

Child Abuse in Romania

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“A recent report suggests a growing number of Romanian children are being subjected to emotional, physical, and even sexual abuse in their own families.” This is how a 2002 RadioFreeEurope report commenced its account of child abuse in Romania. More than 18 years later, Statista reports almost 11 thousand child neglect cases and just under 4000 emotional, physical and sexual abuse ones. 18 years and no improvement has been achieved when it comes to the mishandling of children.

UNICEF published a press release in April this year claiming that children might, in fact, be at increased risk of harm online during the global COVID-19 pandemic. In an attempt at helping governments, ICT companies, educators and parents to protect children during lockdown, UNICEF Romania has released a statement intended to raise awareness about the dangers of excessive screen time for under-18's. Executive Director of the Global Partnership to End Violence, Dr. Howard Taylor stated: “School closures and strict containment measures mean more and more families are relying on technology and digital solutions to keep children learning, entertained and connected to the outside world.” The danger emerges – as Taylor notes – from the fact that “not all

children have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources to keep themselves safe online.”

Shortly after Romania joined the European Union in January 2007, “Humanium” published a report analyzing children’s rights in Romania and positioned Romania’s situation on the “Realization of Children’s Rights Index” at 8,54/10, claiming that the situation in Romania is “satisfactory”. Despite this rose-tinted, overly-positive analysis, the report then proceeds to outline Romania’s “very poor” economic state, the fact that 1% of children are working in Romania and the 10,000 figure which encompasses the number of unassisted pregnancies that occur yearly. The report claims that “in addition [to the figures states previously], girls are also victims of trafficking which often leads to prostitution. Abused by gangs, they often have little hope of escaping. They are subjected to psychological and physical trauma from which it is difficult to recover.”



In what the world bank now classifies as a “high income economy” - having achieved relative macroeconomic stability after the 1989 decline - the lack of education, health and public services in rural areas is striking. There are many major urban areas in Romania including Bucharest [capital], Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Iași, Constanța, Craiova, Brașov and Galați. However, more than 45.92 percent of Romania lives in rural areas, which are prone to severe poverty and lack of access to sanitation and educational and health facilities. These areas have the highest rates of child abuse which come as a result of a lowered “educational aspiration” of both children and adolescents. These statistics lead to “the appearance of frustration and thus the reproduction of feelings of alterity and marginality”, which, in return, makes children even more prone and vulnerable to abuse.

Child abuse is a concern all throughout the world, not solely in Romania. The World Health Organization regional office for Europe claimed that “at least 55 million children experience some form of violence in the WHO European Region”. The most common form of abuse is emotional (29.1%), closely followed by physical (22.9%) and sexual (9.6%).

The importance of these cases is neatly outlined by Dr. Bente Mikkelsen, WHO/Europe’s Director of the Division of Noncommunicable Diseases and Promoting Health through the Life-course. “Child trauma has a terrible cost, not only to the children and the adults they become, whose lives it wrecks, but to every country’s well-being and economy.” The Doctor goes on to present a possible outlook on the

future: “With political will, we can all tackle this. Every sector and part of the community can make a difference in making society safer for children.” The important thing here is that “we need to speed up.”

There is not nearly enough being done to improve the situation in nations such as Romania where political corruption and dishonesty remains as endemic as ever. Programs such as the INSPIRE package provided by WHO/Europe provide strategies to promote the “implementation and enforcement of laws; norms and values; safe environments; parent and caregiver support; income and economic strengthening; response and support services; and education and life skills.” These are the exact areas of our modern-day society that demand our focus.

2020 has been swept by a rise in youth activism and incentives to better the world. Change.org has multiple on-going child abuse and murder preventive petitions active. One of these, started by Governor Andrew M. Cuomo via a “Stop Abuse Campaign” has been signed by 7,281 people. Sadly, these numbers are not enough to raise awareness among policy makers who, whether we like it or not, are the only ones that can implement long-term effective change.

Regrettably, Romania has a history of child abuse – the worst of all being under Ceausescu’s communist regime. As the Guardian states, “by 1989, when the dictator was killed, up to 20,000 [children] had died in Romania’s children’s homes.



Now [30 years later] criminal cases may finally be brought.” Pictures of “emaciated children clothed in rags, looking into the camera with desperate eyes amid the squalid decay of the country’s orphanages” toured the world in the aftermath of the 1989 anti-communist 1989 revolution. Horrifyingly, in the three decades since his fall, “only a handful of people have faced legal punishment for their roles in Ceausescu’s repressive regime.” There have been no criminal cases over the tens of thousands of children mistreated by the regime’s inhumane “network of juvenile internment institutions”.

30 years later, the people responsible have still not been held accountable for their actions. Ana Blandiana, a renowned Romania poet, writes, “the point is not to put 90-year-olds in prison, the point is to speak the truth about the period to close this chapter.”

Romania needs governmental transparency, effective policy making, and an educational system that encourages its youth to stay in school. Unfortunately, it is not the only one.

For references, click [here](#).