

# THE POST DECEMBRIST EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AS AN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF SPECIALISTS TRAINING AND AS INSTITUTIONAL-ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

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**Abstract:** *Social assistance is a complex social phenomenon that presents itself in several ways: as an educational system of specialists training, as a profession, with its own status, with distinct objectives and characteristics, as an institutional-administrative system, including the sphere of services, practical activities carried out in order to solve special cases. After the 1989 Revolution, a new field of institutional development as part of the global social reform was opened in our country by social assistance as an educational system for training specialists and as an institutional-administrative system. In this article we try to find an answer to the question: in what direction has the social assistance system in Romania evolved, taking into account the communist heritage, from the perspective of the educational system of training of specialists and from the perspective of services?*

**Key words:** *social assistance, educational system, social services, decentralization.*

## 1. Introduction

The need for social assistance has existed and will always exist, given that human civilization is not a perfect one.

Social assistance contributes to improving people's lives, to maintaining social order and stability, as it has over time been experiencing cumbersome development, from simple assistance activities based on compassion, to specialized intervention activities of specialists trained in higher education institutions, in order to eliminate the malfunctions in the relationship between the individual and the social environment.

Social assistance in a modern, democratic society is at the same time a necessity of the whole society and a citizenship right.

Throughout history, in the specialty literature, a multitude of definitions of social assistance have been elaborated. In 1973, the US National Association of Social Workers (NASW) established that "Social Assistance is a professional activity to support individuals, groups or communities in potentiating and restoring their own functioning capabilities and creating favourable social

conditions for this purpose” (Standards for social service manpower: Policy Statement 4, 1973: 4).

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) replaced the definition of social assistance in 2000 with a new definition that emphasizes that "Social Assistance promotes social change as well as mobilizing and engaging people to increase well-being. The principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social assistance” (Miley, Melia, Dubois, 2006: 28).

Regarding the specialty literature in our country it is used the concept of Romanian pedants Cătălin Zamfir and Elena Zamfir defining the social assistance as "... an ensemble of institutions, programs, measures, professionalized activities, specialized services for protection of persons, groups, communities with special problems, temporarily in difficulty, who, due to reasons of economic, socio-cultural, biological or psychological nature, do not have the opportunity to achieve by their own means and efforts a normal, decent way of life” (Zamfir, Zamfir, 1995: 100).

According to the Romanian legislation in this field "social assistance through specific measures and actions aims at developing individual, group or collective capacities to ensure social needs, to increase the quality of life and to promote the principles of cohesion and social inclusion” (Legea nr. 292/2011 a asistenței sociale, actualizată, art. 2, alin. (3)).

The mission of social assistant profession in NASW view in 1996 "is to contribute to human well-being and to meet the fundamental needs of individuals, paying special attention to vulnerable, disadvantaged and those living in poverty” (Code of Ethics, 1996: 1).

Starting from the above-mentioned definitions, we find that social assistance is a complex social phenomenon that is manifested in several ways: as an educational system of specialists training, as a profession with its own status, with distinct objectives and characteristics, as an institutional- administrative system, including the sphere of services, the practical activities carried out in order to solve the special cases.

In our country, a new field of institutional development, as part of the global social reform, was opened by the 1989 Revolution: social assistance as an educational system for training specialists and as an institutional-administrative system.

The profession of social worker had been removed from the nomenclature of professions and reduced only to financial aid for that in need. It has been considered that the problems of the individual can be solved only by an administrative mechanism, the specialized system of social assistance services being degraded gradually in this context.

Immediately after the Revolution, in the academic and research environment, a social development strategy has been devised since the early

years of the transition to diminish the undesirable effects of rapid transition from one social-economic system to another.

Social welfare education had a rapid evolution; a very important role in relaunching this profession being played by the community of sociologists in whose ranks there was a broad consensus on the need to reconstruct the profession of social assistant. This gesture was a tribute to the Sociological School of Dimitrie Gusti and H. Stahl, of the important contribution made by sociologists with prestige for the development of Romanian social assistance. In addition, sociologists, together with social assistants, have also experienced the discontinuation of sociological education since 1978. There was also a part of social workers trained until 1969 that joined this action, and who failed to keep their vocation of their profession

In creating the professional profile of the social assistant at university level, two complementary aspects were taken into account:

- interpretation from a new point of view of the tradition of the Romanian social assistance education between the two wars, thus exemplifying the Social Assistance Law of 1930, the Community Social Services Law, community support services that continued to develop under very difficult political conditions until 1969 when they were definitively abolished;

- selectively takeover of formative models from the Western countries with experience in the field.

Social welfare education was re-established in 1990, with the intention that the social welfare network should develop rapidly, along with the emergence of new generations of social workers.

In the process of developing social assistance, there was a mismatch between the legislative-institutional system and the system of training of specialists in the university environment. If the academic formation of the new generation of professional social workers started immediately after international standards in 1990, re-establishing the sociological, psychological and social care professions as specialization fields, the same cannot be said about the legislative system which grew late, showing numerous gaps and inconsistencies. Social services for prevention and recovery of those in distress practically did not exist, and social assistance institutions reformed quite hard.

The dynamic initiative to re-establish the social assistance education was owned by the Minister of Labour and Social Protection (Cătălin Zamfir), who also had the Minister of Education's approval. Thus, social assistance wards were set up at several large universities: the University of Bucharest, the University of Cluj-Napoca, the University of Iasi and the West University of Timisoara. Social welfare departments initially had an ambiguous status, first of three-year college type, and immediately after 1991, with the support of an international program coordinated by Elena Zamfir and supported by the Dutch government, with the

approval of the Minister Education (Mihai Golu) became a four-year university education.

In 1994, the first social assistantship was launched, and social assistance education expanded, social assistance specialization being introduced to other state and private universities in the country.

An important support for the rehabilitation of social assistance education has been received both from the inside, from sociologists and specialists in socio-human sciences, from public institutions, decision-makers in the field, as well as from some international organizations and specialists from several universities in Europe and the US. The UNICEF Representative in Romania played a special role in supporting the development of social assistance, which was actively involved in the development of education and in the creation and development of modern services for children in difficulty. Also, with the support of UNICEF in Romania, there has been a constant exchange of experience with some countries in Europe with a tradition of social assistance, the development of study programs and the development of practice centers for social assistance students.

Thus, from the beginning, the Romanian school benefited from the rethinking of the profession in a new university environment, the educational plan being designed in such a way that there is a balance between the theoretical training and the practical skills.

"Until 2004-2005, the training of social workers was carried out at the four-year university level (long-term higher education) and at the three-year university level (short-term higher education). From 2005-2006, by the decision of the Minister of Education and Research, invoking the Bologna process, the training of social workers, as in other social and humanist professions, was reduced to three years with an optional master level" (Zamfir, 2006:200).

In the development and modernization of the social assistance education in Romania, Professor Elena Zamfir, the head of the Department of Social Assistance at the University of Bucharest, who in 1992 laid the foundation of the Romanian Association for the Promotion of Social Assistance, and in 2003 contributed to the creation of the National Federation of Social Workers in Romania (FNASR), which is a member of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) had an important contribution.

During the 28 years of transition, the whole system of training the social assistant profession, both at the university level and at the postgraduate level - masters and doctorate - gradually was rethought, according to modern quality standards. Thus, the social assistant profession gradually regained a clear position in the hierarchy of social professions and regained the lost social value during the communist regime.

"From the academic year 2001-2002, the higher education of social assistance was organized by specialization modules for the students of the final years. These modules are focused on:

- social services for family and child
- social assistance of young offenders
- forming the probation counsellor
- European social compared policies” (Zamfir, 2009: 41).

The same author points out that the organization of modular education has taken into account the necessity of specialized training aimed at the rapid integration of graduates into specialized services based on tutoring focused on actions/punctual answers for the problems of those in difficulty, the specialization module being correlated with an intensive specialized practice in the required field of specialization.

However, now, after 28 years, we are witnessing confusion and mistakes regarding the qualifications required by the different types of activities the social assistant should undertake in line with international standards.

At present, in our country there is a legal framework regulating the status of the social worker, namely Law no. 466/2004 on the *Statute of the social worker*, as well as other legislative regulations, which highlight the main elements of the specificity of this professional category.

Regarding the conditions to be fulfilled by the persons who may be social assistants, they are the following: to be Romanian citizens, citizens of the Member States of the European Union, of the other states of the European Economic Area and of the Swiss Confederation, citizens of third countries with which Romania has reciprocal bilateral agreements and who have a temporary or permanent residence in Romania. To these are added the conditions related to the formation of the person, respectively the title of social worker may be held by:

- the person who obtained the license degree in a higher education institution with specialization in the field, the long-term form, 4 years, accredited according to the law;
- the person holding the graduation diploma of a higher education institution with specialization in the field, the short-term form, 3 years, accredited according to the law;
- the person who holds the equivalent of a social worker equivalent according to the law;
- the person holding the diploma of a social worker who is granted or recognized in one of the Member States of the European Union, in one of the States belonging to the European Economic Area or in the Swiss Confederation.

At the same time, in addition to the aforementioned conditions, in order to be able to practice as an assistant, the person must register in the National Register of Social Workers in Romania.

Identifying the population segment that is the subject of social assistance activities, identifying and evaluating social human issues in a particular region, community or locality, raising public awareness and informing on social issues,

establishing concrete ways of accessing specialized assistance services and services based on needs assessment, are just some of the activities that the social worker carries out. To accomplish these activities, it is necessary for the social assistant to have certain specific skills, but also theoretical knowledge and, most importantly, to have a vocation.

As far as the values and principles that the social worker has to consider when performing his activity, they are found in the code of ethics of the social assistant profession. The values in general are: respect for the person and his dignity, respect for privacy, respect for confidentiality, respect for the right to option and self-determination of the client, respect for the local cultural traditions and model, cooperation with local social actors, adaptation of the intervention to the specific of the community and its suitability according to its cultural values.

At the same time, customer participation, self-determination and confidentiality are fundamental elements in relation to which social workers should work.

In its relations with the governmental and non-governmental institutions, internal and international, the National Social Assistance College, through its bodies, is a representative of the body of social workers in Romania.

Given that the role of the social worker is to help individuals, groups and communities, identify available resources and design their problem-solving strategies, helping to redress the deficiency of normal integration for those in difficulty, providing opportunities for knowledge and access to specialized services, it is necessary to identify the solutions leading to the occupation of human resources specialized positions in social assistance.

## **2. Social assistance services**

Taking into account the fact that the social assistance system was underdeveloped during the communist regime, the expectations regarding the resumption of the rich tradition of social assistance that Romania had, were great after the Revolution of 1989.

Institutions of social assistance for abandoned children, for severely disabled people, or for helpless elderly people offering low-quality services, sometimes under decency, were the only elements of social assistance. Their location in isolated places, hard to reach, with unskilled staff, offered a nightmare image. Community social assistance services had been completely abolished, and professional social workers were deprived of the formal recognition of their profession, being held in marginal administrative positions.

In the years after the Revolution, many of the social services were occasionally developed by NGOs, remaining undeveloped in the public sector. Foreign-funded NGOs initiated the first reform processes in the institutionalized

and disabled people sector. But they could not cover either geographically or by typology the multiple problems of people in difficulty. However, they were a promising start for specialized social assistance.

Both financial support and social assistance services were initially accentuated centrally.

In 1997, the process of decentralization of social assistance started by changing the subordination of all child protection institutions at the level of the ministries at the level of the county councils. Methodological coordination has been maintained at the central level, but reforming and developing child welfare services have become the task of communities through county councils.

The decentralization process, an absolutely necessary one, was characterized by incompleteness, inconsistency and confusion:

- decentralization has not led to a reduction in the gap between socially advantaged communities and disadvantaged communities as the process has not been complemented by a financial transfer to the poor;
- decentralization, without ensuring funding sources and ensuring specialist, has led to inconsistencies in the responsibilities received and the local financial resources;
- decentralization was mainly done at county level, the local level being largely ignored.

Starting from the needs of each person, social services can have a broader addressability at group or community level.

In order to achieve coherent, unitary and effective social actions for the benefit of the individual, social services can be organized and provided in an integrated system with employment, health, education, and other social services of general interest, as the case may be.

Beneficiaries of social assistance have a confused diversity. Despite this diversity, some classifications of people who may become beneficiaries can be made as follows:

- baby and/or family
- persons with disabilities
- elderly people
- victims of domestic violence
- people without home
- people with different addictions, namely alcohol, drugs, other toxic substances, etc.
- trafficking in human beings
- persons deprived of liberty
- persons punished by educational measure or non-custodial punishment under the supervision of probation services
- persons with mental illness
- persons from isolated communities

-the beneficiaries' caregivers.

According to the legislation in force:

-in the field of social services both providers and social services are accredited;

-providers can only provide social services if they have an accreditation certificate;

-social services may operate on Romanian territory only if they have an operating license;

-the accreditation of social services is based on the minimum quality standards, which are the minimum requirements regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the activities carried out in relation to the needs of the beneficiaries, the objectives assumed, the expected results. Minimum quality standards are the benchmark for the quality of social services, and their fulfilment is mandatory and certified by an operating license;

-social services set up by social service providers, whether public or private, are organized in compliance with the provisions of the Social Services Nomenclature as well as the quality standards, the general norms of minimal staffing norms that are the basis of establishing the cost standards, regulated by the special legislation;

-the name of the service must fit into the categories and types of social services, with the code mentioned, according to the Social Services Nomenclature.

In 2005, Government Decision no. 539/2005 for the approval of the Nomenclature of Social Welfare Institutions and the Indicative Staff Structure, of the Framework Regulation for the organization and functioning of social assistance institutions, as well as of the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of the Government Ordinance no. 68/2003 on social services.

GD 539/2005 was repealed by the entry into force of GD 867/2015 for the approval of the Social Services Nomenclature, as well as of the framework regulations for the organization and functioning of social services.

From the statistical data available on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, currently 2614 public and private social service providers are accredited in Romania, and in terms of number of licensed social services it amounts to 3175.

Compared with 1989, when the only form of social assistance for people in difficulty was the institution (abandoned children's institutions, institutions for children and adults with disabilities), both the types and categories of social services and the categories of beneficiaries are currently much diversified.

However, in the field of child protection, residential services (family-type houses and placement centers) predominate, and there are still social categories in risk situations for which social services are not developed. An example is that of young people leaving the child protection system. According to the law, the young person who has acquired full exercise capacity and has been granted a special protection measure but who does not continue his studies, being faced

with the risk of social exclusion, enjoys protection on demand for up to 2 years special in services for the development of independent life skills. Currently in the public social assistance system there are only two such services in Galati.

Regarding the institutionalization of the child, it seems that it continues to remain one of the state's answers to family problems.

<b>Service type</b>	<b>Number of children (cases active on December 31, 2002) reported to a total of children of 6,600,000</b>	<b>Number of children (cases active on 30.06.2017) reported to a total number of children of 3,734,667</b>
<b><i>FAMILY-TYPE SERVICES</i></b> , of which:	<b>43092</b>	<b>37688</b>
- to maternity assistants employed by DGASPC	10461	18595
- maternity assistants employed by accredited private bodies	474	67
- to relatives up to the IV <sup>th</sup> grade inclusive	25260	14230
- to other families/people	5605	4796
<b><i>RESIDENTIAL-TYPE SERVICES</i></b> , of which:	<b>43234</b>	<b>18901</b>
public	37781	15031
private	5453	3870

At first glance it could be said that the number of children under special protection has dropped significantly, from 86326 in 2002 to 56589 in the middle of 2017. However, taking into account the total number of children, it results that in 2002 , 1.31% of children were under special protection, while in 2017 the percentage was 1.52%. It seems, however, that family-type services, such as foster care and placement to relatives/families/people, have begun to be an alternative to residential services.

In the area of adult disabled people, from the statistical data available on the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice in the middle of 2017 out of the total of 788092 persons with disabilities, 17969 and 2.28% are in residential public institutions. 710,723 namely 97.72% are in family care and/or live independently.

The number of public social assistance institutions for disabled adults on 30 June 2017 is 450 (compared to 443 on 30 June 2016), of which: 389 residential (compared to 383 on 30 June 2016) and 61 non-residential – day-care (to the same number 60 on 30 June 2016).

Approximately two-thirds (59.38%) of public residential institutions for disabled adults are: care and assistance centres (29.56%) with 6,618 beneficiaries

and sheltered housing (29.82%), 909 beneficiaries . They represent 41.89% of the total number of 17,969 people in residential institutions.

A significant number of beneficiaries also exist in the 67 neuropsychiatric recovery and rehabilitation centres, respectively 5,935 persons (33,03%).

At present, there is no coherent conception regarding the development of the social assistance system at county and local level, which makes change happen under the impact of urgent needs and new legislative regulations, the general characteristic being that of institutional improvisation.

Any assessment of the social assistance system should be based on a clear diagnosis of the need for social assistance. There is currently no structured picture of the need for social assistance, and therefore there are difficulties in setting priorities in the field.

Synthesizing the aspects presented in this report, the answer to the question of the direction *in which way the social assistance system in Romania evolved from the perspective of the educational system of specialists and services?* is next:

-as regards the educational system for specialists training, we can say that in the university academic environment there was a constant concern for the development of social assistance education. Through the new educational structure, the social assistant profession has gained new value in the hierarchy of socio-human professions and has gradually regained its well-deserved prestige lost in the communist regime.

-the evolution of social services took place not through coordinated diversification and based on the identification of needs, but through the chaotic multiplication of institutions. Social welfare services tend to be offered especially in crisis situations and less to prevent crises. The lack of a clear diagnosis of needs has as consequence the inability of explicitly setting priorities.

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