area. In October 2016, the Government approved a national programme for promoting and defending the rights of people with disabilities, which aims at deinstitutionalisation and the prevention of institutionalisation of people with disabilities, and at creating day centres and protected homes. This initiative could ensure the widest possible range of trades accessible by people with disabilities and compatible with the labour market's requirements. Employers and trade unions are not sufficiently informed regarding the professional insertion of young people into the work arena. In this area, stereotypes and prejudices still persist. In general, there is a widespread lack of information on activities for adolescents with disabilities and their families, as well as on the right to, and conditions for, employment of people with disabilities.

Testimony

At age 21, Erika G, a healthy young woman, was confronted with the terrible news that she would become "prisoner in a wheelchair". Though life seemed to her unfair, she faced obstacles and understood that although she had the status of a person with disabilities, she must remain an active person. "Although most disabled people with disabilities cannot fully participate in social life, they cannot go to school, work, we have to help them and create a friendlier environment and help them integrate. It is sad to see how society gives no chance to these people." says Erika. Now, Erika is the communications specialist of the Motivation Foundation, an NGO that defends and represents the interests of people with disabilities in Romania.

The legislative framework is incomplete and does not set norms that explicitly provide for the right to social integration of young people with disabilities. Romanian legislation has yet to promote an inclusive education system across all levels, considered essential for respecting the right to education of people with disabilities. Despite having ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2010, the National Education Law of Romania, approved in 2011, does not include any reference to inclusive education. There are not enough services available to students with disabilities that meet their specific needs. In early education, a mix of services is often required. In schools, physical access limits the choice, as well as the provision of support services. Rural, isolated areas offer a minimal choice. There are widespread shortcomings in terms of accessibility. Many buildings used to care for children, preschool children, school pupils, and spaces used for adult education are not physically accessible. Many of them are not suitable for modification, or such changes would require enormous expenditure.

There is a great need for more, appropriate and comprehensive services to help students with disabilities in the three main periods of transition from one level of education to another. These are of great importance in solving students' problems related to the actual transition to the next level. The first stage of transition is from pre-school to primary school. The second is the transition from primary school to high school. The third is the transition from high school to work, vocational training, and tertiary academic or adult education. There is a need for many more services in this area in order to enable people with disabilities to obtain livelihoods, to develop a meaningful professional activity, and to generate appropriate opportunities for their leisure time. Boys and girls with disabilities still suffer intense social exclusion, as manifested in discrimination, social isolation, bullying, intimidation or harassment by students without disabilities.¹³

Rights that young people have more difficulties in actualising

- ❖ **Right to education**
- ❖ **Right to healthcare**
- ❖ **Right to work**
- ❖ **Right to housing**
- ❖ **Right to equality and non-discrimination**
- ❖ **Right to social protection**

Young people in Romania have more difficulties in accessing the following rights:

- Right to education
- Right to healthcare
- Right to work
- Right to housing
- Right to equality and non-discrimination
- Right to social protection

The main problems related to not being able to secure these rights are generally related to the following aspects:

- Limited access to social and medical services across all areas of the country
- Lack of information on the rights of vulnerable groups
- Low incomes and lack of good employment opportunities
- Stigmatisation and social and economic segregation
- A weak social protection system and legal framework

¹³ <http://www.unicef.ro/wp-content/uploads/Raport-Situatia-copiilor-cu-dizabilitati-din-Romania-2013.pdf>

BOX 1. Ratification and implementation of the European Social Charter related to young people

ROMANIA has ratified the majority of Articles of the Revised European Social Charter. Some of the following Articles have not been ratified and could have an impact on the social inclusion of young people:

- The right to vocational training (Article 10)
- The right to benefit from social welfare services (Article 14)
- The right of migrant workers and their families to protection and assistance (Article 19, in parts);
- The right to dignity at work (Article 26);
- The right of workers with family responsibilities to equal opportunities and equal treatment (Articles 27.1, 27.3);
- The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30);
- Right to housing (Article 31).

Romania has NOT YET RATIFIED the [Additional Protocol](#) providing for a System of Collective Complaints.

More information on the provisions [accepted by Romania](#) can be found at this link.

FACTSHEET: [Romania and the European Social Charter](#)

How effective are Romania's policies to fight poverty and social exclusion among young people?

Policies that are having a positive impact

Policies	Reasons why they are being effective
<p>Programme of equal opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (rural youth, young people with disabilities, Roma youth, etc.) to promote their social integration – in partnership with the National Authority for Child Protection and Rights (signed on May 8 2017). This programme provides support for 200 young people between the ages of 15 and 17 who are preparing to leave their families and/or placement centres, through participation in a series of courses at the Ministry of Youth and Sport's leisure centres.</p>	<p>During this programme, through the project "Ready for Life"¹⁴, young people participate for 5 days in non-formal educational activities on the following topics: risk prevention, personal development and social inclusion.</p> <p>The project is presented in two counties of the Moldavia region in Romania that face big challenges regarding social protection for children and youth: Botosani and Iasi.</p> <p>The pilot project is responding to the measure regarding the development of opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p>

Policies that have a limited impact

The following policies are having a limited impact on fighting poverty and social exclusion among young people:

Policies	Gaps or reasons why they are not being effective
Youth Guarantee	The Youth Guarantee does not generate stable employment and does not reach out to rural areas
Education policies combating early school-leaving and early drop-outs	Government policy and action have not managed to decrease the school dropout rate. This is even worse in remote rural areas.
Access to affordable housing	Subsidies for fostering first time home ownership do not target the most vulnerable

¹⁴ <http://mts.ro/noutati/ministerul-tineretului-si-sportului-implementeaza-o-noua-masura-din-programul-de-guvernare-pregatit-pentru-viata-este-un-proiect-pilot-care-promoveaza-egalitatea-de-sanse-pentru-tin/>

Youth Guarantee

Young people have become a minority demographic category in Romania. There are also negative trends in their level of social and economic well-being, as well as their professional training, which places young people in the most disadvantaged social group in Romania. The political class seems to have little concern about the poverty of young people. This results in a strong migration of the younger labour force to countries with greater employment opportunities. There are only a few sources of information when it comes to opportunities for young adults regarding career orientation. Information that is mostly on the internet is not accessible to young people from disadvantaged families. The Youth Guarantee targets only young people between the ages of 16-24, but the problems and the insecurity of a decent living standard persist after the age of 24. Only 40% of young people who have accessed the services of the National Employment Agency (ANOFM) have found employment.¹⁵ In 2014, only 177 young entrepreneurs had set up start-up companies.¹⁶ These are created especially in the urban areas, neglecting the need to create employment opportunities in rural areas. When it comes to entrepreneurship, young people are a minority and passive stakeholders, especially in rural areas where access to long-term education is limited.

Education policies combating early school-leaving and early drop-outs

In Romania, there are education policies to combat early school-leaving and early drop-outs. However, this is contributing only partially to reducing poverty and social exclusion among young people. Rural areas remain the most badly affected by the phenomenon of school drop-out. Most children who give up education, mainly after primary school, come from disadvantaged families, and lack of decent living conditions and material deprivation adds to this phenomenon. In 2007, Romania was positioned at mid-field of the school dropout rate in a comparison of European countries. Since then Romania is one of the very few countries in which this rate has risen and is now amongst the countries with the highest rate.

Access to affordable housing

Although in Romania there are policies to ensure access to affordable housing, their contribution to reducing poverty and social exclusion among young people remains very limited. One policy that contributes to accessing proper housing conditions is the *Prima Casa Programme*, which is supposed to offer a special, affordable bank rate to young people who want to live by themselves. However, not all are financially and economically eligible for this kind of bank credit. Hence, by targeting the middle class instead, this measure is regressive.

¹⁵ 71,893 out of 182,094. Data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Press release, April 2015, <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/3765-garantia-pentru-tineret-cel-mai-amplu-program-de-combatere-a-somajului-in-randul-tinerilor-din-ultimii-25-ani-8-aprilie-2015>

¹⁶ <http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/comunicare/comunicate-de-presa/3765-garantia-pentru-tineret-cel-mai-amplu-program-de-combatere-a-somajului-in-randul-tinerilor-din-ultimii-25-ani-8-aprilie-2015>

Informal education and civic participation

In Romania, there are policies on informal education and civic participation. Whilst some of these contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion among young people, they are unevenly distributed. Access to informal education is limited for children and young people in isolated rural areas, who are the most vulnerable social group. As these services are not evenly distributed across the country, the phenomenon of poverty and social exclusion will persist.

Access to affordable childcare

In Romania, there are policies on informal access to affordable childcare. This is contributing to reducing poverty and social exclusion among young people. However, excessive bureaucracy and a lack of information lead to delays in providing social benefits for childcare. Moreover, there is no possibility of equally giving both parents the chance to share parental leave. Furthermore,, Romania is among the countries with the lowest child allowance in Europe.

Example of an effective policy or programme related to young people

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection launched a pilot programme in 2013 that helped entry into the labour market of 5,000 young persons aged 15-24, from 22 counties, who had not graduated with the national exam (baccalaureate), through personalised tuition/counselling. The implementation period was between 2013 and 2015.¹⁷

Example of an ineffective policy or programme related to young people

In 2016, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the City Halls, created a programme geared towards ensuring basic supplies and clothes for pre-schoolers. Its design was to issue social vouchers. This programme can be considered a failure, however, because first the child needs to be evaluated to be eligible for the programme and the vouchers are issued only after the evaluation, which mostly leads to delays and the child only gets the voucher after he or she has started their pre-school year. For example, one criterion for the child to be eligible is their degree of attendance at kindergarten.

¹⁷http://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Raport-cercetare-NEET_final_2016.pdf

The use of EU funds in Romania to combat youth poverty and social exclusion

The European Social Fund is contributing to a reduction in poverty and social exclusion among young people. In total, 1.65 million Romanians have been supported through the European Social Fund since 2007. This fund has contributed to Romania's slight economic growth in recent years, but the process of overcoming the financial crisis is still sluggish. With regard to employment support, only a third of the beneficiaries of the funded programmes have managed to find a job. Of the total 621,600 Roma population, only 20,000 Roma benefited from support between 2007 and 2013.¹⁸

The following improvements to the management of the ESF could help to ensure it better promotes the social inclusion of young people and/or prevents the transmission of poverty:

- Emphasise targeting young people in rural areas.
- Develop policies to retain young employees in Romania and attract emigrants for reintegration within Romania.

Example of an effective programme financed by the ESF that has had a positive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion or the prevention of the transmission of poverty to young people.

POSDRU - The Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development has been implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Its objective is to facilitate the access of young people to the labour market, to stimulate the learning process, develop a modern labour market, and facilitate access to the labour market for representatives of vulnerable groups. Between 2007 and 2014, 1,345,713 people were registered in the programme, of whom 560,428 were men and 785,285 women.¹⁹

Policy area: Access to employment, Education and training

Other EU funding schemes that are contributing positively to reducing poverty and social exclusion in Romania relating to young people include the Human Capital Operational Programme (PO CU).

¹⁸ http://www.recensamantromania.ro/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/REZULTATE-DEFINITIVE-RPL_2011.pdf, page 5.

¹⁹ <http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/images/files/programe/OLD/POSDRU/rai.posdru.30.06.2015.pdf>

2. The response of Caritas: promising practices that combat poverty and social exclusion among youth

Training women in the nursing profession for quality medical and social services

<http://www.infirmiera.ro/>

Description

The project aims at increasing the number of home care specialists, by offering training courses to 765 women in rural areas. It also supports the creation of the first Association of Nurses in Romania.

Problem addressed

Lack of qualified staff in the health care system.

Results

Since the start of the project, 765 nurses were trained, and 100 were employed in Romania.

Innovative features & success factors

Increasing qualifications in the health and social care system increases the quality of service in these two areas.

Facilitates donations in order to develop further, new activities (via a donations tab on the website).

Provides a complex online platform specially designed for nurses.

Better representation of the target group in their communication with authorities and other involved partners.

A chance for a better future

<http://www.caritas-ab.ro/ro/o-%C8%99ans%C4%83-pentru-un-viitor-mai-bun>

Description

A chance for a better future tackles the lack of services for children in difficulty, aged 6-14, from the city of Sîngeorgiu de Pădure and the villages of Bălăușeri, Fântânele and Ghindari. The implementation of the initiative was necessary due to the problems faced by the children of these regions, namely: financial difficulties, a high level of absenteeism from school and the negative influence on their development caused by absent parents, all of which can lead to social exclusion.

Problem addressed

The project succeeded in strengthening the relationship between child-parent and teaching staff and local institutions. We have contributed to the enhancement of access to social and basic services, and provided these services for children in difficult situations, striving to prevent their social exclusion and laying the basis for long term social inclusion.

Results

Four social centres were created, providing social services for individuals and groups that reached 171 direct beneficiaries and 365 indirect beneficiaries over an 11-month period.

Innovative features & success factors

Integrated and complex approach in children's social and educational assistance: group activities for children, parents and teachers who have been trained through common activities.

Non-formal education has represented a new innovative approach.

Interventions were led by specialists: psychologists, social assistants, special psycho-pedagogues, social pedagogues, depending on the problem.

3. Recommendations to address the described problems

Recommendation 1: Encourage volunteering from an early age in order to develop educational and professional skills in young adult life

- **Problem addressed if implemented:** Low civic engagement of young people.
- **Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:** The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.
- **Main arguments supporting this measure:** Engaging in social life from an early age will reduce the risk of school drop-outs and create opportunities for future professional skills development.
- **Policy framework:** National Youth Strategy, 2014-2020.²⁰

This measure corresponds to Target 8.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): *“By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.”*

- Direct involvement of the voluntary sector in the elaboration of public policy targets, in areas where volunteering is taking place.

- Developing the infrastructure for volunteering by strengthening technical capacity, operational and financial resources of organisations.

➤ **How the European Commission could support this measure:**

Promote successful participation patterns to encourage young people to get involved in community life, at national level.

Ensure the conformity of the legal framework regulating the volunteer movement in Romania, with the European directives, by improving the framework law - Volunteer Law 195/2001.

Facilitate the mobility of Romanian volunteers in the European and international arena.

Recommendation 2: Develop entrepreneurship opportunities for young people in rural areas

- **Problem addressed if implemented:** Lack of jobs in rural areas.
- **Governmental department or responsible institution that could lead this measure:** The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of European Funds.
- **Main arguments supporting this measure:** The initiative would contribute to strengthening agriculture and encouraging the association of young farmers, financial support and consultancy advice for young entrepreneurs, help overcome the stage of social and economic vulnerability of rural youth and invest in the professional development of young people from rural areas.

²⁰ <http://www.isjcs.ro/strategii/Strategia-tineret-ianuarie-2015.pdf>

➔ **Policy framework:** National Strategies for Employment and Rural development.

- Law no. 76/2002 on the unemployment insurance system and the stimulation of employment.
- Law no. 346/2004 on the stimulation of the establishment and development of small and medium-sized enterprises, as subsequently amended and supplemented.

This measure corresponds to Target 4.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): “By 2030, *substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship*”.

➔ **How the European Commission could support this measure:**

Integrate the rural dimension into the current European Semester deliberations.

Disclaimer

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