

Romania

Update on the context and situation of children

An upper-middle-income country and member of the European Union (EU), Romania has the fourth highest economic growth rate in the EU. Its economy grew at a real rate of 4.1 per cent in 2018, significantly slower than in 2017 (7.0 per cent). Although significant progress has been made on human development indicators, major challenges remain as growth is not trickling down, leading to rising inequalities. While social sector budgets increased slightly, these were not used for strategic investments. Romania remains one of the EU countries with the lowest levels of investment in education, health and social protection.

The Romanian population is 19.4 million (resident). Birth rates are declining. The child population was 6.6 million in 1990, but only 3.65 million in 2019 and expected to decrease further. The population declared as ethnic Roma represents 3 per cent of the total in the last census, but studies estimate it at 10 per cent.

During the last 20 years, Romania has registered significant improvements in the situation of children. Infant mortality rates dropped from over 26.9 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 6.5 deaths in 2018; the number of children in institutional care dropped substantially from over 100,000 early the 90's to 16,505 children as of 30 June 2019; the overall risk of poverty and social exclusion declined from 47 per cent in 2007 to 32.5 per cent in 2018.

Yet, child poverty is still a major concern, Romania being one of the two poorest EU countries. The severe material deprivation rate continues to be higher for children compared to the general population (19.7 per cent, respectively 16.8 per cent) and is more than three times higher than the average EU rate (5.8 per cent). Two in five children are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Despite a decline from 41.7 per cent in 2017 to 38.1 per cent in 2018, the rate is higher for children than for the general population (32.5 per cent in 2018) and considerably higher than the average EU rate (21.7 per cent).

52,220 children were still separated from their families as of 30 June 2019: 18,096 children with professional caregivers, 17,619 in the care of relatives and other families/persons and 16,505 in residential care institutions (31.61 per cent). Among main causes of family separation are poverty, abuse and disability.

The National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoptions registered 7,689 cases of child abuse, neglect and exploitation (3,549 boys and 4,140 girls) during the period 1 Jan.-30 Jun. 2019. Most were cases of neglect (69.98 per cent) followed by emotional abuse (12.72 per cent), physical abuse (8.92%) and sexual abuse (5.54 per cent). Most of the cases were found in families (92%) followed by other locations (5.23 per cent) and school units (1.08 per cent).

91,345 children (45,835 boys and 45,510 girls) have been left behind by migrant parents as of 30 June 2019, of whom 3,870 are in the special protection system (residential care – 784 children). Almost 24 per cent of children with parents working abroad are deprived of the presence of both parents or the parent who provides for the family. The estimated number of affected children is around 350,000 since not all parents declare when they leave the country.

According to the former National Authority for Persons with Disabilities (NAPD), as of September 30, 2019, there were 67,639 children with disabilities in Romania (in families) who possess a certificate of disability and receive social benefits. Data from the former National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of the Child and Adoption as of 30 June 2019, referred to 71,893 children with a disability certificate who are either in a family or the special protection system (residential care institutions or alternative care).

Despite significant improvements in education, disparities remain. The most vulnerable children in Romania regarding access to and participation in education, retention and progress to higher levels of education are: children from poor families, Roma children, children living in rural areas and children with disabilities.

The gross enrolment rate for preschool education increased between 2001 and 2018 from 66 per cent to 91.4 per cent. Preschool enrolment rates for Roma children are lower than the national average by 47 per cent. A total number of 339,639 children aged 6–18 years (out of which 162,669 are girls, as per UIS, 2016) are out of school, and school completion rates are declining. Roma children are six times more likely than other Romanian children not to complete secondary education.

International education assessments (PISA 2018) show that more than four in 10 Romanian students do not understand what they read. They have lower scores in reading, mathematics and sciences on the 2018 PISA tests than they did in both 2015 and 2012; functional illiteracy rose from 39 per cent in 2015 to 44 per cent in 2018. In reading, Romanian students

Romania

scored 428 points: six points lower than in 2015 and 10 points below 2012 results. In mathematics, performance declined to 430 points (a drop of 14 points compared to 2015 and 15 points compared to 2012); in science, it declined to 426 points (9 points lower than 2015 and 13 points below 2012 scores). Overall, results are significantly lower (by about 60 points) than the average for OECD countries.

With an early school leaving rate of 16.4 per cent in 2018, Romania is far from meeting the EU 2020 target of 11.3 per cent. The rural-urban divide is sharp, making early school leaving more prevalent in rural areas. The EU estimates that 77 per cent of young Roma (79 per cent female and 76 percent male) aged 18-24 are early school leavers. The causes are poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, including school segregation. More than 26 per cent of Roma students learned in segregated classes (i.e., classes where all or almost all students were Roma).

Romania has made progress on access to early education. 89.6 per cent of children currently enrolled in early child education and care facilities. However, the country still faces a significant equity gap affecting children with disabilities, Roma children, children from poor families and from rural areas, who are the least likely to access and participate in quality education. No ante-preschool facilities are available in rural areas.

The Europe Kids Want survey gathering responses from over 20,000 children within the EU reveals that only 14.6% feel that adults listen to their opinions when making decisions in school and less than 8% feel that adults listen to their opinions when making decisions in their community. Figures show that child participation is also a challenge in Romania.

Romania's infant and maternal mortality rates continue to be the highest in the EU: 6.5 per cent (over 50 per cent neonatal), and 9.5/100,000 in 2018, respectively. Despite consistent progress in recent decades, it is still more than double that of EU28. Ministry of Health data show that infant mortality is 50 per cent higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Disparities exist in relation to place of residence and coverage by health services, leading to lower primary care coverage in rural areas throughout the country. A study on Infant and Maternal Mortality to be finalized soon by the National Institute for Mother and Child Health also analyzed the highest level of education attended by parents. It has found that the educational level of the parents in the studied group is well below the educational level of the general population and 30.3% are illiterate or with primary school completed or unfinished.

Vaccination coverage has dropped to worrying levels (below 90 per cent for polio, below 75 per cent for others). Vulnerable groups are potentially more affected, as they have lower access to basic health services (Roma children, children with disabilities, children living in rural areas and children from poor families). The measles outbreak since 2016 is only one warning sign of the lack of strategic investments in health.

In July 2019 WHO made public the estimations for 2018 national coverage rates. The first dose of MMR for children aged 12 months was estimated at 90 per cent - below herd immunity (yet, 4 per cent higher than 2017). As of mid-December 2019, 18,832 cases of measles had been recorded since the start of the outbreak in February 2016, causing 64 deaths. Most cases (15,137) were among children aged 0-14 years. Of the total cases, 17,324 were unvaccinated, 885 received one dose, 414 had received two doses and 209 had an unknown status. This indicates that over the years, many cohorts of children went unvaccinated.

Major contributions and drivers of results

UNICEF successfully promoted child participation at the European Union level through the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council.

Over the first half of 2019 Romania held the Presidency of the European Council. From 2018 onwards, UNICEF successfully advocated with the Romanian Government to make child rights a priority for Romania EU Presidency, with a strong focus on child participation. The goal set was to strengthen inclusion and ownership of children in relevant EU decision and policy making processes. This was to be achieved by establishing a general rule and concrete structural mechanisms at the EU level that guarantee children's continued participation in debates, policy and decision making, to help shape a new future for the Union.

Before and during the Romanian EU Presidency, UNICEF worked with the Romanian Government, civil society organizations and children in EU member states to capitalize on this great opportunity to promote child rights and participation in the European Union. Multiple workstreams were set up with the aim to develop and adopt the first-ever EU Children's Declaration as a call to action for the EU and its member states, to establish formal mechanisms that promote children's participation in decision-making processes as per the EU Recommendation Investing in Children, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Romania

The key workstream was a child-led one. UNICEF established the first-ever Romanian Children's Board; a child-led group with around 20 members boys and girls of different ages, from different cities, urban and rural areas, different ethnic minorities, disability; some who grew up in families and others in public care and with diverse experience in representation. Members of the Children's Board included four Junior Romanian Ambassadors to the EU, which were selected and appointed formally through a partnership between UNICEF with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice.

UNICEF supported the empowerment and capacity building of the children and, in particular of the Junior Ambassadors to the EU, providing them with training in public speaking and protocol, that proved to be an important asset leading to successful presentations in different Romanian and EU forums and high-level meetings. They called on European Institutions and EU member states to make child participation a priority and reality, demanding that their participation be supported and strengthened at all levels: family, community, local, regional, national and EU levels, through dedicated mechanisms and platforms, as outlined in the "Bucharest EU Children's Declaration".

The main goal of the Romanian Children's Board was to draft, facilitate Europe-wide consultation process and to finalize the Declaration, and as a last step to be the host for the European Conference on Child Participation where the Declaration was adopted. To realize this, multiple writing workshops and debates were held, along with an online consultation process with children in Romania (using U-report) and children child rights organizations around Europe, facilitated in partnership with EuroChild, UNICEF National Committees and Country Offices from EU member states, along with other partner organizations like Save the Children, World Vision, SOS Children Villages etc.

The process was supported through a communications and social media campaign, press conferences, and several high-level decision makers meetings and events, including a technical expert workshop on child participation in Brussels, participation of the Junior Ambassadors in the EU Child Rights Forum and debates with Members of the EU Parliament. Child participation was included on the national and EU agenda, as the Bucharest EU Children's Declaration, the 1st ever international document that was drafted by children was adopted and handed over to several EU leaders, among which Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, Joseph Daul, the President of the European People's Party, and Klaus Iohannis, the Romanian President. Romanian Junior Ambassadors to the EU and members of the Children's Board, also presented the Declaration to youth and education ministers and representatives of all 28 EU Member States in Brussels, also a one-of-a-kind endeavor.

In addition to these advocacy achievements, UNICEF in Romania made significant efforts to communicate this process through different communication materials in the traditional and online media and reached more than 14.4 million people through both channels. People all around EU are better informed regarding the importance of child participation as a result of the ongoing communication through different channels. The Romanian Government, together with UNICEF and the Romanian Children's Board, hosted the first-ever official European conference on child participation and rights in May 2019 in Bucharest, where half of all participants were children and the other half key policy makers from the EU and its member states, including the President of the Inter-group on Child Rights of the European Parliament, the EU Child Rights Coordinator, the President of EuroChild, and the leadership of the Romanian Government (Prime Minister, Vice-Prime Minister, several Ministers) along with the Head of the Royal House of Romania. The highly participatory and innovative conference was designed with and for children (including boys and girls of different ages, from different cities, urban and rural areas, different ethnic minorities, disability; some who grew up in families and others in public care and with diverse experience in representation) and resulted in the formal adoption of the Bucharest EU Children's Declaration.

Following adoption of the Bucharest EU Children Declaration, the Romanian Children's Board presented the declaration at the Informal Leaders' Summit in Sibiu, and personally handed copies to EU Council President Donald Tusk, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and EPP President Joseph Daul. In addition, copies were sent to all EU Heads of State, and finally presented by the Romanian Children's Board at two EU Council of Ministers meetings, namely the one for Education and the one for Youth and Sports in Brussels.

While the Romanian Children's Board as well as U-Report were initially established to support child participation as part of the EU Presidency, because of their success both initiatives will continue to be supported. The year 2019 ended with a recruitment drive for the Children's Board and with campaign to promote U-report as a consultation platform for the Children's Board. Since its launch, nearly 8,000 young people (90% children/65% girls) are now engaged in U-Report, sharing their views regarding their rights, participation and child-friendly cities, among others.

Follow-up communication and a comprehensive report have been developed and shared with colleagues from countries to preside the EU Council (Finland and Croatia) to continue efforts to have child participation on top of the EU Agenda. The Bucharest EU Children's Declaration and the visual-story of one Romanian Children's Board member have been presented at a EU-level meeting in Helsinki in August 2019. UNICEF in Croatia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Croatia have agreed to have a Young Ambassadors Programme, inspired by the Romanian case. The Croatian Junior Ambassadors will be

Romania

able to participate in a series of events and activities during the presidency and afterwards.

UNICEF released evaluation findings of the Minimum Package of Services (MPS) model in support of scaling up MPS to improve child well-being.

The final independent evaluation of UNICEF's minimum package of services model confirmed its positive impact on social inclusion of vulnerable children and families. The evaluation found that early identification, intervention and response produces positive changes; is cost-efficient; and has the potential to become a national universal programme and a reference for other countries. Among major confirmed results were: i) sharply decreased percentage of children living in households affected by income poverty (from 16.88 per cent to 0.39 per cent); ii) a nearly one third decline in the percentage of children at risk of violence; and iii) all children identified as at risk of family separation remained with their families. The MPS also helped to raise awareness and mobilize communities to address child vulnerabilities and increased the capacity of community workers to provide the needed support.

In follow up the release of the MPS evaluation findings, UNICEF stepped up its advocacy efforts for scaling up the programme to national level, which resulted in the Law on Social Assistance (292/2011) being amended to incorporate MPS. This amendment was then endorsed by members of all major political parties and official submitted to the Senate. UNICEF is hopeful that the law amendment will pass and result in the financing of the MPS scale up in Romania.

Combined advocacy and technical assistance using the lessons learned from the MPS model also influenced the allocation of significant EU funds for the development of integrated social services and community centers (such as the Human Capital Operational Programme 2014-2020, to which some €30 million was allocated to increase access to accessible, high-quality and sustainable social services). The project, run by Ministry of Labor in partnership with Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, continued to develop integrated community services for combating poverty and social exclusion in 40 Romanian counties (including 139 of the most vulnerable communities). The MPS's integral digital platform – Aurora – is also being adapted to support ongoing national programmes.

UNICEF developed a strategy to promote digital solutions to complement human resources in the fight against child poverty and social exclusion

To address an increasing gap in human resources in delivery of basic community services, UNICEF is looking into digital solutions to strengthen access of vulnerable households and children to integrated community services. In 2019 an assessment of the digital health environment was done to inform the National Digital Health Strategy and much work was done in designing a digital health and social services strategy for UNICEF, building on a round-table discussion UNICEF organised end 2019 in partnership with the National Health Insurance House, the Bucharest Impact Hub and Botnar Foundation. The strategy is building on the MPS programme and a new services model designed around Integrated Community Services Centers which are envisioned to combine community-based basic services with more specialized services, including virtual components health diagnostics driven by Artificial Intelligence, online consult reservation system, digital facts-for-life tool among others.

UNICEF contributed to a 4 per cent increase in overall MMR coverage and a 6 per cent rise for the second dose.

UNICEF continued to support the strengthening of the national health care system, with a strong emphasis on immunization, (given a continued measles outbreak). A package of actions was implemented addressing both the extremely low immunization coverage in certain communities through catch-up campaigns, as well as actions that are addressing systemic bottlenecks in the immunization system.

To support the collection of quality data on immunization and the digitalization of the health system, UNICEF enhanced the national electronic registry for vaccination managed by the National Institute of Public Health. The new system passed the security and GDPR testing and will be launched in early 2020. This system will deliver reliable and real-time data on the number of vaccinated children and vaccine stocks available and will contribute to better planning and forecasting. It also includes a communication mechanism that reminds parents of the immunization schedule of their child(ren) and encourage them to go for vaccination.

A measles outbreak that started in 2016 and killed nearly 60 children is the clearest indication of the poor state of the Romanian health care system. To support national awareness raising on the importance of immunization and to break the measles epidemic UNICEF, WHO and the Ministry of Health implemented a year-round National communication campaign which was promoted through national television, radio and print media, and supported by prominent influencers, including two National Ambassadors, journalists and parliamentarians. The campaign aimed to tackle issues with vaccine hesitancy as well as fill a gap in public health awareness for vaccination.

To strengthen the immunization system, UNICEF developed - through a highly participatory process - costed immunization

Romania

implementation plans for two low-coverage counties, covering procurement, cold chain, distribution and vaccination promotion and offering recommendations for improving the national immunization programme. This planning process is now being scaled up to other counties and at National level.

Lastly, in 2019 an observational study looking at vaccination practices of local health care providers was completed and identified major gaps in interpersonal communication and motivational interviewing skills of family doctors, hospital/maternity staff and community nurses. In follow up to the study, UNICEF in partnership with the National Institute of Public Health and Center for Disease Control (CDC) Atlanta initiated a programme to strengthen motivational interviewing techniques to promote the importance of vaccinations, while testing the interpersonal communication training package for immunization developed by ECARO.

UNICEF expands national focus on Quality and Inclusive Education (QIE) at all levels of the education system.

UNICEF's quality inclusive education programme was finalized in 2019 as planned. Via the "Quality Inclusive Early Education" project, the capacities of 2,600 professionals in early education were strengthened. During 2019, all school inspectorate staff in Bacau and Ilfov counties participated in a capacity-building exercise, which led to their strengthened capacity to implement QIE. While the program evaluation is ongoing, part of the modelled approach and tools were already adopted by Ministry of Education for nationwide use. This is happening in a staged process whereby leveraged EU funds (Euro 45,6 million) are being used in the framework of the 'Relevant curriculum, open education for all' project, to strengthen the capacities of 55,000 teachers.

UNICEF Romania expanded the QIE model to the entire pre-university educational cycle focusing on early childhood education and care and facilitating transition to upper secondary education. The enlarged model facilitates: a) access to quality integrated services for early childhood education and care for children from birth to age six, responding to increased demand for quality services for young children; and b) students' transition from lower- to upper-secondary education through a multifaceted approach that targets and tracks individual school- and child-related factors. UNICEF technical assistance resulted in the adoption the first National early education curriculum covering both ages 0-3 and 3-6.

As part of its support to the Ministry of Education, UNICEF prioritized the development and testing of a school desegregation framework. A National Commission for School Desegregation and Inclusion was set up and created a methodology for monitoring segregation. The Ministry of Education and county stakeholders defined multiple areas of segregation including based on ethnicity, disability, family socio-economic status, learning performance and area of residence.

The National Commission for Financing the Pre-University Education System approved plans for an extensive, multi-faceted review of the planning, allocation and expenditure of national education budgets via the country's per capita funding formula covering 2014-2018. The extensive review is likely to result in revisions to the standard cost per student, using updated standards and differential coefficients and lead to a more equitable distribution of funds to schools across the country. Within this national process, UNICEF is providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Education to develop a standard cost for ante-preschool education.

UNICEF successfully advocated to prohibit institutionalization of children under the age of 7, including those with disabilities (who were an exception to the law so far).

In 2019, UNICEF advocacy and technical assistance facilitated the Government's proposal to make amendments to the Law on the Rights of the Child, such as a prohibition against institutionalization of children under seven years of age and eliminating the exception for institutionalization of children with disabilities. UNICEF agreed to test a model of services needed to support families with children with disabilities. Furthermore, the closing of 31 institutions that began in 2019 is currently being leveraged by EU funding aimed at increasing the number and quality of services for children deprived of parental care and preventing separation of children from their families.

UNICEF's cooperation with the National College of Social Workers ensured that the professionalization of the social services workforce remained on the public agenda. A study of the legal framework governing social assistance, undertaken with UNICEF support, guided policy advocacy for commitments and legal steps to increase the number and qualifications of social workers throughout Romania. Regulations governing social work standards, one of the key documents produced with UNICEF's assistance were published in December 2019 in the Official Gazette, and a draft curriculum for continuing training that incorporates the competencies framework endorsed through the 2018 Regional Call to Action, represent important milestones for achieving quality social assistance services. As in most countries in the region, social work is a feminized profession - according to a 2015 study, 9 out of 10 social workers are women, of around 36 years old, who had been working in the system for at least 3 years. The latest data from the National College of Social Workers show that the out of 9245 licensed social workers in Romania, 1036 are men and 8209 and women, about 75% of social workers are employed by public services and the rest in NGOs.

Romania

UNICEF mapped major gaps in data needed to plan and monitor the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNICEF continued to monitor the situation of children in Romania, focusing on key indicators for health, education, child protection and poverty. A data gaps assessment on 38 child-related indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provided in-depth analysis on data availability at the national level for the 38 indicators, of which 35 are relevant in Romania, 18 are held in common and no data is available for five. Much available data, however, is not disaggregated. UNICEF advocacy during 2019 led Romanian authorities to consider implementing a first-ever MICS through a collaboration between UNICEF, the World Bank and the Ministry of Labor, with EU funding.

UNICEF reached ambitious fundraising targets.

UNICEF successfully fostered private sector engagement to provide sustainable and unrestricted funding for Country Programme implementation as well as contributions to Regional Thematic Funds and UNICEF core resources supporting UNICEF programmes globally.

The total local fundraising gross revenue generated in 2019 was US\$ 1.43 million, from private individuals and business of US\$ 1.37 million and soft credit of US\$ 0.06 million. US\$ 1.12 million was raised from pledge donations through direct debit, SMS and online channels, in line with UNICEF's strategy of building long-term, sustainable income for vulnerable children in Romania and abroad. US\$0.02 million was generated by one-off donations. Despite difficulties to attract corporate sponsorships due to changes in Romania's fiscal code, the gross revenue generated by corporate donations was US\$ 0.23 million.

Nearly 60 per cent of pledged flexible income was generated by direct debit donors, acquired through the 'face-to-face' campaign run since 2014. For the first time UNICEF Romania used virtual reality videos to acquire face-to-face donors, bringing potential donors closer to the reality faced by vulnerable children. Around 300 new direct debit donors were acquired as a result. A fundraising TV show broadcast on primetime on a major News Romanian Television channel was the starting point of a one-month fundraising campaign, which resulted in more than 15,000 UNICEF pledge donors.

Over the year significant efforts were invested in UNICEF's public sector resource mobilization. With Romania in the European Union, the public sector fundraising environment continues to change. Much effort went into development of a proposal for EEA Norway Grants for which the proposal received a positive technical endorsement just before the end of the year. Innovative models for resource mobilization are also being explored such as through the various instruments of the European Union and the Romanian private sector.

In 2019 UNICEF had the largest (social) media footprint ever.

On World Children's Day (WCD), Romanian children attended a national summit on World Children's Day in Bucharest and 4,200 schools across the country were mobilized to disseminate the World Largest Lesson, informing some 120,000 students about their rights. WCD was also celebrated at numerous commercial outlets; influencers and UNICEF national ambassadors organized kids' 'take-overs' and other awareness-raising activities. One of the first countries to sign the CRC, in 2019 Romania formally renewed its commitment to full CRC implementation.

High-level public events and WCD initiatives generated approximately 4,300 news articles that reached 170 million potential impressions. 16 million people were reached via social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) with child-related messages.

UNICEF supported the United Nations System in Romania.

UNICEF is the lead UN agency and assumed several UN Coordination functions, such as chairing the United Nations (UN) Country Team (comprised of all UN agency heads) and managing the UN operations team, acting as designated security official for the UN system, and administering the UN House. UNICEF also took the lead and successfully completed UN surveys on cost-of-living and maximum rents.

UNICEF Romania occupies Government-provided, rent-free premises shared with other UN agencies and the Council of Europe. During 2019 the office was requested (either by the Government of Romania or by headquarters of other UN agencies) to facilitate or organize official high-level visits, such as those of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and Office of the Under-Secretary General of Department of Peace Operations.

Romania

Lessons Learned and Innovations

Romanian Children's Board and Junior Ambassadors to the EU

As part of the EU Presidency UNICEF established the Romanian Children's Board comprised of 20 children (under 18) from all parts of Romania, from different socio-economic background and ethnic groups. Members were selected mostly from existing child led organizations and councils, such as the Romanian Students Council. The main objective of the Children's Board was to draft and lead the consultation and finalization process of the Bucharest EU Children's Declaration and to promote child participation in Europe. UNICEF facilitated the training of the Board as well as several workshops, consultations, press statements, communication and other activities of the Board. As part of the process UNICEF also established a support group comprised of the National Child Rights Authority of Romania, the National federation of Child Rights NGOs and several NGOs. Part of the overall design also included the selection and appointment of 4 Junior Ambassadors to the EU in partnership with the Child Rights Authority and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They were appointed in January, were members of the Children's Board and represented Romania at several national and international meetings, such as an expert level meeting on child participation, the EU Child Rights Forum, and 2 formal meetings of Council of Ministers.

Lessons learned from the process:

- The performance of the Romanian Children's Board really exceeded anyone's expectations. Leadership take by the children was impressive, and in all events, they were able to debate and stand their ground with senior Government and EU leaders;
- Messages on child rights and child participation are so much more powerful (and legitimate) when they are formulated and presented by children themselves;
- The Romanian Junior Ambassadors to the EU were very well received by EU Officials and a great way to get access to the most senior levels of decision makers, beyond what we in a UNICEF can reach;
- There is a tendency to confuse child and youth activists. We focused on children only as this is the group (nearly a quarter of the population of Europe) that is in no other way represented, as they have (in most cases) no voting rights and in most societies are perceived as 'still learning and not responsible nor educated enough to make decisions' (quote from a Minister);
- Partnering with children is nothing like partnering with adults. It requires careful adapted approaches and facilitation, and is not simply about bringing children into an adult situation. A new space needs to be created to bridge the world of children and adults in order for successful sharing of ideas and forming of new ones to happen;
- It also requires dedicated safeguarding measures at all levels, including a full-time safeguarding focal point for each event, and significant additional funding;
- Globally and in Europe experiences and lessons in area of child participation are still extremely limited and without additional dedicated resources, human and funding, there will be no meaningful child participation.

Lessons learned from MPS Evaluation

Mid 2019, the external evaluation of the Minimum Package of Services (MPS) model was released, showing extremely positive results of the modelling on a wide-variety of child rights indicators in areas of child-poverty, health, education and child protection. The evaluation is the key document around which the scale-up strategy was based. As part of the scale-up, strategy, UNICEF Romania is pursuing multiple avenues in Romania and at the level of the EU. Advocacy with the President of the lower house of Parliament and several MPs of all key ruling and opposition parties, resulted in a MPS law being drafted, which by the end of the year had received endorsement from all political parties. The text was ultimately included as an amendment to the Law on Social Assistance. At the time of writing this report, the law amendment was submitted to the Senate for approval. Advocacy for the law was supported by several communication materials, which included a briefing package as well as a virtual reality movie and installation on the MPS programme.