

The Minimum Package of Services

Highlights of accumulated evidence



What is the Minimum package of services (MPS)?

The minimum package of services (MPS) is an umbrella concept involving the delivery of basic, integrated services in health, education and social/child protection in communities, with a special focus on the most vulnerable children and their families. The MPS was designed to prevent, or address at an early stage, problems such as: violence, poverty, early pregnancy, preventable disease, lack of access to cash benefits and school dropout. In most cases children face not just one, but several of these deprivations, underlining the importance of a cross-sectoral approach.

How does the MPS work?

Concretely, the MPS requires the presence in each community of at least one social worker, one community nurse and one school counsellor. In the poorest communities, including those with Roma populations, the package may include specialized school and health mediators. Working in close collaboration, these actors help vulnerable children and their families, assessing their needs and providing tailored support. These professional also work with local stakeholders such as the mayoralty, NGOs and other community partners.

These community professionals provide services in an integrated manner. This means that they: 1) rely on a common data base developed through a thorough assessment of all members of the community (known as a 'social census'), 2) implement case management principles, 3) often share a common location and 4) undergo joint training and regularly exchange information, developing joint solutions.



Working hypothesis

The universal delivery of the minimum package of services at local level (health, education, social protection), in communities coordinated way, will reduce the equity gaps and the deprivations affecting vulnerable children and their families. The package of integrated social services may also contribute to reducing the medium- and long-term costs in the social sector, ensuring the shift of the focus from remedial and costly specialized interventions, to cost-effective prevention services.

MPS implementation in Bacău County

The MPS was first implemented in Bacău County in 2015 as a modelling project entitled "Social inclusion through the provision of integrated community-based services". The project's design was based on a multi-level partnership (local, county and national) and involved 34 rural and four urban municipalities, county administrative and specialized authorities and relevant national authorities and ministries.

Practically, the flow of activities for the delivery of the Minimum Package of Services included:

- *Outreach work and home visitation* by the community professionals, who identified all vulnerable children and their families through the first-ever social census in their areas. The community professionals jointly assessed the risks faced by the family (e.g., living conditions, whether the child is registered with a family physician, status of children's vaccinations and school attendance). This information was entered on the innovative online platform Aurora, using tablets or phones.
- *Enhanced understanding of the key sources of family risk and vulnerabilities* was combined by Aurora with a list of predefined interventions, part of the minimum package of services. Aurora helps with the selection of appropriate services and interventions for each individual child to be delivered by the community workers, either through home visits or individual and group activities in community centres that were created in each participating community.
- Aurora supported the periodic monitoring of the situation of children benefiting from the MPS and, by aggregating data at various levels (community, county or region), also contributed to the type of evidence needed for policy adjustments or development.

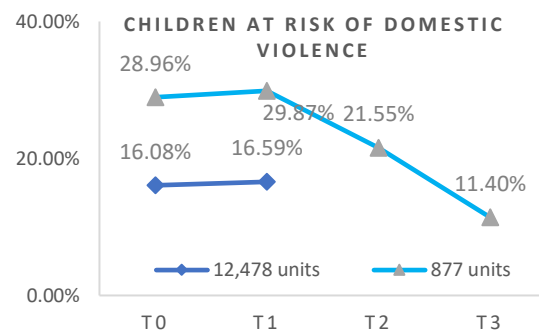
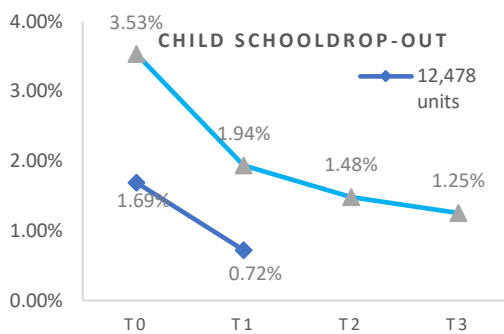
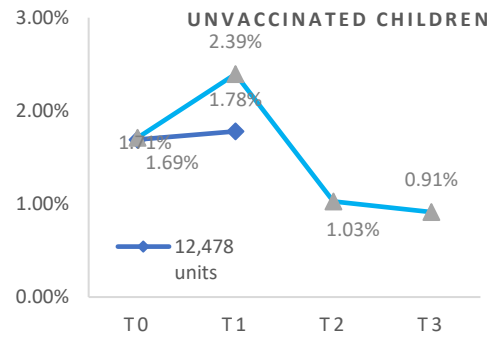
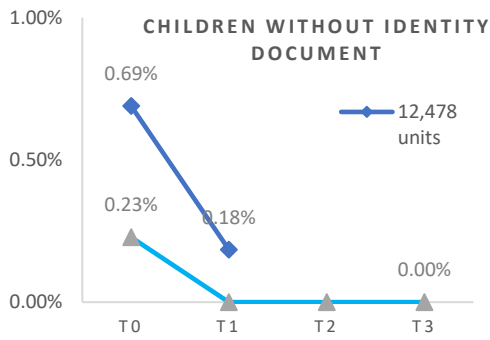
What did the 2019 independent evaluation say about MPS?

One of the purposes of the evaluation was to ascertain whether the minimum package of services is a valuable tool for improving the social inclusion of vulnerable children and their families.

The evaluation confirmed that all facets of the MPS are **highly relevant**, including: the social census, services provided, micro-grants and training of community workers and other human resources involved, as well as the model's integrated approach and the inter-institutional cooperation that it generated.

Analysis of the Aurora databases highlighted the **effectiveness** of the model, demonstrating that 33 of 42 evaluated vulnerabilities were reduced or eliminated in participating towns and villages.

The evolution of some vulnerabilities from the first assessment performed during the social census through consecutive re-evaluations using Aurora (at different times, T0 to T3) performed between the 2015-2018, is captured in the examples below.



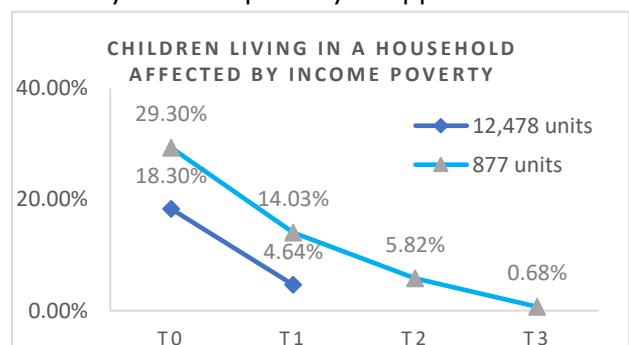
12,478 children were visited at least once by community professional teams. 877 children were supported throughout the entire project, benefitting from at least three evaluations made by the team.
Source: Aurora database

The MPS model also demonstrated considerable **efficiency**, considering the total of 11,588,538 lei/2.886,490 USDⁱ used in 2015-2018, representing an average of 257,523 lei/64,144 USD/municipality. Compared to other similar projects or programmes or to standard costs, MPS costs are low or very low.

MPS also clearly shows a **positive impact** on the situation of vulnerable children in participating communities:

- All children lacking documents in the beginning of the programme now have identity papers and are registered with a family doctor
- The number of unvaccinated children dropped by 40 per cent
- The number of teenage mothers decreased by 50 per cent
- All pre-schoolers are enrolled in kindergarten and school drop-out declined by 60 per cent
- The number of children living in households affected by income poverty dropped from 29.30 to 0.68 per cent, even though the project didn't provide cash transfers.

These successes demonstrate that the process of identifying the most vulnerable, providing needed referrals for care and accompanying beneficiaries for receiving their entitlements is of the utmost importance. The project therefore demonstrated that by eliminating errors of exclusion from the social protection system monetary poverty can be significantly reduced.



In sum, the strengths of the MPS programme can be summarized as:

- Strengthens collaboration and accountability across different local government departments



- Is proactive, involving field visits to identify 'the invisibles', and focuses on prevention rather than solving problems after they arise
- Is comprehensive and people-centred, looking not only at individual children, but also at families and community environments
- Delivers a minimum package of services through home visits or community centres
- Helps to raise awareness and mobilize communities to address children's vulnerabilities, and builds the intervention capacity of community workers
- Coordinates the work of different agencies, while facilitating monitoring of individual cases
- Eliminates most paperwork, allowing social workers to concentrate on people-centred tasks
- Gives policymakers and citizens access to aggregated data on household vulnerabilities and what interventions are needed to provide support.

What's next?

Advocacy efforts need to continue to ensure that all children have access to quality, universal, community-based, child- and family-centred services, such as the minimum package of services. A scale-up plan could be rolled out at any time, with technical assistance from UNICEF and partners involved in implementing the MPS model in Bacău.

How much would it cost to expand the MPS?

Several analyses and reports were undertaken to estimate the cost of scaling up the MPS model, in an effort to provide realistic budget estimates that allow public authorities to assess the efforts required for implementation. In 2020 an exercise was performed to update the costs of extending the MPS model nationwide, resulting in five potential scenarios for progressive implementation:

- Scenario 1: Implementation of MPS only in highly marginalized communities
- Scenario 2: Implementation of MPS in all rural communities
- Scenario 3: Implementation of MPS by development regions
- Scenario 4: Implementation of MPS in all communities in Romania
- Scenario 5: Implementation in all highly marginalized rural and urban communities.

Depending on which scenario is selected, some important variables should be noted:

- The number of children benefiting from MPS could vary from 736,268 children (under scenario 1) to over 3.9 million children, Romania's entire child population, under scenario 4.
- The average cost per child would also vary: from a minimum of 193 lei/47 USD/child/yearⁱⁱ (scenario 4) to 323 lei/78 USD/child/year (scenario 1);
- The total number of staff required to implement MPS would vary from 3,458 (scenario 1) to 12,977 (scenario 4);
- The total cost of a three-year effort in highly marginalized communities is calculated at 350,900,632 lei/84,871,359 USD, or about 770,785,755 lei/186,427,804 USD for one year of implementation under scenario 4
- In all cases the per cent of GDP required to cover total costs is below 0.1, ranging from 0.021 per cent to 0.071 per cent.

ⁱ Amounts calculated based on RON/USD average conversion rate from BNR for 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018: 1 USD = 4.01475 RON

ⁱⁱ Amounts calculated based on RON/USD conversion rate from BNR on 13 October 2020: 1 USD = 4.1345