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Adoption in Romania: Historical Perspectives and Recent Statistics

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ABSTRACT

In this article we present a brief history and recent statistics of child abandonment and adoption in Romania. After a rise in international adoptions in the 90s, a moratorium on adoption was established and in 2004 international adoptions became virtually impossible. Based on statistics of the Romanian National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption, we noted that since 2004 international adoptions were rare, whereas domestic adoptions remained relatively stable with about 1,000 adoptions each year. To date, not all potential adoption placements are realized. We conclude with reflecting on possible changes to improve child welfare in Romania.

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Romania; domestic adoption; international adoption; child welfare; child abandonment

Short statements

1. Since the moratorium on international adoption in Romania in 2004, international adoptions have been rare, yet domestic adoptions remained relatively stable with about 1,000 children adopted each year.
2. To date, each year more children are eligible for adoption in Romania than are actually adopted, and not all potential adoption placements are realized.
3. More potential adoption placements should be realized so that more Romanian children can find a permanent and stable home through adoption.

Every country's child protection system focuses on providing abandoned children with good physical and mental health services and ample opportunities for education (McDavid, 2015; Pecora et al., 2006; Segalen, 2011). Adoption may offer a suitable alternative to provide a permanent, stable home for children who have been abandoned by their birth parents (Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2012; Palacios et al., 2019).

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Throughout history, children have been abandoned by their parents in various circumstances and for different reasons (Ayres, 2008; Segalen, 2011), including as a symbol of political protest (Gill, 2014; Veyne, 1994). Over the last century, children separated from their parents were often raised in institutions (Nelson, Fox, & Zeanah, 2014), placed in foster families or adopted. In such cases, child protection services take over the parental responsibilities and try to promote the child's welfare applying the results of evidence-based or practice-based knowledge in the field.

In this article we present a brief history of child abandonment and domestic and international child adoption in Romania with the aim of providing an overview of developments in Romanian child welfare policy and child protection services (CPS). The year 2004 became a milestone in child welfare history in Romania, because international adoptions became almost impossible due to changes in child protection and adoption legislation. Recent statistics on child abandonment and adoption are used to reflect on current practice of child adoption.

Abandoned children and CPS during the communist period in Romania

After the Second World War, Romania became a communist country. During Ceausescu's leadership the Romanian people, especially vulnerable groups such as children, disabled, and older people, seemed to have lost their value due to the political strategy aimed to promote the "new type of human being, multilateral developed", meaning a perfect human being without any personal or social difficulty, and able to implement through his work the ambitious communist policy (Bocarnea & Osula, 2008; Partidul Comunist Roman, 1975; Tismaneanu, 2006). Consequently, persons with different challenges such as children, elderly and disabled people were almost ignored with no support services or legislations and often placed in institutions without any chance for thriving.

Ceausescu's reproductive policy, which began in 1966 with a Decree prohibiting abortion (Kligman, 2000), coupled with a scarcity of support services for families and with growing poverty, led to a dramatic increase in the number of children lacking parental care. One immediate effect of the Decree was a deterioration in maternal and infant health (Stephenson, Wagner, Badea, & Serbanescu, 1992; UNICEF, 2004) and "*the sudden and temporary increase of fertility was followed by a large increase in the number of abandoned children in orphanages that were meant to shelter them*" (Segalen, 2011, p. 366). A common saying in those years ran as follows: "*The State wanted children, let the State look after them*" (Carpena-Caillard,

2000), illustrating the political protest involved in the decision of parents to abandon their unwanted children.

The Romanian Government adopted Law 3/1970 for the protection of minors (Roth, 2009) promoting institutionalization as the key way of protecting children left without parental care. Children in the state's care were placed in and moved between different types of institutions depending on their age and level of development: nurseries (for infants aged 0–3); children's homes (according to children's age and gender), hospital homes (for children with special needs), and reeducation centers (for juvenile offenders). Different types of institutions came under the jurisdiction of a number of ministries (Health, Justice, Education, and Labor and the Family). Three categories of personnel worked in these institutions: cleaning, childcare, and medical staff. The staffing ratio was usually one adult to 30 children and staff mobility was extremely high.

Based on the provisions of Law 3/1970, the children would be given a physical and mental health assessment when they were moved between institutions, according to their age. If their development and health were seriously below the expected standard, the child would be kept in the same institution for a longer period. Persistent delay often led to placement of children in institutions for disabled children. The mortality of institutionalized children was high but no statistics were kept to mirror its incidence. Institutions for children were closed spaces that often did not allow outside visitors, not even relatives. Most Romanians were not aware about the conditions in these institutions. Ordinary people were denied access, and if relatives were allowed, they were received in special visiting rooms only. Relationships between family members and child were not encouraged (Falls, 2011; Kligman, 2000) and many children placed in institutions for a temporary period especially due to family's poverty were ultimately abandoned by their parents (Kligman, 2000; Muntean, 2013; Roth, 2009).

The emotional and cognitive stimulation of institutionalized children was suboptimal, the continuity in social relationships was limited, and children's physical and psychological health was poor (Roby & Ife, 2009).

During the communist period the practice of domestic and international adoption of children from institutions (Kligman, 2000; Muntean, 2017) was limited. Only a few well-off infertile couples selected and adopted children from institutions. Usually couples without children adopted a child from within their wider family network or from relatives who had several children. The common practice within families to deal with orphaned children was to adopt them in the extended family, thus preventing institutionalization. International adoption was allowed only with special permission from

Ceausescu and there are no statistics available to examine how widespread or sporadic this practice was.

1990 and the following years

In the year 1989, Romania was a poor country and with many abandoned children living in institutions. An UNICEF Report in 1991 mentioned that 142,000 to 200,000 children (4% of Romania's child population) were living in 628 residential care institutions (Hines, Kessler, & Landers, 1991; Johnson, Edwards, & Puwak, 1993; Johnson & Groze, 1993). However, there are no official statistics available to confirm this information. Within the 72 orphanages spread all over the country caring for children aged 0 to 3 years, there were 6,642 children and 65% of them (4,215 children) had various medical or psychological problems (Johnson et al., 1993). When children were placed in institutions, no attention was paid to keep the child in the proximity of the family. The adverse conditions in the institutions were revealed by television news broadcasts around the world and many people, moved by compassion, became interested in adopting children internationally from Romanian orphanages (Selman, 2009).

Romanian Law 11/1990 facilitated international adoptions and within an eight-month period 4,491 children were adopted internationally (Johnson et al., 1993). In 1991 Romania was a major country of origin of internationally adopted children. Estimates are around 10,000 children from institutions being adopted internationally between 1990 and 2001 (Dickens, 2002), but no statistics are available before 1997, the year when through the ordinances 25 and 26/1997 a new structure for child protection and adoption was initiated.

The wave of international adoptions was assumed to stimulate a “black market” of Romanian children (Johnson & Groze, 1993; Woodling, 2004), especially due to the lack of legislation and services in child protection within a society heavily affected by poverty. During the communism some poor parents placed their children into the institution to provide them with a better future and education. The first years following 1990 and based on almost the same assumptions some poor families “sold” their children to foreign adoptive families.

During 1990–1992, in the context of the postrevolution enthusiasm and hopes, there seemed to be a considerable decrease in the number of children in institutions, whereas in the following years, as mentioned by Vitillo and Tobis (1997), the institutions were filled up again and some of the children initially taken back by their families were once again abandoned in institutions.

Developments of the legal framework and child protection structures

Between 1990 and 2004 a number of laws regarding CPS were passed (for overviews see Appendix A: Reports, and Appendix B: Laws). In September 1990, Romania ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Law 18/1990) and Law 11/1990 liberalized the international adoption regime. Two new governmental structures designed to protect children and regulate the adoption of children were set up through Law 48/1991: the Commission for Child Protection and the Romanian Committee on Adoption. Two years later Law 47/1993 stipulated that a child resident in a social or medical institution or in a private institution would be pronounced abandoned by Court decision if the parents showed no interest in the child during a period of 6 months. The law defined “no interest” as the absence of any evidence that the parents or relatives had either visited or telephoned to ask for information about the child within that period. The European Convention on child adoption (Strasbourg Convention) became Law 15/1993 and The Hague Convention on child protection and cooperation for international adoption was ratified through Law 84/1994.

The year 1997 brought a turning point in CPS and new laws were issued giving rise to new policies and structures. The emergency Ordinances 25/1997 and 26/1997 for the protection of children in difficult circumstances abrogated Law 3/1970. This was the first Romanian regulation to promote deinstitutionalization by setting up new kind of services, mainly family-type homes and foster families and taking in consideration child adoption. In June 1997, 39.569 children were in institutions, while in foster care there were 11.899 children (NAPCRA, n.d.), and according to the official statistics in the following years the number of children placed in foster care increased in parallel with the decrease of the number of children placed in institutions.

In 2004, Laws 272/2004 and 273/2004 established the procedures and governmental structures responsible for child protection and adoption. One of the most important aspects regulated was related to abandoned children’s legal relationship with their biological parents. The Romanian Office for Adoption (ORA) was established as a specific governmental body focused on adoption at the national level.

In 2014 following the national elections, ORA was integrated within the National Authority for Protection of Children’s Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) which is part of the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice.

In the same year, Law 131 ruled that children aged 0–3 should be placed within family environment. In Romania there are three types of foster parents to whom children in CPS can be placed: 1) foster parents who are specifically trained and approved, and supervised by CPS, being full time employed, meaning that they are working 24 hours each day, 2) foster families trained and paid by NGOs, and 3) relatives or neighbors who decide to

take care of the child and who receive a small allowance to cover the child's needs. The law makes an exception for children with disabilities who could be placed within institutions with specialized care. The law also stipulates that siblings should be placed together. Unfortunately, these exceptions seem to set up the framework for infants' placement in institutions, as will be shown later in this article.

A significant category of children in CPS are abused and neglected children. For these children and their families special support is provided and in severe cases the children are taken out of the family. To date, a constant problem seems to be the continuing high level of child abandonment. Romanian media have highlighted situations in which children had been left in dangerous places that put their life at risk, such as railway stations or even in open spaces (Rusu, 2015). Usually, parents who give up their child ask for help from CPS (Scorcia-Popescu, 2016). Sometimes children are placed and abandoned by their parents within hospital units and often these children end up in the care of CPS.

Most of the abandoned children who enter CPS are infants left in maternity hospitals. European statistics reveal the top position of Romania in regards of adolescent mothers (Eurostat, 2017a). Many adolescent and unmarried mothers without social support or access to support services relinquish their new-born infant without leaving anything that could identify them, which would be particularly relevant when the child has health problems (Nelson et al., 2014). In such cases, when the parents do not visit the child in hospital or within CPS and no relatives can be traced during a year, the child is regarded as suitable for adoption. This lengthy process jeopardizes the development of children who live their early lives in institutions, which are known to be inappropriate environments for a healthy development. Even though "some sort of improvement" (Rijk, Hoksbergen, & ter Laak, 2010, p. 245) has taken place in Romanian institutions, the negative impact of institutional care on the health, behavior, and cognitive and socioemotional development of the child should be acknowledged (Beckett et al., 2006; Juffer & Van IJzendoorn, 2005; Marshall, Fox, and the BEIP Core Group, 2004; Rutter, Kreppner, & O'Connor, 2001; Rijk et al., 2010; Van IJzendoorn, Juffer, & Poelhuis, 2005).

Despite evidence that adoption is a viable intervention for providing a permanent family to an abandoned child at any age (Barroso, Barbosa-Ducharne, Coelho, Costa, & Silva, 2017; Pace & Zavattini, 2011; Van IJzendoorn & Juffer, 2006), in Romania adoption still seems to be undervalued and influenced by the political context. In 2015 the law on adoption was changed, making international adoption possible once again, but only for Romanian citizens living outside Romania and for foreign citizens who are residents in Romania.

The provision of Romanian legislation on adoption

Law 273/2004, as mentioned previously, was passed in response to allegations made at European Union level by the European Reporter for Romania during the process of adjusting that took place in Romania in order for the country to join the European Union (Kang, 2014). The allegations had to do with rumors about abuse in international adoption—rumors that were, to the best of our knowledge, never substantiated. Following these criticisms of international adoptions of Romanian children, in 2001 a moratorium on adoption was established, and in 2004 international adoptions became virtually impossible (Selman, 2009).

According to Law 273/2004 the adult person willing to become an adoptive parent should be without a criminal record and free of psychiatric illness; the person should prove emotional and material stability and should not have a child abandoned or placed in an institution. The child may be adopted by a couple or by a single person as long as the future parent is at least 18 years older than the adoptee. The process for becoming an adoptive parent starts by submitting a request to CPS of the respective county. During the following 90 days, the individual or couple will be assessed and trained in child protection and childcare topics by the staff of CPS. At the end of the process those people able to fulfill all requirements will be certified as suitable to adopt.

Both domestic and international adoptions are permitted only for children who have been declared suitable for adoption by Court order and who are mentioned on the National Register for Adoptive Children kept by the NAPCRA. The list of adoptable children is regularly updated by NAPCRA on the basis of statistics reported by CPS operating in 41 counties in Romania and six sectors of Bucharest.

The procedure leading to the status of a child suitable for adoption starts at the end of a year spent by the child within CPS without any sign or connection with parents or relatives. For newborn babies abandoned in maternity hospitals and whose relatives cannot be located, the procedure for becoming suitable for adoption can begin following 30 days consecutive to the issue of the birth certificate. Children suitable for adoption and who are older than 10 years must give their consent for adoption in the Court. For adoptable children placed in foster care, the adoption procedure can start following the first 6 months spent within the foster family.

The adoption procedure starts with the placement of the child within the adoptive family for a period of 90 days, “so that in case of approval for adoption the established family relationships may be rationally assessed” (Law 273/2004, section 40). Following this matching period the adoptive parents can apply to the Court for finalizing the child adoption. Any adoptable child is initially available for domestic adoption.

International adoption is permitted for children who have been on the Adoption Register for at least two years without any Romanian adoptive parents requesting to adopt them. Mainly the children “difficult to adopt” due to their age or disabilities are available for international adoption. The international adoption can start when one of the following criteria is satisfied:

- The person willing to adopt or his/her spouse is a relative of the adoptable child;
- The person willing to adopt or his/her spouse has Romanian citizenship;
- The person willing to adopt has married the biological parent of the adoptable child.

Due to these requirements international adoption is a difficult endeavor.

Domestic adoptions are lengthy processes delayed by the expectations of the adoptive parents regarding the child and by the legal requirements that the adoptive parents have to fulfill. In many cases, adoptive families are seeking a specific type of child, such as infants and children without medical problems (Stănculescu et al., 2017). Additionally, when the adoption is not completed during the two years of parents’ accreditation, the potential adoptive parents lose their accreditation and have to apply and start again the entire procedure for accreditation. To date, a new amendment to Law 273/2004 regarding child adoption is being discussed. New regulations will extend the validity of parents’ accreditation to 5 years, and it will allow in some cases such as for children up to 14 years old the opening of the adoption procedure after the first 6 months spent by the child within CPS. The new amendment is expected to better support the adoptive parents and adoption processes in Romania.

Current study

We described that in the past many children were abandoned and institutionalized in Romania, often in circumstances of adversity and severe deprivation. After a rise in international adoptions in the 90s, a moratorium on adoption was established in 2001, and in 2004 international adoptions became virtually impossible. How did child adoption develop since 2004 in terms of number of children involved? And how many children were abandoned and adopted more than 10 years after the stop on international adoption? We were also interested in the ratio between abandoned children, children eligible for adoption, and the number of children who were actually adopted.

Method

We describe the development of domestic and international child adoption since 2004—the year that the moratorium on international adoption had come into force—until 2017. We also elaborate on child abandonment and child adoption in Romania in the period 2014–2018, more than ten years after the moratorium on international adoption. A secondary analysis based on the official statistics published annually on the website of the National Authority for the Protection of Child’s Rights and Adoption shows the state of affairs in child adoption in Romania.

The data used are publicly available only from the National Authority for the Protection of Child’s Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA). The NAPCRA is using The Child Monitoring and Tracking Information System database (CMTIS) (Stanculescu et al., 2017), which was implemented in 2003. CMTIS is used by CPS in some counties, while the others are using a different system, but all counties’ CPS are regularly sending their local data to the NAPCRA. NAPCRA publishes the data online for each trimester, but sometimes with delay, from what we observed over the years.

Regarding the number of adoptions, no statistics are available for 2018. Our purpose is to highlight and describe:

- The development of domestic and international adoption, during 2004–2017, following the implementation of the moratorium for international adoptions.
- Abandonment of children and protective measures taken by the Romanian CPS (e.g., foster care) between 2014 and 2018.
- Abandonment of infants (2014–2018).
- Children in institutions, in foster care, and eligible for adoption (2014–2018).
- The ratio between children eligible for domestic/international adoption and parents approved for domestic/international adoption, and the actual number of domestic/international adoptions (2014–2018).

Results

Development of domestic and international adoption (2004–2017)

Figure 1 shows the development of domestic and international adoption since 2004, the year when the moratorium had come into force and the new laws in child protection (272/2004) and child adoption (273/2004) were enacted. No statistics are available yet for adoptions during 2018. Between 2006 and 2012, no international adoptions took place. Both domestic and international

The situation of adoption during 2004 - 2017, in Romania

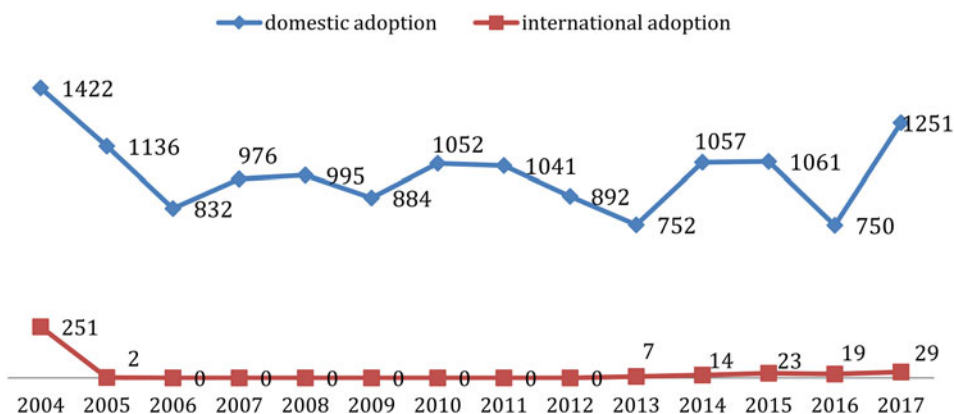


Figure 1. Adoption of children in the care of CPS in the period 2004–2017.

(Source: Romanian Ministry of Labor and Social Justice, NAPCRA, March 2019)

No available statistics for 2018.

Table 1. Child abandonment and protective measures taken by the Romanian child protection system

Year	Children abandoned within health units		Children from the discharged health units				Children not discharged/ Sheltered within hospital units	
			Re-integrated into families		Placed within CPS			
Year	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2014	1,213	100%	487	40.14%	570	46.99%	156	12.86%
2015	977	100%	426	43.60%	459	46.98%	92	9.41%
2016	1,000	100%	444	44.4%	501	50.1%	55	5.5%
2017	804	100%	356	44.27%	399	49.62%	49	6.09%
2018	751	100%	302	40.21%	411	54.72%	38	5.05%
Total	4,745	100%	2,015	42.46%	2,340	49.31%	390	8.21%

Source: Table generated by the authors, based on NAPCRA data (www.copii.ro)

adoptions remained relatively stable, with about 1,000 domestic adoptions and no or just a very few international adoptions each year.

Abandonment of children and CPS measures (2014–2018)

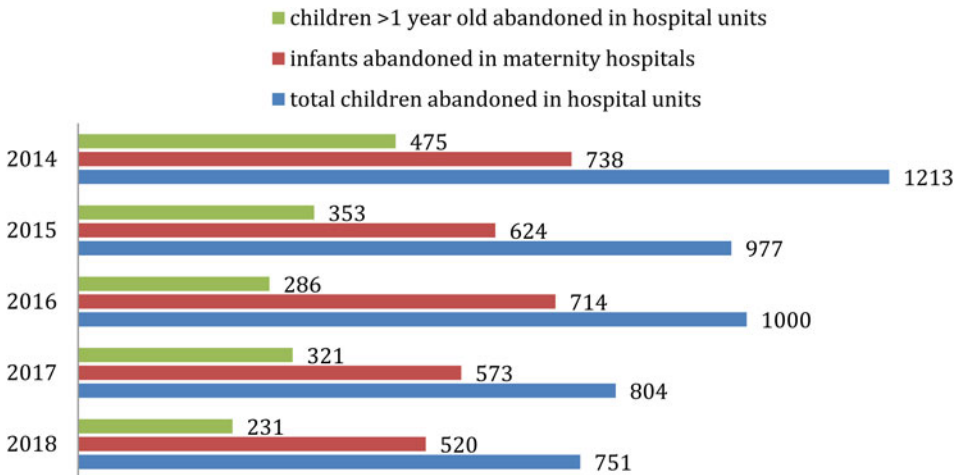
Table 1 shows the number of children abandoned each year and the CPS measures taken for these children during the period between 2014 and 2018. In total, 4,745 children were abandoned within hospital units and the number seems to be slowly decreasing each year (about 1200 in 2014 and 751 in 2018). About 43% of the total number of 4,745 abandoned children ($N=2,015$) were reintegrated into their families and about 49% ($N=2,340$) of abandoned children were placed in CPS facilities, while about 8% ($N=390$) of abandoned children were not discharged and remained within health units (Table 1).

Table 2. Children in CPS (placed in institutions and family foster care) and children eligible for adoption.

Year	Children in the CPS		In institutions (public and private)		In foster care		Eligible for adoption	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2014	58,178	100%	21,540	37.02%	36,638	62.97%	4,060	6.97%
2015	57,279	100%	20,291	35.42%	36,988	64.57%	3,436	5.99%
2016	56,866	100%	19,369	34.06%	37,497	65.93%	3,250	5.71%
2017	55,302	100%	18,197	32.90%	37,105	67.09%	3,257	5.88%
2018	52,783	100%	17,096	32.38%	35,687	67.61%	ND*	ND*

Source: Table generated by the authors, based on NAPCRA data (www.copii.ro).

*No data available.

**Figure 2.** The abandonment of infants compared to total child abandonment in Romania, 2014–2018.

(Source: Generated by the authors, based on NAPCRA data (www.copii.ro))

For the period between 2014 and 2018 the placement of children within CPS showed an evident decrease of placement in institutions. Placement within foster care slowly increased, from 36,638 in 2014, to 37,497 in 2016, while the following years the number of children placed in foster care diminished to a minimum of 35,687 in 2018 (Table 2). In parallel with the decreased number of children placed in CPS, the number of children in CPS foster care diminished during 2016 to 2018, yet the percentage of placements in foster care is increasing yearly with 62,97% in 2014 and 67,61% in 2018. Some children abandoned in hospital, will be either placed in emergency units or in “other situations,” or not discharged and kept within hospitals for longer time. The number of children not discharged from the hospital units has decreased, being 156 in 2014 and 38 in 2018.

Abandonment of infants (2014-2018)

Figure 2 shows the statistics of child abandonment. In fact, during 2014 to 2018 four to five infants in every 1,000 newborns were abandoned by their

mothers within maternity hospitals or other health units. For example, in 2014, there were 738 newborns abandoned in maternities, representing 0.39% from the newborn population ($N = 186,933$). In 2018, the percentage was smaller, 0.27% ($N = 520$), from all 188,777 newborns. Compared with the newborn population, child abandonment in all hospital units was between 0.64% ($N = 1,213$ in 2014) and 0.39% ($N = 751$ in 2018).

In 2014, out of 1,213 children abandoned in hospital units 738 (60.84%) were newborn babies. In 2015, 624 (63.86%) of abandoned children were infants, while in the following year, 714 (71.40%) of children entering CPS were infants; in 2017, out of 804 abandoned children, 573 (71.26%) were infants. Finally, in 2018, there were 751 abandoned children including about 70% ($N = 520$) infants.

Each year, according to the official statistics (NAPCRA, n.d.) about 3% of abandoned children aged up to two years were placed in institutions. Probably, they have siblings in institutions or have disabilities, those being the only exceptions mentioned in Romanian legislation. In 2014 there were 628 children under two years placed in public or NGO institutions, 585 in 2015, 459 in 2016, and 443 in 2017 while in 2018, 405 children aged up to two years were placed in institutions.

Children placed in CPS facilities and children eligible for adoption (2014–2017)

Table 2 compares the number of children placed within CPS facilities (mainly institutions and foster families) with the number of children eligible for adoption, during 2014 to 2017 (no available data in 2018). It should be noted that the number of children eligible for adoption decreased from 6.97% ($N = 4,060$) in 2014 to 5.88% ($N = 3,257$) in 2017. In parallel, the total number of children in CPS decreased from 58,178 in 2014 to 52,783 in 2018 (Table 2).

Following the adoption of Laws 272 and 273 in 2004 the number of children in CPS had already substantially declined. Although official statistics showed 82,918 children in CPS in 2004, by 2018 the total number of children in CPS had decreased to 52,783 representing a reduction of about 36% ($N = 30,135$) over 14 years. A similar decrease over the same period took place for children placed in institutions. The percentage of institutionalized children dropped from 39% in 2004 to 32.38% in 2018. Table 2 shows this trend between 2014 and 2018. Similarly, according to the official statistics, placements of children within institutions run by NGOs diminished as follows: 4087 in 2014; 3895 in 2015; 3907 in 2016; 3705 in 2017 and 3496 in 2018. The percentage of children institutionalized within

private units stayed around 20%, slightly increasing from 18.97% in 2014 to 20.44% in 2018.

At the same time, according to the official statistics, the number of children placed in foster care decreased with 27% during the years 2004 to 2014. However, since 2014, the percentage of children placed in foster care slightly increased from 63% ($N=36,638$) in 2014 to 67% ($N=35,687$) in 2018 (Table 2). About half of the foster children were placed with foster parents employed by CPS and the other half found a home with relatives, neighbors or foster families supported by a range of NGOs. Additionally, according to the official statistics, the number of foster parents employed by CPS diminished from 12,079 in 2014, to 11,235 in 2018, while the average number of children per foster parent remained about 1.5.

Ratio parents approved for adoption and adoptable children

With regard to adoption, the ratio of children declared by the Courts as suitable for adoption and the accredited adoptive parents is shown in Table 3. Regarding child adoption, no statistics are available for 2018. Between 2014 and 2017 the number of adults approved to adopt increased each year, whereas the number of adoptable children available for adoption was decreasing. No data is available regarding how many adults were qualified to adopt and succeeded to adopt during the same year. Table 3 shows the number of children eligible for adoption in 2017 ($N=3,257$) and their age, and the number of domestic and international adoptions done. In 2017, out of the 3,257 adoptable children 1,280 were eventually adopted, although there were 2,693 adoptive parents.

There is additional information regarding the group of children that are difficult to adopt. In 2017, according to official statistics (NAPCRA, n.d.), out of 3,257 adoptable children (Table 3) 72,5% ($N=2,362$) were children difficult to adopt mainly because they did not meet the common expectations of adoptive parents regarding age (children aged 7 to 17 years are difficult to place for

Table 3. Comparing children eligible for adoption to adults approved to adopt and to adoptions done (2018: no data available).

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Children eligible for adoption	4,060	100%	3,436	100%	3,250	100%	3,257	100%
0–2 years	548	13%	524	15%	546	16%	430	13%
3–6 years	1,063	26%	880	25%	830	25%	959	29%
7–13 years	2,140	52%	1,711	49%	1,511	46%	1,865	67%
14–17 years	309	7%	321	9%	363	11%	3	0,09%
Adults approved to adopt	1,766	43%	1780	51%	1,881	57%	2,693	82%
Adoptions realized	1071	26,37%	1084	31,54%	812	24,98%	1280	39,29%

Source: Generated by the authors, based on NAPCRA data (www.copii.ro).

No data available for 2018.

adoption), health condition, or ethnic group. In the same year 20,5% ($N = 257$) of children difficult to adopt found an adoptive family.

The number of children eligible for *domestic adoption* decreased with about 20% ($N = 803$) between 2014 and 2016 (Table 4). Possible reasons are: the decreasing number of infants in CPS; the impact of the intensive migration of Romanians on the population of potential adoptive parents; the frequent changes in adoption law which ask longer time for implementation; the focus of CPS personnel is on the improvement of shelter conditions for children rather than on adoption and moving the children out of CPS; the unfulfilled needs of practitioners in adoption for training and professional support, including supervision; for siblings it is difficult to find adoptive parents; and, the unrealistic expectations that parents often have.

In 2017, there were 2,652 approved parents for domestic adoption and 1,251 children were adopted. Table 4 also shows the relatively low percentage (between 27% to 35%) of children adopted compared to the number of adoptable children and the number of parents accredited to adopt (that is, the available places for adoption).

During 2014–2016 about 89% of children eligible for *international adoption* were 7 to 17 years old (Table 5). Based on their age, these children are included in the group of children difficult to adopt. No data is available

Table 4. Domestic adoption during 2014–2017 (2018: No data available).

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Children eligible for domestic adoption	3,439	100%	2,953	100%	2,716	100%	ND*	
0–2 years	548	15%	524	17%	546	20%	ND*	
3–6 years	991	28%	833	38%	761	28%	ND*	
7–13 years	1,677	48%	1,373	46%	1,162	42%	ND*	
14–17 years	223	6%	223	7%	247	9%	ND*	
Parents approved for domestic adoption	1,714	49%	1,708	57%	1,800	66%	2,652	ND*
Children adopted domestically by the end of the year	1,057	30%	1,061	35%	750	27%	1,251	ND*
Available places but no adoption realized	2,382	70%	1,892	65%	1,966	73%	ND*	ND*

Source: Generated by the authors, based on NAPCRA data (www.copii.ro).

*ND: No data available.

Table 5. International adoption during 2014–2017.

Year	2014		2015		2016		2017	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Children eligible for international adoption	621	100%	483	100%	534	100%	ND*	
0–2 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	ND*	
3–6 years	72	11%	47	9%	69	12%	ND*	
7–13 years	462	74%	338	69%	349	65%	ND*	
14–17 years	86	13%	98	20%	116	21%	ND*	
Parents approved for international adoption (compared to children)	52	8%	72	14%	81	15%	41	ND*
Children placed within families by the end of the year	14	2%	23	4%	19	3%	29	ND*
Available places but no adoption realized	38	6%	49	10%	62	11%	ND*	

Source: Generated by the authors, based on NAPCRA data (www.copii.ro).

*ND: no data available.

for 2017, except the number of adoptive parents ($N=41$) and international adoptions done ($N=29$).

Discussion

After elaborating on some historical perspectives of child abandonment and child adoption in Romania, we described the statistics of abandonment and adoption. We also examined the ratio between the number of parents approved for adoption and the number of children eligible for adoption compared to the yearly number of adoptions. Since the stop on international adoption in 2004, both domestic and international adoptions were relatively stable, with about 1,000 domestic adoptions and hardly any international adoptions each year. Ten years following the moratorium on international adoption the abandonment of children seems to be slowly decreasing to about 800 abandoned children in 2017 and 70 percent of them being infants. Between 2014 and 2017, almost half of the abandoned children were reintegrated into their birth families and more than a third were placed in foster homes. To date, many children find a home in a foster family, employed by CPS, or they stay with relatives or with foster families supported by NGOs. A small number of children (3.4%) were placed in institutions. Since 2004, the number of children in CPS and those placed in institutions have declined substantially. The number of children eligible for domestic and international adoption decreased between 2014 and 2017, while the number of parents approved for adoption increased. However, each year fewer children were actually adopted than the number of eligible children and the potentially available approved adoptive parents.

Developments within the Romanian CPS

The deinstitutionalization in Romania has been and is accomplished in two ways. One is by taking the children out of the system through adoption or by re-integrating the children in CPS within their biological families. In these cases, children receive a permanent family to belong to. The second way of deinstitutionalization keeps the child within CPS but within a family environment. This means that the child is placed within a temporary family, either in foster families or in family-type centers organized within the old institutions. The number of CPS' residents also decreases yearly through the departure of young people who grow beyond the legal age limits to which they can benefit from CPS support. Law 272/2004 permits an extended stay in CPS if this is requested by adolescents who are 18 years old and have no social support. For those still enrolled in academic studies the extension of stay in CPS is possible up to the age of 26.

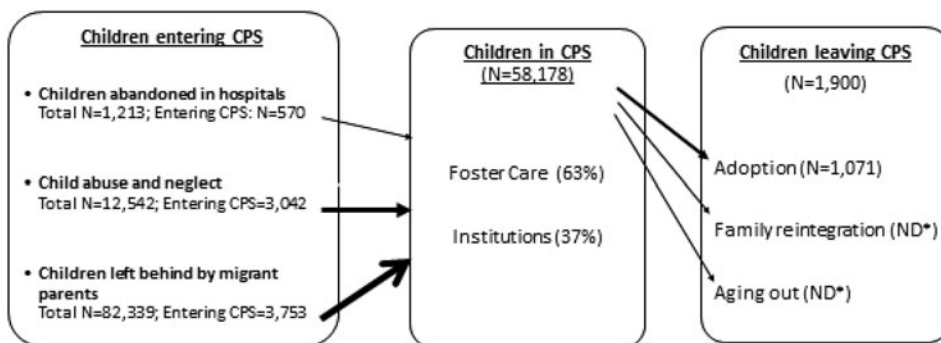


Figure 3. The path of children in CPS in 2014. Based on NAPCRA data for 2014.

*ND: No data available.

A flow chart with the pathways of children within CPS is presented in Figure 3. In 2014, there were 7,365 children entering CPS, while 1,900 left CPS.

Despite the substantial efforts done for deinstitutionalization there are still many children placed in institutions. For instance, in 2016 there were 19,369 children living in institutions, 459 of them being under two years old (NAPCRA, *n.d.*), whereas the new law provisions forbid the placement in institutions for children aged up to three years.

We consider that the following aspects may have had an impact on the abandonment and adoption of children in Romania in the past decades:

- In the communism and particularly as a consequence of Ceausescu's Decree, the child lost value and significance and became an additional anxiety for adults and parents. Potential mothers fought to avoid pregnancy at any cost, including that of their lives. During that time Romania had the highest rate of mothers' mortality in Europe (Stephenson et al., 1992; Kligman, 2000). In 1997, when CPS was established, the same women and men who under communism had done everything they could to avoid having a child became the coordinators of CPS for abandoned children, without receiving hardly any psychotherapy, except for a short training. Consequently, their efficiency may have suffered from these old attitudes towards children.
- The study and practice in psychology were banished since 1977, which may have resulted in lacking knowledge in child and human development among professionals and practitioners in child protection; consequently, the new policy seemed to be applied without a full understanding of the scientific background and needs.
- As mentioned previously, the traditional adoption usually took place within the extended family and very seldom for institutionalized children.

- The new policy for CPS originated in 1997 when Romania started working towards joining the European Union; at that time there was no cultural context in place to support the setting up of the new system and vision brought by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The new policy kickstarted in 1997 by the passing of new regulations designed to achieve the deinstitutionalization of children and without taking into account the social mentalities and the scarcity of the infrastructure necessary for successful implementation.

These aspects form a heavy burden on the development of CPS's vision about child welfare. Consequently, too many children are still living in institutions and not enough adoptions are completed, and child abandonment continues to be high.

The support services provided to families in need are not yet adequate and sufficient in delivering preventive measures and interventions in child welfare.

Developments in abandonment of children

The Romanian child welfare system has been described as dysfunctional and underfunded to be able to fight against child abandonment (Pelton, 2015). More than half to three-quarters of the abandoned children are newborn infants left behind by mothers who vanish without giving any sign. A possible important issue not yet taken into account, despite the possible connections with the abandonment of infants, is the mothers' postnatal depression. In addition, the rate of child abandonment has to be considered together with the high rate of adolescent mothers in Romania (Eurostat, 2016).

A new type of child abandonment is occurring nowadays in Romania, the so-called "children left behind" by parents going to work abroad (Stanculescu, Grigoras, Tesliuc, & Pop, 2017; Toth, Toth, Voicu, & Stefanescu, 2007). According to the official statistics in 2014 Romania had 82,339 children left behind. Ironically often the reason expressed by parents for emigrating is the wish to provide a better life for their children. Some of the children left behind end up in institutions as neglected children. For instance, in 2014 CPS received 3753 children left behind. These children were placed in foster care ($N=2851$) to professional foster care families and to relatives or other families and in institutions ($N=902$).

According to NAPCRA statistics, each year about 5% ($N=2,762$ in 2018; $N=2,625$ in 2017; $N=2,734$ in 2016; $N=2,961$ in 2015; and $N=3,042$ in 2014) of children entering CPS have been abused or neglected within their families, and removed from parental care. The reported cases of children abused or neglect are much higher. For example, in 2018, there were 15,253 reported cases of child abuse

and neglect, but 12,248 children were kept within their families with special support and counseling services provided by CPS, and 2,762 were placed within CPS.

Children left behind by migrant parents and children abused and neglected or living at home in severe poverty are not a pool for adoption. The work with them is focused on their reintegration into the families. This also explains the relatively small percentage of adoptable children within CPS. There is public data available referring to abused and neglected children, but no public data is referring to their path through CPS. [Figure 3](#) presents an example of the pathways of entering and leaving CPS, in which the data for the abused and neglected children category is available only for children entering CPS.

The official statistics presented in this article also raise some questions: where are the 390 abandoned children not taken out of the system during 2014–2018? What is the meaning of the “other situations” in which 193 abandoned children were involved? What kinds of evaluation and support were available to facilitate the successful reintegration into their families of the 2,015 children initially abandoned within health units? Based on the information displayed in the official statistics we wonder whether—despite the new policy and good legislation for promoting children’s rights in Romania—accurate registration and follow up of the child’s whereabouts is still not fully in use. The situation of children 0–3 years old still placed in institutions raises the question: Why are child protection regulations not fully enforced? The same question appears when we focus on the situation of abandoned infants not discharged from maternity units. The hospital units have no special facilities and caretakers for small children. Consequently, the longer time spend within a hospital environment may have a negative impact on child development.

Due to its recent and quick start, CPS seems to be focused on the large number of children in care and to lose the individual cases. In our view, a qualitative and individualized vision tailored to meet the needs of each child should be further strengthened.

The child’s right to a family

The political and practical efforts focused on the child’s right to a family have brought important changes in CPS. The population of children living within CPS and children placed in institutions diminished while the number of children placed in foster care increased in parallel with a diminished number of foster families employed by CPS. This means that the number of foster families run by NGOs is increasing, or that the ones employed by CPS receive more than one child. Attachment relationships develop within foster families between family members and the child placed in foster care

(Lipscombe, Moyers, & Farmer, 2004; Poland & Groze, 1993; Twigg & Swan, 2007) no matter if the child is declared available for adoption. CPS's staff needs to be trained to recognize the attachment processes and to provide the professional support for foster parents regarding the impact of child adoption. The law gives priority to foster parents if they decide to adopt the child but this is not often happening. There are no available statistics to reflect the incidence of children adopted by the foster care family.

The adoption procedure takes time and starts very late. The lengthy process jeopardizes the chances for the institutionalized or foster child to get a permanent family. A recent study done by UNICEF in Romania (Stănculescu et al., 2017) found an average of 5.5 years of children's stay within CPS until the adoption process started.

Between 2014 and 2017 more than half of the adoptable children were aged between 7 and 17, representing children hard to place in adoptive families in Romania due to behavioral problems related to prolonged institutionalization (Groza & Ryan, 2002, p. 195), various disabilities, or their supposedly belonging to an ethnic minority group suggested by the child's dark skin (Buzducea & Lazăr, 2011). The high proportion of young infants among the children abandoned is an opportunity to increase the rate of adoption. However, many children aged below two years can still be found in institutions. The revision in 2015 of Law 272/2004 prohibits the placement of children aged zero to three in institutions and encourages their placement in families, with the two exceptions mentioned above. The implementation of laws' provisions takes time, however.

The number of adoptive parents increased between 2014 and 2017 due to the efforts done by CPS and NGOs. In 2017, the number of adults approved to adopt a child in Romania represented 82% ($N=2693$) of the number of children ready for adoption ($N=3257$). The relatively small number of adoptive parents outside Romania is increasing as well, while the children available for international adoption often belong to the hard-to-adopt group. Either for domestic or international adoption there are more eligible children for adoption than the number of parents approved for adoption.

Nevertheless, regarding both domestic and international adoptions, not all approved parents do actually become adoptive parents. Often potential (domestic and international) adoptive parents do not receive an adoption proposal and lose their certification having to begin again the accreditation process. In parallel, children available for adoption stay and grow up within the system of child protection, eventually joining the group of children hard to adopt.

Obviously not all the existing opportunities for adoption are used and not enough children from CPS can find a stable and loving home.

Limitations

The limitations of this project are determined by the limits of the official statistics that we used. It is not possible to check the accuracy of the data as no parallel system to report is in place. The data is not regularly updated and sometimes there are noticeable delays in reports (Stănculescu et al., 2017).

In some cases, especially for the years 2017 and 2018 the available data may have been not complete or have been organized in somewhat different ways. Also, the relatively brief period of time, 2014 to 2018, does not allow long-term observations and trends in abandonment and adoption of children in Romania.

Conclusions

The development of CPS in Romania is a dynamic process based on efforts realized by professionals and administrators which relies on the acquisition of knowledge and skills as well as on the available financial resources. Romania is a country with strong survival and traditional values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2014), that emphasizes the importance of religion, blood ties, and economic security. National pride, low levels of trust and tolerance, and higher levels of violence in personal relationships seem to be characteristic features of such societies (Inglehart & Welzel, 2014). These characteristics partly set up the framework in which children are reared in Romania, whether within their families or in CPS. Poverty, lack of knowledge regarding child development and pregnancy and family planning, and limited access to health services, especially for rural residents, are among the reasons that play a role in the field of child and family welfare. The cultural framework and marks left by the communist legacy should be considered in evaluating the developments in child abandonment and adoption in Romania.

The growing interest in adoption and the strong focus on deinstitutionalization are the results of efforts made by CPS representatives to change services and laws and regulations in the context of increased poverty that places at risk almost half of Romania's population of children aged zero to 17 (Eurostat, 2017b). The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with Romania's adherence to the European Union in 2007 provided a strong basis for improving the place of the child within society, and for developing new attitudes regarding the protection of children separated from their biological parents. Romanian laws on child protection and adoption have been improved several times and they are still a work in progress.

Unfortunately, within the current political context the child still does not have a central position. Consequently, the laws and regulations implementation in child welfare is a lengthy process and the system is underfunded.

More support services to prevent child abandonment and to increase the adoption rates are needed. Unfortunately, the lack of knowledge regarding the child's needs for healthy development and the traditional way of approaching children leave a too large place for the practice of abandonment and taking care of children within institutions. Despite the efforts done for deinstitutionalization within the state's CPS, some NGOs - especially those belonging to a church - are proud to take care of a large number of children separated from their biological parents within an institutional environment. Such private units are not working for adoption. They are not funded and less controlled by CPS but they enjoy a good image within Romanian society which is very religious.

Adoptive and foster parents need training about the consequences of institutionalization on child behavior and development. Adoptive parents also need post-adoption support services that are not yet in place (Groza & Ryan, 2002; Juffer & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2018; Ryan & Groza, 2004). The recruitment of adoptive parents for children in the category of difficult to adopt could be improved. The efforts being made by NGOs in the field of child protection and child adoption should be valued by the Romanian child welfare system. Better cooperation between state structures and civil society may offer the best approaches for children separated from their parents. Further, politicians, and Romanian society as a whole, need education in child welfare and adoption. Research into adoption needs to be broadened and best practices developed taking into account research results. Many studies not enough acknowledged in Romania were conducted around the world in the United States, Netherlands, UK, and Canada regarding children adopted from Romanian institutions and the long-lasting impact of institutional care on child development.

On the policy level, the topic of child welfare is not yet getting enough attention. Individual and regular assessments for each child within CPS should be done carefully by trained professionals and practitioners. A concept not yet fully understood is "the best interests of the child." Applying this concept requires profound knowledge of child and family psychosocial development and functioning. Improved training opportunities for professionals and regular refreshing of their knowledge on child development and family issues are necessary. Practitioners in CPS are in need of professional support such as supervision and team building strategies as well as professional meetings on the best practices in CPS. Although enormous progress has already taken place, CPS in Romania could be further

strengthened to adopt the flexibility, responsibility, and commitment that each individual child needs.

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Conflict of interest

No potential conflict of interest is reported by the authors.

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Appendix B: Laws

- Emergency Ordinance 26/1997 regarding the protection of children in difficulty, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 276 of 24 July 1998.
- Law 3/1970 on the child welfare regime, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 28 of 28 March 1970, abrogated by Emergency Ordinance 26/1997.
- Law 11/1990 on adoption, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 95 of 1 August 1990.
- Law 18/1990 on Child protection Convention, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 109 of 28 September 1990.
- Law 47/1993 regarding official court rulings respecting child abandonment, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 153 of 8 July 1993.
- Law 15/1993 regarding Romania's adherence to the European Convention on the Adoption of Children, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 67 of 31 March 1993.
- Law 84/1994 regarding Romania's ratification of the Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, published in the *Official Journal*, no. 298 of 21 October 1994.
- Law 272/2004 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, republished in the *Official Journal*, Part I no. 159 of March 5, 2014.
- Law 273/2004 on adoption procedures, republished in the *Official Journal*, no. 739 of 23 September 2016.
- Law 131/2004 for the modification of Law 272/2004 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of the Child, published in the *Official Journal*, Part I no. 740 of October 10, 2014.