UNICEF Romania

Annual Report 2012

Executive Summary
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Much due to the economic crisis and austerity measures, while macro-economic indicators improved, the situation of vulnerable children continued to deteriorate. At 33%, child poverty is among the highest in the EU, and remains above the pre-crisis level. In 2011, the number of institutionalised children increased for the first time in 15 years; the number of children victims of trafficking is growing. After years of improvement, the school dropout rate is on the rise.

The renewal of the UNICEF-Romania partnership for 2013-2017 signalled Romania’s commitment to continue to address child rights violations and increase equity. It also presents an opportunity for Romania to share its 20-year experience in implementing reforms for children.

The 2010-2012 Country Programme brought about some key results. Following advocacy, evidence generation, partnerships development and technical advice supported by UNICEF, Romania launched a drive for social inclusion and equity to reintegrate 400,000 children who do not regularly attend school. Evaluation of the model implemented in 230 communities shows how mobilisation of schools, social workers, authorities and parents can achieve significant results – with up to 60% of at-risk children remaining in school. Generated evidence was used to influence policies, norms and standards development.

Significant progress was also made in promoting prevention, strengthening the capacity of local authorities to identify and respond to vulnerabilities of children and families. Evaluation of the model implemented in 64 communities demonstrated results in preventing family separation caused by abuse and neglect, and revealed that the cost of keeping a child in the family was approximately one third that of providing protection services. As preventive models gain popularity, supported by civil society, subnational authorities and the Ministry of Labour, evidence and joint advocacy, combined with policy advice and common efforts to leverage EU funding are expected to result in its nationwide scaling-up.

The economic crisis also impacted the ability of UNICEF Romania to fundraise for children. With over 500,000$ raised it became clear that new fundraising strategies and corporate engagement were required to support child rights in the country.

Forming sustainable and strategic partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders continued to be a priority in 2012. In addition to line ministries, UNICEF worked intensively with civil society, especially Roma NGOs and the Federation of NGOs for Child Protection, to promote child rights, raise awareness and progressively change detrimental social norms. Long-term and innovative partnerships with companies such as GDF Suez, BRD – Groupe Société Générale and Realitatea TV proved essential in raising awareness and funds for vulnerable children. The new partnership signed with the Parliament opens new possibility to leverage political will, policies and budgets for vulnerable children.

**Country Situation**

After years of record economic growth, the aftershock of the global financial crisis has left Romania with reduced living standards, tightened state budgets, and rising disparities. Macro-economic indicators improved noticeably, and some structural reforms were launched. However, some long-term reforms (initiated before 2008) either stagnated or even regressed due to the crisis, particularly those targeting vulnerable children and families.

Poor absorption of EU structural funds also constrained social inclusion initiatives aimed at strengthening local capacity, and more equitable allocation of resources at decentralized levels,
including scaling up innovation for excluded families and children. According to government reports, by the end of 2012, less than 10% of funding had been absorbed. Political instability made public commitment to long-term reforms more challenging.

The 2011 Situation Analysis found that disparities and exclusion particularly affect the ethnic minority Roma population, children with disabilities and children living in rural areas. Data from the Ministry of Health reveals that the infant mortality rate is 60% higher in rural areas than in urban areas and 87% higher in the northeast region, the poorest part of the country, than in Bucharest. According to a 2011 Study, 54% of the Roma minority was living in absolute poverty, compared with 13% of the majority population. Some 44% of Roma children aged 7 to 11 were out-of-school. A 2010 NGO study conducted in 9 counties found that 23% of children with disabilities do not go to school, and only a third of those who attend do so in the mainstream education system. While many bottlenecks lie in the systems supposed to provide services to vulnerable families, others are related to social norms (particularly discrimination against Roma and people with disabilities, and tolerance towards violence against children), and knowledge and skills of families.

The 2008-2013 National Strategy on the Promotion and Protection of Children’s Rights set higher standards and expanded the range of obligations and entitlements. Though Romania more than halved the number of children in residential care in the past ten years, for the first time in 15 years, the number of children in state care facilities slightly increased in 2011. The situation is associated with more families falling into extreme poverty while the public care system budget was reduced and prevention services remained insufficient. Though the law prohibits children under the age of 2 years from being institutionalized, there were still over 700 children below the age of three in residential care, showing an increasing rate per 100,000 children since 2005, exacerbated in the last couple of years. There is also a projected budget drop in the social sector, from 2.86% of GDP in 2010 to 2.08% in 2013. The economic crisis, combined with the contraction of social assistance and protection, poses both immediate and long-term risks to poor and vulnerable households.

In child protection, there has been progress in increasing prevention efforts so that children and families at risk of violence, abuse and neglect are identified at an early stage and receive support to protect children from these risks, hence reducing their vulnerability. This shift has proved to be more affordable and consistent with a rights-based approach, and is being promoted through models supported by the Country Programme, advocacy and partnership with various stakeholders.
The National Education Law adopted in 2011 incorporates some of the areas promoted through UNICEF initiatives, including a focus on early childhood education and new system for professional development. The main challenge lies in implementing the law, particularly through the development of secondary legislation, norms and standards, and increased capacity of education professionals, to ensure that it translates in a higher retention of vulnerable children and better quality education. Despite policy improvements, the drop-out increased again for the 2010-2011 school year – affecting primarily children from poor and/or Roma families and children with disabilities. As drop-out determinants are often related to social protection issues affecting vulnerable families (poverty, violence etc.), increased coordination between the education and social sectors is essential.

Though preschool enrolment is relatively high in Romania at 78%, preschool and school attendance need to be bolstered to reduce equity gaps, particularly for Roma children (who have an attendance rate of 23%) and children with disabilities. The Government uses a sub-national approach to improve the quality of early education services for children in deprived communities, with successful implementation in selected areas of the country. Scaling up these approaches requires better coordination among partners and more financial support to the poorest areas, a policy already in place but not always implemented.

As to child survival rights, at 12 deaths per 1,000 live births, the under-five mortality rate in Romania is low by international standards, but it remains the highest in the EU. Nearly a quarter of children are hospitalized every year, largely because primary and community care receive limited attention. The mother-to-child transmission rate of HIV remains constant, despite the increasing number of babies born from HIV-positive mothers. The number of vulnerable adolescents and young people infected by HIV is on the rise. Romania’s public health care spending is below EU average and the primary health care budget decreased by 2% between 2008 and 2010. Reforms are being made, with support from UNICEF, the World Bank and the European Council.

While there is not much data around vulnerable adolescents, some statistics reveal that adolescents in Romania are at high risk of poverty, HIV infection, substance abuse, violence, teenage pregnancy and school dropout. For instance, in 2012, over 20,000 teenage girls gave birth before their 19th birthday. However, there is not much focus or discussion among policy makers on issues confronted by adolescents. Community-based services are not youth-friendly and specialised services for vulnerable adolescents are scarce. A determinant analysis, planned for 2013 with UNICEF support, will generate evidence and propose policy options in improving the situation of vulnerable adolescents.

Programme Overview

Main determinants to social inclusion and disparities reduction, as well as resource mobilization for vulnerable children, were addressed through advocacy, knowledge management, capacity building, leveraging resources, partnerships and monitoring and evaluation.

UNICEF and Ministry of Labor continued monitoring the impact of the economic crisis, generating evidence on bottlenecks and vulnerabilities to propose policy options. Despite strong advocacy and partnerships, leveraging resources for children, including EU funding, proved challenging in the current context, but UNICEF provided technical assistance in the development of the 2014-2020 EU funding cycle. New child rights monitoring tools were disseminated to improve data collection and analysis, and policy implementation.
Models for the protection of vulnerable children from violence and family separation, and for the retention of at-risk children in school continued with the authorities and civil society. Evaluations generated evidence on their impact, such as increase in enrolment rate of vulnerable children (including Roma children), and identification and support to children and families unreached by any system. This was used to propose models of communication for development and policy options at national level.

Following UNICEF advocacy, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education initiated action to better identify and protect vulnerable adolescents, convening the first inter-ministerial group and initiating a determinant analysis in this area.

UNICEF Romania further developed its partnerships with civil society, resulting into joint advocacy on child rights, including during the political campaign. The Chamber of Deputies and UNICEF signed a partnership for joint advocacy, policy work and knowledge management.

Following a decline in local fundraising, UNICEF Romania is re-positioning itself to develop broader corporate partnerships, using all corporate engagement tools. Private individual fundraising options are tested to be ready with best options once the necessary banking tools are available.

Linking to the EU 2020 Strategy and the new Government programme, the 2013-2017 UNICEF-Romania partnership will emphasise some new directions in addressing the “unfinished child rights agenda” for vulnerable children and improving equity. The Country Programme will also facilitate the exchange of knowledge between Romania and other countries.

Comprehensive partnerships with all stakeholders are envisioned with a stronger role of UNICEF as a convenor. Leveraging resources for children from national and subnational budgets and EU structural fund will remain a priority with UNICEF positioned as a provider of technical assistance.

UNICEF will increasingly address social norms and mindsets to provide an enabling environment in society and families for the realisation of all children’s rights, addressing discrimination against Roma children and children with disabilities. Strengthening child rights monitoring systems at all levels will become a priority.

In addition to the rights to education and protection for all children, the Partnership will progressively strengthen an integrated system for the early development, education and protection of young children. Efforts will also focus on strengthening the national dialogue on issues faced by adolescents, focusing on vulnerable boys and girls.
Mobilisation of local public and private resources and awareness raising to support UNICEF mandate and children locally and globally will increase, in view of the transforming engagement of UNICEF in Romania.

**Resource mobilisation**

In the context of the global and economic crisis, fundraising was very challenging in 2012. The Office pursued a multi-pronged strategy, seeking funds within Romania through private fundraising with corporate partners and individuals, and outside Romania with National Committees and Headquarters.

The 2010-2012 Country Programme was able to raise nearly $5.7 million. In 2012 alone, the top four funding sources in 2012 were thematic funding for education, the German National Committee for UNICEF, the UK National Committee for UNICEF, and GDF Energy Suez Romania.

Local fundraising contributed around $550,000 to the Country Programme and national priorities. Some 55,000 private individuals and seven companies provided financial support: BRD Groupe Société Générale, GDF Energy Suez Romania, Ikea, Carrefour, Unicredit Tiriac Bank, ING and H&M. Media partners such as Realitatea TV, Ringier Group, Adevarul Holding, online media and several bloggers enabled UNICEF to successfully raise awareness and funds.

The flagship campaign focused on ‘Helping Invisible Children’. Besides fundraising, it helped explain and promote the importance of prevention services in child protection, supporting simultaneous advocacy efforts. This communication and fundraising campaign used a mix of traditional and social media channels. Online pledges were launched to convince private individuals to switch from one-off donation to long-term support for children, reaching an audience of 110,000 people.

In response to reduced CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) budgets, and in line with the global “Child Rights and Business Principle” strategy, UNICEF progressively shifted from sponsorship to corporate engagement and partnership, engaging employees and customers. Other innovative approaches are being piloted, such as working with business associations. Building a sustainable income is promoted through approaches that are new in Romania (such as pledges, both face-to-face and digital) to overcome the fundraising constraints imposed by the crisis on both CSR budgets and disposable income of private individuals.