

**Research Article**

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## **Education for Children with Special Needs**

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### **Abstract**

#### **Keywords**

education,  
special needs,  
school,  
visual impairments,  
mental and  
behavioral disorders.

Children have the right to access an educational system. Education is a fundamental right of children. It has no importance whether the child is healthy or has a health problem. When the medical problem of the child impairs him to learn in a normal school, it is necessary to find alternative forms of study. The fundamental children's right for education is offered to children with special needs by special schools.

The issue paper is an analysis of the Romanian study opportunities of children with special needs. This analysis is based on the educational system, and on the educational opportunities of children with disabilities such as: visual problems (blindness, amblyopia, and other visual impairments), mental and behavioral disorders.

Conclusions: The right to education is a universal right for all children.

### **Introduction**

Romania is a country located in the South-Eastern Europe, and has a naval port at the Black Sea. The actual population is 19.64 million people (year 2006: 21.13 million people).

Romania has an integrated educational system for children with special needs. The children are pedagogically, medically, socially and psychologically evaluated, and benefit from school orientation in agreement with Ministerial Order No.5805/23.11.2016, Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, Ministerial Order No.1985/4.10.2016, Ministry of Family, Social Protection and Elderly People, and

Ministerial Order No.1305/17.11.2016, Ministry of Health. These ministerial orders approve of the methodology for integrated assessment and intervention for children with disabilities. Through these assessments, the children are enrolled in a degree of disability. Children with disabilities and/or special educational needs are offered educational and vocational guidance for rehabilitation. These orders are based on the Children's Rights Protection Law, and the

(1) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Health Reform; National Education Law no. 1/2011, with the amendments into force;

and the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (World Health Organization/2007), validated in Romania in 2012.

(2) The purpose of this Order is to provide the unitary conceptual and operational framework for the assessment of children with disabilities and/or special educational needs, hereinafter referred to as ESN, and integrated intervention to ensure the right to education, equal opportunities for these children, as well as for their empowerment and rehabilitation, including inter-institutional collaboration and case management (Article 1).

(2) The provisions of this Order shall be supplemented by the provisions of the Order of the Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sports no. 5574/2011 for the approval of the methodology for the organization of educational support services for children, pupils and young people with special educational needs (ESN) integrated in mass education, with subsequent amendments, and of the Order of the minister of education, research, youth and sport no. 5575/2011 for the approval of the framework methodology on home schooling, namely the establishment of groups / classes in hospitals.

Article 2 (1) The provisions of this Order shall apply to children with disabilities and/or ESN, without distinction as to whether they are: family, boarding schools of special education, special protection system or other situations such as educational centers, sanitation, etc.

(3) Depending on the degree of disability and on the school and professional orientation based on ESN, and considering that the degree of disability is achieved only at the request of the parents/legal representative and the registration of disabled children and ESN in the special and specially integrated education is made only on the basis of the school and professional guidance provided by the School and Professional Guidance Commission (SPGC) by Article 2 of this law.

In accordance with this Legal Order, there are four categories of learners (schooled children and youth):

1. children enrolled in disability degree (disability and ESN) with school and professional orientation by SPGC;

2. children with disabilities and school/professional orientation by SPGC:

- children with disabilities and without ESN, enrolled in a normal/conventional school;
- children with simultaneous disabilities and ESN, whose parents/tutors have not requested school orientation;
- children with disabilities and without ESN, enrolled in normal schools;
- children with physical disabilities, severe chronic illnesses, invalids (HIV/AIDS) or rare diseases not accompanied by mental disorders;

3. children with disabilities, with school/vocational orientation by SPGC, either being children with both disabilities and ESN whose parents have not requested or refuse a disability certificate, or children with only ESN;

4. children not classified as handicapped who have not been school-oriented or professionally oriented by SPGC, these being children with both disabilities and ESN, for whom parents or tutors have not requested school orientation or disability certificate.

All these categories of students are equated with the term 'children with disabilities' and promote the term 'children with different abilities'.

Disability is described by the medical model sustained by World Health Organization (W.H.O, 2001) and by the social model (European Union: E.U.), (Manea, 2006, p.1). Through the social model, the handicap is defined in relation to the environment as the impossibility to carry out the same activities as others. A child who is disadvantaged to others through attitudinal or environmental barriers, has a handicap. The Social Model of disability is promoted by E.U.

Loss of anatomical substance----- partial / total  
 loss of function ----- limitation of social function

In accordance to the Social Model of disability, it is necessary to adapt the environment to favor the inclusion of people with medical problems (Hurst, 2003; Smart, 2005, p. 216). For children with health problems, these strategies augment their inclusion. The inclusion of children with special educational needs is achieved by offering them the possibility to attend a special school, because their state of health does not allow them to attend a normalschool.

In Romania, the law promotes the integration in schools of children with disabilities, based on the biopsychosocial model (Peterson & Rosenthal, 2005; Simeonsson et al., 2003 & 2006; Ueda & Okawa, 2003). The integration is realized depending on the students' abilities, capacities and restant functions.

The school eliminates the obstacles of children with special needs and gives them equal chances in life.

National Organization of Persons with Handicap in Romania (ONPHR) has shown that the lack of educational and professional training of people with disabilities, along with social stigma and employers' mentality, as well as lack of support, are the main obstacles to finding a job for these people. Some francophone countries conducted studies in international projects for better integration of people with mental chronic disorders. In Romania, the 'Santé Publique – Santé Mentale' (SPSM) Project has shown that the employers' mentality and lack of support constitute brakes for founding a job (Fond Harmant, Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2017). These aspects have shown the necessity of health education and social education (Gavrilă-Ardelean & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2017; Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2016).

Romanian statistics over a period of 26 years (1992-2017) have shown an increasing number of children with disabilities (table 1, fig. 1).

**Table 1 Evolution of the number of children with disabilities in Romania, 1992-2017 (after ANPD)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1993</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Children</b>	8.845	11.466	32.352	47.336	59.521	65.255	52.717	54.364	56.390	59.746	56.886
<b>Year</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Children</b>	56.124	56.292	54.861	55.121	56.896	59.247	61.516	61.287	60.269	60.859	60.993
<b>Year</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>							
<b>Children</b>	59.775	60.942	62.066	61.889							

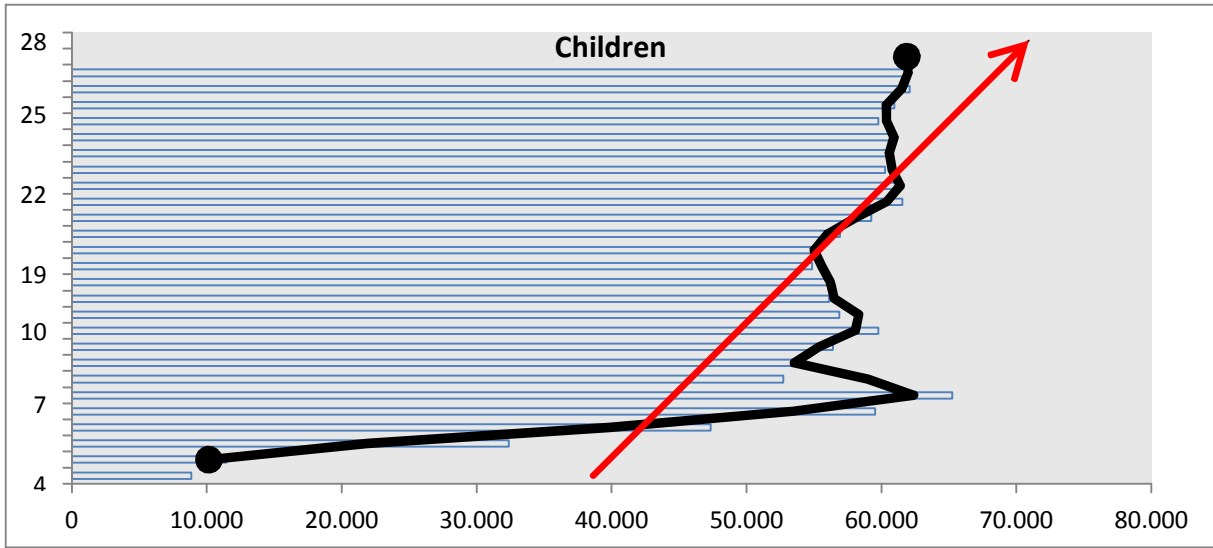


Figure 1. Statistic of disabilities in child Romanian population, from 1992 to 2017 (adapted after ANPD)

The number of children with disabilities in Romania in semester 1 of year 2017 has shown that disabilities in children have increased with 385 (from 61.504 to 61.889), table and figure 2.

Table 2. Number of children with disabilities in Romania in 2017 (March-June 2017) (source ANPD)

Period	31.03.2017	30.06.2017
Children	61.504	61.889

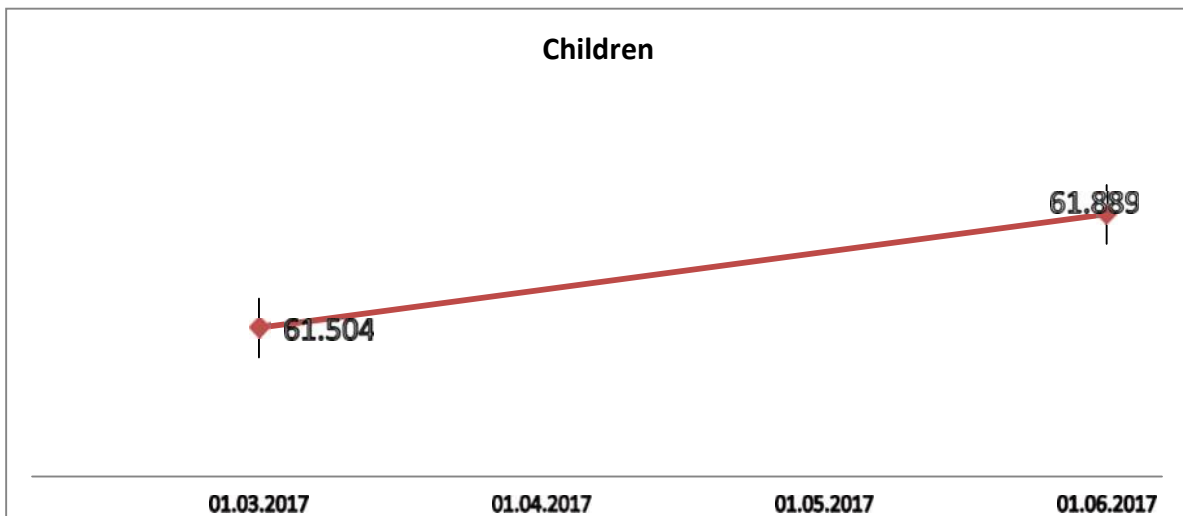


Figure 2. Number of children with disabilities in Romania in semester 1 of year 2017 (Source ANPD)

Reported to the number of child population of Romania, children with disabilities in 2015 represented 1, 53% (table 2).

Table . 2. Total number of children and children with disabilities in 2015 in Romania

Children with disability	Romanian child population	Percentage
60 942	3 976 000	1.53%

In Arad County, statistics have shown the distribution of school population on school years and school levels (table 3, figure 3 and figure 4), (INSSE Arad).

Table.3. Distribution of school population in Arad County in 2011-2015 (INSSE Arad)  
Primary and Middle School (including special school)

Years	Total	Pre-school	Primary School	Middle School	High School	Professional School	Postliceal School	University	Total
2011/2012	86435	14076	34204	16934	17270	18649	266	1010	18174
2012/2013	84478	12233	36551	19604	16947	17818	328	1373	16175
2013/2014	79515	12053	36363	19691	16672	16073	610	1530	12886
2014/2015	77880	12195	35757	19480	16257	15031	1157	1526	12052

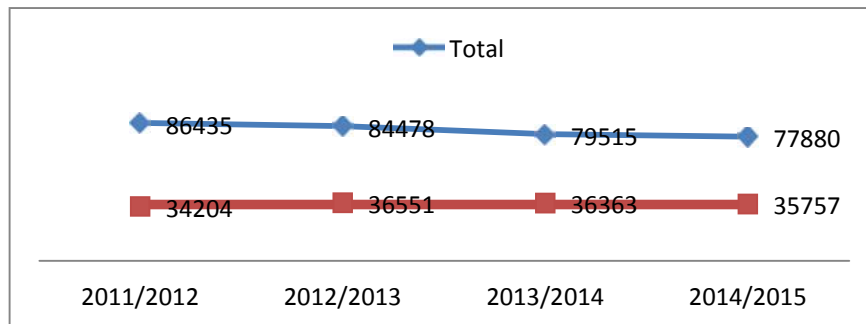


Figure 3. Total school population and Primary and Middle School population, including special school population, distribution in Arad County in 2011-2015 (INSSE Arad)

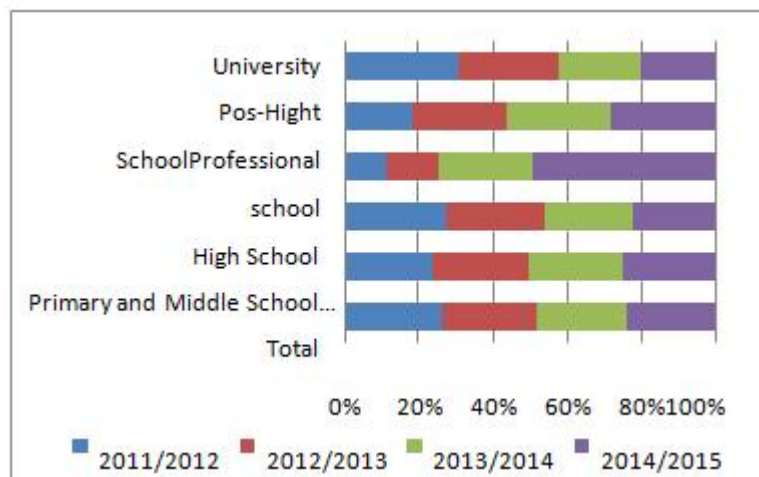


Figure 4. Comparative statistical distribution of school population in Arad County, on educational levels and school years (INSSE Arad)

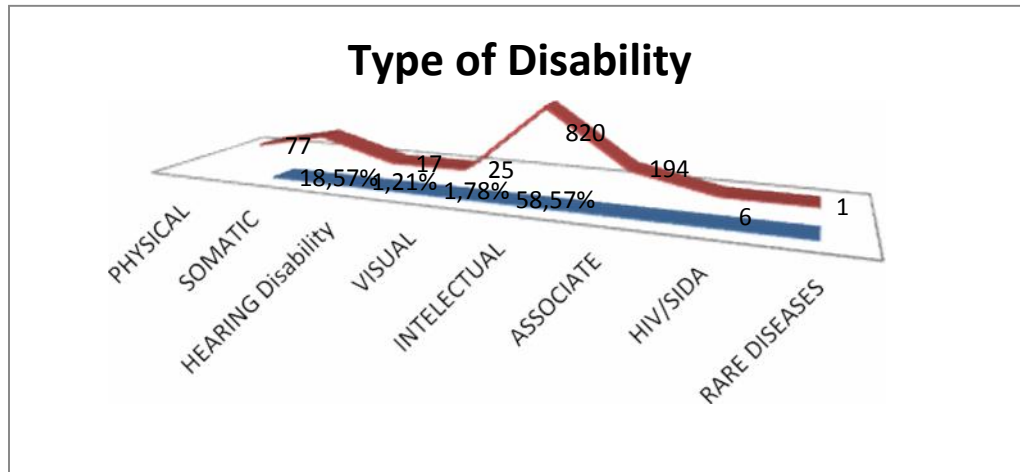


Figure 4. Types of disabilities in child population of Arad County at 30.07.2017

The most important percentage of different types of disabilities in child population of Arad County at the end of first semester of 2017 is represented by mental disability (820 cases: 58, 57%).

On the second place, there are somatic disabilities (260 cases from 1400 total child disability cases from Arad, 18,57%), and on the third place there are the associated disabilities (194 cases: 13,85%), (figure 5).

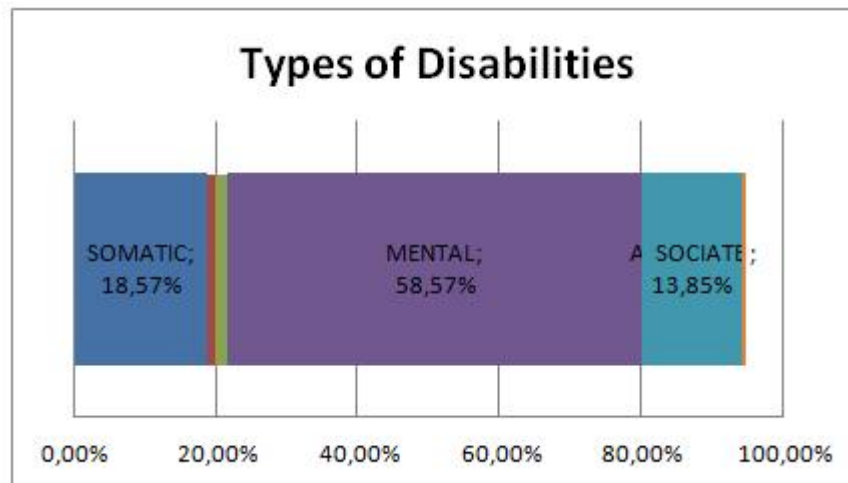


Figure 5. Types of disabilities in child population of Arad (ANPD)

In this statistic of child population and disabled child population, we focus on children rights. Work and active life are based on profession. An active life is the base of human mental health and offers a quality life. Therefore, we educate them to ensure the future well-being of society.

UNICEF O.N.U. Convention of children's rights stipulates in articles 28 and 29 that children have the right to a quality education that provides them equal life opportunities and a good development

of their personality. They have the right to benefit from compulsory and free primary education, access to high school and college, access to information, as well as school and professional guidance services (<http://www.unicef.ro>). Education is a universal right for all children in the world, and contributes to a qualitative intellectual and emotional growth. Educational process helps children to maximize their full potential for life. This is a non-discriminatory process; it does not matter whether the children

have health issues and social problems or not. Therefore, the state (government) must find and provide children with the best and most inclusive methods and resources for schooling. For children with a diagnosis of disability and serious health problems, who have special educational needs, the government should create special school programs that can offer them equal opportunities to education. These programs should be adapted, so as to suit their remanent functional capabilities. These goals can only be achieved by allocating funds and by educating people in order to eliminate stigma (Gavrila-Ardelean, 2016).

Law 272 from 2004 presents the right and duty of parents to protect and promote the rights of their children: The child has the right to receive an education that allows him to develop, under non-discriminatory conditions, his or her skills and personality. The child's parents shall have the right to choose the kind of education to be given to their children and have the obligation to enroll the child at school and to ensure that they regularly attend school (Article 47).

In Article 487 of the Child Protection law, the duties of parental authority show that parents have the right and duty to raise the child and to care for his or her health and bio-psycho-social development. This includes educating and schooling child, as well as his or her professional training.

In Romania, education is a national priority. In our country, state schools (units) are free and compulsory for the first 10 classes. The state guarantees the right to education for all children with special educational needs. Special education and integrated special education are part of the national pre-university educational system, and are free of charge in Romania, supported by the state. They comprise all levels of education, and are differentiated depending on the type and degree of deficiency.

Institutionalized pupils with special educational need benefit from free transport.

The families of disabled children, who have social problems, benefit from social and financial assistance by law.

How can the right to education of children with disabilities be raised? Many organizations propose a lot of commentary strategies to highlight this fundamental right, which will create the intellectualresources of the next generations. The free access to education of all children, including those with disabilities, gives those equal chances for a quality life. It reduces stigma and discrimination, thus giving them equal chances for social inclusion and for an independent life.

An example is the active implication of the public system in diverse activities, as (adapted after European Center for Disabled Children's Rights, [www.cedcd.ro](http://www.cedcd.ro)):

- legal representation in national, European and international forums, to adapt laws for assistance and protection of children with disabilities;
- participation in public debates on educational rights and social assistance of disabled children;
- proposing and substantiating public policies for non-discriminatory access to education of children with disabilities;
- external monitoring activities aimed at civil enforcement of laws, for observance of the right to education of children with disabilities;
- writing local and European civic projects, to create an infrastructure tailored to the need of access to education of children with special needs, and of those with serious health problems;
- informing the society on the right to education of children with disabilities, as well as on their need for social inclusion (mass schools - specially integrated educational system);
- Counseling and supporting the families of children with disabilities, and informing them about parents' rights and obligations regarding access to education of their children.

As professors and educators, we have the right and obligation to raise the awareness of families and society on the right to education of children with disabilities, because it is our duty to build the mental capital of mankind and the educational capital of future generations, in order to transform disability in a 'different kind of ability', through pedagogical methods and instruments.

A practical example of rising awareness of the international visibility of children's right to modern education for disabled children, is the latest Erasmus European Project run by a special school in Arad, where I work.

The Erasmus + Project, "The Future through Our Eyes", funded by the European Commission, through national organizations for Romania, took place at the Special High School "Santa Maria" Arad ("St. Mary Special High School"), in 2016-2017. During the school year, students and teachers had the opportunity to improve their professional and personal skills.

Two learning mobility exchanges for good practices took place. The participants were pupils and special school teachers. In May, a number of 12 teachers participated in a training program in Portugal. The program was developed in partnership with "Associate Intercultural Amigos Da Mobilidade". Students with special needs participated in a second mobility that took place in Greece in June. A total of 16 pupils from 10th and 11th grades of high school, along with accompanying teachers, participated in a training exchange in Thessaloniki through the "IPODOMI - A.SINANIS & SIA O.E. Learning Center".

Thus, children with visual impairments, mental and associated deficiencies who study at the "St. Mary Special High School" from Arad, have acquired good practices in various domains: food, mechanical and environmental industries, through practical participation in economic agents.

Through this project, children with special educational needs have acquired new professional and transversal (personal) competences. From a professional point of view, high school students have deepened their technical knowledge, becoming better bakers, locksmiths or environmental technicians. Their personal skills have been improved by ameliorating communication in a foreign language. Teenagers have learned to use new technologies that will be useful in their future professional insertion into the labor market. In addition to communication, students have also developed their cultural skills. Nowadays, it is extremely important to know how to value personal competences and to fluently speak a foreign language.

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