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Non-cognitive skill
development
in adolescents in Romania

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Contents

List of Acronyms

AIDS =   Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ALIAT =   Alliance for Fighting Against Alcoholism and Drug Addiction
AMI =   Achievement Motivation Inventory
ANA =   National Antidrug Agency
ARAS =   Romanian Association Against AIDS
ARDOR =   The Romanian Association for Debate, Elocution and Rhetoric
ASC =   the Adolescent Self-Consciousness Questionnaire
BBU =   Babeş-Bolyai University
BCERA =   Bucharest Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance
CEECIS =   Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of
              Independent States
CNDIPT =   National Centre for the Development of Technical and
              Vocational Education
EDFORSO =   Youth Centre for Education, Training and Society
ESF =   European Social Fund
EU =   European Union
FDSC =   Civil Society Development Foundation
fMRI =   functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
FNO =   New Horizons Foundation
GPA =   Grade Point Average
HBSC =   Health Behaviour in School-aged Children
HHC =   Hope and Homes for Children Romania
HIV =   Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICDI =   International Child Development Initiatives
ICDPSC =   Institute of Psychological Research and Development and
              Related Sciences
IES =   Institute of Educational Sciences
IPE =   Centre for International Projects in Education
IQ =   Intelligence Quotient
JAR =   Junior Achievement Romania
MoNESR =   Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research
MoH =   Ministry of Health
NAPCRA =   National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and
              Adoption
NEET =   Not in Employment, Education, or Training
NGO =   Nongovernmental Organization

NIS =   National Institute of Statistics
OECD =   Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPAL =   Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning
PALS =   Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales
PISA =   Program for International Student Assessment
POSDRU =   Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources
                Development
PWDs =   Persons with disabilities
RAQAPE =   Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University
                Education
RBLS =   Romanian Business Leaders Foundation
REF =   Roma Education Fund Romania
REMO =   Relationship and Motivation Scale
SAI =   School Attendance Initiative
SDQ III =   Self Description Questionnaire III
SDV =   School of Values Association
SECS =   Society for Education on Contraception and Sexuality
SELF Kit =   Social Emotional Learning Facilitator Kit
SMALSI =   School Motivation and Learning Strategies Inventory
SOC =   Selection-Optimization-Compensation model
SRL =   Self-Regulated Learning
UK =   United Kingdom
UNICEF =   United Nations Children's Fund
US =   United States
WHO =   World Health Organization
YfY =   Youth for Youth Foundation

Executive Summary

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **Adolescence is a very complex period of life, with growing opportunities as well as increased risks**. Research shows that this period of life is characterized by an increase in physical and mental abilities, making teenagers stronger, bigger, faster and more resilient than before, and at the same time, by an increased vulnerability due to the difficulty in controlling emotions and behaviour, the escalation of sensation-seeking, risk-taking, impulsivity, recklessness or failure to consider long-term consequences of actions. Moreover, research revealed that despite the fact that cognitive abilities, particularly reasoning and decision-making, reach adult levels, there is still immaturity in the motivational and emotional area. Therefore, the dissociation in developmental trajectories of cognitive versus non-cognitive skills makes a strong case for considering the impact of the latter on the life of adolescents, and consequently, for conducting a thorough analysis of non-cognitive skills.

- **While the topic of non-cognitive skill development is clearly generating a growing interest at the international level (mainly US, UK), our desk research evidenced a relative scarcity of theoretical and empirical data from our geographical area of focus.** In particular, in Romania, we identified only few related initiatives, for example in terms of adapting various tools for the measurement of non-cognitive abilities or designing evidence-based interventions for social-emotional learning. Fundamental or applied research studies seem also underrepresented. Possible reasons for this relative scarcity of data/initiatives include the terminological fuzziness, as well as the measurement difficulties in circumscribing non-cognitive psychological variables.

- **There is no scientific consensus regarding what non-cognitive skills actually are and how they can be defined**, although the common denominator of all analysed literature resources tends to define them as "other than cognitive" or as "not measured by IQ tests or achievement tests". Moreover, research shows that, in fact,

making a sharp distinction between non-cognitive and cognitive processes is not accurate, because they are actually intermingled processes. Therefore, we may say that a unique definition of non-cognitive skills is still under debate and at the same time a challenge with regard to conducting rigorous research and translating research into practice.

- Our desk research pointed to a wide variety of terminology that is used in relation to non-cognitive skills, such as: soft skills, non-cognitive abilities, socio-emotional skills, personality traits, character skills, personal qualities, psychological dispositions, moral qualities (like character), social-emotional learning skills etc. However, the literature review showed that all these terms are still debatable and pose a challenge in conducting a rigorous research and in translating research into practice. Additionally, the struggle of reaching consensus is also due to the fact that some authors argue that as long as processing of information is involved in any facet of psychological functioning, pure non-cognitive dimensions do not really exist, since they also include a cognitive component.

- **In the context of the current research, we took into consideration or reviewed the most prominent types of non-cognitive skills, related to an individual's personal and social dimensions,** that, in turn, give birth to other character traits (such as optimism, perseverance, resilience and curiosity, to name just a few): a) personal dimension: self-concept, self-efficacy, self-regulation, motivation, creativity; b) social and community dimension: social skills, civic skills. We consider that, according to the literature review sources, all these skills represent important assets in the development of resilience. According to the reviewed research papers, resilience is not regarded as an attribute or personality trait that some children possess and others lack, but rather as a developmental process, which can be fostered by meaningful interventions.

- Our desk research identified only few initiatives in using specific assessment and evaluation approaches of non-cognitive skills in Romania and in the region. More specifically, the initiatives we found in Romania are focused either on adapting various tools for the measurement of non-cognitive abilities (testcentral.ro) or on designing evidence-based interventions for social-emotional

learning, like SELF Kit (Social Emotional Learning Facilitator Kit, www.selfkit.ro). The insufficient number of initiatives may be explained by the fact that we still found a lack of consensus with regard to the terminology used in this area. An additional barrier seems to be the measurement difficulties in circumscribing non-cognitive psychological variables in the context of wider types of interventions in education, social protection or health. However, it is also to be noted that related Romanian scientific studies are still emerging and, as yet, do not enjoy the visibility and impact of the international ones.

- **The literature review exercise confirmed that non-cognitive skills are very important factors for adolescent development and the connection with cognitive abilities should not be neglected**. Environmental factors might play a crucial role in the learnability and malleability of non-cognitive skills, via peers, family, school, community-level interventions. Action-taking in the social world involves a lot of non-cognitive abilities, as well as an intellectual challenge. Therefore, in the adolescents' real time experience, non-cognitive and cognitive skills are interdependent.

- **In terms of measurement and evaluation of non-cognitive skills, our literature review has found a variety of tools** such as: standard questionnaires, self-assessment scales, experimental tasks, simulated experiments, structured interviews, creative insight tasks, divergent thinking tasks, general and creative ideation tasks. A different type of assessment is the "Consensual Assessment Technique" (Amabile, 1982; Kaufman et al., 2008), by which panels of expert judges rank creative products such as stories, collages, poems and a "composite creativity score" is compiled. More recently, neuroimaging techniques are being used to identify brain features associated with different non-cognitive skills, whereby subjects are given various tests, while their brain is being scanned in an MRI scanner (Kleibeuker et al., 2013).

- **Standard questionnaires are by far the most widely used measurement tool** because they are convenient to use, adaptable to online application, and in many cases they have proven very good predictors of various outcomes. However, questionnaires may also present a series of disadvantages and, for the time being, most research papers recommend using a plurality of measurement tools

– questionnaires, performance tasks, interviews, observation protocols – whenever possible, in order to increases the validity of the measurement.

- **The current literature review also pointed out an important caution**: the mere use of already existing scaled measurement tools for assessing non-cognitive skills regardless of the context, the specifics of the target groups and the purpose of the intervention could often lead to serious validity risks. For this reason, the best assessment approaches should always be designed by experts according to the specifics of the intervention.

- **The vast majority of the reviewed literature in the current report demonstrates that non-cognitive skills are malleable to intervention programmes.** Given the plasticity of the adolescence period, both neurally and behaviourally, the literature review showed that environmental factors could play a crucial role in the learnability and malleability of non-cognitive skills, via peers, family, school, community-level interventions. However, the research also draws attention to the fact that adolescents best develop their non-cognitive skills in real time experiences, when they are encouraged to be actors in their own lives and when they are not seen as mere containers of adults' educational decisions.

- A special place within the scientific literature is dedicated to the concept of resilience. Although some of the scientific literature may relate to resilience in the area of non-cognitive skills, others are arguing that resilience is not in fact a non-cognitive skill *per se*, but is an important outcome of a certain level of development and combined impact of non-cognitive skills. Therefore, resilience has been defined as positive adaptation despite the presence of risk (Masten, 2001, 2014; Rutter, 2000). For example, a recent OECD study on educational resilience, based on the PISA 2006 testing results, concluded that resilient students are more motivated, more engaged and have greater self-confidence in their ability to learn (OECD, 2011), all these qualities belonging to the realm of non-cognitive skills. Consequently, while we may consider, in a certain working definition, that resilience is part of non-cognitive skills, we should be aware that resilience cannot be proven in the absence of other basic non-cognitive skills such as self-awareness, motivation, self-efficacy or social skills.

POLICIES IN THE AREA OF PROMOTING NON-COGNITIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- **Although we couldn't find an explicit promotion of non-cognitive skills as such at policy level in Romania, the current analyses of policies showed that there is a more visible interest in ensuring a better support for the integrated development of children and youth in all sectors**: education, social protection and health. Transversal competencies, socio-emotional competencies, life skills, skills for mental health and wellbeing and other types of skills are more and more mentioned in various analysed strategic documents. Moreover, in several policy documents we analysed, we noticed a clear concern for integrated approaches (education, health, social, legal etc.) to the issues related to different groups such as: children, Roma, categories at risk, people with disabilities, adolescents, children left behind etc.
- **However, there is no common approach to non-cognitive skills across all analysed sectors**. In the educational field, the "key competencies" approach paradigm in the current curriculum reform has enabled an extension of the interest in education from purely cognitive aspects to other aspects of personality development, including non-cognitive skills. In the field of social protection, the 'independent life skills' term is mostly used in relation to non-cognitive skills, while in the health sector, the need for non-cognitive development of adolescents is mostly related to adolescent "health education" as a way of developing health risk behaviour prevention.
- The interviews and workshops with different experts and stakeholders organised in the framework of the current report have highlighted **the need for a common understanding of non-cognitive skills across all sectors (education, social protection and health).** A repertoire of non-cognitive skills definitions and assessment tools was also suggested during the discussions as a starting point for a wider awareness campaign to promote the importance of non-cognitive skills at the level of all stakeholders. At the same time, one priority pointed out was the need to provide professionals working with adolescents in all analysed sectors with a systematic training on addressing non-cognitive skills.

PRACTICES FOCUSED ON NON-COGNITIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN ADOLESCENTS IN ROMANIA

EDUCATION SECTOR

- The current analyses identified several system-level initiatives in education that could open the gate for further potential programmes in the area of non-cognitive development. Although the initiatives do not necessarily target adolescents specifically, but rather all children and youth enrolled in education, a change in the recent curriculum approach may have impact in the long run on the future adolescents of Romania. However, the most important challenges towards a more non-cognitive skills-based approach in education which emerged from stakeholder interviews and several background studies include: the teacher training system is not fully developing the teaching skills required for a non-cognitive approach to education; assessments and examinations are still focusing on student cognitive skills; teachers have limited resources (in terms of information, learning materials, methodological guides, continuing training offers) to support a more non-cognitive skill development approach in their daily teaching activities; counselling services are still underdeveloped and students have limited access to counselling, especially in rural areas.
- Another area that may provide adolescents with opportunities for non-cognitive skill development within the education system is the school-based curricula. At present, the current national offer contains a set of optional courses with high potential for non-cognitive skill development, such as life-skills development optional, health education, civil education, intercultural education etc. Other extracurricular activities hosted by schools in Romania may also create an opportunity for educational activities that address non-cognitive skill development, such as: "School-After-School" Programme, "A Different School" national programme and "the Second Chance" programme. However, so far, there is no specific assessment and evaluation experience to show the impact of the above-mentioned programmes on non-cognitive skill development in adolescents.
- During the interviews, a specific point of discussion regarding the non-cognitive approach to education was related to the fact that the

current assessment and examination system in education is focused mainly on cognitive skills. Several stakeholder opinions expressed during the validation workshop were in favour of developing an assessment system for non-cognitive skills at national level. However, a systemic change of the current assessment and evaluation of learning based on a non-cognitive skills approach requires further debate, since the interviewed stakeholders did not display a common understanding and awareness regarding the importance of non-cognitive skills and their role in the overall educational achievements of adolescents.

- In many interviews conducted during the current study, school climate and the quality of teacher-student-parent relationships were often indicated as critical factors for non-cognitive skill development. According to the interviewed experts, these relationships and the general school climate are important factors in creating a favourable and safe context for learning and development.

- There are several programmes and initiatives explicitly addressing the development of non-cognitive skills of children and adolescents: UNICEF (the School Attendance Initiative), World Vision, Save the Children, and Roma Education Fund also infused their educational programmes with specific actions designed to increase students' motivation, self-esteem and assertiveness, and communication skills. Another example of good practice is the education through coaching model implemented by ROI Association in high schools with high shares of disadvantaged students.

SOCIAL PROTECTION SECTOR

- At policy level, recent years show a shift in the social protection system in order to ensure child development, wellbeing and universal access to social services, through **a holistic and integrated approach** among all public institutions and authorities in the areas of health, education and social protection. The recent policy document *National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020* and its operational plan clearly aim to facilitate access to quality education and health services. The current strategic document focus on **prevention** and on the proactive role of the social protection system may also be in favour of a more non-cognitive approach type of intervention for

adolescents in the future, since the text of the strategy explicitly mentions **the need for developing "the independent life skills" of institutionalized children, by training the professional staff and revising the current legal framework.**

- Specific objectives regarding poverty reduction and promotion of social inclusion amongst vulnerable adolescents and youth are also included in **the National Youth Policy Strategy 2015-2020**[1]. According to this document, one of the main lines of action is "Culture and Non-formal Education", with specific provisions on improving counselling and creating opportunities for non-formal education for youth at risk of early school leaving, young people in rural areas and/or NEETs. Although not explicitly mentioned, counselling and non-formal activities may offer a good opportunity for including the development of non-cognitive skills of adolescents in this area of intervention, as well as in the one related to participation and volunteering.

- **Non-cognitive skills are also included in the current standards promoted by** the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) with regard to the formal child protection system, with reference to social-emotional skill development, seen as "life skills". Another regulation[2], approving the minimum compulsory standards for day care centres for children with disabilities, lists rehabilitation activities such as: *developing self-control skills (e.g. voluntary inhibition process development); organization and creation of personal autonomy etc. (Standard no 6.3).* Moreover, starting 2007, the child protection system should also comply with the minimum compulsory standards for the services aimed at developing life skills and with the methodological guide for implementing the standards.

- Over the last years, public institutions (County Agencies for Employment; General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection etc.) and some NGOs have designed various projects and interventions centred on developing the skills of people with disabilities, especially regarding their access on the labour market. In most cases, the professional skills approach consisted also in targeting a set of specific life skills (including non-cognitive skills

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[1] http://www.unicef.org/romania/Strategia_pt_tineret_en.pdf
[2] http://www.legex.ro/Ordin-25-2004-41161.aspx

such as motivation, resilience, socio-emotional skills, and autonomy) that would facilitate the inclusion of PWDs on the labour market and their gaining a certain level of autonomy.

- The current research also identified several relevant international experiences that highly value the development of life skills among young people (as part of non-cognitive skills), such as the Chile Solidario[3] large-scale government programme (2002-2009) or the Voix Libres[4] Programme (an NGO based in Switzerland) in Bolivia. The main lesson of those international experiences is that there is a need for young people's participation in order to create opportunities that meet their needs and motivations and to provide them with the best protection and support.

- Nevertheless, UNICEF is among the pioneers and one of the most coherent voices in supporting advocacy for a more integrated approach to dealing with vulnerabilities, inequities and poverty among children and adolescents. There are also other examples of organizations that designed programmes focused on non-cognitive skill development for children and youth in Romania, especially those placed under child protection. These initiatives generally aim at raising adolescents' motivation, enhancing their ability to integrate into society, manage their own lives and plan their future independent life.

- There is very limited evidence that the intervention programmes addressed to adolescents in Romania, aiming to support adolescent non-cognitive skill development, have measured their impact and results and much is to be done in the years to come in this respect.

- According to the interviewed experts' perspectives on child protection and non-cognitive skill development, although the legal framework is well developed in terms of including the rights to health, education, social services, in reality, the capacity of the public institutions to provide such services is significantly reduced either due to lack of staff or, where there is sufficient personnel, due to inadequate training of the respective professionals.

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[3] http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/reflections-social-protection-and-poverty-alleviation-long-term-impact-chile-solidario
[4] http://www.voixlibres.org/

HEALTH SECTOR

- **Research findings at national and international levels highlight the explicit relationship that exists between an individual's health and objective contextual (social, economic, cultural, etc.) and subjective (attitudes, including non-cognitive skills) factors.** The cases referred to in the study reveal that interventions in national health programmes are often decontextualized.

- **Currently, the health system does not focus on non-cognitive skills in children, or in adolescents**. Often, intervention programmes on health focus on curative activities and less on prevention and health promotion.

- In terms of promoting health among adolescents (including adolescents facing risk behaviours), a number of **national programmes in different areas of health** have been recently implemented. Some of them were focused explicitly on monitoring and improving the health of adolescents and have had an impact on non-cognitive skill development, such as the *National Programme for Mental Health and Prevention in Psychiatric Pathologies* or *The National Programme for Evaluation and Promotion of Health and Health Education*. These programmes included some monitoring indicators of child and adolescent health status that bear direct relevance to the issue of non-cognitive skills: social-emotional; verbal; cognitive; motor behaviours.

- **Several national programmes have been implemented recently, with a potential impact on developing adolescent non-cognitive skills in the area of healthy life skills.** The National Antidrug Agency has a series of programmes that aim to prevent or reduce the use of psychoactive substances and other drugs, alcohol and tobacco among young people. Campaigns also include training sessions for adolescents in the area of healthy life skills and attitudes towards drugs and psychoactive substances. Another initiative is related to the "Education for Health" topic, which is a comprehensive theme that addresses the issue of non-cognitive skills as part of the school-based curriculum. This optional syllabus is part of a National Educational Programme aiming at promoting a healthy lifestyle, and includes: promoting a healthy lifestyle and well-being (self-awareness and self-concept, communication and interpersonal skills; career orientation); personal development; prevention.

- Several **NGO projects** also contributed to the non-cognitive skill development in adolescents fighting serious diseases or facing risk behaviours, offering daily services for children and youngsters in hospitals all over the country. Their volunteers and experts use dedicated techniques designed to improve the quality of those teenagers' lives. Specific skills and attitudes are targeted, such as: resilience and coping mechanisms; self-acceptance and positive attitude; social and emotional competencies; autonomy (being able to take care of oneself and avoiding acting as a victim); planning and basic management (life) skills. Improvements were noted in children's emotional spectrum, in their positive self-evaluation, in their ability to identify new coping mechanisms, and in their hope for their healing, as well as in the way they see their life after treatment.
- Another example of good practice is the project implemented by ALIAT (*The Alliance for Fighting Against Alcoholism and Drug Addiction*) in partnership with UNICEF. The project developed local centres offering integrated interventions for vulnerable adolescents, personal development workshops and opportunities, as well as psychological and career counselling, with the aim of creating an innovative model of intervention at local level.
- Interviews conducted in the framework of the current report showed that NGO initiatives run through projects targeting health education are too focused, have an unbalanced territorial coverage and face the issue of sustainability. Generally, regional/local projects lack long-term sustainability capacity once the initial funding ends. In the context of health system underfunding, community involvement in medium and long-term commitments to continue those activities is almost null.

CASES OF ORGANIZATIONS AND PROGRAMMES PROMOTING NON-COGNITIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR ADOLESCENTS FROM VULNERABLE GROUPS

- The current research gathered several examples of adolescents that had the chance to develop their non-cognitive skills by getting involved in volunteering activities, sometimes through collaboration with local or national NGOs. The approval of a new Law on volunteering in 2014 offers adolescents an opportunity to have their

professional experience as volunteers properly recognized and valued, while NGOs are expected to issue volunteering certificates that acknowledge the progress made by volunteers in different areas (knowledge, competencies, abilities, attitudes). The volunteering certificate - currently being tested - refers to the key competences used at European level and has been influenced by the Youthpass certificate issued for volunteers in the Erasmus+ programme.

- A good practice in this respect is also the programme developed by the *New Horizons Foundation* since 2009. Their IMPACT programme for teenagers aged 12 to 19 promotes a model for certification of the volunteering activity based on four learning areas (active citizenship, employability, social entrepreneurship and leadership). Another good practice example analysed in the context of the current research is the model promoted by the *Youth for Youth* organization, with support from international institutions, focused on volunteering and peer-education, for a more comprehensive approach to "family life education" for teenagers. The programme uses an evaluation process based on questionnaires before and after the training courses.

- Other organizations such as ARDOR - The Romanian Association for Debate, Elocution and Rhetoric, promote training programmes for adolescents, including vulnerable ones, aimed to improve self-perception, motivation, self-control, inter-personal skills and civic skills. Volunteering as a means for personal development and transcending the current constraints is used by other organizations such as *Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('Drawing Your Future' Association)*, *Romania's Scouts, Clubul Liderii Mileniului Trei (Leaders of the Third Millennium Club), Şcoala de Valori (School of Values Association)* and *LEADERS Foundation* - focusing on education for life, leadership, responsibility and values, building character.

- We also identified other examples of NGOs whose programmes for teenagers included elements of entrepreneurship, mentorship and career counselling: Junior Achievement Romania, World Vision Romania, the Institute for the Development of Educational Assessment, the Romanian American Foundation, Romanian Business Leaders Foundation, and the Centre for Academic Excellence etc.

- Our research identified a wide variety of projects and initiatives with high potential in developing non-cognitive skills of disadvantaged adolescents. However, we seldom found a systematic evaluation model that would allow evidence-based conclusions on the impact and effectiveness of the implemented initiatives.

INTEGRATED APPROACHES AND POTENTIAL FOR NON-COGNITIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- The current research also identified specific programmes developed on the basis of a more integrated approach. It is estimated that a more coherent support at the community level would provide adolescents with a better environment for developing their non-cognitive skills. The examples analysed in the current report belong to: UNICEF Romania, Save the Children Romania, World Vision Romania, the Romanian Orthodox Church, SOS Children's Villages, Concordia Romania, Hope and Homes for Children Romania, Alternative Sociale (Social Alternatives Association), Roma Education Fund Romania, 'Ana şi Copiii' *('Ana and Children' Association)*, Amurtel Association, Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('*Drawing Your Future' Association*) etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **There is a need for policy engagement in recognizing the importance of non-cognitive skills** and their inner potential for enhancing adolescents' learning outcomes, the social integration and well-being of young people, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups. An integrative national approach to non-cognitive skill development should be further discussed in the preparation of new policy and strategic papers in education, health and social protection.
- **Evidence-based interventions and programmes should be further supported by scientific research and relevant evaluation methodologies**. There is a clear need for a platform of exchanges between relevant stakeholders in the area, using specific models, methodologies and tools to assess and evaluate the impact of non-cognitive skill development programmes in order

to bring evidence on quality and relevance of those interventions for the specific target groups.

- **UNICEF may take a leading role in hosting cross-sectorial open discussions on the importance of non-cognitive skill development**, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups, bringing to the same table policy makers, researchers, parents, adolescents and practitioners in various sectors. The outcome of the open discussions may be a draft of a joint policy document on development of non-cognitive skills at national level. UNICEF could also become a catalyst of various national, regional and international initiatives in the area of non-cognitive development.
- **There is a need for real dialogue between different initiatives and programmes on non-cognitive skill development** implemented by various civil society organizations in order to ensure a more coherent approach and mutual support.
- **There is a clear need for interventions targeting the training of professionals at the level of all sectors** (teachers, health workers, and social workers) by updating the current training offer, embedding an explicit priority on the non-cognitive skills approach.
- **Parents and legal family representatives are key players in stimulating the development of non-cognitive skills from the early stages in the family environment**, but also later on in helping children enhance their non-cognitive skills during the school years. Providing parents with the specific methods and tools they need in order to better support the development of their children's non-cognitive skills would also be an important direction for future actions.
- **Building relevant policies and practices in the area of non-cognitive skills should primarily start with children and young people's voices**. Involving young people in various stages and levels of decision-making regarding the programmes addressed to them creates a favourable context for developing their non-cognitive skills, reflecting on their own role, analysing their strengths and their contribution to the wider world. The input of NGOs working with beneficiaries from vulnerable categories could be valuable in designing new policies, programmes and initiatives in this area.
- **Local authorities could also better contribute** by supporting special interventions for young people, taking into account the development of non-cognitive skills. Sharing best practices regarding cooperation between different stakeholders at local level could be added-value.

Background and methodology

WHY THIS STUDY?

The current report was drafted based on a consultancy request of UNICEF Romania launched in May 2015. According to the 2013 – 2017 Country Programme Action Plan, one of the major priorities for UNICEF Romania is to contribute to an increased availability of basic and specialized services for adolescent boys and girls, especially vulnerable ones, and to the emergence of a generation of adolescents more aware and empowered to practice safe behaviours.

The need for the current report was based on **three major assumptions**:
- The latest brain development and neuroscience research shows that adolescent brain is still flexible and actually grows and changes a lot during the second decade. Adolescence is a time when adverse childhood events (abuse, neglect, violence, extreme poverty) can have a serious impact - it is also a window of opportunity to help adolescents acquire the non-cognitive skills they need and didn't necessarily develop during childhood (resilience, optimism, self-confidence, grit etc.).
- Supporting the development of services that provide adolescent boy and girls, especially vulnerable ones, with a set of cognitive and non-cognitive skills that will increase their resilience, contribute to their protection (against risky behaviours, violence, extremism etc.) and enhance their opportunities to participate in and contribute to an inclusive society is a new area of work for UNICEF Romania.
- In Romania, the health, social protection and education systems have limited capacity to identify and provide adapted services to vulnerable adolescents and their families to help them avoid risks, access basic services and fully enjoy their rights. Community-based services are not adolescent-friendly and specialized services for vulnerable adolescents are scarce.

Based on the above mentioned background, the main **research questions** addressed by the current study were the following:

- **What? Meanings of non-cognitive skills for different types of actors** (definitions, terminology, contextualized understandings)
- **Why? Relevance of non-cognitive skills for policies and practices in different contexts** (including level of trust in non-cognitive skills approach, malleability)
- **How? Strategies, experiences, practices** (including evaluation methodologies, tools and indicators)
- **For what and for whom?** Target groups/needs/problems addressed

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this report is to review current scientific evidence on non–cognitive skills and to identify areas of promise with a view to inform adolescent programmes in Romania.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To provide / list definitions of non-cognitive skills and of their subcategories (see Annex 3) and assess how they are measured, including scales of measurements and tools used globally and calibrated to the Romanian population, with focus on adolescents;
- To map interventions implemented in health, education and child protection for the development of adolescent non-cognitive skills, globally and in Romania in the past 5 years;
- To provide the background for a more articulated dialogue between various stakeholders and to build the capacity of UNICEF staff and partners with regard to non-cognitive skills.

RESEARCH METHODS AND TOOLS

The methodology consisted in a complementary approach between desk research and individual interviews and focus group discussions on how non-cognitive skills are defined scientifically and how they are translated into practice, at national level. A specific focus was on literature, policy and practice related to adolescents from vulnerable groups aged 10 to 18.

- **Literature review focused on non-cognitive skills of adolescents and good practices published recently, after 2010, in scientific journals**

Our first step was to look for a definition area for the non-cognitive skills concept, extracting different scientific approaches from the research literature in psychology and educational sciences. Throughout the study process, we drafted several versions of definitions of the concept, adding new layers or refining the existing ones, after exploring new literature and taking more interviews with Romanian academia representatives. We explored the types of non-cognitive skills and the evidence that research studies have produced so far, regarding the relation between these skills and various outcomes in the life of adolescents. The research objectives of the literature review were as follows:

- How are non-cognitive skills defined in the scientific literature - worldwide and in Romania (in psychology, educational sciences and sociology);
- What types of skills are currently being considered as non-cognitive;
- What are the main conclusions of international and Romanian research regarding the study of non-cognitive skills;
- How are those skills measured.

The following **instruments were used for drafting the current literature review**: a) a literature analysis grid; b) an interview guide for experts in academia; c) a references list. Specific **types of literature** were examined in the current study: articles published in peer reviewed journals; articles presented in academic conferences; doctoral theses; activity reports; technical reports (see Annex 1).

- **Interviews and/or discussions with academia for defining non-cognitive skills and their subcategories**

The literature review was complemented by 6 interviews with experts in social sciences. The main goal of the interviews was to become familiar with recognized experts' perspectives on the topic of non-cognitive skills. The interviews deepened the understanding provided by the literature review, by contextualizing it, while offering a broader and integrative picture.

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- **Interviews and discussions with relevant stakeholders**

In the framework of the current study, we conducted 24 interviews with practitioners and policy makers from the education and youth, health and social protection sectors in Romania, involved in programmes aiming to develop the non-cognitive skills of the adolescents that they are working with, and we also looked for those organizations, programmes or practices that are targeting the vulnerable groups of adolescents. A structured interview grid was developed and filled-in online by representatives of several relevant organizations. In total, the research covered a number of **29 organizations included in the analysis** (see Annex 2).

Complementally, **two workshops** based on the focus group tool were organised in order to collect group ideas regarding non-cognitive skills-related understanding, practical preferences and lessons learned from personal experiences: Workshop 1- Practitioners' level – organised in the framework of Restart Edu Camp, Cheia, 5 September 2015 and **Workshop 2 - Policy level representatives**, Bucharest, 24 September 2015. A total number of 35 participants attended the workshops in Cheia and Bucharest (see Annex 2).

- **Validation workshop with relevant counterparts**

The validation workshop aimed to identify the main issues regarding adolescent non-cognitive skill development that the practitioners and policy makers perceive at national level. Therefore, on October 29th, at the UNICEF Romania premises in Bucharest, we organized a validation workshop in order to obtain feedback from the main stakeholders on the first conclusions and recommendations of the study. The event was attended by 25 representatives of: public authorities (Ministry of Education, Institute of Educational Sciences, National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and Adoption, National Anti-Drug Agency, Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education, Bucharest Centre for Educational Resources and Assistance), academia (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences from Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, 'Carol Davila' University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest), NGOs (Împreună Community Development Agency, the Alternative University educational programme, World Vision Romania), members of the research

team and the hosting organization – UNICEF Romania. The main outcomes of the validation workshop are presented in the conclusions and recommendations chapter of the current report.

The increased interest in the non-cognitive skills approach in Romania is also confirmed by a recent initiative of the Ministry of Education and the World Bank that organized a workshop on **Socio-emotional Skill Development** in January 2016. The workshop was organized as part of the Romania Secondary Education Project - ROSE[5], which will be implemented in the next 7 years by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank.

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[5] http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/12/03/romania-launches-project-to-increase-students-chances-of-successfully-transitioning-to-tertiary-education

CHAPTER 1.

Review of the scientific literature on non-cognitive skills

1.1. Adolescence and the relevance of non-cognitive skills: neurobiological evidence

Adolescence has been acknowledged in the last decades as a particular period of growing opportunities as well as increased risks. This idea has been captured in the so-called "health paradox of adolescence" (Dahl, 2004): while during this developmental period there is an increase in physical and mental abilities, making teenagers stronger, bigger, faster and more resilient than before, there is also an increase of 200% in mortality and morbidity rates as compared to the previous period, predominantly due to the escalation of sensation-seeking, risk-taking, impulsivity, recklessness or failure to consider long-term consequences of actions (Casey, Jones & Somerville, 2011; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Scott, 1992; Steinberg et al., 2008). The main factor seemingly responsible for the increased vulnerability of adolescents is the difficulty in controlling emotion and behaviour, which highlights a "second level of paradox" (Dahl, 2004): despite the fact that cognitive abilities, particularly reasoning and decision-making, reach adult levels, there is still immaturity in the motivational and emotional area. Actually, adolescents are even more prone to sensation seeking and risk taking than children, having an increased sensitivity to motivationally and emotionally relevant cues in the environment and changing their own behaviour accordingly; for example, they are more vulnerable to the influence of peers or to immediate rewards (that bring short-term gain but potential long-term loss) (Blakemore & Mills, 2014; Galván, 2014).

This particular dissociation in developmental trajectories of cognitive versus non-cognitive skills makes a strong case for considering the impact of the latter on the life of adolescents, and consequently, for a thorough analysis of non-cognitive skills.

Several neurobiological models have been advanced in order to explain this dissociation, and they are convergent in assuming that affective-motivational brain structures mature earlier than those involved in cognitive processes, that take control over the first progressively, as adolescents step into adulthood (Casey, Jones & Somerville, 2011; Ernst, Pine & Hardin, 2006; Steinberg et al., 2008; Van Duijvenvoorde et al., in press). On the other hand, the heightened sensitivity of emotional and motivational brain circuitry seems to be due to the action of gonadal hormones that is augmented along with puberty. As a consequence, it is thought that puberty represents a period of synaptic reorganization and brain circuitry remodelling (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006), thus a period of increased plasticity to external influences. Such reorganization processes target more specifically those neural structures devoted to social and emotional processes, thus consequences are expected particularly in these psychological functioning areas (e.g., redistribution of dopaminergic receptors that may increase reward-seeking behaviour (Crone & Güroğlu, 2014; Sisk & Zehr, 2005; Spear, 2009).

Additionally, during this period, the brain might be more sensitive to experiential input; thus, adolescence is a period of both increased opportunities and vulnerabilities (Dahl, 2004), particularly in the non-cognitive domains.

1.2. Overview of the literature review

*Our literature review aimed to present the state-of-the-art scientific knowledge devoted to non-cognitive skills, with a special focus on adolescents aged 10 to 18. We concentrated mainly on approaches from the CEECIS region (Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent states), and more specifically from Romania, published from 2010 onwards, integrating them in the more generous landscape of international studies from the US and Western Europe. Since fundamental concepts related to non-cognitive skills have been studied long before, we also selected and reviewed relevant and important studies that were published before 2010. By not including these studies, we would have missed some of the most important international findings related to this subject. **The review took into consideration mainly studies from psychological literature, with application in education, health and social protection.***

While this subject area is clearly generating a growing interest, our desk research evidenced a relative scarcity of theoretical and empirical data from our geographical area of focus. In particular, in Romania, we identified few related initiatives, for example in terms of adapting various instruments for the measurement of non-cognitive abilities (Iliescu and collaborators, testcentral.ro) or designing evidence-based interventions for social-emotional learning, like SELF Kit (Social Emotional Learning Facilitator Kit, www.selfkit.ro, Opre et al. 2011, 2012). Fundamental or applied research studies (e.g., covered by recent PhD theses) seem also underrepresented.

Possible reasons for this relative scarcity of data/initiatives include the terminological fuzziness, as well as the measurement difficulties in circumscribing non-cognitive psychological variables (see Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

While the common denominator of all these variables is that of being "other than cognitive" - which **in our working definition was specified as "not measured by IQ tests or achievement tests"** - a consensus regarding what non-cognitive skills are has not been reached.

Non-cognitive skills can be found in literature referred to as soft skills, non-cognitive abilities, socio-emotional skills, personality traits, character skills. The conceptual status of these "personal qualities" (Willingham, 1985), as skills versus abilities, skills versus disposition, moral qualities (like character) versus 'pure' psychological competencies (like social-emotional learning) is still debatable and challenging when conducting rigorous research and translating research into practice.

Another problematic issue regards the very term "non-cognitive", which can be understood by laypersons but also professionals as "devoid of cognition". Yet, as pointed out by Duckworth & Yeager (2015), as long as processing of information is involved in any facet of psychological functioning, pure non-cognitive dimensions do not really exist. Secondly, some definitions assume, like Borghans et al. (2008), that non-cognitive abilities are patterns of thoughts, behaviours and emotions (modifiable along the life course, and different than general intelligence/IQ) - thus, they explicitly include a cognitive component. Thirdly, one of the most popular non-cognitive dimensions, namely self-regulation/self-control, relies on top-down cognitive processes, the executive functions which include working memory and attentional control. Thus, any focus on the non-cognitive

aspects of human functioning, either for research or intervention purposes, should consider that cognitive and non-cognitive processes are intermingled.

1.3. Types of non-cognitive skills

In this chapter we will provide a brief presentation for each of the skills mentioned above, highlighting the definitions currently used, the main findings of the international and Romanian scientific studies, as well as the instruments used by researchers to measure these skills. We also analyze the malleability to interventions of various non-cognitive skills, based on the evidence that is currently available.

UNICEF considers non-cognitive skills as learnable skills, which are scientifically proven to be equally as important as cognitive skills in helping young people build constructive and positive lives and avoid risky behaviours. Non-cognitive skills are: optimism, motivation, self-control, perseverance, integrity and curiosity. Resilience is defined as the capacity of an adolescent to "bounce back" and overcome difficult circumstances and adversity in life. Supporting adolescents to build their resilience involves the "7 Cs": confidence, competence, connection, character, control, coping ability and contribution. **A key challenge for all of us is to translate the latest scientific developments in neuroscience and epigenetics into sound, actionable and effective youth policy & programming approaches.**

Our review shows that several skills have been proposed as being 'non-cognitive', but a consensus in pointing the exact types of skills that classify as being non-cognitive has not been reached (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015).

For the purpose of our review, we considered the most prominent types of non-cognitive skills, relating to the personal and social dimensions of the individual, from which other types (such as optimism, perseverance and curiosity, to name just a few) derive:

Dimensions/Types of non-cognitive skills
a) Personal dimension (in terms of managing oneself)
- Self-concept
- Self-efficacy
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Creativity
b) Social and community dimension (in terms of social relationships)
- Social skills
- Civic skills

All these skills represent important assets in the development of **resilience**, which has been defined as positive adaptation despite the presence of risk, which may include poverty, parental bereavement, parental mental illness, and/or abuse (Masten, 2001, 2014; Rutter, 2000).

Children growing up in socially deprived environments, such as placement centres, exhibit during their childhood, but also puberty, adolescence and later on, not only cognitive disturbances, but mostly emotional problems (e.g. depression), inattention/hyperactivity and even a syndrome that mimics autism. A randomized trial started in 2000 in Bucharest (Bucharest Early Intervention Project: http://www.bucharestearlyinterventionproject.org) evaluated in a scientific valid way the effect of institutionalization on children, but also the positive effects of removing children from institutions and placing them in foster homes, effects that seem to last to the adolescent years.

From an **economic perspective**, cognitive and non-cognitive skills are equally important. Economic studies have shown that increasing the level of non-cognitive skills has an effect on behaviour comparable and sometimes even greater than the increase in the level of cognitive skills (Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006). Even though it is difficult to estimate by calculations the economic return of the potential increase in non-cognitive skills generated by further investment in education (Varly et al., 2014), a recent study provided stronger reasons to invest in social and emotional learning programmes. In 2015, Clive Belfield and collaborators showed that every dollar invested in such programmes results in a substantial economic return of 11 dollars and in long-term benefits ranging from reduced juvenile crime, higher lifetime earnings, to better mental and physical health.

Definitions and short descriptions

In the following we are going to present the non-cognitive skills mentioned above, by providing the general agreed definition and a short description of the skill.

1.3.1. Self-concept

Self-concept refers broadly to the person's perception of himself or herself (Sebastian et al., 2008; Chmielewski et al., 2013). We can speak about global self-concept, as well as specific self-concept(s), related to specific areas of a persons' life. Below, there is a short presentation of global self-concept and some specific self-concepts with special relevance to adolescents.

Global self-concept refers to how individuals feel about themselves more generally, while domain-specific self-concepts concern their perceptions in a single area, like academic self-concept, social self-concept or body image. These domain-specific self-concepts hold special relevance for adolescents, being also the focus of international and local research.

Academic self-concept was defined as mental representations of one's abilities in academic domains (Brunner et al., 2009). Scientific literature distinguishes between domain-general academic self-concept - "I am good at school" - and domain-specific academic self-concepts - "I'm brilliant at mathematics", "I'm illiterate in Chemistry". This multidimensional, domain-specific nature of academic self-concept has been shown to hold across different cultures (Marsh & Hau, 2004) and should be taken into consideration when conducting studies and designing intervention programmes.

Social self-concept represents a person's self-perceptions of his or her social acceptance by others as well as his or her skills with respect to social interactions with others (Berndt & Burgy, 1996), sometimes referred to as the 'looking glass self' (Brunner et al., 2009).

Body image refers to the mental representation of information related to the physical aspect (Nanu, 2013).

Self-consciousness refers to the tendency to direct attention on both interior and exterior aspects of the self (Delvecchio et al., 2015), and seems to be heightened in adolescence.

1.3.2. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to the subjective judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals (Bandura, 1977, 1997) and is strongly connected to the feeling of being in control (Bandura, 1995). It is a belief about what a person can do, whereas self-concept refers to an affective appraisal of one's attributes and performance ("I can …" in self-efficacy vs. "I am …" in self-concept).

Self-efficacy is a context-specific construct, so we can speak about academic, inter-personal, affective, civic self-efficacy and so on, or make even finer distinctions, like self-regulatory efficacy, which is the perceived self-efficacy for self-regulated learning (Caprara et al., 2008). Each context in its turn is divided into sub-domains; for example in relation to academic self-efficacy, an individual's level can vary across different subjects, such as reading, algebra, and writing.

1.3.3. Self-regulation

Self-regulation refers to the process of self-management, through which one controls oneself. It is an adaptive process, by which people alter their thoughts, attention, emotions, and behaviours to react to and influence different environments (Gestsdottir et al., 2015). The ability to self-regulate is considered as fundamental for all human developmental changes (Baltes et al., 2006).

Self-regulation is sometimes referred to as self-control, or the ability to resist short-term impulses in order to prioritize longer-term goals (Schoon & Gutman, 2013).

In the education field, we have the construct of self-regulated learning (SRL), which represents a goal-directed process and implies taking control of and evaluating one's own learning. This is done by focusing awareness on thinking and selecting, monitoring, and planning strategies that are most conducive to learning (Zimmerman, 1990, 2001).

1.3.4. Motivation

Motivation refers to the reasons for actions, desires and needs. There is a wealth of research regarding motivation, most of it belonging to some theoretical traditions (Rosen, Glennie, Dalton, Lennon, & Bozick, 2010), of which the most important are the theory of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971), the expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983) and the achievement goal theory (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Ames, 1992).

The intrinsic/ extrinsic theories:

Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something based on inherent interest, pleasure or enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation refers to doing something for external goals, such as tangible rewards or social pressure. The self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) is a derived theory, introducing the terms autonomy and control. Intrinsic motivation is viewed as autonomous and extrinsic is more of a controlled form of motivation.

Expectancy-Value theory:

This line of research views motivation as dependent on the expectancy of success and the value ascribed to the task. Expectancy reflects the extent to which an individual believes he or she can be successful in a task (i.e. self-efficacy) and value reflects the extent to which an individual believes a task is worthwhile.

Achievement goal theory:

This recent prominent theory deals directly with motivation in the educational setting, by focusing on the goals that students have. Broadly, students can have two types of achievement goals: mastery and performance goals. Mastery, or learning goals are directed towards a true understanding and mastery of the task. Performance goals are focused on demonstrating the competence, competition and comparison with peers.

1.3.5. Creativity

Broadly, creativity has been defined as the ability to generate ideas and problem solutions that are both novel and appropriate (Sternberg & Lubart, 1996).

Even though creativity is often referred to as a non-cognitive skill, it has a heavy load of cognitive components, most authors naming it creative cognition (e.g. Kleibeuker et al., 2013; Stevenson et al., 2014; Kleibeuker et al., 2013). On the non-cognitive side, creativity has been often associated with the personality factor of Openness, from the Big Five personality theory, and some authors argue that it depends greatly not only on other non-cognitive skills, such as motivation, interest, perseverance, but also on the environment (Ciskszentmihalyi, 2013).

We argue that creativity has found its place among the non-cognitive competences also because it is not traditionally supported in the formal educational system (see Ken Robinson's popular TED talk "Do schools kill creativity?" (Robinson, 2006).

Related concepts are divergent thinking and insight, both being associated with the ability to be creative (Kleibeuker et al., 2013).

A valued outcome of creativity is **entrepreneurship**, which refers to "the ability to turn ideas into action" (European Commission, 2006). Entrepreneurship requires creativity and innovation, but also other skills and abilities like risk-taking, the ability to work both as an individual and collaboratively in teams, the ability to plan, organize, manage, lead and delegate, analyze, communicate, de-brief, negotiate, evaluate and record in order to achieve the objectives of a project. An entrepreneurial attitude means to have initiative and determination, to be pro-active, independent and innovative in one's personal and social life, but also at work.

1.3.6. Social skills

Social skills have been defined as "socially acceptable learned behaviours that enable a person to interact effectively with others and to avoid socially unacceptable responses" (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Usually, social skills include pro-social behaviours, such as cooperation, sharing, empathy, communication, general friendliness. Social skills are especially important in adolescence, a developmental period marked by a heightened susceptibility to peer influence.

1.3.7. Civic skills

Civic competence refers to the capacity to fully participate in civic life (engage effectively with others in the public arena, demonstrate responsibility, solidarity and interest in solving problems affecting the local and wider community, respect for human rights, for differences between value systems of different religious or ethnic groups, for the shared values that are necessary to ensure community cohesion). Civic participation is related to several skills, both non-cognitive and cognitive, such as critical and reflective skills, creative abilities, decision-making skills, motivation for engaging with others in the public domain and for constructive participation (European Commission, 2006).

1.3.8. Resilience – a special case

We assert that resilience is a special case, because it is not in fact a non-cognitive skill, but is an important outcome, which depends a lot on the development of these skills. As mentioned before, resilience has been defined as positive adaptation despite the presence of risk (Masten, 2001, 2014; Rutter, 2000).

Social and emotional skills together with significant relationships can make a positive difference in the life of a child or adolescent faced with serious adversities while growing up, helping him or her to "bounce back" in the face of setbacks. The OECD study on educational resilience, based on the PISA 2006 testing results, concluded, among others, that resilient students are more motivated, more engaged and have greater self-confidence in their ability to learn (OECD, 2011), all these qualities belonging to the realm of non-cognitive skills.

There have been successful evidence-based interventions at the international level, which increased the resilience of children and adolescents, a common feature being that the programmes were complex, community-based and not directed to only one particular skill.

Here are some examples of evidence-based interventions for fostering resilience (Wright, Masten & Narayan, 2013, Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005):

- Prevention and decrease of risky behaviours and delinquency: FAST Track, Seattle Social Development Project

- Early interventions for increasing the chances of children living in poverty or disadvantaged environments: Abecedarian Project, Head Start, Perry Preschool Project, Chicago Longitudinal Study
- Promotion of parental involvement: Parent Management Training - Oregon Model (PMTO), The Multidimensional Family Therapy (MDFT) programme, Preparing for the Drug Free Years (PDFY), Iowa Strengthening Families Program (ISFP), Flint Fathers and Sons Program, Adolescent and Family Rites of Passage Program (MAAT), Familias Unidas
- General development of abilities: LifeSkills Training, The Resourceful Adolescent Program (RAP)

1.4. Relation between non-cognitive skills and outcomes in adolescents: Evidence from international and Romanian research studies

In the following, we will show evidence regarding the impact of non-cognitive skills on various outcomes in children and adolescents, such as education, occupational aspirations, sociality, health, risky behaviours, and others. Evidence was collected from international, as well as Romanian scientific literature.

1.4.1. Self-concept

There is compelling evidence for a positive relation between academic self-concept and desirable outcomes, such as academic achievement (Marsh & Martin, 2011) or occupational aspirations (Ireson & Hallam, 2009).

However, the majority of the research showed that social self-concept and academic self-concept are poorly or not related.

Evidence from neuroscience showed that adolescence is an important developmental period for the self, with heightened brain activity associated with self-processing (Sebastian et al., 2008).

In Romania, recent interest in the research of self-concept or related constructs comes from the domain of Psychology, with findings suggesting a positive association between self-image, self-esteem and pro-social

behaviour (Zaharia, 2012), bringing evidence of the antecedents and outcomes of perfectionism in adolescents (Damian, 2013), revealing the individual and social factors associated with body image in adolescence (Nanu, 2013), or analyzing the identity dynamics in the educational context in adolescents (Pop, 2015).

1.4.2. Self-efficacy

Scholars have argued that adolescents' perceptions of efficacy play an important role in their transition from childhood dependency to adulthood self-sufficiency. Research has shown that adolescents' self-efficacy beliefs are connected to both causes and effects of personal and academic functioning, as well as future occupational choices (Zimmerman & Timothy, 2006).

Adolescents' emotional and interpersonal self-efficacy beliefs have been proven as important in contrasting maladjustment, despite the impairing effect of personal and contextual risk factors. Thus, in middle adolescence, individuals' beliefs in their capability to handle relations with parents, to resist peer pressures toward risky behaviour, and to empathize with others' feelings had a longitudinal influence on depression and delinquency (Caprara et al., 2010).

Regarding the developmental trajectory, longitudinal studies have revealed a progressive decline in self-regulatory efficacy from junior to senior high school, with males experiencing the greater reduction (Caprara et al., 2008). The greater the decline, the lower the school grades and higher the risk of school dropout. This decreasing tendency is similar to the one observed in academic motivation, which drops during middle adolescence.

Romanian researchers have been more interested in studying the broader concept of self-esteem in adolescents (a general self-worth emotional appreciation), than studying self-efficacy. However, there were some doctoral theses that studied self-efficacy in adolescents in relation to various outcomes. For example, career related self-efficacy has been shown to mediate the relation between trait anxiety and career indecision in a sample of Romanian adolescents. The study suggested that trait anxiety leads to lower levels of career self-efficacy, which in turn determines career indecision (Perțe, 2013).

1.4.3. Self-regulation

Self-regulation has been associated with desirable outcomes for individuals, such as finding more responses to a problem, learning from his or her mistakes, managing more effectively expected and unexpected events and persevering in the face of adversity (Lerner, 2002; Trommsdorff, 2012).

Self-regulation skills have been proven to be a core developmental component of conscientiousness, a personality factor related to the capacity to work diligently on productive, goal-directed activities (Eisenberg et al., 2014).

With respect to educational outcomes, students with better self-regulatory skills seem to be cognitively, meta-cognitively, and motivationally active learners (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994).

Self-regulation is also closely connected to the quality of social relationships. A review of studies on the role of relationships for self-regulation in adolescents (Farley & Kim-Spoon, 2014) showed that adolescent self-regulation has a bi-directional relation with social relationships, being both influenced by them and also actively influencing the quality of social relationships; results seem to consistently support the idea that better self-regulators have better quality relationships.

In Romania, there is interest in the study of self-regulation, in relation to different outcomes and to various factors of influence, for example the moderating role of individual differences in self-regulation (Susa, Benga, Pitica, & Miclea, 2014).

Recently, a series of doctoral theses in the domains of Psychology and Educational Sciences have dealt with the issue of self-regulation in adolescents, in relation to academic outcomes (Maier, 2012; Peculea, 2014).

In Romania, the interest in studying self-regulation is often subsumed under the broader theme of the learning to learn key competence, defined by the European Council as "the ability to pursue and organize one's own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one's own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities" (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2006), original Romanian papers being

presented at educational conferences (e.g. Peculea, 2015 in Edu World International Conference 2014).

1.4.4. Motivation

As a general tendency, multiple research studies suggest a decreasing pattern of students' motivation with age. The decrease stagnates when students are about 16 years old and then an increase in intrinsic motivation can be observed in some disciplines (Spinath & Steinmayr, 2012).

Generally, intrinsic motivation is associated with better academic and occupational outcomes. Still, research suggests that adolescents do not have to enter an educational programme already motivated, as, in time, they can develop intrinsic motivation, given that the programme connects with their authentic personal needs (Dawes & Larson, 2011). On the other hand, extrinsic incentives significantly undermine intrinsic motivation, when this is already installed (Deci & Ryan, 1999).

In order to foster intrinsic motivation, educators should strive to create a learning-oriented environment, by choosing methods that let students experience their learning progress. For this purpose, intra-individual comparisons, through which each student compares his or her work results and competencies over time (e.g. by means of the educational portfolio) and sees the learning progress, foster motivation more than comparing students' performance to a social norm (Spinath & Steinmayr, 2012).

According to the achievement goal theory, mastery goals lead to better engagement and learning than performance goals (Rosen et al., 2010).

In addition, David Yeager and collaborators found that low income high-school students with more of a self-transcendent purpose for learning persisted more on a boring task rather than giving in to a tempting alternative and, many months later, were less likely to drop out of college (Yeager et al., 2014).

Relationships with teachers and peers are closely connected to students' motivation and for this reason the learning environment should be taken in consideration when studying and attempting to foster students' motivation (Jagenow et al., 2015). It is very important to bear in mind that the inter-individual differences and intra-individual developmental changes in

motivation are quite big in adolescents. As a consequence, motivational types should not be regarded or used as fixed labels, on the contrary, they are very likely to change over time. It is important for educators to recognize inter-individual differences in order to foster each student's unique potential by respecting their own motivational needs (Jagenow et al., 2015).

In Romania, a group of researchers from Babeş-Bolyai University, the Faculty of Psychology, are studying motivation, especially from the perspective of the achievement goal theory, with emphasis on the cultural influences on motivation and performance (Damian et al., in press; Negru, 2012). There are also a number of doctoral theses in Psychology and Educational Sciences from universities in Bucharest, Iaşi and Cluj-Napoca that have addressed the topic of school motivation.

1.4.5. Creativity

Creativity is associated not only with outstanding performance in arts and sciences, but also with entrepreneurial activities (Amabile, 1997) and with the development of social institutions (Mumford, 2002), to name just a few outcomes.

Developmental research has shown that adolescence is a period not only of immaturity, but also of creative potential, especially in the visual-spatial domain, this feature being in line with the wide and explorative focusing style characteristic of middle adolescents (Kleibeuker et al., 2013). Middle adolescents (15, 16 years old) seem to have increased exploratory success compared to younger and older age groups.

Regarding the use of brain areas, on average, adolescents are better than adults at using relevant prefrontal brain areas during creative problem solving. On the other hand, studies have also demonstrated that generating multiple creative ideas, which represents a hallmark of divergent thinking, needs additional prefrontal cortex activation, which is not yet optimized in adolescence (Kleibeuker et al., 2013).

In Romania, there are various European funded projects aimed at fostering creativity in students, some having also a research evaluation component. For example, Pecheanu, Susnea and Tudorie presented a paper at the

2014 Edu World International Conference, with the preliminary results of two projects, one which intervened on the learning environment, and the other on the educational content, both with the aim of developing creativity in students. They call for a reformed school, which is, in their opinion, the only efficient social instrument for promoting creativity on a large scale (Pecheanu et al., 2015).

Marius Stanciu talked about the underdeveloped concept of embodied creativity - the influence that the body and the environment can have on shaping creativity - grounding it on the much more studied concept of embodied cognition (Stanciu, 2015).

The superiority of figural over verbal creativity in adolescents, as shown in international studies, has been proven also on a sample of Romanian high-school students (Dău-Gaşpar, 2013).

1.4.6. Social skills

Research in neuroscience has demonstrated that social brain and social cognition undergo a profound period of development in adolescence, this period being sensitive for socio-cultural development (Blakemore & Mills, 2014).

Positive relationships during adolescence act like a social buffer, making individuals less sensitive to negative social experiences later on (Masten et al., 2012).

Empathy, a core component of social skills, tends to increase during the adolescent years and also to predict higher empathy in adulthood and the use of more constructive communication skills (Allemand et al., 2015).

In Romania, the development of social and emotional competences in children and adolescents is the focus of a group of researchers from Babeş-Bolyai University, coordinated by Professor Adrian Opre, his team designing also evidence-based interventions and training programmes (SelfKit, 2012).

Recent Romanian doctoral theses focused on the analysis of antisocial behaviours, as an outcome of underdeveloped social skills (Demeter, 2012; Beldean-Galea, 2012).

1.5. How do researchers measure non-cognitive skills?

In this section, we are going to discuss the current measurement tools for non-cognitive skills, their advantages and also limitations.

As one can see below, the most widely used measurement tools are questionnaires, in the form of self-reports or teacher/ parent report. Questionnaires are convenient to use because they are quite cheap, quick to administer and score, adaptable to online application, and in many cases they have proven to be very good predictors of various outcomes. However, they also present a series of disadvantages, such as misinterpretation by the participant, who may interpret the item in a different way than intended by the researcher; inaccurate reports of internal states by the respondent; reference bias, which makes judgement differ across various social standards; and, not least, faking or social desirability bias (Duckworth & Yeager, 2015). For this reason, a good recommendation at the moment is to use a plurality of measurement tools – questionnaires, performance tasks, interviews, observation protocols, whenever possible. We are aware that this increases the allocated time and requires extra effort, but on the other hand, it is less prone to errors and increases the validity of the measurement.

Equally important is to mention that the majority of the measurement instruments have been used for research and their validity is usually confined to this purpose. These tools are not intended to be used for individual diagnosis or school evaluation and serious errors of interpretation can occur if one proceeds in such manner.

1.5.1. Self-concept

Self-assessment scales are the current main modality to assess self-concept in adolescents. One of the best self-concept instruments available is considered to be the Self Description Questionnaire (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984), from which some items have been extracted for use also in the PISA study. Some subscales have been validated for Romanian adolescents' population (Nanu, 2013).

Recent advances in technology gave rise to an increasing use of neuroimaging techniques in the investigation of various psychological

characteristics. In this respect, the fMRI technique (Functional magnetic resonance imaging) is being used also to investigate brain areas related to global or domain specific self-concept in adolescents (Sebastian et al., 2008).

1.5.2. Self-efficacy

Since self-efficacy is a domain specific concept, there is no all-purpose measure of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006). Thus, researchers have designed various self-report scales to measure domain specific beliefs of self-efficacy. For example, Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales – PALS (Midgley et al., 2000) has a subscale for academic self-efficacy. The Regulatory Emotional Self-efficacy Scale measures one's perceived capability of regulating negative affect (Caprara & Gerbino, 2001; Caprara et al., 2008). The Filial Self-Efficacy Scale measures adolescents' beliefs in their capabilities to discuss personal problems with their parents (Caprara et al., 2004).

The scales mentioned above are only some examples of instruments that have been used in research worldwide, but one can find many others, depending on the area they investigate (e.g. interpersonal relationships, peer pressure, career development, collective self-efficacy, etc.).

Some of the scales have been adapted also for certain Romanian adolescent samples, for example the Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale, which has been used in a doctoral thesis in Psychology (Perțe, 2013).

1.5.3. Self-regulation

Self-regulation is measured most often with self-report questionnaires and various experimental tasks.

The scales contain questions designed to assess various self-regulation strategies, for example the SOC questionnaire (Freund & Baltes, 2002), the Self-control scale (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), the Child Behaviour Questionnaire (Rothbart, Ahadi, Hershey & Fisher, 2001) or the Early Adolescent Behaviour Questionnaire (Ellis & Rothbart, 2001).

Experimental tasks involve concurrent think-aloud protocols employed while students are actively involved in learning and problem-solving tasks (e.g. Galla et al., 2014; Ainley & Patrick, 2006; Biswas et al., 2010), delay of gratification tasks or inhibition/control tasks, that involve ignoring distractor stimuli.

Interviews are another way to assess self-regulation, a known structured interview guide being the Self-Regulated Learning Interview Schedule (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990).

In Romania, some questionnaires have been validated for the Romanian population in the context of doctoral theses (e.g. Maier, 2012; Peculea, 2014). The commercial Questionnaire assessment of learning strategies - SMALSI (ages 8-12 and 13-18) has subscales regarding self-regulation in educational settings (Cognitrom, 2010).

1.5.4. Motivation

Motivation is most often measured by using self-assessment scales. Very rarely interviews, followed by the qualitative analysis of the transcripts (Dawes & Larson, 2011) or observational protocols (Patrick et al., 1997) are being used.

Scales used to assess adolescents' motivation include Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales - PALS (Midgley et al., 2000), Scale of student motivation (Kosovich et al., 2015), Relationship and Motivation Scale – REMO (Raufelder et al., 2013).

In Romania, the Achievement Motivation Inventory (AMI) can be used for adolescents above 16 years old (Test Central, 2007). The Questionnaire assessment of learning strategies (ages 8-12 and 13-18) has subscales regarding motivation (Cognitrom, 2010) and the Development Evaluation Platform – Form B (7-18 years) also has a subscale for the assessment of values and interests (Cognitrom, 2012).

1.5.5. Creativity

Up until now, researchers seem to agree that it is quite improbable to capture someone being truly creative in a laboratory setting (Jung et al.,

2013). However, there are various designed tests aimed to measure components of creativity, such as creative insight tasks, divergent thinking tasks, general and creative ideation tasks. A different type of assessment is the "Consensual Assessment Technique" (Amabile, 1982; Kaufman et al., 2008), by which panels of expert judges rank creative products such as stories, collages, poems, and a "composite creativity score" is compiled.

More recently, neuroimaging techniques are being used to identify brain features associated with creativity. Usually, subjects are given various creativity tests, while their brain is being scanned in an fMRI scanner (Kleibeuker et al., 2013).

In Romania, the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking have been adapted for the Romanian population and are available for commercial and research use (Test Central, 2008).

1.5.6. Social skills

Self-report scales are the most widely used instrument for the assessment of social skills, such as the Prosocial Behaviour Scale (Caprara et al., 2005) or the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

Alternative methods have also been designed, such as the use of daily diary for a period of time (Masten et al., 2012) or hypothetical situation vignettes (Vanhalst et al., 2015).

Simulated experiences of social exclusion are also being used in experimental settings, sometimes coupled with fMRI scans (e.g., Masten et al., 2012).

1.6. Are non-cognitive skills malleable to intervention programmes?

1.6.1. Self-concept

There have been successful interventions aimed at enhancing the self-concept of ability in children and adolescents (Schoon & Gutman, 2013)

and at enhancing body image (e.g. Nanu, 2013), indicating that self-concept is a malleable construct at this developmental stage.

Self-concept seems to be culturally dependent, some studies showing that, in collectivistic cultures, self-concept is more malleable and dependent upon the social context than in more individualistic cultures in which self-concept is more stable across situations (Tafarodi et al., 2004).

1.6.2. Self-efficacy

Albert Bandura, the most influential scientist in the study of self-efficacy, argued that self-efficacy can be developed by four main sources of influence (Bandura, 1995): mastery experiences, the most effective modality, referring to first-hand experience of success; vicarious experiences, which refers to seeing similar people succeed as a result of sustained effort; social persuasion, which is a direct influence of another person who actively persuades people verbally that they are able to be successful in given activities and who also structures situations in ways that bring success and avoids placing people in situations where they are likely to fail often; and enhancement of physical status, reducing stress and correcting misinterpretations of bodily states.

However, evidence regarding these types of influence, especially culturally adapted, still needs to be collected.

There is evidence that adolescents' self-efficacy is greatly influenced by their ability to self-regulate their functioning, such as setting goals, following them through by the use of effective strategies and self-monitoring techniques, self-evaluation. As a consequence, interventions aimed at increasing the self-efficacy of adolescents should also take into account the development of self-regulatory skills (Zimmerman & Timothy, 2006).

In Romania, a training programme called "I know! I can! I choose!" has been tested and shown to have good results in increasing self-efficacy and decreasing career indecisiveness in adolescents (Perțe, 2013).

1.6.3. Self-regulation

There are educational programmes designed to improve self-regulation, which have demonstrated good results, like metacognitive trainings, some being adapted for a Romanian population of students. Individual interventions proved to be more efficient than those involving small groups (Maier, 2012), especially in the case of students with learning problems. Interventions directed at the improvement of the learning to learn competence have also been shown to have success for a population of Romanian high-school students (Peculea, 2014).

1.6.4. Motivation

Educational interventions showed some success in fostering and developing academic motivation in students.

Dawes and Larson found that the change process regarding motivation in organized youth programmes involved forming a personal connection, through which personal goals are progressively integrated with the goals of programme activities. Motivational change could especially be driven by goals that transcended self-needs (Dawes & Larson, 2011).

David Yeager and collaborators proved that a brief, one-time psychological intervention that promoted a self-transcendent purpose for learning in low-income students could improve high-school science and math grade point average (GPA) over several months (Yeager et al., 2014).

1.6.5. Creativity

Adolescence seems to be a good developmental period for the training of creativity. For example, Stevenson and collaborators found that adolescents benefited more from creativity training than adults, regardless of the type of training provided (Stevenson et al., 2014).

Other studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of trainings in divergent thinking, with performance gains in terms of originality. Most successful programmes were likely to focus on the development of cognitive skills and the heuristics involved in skill application (Scott et al., 2004).

1.6.6. Social skills

There are a number of intervention programmes targeting the development of social and emotional learning in children and adolescents, Romanian examples including the SelfKit programme developed at Babeş-Bolyai University and programmes designed to reduce school aggression by promoting social skills (e.g. Beldean-Galea, 2012).

There is evidence that empathy can be influenced by teaching and practice, empathy trainings promoting emotional competences in school-aged children (Greenberg et al., 1995).

1.7. Conclusions of the literature review

Non-cognitive skills are very important considering the specific developmental tasks of adolescence, such as: adjusting to physical changes, constructing and accommodating to a new body image; navigating in a wider social world, managing a larger network and an increasingly complex social environment; performing academically; constructing an identity (general, vocational/educational etc.); gaining more autonomy relative to adults, as well as to peers.

Adolescence is a challenging time, when the individual has to finally face the external world "in the wild", encountering a large network of various social agents (friends, romantic and sexual partners, teachers and employers, society at large), while gaining a new degree of control over thoughts and emotions, both at home and outside of it (Brizio, Gabbatore, Tirassa & Bosco, 2015).

Individual differences in each of the non-cognitive skills described before, or a combination of them might specifically put some adolescents at risk. However, given the plasticity of this age group, both neurally and behaviourally, environmental factors might play a crucial role in the learnability and malleability of non-cognitive skills, via peers, family, school, community-level interventions. Yet, one should not forget that adolescents, and their plethora of skills and aptitudes, are not passive recipients of adult-directed interventions. Instead, adolescents are actors in their own lives, in constant interaction with environmental influences, at times becoming

active contributors to others' lives (e.g., active citizens or catalysts of community change, Makhoul et al., 2012).

Action-taking in the social world, from school to civic and ideological/political stances involves a lot of non-cognitive abilities, and in particular self-regulation, mostly in interactions that are emotionally compelling but also intellectually challenging (since they involve understanding, explaining, predicting, etc.). This implies that in adolescents' real time experience, non-cognitive and cognitive skills are interdependent.

1.8.   Limits of the literature review

Given the unclear definition of non-cognitive skills and lack of consensus among scholars, each review on this topic finds a way to carve the vast domain of non-cognitive skills. The reason behind our selection of the types of non-cognitive skills was that of best evidence available so far; we included those skills that have been well studied and that show a certain degree of malleability to intervention. This of course doesn't mean that other types of abilities are less important.

The literature review covered studies that involved children and adolescents aged 10 to 18. Although we focused on literature published from 2010 onwards, we also included earlier relevant international studies. The reason for this decision was that important fundamental concepts have been studied prior to 2010, and excluding these findings would have resulted in a lack of clarity of the present review. However, the Romanian literature analysis abides by the '2010 onwards' principle. One can notice a slight disparity between the international and the Romanian literature, in the sense that most of the international studies analyzed here were published in peer-reviewed scholarly journals, while the Romanian studies, with a few exceptions, are mainly PhD theses and presentations at various conferences. There is an obvious reason for this choice, namely Romanian scientific studies are still in their emerging years and don't yet enjoy the visibility and impact of the international ones.

CHAPTER 2.

What policies are formulated in Romania for non-cognitive skill development?

The concept of "non-cognitive skills" does not appear explicitly in the Romanian policies on education, health, social protection and assistance. However, over the last years, increased efforts to develop **coherent sets of national sectorial and inter-sectorial strategies** clearly promoted the idea of developing competences. Some of these strategies also include, as specific objectives or measures for specific intervention, several references to non-cognitive skill development under various names (socio-emotional competences, independent living competences etc.).

Here are a few examples:

- *The Partnership Agreement* proposed by Romania for the 2014-2020 programming period makes several references to non-cognitive skills, using various terms in relation to cognitive skills: transversal competences, life skills, socio-emotional skills, and basic skills. The needs assessment by sector presented in the document reveals a shortage of such skills, both with reference to the education sector and in relation to the demands of the labour market or to the lifelong learning approach. The proposed priorities for funding under the different thematic objectives do not make explicit reference to non-cognitive skill development. However, under several priorities of the partnership agreement, there are clear arguments in support of more integrated and multi-dimensional measures that promote the development of transversal skills in education, training and lifelong learning;
- *The Strategy on Reducing Early School Leaving* makes references to the need to transform schools into real learning communities. At the level of specific intervention policies, the strategy proposes several concrete actions with impact on reducing the risk of early school leaving, and indirectly, on the development

of non-cognitive skills: developing strategies for mentoring and counselling services for students, the role of extracurricular activities, parental education, as well as Personalized Educational plans in the case of children with special educational needs.

- **The National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2015-2020** sets forth the clear objective of developing a more comprehensive set of skills from childhood to adulthood. This strategy explicitly uses the term socio-emotional competences, defined as a set of attitudes, skills and knowledge designed to serve as a basis for achieving success in education and at the workplace, e.g. motivation, perseverance and self-control. It recognizes and promotes the importance of these skills in determining academic achievement and in ensuring success at the workplace.

- **The National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020** includes specific intervention measures for children and youth in different risk situations (children in rural areas, Roma children, children with disabilities, drug addicts, victims of violence etc.). It does not include explicit references to non-cognitive skills, but it stresses the importance of counselling services and integrated programmes for the development of children and youth.

- **"A society without barriers for people with disabilities" National Strategy 2015-2020** promotes PWDs' full participation in society and proposes specific intervention measures focused on the development of social and civic skills in people with disabilities and in staff working with this group in education, health and social protection. The goal is to enhance independence and to develop the physical, mental, social, educational and professional potential in PWDs, to ensure their full integration and participation in all aspects of life.

- **The Government Strategy for the Inclusion of the Romanian Citizens Belonging to Roma Minority 2014-2020** does not explicitly refer to non-cognitive skill development, but includes some intervention measures focused on the development of tutoring/ mentoring, counselling activities and guidance for students. The purpose is to increase the motivation for learning and stimulate interethnic relations. There are also measures for parents, in order to better support and understand their children and to increase their involvement in children's education.

- ***The National Youth Policy Strategy 2015-2020*** contains references to strategic goals and directions of action for the development of transversal competences relevant in terms of non-cognitive skills, by: expanding school counselling and vocational guidance in the framework of formal and non-formal education; fostering young people's interest to participate in non-formal education activities; directing non-formal education mainly to areas that ensure a better social integration of young people and their active and responsible expression (for example, education for a healthy lifestyle); creating and implementing a system for recognizing skills acquired through volunteering; providing facilitators and youth workers with the professional training and skills required to attract young people to leisure activities that have a positive impact on their personal development.

- ***The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Strategy 2015-2020*** – draft policy currently under public debate – sets priorities and lines of action focusing on preventive and early diagnosis and age-specific issues. The strategy identifies several intervention needs relevant to non-cognitive skills: parent education programmes; promoting the overall training of health professionals; promoting socio-emotional aspects in curricular and extracurricular activities; developing mental health services tailored to the needs of different categories of children and youth and increasing access to psychological and expert guidance services in the public sector through the development of mental health community centres.

- ***The National Health Strategy 2014-2020*** identifies specific strategic areas and national priorities in the health sector that are relevant to the non-cognitive skills approach, such as: increasing the role and capacity of health services (family medicine and health care, community health assistance, school medical services) to identify the health risks, to provide information and counselling, especially in the case of disadvantaged or at risk persons.

- ***The National Strategy for Tertiary Education 2015-2020*** aims to develop the training curricula for students and create ways to assess the transversal skills directly related to professional skills relevant to the labour market. Transversal skills are not detailed in the Strategy, but presumably, they include non-cognitive skills in relation to occupational standards.

In conclusion to the above presentation of sectorial and inter-sectorial strategies, we can state that:

- At policy level in Romania, there is a concern for integrated approaches (education, health, social, legal etc.) to issues regarding different groups (children, Roma, at risk categories, people with disabilities, adolescents, children left home alone etc.).
- These strategic documents employed the transversal approach of the European documents (strategies, recommendations) with relevance to non-cognitive skills.
- At present, these strategies are at the stage of endorsement and development of framework plans of measures or monitoring plans. How those matters specifically aimed at promoting the development of complex approaches that take into account non-cognitive skills will become reality remains to be seen.
- Non-cognitive skills are not explicitly promoted, but there is increased visible concern for supporting the integrated development of children and youth; transversal competences, socio-emotional competences, life skills, skills for mental health and other types of skills are mentioned.
- There is support for the development of skills that go beyond the strictly cognitive area and help with learning and employability, for various groups at risk (educational, social etc.)
- In most of the sectors analysed (education, health, and social protection), at policy level, the strategies highlighted the importance of providing specialists in these areas with adequate training, not only strictly professional training, but also training on associated, transversal skills relevant in terms of non-cognitive skills (communication, working with different groups of children and young people at risk, etc.).
- There is recognition of the importance of counselling for children and parents alike, as well as other solutions (mentoring, tutoring, volunteering etc.), an intervention area with significant potential for the development of non-cognitive skills.

In the **educational field**, the current value orientations are increasingly correlated with the concept of competence and related terms (skills). The competency approach paradigm has enabled an extension of the interest in education from purely cognitive aspects to other aspects of personality

development, including non-cognitive skills. In education, their role in the value orientation of cognitive skills and in the affective and motivational support is recognized and sustained.

A document with a broad echo among European educational policies is EU's *Key competences for lifelong learning - A European reference framework*. It outlines eight domains of key competences (Communication in the mother tongue, Communication in foreign languages, Math competence and basic competences in science and technology, Digital competence, Learning to Learn, Social and civic competences, Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, Cultural awareness and expression), defined as sets of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They should govern the compulsory school curricula and provide the foundation for continuing studies in various non-formal and institutionalized forms. Most European countries have recognized the legitimacy and appropriateness of the eight types of competences and are in different stages of their implementation in school practice.

In Romania, the *National Education Law no. 1/2011* promotes curriculum focus on the set of eight key competences. This context gave birth to *Guidelines for designing and updating the national curriculum,* a document on educational policies currently under public debate, which makes proposals with direct and explicit impact on the development of non-cognitive skills. The document starts from the European referential document on the eight key competences and develops a training profile of the graduate at various levels, based on four vectors: cognitive and socio-emotional development; internalization of norms and values; self-awareness and reflection; autonomy in learning; creativity. The description of graduates' profiles for different levels of education presented in the curriculum policy document includes a set of non-cognitive skills. The graduates' profiles are a reference framework for further development of future curricular documentation (educational framework plans and curricula) over the next 2 years in the Romanian educational system.

In **the area of child protection policies**, non-cognitive skills have significant relevance, both with regard to children in their family and to children in the special protection system. Thus, the development of life skills, of social and recreational activities is included in all the minimum compulsory standards for the services for children and families. Examples: foster care; child helpline; counselling services and centres for different

groups of children (children with disabilities, street children, orphans etc.). Independent life skills are defined as technical and psychosocial skills that enable the individual to lead a normal life, without relying on assistance from society, and to make use of the opportunities that society provides. The types of independent living skills covered by specific regulations available in the child protection field (daily life skills, home management and use of community resources, money management, personal care, social development, professional integration) also include aspects relevant to non-cognitive skills.

In **the healthcare field**, non-cognitive skills are not explicitly mentioned in policy documents. However, there is emphasis on the importance of non-cognitive skills in training health professionals (e.g. communication with patients and families, inter-personal communication (multispecialty teams), non-verbal communication, communication of diagnoses with poor prognosis). At the moment, the focus of medical training is only on scientific knowledge, while non-cognitive skills remain to be acquired at random, using unsystematic opportunities of training. This calls for a systematic way of defining, assessing and building non-cognitive skills, perhaps starting with an inventory of non-cognitive skills relevant to the field. Once recognized by professionals, interventions to address/develop these skills during medical undergraduate training should be developed and included in the basic curriculum. Also, an assessment of certain relevant non-cognitive skills should be included in the evaluation for attaining different professional positions.

CHAPTER 3.

General overview of practices focusing on adolescent non-cognitive skill development in Romania

According to the opinions collected during the current research from various stakeholders in education, health and social protection, the Romanian society in general, but also school expectations still remain focused mainly on the academic/cognitive skills and continue to address young people's specific non-cognitive skills unsystematically. Several recent studies, among which one drafted by the Institute of Educational Sciences on students' learning culture, also show that students in Romanian schools manifest a general lack of motivation and commitment to school achievements (IES, 2015). PISA 2012 testing results also indicate that Romanian students are among the countries with the lowest level of well-being and motivation to learn in school.

However, the current research identified that NGOs in Romania implement a variety of projects that contribute to the development of non-cognitive skills, although in many cases the approach towards non-cognitive skills is not necessarily an explicit one, but rather an implicit goal or sometimes a collateral outcome of their projects.

In order to offer a broader picture of the current practices connected to the development of non-cognitive skills in Romania, we present below an overview of the identified experiences based on the qualitative research conducted by way of individual interviews and focus groups (experts in education, social protection and health sector, policy makers, school counsellors, stakeholders, teachers, NGO representatives).

The analyses will be structured along the 3 main sectors - education, social protection and health, and for each sector we will present the main findings at system and practices level. Additionally, this chapter will also review interventions that do not specifically belong to one sector alone, but are

rather integrative approaches. Other relevant practices with potential for adolescent non-cognitive skill development are also briefly analysed at the end of this chapter, with a focus on parenting, community and volunteering programmes.

3.1.   Education

Of the analysed sectors, education is one of the richest in initiatives with high potential for developing the non-cognitive skills of adolescents in Romania. However, as we will see in this chapter, within the education sector, the non-cognitive approach is most visible in the area of non-formal education and extracurricular activities.

Our analysis shows that, at policy level, there are several initiatives and measures in favour of creating the necessary environment for non-cognitive skill development, but most programme interventions are often initiated by the civil society. However, as we will see below, it is difficult to identify an articulate and systemic approach, especially in the absence of a coherent educational policy in the field of non-cognitive skill development. Moreover, the lack of coherence and coordination between different levels and actors makes it even more difficult to assess the real impact of the existing initiatives on the development of non-cognitive skills in adolescents in Romania.

3.1.1. System-level initiatives in education

The current analysis identified several system-level initiatives in education that could open the floor for further potential programmes in the area of non-cognitive development. As we will see, the initiatives do not necessarily target adolescents, but rather all children and youth enrolled in education. Although system-level initiatives do not explicitly pursue the development of non-cognitive skills, they are relevant to the current study because they open up avenues for further development of non-cognitive skill approaches.

3.1.1.1. Curricular reforms and opportunities for non-cognitive approaches

Over the last 20 years, Romania passed several major curriculum reforms, registering a clear policy shift from knowledge-based to competence-based approach. The first major curriculum reform in 1998, but also the more recent curriculum revision initiated in 2012 benefit from a clear policy commitment towards a more student-centred approach. According to the official curriculum documents, competence is defined as a complex set of knowledge, abilities and attitudes. Although these documents do not specifically provide a definition of non-cognitive versus cognitive skills, they contain relevant premises that may be in favour of a non-cognitive development approach in the educational system for all children and youth:

- The National Education Law no. 1/2011, Art 2 (3), explicitly formulates that the educational ideal pursued by the Romanian school system is that of ensuring the *free, integral and harmonious development of one's individuality, the shaping of an autonomous personality and the internalization of values required for personal fulfilment and development, for development of the entrepreneurial spirit, for an active civic participation in society, for social inclusion and professional integration on the labour market.* As we can see, the broad purpose of schools in Romania, as defined by the law, highly promotes important features of the non-cognitive skills approach.
- The recent publicly debated draft educational policy document[6] on curriculum revision and updating clearly targets a national curriculum that is based on the development of the 8 EU key competences, which are embedded in relevant specific non-cognitive skills such as: communication, learning to learn, entrepreneurship, emotional development, civic and social skills. Moreover, the document also addresses specific vectors for curriculum development that are highly relevant to the non-cognitive approach, such as: socio-emotional development, creativity, self-knowledge and self-reflection, personal autonomy, internalization of values.

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[6] Institute of Educational Sciences (2015), Proiect de document de politici educaţionale: Repere pentru proiectarea şi actualizarea Curriculumului Naţional (*Guidelines for designing and updating the national curriculum. Educational policy document),* working version, April 2015 http://www.ise.ro/repere-pentru-proiectarea-si-actualizarea-curriculumului-national

- Classes on topics such as "civic education" for gymnasium and high school.

As we may notice, the general framework of the written curriculum is relevant for a potential non-cognitive development approach. However, the Romanian school is currently challenged by several systemic dysfunctions that make it very difficult to translate the policy documents into real practice at school level, with high disparities in quality and effectiveness. Some of the most important challenges towards a more non-cognitive skills-based approach which emerged from stakeholder interviews and several background studies include: the teacher training system does not fully develop the teaching skills required for a non-cognitive approach to education; assessments and examinations still focus on student cognitive skills; teachers have limited resources (in terms of information, learning materials, methodological guides, continuing training offers) to support a more non-cognitive skill development approach in their daily teaching activities.

Moreover, according to the interviewed stakeholders, the non-cognitive development side of the existing national curriculum is not fully capitalized on in school practice.

Other critical opinions on the current curriculum framework implementation collected during the focus group discussions and interviews include:

- *Teachers feel that the burden of providing disadvantaged students with adequate emotional support is left only on their shoulders and that there is little or no support from other community stakeholders and the educational system.*
- *The educational system is generally perceived as undermining the student's self-concept by pointing out to most students that they "are not good enough". Someone said during the interviews that there is a lot of "should" in the educational system right now, and both teachers and students feel that creativity is discouraged. In order to develop non-cognitive skills, there is a need to change the approach from fulfilling the system requirements to developing the student.*
- *Introducing "personal development" in the curriculum is a step, but it is not the answer to changing the general approach that currently generates all actions/decisions.*

Another area where adolescents may have room for non-cognitive skill development within the education system is the **school-based curriculum**. According to the national curriculum framework, schools have the option to develop their own curriculum, based on specific student learning needs. A national offer for an optional curriculum is also made available, usually developed in the framework of different projects and programmes. The current national offer contains a set of optional courses with high potential for non-cognitive skill development, such as life-skills development optional, health education, civil education, intercultural education etc.

Counselling and guidance services provided for young people in school also represent, at least in theory, a great support for non-cognitive skill assessment and development. Even though Romania currently counts more than 2,300 school counsellors working in public schools, the practitioners' feedback shows that school counselling is not really present in all schools, as one counsellor is responsible for minimum 800 students, which means they find it hard to be effective in school and to reach the majority of the students, parents and teachers.

Another system setting that may enable adolescents to receive school support with their non-cognitive skill development is the homeroom class (in Romanian - *dirigenţie*) conducted by the class master once a week. This class is compulsory from the 5th to the 8th grade and optional from the 9th to the 12th grade. However, in reality, one can find teachers who do not take this opportunity and, instead, do additional work on the main subjects in school (math, literature etc.), sometimes with parents' support. In addition, counselling/advising is generally perceived by teachers as the counsellor's task, not theirs. Issues such as investment in teacher training and supervision should be taken into consideration, if we want teachers to assume an active role in the guidance of students.

3.1.1.2.   Extracurricular initiatives

Interviews with teachers and parents conducted under the current research show that many schools are involved in extracurricular activities and projects, usually top-down propositions made at the request of the County School Inspectorate and the Ministry of Education; there are also proposals for partnerships initiated directly by NGOs (national or local). Often, such activities include many competitions (which have recently been regulated

by the Ministry of Education). Also, there are camps and trips during vacations, usually with pay, which means parents have to make an additional financial effort, thus the access of vulnerable children remains problematic.

Schools need to improve their capacity to select extracurricular activities and to assess them in an objective manner, in correlation with the school needs/plans/objectives. Also, schools (principals, teachers) need to learn to reach out and ask for support from other professionals and school partners, starting from the needs of their students (increasing motivation, improving communication and interpersonal relationships, additional support for certain students etc).

Other extracurricular activities hosted by schools in Romania which could create the settings for educational activities that foster non-cognitive skill development include: "the School-After-School" Programme, "A Different School" national programme, and "the Second Chance" programme. A review of those programmes and their potential for adolescent non-cognitive skill development highlighted the following:

- **"School-After-School" Programme.** Formally introduced in the system in 2011, "the School-After-School" Programme has an important potential for non-cognitive skill development. According to the methodology, the school-after-school programme targets the development of specific skills in a more non-formal context. Although there are a lot of initiatives that use the school-after-school programme as a window for strengthening non-cognitive skill development, in reality, in many schools, the focus is still on complying with school requirements and homework. In the absence of a state financial support, access to the programme is limited to students from families that can afford to pay for the programme which is less available in the case of students from vulnerable categories.
- **"A Different School" programme.** The introduction of the week entitled "A Different School" (Şcoala altfel) as of 2011-2012 was an element intended to encourage more creative and group activities (trips, visits outside the schools to museums, companies etc.). Such activities can be an opportunity for non-cognitive skill development because students leave the school environment that usually focuses

on cognitive academic skills and experience on their own other social and learning settings in which they may require real life communication and social skills.

- **Second Chance programme.** It too can be used as a platform for non-cognitive skill development, especially in the case of adolescents that left school early. The programme addresses the development of specific basic communication and self-evaluation skills and is in itself a challenge for resilience skill development in the case of those adolescents who struggled in the past to reach the mass school programme and now come back to school in order to successfully complete their basic education.

However, so far, there is no specific assessment and evaluation experience to show the impact of the above-mentioned programmes on adolescent non-cognitive skill development.

3.1.2. Specific interventions towards creating opportunities for non-cognitive skill development

Generally, large projects on education have been implemented by the MoNESR and/or the School Inspectorates, and, occasionally, with the support of local authorities. As a positive development, in certain cities, there are schools that learned to apply for and implement projects with European funds, many of the projects focusing on mobility and intercultural exchanges. This expertise could be shared with others and become a learning process that schools could leverage for their own improvement, also in the area of non-cognitive skill development.

Such projects were not necessarily evaluated and did not become sustainable after programme completion, in terms of following up on students' progress and on how schools improved their own practices after finalizing the projects. This process would require training and coaching of school principals and key opinion leaders at school level.

For instance, between 2008 and 2011, MoNESR in partnership with the Civil Society Development Foundation and International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) implemented the European funded project entitled "Innovative Methods in Teacher Training for Life Skills Development of Students". In this project, the training and development of curricular

resources was aimed explicitly at developing a set of life skills, including non-cognitive skills along with cognitive skills: self-control and self-regulation, healthy lifestyle, social skills, knowledge management skills like planning and organization, problem solving, critical thinking, etc.

The project included over 80 programmes and activities for developing student life skills. Over a thousand teachers attended the course on developing student life skills. Studies on the identification of key life skills for children and a set of relevant curricular resources were produced: methodological guides for teachers; optional curriculum on "life skills development" for middle school students.

A relevant project developing non-cognitive skills is JOBS (Job Orientation Training in Businesses and Schools), a result of the cooperation between the Zurich Pedagogical University, the Ministry of National Education and the National Centre for the Development of Technical and Vocational Education (CNDIPT) in Romania, and coordinated by the Centre for International Projects in Education (IPE). The objective of this project is to prepare Romanian students in junior high and early technical education for a) the acquisition of life skills, b) obtaining a realistic perception of the opportunities available on the labour market in their region, c) making a decision on their future education and career. The component for developing life skills includes significant references to the development of non-cognitive skills, in relation to the goal of labour market integration. The project promotes cross-educational approaches, using appropriate methods of teaching and learning, specific curricular materials for students, training and mentoring for teachers.

3.1.3. Assessment tools and methodology

As mentioned previously, the current assessment and examination system in education focuses mainly on cognitive skills. Moreover, relevant learning experiences that students gain by getting involved in other type of activities such as "School-After-School", "A Different School" one week -programme, volunteering activities or hobbies, are not formally recognized and valued in the system. However, several initiatives using students' learning portfolios have already been tested and the Law on education also mentions the need for recognizing and certifying learning experiences acquired in other contexts, outside the educational system. The methodology for recognition

and certification of learning in pre-university education is not yet drafted and it is unlikely that it will be applied in real practice very soon.

Several stakeholder opinions expressed during the validation workshop were in favour of developing an assessment system for non-cognitive skills at national level, though such task should be approached with caution to avoid putting additional pressure on students. However, this is a subject for further discussions and decisions, since stakeholders do not yet display a common understanding and awareness regarding the importance of non-cognitive skills and their role in the overall educational achievements of adolescents.

3.1.4. Experts' perspectives on non-cognitive skill development in education

In many interviews conducted during the current study, school climate and the quality of teacher-student-parent relationships were often pointed out as critical aspects of non-cognitive skill development. According to the interviewed experts, these relationships and the general school climate are important factors in creating a favourable and safe context for learning and development. Respondents showed that the relationship between class master and his/her class is strongest in primary school; there are teachers who pay attention to vulnerable children and who learned to cooperate with/draw children's parents in school activities (the UNICEF "School Attendance Initiative", other projects with teacher training components, or projects developed by NGOs such as OvidiuRO, Save the Children, World Vision). Starting with the 5th grade, this relationship fades away and the competition enhances as well as the pressure of exams.

According to the interviewed experts, the relationship between teachers and students generally becomes distant and there is little communication at the personal level. Teachers generally want to maintain their authority and are afraid that becoming "friends" with students endangers their position of authority; they prove little understanding of their role as facilitators / mentors / coaches, depending on the situation; also, they need support in managing conflicts and difficult situations in terms of the emotional burden. To improve teacher-student-parent relationships, the school could take a leading role, with positive impact at many levels (family, community,

school), one of the goals being to improve students' motivation and self-esteem. Specific initiatives in education designed to strengthen/improve the school climate and teacher-student relationships may become an example of good practices in this area.

UNICEF (through its School Attendance Initiative), World Vision, Save the Children and Roma Education Fund Romania also infused their educational programmes with specific actions designed to increase students' motivation, self-esteem and assertiveness, and communication skills. Another example of good practice is the education through coaching programme implemented by ROI Association in high schools with high shares of disadvantaged students. ROI Association programmes show that students' academic outcomes can be significantly improved when students take the initiative and when they work and communicate better with their teachers and parents. The main approach of the ROI Association programme was to develop a specific team coaching method for helping teachers, students and parents work together and empowering them to find solutions to their problems and implement specific actions.

3.2.   Social protection

3.2.1. Social protection policies and non-cognitive skill development

A recent European Commission Recommendation - *Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage* (2013/112/EU)[7], emphasizes the need for respect for human dignity, as the founding value of the European Union, aiming to promote the well-being of its people, protect the rights of the child, combat social exclusion and discrimination, and promote social justice and protection.

The most successful strategies in addressing child poverty have proved to be those underpinned by policies improving the well-being of all children, whilst giving careful consideration to children in particularly vulnerable situations.

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[7] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN

One of the Europe 2020 strategy goals is to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020, as well as to step up efforts to address early school leaving. This led to the recommendation for Member States to *organize and implement policies to address child poverty and social exclusion, promoting children's well-being,* through measures such as:

- *Tackling child poverty and social exclusion through integrated strategies that go beyond ensuring children's material security and promote equal opportunities so that all children can realize their full potential;*
- *Strengthening child protection and social services in the field of prevention; and helping families develop parenting skills in a non-stigmatizing way, whilst ensuring that children removed from parental care grow up in an environment that meets their needs, or*
- *Stopping the expansion of institutional care settings for children without parental care; promoting quality, community-based care and foster care within family settings instead, where children's voice is given due consideration.*

The Romanian Government took into consideration the above recommendations, as well as the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2012-2015[8] and other relevant documents, in the process of drafting its National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020 (and its operational plan), with the support of UNICEF and the nongovernmental sector.

Given the Europe 2020 strategy targets, the Romanian Government committed to reduce the number of individuals at risk of poverty by 580,000 until 2020, and the number of children at risk of poverty by 250,000, the target for 2020 being maximum 1.1 million children at risk of poverty. In Romania, more than half of the overall 3.65 million children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (52.2% in 2012), the highest level in EU 27, with the exception of Bulgaria. Age group analysis shows that 12-17 year olds face the highest risk of poverty, followed by 5-11 year olds (52.5%)[9].

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[8] https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1908087&Site=CM
[9] http://www.copii.ro/anpdca-content/uploads/2015/01/Anexa-1-Strategia-nationala-aprobata-de-Guvern.pdf

The National Strategy aims to ensure child development, well-being and universal access to social services, through **a holistic and integrated approach** among all public institutions and authorities in health, education and social protection. Its purpose is to facilitate access to quality education and health services, with a special focus on children from poor areas, from rural areas, Roma children, children with disabilities, those in residential care, drug addicts, delinquents, homeless children, children left behind by parents working abroad, and also **all adolescents**.

The most important outcomes foreseen by the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA) are: providing public social services, improving community input and parenting skills, protecting the rights of vulnerable children, preventing and combating any form of violence against them, as well as encouraging children's participation.[10]

Compared to previous strategic policies, the main shift in the Strategy resides in the **increased focus on prevention** and on the proactive role of the social protection system, which should ensure support for families at risk, rather than address symptoms by providing financial social benefits to the socially and economically disadvantaged persons. This document also marks an evolution over the past several years in taking a more comprehensive approach to addressing all children and vulnerable categories, while looking at **complementary areas of intervention** (health, education, social protection). Special issues regarding **adolescents** are envisaged, such as the need for better health services focused on prevention of risk behaviours (alcohol and tobacco use, drug use, and early sexual debut), with the objective of promoting a healthy lifestyle among this target group. Another adolescent issue included in the Strategy refers to early pregnancies, 1 in 10 children being born by young women under 20 years old.

In terms of adolescent non-cognitive skills, the above-mentioned Strategy for 2014-2020 specifically refers to **the need for developing "the independent life skills" of institutionalized children, by training the professional staff and revising the current legal framework.**

Romania is acknowledged as having been one of the most centralized Eastern European states regarding the child protection system. Thus, for

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[10] http://www.copii.ro/about-us/strategy/?lang=en

the last two decades, an important part of the efforts for reforming the social protection system have been directed to the area of institutionalized children.

Around 57,000 children (below 18 years old) are currently enrolled in the child protection system, of which more than 21,000 in residential care, and the rest in family based or other types of care[11]. Also, more than 32,000 professionals are employed to support this system.

Child protection system reform was initiated in 1997, when new legislation was issued in order to decentralize child protection activities, developing alternatives such as foster care services and including measures to prevent child abandonment.[12]

The next step was made in 2001-2004, with the aim of aligning the national system to relevant international standards, focusing on shifting child protection from an institutionalized approach to a family based one. This led to shutting down large institutions and replacing them with alternative services, designed to prevent child-family separation.

The National Strategy on Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2008-2013 was the first national strategy addressing all Romanian children, including those on foreign territory, but also those without a citizenship, refugees or foreigners in emergency situations living in our country.

The main current legal framework is ensured by Law no. 272/2004 on child rights protection and promotion, which sets forth the types of services to be provided for preventing child-parent separation, but also the measures of social protection for children who are temporarily or permanently separated from their parents.

Main services currently running are: day-care services (day-care centres, parental counselling and support centres, centres for monitoring and assistance services for the rehabilitation of children with psychological or social problems, and monitoring and assistance services for pregnant women at risk of child abandonment), foster care services, and residential care services (including placement centres, emergency shelters for children

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[11] http://www.copii.ro/anpdca-content/uploads/2016/01/sinteza-statistica-copii-30.09.-2015.xls
[12] http://www.copii.ro/about-us/strategy/strategy-archive/?lang=en

and maternity centres). These services are managed by several national, regional and local authorities who also ensure observance of the quality standards set in the law. In some cases, alternative services are provided by qualified NGOs which are certified according to national standards (e.g. SOS Children's Villages).

Trends

The shift introduced by the National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020 is supported by the findings of a recent World Bank analysis (*Provision of Inputs for the Preparation of a Draft National Strategy and Action Plan on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction*) regarding further national policies for social inclusion and poverty reduction. According to this World Bank report[13], the need for social services will most probably rise in the medium term, considering the country's main demographic trends, Romania being among the top five countries with a demographic decline, as revealed by the Eurostat statistics derived from the 2011 population and housing census, due to migration and population decrease. An alarming fact is that, although half of the population lives in rural areas, only 24% of the social services are being provided to these locations, and just 6% from the state budget is allocated to NGOs that could support this provision at local level.

Another alarming trend foreseen by the analysis is a growth of the emigration rate (mostly that of women), which calls for increased social work services for families and children.

A more participatory and community oriented budgeting system is required in order to foster local capacity development. Also, the existing community practices regarding social service provision are criticized due to their lack of focus on autonomy and human development. A more participatory and life quality improvement approach is needed, centred on the family and the individual and based on a holistic vision of human development. This should also take into consideration the harnessing of creativity and other community resources, in order to sustain communities, as well as harmonizing future policies on inclusion and financial and administrative regionalization and decentralization.

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[13] http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Familie/2015-DPS/2015-DocS_sn-is-rs.pdf

Six main development objectives are proposed for further inclusion in specialized policies:

(1) Fostering co-decision and beneficiaries' involvement in providing social services;

(2) Improving needs assessment and information management systems and ensuring policies and practices are aligned with local decision-making practices;

(3) Improving the funding of social services;

(4) Strengthening and improving social work at community level;

(5) Creating integrated community intervention teams, especially in poor and marginalized communities;

(6) Developing services targeting vulnerable groups, including children and people with disabilities (as well as those with mental health problems), the elderly and other vulnerable groups.

Specific objectives regarding poverty reduction and the promotion of social inclusion among vulnerable adolescents and youth are also included in **the National Youth Policy Strategy 2015-2020**[14]. According to this document, social inclusion "for certain adolescents and young people cannot be achieved through sectorial measures designed for youth in general, but only through integrated inter-sectorial interventions directed at vulnerable groups".

One of the main directions of this Strategy is "Culture and Non-formal Education", with specific provisions on improving counselling and creating opportunities for non-formal education for youth at risk of early school leaving, young people in rural areas and/or NEETs. This area could be an opportunity for including adolescent non-cognitive skill development, as is the area related to participation and volunteering. The Strategy, which outlines responsibilities for all ministries who reach youth between 14-35 years old, does not have an implementation plan yet, with specific measures for adolescents. As already mentioned, it could be considered as

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[14] http://www.unicef.org/romania/Strategia_pt_tineret_en.pdf

a possible gateway for introducing specific measures targeting the development of non-cognitive skills in adolescents.

Current standards and non-cognitive skills

The NAPCRA website features a statement according to which *"all children must be provided with resources that meet their basic needs, not only for the purpose of survival and protection, but also to develop their personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities"* [15]. Also, according to Law no. 272/2004 *"the child has the right to receive an education that enables non-discriminatory development of his or her skills and personality"* (Article 51).

Legally, ever since 2003-2004, NAPCRA developed internal regulations providing standards regarding the formal child protection system, with reference to social-emotional skill development (in correlation with life skills, and recreational and social activities):

1) Special attention that should be provided by professional foster carers (the Romanian term is 'maternal assistants')[16]:

- *The child is supported and encouraged to develop skills to overcome discriminatory situations; minority children are helped and encouraged to develop skills to respond to discriminatory attitudes.*

- *The child is encouraged and provided with equal access to opportunities for developing his or her talent, interest or passion; each child is encouraged to develop his or her passions in areas of interest which are age- and personal abilities-appropriate.*

2) A focus on community resources[17]: "…*children and their families receive the support and resources of the community centre in order to reach rehabilitation and community reintegration".*

3) Standards[18] designed to facilitate the development of child non-cognitive skills:

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[15] http://www.copii.ro/activity/child-rights/development-rights/?lang=en
[16] http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/geydsnzuhe/ordinul-nr-35-2003-privind-aprobarea-standardelor-minime-obligatorii-pentru-asigurarea-protectiei-copilului-la-asistentul-maternal-profesionist-si-a-ghidului-metodologic-de-implementare-a-acestor-stan
[17] http://www.legex.ro/Ordin-177-2003-36414.aspx
[18] http://www.dgaspc-olt.ro/dgaspc/gallery/legislatie-copil/ord-21-2004.pdf

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- *Children in the residential care facility receive clothing, shoes, school supplies and equipment for their own use, as well as pocket money, and they also are entitled to choose items of personal use in accordance with their level of maturity. (Standard no. 11)*
- *Leisure activities are directed towards understanding the physical and social environment surrounding the child, including the child protection residential services, as well as towards knowing and networking with other children, representing a form of socializing in the peer group. Also, these activities contribute to the formation of abilities and skills the child shows interest in, and to the development and fostering of talents, creating opportunities for children to exercise options and initiative. Child protection residential services provide children with multiple opportunities for leisure, recreation and socialization, which contribute to the physical, cognitive, **social and emotional development of children**. (Standard no. 15)*
- *Staff must have communication and empathic skills and contribute significantly to the development of children's affection. (Standard no. 18)*

4) Child care professionals well trained for this purpose: *In order to improve knowledge, skills and abilities related to meeting the needs of children and their families, each day centre employee, including his/her coordinator, receives at least 42 hours per year of continuous training on child protection issues or related/ interdisciplinary areas covered from the employer's budget (Standard no 13.3)*[19]. Also, *the so-called social parent must have studies in education or special education.* The standards[20] *recommend the use and promotion of the term <<reference person>> instead of <<social parent>>.*

The child-adult ratio (abused, neglected or exploited children that an adult should work with in good conditions in the emergency centres dedicated to these children) is of 1:4 for a group of 12 children aged 7-12, and of 1:6 for a group of 12 children aged above 13.

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[19] http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/heztomjz/ordinul-nr-24-2004-pentru-aprobarea-standardelor-minime-obligatorii-pentru-centrele-de-zi
[20] http://www.legex.ro/Ordin-27-2004-41195.aspx

An important role in child protection is played by the centres for training and support of reintegration or integration of children in their families[21]. Each specific intervention programme dedicated to a single case has a responsible person that should collaborate with other experts, such as social workers and psychologists, to assist children and their families, including ensuring a quarterly case monitoring. The aims of psychosocial and legal counselling include: *helping the child to reconcile with the family and accept the past, to overcome trauma caused by separation or loss; preparing children for changing their living environment; restoring, maintaining, strengthening the child-family relationship; establishing positive bonding relationships; stimulating and encouraging the child to express feelings and opinions; improving behavioural disorders; reducing the state of dependence on the institution and its staff; encouraging children to exercise and obtain their rights etc.*

5) The provision of dedicated activities. Another Order[22], approving the minimum compulsory standards for day care centres for children with disabilities, lists rehabilitation activities such as: *developing self-control skills (e.g. voluntary inhibition process development); organization and creation of personal autonomy etc. (Standard no. 6.3).*

The *independent life skills* concept[23]

Last but not least, starting 2007, the child protection system should also comply with the minimum compulsory standards for the services aimed at developing life skills and with the methodological guide for implementing the standards. These services are focused on increasing the child's autonomy, stimulating one's individuality and developing the personal resources needed in order to lead an independent life. Professional staff are required to have socio-humanistic studies, while experience with developing educational strategies for supporting children's personality development is welcome.

The terms/definitions provided in the methodological guide include that of *life skills*, presented as learned behaviours helping or hindering a person in his or her life. The main life skills developed and supported by the child protection system are those allowing the beneficiary to lead an independent

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[21] http://www.legex.ro/Ordin-287-2006-73773.aspx
[22] http://www.legex.ro/Ordin-25-2004-41161.aspx
[23] http://www.mmuncii.ro/pub/imagemanager/images/file/Legislatie/ORDINE/O14-2007.pdf

social life, with skill categories such as: daily personal routines (nutrition, eating behaviours, buying food, cooking, house cleaning and safety etc.), household management and using community resources (such as housing or using public transportation), personal budget management, personal care and hygiene, social development (e.g. socializing with others, understanding culture), professional integration (using education and training services and career orientation).

The recommended methods are either training and workshop sessions, or individual counselling. Willpower is considered to be trained through repeated actions. Elements such as self-efficacy, self trust, social skills and self-control are considered important for these activities. The main steps of the approach are: defining the skill (giving examples, repeating and correcting), illustrating performance (practicing with feedback, assessing performance and formulating recommendations), and ensuring skill maintenance (by providing opportunities for practice and stimulating self-evaluation and improvement).

Children should be supported in their development taking into consideration their age specifics. For example, in the case of the 8-14 age range, specialists consider that there is a special need to stimulate their personality development through rewarding mechanisms, broadening their access to the world, offering them extra attention, a more visual approach, managing competition and other forms of confrontation with others. The 15-18 age range is considered a sensitive period because that is when children approach the moment when they should become fully responsible for themselves. Most of them feel nervous, unsatisfied, suspicious and uncertain about their future. And they lack knowledge of their own personality, wishing they had someone that they could relate to as an authority or a peer. Communication is essential at this stage and staff need to find ways to relate to them and introduce them to the adult life in a friendly manner.

As provided by the regulations, each child or youngster enrolled in the child protection system should benefit from a special intervention programme for life skills development, customized to his or her individual needs and social and familial contexts. This programme should be designed within maximum 30 days as of the case assignment. During the programme, such skills can be measured in relation to seven parameters: basic life skills, social competence, health information, knowledge on community resources,

pragmatic thinking, future planning, and preparing for independent living (self-assessment).

However, despite all the legal provisions, there is a lack of capacity in providing these children with the appropriate services. According to the National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020, "young people leaving the child special protection system after turning 18 represent a vulnerable category, exposed to the risk of unemployment and social exclusion, due to the reduced availability of services for independent life skill development. Without family support and the skills for social and professional integration, these young people often do not receive job counselling services or help to obtain social housing"[24].

Development of life skills is also particularly important for people with disabilities. The focus on non-cognitive skills is notable among the specific research literature which emphasizes their role in personality development, empowerment and rehabilitation, in the preparation for independent and community life. At the educational level, there are fewer or less visible good practice examples of non-cognitive skill development in people with disabilities, given the low overall concern for this category of students.

Over the last years, public institutions (County Agencies for Employment; General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection etc.) and some NGOs have designed various projects and interventions centred on developing the skills of people with disabilities, especially regarding their access on the labour market. In most cases, the professional skills approach consisted also in targeting a set of specific life skills (including non-cognitive skills such as motivation, resilience, socio-emotional skills, and autonomy) that would facilitate the inclusion of PWDs on the labour market and their gaining a certain level of autonomy. Beneficiaries received access to information and counselling, motivation, vocational training, accessibility and post-employment assistance, employment mediation and tutoring at the workplace. Other examples of projects for people with disabilities aimed to develop their skills in using several assistive technologies; certain non-cognitive skills were also included (increased self-confidence and active participation in society).

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[24] http://www.copii.ro/anpdca-content/uploads/2015/01/Anexa-1-Strategia-nationala-aprobata-de-Guvern.pdf

3.2.2. Relevant interventions on child protection and non-cognitive skill development in adolescents

In the previously mentioned European Commission recommendation (2013/112/EU)[25], there is a clear focus on the practices that need fostering. For example, Member States should *support the participation of all children in play, recreation, sport and cultural activities*, in order to:

- *Acknowledge the influence children have over their own well-being and their resilience in overcoming adverse situations, in particular by providing opportunities to participate in informal learning activities that take place outside the home and after regular school hours;*
- *Enable all families to participate in social activities that boost their parental skills and foster positive family communication;*
- *Promote approaches to participation that build on the potential for community volunteering and foster solidarity between generations.*

Also, the document recommends that Member States:

- *Put in place mechanisms that promote children's participation in decision-making that affects their lives;*
- *Strengthen synergies across sectors and improve governance arrangements*;
- *Strengthen the use of evidence-based approaches.*

All over the world, there is a clear focus on developing young people's life skills (as part of non-cognitive skills). Although education seems to be the main sector for designing most of the projects in this regard, child protection services are also showing special consideration to this area.

For example, Chile Solidario[26] is a large-scale government programme (implemented between 2002 and 2009) explicitly targeting the extreme poor and promoting access to transfers and services in the short term with supply side interventions to sustain exit from poverty through building skills and endowments, in the longer term. Also, Mexico and Brazil are shifting

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[25] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013H0112&from=EN
[26] http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/reflections-social-protection-and-poverty-alleviation-long-term-impact-chile-solidario

the design of their conditional cash transfer to place a broader emphasis on developing inclusion skills, with productivity and financial inclusion at the forefront.

An interesting finding of the impact evaluation of the Chile Solidario programme is that the motivation to obtain a job and have a house are important triggers for stepping out of poverty. These aspects could also be cultivated in the young people under child protection in terms of exploring and identifying a motivation in the first place. At a larger scale, as one of the lessons of the previously mentioned programme shows – the supply side followed the demand. Therefore, there is a need for young people's participation in order to create opportunities that meet their needs and motivations and provide them with the best protection and support.

Another example is the complex intervention of the Voix Libres[27] (an NGO based in Switzerland) in Bolivia, in conditions of extreme poverty. Voix Libres started to work with a group of children, adolescents and women working in mines and rubbish dumps, and 20 years later it reached out to 1 million beneficiaries (a third of the country). In partnership with various institutions, the NGO managed to create 250 infrastructures, 20 social businesses run by 400 Bolivian employees, for the most part former programme beneficiaries and specialists in the transformation of extreme poverty. The intervention starts with art therapy as a way of healing the traumas suffered by the beneficiaries and it continues with community empowerment actions and projects, as well as entrepreneurship education, including the possibility of obtaining interest-free micro credits in order to create small businesses.

Community-based interventions

UNICEF is among the pioneers and one of the most coherent voices in supporting advocacy for a more integrated approach to dealing with vulnerabilities, inequities and poverty among children and adolescents.

After a consistent integrated programme tackling school dropout at national level (the School Attendance Initiative - SAI) and an integrated model targeting the development of preventive community-based services, UNICEF Romania started working with partners to ensure that an increasing number of children and adolescents who are relinquished or

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[27] http://www.voixlibres.org/

abandoned, who are exposed to violence, abuse and neglect and therefore at risk of being separated from their families, receive quality care to prevent these risks (the 'Helping the Invisible Children' project), and in 2015, they launched a new integrated project on "Community-based child services"[28].

This recent project on social inclusion through the provision of integrated services at community level in Bacău County is another relevant example of community-based interventions. The pilot project aims to test a model of integrated community service delivery in a significant number of urban and rural communities. The concept of integrated community-based services was developed as a result of a joint initiative of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly, the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, and the Ministry of Health, with technical assistance from UNICEF. According to the UNICEF project presentation, integration will be achieved as a result of inter-sectorial coordination of health, education and social protection services delivered by: community health nurses, social workers, and school mediators. The model also aims to support the access and participation of all children and adolescents to inclusive quality education and reduce the incidence of risky behaviours in adolescents.

Previously, starting 2011, within the framework of the National Strategy for Child Rights Promotion and Protection, UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, The General Directorate for Child Protection, had launched a programme (Helping the 'Invisible' Children – HIC) implemented initially in 8 disadvantaged North-Eastern counties of Romania. According to the two programme evaluation reports (2011[29] and 2013[30]), a prevention strategy (implemented at family and community levels) is far more efficient than the measures offered by the State's child protection institutions.

This could prevent harmful situations such as: physical and psychological violence, physical and sexual abuse, neglect or family separation, risks faced by young people in institutionalized centres, thus better complying with the universal child rights. However, another conclusion of the evaluation reports is that in order to have sustainable and effective Community Consultative Structures to operate at community level, there is

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[28] http://unicef.ro/serviciicomunitarepentrucopii/en/about
[29] http://www.unicef.org/romania/Raport_HIC_engleza.pdf
[30] http://www.unicef.org/romania/HIC.eng.web.pdf

a need for well-trained and dedicated social workers, and sufficient local budgets. The Consultative Community Structure is designed as an advisory board for the local council and the best practices reviewed showed that a close collaboration between local stakeholders such as city hall representatives, social workers, medical doctors, policemen and teachers, made a difference in ensuring a better social protection of vulnerable children.

This approach of activating local Community Consultative Structures and providing integrated community services is part of the Operational Plan[31] for implementing the National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020. According to this Plan, a study on the organization and operation of integrated community services and a pilot project on the development and implementation of integrated community services in 4 counties are scheduled in 2016.

Other interventions

Another partnership recently developed by UNICEF Romania is the one with ALIAT Association (The Alliance for Fighting Against Alcoholism and Drug Addiction), Alături de Voi (Close to You Foundation) and local authorities, with the aim of opening resource centres for teenagers[32]. These centres, currently running in five Romanian cities, offer personal development workshops and opportunities, as well as counselling for vulnerable adolescents, both on-site as well as in partnership with schools.

Another example of intervention is the *Wella-UNICEF Making Waves* programme[33], initiated as a long-term partnership between the two institutions, supporting the provision of life skills education, mentoring and hairdressing training to vulnerable young people in Brazil, Vietnam and Romania. During 2010-2015, more than 18,000 young people have been empowered to fulfil their rights (taking informed decisions) and their potential (being able to deal with the challenges of everyday life).

In Romania, UNICEF set up this project for adolescents in Focşani and Piatra Neamț. The Child Protection Departments at local level facilitate their practice in hair salons, in training centres, as well as the connection with

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[31] http://www.copii.ro/anpdca-content/uploads/2015/01/anexa-2-Strategia-nationala-aprobata-Guvern.pdf
[32] http://www.adolescenteen.ro/
[33] http://www.wella.com/professional/en-EN/program

local employers. Few of these adolescents succeeded in identifying and keeping a job in this area because of several reasons, such as: limited job offers in this area; some of them pursued different educational paths. An inter-institutional partnership between the social protection and employment systems was created at county level, aiming to facilitate adolescents' transition from the child protection system to the labour market.

At practice level, there are also other examples of organizations that designed programmes with special focus on non-cognitive skill development for children and youth in Romania, especially those placed in child protection, such as: Hope and Homes for Children Romania, Sera Romania, Save the Children Romania, SOS Children's Villages, Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('Drawing Your Future' Association), 'Ana şi Copiii' ('Ana and Children' Association), Lindenfeld Association – Ajungem Mari (Getting to Grow Educational Programme), Concordia Romania, the Centre for Academic Excellence and Federeii Association - a newly founded association created by former institutionalized children themselves.

Using non-formal methods, these organizations developed programmes such as: special education curriculum and training centres for teachers (Hope and Homes for Children); personal development workshops; individual counselling and guiding sessions; mentorship; inspirational talk sessions; European funded trans-national projects - with non-formal education and intercultural activities; afterschool programmes.

Important topics with relevance to non-cognitive skill development include: self-exploring; leadership, team working and collaboration; interpersonal communication and public speaking; emotional skills; lifestyle and health; civic and social skills; planning and management skills; critical thinking; independent life skills (for normal and special needs adolescents).

In recent years, volunteering started to bring increasing additional resources to the child protection system. For example, "Ajungem MARI" ("Getting to Grow")[34] is an educational programme initiated in Bucharest in 2014 and rapidly expanding at national level. Currently, more than 500 volunteers (mainly 15+ year old high-school and university students or adults) help each week around 1,000 institutionalized children to grow (up) by supporting them with their homework or participating in non-formal education activities (e.g. going to the theatre, museum, movies etc.). Before

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[34] http://www.ajungemmari.ro/implica-te/devino-voluntar/

interacting with these children, volunteers are being trained and briefly prepared by educational counsellors and by more experienced volunteers, to have the best interaction and experience with these kids and youngsters. The project is already a prize winner among Romanian civil society organizations and promising in terms of impact and coverage.

Another initiative worth mentioning is the first youth centre in Bucharest for institutionalized teenagers or former institutionalized young people, 14 to 26 year olds (EDFORSO – Youth Centre for Education, Training and Society) that was founded by Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('Drawing Your Future' Association) and its initiator, Vişinel Bălan, also a former institutionalized adolescent and homeless child. The centre functions based on private donations from community members, but, generally, NGOs supporting these programmes lack sustainable funding.

These initiatives generally aim at raising adolescents' motivation and developing the skills required for social integration, for managing their own lives and planning their future independent life. Also, these skills are meant to overcome the gaps in their basic education, which should have been provided by their family. In this process, a personalized approach and counselling are very important and the relationship with the educators is essential.

As a conclusion regarding the practices developed in Romania with the aim of supporting adolescent non-cognitive skill development, irrespective of the level of intervention, we may say that although a lot of things have been done in the last two decades, few had their impact and results measured and much is to be done in the years to come in this respect.

3.2.3. Experts' perspectives on child protection and non-cognitive skill development

"Activities dedicated to non-cognitive skill development are the last to count for the child protection professionals. There is no visible concern for developing these skills, irrespective of age or context - services provided in host families or child protection centres. The situation is even worse in the rural areas, compared to the urban located facilities." (Interview with a child protection expert)

Although the legal framework is well developed in terms of including the rights to health, education, social services, in reality, the capacity of the public institutions to provide such services is significantly reduced either due to lack of staff or, where there is sufficient personnel, due to inadequate training of the respective professionals (Abraham, 2013[35]). At the same time, legislation lacks enforcement and monitoring mechanisms. Moreover, there is a need for informing adolescents and their families of their rights.

According to Hope and Homes for Children Romania[36], one of the NGOs with significant contributions to the decentralization of the child protection system, "...young people in the child protection system are not at all prepared for an independent life, and the personnel that interact with them are not trained to help with that either. A social system that marginalizes them through institutionalization continues to marginalize them through the lack of specific programmes or strategies that could help them start an independent life on the right foot" (National Director - Hope and Homes for Children Romania).

Policies and standards regulating the development of **independent life skills** focus mainly on the acquisition of common social skills such as using public transportation, cooking, or managing one's personal budget. This concept is less understood as socio-emotional skills (as NGOs usually define "life skills"). Generally, child protection professionals pay more attention to such skills in institutions that host a low number of children and where the personnel show true dedication to their profession. But, in most state centres for institutionalized children, children do not benefit from a personalized treatment and they often live without the possibility of customizing their accommodation space, without the possibility of developing their own identity and of expressing their creativity. Such centres lack the community ethos and experts perceive them as *"rather cold institutions, similar to military units, everything being standardized and very rigorous, due to hygiene and physical protection norms and regulations"*.

Another interview with a Senior Advisor at NAPCRA revealed that *currently no national programmes on non-cognitive skills are under discussion. The main priority is to support the deinstitutionalization of children. However, in*

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[35] http://www.unicef.org/romania/UNICEF_Study_State_of_adolescents_in_Romania.pdf
[36] http://www.hhc.ro/despre-noi/protectia-copilului

setting up alternatives to institutional care facilities, the standards mentioned earlier are enforced and thus, indirectly, life skills are taken into account, which could be a window of opportunity for the introduction of non-cognitive skills. Clarifying the concept of non-cognitive skills and informing decision-makers could be the first step to improving public policies that benefit children.

Community-based services could provide a good leverage for supporting vulnerable children and teenagers within the community, but, according to a child protection expert interviewed, these have poor coverage in rural areas, where needs are greater. Most of the meaningful work in this respect is done by NGOs and rather private initiatives, but the issues to be addressed in such cases are territorial coverage and long-term sustainability.

To conclude, the UNICEF Romania Child protection expert stated that *"in most Western countries, community interventions are at grass roots level, which is somewhat common sense and it works, it did not require impact studies. For example, the French, British or German systems are based on field social work(ers). In Romania, we only lately came to the conclusion that it is better to prevent than to treat vulnerabilities."*

3.3. Health

3.3.1. Health regulations and relevance to non-cognitive skill development

Various **reports and studies at the international level** (Currie, 2012) recognize that poor health involves the circumstances in which young people live; their access to health care, schools and leisure opportunities; and their homes, communities, towns and cities. It also reflects individual and cultural characteristics such as social status, gender, age and ethnicity, values and discrimination. In short, individual and population health is heavily influenced by social determinants.

The HBSC study (a WHO collaborative cross-national study) shows that disadvantaged social circumstances are associated with increased health risks. Health inequalities in adult life are partly determined by early-life circumstances. The study shows that protective mechanisms and assets

offered within the immediate social context of young people's lives can offset the effect of some determinants of health inequalities, including poverty and deprivation.

Main factors influencing adolescent health include:

- Young people's accumulation of support from parents, siblings and peers leads to an even stronger predictor of positive health (positive body image, higher self-rated health, not smoking, higher life satisfaction, fewer physical and psychological complaints, less probable participation in aggressive behaviours and substance use).
- Self-rated health is a subjective indicator of general health associated with a broad range of other indicators: medical, psychological, social and health behaviours (broken family structure, poor communication with parents and low family affluence, migrant status, level of education and access to education, health and social services).
- Life satisfaction in young people is strongly influenced by experiences and relationships: good family communication, supportive peers, family structure, the school environment and role of academic success.
- Frequent or sustained stress (family conflicts, bullying, lack of acceptance by peers and lack of support from parents and teachers) leads to emotional and physiological stress, which in turn affects the development of frequent complaints.
- Overweight and obesity remain public health problems among young people which have consequences such as poor self-image, stigmatization, depression and impaired quality of life.
- Body image is a psychological construct that is part of self-image and is highly important at puberty level. Protective factors against excessive body-image concerns include regular physical activity, acceptance by peers and family, and good social relationships.
- Preventing health-compromising behaviours from an early age through interventions that aim to provide young people with opportunities for healthy development is an important factor.
- Health-compromising behaviours increase for 13- and 15-year-olds, with the extent and pattern of increase varying across countries. This indicates that social, cultural and economic country contexts

could play an important role in influencing young people's health perceptions and behaviours.
- The school setting has been identified as a particularly relevant arena for relevant interventions, using the knowledge and skills of teachers and health support staff.

This suggests that youth health professionals should not only address health problems directly, but also consider family and school influence in supporting the development of health-promoting behaviours. These findings are important when advocating for the need to develop the non-cognitive skills of human resources in health and education.

At European level, the European Child and Adolescent Health Strategy 2015–2020 highlights a specific state of adolescent health:

- More than 10% of European adolescents have mental health problems; major depressive disorders are the most common conditions in children and adolescents, followed by anxiety disorders, behavioural disorders and abuse of psychotropic substances;
- European countries have the highest adolescent suicide rates in the world and in some countries suicide is among the leading causes of death among young people;
- European countries have some of the highest prevalence rates of tobacco use among teenagers; smoking prevalence at ages 11-15 years exceeds 15% in some countries;
- Adolescent alcohol use is common in Europe, associated with many causes of ill health, including injuries, smoking, illicit drug use and unprotected sex;
- Prevalence of overweight (including obesity) in children and adolescents is broad, ranging from 5% to over 25%.
- Adolescent sexual health is an issue, with outcomes such as sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies among adolescent girls.

The intervention measures promoted by the European Child and Adolescent Health Strategy 2015–2020 include a set of issues with direct impact on the development of non- cognitive skills: access to good-quality health services, including mental health services; high-quality parenting;

age-appropriate access to health and sexuality information and support; support services to develop self-confidence and ability to make informed decisions and develop positive relationships.

At national level, reports and studies on **Romanian population health** (e.g. *National Report on the Health of Children and Young People in Romania in 2014*) reveal major inequalities based on various determinants of health: socio-economic factors, behavioural factors, factors related to the physical environment and work life or individual characteristics. NIS statistics and the conclusions of the above-mentioned report indicate that adolescent health is largely influenced by a combination of factors and risk behaviours, such as tobacco use, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, sedentary lifestyle and overweight/obesity, sexual behaviour.

According to the report, there is a shortage of school doctors and nurses country-wide. Such services are available in schools located in urban areas, but not in rural areas, where family doctors should also cover schools. So, this points to an inequality from the very start, one not yet addressed through coherent strategies, even though WHO highlights the important role of in-school health services and staff for health promotion. In this context, schools can play an important role in working directly with children, including adolescents, and in advising and supporting their parents. Schools can contribute to the development of self-regulation, including the ability to make the right decisions (in case of risky behaviours) and to get over anxiety, and to the development of social skills, such as communication. Thus, schools and parents' support can help build trust, self-esteem and adaptability in children.

Other studies (Abraham et al., 2013) emphasized that although the legislative framework is well developed in terms of health service provision, it remains incomplete at the level of application. This results in risk behaviours (e.g. the sale of alcohol, cigarettes and drugs to minors) and limited access to rights and to certain health services.

- For example, child protection legislation stipulates compulsory health education and its provision by the entities with responsibility in health and education, but secondary legislation does not include special provisions for the implementation of health education. At the national level, there is a curriculum for health education (for all pre-

university education), but this field of study is an optional subject and is taught in schools in an inconsistent manner.

- Health protection legislation focuses on discouraging risk behaviours (smoking, drinking), but there are still incomplete or ineffective legal frameworks related to the sale of alcohol and tobacco. There are no specific regulations for risk reduction, particularly among minors.
- For any medical interventions, including access to reproductive health services, parental consent is required, the adolescent having a rather passive role.
- At legislative level, there are various categories of professionals qualified to carry out preventive health interventions, including for adolescents (public health authorities, school doctors and nurses, family doctors and nurses, community health nurses).
- However, in the decentralization process, the capacity of institutions and specialists to carry out health education interventions at local level has declined in recent years. Many services remain poor and there are discrepancies between urban and rural areas. The number of specialized human resources (community workers, mediators, school doctors) is much reduced compared to the needs.

Over the years, the Ministry of Health included adolescents in various programmes and strategies. For example, the 2002-2006 Strategy regarding the health of women, children and families targeted adolescent and youth health in terms of reproductive health. Teenagers and their health are a topic of interest in the following national strategies that are already approved or under public debate: National Reproductive Health and Sexuality Strategy 2012-2015; National HIV/AIDS Strategy 2011-2015; National Anti-Drug Strategy 2013-2020; National Child and Adolescent Mental Health Strategy 2014-2020.

At policy level, documents do not explicitly mention non-cognitive skills. The focus of medical training is only on scientific knowledge, while non-cognitive skills remain to be acquired at random, using unsystematic opportunities of training. There are some provisions with relevance in terms of non-cognitive skills, and below are several examples:

- *The National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020* includes specific intervention measures for children and

youth in different risk situations and stresses the importance of counselling services and integrated programmes for the development of children and youth.

- *The Strategy for Child and Adolescent Mental Health 2014-2020* identifies several intervention needs relevant to non-cognitive skills: parent education programmes; promoting the overall training of health professionals; promoting socio-emotional aspects in curricular and extracurricular activities; developing mental health services tailored to the needs of different categories of children and youth and increasing access to psychological and expert guidance services in the public sector through the development of mental health community centres.

- *The National Health Strategy 2014-2020* sets strategic areas and national priorities in the health sector, relevant to non-cognitive skills: programmes that strengthen parenting skills; promoting integrated training of health and education professionals; promoting socio-emotional aspects in curricular and extracurricular activities and in the school culture; developing programmes to prevent abuse, intimidation and violence against young people and their exposure to social exclusion; developing mental health services tailored to different social groups, including adolescents; developing community mental health centres; revising the curriculum for initial and continuous training of health professionals, centred on the needs of people and communities; reinforcing the network of school medical services; ensuring the obtaining of health qualifications through correlation with the European standards for health professionals in the European Union.

3.3.2. Specific interventions on adolescent health and non-cognitive skill development

In terms of promoting adolescent health (including for adolescents facing risk behaviours), the main responsible institutions are: the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the National Antidrug Agency. NGOs also provide input in this area through various projects.

According to the **Ministry of Health's Activity Report for 2014**, a number of **national programmes in different health areas** were recently

implemented. Some of them focused explicitly on monitoring and improving the health of adolescents and had an impact on non-cognitive skill development - whether as a result of specific interventions or of promoting the importance of this aspect.

As such, one aim of the *National Programme for Mental Health and Prevention in Psychiatric Pathologies* concerned the access to specific mental health programs for children and adolescents. In this regard, 2014 programme activities included: active depression screening; parental training activities designed to help parents develop their children's social and emotional skills (within some county health units); training for nurses working in the mental health system.

The National Programme for Evaluation and Promotion of Health and Health Education set the objective of improving population health by promoting a healthy lifestyle and fighting against main risk factors. The following were developed under this programme:

- Health promotion campaigns on various topics: preventing and discouraging consumption of ethnobotanical plants and psychoactive substances; healthy lifestyle, healthy eating and regular physical activity; risk behaviours;
- The Project for *Strengthening the National Network of Roma Mediators to Improve the Health Status of Roma 2014-2016* (24 months) – developed by the National Institute of Public Health in partnership with SASTIPEN - Roma Centre for Health Policies – focuses on the continuous development of Roma health mediators and community health nurses network. The project provides: development of functional teams of community workers/Roma mediators at community level, the establishment of community health centres, development of promotional materials, and health training for staff of County Health Directorates and health workers/community health nurses;
- Programmes to prevent and combat tobacco use;
- Monitoring and evaluation activities of county action plans for healthy diet and physical activity among children and adolescents.

It should be noted that some of the monitoring indicators of health status in children and adolescents bear direct relevance to the issue of non-cognitive skills. Thus, the *National Report on the Health of Children and Young*

People in Romania in 2014 includes statistics on monitoring the adequate development of children at different levels: socio-emotional; verbal; cognitive; motor behaviour. Socio-emotional behaviour takes into account social and self-concept skills, which critically influence the learning process. Such reports are valuable in terms of recommendations that could be taken into consideration for creating friendly, supportive and safe school environments from a psychological and social point of view, as well as an integrated approach to the work of different professionals focused on prevention, the well-being and holistic development of children and teenagers, especially vulnerable ones.

The National Antidrug Agency has a series of programmes that aim to prevent or reduce the use of psychoactive substances and other drugs, alcohol and tobacco among young people. The main objectives of its campaigns are to raise awareness, help reduce consumption of dangerous substances by informing vulnerable groups about the associated risks and training them on healthy life skills while increasing influence of protective factors and decreasing individual and social risk factors.

Types of preventions and interventions coordinated by the National Antidrug Agency include alternative leisure programmes (extracurricular activities, cultural, art or sports activities), public events (musical shows, information-education sessions, national competitions), networking among institutions active in the field, empowering through training modules focused on the many factors involved in correcting risk behaviour. All these are intended to send young people in general, including adolescents, a positive message based on involvement and skill development, to strengthen protective factors against substance abuse, to offer healthy life alternatives, and to form the right attitudes towards drugs and psychoactive substances.

At the educational level, the national offer of optional subjects (school-based curriculum) includes "Education for Health", which is a comprehensive theme that addresses the issue of non-cognitive skills. This optional syllabus is part of a National Educational Programme aiming at promoting a healthy lifestyle, and includes: promoting a healthy lifestyle and well-being (self-awareness and self-concept, communication and interpersonal skills; career orientation); personal development; prevention. As a positive sign, in November 2015, the Romanian Presidency organized a debate on *Education for Health,* with special focus on prevention, bringing

together ministers with different portfolios (Education, Health, Labour and Social Protection, Youth and Sports), experts and NGOs from different areas of work.

At practice level, **NGO projects** addressing the needs of disadvantaged adolescents usually include health services in their work. Such interventions may involve bringing in health specialists/ medical assistance on the project teams.

Oftentimes, social workers or mediators advice disadvantaged families in terms of basic skills for personal hygiene and keeping their living quarters clean.

- The representative of "Ana şi copiii" ('Ana and Children' Association) said that the NGO supports disadvantaged families by providing them with different products, including house cleaning products. However, sometimes parents don't know how to use them because they are illiterate, so they need basic support to overcome such obstacles.
- Another experience is that of the Community Centre in Călăraşi according to which children showed fear when using a shower for the first time in their life (the centre's shower), as they did not have such facilities at home.

There are also several NGOs that narrow their focus to very particular issues, such as adolescents suffering from diseases like HIV/ADS or cancer. These youngsters are mainly affected by social stigma and emotional stress, and need support in overcoming that through self-control, emotional competences, resilience as well as coping measures.

- As mentioned on the ARAS (Romanian Association Against AIDS) website, the role of all professionals in health or social assistance who deal with these teenagers should be mainly to provide services that help them cope with stress, stigma, and discrimination.
- Another example of contribution to non-cognitive skill development of adolescents fighting with serious diseases (cancer) is that of Little People Romania. The Association provides daily services to children and youth from cancer treatment hospitals all over the country (and also to their families). The organization developed special support programmes, such as summer camps, play therapy, thematic

workshops or a youth club ('Temerarii' – the Daring). Their volunteers and experts use dedicated techniques to improve the quality of those teenagers' lives. Specific skills and attitudes are targeted, such as: resilience and coping mechanisms; self-acceptance and positive attitudes; social and emotional competences; autonomy (being able to take care of oneself and avoiding acting as a victim); planning and basic management (life) skills. Improvements were noted in children's emotional spectrum, in their positive self-evaluation, in their ability to identify new coping mechanisms, and in their hope for their healing, as well as in the way they see their life after treatment. The most remarkable results were related to adjustment in case of illness and the positive attitude they learned to have in dealing with treatment-specific challenges.

Another type of NGO intervention refers to adolescents facing risk behaviours.

- There are NGOs active in this area such as ALIAT which developed a special school course ("I know I can") to prevent drug consumption through developing communication and decision-making skills for teenagers aged 13-16. Also, in partnership with UNICEF, ALIAT opened five resource centres for adolescents in cities around the country. These centres offer integrated interventions for vulnerable adolescents, personal development workshops and opportunities, as well as psychological and career counselling, with the aim of creating an innovative model of intervention at local level. The services offered through the centres are complemented by dedicated online platform (www.adolescenteen.ro) and activities (information campaign and workshops) implemented in schools.

- In terms of sexual risk behaviours, we already mentioned the "Family Life Education" best practice programme developed by Youth for Youth for teenagers, using an integrative approach. This programme starts from self-awareness and personal values, and goes on to developing the abilities required to make decisions and evaluate risks. Adolescents get to know their bodies better and have the opportunity to learn and discuss about sexual life/ risks/ contraception etc. Of note are the quality of the curriculum, the evaluations (before and after the programme) and the peer-education model, based on volunteering.

3.3.3. Experts' perspectives on health and non-cognitive skill development

The opinions expressed by experts interviewed during the research – representatives of public institutions, universities, NGOs – support the realities described by the aforementioned studies and reports. They identify specific issues such as:

- Currently, in practice, the health system does not focus on child or adolescent non-cognitive skills. There is rather a need for the staff in this sector to be informed and trained regarding non-cognitive skills;
- There is a need for opening the specialized training to the area of individual counselling and joint training courses with training based on professional models. As a result, training of health professionals must include a component of personal non-cognitive skill development and learning ways to promote these in various categories of patients/individuals;
- School is one of the main ways to promote health education. School doctors could play an important role in prevention and monitoring of child and adolescent well-being and should be considered as key resources in the area of non-cognitive skill development;
- Many national intervention programmes on health focus on curative activities and less on prevention and health promotion. Occasionally, these programmes include interventions with direct relevance to non-cognitive skills;
- In terms of human resources, the family doctors does not currently fulfil the needs for prevention and well-being for the members of the community (including adolescents);
- NGO initiatives run through projects targeting health education are too focused, have an unbalanced territorial coverage and face an issue of sustainability;
- Generally, regional/local projects lack long-term sustainability capacity once the initial funding ends. In the context of health system underfunding, community involvement in medium and long-term commitments to continue those activities is almost null.

3.4. Participation: volunteering, entrepreneurship and the students' Council

Volunteering activities are increasingly seen as an option for "personal development", sometimes through collaboration with local or national NGOs. According to the study "Romanian Youth: Worries, Aspirations, Values and Lifestyle" conducted by CURS (Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology) for Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Romania in 2014, 29% of the young people aged 15-19 have been involved in volunteering activities during the last year (close to the EU average), with a higher participation rate in urban versus rural areas. The fact that the Law on Volunteering recognizes the contribution of volunteering as a professional experience is an incentive for young people in this respect.

Students' representation in the decision-making process is also an important factor. In 2007, the National Students' Council (secondary school students) was established by the Ministry of Education as a representative structure for pupils, direct beneficiaries of the educational system, to make their voice heard. Council members are elected annually, as a democratic exercise for students. The main objective of the Council is to ensure that students actively participate in the school decision-making process and that their rights are protected. The Council encourages volunteering and actions that respond to students' needs.

Over the last years, the Council became more active and present in the public arena and, in 2015, it released a resolution with specific proposals regarding students' needs and necessary changes to the system. Recently, the Council obtained support from the Romanian Presidency, organizing a debate on the proposed changes.

According to its president, the National Students' Council focuses on developing the following skills: leadership, organization, representativeness, innovation, time management, communication and teamwork. "We focus on these skills because we truly believe they are very important for a future grown-up in the 21st century".

The Council's resolution reflects the pressure felt by students as a result of having to deal with a burden of academic requirements that focus on the accumulation of information with limited relevance in practical terms. The document does not refer to non-cognitive skills as such (as they are not

specifically addressed as such in formal education), but it refers to competences. Briefly, according to its resolution, the Council considers that the current curriculum is only slightly relevant to students' needs and that it focuses on the capacity to memorize, instead of on their competences. Students would like to have more information about the map of the learning process, what are its objectives and the competences to be developed.

In the Council's views, teacher training should focused more on child psychology. Among other requests, the Council asks for the weekly counselling and career guidance class to actually take place and the students to be involved in proposing topics for this session. Students' representatives ask for trainers and mentors to take part in these sessions. They also ask that optional classes – which could provide an opportunity for non-cognitive skill development - be chosen such as to address their needs and not the needs of teachers with certain qualifications.

The involvement of adolescents in volunteering projects is a way of developing both non-cognitive and cognitive abilities, in a more engaging manner. As mentioned above, according to the 2014 Romanian Youth Report, 29% of the young people (15-19 y.o.) were involved in such activities, with a higher participation rate in urban versus rural areas. Teenagers are much more involved compared to an average of 18% of the total active population (one of the lowest in the EU). Some of these activities are initiated by schools, often in partnership with NGOs.

A positive development is the approval, in 2014, of a new Law on volunteering, with the contribution of the NGOs that form Volum Federation (Federation of Organizations Supporting the Development of Volunteering in Romania), designed to promote volunteering at national level. The new law recognizes youth's professional experience as volunteers, while NGOs are expected to issue volunteering certificates that acknowledge the progress made by volunteers in different areas (knowledge, competences, abilities, attitudes). The model of volunteering certificate - currently being tested - refers to the key competences used at European level and has been influenced by the Youthpass certificate issued for volunteers in the Erasmus+ programme.

In terms of volunteering and community development, the New Horizons Foundation developed, starting 2009, the IMPACT programme for teenagers aged 12 to 19, implemented in 130 youth clubs around the

country. The clubs are present in many schools as an extracurricular activity, under dedicated teachers' coordination. This model is based on four learning areas (active citizenship, employability, social entrepreneurship and leadership) and develops key cognitive and non-cognitive competences and core values. The IMPACT programme has grown nationally as well as internationally in 9 countries.

An interesting model is the one developed by Youth for Youth, with support from international institutions, focusing on volunteering and peer-education towards a more comprehensive approach to "education for health" and to "family life education" for teenagers. The course starts from self-awareness and values, goes on to tackle teenagers' relationship with their own body and reproductive and family health, and finishes with encouraging volunteering. The NGO aims to develop responsibility-taking and decision-making capacity. Youth for Youth uses an evaluation process based on questionnaires before and after the training courses to show that most trainees improve their knowledge and abilities. Trained young volunteers, who also progress significantly in the process, deliver the interactive workshops.

Also based on volunteering, the debate form of activity has developed in high schools over the last 20 years, mostly in urban areas. According to ARDOR - The Romanian Association for Debate, Elocution and Rhetoric, speaking in front of an audience can improve self-perception, motivation, self-control, inter-personal skills and civic skills. Recently, the organization launched a number of initiatives designed chiefly for vulnerable children and teenagers, Roma high school students and children with special needs. A national assessment of the project developed in high schools is scheduled for 2015-2016.

Volunteering as a means for personal development and transcending the current constraints is used and recommended by Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('Drawing Your Future' Association), an NGO recently established by Vişinel Bălan, a formerly institutionalized youth himself, who started ambitious and creative projects for institutionalized teenagers.

Another organization based on volunteering and with a long tradition in Romania is Scouts - which approaches children and teenagers from a holistic perspective, focusing on education for life, leadership, responsibility and values, and aiming to supplement the education provided by school

and family. The organization promotes a way of life based on principles, with a holistic approach – at the spiritual, social and personal level.

Clubul Liderii Mileniului Trei (Leaders of the Third Millenium Club), Şcoala de Valori (School of Values Association) and LEADERS Foundation are other organizations working with teenagers and focusing on developing their sense of leadership, character, and defining values.

Entrepreneurship

Many NGO adolescent programmes have included elements of entrepreneurship, mentorship and career counselling, such as Junior Achievement Romania, World Vision Romania, the Institute for the Development of Educational Assessment, the Romanian American Foundation, Romanian Business Leaders Foundation. Many of the projects encouraged high school students to create simulation companies, in European funded programmes. Even though the above organizations do not primarily target vulnerable children and adolescents, these can be found amongst their beneficiaries. There are also NGOs, such as the Centre for Academic Excellence, which designed specific projects aimed at developing the entrepreneurial skills of youth on the verge of leaving the foster care system (once they turned 18) to support them to start their own project/business.

3.5. Parenting programmes

According to the National Education Law, parents can be represented on the School Board, but it is rarely the case when they use this right and make themselves heard in the decision-making process. The establishment of Parent Associations is in its early stages in most schools.

According to a study on "Values and Models of Youth in Romania" conducted in 2014 by Şcoala de Valori (School of Values Association) and IPSOS Research Romania, the main models for high school students (in urban areas) are: their parents (62%), other relatives (25%), teachers (23%), colleagues/friends (15%), international stars/VIPs/public persons (2%), Romanian stars/VIPs/public persons (0.5%). Parents and other members of their family represent a source of significant influence in teenagers' life, especially due to their career or personal achievements.

From this point of view, as a positive development, one can notice an emerging trend in the area of parenting education programmes in Romania, some parents becoming aware of the need for ensuring a holistic development of their children (from nutrition to environment, body/mind/spirit/emotions). However, disadvantaged families or families in rural areas very seldom have access to such courses/information. In many conversations, the idea of a "school for parents" was indicated as a need, especially for disadvantaged families.

3.6. Integrated services for disadvantaged adolescents

There is a general opinion among the interviewed stakeholders that integrated interventions addressing the support for children and adolescents and their non-cognitive development have a higher potential to overcome challenging life situations for vulnerable groups.

UNICEF is among the pioneers and one of the most coherent voices in supporting advocacy for a more integrated approach in dealing with vulnerabilities, inequities and poverty among children and adolescents. Specific integrated programmes for adolescents implemented by UNICEF Romania in recent years were already presented in the previous chapters.

There are also other organizations which have developed programmes in this respect over the last two decades in Romania, such as Save the Children, World Vision, SOS Children's Villages, Concordia, Hope and Homes for Children, generally entities which are part of larger international structures. Their mission is to support social, family, school and professional (re)integration of children, young people and families in difficult situations, so that these can lead an independent and autonomous life. Alternative Sociale (Social Alternatives Association), Roma Education Fund Romania, 'Ana şi Copiii' ('Ana and Children' Association), Amurtel Association, Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('Drawing Your Future' Association) etc. are other examples of organizations in Romania which address the needs of vulnerable children and adolescents.

"Life skills development is not merely an education sector issue. World Vision has been developing life skills in children and adolescents for years through the programming of many other sectors. Because life skills are both formed and expressed through activities in any arena of daily life, an

integrated sector approach is needed for the holistic development of the child. Health, child protection, participation, economic development, peace building and spiritual nurture programming all provide opportunities for the acquisition of essential life skills as do cross-cutting themes like gender and disability" (Life Skills Development – World Vision International).

These organizations have developed programmes aiming to support specific categories of vulnerable children and adolescents struggling with stigma and discrimination (Roma), mental deficiencies, socio-emotional or behavioural disorders. The question is **how we can learn from all these solutions while designing viable public policies**. We looked at such practices from the point of view of non-cognitive skill development in vulnerable adolescents, even though the practices themselves do not explicitly focus on these skills.

For the purposes of the current report, we looked at the organizations that address the needs of certain categories of vulnerable children and adolescents at multiple levels, in an integrated manner. Usually, they focus on developing life skills, which include both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. For instance, World Vision follows UNICEF in defining life skills as an integrated set of critical thinking, personal, and interpersonal competencies that children and adolescents need in order to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

World Vision's approach to life skills programs is based on four principles:
1. Much of what children learn, they learn when they are very young
2. Children and adolescents need a safe environment as they learn
3. Children and adolescents need consistent, loving attention, acceptance and affection from at least one person
4. Children and adolescents learn by playing and trying things, and by observing and copying what others do

In general, the programmes developed by these organizations include support related to health, child protection, family and community development.

The main services that these NGOs provide to disadvantaged adolescents include:

- Educational programmes for dropout prevention and recovery - such as after school activities (homework preparation guidance, extracurricular activities);
- Workshops for learning life skills;
- Day centres and social care (including meals);
- Vocational training and education;
- Summer camps/trips;
- Scholarships;
- Individual counselling/mentoring and guidance for adolescents, parents as well as teachers (sometimes, school principals);
- Community services;
- Most advanced programmes also offer beneficiaries jobs or create social companies for them (e.g. community projects in Ploieşti – Concordia Romania, in Valea Lupului/Buzău - Amurtel Association and in Stejărişu/Sibiu - Austrian support).

These programmes respond to adolescents' needs in a comprehensive manner and usually include the development of their non-cognitive skills under the life skills umbrella. For example, it is very important to develop the employability skills of sheltered adolescents in Concordia. The organization founded a vocational school and also a bakery functioning as an employer for the trained sheltered young people. These programmes aim to provide a qualification, but also to cultivate different personality traits and life skills, using also job coaching to improve communication abilities and personal budget planning skills.

In order to implement such complex projects, the NGOs work in close partnerships with local authorities, schools, child protection authorities, the church etc. On numerous occasions, as a result of such partnerships, the projects that the NGOs initiated were later multiplied due to access to European funds and the infrastructure and human resources available in the public sector. For example, World Vision and the Orthodox Church developed over 50 "Choose School!" ("Alege şcoala!") centres – including in rural areas - to prevent school dropout and run remedial actions.

The impact of such programmes is highlighted by the life stories of former assisted child beneficiaries who succeeded to integrate in society after going through the programme experience provided by the organizations. Some of these NGOs specifically include assessment/impact evaluation

studies in their projects and, using their experience, they make proposals for public policies in the respective field (Save the Children, HHC, SOS Children's Villages).

3.7. The contribution of other organizations

The practices analyzed and the stakeholder interviews held clearly demonstrate an increasingly visible contribution on the part of civil society organizations in promoting non-formal and informal learning activities addressed to children at high risk of dropping out of school, including Roma. Alternative student clubs, informal remedial activities provided by volunteers, summer non-formal activities also have an impact on increasing the self-esteem and specific life skills of children from deprived communities. Although there is no systematic evaluation of these types of measures, the qualitative research conducted for the purpose of the present report revealed interesting teaching practices and innovative approaches and methodologies intended to support the learning motivation and personal development of students at risk of dropping out of school (sport, arts and crafts, origami, social theatre etc.).

In terms of cultural differences, Roma civil society also addressed issues of cultural identity in Roma children and aimed to implement measures for ensuring ethnic identity valuing and increasing ethnical self-esteem of Roma children as a means for better educational inclusion. 'AMARE Rromentza' Roma Centre has been active in these areas.

In the framework of UNICEF School Attendance Initiative, Agenția 'Împreună' ('Together' Community Development Agency) developed a project aimed to increase young people's ethnic self-esteem and support them to overcome discrimination in schools and in society. The project called "*What would you like to be when you grow up?" is* based on promoting role models and holding open discussions with students after inspiring story telling (via movies or meeting Roma public personalities willing to share their life stories).

According to the interviewed stakeholders, most of the analyzed projects were not specifically designed to develop non-cognitive skills in Roma young people. However, a wide variety of the implemented activities seem to have a great impact in increasing Roma student's self-identity and self-

esteem, but also social and emotional skills. The main activities with potential for developing non-cognitive skills include:

- Counselling activities and vocational guidance;
- Educational support activities to prepare successful debut in first grades of compulsory education or high school;
- Informal and non-formal learning activities (camps, workshops, schools, clubs, etc.)
- Counselling activities for Roma parents in order to increase their motivation for sending children to school;
- Training for staff working with Roma children (teachers, school managers, mentors, role models etc.)

However, only few of the above-mentioned projects were evaluated from the perspective of non-cognitive skill development. Different reports and project experiences conducted in Romania also found a correlation between positive feelings of Roma children in school and their tendency to continue their education to a higher level. This hypothesis is verified by a recent study conducted by the Roma Education Fund (REF) in Romania. According to the REF study, 87.7% of dropout students stated that they found no joy in going to school. Other studies on Roma ethnic self-esteem highlighted the role of education in building a positive self-image of Roma children with regard to their ethnic identity. The studies recommend having a curriculum that includes elements of Roma culture, history and language and promoting positive Roma social success models as a way of contributing to increased positive public image of Roma ethnic identity.

3.8. Conclusions on practices towards non-cognitive skill development

- The term "non-cognitive skills" is not a commonly used term in Romanian policies and practices. There is a wide variety of terms that more or less cover the conceptual area of non-cognitive skills such as: life skills, soft skills, key competences, basic skills, socio-emotional skills, personal development.
- Most commonly, interventions in the area of non-cognitive skill development are not embedded in the formal system, they are rather additional or complementary programmes usually

implemented in non-formal settings. Civil society organizations are often the pioneers of such interventions.

- The coordination of measures adopted in the formal system and those initiated outside the formal system is usually very poor, and the different actors involved lack awareness of the connections and complementary relationships between cognitive and non-cognitive skills.
- The assessment and evaluation of programmes aimed at non-cognitive skill development are unsystematic and often lack specific methodologies and tools.
- Regardless of the type of intervention or sector, the non-cognitive skill development approach requires specific teaching, learning and assessment methodologies that are more likely to be specific to non-formal education. This is a particular challenge when it comes to a more focused approach of non-cognitive skills at formal system level.
- Although integrated policies are still in their early stages, the already existing experiences offer a high potential for valuing non-cognitive approaches in the future.

CHAPTER 4.

Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 General conclusions and recommendations

- There is clear research evidence that non-cognitive skills are learnable skills in the case of adolescents and that there is a high social return on the investment in programmes addressing these skills.
- It is also important to bear in mind that, particularly where adolescents are concerned, the design of specific interventions need to be based more on real life experiences, on target group direct involvement in the process (at the beginning in the needs assessment stage, then during the designing of the intervention, and in the end when assessing and evaluating outcomes and impact).
- Research shows that although non-cognitive skill development is highly important for young people to overcome different educational and social challenges, cognitive skills cannot be separated from the process of structuring their personality and their personal strategies in dealing with difficult life situations. Rather than looking at them as separate areas, research shows that taking an integrated approach to cognitive and non-cognitive skills has the potential to maximize impact on students' personal development, learning outcomes and academic achievement.
- In the absence of a scientific consensus on the concept of non-cognitive skills, any type of intervention addressing the development of non-cognitive skills in adolescence should be designed using its own explicit working definition, which should be agreed upon in the context of the intervention, and in accordance with the intervention purpose, target group and specific activities envisaged. The working definition of non-cognitive skills may be based on a specific research approach and should be consistent through the entire intervention – from hypotheses, purposes, to activities, evaluation tools and assessment.

- Standardized tests and other already existing assessment tools for non-cognitive skill development should be carefully used and interpreted in other contexts. In most cases, the evaluation and assessment methodologies used for research purposes may not be entirely valid for a specific programme intervention. Therefore, one needs to invest in developing tailored assessment and evaluation methodologies and tools, compatible with the type and specifics of the respective programme or intervention.
- There is a clear need for an exchange platform between relevant stakeholders for the purpose of using specific models, methodologies and tools to assess and evaluate the impact of non-cognitive skill development programmes in order to bring evidence on quality and relevance of those interventions among specific target groups. As many of the interviewed stakeholders mentioned during the current research, an easily accessible repertoire of assessment and evaluation methods and tools could be useful to better adapt and design customized methodological solutions. A guide on how to assess and evaluate a programme addressing adolescent non-cognitive skills could also be very useful to those organizations that have limited resources for investing in sophisticated assessment and evaluation methodologies.
- There is a need for policy engagement in recognizing the importance of non-cognitive skills and their inner potential for enhancing adolescents' learning outcomes, and the social integration and well-being of young people, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups. Non-cognitive skills should be explicitly addressed by the cross-sectorial agenda in the area of support for young people in vulnerable situations. Stakeholder interviews also showed a high interest for training programmes in the area of non-cognitive skills that may benefit from a wide audience: policy makers, programme managers, NGO representatives, teachers and parents, social workers and medical staff, and adolescents themselves. As suggested during the validation workshop, specific professional networks may be particularly interested in attending a training on this topic: school counsellors, the personnel working in prevention and rehabilitation services for drug addicts, school doctors, the Church, social networks that adolescents are resorting to for information-seeking purposes, children and youth clubs and

centres network, sports clubs, centres for inclusive education, volunteering services providers, teacher training providers etc. Training programmes may cover the understanding of non-cognitive skills, specific approaches and interventions for non-cognitive development, methods and tools for assessment and evaluation, interpretation of outcomes etc.

- A collection of good practices in implementing non-cognitive skill development programmes would bring an important added value for exchanges and further promotion of an explicit approach to non-cognitive skill development. As already mentioned, an online platform hosting a dedicated space for sharing, communication and exchange of practices may be a solution in this respect.

- Where the Romanian context is concerned, there is a clear need for a public awareness campaign on the role and importance of adolescent non-cognitive skills, targeting a wide audience, including teachers, trainers, parents and other social actors. A collection of previous programme and project main messages on the value of non-cognitive skills may have an impact on future programmes addressed to adolescents. The interviewed stakeholders also suggested that the public awareness campaign bring in relevant opinion leaders to support those messages. Valuing best practices already implemented in this area may also support a public campaign initiative.

4.2. Conclusions and recommendations for UNICEF strategic planning process

- **UNICEF may take a leading role in hosting cross-sectorial open discussions on the importance of non-cognitive skill development**, especially in the case of disadvantaged groups, bringing to the same table policy makers, researchers, parents, students and practitioners in various sectors. The outcome of the open discussions may be a draft of a joint policy document on the development of non-cognitive skills at national level. UNICEF could also play an important role in promoting relevant discussions, among various stakeholders, on the importance of non-cognitive development in local, national and international contexts: policy makers across sectors, teachers, parents, community

representatives, adolescents, including vulnerable ones, and researchers. A public campaign for promoting the importance of non-cognitive skills in general and for disadvantaged categories of adolescents in particular, could also contribute to an increased awareness among the general public.

- UNICEF already has relevant experience and great contribution in supporting research and pilot projects in the area of education, health and child protection and **should further continue providing policy advice and recommendations based on evidence and relevant data**. Therefore, UNICEF could also become a catalyst of various national, regional and international initiatives in the area of non-cognitive skill development.

- UNICEF may further contribute to expanding the non-cognitive skills agenda, by explicitly embedding non-cognitive development objectives in its current and future projects and initiatives in education, health and social protection. Each UNICEF implemented programme intervention that addresses the development of adolescent non-cognitive skills should explicitly define the type of non-cognitive skills targeted, the specific assumptions and the expected outcomes. A tailored assessment and evaluation methodology should also be drafted according to the intervention specifics.

- UNICEF could build on the partnership with Romanian authorities and, where the organisation has contributed with advice on long term national strategies and plans, it could also provide support on implementation and monitoring/assessment of what has been achieved so far, as well as recommendations for improving these documents, taking into account the importance of non-cognitive skill development (e.g. the National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020, the National Youth Policy Strategy 2015-2020 etc.). The risk mentioned by many stakeholders is to have such documents remain on paper only, lacking the necessary drive, institutional capacity and appropriate resources for implementation.

- UNICEF could capitalize on the interest shown by NGOs in developing projects related to non-cognitive skills. Establishing a platform for dialogue with NGOs could increase practitioners' awareness of non-cognitive skills, improve their interventions and enhance their impact on the community they work with. A round

table discussion with and/or establishing a working group of NGOs with broad experience in integrated interventions (e.g. Save the Children, World Vision, SOS Children's Villages, HHC, Concordia, Roma Education Fund Romania, Ana şi Copiii, Desenăm Viitorul Tău etc.) could especially provide UNICEF with additional insight in order to improve the design of its programmes targeting vulnerable adolescents.

- An important step would be to engage teenagers in such debates about their own development and their needs. Special attention should be paid to volunteering as a way of personal growth and engagement, to mentoring and peer education, which proved good results in certain projects developed by various organizations.
- Providing support to key institutions on major projects such as the Romanian Secondary Education Project (ROSE), implemented by the Ministry of Education and World Bank over the next seven years in most high schools in Romania, could be a great opportunity for developing non-cognitive skills in a large population of adolescents, especially vulnerable ones.

4.3. Conclusions and recommendations concerning the sectorial policy level

4.3.1. Education

- There is a clear need for initial and continuous training of teachers in the area of adolescent non-cognitive skill development. Universities could play an important role in embedding areas of non-cognitive skill development in their teacher training programmes, while continuous teacher training programmes at national level should be further developed. Already experienced organizations in the area of promoting non-cognitive skills could also be encouraged to design continuous teacher training programmes. Alternative teacher training programmes such as coaching, mentoring and counselling, should also become a priority, both in initial and continuous training.
- Collecting and further developing accessible specific resources and toolkits for non-cognitive skill development programmes for teachers, parents and students would be a great support in the

implementation of non-cognitive skill development programmes in both formal and non-formal education systems. Digital resources and available online tools would enhance access to and use of the methodological support.

- There is a need for developing a specific system for recognition of non-cognitive skills acquired by students in different contexts (formal, non-formal, informal). The same recognition should also be provided to those teachers that closely follow their students' non-cognitive development progress. From this perspective, extracurricular activities that use the non-cognitive skill development approach should be further valued and diversified.
- Assessment and evaluation methodologies used in school or in national examinations may also need to be revised in order to take into consideration all students' non-cognitive skills. Specific assessment methods such as self-assessment, team projects, and students' portfolios could better provide opportunities for non-cognitive skill recognition.
- There is a clear need to expand the school counsellor network and to provide the school counsellor with specific methodological background in the area of non-cognitive skills.
- Specific methodological support for schools in order to develop their school-based curriculum in tune with their students' interests is also needed in order to provide more opportunities for student non-cognitive skill development. The same support is also needed in the implementation of different national programmes with high potential for developing students' non-cognitive skills, such as "A Different School", "Second Chance" programme, "School-After-School" programme.

4.3.2. Social protection

- The current policy context in the social protection sector is highly favourable to a more holistic and integrated approach towards adolescent non-cognitive skill development. Moreover, the fact that non-cognitive skills (in terms of life skills development) are included in the current standards established for the child protection system and services is a good base to build on in this area. However, according to the interviewed experts, although the legal framework

is well developed in terms of including the rights to health, education, social services, in reality, the capacity of the public institutions to provide such services is significantly reduced either due to lack of staff or, where there is sufficient personnel, due to inadequate training of the respective professionals. Therefore, there is a need to address issues at management level and at HR level in order to improve the current situation.

- There is a need for adequately recruited and trained human resources (health and social workers) within the community, with the support of local public authorities. The initial training of these professionals in health, psychology, social work must improve and give special attention to non-cognitive skills. Also, continuous training is necessary.
- Relevant international experiences that highly value the development of life skills among young people (as part of non-cognitive skills), such as the Chile Solidario[37] large-scale government programme (2002-2009) or the Voix Libres[38] Programme (an NGO based in Switzerland) in Bolivia, as well as other good practices from the international or national context could be further promoted in the social protection sector.

4.3.3. Health

- Shifting the national health programmes paradigm from a curative to a preventive approach would create further opportunities for adolescent non-cognitive skill development. Moreover, existing programmes should be expanded to cover the entire adolescent population, not only those already facing difficult health situations.
- The ongoing national programmes in different areas of health (*National Programme for Mental Health and Prevention in Psychiatric Pathologies* or *The National Programme for Evaluation and Promotion of Health and Health Education,* "Education for Health" etc.*)* could use specific methodologies in order to include the development of non-cognitive skills of adolescents and to assess the impact of those programmes in this respect.

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[37] http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/reflections-social-protection-and-poverty-alleviation-long-term-impact-chile-solidario
[38] http://www.voixlibres.org/

- There is a clear need for specific initial and continuous training programmes for healthcare professionals, and explicit embedding of the non-cognitive skills subject in the curriculum. More specifically, skills of family doctors and school medical staff that play an important role in terms of prevention and well-being in the community could be enhanced, with a special focus on rural areas. The personnel working with adolescents dealing with health problems must also be trained in order to enable those vulnerable teens to develop proper coping measures during illness and recovery periods (e.g. learning to face social stigma and discrimination, gaining self-confidence and resilience).
- Encouraging adolescents' participation in designing and implementing campaigns and programmes for a healthy life style is a real life opportunity for them to develop their non-cognitive skills such as self-awareness, self-efficacy, motivation and social skills.
- Hospitals with paediatrics wards should develop special programmes for adolescents in long-term hospital care and should create partnerships with other specialized institutions (such as NGOs) to support those adolescents' need for non-cognitive skill development.
- Developing counselling and support programmes for parents of teenagers with various health problems highlighting the importance of non-cognitive skills in coping with difficult situations (medical information and socio-emotional support during periods of illness).

4.4. Conclusions and recommendations concerning the various stakeholders level

4.4.1. Parental level

- Parents are key players in stimulating the development of non-cognitive skills from the early stages in the family environment, but also later on in helping children enhance their non-cognitive skills during the school years. According to the current research, parents are sometimes divided in two groups with opposite opinions on the importance of non-cognitive skill development. A lot of parents heavily criticize the educational and evaluation system's current

focus on cognitive skills, while others ask schools to increase cognitive skill development as a means of enhancing their children's preparation for exams and, in the long run, of ensuring their academic success. From this perspective, there is a need for deeper and more meaningful parental involvement at policy, school and community level, in order to have a common shared voice.

- More information on the importance of non-cognitive skills supported by research evidence and also parental involvement in specific non-cognitive development programmes at school and community level may also act as an accelerator of increased awareness and interest in this topic. Providing parents with the specific methods and tools they need in order to better support the development of their children's non-cognitive skills would also be an important direction for future actions. The role of parenting programmes should also be strengthened as a valuable contribution to supporting parents' input in developing non-cognitive skills in the context of their family life, especially where parents are in socially and economically vulnerable situations.

4.4.2. Support staff for institutionalized children and young people

- Various studies on institutionalized children point out the fact that although social services in Romania have gone through several processes of reform of staff professionalization and services, children still struggle with attachment issues in the absence of a natural family environment. Raising awareness on non-cognitive skill development and specific training programmes on the issue of non-cognitive skills can improve current institutional practices and better support the personal development and educational achievements of institutionalized children and young people.
- Social workers, as all those involved in the social care of institutionalized adolescents need to help these teenagers to become aware of their vulnerability, and accept it, but also to support them to discover their own strengths in order to be able to move on with their life. This could be approached by creating a learning context in which adolescents are accepted, validated and encouraged to take responsibilities, through individual or group

support. They mainly need counselling and therapy, because schooling is not the only problem of vulnerable groups, their background is also an issue, and if this issue is not addressed school becomes irrelevant (this is also needed for their family members). Also, group support mechanisms could be facilitated, e.g. alternative student clubs, minority group cultural festivals or other dedicated events. Social care experts should enable a more profound sharing of activities among teenagers and should allow for debriefing sessions afterwards. Special attention should be given to empowering these adolescents and not treating them as victims.

- These teens need to be motivated and supported to complete their studies (through educational programmes for dropout prevention and recovery, such as homework preparation guidance or extracurricular activities). But first of all they need a special education that addresses their special needs, which the standard educational programmes do not approach (mainly addressing basic life skills, but also skills to overcome their social situation and integrate into society).

4.4.3. Adolescent level

- Building relevant policies and practices in the area of non-cognitive skills should primarily start with children and young people's voices. Involving young people in various stages and levels of decision-making regarding the programmes addressed to them creates a favourable context for them to develop their non-cognitive skills, reflect on their own role, analyse their strengths and their contribution to the wider world.
- Encouraging adolescents' involvement in volunteering activities, especially in rural areas and disadvantaged communities, could be a means of developing key cognitive and non-cognitive skills, as well as of empowering them to take initiative and action.
- The National Students' Council has become more active during the last years and is worth being considered as a partner in developing and implementing policies and initiatives regarding the importance of non-cognitive skill development in general and for vulnerable adolescents in particular. Moreover, the Students' Council could be encouraged to propose initiatives for integrating adolescents from vulnerable categories.

- The input of NGOs working with beneficiaries from vulnerable categories could be valuable in designing new policies, programmes and initiatives in this area. Existing practices regarding peer-education and team work for adolescents are worth exploring.

4.4.4. Community level

- Local authorities have different levels of involvement regarding children and youth. Depending on the available resources, especially in larger cities, local councils could develop special programmes for young people (special centres, trips, camps etc.), and in some cases, for vulnerable children and adolescents. A special focus on the objectives, the skills developed through such activities and on measuring the impact of the various programmes should be considered. In order to reduce the disparities between different levels/degrees of community involvement based on their available resources, specific interventions should give priority to the most disadvantaged communities.
- In terms of local level health, social protection and educational services for vulnerable adolescents, there is a need for a common and integrated strategy/approach on the part of various actors - local council, school and locally active NGOs. This approach should also take into account the development of non-cognitive skills. Sharing of best practices regarding cooperation between different stakeholders could be valuable.
- An information campaign on the meaning and importance of non-cognitive skills aimed at the public services and NGO staff working with children and adolescents would be recommended.
- Encouraging youth engagement and volunteering, especially in rural areas where civil society is underdeveloped, could be a way of increasing awareness and empowerment of young people. The local authorities' staff should be trained in this area, with specific focus on the situation of vulnerable adolescents. A specific training programme for NGO representatives to increase their understanding of rural area contexts and needs would also help expand interventions and programmes to cover the most disadvantaged communities.

- Fostering a learning culture in the community through a genuine student-parent-teacher-expert dialogue would be of great value, including in the process of learning about non-cognitive skills and the need to take non-cognitive skill development in children and teenagers into consideration at home/in institutions, at school or after-school and in society.

Annexes

Annex 1. Research tools

1.1 Literature review – analysis grid

Definition of non-cognitive skills	- common understandings of the concept of non-cognitive skills - convergences and contrasting points of view
Types of non-cognitive skills	- what are the skills considered to be non-cognitive? - are they treated globally or in a more discrete fashion?
Measurement of non-cognitive skills	- survey instruments - scales - self-reports - interview protocols - observations
Evidence (correlational, causal)	- associations between non-cognitive skills and other outcomes, which don't imply causality - causal evidence from experimental and quasi-experimental studies that non-cognitive skills have significant effects on the outcomes of children and adolescents, especially vulnerable ones
Malleability	- indicators that the non-cognitive skills are malleable (modifiable) through interventions, that is they can be taught or improved
Limits/ gaps identified	- main gaps in knowledge that have not been addressed so far
Implications of current research findings	- in terms of theory, policy and practice

1.2 Semi-structured guide for the interview with experts in social sciences

- *What is your relevant experience related to the study/ development of non-cognitive skills?*
- *Is there a special approach in the area of non-cognitive skills for adolescents, especially vulnerable ones?*
- *What is the theoretical framework (epistemology, paradigm) in which you can place your work and in which way it influences the study of non-cognitive skills?*
- *How do you see the findings related non-cognitive skills better applied for adolescents, especially vulnerable ones? What would be the most appropriate approach in various fields (family, society, education, health etc.)?*
- *What is your understanding of non-cognitive skills? What are the constructs you work with? Can you give us a rationale?*
- *In your understanding, how have the concepts related to non-cognitive skills evolved?*
- *What about the evolution of your interest in non-cognitive skills?*
- *In your opinion, what is the relation between cognitive and non-cognitive skills?*
- *In which way do you think the theory can inform practice in this domain? (intervention programmes, training of practitioners, etc.)*
- *Other comments, suggestions.*

1.3 Grid for analysis of best practices

Project/practice title	………
Region/urban/rural	
Contact person:	*Please provide the name, title, report, evaluation, website that may provide additional information on the good practice.*
Issue (Background):	*Briefly (2-3 paragraphs) describe the initial situation (context) and the problem/ issue that prompted the implementation of this good practice.*
Strategy and Implementation:	*Describe in 3-4 paragraphs the strategy and its implementation. This should link to the issue outlined above and highlight the main points of the strategy implemented. Strategies could be regarding advocacy, participation, gender equity, ownership, capacity building, coordination and partnerships, monitoring and evaluation and replication/scaling up.*
Progress and Results:	*In summary (2-3 paragraphs), describe the progress and results validated through evaluations or formal review process. The results can be classified at output, outcome and impact level. Provide quantitative and/or qualitative evidence for different aspects (e.g. relevance, effectiveness, efficacy, potential for replication, sustainability) that are the basis of the good practice. Please also describe factors that enabled or hindered progress (challenges).*
Good Practice:	*Please provide 3-4 short paragraphs to describe in summary good practice(s) in the field. This should leave the reader with an overall picture of the practices, why they are useful and evidence of value they added.*
Potential application:	*Please describe briefly the potential application of this practice to programming beyond the original context. Are there potential applications nationally, regionally, in emergency situations, etc.? What are the issues that need to be considered?*
Next steps:	*Describe (2-3 paragraphs) any planned next steps in implementation or any challenges in strategy as a result of this good practice to date.*
Non-cognitive skills approach	*General approach, concepts, definitions, types of non-cognitive skills*

1.4. Interview guide for practitioners: individual and group interview

Topics of discussion	Indicative list of issues/questions
General information/ Description	Organization type (Public institution, Private institution, NGO, CBO - Community based organization, School, Other. Specify which:....) Area of interest and practice/expertise:
Context and process	• What practices/projects/programmes related to the development of non-cognitive skills did you implement? [also *identify the type of the practice: a. mentoring; b. service learning (e.g. volunteering); c. social and emotional learning programmes; d. outdoor activities; e. other. specify which:......*] • What were the **main goals/objectives** of the practice/project/programme? • How did you manage to implement it? [*references about economic, useful relations resources*] • What were the **steps/stages** of the project?
Structures of intervention	• What were the **needs** addressed by the intervention? • What kind of **approach** did you use? [*identify if it is: a. preventive intervention; b. intervention that emphasizes the strengths, resources and potential and focuses on positive development; c. other. specify which:......................*] • Who were the **target groups** and why were they selected? Is there a greater need to develop non-cognitive abilities among certain target groups, such as adolescents, especially vulnerable ones? • What type of **human resources** did you use for these interventions (trainers, experts, practitioners, etc.)? Who trained them and in what way?

Non-cognitive skills approach	• Did you target the non-cognitive abilities explicitly or implicitly [*for example in a broader theme*]? • What **terminology** did you use? [*non-cognitive abilities/ soft skills/ character skills/ life skills, etc.*] How did you **define** the non-cognitive abilities that you have targeted? • What **types of non-cognitive skills** were targeted? [*listed*] • What were the **reasons** you chose to focus on these particular skills and not others? • What were the **specific activities** that you used to foster/develop these skills? • What were the outcomes and how did you evaluate the **impact** of your intervention on the development of non-cognitive skills? What was the **methodology** you used, how did you measure it? [*estimation, indicators, evidence*] • Are there any **difficulties/obstacles** in working with and fostering non-cognitive skills in different target groups, particularly in vulnerable and at risk adolescents? • What do you think is the **relation between cognitive and non-cognitive skills**? [*is there a relation, what type, which one influences which, etc.*] • What do you think are the **needs for future interventions** for the development of non-cognitive skills? What could be your/ your organization's role in this perspective?

1.5 Grid for policy analysis

Policy title	Type of policy (international convention, national legislation, sector-related legislation, policy document, national strategy etc.)
Intervention areas	(education, health, social protection, youth etc.)
Level of intervention	(international, European, national, sector-related, local)
Non-cognitive skills approach	
Definitions and used terminology	Non-cognitive / soft skills / character skills / life skills
Context	(policy context, specific needs)
Measures and programmes	
Target groups addressed	
Estimated impact	
Lessons learned	
References	Strategic/policy background paper, implementation plans, evaluation reports etc.)

1.6 Interview guide for main stakeholders

- *Introduction: explanation of non-cognitive skills and a few examples, in order to give respondents some focus*
- *Are non-cognitive skills relevant to your sector/organization policy? What are the main target groups addressed?*
- *To what extent are non-cognitive skills addressed in policy or strategic documents?*
- *How are non-cognitive skills defined? How are non-cognitive skills assessed?*
- *How do you perceive their relevance to the context in which you are working?*
- *Are there resources available to develop targeted programmes for the development of non-cognitive skills?*
- *What other measures are needed in order to better address non-cognitive skills?*

Annex 2. Research samples

2.1 Interviews with experts

1. Izabela Popa – NAPCRA
2. Vişinel Bălan – Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('*Drawing Your Future' Association*) & Federeii Association
3. Oana Moşoiu – University of Bucharest
4. Dragoş Iliescu – University of Bucharest
5. Voica Pop – UNICEF Romania (Child Protection Expert)
6. Florentina Furtunescu – 'Carol Davila' University of Medicine and Pharmacy
7. Borbala Koo – UNICEF Romania, Society for Education on Contraception and Sexuality (SECS)
8. Alin Apostu – Romanian Business Leaders Foundation (RBLS)
9. Emanuel Beteringhe – The Romanian Association for Debate, Elocution and Rhetoric (ARDOR)
10. Tiberiu Culidiuc – New Horizons Foundation (FNO)
11. Marius Rusu – Save the Children Romania
12. Otto Sestak – Hope and Homes for Children Romania (HHC)
13. Mariana Arnăutu – World Vision Romania
14. Simona David-Crisbăşanu – ROI Association
15. Horia Oniţa – The National Students' Council
16. Ştefan Pălărie – School of Values Association
17. Burlacu Alina – Centre for Academic Excellence
18. Loredana Poenaru – Junior Achievement Romania
19. Adina Manea – Youth for Youth Foundation

2.2 Workshop with practitioners – Restart Edu Camp, Cheia, 5 September 2015

Participants:

Simona Mitrea – Kleine Schule Association for Education and Science, Maria Pavelescu – The Educators' Association in Suceava, Jean Baptiste Manitou - Humains Profiles Association, Vlad Dumitrescu – FDSC, Georgiana Mincu – Romanian-American Foundation, Cosmin Chiriţă, Larisa Popescu, Dragoş Apostu, Crisa Cristea, Ciprian Stava, Ramona Neculiţă – Fundaţia Inimă de Copil (*Heart of a Child Foundation*), Ana-Maria Grădinariu – Federaţia Volum (*Federation of Organizations Supporting the Development of Volunteering in Romania*), Monica

Ploeşteanu – Colegiul Tehnic Mihai Bravu (*Mihai Bravu Technical College*), Simona David-Crisbăşanu – ROI Association, Alina Burlacu – Centre for Academic Excellence, Mirela Hagea – Romania's Scouts (volunteer), Raluca Bogdan – ARDOR, Adina Manea – Youth for Youth, Mădălina Coza – Romanian-Danish Centre for Integrated Education (RODACIE)

2.3 Workshop with policy-level representatives, IES, 24 September 2015

Participants were representatives from CNDIPT, School of Values Association, Federeii Association, World Vision Romania, BCERA, IES

2.4 Validation workshop, UNICEF, 29 October 2015

Participants:

Scoda Andreea – IES, Izabella Popa – NAPCRA, Monica Necula – ANA, Mihaela Bebu – ANA, Cătălina Chendea – MoNESR, Speranţa Ţibu – IES, Daniela Dumulescu – BBU, Ana Duminică – Împreună Agency, Şerban Iosifescu – RAQAPE, Arnăutu Mariana – World Vision Romania, Violeta Maria Caragea – The Alternative University, Irina Horga – IES, Edi Petrescu – UNICEF Romania, Adrian Opre – BBU, Florentina Furtunescu – 'Carol Davila' University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Claudia Marcela Călianu – BCERA

2.5 Organizations, policy & programme documents included in the practice analysis:

1. Alliance for Fighting Against Alcoholism and Drug Addiction (ALIAT)
2. National Antidrug Agency (ANA)
3. 'Ana şi Copiii' (*'Ana and Children' Association*)
4. Romanian Association Against AIDS (ARAS)
5. The Romanian Association for Debate, Elocution and Rhetoric (ARDOR)
6. Chile Solidario programme
7. National Centre for the Development of Technical and Vocational Education (CNDIPT)
8. Community Centre in Călăraşi
9. Concordia Romania
10. Desenăm Viitorul Tău ('*Drawing Your Future' Association*)
11. 'Education for Health' (MoNESR's & Presidency's programmes)
12. Federeii Association

13. New Horizons Foundation (FNO)
14. Lindenfeld Association - Ajungem MARI (*Getting to Grow Educational Programme*)
15. Hope and Homes for Children Romania (HHC)
16. Împreună Community Development Agency
17. Junior Achievement Romania
18. LEADERS Foundation
19. Little People Association
20. Motivation Romania Foundation
21. National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and Adoption (NAPCRA)
22. National Programme for Mental Health and Prevention in Psychiatric Pathologies
23. Romanian Business Leaders Foundation (RBLS)
24. ROI Association
25. "Amare Rromentza" Rroma Centre
26. Roma Education Fund Romania
27. Cercetaşii României (*Romania's Scouts*)
28. Save the Children Romania
29. Şcoala de Valori (*School of Values Association*)
30. Sera Romania
31. Asociația Alternative Sociale (*Social Alternatives Association*)
32. SOS Children's Villages
33. Centre for Academic Excellence
34. The National Programme for Evaluation and Promotion of Health and Health Education
35. The National Strategy for Child Rights Protection and Promotion 2014-2020
36. The National Youth Policy Strategy 2015-2020
37. Asociația Clubul Liderii Mileniului Trei (*Leaders of The Third Millennium Club*)
38. UNICEF Romania (main programmes and partnerships analyzed: School Attendance Initiative, Community-Based Services, Wella-UNICEF Making Waves, ALIAT)
39. Voix Libres Bolivian programme
40. World Vision Romania
41. Youth for Youth Foundation (YfY)

Annex 3. Non-cognitive skills definitions and research approaches

Generic definition

Non-cognitive skills are those abilities which are academically and occupationally relevant and which are not measured by IQ tests or achievement tests. These skills are known in the specialized literature as soft skills, personality traits, non-cognitive abilities, character skills, socio-emotional skills.

TYPES OF NON-COGNITIVE SKILLS

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions

Personal dimension (in terms of managing one's self)	Self-perception
	    Self-concept
	    Self-efficacy
	Motivation
	    Intrinsic - learning orientation
	    Extrinsic - performance orientation
	Self-control
	    Perseverance
	    Self-regulated learning
	Creativity and entrepreneurship

Social and emotional dimension (in terms of social relationships)	Emotional competences Inter-personal skills Situational behaviours Academic behaviours Resilience and Coping
Community dimension	Civic skills

Definitions and examples for each skill

Dimensions	Sub-dimensions	Definition	Examples
Personal dimension (in terms of managing one's self)	Self-perception	Self-Perception refers to: **Self-Concept** ● Self -concept has been defined as an individual's self-perception of their ability shaped through experiences and interactions with the environment (O'Mara et al., 2006; Valentine et al., 2004). Global self-concept concerns how individuals feel about themselves more generally, while domain-specific self-concept concerns their perceptions in a single area. ● Academic self-concept is usually defined as a student's self-perceived competence in school generally or in a specific academic domain. Conceptually, academic self-concept consists of global self-concept (a student's beliefs about his or her overall ability in school) and domain-specific self-concept (feelings	**Self-concept** Examples of global self-concept: "I am a generous person" "I have a good sense of humour" "I am a religious person" Example of general academic self-concept: "I am an A level student" versus "I am a D level student" Examples of domain-specific self-concept: "I am brilliant at Math" "I am illiterate in Chemistry" **Self-efficacy** "I can play soccer very well" "I am not good at talking to strangers" "I can cook delicious meals"

			of competence in a particular subject matter, such as math or reading).	
			Self-Efficacy ● Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that they have the capability to succeed at a particular task in the future (Bandura, 1977, 2001). Whereas self-concept of ability assesses how an individual feels about their past performance in relation to others, self-efficacy measures an individual's expectations about whether or not they can successfully perform a specific task at a later point in time. ● Self-efficacy, specifically academic self-efficacy, is the student's belief that he or she can complete the task at hand. Self-efficacy is subject-specific; in other words, an individual's level of self-efficacy can vary across academic domains, such as reading, algebra, and writing.	Examples of academic self--efficacy: "I can solve difficult Physics problems" "I am not able to pass the Reading test"

	Motivation	Psychological theory distinguishes between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic motivation,** as manifestations of autonomy versus control (Deci & Ryan, 1985).	**Intrinsic motivation**

| | Motivation
● Intrinsic - learning orientation
● Extrinsic - performance orientation | Psychological theory distinguishes between **intrinsic** and **extrinsic motivation,** as manifestations of autonomy versus control (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
● **Intrinsic motivation** develops as a result of autonomous, self-determined decisions that give individuals a sense of control and power.
● In contrast, **extrinsic motivation** is created when individuals are forced or compelled to act through controlling situations. (London IES, p. 7+)

The application of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation in the academic context is well described by *the achievement goal theory* (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Legget, 1988). Achievement goal theory distinguishes two types of goal orientations:
● a learning orientation is focused on gaining competence in a subject area or skill and | **Intrinsic motivation**
An adolescent enrols in a sports team because she enjoys sports.
A child plays piano daily because he loves music and feels completely absorbed while playing.

Extrinsic motivation
An adolescent enrols in a sports team to lose weight and to increase her popularity.
A child plays piano in order to satisfy his parents' expectations.

Learning orientation
"My goal is to learn as much as possible"
"I am striving to understand the content as thoroughly as possible"
"My aim is to completely master the material presented in this class"

Performance orientation
"I am striving to do well compared to other students"
"My goal is to avoid performing poorly compared to others"

Examples from: Achievement Goal Questionnaire - Revised (AGQ-R) Elliot, A. J., & Murayama, K. (2008). On the measurement of achievement goals: Critique, illustration, and application. Journal of Educational Psychology, 100 (3), 613-628. |

		● a performance orientation is focused on demonstrating competence to others, seeking competition, and comparing performance to others.	
	Self-control ● Perseverance ● Self-regulated learning	**Self-control** is generally defined as the ability to resist short-term impulses in order to prioritise longer-term goals. This involves exerting self-control over behaviours, feelings, and thoughts in order to conform to rules, plans, promises, ideals, and other standards. Related terms: self-discipline, delay of gratification, self-regulation, and impulse control. In the academic setting, self-control can be most often identified as **perseverance**, respectively **self-regulated learning**. Broadly, **academic perseverance** refers to a student's tendency to complete	**Self-control** A child resists going outside to play in order to finish his/ her homework. An adolescent controls her impulse to respond aggressively to a teacher who had treated her unfairly, and instead communicates her needs in an assertive manner. **Perseverance** A student who exhibits perseverance: - Works hard in his/her class. - Keeps working and working until he/she gets his/her schoolwork right. - Tries his/her best to learn things he/she doesn't understand. - Finishes his/her assignments even when they are really hard. (Adapted from Academic Perseverance Scale, Tyler L. Renshaw, Research Gate, 2015, DOI:

| | | school assignments in a timely and thorough manner, to the best of one's ability, despite distractions, obstacles, or level of challenge. (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 9)

Concepts related to academic perseverance:
● Grit, Tenacity
● Delayed Gratification
● Self-Discipline
● Self-Control

To persevere academically requires that students stay focused on a goal despite obstacles (grit or persistence) and forego distractions or temptations to prioritize higher pursuits over lower pleasures (delayed gratification, self-discipline, self-control). (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 9).

Self-regulated learning is a goal-directed process, which implies taking control of and evaluating one's own learning. This is done by focusing awareness on thinking and | 10.13140/RG.2.1.4068.9767)

Academic perseverance is the difference between doing the minimal amount of work to pass a class and putting in long hours to truly master course material and excel in one's studies. (Farrington et al., 2012, p. 9)

The self as learner:
"I study better in the morning than in the evening"
"Having previous knowledge on a topic helps me understand a text better"
"I can study for about one hour continuously, and then I need a 10 minute break"

The learning task:
Solving a Chemistry problem involves different processes than writing an essay.
Reading a drama play requires different resources and processes than acting in a play. |

		selecting, monitoring, and planning strategies that are most conducive to learning (Zimmerman, 2001). The regulation involves actively reflecting on: - The self as learner: what we know about the way our mind works and about the human mind in general - The learning task: what we know about the nature of various intellectual tasks and the strategies we use in order to approach different tasks	
	Creativity and entrepreneurship	**Creativity** is the production of novel and useful ideas. According to Ciskszentmihalyi (1996), creativity results from the interaction of a system consisting of three elements: a culture that contains symbolic rules, a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation. (London IES, p. 7+). **Entrepreneurship** is the ability to turn ideas into action. The	**Creativity** Finding novel associations between concepts. **Entrepreneurship** Discovering a new and more productive way to do things.

		individual is aware of the context of his/her work and is able to seize opportunities that arise. (Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, European Parliament and Council, 2006)	
Social and emotional dimension (in terms of social relationships)	Emotional competences	Emotional competence is the ability to deal efficiently with emotion eliciting situations in order to ensure adaptation to the social context (Buckley, Storino, & Saarni, 2003; Saarni, 2001). Three dimensions of emotional competence have been identified: **emotion understanding**, **emotional expressiveness**, and **emotion regulation** (Denham, 2006; Halberstadt, Denham, & Dunsmore, 2001). **Emotion understanding** consists in the ability to correctly identify emotions based on their label (sadness, joy, etc.) or facial/body display. **Emotional expressiveness** refers to the ability to convey emotional messages in a socially accepted manner. **Emotion regulation** was defined as the processes involved in	**Emotion understanding** Persons who have difficulties in understanding others' emotions can misinterpret them: e.g., they can erroneously assume that someone is displaying anger. In consequence they are more likely to respond aggressively in a conflict situation. **Emotional expressiveness** Some children and adolescents exhibit disproportionate or inadequate negative emotional expressiveness, namely anger. In turn, they are less likely to be perceived positively by their peers and teachers (Sebanc, 2003). **Emotion regulation** can be seen when someone is getting angry at something, then he/she realizes that the angry response is not appropriate and tries to change the emotion. *Suppression* : "When I feel negative emotions, I do not express them" *Cognitive reappraisal:* "When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation".

| | | "evaluating, monitoring and modifying emotional reactions […] in order to accomplish one's goals" (Thompson, 1994). Emotion regulation can be manifested as *emotional suppression* (not expressing the emotion experienced) or *cognitive reappraisal* (thinking about the situation in a different way) (Gross & John, 2003). Emotion regulation leading to more positive emotional expressiveness is in turn related to prosocial behaviours, empathy, and positive problem-solving strategies in conflict situations (Calkins & Fox, 2002; Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000; Eisenberg, Guthrie, Murphy, Shepard, Cumberland, & Carlo, 1999). | (Adapted from EMOTION REGULATION QUESTIONNAIRE (ERQ), Gross, J.J., & John, O.P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85, 348-362.) |
| | Inter-personal skills | Inter-personal skills are the skills used by a person to properly interact with others. They include behaviours such as cooperation, sharing, helping, communication, expressing empathy, providing verbal support or encouragement, and | **Inter-personal skills** An adolescent encourages the soccer team of her class before a match. Adolescents work well together in a team for a school project. A child provides moral support and dedicates time to stay and play with a friend who has lost his pet. |

		general friendliness or kindness. (London IES, p. 7+).	
	Situational behaviours ● Academic behaviours	Situational behaviours are those behaviours that are adapted for the social situation, like academic related behaviours, work related behaviours, peer group related behaviours, and so on. In the academic setting we talk about academic behaviours, which are those behaviours commonly associated with being a "good student", that show students' engagement and effort.	Examples of academic behaviours: Regularly attending class. Arriving ready to work (with necessary supplies and materials). Paying attention. Participating in instructional activities and class discussions. Devoting out-of-school time to studying and completing homework.
	Resilience and Coping	**Resilience** is defined as positive adaptation despite the presence of risk, which may include poverty, parental bereavement, parental mental illness, and/or abuse (Masten, 2009, 2011; Rutter, 2006). Resilience is demonstrated when children succeed (e.g. in terms of educational attainment) despite exposure to significant risks. Resilience is often thought of as "bouncing back" in the face of setbacks and is not considered a	**Resilience** A child from a violent family, who has good academic achievement, has friends, behaves well, has a good relationship with his/her teacher. A survivor of an earthquake returns to normal functioning and development. An adolescent who was abandoned by his/ her parents and was raised from a very young age in a placement centre functions 'normally', compared to his/her peers who benefited from a regular family life: goes to school, has good grades, has friends, has prosocial behaviour.

		personal attribute or trait, but rather a developmental process, with a strong focus on relationships with others. **Coping** refers to a set of skills a person uses to respond to stress. Coping can be defined as "constantly changing efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141). The range of situations that require coping varies from daily hassles to life-threatening trauma. (London IES, p. 27)	**Coping** **Humour.** Pointing out the amusing aspects of the problem at hand, or "positive reframing". **Seeking support.** Asking for help, or finding emotional support from family members or friends. **Problem-solving.** A coping mechanism that aims to locate the source of the problem and determine solutions. **Relaxation.** Engaging in relaxing activities, or practicing calming techniques. **Physical recreation.** Regular exercise, such as running, or team sports. **Adjusting expectations.** Anticipating various outcomes to scenarios in life may assist in preparing for the stress associated with any given change or event. **Denial.** Avoidance of the issue altogether may lead to denying that a problem even exists. Denial is usually maintained by distractions, such as excessive alcohol consumption, overworking, or sleeping more than usual. **Self-blame.** Internalizing the issue, and blaming oneself (beyond just taking responsibility for one's actions), leads to low-self esteem and sometimes depression. **Venting.** An externalizing coping technique, venting is the outward expression of emotions, usually in the company of friends or family. In moderation it can be healthy; however, ruminating on the negative can lead to strained relationships over time.

			Adapted from https://www.semel.ucla.edu/dual-diagnosis-program/News_and_Resources/How_Do_You_Cope
Community dimension	Civic skills	Civic competence, and particularly knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights), equips individuals to engage in active and democratic participation. (Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, European Parliament and Council, 2006).	**Civic skills** Doing advocacy and lobby. Representing others' views. Actively participating in students' Council. Being involved in community projects.

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