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Child Protection as a Priority of Local Administrative Authorities — A Study at the Level of Suceava County Council

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Abstract: *This article explores the special role played by local administrative authorities in ensuring child protection in Romania, with a particular focus on the activities carried out by the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) Suceava, which operates under the authority of the Suceava County Council. The analytical approach is structured into eight sections, covering both the theoretical framework and legislative evolution of the child protection system, as well as institutional and strategic realities at both national and local levels. After outlining the general context, the study focuses on analyzing the functioning of DGASPC Suceava, highlighting the dynamics of resources, budget allocations, and the wide range of measures implemented. The analysis of the institution's outcomes—predominantly quantitative in nature—addresses key areas such as the prevention of child-family separation, the fight against abuse, the promotion of adoption, the development of alternatives to institutional care, and support for children with disabilities or those whose parents are working abroad, as well as actions aimed at preventing social exclusion. The study emphasizes the tangible impact of local administrative intervention on children's rights and underlines the complexity of interventions, which include psychological, legal, and social assistance services provided to minors in various risk contexts: children with disabilities, street children, youth leaving the protection system, children whose parents are abroad for work, and minors who are victims or witnesses in legal proceedings. Through the closure of all traditional placement centers and the development of small-capacity family- and residential-type services, the institution under analysis has aligned itself with the requirements of both national and county-level strategies in this field. The research also highlights inter-institutional collaborations, partnerships with non-governmental organizations, and the community prevention and education efforts carried out by mobile teams. Of particular importance for decision-makers and legislators are the SWOT analysis and the set of recommendations aimed at improving the results of DGASPC Suceava's activities in the area of child protection. Equally important and valuable is the Conclusions section. Despite the constant concern for supporting young people in their transition to independent living and integrating children into environments as close as possible to the family model, the author emphasizes the need for future research to expand on the impact of these interventions and the efficiency of the resources employed.*

Keywords: *child protection; strategy; public administration; child abandonment/separation; abuse/neglect/exploitation/trafficking; domestic violence; adoption; partnerships.*

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Introduction

Child protection is a fundamental right of every minor, and in the current European and national context, for social, political, legal, and other reasons, it is a priority for the local public administration authorities in Romania. Abuse, neglect, and exploitation are realities faced by many vulnerable families, and intervention by the authorities is important to ensure a safe and healthy environment for children's development. In Romania, child rights protection is regulated by several legal acts, and local authorities, including County Councils, through DGASPC, play a key role in their implementation. A World Bank study regarding the issues we are addressing (WB, 2022) shows that Romania is in a transition process from institutionalized child care to a model based on community services. This change involves the gradual closure of placement centers and the development of modern solutions to support children and their families, so that child separation from the family is avoided. Important in this process is that the disappearance of classic institutions is accompanied by the expansion of accessible local services – educational, medical, social, rehabilitation, or housing – that support the child's development in a family environment. Among these, day centers have proven to be among the most effective in preventing separation. In recent decades, Romania has made visible progress in reducing the number of institutionalized children by promoting care in family-type settings. Between 2010 and 2022, the number of minors in the special protection system decreased steadily, but at the beginning of 2022, there were still 44,334 children and young people in the system. Annually, between 2019 and 2021, more than 4,000 children were included in the system, the majority (over 89% in 2021) coming from families, with the rest abandoned in hospitals or found in various circumstances. Most of them were without disabilities (91%) and under 10 years old (65%), with an even distribution between girls and boys. In 2021, the age distribution of newly enrolled children was as follows: 0–2 years (26%), 3–6 years (20%), 7–10 years (19%), 11–14 years (22%), 15–17 years (13%). The main causes of child separation from the family are related to neglect, abuse, or exploitation (55%), but also to social problems (26%) such as poverty, poor living conditions, disorganized families, minor parents, or deviant behaviors of adults. In this context, strengthening prevention services is extremely important, as they must become a central pillar of efforts to support families and reduce the number of children entering the protection system.

Our approach aims to analyze the child protection measures implemented at the national level, evaluate their impact on protected children,

and identify the challenges local authorities face in implementing these measures. In addition, proposals to improve the child protection system will be discussed, considering the economic, social, and institutional context of the Bukovina Region, based on the data and information provided by DGASPC Suceava.

The structure of the paper is as follows: (1) Introduction; (2) Theoretical framework concerning child protection issues; (3) Brief presentation of the current status of child protection at the national level; (4) Romania's strategic vision; (5) Public administration bodies involved in ensuring child rights protection; (6) Evolution of the Romanian regulatory framework affecting the child protection system; (7) Suceava County Council (DGASPC), a link in the child protection system: Specific activities, results, and some perspectives (divided as follows: 7.1 - Organization and functioning of DGASPC Suceava, 7.2 - Dynamics of human resources and main budgetary elements, 7.3 - Implementation of institutional measures in the child protection system at the 2023 level and some trends of specific indicators from 2015–2023, 7.4 – SWOT analysis and recommendations for improving the results of DGASPC Suceava's activities ("child protection" aspect)); (8) Conclusions.

Regarding the research methodology, we opted for a qualitative approach based on documentary analysis of the national legislative and strategic framework, correlated with a case study regarding the activity of DGASPC Suceava. Official data, institutional reports, and sources from the specialized literature were used to identify trends, local practices, and perspectives in the field of child protection.

Theoretical framework concerning child protection issues

The issue of child protection is of paramount importance in the current stage. Several researchers have focused on this topic (Bucur, 2015; Neamtu, 2011; Muntean & Sagebiel, 2007; Spânu, 1988), and their works highlight the conceptual congruence that child protection is, in fact, a set of legislative, institutional, and social measures aimed at guaranteeing the fundamental rights of children, ensuring their healthy development and protection from any form of abuse. Moreover, a special branch of law has even developed in this regard (FRA, 2015; Emese, 2007; Mateescu & Gheorghe-Bădescu, 2008; Balahur, 2001). Most of the leading researchers argue that for genuine child protection, it is necessary, in addition to interventions aimed at preventing abuse and neglect, to adequately promote the educational environment, health protection, and the social integration of vulnerable children.

Law no. 272/2004, based on the values enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, regulates in Romania the set of rights children benefit from, as well as the institutional interventions necessary for their protection (RP, 2004). The legal act does not limit child protection to managing cases of abuse or neglect, but extends this protection to proactive measures aimed at preventing child separation from the family, while simultaneously promoting support for parents and the child's harmonious development in the family environment. The national child protection system is anchored both in domestic legislation and in Romania's international obligations, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1990, which emphasizes every child's right to protection without discrimination (United Nations, 1989), as well as the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1950). The adaptation of Romanian legislation aimed not only at aligning with these international standards but also at strengthening the responsibility of the natural family and community in raising the child, encouraging family reintegration when possible. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the state intervenes only when the family cannot provide optimal care conditions. Thus, state institutions have been redefined as support actors for parents and legal representatives, offering them assistance in fulfilling their parental responsibilities. Currently, local public authorities are tasked with informing families about children's rights and the possibilities for accessing social assistance and protection services, actively contributing to preventing social vulnerabilities (PC, 2016).

Synthesis of the current state of child protection in Romania

Between 2015 and 2020, Romania's child protection system made remarkable progress in terms of regulating its areas of intervention, promoting the deinstitutionalization process, and supporting the transition to community-based child care. At the same time, services were established to prevent the separation of children from their families, and integrated social support models were developed. However, children remain the most vulnerable category in the face of the risk of poverty and social exclusion in Romania. Although recent trends show a slight decrease in this risk, EUROSTAT data indicates that 38.1% of Romanian children live under such conditions—a considerably higher percentage than the European Union average (about 14% above it) (RG, 2023a). Moreover, the social assistance system remains underdeveloped relative to actual needs, particularly due to chronic underfunding—Romania having the lowest social expenditure in the EU (14.4% of GDP in 2017)—and due to the shortage of qualified personnel

in many administrative-territorial units (ATUs). Although the law requires each ATU to have a public social assistance service (SPAS), only 792 of them are accredited to provide such services. Considering there are 3,187 ATUs in the country (including the sectors of Bucharest), it results that only about a quarter meet this condition (RP, 2012). Additionally, there are notable imbalances between the regions of the country and between urban and rural areas: only 21% of rural ATUs have accredited social services, while in urban areas the percentage reaches 63% (RG, 2023a). An important factor for the effective functioning of these services is the presence of qualified personnel. According to data from the Ministry of Labor in 2018, approximately 2,500 social workers were working within SPASs at the level of municipalities, towns, and communes. Between 2014 and 2019, Romania intensified the deinstitutionalization process, reducing by about 7,000 the number of children in the special protection system and increasing by over 8,500 the number of children supported through family separation prevention services. Thus, the number of minors in residential centers decreased by over 5,500 during this period, reaching 15,993 in September 2019 (RG, 2023a). Reducing dependence on institutional centers was made possible by expanding forms of family-based protection, such as placement with relatives or foster care. In the past three years, the number of children in classical or modular centers decreased by about 2,000, and 23 such institutions were closed. While in 2014 there were 166 centers (83 classical and 83 modular), by December 2019 this number had dropped to 143 (91 classical and 52 modular). A significant decrease was observed in the number of centers dedicated to children with disabilities—25 of them were closed—while two new units were created for children without disabilities (RG, 2023a). Even though the total number of centers did not drastically decrease, the number of children cared for in them dropped from 7,974 in 2014 to 4,427 in 2019. A similar trend is observed in the centers operated by NGOs, where the number of units decreased from 36 to 27. For children between the ages of 0 and 2 benefiting from residential services, the number dropped from 716 to 359. Additionally, although the ban on institutionalizing children under the age of 7 came into force only in 2019 (previously it was 3 years), the number of children between the ages of 3 and 6 nonetheless significantly decreased between 2014 and 2019—from 2,032 to 665 (RG, 2023a). In our view, it is concerning that in Romania there are numerous "blank spots" of essential services for preventing the separation of children from their families, specifically a large number of communities without individual services and groups (Figure 1).

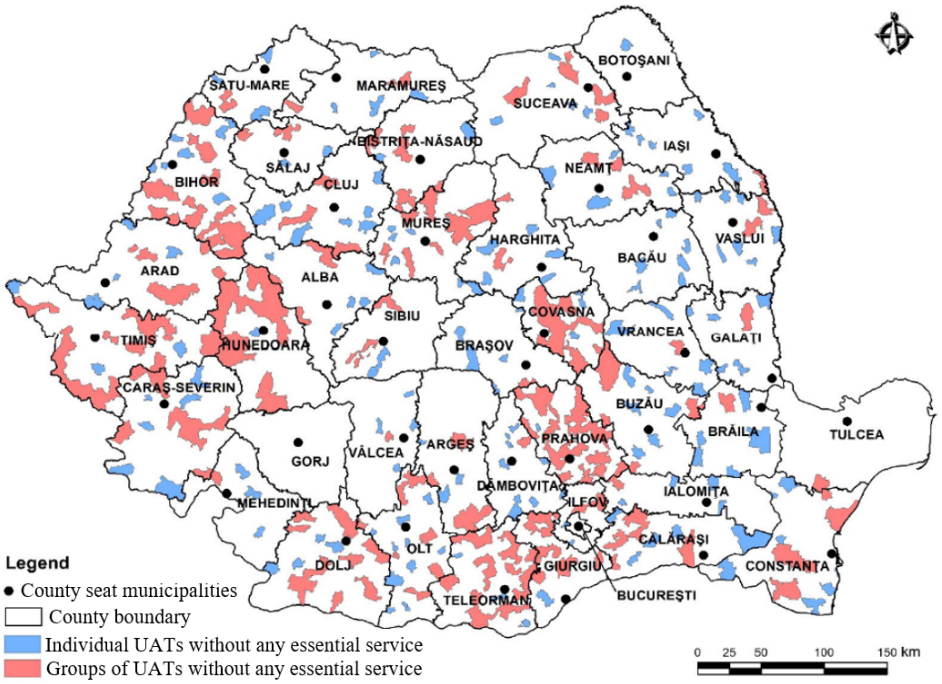


Figure 1. White areas of essential services for preventing child separation from family (individual and group) (WB, 2022)

The territorial analysis reveals that the so-called "blank zones" — meaning localities without adequate access to social services — are predominantly distributed in isolated, individual areas in the North-East and South-East regions of the country. In contrast, in the West and South-Muntenia regions, the deficiencies manifest in grouped forms, creating territorial clusters. On a national level, approximately 70% of administrative-territorial units (ATUs) are part of such groupings, with only 41% of localities in the South-East and 47% in the North-East falling into this category. However, in the South and West regions, the concentration is significantly higher, with 82% and 84%, respectively, of ATUs situated in continuous territorial clusters (WB, 2022).

Building on these findings, the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities (MFTES) has formulated new strategic directions, embodied in the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights 2022–2027, titled "Protected Children, Safe Romania," along with an operational plan dedicated to its implementation.

The strategic vision of Romania

As mentioned previously, the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights "Protected Children, Safe Romania" (2022–2027) aims to ensure the real exercise of children's rights, including those facing heightened vulnerability. The main objective is to facilitate universal and non-discriminatory access to quality public services in all important aspects of life, with the active involvement of children in this process (RG, 2023b). Moreover, it is considered that, regarding the EU Strategy on children's rights, "Its main ambitious objective is to offer children in the European Union and around the world the best possible life. The strategy reaffirms the rights and role of children in our society. Children inspire us and are at the forefront when it comes to raising awareness about crises related to nature and climate change, discrimination, and injustice. They are both the citizens and leaders of today and the leaders of tomorrow. The objective of this strategy is to encourage us to take on the common responsibility of uniting our efforts to respect, protect, and implement the rights of every child and to build together with children healthier, more resilient, fairer, and more equal societies for all." (EC, 2021). We emphasize that the interventions of the European Union in this area are based on Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which provide the legal basis for youth policies. Furthermore, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU includes specific provisions — Article 24 concerning children's rights and Article 32 regarding the protection of young people in the labor market and the prohibition of child labor exploitation. The Romanian national strategy was developed through an extensive consultation and inter-institutional collaboration process: the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) coordinated efforts along with relevant ministries, public institutions with responsibilities in the field, non-governmental organizations supporting children, student and child associations, international partners specialized in children's rights, and representatives from the academic environment. The anticipated results of this strategy are structured around 19 target objectives, defined for each thematic area covered by the document, with deadlines set for 2027. Achieving these results will be possible through the implementation of a set of general and specific objectives aimed at addressing persistent challenges that were not fully resolved in the previous strategy. The objectives with particular impact on ensuring the exercise of children's rights are presented in Figure 2, and the related targets are illustrated in Figure 3.



Figure 2. Objectives with particular impact on ensuring the exercise of children's rights

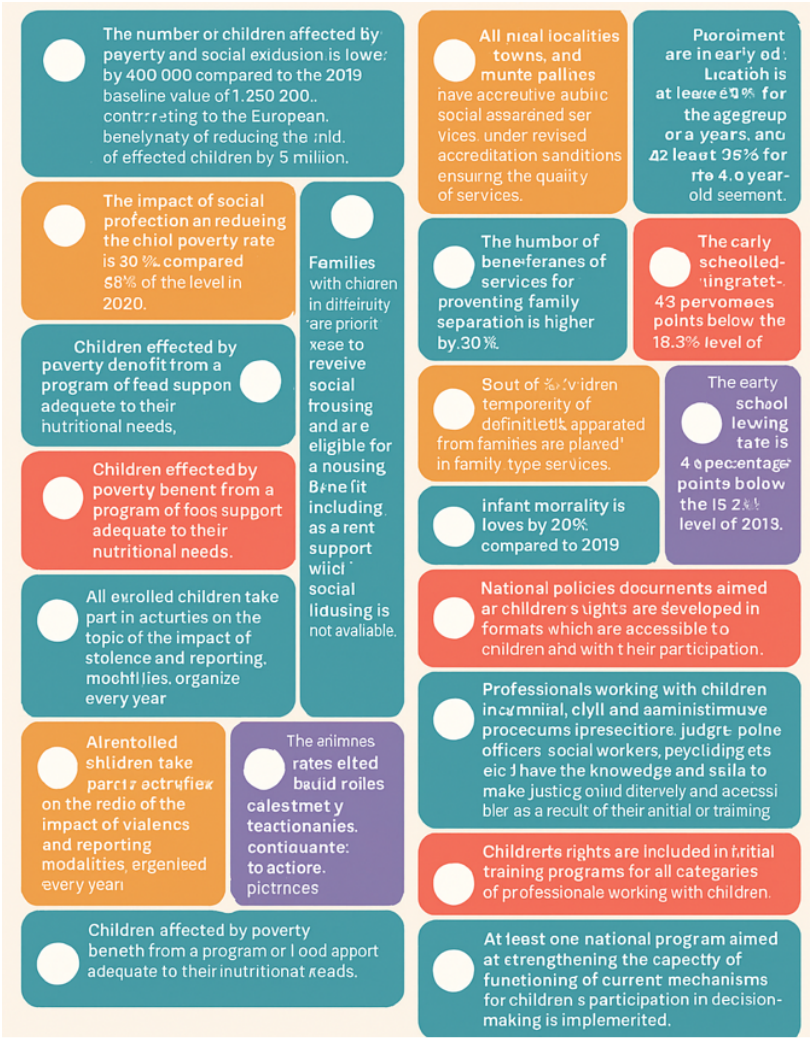


Figure 3. Targets of the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child (2023-2027)

Undoubtedly, the implementation of the Strategy will have a significant impact on improving the living conditions of children in Romania, highlighting the importance of fully guaranteeing their fundamental rights. The strategic document comprehensively addresses key areas that directly influence children's lives — from healthcare and education to the social protection system, juvenile justice, and strengthening their involvement in decisions that affect them. At the same time, the Strategy supports Romania's international commitments, particularly those undertaken in the context of

implementing Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004 regarding the establishment of the European Child Guarantee. The main goal of this instrument is to facilitate access for children in vulnerable situations to essential services such as education, healthcare, and social support.

Public administration bodies involved in ensuring the protection of children's rights

According to the Romanian Constitution, Article 49 – Protection of Children and Youth, "(1) Children and youth enjoy a special protection and assistance regime in the exercise of their rights; (2) The state provides child allowances and assistance for the care of sick or disabled children. Other forms of social protection for children and youth are established by law; (3) The exploitation of minors, using them in activities that may harm their health, morality, or put their life or normal development at risk, is prohibited; (4) Minors under the age of 15 cannot be employed as salaried workers; (5) Public authorities are obligated to contribute to ensuring conditions for the free participation of youth in the political, social, economic, cultural, and sports life of the country." (RP, 2003). The transformations regarding child protection in Romania began after 1990, but truly structural reforms took shape only in 1997, when a new child protection system was established, based on decentralization. At that time, the coordination and management responsibilities were transferred from central authorities to county-level authorities through the creation of 41 County Directorates for Child Protection and similar structures in each of the six sectors of the capital city (ANPDCA, 2024). These entities became responsible both financially and operationally for managing situations involving vulnerable children, as well as for the administration of existing care institutions in their territorial areas. The main strategic direction of this new decentralized model was to prevent the institutionalization of children in large centers by supporting families in difficulty and, simultaneously, by reorganizing traditional institutions in favor of alternative solutions more friendly to child development. Several key factors favored the acceleration of these reforms, including the establishment of a specialized central structure – initially the Department for Child Protection, which later became the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) – as well as the transfer, starting in 2000, of responsibility for institutionalized children from the relevant ministries (health, education, etc.) to the county directorates, which now operate under the name of General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection. Regarding service organization, the current system is based on two major categories: services that prevent the separation of children from

parents and special services dedicated to children who have already been separated – either temporarily or permanently – from their biological families. Thus, three types of services have been developed (RP, 2004): (i) Day services, aimed at supporting families to prevent child separation, including daycare centers, parental counseling centers, support units for children with social and psychological difficulties, and services for pregnant women at risk of abandonment; (ii) Family-type services, in which the child is cared for in an environment similar to a family, at the home of a foster parent or within a substitute family; (iii) Residential services, where children receive care in a legally regulated institutional framework, such as placement centers (including family-type houses), emergency reception centers, and maternity centers. In Romania, the system for the protection and promotion of children's rights is supported by a network of institutions organized at multiple administrative levels (RG, 2017). At the central level, coordination is the responsibility of ANPDCA, which is under the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities (MFTES). Its role is to develop national policies and strategies in this field. At the county level, the responsibility lies with DGASPC, autonomous public institutions from a legal standpoint, under the authority of the County Council or, in the case of Bucharest, the local sector councils. DGASPCs are tasked with implementing social protection measures for various vulnerable categories: children, elderly people, persons with disabilities, families in difficulty, and others at risk. At the local level, within each urban or rural locality, Public Social Assistance Services (SPAS) operate. These are organized by the local councils of municipalities, cities, and communes, and among their tasks is the prevention of child separation from their families. In communes where no formal SPAS exists, the duties are taken over by designated public officials from the municipality's own apparatus. Regarding existing vulnerabilities at the rural level, data indicates that 42% of communes in Romania (approximately 1,188 units) face a high risk of child separation from the family environment (WB, 2022). These communities urgently need the development of social support services, including in education and health. The national classification of these communes is based on the combination of two criteria: the community risk index (IRC) and the presence of at least one marginalized area (ZRM) within the administrative unit, resulting in four distinct types of vulnerable communities (Figure 4).

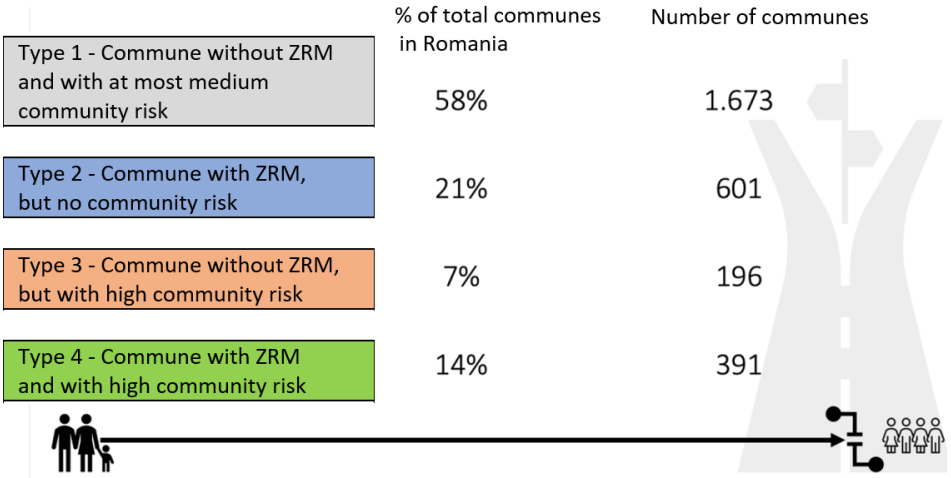


Figure 4. National typology of vulnerable/marginalized communities (WB, 2022)

Note: Total number of communes = 2.861.

Marginalized Areas represent deeply disadvantaged territories where residents face multiple difficulties: educational levels are low, with the majority having only secondary education or less, and income sources primarily come from occasional work or subsistence agriculture. Housing is often inadequate—overcrowded, without access to important utilities such as running water or electricity—even by modest rural standards. These communities are labeled as "problematic" because they concentrate a series of social vulnerabilities: high poverty rates, low levels of functional literacy, lack of skills demanded by the labor market, numerous single-parent families, a large number of children, and a high frequency of juvenile delinquency (WB, 2022). Compared to other settlements, marginalized areas—especially those in rural environments—are hard to access due to poor road infrastructure, face unsafe housing, heightened exposure to dangerous natural phenomena (such as floods or landslides), as well as the absence or poor quality of essential public services (banking, transport, education, healthcare). Predictably, most communes in this situation are found in the country's poorest regions, such as Dolj, Vaslui, Iași, Bacău, and Buzău counties. To manage these challenges, local administrations are responsible for involving the community in the process of diagnosing and solving social problems, particularly those affecting children. In this regard, community consultative structures can be established, consisting of relevant members of the community: local entrepreneurs, representatives of religious denominations, teachers, medical staff, local counselors, or police representatives. These groups can intervene in specific

social cases but also define strategic directions for improving the overall quality of life in the community. The mandate of these structures is formalized through administrative acts issued by local public authorities.

The evolution of the national regulatory framework pertaining to the child protection system

After Romania's accession to the European Union, the legislative framework governing the functioning of public institutions involved in guaranteeing children's rights underwent a complex review process. Law 272/2004, which regulates the protection and promotion of children's rights, was thoroughly reassessed, and in 2013, substantial amendments were adopted. These legislative adjustments were driven by the real needs emerging in the practice of responsible institutions, as well as by the increasingly evident social changes in the post-accession context. Among the new challenges addressed by the legislation are the growing number of children left in the country while their parents work abroad, the right of children to maintain contact with the parent who does not live with them on a constant basis, and the clear regulation of activities carried out by minors in areas such as art, sports, advertising, or modeling. Moreover, the importance of strengthening the role of the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) in coordinating local social services was emphasized, with the goal of enhancing the capacity of local authorities to prevent the separation of children from their families. However, the continuous evolution of society, as well as the specific needs of children in the special protection system, necessitated a new reassessment of Law 272/2004. The reforms assumed at the government level aimed not only to continue transforming the protection system but also to constantly adapt it to new social realities and contemporary values. Thus, starting in 2018, there was an acute need to complete and clarify the provisions of the law to reflect the changing perspectives on children's rights and to respond more effectively to the diversity of situations they face. Evaluations carried out by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights (ANPDCA) highlighted several deficiencies in the functioning of the special protection system. Correcting these dysfunctions required the revision of the existing regulations to ensure that policies and strategies applied in the field were implemented coherently and uniformly at the national level. Furthermore, a significant diversification of institutional forms of residential protection was observed, which led to the need to review the conceptual foundations of special protection in these structures. This paradigm shift occurred in the context of the central authorities' commitment to closing the last remaining traditional-type centers still in operation by 2020. The reorganization of residential

protection services, proposed through a legislative project (RP, 2018), was centered on improving the assurance and protection of each child's rights, adapting the legislative framework to the realities and changes in society. The aim was to complete the deinstitutionalization process by closing the last traditional institutions still functioning nationwide. In the medium term, the creation of a space closer to a family environment was envisioned, which would make the child protection system not only more effective but also more cost-efficient. Relevant modifications were made through the adoption of additional regulatory acts (RP, 2022, 2024abc), which aimed to clarify the term "extended family" in order to accelerate the process of identifying the most suitable special protection measures for children. An important objective was to avoid delays in the decision-making process caused by searching for relatives who, in many cases, did not have a real relationship with the child. Regarding the protection of children's rights, an article was also introduced regarding the mandatory consent of children aged 14 and over. In case of refusal, the court would determine the protection program. The legislative project also addressed the increase in violence in schools, introducing measures to strengthen the role of teachers in preventing and combating this phenomenon, which severely affects the development and education of children. Schools were required to maintain an adequate environment and prevent aggressive behaviors, including modern forms of violence such as bullying or cyberbullying. Evaluations revealed that not all case managers are responsible when it comes to decisions regarding family reintegration or adoption as the final outcome of protection plans. Additionally, the responsibility of parents was more clearly regulated, obligating them to contribute to the child's maintenance if the financial contribution could not be paid. To avoid legal ambiguities, the amount of the monthly contribution was specified as soon as the protection measure was applied. In the context of international migration, especially that of children, the project included the obligation for DGASPC (General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection) to designate a person responsible for assisting minor asylum seekers during legal procedures. The amendments also regulated in detail the designation of the person who should ensure the care and upbringing of children whose parents work abroad, extending this possibility to other individuals in the child's social network who had an attachment relationship with the child. Furthermore, the norms regarding the composition of the child protection committee and the evaluation criteria for children with disabilities were redefined. Given the need to provide "an environment as close as possible to a family setting for children cared for in residential institutions," the types of services included in this category were clearly defined. Thus, residential services include: family-type homes, apartments, emergency reception centers, and

maternity centers. A family-type house represents a dwelling that ensures the main conditions of rest, food preparation, education, and hygiene for a group of 12-16 children who are in emergency placement or foster care (RP, 2018). An apartment is a similar dwelling, intended for a maximum of 6 children in emergency or foster care. The emergency reception center provides temporary shelter for up to 6 months and can accommodate up to 30 children in emergency situations. To prevent the transformation of existing foster care centers into reception centers, a maximum of three such centers per county was established. The maternity center provides temporary shelter for mothers and children for up to a maximum of two years, with a capacity of 9 mother-child pairs. Considering the effectiveness of family placement or placement with individuals or relatives, a measure was introduced to encourage those wishing to become involved in raising a child separated from their family by offering a monthly allowance of 400 lei, with the possibility of increasing it. In parallel, to support the deinstitutionalization process, the placement of children in residential institutions with characteristics of traditional centers was prohibited starting January 1, 2021. This measure aimed at the gradual closure of old institutions and the strengthening of alternative service networks. Additionally, local authorities and private social service providers were required to reorganize these services in accordance with the new regulations, closing placement centers or reorganizing residential services by December 31, 2020. Continuing Romania's government measures to improve the quality of life for young people leaving the child protection system, DGASPC was required to assist these young people in finding a job and accommodation during the last six months of their stay in the system. Moreover, "they will be monitored by the public social assistance service for two years, and the allowance provided upon leaving the system will be increased from the value of a minimum gross salary to the value of three minimum gross salaries" (RP, 2018). Furthermore, a new measure was introduced recently through another regulatory act (RP, 2024c). This measure pertains to the possibility for children aged 14 and older to participate in decision-making processes in central and local public administration. Thus, "Starting in 2025, Parliament, the Presidential Administration, the Government, local public administration authorities, as well as public institutions under their authority or coordination, will organize at least one annual consultation session with children, which will consist of an event or activity dedicated to ensuring a protected dialogue environment that encourages participation on issues of interest to them" (RP, 2024c). These institutions will develop a system to consult children on topics affecting them, activated based on the activities and decisions of the institutions when they are relevant to children's rights.

Suceava County Council (DGASPC), a link in the child protection system: specific activities, results, and some perspectives

The local public administration authorities, particularly through specialized institutions, are responsible for implementing social assistance and child protection measures at the local level. Their scope of activities is very diverse (Figure 5).

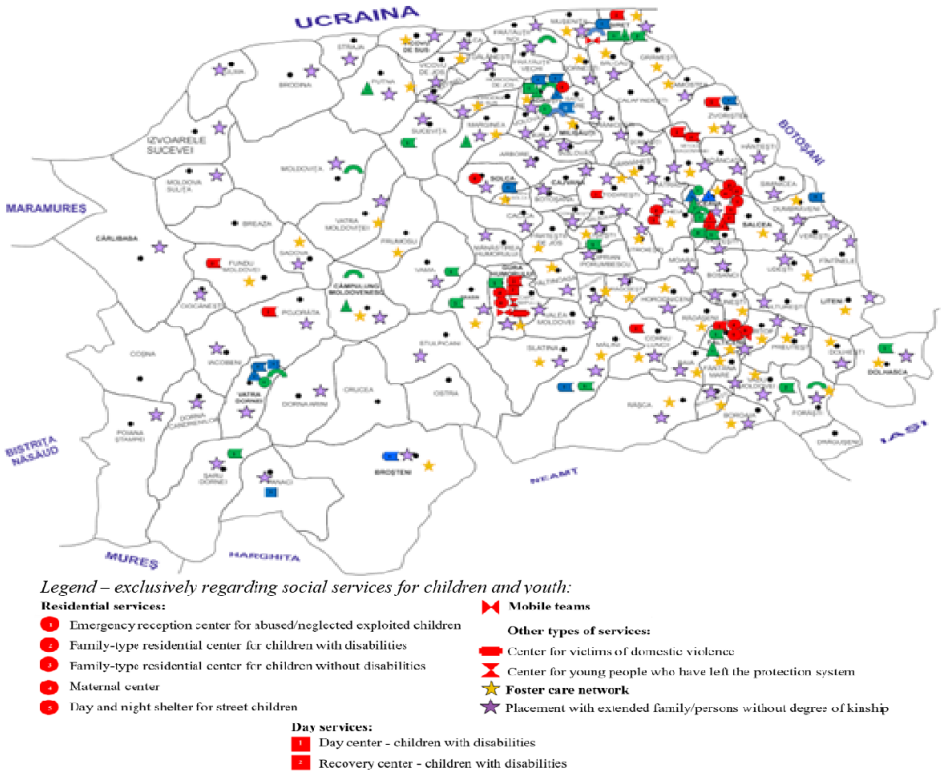


Figure 5. Map of social assistance and child protection centers/points – Suceava County (DGASPCSV, 2024a)

In Suceava County, the area we analyzed presents certain particularities. Thus, the Social Services Development Strategy for the period 2022-2027, developed for Suceava County, emphasizes that it was created in accordance with current legislation, integrating sectoral strategies and elements from the plans of other institutions or authorities that have direct or indirect responsibilities in the social field at the county level (CJ Suceava, 2022). According to government regulations on the organization and functioning of public social services and the indicative staff structure (RG,

2017), the strategy development process takes into account the following aspects: (a) The territorial characteristics of Suceava County; (b) The socio-economic and cultural development level of the administrative-territorial units in the county; (c) Demographic indicators, such as the population structure by age, sex, occupation, life expectancy, migration, etc.; (d) Types of difficult situations, vulnerability, dependency, or social risk, as well as an estimate of the number of beneficiaries; (e) Types of social services necessary to meet the identified needs and the justification for choosing them. In this context, Suceava County faces major challenges related to economically and socially disadvantaged areas, low-income families, various infrastructure problems, and the forced migration of the workforce to more developed countries, creating significant difficulties in ensuring the protection of children's rights in the Bucovina area. The situation of children in the protection system (family and residential) as of 30.09.2023, in comparison with the North-East region, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Children in the protection system (family and residential) in RDNER counties (2023). (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

NE Region / Counties	**Children in Family-Type Services**			**Children in Public Residential Services**	**Children in Private Residential Services**	**Total**
	With professional foster carers	With relatives up to 4th degree	With other families/persons			
Botoşani	490	199	55	257	71	1072
Neamț	502	225	42	286	47	1102
Suceava	538	283	46	281	10	1167
Bacău	826	145	80	152	138	1341
Vaslui	1352	566	125	228	6	2277
Iaşi	1467	578	217	575	36	2873

On the other hand, another concerning aspect is that Suceava County ranks at the national top in terms of the highest number of children whose parents are working abroad (Table 2).

Table 2. Children with parents working abroad from RDNER counties (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Region/ County	Children with parents working abroad, of which:			
	Children with both parents away	Children with only one parent away	Children with asingle parent away	**Total**
Total counties	10581	49296	8256	68133
North-East	3259	19017	2671	24947
Suceava	578	5789	350	6717
Botoșani	712	3078	857	4647
Iași	600	2911	418	3929
Neamț	446	2766	372	3584
Vaslui	577	2636	367	3580
Bacău	346	1837	307	2490

DGASPC Suceava holds key responsibilities, considering that the majority of children at risk are protected through placement centers or family reintegration programs, all of which are coordinated by the county authorities.

Organization and functioning of DGASPC Suceava

The General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) operates under the authority of the Suceava County Council, as a "public institution of county interest, with legal personality, operating in accordance with its Organization and Operating Regulation and the applicable legislation" (DGASPCSV, 2024c). Through its actions, DGASPC aims to improve the services provided and to implement the mandatory minimum standards to ensure quality services within residential, family-type, and day-care structures. DGASPC was established in September 1997 at the level of the Suceava County Council, by County Council Decision no. 25/1997, based on Government Emergency Ordinance no. 26/1997, as a public institution of local interest with legal personality. The main purpose of establishing DGASPC was to monitor the situation of children in difficulty, to prepare and propose appropriate protection measures, and to ensure their proper implementation throughout the county. In 2005, the entire social assistance system was reorganized through the creation of DGASPCs at county level and in the sectors of the Municipality of Bucharest, bringing all support services for people in difficulty under the coordination of a single institution. During the same period, Suceava County Council adopted Decision no. 18/23.03.2005, establishing DGASPC Suceava as a public institution under its subordination, resulting from the merger of child protection services and those intended for adults with disabilities. This initiative brought forward new

priorities, such as promoting the rights of people with disabilities, combating their discrimination and marginalization, improving their quality of life within the protection system, and initiating the process of closing traditional centers for adults with disabilities, starting in 2018, in favor of developing protected housing and family-type homes, as well as reintegrating rehabilitated individuals into their families. DGASPC Suceava's mission is to provide specialized intervention in the "identification and resolution of social problems in the fields of child protection, family, single individuals, the elderly, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable categories, with the goal of implementing national and county social assistance strategies in accordance with national and international legislation" (DGASPCSV, 2024c). In this context, DGASPC aims to achieve governmental objectives in the field of social assistance by coordinating activities and managing available resources. The main functions of DGASPC Suceava include the development of social assistance strategies and plans, coordination of child protection and social assistance activities at county level, fund administration, collaboration with relevant social institutions, and ensuring the resources needed to implement anti-poverty and marginalization prevention programs. Moreover, DGASPC Suceava represents the County Council in the field of social assistance and child protection, both nationally and internationally. DGASPC Suceava's activities include child rights protection, social assistance for people with disabilities, support for the elderly, monitoring, information, and collaboration activities, as well as administrative and financial actions, including audit and control (DGASPCSV, 2024c). The main beneficiaries of the services provided by DGASPC Suceava include children living in families facing hardship, young people receiving special protection in residential or family-type services, as well as children and young people supported through day services such as day centers and recovery centers. Also included are adopted children, children with disabilities, those at risk of abandonment or abandoned in medical facilities, children separated from their families due to parental migration, young people leaving the protection system, children who have committed offenses but are not criminally liable, victims of abuse, domestic violence, trafficking or exploitation, as well as adults with disabilities and the elderly. As of December 31, 2023, DGASPC Suceava managed a diversified structure of social services, including 35 residential services for children and young people, among which 15 family-type homes (9 of them for children with disabilities), 16 apartments (4 for young people with disabilities), a maternal center, a respite center, an emergency reception center for abused or neglected children, and a shelter for street children (DGASPCSV, 2024b). In terms of day services, DGASPC Suceava provides

"a day center for children with disabilities, two recovery centers for these children, and three mobile teams active in the localities of Fălticeni, Gura Humorului, and Siret." The organization also manages a network of professional maternal assistants (AMP), as well as placements with extended families or individuals/families with no kinship ties. Regarding services for adults, DGASPC Suceava operates 18 residential services for "adults with disabilities, including 4 recovery and rehabilitation centers, 10 habilitation and rehabilitation centers, 2 care and assistance centers, and 2 protected homes." Additionally, there are two day services for adults with disabilities, including a day center and an outpatient recovery center. Furthermore, DGASPC also offers "other types of residential services, such as the Multifunctional Center for victims of domestic violence in Gura Humorului and the Social Multifunctional Center in the same locality," intended for young people transitioning out of the protection system.

Human resources dynamics and main budgetary elements

According to Suceava County Council Decision no. 226 of September 29, 2022, which approved the organizational chart and staffing structure of DGASPC Suceava, a total of 1,667 positions were planned at the beginning of 2023. Of these, 134 were public positions, including 18 management roles, and 1,533 were contractual positions, including 21 management roles and 460 positions for professional maternal assistants (AMP). Following the modification of the organizational chart and staffing structure, according to County Council Decision no. 122 of June 29, 2023, the total number of positions was reduced by 15, resulting in a total of 1,652 positions. Of these, 134 were public positions, including 18 management roles, and 1,518 were contractual positions, including 21 management roles and 460 positions for AMP. As a result of the reorganization of DGASPC Suceava, several significant changes occurred in the structure of social services, so that by the end of 2023, out of the 1,652 approved positions, 1,428 were filled, and 224 remained vacant. The institution's budget for the 2023 financial year amounted to 175,035,000 lei (with a budget execution of 141,288,469 lei), broken down by expenditure categories as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The budget of DGASPC Suceava, în LEI (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Name of indicators	Indicator Code	Annual budget provisions 2023	Budget execution as of 31.12.2023
Total expenses		175,035,000	141,288,469
Title I – Personnel expenses	10	101,000,000	95,497,380
Title II – Goods and services	20	28,120,180	21,756,293
Title IX – Social assistance	57	14,769,300	14,394,321
Title X – EU Funded projects under the financial framework 2014–2020	58	21,806,960	7,615,156
Title XI – Other expenses	59	1,262,000	1,243,786
Title XII – Projects financed from amounts representing financial assistance	60	51,765	51,770
Capital expenditures	70	8,0242,790	729,768

Implementation of institutional measures in the child protection system in 2023 and key trends in specific indicators observed during the 2015–2023 period

Prevention of child abandonment and separation from family

To prevent the separation of children from their families, DGASPC Suceava implements several specialized services (DGASPCSV, 2024c). In this context, the Blijdorp Romania Day Center for Children with Disabilities, with a capacity of 50 places, aims primarily to prevent child abandonment and institutionalization. It offers daily care, education, habilitation-rehabilitation, recreation, socialization activities, as well as counseling for developing independent life skills and school guidance. Additionally, support and counseling services are provided for parents or caregivers of children with disabilities, with activities tailored to the individual needs of each child within their socio-family context. Another important service is the Neuro-Psychomotor Recovery Center within the Social Services Center for Children with Disabilities, which has a capacity of 63 places. It offers personalized rehabilitation for children with severe or profound disabilities, through services such as kinesitherapy, speech therapy, education, occupational therapy, habilitation-rehabilitation, and psychological intervention. Support and counseling activities are also carried out for parents and others caring for children with disabilities, with a focus on the individual needs of each child. The Multifunctional Services Center for Children in Difficulty in Gura Humorului, with a capacity of 64 places, provides a wide range of services, including personalized intervention programs, psychological counseling, sensory and motor therapy, life skills training, and medical assistance. The goal of this center is to help children overcome the challenges they face, promoting

their social integration and preventing risks of social exclusion. Furthermore, DGASPC Suceava extends its interventions through the three mobile teams in Fălticeni, Gura Humorului, and Siret, which are part of the Residential Multifunctional Services Center Suceava. These teams are designed to offer specialized services aimed at preventing the separation of children from their families, thus supporting family integrity and combating social marginalization. The distribution of children benefiting from day services in the DGASPC Suceava structure, sorted by the degree of disability, is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Children benefiting from day services (sorted by degree of disability), 2023 (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Day service		Total beneficiaries	Degree of disability				
			Severe (I)	Severe	Medium	Mild	No disability
Neuro-psycho-motor recovery complex "Blijdorp - O Nouă Viață" Suceava	Daycare Center for Children with Disabilities Blijdorp Romania	45	43	2	0	0	0
	Neuro-Psycho-Motor Recovery Center	58	55	2	1	0	0
Multifunctional service center for children in difficulty Gura Humorului	Recovery Center	48	18	26	4	0	0
Multifunctional residential service center Suceava - Emergency reception center for abused, neglected, exploited children	Falticeni Mobile Team	54	5	11	0	0	38
	Gura Humorului Mobile Team	29	21	3	0	0	5
	Siret Mobile Team	30	9	0	1	0	20
Total		**264**	**151**	**44**	**6**	**0**	**63**

The Suceava Maternal Center is a residential service dedicated to maternal-infant protection, offering support to mother-child couples and pregnant women in difficulty. It provides "temporary accommodation, psychological and social counseling, medical assistance, socialization and leisure activities, as well as measures for reintegration into the family and community" (DGASPCSV, 2024b). The main goal of the center is the "proper application of the minimum mandatory standards for the protection of the mother and child in difficulty," playing an important role in supporting them through multidisciplinary intervention. The services offered by the center aim to prevent the placement of the child in the protection system by strengthening the attachment bond between the mother and child. Additionally, the center supports the personal development of mothers, raising awareness of the maternal role, and promoting stable family life, with a special focus on educating minor mothers about the importance of education and preventing abandonment. Informational activities on contraception and family planning are organized, as well as support for maintaining connections with extended

family and friends. After discharge, beneficiaries are informed about their rights and entitled benefits, and the center facilitates the preparation for their reintegration into the natural family. Furthermore, reintegration measures are carefully monitored and evaluated. At the end of 2023 (DGASPCSV, 2024b), the center had 10 beneficiaries: four children, four minor mothers, one pregnant minor, and one adult mother. During 2023, there were 29 child entries, originating from the community, from placement in the AMP system, or from other residential services. At the same time, 29 children left the center, either through reintegration into their families, transfer to another protection service, or at their request. As of December 31, 2023, "376 children were benefiting from private day services within Suceava County, of which 5 were for children with disabilities." (Table 5).

Table 5. Private day service children, by gender and age groups: (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Private day services	Total	Sex		Age groups (Years)					
		M	F	0-2	3-6	7-9	10-13	14-18	Over / more
"Sf. Vineri" Social Day Center Suceava	**25**	18	7	0	2	6	8	9	0
"Maria Ward" Day Center Rădăuți	**50**	25	25	0	8	19	19	4	0
Emanuel Recovery Day Center	**93**	64	29	5	40	25	23	0	0
Suceava Day Center (recovery center for children with disabilities) – HELP AUTISM	**17**	13	4	3	13	0	1	0	0
"Sf.Tereza" Day Center Fălticeni	**89**	59	30	4	27	32	18	8	0
"ATIPIC" Center (recovery center for children with disabilities) - AIAS	**30**	20	10	2	18	9	1	0	0
Elena Center for Counseling and Support for Parents and Children Rădăuți	**0**	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hope's Multifunctional Day Center Rădăuți	**56**	42	14	3	26	13	4	9	1
"Speranța" Day Center Siret	**16**	6	10	0	2	5	6	1	2
Total	**376**	**247**	**129**	**17**	**136**	**109**	**80**	**31**	**3**

Child protection against abuse, neglect, exploitation, and domestic violence

Within DGASPC Suceava, the Special Telecommunications Service (STS) has activated the "national helpline 119", dedicated to reporting cases of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of violence against children, according to Government Emergency Ordinance 105/2021, which regulates the "implementation of the national support program for children", carried out in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic ("Out of care for children"). The "Child Helpline" (119) operates 24/7 and is managed by specialized staff within the Residential Multifunctional Services Center in Suceava. In cases

requiring urgent intervention, the center's staff and mobile teams are responsible for intervention. The caller receives counseling and guidance to resolve the reported situation. In 2023, "990 cases of domestic violence were reported, of which 621 were confirmed, detailed as follows: 491 cases of neglect, 56 cases of emotional abuse, 62 cases of physical abuse, and 12 cases of sexual abuse. Out of the 621 confirmed cases, 163 children were integrated into the protection system, 16 children along with their mothers were sheltered in the Multifunctional Center for Victims of Domestic Violence in Gura Humorului, and 442 children remained in their families, benefiting from specialized services and continuous monitoring, including psychological counseling" (DGASPCSV, 2024b). The dynamics of abused, neglected, and exploited children from 2015-2023 are presented in Figure 6.

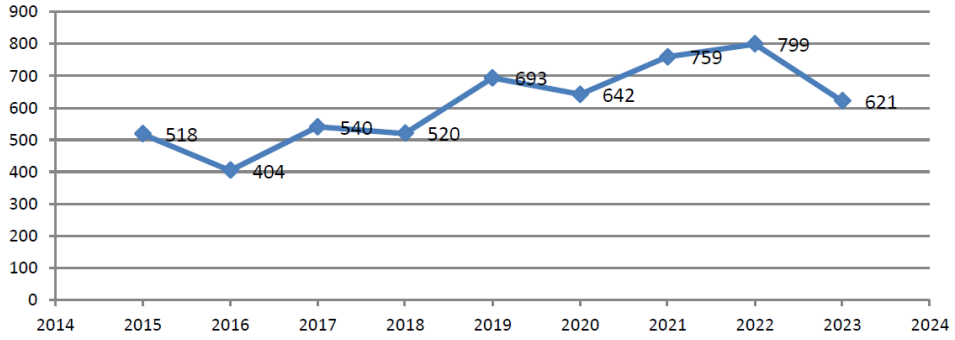


Figure 6. The dynamics of abused, neglected or exploited children (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

The Multifunctional Center for Victims of Domestic Violence in Gura Humorului is part of the DGASPC Suceava structure and was established in 2012 as a result of the implementation of a project dedicated to social inclusion. Specifically, it was created to address the need to provide specialized social assistance services for individuals affected by domestic violence. In 2023, 53 people (31 children and 22 adults) benefited from the services of this center (Table 6).

Table 6. Beneficiaries of the Gura Humorului Multifunctional Center based on their place of origin and gender (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Year	Total beneficiaries	Place of origin		Sex	
		Urban	Rural	M	F
2015	**37**	12	25	11	27
2016	**55**	19	36	18	37
2017	**52**	21	31	17	35
2018	**48**	4	44	12	36
2019	**61**	11	50	26	35
2020	**77**	14	63	24	53
2021	**88**	17	71	30	58
2022	**88**	20	68	34	54
2023	**53**	7	46	16	37

Within the Residential Multifunctional Services, the Emergency Reception Center for Abused, Neglected, and Exploited Children operates as a child protection service. Its purpose is to receive reports related to children in situations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation. This center intervenes in cases where children are in imminent danger within the family, whether it is the biological, extended, or substitute family, and where there is clear evidence that their life and safety are at risk. The center also provides telephone counseling and rapid interventions in urgent cases of this nature. In 2023, 10 such cases were reported, and the dynamics of these cases (entries and exits) for the years 2015-2023 are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. Evolution of emergency placement entries – abused, neglected, or exploited children (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
From the community	14	5	22	9	6	7	18	13	9
From placement in the extended family		1			1		2		
From placement with families/individuals without			1				1	3	
Degree of kinship							2	1	1
From placement in the AMP		1				1			
Total	**14**	**7**	**23**	**9**	**7**	**8**	**23**	**17**	**10**

Table 8. Evolution of emergency placement exits – abused, neglected, or exploited children (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Family reintegration	3			5	1	1	9	3	3
Transfer to other residential services	14	4	6	8	11	1	7	6	3
Transfer to family services		2	5		1	2	4	7	2
Transfer to other DGASPCs in the country		1	3				4	1	
Total	**17**	**7**	**14**	**13**	**13**	**4**	**24**	**17**	**8**

Supporting and promoting national adoption

The Adoption and Post-Adoption Office aims, through its activities, to support and facilitate national adoption, encourage this process, and provide services for both children eligible for adoption from the protection system and adoptive families. It also offers pre-adoption assistance, post-adoption services for adoptive parents and their children, as well as counseling for biological families, helping them understand the impact of adoption. In 2023, "21 national adoptions were approved for children from the DGASPC Suceava protection system and for 26 children from other counties benefiting from special protection measures." Additionally, for 19 children from the protection system, the measure of entrusting them for adoption was established, and adoption procedures were initiated for 70 children, for whom adoption was planned as the final objective in the Individualized Protection Plan. The evolution of adoptions between 2015 and 2023 is illustrated in Figure 7.

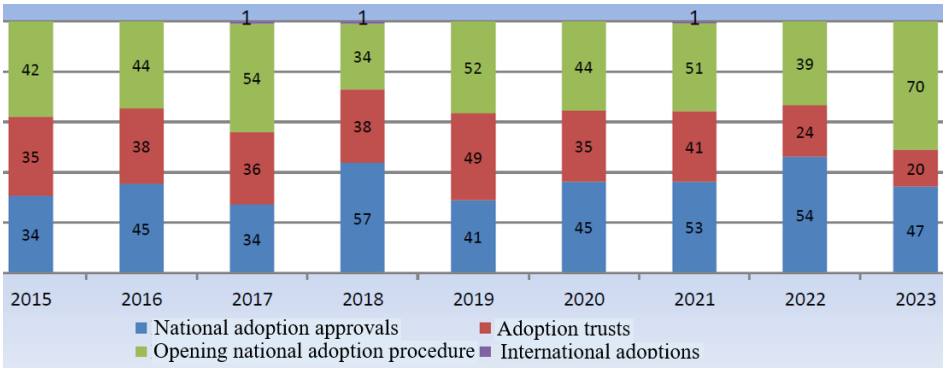


Figure 7. Evolution of adoptions (2015 – 2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Division by "sex and age group of children for whom in 2023 the adoption was approved / the measure of entrustment for adoption was established, and the adoption procedure was initiated" is presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Children included in the national adoption procedure (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Specification	Sex		Age groups (Years)					Total
	Male	Female	0-3	3-7	7-10	10-14	>15	
National adoption approvals	24	23	2	23	12	7	3	**47**
Adoption trusts	14	6	1	12	5	2		**20**
Opening national adoption procedure	37	33	7	32	17	13	1	**70**

Other activities carried out (DGASPCSV, 2024b): "46 individuals or families were evaluated and participated in courses for the development of parenting skills, and 37 families or individuals were certified as suitable for adoption through the organization of 12 training sessions. Additionally, meetings were organized with 105 individuals or families certified for adoption to view the profiles of hard-to-adopt children from the National Adoption Register. The Adoption and Post-Adoption Office monitored 127 national adoptions by preparing quarterly reports and organizing meetings within support groups, attended by adoptive parents. Their monitoring is conducted quarterly for 2 years after the adoption is finalized."

Development and diversification of alternative services to institutional care

The Foster Care Service aims to protect children who require special protection measures by ensuring their growth, care, and education through foster care. In 2023, the recruitment, training, and employment process of 150 foster parents (AMP) was completed (throughout the project, 164 foster parents were employed, and 14 of them ended their collaboration for various reasons). Between July and November, continuous professional development courses were held, attended by 456 foster parents, who also received 520 Android tablets, along with case managers and specialized staff of DGASPC Suceava. To improve the performance of foster parents, periodic training sessions were organized on operational procedures. Based on specialists' recommendations, a specially established commission approved the issuance of 42 certificates and the renewal of certificates for 119 foster parents. Additionally, quarterly reevaluations of the objectives in the "Individualized Protection Plan for Children and Youth in Foster Care" were carried out, and the results were: 83 children with the final goal of adoption, 406 with the final goal of reintegration into the family, and 217 with the final goal of socio-professional integration. As of December 31, 2023, the family protection system included "849 children and young people (75% of the total number benefiting from special protection), of which 516 were in foster care, 289 in placement with extended families, and 44 in placement with families or individuals without a kinship degree." The situation of foster parents with children in placement as of December 31, 2023, is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Professional foster parents with children in placement (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Childminder	AMP	Number of AMPs		Number of children	
Childminders with 1 child	AMP with a child with disabilities	**237**	44	**237**	44
	AMP with a child without disabilities		193		193
Childminders with 2 children	AMP with one disabled child and one non-disabled child	**133**	24	**266**	48
	AMP with two disabled children		5		10
	AMP with two non-disabled children		104		208
Childminders with 3 children	AMP with two non-disabled children and one disabled child	**3**	1	**9**	3
	AMP with one non-disabled child and two disabled children		2		6
Childminders with 4 child	AMP with two non-disabled children and two disabled children	**1**	1	**4**	4
Total		**374**		**516**	

The frequency of "placements/entries into family-type services (amp, extended family, families/persons without kinship)" is shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Entries into placement (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**	*	**
Placement at a PHA	73	13	50	8	66	20	40	18	82	23	88	24	119	9	123	20	68	9
Placement in an extended family	69	7	37	4	42	4	52	6	13	4	45	2	42	5	32	3	60	11
Placement with families / individuals	9	10	7	11	7	12	6	8	2	2	7	6	6	6	3	8	3	2
Total	**151**	**30**	**94**	**23**	**115**	**36**	**98**	**32**	**96**	**29**	**140**	**32**	**167**	**20**	**158**	**31**	**131**	**22**
	181		**117**		**151**		**130**		**125**		**172**		**187**		**189**		**153**	

*Note: *enter from the community; **enter from other protective measures.*

The dynamics of exits from family-type services during the period 2015 – 2023 (professional foster care, extended family, families/individuals without kinship) is shown in Table 12.

Table 12. Exits from family-type services (2015 – 2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	Family reintegrations	Revocations by operation of law (18 years)	Transfer to other protective measures	Trust for adoption/adoptions	Others	Total
2015	37	56	39	41	3	**176**
2016	32	48	38	39	1	**158**
2017	21	51	24	36	6	**138**
2018	18	65	29	40	11	**163**
2019	40	78	16	53	3	**190**
2020	34	63	11	39	7	**154**
2021	36	63	23	54	12	**188**
2022	42	110	42	35	7	**236**
2023	33	184	18	28	4	**267**
Total	**631**	**619**	**580**	**532**	**502**	**419**

Improving the quality of services provided by dgaspc suceava through the development of partnerships with various authorized organizations, aiming to diversify the social services provided

We will not detail the partnerships and activities carried out here, but it is important to mention that, in accordance with the National Strategy and the County Strategy on Child Protection and Rights Promotion, DGASPC Suceava has closed all traditional placement centers and, at present, offers only residential services, each with a capacity of no more than 12 places. Additionally, in Suceava County, there are several legally authorized private residential services for children, managed by foundations and associations (Table 13).

Table 13. Private residential services for children (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

No.	Name of the private residential service	Capacity	Private body under which the service operates
1.	Family-type house "St. Nicolae" Suceava	12	FARA Foundation Suceava
2.	Family-type center "Pr. Mihai Negrea" Vatra Dornei	12	Christian Association "Holy Princes Michael and Gabriel" Vatra Dornei
3.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 1	12	Foundation "Holy Hierarchs Leontie and Theodosius" Rădăuți
4.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 2	12	
5.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 3	12	
6.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 4	12	
7.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 5	12	
8.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 6	12	
9.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 7	12	
10.	Children's home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 8	12	
11.	Children's Home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 9	12	
12.	Children's Home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 10	12	
13.	Children's Home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 11	12	
14.	Children's Home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 12	12	
15.	Children's Home "St. Hierarch Leontie" Rădăuți - House 13	12	

The evolution of entries into private residential services for the period 2015-2023 is shown in Table 14.

Table 14. Entries into private residential services (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	From the community transfer	From other protection measures	Total
2015	7	0	7
2016	17	1	18
2017	8	1	9
2018	5	2	7
2019	9	5	14
2020	2	25	27
2021	6	2	8
2022	8+7 (refugee)	5	13+7 (refugee)
2023	11	2	13

The dynamics of children/young people (entries/exits) in/out of the residential protection system of DGASPC Suceava (designated for children) are shown in Tables 15 and 16.

Table 15. Entries into the residential services of DGASPC Suceava (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	Entrances to residential services within the structure of DGASPC Suceava (intended for children)		Total
	From the community	Transfer from other protection measures	
2015	157	20	177
2016	115	31	146
2017	153	18	171
2018	114	13	127
2019	85	11	96
2020	42	5	47
2021	53	24	77
2022	52+34 (refugee)	21	107
2023	40+2 (refugee)	4	46

Table 16. Exits from the residential services of DGASPC Suceava (2015-2023)
(DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Residential services	Total, of which:	Family reintegration	Revocations according to law (18 years old, no longer attending school)	Transfer to other protection measures	Other (death, marriage, transfer to other counties, transfer to adult centers), OPA transfer
2015	162	61	46	41	14
2016	138	47	49	20	22
2017	162	53	43	37	29
2018	137	58	44	27	8
2019	127	40	43	31	13
2020	141	28	40	21	52
2021	112	33	45	13	21
2022	92+32 (refugee)	31+27 (refugee)	41	16	4+5 (refugee)
2023	96	26+3 (refugee)	51+1 (refugee)	9	6

Prevention of human trafficking and combating drug consumption and trafficking (...)

DGASPC Suceava has provided a suitable space for setting up an interview room for minors, located at the Emergency Reception Center for Abused, Neglected, and Exploited Children in Suceava. This room was designed to offer a child-friendly and safe environment, where children can be interviewed in a judicial setting that respects their rights, in order to prevent further traumatization of victims through an extended process of institutional victimization. The use of such a properly designed location brings multiple benefits, such as creating an environment in which the child feels protected and comfortable, allowing for the participation of multiple individuals during the interview, audio-video recording of sessions, and other technical facilities. In 2023, 235 minors were assisted in the room as victims, witnesses, suspects, or defendants. Additionally, based on recommendations and evaluations conducted by specialists from the Juvenile Delinquency, Human Trafficking, Refugees, and Repatriates Department of DGASPC Suceava, the Suceava Child Protection Commission ordered the specialized supervision measure in the family for four minors in 2023 (Table 17).

Table 17. The evolution of children under specialized supervision in the family (2015-2023)
(DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Specialized family supervision measures	3	1	0	5	2	1	3	4	4
Reeducation center admission			1	0	0	0	0	0	

Psychological counseling and representation services were provided in court for children in the protection system, as well as for those in the community. These services were also offered at the Suceava Prosecutor's

Office, the Suceava Municipal Police, B.C.C.O., and D.I.I.C.O.T., all for children in the community. In 2023, the Suceava Multifunctional Residential Services Center assisted 235 minors, either as victims, witnesses, suspects, or defendants. Additionally, 103 street children, aged between 3 and 18 years, the majority of whom were girls, benefited from psychological and social counseling, and they were monitored and supported after reintegration into their families.

Combating the risk of social exclusion for children with disabilities

At the request of the Child Disability Assessment Service, "The Suceava Child Protection Commission issued disability certificates for 1,790 children with disabilities, of which 337 were new cases" (DGASPCSV, 2024b). Of these, 840 were classified with severe disabilities, 586 with moderate disabilities, 320 with mild disabilities, and 44 with light disabilities. Each child benefited from a personalized habilitation-rehabilitation plan, a list of activity limitations and participation restrictions according to age, as well as a contract with the child's family. Parents and guardians of children with disabilities received support through counseling, and the specialists from the service maintained contact via email or phone, collecting the necessary documents for the files through courier, post, or email. At the end of 2023, DGASPC Suceava had recorded 2,499 children with disabilities, and the distribution of these children by gender and age groups is presented in Table 18.

Table 18. Distribution by gender and age groups of children classified with disabilities (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Disabilities	**Sex**		**Age groups (Years)**				**Total**
	Male	Female	**0-2**	**3-6**	**7-13**	**14-17**	
Mild degree of disability	30	10	10	10	16	4	**40**
Moderate degree of disability	170	164	37	51	144	102	**334**
Severe degree of disability	285	336	26	95	288	212	**1.504**
Severe degree of disability	878	626	130	381	608	385	**621**
Total	**1.363**	**1.136**	203	537	1.056	703	**2.499**
	2.499		**2.499**				

The evolution of the number of children/youth with disabilities in the protection system is shown with the help of Table 19.

Table 19. The evolution of the number of children/youth with disabilities in the protection system (2015-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Special protection measure	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Placement with professional foster carers	116	109	104	107	98	100	100	96	85
Placement in extended family	30	33	35	37	39	38	38	35	31
Placement with families/individuals without a degree of kinship	17	17	17	15	11	11	11	11	11
Placement in public residential services	162	174	159	151	139	104	90	85	39
Placement in private residential services	5	6	7	7	6	8	10	9	6
Total	**330**	**339**	**322**	**317**	**293**	**261**	**249**	**236**	**202**

The three mobile teams provided specialized services and "monitored a total of 113 children with disabilities in the community, offering therapies such as speech therapy, physical therapy, psychological and social counseling, and rehabilitation." They also supported their families by transferring knowledge and skills, helping them apply effective recovery, therapy, and rehabilitation methods. The mobile teams carried out various activities, such as distributing leaflets and informational materials to schools, local authorities, and families, to provide useful information about children with disabilities and assist them in obtaining necessary documents, such as school orientation certificates, medical or identity documents, and disability certificates. Additionally, they organized meetings in communities and schools with students, teachers, mayors, social workers, and priests to promote services available for children with disabilities. Furthermore, they organized counseling and training sessions for caregivers of children with disabilities, aiming to transmit important knowledge and skills for applying effective recovery, therapy, and rehabilitation methods through social, psychological, and speech therapy support activities. "Children at the Neuro-Psycho-Motor Recovery Complex 'Blijdorp-A New Life' Suceava, diagnosed with various levels of autism and different ages, benefit from multiple therapies" – such as hippotherapy, which involves the use of horses as co-therapists alongside human therapists.

Supporting Social Inclusion Actions for Young People Leaving the Protection System

DGASPC Suceava encourages institutional collaboration between different entities involved "in the socio-professional integration of young people leaving the protection system, including with the Suceava County Agency for Employment and various public or private institutions" (DGASPCSV, 2024b). Thus, case managers provide young people with information and guidance regarding training and requalification courses organized by the Suceava AJOFM and continuously support them to

participate in job fairs, facilitating their access to the labor market. Additionally, within residential and family services, activities are organized with the aim of preparing young people for job interviews, completing a personal file, and drafting a CV. Young people who have obtained full legal capacity and have benefited from special protection but do not wish to continue their studies and cannot return to their family, being at risk of social exclusion, may request special protection for up to two years, aimed at their social integration. Young people leaving the special protection system benefit from a one-time allowance at the time of departure, equivalent to three times the gross minimum national salary. In 2023, the total amount granted was 1,967,476 lei for 267 young people. Additionally, young people who have reached the age of 18 can choose to continue special protection or receive a monthly allowance of 4.8 ISR (Social Reference Indicator/660 LEI – March 2024) until the age of 26, if they are enrolled in a form of education or have a job. This allowance is provided by the Suceava County Agency for Social Benefits and Social Inspection. The dynamics of these young people (2015 – 2023) are presented in Figure 8.



Figure 8. The dynamics of young people in the protection system (2015 – 2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

We observe that there is still a certain proportion of young people (over 18 years old) in the protection system (Table 20).

Table 20. The proportion of young people (over 18 years old) in the protection system (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Special protection measure	Total beneficiaries	Young people	Share of young people
Placement with professional foster carers	516	0	0%
Placement in extended family	289	16	5,5%
Placement with families/individuals without a degree of kinship	44	2	4,5%
Placement in public residential services	166	48	28,9%
Placement in private residential services	124	20	16,1%

Following the collaboration agreement signed with DGASPC Suceava, the "Hope and Homes for Children Romania" Foundation (HHC) allocated the amount of 71,200 lei in 2023 to support 16 young people who left the protection system, aiming to facilitate their socio-professional integration. Also, in 2023, 19 young people who exited the protection system benefited from the services offered by the Gura Humorului Multifunctional Social Center, with the goal of integrating them into the labor market. The dynamics of the exit of the beneficiaries of this Center, structured by their place of origin and sex, is illustrated in Table 21.

Table 21. The exits of beneficiaries from the Gura Humorului Multifunctional Social Center (2015 – 2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Years	Total beneficiaries	Place of origin		Sex	
		Urban	Rural	M	F
2015	27	20	7	17	10
2016	29	23	6	18	11
2017	22	15	7	13	9
2018	16	10	6	9	7
2019	19	12	7	11	8
2020	16	11	5	14	2
2021	22	21	1	18	4
2022	32	28	4	22	10
2023	**19**	15	4	12	7

Monitoring and initiating actions for children with parents working abroad

At the end of 2023, the analyzed institution "had on record a total of 5,419 children with parents working abroad, coming from 4,068 families, according to data centralized from the 114 territorial administrative units in the county" (Table 22).

Table 22. Children with parents working abroad (2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

Number of families in which parents are working abroad at the end of the reporting period		Number of children at the end of the reporting period	Number of children in the care of relatives up to the fourth degree, without protective measures	Number of children with protection measures at the end of the reporting period				Other situations
				At AMP	In public or private residential services	To relatives up to the 4th degre	To other people/families	
With both parents working abroad	355	470	467	2	0	1	0	0
With only one parent working abroad	3.438	4.620	4.619	0	0	1	0	0
With the sole breadwinner of the single-parent family working abroad	275	329	307	4	4	14	0	0
Total	4.068	5.419	5.393	6	4	16	0	0

In this regard, the dynamics of children with parents working abroad, although decreasing, remains high (Figure 9).

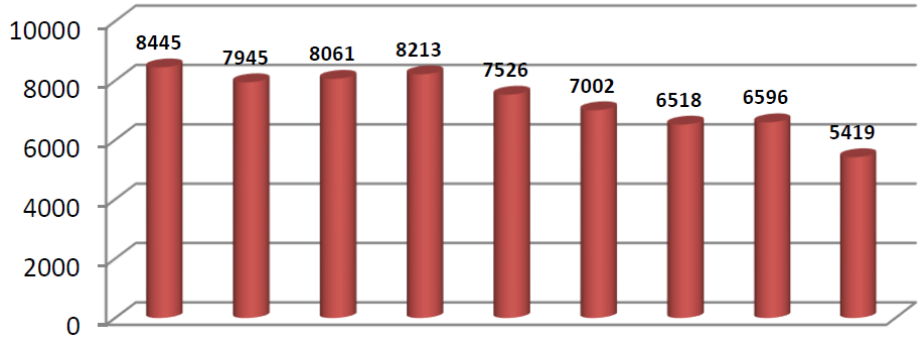


Figure 9. The dynamics of children with parents working abroad (2020-2023) (DGASPCSV, 2024b)

To improve the situation of children left behind due to their parents working abroad, mobile teams have actively intervened in the community, providing specialized support to the 27 children, consisting of social, psychological, and legal counseling. The primary goal of these interventions was to prevent the risk of family separation and social exclusion. Additionally, awareness campaigns were carried out by distributing educational materials and organizing meetings in schools and at the community level, with the participation of teachers, local authorities, and clergy members. Alongside these efforts, community integration activities for these children were initiated, aiming to promote solidarity and inclusion through participation in local events. At the same time, working sessions were organized to establish new methods for

admitting beneficiaries and strategies for preventing abuse, as well as counseling and training sessions for those responsible for the care of these minors.

SWOT analysis and recommendations for improving the results of the activity of DGASPC Suceava (child protection aspect)

Based on the findings from investigating the implementation of institutional measures in the child protection system at the level of 2023 (DGASPC Suceava – 8 action directions: 7.3.1 – 7.3.8) and observing the trends of specific indicators between 2015-2023, we have developed two key components of this endeavor. These include the SWOT Analysis of DGASPC Suceava's activity (exclusively in the context of child protection) and a set of recommendations aimed at improving the results of the institution's activities as analyzed by us. Table 23 provides a SWOT analysis of DGASPC Suceava's activities in the context of child protection.

Table 23. SWOT analysis regarding the activity of DGASPC Suceava ("child protection" side)

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Modernized infrastructure (family-type centers, specialized hearing rooms)	Limited financial resources for the expansion and maintenance of specialized services
Solid institutional partnerships with non-governmental organizations and public institutions	Lack of specialized personnel in certain rural or hard-to-reach areas
Complex services adapted to different needs (children with disabilities, street children, victims, etc.)	Variable degree of information and awareness in the community regarding children's rights
Active involvement in the socio-professional reintegration of post-institutionalized youth	Uneven monitoring and evaluation of the impact of services over time
Opportunities	**Threats**
Access to European funds for the development of social services	Continuous migration of parents and lack of community support in some localities
Expanding partnerships with the private sector and NGOs to support vulnerable young people	Legislative or bureaucratic instability in the field of child protection
National and county programs dedicated to combating social and educational exclusion	High administrative pressure on specialized personnel
Developing integrated service networks in rural areas	Decreasing interest of young people in training/insertion programs

We note that we have chosen to present the SWOT analysis at this point in our work (towards the end), with the aim of grounding it on data and observations of real developments, rather than on perceptions or hypotheses. On the other hand, based on a deeper understanding of the issue under discussion, we outline a series of concrete directions (Figure 9) through which the activity of DGASPC Suceava (child protection aspect) can be made more efficient and better adapted to the real needs of its beneficiaries.

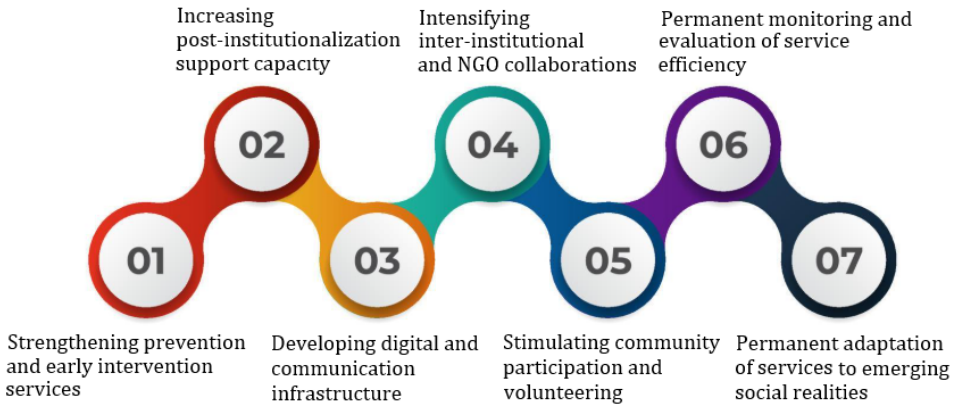


Figure 10. Directions for streamlining the activity of DGASPC Suceava ("child protection" side)

In this context, we detail our recommendations aimed at improving the efficiency of DGASPC Suceava (child protection aspect) and better adapting to the real needs of its beneficiaries:

• Expanding and diversifying preventive services, particularly in rural areas, regarding counseling and support for vulnerable children. Equipping mobile teams with additional resources and providing continuous professional training for specialists to reduce the number of severe cases through early intervention.

• Developing integrated "after-care" programs for young people leaving the protection system, including mentoring, financial support, social housing, and stronger collaborations with local employers to facilitate professional integration (post-institutionalization support).

• Modernizing IT infrastructure and promoting digital solutions (online communication platforms with families, electronic document archiving, case management systems) to address current challenges, including those created by the high mobility of parents and children.

• Expanding partnerships with public institutions and non-governmental organizations through joint professional training projects, logistical support, and community involvement activities. Additionally, attracting European funds for joint initiatives in child protection could be useful.

• Actively involving the local community through volunteering, sponsorships, or educational initiatives to reduce the stigmatization of vulnerable children and foster a culture of solidarity. DGASPC Suceava could launch awareness campaigns in this regard.

• Periodically reviewing activities based on clear performance indicators. This evaluation could be conducted in partnership with the "Ştefan cel Mare" University or research institutes, ensuring objectivity and professionalism in interpreting data.

Finally, in our opinion, in the context of the need for the continuous adaptation of DGASPC Suceava's services to emerging social realities, considering the migration phenomenon, the diversification of abuse forms, and multiple social risks, it is necessary for the analyzed institution to become more flexible and proactive in designing and implementing social policies.

Conclusions

Child protection is not only a legal and moral obligation of the state but also a strategic priority for local public administration, with a direct impact on social cohesion and the future of communities. The study conducted highlights that DGASPC Suceava, under the coordination of the County Council, plays an important role in the national child protection system through the complexity of the measures implemented and the institutional adaptability demonstrated in the face of various challenges. The analysis of DGASPC Suceava's activity reveals a coherent and multi-dimensional approach, structured around well-defined intervention directions, from preventing abandonment and supporting vulnerable families to developing alternative services and promoting social inclusion. Despite budgetary constraints and a lack of qualified staff, the institution has managed to maintain a reasonable level of efficiency, thanks to engaged management and strengthened inter-institutional collaborations. Overall, the institution has demonstrated a proactive and integrated approach, centered on the individual needs of vulnerable children and young people, aiming both at their immediate protection and their long-term integration into society. The main concluding ideas we take away refer to the fact that the analyzed institution has intensified efforts to ensure the protection of children through the development of the AMP network, organizing continuous training courses, periodic reassessment of cases, and creating personalized intervention plans. A large portion of children under protection measures are found in family-type services, reflecting a focus on solutions closer to the family environment. By opening the minor hearing room and providing psychological, social, and legal services, the institution aimed to create a safe and friendly environment for children in difficult situations—whether as victims, witnesses, or suspects in judicial procedures. The support network for children with disabilities has been strengthened through the certification of disability degrees, developing personalized intervention plans, and activating mobile teams that provide

recovery, counseling, and family support services. Additionally, innovative methods such as hippotherapy have been introduced in the therapy of children with autism. Young people leaving the protection system benefit from counseling, guidance towards qualification courses, support for obtaining a job, and access to allowances and housing services. Institutional partnerships, such as the one with the "Hope and Homes for Children" Foundation, complement the public administration's efforts. Finally, DGASPC Suceava has recognized the social risks to which these children are exposed and intervened through counseling, information, and community activities to prevent marginalization and strengthen links with the school and community environment. Thus, the example of DGASPC Suceava demonstrates that the local administrative factor can become an active and innovative actor in guaranteeing children's rights, with the key condition being the existence of a functional organizational framework, a clear strategic vision, and effective cooperation with civil society and other public institutions. Investing in child protection is not only an investment in the present but also a guarantee for a more equitable, inclusive, and secure future. As we highlighted in our set of recommendations, to improve child protection in Suceava County, it is important to allocate increased funds for improving the infrastructure of placement centers and creating continuous training programs for staff working with children in risk situations. Additionally, collaboration with non-governmental organizations should be strengthened to implement innovative and sustainable solutions for child protection, also aiming at continuing and expanding programs that prevent child-family separation through counseling and supporting parents in their social integration.

Limitations of the study and future research directions

Although this research aimed to analyze the measures implemented by the county authorities in Suceava in the field of child protection, specifically through the activity of DGASPC, certain methodological and contextual limitations must be acknowledged. First and foremost, the geographical delimitation of the study to Suceava County restricts the possibility of extending the conclusions to other administrative units across the country. Local realities—such as demographic, budgetary, or institutional factors—can vary from county to county, meaning that a comparative analysis would be necessary for a broader validation of the observations presented. Additionally, the approach was predominantly descriptive, focusing on the presentation of activities and services provided, without integrating a critical analysis of the efficiency or outcomes achieved in relation to the resources invested. Moreover, our attention did not specifically focus on the differences between

rural and urban environments, a distinction that is important in a county characterized by significant population and resource dispersion. Therefore, with a view to future research, we intend to expand the analysis to the areas suggested by the "limits of the research." Seeking to add further depth to our evaluations, we also aim to take into consideration the perspectives of the direct beneficiaries. While this research documented the measures applied for vulnerable children and young people, it did not include a qualitative analysis of their perceptions or those of the families involved. Additionally, we believe that integrating other qualitative research methods—such as interviews with beneficiaries, focus groups with specialists, or case studies—could provide a much more comprehensive view of the efficiency of the protection system. Furthermore, we believe that a multidisciplinary approach, including economic analysis and evaluation of the sustainability of social services, would contribute to shaping better-grounded and more equitable public policies.

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