



Sociologie Românească

ISSN: 2668-1455 (print), ISSN: 1220-5389 (electronic)

SOCIAL RISKS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN ROMANIA

Mariana STANCIU

Sociologie Românească, 2026, vol. 24, Issue 1, pp. 87-115

<https://doi.org/10.33788/sr.24.1.4>

Published by:
Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:
Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy
and
Romanian Sociology Association

SOCIAL RISKS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN IN ROMANIA

Mariana STANCIU¹

Abstract

Currently, in Romania, many *families with children* are under the pressure of some disrupting factors which decrease quite seriously the well-being of their members. In this study, I will focus on the statistics dimensions of the most frequent of these social factors – as they have been identified in the public discourse on the Romanian media (March 2025, evening News, TVR 1), as follows: precarious economic situation of families with children, negative consequences of adult emigration in search of a better-paid job on children left at home, the influences of adults separation/divorce on the life of their minor descendants, the education deficit of the children in the adulthood stage of life, drugs use or alcohol addiction, high social incidence of the premature motherhood and its social consequences. Such factors with major impact on social disintegration and on quality of family life reduction require the initiation of some specific social policies to prevent and mitigate their effects. The latest available and relevant data were gathered from the publications of the national/international statistics, which address this kind of problems and life difficulties of *the families with children from Romania and EU countries*, in order to formulate some pertinent policies for alleviating the associated social risks.

Keywords: risks factors, family, children, social policies.

Résumé

Actuellement, en Roumanie, des nombreuses familles avec enfants subissent la pression des facteurs perturbateurs qui nuisent gravement à leur bien-être. Cette étude se concentre sur les dimensions statistiques des facteurs sociaux les plus fréquents, tels qu'ils ont été identifiés dans le discours public des médias roumains (mars 2025, Journal télévisé, la chaîne TVR 1), à savoir: la précarité économique des familles avec enfants, les conséquences négatives de l'émigration des adultes à la recherche d'un emploi mieux rémunéré sur les enfants restés au foyer, l'impact

¹ Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, ROMANIA.
E-mail: mariana3stanciu@gmail.com.

de la séparation/du divorce des adultes sur la vie des enfants mineurs, le retard scolaire des jeunes adultes, la toxicomanie ou l'alcoolisme, ainsi que la forte incidence sociale des grossesses précoces et leurs conséquences. Ces facteurs, qui ont un impact majeur sur la désintégration sociale et la dégradation de la qualité de vie familiale, nécessitent la mise en œuvre des politiques sociales spécifiques pour prévenir et atténuer leurs effets. Les données les plus récentes et pertinentes ont été collectées à partir des publications statistiques nationales et internationales traitant ce type de problèmes et les difficultés rencontrées par *les familles avec enfants en Roumanie et dans les pays de l'UE*, afin de formuler des politiques adaptées pour atténuer les risques sociaux associés.

Mots-clés: facteurs de risque, famille, enfants, politiques sociales.

Introduction

The scientific objective of this study was to formulate and recommend some social policies addressed to the most common concerns of the population, regarding social problems that high affect quality of life in families with minor children from Romania. At the same time, I aimed to assess to what extent the most frequently identified social risks are confirmed (or not) by the social indicators published in various national or international statistics.

Research methodology: for the identification and selection of the social risks included in this study, I monitored the frequency of the citations (retaining only those with at least five citations during the month analysed) of such issues in the evening *News* broadcasts of *the national television channel TVR 1*, during March 1-31, 2025. The social indicators used in the brief description of the concrete social risks identified were drawn from national and/or international statistics (published by National Institute of Statistics from Bucharest, Eurostat, UNICEF, UN, and other relevant sources).'

The identified social risks were the following: a higher poverty rate in families with children (21 citations), parents emigration for better jobs (16), educational deficit of children and adolescents (14), increase in drug use among young people and children (13), frequent alcohol consumption by parents/children (13), fewer marriages – more divorces – influences on descendants (7), the problem of premature motherhood (5). This study provides a secondary analysis of some relevant social indicators for the areas specified above.

During the modern era, the concept of family has suffered some influences in the direction of expanding its classical semantics. This concept – long used as a synonym for marriage – has shifted the focus towards the consequences and new meanings it may generate in couples' relationships and their impact on the quality of descendants' life. The economic and social conditions of modern life have statistically led to new restrictions on the family structure, limiting

essential relationships to the closest family members. In many cases, this has resulted in families being structured predominantly vertically – intergenerationally (grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren) – and less intra generationally (siblings, cousins, brothers-in-law etc.). The number and social roles of family members have had a major influence not only on the labour market and the economic system, but also on care and education systems, access to medical services, and social insurance systems. The population aging has slowly but surely transferred to the younger generations the task of caring for both the older and the younger generations (so called sandwich generations). Even so, in the longer term, the trend in families is towards having fewer members and incorporating fewer extended family relatives into daily relationships.

As a result of adults' often extended working hours and the extended timetable of secondary education (i.e. high school), members of many families end up spending less time together. A recent study shows that the number of relatives a person will have decreases by a third in the coming decades, and the structure of the family will change substantially (PNAS, 2024). This is leading to significant social consequences, including the increases of the social risks for the families with children.

In Romania, trends towards changing the European understanding of the *concept of family* have encountered quite conservative attitudes among the majority of the population, despite the apparent failure of the 2018 referendum on the family. The traditional family continues to prove resilient, especially if the issue of raising and educating minors in the family arises. In such families, respect for male authority and traditional gender roles remains prevalent, and elements of this model can still be active in more modern families, particularly those with children. The concepts of children's communication and socialisation are also undergoing certain changes. The increase in the number of agents with whom children can interact (as a result of the large-scale digitalisation of information) leads to a reduction in direct contact with parents and, implicitly, to a diminished socio-cultural influence of parents on their children. The digital communication technologies that a schooler comes to use facilitate the digital literacy and more extensive socialisation outside the family circle, but they also expose children excessively to various social risks arising from a potentially dangerous online environment beyond parental control.

Romania – a declining population with high decreasing generations of children

The number of the Romanian population registered a minus of 11,150 people in March 2025, compared to March 2024 (Economica.net, 2025). According to the criterion of domicile, on January 1, 2024, the total population of Romania was 20,121,641 inhabitants (NIS, 2024a). The historical region with the largest

population decline was Muntenia, which generated 60% of the recorded population declines (in Oltenia, Bărăgan and Dobrogea). In 2021, higher fertility rates were recorded in Moldova – Vaslui, Iași, Suceava – and also in two counties of Transylvania – Sălaj and Bistrița Năsăud. The significant population decline was not specific to Romania alone, Europe itself recording a natural decline in its native population. In 2022, nine of the 27 EU member states recorded a decrease in the number of native populations. Only France registered a total fertility rate of 1.84, followed by Ireland with 1.83 – these being the highest fertility rates in the EU27, but the minimum annual rate needed to ensure a constant population growth is 2.1.

Marital status of the Romanian population. Less than half of the resident Romanian population (47.9%) is married. Two in five have never been married, and widows account for 5.2% of the total resident population (Economica.net, 2025).

Educational attainment of the Romanian population. Under half of the resident population (43.5%) had a medium level of education, while 40.5% had a low level (primary, secondary), and only 16.0% held a higher education qualification (RPL, 2021). At the 2021 RPL, 143.6 thousand people were recorded as illiterate, representing a decrease of 101.8 thousand compared with the 2011 RPL.

Current employment status. Romania's active population was 8,185.0 thousand people, comprising 7,689.0 thousand employed people and 496.1 thousand unemployed (NIS, Press Release 85/2024). The inactive population of 10,868.8 thousand people is made up of pensioners and social assistance beneficiaries, who represent 39.5%; pupils and students give almost 32.0% from the population. However, younger generations are becoming less and less numerous. The population aged at least 65 years, starting in 2013, has registered a constant increase, by almost 17% in 2024. Demographic aging continued in 2023, with a decrease of 0.3 percentage points in the share of people aged 0-14 and an increase of 0.4 percentage points in the share of people aged 65 and over. The share of elderly people reached 20% of the total population in 2024 (16.3% in 2013), while the median age rose to almost 44 years compared to 40.5 years in 2013.

The generations between 15-19, 10-14, 5-9 and 0-4 years are increasingly less numerous within the total population, which reveals also a decreasing trend of couples in assuming the burden of giving birth and raising children (NIS, Press Release 85/2024). Although the total population has slowed its decline in recent years, demographic projections by Eurostat predict a reduction of almost 10% by 2035.

Table 1. Number of live births with domicile or residence in Romania and birth rate in 2021 compared to 2020

Live births		Difference 2021 compared to 2020	Birth rate (live births per 1000 inhabitants)	
2020	2021		2020	2021
201,849	180,735	-21,114	9.1	8.2

Source: Pisičă, S. (ed. coord.), *Demographic Events in 2021, NIS, 2022*.

The fertility rate in Romania, of 30.7 live births per 1,000 women of childbearing age (15-49 years), takes into account the highest birth rates in the North-West (8 live births per 1,000 inhabitants) and Center (7.7 live births per 1,000 inhabitants), but also the lowest in the South-East (6.4 live births per 1,000 inhabitants) and South-West Oltenia (6.3 live births per 1,000 inhabitants). Native families did not want many children, neither before nor after 1989, given the chronic state of economic precariousness, and the changing styles of life, for a large part of the population.

After 1945 until now, in Romania, the highest number of births was 527,764 children, in 1967. After that, the birth rate had decreased even if the communist regime banned abortions (NCS, 1969).

From 1990 to the present, Romanian communities have experienced an increase in social breakdown, which has made the reform of the social assistance sector an absolute public priority. In spite of this, however, there was less discussion of the bankruptcy of the *family institution* in Romania – an institution that was, at that time, at the end of a long road of frustrations and constraints. At the end of the 1990s, as part of Romania's accession negotiations to the European Union, radical changes were imposed in the social assistance for children, by replacing classic children's homes with "*family-type care homes*". In such homes, children would live in more humane conditions, adequate to a family-type life.

In 2021, the number of children seems to have reached a minimum in Romania, after which it began to grow again in 2022 (Table 2). The decline in the population of Romania is, however, far from having reached its minimum.

Table 2. Children in Romania, by age group, on July 1 (number of persons)

Age group (years)	2020	2021	2022
Total country population	19,296,076	19,126,302	19,049,175
Of which children:			
0-4	1,037,631	993,840	965,413
5-9	958,216	990,270	1,031,625
10-14	1,062,509	1,074,498	1,090,045
15-19	1,027,866	1,033,444	1,054,930
Total number of children	4,186,222	4,092,025	4,132,013
Share of children in total population	21.7	21.4	21.7

Source: NIS, 2023, *Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2023*, Bucharest.

At the beginning of 2024, there were only 3.79 million children living in Romania, aged up to 18, that is 80,700 fewer than in January 2022. The share of minors by domicile in the total population decreased to 17.4%. The number of children born in 2023 was the lowest since 1930 (Roșu, 2024).

A slightly exotic phenomenon regarding the birth of children in Romania was the number of *women of other nationalities who became mothers in Romania*. If in 2013, almost 1,300 children were born in such conditions in Romania, in 2020 their number reached 11,500, and in 2021, 10,800 – around 5% of children born in Romania.

Premises for the manifestation of vulnerabilities within families with children

A higher poverty rate in families with children in Romania

Between 2019 and 2023, the poverty rate for the 0-17 age group was over 10 percentage points higher than the corresponding EU27 rate, and was the highest among all age groups in Romania. It only decreased by 1.2% between 2019 and 2023 (Eurostat, 2024a). This affected (in 2022) the school results of 57.8% of the pupils from families in the first quartile of income (where many Roma families are represented), who failed to reach the minimum level of proficiency in mathematics, reading and science (compared to 9% in the better-off quartiles) (FRA, 2022).

The high poverty rate in families with children in Romania is compounded, as social effects, by the difficulties of the education system (chronic underfunding) – effects strongly felt both at the level of each student and of the national education system. This has negative consequences, in the short and medium/long term, on the psychosocial development and professional path in the adult life of today children. In Romania, *the poverty and social exclusion rate was the highest in the EU27 in 2022 – 34.4% compared with 21.6% in the EU27 (Eurostat, 2024)*. Only half of Roma children attended schools in which all or most pupils were Roma.

Parents who emigrate – children left at home

Romanian emigration seriously affects the quality of life of families with children. The steep demographic decline of the last three decades – in fact, a continuation of the phenomenon triggered in the 1990s – was fuelled also by the unprecedented increase in the *emigration of adults* in search of better-paid jobs. Our country ranks 17th globally, with over 5.7 million Romanians who have left the country, and many have chosen to settle abroad. The current ratio between the number of Romanian emigrants and that of immigrants settled in Romania is 6 to 1 (WOM, 2024; Popa, 2024). The current trend is a decline in the native population, even though in 2024 the number of people returning to the country exceeded the number of those leaving. In 2019, more than 21.3% of Romanians aged 20-64 were working and living in other EU countries (SOEC, 2019). The data shows an increasing percentage of Romanian emigrants compared to 2017, when the Romanian workforce abroad did not exceed 19% of the population (SOEC, 2017).

Romanians have been the top nation in terms of acquiring citizenship of another EU member state for many years. In 2015, for example, over 28,000 Romanians acquired Italian (50.7%), German (10.7%) or Hungarian (9.2%) citizenship. Currently, the exodus of the Romanian workforce is the second leading cause of population decline. A recent OECD report (2019) shows that approximately 5.6 million Romanians were living abroad in 2019, making the Romanian diaspora the fifth largest in the world. This is why, since 2016, the UN has placed Romania among the top 20 countries that have become the source of migrants worldwide (UN, 2016), when the international migration growth rate of 7.3% placed Romania in second place, after Syria.

When emigrants are parents and their minor children remain at home, this gives rise to a particularly challenging social problem affecting both those left behind (children and their caregivers) and the social assistance institutions responsible for monitoring the minors' quality of life. According to the *National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions*, in 2016, approximately 95,308 children from Romania had their parents working abroad, their number decreasing to 75,136 only as a result of the epidemiological crisis in 2020 (NARPDCA, 2016).

Children from the South-West Oltenia Region

• Craiova, April 4, 2024: Over 40,000 children from the South-West Oltenia Region had, in 2021-2022, at least one parent who left to work abroad, i.e. 10 times more than indicated by NARPDCA statistics for the same period. The majority (51%) of parents who left to work abroad were young people, up to 39 years old, and most children with both parents gone were pre-adolescents;

• Italy and Spain were the top destinations for women, and Germany, Italy, Spain and England were the top destinations for men;

• Children with parents working abroad were approximately 50% less likely to benefit from annual medical check-ups and tests.

Source: *Save the Children, Romania, 2025*, <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sites/ro/files/2024-04/36-dintre-copiii-cu-parintii-plecati-au-si-mama-plecata.-studiu-regiunea-sud-vest-oltenia.pdf>.

The data collected by the Ministry of National Education, through the County School Inspectorates, however, indicated a much higher number of 159,038 children with parents abroad.

In 2020, of the 75,136 minors left at home, about 13,253 children had both parents gone, and 9,409 children had the only supporting parent gone (Table 3).

Children left at home, even if they were under the supervision of some adults, relatives, neighbours etc., usually felt the lack of care and affection from their parents.

Table 3. The situation of children in Romania with parents working abroad

Year	Total	With one parent away	With both parents away	With sole parent away	Completely lacking parental care	Entered in the special protection system
2020 (dec.)	75,136	52,474	13,253	9,409	22,662	3,047
2019 (dec.)	91,345	59,262	15,858	11,723	27,001	3,500
2018 (dec.)	92,027	62,890	16,331	12,806	29,137	3,659
2017 (dec.)	94,896	64,701	17,425	12,770	30,195	3,730
2016 (dec.)	95,308	62,978	18,646	13,684	32,330	3,870
2015 (dec.)	85,194	53,507	21,610	10,077	31,687	4,227
2014 (dec.)	82,339	49,855	22,050	10,434	32,484	3,753
2013 (dec.)	80,036	47,394	22,329	10,313	32,642	3,674
2012 (dec.)	79,901	46,917	22,993	9,991	32,984	3,346
2011 (dec.)	83,658	49,470	23,924	10,264	34,188	3,654

2010 (dec.)	84,084	48,037	25,567	10,480	36,047	3,544
2009 (dec.)	85,605	48,665	26,472	10,468	36,940	3,623
2008 (dec.)	92,328	53,125	28,795	10,408	39,203	3,684

Source: *Save the Children*, <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/protectie/copii-cu-parinti-plecati-la-munca-in-strainatate>. Accessed May 19, 2026.

The situation was particularly difficult for children with only one parent who was away, but it could be even more dramatic in the quite numerous cases where both parents were absent. In such situations, children were also exposed to other risks, such as dropping out of school or developing emotional and behavioural disorders. In addition, the absence of parents or legal guardians meant that children had limited access to certain medical services or social benefits.

The social conditions of family life in Romania changed radically immediately after the political regime shift. The decline in the Romanian population within national borders not only led to structural changes in the native population, but also resulted in the birth of a significant number of Romanian children abroad. The impact of this social change was particularly evident in 2019, when 47,500 children of Romanian families were born abroad (Cornea, 2023). Italy ranked first among destination countries between 2009 and 2017, followed by Germany between 2018 and 2021, and the United Kingdom in 2024. Of approximately 3.09 million Romanian children born between 2009 and 2014, nearly 411,000 were born beyond national borders (NIS, 2019). This phenomenon has had significant consequences (not always positive) on the care and education of children.

In 2026, only less than a half (45%) of parents working abroad spent the Easter holidays in Romania with their children, while only 38% had said they would return home for Easter, mostly for financial reasons (survey conducted by *Save the Children Romania* among beneficiaries of a programme for children with parents working abroad, in 2026). The parents included in this survey had been living abroad for an average of six years, both mothers and fathers) (Romania Journal, 2026).

The educational deficit experienced by children primarily refers to a lack of education provided during the early years spent within the family environment – which may generate major social problems, such as juvenile delinquency, reprehensible behaviour at home and/or at school, and the involvement of minors in various organised criminal groups – drug trafficking networks, human trafficking, begging networks etc. Home-based education provided within the family until the age of 18 also plays a decisive role in later life outcomes (in this regard, close and effective communication between parents and children, as well as the example set by parents, have a significant influence).

Table 4. Extract from the Statistics of the main activities carried out by the Romanian Police in 2024

Persons investigated in cases solved / declined to the prosecutor's office - total	199,267
of which minors - total	7,414
a. up to 14 years old	824
b. 14-18 years old	6,590

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police, Statistics Archive, 2025.

In Romania, minors under the age of 14 are not criminally liable for offences committed. From the age of 14 up to 16, they may be held criminally liable similarly to adults, if it is proven that they had discernment at the time of committing a criminal act. Data provided by the *Romanian Police* on juvenile delinquency in Romania, in 2024, are quite revealing (Table 4).

The *Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) in Germany* reports that, in relation to Romanian juvenile delinquency in Germany, between 2019 and 2023 there were 27,553 cases involving children and young people (aged 6 to 18) originating from Romania and suspected of committing offences in Germany. During the same period, there were 11,630 cases involving minors from Serbia and 5,342 involving minors from North Macedonia (Chiriac, 2024). The offences committed were diverse, including theft, street crime, property offences, forgery, assault etc. *Romanian minors accounted for the highest numbers in almost all categories* (and increasing in recent years), with theft being the most common offence. However, Romanian authorities have no direct control over Romanian children residing in countries of emigration. Most of them migrate with their parents, and while some integrate into local educational systems, others do not. For example, in the 2022-2023 school year, 79,429 Romanian children were enrolled in education delivered in the German language and cultural system, compared with 75,992 in 2022, 70,325 in 2021, 64,517 in 2020, 56,849 in 2019 or 49,598 in 2018. However, many children who emigrated to Germany did not attend school. Some stayed abroad only temporarily, others ended up in human trafficking networks, others were exploited for labour, and in some cases they committed offences and ended up in police custody (Chiriac, 2024). As a rule, most of them came from dysfunctional families or had discontinued their education. Overall, these cases of juvenile delinquency result from a combination of weaknesses in the national education system and the precariousness or even absence of education within the family environment of the children concerned.

The educational deficit among children in Romania

In the autumn of 2023, approximately 3.46 million children were enrolled in various education systems in Romania, i.e. around 70.3% of school-age children, in a system of 7,102 educational units, where 245,000 teachers and educators worked. The number of children in nurseries and kindergartens was 547,700, while 1.59 million were enrolled in primary and lower secondary education, and 602,000 in upper secondary education (NIS, 2024b).

One of the main deficiencies of the education system in Romania stems from chronic underfunding. The OECD report “*Education at a Glance 2024*” shows that Romania’s education expenditure (around 3.2% of GDP, although in 2021 Romania allocated only 2.5% of GDP, including *research and development* (compared with an OECD average of 4.9% of GDP) has remained below the OECD average over the long term. Romania faces *a significant shortage of teachers* and a proportion of adults without upper secondary education that is 12 percentage points above the OECD average. In Romania, *the average annual spending per pupil from primary to upper secondary level* (including research and development) was \$6,279, compared with an OECD average of \$14,209 in 2023. Such an economic and social context has reduced the attractiveness of school and professional training for students in Romania – therefore affecting the quality of teaching and staff performance. The generally low level of educational provision in Romania has contributed to maintaining social tensions within the system, sometimes leading to *teacher strikes* or *widespread student absenteeism*. These disruptions have been felt particularly in rural areas, but also in urban areas, where the learning process has been interrupted by teacher strikes particularly at the beginning or the end of the school year, or during the periods of various student tests (European Commission, 2024).

Students in Romania also record *a significantly higher early school leaving rate* than the European average (Eurostat: edat_lfse_14.). In 2022, the early school leaving rate was particularly high in rural areas (27.5%), followed by small towns and suburbs (14.3%), and large cities (3.3%), and was especially high among Roma communities (FRA, 2022). At national level, annual school dropout rates have decreased over the past decade, but remain more than twice as high in rural areas (Ministry of Education, 2023).

According to a study conducted by the University of Bucharest in 2024, the potential number of students who should have completed the 8th grade between 2013 and 2024 was 275,000. However, the average number of students dropping out of school during that period was 23,000 per year. This implies that a student who drops out of school is expected to earn, on average, approximately EUR 190,000 less over his lifetime than a high school graduate. Individuals who leave school before completing compulsory education typically experience shorter employment trajectories and earn, on average, 30-40% less than high school graduates (AmCham Romania, 2024; Bechir, 2024). The report on *the*

economic impact of early school leaving in Romania (AmCham Romania, 2024) is the first study to go beyond the analysis of the perceived negative impact on individual educational outcomes, assessing the effects of this phenomenon on the macroeconomics, with the aim that Romanian policymakers will stop treating education as a simple *social cost*, and will consider it as *long-term investment in human capital*.

The academic performance of Romanian students is among the lowest in the European Union, varying from one educational institution to another and being highly polarised. As a rule, the majority of students achieve relatively poor academic results (OECD, 2024).

The 2022 *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* (OECD, 2023) revealed that a large proportion of Romanian students lack basic skills, 48.6% of 15-year-old students do not achieve minimum proficiency in mathematics, 41% perform poorly in reading, and 44% in science (OECD, 2023). Romanian students recorded the highest shares of low performance in the EU27, standing well above the EU27 average of 29.5% in mathematics, 26.2% in reading and 24.2% in science. Only a small proportion of Romanian students were top performers in the PISA test: 4.0% in mathematics (EU average: 7.9%), 2.0% in reading (EU: 6.5%), and 1.4% in science (EU: 6.9%). Only 47.5% of students aged 16-19 demonstrated basic or above-basic digital skills (EU: 66.4%) (Eurostat: [isoc_sk_dskl_i21__custom_11612258].).

A study conducted by *World Vision Romania* (2024) entitled “*The Well-being of Children in Rural Areas*”, shows that in rural Romania four in ten lower secondary school pupils (41%) do not wish to continue to upper secondary education, instead preferring to enter the labour market, work within the family, or pursue vocational training. Everything becomes explicable if we consider the current difficult conditions in which most rural students attend high school (usually in another locality), where commuting time exceeds one hour in most cases. In addition, students often receive limited support with homework due to parents’ limited available time and, in some cases, the relatively low level of educational attainment among rural parents.

Increase in drug use among young people and children

Addiction to some psychoactive substances has become a public health problem that affects numerous families but also a lot of people who do not (anymore) have a family. Worldwide, the declared number of drug users was 316 million people in 2023, i.e. 6% of the world’s population aged 15-65 (5.3% in 2013) (UNODC, 2025). The use of such substances, at any level, has particularly serious consequences for both the physical and mental health of the user, significantly

altering cognitive functioning and behaviour. In addition, individuals who develop substance dependence may experience a range of associated health problems (including HIV and hepatitis), as well as difficulties in personal development, family life, economic stability, interpersonal relationships, education or employment, and legal issues.

Attempts to stop drug use, after the stage of addiction has been established, also come with particularly unpleasant and intense physical and mental symptoms (withdrawal) that require specialised medical and psychological support in the recovery process. Excessive consumption of psychoactive substances is associated with increased mortality risk and contributes to the breakdown and social decline of affected families. Some specialists argue that the development of addiction occurs more frequently in certain families that are at higher risk, due to their genetic inheritance or the presence of first-degree relatives (parent, sibling) with alcohol or drug dependence, or due to a family history of conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, attention deficit disorder, or hyperactivity. Early substance use and addiction generate numerous complications that are difficult to overcome, posing a risk of fatal outcomes in cases of overdose. Adults under the influence of psychoactive substances are at higher risk of road traffic accidents, violent behaviour, and suicide. In children, substance use may lead to antisocial behaviour, declining academic performance, increased absenteeism, violence, and, in extreme cases, involvement in criminal networks or drug trafficking.

Romania currently served as a transit country for two main drug trafficking routes: heroin from Afghanistan, Iran, or Pakistan, and cocaine or ecstasy from Western Europe.

According to a study by the *National Anti-Drug Agency* (2019), a prevalence of illicit drug use of 10.7% was identified among the general population (National Drug Strategy 2022-2026).

Over the period 2013-2020, three types of illicit drug use increased: experimental use, from 6.6% in 2013 to 10.7% in 2019; recent use, from 2.5% to 6%; and current use, from 1.1% to 3.9%. *By age group, the highest prevalence in Romania was recorded among individuals aged 15-34 years, with rates of 16.9%, 10%, and 6.6%, respectively for the three categories of use.* Compared with the growth rates recorded during the implementation of *the National Anti-Drug Strategy 2005-2012*, those identified in the 2013-2020 period were lower (38.3% compared with 78.8% for experimental use, 58.3% compared with 84% for recent use, and 71.8% compared with 90.9% for current use). The most commonly used illicit substances in Romania – 6.3% of the population aged 15 to 64 years old trying to use at least once in their lifetime – were new psychoactive substances, followed by cannabis at 6.1%. The highest increase was observed in overall illicit drug use, which generated an increase in the number of addicted consumers and, implicitly, a greater need for treatment and support services (National Drug Strategy 2022-2026).

Drug use among 16-year-old students

During the period 2013-2020, the European ESPAD study (conducted internationally, every 4 years, since 1995) was implemented in Romania twice, in 2015 and 2019. At national level, among 16-year-old students, the lifetime prevalence of any illicit drug use, according to the ESPAD 2019 study, was 9.5%, while last year prevalence was 9% among students. The psychoactive substances included under the term “any illicit drug” were: amphetamines, cannabis, cocaine, crack, ecstasy, LSD or other hallucinogens, heroin, and others. Among 16-year-old students, the most commonly used illicit substance was cannabis, followed by new psychoactive substances (8.7% of 16-year-olds reported lifetime use of cannabis, 7.2% reported use in the past year, and 3.3% reported use in the past month) (ESPAD, 2020).

Admission to treatment due to drug use

During the implementation period of the National Anti-Drug Strategy 2013-2020, there were approximately 231,770 beneficiaries of treatment for addiction recovery. The upward trend in *demand for treatment* for drug-related problems (recorded since 2014) reached a peak in 2019, both in terms of the total number of requests (42,835), and the number of beneficiaries admitted to treatment for the first time (31,026) (Romanian National Anti-drug Agency).

The most recent legal assessment of the field shows that in 2024, 3,662 people were sent to court for cases related to drug trafficking. *The number of minors involved in drug trafficking in Romania has increased significantly in recent years*, primarily as a result of the lack of policies focused on monitoring spaces commonly frequented by children (such as schools, their surrounding areas, and venues hosting cultural activities for children), but also as a result of the intensification of the trade in prohibited substances in the online environment, despite its illegal nature (DIOCT, 2025; Stan, 2024). DIOCT nevertheless reports a decrease in the number of minors caught by the authorities, although this does not necessarily indicate an actual reduction in the number of children recruited by trafficking networks. *In 2022, 410 minors were identified, compared with 338 in 2023, and 129 in the first nine months of 2024* (DIOCT, 2024). In 2024, the organised crime police and DIOCT prosecutors conducted over 990 operational actions, detained 1,560 individuals, of whom 1,355 were arrested, and 388 were placed under judicial control measures.

Frequent alcohol consumption among parents/children

The family environment in which alcohol abuse is present is often one from which victims – usually other family members, both adults and children – seek to escape whenever possible. The fact that one or both parents have alcohol

dependence causes significant psychological and emotional distress for all family members, beyond the financial and relational instability. In families where children are present, they develop an introverted emotional background, usually confused, dominated by feelings associated with depression, fear, insecurity, alienation, or suppressed rebellion, as well as antisocial behaviours or various psychopathological difficulties. In some cases, children may blame themselves, as if they were responsible for their parents' difficulties or for their own material needs. Not infrequently, such children assume a protective role towards younger siblings, or a caregiving role towards the alcohol-dependent parent, especially in extreme situations. In adulthood, they may reproduce their parents' behaviour or, on the contrary, develop extreme manifestations of almost violent denial or intolerance towards other situations of addiction encountered. Most of them show poor social integration skills, struggle with problem-solving in their own lives, and tend to develop tense, dysfunctional social relationships. There are studies that analyse the predisposition of adults or children of alcohol-dependent parents to a series of symptoms of anxiety, panic disorder, agoraphobia, dysthymia, suicidal tendencies or other social dysfunctions (Psychology Monitor, 2023). Children of alcohol-dependent parents are very susceptible to going through various types of trauma, or to becoming victims of neglect or abuse. As a result, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder is significantly higher among these children, with long-term effects that may persist into adulthood.

Given the serious social consequences of excessive alcohol consumption, a number of international organizations such as the UN, WTO, OECD, WHO etc. draw attention to the fact that this is *a major social risk factor, underlying many deaths – 3 million/year – worldwide, or disability among adults and children, being involved in 7.1% of the social costs of illness for men and 2.2% for women.* Excessive alcohol consumption is an aggravating factor for cardiovascular diseases, liver cirrhosis, and certain types of cancer, having a significant impact in terms of legal costs, losses resulting from unemployment linked to alcohol use, and *harm caused to others*, including family members and the wider community. Alcohol intoxication is implicated in *numerous road traffic accidents, injuries, violence, homicides, suicides, and mental health disorders among young people, adults, and, in recent years, even minors* (WHO, 2025). Among the most serious manifestations of harm to others are the consequences of prenatal alcohol exposure, which can result in a range of developmental disorders in children. The harm to others may be less visible, resulting from behavioural changes in alcohol users, including harassment, verbal abuse, threats, deterioration of the family environment, and repeated violence or abuse within the household.

However, currently, awareness and policy action among social policymakers in Romania, as well as among the general public, regarding the negative impact of alcohol consumption on population health and safety remain relatively low. Commercial interests and the massive regulatory deficit in the marketing of alcoholic beverages in our country limit the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at

reducing excessive alcohol consumption. This is one of the reasons why alcohol consumption at national level is relatively high. *In 2020, Romanians recorded, on average, an annual consumption of 11 litres of pure alcohol/person aged 15 and over (18.6 litres among men and 5.5 litres among women), a value above the EU27 average of 9.8 litres/capita* (Eurostat, 2020). Eurostat data for 2014 show that the proportion of people with excessive alcohol consumption was higher in Romania (4.2%) than in the EU27 (2.7%), with significant differences between men (7.7%) and women (0.9%) in Romania. The prevalence of excessive alcohol consumption was 3 percentage points higher among people with low levels of education compared with those with higher education and 4 percentage points higher among people with low income compared with those with high income (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of episodic binge drinking in the EU27 and Romania (EHIS study)

	Every day	Every week	Every month	Less than once a month	Never or never in the last 12 months
EU27 (2020) Men	13,4	37,2	22,5	10,1	16,8
Romania (2019) Men	5,6	32,2	32,0	12,4	17,7
EU27(2020) Women	4,2	22	23,8	17,7	32,3
Romania (2019) Women	0,3	6,6	24,9	25,7	42,5
EU27 (2020) Total	8,6	29,4	23,2	14,0	24,8
Romania (2019) Total	2,9	19,0	28,3	19,3	30,5

Source: Eurostat, 2020, *Alcohol consumption statistic*.

In contrast to EU27 averages, the proportion of excessive consumption is higher among the population aged 15-64 than among those aged 65 and over, being almost three times higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

In terms of drinking frequency, in 2019, one in 12 people (8.6%) aged 15 and over in the EU27 reported daily alcohol consumption, and in Romania, one in 34 people (2.9%), according to the EHIS (Eurostat, 2020, European Health Interview Survey). The proportion of individuals aged 15 and over who reported having had at least one binge drinking episode in the past month varied greatly between countries, as well as by gender. Romania had the highest prevalence of binge drinking among men, with more than 50% of men reporting having had at least one binge drinking episode (one in five men who had consumed alcohol in the past month).

Excessive alcohol consumption is a major problem among men in Romania. Annual alcohol consumption among adults in Romania is high, standing at 10 litres per capita in 2019. On average, more than one-third of adults in Romania reported excessive alcohol consumption *at least once a month* in 2019 – the second highest rate in the EU27 after Denmark (35.0% compared with the EU27 average of 18.5%). There are substantial gender differences in excessive alcohol consumption: more than half of men (53.1%) and less than one in five women (18.0%) had such a consumption pattern in 2019. *A fairly high alcohol consumption was also recorded among adolescents in Romania, with the rate of repeated drunkenness in Romania (17%) being close to the European average (18%).*

Fewer marriages, more divorces – influences on descendants

An analysis of trends in official statistics on *marriage* and *divorce* is far from capturing *the true dynamics of the formation/dissolution of marital unions*, both in other European countries and in Romania. In the European countries, statistical data provide information on the formation of new families through marriage. However, alternatives to religious or civil marriage, such as the partnership not registered in the *Civil Status Register*, are increasingly common in most European countries. In response, some states have adapted their legislation, granting more extensive rights and freedoms to cohabiting couples.

The number of marriages per 1,000 inhabitants has declined in the EU in recent decades, while *the number of divorces* (legalized or not) has increased slightly (Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Evolution of the crude marriage rate – Romania compared with the European average, selected years from 1970-2023

	1970	1990	2000	2010	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
EU Average	7,8	6,7	6,3	5,2	4,4	4,3	3,2	3,9	4,2
Romania	7,2	8,2	8,3	6,1	5,7	6,6	4,2	6,0	6,2

Source: Eurostat, 2024, Crude marriage rate, selected years, 1964-2023 (per 1,000 persons)

In the EU27 space, the substantial decrease between 2019 (4.3 per 1,000 people) and 2020 (3.2) in *the crude marriage rate* might be an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, representing a decrease of almost 25% (Table 6).

Table 7. Evolution of the crude divorce rate in Romania compared with the European average in selected years from 1980-2023

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
EU Average	1,5	1,5	1,7	1,9	1,5	1,8	1,7	1,6	1,6
Romania	1,5	1,4	1,4	1,6	1,6	1,2	1,4	1,2	1,2

Source: Eurostat, 2024, *Crude divorce rate, selected years, 1964-2023 (per 1 000 persons)*.

Around 1.8 million marriages and around 0.7 million divorces took place in the EU27 in 2023. These figures can also be expressed as 4.2 marriages per 1,000 people (the crude marriage rate) and 1.6 divorces per 1,000 people (the crude divorce rate).

The crude marriage rate in Romania has remained consistently above the European average (Table 4), which attests the greater adherence of the Romanian population to the *institution of marriage*. During the same period, the crude divorce rate decreased, from 1.6 in 2010 to 1.2 per 1,000 persons in 2023 (Eurostat, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact by decreasing the divorce rate in between 2019 and the end of 2020 in Romania but not in the other EU countries (Table 7). These trends were different for the interval 2020-2021.

In 2023, the highest crude divorce rates were reported in Latvia (2.8 divorces per 1,000 people), Lithuania (2.5) and Finland (2.1). The lowest crude divorce rates in the EU were recorded in Slovenia (1.0 divorces per 1,000 people), Croatia (1.1) and Romania (1.2) (Eurostat, 2024).

Many families who cohabit outside or within civil or religious marriage, generate offspring. In recent years, an increase in the proportion of children born outside marriage has been observed in Romania, doubling compared with 1993 (when it stood at 17.7%). This fact has significantly increased exposure to certain social risks that may negatively affect both the quality of life of children and the quality of family life. In 2023, this proportion was around 41.1%, meaning that only 58.9% of children were born within a traditional family. Certainly, such a share reflects a major change in the way families are constituted, within the broader framework of the modern world. Non-marital births occur among cohabiting couples, single parents, and also within legally registered partnerships. The number of births within marriage exceeded that of births outside marriage in six EU countries (for which data are available), with Bulgaria in first place (where 59.7% of births took place outside marriage), followed by Portugal (59.5%), France (58.5%), Sweden (57.4%), Slovenia (56.5%), and Estonia (53.8%). Greece was at the opposite end, with 90% of births taking place within a traditional marriage. Non-marital births also increased in five other EU countries in 2023, compared with 2022, while remaining at the same level in the Netherlands.

The type of family into which a child is born matters, as it shapes their life into adulthood, especially if they choose to start their own family. During childhood, parental divorce can create a very traumatic period in a child's life (even if in some cases the child may suppress a large part of the emotional distress they experience). Parental divorce can trigger various negative emotions in a child's life, such as anxiety, sadness, anger, and feelings of personal insecurity. Some children may exhibit more introverted behaviour, while others may become irritable or aggressive, which may sometimes manifest in developmental delays, depression, social withdrawal, enuresis, or antisocial behaviour. In such situations, children may struggle to adapt to change, manage stress, or maintain focus, and, as result, school performance may decline, some problems may also manifest in the child's relationships with other children or with his own parents. Under these circumstances, help from the extended family and/or specialists becomes essential, with parents playing a decisive role through open communication appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding. Parents are also responsible for ensuring that, despite separation, a stable and safe environment is maintained, with routines that foster security and the continued involvement of both parents in the child's life (Pleteriu, 2025).

Specialists state that when a person grows up, for example, in a single-parent family, or in a family where the parents have divorced, this may significantly influence the decisions they make later in life, regarding future family formation, the nature of their relationships with others in society, and their broader participation in social life. Numerous studies show that, in Europe and North America, children from divorced families are less likely to marry and more likely to cohabit. Härkönen, Brons, and Drunkers, (2021) analyse the relationship between parental separation and the partnership patterns of children in 16 European countries over time, using data from *the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) or Harmonized Histories* on 138,739 respondents born between 1930 and 1980. Some factors that determine dysfunctions in family life among offsprings may be more difficult to identify, as noted by Porthan *et al.* (2020) who found that parental divorce in childhood does not independently predict the appearance of depression symptoms during pregnancy. Overall, the social impact of parental separation on children's later life outcomes is too complex to be fully addressed within the scope of this study.

The problem of teenage motherhood

The phenomenon of teenage mothers at global and European levels reveals that, every year, approximately 21 million girls aged 15-19 in developing regions become pregnant, and approximately 12 million of them give birth. According to the *End of Childhood Index*, compiled annually by *UNICEF Save the Children*, which compares recent data from 172 countries and assesses the extent to which children are deprived of childhood, Romania records higher rates of births during the teenage period of mothers than countries such as Rwanda (25.6), Trinidad

and Tobago (30.8), the United Arab Emirates (30.1), Uzbekistan (17.6), Albania (21.8), the Bahamas (28.7), Botswana (31.0), Burundi (27.9), Djibouti (21.0), India (23.3), and Mauritius (28.3).

Romania records 34 births per 1,000 adolescent girls. *One in ten newborns in Romania has a teenage mother.* Over the past five years, over 88,000 births to minor mothers have been recorded in Romania, including over 84,000 births to mothers aged 15-19, and more than 3,600 births to mothers under the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2025, *The State of the World's Children 2024, The future of childhood in a changing world*).

As a consequence of limited access to sexual and reproductive health education, particularly among young people and girls, the birth rate among adolescent girls aged 15-19 remains a significant concern due to its social implications. In Europe, only two countries have a more serious situation: Bulgaria and Georgia, with 36.8 and 38.3 births per 1,000 adolescent girls, respectively. This situation led *the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* to highlight the urgent need for the Romanian Government to adopt a national strategy to ensure access to comprehensive sexual education and reproductive health counselling for young women and adolescents (Alexandrescu, 2024).

Currently, approximately 45% of girls under the age of 15 who become mothers in the European Union are from Romania, while 30% of minor mothers (under 18) in the European Union also originate from Romania. It is a truly worrying reality that indicates *the need for a multidimensional approach that aims to address access to sexual education, access to quality healthcare services, and support for young parents.* In terms of public policy, efforts to address teenage motherhood in Romania remain at an early stage. There are certain legislative regulations and isolated programmes targeting this group, but they are not integrated into a coherent, unitary framework. Moreover, there is a clear absence of policies explicitly dedicated to the problems associated with teenage mothers, as well as a lack of well-defined strategic guidelines in this area.

Young women who become mothers at an early age are exposed to significant health risks, including conditions such as hypertension, anaemia, preterm birth, low birth weight of the newborn, or postpartum depression. Early motherhood exposes young mothers to the risk of dropping out of school, bringing with it the prospect of entering the vicious circle of poverty, with transgenerational effects. Without knowing the causes that lead to the perpetuation of the phenomenon of early motherhood in Romania, the challenges encountered in the process of identifying and referring cases, or the legislative limits in ensuring optimal protection of

newborn children, it is not possible to establish an adequate strategy for managing various situations, nor is it possible to change the general mentality towards minor mothers and their needs/their children needs. Such an approach is carried out by UNICEF, which provides authorities, specialists and all interested parties with nationally representative scientific data, particularly useful in drafting strategies and public policies that focus on protecting children's rights and diversifying services for vulnerable children.

Pregnancy and motherhood during adolescence do not represent favourable conditions for the personal development of young mothers and their children, nor for their psychological wellbeing, educational attainment, or future social and professional status. Moreover, recent studies indicate the occurrence of disorders with long-term effects for both the mother and the child. Therefore, it is necessary to address this social issue through specific social policies in order to reduce its negative impact on young mothers, their children, and their families of origin.

Conclusions and social policy proposals

Currently, official statistics confirm the relatively high social relevance of the population's concerns regarding the problems faced by many families with children, as highlighted by Romania's national television broadcaster. Indeed, in many cases, *the family with children from Romania* is under the pressure of numerous disrupting factors. This study has addressed only a few of the most dangerous of them, in order to create a framework for formulating policies aimed at reducing threats and deficits where they manifest. It should not be forgotten, however, that all these factors are likely to be compounded in their action, thus generating the aggravation of existing problems – for example, some families face situations such as children running away from home, domestic violence, involvement with the justice system. Such phenomena can appear as consequences of only one or two factors mentioned above, including poverty, alcohol abuse, drug use or others. Consequently, targeted intervention in one or more of these risk factors may help prevent or mitigate a range of negative social outcomes. The adoption of some basic social policies could facilitate the intervention of public institutions in the lives of families where certain dysfunctions are already installed, in order to alleviate acute situations, return to normal family life, increase cohesion and social integration of individuals and families exposed to various risks.

Reducing the economic vulnerabilities of families with children

At the time of the initiation of *the new austerity measures by the Bolojan Government (August 2025)*, Romania was already *the country with the highest poverty rate in the EU27*. The implementation of the new legislative initiatives to deepen economic austerity therefore comes against a national socio-economic background that is already highly vulnerable, in which families with children in Romania were much poorer than similar families in EU states, but also compared to other local social categories. Therefore, the initiatives of *the Bolojan Government, in the short term, will only worsen the socio-economic situation of families with children in Romania*. Therefore, as a first priority, it is necessary to recalculate the share of the population living in poverty, starting from *the redefinition and recalculation of the minimum consumption baskets for different categories of families with children* (minimum decent consumption basket, subsistence basket), because, no matter how dramatic the situation of these families becomes, *any initiative becomes effective only after the most precise knowledge of the new dimensions and characteristics of poverty in families with children*. In a later phase, it is necessary to identify economic resources for the socio-economic support of families that are at or below the minimum decent consumption level, in the new conditions of the current Romanian economy and society.

Reducing the trend of labour emigration

The problem of reducing labour migration from Romania can only be addressed in the context of the *improving employment opportunities and wage levels on the domestic labour market, in line with the European average*. Currently, approximately six in 10 Romanian employees are still worried about the stability of their job until retirement, the share being higher among women and people over the age of 40 (Dumitrescu, 2025). The main fears also stem from the possibility of a decrease in salaries, given the current social and economic politics of Bolojan Government, but also from the impact of technological evolution and artificial intelligence.

Returning home of parents

In this area, it is urgently necessary to establish, through the state budget, *policies of economic and social co-incentivisation for employers and employees, in order to preferentially employ adult parents with minor children* who can provide proof of returning home from emigration, after an absence of at least six months to one year. Such an employment offer must be thoroughly substantiated economically and popularized across the border, being brought to the attention of the main groups of the Romanian diaspora in the world and especially the diaspora in the main countries of Romanian emigration, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain.

Recoupment of the education deficit:

- In the family.

a) Establishment at the local administration level of counselling centres for parents who faced various episodes of juvenile delinquency on the part of their children. The regulation of the activity of the such centres, including the rights and obligations of beneficiaries, regarding access to specialised counselling services for parents whose children have cases of juvenile delinquency.

b) Establishing more specialized legal courts (separating cases involving drug trafficking or drug use and those involving offences such as robbery or theft) in resolving juvenile delinquency cases in Romania, which also requires cooperation with courts in other states, in order to shorten the resolution intervals.

- At the level of general schools.

Currently, about 24% of rural children and 14% of urban children are outside the public education and training system (Ministry of Finance, 2023). Urgent measures are therefore needed for the enrolment and reintegration of children not included in the public education and training system. In order to cover the gaps in school preparation of Romanian children, it is urgently necessary to develop new learning practices, as well as new school capacities to promote effective teaching and learning, through additional courses of preparation for students with various assimilation difficulties. Full use of the resources offered by different funding schemes, for the establishment of school laboratories for science, for arts, as well as for smart laboratories, for the acquisition of digital skills. It is also necessary to make more intensive use of school counsellors and speech therapists in schools, of new teaching staff intended to support the education process in its various dimensions.

There is also a need to implement *the National Programme for Reducing School Dropout* in more than 2,250 schools where there is a large number of students at risk of dropping out. Romanian students also need *the increasing of the number and values of grants for the prevention of school dropout*, and planning *remedial education and social support activities*, as well as extracurricular activities.

Combating drug trafficking networks and eradicating drug use among children

Before implementing any other measures to combat drug use among children and adults in Romania, it is necessary to clearly project the will of the authorities *to restrict, as much as possible, the area of action of larger or smaller networks of drug traffickers from within or across borders.* One of the key factors in *discouraging drug demand* derives from *the severity of the penalties applied to drug traffickers and no less to consumers*, knowing that *any consumer can quickly become a drug trafficker.* An analysis of court decisions in Romania shows that suspended prison sentences under supervision are applied to a very large extent,

both in cases of drug trafficking and in cases of possession for personal use. Such measures are generally considered to have limited deterrent effect. A peak was recorded in 2016, when 440 such sentences were issued.

In Romania, there are also some organised crime groups that develop local drug production capacities (cannabis crops, drug production, or extraction laboratories). The online environment and parcel delivery systems are used most frequently for the illicit circulation of drugs, in relatively medium or small quantities. It should be noted that Romanian specialised institutions are generally aware of the main routes of entry into the country, as well as distribution channels towards end users. What remains necessary is the effective enforcement of measures aimed at identifying and apprehending traffickers and network leaders in order to curb this phenomenon.

Drug distribution in and around schools must be strictly prevented. In order to limit this phenomenon, the following measures are necessary:

a) The use of undercover monitoring mechanisms, including confidential reporting systems, to identify drug distribution activities in and around educational institutions, alongside systematic surveillance of school perimeters to prevent trafficking activities.

b) The training and awareness-raising of parents and teachers regarding the risks of such phenomena, as well as the development of capacities to intervene appropriately when necessary.

c) The implementation of *extensive information campaigns for young people and children on the dangers of drug use*.

d) The regulation of cultural and educational events, with clear accountability mechanisms for organisers in cases where drug distribution is proven to have occurred during such activities.

e) The expansion of *specialised medical and psychological treatment services for addiction* (Ionescu, 2025).

Combating alcoholism and assisting its victims within families with children

Policies to combat alcohol consumption in Romania include *fairly consistent legislation enforcing a zero blood alcohol limit for drivers, a ban on the sale of alcohol to minors and near schools, a prohibition of alcohol consumption in the workplace, and restrictions on alcohol sales at sporting events*, as well as *stricter advertising regulations*. Additional policies are still needed to strengthen marketing regulations, especially with regard to advertising targeted at young people, and to introduce *warning labels on alcohol containers* regarding the health risks associated with excessive alcohol consumption (OECD, 2021).

There is also a need *to initiate education and information campaigns aimed at the general public and families with children in particular*. Potential consumers should be informed through various channels that *alcoholism is a disease that can be treated and eradicated*. Access to such information can help support families with children affected by alcohol dependence. Furthermore, there is a need *to establish specialised counselling and treatment centres for alcohol addiction*, accessible both by affected individuals and their families. *Supporting the treatment and recovery process of family members affected by alcohol dependence is essential*. The family must be counselled and, when necessary, participate in family therapy, as well as be encouraged to support the addicted person in maintaining abstinence.

Fewer divorces in families with minor children

The General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection in each county should consider initiating at least one project aimed at developing support services for vulnerable children and families, co-financed through the *European Social Fund under the Social Inclusion and Dignity Programme 2021-2027 (PIDS)*, addressed also to *children from families at risk of divorce or separation*. The overall objective should be to increase access to community-based services for children from families at risk of separation, thereby improving the quality of life of these families. The project could include the establishment of several *day-care centres* aimed at preventing the separation of children from their families (or from one of the parents), as well as *counselling centres for children and families*. Additional services could include specialised centres addressing various needs of family members, such as temporary care centres for children or adults from families in crisis, emergency support services, psychological assistance centres for abused children and parents, and other similar facilities designed to respond to acute family crisis situations.

Preventing premature births

Counselling services should be established in each school and in maternity hospitals to ensure that adolescents who need or request support can access appropriate guidance. Psychologists and other relevant specialists should play a more active role in raising awareness within Romanian society, particularly among young mothers, regarding the responsibilities associated with teenage pregnancy, as well as the risks of repeated teenage pregnancies. A specific concern is *the need to prevent abuse and its recurrence*. To address this, both children and parents, together with medical staff, should receive appropriate training and support through specialised counselling centres focused on prevention, early intervention, and protection mechanisms.

References

- Alexandrescu, G. (coord.), (2024). *Study on Minor Mothers and Pregnant Minors, Save the Children Romania*. Available at <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sites/ro/files/2024-04/studiu-privind-mamele-minore.pdf>.
- AmCham Romania. (2024). NEW AmCham Report: The Economic Impact of School Dropout in Romania – an analysis conducted for AmCham Romania by the University of Bucharest, <https://www.amcham.ro/communication/amcham-press-releases/the-economic-impact-of-school-dropout-in-romania-an-analysis-conducted-for-amcham-romania-by-the-university-of-bucharest>
- Bechir, M. (2024). *The first study on the impact of early school leaving in the last decade on the economy. Socio-economic components that lead to the loss of 5.23% of GDP, Governance Course*. Available at <https://cursdeguvernare.ro/studiu-impact-economic-abandon-scolar.html>. Accessed November 20.
- Chiriac, M. (2024). Crimes without age. *Minors from Romania and the Balkans are committing more and more crimes in Germany*, SINOPSIS. Available at <https://sinopsis.info.ro/2024/12/01/delict-e-fara-virsta-minori-din-romania-si-balcani-comit-tot-mai-multe-infractiuni-in-germania/>. Accessed December 1.
- Cornea, R. (2023). *Almost 411,000 Romanian children were born abroad in the last 14 years. Italy, Germany and Great Britain are the countries where most Romanian children are born. The peak of this indicator was reached before the pandemic, in 2019, when almost 47,500 Romanian children were born across the border*, ZF. Available at <https://www.zf.ro/profesii/aproape-411-000-copii-romani-s-au-nascut-afara-granitelor-ultimii-14-22019527>. Accessed on 20.07.
- DIOCT (2025). *The participation of minors in drug trafficking has increased considerably, and online platforms are increasingly used to sell narcotics*. Available at <https://tvrinfo.ro/DIOCT-a-crescut-considerabil-participarea-minorilor-la-traficul-de-droguri-iar-platformele-online-sunt-tot-mai-utilizate-pentru-a-se-vinde-stupefiant/>.
- Dumitrescu R. (2025). *Roughly 60% of employees in Romania worried about job stability until retirement, report shows 27 august*. Available at <https://www.romania-insider.com/employees-romania-job-stability-retirement-2025>.
- Economica.net (2025). *Criză demografică România – Declinul populației continuă și în martie 2025. Care era populația țării noastre la începutul anului* (date oficiale INS). Available at https://www.economica.net/criza-demografica-romania-declinul-populatiei-continua-si-in-martie-2025-care-era-populatia-tarii-noastre-la-inceputul-anului-date-oficiale-ins_835395.html.
- Economica.net (2025).| *Diaspora sent 25% less money to Romania. Foreign workers took 1.2 billion euros out of the country*. Available at <https://termene.ro/articole/economica-net-diaspora-a-trimis-cu-25-mai-putin-bani-in-romania-muncitorii-straini-au-scos-din-tara-12-miliarde-de-euroBRU>.
- Europa Liberă (2023). *Romania The fewest children were born in the first semester of 2023 in the last 145 years*.
- European Commission (2024). *Education and Training Monitor, Romania*. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor/ro/country-reports/romania.html#3-school-education>.

- Eurostat (2020). *Alcohol consumption statistic*. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/hlth_ehis_all1b/default/table?lang=en.
- Eurostat. (2020). *European Health Interview Survey*.
- Eurostat (2024). People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240612-1>
- Eurostat (2024a). *At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold, age and sex - EU-SILC and ECHP surveys*, ilc_li02.
- Eurostat (2024). *Crude divorce rate, selected years, 1964–2023* (per 1,000 persons, (demo_ndivind).
- Eurostat (2024). *Crude marriage rate, selected years, 1964–2023* (per 1,000 persons), (demo_nind).
- Eurostat (2025). edat_lfse_14.
- Eurostat (2024). [isoc_sk_dskl_i21_custom_11612258].
- FRA (Fundamental Rights Agency) (2022). *Key indicators for the EU strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030*. Available at http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2022-roma-survey-2021-main-results2_en.pdf.
- Ghețău, V. (2024). ANALYSIS Migration in Romania: 2022 was the first year in which more citizens came to all counties than left/ The resident population increased through the massive immigration of Ukrainians and foreign workers, *Economedia.ro*, August 27. Available at <https://economedia.ro/analiza-migration-in-romania-in-2022-was-the-first-in-care-in-all-counties-more-citizens-arrived-than-left-the-resident-population-has-increased-through-massive-immigration-of-ukrainians-and-municipalities.html>.
- Härkönen, J., Brons, M.D., & Dronkers, J. (2021). *Family forerunners? Parental separation and partnership formation in 16 countries*, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 83(1), 119-36. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Marriage_and_divorce_statistics, <https://population-europe.eu/research/popdigests/children-divorce>.
- Ionescu, V. (2025). Prevention of Drug Use in Schools – Measures Proposed by the Minister of Education, *Government Course*, March 19.
- Ministry of Education (2023). *Report on the state of pre-university education in Romania 2022-2023*. Available at https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2023/Transparenta/Rapoarte_sistem/Raport-Starea-invatamanului-preuniversitar-2022-2023.pdf.
- Ministry of Finance (2023). *Activity report for 2023*.
- Ministry of Internal Affairs (2025). *General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police, Statistics Archive, 2025*.
- Ministry of Internal Affairs (2025). *Tons of Drugs and Other Prohibited Substances Removed from the Market by Police and Prosecutors in 2024*. Available at <https://www.mai.gov.ro/tone-de-droguri-si-alte-substante-interzise-scoase-din-piata-de-politisti-si-procurori-in-anul-2024/>.
- NARPDCA (National Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions) (2016). De unde anume sunt preluate informațiile?
- NARPDCA. (2024). *Save the Children*. Available at <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/ce-facem/protectie/copii-cu-parinti-plecati-la-munca-in-strainatate>.

- National Anti-drug Agency, Romania 2013-2020 (2013).
- National Institute of Public Health (INSP) (2024). *National Month of Information on the Effects of Alcohol Consumption, Situation Analysis June, 2024*. Available at <https://insp.gov.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Analiza-de-situatie-alcool-2024.pdf>.
- NCS (National Commission of Statistics) (1969). *Statistical Yearbook of the RSR, 1968*. Bucharest: Direcția Centrală de Statistică.
- NIS (2023). *Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2023*. Bucharest: NIS.
- NIS (2024a). *NIS Press Release No. 83 / April 5, 2024 Population by residence* on January 1, 2024 reached 21,833.2 thousand people*.
- NIS (2024b). *NIS Press Release 85/2024*.
- NIS (2025). *Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2025*. Bucharest: NIS.
- OECD (2020). *Preventing Harmful Alcohol Use, OECD Health Policy Studies*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/6e4b4ffb-en>, 6. Policies and best practices for reducing the harmful consumption 2025, DE.
- OECD (2021). *Policies to combat harmful alcohol consumption include comprehensive strategies and target chronic alcohol users* Available at <https://www.oecdilibrary.org/sites/eeb99a6ben/index.html?itemId=/content/component/eeb99a6b-en>.
- OECD (2023). *PISA 2022 Results (Volume I): The State of Learning and Equity in Education*, [Resultatele PISA din 2022 (vol. I): situația în în educație].
- OECD (2024). *Education at a Glance Report, 2024*.
- Pisică S. (coord. ed.) (2022). *Demographic events in 2021*, NIS Bucharest.
- Pleteriu, R. (2025). *The effects of divorce on children, Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy*. Available at <https://www.pleteriu.ro/articol/efectele-divortului-asupra-copiilor>.
- PNAS (2024). *Families will change dramatically, 2024, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.
- Popa, D. (2024) *Romania - 17th place in the world in emigration. Almost 6 million Romanians have chosen to work and settle abroad. For every 6 Romanians who emigrate, we bring an immigrant (analysis)*. Available at <https://hotnews.ro/romnia-locul-17-n-lume-la-emigrare-aproape-6-milioane-de-romni-au-ales-sa-lucreze-si-sa-se-stabileasca-n-strainatate-la-6-romni-care-emigreaza-aducem-un-imigra-14982>.
- Porthan, E., Lindberg, M., Ekholm, E., Scheinin, N.M., Karlsson, L., Karlsson, H., & Härkönen, J., (2020). *Parental divorce in childhood does not independently predict maternal depressive symptoms during pregnancy*. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*.
- Psychology Monitor (2023). *Inspirational Minute: Alcoholism in the Family*, 23 Apr. Available at <https://monitorulpsihologiei.com/minutul-de-inspiratie-alcoolismul-in-familie/> of alcohol Preventing Harmful Alcohol Use | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org).
- Romania Journal (2026). *Nearly Half of Parents Working Abroad Won't Spend Easter with Kids*, April 7. Available at <https://www.romaniajournal.ro/society-people/nearly-half-of-parents-working-abroad-wont-spend-easter-with-kids/>.
- Roșu, R. (2024). *Children's Day in statistics: The number of children in Romania has decreased by 80,700 in the last year, and the number of children born in 2023 is the lowest since 1930. Only 70% of school-age children are enrolled in education*. Available at <https://www.zf.ro/zf-24/ziua-copilului-statistici-numarul-copilor-romania-s-redus-ultimul-22393128>.

- RPL (2011). *Population and Housing Census (Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor)*.
- RPL (2021). *Population and Housing Census (Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor)*.
- Save the Children, Romania (2025). Available at <https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/sites/ro/files/2024-04/36-dintre-copiii-cu-parintii-plecati-au-si-mama-plecata.-studiu-regiunea-sud-vest-oltenia.pdf>.
- SOEC (2017). *Statistical Office of the European Commission*.
- SOEC (2019). *Statistical Office of the European Commission*.
- Stan, V. (2024). *Children transformed into drug traffickers. How they ended up in the hands of networks in Romania. Prison interview with a former drug dealer*. Available at <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/copii-transformati-in-trafficanti-de-droguricum-au-ajuns-pe-mainile-retelelor-din-romania-interviu-in-inchisoare-cu-un-fost-trafficant-2989237>.
- UN (United Nations) (2016). Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.
- UNICEF (2025). *The State of the World's Children 2024, The future of childhood in a changing world*
- UNODC (2025). *World Drug Report 2025, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, quoted by EFE*.
- WHO (2025). Available at https://www.who.int/health-topics/alcohol#tab=tab_1.
- WOM (2024). *World Organization for Migration, Bucharest Center for Economy & Society*.
- World Vision Romania (2024). *Well-being of children in rural areas (WHO)*, Available at https://www.who.int/health-topics/alcohol#tab=tab_1.