Romania - Child Protection Sub-Working Group

Quarterly meeting & Social Cohesion and Social Inclusion Workshop

13 May 2025

The CPSWG meeting on May 13, 2025, brought together child protection actors to review the current operational and funding landscape, assess the impact of recent programmatic reductions, and explore ways to strengthen coordination in light of the ongoing constraints. The group reflected on lessons learned from the past year, particularly around inclusion, collaboration with national authorities, and the sustainability of services for refugee and host communities. The discussion also aimed to identify strategic priorities moving forward, including the integration of social cohesion, and the potential restructuring of coordination mechanisms.

The meeting was co-facilitated by UNHCR (Pedro Munoz Alonso) and UNICEF (Gheorghe Trofin).

Participants: ANPDCA (Izabella Popa), World Vision (Florina Dragulin, Laurentia Mereuta, Liviu Vacareanu), Romanian Red Cross (Catalina Grecu), UNHCR (Pedro Munoz Alonso, Anca Costei, Yuliya Feshchenko, Eva Nassar), UNICEF (Gheorghe Trofin, Simina Guga, Ioana Florea).

Introduction (UNHCR)

- Noted that fewer organizations were present in the meeting.
- Child Protection sector is facing significant budget constraints.
- WV discontinued activities in Cluj (April), Iasi, and Suceava (from August), alongside reductions in staffing.
- Emphasis on the need to rethink existing coordination structures and strategies to adapt to the new context and presence of actors, particularly around funding constraints and collaboration.

Organizational updates

UNICEF

- No current partnerships with CSOs or direct service provision.
- Focus on collaboration with local authorities (nexus approach), development of the Blue Grid local governance for refugee children, UASC monitoring and technical support to DGASPCs, exploring technical solutions for integration of Primero into the National Observatory.
- Support for national authorities on implementation of the new PACT on Migration and Asylum, and TSI on preventing and addressing violence against children in partnership with ANPDCA.

World Vision (WV)

- WV underwent three rounds of budget reductions with CP activities reduced, yet still implementing the project until the end of year.
- Current Projects:
    - With support from the US-funded CPC project, there is hope WV will be able to assist refugees.
    - Inclusive Education (Happy Bubbles), remedial education and MHPSS via DEC funding – ends in August 2025.
- Long-term focus: Child Protection and Education; fundraising strategy will focus on these pillars.
- While some projects are not designed to include refugees, WV is actively exploring ways to ensure their inclusion.

ANPDCA

- Noted that the new ANPDCA leadership met with UNHCR and UNICEF.
- Stressed need for NGOs to ensure proper handover to authorities and emphasized the need for enhancing coordination to assist DGASPCs, given their heavy workload and limited resources
- Legal gaps discussed, particularly regarding representatives for unaccompanied foreign children holding temporary protection. While Law No. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child does not specify the nomination process, the asylum law does address the nomination of representative for children holding temporary protection. For unaccompanied children holding temporary protection, the process should follow the same procedures as for other children requesting asylum. UNICEF and UNHCR can assist staff in understanding and interpreting the relevant laws.
- ANPDPD and ANPDCA have been holding discussions to reach a common standpoint regarding disability certification and its requirements for children holding Temporary Protection. Once the final decision is made by the institutions, feedback on the outcome will be shared.

Red Cross

- Less affected by funding constraints due to emergency appeal valid until the end of year.
- Exploring ways to harmonize activities and projects for both the Romanian community and asylum seekers.
- Interested in developing a uniform referral pathway system and would like to know if other organizations are also interested. UNHCR mentioned that Services Advisor will continue to be the point of reference.

Coordination and strategy

- Partners encouraged rethinking coordination strategies moving forward.
- UNICEF proposed considering as an option merging working groups to improve efficiency.
- WV suggested engaging AMIF implementation NGOs for broader inclusion (pending internal review by UNHCR as the AMIF implementation partners would not align with the Ukraine refugee response).

- **Service mapping**

- WV presented findings from February's CP Service Mapping Exercise.
- Noted significant changes since then; institutional landscape might shift post-elections.
- Proposal to establish a WhatsApp group with clear usage guidelines for WG communication.

Social cohesion workshop highlights (UNICEF-led)

- Save the Children and World Vision were the organizations that contributed with inputs.
- During the workshop, discussions around the topic focused on:
    - Breaking social "bubbles"
    - Reducing stereotypes
    - Inclusion, empathy, and mental health
    - Promotion of diversity

World Vision Initiatives

- Involves local authorities, schools, and faith-based leaders.
- Focuses on prevention by equipping children and caregivers through workshops and parenting programs. These initiatives aim to ensure children's well-being by teaching how to recognize abuse, respond effectively, and safely report concerns.
- Builds the capacity of local authorities to respond to and prevent abuse.
- Addresses the issue of underreporting of abuse cases, often caused by victim-blaming and fear of repercussions.
- Aims to improve cohesion between refugee and host communities by organizing school-based workshops that promote a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. When everyone has the tools and knowledge to identify abuse, prevention becomes a collective effort.
- Actively involves children in decision-making processes through focus groups that help shape relevant programs.
- Works with the Children's Consultative Council (a pre-existing body) by involving its members in advocacy and encouraging peer-to-peer support networks.
- When WV lacks the necessary capacity, they are open to partnering with other organizations that can provide support.

UNICEF Observations

- Observed that institutions often take a less proactive approach due to the lack of interpretation services and other resources, including human, which limits direct communication with beneficiaries. As a result, NGOs have had to act as intermediaries.
- Raised the question of whether social cohesion initiatives are still necessary in the current context of the protracted refugee crisis. The conclusion was yes—support structures are even more essential when resources are limited, as they help communities remain resilient and connected.

Final observations

- Authorities, especially in high-demand and low-resource environments, require clear guidance and sustained support.
- Negative societal attitudes toward violence against children, domestic violence, and diversity remain persistent challenges.
- Educational reform and ongoing training for adult staff are essential to improve service delivery and inclusivity.
- Social cohesion should be understood as both a goal and an ongoing process aimed at preventing hate crimes, tensions, and misunderstandings.
- A common definition and standardized measurement framework for social cohesion is necessary for effective implementation.
- Mutual understanding and reduced fear among different groups can be fostered through structured exposure and interaction.
- Prejudice and mistrust often stem from limited contact with persons outside someone's community; building empathy and shared responsibility is key.
- Consider developing a repository of good practices and legislative recommendations to serve as a legacy of the refugee response.
- The Joint *Order No. 119/20643/2023 on the conditions of appointment, role, duties and requirements for training, education and professional experience for persons appointed as representatives for unaccompanied foreign minors who request or obtain a form of international protection* should be revised to align with the updated PACT and relevant EU directives.

Next Steps

- Consider measures for streamlining the CPSWG, including merging working groups for better coordination or establishing WhatsApp communication group with clear guidelines.
- Discuss how to ensure the sustainability and legacy of current initiatives within the CPSWG, including exploring the integration of relevant policies (e.g., Emergency Orders and other ordinances) into permanent legislation, and developing a shared strategy or a repository of good practices.
- Follow up on collaboration with AMIF NGOs.