Romania 2035 Education Children and Social Mobility Programme

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Executive summary

This programme starts from a simple idea: education policy and social policy cannot be treated separately if the objective is to give every child a genuine opportunity to build a productive life in Romania. School, child health, nutrition, safety, childcare, the family's circumstances, transport and parents' access to employment all affect one another. A child who drops out of school is not merely a problem for the Ministry of Education; it may represent a failure involving poverty, health, transport, social protection, family circumstances and the labour market.

Romania 2035 therefore proposes a Child Opportunity Guarantee: access to early childhood education and care, a safe and functional school, early identification of dropout risk, basic nutrition and healthcare, and a credible pathway after school - university, vocational and technical education, or employment. It does not create a parallel administration. It uses MATE, PNRAS, SIIIR, investments already made through the NRRP, the Education and Employment Programme, local services and existing systems, but connects them to common outcomes.

The multiplier effect is central. A childcare place does not help only the child: it can allow a parent to return to work, increase household income, broaden the contribution base and reduce social vulnerability. A MATE system connected operationally to health and social services can prevent dropout before the state pays years of downstream costs from marginalisation. Vocational and technical education linked to employers simultaneously supports industry, investment, incomes and regional development.

The programme is designed around institutional continuity. The Ministry of Education remains the owner of educational standards; local authorities remain responsible for local capacity and service operation; the Ministry of Labour and social services intervene where vulnerability exists; the health system participates where a child's risk requires it; and employers become genuine partners in vocational pathways. The objective is not a temporary campaign, but to turn these connections into a normal capability of the Romanian state.

The 2035 objective

Level	Intended outcome
Child	Real access to early education, a safe school, support when at risk, and a pathway into study or employment.
Family	Childcare and local services make it possible to combine employment with family life.
School	Lower dropout, measurable competencies, supported teachers and clear responsibility for safety.
Economy	Vocational and technical education connected to regional skills demand; higher parental labour participation.
State	One intervention pathway around the child, using existing data and programmes rather than parallel systems.

1. Education, skills and school completion

Human capital is economic infrastructure. Romania cannot sustain a higher-productivity economy, more sophisticated industry, better healthcare or a modern public administration if a significant share of young people leaves the system without functional skills or a credible pathway into work. Reform must therefore measure the outcome achieved by the student, not the number of projects, interactive boards or training courses purchased.

The immediate priority is preventing dropout and identifying risk before the student disappears from the system. MATE remains the national early-warning mechanism, but it should be operationally connected to social services, healthcare and the local authority. An intervention must have an owner, a deadline and a verifiable outcome, without turning schools into social-investigation agencies.

At the same time, completing education must mean more than formal attendance. The objective is completion of Grade 12 or an equivalent vocational pathway and a real exit route into university, training or employment. Vocational and technical education should be designed regionally with employers so that qualifications, practical training and equipment correspond to economic demand.

Over the long term, the measure of success is straightforward: fewer young people lost between school and the labour market, stronger competencies and an economy that can find in Romania the people it needs. This reform multiplies investment in industry, energy, healthcare, digitalisation and entrepreneurship.

Measures

• Completion of Grade 12 or an equivalent vocational pathway as a system objective, without turning a single examination into a universal barrier.

• MATE/SIIIR as the single mechanism for identifying dropout risk, procedurally connected to social and health services.

• Regional employer-school councils for vocational and technical education, using data on skills demand and graduate employment.

• Transparent teacher incentives linked to certified competencies, additional roles and outcomes, rather than arbitrary bonuses.

• Teacher development focused on digital pedagogy, risk intervention, assessment and applied competencies; hardware is not treated as an outcome.

• Public reporting on dropout, competencies, labour-market insertion and the actual use of existing investments.

Legal framework and existing programmes

Category	Treatment
Supporting law - use it	Pre-University Education Law No. 198/2023; Higher Education Law No. 199/2023; Law No. 272/2004 on children's rights; MATE/SIIIR and PNRAS regulations; the framework for dual education and vocational training.
Barriers - amend/clarify	Insufficient MATE-social-health integration; weak alignment of vocational pathways with employers; inconsistent staff incentives; fragmented intervention and accountability protocols.
EU - priority/alignment	European Education Area; Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success; European Child Guarantee; European Skills

Category	Treatment
	Agenda; EU recommendations on vocational education and training. Organisation of schooling remains largely a national competence.
Existing programmes - do not duplicate	PNRAS/MATE; NRRP digital equipment, training, early education and vocational investments; Education and Employment Programme 2021-2027; Erasmus+. The priority is to operate existing assets and close outcome gaps.
Funding	ESF+/Education and Employment Programme for skills, inclusion and training; education budget for operations; regional/ERDF funding for eligible infrastructure; NRRP resources already invested are used, not repurchased.

2. Safe schools and student protection

A school cannot produce educational results if the student is not safe. Safety must be treated as an operational responsibility, not as a sequence of reactions after incidents. Every school must know who is responsible, how a risk can be reported confidentially, and at what point the family, social services, healthcare, police or child-protection authorities must become involved.

The Safe Schools Compact proposed in the programme does not create a new institution. It standardises accountability, reporting routes and multi-agency cooperation. Child-protection law and existing staff duties already provide an important foundation; the problem is uneven application and the absence of a predictable intervention pathway.

Student protection includes violence, bullying, abuse, neglect, dropout risk and situations in which health or family circumstances prevent participation in education. Data should be accessed strictly according to role and necessity, protecting confidentiality and avoiding unnecessary parallel databases.

Measures

- A designated student-safety lead and a clear escalation protocol.
- A confidential reporting channel for students, parents and staff.
- A multi-agency protocol with deadlines and accountability, using existing institutions.
- Linking safety indicators to absenteeism and MATE risk, with limited and justified access to data.
- Periodic audit of incidents and intervention times, not merely counting reports.

3. Childcare as economic infrastructure

Nurseries, kindergartens and complementary childcare services are not only social policy. They are economic infrastructure. The absence of a childcare place can remove a parent from the labour market, reduce household income and make a community less attractive to families and employers. Childcare capacity should therefore be planned together with housing, transport and economic development.

Romania has already invested through the NRRP in nurseries and complementary services. The next-stage problem is not only construction, but operation: staffing, opening hours, accessibility, cost and geographic distribution. A building without staff and an operating budget is not real social capacity.

The programme requires large developments and Housing Growth Zones to demonstrate childcare, preschool and school capacity early. Services may be public, nonprofit, private or employer-supported, under common quality and protection standards. The objective is capacity available to the family, not monopoly by a single provider type.

The multiplier is direct: the child receives early development, the parent can work, the family earns income, the employer can recruit, and the state gains contributions while reducing poverty risk. A childcare place should therefore also be evaluated as an investment in employment and household income.

Legal framework and funding

Category	Treatment
Supporting law	Law No. 198/2023 - early education; Law No. 272/2004; Social Assistance Law No. 292/2011; Social Services Law No. 197/2012; Fiscal Code for potential employer-supported mechanisms.
Barriers	Capacity is not sufficiently linked to major housing developments; buildings can be funded without a staffing and operating plan; responsibility is split between education, social policy and local government.
Required change	Planning standard for major developments/growth zones; infrastructure funding conditional on an operating and staffing plan; common service standards for eligible providers.
EU	European Child Guarantee; revised Barcelona targets for early childhood education and care; ESF+ for inclusion, participation and work-family reconciliation.
Existing programmes	NRRP investments in nurseries and complementary services; Education and Employment Programme; regional and local programmes. Capacity gaps are filled rather than creating parallel schemes.
Funding	ESF+ for services/inclusion; ERDF/regional funding for eligible infrastructure; local/national budgets for operations; developer contributions where lawful and proportionate; employer support.

4. Child Opportunity Guarantee

The Child Opportunity Guarantee is the framework that connects the components. It is neither a new universal benefit nor a new institution. It is an operational promise that a child's vulnerability will not be divided among ministries until nobody remains accountable. Existing systems must identify the problem, designate an owner and follow the result.

The Guarantee covers access to early education, a safe and functional school, basic nutrition and healthcare, intervention when dropout risk appears, and a pathway after school. The intensity of support differs according to need. The opportunity standard is universal; financial or social intervention is targeted.

In vulnerable communities, the school, social service, healthcare system and local authority should work to a common plan, with data minimisation and clear responsibilities. It is not necessary for every institution to see every piece of information about the family; it is necessary for each institution to know which action belongs to it.

Intended outcomes

- Lower dropout and chronic absenteeism.

• Higher participation in early childhood education.

• Fewer children whose vulnerability is identified late.

• Faster access to the appropriate service, with fewer referrals between institutions.

• Measurable transition from school into further study, training or employment.

5. Work, family and social mobility

Social policy should protect vulnerable people without turning inactivity into a trap. Romania 2035 links childcare, reskilling and mobility to labour participation. For a family, the ability to accept a job often depends on transport, the child's schedule and the cost of care just as much as on the salary offered.

Childcare and metropolitan/regional transport are therefore also treated as employment policies. Where fiscal modelling allows, employer-provided mobility benefits may receive favourable treatment. Employment programmes should be evaluated on sustainable employment and income, not on the number of people enrolled in courses.

Formal employment simultaneously strengthens the family and the pension and health systems. Enforcement should focus on genuine risk and material fraud, while hiring and reporting for microenterprises and SMEs should be simplified. The objective is a broader contributor base, not transferring more burden onto those who already comply.

Support framework

Category	Treatment
Legislation	Labour Code No. 53/2003; Law No. 76/2002 on employment; Law No. 360/2023 on pensions; Fiscal Code; Social Dialogue Law No. 367/2022.
Barriers	Disproportionate administrative reporting; fragmented programmes; incentives weakly tied to sustainable employment; inconsistent tax treatment of mobility/commuting.
EU	European Pillar of Social Rights; Directive 2019/1152; Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance; EU recommendations on employment and skills.
Programmes	Education and Employment Programme 2021-2027/ESF+; ANOFM; vocational training and regional instruments. No parallel scheme is launched if the result can be purchased through an existing programme.

6. PNSCL - voluntary, paid national civic service

PNSCL is designed as a voluntary and paid pathway through which young people can gain experience, professional discipline and useful skills in fields with public value. It is not compulsory military service and does not replace permanent jobs. Its role is to create a bridge between education, community service and entry into the labour market.

Tracks may include healthcare and emergency response, cybersecurity, aviation, environment, driving, logistics and community services, only where there is genuine training, supervision and useful work. Participation must produce a certifiable competency or recognised experience, not cheap labour for institutions.

PNSCL also has a resilience function: it creates a larger population of young people trained in skills useful to communities and the state. The programme should nevertheless be piloted and rigorously evaluated before scaling, precisely to avoid becoming a bureaucracy or an artificial employment scheme.

Design principles

• Voluntary, civilian and paid.

• Defined duration and training standards for each pathway.

• No substitution of permanent jobs or regulated professions.

• Certification of competencies and recognition of experience.

• Regional/sector pilot before national expansion.

• Metrics: completion, competencies gained, subsequent employment, cost per participant and host-institution satisfaction.

7. Implementation and accountability

Mission	Political owner	Executor	Long-term caretaker
Education and MATE	Ministry of Education	Schools, territorial education structures, local authorities	Ministry of Education and existing education systems
Child safety	Education + child protection	School, DGASPC/SPAS, healthcare, police where appropriate	Existing institutions through a common protocol
Childcare	Education + Labour + Development	Local authorities and eligible public/nonprofit/private providers	Local authority for capacity; Education for standards
Vocational education	Ministry of Education	Schools, employers, regional/local authorities	Ministry of Education + regional partnerships
Employment/mobility	Ministry of Labour	ANOFM, employers, transport authorities	Ministry of Labour/ANOFM
PNSCL	Government + participating ministries	Accredited host institutions	Coordinating ministry designated after pilot

8. Sequencing

Horizon	Action
First 100 days	National baseline; audit of MATE/PNRAS and childcare capacity; Safe Schools standard; map vocational pathways and employer demand; design PNSCL pilot; inventory NRRP assets and operating costs.
Year 1	Procedural MATE-social-health integration in pilot areas; first

Horizon	Action
	regional vocational councils; opening/operation of existing childcare capacity; public indicators; PNSCL pilot.
Years 2-5	Scale interventions that demonstrate results; connect housing planning to social capacity; outcome-oriented funding; expand validated vocational pathways.
Years 5-10	Mechanisms become normal administrative practice; dropout reduction and stronger participation/competencies become permanent national outcomes; temporary structures close or are absorbed.

9. Indicators that determine whether the programme works

Area	Indicators
Child	early-education participation; chronic absenteeism; dropout; access to services; safety incidents and response time
Education	competencies; Grade 12/equivalent pathway completion; vocational-to-job transition; progression to further study
Family	childcare places per 100 children; access time; family cost; parental labour participation
Employment	employment; formalisation; real median wage; parents returning to the labour market
System	cost per child/participant; use of existing assets; intervention time; duplicate programmes eliminated
PNSCL	completion; certified competencies; subsequent employment; cost per participant; permanent jobs not displaced

10. Safeguards against programme failure

• Do not repurchase hardware when the problem is pedagogy, operations or maintenance.

• Do not build a nursery or school without a staffing, operating and recurrent-cost plan.

• Do not create a new database if MATE/SIIIR or an existing register can lawfully do the job.

• Do not define an employment programme's success by participant numbers; measure sustainable employment and income.

• Do not scale PNSCL until the pilot demonstrates competencies and employment outcomes without replacing permanent jobs.

• Do not transfer sensitive data between institutions merely because it is technically possible; access must follow

role, necessity and legal basis.

• Do not treat European funding as the objective. Reuse an existing programme if it can deliver the result; create a new mechanism only where a demonstrated gap exists.

11. Force-multiplier effect

The programme should be judged by cross-sector effects, not only by the indicators of one ministry. Childcare raises labour participation and family income. Dropout prevention reduces downstream social costs and expands the future skills base. Vocational education supports industrial and regional investment. Safe schools improve participation and reduce late intervention. Mobility allows a family to accept employment without relocating. PNSCL can turn a young person's transition period into experience and public resilience.

Intervention	Multiplier chain
Childcare	child -> parent in work -> household income -> contributions -> lower vulnerability
Integrated MATE	risk identified -> early intervention -> dropout avoided -> skills -> future income
Vocational education	employer + school -> relevant skill -> job -> investment/productivity
Safe school	reporting + intervention -> participation -> educational outcomes -> lower social risk
Mobility	accessible transport -> larger job catchment -> income -> family sustainability
PNSCL	voluntary service -> skill/experience -> employment + resilience capacity

12. Design and adoption conditions

Child Opportunity Guarantee; the public-private balance in childcare; and which indicators should trigger additional funding or termination of an intervention.

This sector programme implements the complete programme and the European and legal conditions below.

European integration and legal framework

Care capacity supports work participation and access for vulnerable children, including children with disabilities. The Opportunity Guarantee connects to the European Child Guarantee through existing services for early education, health, nutrition and adequate housing. Actual access and family cost are measured; work-life balance and statutory leave are preserved.

Long-term care integrates social and health services, carer support and personal choice. Independent living for people with disabilities and prevention of avoidable institutionalisation matter alongside capacity. Standards, protection from abuse and recurring cost are conditions for expansion.

Skills matching includes low-skilled adults, people with disabilities, women, young people outside work or education and rural or marginalised communities. Employment services connect training to demand and accessible support without unlawful conditioning of assistance rights. Qualification recognition, workplace safety, collective bargaining and equal treatment are checked. KPIs track sustained employment and real income.

Basic skills and dropout prevention take priority, including rural and marginalised communities, through existing early-warning and coordinated services. Requirements accommodate students with disabilities and preserve equivalent vocational routes. The 5%+5% incentives follow statutory pay rules, budget and social dialogue, with moderated indicators that do not penalise schools serving disadvantaged students.

The approximately 30% interdisciplinary-work objective at Master's and doctoral level is implemented through academic decisions and accreditation standards, with field-appropriate equivalents. University autonomy under Article 32(6) remains guaranteed; the ministry does not unilaterally prescribe curricula or doctoral credits. Funding may reward documented outcomes while respecting academic freedom, basic research and scientific integrity.

The 60% national and 40% university rule applies to eligible net revenue from future public programmes under clear lawful terms agreed before funding. It does not retroactively transfer existing IP or earned income or override grant and partner obligations or inventors' rights. Existing assets and contracts follow law or valid agreement. Legislation and agreements preserve university autonomy and contributor remuneration. Statutory inventor remuneration is reserved and paid before the eligible residual proceeds are divided 60/40; cases within Article 11 of Law 83/2014 retain at least 30% of the income defined by law. Contracts do not reduce that minimum by calculating it only against the university share.

Civil service remains voluntary and paid with child safeguarding, work and training standards, insurance and contractually defined exit rights. It does not replace permanent jobs or authorise access to sensitive data or regulated professions. Civil-protection skills use competent-authority standards and community preparedness exercises.

Legal and fiscal card

Before launch, each initiative publishes amendments required, competence, mandatory opinions and consultation, rights and equality impact, years 1–5 and lifecycle costs, staffing, maintenance, cofinancing and confirmed funding. Finance checks net expenditure, deficit and debt. Unpriced costs are not fiscal space. Political commitment, submission of a bill and lawful entry into force are distinguished.

Rights and transition

Review covers non-retroactivity, property, university and local autonomy, academic freedom, labour rights, privacy and access to court. Restrictions must pass Article 53 where applicable and EU tests. Penalties are statutory, individualised and appealable. Sensitive data need a distinct legal basis and assessment; technical connection creates no general access right.