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The Socio-Professional Insertion of Young People who Leave the Child Protection System

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Abstract: As result of the social problems diversification, the Romanian authorities created new structures and institutions specialized in social assistance in order to diminuate the severity of the social problems. Starting from this, in this study we intend to investigate the socio- professional evolution of disadvantaged teenagers coming from the protection system after they leave the centers of protection. We decided to deal with this issue because we believe the public institutions and the members of the romanian society doesn't pay enough attention to this subject. By using the content analysis, the data reported in this topic draws attention to the need of these vulnerable teenagers to be helped by the authorities to prepare themselves for the life beyond the walls of the institutions by encouraging their skills and knowledge acquisition both in the institution and school environment, which will be useful for them in the future. Therefore, all the elements presented in this paper has the purpose of establishing the legal and institutional framework that it is considered to support the socio- professional integration of teenagers leaving the social protection system as well as highlighting policies and social assistance measures to support and encourage an independent life for this disadvantaged young people.

Keywords: social problems; disadvantaged people; socio- professional evolution; protection system; independent life

1. Introduction

For collecting and interpreting the data necessary for the elaboration of this article, we used the method of content analysis research, taking into account the theoretical concepts of social procedures at national level as well as the legislative provisions adopted at European level to solve social problems.

According to Prof. Chelcea Septimiu, the content analysis is considered to be: "... a set of qualitative research techniques, regarding verbal and nonverbal communication, for objective and systematic identification and description of the manifest and/ or latent content, in order to draw conclusions about the individual, society and the communication between them, as a process of social intercourse." (Chelcea, 2007, p. 573) Without a specific reference period or a socio- cultural space of their existence, the romanian communities have been constantly confronted with various impediments due to the lack of economic funds, their inefficient distribution, and the excesses and low interest at the level of the Romanian communities from the representatives of the political structures as well as the lack of their efficient governance.

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As a result of the insufficient and provisional settlement of the problems we have mentioned above, Romania have faced many other problems. There are many cases where local authorities and institutions doesn't have the ability to act effectively in solving social problems so that they risk to scale up and generate other secondary complications.

Moreover, malfunctions and lack of social assistance funds are increasing alarmingly amidst the economic fluctuation and although we expect this situation to improve with the return to growth, things are not at all as we expected.

Although the lack of efficiency of the national political system is to be condemned, we consider it was necessary to mention here some small positive aspects. Thus, as a result of the diversification of the social problems, the Romanian state has facilitated the development of new structures and institutions with specialization in social assistance in order to help reduce the severity of social problems.

Moreover, even community interest has increased in this area, which is why it became possible, necessary and even effective to create various non- governmental associations to constantly involve citizens in the process of social assistance policies and practices.

Therefore, institutions, authorities and associations with specialization in social assistance played an important role in restoring or maintaining a work- life balance in optimal parameters of the services and social assistance policies for the community they belong to.

2. Contents

2.1. Theoretical Delimitations

According to the National Agency for Payments and Social Services and Art. 27 of Law 292/ 2011 of Social Assistance, "social services represent the activity or the set of activities designed to meet social needs as well as special, individual, family needs or group, in order to overcome situations of difficulty, prevent and combat the risk of social exclusion, promoting social inclusion and increasing the quality of life."¹

We deduce from here that social services are a general interest subject and that is why they are organized in different structures, depending on the specificity of their activity and the needs of each categories of beneficiaries in difficulty.

Thus, social services are divided into three main categories in order to ensure the basic needs of the affected persons: personal care services, recovery services or rehabilitation and social insertion or reintegration services. These services can be provided by both public suppliers as well as private suppliers with the mention that the social service can be offered at the request of the person concerned, his/her legal representative or ex officio. The last mentioned category is part of the theme that we'll deal with in the content of this paper, in the following.

2.2. Financial Statistics on the Romanian State Budget for Social Assistance

In order to prevent the social and professional marginalization of the disadvantaged people, including here the category of young people coming from the social protection system, the Romanian state provides differentiated financial support, as can be seen in the table below:

¹Ministry of Labor and Social Protection. Specifics of the National Agency for Payments and Social Benefits. <http://www.mmanpis.ro/evaluare-servicii-sociale/>, Bucharest, 2017, pag. 1;

Table 1. Costs provided from unemployment insurance budget to fund active employment measures at national level in the last year

Effective measure	Budget execution at the end of the last year (ron)
Total amount	195.901.063
Professional training	33.759.301
Stimulating young people employment	37.109.078
Stimulating the employment of the unemployed people before the unemployment period expires	14.386.712
Stimulating labor mobility	4.168.723
Stimulating the employment of unemployed persons from defaulted categories	84.210.560
Payments for the graduates employment stimulation, according to Law no. 76/2002	2.921.894
Payments for students employment stimulation according to Law no. 76/2007	630.564
Payments for the professional training of graduates according to Article 84 of Law no. 76/2002	698.138
Payments for interns according to Law no. 335/2013	17.649
Payments for disadvantaged persons	14.852.514
Active measures to combat unemployment: assistance and consultancy in profession	2.192.104
Collective pre- dismissal services	952.926

The source of the data presented in the table: The Romanian National Employment Agency database

As we noticed in the table, the biggest part of the funds are invested in training the unemployed in order to carry out specialized professional activities according to their abilities.

A considerable part of the funds are also invested to stimulate the employment of young graduates as well as hiring people before the end of the unemployment period by offering them financial support by the authorities and employers who are recruiting labor from these social categories.

We note here that, according to the statistics of the National Employment Agency, the state mainly encourages the graduates, students and pupils employment which is meant to avoid the population aging from a professional point of view.

Regarding the category of disadvantaged people, referring here to people with disabilities, we note in the table above that the Romanian state invests considerable sums for the employment of this category. Thus, 84.210.560 of the unemployment insurance budget is targeted for the employment of the unemployed people of disadvantaged categories, while 14.852.514 are targeted for marginalized persons payments.

Thus, the authorities contribution to socio - occupational inclusion of disadvantaged categories of people is a useful element for the employment of the affected people.

2.3. Justify the Theme

Starting from this information, in this paper we proposed to investigate the evolution of children came from the child protection system after they leave the system.

We decided to deal with this topic because we think it is not being given enough weight by the authorities, so we intend to increase the attention of the community on the socio- professional area of the children after they leave the social assistance system.

Although, the Romanian state has been concerned by various reforms of the residential institutions abolition and has developed and supported the establishment and constant improvement of new protection services for children at risk, it has omitted in its actions a category of vulnerable children, more exactly, the teenagers who look after the protection system and become exposed to the outside inhospitable environment.

2.4. A Brief History of the Institutionalization of Disadvantaged Children

After the 1989's state Revolution, the whole world was impressed by the situation of institutionalized children in Romania. "A tough reality showed that over 100.000 children lived in large, impersonal institutions, improperly endowed and served by inadequate staff, often unqualified, these children being the result of an aberrant birth rate, in a poor country without democratic benchmarks." (Dărăbuș, 2006, p. 12)

We considered it necessary to mention here that during the communist regime the only form of protection of children in crisis was institutionalization. After this period, the Romanian state has developed protection as a family support through temporary placement or national adoption. These practices have been particularly supported by the signing of the United Nation Convention of the Child Rights by Romania. In 1990's this document found a correspondent in our country in Law no. 18/1990, where the Romanian state and its citizens committing themselves to ensure a better life for each child.

Also, we have considered that this objective was particularly difficult to accomplish in Romania in 1989's, due to the economic imbalance, the increase of the unemployment rate, poverty and the social imbalance.

However, after signing the United Nation Convention, local institutions and authorities have been taken measures to protect disadvantaged children, including to avoid social exclusion as a result of the economic instability.

As a result, we believed that social exclusion can be noticed in the disadvantaged categories of people born and living in near-limit areas, socio-economically limited, and in the case of individuals who withdraw from the social environment due to poverty, illicit consumption of the drugs or alcohol as well as deviant acts.

The first category we consider to be vulnerable, while about the second category we consider dependent on various factors, such as those mentioned above.

2.5. Particularities of Institutionalized Young People

Behavioral Characteristics:

"Social maturation has as a decisive element on the individual's ability to maintain a dynamic balance between his interests and social interests, between his needs and aspirations and those of the society." (Dărăbuș, 2006, p. 12)

We can deduce from here that young people leaving the protection system are not sufficiently mature from the social and psychological point of view so they can not be ready to adapt themselves to the requirements of the social system of values and norms. Behavioral particularities recall here some of these particularities: instability, emotional lability, irritability, impulsive action, disregard, nonconformism. Lack of sense of belonging and responsibility for actions taken, make young people who have been institutionalized to be prone to deviant acts such as: aggression, school absenteeism, neglect of studies, nonconformism, theft, consumption of drugs or alcohol, and many other forms of

delinquency. Considering these aspects, we believe that these behavioral disorders are born as a result of the parental example lack of.

Affective features:

“Affective processes are a complex psychic phenomena characterized by physiological changes through a behavior marked by emotional expressions and a subjective experience.” (Dărăbuș, 2006, p. 12)

Within the child protection system, young people have been somehow beware of the processes that take place in ordinary life, so when they leave the protection institutions suffer various emotional shocks, not being sufficiently prepared for the real life.

The affective disorders suffered by institutionalized young people may be: lability and emotional insecurity, depression, high emotionality, need for affection, dependence on a third person. Unfortunately, these feelings are often outdated in unpleasant forms such as suicide, delinquency, anxiety, depression, apathy, and so on.

2.6. Particularities of the Self- Identity Construction

Due to the fact that young people in the child protection system have had uniform education and care, they tend to form their own self- image when leaving the system of guardianship. Most of the time, this image is built to the extreme, with the risk of slipping gently into the slope of delinquencies in order to get out of the pattern they have been accustomed to throughout the child protection centers.

On this point, we can say that “institutions prove to be environments that make difficult for children to develop any autonomy, which prevents them from acquiring those experiences necessary for the skills of an independent living: experiences in the domestic environment, experiences outside the institution, here again, the young man is provoked and fed up with negative experiences. The young man feels most often neglected, ridiculed, humiliated, devoid of those occasions that make him choose, think, decide.” (Dărăbuș, 2006, p. 12)

We believe that, along with institutionalization, children have mastered and assimilated a certain self-image that they did not have the opportunity to reveal. Upon leaving the practical protection system, young people express their self- image through the years spent in the institution and, of course, enriching this image with aspects taken from the environment in which they are about to live. Some of them are trying to find their parents out of the institution to identify with them, others reject their origins, and build a contradictory image to the family of origin.

Young people coming from the protection system can not realize what skills, capabilities or capacities they have, in lack of a very well- developed value system. To this end, the vocational guidance activities that can be organized by the General Directorate for Child Social Assistance and Child Protection at the local level can prove to be particularly useful for the professional and social future of young people.

So these may be in extreme cases: some may want a stable family life and future plans to overcome past experiences while others reject the idea of living otherwise than they were accustomed to because they are afraid to be marginalized or disappointed.

Also, young people who are inclined towards socialization have greater chances to socio-professionally integrate compared to those with a tendency in isolation.

A representative case for the subject of this report is the situation of Bihor County. At the county level, a study by the Social Affairs and Human Rights Commission has been carried out that reveals that institutionalized young people over 18 years old who have left the protection system are one of the most important sources of crime. Although their chances of integration are very low, there are exceptions, as follows: “The chances of optimal integration into society are for young people who have been selected by Christian foundations providing them with qualified support and assistance for integration into work and the formation of independent life skills. Another category with increased chances of integration is young people who continue their studies, which allows them to remain in the protection institutions, as well as a significant part of those who were integrated into their natural families.” (Chipea, 2008, p. 4)

At the opposite end, the youngest homeless institutions or those in prisons have the lowest chances of integration, exposing deprivation of liberty.

The problem of institutionalized young people leaving the social protection system is an important subject of great interest, even at European level. In this respect, the European Council adopted the European Youth Pact in the revised Lisbon Strategy in 2005's, thus admitting that the social integration of these young people and the use of their potential in the labor market could bring significant added value to society.

We agreed with this premise of the European Council because many European countries are facing an alarming aging process, which is why the work of these young people may be more than recommended. Together with the European Council, the European Commission encourages the involvement of social partners in the social inclusion of young people through the development of social dialogue as well as practical and theoretical volunteer activities aimed for helping them become more familiar with the professional environment.

Chapter no. 1 of H.G. no. 669/2006 supports my statement below as follows: “A study launched by the European Commission in 2005's on the social integration of marginalized young people analyzes the opportunity of their insertion into the labor market, their autonomy and their active participation in society. The Commission encourages the commitment of the social partners to contribute to this initiative through joint actions in the social dialogue, invites employers and companies to show social responsibility in the field of young people's professional integration and recognizes as a priority for active citizenship activities such as participation or volunteering.”¹

As noted at the beginning of this paper, the Romanian authorities had been concerned with the legal procedures development for the social protection of institutionalized youth and beyond. In this respect they adopted the Law no. 76/2002 of the unemployment insurance system and the stimulation of employment with the purpose of protecting the persons exposed to the risk of unemployment, as well as the support (mediation, training and professional counseling) offered to them to adapt to the requirements and tendencies existing on the labor market.

Moreover, the Romanian state adopted H.G. no. 1149/2002 approving the methodological norms for the application of Law no. 116/2002 to support young people leaving the protection system by taking the following measures:

“a). Measures to guarantee the access to employment: it is carried out by the National Employment Agency through the conclusion of solidarity contracts for 1- 2 years, on the basis of which young

¹ The Romanian Government. H.G. no. 669/2006 on the approval of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of young people leaving the child protection system, Monitorul Oficial no. 479 din 2 june 2006, p. 7.

people aged between 16- 25 years old, in need, are facing the risk of social exclusion, benefit from personalized social accompaniment, through professional counseling and mediation by the Agency's staff specialized, followed by employment with employers with whom county agencies conclude conventions.

b). Measures to guarantee the access to their own house: they are applied to persons up to the age of 35 years old who are in a position to purchase a home by their own means. It is a task of the county councils, which within the limits of the funds must ensure either the advance payment for the acquisition of the property or the rent for a period of up to 3 years.

c). Ensuring access to health care for young people in families receiving minimum guaranteed income paid by the Labor, Social Solidarity and Family Ministry. Healthcare professionals in public health establishments are obliged to provide emergency and curative medical care to them.

d). Guaranteeing access to education by providing scholarships to continue studying those attending pre- university and university education, conditional upon attending courses and obtaining promotion scales for young people from foster care centers and families who qualify for income guaranteed minimum.

e). Free access to rest camps or training for young scholarship to help them continue their studies.

f). Participants in literacy programs, selected according to the developed methodology by the Education and Research Ministry, can benefit from literacy scholarships established and paid by the local councils."¹

State involvement for the socio- professional integration of young people over 18 years old who leave social protection centers is also felt through the adoption of distinct laws.

It is important to note here the laws:

- Law no. 416/2001 regarding the minimum guaranteed income so that young people or those from disadvantaged families receive social benefits after leaving social protection centers;
- Law no. 208/1997 allows disadvantaged young people who leave the placement centers at the age of 18 years old, with low or no income, to have access to the social care canteens;
- Law no. 34/1998 regarding the subsidization and financing by the Romanian authorities of foundations, associations, national governmental organizations, local and county councils in order to provide social, medical or legal assistance services to disadvantaged young people;
- Law no. 47/2006 regulates the functioning of the social assistance structures subordinated to the Local County Councils meant to ensure the functioning of social protection policies for disadvantaged persons: children, single- parent families, elderly people, disabled persons, institutionalized and deinstitutionalized youths.
- H.G. no. 669/2006 approving the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of young people leaving the child protection system for the purpose of integrating young people into society and efficient use of their professional potential.

¹ The Romanian Government. H.G. no. 669/2006 on the approval of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of young people leaving the child protection system, Monitorul Oficial no. 479 din 2 june 2006, p. 9.

2.7. Lack of Self- Preparation for Children to Leave the Institution

Although many laws have been adopted at national and international level to provide a legal framework for development as well as standard procedures to be followed in preparing children for an independent life, we are faced with particular situations that make harder to fulfill these objectives and goals.

The predominant here is the lack of skills, knowledge, abilities and life experiences among institutionalized young people who are essential to them in having an independent life as adults. These lacks are due to living in the institutions, and especially to the standardized way of raising and educating young people in the child protection system.

As examples in this respect, George Neamțu highlights in his Social Assistance Treaty the following:

“- Very often institutions can provide role models. This is due, among other things, to the prevalence of specialized female staff in institutions. In some cases, the young people coming from the system take as an example the common work of the social workers and apply it in the future: cooking dishes in large quantities in boilers, common dress code etc;

- Orphanage care is done by family leave even in cases of children who are not orphans or have not been permanently abandoned on the grounds of material, financial, financial difficulties of the origin family;

- Through institutionalization, children get a lack of self- motivation as well as addictive states. When faced with leaving the placement centers with the lack of addictive people, young people become dangerous and we often find them in penitentiaries or psychiatric hospitals;

- Social assistance structures have their own care, education, and so on, for the growth of institutionalized children, which generates their isolation from the society and later the negative impact of leaving of the institution after the age of 18 years old generates on the disadvantaged young people;

- Most institutions are not interested in the evolution of young people after leaving institutions, which can discourage them in their future daily lives.” (Neamțu, 2003, p. 817)

Regarding these aspects, we think that the success of young people in leading an independent life largely depends on their maturity and desire to overcome their social condition. Most of the time, young people clutch when they leave institutions, generating delinquency. Surprisingly, a part of these young people refers to the way of living in placement centers and they manage to lead a decent life beyond the walls where they were institutionalized.

3. Conclusions

In this study we have discussed about the socio- professional integration of the young people coming from the child protection system and the particularities of their growth in the protection centers.

As a result of the data mentioned above, we believe that this topic draws attention to the need of these vulnerable young people to be helped by the institutions to prepare themselves for the life that awaits them beyond the walls of the institutions by encouraging their skills and their knowledge both in the protection center and in the school environment, which will be useful for them in the future.

Moreover, we think that a very important role has the contribution of the civil society at the moment of the exit of the young people from the placement centers, so that its members should provide support and help them to gain unimpeded access to education and healthcare.

In this way the child- adult and center- society transition would be easier and younger people would have many chances to comply with society standards and to avoid delinquent acts.

Of course, the above recommendations would not be possible without the work and shown interest related by the local authorities, civil society, specialized national or international organizations and associations. Fortunately, after the 1990's, specific procedures and practices of social assistance has grown so that we can show a lot of optimism regarding the improvement of the social assistance system in Romania.

We conclude this study in a spirit of optimism, stating that we are still witnessing a positive evolution of the social assistance system, both following the procedures and regulations legal frameworks set out above aimed at protecting young people institutionalized when leaving protection centers, and as a finding that "at the beginning of 2005's, 32,821 children were in the system of protection, among whom the most important are the elderly between 14 and 17 years, respectively 12.247 children and 5-983 children aged 18 years old and over. The lower percentage of young children is proof of the fact that the measures institutionalization alternatives have begun to function by developing service providers caring for children in difficulty in substitute families (foster parents) number of institutionalized children dropped between 2000's and 2005's starts from 57.181 to 32.821 of which more than half are over 14 years of age, followed by about 4.500- 5.000 over the the age of 4 years old children leaving the system of protection every year. Almost 6.600 of young people up to 26 years old follows a form of education and they still are living in the social protection system."¹

Forecasts in previous years tend to support the dose of optimism shown above in the period the following modest large discrepancies in the percentage of disadvantaged people.

Therefore, all the elements and regulations presented in this paper have established the legal and institutional framework that it is considering to encourage the socio- professional integration of young people leaving in the social protection system as well as highlighting policies and social assistance measures to support and encouraging an independent, better and more decent life for this disadvantaged young people.

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