

Dinculescu, Corina-Georgeta

**Conference Paper**

## Daycare centers to prevent the separation of children from the family: A possible solution for disadvantaged communities

**Provided in Cooperation with:**

The Research Institute for Agriculture Economy and Rural Development (ICEADR), Bucharest

*Suggested Citation:* Dinculescu, Corina-Georgeta (2024) : Daycare centers to prevent the separation of children from the family: A possible solution for disadvantaged communities, In: Rodino, Steliana Dragomir, Vili (Ed.): Agrarian Economy and Rural Development - Trends and Challenges. International Symposium. 15th Edition, The Research Institute for Agricultural Economy and Rural Development (ICEADR), Bucharest, pp. 182-192

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/319520>

**Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

**Terms of use:**

*Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.*

*You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.*

*If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.*

# DAYCARE CENTERS TO PREVENT THE SEPARATION OF CHILDREN FROM THE FAMILY – A POSSIBLE SOLUTION FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

**Corina - Georgeta DINCULESCU<sup>4</sup>**

Institute of Agricultural Economics

*Corresponding author email: corina.dinculescu@gmail.com*

**Abstract:** *Starting from the concept of harmonious development, children's needs, love and protection in a stable family environment, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, support services provided by the state, both for them and for their families, it becomes essential for the state to intervene actively to support children in difficulty. State services must be designed to support families and prevent children from being separated from them, ensuring that every child has the chance to grow up in safety and stability in their own family.*

*Within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, one of the specific objectives of Component 13 – Social Reforms is to ensure the legal framework necessary to carry out the activity of preventing the separation of the child from the family and supporting the family in terms of raising and caring for the child at risk of separation. In this context, a funding program was created to support local initiatives that lead to the creation of service networks in the interest and well-being of the child, namely Investment II - Creation of a network of day care centers for children at risk of being separated from their families.*

*This paper presents the situation of the day care centers created for children at risk of separation from their families, as an alternative to the radical solutions that some local communities, through the local authorities, choose to apply to children in this situation.*

**Key words:** *child protection, vulnerable families, residence areas, development regions, European funding*

**JEL Classification:** I38, J13, O18, R23

## INTRODUCTION

The year 1990 was the turning point for child protection in Romania, when Romania ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as a first step in the development of the child protection system. However, the measures applied after 1990 were mainly crisis reactions (provisional solutions to the already chronic problems at that time) to media criticism and international political pressures<sup>5</sup>. Changes have taken place to improve the situation of children in the child protection institutions; but a real reform began in 1997, with the establishment of child protection system, namely the child protection departments, when the decentralisation of child protection activity was initiated.

The change of this system was extremely slow, following small steps in the creation of a new child protection system that would extract the children from the child protection institutions and place them with their families or in a setting as close as possible to the family model. This implied the following:

- improvement/ harmonisation of the necessary legal framework;
- national strategies for the development of the child protection system;
- creation and development of a national system for monitoring and evaluating the situation of vulnerable children/children in difficulty/ children at risk, to find out the most appropriate forms of child protection, which must consider the best interests of children, to meet their needs;

---

<sup>4</sup> Corina Dinculescu, scientific researcher, Institute of Agricultural Economics

<sup>5</sup> Cătălin Zamfir, 1997

- identification of a family-type environment for each child: biological family, extended family or family-based or family-like child care options.

A slow, but steady process of reforming the child protection system in Romania followed, with the main objective of closing child protection institutions; child protection within a specialised institution should be a solution accepted only in situations of strict necessity and only for a temporary period.

From a dysfunctional system, in major crisis, based on the institutionalisation of vulnerable children/ children in difficulty, which existed until 1990, Romania has gone through several stages of decentralisation of child protection activity. During this time, part of the child protection institutions have been modernised, while others have closed. The concept of alternative protection was introduced, represented by prevention and support services<sup>6</sup>: network of foster parents, recovery daycare centres and counselling and support centres for children and parents/centres for children with disabilities, family-type houses and apartments. These can replace the temporary or permanent incapacity of families to raise and take care of their children, and represent solutions adapted to the fundamental need of children to grow up in a family.

Since 2004, the special child protection has been represented by the set of measures dedicated to the care and development of children deprived of the protection of their parents (temporarily or permanently) or of children who cannot be left in their parents' care, in order to protect their interests.

Only in the third stage of reforms (announced in 2014, but effectively initiated in 2016), one of the major goals of this new wave of reforms was stated – the assumption that by the year 2020 there would be no children in foster homes, namely that all the large residential centres would be closed. A series of priorities were established regarding the transition to community-based services and preventive and immediate interventions, which would ensure the respect for the child's right to grow up in a family environment and would help children to reach their maximum potential. However, there are communities where children coming from disadvantaged families (with a precarious economic situation, for instance) are removed from their family environment, and are applied a special protection measure, as well as children whose parents went abroad to work, and are at risk of being separated from their families.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Evaluations carried out at national level revealed that the activity of preventing children separation from their families has continued at a very modest pace, highlighting a practice at the level of some local authorities, mainly in less developed communities that lack services for children and families, of not assuming responsibility for carrying out the activity of preventing child separation from family<sup>7</sup>. These directly request that the child at risk is taken into the special protection system by the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) at county level, without an assessment of the situation and without assuming a minimum responsibility in the attempt to find solutions at community level, for such cases. In the motivation for this practice, they most often invoke the poverty of the child family, a community with no or limited resources, so that the

---

<sup>6</sup> These types of services are under the general umbrella of prevention and support services, mentioned in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, by which member states must provide special assistance and a form of alternative protection to the family.

<sup>7</sup> According to the National Child Guarantee Action Plan, 2023

easy solution of local authorities is child separation from family, considering that a residential care service of DGASPC would offer all the conditions that the child is lacking in the family.

Yet these practices are detrimental to the child full development, and when children enter the special protection system they will be subject to additional challenges related not only to the lack of contact with parents, but also to adapting to new living conditions.

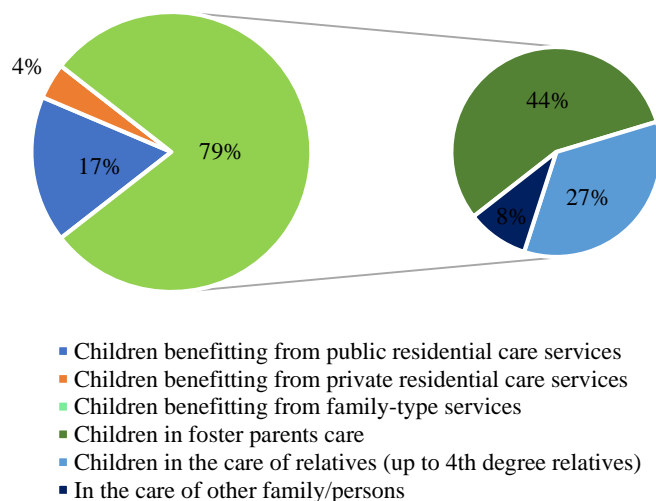
Statistical data<sup>8</sup> also highlight the need for a direct involvement of local communities, for children at risk of separation out of various reasons:

- about 60% of children in the special protection system come from the rural area – these being the most exposed to the social exclusion risk;
- about half of the number of children in Romania (48%) are living in rural areas;
- about 15% of communities are identified in marginalised, poor areas;
- for more than 90% of children found in special child protection system, the mother is known, which indicates a reduced effort of local authorities for identifying and applying solutions to maintain the child within the natural family.

In the absence of the activity of preventing child separation from family and of the services intended to prevent child separation from family, in late 2021, in the special protection system, about one third of children who had a special protection measure had entered the system as a result of the precarious economic situation of the family, according to data mentioned in the *National Child Guarantee Action Plan*.

The distribution by type of special protection measure in which children from the special protection system<sup>9</sup> fall highlights that more than three quarters of these benefit from special protection measures in family-type services (out of which: almost half are in the care of foster parents, one quarter are in the care of relatives up to the 4<sup>th</sup> degree) and almost 20% benefit from public residential care services.

#### Children in the special protection system, by type of measure they benefit from



Source: ANPDCA, Statistical Bulletin, June 2024

The precarious economic situation of family is not the only reason that might determine the child separation from his family. Children with parents abroad are also exposed to such risk. Some of these children end up in the special protection system (in the care of foster parents or foster homes),

<sup>8</sup> ANPDCA and NIS statistical data

<sup>9</sup> Statistical data, June 30, 2024, ANPDCA

facing additional challenges related to the adaptation to new living environments and to the lack of constant contact with their parents.

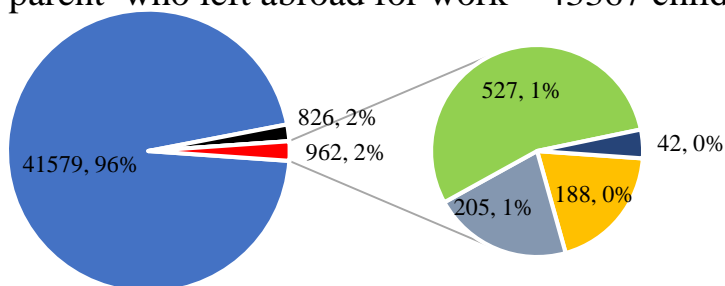
According to the official data of the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA), in June 2024, 59 thousand children from 48 thousand families were in this situation, down from the same period of the previous year, when 71 thousand cases from 56 thousand families were registered. Although the 17% decrease indicates a continuous downward trend, which has been noticed in recent years, thousands of children continue to live in the special protection system, being deprived of what the family generally can offer.

The graph below highlights, comparatively, the situation of children left at home with both parents or the single parent who left abroad for work, on the one hand, and the situation of children left at home who come from families with one parent abroad for work, on the other hand.

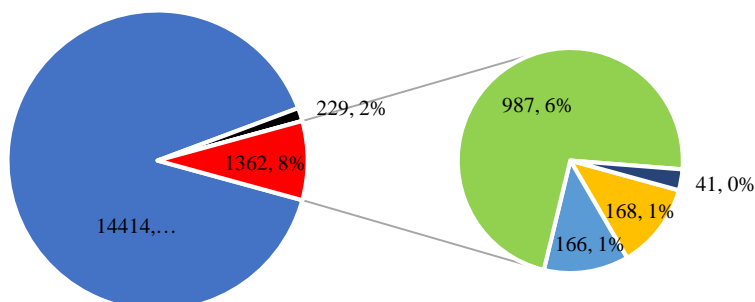
The situation of children left at home who come from families with one parent left abroad for work is slightly more favourable than that of children with both parents or with the single parent who left abroad who remained in the care of relatives (up to fourth degree relatives).

### Children left at home, who come from families with:

one parent who left abroad for work – 43367 children



both parents or single parent who left abroad for work – 16,005 children



- a) Number of children who remained at home in the care of relatives up to 4th degree, with no protection measure
- c) Other situations (neighbours, other families/persons with no protection measure)
- b) Number of children who remained at home who are in the special protection system, of which:
  - in the care of foster parent
  - in services of residential care
  - in the care of relatives up to 4th degree
  - in the care of other families/persons

*Source: ANPDCA, Statistical Bulletin, June 2024*

This conclusion derives from the indicators – number and proportion of children with one parent who left abroad for work who are in the care of relatives (up to fourth degree relatives), with no protection measure, is higher than that of children with both parents or with the single parent gone

abroad for work, which reveals that these children are cared for in the family (the family of origin, by the second parent, or by the extended family, up to fourth degree relatives, which is a more favourable situation for children's development).

In the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, one of the specific objectives of Component 13 – Social Reforms, is to ensure the necessary legal framework for preventing child separation from family and supporting the family in raising and caring for the child at risk of separation. The establishment of daycare centres for children at risk of separation from family in the most vulnerable communities can contribute to achieving the goals of the EU strategic framework for equality and inclusion of vulnerable children; these community services have a fundamental role in the reform of the current child protection system, i.e. preventing re/institutionalisation and supporting the deinstitutionalisation process.

This creates the premises for fulfilling the commitments assumed by Romania in terms of completing the deinstitutionalisation process and of those derived from the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In this context, within the NRRP, under Component C13 – Social Reforms, a funding programme was created to support local initiatives that lead to the creation of service networks in the interest and for the well-being of child, namely Investment I1 – Creating a network of daycare centres for children at risk of being separated from family.

Investment I1 targets the creation of social services for preventing child separation from family, such as: care, education, recreation-socialisation, counselling, school and professional orientation, supervision and support activities in the learning process for children, as well as support, counselling, education, etc. activities for parents. These activities do not replace the efforts of the child's own family, but are complementary to them and to those provided by educational units.

2 calls have been launched for this investment, following which 168 projects for funding have been selected, with beneficiaries from municipalities, towns and communes, having as common objectives the creation of social services to prevent children separation from their families, through:

- building of daycare centres for children at risk of separation from their parents, recovery daycare centres for disabled, centres for counselling and support for parents and children and
- maintaining 14,483 children in their families, ensuring their access to services for the prevention of child separation from family offered by the daycare centres that will be created.

The selection of projects took into consideration the most vulnerable communities and was made taking into account the areas with (high, medium, low) priority, established on the basis of the results of the mapping<sup>10</sup> of services and infrastructure available for children at risk of being separated from their families, mainly in vulnerable communities. Daycare centre projects from high priority

---

<sup>10</sup> The mapping was carried out by the World Bank under the Agreement of services and technical assistance concluded for the project „PROGRESS in ensuring the transition from institutional care to community care”, code SIPOCA577/MySMIS 127380, implemented by the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and Adoption and co-financed from the European Social Fund through the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme.

The mapping aimed to identify the vulnerable communities with the greatest needs for the development of services to prevent child separation from family, which at the same time have the fewest services and infrastructure dedicated to the activity of preventing child separation from family.

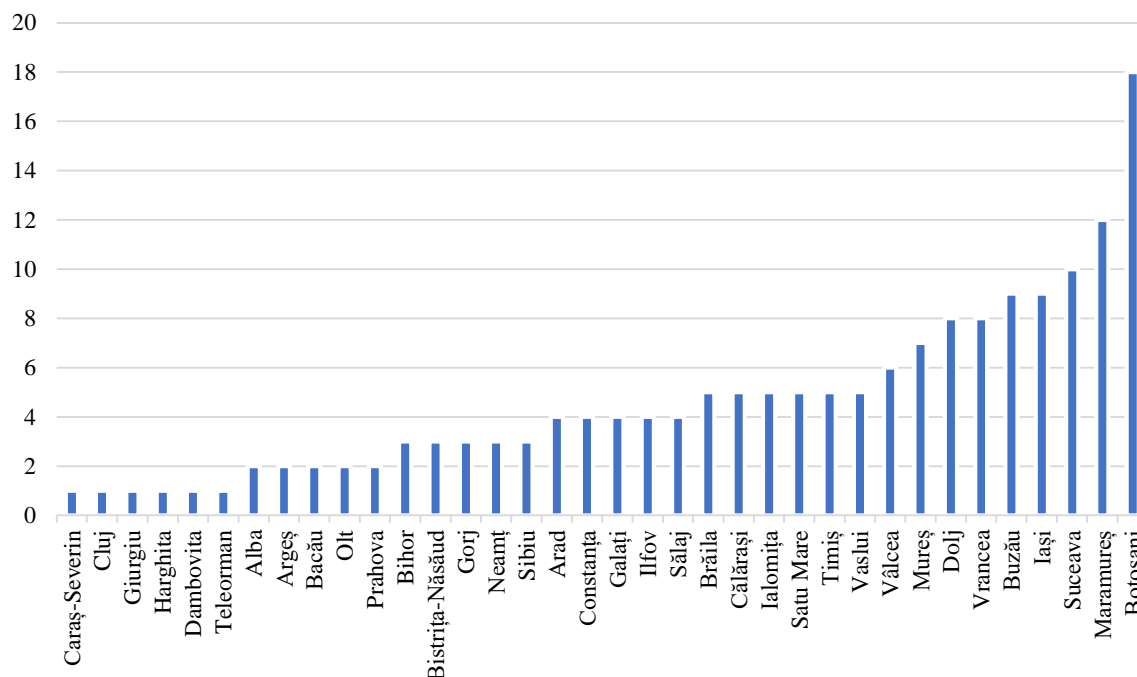
The indicators used in the establishment of most disadvantaged communities were the following: number of children in the community; share of children in total population; community type (urban/ rural); rate of risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE); guaranteed minimum income (GMI); average unemployment rate; school dropout rate.

areas received a higher score. Daycare centre projects located in administrative territorial units with a significant Roma population (more than 5% of total population), according to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, also benefited from additional points.

Thus, the 168 daycare centres for children at risk of being separated from their families will be established in 36 counties, with the largest number of centres in Botoşani county (10.7% of total), followed by those in Maramureş (7.1%), Suceava (6%), Iaşi and Buzău (5.4%) counties.

At the opposite pole, we can find Caraş-Severin, Cluj, Dâmboviţa, Giurgiu, Neamţ and Teleorman counties, with only one daycare centre.

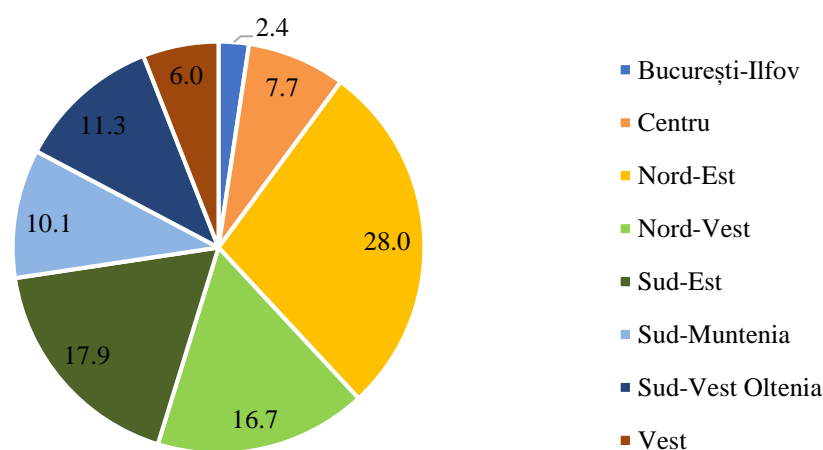
**Number of daycare centres for children at risk of separation from family, by counties**



*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list- 15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author's own calculations*

The analysis **by development regions** reveals that most daycare centres will be established in the Nord-Est Region (more than one quarter of total), in the Sud-Est Region (18.2%) and in the Nord-Vest Region (17.0%). The fewest daycare centres will be created in the following regions: Vest (with 6.3% of total daycare centres), Centru (7.5%) and Sud-Muntenia (9.4%).

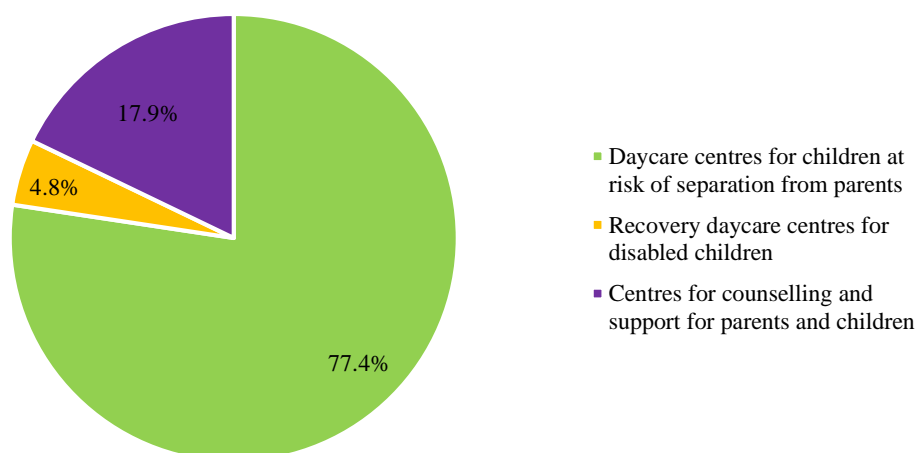
#### **Structure of daycare centres for children at risk of separation from family,by development regions**



*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list- 15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author's own calculations*

The following categories of social services are financed: daycare centres for children at risk of separation from parents; recovery daycare centres for disabled children; centres for counselling and support for parents and children. The distribution of projects accepted for financing by these categories of social services highlights that three quarters of daycare centres will be created for children at risk of separation from parents.

#### Structure of daycare centres, by category of social services

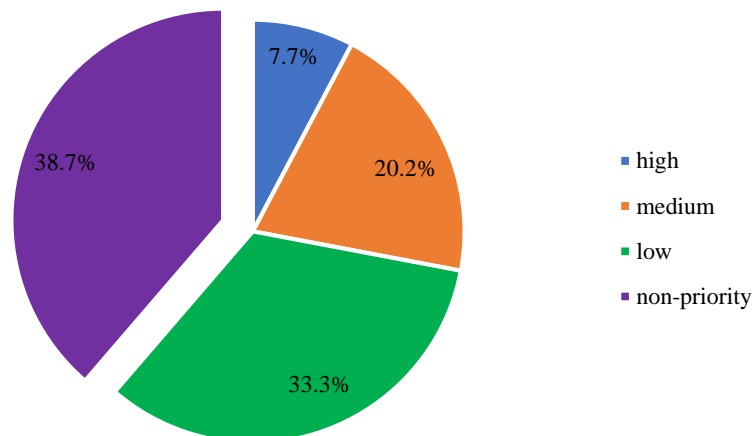


*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list- 15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author's own calculations*

The selection of projects for funding, by priority areas (high, medium, low), reveals that of the total number of daycare centres, one third will be established in low priority areas, 20% in medium priority areas, less than 10% in high priority areas. But most daycare centres (38.7%) will be established in non-priority areas.



### Structure of daycare centres, by priority areas



*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list- 15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author's own calculations*

The low number of projects submitted and accepted for funding can be explained by:

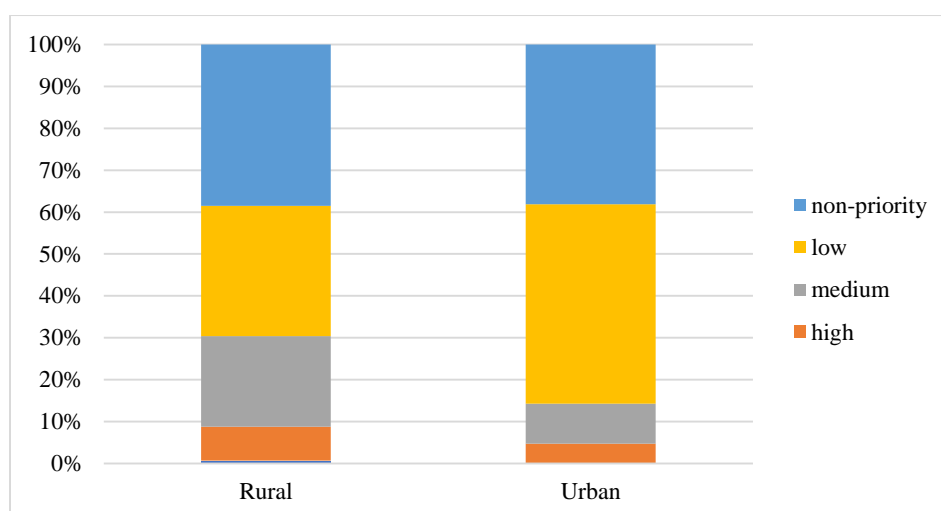
- lack of qualified human resources at the level of local councils (that could make an initial assessment of the cases of children at risk of separation from their families and identify immediate solutions at local community level);
- lack of own financial resources available to be allocated for the prevention activity, namely for the initiation of such a project – feasibility study for the future construction of the daycare centre, file submission, technical project, approvals, etc. and for the subsequent contribution necessary to support the daycare centre;
- non-involvement of local authorities in the creation of such daycare centres for children, which would benefit not only the persons concerned, but would also contribute to community development.

From the analysis of the distribution of daycare centres by residence and priority areas, it results that out of the 13 daycare centres (7.7%) that will be created in high priority areas, 12 centres will be located in rural areas; out of the 34 daycare centres (20.2%) that will be created in medium priority areas, most centres will be located in rural areas (32), and out of the 56 centres that will be established in low priority areas, more than 80% will be created in rural areas, which once again confirms that the rural population continues to be vulnerable.

At the same time, although most daycare centres will be created in the rural area (87.5%), rural areas being considered at higher poverty and social exclusion risk, there are also urban areas that are identified with high or medium priority (3 out of the 21 projects based in urban areas), in terms of the previously-mentioned mapping.

About half of the total number of daycare centres in the urban areas will be located in low priority areas, 9.5% in medium priority areas and only 4.8% in high priority areas.

### Structure of daycare centres, by priority area and residence area

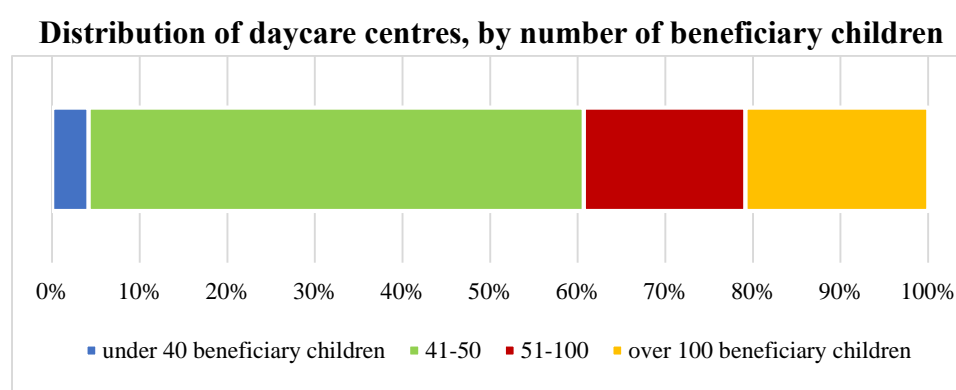


*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list- 15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author’s own calculations*

About one third of daycare centres in the rural areas will be located in low priority areas, 21.8% in medium priority areas and only 8.2% in high priority areas.

This situation indicates either a lack of interest of local authorities in creating benefits (namely daycare centres for children at risk of being separated from their parents) for community development, or a much too poor community, unable to ensure in advance the necessary resources for funding, up to the payment of transfer requests, in the case when the project is admitted for funding and to financially support the maintenance of the daycare centre, for 5 years after the completion of the investment<sup>11</sup>.

As for the beneficiaries of the daycare centers to be created, more than half of them (56.5%) will aim to keep 41-50 children in their families by ensuring their access to services to prevent child separation from the family offered by the daycare centers, 20% of them will have between 51 and 100 children beneficiaries and another 20% of the daycare centers will have more than 100 children.

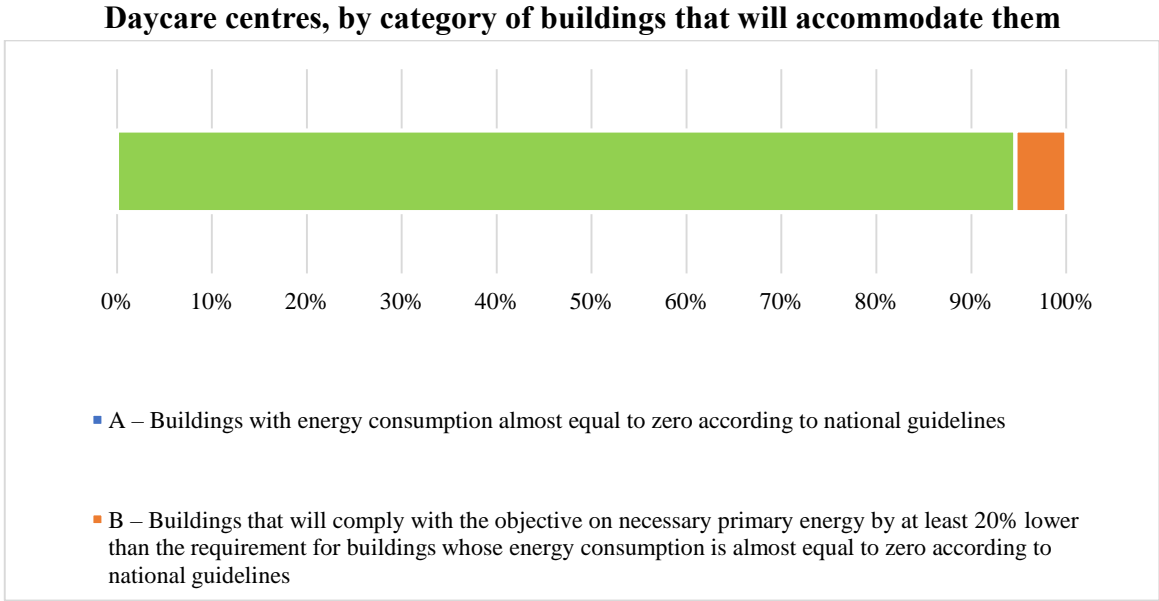


*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list-15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author’s own calculations*

Of the total 168 day care centers to be created, 159 will be in nearly zero-energy buildings according to national guidelines, and only 9 will be in buildings that will meet the target for primary

<sup>11</sup> Mandatory for projects funded through NRRP

energy demand at least 20% below the requirement for nearly zero-energy buildings according to national guidelines.



*Source: MFTES, Final-List-accepted-for-financing-NRRP-2022-C13-II\_CALL 1, Final-list-56-projects-selected-for-funding and Final-list- 15-eligible-projects\_CALL 2 – Author’s own calculations*

### CONCLUSIONS

Children must grow and develop in a suitable family environment, which provides for their material needs, as well as for their psychological needs. Therefore, in the case of children at risk of separation from family, out of various reasons, local authorities are the first to intervene, not to send children to an emergency centre (and later on to another protection measure, which would only meet children’s material needs), but to find specific solutions, at local level. The first interventions should take into consideration the correct assessment of the situation, finding relatives from children’s families, willing to care for them temporarily.

The creation of these daycare centres would be beneficial for any vulnerable community, reducing the burden on local authorities to support families at risk of poverty and social exclusion and their children.

At the same time, services to prevent children separation from their family and support services from local authorities must be developed, human resources from local councils must be specially trained for situations in which the child is at risk, to be able to make an accurate assessment of each special situation that will occur.

Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to correlate social policies in the field of child protection with support policies for child and family; this implies solving the problems that can cause child separation from family, namely those related to poverty, family abandonment, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, drug use, etc.

## REFERENCES

1. Department of Health, (1995), Looking After Children-Assessment and Action Record, HMSO;
2. Guvernul României, HG nr. 205/1997, cu privire la Organizarea autorităților administrației publice locale în domeniul protecției copilului;
3. Guvernul României, OU nr. 26/1997, privind protecția copilului aflat în dificultate;
4. Kellmer-Pringle, M.L., (1975), The Needs of Children, London, Hutchinson;
5. Organizația Națiunilor Unite, (1989), Convenția cu privire la drepturile copilului;
6. Cartografierea-nevoilor-a-serviciilor-si-infrastructurii-disponibile-pentru-copiii-expusi-riscului-de-separare-de-familie-in-special-in-comunitatile-vulnerabile, București, 2022;
7. Ministerul Familiei, Tineretului, Egalității de Șansă, Ghid specific – condiții de accesare a fondurilor europene aferente PNRR în cadrul apelului de proiecte PNRR/2024/C13/I1, 2024;
8. <https://mfamilie.gov.ro/1/pnrr/>
9. <https://deinstitutionalisation.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/guidelines-final-english.pdf>
10. <https://copii.gov.ro/1/statistici/>
11. [https://copii.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Plan-national-Garantie\\_aprobat\\_site.pdf](https://copii.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Plan-national-Garantie_aprobat_site.pdf)