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Policy Analysis  
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# Access for children in need to the key services covered by the European Child Guarantee

Romania

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Social Europe



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EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY ANALYSIS NETWORK (ESPAN)

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## **Romania**

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## Summary

On 14 June 2021, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation establishing a “European Child Guarantee” (ECG), with a view to guaranteeing access to six key services for “children in need”:

- effective and free access to four services: high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC); education and school-based activities; at least one healthy meal each school day; and healthcare; and
- effective access to two services: healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

The purpose of the present report is to assess the extent to which low-income children do indeed have effective (or effective and free) access to these services.

In Romania, all six services covered by the ECG are primarily regulated at national level. Basic educational services, from pre-school ECEC to secondary education, including snacks/meals in pre-school and school education, are provided, by law and de facto, free of charge to all children (see Section 1.1). However, there is a series of barriers for low-income children in accessing educational services – including significant out-of-pocket costs for education, due to both poor coverage by local budgets of some educational supplies/materials in school, and additional costs related to school attendance (uniforms, notebooks etc.). Many of these costs – which are transferred, informally, to the parents – are the result of a seriously underfinanced educational system and a constantly changing legislative framework, especially secondary legislation (not allowing for the effective implementation of measures after they have been adopted). Out-of-pocket costs for education are putting low-income children at a disadvantage, especially those in rural, remote or marginalised communities. Some benefits are in place for low-income children to compensate for these costs and stimulate participation in education (social educational vouchers, and educational scholarships). These have failed to prevent school dropping-out, and their ineffectiveness is due to constant changes in legislation and low administrative capacity, rather than the inadequacy of benefits.

The same holds true for the programmes establishing meals in schools. A pilot programme was extended to 450 schools in 2022, but it is still far from being fully institutionalised and functional. Access to healthy nutrition faces similar challenges, as education regarding healthy nutrition is still not effectively delivered in kindergartens/schools and is still a weak part of the national medical prevention programmes. The weakness of the preventive and educational components particularly affects children in low-income households.

Healthcare and basic dental services, although free for all children, are unevenly distributed across regions and between rural and urban areas, increasing costs especially for children in rural remote areas and in marginalised communities. The low emphasis on prevention and prophylaxis results in a high proportion of preventable morbidity and mortality among children. Medicines are either subsidised or free, depending on the class they belong to; however, there are no social benefits compensating for the out-of-pocket costs for low-income children.

Housing benefits are entirely absent. Social housing is scarce, and where available is inadequately managed. Children in low-income households, of whom a significant part live in marginalised communities or non-conventional settings, are clearly disadvantaged, as most of them are suffering severe housing deprivation. The only support measures are those targeted at vulnerable energy consumers; however, these only reach those children who are living in conventional dwellings.

Current national strategic documents acknowledge and address most of these challenges faced by the social assistance, education, and healthcare sectors. However, although strategic directions are promising, the effectiveness of recently adopted measures is conditional upon a

relative stable legislative framework, the adequacy of social benefits to provide the intended support, and a consistent approach to children's vulnerability.

## Introduction

On 14 June 2021, the EU Member States unanimously adopted the Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 establishing a "European Child Guarantee" (ECG).<sup>1</sup>

The objective of the ECG is to offset the impact of poverty on children and to prevent and combat their social exclusion. To this end, it is recommended that Member States guarantee for "children in need" (defined as people **under 18** who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion – AROPE):

- effective and free access to four services: high-quality early childhood education and care (ECEC); education and school-based activities;<sup>2</sup> at least one healthy meal each school day; and healthcare; and
- effective access to two services: healthy nutrition and adequate housing.

According to the ECG Recommendation, **effective access** means "a situation in which services are readily available, affordable, accessible, of good quality, provided in a timely manner, and where the potential users are aware of their existence, as well as of entitlements to use them" (Article 3d). **Effective and free access** means "effective access" to the services, as well as free-of-charge provision – either by organising and supplying such services or by providing "adequate benefits to cover the costs or the charges of the services, or in such a way that financial circumstances will not pose an obstacle to equal access" (Article 3e).

The Recommendation directs the Member States to prepare action plans, covering the period until 2030, to explain how they will implement the Recommendation.<sup>3</sup> These plans are to be submitted to the European Commission.

The purpose of the present report is to assess the extent to which children AROPE have effective and free access to four of the six services covered by the ECG and effective access to the other two (see above). Given that the eligibility criterion (or criteria) for accessing those services in individual Member States (at national and/or sub-national level, depending on how the service is organised) is/are not based on the EU definition of the risk of poverty or social exclusion,<sup>4</sup> the report focuses on access for **low-income children** to each of these services, using the national low-income criterion (or criteria) that apply (e.g. having a household income below a certain threshold or receiving the minimum income). Throughout this report, "low-income children" is to be understood as children living in low-income households.

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<sup>1</sup> The full text of the ECG Recommendation is available at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L\\_.2021.223.01.0014.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A223%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.223.01.0014.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A223%3ATOC).

<sup>2</sup> According to the Recommendation (Article 3f), "school-based activities" means "learning by means of sport, leisure or cultural activities that take place within or outside of regular school hours or are organised by the school community".

<sup>3</sup> Once they have been submitted to the European Commission, the plans are made publicly available online at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1428&langId=en>.

<sup>4</sup> According to the EU definition, children are AROPE if they live in a household that is at risk of poverty (below 60% of median income; hereafter AROP) and/or severely materially and socially deprived, and/or (quasi-)jobless. For the detailed definition of this indicator and all other EU social indicators agreed to date, see: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=756&langId=en>. In 2021, EU Member States agreed a target to be reached by 2030: a reduction in the number of people AROPE in the EU by at least 15 million, including at least **5 million children**.



In Romania, all six services covered by the ECG are primarily regulated at national level. Therefore, the report seeks to provide a general picture of the (effective/free) access for low-income children in the country.

The report is structured by service:

- effective and free access to high-quality ECEC;
- effective and free access to education and school-based activities;
- effective and free access to at least one healthy meal each school day;
- effective and free access to healthcare (e.g. free regular health examinations and follow-up treatment, and access to medicines, treatments and support);
- effective access to healthy nutrition;<sup>5</sup> and
- effective access to adequate housing.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to ECEC services.

### 1.1. Mapping accessibility and affordability of ECEC

In Romania, ECEC is primarily provided in crèches (0-3), kindergartens (3-5/6) or complementary ECEC services such as daycare centres, toy libraries or community kindergartens. ECEC in Romania has two main components: (a) the ante-pre-school component, targeting children aged 0-3; and (b) the pre-school component, when children aged 3-5/6 attend a preparatory class as part of the transition to primary school (i.e. “grade 0”, regulated within the primary education system). The framework for the organisation of ECEC is provided by the national education law.<sup>7</sup>

**Ante-pre-school ECEC services.** The organisation of the ante-pre-school system changed recently due to a series of legislative amendments to the national education law.<sup>8</sup> The newly adopted legislation (2021-2022) changed, radically, the organisation and financing mechanisms for these services (i.e. crèches). Until 2021, ante-pre-school ECEC services were decentralised, their organisation and financing being the responsibility of local authorities. However, to obtain the status of ECEC services, they were supposed to undergo an accreditation process. As very few were fulfilling the criteria set by the Ministry of Education, most were reclassified as social assistance services (e.g. day centres).

Since 2021 ante-pre-school ECEC services have been recentralised and, like all other educational services, have become primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Their financing mechanism follows the same logic as the financing of all other educational services, based on the principle that “the money follows the child”. Thus, the state budget

<sup>5</sup> According to the Recommendation (Article 3g), “healthy meal” or “healthy nutrition” means “a balanced meal consumption, which provides children with nutrients necessary for their physical and mental development and for physical activity that complies with their physiological needs”.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Recommendation (Article 3h), “adequate housing” means “a dwelling that meets the current national technical standards, is in a reasonable state of repair, provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort, and is available and accessible at an affordable cost”.

<sup>7</sup> Law no 1/2011.

<sup>8</sup> GEO no 100/2021, approved and amended by Law no 17/2022 and its methodological norms, approved by GD no 1,604/2022.

finances crèches according to a standard cost per student/child per year. The state budget covers, to a similar extent, the basic costs for private (confessional) crèches that have undergone an accreditation process by the Ministry of Education. Local authorities continue to play a complementary role by financing a series of current and maintenance spending measures. Thus, while the role of local budgets continues to be important, since the 2021/2022 school year the state budget has covered the basic costs of ante-pre-school educational services for all children (HG 1,604/2020).

In addition to the costs covered by local and state budgets, parents (or legal guardians) are responsible for a fee covering two types of spending – current spending and meals. The fee is approved by the administration council of the crèche after consultation with the parents. The only category fully exempted from the fee is the parents (or legal guardians) of children at risk of being separated from their families (i.e. at risk of being abandoned by, or taken from, the family due to family problems that put the child at risk), and for whom social assistance services and intervention plans have been elaborated. For these children, contributions are covered by the local authorities from local budgets.

Currently, due to the previous decentralisation of ante-pre-school services, the number of crèches is extremely low compared with kindergartens, but also compared with other ante-pre-school services (until 2021 classified merely as social assistance services: see Figure A.1 in Annex).

**Pre-school ECEC services.** The availability of pre-school ECEC services (i.e. kindergartens and other complementary services) is significantly higher than that of ante-pre-school services (Figure A.1 in Annex), and this is also reflected in a more significant proportion of children attending kindergartens. Furthermore, the financing system for pre-school services is the same as the current one for ante-pre-school ECEC services, revolving around a standard cost per child in kindergartens. However, parents have no financial obligations specified by law.

**Complementary educational services.** A legislative novelty is complementary educational ECEC services for children up to age 6, in the form of toy libraries, community kindergartens, or daycare centres. These can be developed alongside regular ECEC services in any community, at the initiative of the local authorities, or can replace ECEC services in those communities that do not meet the criteria for establishing crèches or kindergartens (GED no 18/2022, Law no 364/2022). Until 2022, these functioned as social assistance services (i.e. daycare centres) in the absence of an accreditation from the Ministry of Education. Although the number of them was high compared with educational facilities (see Figure A.1 in Annex), their status was different and they were regulated as social assistance services. In December 2022, the Ministry of Education announced plans to develop 850 toy libraries and community kindergartens, with 2,550 new employees hired.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 1.1: Accessibility and affordability of ECEC**

Childcare (usually under age 3)		Pre-school setting (usually age 3 to compulsory school age)	
Accessibility	Affordability	Accessibility	Affordability
ENT-ALL0year	NO	ENT-ALL3years	FREE-ALL3years

*Note: "ENT-ALLxxx" means a legal entitlement for all children from the age of xxx. "FREE-ALL3years" means free for all children from age 3. "NO" in the affordability column means not free for low-income households. If the*

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/ministerul-educatiei-va-infiinta-850-de-gradinite-comunitare-ludoteci-si-centre-de-joaca-si-2-550-de-posturi-noi-pentru-asigurarea-personalului-necesar/>

*information differs between centre-based and home-based care, the information provided applies to centre-based care.*

Since 2021 all children up to 3 have been entitled to **ante-pre-school ECEC services**, as part of the lifelong educational process (Table 1.1). Children were also entitled to ante-pre-school educational services before the 2021/2022 legislative amendments, but their access to ECEC services was seriously hampered by the small number of accredited facilities. Although the number of crèches is still extremely low compared with demand, and geographically concentrated in urban areas, the recent legislation on crèches and complementary services will lead to an increase in *physical availability*. However, rural areas will continue to be at a disadvantage, as the demand in these areas is lower and households are geographically more scattered.

*Selection criteria* for prioritising applicants, when demand is higher than supply, become extremely important, especially in the context of an acute scarcity of ante-pre-school ECEC services. Although low income and monetary poverty per se are *not criteria* for prioritising applications, the Ministry of Education specifies some general tie-breaking criteria. All these are related to social exclusion vulnerabilities rather than to monetary poverty. A first criterion prioritises orphan children, including children in residential care or family placements. A second criterion prioritises children who have lost one parent. Disability represents another vulnerability considered as a tie-breaking criterion. On top of this, having siblings in the same facility increases the child's chances of being enrolled. Other specific priority criteria can be adopted by the ante-pre-school service-provider and applied once the general criteria, listed above, have been exhausted.

Regarding affordability, the law on education states that: "*public education is free (...) but for certain activities, levels, cycles and educational programmes fees can be set, under the circumstances established by the law*" (Law 1/2011, Article 9 [3]). In line with all other educational levels, ECEC is therefore free up to a certain level for all children, within the limits set by the standard cost per child in ante-pre-school services, which is established annually by the National Council for Financing Pre-university Education (see Table 1.1 regarding affordability).

Local budgets help to meet these costs and ensure building maintenance and other current costs related to educational activities or extramural activities (i.e. complementary costs). Any additional costs associated with current activities and meals, and not covered by either state or local budgets, are covered by the parents. The decision related to the monthly amount of this contribution is taken by the administration council of the service-provider. The law does not specify that a reduced-hour programme (five hours) exempts parents from the payment of any contribution. The only category of families that is exempt from any contribution is those with children at risk of being separated from their families, and for whom intervention plans have been established by the social assistance services (GD 566/2022).

Since 2022, when the new methodology was approved (GD 566/2022), the parents' contribution has reflected only the meals offered to children, and is the same for all parents regardless of income and the number of children in the family. However, to ease access to ante-pre-school services, some benefits have been put in place. The legislation (GD 566/2022) stipulates explicitly that parents' contributions can be paid with social coupons, crèche tickets or social vouchers.

**Social coupons for ante-pre-school services** were established by the law on education (Law no 1/2011) as a specific means to support access by low-income households to these services. The law does not provide any details on the value of the social coupons or on the

eligibility criteria. A long series of legislative amendments postponed the implementation of this measure,<sup>10</sup> resulting in no support to low-income households.

**Crèche tickets** are part of a larger package of value tickets that can be offered by employers, after consultation with trade unions.<sup>11</sup> Value tickets can be specifically food tickets, gift tickets, crèche tickets, cultural tickets, or vacation tickets. Some employers can therefore decide to provide crèche tickets to employees who do not benefit from child-rearing leave and who, instead, have returned to work. The tickets can be used by parents with ante-pre-school children who are on the waiting list for a crèche, to pay a legally hired babysitter. The tickets are granted to only one of the parents and cannot exceed RON 570 (€115) per month per child in ECEC.<sup>12</sup>

An additional **fiscal facility** to encourage ante-pre-school participation was put in place in 2020. According to the amendment to the fiscal code, employers can grant employees up to RON 1,500 (€306) per month to cover the costs of kindergartens or crèches, with the money deductible from the profit tax paid by the employers. The law was suspended in 2021, and its implementation is still pending.

However, only one of these benefits provide targeted support to low-income households with ante-pre-school children – this is the social coupon, which has been never put into practice.

**Pre-school ECEC services** differ from the ante-pre-school services, as they are not only legally defined as a universal entitlement but also, through an amendment to the law on education,<sup>13</sup> gradually becoming part of compulsory education (between 2020 and 2030). Pre-school educational services are organised around three age-appropriate groups: lower (3-4), intermediate (4-5) and advanced (5-6). At the end of 2020, the advanced pre-school level became compulsory, to be followed at the end of 2023 by the intermediate pre-school level. In 2030, the lower pre-school level will become compulsory as well.

Priority criteria for enrolment in a public kindergarten or any other complementary educational services for pre-school children are the same as those used for crèches, with a set of general tie-breaking criteria and a set of specific criteria established locally and adopted by the administration council of the educational facility. The general tie-breaking criteria are the same as those for crèches (i.e. loss of one or both parents, disabilities, or risk of being separated from their families) and are not necessarily targeted at low-income households.

Compared with ante-pre-school ECEC services, pre-school education is free of charge for all children. However, in practice, many kindergartens ask parents to cover some of the costs of meals, educational materials, extramural activities that are part of the curriculum, and, in some cases, even personal hygiene goods. The law opens the possibility of attracting funds through donations; in many cases, parents' associations therefore raise money to cover educational costs. Although these practices are widespread, parents are not legally required to pay any contribution to the kindergarten/group fund.

<sup>10</sup> Law 283/2011, GEO 92/2012, GEO 103/2013, GEO 183/2014, GEO 99/2016, GEO 90/2017, GEO 96/2018, GEO 226/2020, GEO130/2021, GEO 168/2022. A long series of amendments postponed the implementation of the measure by one or two years each time, resulting in no support whatsoever to low-income households over the entire period between 2011 and 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Law no 165/2018.

<sup>12</sup> The value of RON 570 (€115)/month was approved through the order of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, order 1306/2022, for the period October 2022-March 2023. The benefit is indexed twice a year, in accordance with the inflation rate.

<sup>13</sup> Law no 56/2019.

Some costs related to educational supplies for individual use are covered, for low-income households, by the state. In addition, some other benefits to stimulate and support kindergarten attendance are also in place.

First, low-income households are entitled to an **educational stimulus**,<sup>14</sup> taking the form of social tickets (*stimulent educational sub forma tichetelor sociale*). The educational stimulus is granted monthly throughout the school year from September to June, and amounts to 0.2 of the social reference index (SRI).<sup>15</sup> The benefit is currently RON 105 (€21) per month and is granted to families with an income per capita that would make them eligible for the means-tested family support allowance. Currently, the eligibility threshold for the family support allowance is 1.06 SRI (i.e. RON 557, or €114, net income per family member per month). Families do not need to provide any documents if they are already beneficiaries of the family support allowance, or if the right to this benefit has been previously established for them. The benefit is granted for each child aged 3-6 attending ECEC services, and is open not only to Romanian citizens but also to any other citizens who are legally residing in Romania. The law explicitly stipulates that homeless families are also entitled to the benefit.

Another benefit is the **social educational voucher** (*tichet social pentru sprijin educational*) of RON 500 (€100) per year granted through the national support scheme for disadvantaged students.<sup>16</sup> In the case of pre-school children, the benefit is targeted at families with a net income per family member equal to, or lower than, the eligibility threshold for the means-tested family support allowance (the same eligibility criteria as for the educational stimulus presented above). The benefit, granted on electronic support (i.e., a 'social voucher' which can be used to purchase only certain items), is limited to the acquisition of educational supplies, including clothing. In addition to the benefit, some auxiliary measures are provided, taking the form of educational programmes for: the encouragement of pre-school/school attendance; personal care and home hygiene; professional counselling; personal budget management; access to medical services; and the reconciliation of educational and cultural aspects. The programme is financed from the EU Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived. It replaces a former programme aimed at providing educational supplies to disadvantaged children at the beginning of the school year.

On top of this, children in ECEC and primary/secondary education with certified special educational needs (*SEN*) benefit from a **food allowance** and an **allowance for educational supplies, toys, apparel, transport, or educational activities**.<sup>17</sup> Both allowances are given upon request and are the same as those granted to children placed in special protection (in residential or family care). In 2022-2023 the food allowance is RON 22 (€4.50) per day; and the allowance for education-related costs is RON 580 (€117) per year for children aged 0-2, and RON 789 (€160) per year for children aged 3-6.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, **kindergarten tickets** – part of the package of social vouchers offered to employees (as part of the salary package but exempted from social contributions) – are regulated in the same way as crèche tickets. Their value has been, since October 2022, RON 570 (€115) per month per child in pre-school ECEC services.

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<sup>14</sup> Law no 248/2015 and its implementation norms, GD 15/2016.

<sup>15</sup> The SRI was introduced by the law on unemployment, and is used as a unit to express the value of most social benefits. Its current value is RON 525.50 (€106).

<sup>16</sup> GEO no 133/2020.

<sup>17</sup> GD no 564/2017.

<sup>18</sup> According to the same methodology for establishing benefits for children placed in special protection (GD no 838/2022, Law no 143/2022).

### 1.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

**Ante-pre-school ECEC services.** There are no low-income priority criteria for allocating places in publicly funded crèches (see above, Table 1.1), and there are no contribution/fee exemptions for low-income children attending crèches. In addition, no benefit targeting low-income parents in order to increase access to ante-pre-school ECEC is currently available.

**Pre-school ECEC services.** There are no low-income priority criteria for allocating places in publicly funded kindergartens (see above, Table 1.1). In principle, pre-school education is free of charges, and there are therefore no criteria for targeting low-income groups in service-provision. However, other costs associated with attendance are not covered automatically by the state (such as transport, clothing/uniforms, educational supplies, and backpacks).

### 1.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

Access is quasi-free of charge for all children in crèches (with the same level of contribution set for all children) and free for all children in kindergartens. However, two benefits are in place targeting low-income households, aimed at ensuring a completely free-of-charge education and stimulating pre-school attendance: the **educational stimulus** and the **social educational voucher** (see description above of these benefits). Both have the same target group, as their eligibility criteria overlap.

- 1) The income-based eligibility criterion is the same as that for the means-tested family support allowance. In 2021, the maximum eligibility threshold was a net income of RON 530 (€108) per family member per month, compared with the AROP threshold which varied, depending on the family type, within the range RON 614-623 (€125-127). However, the eligibility threshold is synchronised with the AROP threshold for the previous year, which was RON 532-540 (€110-112) in 2020. Thus, most children in monetary poverty (about 1 in 4 children aged 0-6 in 2021) would benefit from the measure.
- 2) Statistics regarding these benefits are not publicly available; nor are statistics indicating the number/age of children in families who benefit from the family support allowance. We can therefore assume that almost all children AROP are covered by benefits if they attend a form of ante-pre-school or pre-school education. A precise estimate is not possible, as the number of children in monetary poverty or AROPE is broken down by wider age groups.
- 3) Non-take-up among children entitled to pre-school education is the result of either their exclusion from all benefits (especially for the educational stimulus, granted monthly), absenteeism (which in some cases is due to circumstances related to health and poverty) or the unavailability or shortage in supply of ante-pre-school ECEC services. Children in rural areas and marginalised communities are at a disadvantage and non-take-up is higher among these. This initiates a vicious cycle, as non-take-up leads to no benefits, which in turn reduces the likelihood of take-up.
- 4) Children living in remote rural areas, children in marginalised communities, and Roma children are the most obvious groups of children who will be hardest to reach by educational benefits due to lower take-up (World Bank, 2016).

## 1.2 Main barriers to effective and free access to ECEC for low-income children

### 1.2.1 Financial barriers

Financial barriers to accessing ante-pre-school ECEC for low-income households are obvious, as parents are supposed to pay contributions, which might vary in level across educational units. The level of contribution is the same for all children and does not take into account the number of children in the family or the income level of the family. The only benefit that is supposed to target low-income households has been never put in practice. Low-income parents who are employed might have a chance to receive a non-taxable amount (exempted from social contributions) of up to RON 570 (€115) per month per child, thus reducing their costs to some extent. The households who are most disadvantaged, from a financial perspective, are therefore parents who are out of work or who are self-employed, as these do not benefit from any support.

Regarding pre-school ECEC services, additional costs associated with attendance (e.g. transport, clothing/uniforms, and individual educational supplies) result in inequalities of access among families with children. Poor households might not be able to provide transport for their children, which might even result in non-attendance; other families might not be able to afford clothing or supplies for their children, discouraging attendance. To reduce inequalities, two financial benefits are in place – the educational stimulus, a monthly benefit; and the social educational voucher, granted once a year for educational supplies (see Section 1.1). Although these are targeted at low-income households, and would, in principle, cover almost all children in monetary poverty (AROP), their effectiveness is weakened by three aspects related to their design/implementation. First, the fact that information about income is collected through schools/kindergartens makes the eligibility-testing procedure unreliable and time-consuming.<sup>19</sup> Second, huge delays in the provision of benefits have been reported. For example, in 2022 educational vouchers that were supposed to reach beneficiaries at the beginning of the school year were distributed – to those who did not yet own an electronic card specially designed for uploading the benefit – only at the end of November.<sup>20</sup> Third, benefits reach only those attending formal education, thus creating even greater disadvantage for children who, due to the financial situation of their families, are unable to attend mainstream educational services.

Another set of costs that tend to put pressure on low-income parents are charges, agreed by parent associations with kindergartens/schools, to supplement spending on food or other educational or hygiene goods (class or kindergarten funds). The contributions requested by kindergartens/schools, or decided upon by the parents' associations, take the form of donations (through the parents' associations); however, although some parents put pressure on other parents to raise the money, the payment of the contribution is not compulsory and some parents may decide not to pay, regardless of the reasons for them. Although in principle kindergartens are free of charge, anecdotal evidence<sup>21</sup> shows that in practice some kindergartens decide to impose fees for meals, paid by parents indirectly through the parents' associations. According to the article cited above, in September 2021 contributions were in the

<sup>19</sup> Based on an online article of the Edupedu Foundation on the problems encountered by parents in receiving the benefits in 2022, see: <https://www.edupedu.ro/tichetele-sociale-pentru-sprijin-educational-de-500-de-lei-acordate-pe-baza-unei-proceduri-de-secol-ix-prin-care-fiecare-invatator-sau-diriginte-intreaba-parintii-ce-salariu-au-primit-luna-aceasta/>.

<sup>20</sup> Edupedu Foundation: <https://www.edupedu.ro/ministerul-fondurilor-europene-a-anuntat-ca-a-doua-transa-din-banii-pentru-tichetele-educationale-pentru-rechizite-au-fost-virati-in-octombrie-parintii-spun-ca-abia-miercuri-23-noiembrie-au-fost/>.

<sup>21</sup> Article based on debates and information on Facebook parents' groups, see: <https://ziare.com/scoala/gradinita/preturi-masa-gradinita-copii-parinti-1699814>.

range RON 15-20 (€3-4) per day per child in Bucharest and around RON 10 (€2) per child per day in other cities.

Pre-school tickets, offered as a non-taxable salary-related benefit, reduce barriers for employees, while not being available to self-employed people. Parents without formal employment do not benefit from this support. However, they are not granted to all employees, as not all employers decide to offer social vouchers. There are no publicly available statistics on the number/type of employers granting the benefit, or on the number of employees benefiting from them.

### 1.2.2 Non-financial barriers

As shown above, one of the main problems regarding ante-pre-school education is the lack of availability of services. The decentralisation of ECEC services for children aged 0-3 led to a decrease in availability, and, in time, to the replacement of educational facilities accredited by the Ministry of Education with day centres, which are classified as social assistance services. However, not even the combined number of these types of services – educational and social assistance – matches the demand, especially in rural areas (Figure A.1 in Annex).

Of all children in ante-pre-school formal care, only 2.1% in 2019-2020, and 2.5% in 2020-2021, were residing in rural areas, as the number of ante-pre-school educational and care facilities in rural areas is extremely low compared with that in urban areas. Not only is the number of ante-pre-school facilities more than 30 times lower in rural areas than in urban ones, but their absolute number is extremely low; in 2021 only 12 crèches or alternative ante-pre-school care services were available across Romania's rural areas (Table A.1 in Annex). This suggests a significantly lower level of access for children in rural areas.

The ECEC service network for pre-school children is more developed than that for ante-pre-school children, and enrolment rates are higher among pre-school children (aged 3-5/6). However, persistent differences between urban and rural areas can also be observed among pre-school children. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, during the 2018/2019 school year, the gross enrolment rate in pre-school education was 90%, falling to 84.5% during 2020/2021. Before the pandemic the gap between urban and rural areas was 12.7 percentage points, falling to 8.4 points as the enrolment rate in urban areas fell more quickly (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Although administrative data are not available on the proportion of low-income children who attend ante-pre-school and pre-school formal education, Eurostat data suggest that no child below the poverty threshold was receiving, in 2016, ante-pre-school formal care.<sup>22</sup> Finally, according to Save the Children Romania, 76% of Roma young people under 19 did not attend any pre-school formal education.<sup>23</sup>

## 1.3 Free meals provision for low-income children in ECEC

Meals are not free for ante-pre-school children, and the social benefits to compensate for the costs associated with the meals are not targeted at low-income households. Although in theory a benefit targeting low-income households was established in law, this has never been granted in practice and lacks operational norms.

<sup>22</sup> Eurostat, SILC survey, ilc\_ats01; data on pre-school attendance are not reliable, as these vary significantly from those from other Eurostat data or national data.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/educatie/educatie-prescolara>



In contrast to ante-pre-school care, meals in pre-school services are supposed to be free. Anecdotal evidence shows that in fact this is not the case, and many kindergartens negotiate with the parents a contribution towards the meal plan. Although the payment of this negotiated contribution is not compulsory, parents are pressured into paying it and there is no formal rule regarding how to approach inability to pay.

A governmental pilot programme offering free meals in schools (primary and lower secondary levels) and kindergartens, carried out with EU funding, was launched in 2016, but it started to take effect rather late, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2019/2020 school year, 150 schools and kindergartens were part of the project, but only 104 of these were able to implement the programme. A government decision adopted in 2022<sup>24</sup> extended the programme to 300 schools for 2022/2023, covering around 140,000 children, with a total allocation of RON 414 million (about €84.5 million). Later, the government decided to supplement the number of schools by 150, to reach 450 schools in 2023.

However, the number of kindergarten/pre-school children actually benefiting from the programme is not publicly available. Children in short pre-school programmes (who do not have a hot meal included in their programme) benefit from a “milk, croissants and apples” meal, a programme providing free snacks in pre-school, primary and lower secondary schools for more than a decade. The programme is contested, due to the low quality of the products and its underfunding, and is under continuous adjustment to improve both the quality of food and the acquisition/contracting procedures (see Section 3 for further details).

## 2. Education and school-based activities

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to education and school-based activities.

Section 2.1 maps the main school costs in public primary and secondary education, distinguishing between the following:<sup>25</sup>

- compulsory basic school materials (schoolbag, pens, glue, scissors, etc.);
- compulsory school materials (textbooks, school supplies, notebooks, etc.);
- compulsory specific clothing (uniform, sports clothing);
- IT equipment requested by the school;
- sports equipment or musical instruments requested by the school;
- compulsory extramural activities (e.g. school trips, sport, culture) that are part of the curriculum;
- other compulsory fees or costs; and
- transport costs to or from school.

Section 2.2 briefly describes the cash benefits specifically intended to help meet educational costs.

Finally, Section 2.3 seeks to identify the main barriers that prevent low-income children from having effective and free access to “school-based activities” as defined in the Council Recommendation establishing the ECG (see “Introduction” section). Given that the distinction between these activities and some of the activities covered above – especially the “compulsory

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<sup>24</sup> GD no105/2022.

<sup>25</sup> Tuition fees charged by private schools are not covered.

extramural activities (e.g. school trips, sport, culture) that are part of the curriculum” – may not always be clear-cut, the focus of Section 2.3 is specifically on school-based activities which are not part of the curriculum.

## 2.1 Mapping the main school costs in public primary and secondary education

According to the law on education and its latest amendments, primary and lower secondary education (and from 2023 upper secondary education too) are compulsory and free of charge in Romania. Spending on primary and secondary education, similar to that for other educational levels, is quantified based on standard costs per child in different educational cycles and is primarily supported from the state budget. Local budgets cover a series of additional costs related to the maintenance of buildings and educational infrastructure, and (in part) educational supplies for the schools. In-class supplies for various educational activities are therefore available, in variable amounts, free of charge, depending on the financial capacity and willingness of local authorities to invest in education. Other items, meant for at-home or individual use, are not provided free of charge by schools, thus creating a category of costs that must be supported by the parents.

The basic costs covered by public schools for children in primary and lower secondary education are, in theory, the costs of textbooks and practice/exercise books. Any other educational supplies used daily by the student at school or at home (such as pens, penholders, erasers, and backpacks) are not provided by the school.

Although public schools do not require uniforms anymore, children are required to use special clothing for sports classes, which is not covered through public funding.

Schools do not require nor provide IT equipment, but the lack of computers or internet connections results in important differences between students and creates inequalities in learning opportunities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the experience with the national programme providing free tablets with internet connections to children who could not otherwise afford to attend online school programmes highlighted both: (a) the low administrative capacity of the educational system to identify needs and provide IT equipment; and (b) the huge differences among children and teachers in their ability to use computers and internet resources (Pop, 2021). However, as the more recent experience of the programme providing educational tickets shows, identification of needs is still an issue.

Sports, art, and music supplies are not provided by schools and the supply of in-school materials is also poor, inadequate and unevenly distributed. Extramural activities are, in theory, supported from public funding; in some cases, local budgets supplement spending and cover all necessary costs, while in some other cases schools put pressure on parents to raise funds for various activities.

Although there are some legal regulations regarding the transport of school children, the procedures are ambiguous and are changing constantly. The procedures changed in 2020,<sup>26</sup> making transport by train free for students in primary and secondary education who attend school in a different locality from where they live. Although the measure is targeted at vulnerable children, it is not specifically aimed at low-income households. However, in most cities public transport for students is free, by decision of the local authorities and/or independent transport-providers. For example, in Bucharest underground transport for students is free.

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<sup>26</sup> GD no435/2020 and GD no 863/2020, amending GD no 42/2017.

Furthermore, transport for children in remote areas is supposed to be provided free of charge by local authorities, in the form of school buses. The lack of clearly defined responsibilities regarding the transport of children to school (type of provision, costs, coverage), results in a wide variety of situations and an uneven distribution of costs between rural and urban areas, and across regions, with children from low-income households and at risk of social exclusion being the most vulnerable.

Overall, Romania has a low level of public spending on education, the lowest among all EU Member States. In 2019, Romania spent 3.16% of GDP on education, compared with the EU average of 4.7%. Romania also exhibited, in 2019, the lowest level of spending on primary education as a proportion of GDP.<sup>27</sup> This results in extremely tight budgets for schools, and inadequate coverage even by those services that are supposed to be free of charge.

**Table 2.1a: School costs of primary education (free for all/low-income children)**

Basic material	Books	Clothing	IT	Sports or music equipment	Extra-mural activities	Other fees or costs	Transport
NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	MOST ITEMS	NO	MOST ITEMS

Note: "MOST ITEMS" means that most but not all items in the category are free for low-income children, "NO" means that most/all items in the category are not free for low-income children.

**Table 2.1b: School costs of secondary education (free for all/low-income children)**

Basic material	Books	Clothing	IT	Sports or music equipment	Extra-mural activities	Other fees or costs	Transport
NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	MOST ITEMS	NO	MOST ITEMS

Note: "MOST ITEMS" means that most but not all items in the category are free for low-income children, "NO" means that most/all items in the category are not free for low-income children.

The services provided free of charge for primary and secondary education are similar, even if costs associated with various educational supplies, compulsory activities and transport are different across educational levels, as these are supported by local budgets and the law is not very specific about the size of these costs.

Basic materials used in class for educational activities are mostly provided by schools, especially for primary education, although the variability among schools is high. However, educational materials for individual and/or home use are not covered by schools at all, for any category of children. The school does not provide, or subsidise the costs of, sportswear, musical instruments for individual use, or IT equipment for individual/home use (Table 2.1a and Table 2.1b).

Schoolbooks are provided free of charge. Compulsory extramural activities and transport costs are mostly subsidised by schools, relying on support from local authorities and (partially) the Ministry of Education. Rules regarding transport are variable, depending on the situation and the type of public transport available. In remote rural areas transport is supposed to be provided by local authorities, especially for children in primary and lower secondary education, whereas in cities and between cities, for students who need to attend a school in another town,

<sup>27</sup> Eurostat database, educ\_uoe\_fin06.

it is partially supported by the state budget and, in some cases provided free by local authorities (Table 2.1a and Table 2.1b).

In the absence of clear-cut rules regarding the precise set of goods and services provided free of charge, variability in provision is significant. And so is the variability in the costs borne by families.

The costs of “free” education were assessed in 2010 and 2018 by Save the Children Romania. According to the survey-based study carried out in 2018, the average annual costs incurred by parents for a child in public school (primary and secondary education) were about RON 3,093 (€665) (Save the Children Romania, 2018). Higher costs were reported in urban areas, at RON 3,351 (€721), than in rural areas, with an average of RON 2,757 (€593). Costs tend to increase with each educational cycle: RON 2,545 (€547) for primary education; RON 3,083 (€663) for lower secondary education; and RON 3,647 (€784) for high school education. Finally, the study shows that costs had doubled since 2010, when the first survey was carried out. According to the study, this increase was primarily the result of an increase in private tutoring costs and in the costs of school meals.

Fund-raising for various class activities and material needs, although legally possible, is not compulsory. The study shows that although the practice is still widespread, fewer parents paid contributions to a class fund or school fund in 2018 – 56%, compared with 72% in 2010 (Save the Children Romania, 2018).

Almost all parents interviewed reported having to pay for educational materials (pens, backpacks, notebooks etc.), and over 90% reported spending on school and sports clothing. In addition, all parents reported bearing significant costs for school meals. 88% complained about the costs of textbooks that should be free, and also practice books and special exercise notebooks. Transport costs were borne by only 37% of the families interviewed (Save the Children, 2018).

Spending on renovations of classrooms made up 46% of the total costs paid annually by parents for education. A higher proportion of this category of spending is met by parents with children in primary education (50%) and rural families (48%). This is an expenditure which should fall under the responsibility of local authorities and schools, and was the result of their underfunding. Although this made up almost half of the costs incurred by parents, the spending considered by most parents to have the highest impact on education was that on books (textbooks, exercise books, and notebooks), educational supplies (pens, backpack, supplies for art, and technology etc.) and school meals. These were followed by tutoring and transport (Save the Children, 2018).

Extramural activities are rather few, and most of those organised by schools are recreational daytrips, followed by theatre shows and museum visits with a far lower incidence. Some of these are curriculum-related. The study carried out by Save the Children pointed out that about 40% of the children of the parents interviewed never participated in an extramural activity organised by the school. Not enough data are available to assess the reasons for not organising extramural activities and for the high rate of non-participation (see Table A.2 in Annex).

### 2.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

As the school materials and activities listed in Tables 2.1a and 2.1b are, in principle, free of charge for all students, there is no specific provision in place to compensate for the costs that might occur as a result of inadequate coverage from local budgets. However, some benefits are in place to stimulate school attendance and help low-income households to cope with some additional costs.

Income-related conditions to qualify for the social educational vouchers, and for the social assistance and study scholarships (see Section 2.2), are linked to the statutory minimum wage – 50% of the gross minimum wage for social educational vouchers and social assistance scholarships and 100% of the minimum net wage for study scholarships.

The provision of free public transport is the only programme where targeting is in effect: however, the measures do not directly target low-income households, but rather children who are studying in a different locality from where they live and who are considered to be vulnerable.

### 2.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

No systematic data are available regarding the children for whom transport is free. Transport should in theory be provided for some categories of children in rural areas, which are also among those AROPE. These include especially children in primary education living in remote areas and marginalised communities. However, the number of children who benefit from free transport in remote rural areas is not available. Furthermore, transport for children attending school in another locality is also supported by the state, a measure which targets a segment considered vulnerable by law. However, provision is not conditional upon income and the number of children who benefit from free or subsidised transport is not available.

The most vulnerable groups are children in rural/remote areas, children who attend school in a different locality from where they live, and children living in marginalised communities.

## 2.2 Cash benefits whose specific purpose is to help meet educational costs

Two important benefits targeting low-income households are in place, to help these to cope with any additional costs related to educational services.

A first benefit is the **social educational voucher** (GD no133/2020), worth RON 500 (€100) per year, granted through the national support scheme for disadvantaged students. The programme is designed to cover the costs of educational supplies/materials and school apparel for low-income households with children in pre-school, primary or lower secondary education, and replaces the former national programme for in-school provision of educational supplies at the beginning of the year. The programme does not cover high school students (upper secondary education).

The educational voucher is conditional upon income-testing, and the eligibility threshold differs from that used for families with pre-school children; eligibility is given by a *net income per family member of 50% or less of the statutory minimum gross wage*. The income test applies to July (one month before the start of the school year) and all types of income are taken into consideration. In 2021, the eligibility threshold per family member was RON 1,150 (€267) per month. The threshold was therefore above the AROP threshold for both two-parent and single-parent families.<sup>28</sup> An additional condition, on top of the income test, is enrolment in a kindergarten or school.

Statistics regarding the number of benefits distributed are not publicly available. However, in November 2021 the Ministry of European Funds announced that 431,000 children would

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<sup>28</sup> In 2021, respectively, RON 614 (€125) and RON 623 (€127).

benefit from the programme.<sup>29</sup> For the 2020/2021 school year, 233,417 children benefited from the “educational supplies programme”, which the social educational voucher programme replaced in 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2021). In the absence of the number of children AROP in pre-school, primary and lower secondary education, the approximate number of beneficiaries can be assessed against the number of all children under 18 who are AROP. In 2021, 1.078 million children in Romania were living below the AROP threshold. Only about 1 in 4 children AROP therefore benefited from the measure.

Based on these data, we can conclude that non-take-up is significant, as the eligibility threshold for the benefit is double the AROP threshold, whereas the number of children AROP is 2.5 times greater than the number of children receiving the benefit. However, this is just a rough assessment, in the absence of adequate data.

Some auxiliary measures are available for the beneficiaries of this programme, including education for school attendance, personal hygiene, school support programs, professional orientation, basic financial education, and access to healthcare services. These are provided based on the local needs of the most vulnerable categories of children.

A similar benefit, intended to compensate for additional educational costs, is provided to children and young people certified as having *SEN*. The programme, described in Section 1.1, provides an annual benefit, which varies by age. For children aged 3-6 the annual benefit is RON 789 (€160), for children aged 7-13 it is RON 968 (€196), for students aged 14-17 it is RON 1,195 (€242), and for young people in education aged 18-26 it is RON 1,338 (€271).

In addition, children from low-income households in primary and secondary education are entitled to **social assistance scholarships** and **study scholarships**. Scholarships are granted monthly. Social assistance scholarships, of RON 200 (€41) per month in 2023, are granted throughout the year. Study scholarships, of RON 150 (€30) per month in 2023, are granted throughout the school year and pro-rated according to the number of actual schooldays. Social assistance scholarships are available in primary and secondary education, whereas study scholarships are restricted to secondary education. The benefits are cumulative.<sup>30</sup> A draft law on education, which has been under discussion since August 2022, would abolish study scholarships, and increase the value of social assistance scholarships by 50%.

**Study scholarships** combine two access criteria, an income-based criterion and a performance-related criterion. Income-based eligibility is given by a monthly average (based on the three previous months) *net income per family member equal to, or lower than, the statutory minimum net wage*. All types of income are considered when assessing eligibility. The minimum net wage differs according to the number of children under the responsibility of the parent: in the summer of 2021, the minimum net salary with a personal deduction (i.e., basic non-taxable income) for one child was RON 1,386 (€281) per month, more than double the AROP threshold. On top of this, the performance-related criterion requires children to have an average grade per semester of 7.5 (on a scale from 1 to 10, where 5 is a pass and 10 the maximum) and no more than 10 unjustified absences. Eligibility for the scholarships is assessed after each school semester. The Ministry of Education reported that 31,857 study scholarships were awarded, on average, during the 2020/2021 school year (Ministry of Education, 2021).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See <https://mfe.gov.ro/431-000-elevi-vor-primi-tichete-pentru-suport-educational-in-valoare-de-500-lei-fiecare/>. Various official sources put the number of beneficiaries for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 at around 400,000.

<sup>30</sup> According to the ministerial order no 5,379 of September 2022.

<sup>31</sup> For 2020-2021, all scholarships had a value of RON 100 (€21) per month.

**Social assistance scholarships** are granted to children from families with an average net monthly income per family member (over the previous 12 months) of *no more than 50% of the statutory minimum net wage*. For these scholarships the eligibility threshold is lower, being in 2021 about the same as the AROP threshold for a family of four. Social scholarships are also granted (regardless of family income) to children who have lost one or both parents, children in social care, children with a functional deficiency and children in rural areas who are attending school in a different locality from where they live. Social assistance scholarships can be also granted occasionally, once a year, to children in families with a net income per family member per month between *50% and 75% of the statutory minimum net wage*. The value of occasional scholarships cannot be lower than the regular social assistance scholarships. Eligibility for social assistance scholarships is re-evaluated monthly. On top of the income-based criteria, the benefit is conditional upon not cumulating more than 10 unjustified absences per semester. During the 2020/2021 school year, 156,038 social assistance scholarships were disbursed (Ministry of Education, 2021)<sup>32</sup> – beneficiaries represented 6.5% of the total population enrolled in primary and secondary education.

An additional programme is **“Money for high school”**.<sup>33</sup> This is an income-tested benefit, targeted at children in high school or professional schools from families with a monthly average (over the previous three months) *gross income per family member of RON 500 (€101) or less*. Income from state child allowance, family support allowance, study and social scholarships or other social benefits for children is disregarded when assessing eligibility. If there is a tie between two children with the same income level, rural residency and school attendance in a different locality from that of residency are the tie-breaking criteria. The benefit is also granted to children in placement or under guardianship who meet the financial criteria above. This threshold is well below the AROP threshold and was last modified in 2019. The amount of the benefit is RON 250 (€50) per month, throughout the school year. In 2022, the Ministry of Education announced that 20,501 requests for the benefit had been approved for the 2022/2023 school year. This represents about 3.5% of the high school population.

Another programme (**Euro 200**), similar to the previous one but granting a one-off benefit of €200 to support students acquiring a new computer/laptop/notebook, is targeted at low-income children from primary through tertiary education. However, the effectiveness of the programme is questionable, as the income limit is even lower than for the money for high school programme. It is aimed at families with an average (over the previous three months) gross income per family member of not more than RON 250 (€50) per month, disregarding any social benefits for children. It is also conditional upon not owning certain goods, amounts of land or additional real estate properties besides their own residency, in accordance with the means-testing procedures used for the minimum income guarantee. In 2021, the benefit was granted to 2,122 children in primary and secondary education, representing less than 0.1% of the total school population.

Studies assessing the impact of these benefits are not available; however, the frequent changes to the design, level and availability of these benefits during recent years would make such studies less meaningful.

Furthermore, educational benefits, when reported, are not broken down by educational level. This makes assessing their impact even harder, as the educational costs incurred by families differ according to the educational level.

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<sup>32</sup> For 2020-2021, all scholarships had a value of RON 100 (€21) per month.

<sup>33</sup> The programme was launched in 2004 (GD no 1,488/2004, lastly amended by the order of the Ministry of Education no 3,125/2019).

However, a simple calculation shows that, in principle, for a child from a family with an income equal to, or less than, 50% of the minimum net wage per family member, the benefits to which they are entitled cover the average costs reported by parents as having to be paid out of pocket (Save the Children Romania, 2018). Survey-based estimates of costs incurred by parents, broken down by educational cycle and type of spending, are presented in more detail in Table A.2 in the Annex and in Section 2.1. For primary and upper secondary education, the annual amount of money received by parents in the form of various educational benefits falls just short of the estimated parental out-of-pocket contributions, according to the Save the Children study. However, for lower secondary education, the cumulative benefits for low-income households (defined as above) are well above the average costs incurred by parents, even after adjusting these for inflation (Table A.2 in Annex).

No systematic studies have been carried out to assess the coverage of low-income households with children enrolled in public education by benefits aimed at compensating for the out-of-pocket costs of education. However, one of the challenges in assessing the take-up and coverage of benefits is the constant changes in primary and secondary legislation on education. A coherent and stable legislative framework, and systematically updated benefits, would have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the benefit packages put in place during the past five years.

Children who do not attend school, or accumulate too many unjustified absences, are excluded from the benefits; children in marginalised communities and poor Roma communities therefore have a higher probability of being excluded from the benefits.

## 2.3 Main barriers to effective and free access to school-based activities for low-income children

Only a few activities organised by schools fall under this category. The few exceptions refer to daytrips (other than those that are curriculum-based) and the “school after school” programme (see description in Section 2.3.1). The decision to carry out optional activities or increase expenditure on some types of educational materials is taken by the school or class committees. However, the school after school programme must be approved by the county school inspectorate, and the costs are partially or fully covered by the Ministry of Education. Besides this programme, school-based activities that are not curriculum-based are therefore hard to assess, as they are not reported separately. In fact, even the available data regarding the costs supported by parents (see Save the Children, 2018) do not distinguish between the two categories of activities – compulsory/curriculum-based vs optional. In this section the focus is therefore solely on the school after school programme. Other activities and materials are addressed in Section 2.1, as they are essentially compulsory/curriculum-based activities.

The 2018 national strategy reiterates the importance of the *school after school* programme, launched in 2011 but underdeveloped during the period 2011-2019 due to lack of funding. In 2021 the government amended the initial legislative framework<sup>34</sup> to introduce a national pilot programme, financed through the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020, which was aimed at making the programme free of charge for:

- children at risk of early school-leaving or at risk of school failure;
- children who are disadvantaged regarding the use of digital technology, with no or limited access to technology and the internet;

<sup>34</sup> GEO no 6/2021, approved by Law no 323/2021, amending Law no1/2011 on national education.



- vulnerable groups such as Roma children, children in rural areas, and children with disabilities or other SEN; and
- economically disadvantaged communities that meet the eligibility criteria (i.e. a high proportion of students at risk of failure or dropping out of school, of students with no access to digital technology, or of children with SEN).

For the second semester of the 2020/2021 school year, the programme made available RON 146.121 million (€29.692 million). The state is supposed to support children in primary education at a standard cost of 0.8 SRI<sup>35</sup> per child per month – in February 2023, this represented RON 420 (€85) per month. The law also gives the parents of children in primary education the option to receive the amount as an electronic ticket, which can be used to buy the same type of service from another (public or private) provider.

The programme is not yet fully functional, as many schools still need to apply for the funds and not all local authorities have approved budgets. It is not yet clear how many schools provide (or will provide) the programme, and who will meet the costs (and to what extent) of these services. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many schools in big cities started to provide the programme in 2022-2023, either free of charge for all students (with local authority support) or by requiring a contribution from parents.<sup>36</sup> However, systematic data or assessment reports on the coverage, targeting and effectiveness of the programme are not publicly available, despite the need stipulated by the institutional development strategy on education to provide *ex ante* impact studies for these programmes (World Bank, 2019).

The only available data on education are those provided by the annual reports on the state of pre-university education (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2021 and 2022), which indicate that, between March and August 2021, remedial programmes were carried out in over 2,100 schools (around one third of all schools) with a maximum number of participants in May (of 166,757 children) and of 43,000-48,000 during the vacation months (July and August).

### 2.3.1 Financial barriers

School-based activities not related to the curriculum, and not compulsory, include daytrips organised by the school (with class/school committee consent), and the school after school programme, which has a remedial component and a component targeted at high-performing students. Although the first of type of activities are not free, the school after school programme is thought to be free for vulnerable children at risk of school failure and/or dropping out.

The school after school programme stipulates that schools should organise complementary programmes before or after school in primary and lower secondary education. For the primary education cycle, the programme should offer specialised support activities, such as assistance with homework and remedial activities for children with SEN. Children in lower secondary education should benefit from: (a) an activity package for accelerated learning and performance (including preparation for competitions, festivals, and exhibitions); (b) a remedial activity package; and (c) a package of activities on preparedness for life.<sup>37</sup>

As shown in Section 2.2, the existing benefits could, in principle, be effective in compensating for the costs incurred by parents. However, the constant changes in types of benefits, implementation norms, and financing sources have resulted in chaotic provision, disrupted by incompatible implementation norms and delays in payments/reimbursements.

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<sup>35</sup> The value of the SRI was, in February 2023, RON 525.50 (€106).

<sup>36</sup> Articles on [edupedu.ro](https://www.edupedu.ro), an educational resource foundation, available at: <https://www.edupedu.ro/?s=scoala+dupa+scoala>.

<sup>37</sup> Order of the Ministry of Education no 4802/2017.

### 2.3.2 Non-financial barriers

Non-financial barriers to primary and secondary education, and especially for children in low-income households, are the result, on the supply side, of two problematic aspects of the Romanian educational system: (a) disparities in the availability of affordable services; and (b) a weak educational system unable to prevent dropping out and early school-leaving, especially in vulnerable communities – see also Varly (2014) for an analysis of disparities in, and barriers to, education.

The main challenge is the availability of school-based activities, especially in secondary education and in rural areas. One of the problems faced by small or remote rural communities in organising school-based activities is the shortage of human resources.

A second challenge is the need to reach out to families living in marginalised and/or Roma communities, as any possible co-payment for these activities will discourage parents from allowing their children to participate.

The risks of not accessing the school after school programme are school failure and ultimately dropping out of school; and rural communities are more vulnerable, as schools are less equipped with adequate financial and human resources. Although the proportion of early school-leavers has fallen since 2010, the gap between rural and urban areas has increased (Table A.3 in Annex). The school drop-out rate fell in 2019/2020 compared with the previous years, but continued to be high: in 2020, 20,300 children abandoned school. In rural areas drop-out rates were higher, 1.8% compared with 1.3% overall, with a higher rate in lower secondary education than in primary education (1.9% compared with 1.7%). In fact, a cohort analysis showed that, among the children who entered school in 2011, 3.7% in urban areas and 17.1% in rural areas were no longer in school at the beginning of the 2019/2020 school year (Ministry of Education, 2021). In 2017, UNICEF estimated that 300,000 children were out of school entirely.<sup>38</sup> Among these, most were children living in rural areas and Roma children.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/unicef-300-000-de-copii-romani-nu-merg-la-scoala-in-timp-ce-jumatate-dintre-minori-traiesc-in-saracie-lucie-ori-la-limita-subzistentei-16384973>

<sup>39</sup> According to Save the Children Romania, 4 out of 5 children not in school are Roma: <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/educatie/educatie-prescolara>.

### 3. Free meals at school

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to at least one free healthy meal each school day.

#### 3.1 Mapping free provision of school meals

In Romania, two important programmes are in place: (a) the milk, croissants and apples programme, aimed at all children from pre-school through lower secondary education; and (b) a pilot “hot meals in school” programme, currently expected to be carried out in 450 schools.

The first programme is aimed at all children in pre-school (four-hour programme), primary and lower secondary schools. The distribution of milk and croissants started in 2002,<sup>40</sup> and in 2017 fruit and vegetables were added.<sup>41</sup> In 2021, the programme was amended to address the issues related to school lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>42</sup> Currently, the programme provides three milk portions, two portions of fruit or vegetables and five croissants, per child per week. The costs covered from the state budget per child per day are RON 1.10 (€0.22). Although this programme was not designed to provide a full meal, it was intended to replace breakfast, and has been the only in-kind benefit with an important impact on low-income households since 2002.

Another programme, in place since 2016, is the hot meals in school programme,<sup>43</sup> an EU-funded pilot project.<sup>44</sup> The programme is aimed at children in kindergarten, primary and lower secondary education. By 2020, the project had been implemented in 50 schools/kindergartens. In 2020, the programme was extended to 150 schools/kindergartens. Before the 2022/2023 school year the programme was extended to 350 schools/kindergartens.<sup>45</sup> After the beginning of the school year, the programme was once more amended, and the Ministry of Education announced a further expansion to 450 schools/kindergartens. The allocation from the state budget was increased to RON 15 (€3) per child per day.<sup>46</sup> The programme offers either a hot meal (prepared in-house, where schools have cafeterias or catering facilities) or a food package (in those schools without the conditions for preparing/preserving hot meals).

According to the Ministry of Education, 65,000 children were targeted by the programme in 2020, and the budget allocated to the programme was RON 82 million (€17 million) (Ministry of Education, 2021). Currently, for 2022-2023, about 10% of all kindergartens and schools in primary and lower secondary education are included in the programme. The programme focuses, according to a declaration of the minister of education,<sup>47</sup> on healthy meals and is carried out in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture. During January-February 2023, the Ministry of Agriculture carried out a survey of the programme (availability, satisfaction, adequacy etc.), by means of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews with children, parents

<sup>40</sup> GD no 96/2002, Law no 6/2012.

<sup>41</sup> GEO no 13/2017.

<sup>42</sup> GD no 52/2021.

<sup>43</sup> The programme is also referred to, in official documents, as “healthy meals in school”, or “programme for Romanian schools”.

<sup>44</sup> GEO no 72/2016.

<sup>45</sup> GEO no 105/2022.

<sup>46</sup> GEO no 145/2022.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/masa-sanatoasa-in-scoli-programme-national-integrat-propus-de-ministrul-cimpeanu-finantare-de-1-miliard-de-euro-in-2022-2027/>

and school representatives. Currently no data are available; these will become available in the coming months.

The budget allocated to the programme for 2023 is RON 262 million (€53.5 million). The budget was approved by the state budget law and is below the amount announced at the beginning of the school year, despite an increase in the number of participating schools after the beginning of the school year. Overall, the budget allocated to the programme for the period 2022-2027 is around €1 billion.

However, the methodology for choosing the pilot schools is not clear. In the absence of any justification or methodology, an analysis by the Edupedu foundation pointed to the fact that the programme has been used as a political instrument.<sup>48</sup>

As shown above, Romania is still piloting a programme providing free meals in school. Although the expansion of the programme to 450 schools (about 10% of all primary and lower secondary education schools and kindergartens) is beneficial, it does not guarantee the targeting of low-income children.

### 3.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

Not applicable

### 3.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

The milk, croissants and apples programme provides light meals to about 1.9 million children in kindergartens (to those enrolled in a regular half-day programme), and primary and lower secondary education. All children who are AROPE and are enrolled in these educational programmes will benefit from the free snack. However, a UNICEF study, reported in the media in 2017,<sup>49</sup> showed that about 300,000 children were not in school, and these did not benefit from any free meals. These are mostly AROPE, and represent about 20% of all children AROPE.

The most vulnerable categories of children are Roma children, and children in marginalised communities and remote rural areas.

## 3.2 Main barriers to effective and free access to school meals for low-income children

### 3.2.1 Financial barriers

Snacks/meals in schools are provided either to all children (i.e. through the milk, croissants and apples programme) or only to children in schools selected for piloting the hot meals in school programme. Where meals are provided, these are provided free of charge to all children – similar in approach to the milk, croissants and apples programme, which is targeted at all children in pre-school, primary and lower secondary education.

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<sup>48</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/analiza-programmeul-masa-calda-in-scoli-instrument-politic-pestes-63-dintre-scolile-inscrise-in-acest-an-au-fost-alese-din-localitati-conduse-de-primari-pnl/>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/unicef-300-000-de-copii-romani-nu-merg-la-scoala-in-timp-ce-jumatate-dintre-minori-traiesc-in-saracie-lucie-ori-la-limita-subzistentei-16384973>

### 3.2.2 Non-financial barriers

The main non-financial barriers that put low-income children at a disadvantage are related to the uneven geographical availability of services to which there is a legal entitlement, and the wide variations in the quality of education between different areas and regions.

Both programmes mentioned above encountered problems in providing services at all, or in providing services in accordance with the minimum standards required by the law. Three aspects led to this situation: (a) the low cost per student per day approved for these programmes; (b) the low administrative capacity of some schools to handle acquisition and procurement procedures; and (c) the lack of service-providers, in accordance with legally stipulated standards, in the area.

In 2020, 1.9 million children were entitled to receive the snack provided by the milk, croissants and apples programme. Although the budget allocated for the 2022/2023 school year was RON 563 million (€114 million), the cost per day per child was less than RON 1 (€0.20). Since November 2022 the price has increased to RON 1.10 (€0.22) per child per day, due to difficulties in finding service/food providers. The increase was small and is not expected to have a significant impact on the supply. Many counties report problems in finding at least one provider willing to supply the products at this price.<sup>50</sup> The low budget per student allocated during the last few years affected not only the availability of the snack in schools but also the quality of the products provided. For example, in December 2022, children in 12 counties had not received any dairy products since the start of the school year.

Nor was the hot meals in school pilot programme much more successful. According to the minister of education, cited by the Edupedu foundation,<sup>51</sup> out of 150 schools in the programme only 104 schools implemented it during 2019-2020, and 134 during 2021-2022. The first reason was the fact that only 10% of schools in Romania have a cafeteria, and not all schools have conditions for storing hot meals. Schools that meet these criteria are mostly not in vulnerable communities or rural remote areas. In many rural areas, hot meals were therefore replaced with a food package. Second, although the standard cost for a meal is not as low as that for the milk, croissants and apples programme (i.e. RON 15, or €3, per child per day compared with RON 1.10, or €0.22), in many rural areas no suppliers of hot meals or food packages bid for the contract, as the cost per meal per student is also supposed to cover distribution and other related administrative costs. Third, blockages in the tendering processes, and disruptions to financial flows between the state and local budgets, due to the low administrative capacity of some local authorities, resulted in an uneven implementation of the programme.

Although there are no assessments or impact analyses carried out regarding the effectiveness of the programmes, anecdotal evidence shows that offering free meals in school is a valued support to low-income households and an incentive for low-income children to attend school. However, for the programmes to become effective, the standard financial allocation per student needs to be increased and operational norms adjusted to the actual situation.

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/programmeul-european-de-lapte-in-scoli-omorat-de-guvern-incet-si-sigur-procesatorii-de-lapte-care-inca-livreaza-portiile-pentru-elevi-trag-un-semnal-de-alarma-si-sustin-ca-vor-opri-d/>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/anul-trecut-doar-104-de-scoli-din-cele-150-au-putut-sa-organizeze-programmeul-masa-calda-potrivit-ministrului-educatiei-iar-anul-acesta-au-fost-134-cimpeanu-vorbeste-despre-un-programme-viitor-in-ca/>

## 4. Healthcare

This section describes the situation regarding effective and free access for low-income children to healthcare, focusing on vaccinations, care from a general practitioner (GP) or infant nurses, specialist care, dental care (not orthodontics) and prescribed medicines.

### 4.1 Mapping the provision of free healthcare services and products

In Romania healthcare is an insurance-based system, complemented by some non-contributory national programmes, for which costs are supported from the state budget. However, some of these programmes, especially those in prevention, are carried out through the GP network, and others are run by hospitals that are in a direct contractual relationship with the health insurance house.

In accordance with the legislation, children up to 18, along with young people aged 18-26 who are enrolled in education/apprenticeships, are insured by default, without any obligation by the parents to pay social healthcare contributions and regardless of the insurance status of the parents. All children therefore benefit from a basic service package. However, children must be registered with a GP to benefit from curative primary health treatments or preventive services.

Each year the basic service package – for each category of healthcare services (i.e. primary medicine, out-patient and para-clinical medicine, clinical and hospital services, physical therapy and recovery, and dental services) – is revised and forms the basis of the framework contract between physicians, hospitals and the health insurance house.

**Table 4.1: Healthcare costs (free for all/low-income children)**

Vaccination	GP	Infant nurses	Specialist care	Dental care (not orthodontics)	Prescribed medicines
ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	ALL	MOST S&P

*Note: "ALL" means that all services/products in the category are free for all children. "MOST S&P" means that most but not all services/products in the category are free for low-income children.*

During 2022-2023,<sup>52</sup> the basic service package for children up to 18 includes, besides curative medical services, a series of preventive medical services regarding: (a) growth and development; (b) nutritional state and practices; (c) early detection and intervention mechanisms for age-specific risks; and, of course, (d) vaccinations (compulsory schemes and recommended vaccinations). The basic service package also stipulates the type and frequency of services that can and should be provided for early detection and prevention, by age group. Children during the first year of life benefit from home consultations, and so do children up to 18 with infectious and contagious diseases. All children are therefore entitled to: free vaccinations; services provided by infant nurses; and primary, specialist and hospital healthcare services (Table 4.1).

A special package is also available for dental care. This includes regular cleaning (every six months) and prophylactic consultations, dental sealing, basic curative treatments, emergency interventions, and some corrective devices for the treatment of congenital malformations.

<sup>52</sup> This package is valid until March 2023.

Not all medicines are free of charge. Some are reimbursed at 100%, while others require a co-payment, which may vary from 10% to 80% according to a classification system (Table 4.1). The proportion of medicines that are free of charge (reimbursed at 100%) for children is higher than that for adults.

Even though services are free, financial barriers to accessing healthcare services are significant, especially among vulnerable groups. The 2022 Eurobarometer showed that in Romania the proportion of those who make use of the “envelope method” to make informal payments to medical staff is 22%, the highest in the EU. This reflects the low trust people have in doctors and medical staff; only 55% of those interviewed trusted medical staff, the lowest level of any EU Member State and well below the EU average of 76%.<sup>53</sup> According to older surveys, informal payments are meant to buy attention and priority treatment rather than a higher quality of services.

#### 4.1.1 Conditions for qualifying as a “low-income child”

Not applicable, as low income is not a criterion. The rules on access to healthcare services and free or reduced-cost medicines are the same for all children.

#### 4.1.2 Relation between the group(s) of children who have free access and the AROPE population of children in the relevant age group(s)

In principle, all children have access to free healthcare and free or reduced-cost medicines. However, to receive these services, children need to be registered with a GP. One of the roles of community nurses and healthcare mediators is to make sure that children are visible within the healthcare system and registered with a physician. This might contribute to improving the take-up of those who are hard to reach (especially Roma children, and children in marginalised communities or remote rural areas). However, the number of children who in fact have no (or limited) access to healthcare services is not available or estimated. In addition, being on a GP list is not a guarantee of effective access to healthcare services (see Section 4.3), due to the low density of services in rural areas, the lack of physicians or the excessive number of patients per physician (UNICEF, 2021a).

## 4.2 Cash benefits whose specific purpose is to help meet healthcare costs

No cash benefits are granted for the purpose of offsetting the costs of medicines for children in low-income households. Out-of-pocket spending on healthcare was estimated, for 2020, at 18.9% in Romania (compared with the EU average of 15.4%), most of which was on pharmaceuticals (about 60%), followed by dental care (OECD, EOHSP, 2021). Even though, overall, the reimbursement rate for drugs is higher for children than for adults, pharmaceuticals are the most significant, and for most people, the sole out-of-the-pocket costs of healthcare, besides dental care. Furthermore, while a basic dental service package is covered by insurance, all other dental interventions are not, increasing healthcare out-of-pocket costs.

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<sup>53</sup> Database of the Eurobarometer 2022, available at: [https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2693\\_97\\_5\\_std97\\_eng?locale=en](https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2693_97_5_std97_eng?locale=en).

### 4.3 Non-financial barriers to effective and free access to healthcare

The *uneven availability of services* results in differential access to healthcare among children, putting children living in vulnerable/remote/marginalised communities at a disadvantage (UNICEF, 2021a). In 2021, 47% of the Romanian population and 49% of the children aged 18 and below were living in rural areas; but only 36% of GPs practised in rural areas, a proportion that had fallen from 40% in 2019 (Figure A.2 in Annex). The number of GPs in rural areas has fallen slightly over the last five years, while their number has increased in urban areas. In 2021, the number of residents for each GP in rural areas was, on average, 2,177, compared with 1,221 in urban areas (Figure A.3 in Annex). In 2019, 211 localities lacked a GP, of which 90% were rural communities (UNICEF, 2021a). The number of school-based medical offices is also very low, covering less than 10% of kindergartens and schools. In 2020, out of 2,013 medical offices in schools only 22 were in rural areas (INS, 2021b).

A second barrier is the *still weak network of community nurses and healthcare mediators*. These are part of the integrated community centres,<sup>54</sup> which were first developed in 2017 as a pilot project by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in partnership with the Ministry of Health, to increase access to services for vulnerable groups and disadvantaged communities. The project was preceded by a pilot project carried out by UNICEF, instituting a minimum service package approach to realising the rights of vulnerable children through information, counselling, referral, accompaniment, and support to increase access to basic social services (ICE, Camino, 2017).

According to the Ministry of Health, in 2020 the network consisted of 1,754 medical community nurses and approximately 470 healthcare mediators. However, an analysis initiated by UNICEF showed that the geographical dispersion of community nurses was not correlated with needs; the concentration of community nurses was not higher in those counties with a higher marginalisation rate, and, overall, about half of the nurses were concentrated in 11 out of the 42 counties (UNICEF, 2021b). This suggests that community services are currently correlated with a higher financial and administrative capacity of the county, rather than with the actual needs of the county. Furthermore, a problem encountered by these services is, in many cases, a lack of the resources that are supposed to be provided by local authorities, such as space to carry out certain activities, means of transport, and necessary equipment. The high number of people served by each community nurse or healthcare mediator is another problematic aspect, being almost double the level stipulated by law (UNICEF, 2021b).

*Telemedicine*, approved and paid for by the healthcare insurance fund during the COVID-19 pandemic, is not yet developed enough to be mainstreamed as a way to compensate for the weakness of the primary healthcare services in rural remote communities. However, e-health is part of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan for Romania and is expected to consolidate its role during the coming years.

The primary healthcare system is therefore still weak and underdeveloped (with uneven geographic coverage, inadequate provision, and weak prophylaxis), despite the efforts to put in place, as a pro-active component, a network of medical community nurses. The proportion of spending on primary and out-patient services in 2019 was the second lowest among EU Member States, at 18% compared with the EU average of 30%. Spending on prevention is also low, a mere 1.7% of all healthcare spending, compared with an EU average of 3.1% (UNICEF, 2021).

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<sup>54</sup> GEO 18/2017, GD 324/2019.



The state of the primary healthcare system is reflected in the low overall level of vaccination rates, and high mortality and morbidity rates. In 2020, according to the National Public Health Institute, over 95% of children were covered by the BCG vaccination, while all other vaccination rates were near the herd immunity level (around 80-90%), with no significant differences between rural and urban areas (INSP, 2020). Infant mortality in 2021, although lower than in 2011, was 5.2 per 1,000 children, 1.6 times higher than the EU average, and the highest value among EU Member States.<sup>55</sup> Further, Romania has the highest prevalence of preventable diseases among children in the EU. This is the result of a lack of both education for health and prophylaxis (INSP, 2020).

The risks associated with medical emergencies, and with acute and chronic diseases, are higher in rural areas, due to a lower density of primary healthcare providers and dentists. But poor infrastructure in general, limiting timely access to emergency services, and a still weak network of pharmacies, mean that the risks associated with preventive diseases are evenly spread between rural and urban areas (UNICEF, 2021a; INSP, 2020). The group most affected is children with high vulnerabilities, exposed to unhealthy lifestyles and practices (INSP, 2020). This highlights the weakness of the prevention component – at the level of primary healthcare services (GPs and school-based medical offices) – and of the educational system.

The children most affected are those with chronic conditions/disabilities, children in marginalised communities, children in low-income households, and (especially) Roma children.

## 5. Healthy nutrition

This section describes the situation regarding effective access for low-income children to healthy nutrition.

### 5.1 Main barriers to effective access to healthy nutrition

No in-kind or cash benefit to support healthy nutrition is specifically targeted at low-income households with children in Romania. However, some programmes are aimed at a few of the vulnerable categories of children – children with SEN,<sup>56</sup> tuberculosis or AIDS/HIV – thus increasing the chances of access to healthy nutrition by those of these children who also live in low-income households. The programmes will be briefly described below.

The food allowance for out-patients with tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS patients<sup>57</sup> is granted to both adults and children in the same amount – from June 2022, RON 33 (€6.70) per day. All children who are registered are entitled to receive the benefit. However, this is granted at the request of the family, and the number of children benefiting was not high (188 children with AIDS/HIV and 251 children with tuberculosis) during the period 1 January to 30 September 2022. The take-up of the benefit is high, as the overall number of children registered with AIDS/HIV or tuberculosis is about the same as those receiving the benefit.

Children with SEN in pre-school, primary and secondary education (private or public) benefit from two allowances, one for food and one for other necessary educational materials, apparel,

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<sup>55</sup> Eurostat database, demo\_mindfind.

<sup>56</sup> Certification with SEN is granted by a special commission at the level of the county centres for educational resources and assistance.

<sup>57</sup> Law no 302/2018, GD 1448/2022.

cultural spending, or transport.<sup>58</sup> The food allowance is granted to SEN children in accordance with the number of school days, except for children who live in boarding school dormitories. The food allowance is also conditional on school attendance, except for justified absences. The food allowance is currently RON 22 (€4.50) per day.<sup>59</sup> The food allowance is increased by 50% (to RON 33, or €6.70, per day) for children who are also certified with a disability.<sup>60</sup> The allowance is paid during the first 10 days of the month for the previous month and is supported from the state budget (from VAT receipts). According to the minister of education, in January 2023 the number of SEN children exceeded 100,000, with around 77,000 in mainstream education and 26,000 in special education.<sup>61</sup>

Although these benefits are not a guarantee of healthy or adequate nutrition, they create the basis for it. The levels for the daily food allowance are established in accordance with the standard costs used by residential social assistance services, and are not based on a healthy diet, but rather on historical criteria and budgetary constraints.

In addition, a temporary measure targeting low-income households was adopted in 2022 to compensate for the high increase in food prices (see Section 5.3).

### 5.1.1 Financial barriers

The significant increase in food prices during 2022 put even greater pressure on low-income households with children. Social transfers did not increase at the same pace as food prices, especially the means-tested benefits, which are expressed as a proportion of the SRI, the value of which is updated in accordance with the inflation rate for the previous year. Although the universal child allowance<sup>62</sup> was adjusted on 1 January 2023 in line with the inflation rate for 2021 (i.e. 5.1%), pension benefits increased by 12.5%.<sup>63</sup>

### 5.1.2 Non-financial barriers

Poverty is not the only barrier to healthy nutrition. A lack of education regarding affordable healthy diets, their value, and the long-term benefits of medical prevention programmes is an important trigger for nutrition-related, preventable diseases. In Romania the second most prevalent cause of morbidity in children has been identified as non-endocrine obesity in urban areas and weight/stature hypotrophy in rural areas (INSP, 2020).

Starting with the 2021/2022 school year a new, compulsory curriculum component was supposed to be taught in school: education for health and nutrition.<sup>64</sup> In 2022, a new debate was sparked, as the parliament did not approve sexual education in schools as part of education for health.<sup>65</sup> The new legislation re-brands the package as “education for life”, which is supposed to include a series of sub-modules. In addition, the amendment proposing the

<sup>58</sup> GD no 564/2017.

<sup>59</sup> Law 143/2022.

<sup>60</sup> Certified by a county-level commission under the General Directorate for Social Assistance; in September 2022, 74,000 children aged 0-18 were certified with a disability (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, Statistical Bulletin).

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/banii-pentru-copiii-cu-ces-in-2023-ministerul-educatiei-drepturile-financiare-se-majoreaza-cu-50-daca-copilul-cu-ces-are-si-certificat-de-incadrare-in-grad-de-handicap-si-se-aplica-tuturor-copiiilor/>

<sup>62</sup> In 2023, the child allowance is RON 631 (€127) per month for children under 2 and for all children with disabilities up to 18, and RON 256 (€52) per month for children aged 2-18.

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.edupedu.ro/alocatiile-copiiilor-cresc-de-la-1-ianuarie-cu-51-majoritatea-copiiilor-vor-primi-12-lei-in-plus-lunar-echivalentul-a-8-covrigi/>

<sup>64</sup> The introduction of the module was approved in 2019, by an amendment to the law on education.

<sup>65</sup> For a survey evaluating the support for the measure, see: <https://www.edupedu.ro/cercetare-cu-privire-la-introducerea-educatiei-sexuale-in-scoli-peste-83-dintre-respondenti-sunt-pentru/>.

milk, croissants and apples programme specifically highlighted the need to introduce a special module for nutritional education in schools. Nutritional education is also under the responsibility of GPs, as part of national prevention programmes. However, many schools have not yet introduced education for health and nutrition in their curricula and not many GPs take this component seriously.

Despite the political interest in providing healthy lifestyles for children, and the programmes that were proposed and initiated as part of the compulsory curricula in schools and kindergartens, there is still therefore a significant lack of education regarding nutrition.

In April 2022, the Ministry of Education drafted a national strategy (“Educated parents, happy children”) which emphasises the need to focus on educating both parents and children, simultaneously, regarding healthy eating habits. The strategy has not yet been approved.

Finally, the lack of education regarding a healthy lifestyle and nutrition affects more children in low-income households, rural areas, and Roma children, due to a higher proportion of low-educated parents.

## 5.2 Publicly funded measures supporting access to healthy nutrition

The Romanian government adopted a temporary programme – the social voucher, or meal tickets – for supporting access to adequate nutrition by vulnerable groups, in the context of a rapid increase in food prices. The measure, instituted as part of the European Operational Programme for disadvantaged people, is being carried out between June 2022 and December 2023, and provides support, in the form of a social voucher for food spending, to a wide range of vulnerable segments. Among the beneficiaries are families with two or more children, or single-parent families, with an income equal to, or lower than, RON 600 (€121) per month per person for 2022, and RON 675 (€136) for 2023. The social voucher has a value of RON 250 (€51) and is granted once every two months. The benefit is income-tested, and the eligibility threshold in 2022 corresponded to the per capita AROP threshold for 2021. This is to say that most families with two or more children, and single-parent families, who are AROP are supposed to receive this temporary benefit.

## 6. Adequate housing

This section describes the situation regarding effective access for low-income children to adequate housing.

### 6.1 Publicly funded measures supporting access to adequate housing – Housing allowances

No housing allowances are available, despite the significant proportion of households reporting housing costs overburden (see Section 6.2). The only measure to subsidise renting costs is limited to a small group of unemployed people, who move to a different locality from the one where they live in order to take up employment; this is a labour market measure intended to stimulate mobility of the workforce. However, the number of those taking employment in another city and claiming the benefit is insignificant. For this category rents are subsidised, up to a certain amount, for a definite period. Otherwise, no housing allowance is available to low-income households, with or without children.

## 6.2 Publicly funded measures supporting access to adequate housing – Social housing

Housing represents one of the most important challenges for the Romanian population. This is mainly the result of a lack of public strategies and policies in the housing sector during the past decade. Due to the lack of a strategic approach, measures addressing those living in informal or non-conventional dwellings were rather palliative and no emphasis was put on preventing homelessness and on sustainable living conditions. In addition, in the absence of a strategic approach, the development of the social housing stock was weak and chaotic, and the variability regarding priority and tie-breaking criteria for the allocation of social housing across counties and localities was high.

Homelessness increased after 2000, and only scattered, palliative measures were taken to address the needs of people without shelter or those living in unconventional/informal dwellings. Preventing homelessness has therefore never been a priority of social policies. As a result, in Romania a significant proportion of people live in non-conventional (informal) settings or are at risk of becoming homeless. Although the number of street children fell between 2010 and 2014, according to two Save the Children surveys, it was estimated that 1 in 3 homeless people were young people. The profile of the homeless rough sleepers established in 2021 by a survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection showed a slight shift towards older age groups (Romanian Government, 2021).

Children living in marginalised communities, characterised by non-conventional (informal) settlements, are among the most disadvantaged children, as they not only face monetary poverty, but also suffer multiple deprivations (e.g. material and social deprivation, and housing deprivation); and their access to basic social services, including education, is seriously hampered by the lack of availability of basic social services within their communities. A mapping of urban and rural marginalised communities, carried out between 2014 and 2016, estimated that 342,933 people in urban areas, and about 565,600 in rural areas (of which about one third were children) were living in marginalised communities (World Bank, 2014 and 2016). This means that about 300,000 children – in the period 2014-2016, about 22% of the children AROP – were living in inadequate conditions. Assuming that marginalised communities have not decreased in size, and that the number of children living in these communities has remained relatively constant since 2016 (when the last mapping was carried out), about 28% of children facing monetary poverty currently live in marginalised communities. Most of these children have parents with a low level of education and who are not working in the formal economy. The proportion of Roma children living in marginalised communities is higher than among non-Roma children.

The national strategy for the social inclusion of Roma for 2022-2027 refers to a 2019 study by UNICEF and the *Împreună* Foundation showing that Roma families are more likely to live in inadequate dwellings, many of which are in non-conventional or informal settlements; furthermore, 67% of the Roma population have been found to live in Roma-majority neighbourhoods (Romanian Government, 2022c). Another study cited by the national strategy, the 2018 EU-MIDIS report, showed that 80% of the Roma population were living, in 2018, under the poverty threshold; in addition, 1 in 3 Roma lived in dwellings without running water, 1 in 10 without electricity, and 1 in 4 in a household in which at least one member went hungry to bed (Romanian Government, 2022c).

Living in any form of marginalised community (urban or rural) is therefore associated with all the characteristics of precarious living, including lack of (or limited access to) public utilities. In many cases the locational status of the residents is unclear, thus leaving them without a legal address, and (in the case of children) without access to schools or GPs. Many marginalised

communities are organised around informal settlements.<sup>66</sup> According to the national strategy on housing (Romanian Government, 2022a), a recent assessment identified 393 informal settlements, home to about 72,000 people.

Overall, the proportion of people considered to be at risk of homelessness can be approximated based on a few indicators, such as severe housing deprivation<sup>67</sup> and housing cost overburden.<sup>68</sup>

The proportion of people facing severe housing deprivation in Romania was, in 2020, 3 times higher than the EU average, with an even higher incidence among children, older people, families with many children, poor households, tenants with reduced rent, and rural residents. In fact, in 2020, the proportion of the overall population suffering from severe housing deprivation was 14%, while severe housing deprivation affected 1 in 4 children. The proportion of affected children increases to 55% for children AROP (Table A.4 in Annex). An important and persistent difference can be observed between rural areas and big cities, with a far higher proportion of rural residents facing severe housing deprivation.

On the other hand, the proportion of people facing housing cost overburden was, in 2021, lower than the EU average for all categories except for owners with a mortgage or housing loan, tenants renting at the market price, and rural residents. However, owners with a mortgage or housing loan and tenants at the market price represent less than 5% of the total population. Compared with 2020, in 2021 single parents and families with three or more children were better protected against this risk.<sup>69</sup> Overall, children, and especially those under 6, fared better than the overall population (Table A.4 in Annex). While this suggests that families with children and vulnerable groups were better protected against increases in energy prices during 2021, this is also the result of the low proportion of people renting at the market price or of people taking out mortgages/housing loans, compared with the EU average. Furthermore, the high proportion of people, especially children, living in unconventional/informal dwellings is partially the result of significant housing cost overburden (along with evictions and lack of social housing).

The current situation is the result of a lack of strategy and public policies during the past decade. Many national strategies acknowledged the need to address homelessness and to increase access by low-income people to adequate housing, and even set up targets to improve the prevention of homelessness and increase the social housing stock (for example: the national strategies for social inclusion and poverty reduction for 2015-2020 and 2022-2027; the national strategy for promoting children's rights for 2014-2020, and the current draft law on the strategy for 2022-2027; and the national strategy on the social inclusion of Roma ethnic people for 2022-2027).

Finally, the national strategy for housing for 2022-2050 and the action plan for 2022-2027 (RG, 2022), propose, under the objective of inclusive housing, a series of support measures for the Lisbon declaration on combating homelessness: (a) ensuring evidence for an annual evaluation of homelessness and of the specific needs regarding housing; (b) ensuring access to housing services for homeless people through "housing first" interventions; and (c) increasing the social housing supply for homeless people, in co-ordination with social inclusion plans. Furthermore, the housing strategy highlights the need for a national list of criteria for

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<sup>66</sup> Regulated by Law no 151/2019.

<sup>67</sup> According to the Eurostat glossary, severe housing deprivation refers to the population living in overcrowded dwellings, which also exhibit at least one of the housing deprivation traits (leaking roof, no bath/shower and no indoor toilet, or a dwelling considered too dark).

<sup>68</sup> Housing cost overburden refers to households where more than 40% of their disposable income is absorbed by housing costs (net of housing allowances) (Eurostat, glossary).

<sup>69</sup> Eurostat database (tessi166).

priority access to social housing, along with an increased emphasis on housing in strategic documents at the local level.

The main three novelties of the newly adopted national strategies for housing are: the development of housing first type programmes; the expansion of the social housing stock and setting national priority criteria for accessing social housing; and, finally, the adoption of housing benefits. The development of a series of supportive adjacent services is also planned, to increase the chances of vulnerable households accessing and maintaining adequate housing. These measures will be funded from non-repayable EU funds, structural reform support funds or local budgets. Although the strategy highlights the need to ensure a support fund for social investment that can be accessed by local authorities whenever needed, the measure associated with this intervention direction is not very specific.

Romanian legislation distinguishes between three types of public housing available for homeless people and those at risk of housing exclusion: social housing, necessity housing and support housing. Necessity housing<sup>70</sup> and support housing<sup>71</sup> are temporary measures, and, in practice, their number is marginal compared with the actual needs (Pop, 2019).

Social housing<sup>72</sup> – public housing offered at reduced or subsidised rent – is targeted at those with a net average income per person (over the previous 12 months<sup>73</sup>) below the level of the national average net salary, and the rent cannot exceed 10% of the net income of the family. However, prioritisation criteria are required, and currently the law stipulates that these will be established, annually, by local authorities.<sup>74</sup> However, the 2022 amendment<sup>75</sup> established the vulnerable categories that are subject to prioritisation: people and households that were subject to evictions (due to restitutions). They include; young people up to 35; young people exiting the child protection residential care system; pensioners with first- or second-degree invalidity; people with disabilities; pensioners; veterans and war widows; politically persecuted people; and victims of domestic violence. Families with many children or single-parent families are not mentioned among these categories at all. Furthermore, according to the 2022 amendment, priority criteria are not supposed to be formulated at the national level, despite the clear direction established by the national strategy on housing, which was approved prior to the amendment defining the vulnerable categories and decentralising the decisions about priority criteria.

### 6.2.1 Mapping the provision of social housing

According to administrative data<sup>76</sup> for 2022, social housing was available in 48% of the cities, and 6% of the rural localities, that responded to the information request. In January 2022, 16,290 social dwellings (out of 9.5 million dwellings in 2021, according to the National Institute of Statistics) were reported, of which 95% were in urban areas. 40,161 applications for social housing in waiting lists were reported, a number 2.5 times higher than the existing stock, with an even higher ratio of demand to supply in rural areas. Of the 40,161 pending applications, 38,085 were in urban communities. The national strategy on housing for 2022-2050 (Romanian Government, 2022a) also highlights the fact that 73% of the administrative-territorial units that

<sup>70</sup> Regulated by the housing Law no 114/1996: necessity housing targets those whose dwellings are being rehabilitated or demolished, as temporary/emergency solutions.

<sup>71</sup> Regulated by the Law no 143/2017: support housing is aimed at those households who lose their home due to inability to pay their mortgage and who cannot afford to pay rent or buy a dwelling at the free market price.

<sup>72</sup> Regulated by the housing Law no 114/1996.

<sup>73</sup> In 2023, the average net salary reached RON 3,972 (€808) per month.

<sup>74</sup> According to Law no 253/2022.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>76</sup> According to the data collected by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration, as part of the social inclusion indicators database administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, available at <https://mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistentia-sociala/6567-indicatori-incluziune-sociala-2020>. The data are based on a 44% response rate (64% of cities and 41% of rural administrative units).

responded to the questionnaire have no estimates of need in particular locations, and no approved plans for developing the social housing stock.

This situation reflects the absence of any strategic approach over the past decade, as described at the start of Section 6.2. Each administrative-territorial unit that owns social housing makes its own rules on how to maintain and allocate it.

Priority criteria and vulnerabilities to be addressed when allocating social housing are currently established locally, by the decision of the local councils. A brief analysis of the criteria to allocate social housing adopted by a few big municipalities shows that families with children, especially those with two or more children and single-parent families, are among the vulnerable groups identified for prioritisation. The number of points allocated, thus the weight given to these categories of families with children in determining priorities, varies across municipalities. We propose as examples of prioritisation two big municipalities that have both very high administrative and financial capacity and a greater social housing stock to allocate; both of these do take into account the type of family with children and the number of children. However, this does not guarantee priority to families with children (e.g. the municipality of Cluj-Napoca,<sup>77</sup> Bucharest sector 1<sup>78</sup>). In addition, most municipalities give priority to families with an income per family member below the statutory minimum net wage, as opposed to those families with a per capita income between the minimum net wage and the national average net salary (which is the legal eligibility threshold). Additional criteria refer to the current housing conditions and history, age (under 35), disability/invalidity, and employment (number of years in formal employment): these vary across municipalities.

## 6.2.2 Main barriers to effective access to social housing

### 6.2.2.1 Financial barriers

The income level per capita at which eligibility for social housing is set is very high (i.e. the national average net salary, which in December 2022 was 2.9 times the minimum net salary). However, a lower income or no income increases the chances of getting social housing, according to most of the priority criteria lists and procedures approved by local councils. This means that some households that cumulate a high number of risk factors can be given priority over a family that has an income below the poverty line but cumulates fewer risk factors, as established by the city hall.

Once social housing is allocated to a family, the affordability of social housing is high, as the rent is set at 10% of the family's income. The level of the rent itself therefore does not represent a financial barrier to social housing. Electricity and heating costs are offset, for all low-income households in social dwellings or any other type of dwelling, regardless of ownership status, by seasonal and permanent benefits, thus increasing the chances of low-income households maintaining social housing.

### 6.2.2.2 Non-financial barriers

Although there are no obvious financial barriers to social housing, there are multiple non-financial barriers restricting access.

*A first barrier is the scarcity of social housing.* As shown above, at the beginning of Section 6.2, the number of social housing units is low. The legislation regulating social housing (law 114/1996) points out that social housing is established through new construction or the rehabilitation of old social housing stock; municipalities therefore have to invest in new

<sup>77</sup> <https://primariaclujnapoca.ro/locuinte/locuinte-sociale/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.primariasector1.ro/download/hotarari-consiliu-2021/133.2021%20Anonimizat.pdf>

construction and are not able to buy existing housing stock. This might increase the costs of expanding the social housing stock.

A second barrier is the *rapid degradation of the social housing stock, and, in some cases, its conversion into marginalised living communities*. Local authorities, which manage the social housing stock, do not have the capacity and expertise to provide real estate management services, and lack the resources to sub-contract them; this further increases the costs to local authorities of social housing. In addition, local authorities do not develop complementary support services for the beneficiaries of social housing (counselling on available benefits, support with payments for heating and electricity, housing allowances, etc.), to increase their capacity to pay bills, and thus prevent a further deterioration in their position (World Bank, 2014).

*Disparities between big cities and rural areas are wide*, as small administrative units, with a low financial and administrative capacity, are at a disadvantage. Most rural communities cannot afford to develop social housing, as the data on social housing show (see the beginning of Section 6.2).

Finally, being a family with children does not guarantee priority, and in some cases other criteria prevail. One of the criteria that discriminates among groups with similar vulnerabilities is the number of years on the waiting list. Households with a long waiting period gain priority, thus putting at a disadvantage (in particular) those households that are at high risk of becoming homeless. The risk of homelessness is not reflected properly in the criteria adopted by many of the local councils that have a prioritisation strategy (see examples proposed in Section 6.2.1).

### 6.3 Publicly funded measures supporting access to adequate housing – Other measures

In the absence of any housing allowances and in the context of a scarcity of social housing, the only support left to low-income households to cope with housing costs is the seasonal heating aid support and the energy supplement, targeted at vulnerable energy consumers.<sup>79</sup> In fact, these are the only social benefits that are intended to support low-income households with housing costs. The benefit is granted to families with an income per family member equal to, or lower than, RON 1,386 (€282) per month, equivalent to the minimum net salary in 2021. The benefit is a percentage of heating costs,<sup>80</sup> varying (across 10 income brackets) from 100% for families with an income per capita of up to RON 200 (€50) per month, to 10% for families with an income per capita of RON 1,280-1,386 (€260-282) per month – RON 2,053 (€417) for single people. The heating aid is granted for five months per year and the energy supplement is offered throughout the year, up to RON 70 (€14) per month. Some social benefits granted to children or families with children are disregarded when assessing the income level of the family. In addition, the ownership of some goods (real estate and mobile goods) can result in non-eligibility for the benefit. Means-testing procedures are the same as those used for the minimum income guarantee (see law 225/2021 on energy vulnerability and its methodological norms).

Finally, during the winter of 2021-2022, 246,200 households received heating assistance. In 2021, 1.549 million households were AROP, of which 512,300 were households with

<sup>79</sup> Law no 226/2021.

<sup>80</sup> Heating costs are calculated based on a combination of the consumption level specified in the current invoice (previous month), consumption standards based on the temperature zone and surface area of the dwelling, and the reference price per heating unit, according to each type of heating system/fuel, established through governmental decisions.



dependent children. The benefit, despite the generous eligibility threshold, therefore covered a rather small proportion of eligible households – the equivalent of 16% of households AROP. The low coverage is the result of a restrictive means-testing procedure and a variety of living arrangements that disqualify people from applying for the benefit or discourage them from doing so (e.g. tenants without a rental contract, people living with partners who in fact have a different address, and tenants with rental contracts but no utility contracts in their name). The energy supplement was granted to 682,000 households, the equivalent of 44% of the total number of households AROP.<sup>81</sup>

A temporary measure was adopted to subsidise gas and electricity prices for households within a certain consumption level, during the winter months of 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 (GEO 118/2022, GEO 27/2022). The measure was extended until 2025 for a few vulnerable categories, including families with three or more dependent children and single-parent families.

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<sup>81</sup> Data on number of beneficiaries were provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, statistical bulletin (social assistance), while the number of households AROP was retrieved from the Eurostat database.

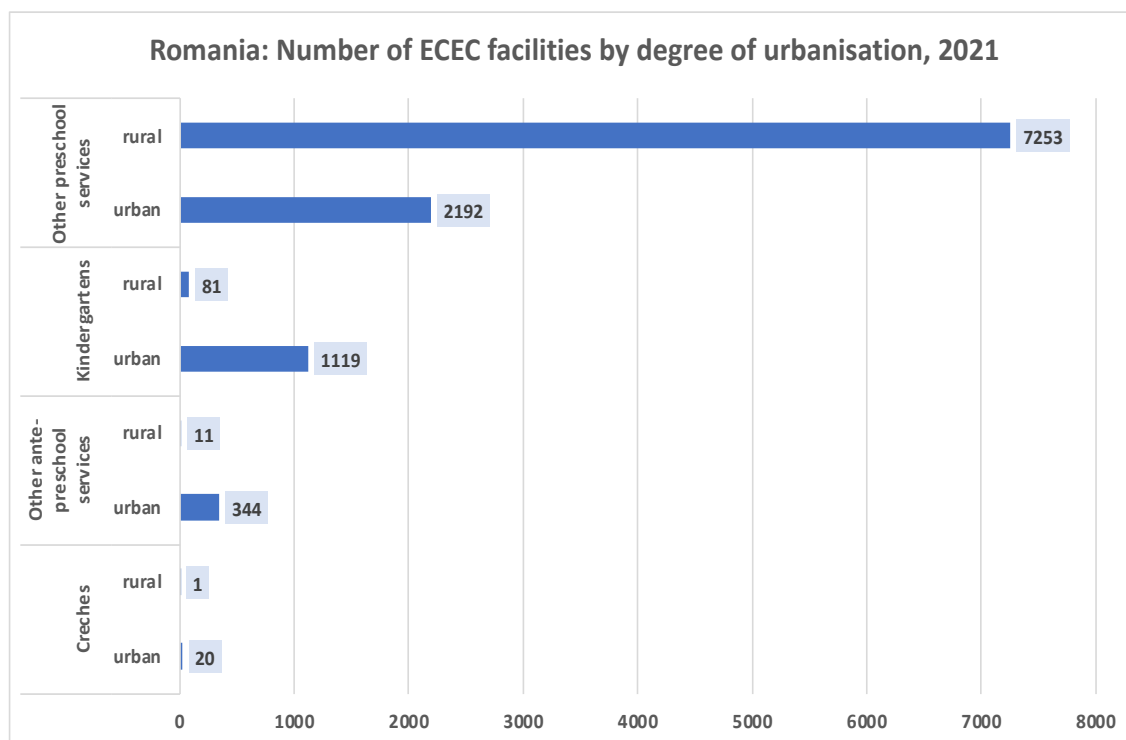
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## Annex

**Figure A.1: Romania – number of ECEC facilities by degree of urbanisation (2021)**



Source: National Institute for Statistics, TEMPO-online database (Tempo-SCL104D).

**Table A.1: Romania – Gross enrolment rates in pre-school, primary and lower secondary education, by residential area (2012, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)**

	2012/2013	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
<b>Preschool (3- to 6 years), of which:</b>	<b>90.2</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>88.6</b>	<b>84.5</b>	<b>85.3</b>
Urban	93.2	95.8	93.8	88.3	89.1
Rural	86.7	83.1	82.3	79.7	80.4
Gap between urban and rural areas*	7%	14%	13%	10%	10%
<b>Primary, of which</b>	<b>88.4</b>	<b>90.8</b>	<b>90.3</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>89.6</b>
Urban	91.5	100.1	99.1	96.7	96
Rural	85.2	80.9	80.9	81.5	82.2
Gap between urban and rural areas*	7%	21%	20%	17%	15%
<b>Lower secondary education, of which</b>	<b>93.4</b>	<b>85.1</b>	<b>84.4</b>	<b>83.4</b>	<b>87</b>
Urban	104.3	99.8	99.1	97	101.4
Rural	84	71.2	70.1	69.8	72.7
Gap between urban and rural areas*	22%	34%	34%	33%	33%
<b>Primary and lower secondary education</b>	<b>90.6</b>	<b>88.2</b>	<b>87.6</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>88.4</b>
Urban	97	100	99.1	96.9	98.4
Rural	84.6	76.4	75.8	75.9	77.6
Gap between urban and rural areas*	14%	27%	27%	24%	24%

\* The gap is calculated as the difference in percentage terms between urban and rural areas, as a proportion of the gross enrolment rate for the entire population.

Source: Ministry of Education, Annual report on the state of the preuniversity education (2021, 2022), available at <https://www.edu.ro/rapoarte-publice-periodice>.

**Table A.2: Romania – Estimated out-of-pocket costs with compulsory materials and school-based activities and educational benefits by educational level and level of income of the family**

	Monthly gross income per family member 500 Lei or less (without social benefits for children/families with children) – (3 months average)	Monthly net income per family member of 50% or less than 50% of the statutory minimum net salary (12 months average)  For 2022: equal or below 762 Lei/month/ family member net income  For 2023: equal or below 949 Lei/month/ family member net income	Monthly net income per family member equal or less than the statutory minimum net salary, but over 50% of the minimum net salary (3 months average)  2022: 762 - 1,524 Lei/ month/ family member of net income  2023: 949 - 1,898 Lei/month/ family member of net income
<b>Primary education</b>			
Social educational voucher (500 Lei/year)	yes	yes	no
Social assistance scholarship (200 Lei/month)	yes	yes	no
Study scholarship (150 Lei/ month, an average of 9 full month/year)	n.a.	n.a.	no
Money for high school (250 Lei/month, for 10 month per year)	n.a.	n.a.	no
Total annual income, for the schoolyear 2022-2023 (Lei/ Euros)	2,900 Lei (580€)	2,900 Lei (580€)	0
Total annual income, in 2018 (Lei/ Euros)*	2,276 Lei (494€)	2,276 Lei (455€)	2,276 Lei (455€)
Average annual out-of-pocket costs based on parents' estimations, 2018 (Save the Children Romania)	2, 545 Lei (552€)	2, 545 Lei (552€)	2, 545 Lei (552€)
<b>Lower secondary education</b>			
Social educational voucher (500 Lei/year)	yes	yes	no
Social assistance scholarship (200 Lei/month)	yes	yes	no
Study scholarship (150 Lei/ month, an average of 9 full month/year)	yes	yes	yes
Money for high school (250 Lei/month, for 10 month per year)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Total annual income, for the schoolyear 2022-2023 (Lei/ Euros)	4,250 Lei (850€)	4,250 Lei (850€)	1,350 Lei (270€)
Total annual income, in 2018 (Lei/ Euros)*	3,336 Lei (723€)	3,336 Lei (723€)	1,059 Lei (230€)
Average annual out-of-pocket costs based on parents' estimations, 2018 (Save the Children Romania)	3,083 Lei (669€)	3,083 Lei (669€)	3,083 Lei (669€)
<b>High school/ professional education (upper secondary education)</b>			
Social educational voucher (500 Lei/year)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Social assistance scholarship (200 Lei/month)	yes	yes	no
Study scholarship (150 Lei/ month, an average of 9 full month/year)	yes	yes	yes
Money for high school (250 Lei/month, for 10 month per year)	yes	no	no
Total annual income, for the schoolyear 2022-2023 (Lei/ Euros)	6,250 Lei (1,250€)	3,750 Lei (750€)	1,350 Lei (270€)
Total annual income, in 2018 (Lei/ Euros)*	4,906 Lei (1,063 €)	2,944 Lei (638€)	1,060 Lei (230€)
Average annual out-of-pocket costs based on parents' estimations, 2018 (Save the Children Romania)	3,647 Lei (791€)	3,647 Lei (791€)	3,647 Lei (791€)

\* Deflated by the consumer price index for 2022 (127.39).

Source: Legislation; Save the Children Romania (2018).

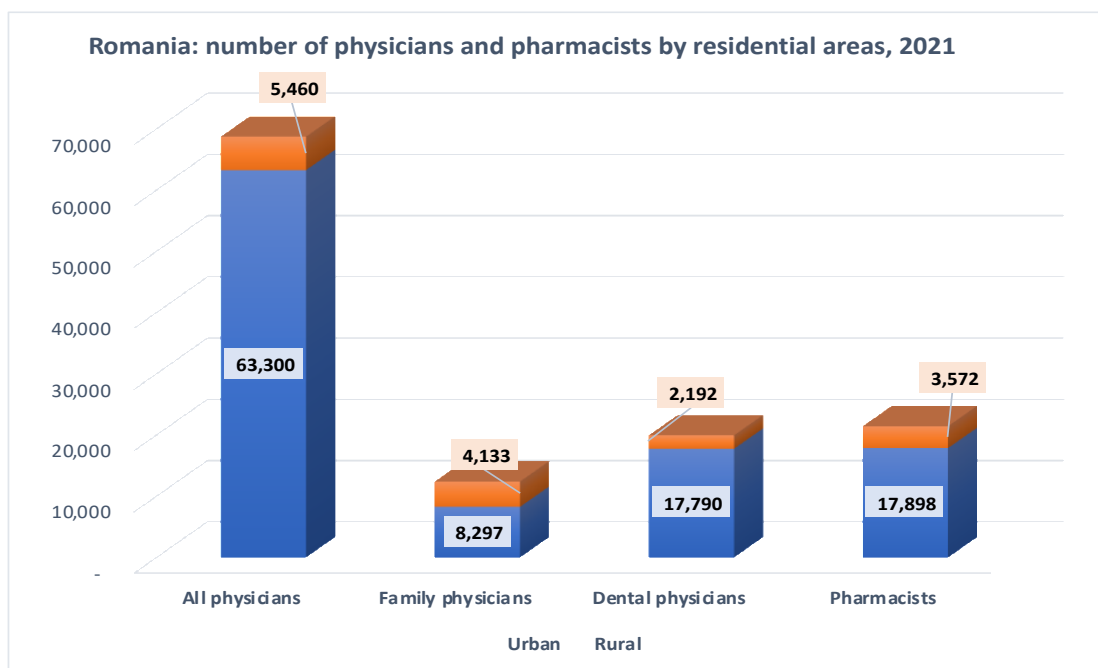
**Table A.3: EU-27 and Romania – Early leavers from education and training by degree of urbanisation (18-24), 2010 versus 2021**

	Romania		EU-27	
	2010	2021	2010	2021
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>9.7</b>
<i>Urban</i>	5.9	4.5	12.6	8.7
<i>Rural</i>	28.3	23.2	15.2	10
<b>Gap between rural and urban areas*</b>	<b>116%</b>	<b>122%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>13%</b>

\* The gap is calculated as the difference in value of indicator between rural and urban areas, as a proportion of the indicator at the level of the entire population.

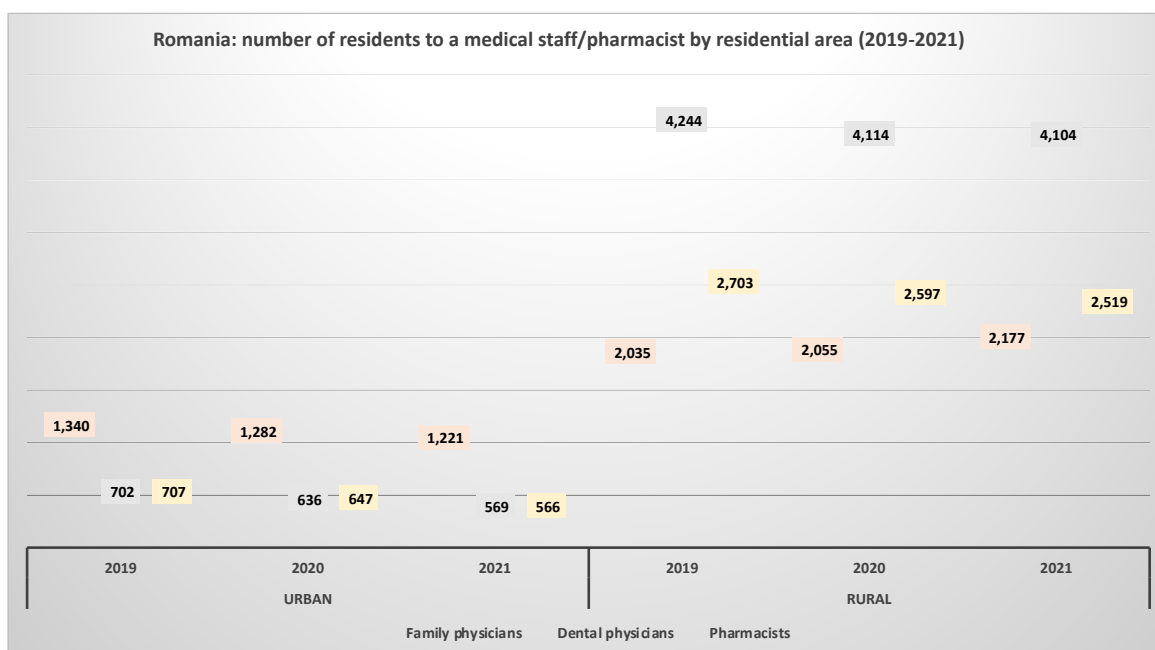
Source: Eurostat, LFS (EDAT\_LFSE\_30).

**Figure A.1: Romania – Number of family physicians, dentists and pharmacists by residential area (2021)**



Source: National Institute for Statistics, Healthcare facilities 2021.

**Figure A.2: Romania – number of residents to a medical staff/pharmacist by residential area (2019-2021)**



Source: National Institute for Statistics, Healthcare facilities 2019, 2020, 2021, TEMPO-online, resident population, 1 July (POP106A).

**Table A.4: Romania and EU – Proportion of people living in overcrowded dwellings, facing severe housing deprivation and housing costs overburden, by age, level of income and residency area (2010, 2019-2021)**

	RO					EU			
	2010	2019	2020	2021		2010	2019	2020	2021
	<b>People living in overcrowded dwellings (%)</b>					<b>People living in overcrowded dwellings (%)</b>			
Total	52	45.8	45.1	41		17.5	15.6	17.4	17
children less than 6 years	64.2	61.5	63.7	61.4		21	19	23.4	22.9
children less than 18 years	69.5	66.3	67.4	60.7		23.8	22.2	25.6	25.2
total AROP	61.9	54.4	54.1	48.9		29.8	26.4	29.2	28.6
total AROP under 18 years	78.7	79.7	79.9	72.8		39	36.8	42.7	42.1
Cities	56.6	47.2	48.1	43.8		18.2	16.8	19.9	19.3
Rural	49.1	46	45.7	40		22.5	15.5	16.1	15.3
gap between cities and rural areas*	14%	3%	5%	9%		-25%	8%	22%	24%
	<b>Severe housing deprivation rate</b>					<b>Severe housing deprivation rate</b>			
Total	25.3	14.2	14.3			5.6	3.7	4.3	
children less than 6 years	35.9	20.9	20.5			7.2	5	6.1	
children less than 18 years	39.7	24.1	24.6			8.2	5.8	6.7	
total AROP	50.6	34.9	35.7			13.4	8.7	10.2	
total AROP under 18 years	65.4	52.9	55.3			17.8	12.9	15.6	
Cities	13.5	4.1	4.8			2.7	3.9	4.8	
Rural	32.3	23.5	24.4			1.5	4.5	4.9	
gap between cities and rural areas*	-74%	-137%	-137%			21%	-16%	-2%	
	<b>Housing cost overburden rate</b>					<b>Housing cost overburden rate</b>			
Total	15.8	8.6	7.1	7.5		10.7	10.1	7.8	8.3
children less than 6 years	17.2	5.3	2.9	2.6		12	9.6	7.5	7.6
children less than 18 years	15.8	8.4	5.9	6.3		10.7	9.3	6.9	7
total AROP	40	29.7	24	25.9		37.1	37.4	31.5	33
total AROP under 18 years	32.8	24.2	15.8	18.2		32.8	32.6	25.9	25.9
Cities	13.4	5.2	5.5	4.7		12.6	12.6	9.9	10.4
Rural	17.1	11.3	8.1	10.8		9.2	7.5	5.8	6.2
gap between cities and rural areas*	-23%	-71%	-37%	-81%		32%	50%	53%	51%

\* The gap is calculated as the difference in value of indicator between rural and urban areas, as a proportion of the indicator at the level of the entire population.

Source: Eurostat database, SILC- survey (ilc\_lvho05a, ilc\_lvho05d, ilc\_mdho06a, ilc\_mdho06d, ilc\_lvho07a, ilc\_lvho07d).

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