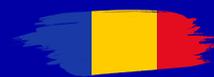


*Country*  
**FACT SHEET**  
**2020\***



# ROMANIA

**Contributor:** Step by Step Centre for Education

\* The information provided in the country fact sheets reflects the situation by end of August 2020.

**first years**  
*first priority*

**A FAIR START  
FOR *every* CHILD  
IN EUROPE**

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

Romania has made adequate efforts over the past year to deliver on early childhood development policies and to support families with young children. ●●●○\*

Romania has a national law or act guaranteeing access to basic ECD services in Education, Health, Nutrition, and/or Social and Child Protection for all children under six. **IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING**

For the moment there is no legal framework supporting early childhood development (ECD) policies as a whole. Access to education is guaranteed by the Constitution and there is a legal framework and commitment to secure financing for early education. Social protection and child protection are elements under the competence of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection. Certain ideas for policy initiatives towards ECD action have been put forward by the Presidential Administration and the process is ongoing. There is also no policy to guarantee coordinated services and support for young children in vulnerable situations, including Romani and Traveller children, families with children with disabilities, migrant and refugee children, children in alternative care, and those living in extreme poverty.

According to Step by Step Centre for Education, the **two biggest challenges** in Romania from the perspective of early childhood development are:

- 1. Lack of financing for ECD;**
- 2. Poor knowledge and understanding of the benefits of ECD policies.**

## IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE DURING THE FIRST WAVE

The COVID-19 crisis presented many difficulties for families with young children:

- 1. Support services for families with young children** were almost entirely unavailable for a long period of time - both during lockdown and at the beginning of the emergency period that followed. This is especially risky in a time of a crisis, which often exacerbates existing difficulties, and creates new ones. Social services that support children and families, especially these in vulnerable situations, are therefore crucial.
- 2. Kindergartens reduced access for children** - at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, many kindergartens, especially in urban areas, announced they would be open in a hybrid schedule, combining in person with online activities, every two weeks. Wherever possible, in person activities were organised. During the spring lockdown, however, there were situations in which no online courses were provided. At the beginning of the school year, different scenarios were implemented according to COVID-19 incidence. This creates additional difficulties for families that need to work and take care of their children simultaneously.

\* This country sheet is based on a contribution from national coordinators, including the ratings - between ○○○○○ (worst) and ●●●●● (best)

**The government introduced some specific measures to support families with young children in coping with the impact of the pandemic.** Some standalone actions of individual institutions include a website, containing online resources and methodologies for home schooling<sup>1</sup> for children up to the age of six prepared in cooperation between the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organisations. The Ministry of Education also launches a support programme for schools that do not have learning platforms to facilitate online learning.<sup>2</sup> Other measures – mainly financial support – were implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, as a general support for parents to stay with the children at home while schools are closed due to COVID19.

## EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The 2020 Country Report in the framework of the European Semester highlights multiple problems still present in Romania in the different areas relating to early childhood development. There was a special focus on the inclusiveness and quality of education, as well as systematic problems such as the lowest spending in the EU on education, (2.8% of GDP vs 4.6% EU average), particularly at pre-primary and primary level. The rate of enrolment in education is also significantly below the EU average. The report points out that among children under three, only 15.7% are in formal childcare. This percentage is higher for the next age group – between four and the compulsory school age – where participation is 89.6%<sup>3</sup>, however it is still lower than the EU average (95.4%). All these rates are significantly lower among children in vulnerable situations, such as children in rural areas and Roma children. In that regard, low participation in early childhood education and care is a worrying trend, as it increases the gap between children and enhances inequalities. Regional and rural-urban disparities also persist. However, positive actions included improving the coverage of the kindergarten network, and using EU structural funds to increase access to and quality of services.

The Report did not mention the fact that education for children aged five to six became mandatory from the 2020-2021 school year. Additionally, despite recognising the efforts made to improve the coverage of the kindergarten network, it should have been pointed out that it still does not meet the needs of the families, and that more efforts are needed to improve access in rural areas.

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1 <https://www.edu.ro/ministerul-educa%C8%9Biei-%C8%99i-cercet%C4%83rii-lanseaz%C4%83-educatiacntinu-aeduro-instrument-online-de-informare>

2 <https://www.edu.ro/peste-200-de-%C8%99coli-din-%C3%AEntreaga-%C8%9Bar%C4%83-vor-utiliza-platforme-educa%C8%9Bionale-online-cu-sprijinul>

3 In 2017

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop national strategies on Early Childhood Development;
- Secure per capita financing for ECD initiatives;
- Make it easier for local communities to finance new ECD services;
- Pay specific attention to the availability and capacity of day care services and kindergartens;
- Improve knowledge and awareness of the importance and benefits of ECD among policymakers;
- Ensure access to support services for families with young children despite the pandemic;
- Develop policy measures to improve participation rates in Early Childhood Education and Care.



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**OPEN SOCIETY  
FOUNDATIONS**

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## The partnership

- **Eurochild** is a network of almost 200 member organisations from 35 European countries working with and for children throughout Europe, striving for a society that respects the rights of children. Eurochild influences policies to build internal capacities and facilitates mutual learning and exchange practice and research.
- **International Step by Step Association (ISSA)** is an early childhood regional network founded in 1999, which through its programs and services connects the early childhood practice, research, and policy to improve the quality of early childhood systems in Europe and Central Asia. More than 90 ISSA members from 43 countries implement programs and cooperate to ensure quality and equitable early childhood services for young children, especially the most vulnerable.
- **European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)** is Europe's leading NGO alliance advocating for better health. A member-led organization made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups, EPHA works to improve health, strengthen the voice of public health and combat health inequalities across Europe.
- **Roma Education Fund (REF)** was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and the ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. To achieve this goal, the organization supports policies and programs which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

**Campaign coordinator:** Dr. Agata D'Addato, Senior Project Manager Eurochild ([agata.daddato@eurochild.org](mailto:agata.daddato@eurochild.org)).

**National Coordinators:** Pomoc Deci (Serbia), Plataforma de Infancia (Spain), Fundação Nossa Senhora do Bom Sucesso (Portugal), Central Union for Child Welfare (Finland), Family, Child, Youth Association (Hungary), Child Rights Alliance (Ireland), Trust for Social Achievement (Bulgaria), Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development (Romania), Ensemble pour l'Éducation de la Petite Enfance (France).