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Coordinated Response to Child Abuse & Neglect via Minimum Data Set: National report on implementing the CAN MDS2 Platform in Romania

Grant Agreement number: 810508 — CAN-MDS II — REC-AG-2017/REC-RDAP-GBV-AG-2017]

Co-funded by the European Union’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme

Context

As explained in the national report on training, we recruited and trained operators in three counties and Bucharest. UBB was responsible all along the project for Satu Mare and Covasna counties, FONPC for Bucharest, the capital, and DASM worked in the city of Cluj. All three Romanian MDS teams developed trainings for the operators of these regional four sites.

To demonstrate the need of the project, the trainings and workshops named some of the discrepancies in reporting, as presented in the table bellow, where for the year 2019 Satu Mare county, has 5 times more sexual abuse cases than the larger Cluj county, or the Bihor county. Maramures county has 27 times more emotional abuse cases than Salaj county. Bistrita Nasaud county has 27 times more neglect than Salaj county, which shows the different definitions and procedures used case work.

Region/ county 2019 before MDS	Disparities in CAN CASES REGISTRATION BY THE NATIONAL AUTHORITY OF CHILD PROTECTION						
	Emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Exploitation for criminal activity	Child labor	Sexual Exploit.	Neglect
National TOTAL	978	686	426	37	156	25	5381
Nord-Vest	150	74	45	0	2	1	479
Bihor	5	12	4	0	1	0	19
Bistrita Nasaud	7	16	10	0	0	0	188
Cluj	42	15	4	0	0	0	16
Maramures	81	17	7	0	1	0	135
Salaj	3	2	0	0	0	0	4
Satu-Mare	12	12	20	0	0	1	117

The context of the COVID, which increased the difficulties to respond to the needs of children and their families, worsened the reporting of CAN, separated the helping professionals and deepened the discretionary aspects of coordinated action. For the entire year 2019 there had been 15996 situations of child abuse and neglect reported², while for 2020 there had been 14170 cases³ as reported by the National Authority for the end of the years 2019 and 2020.

This was the case both at mayoralty level, in the services destined to do the initial evaluation of children at risk of CAN, and also at the level of the specialized services, with the role of detailed CAN assessment and the implementation of services for children exposed to CAN. Referring children towards public CAN services has been mainly performed by completing paper forms. Though the Law 272/2004 mentions definitions of the different forms of maltreatment against children, data collection by the National Authority does not cover the newer forms of violence, like cyberbullying (in spite the fact that in 2020 domestic violence law 2017 has been completed with the definition of cyber-violence). On the other hand, the definitions were not completed with clear and commonly accepted criteria for CAN risk assessment. This resulted in different definitions of maltreatment depending on local and institutional policies, thus large differences in reporting data on CAN in different counties.

The need of collaboration between agencies for a coordinated response in case of violence is also recognised in the Romanian law 49/2011, while on the field there is very little collaboration at local level between child protection-health and education, or between public and non-profit agencies. These statements have been discussed in details in the trainings and in the workshops held before and during the period of operating the platform. Thus, on the field, the collaboration and the coordinated interventions are rare, which needed to be addressed in the local networks.

PREPARATION FOR PILOTING THE PLATFORM

The Romanian consortium prepared the application of the digital platform by targeting the following objectives, as indicated in the project:

- recruiting partners for local consortiums, to work together for improving the response to the needs of children victims of CAN: create local, regional and a national a framework to the collaboration processes between agencies and between specialists in CAN

² <http://andpdca.gov.ro/w/date-statistice-copii-si-adoptii/>

³ <http://www.copii.ro/statistici-2019/>

- offering continuous support to the local consortiums all along the preparation, but also along the period of the actual functioning of the platform
- continuously analysing the advantages of digitalization of child abuse referrals and data collection on the platform
- To improve the rate of referrals on CAN.

Working for the introduction of the CAN MDS platform, the consortium partners created a new context and structure for networking which gave opportunity for the participating agencies to work on the common understanding of CAN between sectors (through discussions around clarification of modalities of introducing a specific case in the system).

In Sfântu Gheorghe (Covasna county) and in Satu Mare (Satu Mare county) were organized to on site meetings, one before the training and one after the training in each of the two locations, where participating representatives of the child protection, educational, medical, judicial sectors and police could clarify their sectoral, institutional, and professional roles related to reporting child abuse and neglect cases. This contributed to the enhancement of coordinated intersectoral interventions in CAN cases. Later, from December 2020, the monthly online meetings of the local networks of operators gave the opportunity to present difficult cases and plan case conference.

To prepare the application of the platform to the local authorities in Bucharest., FONPC sent letters to the 6 offices of the mayor's Office of the 6 sectors of Bucharest and the General City Hall in order to involve local councilors in promoting the CAN-MDS system.

To obtain the support of the central authorities in Romania – the consortium worked also closely with the Ministry of Justice. FONPC is a member of the working group on the protection of victims of crime organized by Ministry of Justice. At the meeting on 24 March 2021 of the permanent working group we presented the CAN MDS system. <http://www.just.ro/protectia-victimelor-infractiunilor-o-prioritate-a-ministerului-justitiei/>

Promoting the CAN-MDS system towards the central authorities in Romania – on 31 March we had a meeting with the new President of National Authorities for Persons with disabilities, Children Rights and Adoption. FONPC also organized a meeting with the new President of National Authorities for Persons with disabilities, Children Rights and Adoption in order to present the program and to ask for the support related the promotion of the CAN – MDS system among the local public authorities - General Directorates of social assistance and child protection. ANPDPCA offered support letter, recommending the agencies and institutions to join the consortium and cooperate for piloting the platform. The objective was to involve institutions and operators to use the CAN MDS system for each of the cases of suspicion or abuse / neglect. [\(10\) Autoritatea Națională - Persoane cu Dizabilități, Copii și Adopții - Postări | Facebook](#)

The trainings took place starting July 2020 and continuing with August, September, and October 2020. The actual start of the data collection was 4th December 2021 on the platform, with the regional network in Satu Mare. Toward the end of December, other regions also started the data collection. Between the training and the start of working on the platform the collaboration agreements were signed with different agencies and the national

administration of the platform. 149 professionals opened accounts on the platform, they became the operators. Bucuresti: 54, Cluj: 27, Covasna: 32, Satu Mare: 31, plus 1 from Iasi, 3 from Galati, and another one from Bacau.

48 Agencies with whom the Consortium established cooperation contracts, as follows: The national Authority for Child Protection (ANDPDCA) , The Child Ombudsman Office, 8 Directorates of Child Protection (5 DGASPC in Bucharest, 1. Covasna, 1 Cluj, and 1 Satu Mare), 1 University (Bucharest University), 3 School inspectorates (Bucharest, Cluj, Covasna), 1 School, 4 Counselling Centers for school children (Bucharest, Covasna, Cluj, Satu Mare), 6 Mayorality Social Services, 8 Medical Institutions (including 4 Emergency Hospitals, 2 Police inspectorate Agencies (one in Bucharest and one in Satu Mare), 8 NGOs (Charities), 1 Daycare Center, 1The Questors Office in Satu Mare (Procuratura)

In July and August UBB organized online trainings for Satu Mare and then for Covasna counties. Training was supplemented later, in January. In September, October, DASM organized trainings for Cluj County (continued in January and March). Also in September 2020, FONPC organized online operators training for Bucharest. In October and in November, the national administrator kept in touch with the operators and supported them, so that in December, we started the piloting phase. Later in the spring, on 24 – 25 June 2021, FONPC organized a training for Judicial and law enforcement personnel (30 participants – 9 prosecutor and 17 policemen. At the training there were representatives of the National Institute for magistrate, the Police of the capital).

Operators were recruited from the following areas: social field – child protection (local and departmental authorities), schools (teachers and psychological counsellors), hospitals (medicines and social workers), ombudsman office (central and departmental office), NGOs. Not all training participant became operators. Mostly those from social fields – child protection DGASPC and DASM became active operators.

On 3.02.2021 (14:00-16:00) and 5.02.2021 (10:00-12:00) the National administrator of the Consortium organized, with the participation of FONPC, DASM and UBB working sessions with the operators in order to support them to use the CAN-MDS platform. The purpose of the working sessions was to answer all the questions regarding the introduction of data process, since the piloting started on 4th of December 2020.

The National administrator and the Consortium have also organized 2 workshops with operator: on 08.04.2020 (10:00-14:00) with the operators from Bucharest, and on 14.04.2020 (10:00-14:00) with the operators from Cluj, Covasna and Satu Mare. The workshops had the main goal to analyse how the intersectoral communications between operators was functioning, and how the sectors cooperate.

The College of Social workers granted professional certificates to those social workers who participated in training and workshops.

The National administrator and the consortium organized a last meeting with the Council of the MDSCAN platform on the 24th, June 2021. There were 16 participants. On the agenda we had the presentation of the National Report generated by the platform and the discussion of the quantitative and qualitative results. The data presented are the same as

those in this report. All representatives of the consortium and of the four sites piloting the platform were represented in the meeting. Representatives of the National Agency of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions, The Children's Advocate (People's Advocate Institution), The National College of Social Workers in Romania, Ministry of Justice, Bucharest University, The International Foundation for the Child and the Family (FICF) participated to the meeting of the Council. Participants much appreciated the results.

During the period of piloting the system (4th Dec 2020-30 June 2021), **287 cases** of abuse and neglect were registered in total, coming from Satu Mare (134), Bucharest (62), Covasna (28) and Cluj (63).

Cases introduced: 287 (100%)	Satu Mare	Covasna	București	Cluj
DGASPC	131 (45,64%)	18 (6.27%)	61 (21.20%)	24 (8.36%)
Mayorality Welfare Services	3 (1%)	5 (1.8%)	-	39 (13.6%)
Medical sector	-	5 (1.8%)	-	
ONG			1 (0.33%)	
	134	28	62	63

For Covasna county the number of referred children represent a significant increase, as in the similar period in 2020 only 5 children have been registered. For Satu Mare the number is almost silar, 134 in 2021, compared to 146 in 2020. For Cluj there is an increase in the data referred by the municipality social services to the Cluj County Directorate of Child Protection. There is an increase in the number of referrals also to the social services of the mayorality of CLUJ (DASM). If in 2020 there were 51 referrals, in the six moths of running the MDS project in 2021, there were 39 cases.

For Bucharest the number of referred children was 62, the operators for the child protection system (social services) was more involved that than other professional categories (57 of the cases were reported by social workers). In Bucharest are active 6 local services named General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection. Only the DGASPC sector 4 was not active at all, DGASPC sector registered 2 cases, DGASPC 2 – 11 cases, DGASPC 3- 14 cases, DGASPC 5 – 20 cases and DGASPC S 6 – 14 cases.

Only 2 cases were registered in data bases in 2020, 60 have been registered in 2021, because the piloting phase started in December 2020.

According to the child's gender, 122 male and 165 female cases have been introduces.

As in fig. 1, 270 (94.07%) of the children had a birth certificate (blue); 5 lacked this document (green); for 10 children the existence of the documents was uncertain (dark blue), and two children had not yet the birth certificate (yellow).

Counting the number of continuous incidents, versus distinct events, 140 new incidents have been introduced in the database during the 6 months of piloting (nearly half the total data), other 75 new incidents for continuous maltreatment cases (more than a quarter of the total

number of cases); for 30 cases(10.45%) there were no distinct events signalled, but continuous maltreatment, and for 42 (14.63%) cases the issue of continuous versus single incident remained unknown.

There were operators who reported cases were:

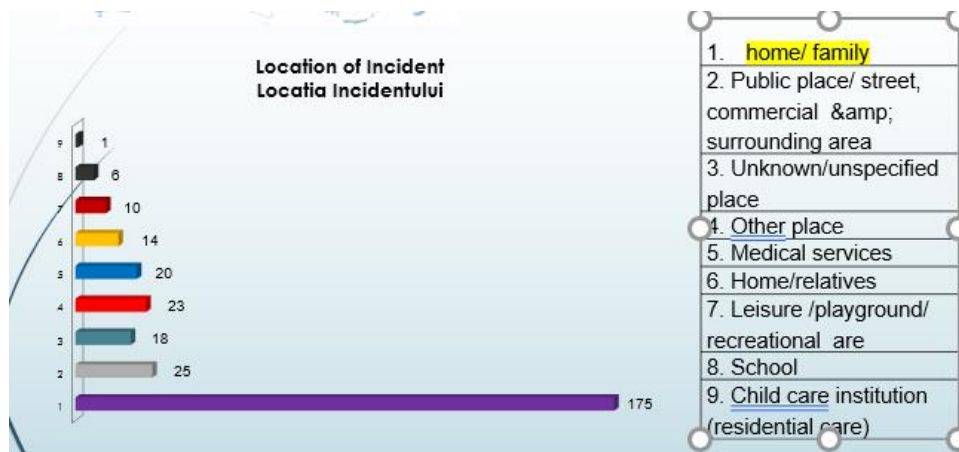
1. Personnel working in Social Services/ Public/Central/Local (77 cases, 26.82%)
2. Parents/foster parents/partners/care provider (55 cases, 19.16%)
3. Personnel working in Police/law enforcement (42 cases, 14.63%)
4. Personnel working in Health services (49 cases, 17.07%)
5. School /preschool /kindergarten personnel (20 cases, 6.97%)
6. Relative (siblings, grandparents, etc.) not living with the child (19 cases, 6,62%)
7. Others (25 cases, 8.71%)

The forms of maltreatment introduced on the platform were as follows:

1. Violent acts against self/self harm,16 cases (5.57%)
2. Physical violence committed against the child, 52 cases (18.11%)
3. Sexual violence against the child, 41 cases (14.29%)
4. Psychological violence, 40 cases (13.94%)
5. Neglect, omission 158 cases (55.05%)

(some cases were introduced as multiple forms of violence)

Most of the incidents took place in the homes of the children (175 cases, 60.98%), and other 14 in the homes of relatives (4.9%), 25 took place in public places like the streets and shops (8.71%), 20 in medical services (6.97%), 10 (3.48%) in leisure places (parcs, playgrounds, recreational areas), 6 (2.09%) took place in schools and 1 in a childcare residential home (0.33%). For 41 cases (14.28%) there was no such information. In 5 cases violence has been observed in more than one place.



The majority of cases introduced on the platform the children lived with their own families (247 cases, 86%), while 6 children live in a recomposed family (2%), 6 children live with their relatives (2%), 6 children (2%)live with friends' families, 3 children (1%) live with a foster family, 14 (5%), children live in residential care and for the others the care situation is uncertain (6 children, 2%).

As for the institutional response, in 87% of the referred situations there has been a specific institutional response, for 9% the response was not specified, and for 4% there has been no

response till the end of the piloting period. In 13% of cases court action has been taken or an equivalent authority has taken a decision. Social welfare services intervened in 122 cases (42.50%), educational services intervened in 6 cases (2%) and also NGOs were involved in 6 cases (2%).

The discussions in the workshops with the operators revolved around the necessity to continue developing this platform in order to allow feed back to those who referred the cases, and for a better follow up of the longitudinal evolution of cases, and their trajectory along different services. The common definitions and the existence of a set of standardised investigation evidence based would also improve the assessment of CAN, and the consecutive response.

For the moment, after the first six months of piloting we cannot demonstrate an overall increase in referrals, as the counties started on different dates and with different staffing, and backgrounds. We can only compare the percentage of different forms of violence (only those mentioned in both datasets), where we can see an increase in referring physical and sexual abuse.

Distribution of the share of different forms of violence reported the first semester of 2020 and 2021

Forms of violence* reported	abuz emotional	fizic	sexual	neglijare
% forms of violence 2020 June	13.60%	9.60%	7.3%	66.93%
% forms of violence MDS2 platform 2021 June	13.94%	18.11%	14.29%	55.05%

*Some cases were introduced as multiple forms of violence. In this table we did not give place to self-harm, and to labour exploitation, as they did not appear in both data sets.

Data on the platform compared to data at county/Bucharest sector (Satu Mare, Covasna, Sector 3 in Bucharest). One can see that in the county which previously had a large number of reported cases have continued in 2021 to have a similar number of reported cases, in spite the fact that at national level the services faced difficulties and CAN referrals have been reduced compared to 2019, see table bellow. The county with the fewest reporting nationally (Covasna) now has increased its number of referrals from 5 to 28, which is 5,6 times. The 3rd sector in Bucharest, with only 8 cases reported in the first semester 2019, now has 14 cases, 1.7 more compared to the same period in 2019.

Counties/Forms of CAN in 2020/ 2021	emotional abuse	physical abuse	sexual abuse	neglect	Total
Satu Mare 2020	10	9	32	92	143
Satu Mare 2021	6	17	25	88	136
Covasna 2020	0	0	2	3	5
Covasna 2021	6	3	1	18	28

Bucharest sect 3, 2020	1	5	1	1	8
Bucharest sect 3, 2021	6	5	2	1	14

In conclusion, the platform is useful because

- the list of descriptors and the clear definitions discussed in the training enables the operators working with the platform to improve the identification of the cases, as well as to respond to the needs of children and their families. Not only the definitions per se, but the clarifications while discussing them in the workshops contributed to more cases being reported.
- the platform being a well organized instrument, it helped the operators organize the modalities to identify and describe the situations of CAN.
- making data visible on a platform encourages collaboration between agencies and professionals, bringing forward the efforts of the child protection system and other related sectors in responding to accountability issues and justifying budgets.
- The feedback in the workshops demonstrated an increase in the motivation of the majority of participants to respond to the needs of maltreated children.
- Using the platform and communicated online during the workshops contributed to the development in the agency's digital competencies, initially sceptical in using the platform. They learned that cooperation is possible on a common platform, without threats to security, and in an ethical way, is another strength of the program.
- Data show an increase in the county which previously had one of the lowest reporting CAN rates.
- The platform fist very well in the actual social context in Romania, as there is a tendency, but also a pressure to digitalize the administrative work in social services, including child protection.