

STEPS TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE: THE NATIONAL PROGRAMME OF THE GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA "OUT OF CARE FOR CHILDREN"

Corneliu-Marius Cioara ¹

*University of Oradea
Romania*

Abstract

Considering the new challenges and threats children are exposed to, especially those consecutive to the COVID 19 pandemic conditions, one of the main concerns of the Government of Romania lately has been to develop a national programme designed to provide psycho-emotional support, so as to increase children's welfare and safety. Among the adopted measures, the public financial support for free sessions of counselling and psychotherapy for children makes Romania one of the few European countries that directly and concretely support the psycho-emotional health of their offspring. The present paper intends to disseminate The National Programme of the Government of Romania "Out of Care for Children" among professionals, highlighting its aims, intervention areas, specific activities, eligibility criteria and procedural aspects.

Keywords: psychotherapy; counselling; psycho-emotional support; public funding

Empirical data cited into the Government of Romania Emergency Ordinance no. 105/2021 reveals that out of the 8700 pupils questioned during and after the pandemic period, when restrictive measures of circulation and social contact were adopted in order to prevent the COVID 19 virus from spreading, 75% reported serious anxiety symptoms, while only 5% could afford psychological assistance, even if up to 23% reported that it would be required. Factors like social isolation, the lack of access to formal education, inadequate emotional support and the increasing incidence of domestic and online violence are often invoked as being responsible for such a situation. Under these circumstances, the Government of Romania developed the national programme "Out of care for children", which has as main objective to adopt measures designed to assure psycho-emotional support and increased safety for children.

¹ Lecturer, PhD, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social and Humanistic Studies, University of Oradea, Romania; E-mail: mcioara@uoradea.ro

Programme description

With a two-year period of implementation and approximately six-million-euro budget, the programme is a complex one and it includes activities like:

- Introducing a unique emergency phone number for children, 119, especially destined to notify the cases of abused children;
- Establishing a new alert service in real time for missing children: RoAlert missing children;
- Developing a platform containing open access informative materials written by specialists regarding children needs, emotional support, guides for early screening and emotional disease identification, monitoring children online activities, recognizing online abuse and its consequences;
- Introducing in the educational curriculum (into the existing area named Counselling and Orientation) new themes related to topics like understanding the specifics, contexts and consequences of basic emotions, emotional manifestation and emotion regulation;
- Developing institutional capacity by establishing specific structures into the educational management units, responsible for psychological support, child safety, optimizing educational climate and anti-bullying campaigns;
- Financial support from public funds for counselling and psychotherapy sessions for children.

In what regards the last aspect, which is the most relevant for the psychological community, it has to be known that up to 70000 hours of psychological assessing and intervention for children with psycho-emotional diseases consecutive to the pandemic period will be provided. For now, it is not mentioned if any type of psychotherapy is eligible and no intervention protocols or techniques are recommended, but it is expected that strong empirical-based psychological interventions will be encouraged, and clear figures specify that only one evaluation session and up to 10 intervention sessions can be funded throughout a year for one child.

Who can benefit from and who can provide psychological services?

Children up to the age of 18 or those who reach this age during the academic year can benefit from the psychological services included in the programme.

At the other end, in order to provide the psychological services mentioned above, a psychologist should fulfill the following conditions:

- To be a certified psychologist by The College of Psychologists from Romania in at least one of the following professional specialties: Educational psychology, School and vocational counselling,

Educational psychology for children with special needs, Psychotherapy, Counselling psychology or Clinical psychology;

- To be enrolled in *The unique register of psychologists with private practice right (part I - certificates)* as an active psychologist (not suspended);
- To own a private practice or to be employed in an official psychology private practice form (namely Individual psychology office, Associated psychology offices or Professional civil society of psychology) stated in *The unique register of psychologists with private practice right (part II – forms of praxis)*;
- To be enrolled in *The register "Out of Care for Children"*, managed by The College of Psychologists from Romania, which requires fulfilling all the above-mentioned requirements. The registration procedure is available at <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/248649>. In order to proceed with the registration process, please access <https://www.copsi.ro/index.php/inscriere-registru-din-grija-pentru-copii>.

Procedural aspects

In order for a child to be part of the programme and to benefit from the psychological services for free, the following steps must to be followed:

- Intimation of the child's need for support – it is a preliminary step when a child in a difficult situation is observed and reported; it can be done by parents, teachers, social workers, medical staff or local experts for national minority groups;
- Official recommendation – following intimation, professionals like general physicians, family or school doctors, school counsellors assess the situation and edit a recommendation for registration in the programme;
- Selecting a psychologist by the parent / legal trustee from a list published by The College of Psychologists from Romania (*The register "Out of Care for Children"*), available also in every school and family medical unit, is the third step;
- Psychological services: the psychologist assesses the child and records the conclusions in a report, on the grounds of which the assessed child can then be registered into the programme and follow up to 10 psychological intervention sessions during the time of a year.

Conclusions

Even if there are still unclear aspects, like who and how will finally decide that a case enters or not the programme, if it will be the psychologist or other professionals / commissions, what diseases make the object of the therapy sessions and what types of psychotherapy are considered, how the

progress / the benefits of the psychological intervention will be assessed and how and when the services will be paid, the programme is a hope giving step for a better future for the children in Romania.

Recommended readings:

- Colegiul Psihologilor din România. (2021). Procedură de înscriere în Registrul psihologilor acreditați să furnizeze serviciile de intervenție psihologică și psihoterapeutică pentru copii din cadrul Programului național de suport pentru copii în contextul pandemiei de COVID-19 – „Din grijă pentru copii”, nr. 7/noiembrie 2021. Monitorul Oficial nr. 1114/23.11.2021. Available at <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/248649>
- Guvernul României. (2021). Ordonanța de urgență nr. 105/2021 privind aprobarea și implementarea Programului național de suport pentru copii în contextul pandemiei de COVID-19 – „Din grijă pentru copii”. Monitorul Oficial, Partea I, nr. 917/24.09.2021. Available at <https://lege5.ro/gratuit/ha4dmnbqhaza/ordonanta-de-urgenta-nr-105-2021-privind-aprobarea-si-implementarea-programului-national-de-suport-pentru-copii-in-contextul-pandemiei-de-covid-19-din-grija-pentru-copii>
- Guvernul României. (2022). Copii din România pot beneficia – în premieră – de consiliere psihologică și psihoterapie în mod gratuit. 70000 de ore de terapie pentru copii – Programul Național – Din grijă pentru copii. Available at <https://gov.ro/ro/stiri/copiii-din-romania-pot-beneficia-in-premiera-de-consiliere-psihologica-i-psihoterapie-in-mod-gratuit-70-000-de-ore-de-terapii-pentru-copii-programul-national-din-grija-pentru-copii#null>.

Received
November 2022

Accepted
December 2022