



Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

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Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2014, vol. 47, pp. 307-324

The online version of this article can be found at:

www.rcis.ro, www.doaj.org and www.scopus.com

Published by:
Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA

is indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters - Social Sciences Citation Index

(Sociology and Social Work Domains)



Measures of Social Assistance Activated within the Romanian Educational Environment: Developments during the Recent Economic Crisis

Liliana STAN¹, Nicoleta Laura POPA²

Abstract

Social existence requires constant management of all types of social and human manifestations, including those expressing vulnerability, a burdensome for the individual, as well as for the group or the community. Scientifically-based reactions of the society facing social vulnerability sums the corresponding measures arising from social policies, social protection and social assistance, and imply the employment of public resources with the aim of reducing marginalization and exclusion. Social protection and social assistance are two large and far-reaching approaches exerting a major impact on normality of the social life. Interventions addressing the situation of vulnerable children and young people are developed within and beyond their family life. In Romania, the school constitutes a social space where several intervention programs aiming vulnerable children and youths are activated. The present study comments on some of these programs, and based on corresponding considerations proposes pedagogical and social assistance valorisations. Within this general framework, relevant Romanian experiences are presented, using as landmarks the number of beneficiaries of the assistance programs, namely “Roll bread and milk”, school supplies for pupils, different types of scholarships, the monthly financial support “Money to attend Secondary School”, the programme “Euro 200” which provides funding for the acquisition of computers, and the programme “The Second Chance”. The study also captures the larger European context in which these Romanian initiatives are designed and implemented, as well as developments of social protection and assistance programs conducted in the school during the recent economic crisis.

Keywords: social assistance, education, school, vulnerability, recent economic crisis, Romania

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Social functioning and vulnerability

Social work constantly and unavoidably includes management of all types of social and human acting manifestations and non-discriminatory involvement of all categories of people, groups and communities to their life and social complex they belong to. At the societal level, normal phenomena and manifestations are recorded, and next to them while ineffably related to them, different types of deviation from normality, towards either ascendant and positive direction, or descendent and negative direction. Positive deviation from normality and normality as such are able to configure the sketch of the ideal society. In history, as it is largely known, no ideal social organisation have been reached up to the present moment so that a perfect human society is still highly desirable, even if optimistic voices pronounce democracy to be the best of societies.

The social scenery in all places and all times reveals vulnerability or sub-normality to be an objective and burdensome presence for both the individual marked by it, and the group he or she belong to (Stan, 2005: 74). Sub-normality appears within multiple contexts: within manifestation or existence of deficiencies exclusively related to individuals, to their will (this is the case of drug and alcohol addiction, organisation of gangs or criminal groups, etc.), or it is related to problems which are not governed by individuals' will (physical malformations or intellectual impairments) which would act over their life streaming, but it also appears in the case of persons affected by poverty, illiteracy, stigmatised diseases (such as AIDS), etc.

These people are frequently perceived and referred to as marginalised or excluded peoples (or groups) and they would therefore involve huge social efforts towards rehabilitation which are certainly correlated with the form and dimension acceptable by the nature of the impairment to be removed and social possibilities to be provided at that moment. It is worthy to mention that within the Romanian legislative context *social marginalisation* if defined by the Law on Prevention and Fight against Social Exclusion (Law no. 116/ 2002) as “peripheral social position to isolate individuals or groups who have limited access to economic, political, educational and communication resources belonging to communities”. Therefore, social exclusion is given by the absence of minimal social conditions of life; a job, a dwelling, medical assistance, education, which the Romanian Constitution mentions them to be the fundamental rights of the citizens. Social exclusion refers to “a person who has been placed outside normal social life as a result of some multiple deprival, and has few chances to be reinserted to normal social life. It is a result of discriminations, lack of opportunities, accumulation of privations, defacement or non-development of normal social capabilities or a marginalising individual or collective lifestyle” (National Plan against Poverty and for Promoting Social Inclusion, 2002: 6). Especially from the point of view of left-wing, centre and right-wing politics, society is considered to “be indebted

to offering for additional chances to those who are experiencing difficult moments in their life, and to provide for support to socially marginalised people and groups.” (Dumitru, 2002: 17).

Organized and scientifically founded reactions to vulnerability includes manifestations related to social policies on social protection and social assistance and requires proper involvement of public resources to reduce number of cases of marginalisation and exclusion. Social protection and social assistance represent two impressive and far-reaching approaches to have a major impact on the normality of the social life. Law no. 705/ 2001 on the national system of social work (published by the Official Journal, no. 814/2001) stipulates, in article 2, that social work as part of the social protection system represents the assembly of institutions and measures through which the state, the public authorities of local administration and civil society would assure prevention, limitation and removal of temporary or permanent effects of some situations which could generate social marginalisation or exclusion off people. Article 24 of the same law mentions the hypostases of these services: they could be community or specialised services which are to be provided at home, within community or specialised institution or schools, hospitals, penitentiaries or other units. Law 47 of 8 March 2006 on the national system of social work (published by the Official Journal no. 239 of 16.03.2006) maintains stipulations of the former act (currently abrogated) within an actualised context. Social assistance in particular concentrates all resources to identify, construct or activate solutions to problems encountered by people who, at a certain moment, are experiencing difficult situations which affect their normal interdependency to social environment (Neamtu, 2011: 272). Under normal social and historic circumstances, or under special critical (economic, financial, resource) conditions, measures related to social assistance are extended by complementary educational interventions to help development of the former. The two categories of social actions (education and social assistance) are subordinated to services for people marked by contextual difficulties.

Children and Youths – Subjects of Educational and Social Assistance Interventions

Children and young people constitute some categories that programmes of social support, protection and assistance have constantly and intensively aimed at. Children constitute a consistent group of vulnerable people or people at risk when they are abandoned (on the streets, in foster care institutions, etc.), when they are neglected, abused or are victims of violence, exploitation (by their own family), when they live in extreme poverty, in vicious families, in disadvantaged areas or in extreme / difficult natural conditions, etc. Young people, in their turn, are made vulnerable due to some characteristics of their existential position: they

do not own any personal heritage at the beginning of their active life, they have not got any job or home, etc. (Dumitru, 2002: 17). Several relevant initiatives and experiences with multiple and original significance could be emphasised among these activities. In our present study we are not dealing with completing an inventory, but we aim at highlighting from a pedagogical perspective some dimensions related to interdependency of social intervention to educational assistance, through the point of view of disadvantaged groups or groups in difficult situations. The announced option is supported by the fact that one of the targets of the application of the social assistance and protection framework for children and young people explicitly involves some aspects of institutional education. Firstly, there is reference to providing for support to those people to help them accede to education and secondly, within educational institutions, it aims at acquiring optimal performance while relating it to the reality of external conditions of learning, and activation of psycho-intellectual and psycho-moral potential of people targeted by special educational and social provisions.

Care and concern for children are socially expressed by assistance-related measures and actions, while the first-level priority is their presence and full integration into their family. A large range of measures deals with children and are for the benefit of families with children, without having any direct connection with the universe of school (especially in the case of children whose ages would not allow them to integrate themselves to nursery or elementary schools). Nevertheless, some of these measures relevantly exemplify the social effort to protect families *and* children: state allowance for children up to the age of 16 or 18 if children still attend one of the educational forms mentioned by the law (Law no. 61/ 1993), maternity allowance (Law 416/ 2001), monthly allowance for foster care for each child having been considered by that measure (Law 272/ 2004), complementary family allowance (OUG no. 105/ 2003), single parent allowance (OUG no. 105/ 2003), maternity leave, (normal or disabled) children care allowance, children care allowance (85% of the national gross minimum wages), medical leaves in case of sick children up to the age of seven and so on.

Measures of Social Assistance in Romanian Schools

Any support, protection and/or assistance approaches to children and young people are also developed even beyond the family framework of their lives. Together with children, other persons involved in different professional manifestations (teaching staff, auxiliary teaching staff or technical and administrative staff) in schools are the beneficiaries of social assistance interventions as well. In Romania, the world of schools constitutes the space for the initiation of some programmes varying in their scope. The following considerations will only mention some of them with the aim to draw conclusions which would include

pedagogical and social assistance valuations, based on described aspects. We are going to present experiences which are relevant to our analysis, and the ordination reference will be the numerical amleness of children and youths benefiting of these opportunities: the programme “Roll bread and milk”, school supplies for pupils, different types of scholarships, monthly financial support “Money to attend Secondary School”, the programme “Euro 200” to provide funding for the acquisition of computers, the programme “The Second Chance”. Except for examples we are going to discuss, some other experiences connected with the needs of persons or groups in significant difficult situations are also known. While considering the elaboration of the Law on the prevention and fight against social marginalisation (2002), the Ministry of Education and Research developed some valuable programmes and some of them were approved and are still in force: free transportation of children to their schools, the Programme “Bridges between cities and villages”, the National Programme of Education for Democratic Citizenship, the Programme for Prevention and Fight against school dropout, etc. (Molan, 2002: p. 29-32).

The experiences invoked hereinafter are also relevant for cases where references are made to the economic crisis of the recent years. Although during the crisis no special measures have been taken, those having been already endorsed kept on being applied under the new circumstances; they essentially featured a diminution of funds, even if there have been an increased social demand for them. On the whole, the programmes to be presented can be also associated to the critical condition of the Romanian educational system after 1990, when it experienced a chronic sub-funding.

The National Programme “Roll Bread and Milk”

The national programme known under the name of “Roll Bread and the Milk” was launched in 2002 in compliance with the ordinance OUG no. 96/ 2002. Articles 1 and 2 of the Order no. 96/ 2002 stipulate that pupils attending grades 1 to 4 in state-owned educational institutions are to be offered free bakery and milk products within a daily allowance of 7.000 lei per pupil. This sum includes the price of the products, their transportation, distribution and storage, if case be. It is also to be updated every year by Government decision and in accordance with evolution of prices and taxes. Only pupils present in classes are entitled to receive it on daily basis according to the educational calendar and only for the periods of attendance.

The programme was initially intended to children in *primary public education* and it was further extended to preschool education with normal educational programme and public and private elementary schools (Law 426/ 2003 and especially OUG no. 95/ 2008 enforced by Law 32/ 2009). From its starting date, the programme funding and management have followed a devious route from

governmental to district and local levels to be currently funded by accessing European aid / funds from the European Union. All operations related to the accession of these funds have been in the charge of the Agency for Payments and Interventions in Agriculture – APIA. APIA actions in relation to the programme we are dealing with are in compliance with the Romanian and European legislation in force. The Romanian legislation on the APIA's actions includes government ordinances and decisions and they focus on delivery of bakery and milk products to pupils in grades 1-8 and preschoolers (Ordinances no. 9/ 2002, no. 96/ 2013 and Decisions no. 761/ 2011, no. 714/ 2008, no. 1628/ 2008). Guidelines for granting the community aid for milk supply in educational institutions, as a reference to all measures undertaking through the aforementioned legislation, stipulate the scope of the European funding; it refers to the distribution free of charge or low price of milk and some milk products to children attending pre-schools and schools (Guidelines for granting the aid, chapter Purpose of the measure) for the time of children's attendance (not during holidays). As for the European regulations, it deals with a series of rules and regulations, among which the Council regulation no. (CE) 1234/ 2007 as regards the common organisation of agricultural markets and some specific directives on specific agricultural products (Single SMO Regulation), the Commission Regulation (CE) 657/ 2008 as regards establishment of norms for the application of the Council Regulation mentioned above, etc.

Due to some further interventions, the food provision scheme has been diversified and it therefore included some dairy products as well (yogurt, cheese) and more bakery products (biscuits and wafers). In 2010, another national complementary programme was launched, and social actors came to know it as “Apples in Schools”, amended by the OUG no. 24/ 2010 as regards the implementation of the programme intended to encourage consumption of fresh fruits in schools. Funds allocated to the programme under analysis constantly increased according to two complementary directions: on the one hand, it was due to the increased number of beneficiaries, and, on the other hand, to the increased financial allowance for milk and bakery products for daily provision of each pupil.

Pedagogical Effects of the Programme “Roll Bread and Milk”

With deep poverty of a large part of the Romanian population, the introduction of the “roll bread and milk” scheme has preponderantly social motivation. Nevertheless, whenever assessment of the programme was carried out another side of its establishment was constantly mentioned: it dealt with the difficult situation of education after the 90s since the social and economic level has decreased and poverty has eventually represented one of the reasons for school dropout, the social intervention under the form of food provision to children from educational institutions constitutes a measure in favour of positively controlling and influencing the lack of attendance and dropout.

In Romania, effects of this programme are beyond any doubt positive. In a qualitative analysis of this national / social work intervention in relation to children and school age youths (Arpinte *et al.*, 2009), the authors show that social and educational actors consider that the “*roll bread and milk*” scheme answers some real needs within poor communities and families, while its universality contributes to a better equity and avoids discrimination among children from disadvantaged groups. Nevertheless, cumulated concrete experiences related to its implementation have emphasised some *shortcomings* and have implicitly maintain some *controversies*. Hence, once it has been launched but also along with its development, perceptions on the national “*roll bread and milk*” scheme have induced interesting debates on its expected and effectively achieved effects.

Participants to this study coordinated by Arpinte *et al.* (2009) indicates *perfectible aspects* of the programme which, given some nuances, would diminish its main benefits. The following problems are being aimed at:

- Milk and bakery products are wasted in urban area while in rural environment they are exhausted every day. The results of another study coordinated by Prejbeanu *et al.* (2010), accounts (based on a research with a non-random sample, conducted with primary school pupils in urban and rural area) that only 39.1%, and respectively 20.9% of primary school pupils consume the roll bread and the milk on daily basis, and the social and economic status of their family represents the main factor determining these behaviours.
- Products having been provided would be often of a doubtful quality and children negatively react to the monotony of their daily snack.
- Transportation and provision of daily snacks in schools are influenced both by problems related to the national infrastructure and by improper material facilities in schools, especially in rural areas.
- Teachers would often claim time investment and administrative effort required by daily management of the programme that should control every day to the prejudice of proper teaching.

Despite all the aforementioned limits, the programme has been considered as a positive social act. At the same time, it is received as a necessary condition from which derives all support to the purpose of sustaining pupils from disadvantaged families. More improvements are therefore required in relation to transportation, preservation and provision at the same time with diversification of daily food (to be able to properly meet the needs for attractiveness as mentioned by children). As a matter of fact, as far as the quality of product is concerned, some of the previously mentioned studies (Arpinte *et al.*, 2009) suggest that the daily snack should be replaced by a hot meal, integrated within larger and more complex social and educational programmes, such as after-school schemes, while it warns

on their consistent budgetary implications, especially in the case of preserving the universality of this social service.

As for public controversies on the “roll bread and milk” scheme, they are generated by the *universality of the measure*; regardless of the social and economic status of their families, children would benefit from the scheme as mentioned by the law, which would often mean a waste of budgetary resources, especially if we consider that the number of children in difficult situations have been increased within economic crisis.

Beyond any controversy, the complementary educational programmes to cover nutritional needs of children attending schools are undisputedly necessary in Romania, and reasons overpass social motivation. The pedagogues (together with other professional categories, of course) appreciate the initiative also through the point of view of arguments given by nutritionists. They mention significant associations between nutrition in schools and academic performances, although the benefits, in their turn, are divergently signified. While some research concludes that effects are rather limited and suggests some social and educational interventions (Powell *et al.*, 1998), other mentions that clear educational performances should be established according to nutritional provision especially in early life (Glewwe, Jacoby & King, 2001). Of course, the need for healthy food constitutes a fundamental human need, and meeting this requirement in the early ages is even more important. Even for this only obvious reason, social services in charge with nutrition of children and young people included in an educational programme constitute a legitimate concern.

A special mention should be made in relation to a pedagogically priority benefit of this social intervention whose value correspondingly increases due to it; a programme of its weight provides the teaching staff with additional *opportunities to promote education for a healthy life and nutritional education*, which are currently relevant dimensions to be more and more intensely addressed to, due to their finalities and educational contents of many educational systems and under the pressure of health depreciation of children and young people. Within even more diversified frameworks (scientific studies, social surveys, education, etc.) there has been a concern on the alarming incidence of eating disorders such as anorexia, bulimia, increased number of children and young people with obesity, etc.

There is a last issue to require for analytical attention within this study and we launch it by an interrogation: are there any explicit connections between the Romanian programmes of this type and educational policies and services? A thorough look on it would discover these associations in programme-related documents but also in studies which connect descending tendencies of school dropout to introduction of the programme “*roll bread and milk*” in 2002. According to the *National Reforming Programme 2011-2013*, amended by the Romanian Government in 2011, increased educational participation of children from

disadvantaged environments can be achieved by integrated social and educational measures, and it mentions programmes to support families and children intended to fight poverty and social exclusion; the daily snack scheme on daily basis is mentioned among these. Different sources reveal that social benefits like the “*roll bread and milk*” scheme are complementary measures to encourage educational inclusion and decreased school dropout, especially in compulsory education (e.g., recent reports of the Institute of Educational Sciences, 2011 and UNICEF Romania, 2012). Between 2002 and 2013 the school dropout rate has constantly decreased in the Romanian educational system and it even registered an intensified diminution between 2007 and 2008 (UNICEF Romania).

Outcomes of some social and educational research would also claim that there is an association between early school dropout rate and social benefits like the “*roll bread and milk*” schemes. In a qualitative analysis centred on school dropout in urban educational institutions, conducted in 2011, F. Mihalache (2011) drew the attention on the fact that the daily snack would no longer be an incentive to determine children from poor families to attend school. On the other hand, in 2003, one year after the commencement of the programme, G. Neagu, L. Stoica and L. Surdu (2003) claimed that this social benefit should be directed towards pupils coming from disadvantaged social families and groups and that access those food products should require daily attendance of the educational programmes. The aforementioned measure is currently included in the regulation framework related to other social services of this type and it contributes to lower school dropout rate.

Provision of Educational Supplies for Pupils

An important aid to pupils in poor life situations has been given by provision of material aids to help children attend educational activities in preparatory classes and grades 1 – 8. Law 126/ 2002 (OUG no. 33/ 2001) on provision of educational supplies stipulates in article 1 that this facility is granted to pupils enrolled in primary or elementary schools, in public educational institutions, who attend full-time education and are in care of the family whose average net monthly wage for each family member, gained in the month of July of each year, is no higher than 50% of the national minimum gross wage.

From the perspective of social assistance, the initiative to provide access to basic materials needed for educational participation is mentioned in article 2 of the regulation which stipulates that funding for procurement of educational supplies is included into the section of “Social Assistance” in the budget of school inspectorates. Funds are allocated by the Ministry of National Education through county school inspectorates and inspectorate of Bucharest, and the annual amount is established at the beginning of the school year, while its procedures are to be

renewed and updated periodically, and applied between the 1st of July and 1st of October each year.

Different Categories of Scholarships to Children and Young People Attending Schools

The social assistance component of the intervention through scholarships granted to children and young people in Romania (who attend pre-higher and higher education) is to be established especially through need-based allowance or social aid. In public educational institutions, scholarships are granted to pupils attending full-time education and they are supported from the public budget. The Romanian legislation mentions four categories of scholarships: performance-based, merit-based, study-based and need-based scholarships. Their related significance, as the Order 5576/ 2012, article 2 mentions, aims at both providing for aid and social protection and at encouraging high achieving students to maintain themselves on high performance levels. Extended support to children and youths attending schools is also provided by private scholarships granted by legal or physical entities as established by the terms of law. More precisely, the Law 376/ 2004 stipulates that private scholarship represents a study support granted by a private or a physical entity to a beneficiary and it is based on a contract. The beneficiary might be a pupil, a student a PhD student or a postgraduate attending courses in an accredited higher institution in Romania or abroad. It could be granted for the whole study period or for a shorter period, it is established by a contract and it should cover at least expenses for eating, accommodation and support but it should not be lower than the minimum wage.

National Programme of Social Protection „Money for Secondary School”

The programme addresses the needs of teenagers attending full-time education in secondary schools or schools of arts and professions, and it provides public monthly financial aid (HG no. 1488/ 2004) to pupils in care of families (whose monthly gross income per each family member, gained in the last three months preceding application is less than 150 Ron) and for young people who are beneficiaries of protection measures, of guardianship or ward ship (the income requirements are the same).

The Programme “Euro 200” to Encourage Acquisition of Computers

Law 269/ 2004 stipulates a monthly allowance of financial aids to pupils and/or students with a view to encourage acquisition of computers while considering some social criteria. It is intended to young people attending accredited public or private educational institutions, of maximum 26 of age (who come from families

whose monthly gross income is no higher than 150Ron for each family member). The financial support, stipulated by article 2 in the aforementioned law, represents the equivalent of 200 euro for a computer (conversion is made according to the exchange rate of the Romanian National Bank).

The Programme „A Second Chance”

As a component of the *Phare Programme: Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups* implemented by the Ministry of National Education, with financial aid from the European Union, the programme has come into force by the Order of M.E.C.T.S. no. 2268/ 2007 and has been further updated by the order of the same ministry regarding the application of the programme “The Second Chance” (order 5248/2011). The initiative refers to development of the programmes both in primary education and lower secondary education. If the programme “The Second Chance” for primary education aims at supporting children, young people and adults to help them coping up with primary education (it is therefore opened to all those who did not complete this educational level and who are four years older than the corresponding age to primary education – in compliance with article 1 of the aforementioned order), the similar programme for secondary education aims at people who are over 14 years and who could not complete elementary education for social reasons. The intention is to complete and graduate basic education within compulsory education, and to train beneficiaries towards achieving a professional qualification, in a certain field (article 1).

The European context of social assistance measures in Romanian schools

A study from the early 2000 based on complex regression models, signed by Hokenmaier (2002), highlighted closed associations between educational and social policies. The authors drew attention on the fact that their findings are relevant mainly to industrialised states, in times of economic prosperity, and demographic and social stability (*i.e.*, reduced fluctuations of school populations and vulnerable social categories in need of aids from social services, especially the elderly).

A recent report published in 2013 by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA, Eurydice and Policy Support) considers the situation of some countries affected by the economic crisis of recent years. The report mentioned the fact that budgetary deficits in European countries deeply affected by the economic crisis determined significant decreases of educational allowances, in general, and of funds intended to support access to education of disadvantaged

groups. The international analysts examined current economic and social evolutions in the world in terms of “post-crisis” measures. Nevertheless, according to public perception, the financial and economic crisis has not passed beyond yet and what is the most suggestive is that states are still finding difficulties in aiding social and educational assisted systems at the same level and with the same intervention instruments as before the crisis. Next to several European countries, Romania belongs to the group of countries having operated some cut-offs in the budget for education for two successive years (2010 and 2011) to return with a hesitant increase in 2012 (Eurydice Report, 2013, p. 11). The crisis determined some decreases of the income of the educational employees (professors, auxiliary teaching staff, technical and administrative staff), lower investment in lifelong learning and especially reduced financial support to children and young people for the purpose to encourage and facilitate participation to education. In the same Eurydice Report it is noted that *“Spending on financial support for students has increased steadily between 2000 and 2009 but from 2010, support schemes for pupils and students are subject to increasing restrictions in education budgets.”* (p. 14).

Within the European context, decreased budgetary allowances for education have been translated by different approaches from one state to another (Eurydice Report, 2013). Although measures of educational support and assistance (especially for social disadvantaged groups) have not changed after 2010, the decision makers identified nevertheless a series of strategies to reduce social expenses for education among which we mention: natural decrease of the number of beneficiaries of child allowances, as these social benefits became conditioned by educational attendance; restructuring of the granting criteria for disadvantaged people, etc. Programmes providing for meals to children and youths within educational institutions have suffered from lower financial allowance in some European states but nevertheless (as one can see from comparative statistical data – the Eurydice Report, 2013, p. 71-84), funding for school transportation benefited from some increases between 2010 and 2012 in some states (including Romania). In several European educational systems parents would also financially contribute to supporting educational activities (after-school programmes, extracurricular activities, teaching aids, etc.).

This reality brings back to discussions the “equity” and “equality of chances” as central values of social and educational policies in European countries. As long as children and young people coming from families with low social and economic status or belonging to other vulnerable social groups do not benefit from integrated social assistance for educational and social inclusion, distinctive social stratification characterising many European countries will replicate, and it will be difficult to remove it only based on family and individual resources. Furthermore under budgetary restrictions generated by the crisis, economic and implicitly social discrepancies among the European states will be preserved through educational systems.

An interesting analysis on the effect of social stratification co-generated by social and educational policies has been introduced by Beblavý, Thumand & Veselkova (2011), who propose an analysis of the phenomenon through the imperfect and often criticised lens built around the influential work of Esping-Andersen (1990), *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, in which *three types of welfare regimes* are described: liberal, conservatory and social-democratic. They have been associated with different tendencies to balance educational policies providing for equal opportunities and policies of social insurances (Hega & Hokenmaier, 2002). Based on a model of analysis which modifies coordinates suggested by Esping-Andresen, the aforementioned authors claim that there are two major groups of states: equalitarian states in terms of educational and social assistance systems (which would found their policies on values as equity and equality of chances) and non-equalitarian states which would leave access to education and training to the care of family, community and free market and would therefore replicate social stratification. Between these two major groups there are obviously subgroups of states which distinguish themselves through different combinations of the two tendencies. Central and Eastern European countries are associated to a distinct group, and Romania is included in the subcategory of developing welfare states. The authors would draw our attention on the fact that equalitarian social policies always provide for equity and equal chances, but policy decisions should be contextualised according to relevant social and historic factors.

Similar conclusions also emerge from studies on social and educational policies initiated at the beginning of the recent economic crisis, which consider information related to the first decade of this century (Jakobi & Teltemann, 2009): the same *educational outcomes* rely on different combinations of decisions and measures, but these subtle mechanisms have never been elucidated. Nevertheless, the recent decades could be characterised by major changes of educational and social policies, including pressures exerted by transnational constraints (see reduction of budgetary expenses caused by international funding mechanisms of the states facing economic difficulties, reorientation of professional training policies as a result of global competition in a knowledge-based society, effect of international evaluation studies on the policies referring to access and selection for a certain educational streaming, etc.)

Conclusions

The informational assembly within this study sustains several conclusive observations, presented in the following:

- Poverty and social exclusion are not only conceived as general social issues, but they are equally seen as problems of the educational system and there have been attempts to identify valuable counterattack and control experiences inside it. It is about a relative control, measured according to acting levers characteristic to educational institutions. In Romania, as in many other European countries, school represents an institution for child protection. Measures for social assistance and protection primarily deal with children and young people (to attract them towards school and to keep them within that institution until completion of studies, especially *basic education* which integrates a year of preschool education, primary and elementary education) and, secondly, they are intended to the teaching staff, auxiliary teaching staff, technical and administrative staff (these categories have not been considered in this study). Actions in Romania are included to larger concerns within Central and Eastern European area regarding the aforementioned issues. Issues on inclusive education and equality of chances are to be found more and more on the agendas of international meetings. For example, at the end of this year (December 2013), in Istanbul, Turkey a conference is held with participation of ministers of education from Central and East European countries and the debates will focus on measures plans intended to reduce the number of children excluded from educational systems; the announced plans rely on four principles (extremely relevant within current analysis): *Each child in school, Each child learns, Each child attends early learning and is included in time in the system and Each child is aided by effective and real governmental policies.*
- General situation in Romanian schools has been marked after 1990 and up to the present by maintained chronic sub-funding; this has been constantly stated by the political decision-makers, and therefore for the educational system the so-called period of crisis (after 2008) presents similar characteristics if compared with preceding years.
- Governmental social programmes regarding nutrition of children attending schools (especially addressed in this very study) come to complete the more complex picture of programmes and services intended to families in difficult situations or belonging to disadvantaged social groups. Even if effects of the national programmes are not yet well documented, we consider that all aspects having been mentioned in previous paragraphs claim the need to integrate these social services to educational programmes and

measures, aiming not only at increasing social inclusion through education, but also at enhancing chances of development according to a (physically, psychically, academically, etc.) normal rhythm for all direct beneficiaries of the educational system, and especially for those from vulnerable social groups.

- The analysis of educational policies assumed for the years to come in the European states indicate a sum of priorities in this field which definitely reveal the assistance-related priorities of the government and can be explained by the social effects of the crisis, especially on vulnerable groups. The priority directions of the European education are the following: to render expenses for education effective (especially through restructuring of the educational networks – see decisions on merging educational institutions in Romania, which has been put into practice since 2010); to develop specific programmes for adult education, intended to disadvantaged groups (professional qualification and re-qualification with a view to increased employability); to increase social inclusion through education of children and young people in disadvantaged groups; to enhance teaching attractiveness, through income rises and benefits for professional lifelong training of teachers; to encourage social innovation through additional investments to higher education and research (Eurydice Report, 2013: 15).
- As for the optimal balancing of educational and assistance-related services for the child and the family, political priorities of the European states give an unclear image on future governmental intentions. Kameran (2003), in her analysis on the services of early education in Central and East European countries (founded on the model proposed by Esping-Andersen), suggests taking an integrated consideration into account when dealing with policies and services targeting the family and the child, on the one hand, and early education, on the other hand. The author draws our attention on the fact that the Northern European model on early education, for instance, although it stands for a genuine reference point to many of the changes of public policies promoted by Central and Eastern European countries, may be unrealistic for the latter. The motivation lies in the government central position when it deals with financial support to social and educational services for early childhood: in the absence of any real possibility to support early education and services for protection of child and family, many of the analysed states have chosen to support family (through increases of the amount of child allowances, regulation of financial support to vulnerable families, encouragement of the professional reinsertion of mothers after giving birth, etc.) to the disadvantage of direct investment to early education. Educational services for children between 0 and 3 years old are not but exceptionally supported by public funding in Eastern European area,

but the West European analysts consider that it is due to economic constraints. These states practically find themselves in the position to “choose” between public support to educational services and social assistance to the family and the child, especially when it deals with early childhood. The same study (Kameran, 2003) concludes that decision-making models to further found educational and social policies in Central and Eastern European countries should be rather eclectic and open to some innovative approaches, if they are to succeed in providing for an optimal balance between educational support and assistance-related intervention.

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