

## FACTS ON CHILDREN'S SITUATION

### Health

The Romanian medical system is confronting with many problems, such as: territorial disparities in providing medical assistance, underdeveloped network of medical assistance in schools, or inadequate system of monitoring children's health. Romanian medical system receives approximately 4% from GDP, comparative with 7% in UE member states.

Poor families are confronting themselves with economical difficulties that are causing low access to medical care. The low level of acknowledgements regarding hygiene and healthy life style represents another cause of children's health problems.

Although the infant mortality rate registered a descending trend, its value reaches the highest level in Europe (16.7‰ in 2003). There are counties where the values are reaching more than 23.9‰. Also, the rate value is higher in rural areas (19.4‰), comparatively with urban areas (13.7‰). Respiratory and perinatal diseases are the main causes of mortality at children under age of 1, while traumatism and respiratory diseases are the main causes for mortality at children between ages of 1 to 4. In the last years, tuberculosis' incidence grew significantly: in year 2002 the proportion of new cases reached 45.6‰, while in 1995 the proportion was 21‰.

HIV/AIDS remains a problem especially for young children – 74.6% of persons with HIV/AIDS are situated in the age group 0-14. An important aspect that has to be stressed is the frequency of discrimination cases – in many cases, the rights of children with HIV/AIDS are not respected, mainly because the society's awareness level is quite low.

There have been several initiatives for improving the medical system and children's health: national programmes for monitoring children and youth's health, for immunization, for promoting family planning, for protecting mother and child's health, for anaemia prophylaxis among pregnant women and children, programmes of education for health, elaborating the national legislative frame for providing public health care or free health services for minors.

### **Recommendations:**

- Improving the mother and child health monitoring system;
- Continuing and developing health education programmes in schools and in community (especially in poor and vulnerable communities) and developing family planning services; eliminating the disparities in pre- and postnatal care, caused by family's economic situation;
- Sustaining and developing nurses network and health mediators network for roma communities; improving the system of medical assistance in school and medical services at community level; extending the units of social and medical care;
- Developing HIV/AIDS prevention programmes in schools and high-schools, and informative and raising awareness campaigns in communities; eliminating the blockings and the delays in distribution of antiretroviral medicaments; simplifying the acquisition procedures of the necessary kits for clinical monitoring of HIV/AIDS patients;
- Increasing the number of social workers from medical units;
- Increasing the funds allocated to the medical sector to 6% from GDP, until 2008.

### **Education**

The education reform registered a rapid advancement, but its effects weren't always the predicted and desired ones. Some of the problems in the education field are connected to low financing, instability of adopted measures and the gap between rural and urban areas (in what respects the educational resources and settings or the rate of school enrolment).

Family's low economical situation and parents and children's negative opinion about school are contributing to the high level of school abandonment. A national survey, carried out in 2004 by "Education 2000+" Centre, revealed that 51% of the respondents are not considering that school is necessary for ensuring a successful life.



As the 2002 Census showed, more than 100.000 persons between 15-25 years old are illiterate. While the number of persons enrolled in higher education tripled in the last 15 years, the school enrolment rate for 2003-2004 in compulsory school was 75%.

## **Recommendations:**

- Allocating 6% of GDP to education sector; increasing the stability and the coherence of the reform measures;
- Ensuring quality education for all children; diminishing the differences between rural and urban schools; continuing the school reintegration programs for children who abandoned school;
- Developing mechanisms for monitoring the quality of the education process;
- Introducing a higher number of extra-curricular activities.

## **Children in institutions**

In the last 15 years, child protection system registered many transformations, especially at legislative level – a legal framework for accreditation and inspection system was established. Also, personnel training sessions were carried out and a public campaign aiming the prevention of child's abandonment and institutionalisation. Since 2001, an intense deinstitutionalisation programme is carried out. Thus, in 2004, 60% of children in difficult situations benefited of alternative care services. In January 2005, the number of institutionalised children was approximately 33.000.

Child abandonment at birth still has alarming frequency. As an UNICEF report<sup>1</sup> revealed, 80% of mothers who abandon their children have low social and economical status, 42% are illiterate and 28% had their first child before reaching 20 years old.

The problems in residential care system are connected to institutions' low capacity of providing an environment suitable for child's development and to low social reintegration opportunities after leaving the institution. There were also situations of child abuse in institutions, committed by personnel or other children.

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<sup>1</sup> National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, Mother and Child Care Institute "Alfred Rusescu" – The child abandonment situation in Romania", 2005

International adoption is not possible anymore, with an exception – if the adopter is child's grandparent. On the other hand, national adoption system is not sufficiently developed to respond to all the entries in childcare system. Child abandonment prevention services should focus on family counselling, not just on material support. This way, the family's awareness on child's needs and self-supporting can be increased.

An analysis, carried out by National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, revealed an unequal distribution of social services for deinstitutionalised children. There are regions in Romania where the number of children who will leave the residential care system, in the next years, is very high but the services for supporting social reintegration are inexistent or low numbered.

**Recommendations:**

- Permanent monitoring of residential institutions and enhancing the existing conditions; adopting and implementing measures for combating and preventing child abuse;
- Programs for developing independent life skills addressed to children in institution; stimulating child's participation to decisional acts that influence their life; maintaining and stimulating parents-child relationship;
- Improving the professional training of personnel; changing the attitudes towards assisted children – treating them as individuals with distinct needs and resources;
- Improving the social reintegration services and adapting their capacity and location to the number of children who are going to leave the residential care system; developing the monitoring system of these services.

**Children with disabilities**

In December 2004, the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child registered a number of approximately 69.000 disabled children, while National Authority for Protecting the Persons with Handicap only 56.292. This discrepancy between different governmental bodies is not a singular case.

Also, there are many children with disabilities who never been evaluated by a special commission so that they would be registered in the authorities' evidences. This situation is caused by family's poor economical situation or by the lack of information regarding the procedures necessary for accessing the rights and facilities stipulated in the law.

At the beginning of 2005, National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child reported a number of 50.788 disabled children older then 7 years of age, and only 18.144 of them attended a form of education - 5.344 in mainstream education system and 11.929 in special education system. Insufficient number of rehabilitation/recovery services, insufficient special facilities, reduced social integration opportunities or limited perspectives for professional training and employment are just some of the problems that children with disabilities are confronting with.

**Recommendation:**

- Ensuring the access of children with disabilities to the community life; developing community services (education, health care services, recovery services, leisure activities, etc.);
- Extending family counselling network, sustaining family support and raising the information level regarding the rights and facilities stipulated by the law;
- Developing the monitoring mechanisms and eliminating the disparities between national authorities; developing a system of prompt registration of cases and early intervention mechanisms;
- Ensuring the access to education and to professional training in accordance with individual talents and interests.

**Children in the street**

In the street, there are four categories of children: those who live only in the street, heaving no connections with their family or with a social care institution; those who work in the street and go back daily to their family; the youths who live in the street (in general, they are persons who turned 18 year old and had to leave the residential care institutions) and children who live with their parents in the street.

It is estimated that, at national level, the number of children in the street is around 5.000 and 2/3 of them are children who don't live permanently in the street.

In the street, money is earned through working (car washing, collecting recyclable objects, selling different products, loading/unloading merchandise, etc.), begging, stealing or through prostitution.

Children in the street have a poor hygiene, a behaviour strongly influenced by street environment and very low education level (illiteracy rate is very high because the majority is not attending school); they are confronted with numerous developmental and health problems, having low chances of social reintegration. Some of them, especially those who live only in the street, are consuming alcohol, tobacco and different types of hallucinogen substances.

**Recommendations:**

- Developing street social assistance services for children in the street, which should include: economical support, family reintegration, obtaining identity papers, juridical assistance, medical care, education for health or placement in residential care institutions;
- Increasing the number of day centres, social apartments, night shelters and educational centres for children in the street;
- Developing public campaigns for preventing child abandonment and child's abuse and exploitation.

**Children's economical exploitation**

Reduced economic situation of some families and the mentality that children have to contribute to family's maintenance are some of the main causes of the worst forms of child labour. In roma families, children's contribution to family's income represents a tradition, and these children are involved in different forms of labour starting from young ages.

As an ILO-IPEC report from 2004 showed, adults stated that a number of 82.884 children are involved in economic activities, comparatively with the number of 141.905 in children's opinion.



Child's economical exploitation is more frequent in rural areas – 89% of child labour takes place in agriculture. These children are working approximately 6 hours daily/ 6 days a week.

## **Recommendation:**

- Increasing the access to education for children who formerly abandoned school;
- Reducing family's vulnerability; developing a network of counselling centres for child and family;
- Developing preventing/combating programmes, taking into account the differences between child labour in rural and urban areas.

## **Abused children**

Child abuse is not a new phenomenon, but entered in the public attention recently. Communities and even specialists are still slowly reacting to child abuse. The mentality of keeping secret the abuses produced in the family generates a low rate of reporting and also an incomplete knowledge of the incidence of this phenomenon.

The Institute for Researching and Preventing Criminality reported a number of 4.100 cases of abused children in 2003, and 2.071 cases in the first 6 months of 2004. In 2004, the sexual crimes included: 284 cases of sexual acts with minors, 114 cases of sexual perversions, 101 cases of sexual corruption and 837 cases of raping.

During 2004, Save the Children Romania (through the Counselling Centres for Abused and Neglected Child) instrumented 506 cases of children who suffered a form of abuse in family or institutional environment.

In the last years, informative campaigns took place; several services for abused children, for their family and for the aggressor were established in General Departments for Social Work and Child Protection and essential improvements in legislation were adopted.

## **Recommendations:**

- Increasing the number of services offered by the General Departments for Social Work and Child Protection and improving the personnel's qualification;
- Developing programs for promoting positive discipline; developing awareness campaigns;

- Creating resource centres for parents.

### **Children and drug abuse**

In the last years, the drug abuse increased dramatically, implicit at children's level. The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs revealed in 2003, an 85% increase in amphetamine abuse, a doubling of marijuana consume, a tripling of ecstasy abuse and an increase of 40-50% in LSD and other hallucinogens substances consume, comparatively with the results obtained in 1999. Also, an increase of almost 50% was registered in injected drug consumption.

A study carried out by Save the Children Romania and Department for Public Health in 2001-2002, showed that the age when drug abuse starts decreased radically to 13-14 years old and that 10% of high-school pupils consumed at least once a type of drug. National Anti-Drug Agency states that 6.3% of drug consumers are minors. In year 2004, Save the Children Romania and Bucharest University – Faculty for Sociology and Social Work, carried out a survey among pupils and revealed the following data on children between 11-12 years old: 2.5% tried at least once marijuana, 0.4% heroin, 0.3% ecstasy, 0.2% cocaine and 0.1% LSD; declared constant consumers of marijuana were 0.1% and of cocaine 0.1% of them.

### **Recommendations:**

- Continuing the prevention programmes in schools; enhancing the professionalism of personnel involved in preventing and combating actions; developing the “harm reduction” programs;
- Enhancing the endowments in medical, police and penitentiary units; developing specific programmes, depending on the consumed drug;
- Involving the community in the programs of preventing drug abuse and in social reinsertion of drug consumer;
- Introducing “Education for Health” programmes in school curricula.



### **Children in conflict with the law**

The incidence of crimes committed by minors have increased and diversified since 1990. Between January 2003 and June 2004, from the total number of 407.770 crimes, 29.374 were committed by minors (1.434 of these crime involved violence). From the total number of crimes committed by minors, 38% were thefts, 2% burglaries, and 5.38% crimes against the person.

At the beginning of 2005, at national level, were functioning 36 penitentiaries and 2 of these are for minors. There are also 3 re-education centres for minors and 6 penitentiary hospitals. Special sections for minors were settled in the penitentiaries for adults and these are hosting the majority of imprisoned children.

Probation services are still low-developed, the focus being the punishment of the crime and not on child's re-education and well-being.

### **Recommendations:**

- Diversifying the alternative services and decreasing the number of imprisoning punishments; developing the reintegration services for minors in conflict with the law;
- Increasing the number of specialised courts for minors; increasing the number of social workers and psychologists in the field;
- Enhancing the professionalism of professionals working directly with minors;
- Having a child rights approach and understanding the needs of children in conflict with the law (there are no special stipulations for the children with disabilities that committed a crime); putting an accent on re-education and well-being of children;
- Developing preventing programmes; offering support to children in vulnerable age periods.

### **Trafficking in children**

The most recent data shows that in 2005 (until September) there were identified 421 children who were trafficked (49 boys and 372 girls).



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Save the Children Romania

14-25 years old is the most vulnerable age group to trafficking in persons and the main destination countries are: Spain, France, Italy, Greece, FYROM, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Turkey, Kosovo and Croatia.

## **Recommendations:**

- Implementing measures for supporting economically disadvantaged families;
- Raising the awareness level regarding trafficking in children; developing informative programmes for the specialists in the field of child protection;
- Promoting, in the community, non-discriminative attitudes towards children who were previously trafficked.