

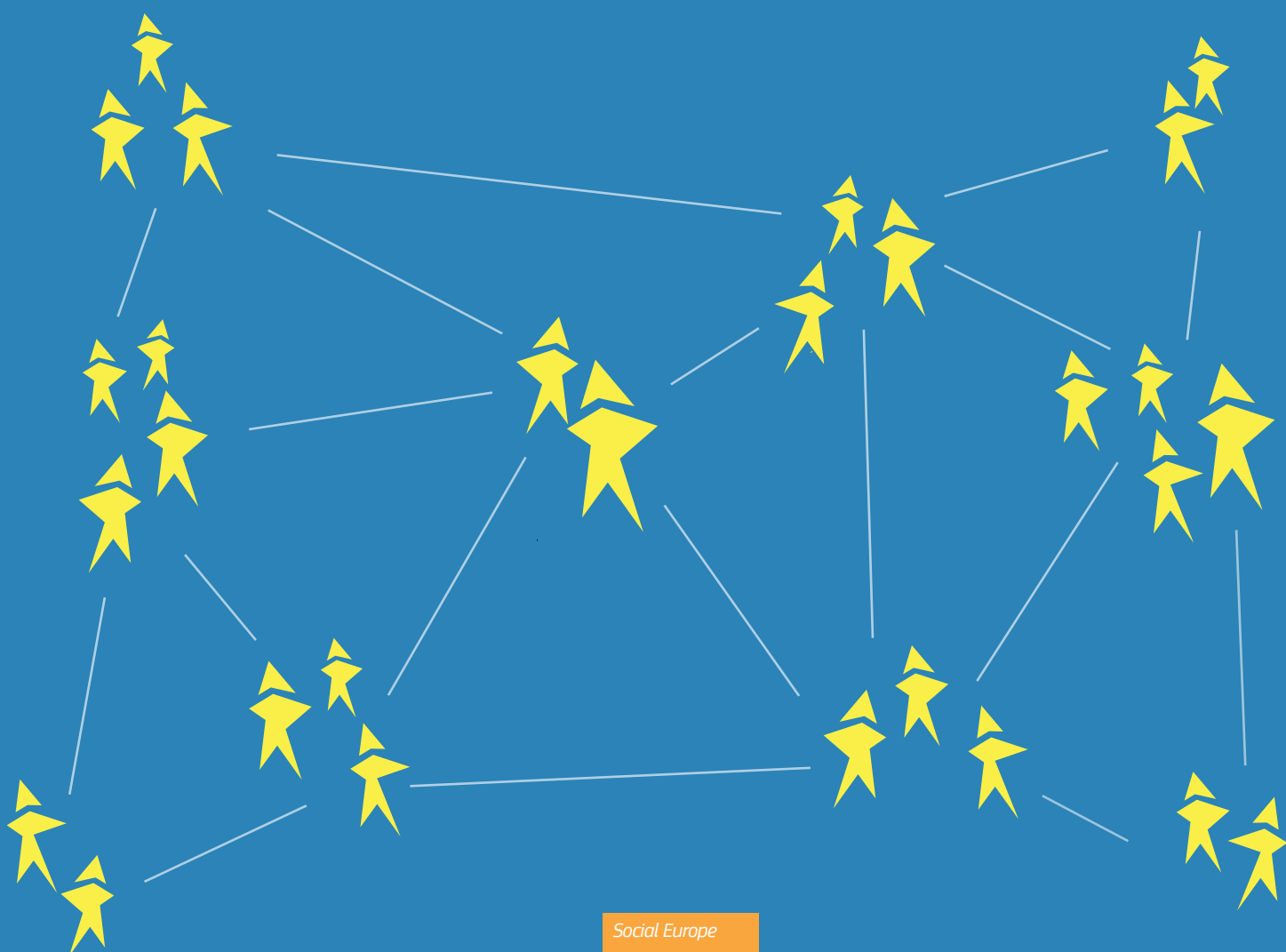


EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY NETWORK (ESPN)

# Access to social protection for young people

## Romania

Luana Pop



Social Europe

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion  
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**European Social Policy Network (ESPN)**

**ESPN Thematic Report:  
Access to social protection for  
young people**

**Romania**

**2021**

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## SUMMARY

Indicators such as the at-risk-of-poverty-or-social-exclusion (AROPE) rate and the material and social deprivation rate (see Section 1) show the fragility and precarity of the young population aged 16-29. Not only are young people more exposed to poverty and social exclusion, but their position in the labour market also continues to be highly unstable, and marked by precarious employment forms (a high proportion of contributing family members among young people, and a high proportion of informal employment); and this despite some attempts by the government to increase formal employment among young vulnerable groups.

During 2015-2020, social protection and employment measures for young people focused exclusively on the school-to-work transition. Most social benefits available to young people are conditional upon work: (un)employment benefits, sickness/healthcare benefits, parental indemnities, and maternal benefits. Those few benefits that are not related to employment – such as the guaranteed minimum income (GMI), family benefits, and seasonal heating benefits – cover a rather small segment of the young population and their levels do not provide effective protection against the risks of poverty or social exclusion.

However, between 2015 and 2020, some legislative amendments were introduced, and some programmes adopted in the field of employment policies, which targeted the young population explicitly; these refer mostly to employment subsidies and active support for NEET young people (not in employment, education or training) to access training and apprenticeships. Some of the benefits available for insured unemployed people – such as unemployment benefits and mobility/relocation bonuses – have been extended to recent graduates, mostly young people. However, cash benefits for unemployed recent graduates are rather low (as these have not been updated since 2008); and bonuses, due to very restrictive conditions, cover a small proportion of those taking up employment. Not only are these therefore unable to provide effective support in the transition of young people to an independent life, they also cannot act as an incentive for young people to enter other active employment programmes.

Furthermore, although sickness, maternal and parental benefits are conditional on relatively short contributory periods (12 months of employment during the previous two years), they still depend on formal employment. However, only employees are adequately covered by benefits; self-employed people are the most vulnerable, as only a few of them (an estimated 10% at most during 2015-2020) are insured in the social and/or healthcare insurance systems, and even fewer take up the voluntary work insurance (payable by employers where work contracts are in place) which covers sickness/unemployment benefits.

Only a few social benefits in Romania were updated between 2015 and 2020, and none of these targeted young people. Unemployment benefits have not been updated since 2008, the GMI has remained at its 2014 level, and so have seasonal heating benefits (the only housing benefit currently in place in Romania). Therefore, coverage has fallen significantly over time.

Finally, the social protection system leaves many gaps in the social protection of the working-age population, and these are also reflected at the level of the young population. The social protection of those in non-standard employment or self-employment, as well as those outside the labour market, is rather weak. Current measures and benefits are not able to assist the transition towards stable and independent employment. Restrictive eligibility conditions, and the weakness of benefits for self-employed people, are the most important access obstacles faced by young people in their transition to secure forms of employment.

# 1 KEY FIGURES ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Distribution of young people (aged 15–29) by main activity status

**Table 1a: Main activity status of people aged 15-29 and 30-64 (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, % 15-29 and 30-64)**

	ROMANIA											
	15-29						30-64					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EMPLOYMENT RATE*	43.1	41.5	43.3	43.0	42.4	41.8	68.2	68.8	71.1	72.3	73.5	73.3
<i>Paid employment**</i>	71.1	72.7	73.1	73.8	74.4	74.3	74.0	76.3	76.8	77.9	78.6	78.9
<i>Self-employment**</i>	10.4	9.9	10.1	9.7	9.5	9.1	17.9	16.8	16.8	16.0	15.7	15.4
<i>Contributing family work**</i>	18.5	17.4	16.9	16.5	16.1	16.6	8.0	6.9	6.4	6.1	5.7	5.7
UNEMPLOYMENT***	14.5	13.1	11.7	10.1	10.2	11.6	5.1	4.4	3.5	3.1	2.8	3.9
INACTIVITY****	49.5	52.2	51.0	52.2	52.8	52.7	28.2	28.0	26.3	25.4	24.4	23.8
	EU-27											
	15-29						30-64					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EMPLOYMENT RATE*	45.0	45.9	46.9	47.7	48.2	46.1	71.4	72.4	73.5	74.5	75.3	74.9
<i>Paid employment**</i>	91.8	92.2	92.4	92.6	92.8	92.5	83.0	83.3	83.7	84.0	84.1	84.2
<i>Self-employment**</i>	5.3	5.2	5.2	5.2	5.1	5.4	14.6	14.5	14.3	14.2	14.2	14.1
<i>Contributing family work **</i>	2.9	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.4	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.7
UNEMPLOYMENT***	17.3	15.8	14.2	12.8	11.9	13.3	8.5	7.7	6.9	6.1	5.6	5.8
INACTIVITY****	45.6	45.4	45.3	45.3	45.3	46.8	22.0	21.6	21.0	20.6	20.2	20.5

Notes: (\*) The employment rate is expressed as a share (%) of the total population in the age group. The 3 categories of employment (paid employment [i.e. employees], self-employment and contributing family work) are expressed as a share (%) of the population in employment in the age group. Contributing family work is a form of labour (generally unpaid, although compensation may come indirectly in the form of family income) that supports another member of the family to run an agricultural holding or another business. (\*\*) The unemployment rate is expressed as a share (%) of the active population, i.e. the population that is either in employment or unemployed (not the total population), in the age group. (\*\*\*) The inactivity rate is expressed as a share (%) of the total population in the age group.

Reading note: In 2020, in Romania, 41.8% of people aged between 15 and 29 were in employment, compared to 73.3% of those aged 30-64. In the EU-27 as a whole, these figures were 46.1% and 74.9%, respectively. The share of people unemployed in the active population in Romania was 11.6% of the 15-29 age group and 3.9% of the 30-64 age group (EU-27 average: 13.3% and 5.8%). The shares of people economically inactive in Romania in the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups were 52.7% and 23.8%, respectively (EU-27 average: 46.8% and 20.5%).

Source: Eurostat, ESPN Network Core Team calculations based on LFS indicators [lfsa\_eegais], [lfsa\_egaps], [lfsa\_pganws] and [lfsa\_igan]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

<sup>1</sup> Except where otherwise specified, the indicators presented in Section 1 of this report were computed by the ESPN Network Core Team on the basis of data coming from two data sources coordinated at the European level by the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>): European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC). These indicators were computed for all the 35 ESPN countries for which the data needed were available. All these ESPN countries' estimates are presented in Annex B of the following Synthesis Report: Dalila Ghailani, Stéphanie Coster, Ramón Peña-Casas and Pietro Regazzoni (2021), "Access to social protection for young people. An analysis of policies in 35 countries", European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. This Synthesis Report can be downloaded [here](#).



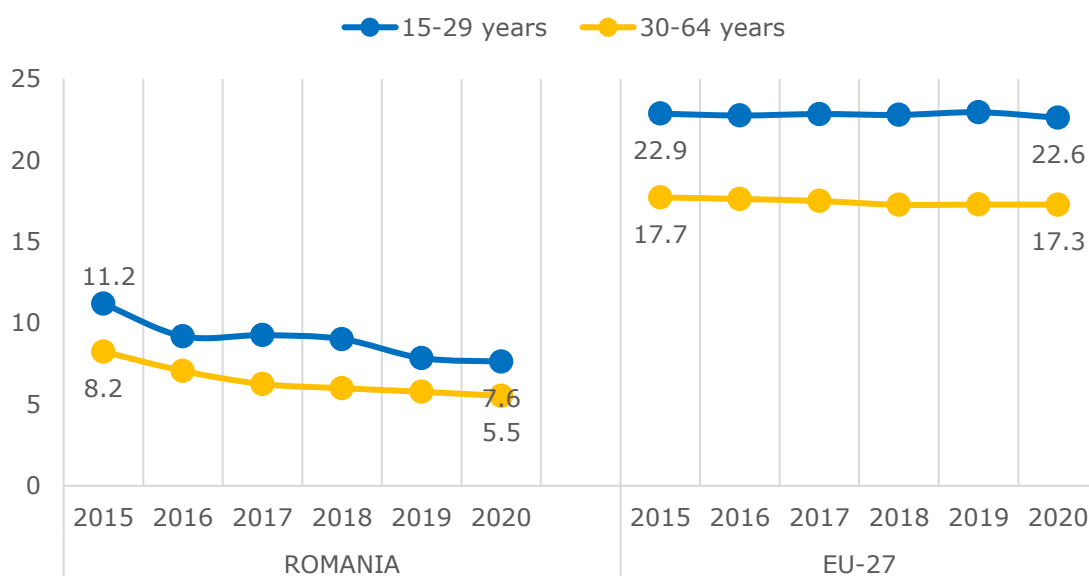
**Table 1b: Main activity status of people aged 15-29 and 30-64 (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, ratios 15-29/30-64)**

	ROMANIA						EU-27					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EMPLOYMENT RATE*	0.63	0.60	0.61	0.60	0.58	0.57	0.63	0.63	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.62
Paid employment**	0.96	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.94	1.11	1.11	1.10	1.10	1.10	1.10
Self-employment**	0.58	0.59	0.60	0.61	0.60	0.59	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.38
Contributing family work**	2.30	2.53	2.65	2.71	2.82	2.91	1.21	1.20	1.21	1.24	1.24	1.20
UNEMPLOYMENT***	2.83	2.99	3.30	3.28	3.70	2.99	2.04	2.06	2.06	2.09	2.10	2.29
INACTIVITY****	1.76	1.86	1.94	2.05	2.16	2.22	2.07	2.11	2.16	2.20	2.24	2.29

Notes: To obtain the ratio of 15-29 to 30-64, the 15-29 percentage is divided by the 30-64 percentage: a value below (above) 1 in a given activity status therefore means that 15-29-year-olds are proportionally less (more) numerous in that activity status than 30-64-year-olds. See also Notes to Table 1a above.

Reading note: In 2020, in Romania, 41.8% of people aged between 15 and 29 were in employment compared to 73.3% of those aged 30-64 (see Table 1a) – i.e. a 15-29:30-64 ratio of 0.57. In the EU-27 as a whole (see table 1a), these figures were 46.1 and 74.9% respectively (ratio 0.62).

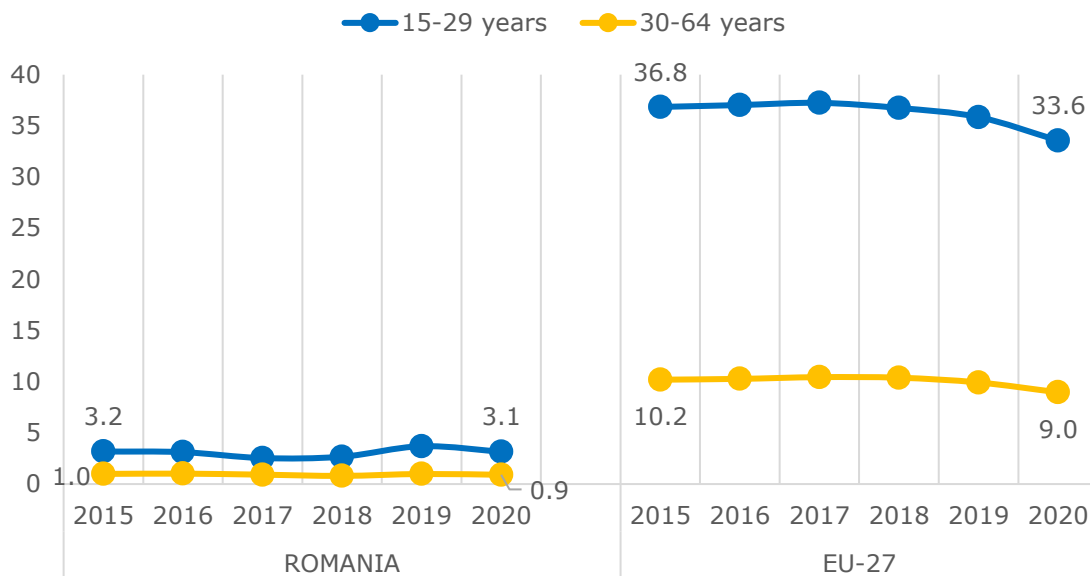
Source: See Table 1a.

**Figure 1: Part-time employment as a share of the population in employment - comparison of the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**

Reading note: In 2020, in Romania, the share of part-time employment in total employment was 7.6% for the 15-29 age group and 5.5% for the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these shares were 22.6% and 17.3%, respectively.

Source: Eurostat, ESPN Network Core Team calculations based on Eurostat LFS indicator [lfsa\_epgn62]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

**Figure 2: Temporary employment as a share of population in paid employment - comparison of the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**

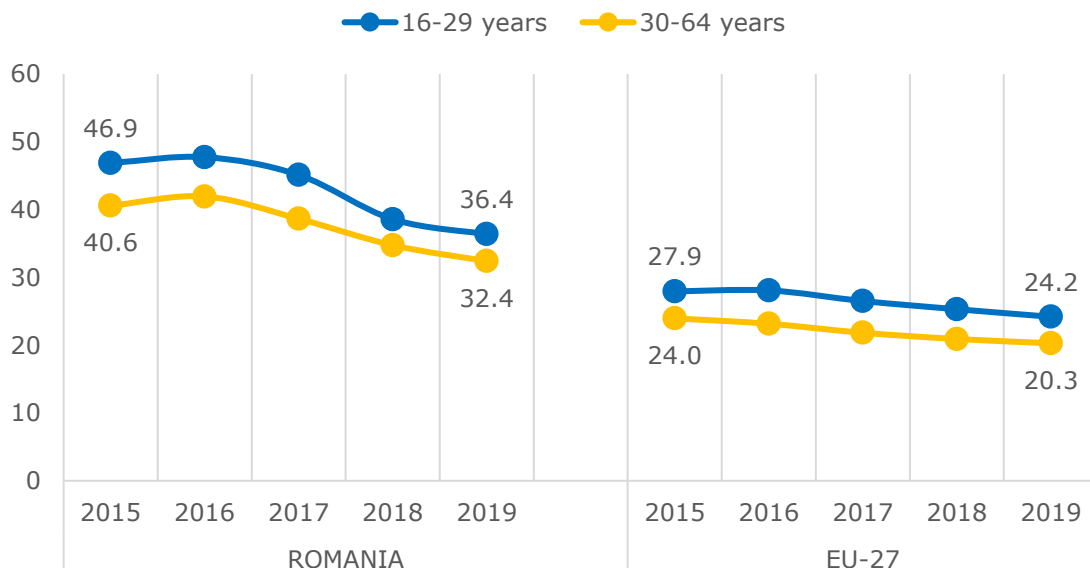


Reading note: In 2020, in Romania, the share of temporary workers among employees was 3.1% for the 15-29 age group and 0.9% for the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these shares were 33.6% and 9.0%, respectively.

Source: Eurostat, ESPN Network Core Team calculations based on Eurostat LFS indicators [lfsa\_epgn62] and [lfsa\_egaps]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

## 1.2 Young people (aged 15–29) at risk of poverty or social exclusion

**Figure 3: People at risk of poverty or social exclusion - comparison of the 16-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**

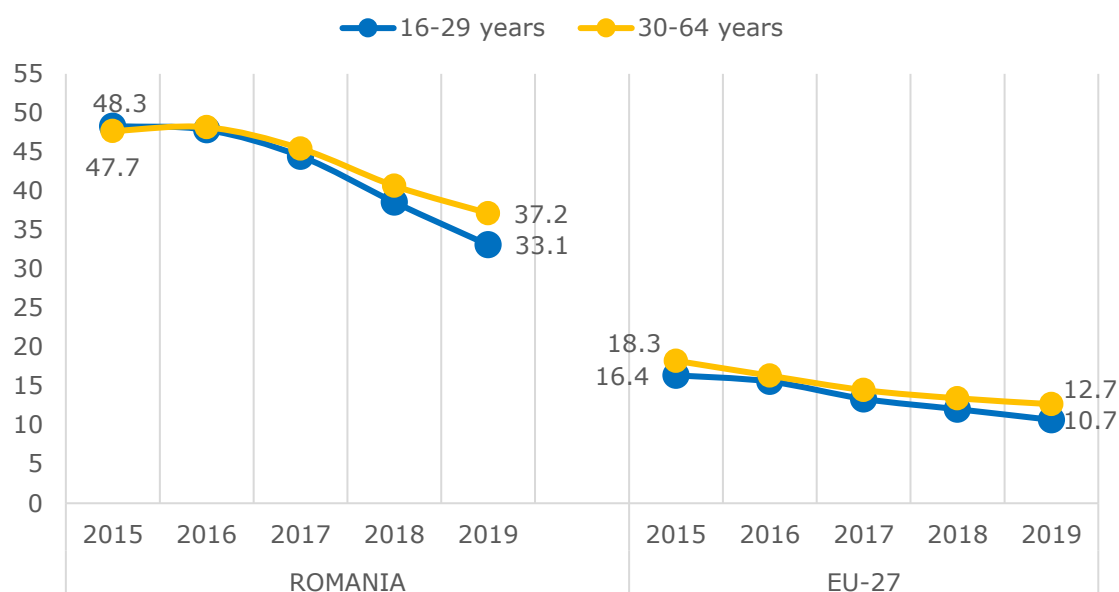


Reading note: In 2019, in Romania, 36.4% of the 16-29 age group were at risk of poverty or social exclusion (i.e. they were living in a household that was at risk of poverty and/or severely materially and socially deprived and/or (quasi-)jobless according to the EU definition of these indicators) compared to 32.4% of the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these figures were 24.2% and 20.3%, respectively.

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc extraction - indicator [ilc\_peps02]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

### 1.3 Young people (aged 15–29) materially and socially deprived

**Figure 4: People materially and socially deprived - comparison of the 16-29 and 30-64 age groups (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**

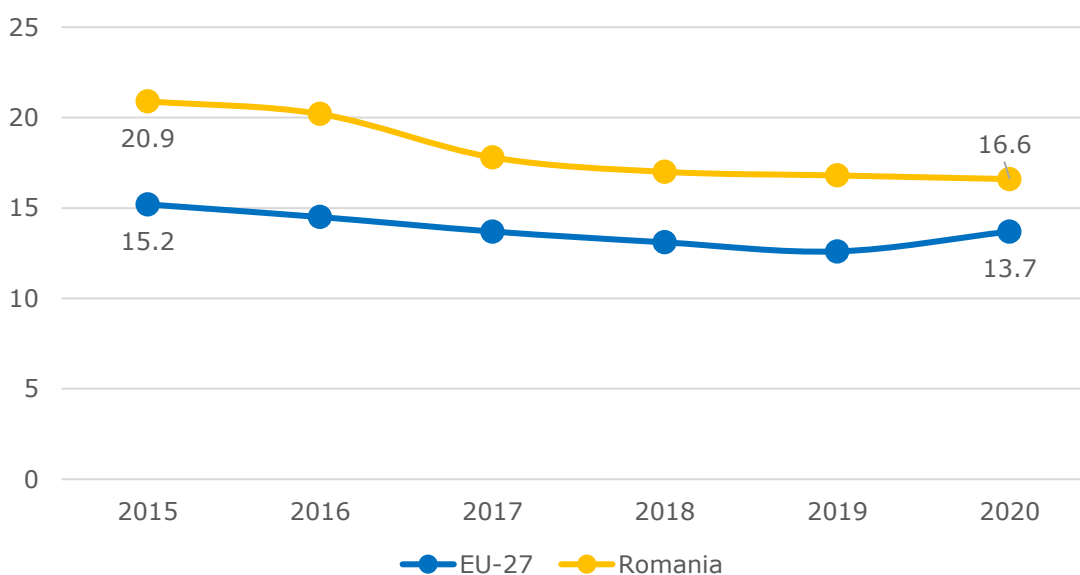


Reading note: In 2019, in Romania, 33.1% of the 16-29 age group were materially and socially deprived (according to the EU definition of this indicator) compared to 37.2% of the 30-64 age group. For the EU-27 as a whole, these figures were 10.7% and 12.7%, respectively.

Source: Eurostat, EU-SILC ad hoc extraction - indicator [ilc\_mdsd]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

### 1.4 Young people (aged 15–29) neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs)

**Figure 5: People aged 15-29 neither in employment nor in education or training (NEETs) (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**

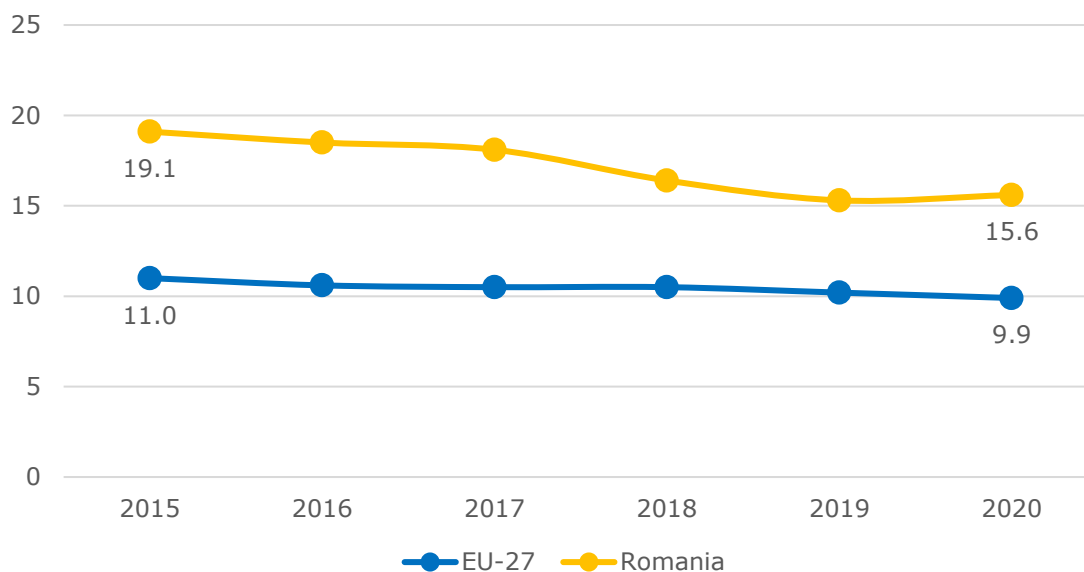


Reading note: In 2020, in Romania, 16.6% of the 15-29 age group were neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) compared to 13.7 for the EU-27 as a whole.

Source: Eurostat, LFS - indicator [lfse\_20]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.

## 1.5 Early leavers (aged 18–24) from education and training

**Figure 6: Early leavers from education and training for the 18-24 age group (2015-2020, EU-27 and Romania, %)**

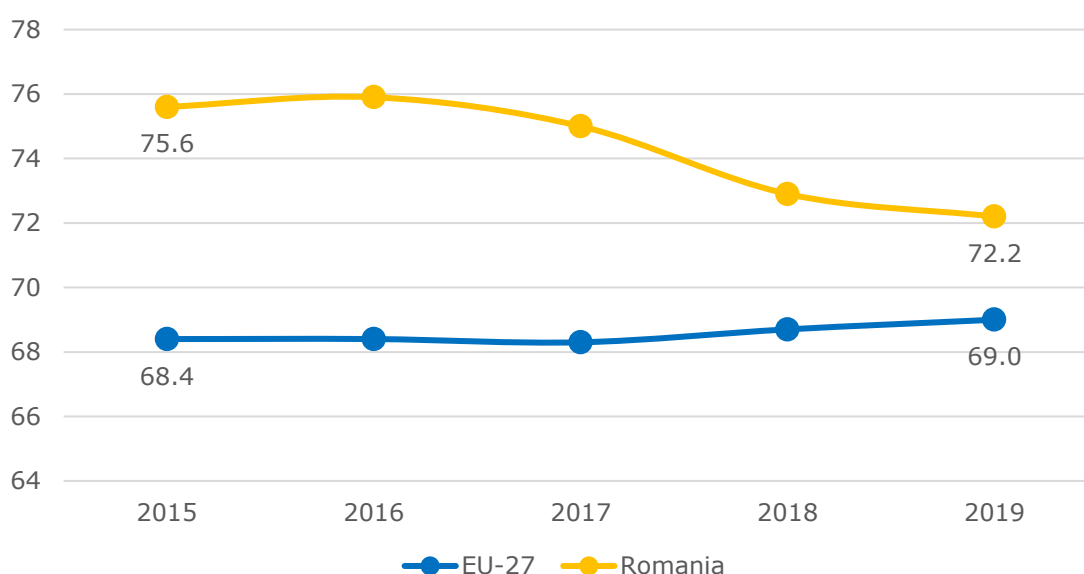


*Reading note: In 2020, in Romania, 15.6% of the 18-24 age group were early leavers from education and training – i.e. they had completed, at most, lower secondary education and were not in further education or training. For the EU-27 as a whole, this figure was 9.9%.*

*Source: Eurostat, LFS - indicator [edat\_ifse\_14]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.*

## 1.6 Young people (aged 16–29) living with their parents

**Figure 7: Young people aged 16-29 living with their parents (2015-2019, EU-27 and Romania, %)**



*Reading note: In 2019, in Romania, 72.2% of the 16-29 age group were living with their parents, compared to 69.0% for the EU-27 as a whole.*

*Source: EU-SILC - indicator [ilc\_lvps08]. Data downloaded on 24 May 2021.*

## 2 ACCESS TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Unemployment benefits and activation/insertion/installation benefits are part of the support provided to vulnerable categories in the labour market and unemployed people, along with other active employment programmes and measures. Unemployment benefits are regulated by Law 76/2002 and its methodological norms (Governmental Decision 174/2002). The scheme does not specifically address the situation of young people. It has a contributory component, and a non-contributory component aimed at recent graduates. All expenditure on unemployment/employment programmes and benefits are supported from the unemployment insurance fund.

### 2.1 Contributory unemployment benefits

Two types of monetary benefits are granted to unemployed people under the unemployment insurance scheme: (i) unemployment benefit (*indemnizația de șomaj*); and (ii) a compensatory indemnity, granted to those unemployed people who find a full-time job while still receiving unemployment benefit.

#### 2.1.1 Unemployment benefits

Unemployment benefit is a contributory benefit, to which only those with a certain contributory history are entitled.

##### 2.1.1.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

#### a) Age

While age is not an explicit criterion for unemployment benefit, eligibility requires a minimum contributory period of 12 months; thus, for employees, or any other contractual workers automatically covered by unemployment insurance, the minimum age at which they can become eligible for unemployment benefit is 17. All those categories for which unemployment insurance is optional, such as self-employed people, can enrol in the unemployment insurance system only at 18, thus becoming eligible at 19 at the earliest.

#### b) Activity status requirement

Unemployment benefit is restricted to registered unemployed people and is conditional upon: (i) being insured against unemployment<sup>2</sup>; (ii) registering at the local labour force office; (iii) not having an income higher than the social reference index (SRI) – currently 500 Lei (€100) per month; and (iv) not refusing the offer of a job in accordance with the person's qualifications or a (re)qualification course. Trainees (students of professional schools) are considered to be in education and therefore not eligible; the same applies to apprentices, who have the status of an employee with a temporary individual work contract. Unemployed people who lost their job by mutual agreement with their employer, or after resigning, are also not eligible.

#### c) Contributory history required to access the scheme

The minimum contributory period required for receiving unemployment benefit is 12 months during the 24 months prior to applying for it.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the law on unemployment (Law 76/2002 and its successive amendments), the following categories are automatically covered by unemployment insurance: (i) workers with an individual work contract (full-time/part-time, permanent/determinate period) or temporary work contract (with a temporary work agency); (ii) public officials and holders of elected positions, members of co-operatives, management contract-holders; and (iii) workers receiving wages or work-related income assimilated to wages (Art. 19). For self-employed people, entrepreneurs, and associates, enrolment is optional, and conditional upon being enrolled in both the public pension system and the healthcare insurance system.

**d) Waiting period**

For unemployed people with a previous employment history, the benefit is granted immediately upon application. Applications must be submitted within one year after the start of unemployment, after which access is suspended.

**e) Replacement rate / benefit level**

Unemployment benefit is calculated as the sum of 75% of the SRI and up to 10% of claimants' average gross monthly income for the previous 12 months. The latter percentage depends on the length of the contributory period: it starts at 3% for those with at least three years of contributions and reaches 10% for those with 20 years or more. Thus, the benefit varies between 28% and 44% of the national minimum net salary (11-18% of the national average net salary) for people previously on the national minimum salary; and it can reach 68% of the national minimum net salary, or 27% of the national average net salary, for those who earned the national average monthly salary after 20 years of work. Although the calculation is not age-specific, because it takes into account people's contributory period the benefit level for young people cannot exceed 56% of the national minimum net salary (22% of the national average net salary).

In addition to the benefit, the unemployment fund supports, for these who are unemployed, the social contribution to the public pension system, including the contribution for sickness benefits, and the contribution to the healthcare insurance system.

**f) Duration**

The duration of unemployment benefit is 6-12 months, depending on the length of the contributory period. The benefit is granted for six months to those with a contributory history of between one and five years, nine months to those with at least five years, and 12 months to those with 10 years or more.

**a) 2.1.1.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people****a) Main gaps in access for young people**

Young people aged 15 are not covered by any unemployment scheme or employment programme. The minimum age of unemployment is 16 (Law 76/2002). The labour code allows those aged 15 to be employed if this is approved by their parents or legal guardians, but they are not subject to any (un)employment policy.

Thus, starting at 16, young people can benefit from all unemployment benefits and programmes, if they are former employees (with temporary or permanent, full-time or part-time, work contracts; or as contractual members of co-operative associations). Self-employed people can, in principle, acquire unemployment insurance on a voluntarily basis, but this is restricted to people aged 18 or over. Thus, young people under 18 who are not employees (thus, without individual work contracts), have no formal access to contributory unemployment benefits.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

The incidence of self-employment among young people aged 15-29 in Romania is among the highest among EU Member States: in 2020 it was 9.1%, compared with the EU-27 average of only 5.4%. In contrast, the incidence of paid employment was very low: 74.3% versus 92.5% for the EU-27 average. The incidence of both paid employment and self-employment among young, employed people was lower than among the population aged 30-64; this leaves this category with a higher proportion of contributing family members, and thus of un-remunerated work: 16.6%, compared with 5.7% (see Section 1). Although the incidence of self-employment among young people is lower than among the 30-64 age group, the overall proportion of those in formal employment is actually much lower.

In addition, self-employment limits access to any unemployment benefits, because self-employed people are not, by default, insured within the unemployment insurance system. Insurance of self-employed people is optional: those aged 18 and over are allowed to enter

a contractual relationship with the National Employment Agency (NEA) if they are already insured in the public pension and national health insurance systems. According to Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, in 2020 only about 7% of the 1.24 million self-employed people aged 15-64 were insured within the public pension system<sup>3</sup>: the proportion who voluntarily signed up for unemployment insurance therefore cannot exceed this proportion<sup>4</sup>.

Due to the employment structure of the young population (see Section 1), which is biased towards contributing family members (non-paid employment) and self-employment, the obstacles encountered by the young population are even higher.

On top of this, although the unemployment rate in Romania is below the EU-27 average for both the 15-29 and 30-64 age groups (see Section 1), only a small proportion of young unemployed people are registered as unemployed with employment offices – in 2020, 36% of unemployed people aged 15-24, versus 63% for all unemployed people aged 15 and over<sup>5</sup>. The low registration rate among young people might be the result of the low coverage of unemployment benefits, especially among young people under 18 and among those without a sufficient history of standard work.

The proportion of registered unemployed people aged 16-29 receiving unemployment benefit for insured people was less than half of that for the overall registered unemployed population (13% vs 31%) in 2020 (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Proportion of registered unemployed people who receive unemployment benefits, by type and age group – Romania, December 2020 (%)**

December 2020	Receiving unemployment benefits	Receiving unemployment benefits for insured people	Receiving unemployment benefits for graduates
<b>All unemployed (16 and over)</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Young unemployed (16-29)</i>	31	13	18
<i>Unemployed (16-24)</i>	30	7	23
<i>Unemployed (25-29)</i>	32	29	3

Data source: Statistical Bulletin 2020, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection.

<sup>3</sup> Data on the number of insured in the public pension system are provided monthly by the national public pension house, <https://www.cnpp.ro/indicatori-statistici-pilon-i>. The 7% has been calculated based on the number of insured who are voluntarily insured within the public pension system (based on a contractual relationship with the national public pension house or a fiscal declaration), during December 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Data on the number of insured people within the unemployment insurance system, especially in regard to those voluntarily insured, are not reported systematically by the NEA.

<sup>5</sup> Data based on the number of people unemployed at the end of the 4th quarter of 2020 (Tempo-online database, National Institute for Statistics, AMG130L, ILO definition, survey-based data) and the number of unemployed people registered with unemployment offices at the end of December 2020 (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Statistical reports, administrative data). The number of ILO-unemployed is computed according to the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition of unemployment. According to this definition, which is also the one used by Eurostat (see Section 1), an unemployed person is a person aged 15 or over who: (i) is without a job during a given (reference) week; (ii) is available to start a job within the next two weeks; and (iii) actively sought employment at some time during the previous four weeks or has already found a job that starts within the next three months.

## **2.1.2 Compensatory indemnity for people receiving unemployment benefit who find a job before the benefit ends**

### **2.1.2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

Finding a full-time job while receiving unemployment benefit makes workers eligible for an indemnity of 30% of the benefit, for the entire duration for which they would have otherwise received it if still unemployed. The indemnity is linked to the unemployment benefit (Art. 72, Law 76/2002).

#### **a) Age**

The same conditions apply as for the unemployment benefit.

#### **b) Activity status requirement**

The indemnity is granted only to those who were in receipt of unemployment benefit when they found full-time employment.

#### **c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The same conditions as for the unemployment benefit apply.

#### **d) Waiting period**

No waiting period is associated with the indemnity.

#### **e) Replacement rate / benefit level**

30% of the former unemployment benefit.

#### **f) Duration**

Until the end of the unemployment benefit to which people would have been entitled (in accordance with their contributory history) if still unemployed.

### **2.1.2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The same as for unemployment benefits, as the indemnity is conditional on this.

## **2.2 Non-contributory unemployment benefits**

Two important non-contributory benefits are available to all registered unemployed people: (i) the same benefit which is available to unemployed people on a contributory basis is also available to recent graduates without a work/contributory history; and (ii) various bonuses for those who find full-time employment (activation/insertion bonuses, accommodation bonus, mobility bonus and relocation bonus).

### **2.2.1 Unemployment benefit for recent graduates**

The benefit is similar to the unemployment benefit granted to insured unemployed people, but it is not linked to any contributory history.

#### **b) 2.2.1.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

##### **a) Age**

Beneficiaries have to be at least 16, the minimum age stipulated by the labour code for young people to take up employment without their legal guardians' consent. No other age criterion is stipulated.

##### **b) Activity status requirement**

The benefit is restricted to school (lower/upper secondary, professional) or university graduates who apply within 60 days after graduation. As in the case of unemployed people with a work history, the benefit is conditional upon: (i) registering at the local labour force



office; (ii) not having an income higher than the SRI – currently 500 Lei (€101) per month; and (iii) not unjustifiably refusing a job offer in accordance with the person's qualifications, or a (re)qualification course.

The following categories of graduates are not eligible: (i) graduates who have been admitted to another educational programme; and (ii) graduates of medical, dental or pharmacy schools who passed the residency exam and have been assigned a position.

### c) Contributory history required to access the scheme

No contributory history is required.

### d) Waiting period

A waiting period applies. Graduates must register at a labour force office within 60 days after graduation, and the benefit is granted only after the 60 days end.

### e) Replacement rate / benefit level

The benefit is 50% of the SRI – 250 Lei (€50) per month. This represented, in 2020, about 18% of the national minimum net salary, and 7.4% of the national average net salary.

If recipients take up employment while still receiving the benefit, they will receive an insertion bonus of three times the value of the SRI, representing the equivalent of a six-month unemployment indemnity.

All other benefit levels – mobility bonus, accommodation bonus and relocation bonus – are identical to those for insured people.

### f) Duration

The benefit is granted for six months to fresh graduates, while all other benefits are similar in duration to those granted to insured unemployed people.

## 2.2.1.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people

### a) Main gaps in access for young people

Young people aged 15 are not covered by any unemployment scheme or employment programme. The minimum age for an unemployed person is 16 (Law 76/2002). The restriction also applies to graduates with no work history.

Thus, starting at 16, young graduates benefit from all the measures and benefits available to insured people.

### b) Main obstacles in access for young people

Although 95% of graduates receiving unemployment benefits are aged 16-29 (with 90% of them under 25, and 5% aged 25-29), they represent only 18% of all registered young unemployed people. However, of all unemployment benefits received by young people under 28, 57% go to graduates.

## 2.2.2 Activation and mobility/relocation bonuses

Registered unemployed people who take up employment are – in principle – eligible for either an activation bonus or one of three mobility bonuses, depending on the circumstances. The four benefits are: (i) the **activation bonus** (*primă de activare*), for unemployed people who are not receiving any unemployment benefit when they take up full-time employment that lasts at least three months; (ii) the **mobility bonus**, for those taking up employment in a town/city over 15 km from their place of residence (*primă de încadrare*); (iii) the **accommodation bonus** (*primă de instalare*), for those taking up employment and residence in towns/cities over 50 km from their previous place of residence; and (iv) the **relocation bonus** (*primă de relocare*), targeted at those taking up employment in a different city and who are renting accommodation. The activation bonus cannot be cumulated with the accommodation bonus but can be received together with the mobility bonus. The relocation bonus cannot be cumulated with any other bonus.

### 2.2.2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

#### a) Age

Age is not a criterion for any of these benefits. They apply to all registered unemployed people who do not receive any unemployment benefit.

#### b) Activity status requirement

The bonuses are targeted at all registered unemployed people who take up employment that lasts at least three months, and who fall into one of the categories mentioned above – that is, not receiving an unemployment benefit, taking up employment in remote locations (over 15 km from their place of residence for the mobility bonus) or relocating in places over 50 km from their previous place of residence (for the accommodation and relocation bonuses).

#### c) Contributory history required to access the scheme

Activation and mobility bonuses are not conditional upon a certain contributory period.

#### d) Waiting period

50% of the activation bonus is granted when employment starts, and 50% after three months. The accommodation bonus is granted after 12 months of employment. The relocation and mobility bonuses are paid monthly, starting with the month employment is taken up.

#### e) Replacement rate / benefit level

The **activation bonus** represents a lump-sum, fixed-rate, benefit of 1,000 Lei (€203). The **mobility bonus** is 0.50 Lei (€0.10) per km, but not more than 55 Lei per day, for 12 months after taking up employment. The **accommodation bonus** is 12,500 Lei (€2,537) for single people and 15,500 Lei (€3,146) for those moving with their families; if both spouses take up employment in a new city, they both receive 16,000 Lei (€2,248), or 19,000 Lei (€3,856) if they have any dependants. The **relocation bonus** covers 75% of the total rent costs, but not more than 900 Lei (€183) per month.

#### f) Duration

- Activation bonus: lump-sum benefit
- Mobility bonus: 12 months, monthly benefit
- Accommodation bonus: lump-sum benefit
- Relocation bonus: up to 36 months, monthly benefit

### 2.2.2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people

#### a) Main gaps in access for young people

Young people aged 15 are not covered by any unemployment benefits or employment programmes. The minimum age for an unemployed person is 16 (Law 76/2002). The labour code allows those aged 15 to work, if this is approved by parents or legal guardians, but they are not subject to any (un)employment policy.

#### b) Main obstacles in access for young people

The main obstacles to accessing these benefits are the highly restrictive conditions and the paperwork involved in applying. For example, in 2020, of all those employed through the NEA who were not benefiting from any unemployment benefit, only 8.2% received an activation bonus; and less than 1% received a mobility, accommodation, or relocation bonus.

## **2.3 Unemployment scheme specifically targeted at young people**

No cash benefits specifically targeting young people are available. The only schemes addressing different categories of young unemployed or vulnerable people are those under the active labour market employment programmes, and consist of wage subsidies, accompanying services and other active employment programmes. These take the form of either wage subsidies or services.

Categories targeted by these programmes are: (i) young unemployed people under 25; (ii) NEETs; and (iii) young people aged 16-26 with a high risk of social exclusion (young people with disabilities; those exiting the child protection system; those living in families who cannot support them; ex-offenders; and victims of human trafficking).

## **2.4 Overall gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

### **2.4.1 Overall gaps**

The unemployment scheme excludes young people aged 15, as 16 is the minimum age for all (un)employment programmes. Young self-employed people are at a disadvantage, as the minimum age for taking out optional social/unemployment insurance is 18.

However, NEETs aged 16-24 are the subject of some important active employment measures (work subsidies, training programmes etc.). Another category of young people considered vulnerable and benefiting from targeted employment programmes is young people leaving child protection institutions who are making the transition to an independent working life.

However: (i) the proportion of unemployed young people receiving unemployment benefits is lower than the proportion of the overall registered unemployed population; and (ii) the average level of benefits is lower, as over half of them are flat-rate (those targeting graduates). The benefits received by graduates are at least 33% lower than those for insured unemployed people. Thus, both benefit coverage and levels are lower among registered young unemployed people.

### **2.4.2 Overall obstacles**

Although direct institutional obstacles to accessing these benefits do not exist, the main obstacle is represented by the apparent lack of incentives among young people to register as unemployed and claim benefits. Possible causes for this could be the scarcity of cash benefits for unemployment, the restrictive eligibility conditions for unemployment benefits or any other cash benefits, the low level and short duration of cash benefits, and the unequal (physical) access to training and specialisation programmes (with the rural areas being at a disadvantage).

## **3 ACCESS TO SICKNESS AND HEALTHCARE BENEFITS**

In Romania both sickness and healthcare benefits are contributory benefits, related to both the pension and healthcare insurance systems. Healthcare benefits have a high coverage, being conditional on generous eligibility criteria (less than 40% of those insured actually pay contributions). However, sickness benefits are conditional on the payment of all three social insurance components (pensions, work and health). Work insurance is compulsory only for employers, and elective for self-employed people; thus coverage is, in fact, mostly restricted to employees.

### **3.1 Sickness benefits**

Sickness benefits take the form of indemnities for medical leave for temporary work incapacity, occupational diseases or work accidents, or the prevention of occupational diseases. They are contributory benefits, conditional on being insured within the pension

system and on the work contribution<sup>6</sup> paid by the employer (or by self-employed people, on an elective basis, who enter into a contractual relationship with the national public pension house).

### **3.1.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

Sickness benefits are conditional upon enrolment in the social insurance system and the payment of contributions for medical leave and indemnities (usually paid by the employer, as part of work insurance). Indemnities for medical leave for sickness are supported from both national insurance funds: the social insurance fund (from the work insurance component) and the national health insurance fund. The first five days are supported by employers, and the following days by the insurance funds.

#### **a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for this scheme. For employees and self-employed people for whom social contributions are compulsory, the minimum age is 16; for self-employed people for whom social insurance is optional, 18 is the minimum age when they can enter a contractual relationship with the national public pension house and the national healthcare insurance house.

#### **b) Activity status requirement**

To access these benefits, people need to be: (i) employees; (ii) self-employed and insured with the social and healthcare insurance systems and with the additional insurance scheme for medical leave and indemnities; (iii) in a contractual relationship with the national public pension house and the national healthcare insurance house, thus paying contributions to all three social insurance components (pensions, work and healthcare); or, finally, (iv) unemployed people receiving unemployment benefits, for whom all insurance contributions are paid by the unemployment insurance fund.

#### **c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The law (GEO 158/2005) requires a minimum contributory period of six months during the 12 months before medical leave. An exception is made for certain medical conditions, such as medico-surgical emergencies and severe diseases (such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and several other infectious diseases under the label "group A infectious diseases", which are established by government decision). The same holds true for maternal risk leave, which does not require any contributory history.

Due to the special measures triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, a measure was adopted in May 2020 granting access for people diagnosed with COVID-19 to paid medical leave, (including quarantine/isolation<sup>7</sup>) and associated indemnities, without any minimum contribution period (Governmental Decision 423/2020).

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<sup>6</sup> A separate contribution to the social insurance fund, besides the pension contribution. While the latter is entirely paid by the employee (25% of gross income), the work insurance contribution (2.25% of gross income) is entirely paid by the employer (or, electively, by the self-employed) and covers benefits related to sicknesses and work accidents as well as benefits related to unemployment.

<sup>7</sup> Law 136/2020 (amended by Law 210/2020) defines quarantine as the separation of individual people who are suspected of carrying an infectious disease or who have been at risk of acquiring the disease, in either special places provided by public authorities or at a home/private address; the public health directorates are involved in monitoring people placed in quarantine, and determine the length of it. (Self-)isolation refers to situations where people who develop infectious diseases are isolated in a health facility or at home (self-isolation), until cleared or for at least 14 days after a positive test. Both situations are subject to specific legal regulations and penalties.

**d) Waiting period**

Although there is no waiting period, the first five days of medical leave are supported by employers from the work insurance fund and by the national/county healthcare insurance houses afterwards, from the national healthcare social insurance fund. Indemnities must be claimed within 90 days of the start of the medical condition.

**e) Replacement rate / benefit level**

*Medical leave/indemnities for temporary work incapacity due to sickness, diseases or accidents that are not work-related:* 75% of the base contractual gross salary.

*Medical leave/indemnities for work-related accidents or occupational diseases, for sickness prevention, and for work capacity rehabilitation:* 80% of the average income over the six months prior to the leave, or 100% for surgery, a medical emergency or other infectious diseases clearly specified by law. In addition, during the state of emergency/alert, the indemnities granted for isolation, quarantine or treatment of COVID-19 will be increased to 100%.

The calculation of the indemnities is not age-specific.

**f) Duration**

*Medical leave/indemnities for temporary work incapacity due to sickness, diseases or accidents that are not work-related:* a maximum of 183 days/year (with some exceptions). Some diseases, as coronary disease, tuberculosis or neoplasms increase the maximum admissible days (to 18 months for neoplasms, and until the disease is cured in the case of tuberculosis).

*Medical leave/indemnities for work-related accidents, occupational diseases, sickness prevention, and work capacity rehabilitation:* a maximum of 180 days/year, with the possibility of being extended by at most 90 days.

*Maternity leave/indemnities:* 126 days, of which 63 days before the birth and 63 after; exceptions can occur, but the minimum number of days after birth is 42. Women with disabilities can claim maternity leave starting from the sixth month of pregnancy.

*Maternity risk leave/indemnities:* a maximum of 120 days.

*Leave/indemnities for caring for sick children:* a maximum of 45 days, except for some medical conditions and infectious diseases.

The duration of the leave is not age-specific.

**3.1.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people to access sickness and healthcare benefits****a) Main gaps in access for young people**

No major legislative gaps exist, but the legislation favours employees over those in various forms of self-employment. Since 2018, most social insurance contributions (for pensions and healthcare), amounting to 35% of gross income, are paid by employees. The only contributions employers pay are the work contributions, on which these benefits are dependent. Self-employed people must cover all contributions, plus an additional 1% (insurance against sickness and work incapacity), to become eligible for all sickness and healthcare benefits.

**b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

The fiscal system puts a high level of pressure on self-employed people, especially those with lower and more unstable income levels. First, in order to benefit from the same coverage as employees, they must pay additional contributions for unemployment and sickness benefits (for employees these are paid by employers). Second, self-employed people with an annual income less than 12 times the national minimum gross salary can gain the same access only if voluntarily acquiring social, health, unemployment and

sickness insurance; the minimum contributions correspond to an insurable income equal to the national minimum gross salary, so low-income self-employed people pay a higher proportion of their income to gain access than those earning more.

The fiscal requirements burden young people even more than the overall population of self-employed people; first, because their income is, on average, lower, as they find themselves in an incipient stage of professional development and/or work life. Second, their incentive to declare their real income, if at all, is weaker, as the idea of drawing a pension is a distant prospect. Overall, only an estimated 7-10% of all self-employed people are insured. The number or proportion of young people among these is not known, as data are not available.

In 2020, 31% of all young people aged 15-29 in Romania were employees; the proportion varied from 2% of those aged 15-19, to 30% among those aged 20-24, and 61% among those aged 25-29. In addition to these, young unemployed people and those self-employed people enrolled in all three social insurance components (public pension, healthcare and sickness benefits) are entitled to the benefits, but their proportion does not exceed an additional 10%. Thus, on average, about 40% of young people aged 15-29 are covered by sickness benefits, with a higher proportion among those aged 25-29.

## **3.2 Healthcare benefits**

Romania introduced, from 2018, a system of a rather symbolic co-payments for hospital and ambulatory specialised healthcare services, with an upper level stipulated within the framework contract between providers and the national health insurance house. In 2019, the co-payment was extended to private healthcare providers, representing the difference between their prices and those approved by the social health insurance system. However, the insured population does not benefit directly from any cash benefits, and any (partial) reimbursement for the costs of services is a direct transfer from the national health insurance house to the healthcare provider. The healthcare insurance system does not leave the responsibility for service payments to the beneficiaries, and thus does not operate any reimbursement for services – with the exception of where patients cover some of the costs of drugs or medical equipment that were unavailable at the moment of service but covered by insurance.

### **3.2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

All young people aged 15-18 are insured, by default, for healthcare services. The default coverage extends to all young people up to 26, if they are enrolled in any educational programme (including apprenticeship programmes) and if they do not earn any income. Young people exiting the child protection system are also covered by default. The same holds true for people with disabilities.

#### **a) Age**

All children up to age 18, or 26 if enrolled in any educational programme, are covered automatically.

#### **b) Activity status requirement**

No specific activity status is required; eligibility is granted by being insured. Insured people are all those who are: (i) employed and paying health insurance contributions; (ii) unemployed; (iii) in a contractual relationship with the national health insurance house; and (iv) covered by default, without the payment of contributions (children up to 18, or 26 if in education; people with disabilities; pensioners; and other groups considered at risk).

#### **c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The minimum contributory period is six months for receipt of any healthcare service/benefit.

**d) Waiting period**

No waiting period is involved; reimbursement is made directly to service providers, once the claim is submitted by these, in accordance with the contractual terms.

**e) Replacement rate / benefit level**

Services are almost entirely covered, with the exception of a symbolic co-payment established by each provider, up to a certain level specified by the framework contract.

**f) Duration**

Benefits cover all insured medical services, regardless of their cost or duration.

**3.2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people****c) Main gaps in access for young people**

The gaps in coverage are due to a lack of insurance for those who are not in any risk group, NEETs, or those who are either inactive or employed in the informal sector. However, whenever medical services are needed, uninsured people can pay the equivalent of the contribution for six months retroactively and benefit from medical services.

**d) Main obstacles in access for young people**

There are no significant obstacles to accessing the services, once people are insured. Obstacles are related to the availability of services, rather than age.

**4 ACCESS TO MATERNITY, PATERNITY AND PARENTAL CASH BENEFITS**

Two different types of benefits fall under this category: (i) leave/indemnities for maternity, pregnancy risk, and sick children; and (ii) parental leave/indemnity for child-rearing up to age 2 (3 for children with disabilities). Although both types of benefits are conditional on people being covered by the social insurance system, the two categories are different: (i) the contributory histories required are different; (ii) the first category requires, in addition to the social contribution of 25% payable by employed people, the payment of the work insurance contribution (either by the employer or by the employed, on an elective basis); and (iii) the first category is paid from the social health insurance fund, whereas parental leave/benefits are considered social assistance benefits and paid from the state budget.

**4.1 Maternity, maternity risk and sick children attendance leave**

Maternity, pregnancy risk and sick child leave (up to age 7, 16 for severe health issues, and 18 for children with disabilities) are regulated by GEO 158/2005 and are conditional on payment of all three social insurance components: pension, work and health. This makes the benefits strongly associated with being an employee or registered unemployed, as for self-employed people the payment of work insurance contributions is elective.

**4.1.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to maternity/paternity leave under the social insurance scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

**a) Age**

The minimum age is 16, or 18 for self-employed people (for whom social insurance is optional).

**b) Activity status requirement**

The benefits are granted to all those who are employed, on condition that all three social insurance components are paid: public pensions, healthcare and work. The last of these is

paid either by employers, in the case of employees (with work contracts of determined/undetermined duration, full-time/part-time, or any contractual relationship with an employer, including workers on temporary contracts through agencies) or by the self-employed as elective insurance. Registered unemployed people also benefit from the leave/indemnities, and contributions are met by the unemployment insurance fund. Apprentices have the status of employees and have the same rights/benefits as any regular employee. Trainees are considered young people in education, and are automatically covered by healthcare insurance, but do not have the status of employees.

### **c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

The minimum contribution period is six months during the 12 prior to claiming the benefit, with the exception of the maternity risk leave/indemnity, which does not require any contributory history. The contributory period is the same for all those who have insurance (compulsory or optional), thus including self-employed people. Paternity leave is not conditional on a minimum employment period, but only on people being insured within the social insurance system<sup>8</sup>.

### **d) Waiting period**

No waiting time is specified; the benefits are granted monthly.

### **e) Replacement rate / benefit level**

*Maternity leave/indemnities:* 85% of the average contractual base gross salary (or of the insured gross income) over the six months prior to claiming the leave (paid only from the national healthcare insurance fund, based on the pre-existing work insurance).

*Paternity leave/indemnities:* 100% of the regular gross income, paid from the social insurance fund.

*Maternity risk leave/indemnities:* 75% of the base gross income (paid only from the national healthcare insurance fund, based on the pre-existing work insurance).

In addition to maternity leave, the social insurance system also covers the situation of parents with sick children<sup>9</sup>.

### **f) Duration**

*Maternity leave/indemnities:* 126 days, of which 63 days before the birth and 63 after; exceptions can occur, but the minimum number of days after birth is 42. Women with disabilities can claim maternity leave starting from the sixth month of pregnancy.

*Paternity leave/indemnities:* five days, claimed during the first eight weeks after the child's birth; the leave can be prolonged by 10 days if the father shows proof of graduating from a child-rearing course.

*Maternity risk leave/indemnities:* a maximum of 120 days.

## **4.1.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles to access for young people identified for this scheme in Romania are the following.

### **a) Main gaps in access for young people**

The scheme is restricted to those who, on top of social insurance (pensions and healthcare) also benefit from sickness benefits insurance. Employees have access to the benefits automatically, whereas self-employed people are not covered automatically by all three

<sup>8</sup> Law 2010/1999.

<sup>9</sup> Leave/indemnities for caring for sick children are calculated as 85% of the average contractual base gross salary (or of the insured gross income) over the six months prior to claiming the leave (paid only from the national healthcare insurance fund), based on the pre-existing work insurance. The leave/indemnities are for a maximum of 45 days, except for some medical conditions and infectious diseases.



components. Some self-employed people are required to pay contributions to the pension and healthcare systems, while sickness benefits insurance remains optional for these. Other self-employed people, due to their low level of income, are not required to pay any social contributions; thus access is limited to those voluntarily enrolled in all three components. Thus, conditions are more restrictive for self-employed people, and especially for those with a low level of income.

Finally, for self-employed people access to sickness benefits is more restricted than their access to parental leave, as the latter is conditional on formal taxable employment, but not on paying sickness benefit contributions.

Finally, the benefit does not cover young mothers under 18 who are not employees, as they have no access to the sickness benefits granted through the social insurance system.

#### **b) Main obstacles in access for young people**

There are no major obstacles to accessing the benefits, especially for employees. However, the proportion of employees among young people, and especially among those under 24, is lower, whereas 56% of all births in 2019 were to mothers under 29. Finally, the obstacles encountered by young people are greater, as the incidence of (informal) self-employment and the birth rates are higher among young people, indicating that a lower level of protection is associated with a greater need for protection against these events.

## **4.2 Parental leave/indemnity: child-rearing leave/indemnity**

Parental benefits – child-rearing leave/indemnities – are granted to either parent, by request, until the child reaches 2 (3 for children with disabilities). An insertion stimulus is granted if the parent enters the labour market earlier, before the legal entitlement to the child-rearing leave ends.

The benefits are non-contributory in the sense that they are paid from the state budget and are defined by law as a social assistance benefit (GEO 111/2010); but entitlement is dependent on work history, and benefits are proportional to the previous average income level. Thus, the scheme is a mixed scheme, combining contributory with non-contributory elements.

### **4.2.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements**

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the child-rearing leave scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

#### **a) Age**

Age is not a criterion for the scheme. However, in 2020, 56% of children were born to mothers under 29.

#### **b) Activity status requirement**

The benefits are granted to all those who are employed: either employees (with a work contract – determined/undetermined duration, full-time/part-time – or any contractual relationship with an employer) or self-employed people with a declared income, who pay social and healthcare insurance contributions. Registered unemployed parents, or parents who have been on various types of medical leave or receiving invalidity pensions, are also eligible, as these periods are assimilated as work periods. In addition, enrolment in educational programmes grants access to the benefits.

#### **c) Contributory history required to access the scheme**

To be entitled to the leave/indemnity/stimulus, parents need a work history, with paid contributions, of at least 12 months during the 24 months prior to the birth. Also considered as contributory periods are: (i) periods during which parents receive unemployment benefit; (ii) medical leave; (iii) periods during which parents receive an invalidity pension; (iv) child-rearing leave for another child; and (v) enrolment in educational programmes,

including PhD programmes. Other exceptions, such as periods of imprisonment or military service, are also considered.

#### **d) Waiting period**

No waiting time is specified; the benefits are granted monthly.

#### **e) Replacement rate / benefit level**

The *child-rearing indemnity* represents 85% of the average net monthly income. The benefit cannot be less than 2.5 times the SRI – currently 1,200 Lei (€244) – and cannot exceed 8,500 Lei (€1,726). Thus, the minimum threshold for the benefit was, in 2020, 85% of the minimum net salary, while the maximum threshold represented the equivalent of 2.5 times net national average net salaries.

The level of the insertion stimulus has increased since April 2021 (GEO 26/2021), as a motivation for parents to enter the labour market earlier. It increased from 650 Lei (€132) per month (about 46% of the minimum net salary in 2020) to 1,500 Lei (€305) (a little over the minimum net salary). The increased stimulus is granted only to those parents entering the labour market before the child reaches 6 months (1 year for children with disabilities). The increased benefit is granted until the child turns 2 (3 for children with disabilities). Between ages 2 and 3 (3 and 4 for children with disabilities), the insertion stimulus falls to its current level, of 650 Lei per month.

The calculation is not age-specific.

#### **f) Duration**

The child-rearing indemnity is granted until children turn 2 (3 for children with disabilities). Parents become entitled to the indemnity after the maternity leave (of at least 42 days) ends. The insertion stimulus either replaces or follows the child-rearing indemnity if parents enter the labour market, up to age 3 (4 for children with disabilities).

### **4.2.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Romania are the following.

#### **a) Main gaps in access for young people.**

The scheme is restricted to those in formal employment (or registered unemployed) who contributed to the social insurance system for at least 12 months during the two years prior to their child's birth. However, for self-employed people the conditions for accessing the benefit are less restrictive than those for receiving sickness benefits or maternity / maternal risk / sick child leave (as for the latter ones, the self-employed must pay additional contributions for sickness benefits, of 1% of total gross income). In addition to this, the benefit can be claimed by either parent, thus reducing the risk of them not being able to access the benefit.

#### **b) Main obstacles in access for young people.**

There are no major obstacles to accessing the benefit; in 2020, the average number of child-rearing indemnities represented about 89% of all births during 2019.

## **5 GUARANTEED MINIMUM INCOME SCHEMES**

Romania has two GMI schemes in place: (i) a general one, targeting all people with an income below a threshold, the so-called minimum income guarantee (MIG) (*venitul minimum garantat*); and (ii) one targeting families with children, with an income below a

threshold, dependent on the type of family<sup>10</sup> (*alocația pentru susținerea familiei*). Both contribute to establishing a minimum income for people or families, depending on the number of people/parents in the family/household and the number of children. The MIG targets people with an extremely low-income level or no income, bringing their income up to the threshold level; whereas the family support allocation both stipulates higher thresholds and provides, based on a means test, a benefit disregarding the level of income of the family, as long as this entitles it to the benefit.

The MIG, a scheme introduced in 2001 (Law 416/2001), will be in place until 1 April 2022, when it will be replaced by a similar scheme, which integrates both benefits – MIG and family support – into one minimum insertion income benefit (Law 196/2016).

## 5.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

### a) Age

None of the benefits is age-dependent or has age as a criterion. However, the benefits are only targeted at people aged 18 and over, and their families. Young people under 18 are entitled only if they are unmarried (or married to a minor) or single, and have responsibility for children. Only under special circumstances are single persons, between 16 and 18 years, without children and unmarried, eligible to apply for the benefit.

### b) Activity status requirement

The MIG and family support are not conditional on activity status, and have few restrictions/conditionalities. An important condition for those able to work and of working age is to be actively searching for a job, and not to reject any job offer made by the NEA. Trainees and apprentices have access to the scheme under similar conditions to those for people on educational programmes or employees.

### c) Other eligibility conditions

Although the GMI scheme is open to everyone regardless of activity status, it requires that working-age people (16-64) who are not in education/training/employment or receiving a pension and who are able to work, register as active job-seekers and accept any job or training programme offered by employment offices. In addition, these people are also required to do community work, proportional to the benefit received. Mothers / single parents of children under 7 are not required to do community work. Claimants need to be legally resident in Romania, with or without a stable address; but this is not different for young people.

In addition, the benefit is conditional on a means test requiring a social inquiry, as certain assets and goods can lead to exclusion from the benefit.

### d) Benefit level

The monthly GMI threshold, last updated in 2014, varies between 142 Lei (€29) for a single person and 527 Lei (€107) for a family of five, with an addition 37 Lei (€7.50) per person. Thresholds are expressed as a proportion of the SRI, which has never been updated since it was adopted. The threshold for a single person represented, in 2020, 10% of the national minimum net salary and 67% of the poverty line (calculated as 60% of the average disposable income). For a family of four, the GMI threshold was still under the poverty threshold in 2020 and represented 31% of the national minimum net salary. The benefit level represents the difference between the family's income and the threshold.

Calculation of the benefit is not age-specific.

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<sup>10</sup> The type of family is determined based on two indicators: (i) single-parent/two-parent family; and (ii) number of children in the family.

### e) **Distinctions between different groups of young people**

There is no distinction between groups of young people, other than the different conditionalities applying to people/families with different activity statuses. Young people not in education or employment are required to take part in any employment programme offered and are expected to actively seek work, whereas older people or mothers of young children have to fulfil no requirements whatsoever.

## **5.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people**

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Romania are the following.

### a) **Main gaps in access for young people**

The scheme does not cover young people under 18, except for young mothers/parents or guardians who are responsible for children.

### b) **Main obstacles in access for young people**

In Romania, public opinion does not favour or support the GMI scheme, and most public interventions assert that the beneficiaries are unwilling to work and happy to live on welfare. Beneficiaries of GMI are perceived as being lazy, abusing drugs and working informally, especially the young ones (Cernat and Vasile, 2018). This position is in most cases also supported by public local authorities and mayors, especially in those communities where there is a higher proportion of Roma, who represent the majority of GMI beneficiaries. The benefit level/eligibility threshold has not been updated for the last seven years (whereas the minimum salary has increased by over 200% during this period) and the implementation of the new law, redesigning the minimum-income scheme, has been postponed.

Unfortunately, there are no systematic data regarding the structure of the beneficiary population (with the exception of the number of family members). However, available information suggests that: (i) most beneficiaries are unable to work (medical reasons, children, mothers with children under 7, pensioners)<sup>11</sup>; and (ii) almost half of beneficiaries are single people without any income – according to Cernat and Vasile (2018, p.9), in 2018, 43% of beneficiary families were single people. In addition, the proportion of young adults under 24 among beneficiaries was rather low (only 4.7% in 2018), while children, mostly under 7, represented 38%. Almost half of beneficiaries (48%) were adults aged 24-64.

Although systematic data are not available, studies and public declarations of local authorities seem to suggest that the proportion of young adults under 24 is low, and this segment does not really represent a significant target population for the GMI scheme. Among these the proportion of mothers with children under 7 is higher, thus suggesting that the GMI represents, at least for the young population, a rather weak form of support during periods of transition from inactivity to employment.

There is an important difference in employment rates and structures as between young people aged 15-24 and those aged 24-29; whereas among the former the employment rate is lower than the EU-27 average, for the latter the rate is above it. In fact, both the employment rate and the incidence of paid employment among young people aged 25-29 are higher than those of people aged 30-64. However, the employment gap between young men and women is among the highest across the EU, and the incidence of paid employment

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the mayor of Galați declared that 83% of total beneficiaries in the city were unable to work (see <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/83-din-beneficiarii-venitului-minim-garantat-din-galati-nu-pot-munci-19882027>).

among those employed is far lower than at the EU level (see Annex B in the Synthesis Report).

The incidence of inactivity among young people is high, especially among those under 24 (above the EU average; see Annex B in the Synthesis Report), and it is even higher among women and the rural population. The gender disparity<sup>12</sup> in Romania among young inactive people was, in 2020, twice the EU-27 level and among the highest across EU Member States. The proportion of NEETs has fallen since 2015, reaching 16.6% in 2020, a higher proportion than that at the EU level. The gender difference is even higher among NEET young people than among inactive young people; the gender disparity has increased since 2015, reaching 64% in 2020, about 2.8 times higher than at the EU-27 level (see Annex B in the Synthesis report).

The number of young people benefiting from training programmes (mediated by employment offices) is still a low proportion of the inactive young population, especially in the case of young women. However, in 2020, 13% of those employed through the national employment programme were NEET young people; this represented, in 2020, about 6% of NEETs<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, despite the emphasis during 2014-2020 on increasing activation among women and young people, particularly NEET young people, training and apprenticeships remain among the weakest activation measures, with a low number of participants in these programmes.

## 6 HOUSING BENEFITS

Heating benefits during the cold season (1 November to 31 March) are the only ones available, but are not exclusive to young people (GEO 70/2011, last amended by GEO 208/2020). The heating benefits are targeted at all categories of vulnerable energy consumers, but are customised according to consumers' income levels and fuel usage. The categories of fuel considered for heating purposes are: (i) centralised heating systems; (ii) natural gas; (iii) electric energy; and (iv) wood, coal, or petroleum.

### 6.1 Eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements

The main eligibility conditions and benefit entitlements that apply to the scheme in Romania as far as young people are concerned are the following.

#### a) Age

Age is not currently a criterion for vulnerability. The minimum age for which the benefit is granted is 16, on condition that young people aged 16-18 live independently and are not supported by their families.

#### b) Activity status requirement

The benefit is means-tested, and as such is not restricted to certain activity statuses. It addresses low-income single people or families, and eligibility is granted based on income level.

#### c) Other eligibility conditions

Although the benefit is means-tested, requiring in some cases social inquiries, it only considers the income level of the person / family member (less any means-tested benefits,

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<sup>12</sup> The gender disparity is calculated based on the data in Section 1, as the difference between the indicators' values for women and men, as a percentage of the indicators' values for the entire population, both women and men.

<sup>13</sup> Calculations are based on the official data of employed people through the employment programme (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Statistical Bulletin, Social Protection of Unemployed, available at [http://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/buletin\\_statistic/ocupare\\_2020.pdf](http://mmuncii.ro/j33/images/buletin_statistic/ocupare_2020.pdf)) and the number of NEET young people estimated through the LFS (Eurostat data).

such as MIG or family support). In addition, proof of legal residence at the address for which the benefit is claimed is required.

#### d) **Benefit level**

Benefits levels are differentiated according to the fuel used and the income level of the person / family member.

For **centralised heating systems**, 10 income brackets are defined, which yield a different percentage coverage of heating costs. All family members with a net income of less than 1.6 times the SRI – 800 Lei (€163) per month, or for single people an income lower than 2.164 times the SRI – 1,082 Lei (€220) per month, are entitled to have a certain percentage of their heating costs covered. The coverage – from the state budget – varies from 5% for families, or 10% for single people, to 90% for those with a per capita net income lower than 0.31 times the SRI – 155 Lei (€31.50) per month, or 100% of it for single people. In addition, all GMI beneficiaries are 100% covered.

Local authorities can, at their discretion, supplement the benefit; the benefit granted by the local authorities cannot exceed 7% of the bill value/ heating costs (for the very low-income families) and 63% of the bill value/heating costs (for the higher-income brackets). However, a compensation of at least 10% of the above-mentioned maximum level must be granted by the local authorities.

For **natural gas users**, 10 eligibility income brackets are specified, with the highest eligibility threshold cap set at 1.6 times the SRI – i.e., 800 Lei (€163) per month – for a single person or family member. The monthly benefit level ranges between 0.524 times the SRI – i.e., 262 Lei (€53) – for those with a net monthly income lower than 0.31 times the SRI (i.e., 155 Lei or €31.50) and 0.04 times the SRI (i.e., 20 Lei or €4) for those in the highest eligibility income bracket.

For **electrical energy users**, or users of **wood, coal or petroleum**, the same income brackets are in place. The difference is the highest benefit level, granted to those with a monthly net income lower than 0.31 times the per capita SRI, which is 155 Lei (€31.50): it is 0.48 times the SRI – 240 Lei (€49) – for electrical energy users, and 0.108 times the SRI – 54 Lei (€11) – for wood/coal/petroleum users.

The calculation of the benefit is not age-specific.

#### e) **Distinctions between different groups of young people**

Single people using a centralised thermic system are favoured over families. Furthermore, there are differences between users according to the heating system / fuel used.

## 6.2 Gaps/obstacles in access for young people

The main gaps and obstacles in access for young people identified for this scheme in Romania are the following.

#### a) **Main gaps in access for young people**

All age sub-groups among young people aged 15-29 are covered; those aged 15-18 are covered as part of their legal guardians' families. If young people under 18 live independently, they are directly covered (a minimum age of 16 is required). Although there are no legislative gaps in access for young people, the proportion of young people aged 16-29 living with their parents was 72% in 2019, a little over the EU-27 average (see Section 1), with a higher proportion than the EU-27 average among those aged 25-29 (see Annex B in the Synthesis Report).

#### b) **Main obstacles in access for young people**

The obstacles to accessing heating benefits are generally related to the failure to uprate eligibility threshold and benefit levels. The first uprating since 2013 took place in December 2020, whereas the minimum salary and pension increased constantly during that period. Thus, the number of beneficiary families / single people fell between 2013 and 2020 by

80%, reaching a low of 202,000 in 2020. Unfortunately, there are no data available regarding the age structure of beneficiaries.

## **7 REFORMS, NATIONAL DEBATES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Reforms implemented since 2015**

No significant reform in the field of social protection has been carried out since 2015. During 2013-2014 most social benefits were updated/increased, after a five-year freeze triggered by the 2008 economic crisis.

Although no significant reforms occurred between 2015 and 2020, the legislation in the field of labour market / employment policies has been marginally amended, in order to strengthen the position of young people in the labour market. NEET young people, inactive young women and the Roma population were targeted as a priority. A series of measures have thus been adopted aimed at these groups, among them subsidised employment and training/apprenticeship programmes<sup>14</sup>. The NEET rate among these age groups therefore fell, especially for the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups (a fall of 20% between 2015 and 2020). The rather exclusive emphasis on designing active measures for young people, including smoothing the transition from school to the labour market, is also reflected in the national strategy regarding young people for 2015-2020. Thus, many European-funded programmes aimed at an increase in employment among young people were designed and put in place during 2017-2019.

However, despite the heavy emphasis on youth employment, the amendments did not cover the issue of formal self-employment, and no programmes easing the transition of non-employees to formal employment were adopted. And, as discussed before (see Section 1), the employment structure – especially among young people aged 20-24 – is heavily skewed towards non-employees.

In addition, the measures adopted by the Romanian government during the COVID-19 pandemic focused, similarly, on protecting employment and maintaining, as far as possible, pre-pandemic work income levels. Employees benefited from the highest protection, while social protection measures have been rather limited and weak. Hence in 2020 an additional measure of work subsidy was adopted, aimed at increasing the chances of young people (under 29) made unemployed by COVID-19 of re-entering the labour market.

Thus, neither the social protection of young people, nor their access to existing social protection programmes, were explicit intervention subjects by governments after 2015, and nothing changed in this respect during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected young people aged 25-29 more than those aged 20-24, despite their relatively high employment rate. This suggests a more precarious position of young employees in the formal labour market; it reflects the comparatively higher increase in (registered) unemployment and the fact that many young people were working in the grey economy, combining formal with informal income<sup>15</sup>.

The risk of poverty fell in 2020 compared with 2019 only for young people aged 15-19, who are mostly dependent on their (working) families. Thus, the improvement in their monetary welfare, compared with other groups, is an effect of the social measures

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<sup>14</sup> Measures regarding NEETs which amended the legislation on unemployment and employment measures (Law 76/2002) were: GEO 60/2016, Law 172/2017 and GEO 60/2018. Measures amending the law on apprenticeships (Law 279/2005) were: Law 554/2017, GEO 96/2018, GEO 93/2019 and Governmental Decision 423/2019, regarding the methodological norms for the implementation of the law on apprenticeship.

<sup>15</sup> Anecdotal evidence shows that many young people accept a lower formal salary, which is doubled by informal or non-taxable supplementary income. Employers avoid higher costs, while employees receive a higher income. Thus, the replacement rate of the benefits during the pandemic for this segment of employees was lower, leading to an erosion of overall welfare indicators.

targeting employees, especially those with a more stable position in the labour market, and of the increase in the value of the universal child allowance.

## 7.2 National debates

National debates during 2015-2020, when focusing on young people, tended to revolve around inactive young people and ways of increasing employment among NEETs, Roma and young people with low employability. Some debates shifted the attention of policy-makers to the need to design a more effective, appealing, and motivational vocational education and training system, as an alternative to high school and university studies (dual education system). The effects of all the amendments in the field of apprenticeships, NEET measures and vocational training are just starting to take shape. The number of NEETs employed annually through the measures put in place in 2016-2017 was around 30,000 during 2018-2020<sup>16</sup>.

The social integration and protection of young people has not been the object of any important public debate. However, the issue of young people was brought up, in a few instances, when debates on the GMI arose. Public opinion is strongly opposed to the GMI system, which is viewed as an opportunity for young people, especially Roma, to live at the community's expense without working. Young beneficiaries of GMI are directly blamed for this, as they are considered to be unwilling to work, and to favour informal activities, while benefiting from public funding. As a result, political interest in maintaining an effective GMI system has been rather low. The implementation of the new legislation adopted in 2016, integrating all means-tested benefits and increasing the activation component of the GMI scheme, has been postponed until 2022.

## 7.3 Good practice and recommendations

Most benefits for the young population are conditional upon employment; and some of them are, in fact, limited to employees, as the costs for self-employed people to access these are far too high (e.g. unemployment, sickness, parental benefits). However, unemployment benefits and parental leave are also targeted at people in education.

Some employment measures – such as work subsidies and activation/accommodation/mobility bonuses – are also directed at the most vulnerable categories in the labour market, including NEET young people. Only a few benefits – the GMI and heating benefits during the cold season – are not at all conditional on formal employment. However, the GMI also requires that young people are registered as actively in search of a job (registered unemployed) and does not allow the rejection of any job offer.

The restrictive eligibility conditions to access other work-related benefits for non-employees, and the negative state of public opinion in regard to the GMI, reduce access to unemployment, sickness and maternity benefits for all self-employed people, but especially for the young self-employed, due to the high fiscal costs compared with the rather low level of income.

Young people are also more affected because of the higher incidence among them of self-employment and (for those under 25) inactivity, compared with other age groups. In Romania, even though the unemployment rate and the proportion of quasi-jobless households are lower among this age group than the EU-27 average, the gap between employees and other people at work (i.e. people working as self-employed or contributing family members) is extremely high in terms of both education and income level, especially among young people aged 15-24 (see Annex B of Synthesis Report).

This leads to significant gaps in the social protection of young people, with important consequences for their future welfare. Currently, the situation of young people in Romania

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<sup>16</sup> According to the statistical bulletin on social protection of unemployed people (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection; see <http://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/transparenta/statistici/buletin-statistic>).



is far worse than for the overall EU-27 young population, with indicators such as the at-risk-of-poverty (AROP) rate, AROPE rate, and material and social deprivation rate, ranging, in 2020, between 1.5 and 4 times higher than the EU-27 averages. In terms of monetary welfare, young people are worse off than the 30-64 age group, despite the fact that the AROP, AROPE and MSD rates among the latter age group were, in 2020, the highest across EU-27 Member States (see Section 1).

Obstacles to accessing social protection benefits are related to both their legislative design and their incentive structure. Low coverage and low, depreciating benefit levels create a disincentive to access these benefits, while the legislative and institutional obstacles to shifting from unpaid or informal employment to formal employment are high. In addition, public debates during the last five years have not shown a significant interest in the problems concerning young people.

Welfare indicators for the 15-24 age group highlight precarity and fragility, associated with high rates of inactivity, a high proportion of informal employment and a low coverage of benefits; young people, aged 25-29, are better off, not only compared with other groups of young people, but all other age groups. Thus, the author of this report considers that special protection is needed to: (i) support young people (especially the 15-24 age group), through different direct monetary and non-monetary benefits, in their transition from school to work; (ii) enhance the access of young people to housing, and subsequently a greater diversity of housing benefits (currently limited to seasonal heating benefits); and (iii) create incentives for young people to enter formal employment by offering discounted fiscal packages and a higher variety of (increased) benefits associated with young people's formal employment.

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