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The impact of governmental programs for family protection.

Case study on single-parent family

*Nicolina RACOCEANU**, *Aniela MATEI***, *Bertha SĂNDULEASA****,
*Mihaela GHENȚA*****

Abstract

The family remains a core value for European citizens even though the reality of families has become much more complex and diversified. Single-parent families are a particularly visible example of this trend, as we are witnessing today a growing number of this type of families. They are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty - it is estimated that one out of four lone parent families is poor according to EU criteria. Support for lone parents cannot exclusively rely on economic benefits but also depended on broader measures which would deal with the fact that lone parents' poverty is not only economic but also social, cultural and educational. Based on these issues, the article is structured in two parts. The first part shows the evolution of single-parent families in Europe and how the issue is reflected within the Romanian governmental programs for social assistance. The analysis was based on legal regulations on services and benefits relating to single-parent families, combined with statistical data provided by Eurostat and the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection and The National Institute for Statistics. For the related to the issue presented. The second

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part presents the results of a research measuring the effectiveness of services and family benefits among single-parents families. The investigation was conducted within Giurgiu County, using the questionnaire as a method for gathering information. Data interpretation was made using techniques of descriptive statistical analysis.

Keywords: single-parent family; social assistance and protection; social services and benefits for single-parent family; family policies; research methodology.

Single parent families within the frame of family policies

The family remains a core value of European citizens even though the reality of families has become much more complex and diversified. Single-parent families are a particularly visible example of this trend. In a broad sense, the single-parent family means a family consisting of a single parent who has one or more dependent children. Number of single parents has increased in the last 20 years both at European and national level. European countries are characterized by a variety of single-parent families' types. (Chambaz, 2000) The most common reasons for the existence of single parent family are the increasing rate of divorce or separation, death of one parent, the fecundity outside the marriage and conception changes in the last decades on traditionally accepted notion of „family”. Whatever the causes, we are witnessing today a growing number of single parent families. But the existing statistics on the extent of single-parent families are not always a reflection of the reality since on the one hand, there are different views as to the definition of lone parent families, and on the other hand, the data that has been collected does not cover all the aspects of this family situation. These families are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty – it is estimated that one out of four lone families is poor according to EU criteria. Support for lone parents could not exclusively rely on economic benefits but depend also on broader measures which would deal with the fact that the poverty of lone parents is not only economic but also social, cultural and educational.

Trends on the evolution of family in Europe

It is estimated that the European single parents represent 14% of all households with children (Prud'homme, 2003). „*Report on the evolution of family in Europe*” drawn by the European network of the Institute for Family Policies highlights the worrying developments related to the family in the EU Member States. The overall EU marriages are becoming less frequent and late, and divorces are more numerous (Țarcă, 2007). Couples evolve towards smaller households and less

stable, couples without children, households consisting of a single person or single parent families. According to EUROSTAT data, nearly 2 million children (33.9%), a child in 3 is born out of wedlock in the EU. For the year 2007, the highest rate of birth is in Estonia with 57.84% and the smallest rate is in Greece with 5.81%. Romania has 26.67% births outside the family for the year 2007, as it is shown in *Figure 1* bellow.

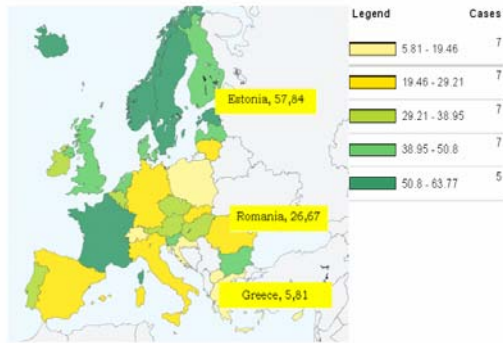


Figure 1. - Live births outside the marriage - Share of all live births (%).

Note: data are computed by authors using the data retrieved from EUROSTAT 2007. Data for Island, Spain and United Kingdom are for year 2006.

In Romania, according to data provided by the Population Census 2002, single parents have 13.4% of all families being spread different between places of residence: 7.7% to 5.7% in urban and rural areas. Because in the most cases of divorce (over 90%) mothers are those who receive the tutorship of the child, most nuclear single parent families consist in mothers with one or more children (84.5%), the rest being fathers with children. Single-parent families often face multiple difficulties in terms of employment, high unemployment rates or shorter career paths. They often hold underpaid jobs. It is also difficult for these families to have access and remain in the labour market partly because child-care facilities are not sufficiently available or that the levels of child benefits are too low in the national systems of social protection. The level and structure of household incomes are determined by the number of income providers, in particular the number of people employed and the type of activity which they carried, so in most cases the incomes of single parent families are below the national average, especially when the number of children in the household increases (Preda, 2007). Due to insufficient income, in most cases, single parents are facing poverty, economic and sometimes economical insecurity and social exclusion. For the year 2000, at European level, 27% of single parents are poor; their level of living is lower than

half the median standard of living in their countries (Chambaz, 2000). In Romania, according to a survey entitled „*Family Budget Survey*”, conducted at national level by the National Institute of Statistics, average monthly gross income of single parent households fell systematically below the national average. In 2007 they were 38% below the average monthly income in total household income. It is very important to fight against poverty and social exclusion which hits single parents families because this can have long term effects, including a negative impact on the education of the children. A greater participation of single-parents in the labour market as well as an improved access to higher quality jobs is essential in order to reduce the number of poor people. Moreover, conciliation of family and professional life should also be promoted through the development of childcare facilities or care for dependent persons. European Commission invites member States to take all the necessary measures to respect the commitments made in Barcelona to increase, by 2010, the offer of childcare which should be made available for at least 90% of children between 3 and 6 years of age and 33% of children below the age of three years old. Such measures would enable single parents to have access to the labour market by relieving them from their family responsibilities.

All European countries have social and family policies more or less targeted towards single parents with the main objective of tackling poverty. Overall social benefits, except pensions represent, on average, 30% of single parents resources. Without social transfers 54% of single parents were poor instead of 27% (Prud'homme, 2003). The National Action Plans for social inclusion which are being presented by member States since 2001 within the context of the open coordination method, have confirmed that living in a poor family, in particular with three or more children or in a single parent family constitutes in many member States, one of the main risk factors for poverty and social exclusion.

European Policy for supporting family

Family's vulnerability to the economic and social changes imposed by the government special attention to the problems it faces. Extremely complex problems related to family and family policies are currently available topics of much concern in the Member States once with the enlargement and free movement rights of workers, but also because of the general phenomenon that manifests in all European countries, with different intensities from one state to another, such as declining birth rates, ageing, the dissolution of traditional family structures, free choice of family patterns and impact on family law, changing the traditional roles within the family, women's empowerment and increasing employment rate for

women, the need for measures to enable a reconciliation between family and professional life (Garfinkel, 1996). Given the importance of the issue of lone parent families, the European Commission launched in 2005, within the framework of the community program against poverty and social exclusion, a study on poverty and social exclusion of lone parent families. The aim of this study was to analyse the reasons these families are more threatened by poverty as well as the obstacles they face in terms of access to employment and to consider how the member States have tried to solve the problem. Particular attention was paid to problems that single mothers are faced with.

At the beginning of XXI century, family policies continue to sustain the family in today's societies because it needs protection and appropriate assistance to perform its functions with dignity and full autonomy and responsibility among society. *Recommendation Nr. R (94) 14 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on coherent and integrated family policies* stated that it's important for family policies to take account of the plurality of family structures and their specific needs. Construction of the European Union required a convergence of social protection policies in Member States towards common objectives and criteria concerning sufficient resources and benefits in social security schemes (*Council Recommendation 92/442/EEC of 27 July 1992 and 92/441/EEC of 24 June 1992*). In general, European law addresses family issues around several themes (free movement of migrant workers and access to family benefits, equality between men and women and in particular the issue of reconciliation between family and professional life, improving social protection), but hasn't agreed on a convergence in terms of family policy objectives. Concrete measures on the family, within various recommendations or directives, began to be taken only during the '90s after the impulse given by the „*Communication on family policies*” as published by the European Commission (COM (89) 363 final) in August 1989. This document stresses the importance of family for the first time and highlights the dependence and vulnerability of the family to economic and social context, the importance of giving a stronger emphasis on family size in the policies, the protection of child rights, reconciliation between family and professional life, support for the families in need (especially low-income families and single parents). A first acquis was transposed in 1996 through the *Council Directive on parental leave* (Directive 96/34/EC). To track trends and developments in family policies in Member States and particularly to assess the impact of these policies on the family it was established an European Observatory on family policies, named after 1999 “*European Observatory on Family Affairs*”. It was closed in 2004. In view of the current situation, it is very important to reopen this Observatory which will enable useful statistical information.

Family within the national social assistance system

To estimate the family protection policies in Romania, and their impact on the family and its members, we should take a look at the economic and social context in which it has evolved recently. An overwhelming influence on the development of a family had the political, economical and social events, which the Romanian people experienced since 1990, events which produced changes in structure, mentality, lifestyle and behavior in a relatively short period. Poverty, high unemployment rate, child desertion and the increase the number of abortions, the vagabondage, increasing crime rate, are just some pictures that marks the Romanian society in this period. Analysis of the macroeconomic indicators shows a high rate of inflation especially in the first part of the transition, a sharp decline in real incomes of the population, a significant reduction in jobs through economic restructuring. These imbalances have strongly affected the labor market, damaging the relationship between the active and inactive population and employment rate, events with negative impact on families and its members, especially on the single parents. In recent years, our country is shaping a more explicit family policy through better targeted family support programs. They were developed a series of programs to protect children in difficulty in order to reduce poverty in families with children, through growth and diversification of family allowances, scholarships and social benefits for children coming from poor families. The social services system for families in difficulty experienced also a significant development and diversification as a result of the emerging of the legal framework in the field. It has been improved the institutionalized service system, and have begun to develop services at home for the elderly and for disabled persons (Racoceanu et al., 2009). Some objectives of the family policies have been included in the overall context of social policies. A number of measures to encourage the birth and maternity protection were taken into account by the social security and assistance systems, from health care for mother and baby throughout pregnancy, holidays and attractive allowance during the leave for raising a small child (by age of two years, three years for a sick child). Social assistance system has an important role in developing family support policies in general and families with dependent children in particular. During the 20 years it has been a profound reform in the system, both in terms of organization system and a method of financing and types of benefits in cash and in kind. Social programs have been directed in recent years to protect the family and children and were more complex and more focused on their objectives.

The National Strategic Report concerning social protection and social inclusion (2008-2010) shows based on existing statistical data, that families with children (especially single parents and families with many children) are the most exposed at risk of social exclusion. Overcoming of such risk involves the development of complex strategies which include ensuring adequate income for family needs,

reconciliation between professional and family life by developing services that encourage a return to life of mothers with children, building a proper social benefits system which encourage dependency but not return to work. For all categories of people in need, the national social assistance system of Romania introduced the minimum income guarantee schemes as a tool to prevent poverty and social exclusion. Current architecture of the system, as it is described in Law no. 47/2006, has two components: *social services* and *benefits*.

Social services

Social services are defined in art. 5, letter d of Law 47/2006 as a „*whole set of measures and actions taken to meet the social needs of individuals, families, groups or communities to prevent and overcome some difficult situations, vulnerability or dependency, raising the quality of life and promote social cohesion*”. Typology of social services takes into account *the nature of social services, the provider and the place of supply*. As to the nature of social services offered, families can receive primary services and specialized services. The first involve identifying and limiting the risk situations and those specialised are more complex and include support and assistance measures aimed at „*maintaining, restoring or family capacity development ...*” (article 10, paragraph 3 from Law 47/2006 on the national social assistance system). In addition, they require trained and qualified personnel to provide social assistance: social workers, psychologists, legal counselors. *In terms of provider*, social services can be provided by natural or legal persons, public or private. Public social services are provided by the social assistance and child protection directions at county level and by the public services of social assistance at local level. Private providers of social services may be associations, foundations, religious cults, authorized individuals. Both the public and private providers must be accredited and must meet the quality standards imposed by legislation. In terms of *place of supply*, the services may be provided at home or institutionalised. The Nomenclature of social services (Hotărârea de Guvern 539/2006) establishes various forms taken by social services for children and families with children but also for other categories of disadvantaged persons, namely:

- reception services and temporary housing, medical assistance and care, emotional support, psychological counseling, family and community re-integration (in emergency reception centers);
- education, accommodation on indefinite period, recovery and rehabilitation, socialization and leisure, child and family counseling, legal advice (in foster care, maternal centers, day care centers for children from families in difficulty for children with disabilities, counseling centers and support for parents and children, including single parent family and children from such families);

- social counseling, emotional support or psychological counseling for child and family (in assistance and support centers for rehabilitation of the child with psychosocial problems);
- hotline, legal, social and psychological help to children and family, emotional support, family and community reintegration (in counseling centers for abused children, neglected, exploited, in centers for preventing abuse, neglect or exploitation, in centers for training and support the integration or reintegration of the child in the family);
- support and care of family type, education, socialization, sociological counseling, emotional support, family reintegration (in centers providing family type services, in centers for monitoring, assistance and support to pregnant women prone to abandon their child, and coordination and information centers for street children);
- hotline, information and education, legal and psychological counseling, medical care, reception and temporary accommodation for victims of domestic violence (in urgent reception centers, recovery centers, support centers for aggressors centers to prevent and to combat domestic violence).

In addition, the government program for 2009-2012 has to increase the number of nurseries and their inclusion in the classification of social services for families, development of childcare services at home, reducing the number of institutionalised children through reintegration within the natural family and family support extended.

Current legislation covers also the approach and provision of the social services for families with children, as a process with several stages: *the initial assessment* – the needs that families are facing, the *development plan for social action* - the types of social services for which family in need has been declared eligible, *comprehensive assessment of family needs* - identifying difficulties and problems facing the family, including analysis of the family living environment, *development of an appropriate plan* of social services, *implementation* of this plan, *ongoing monitoring*, cost assessment - cost versus efficiency and/ effectiveness and *assessment of family's satisfaction*.

Social benefits

Social protection of families and children includes, in addition to various types of social services, family benefits. The family benefits comprise family allowances and also social benefits, allowances and facilities to support families with children and poor families being in risk of social exclusion. Family benefits are granted in amounts that are periodically updated and, depending on their type, involve assessment of family income, the context in which the family lives and grows the state of health or family dependence.

Family allowances „have regard to birth, education and maintenance of children” (Art. 17 paragraph 2 of Law 47/2006) and include: state allowance for children (0-18 years and over 18 years while attending high school or vocational courses), allowance for newborn children, the complementary family allowance and support allowance for single-parent family, monthly food allowance for children infected with HIV/AIDS. According to the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection, the number of beneficiaries of *state allowance for children* has decreased continuously since 2004 when they were 4,228,155 beneficiaries to 3,963,278 children in the first quarter of 2009. In the case of the *allowance for newborn children*, the decrease is even more significant if we consider the decrease in the number of beneficiaries from 185,091 in 2004 to 51,105 of newborns in the first quarter of 2009. Starting from January of 2009, the amount of child allowances is 42 RON, and it should be annually increased by government decision. The amount of the newborn allowance is 230 RON from January 2009. *The complementary family allowance* is regulated in order to support those nuclear families whose net income per family member is below the average national salary. For the first quarter of 2009 the minimum gross national salary is 600 RON. Complementary family allowance has different amounts depending on the number of children from 50 RON for the family with one child to 70 RON for the family with four or more children. The data of Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection show that the amounts provided under this type of social benefit fell continuously during the period 2004-2009 (the 2009 level was less than half from the level in 2004, respectively 283,962,380 RON in 2004 compared with 93,011,767 RON in 2009) along with the decrease in the number of beneficiaries for the same period. *Support allowance for single-parent parents* is granted to families consisting of one person and children aged up to 18 years living with the single parent, if the net monthly income per member of the family is clearly below the minimum net national. Similarly to the complementary allowance, different amounts are provided. They gradually increase depending on the number of dependent children from 70 RON for a family with one child up to 90 RON for family with four or more children. The amounts provided are also going down from 122.314.240 RON in 2004 to 43.333.537 RON in the first trimester of 2009. *Monthly food allowance for children infected with HIV/AIDS* answers to the prevention and protection measures of people infected with HIV/AIDS but also to the needs of families with an adult member or child suffering, whether hospitalised or ambulatory treatment. Allowance is given for the number of days of every month and varies between 364 RON and 403RON for adults and 308 RON - 341 RON for children.

The second element of the social benefits system granted to family in Romania is social allowances. This component comes in support of families with insufficient incomes to cover the minimum needs of life, situation established on the basis of a social inquiry. For the amounts paid, one of the members of the

family has the obligation to provide monthly actions or works of local interest, in proportion to the amount of social allowance. From January 1, 2009, the social allowance ranges between 225 RON and 462 RON and failure to comply the obligation of work results in suspension of the allowance.

Indemnities are provided in order to sustain families with children through raising and education and care. The main types indemnities for the families with children are: *indemnity for child raising and the incentive for child raising* being in case the parent returns to work. This type of indemnity is awarded until the age of 2 years of the child or up to 3 years in the case of disabled child, to those persons who in the year prior to child birth, have earned for 12 months an income subject to income tax. Starting on January 1, 2009, the incentive is granted in the amount of maximum 85% of the average income earned during the last 12 months, but not less than 600 RON. The maximum value is limited at 4000 RON. For the incentive, the value is 100 RON and is added to the social allowance. It is given up to the age of two years of the child and is part of the government program aiming to support the family in raising a child. Those who are not eligible to receive the indemnity for child raising up to 2 or 3 years old in case of the disabled child can receive nursery vouchers. The last cumulates with state allowance for children and also with the incentive for child raising. Nursery vouchers are distributed to eligible employees by the employer and the monthly value is indexed according to the inflation rate as it is stated by the National Institute of Statistics. Funds needed for nursery vouchers but also for the other allowances and indemnities, shall be supported by the state and local budgets. For the first semester of 2009, the value of a nursery voucher is 350RON.

The layette, the emergency allowances, the allowances for heating the house with heat, gas, fuel oil, wood or coal are added to all the family benefits we presented before. *The layette* is a measure sustaining the birth. It is provided only one time, for each child and comprises clothing and care products worth 150 RON. *Emergency allowances* help families being in difficult situations due to natural disasters, fires, accidents or other special situations.

The last part of the present article presents a methodological model to assess the evolution of the single-parent families, starting from the governmental programs focused on family as they were described above. Data were drawn from a larger project which aimed primarily to build and to test a research tool highly replicable. The main scope of the article was to measure the effectiveness of services and family benefits among beneficiaries. In the present paper we extract the information collected for among single-parent families.

Methodological aspects

Main objective of the investigation

The main objective was to build and test a replicable research tool. Using this objective it was achieved a pilot survey in Giurgiu County, from Romania, located in the south of the country, in South-Muntenia region of development. We chose this district because, according to statistics, the county falls between counties with greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. Therefore, knowing the extent to which government programs succeed to support families with children could lead to a better understanding of their social needs and hence a more effective social protection.

The method used

For data collecting it was used a standardized questionnaire because the „*preferences of citizens and their level of satisfaction on actions carried within the public sector are normally determined through questionnaires*” (Popescu et al., 2009).

The purpose of this questionnaire was to measure the effectiveness of family services and benefits among recipients of such services and benefits. The questionnaire included several dimensions, each consisting of specific measurement indicators. The main dimensions of the questionnaire were referred to the socio-demographic characteristics of investigated families and to the governmental action programs to support families in Romania: measures to help families with children; measures to increase family income and quality of family life; measures to reconcile between work and family life; measures to support young families; measures for supporting Roma families.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the household level by interviewing one of the adults from the selected family according to the sampling procedure.

Target group

The target group of the questionnaire-based survey consisted of families with children including single parent families, from Giurgiu County, recipient of social services and benefits. The following categories of families receiving social benefits were concerned: families with children receiving state allowances for children; families receiving the complementary family allowances; families receiving support allowances for mono-parental family; families receiving allow-

ances for new born children, receiving indemnities for child raising, receiving outfits for new born children; families receiving social aid on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income; social housing beneficiary families; families receiving financial aid for newlyweds (aid for family set up, 200 Euros). Analysis of the collected data is going to resume below on the single-parent families.

Sample building

As we said before, basic population consisted of families from Giurgiu County, who benefited of social services and benefits between January 2006 - August 2007. Lists of those beneficiaries, required for the sample extraction, were provided by General Direction for Social Assistance and Child Protection from Giurgiu. From these lists it was designed a sample of 900 people who would be interviewed. Depending on the size of lists, we extracted a *random probabilistic sample* or an *availability sample* for each one of the categories of beneficiaries. The availability sample was selected in situations where, for certain categories of social benefits/services there was a small number of beneficiaries in the above mentioned lists. For each category of beneficiaries a number of questionnaires was allocated and it was specified the sample type.

Data collecting

Data collecting from the field took place from September 17 to October 6, 2007 and it was conducted according to the developed research methodology. The total number of respondents for which questionnaires were validated was 902 respondents.

Results

For this paper we have extracted from the database information collected among single-parent families included in the survey. It should be mentioned that the single-parents sample was an availability sample, due to the low number of single-parent families found in the records of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection in Giurgiu County. Thus, the total number of single parent families included in the survey was 158.

Investigated single-parent families' socio-demographics

From the total number of investigated single-parent families, only 4 families consist of father and child/children, the rest of investigated single parent families consisting of mother and child/children. The average number of children among investigated families was 1.7 children per mono-parental families. Most children were children aged between 7 and 14 years (101 children) and the least were

children aged between 0 and 2 years. Most investigated families were at the time of the survey completion families with children aged between 7 and 14 years (72 families), while the less numerous families were families with children between 0-2 years and families with children aged between 15 and 18 years (38 cases each). In 59.5% of the cases, single-parent family lives with other family members (parents, grandparents, etc.), thus forming an extended family.

Regarding the place of residence, the investigated sample included 148 urban households and only 10 families from rural residential areas (6.3%). Most investigated single-parents completed secondary education (41.1%), 12.7% were parents with no school (Roma people) while 12.7% were high school graduates and only 3.2% of investigated parents were post-secondary graduates and tertiary graduates. Most investigated parents were single-parents of Romanian origin (68.4%), but the investigated sample included also Roma single parents (31%) or other ethnicities (German).

Regarding the marital status of the investigated single-parents, most of them were unmarried persons (61.4%), while 10.8% said that they were living in concubinage at the time of the survey and 15.8% were divorced, the rest being in other situations. Thus, children of investigated single-parent families were generally children resulted out of marriage.

Most single-parents were parents aged between 35 and 44 years (32.3%), but we also found in the investigated population single-parent families of whom head of household had less than 25 years old (24.7%) or whose head of household was aged between 35 and 44 years (27.2%). The rest of the investigated single-parent families were composed of parents aged over 45 years.

Considering the employment status of single-parents enrolled in the survey, most of them were homely persons (86.7%) while only 7% of the investigated single-parents were employed. This means that the vast majority of single parent families depended heavily on incomes obtained from social benefits.

Only 26.6% of the investigated single-parents were living in their own houses. Most investigated parents said they were living with parents (47.5%) in houses owned by parents. Others were living in state rented accommodation (19%) or in a home owned by private individuals (6.3%).

Social services and benefits

Single-parent families declared themselves as in vast majority as beneficiaries of social benefits in cash and only a small number of families referred at social services such as social canteen (25 cases) or services offered by day care centers for various social activities and treatments to elderly or disabled (2 cases). The fact that few single-parent families have received social services is not a surprise

considering the fact that social services for supporting families in Romania are still poorly developed.

On investigated single-parent families' income, only 7% of these families mentioned wages as a source of income. This fact was expected because, as we said before, only a very small number of the investigated parents said they were employed at the time the survey. Most often mentioned as sources of income were *state allowance for children*, *complementary family allowance* and *social aid on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income*, meaning incomes generated by the welfare system.

Concerning the financial value of the income obtained by their families through the welfare system, most respondents said that the revenue helps them in raising their children very little (46.4%), somewhat (30.1%) or not at all (20.3%). Only 2.6% of respondents stated that the income from social assistance helps them to a great extent, as revealed in Figure 2 below. In the same figure, in the graph from the right side, we can see that, although respondents generally state that incomes obtained from the social assistance system helps them in a small extent, they also are the ones who admit that they would not handle the growth and education of their children without such aids, benefits and state allowances.

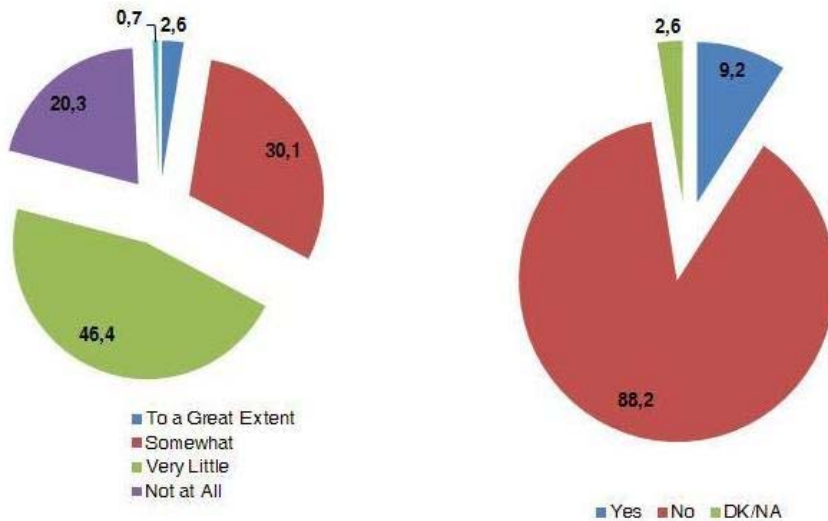


Figure 2. – Social benefits (%)

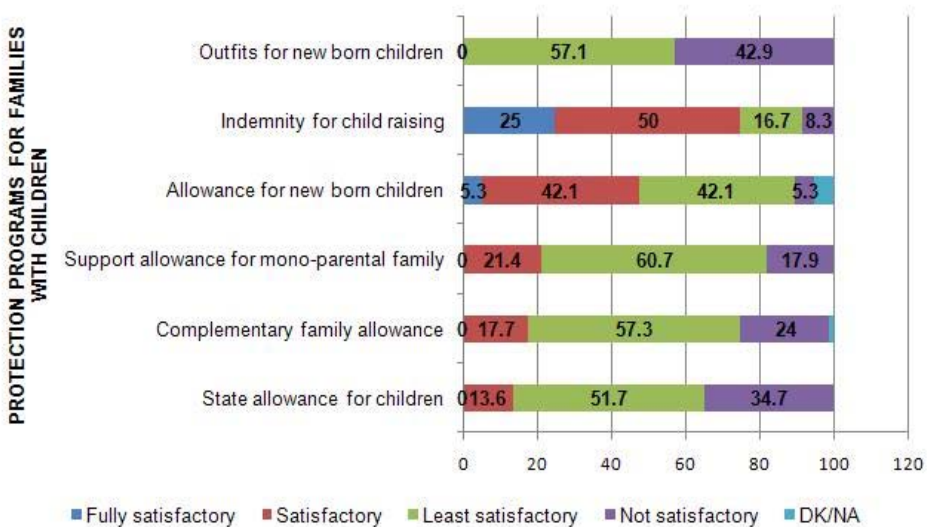
Note: The graph from the left shows to what extent the financial value of the social benefits helps families in raising their children. The graph from the right shows the distribution of the answers when families were asked if they could raise their children in the absence of these benefits.

In terms of respondents' access to benefits, only 15.8% of them mentioned that they encountered difficulties, in order to obtain the right of being beneficiary. Most entries refer to the fact that beneficiaries have waited a long time to resolve their claim because of bureaucracy. Other reasons put forward were referred to the fact that they have lost much time in solving the case because there were many people at the counter who came to seek help. In the following sections we present the situation of single-parent families who received social benefits by the type of programs through which these benefits are offered.

Programs to protect the family with children

The types of social benefits included in these programs are: *state allowance for children, additional allowance for families with children, complementary family allowance, support allowance for mono-parental family, allowance for new born children and indemnity for child rising until the age of 2 years (3 years for a disabled child)*. 97.5% of all investigated single parents said they had received one or more of the social benefits granted to support families with children. State allowance for children was most frequently mentioned as support for families with children (95.5% of investigated single parents said that in their family budget falls also this type of income). The second often referred type of income was complementary family allowance. Of this type of income benefited, according to their declarations, 62.3% of investigated single-parent families. Only 18.2% of the investigated single-parent families said they received the support allowance for mono-parental family during the reference period, meaning January 2006-August 2007. Other benefits mentioned by the investigated parents were allowance for new born children (12.3% of single-parent families), indemnity for child raising (7.8% of single parents, the number of investigated families with children between 0 and 2 years is larger, but not all families have met requirements to qualify for this right, by law) and outfits for new born children (4.5%).

Beneficiaries of these types of services were asked to assess their level of satisfaction reporting themselves on the financial value of allowances/benefits for families with children that they have received in the reference period. Beneficiaries' responses are presented in Figure 3. As it can be seen, most respondents said that financial value is "least satisfactory" or "not satisfactory" in the case of most of the social benefits granted in order to support families with children. The only social benefits to which respondents showed themselves in a greater extent "fully satisfied" or "satisfied" were the indemnity for child rising and the allowance for new born children, for which the financial values increased even in early 2006.



beneficii pentru familiile cu copii (%)

Note: data are computed by authors using the survey results. The graph presents the level of satisfaction for each type of social benefits.

Asked if they could handle the growth and education of their children without these benefits and allowances provided under the protection program for families with children, an overwhelming majority (90%) of respondents said that they could not handle, despite the fact that they declared themselves generally dissatisfied with the financial value of these social benefits.

Programs for increasing family income and quality of family life

As stated above, the survey sought to investigate also the types of social aid and benefits offered by the Romanian state within the program designed to increase family income and quality of family life. These support measures refer to: social aid on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income; social aid for home heating; emergency allowances and social housing. The majority of the investigated single-parent families (80.4%) said that in the reference period they have received at least one of these social benefits. Most respondents said they had received the social aid on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income (94.5% of single parents investigated) during January 2006-August 2007, while 76.4% of single-parent families included in the survey said they have received the social aid for home heating. Only 3.9% said they had received emergency allowances allocated by the National Solidarity Fund and 3.1% said they have benefited of social housing.

Respondents were asked once again to rule on the financial value of the social aids received in cash within the program for increasing family income and quality of family life. As regards social aid for home heating, the beneficiaries declared themselves rather pleased with its financial value, as shown in Figure 4. Concerning the financial value of the social aid on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income, surveyed beneficiaries declared themselves rather unsatisfied. The 5 beneficiaries of emergency allowance also said they were rather unsatisfied with its financial value.

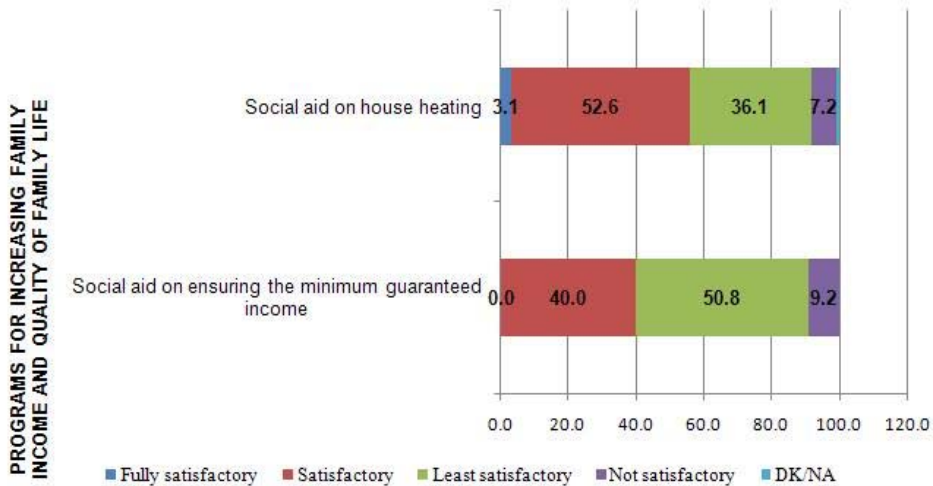


Figure 4. - Single-parents' level of satisfaction on the financial value the social aids received in cash within the program for increasing family income and quality of family life (%)

Note: data are computed by authors using the survey results. The graph presents the level of satisfaction for each type of social benefits.

Programs for reconciliation between work and family life

Another objective of the family policies from Romania refers to the reconciliation between work and family life. These measures relate to: social care and education services for children outside the family (nurseries, kindergartens or infant schools); childcare vouchers provided by employers; flexible working hours at work; incentives granted to mothers who return to the labor market before the child's age of 2 (3 years for children with disabilities). With regard to single-parent families included in the survey, only 7 of a total of 158 said they had benefited from such measures. Specifically, we are talking only about beneficiaries of social care and education services for children outside the family (nurseries, kindergartens or infant schools), services of which beneficiaries declared themselves as being satisfactory.

Programs for supporting young families

The fourth major goal of family policies in Romania is targeted on supporting young families. The governmental measures provided in order to support young families from Romania refer to the following: construction of houses in mortgage system; 200 Euros financial support for family's formation at first marriage of each spouse; family counseling services; prices reductions for domestic items purchased in the first two years of marriage. However, none of the investigated single-parent families said they have benefited of any of the measures listed above in the reference period (January 2006-August 2007).

Programs for supporting Roma families

Roma families are also the focus of family policies in Romania through two governmental measures: granting land, in areas not exceeding 0.5 hectares, into direct and free use for Roma families in need; work reintegration / participation by working at local communities development . Note that none of the Roma single-parent families benefited of any of the two types of measures named above.

The most important objective for family policies in Romania

At the end of the questionnaire, subjects were asked to specify, from a list of three objectives, which one of those objectives they considered as being most important for family policies in Romania. The three listed objectives were:

- improving the living conditions of families and children education;
- financial aid for disadvantaged families;
- providing flexible work conditions for women who want to have children but who want to and work at the same time.

As shown in Figure 5, most single-parent families have named the objective referring to financial assistance for families in need. This response is understandable given the fact that most investigated single-parent families were generally poor families of whom head of household had the status of domestic person.

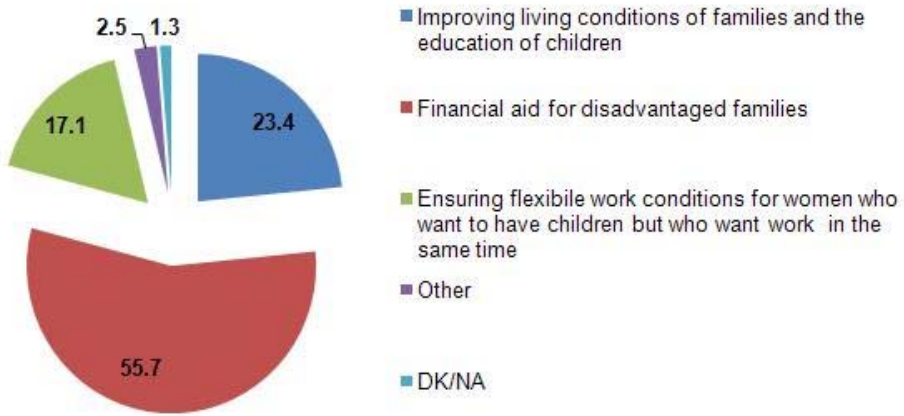


Figure 5. The most important objective for family policies in Romania (%)

Note: data are computed by authors using the survey results.

Conclusions

The issue of single-parent families became a concern for European governments as a result of the significant increase of their number. The most common reasons for the extent of such a phenomenon are the increase number of divorces or separation, death of one parent, the fertility rate outside the marriage and mentalities during the last decades concerning the traditionally accepted notion of „family”. Single-parent families, consisting of a single parent who has one or more dependent children, requires a higher level of confrontation over the life with various social risks such as poverty and social insecurity, risks affecting the health, education, growth and childcare. Taking into account the ageing of population and the dramatic decrease in birth rates, data on the evolution of the European family are of much concern. In Europe one child in three is born out of the marriage. Couples evolve towards smaller households and less stable, couples without children, households consisting of a single person or single-parent families. The divorce rate in Europe increased continuously contributing to an enhanced number of households including single persons with dependent children. In Romania family generally has a similar trend as in the European Union.

Although the divorce rate is among the lowest in the EU, in Romania, the number of single parent families increased, due to the large number of births out of the marriage (Voinea, 2005).

Single-parent families often face multiple difficulties in terms of employment, high unemployment rates or shorter career paths. They often hold underpaid jobs. It is also difficult for these families to have access and remain in the labour market partly because child-care facilities are not sufficiently available or that the levels of child benefits are too low in the national systems of social protection (Spratt, 2009).

In recent years, our country is shaping a more explicit family policy meaning that the family support programs were better targeted to support those being in difficulty due to the lack of income or low income. It has been developed a series of programs to protect children in difficulty in order to reduce poverty in families with children through growth and diversification of family allowances, the scholarships and social benefits for children from poor families. The social services for families have reached a significant development and diversification because of the emerging legal framework in the field. However there are still many gaps in the system's organization and function at local level (Gheţău, 2008).

The investigated sample comprised a total of 158 single-parent families. Of all these, only 4 families consisted of father and child/children, the rest of investigated single-parent families consisting of mother and child/children. Most single-parent families had children aged between 7 and 14 years at the time of the survey. The fewest single-parent families were families with children between 0-2 years and families with children aged between 15 and 18 years. The investigated sample included 148 urban households and only 10 families in rural residential areas. A large number of single-parents receiving family services and benefits were ethnic Roma families (a third). Most investigated parents were either without school and middle school or high school graduates. The low level of education represents a real obstacle in finding a job. This fact is confirmed since almost 90% of investigated single-parents were domestic persons while only 7% of single-parents enrolled in the survey were employed.

Single-parent families under investigation declared themselves in vast majority as being beneficiaries of social benefits in cash and only a few single-parent families have noted that they also benefited of social services. The fact that few single parent families have received social services is not a surprise considering the fact that social services for support families in Romania are still poorly developed. In addition, some respondents noted that they encountered some difficulties in obtaining the right of the beneficiary, most referring to the fact that they waited a long time to resolve their claim because of bureaucracy.

The vast majority of single-parents depended heavily on incomes obtained from social benefits. Most often mentioned as sources of income through the

welfare system were: state allowance for children, complementary family allowance and social aid on ensuring the minimum guaranteed income. Referring to the financial value of incomes obtained by families through the welfare system, most respondents said these revenues helped them to rise their children very little, little or not at all. Despite this fact, respondents admitted that they would not handle rising and educating children without such aids, benefits and state allowances.

Asked to name from a list of 3 goals which one they considered to be most important objective for family policies in Romania, most single-parent families named the objective referring to financial assistance for families in need. This response is understandable given the fact that most investigated single-parents were generally poor families of whom head of household had the status of domestic person.

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