

A photograph of three young children, likely refugees, sitting together in a dimly lit, makeshift shelter. The child on the left is a young boy with curly hair, wearing a striped shirt, looking off-camera with his hand near his mouth. The child in the middle is a girl with curly hair, wearing an orange shirt, looking directly at the camera with her hand near her mouth. The child on the right is a girl with curly hair, wearing a green knitted sweater over a striped shirt, looking directly at the camera. The background shows a rough, corrugated metal roof and a wall with some graffiti.

MUGUR VĂRZARIU, 2024

CHILDREN WITH CHILDREN

To solve is to understand

REALITY CHECK

ROMANIA RANKS FIRST IN EUROPE

- teenage mothers
- deaths in childbirth

THE WRONG EXPLANATION

THE PROBLEM IS USUALLY EXPAINED LIKE THIS:

- lack of sexual education
- cultural norms
- community traditions

THE EXPLANATION

IS INCOMPLETE

**ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY IS NOT PRIMARILY A CULTURAL
ISSUE.**

IT IS A POVERTY-DRIVEN SURVIVAL MECHANISM.

DATA BACKED CONTEXT

- **18,631 teenage mothers**
- **705 under 15**
- **70% poverty in vulnerable communities**

THE MECHANISM

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- Extreme poverty creates structural pressure:
- no space
- no work
- no access to education
- Children become part of survival logic:
- access to resources
- redistribution of family burden
- early marriage = spatial + economic relief

KEY CLARIFICATION

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMMUNITIES ARE OFTEN
MISINTERPRETED.**

■ **Where poverty disappears, behavior changes.**

■ **Where education appears, patterns shift.**

WHY POLICIES FAIL

- **Most interventions target the wrong cause:**
- **sexual education alone**
- **financial aid without conditions**
- **fragmented social policies**

CONSEQUENCE

RESULT

- The cycle continues.

SOLUTION FRAMEWORK

EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION MUST COMBINE:

- economic integration
- conditional support
- education + responsibility
- family-level intervention

**THIS IS NOT A HUMANITARIAN ISSUE ALONE.
IT IS A SYSTEMIC INEFFICIENCY.**

TO SOLVE

THE PROBLEM, UNDERSTAND THE CAUSE.











LACK OF INTEREST

CLAIMING IS ONE THING. DOING IS ANOTHER.

- adolescents in general are not regarded as a priority across strategic documents on reproductive health.
- adolescents' access to family planning services and their use of modern contraceptives are hampered by the fact that those services do not offer a friendly and confidential environment as well as by their lack of information, stigma, cultural and religious barriers, making them more vulnerable to unintended pregnancies.



RELIGION



IF NOT PLANNED...

- the church actively promotes religious education over sexual education.

LACK OF HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAME

CHURCH DOESN'T WANT IT. SCHOOL DOESN'T WANT IT.

- under-age mothers are not a compact group sharing the same characteristics and needs.
- health education is currently optional in schools and does not successfully provide information meant to promote non-risky sexual behaviors and prevent adolescent pregnancy.
- child protection services usually focus their interventions on the provision of cash benefits or services/allowances to these young mothers, yet these actions fail to prevent repeat pregnancies.
- most under-age mothers have dropped out or leave school when they become mothers.

THE MECHANISM

NOT TO BE SHOWN, BUT EXPLAINED

Sali has five daughters. They came one after another, in quick succession. He turned the children into a model of survival. While they are young, the social aid Sali receives for each child helps them all survive. During these early years, they all live cramped together in a small hut.

As time passes, the girls grow up. On the one hand, they no longer fit in the little hut; on the other, the aid is no longer sufficient. Sali has to get rid of the girls. The first menstruation marks the first opportunity. If a suitor appears, Sali marries off his daughter and celebrates with a party where they eat and drink to their hearts' content. After a long time, he falls asleep with a full belly—and, more importantly, for the first time in a while, it feels like there is more space in the hut.

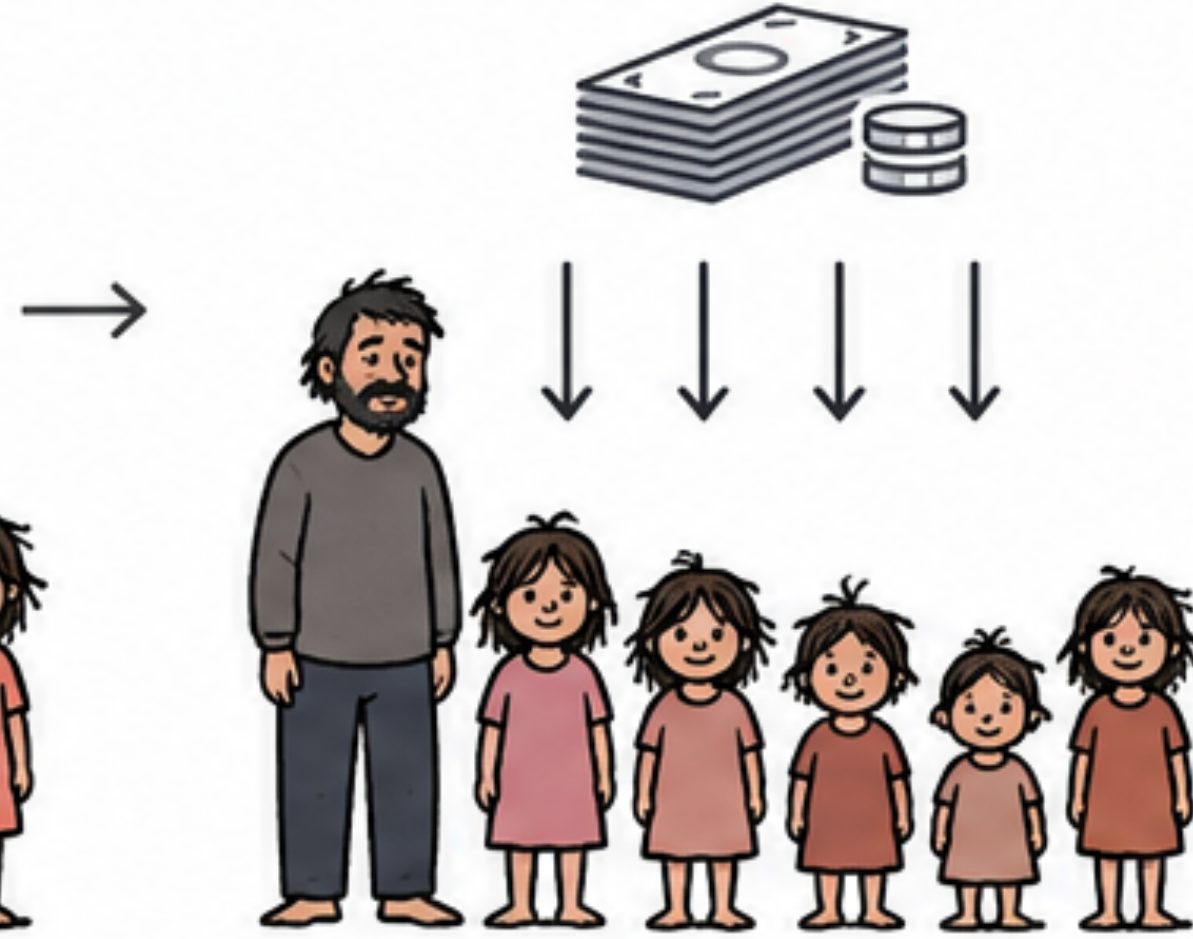
1 Sali has five daughters.

They came one after another, in quick succession.



2 Social aid helps them survive

While the girls are young, Sali receives social aid for each child. This helps them all survive.



3 They live in a small hut.

During these early years, they all live cramped together in a small hut.



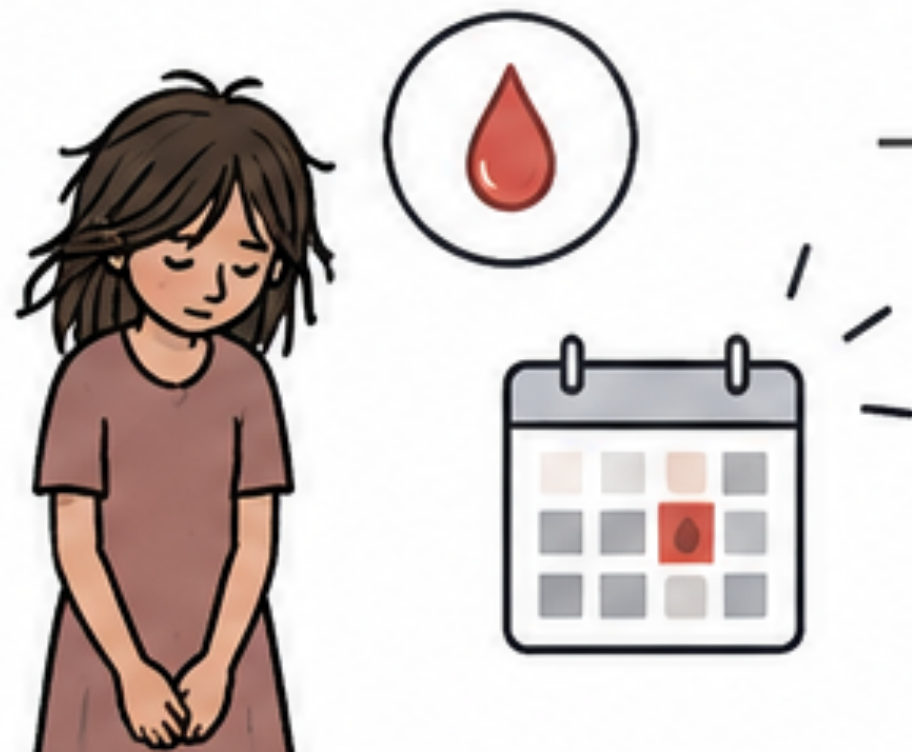
4 The girls grow up.

As time passes, the girls grow up. They no longer fit in the little hut, and the aid is no longer sufficient.



5 First menstruation – the first opportunity.

The first menstruation marks the first opportunity.



6 A suitor appears.

If a suitor appears, Sali marries off his daughter.



7 A celebration.

Sali celebrates with a party where they eat and drink to their hearts' content.



8 More space, for a while.

After a long time, he falls asleep with a full belly — and, more importantly, for the first time in a while, it feels like there is more space in the hut.







**I DIDN'T PHOTOGRAPH A THEORY.
I WATCHED CHILDREN GROW UP.**

AMİŞ SIMAVIŞ

2013











2019





2020 - AMIŞ'S FIRST "MARRIAGE"









2022 - MOTHER







AMIŞ PÂNAR





**THE GIRLS I PHOTOGRAPHED AT SEVEN
BECAME MOTHERS WHILE STILL CHILDREN THEMSELVES.**

VARIATIONS OF THE UNIVERSAL STORY







DIFFERENT ECONOMICAL BACKGROUND













BUT IN THE END...



TO SOLVE IS TO UNDERSTAND.

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More details about Mugur Vărzariu's social involvement and Loving Colours can be found here: www.mugurvarzariu.com

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