

CORRELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY NEEDS AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SYSTEM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The social assistance system is a dynamic and complex one. Dynamically, because social phenomena are interdependent with the degree of development of society, and complex because social phenomena tend to become more and more different, that often the emergence of some involves the development of others. The structural elements of the social assistance system in solving social phenomena are fundamentally related to the personnel involved in the system (specialists - social workers and other specialized personnel), the categories of beneficiaries and the social environment (benefits, services, legislation, institutional network).*

Key words: *social phenomena, social services, social benefits, databases, interinstitutional network*

Generally speaking, social assistance intervenes and tries to identify and implement solutions for undesirable social phenomena within the community.

These social phenomena appear and disappear in direct connection with the way society is organized in general, with the generally accepted standards by community members, and obviously, with the level of socio-economic development of the country.

We can classify these undesirable community social phenomena into two broad categories:

1. *Traditional social phenomena* (found in the community at a lower or larger level for a very long period of time).

Regarding this, we can exemplify these phenomena as follows:

-Abandonment, whether we are talking about child abandonment by natural parents, or talking about family abandonment to a member in difficulty (disabled person, person belonging to a vulnerable group).

Abandonment must be understood both as an action of will and as an inability to provide the survival needs of a family member.

- Domestic violence - a social phenomenon that beyond the criminal nature of the facts and correlative sanctions must also be dealt with from the point of view of the social services at least at the counseling level of the victim, but also of the aggressor.

- Difficult socio-professional integration of people with disabilities.

2. *New types of social phenomena* (that appear at a certain moment in the community due to structural changes in the way the state is organized and functions because of strong socio-economic "disturbances", "earthquakes", or even on the background of natural calamities).

Regarding Romania, a clear example for this type of phenomena is given by the departure of parents in order to work abroad (massively after 2007 - the integration of Romania into the European Union) and leaving children in the country in the care of grandparents, of other children relatives, neighbors or friends, and the most serious situation in the care of the older brother who is also a child (under 18 years old).

The official statistics of the National Authority for the Protection of Child's Rights and Adoption on children with one or both parents working abroad showed a significant increase from approximately 70,000 children in December 2007 to 96,723 in June 2017. Data collected from the school inspectorates, revealed, however, a much higher number of children with parents working abroad, more than 212,000, and these data do not capture the full extent of the phenomenon, because they include only children enrolled in the education system. Taking into account both pre-school and non-enrolled children/school drop-outs, it is estimated that the total number of children with their parents working abroad was around 250,000 in June 2017.

The effects of this phenomenon are direct (psychic traumas of children based mainly on lack of affectivity, lack of supervision and direct education of parents) for which specialized social services should be developed accordingly, but we can also identify in this phenomenon also a cause for the occurrence or aggravation/development of other undesirable social phenomena: school abandonment, low school attendance (absenteeism is often found among minors left alone at home without constant supervision by an adult), association tendency in deviant groups, sometimes even criminal ones, risk of consuming drugs and so on.

Therefore, the link between the society as a whole and the social assistance system must be a direct one, both at organization and deployment level, and also at the level of evolution, reform.

It is absolutely necessary to be able to react to any community need (social phenomenon) and for this there must be a unitary, but flexible regulatory framework and relatively easy to be modified, improved, adapted to the new needs of the community without to intervene on negative manner (destructively) on the solutions identified and implemented in relation to the already existing needs.

From this point of view, in Romania there is a negative example, in the sense that immediately after the occurrence of this phenomenon, since 2009, all vacancies in public institutions (including those in social assistance) were

blocked and it was forbidden setting up new posts. This measure continued to be active by 2015.

Basically, we can say that the state has blocked the establishment of social services to deal with the effects of a "new type" of social phenomenon, consequently, there was no natural link between society and its needs and the services provided by the social assistance system that led to the amplification of the phenomenon and the diminution of the possibilities to blur the unwanted effects.

When talking about a situation of difficulty for a member of the community, it is very important to identify very correctly the needs, their causes in order to be able to objectively identify the solution to be followed and then make a decision in this regard.

Of course, we are in the presence of an extensive, complex process that is necessary to analyze the problem from multiple perspectives (social, psycho-medical, legal, economic, etc.) and from this point of view, it is necessary the opinion of several specialists.

When analyzing the provision of social benefits, such analyzes are carried out at national level and an amount of these benefits is determined to provide the necessary support to manage the difficulty of a person's situation. Subsequently, this amount becomes a social benefit through the adoption of a normative act.

At the same time, a procedure to be followed regarding the granting of these social benefits is established, a procedure that will necessarily include a set of conditions that must exist for a person to benefit from that social benefit.

Consequently, we are in a situation where a person in need demands the social benefit and proves that he / she fulfills the conditions for granting.

Under these circumstances, the "individual decision" method can be applied, namely one person checks, one person proposes/refers, one person approves the granting of the respective social benefit.

When talking about social services, we cannot identify generally valid solutions, but only solutions for each case.

From this point of view, a multidisciplinary case study (minimum socio-psycho-medical) is needed.

In Romania, since 2006, the "case management system" has been regulated. Thus, the bases for the functioning of a multidisciplinary team, under the coordination of a case manager (usually a social assistant) to identify the needs, their causes and to propose the solution/solutions to be followed, have been created.

The solution for the provision of social services is identified by a team, and the approval of this solution for implementation is the responsibility either of an institution (e.g.: Child Protection Commission) - when there is agreement

for that solution of all parties involved - either of a court - when there is no consensus of all parties involved in the identified solution.

Such a control, a verification of the reality and the conformity of the proposed solution is achieved and the general competence in making decision in conflict situations is respected.

Consequently, if in the case of social benefits, the "individual decision" of an authorized person can be used, as regards social services it is strictly necessary to use the "team solution" followed by a control and an "institutional decision"; or a "court order".

We appreciate that the general role of the social assistance system is to provide support for the people in difficulty, but also to take actions in order to prevent the occurrence of difficulties for the members of the community in the socio-economic conditions of the country.

This role is currently fulfilled by:

- Granting to social benefits
- Providing basic social services (especially prevention services)
- Providing specialized services.

Social benefits are a form of financial support that responds to a wide range of social needs and covers both universal rights (for example, state child allowance) and benefits that only address individuals or families in difficulty, vulnerability or addiction.

The social benefits system in Romania includes: family allowances, social benefits, allowances and benefits.

Social services are the activity or set of activities designed to meet social, individual, family or group needs in order to overcome situations of difficulty, prevent and combat the risk of social exclusion, promote social inclusion and enhance the quality of life.

The responsibility for developing, managing and granting social services is shared as follows:

- a) elaboration of public policies, national programs and strategies in the field, regulation, coordination and control of their implementation, as well as evaluation and monitoring of the quality of social services - under the responsibility of central public administration authorities;
- b) organization, administration and granting of social services - under the responsibility of local public administration authorities, attributions that can be outsourced to the non-governmental sector, religious institutions, other natural and legal persons of public or private law, according to the law;
- c) the financing of social services, according to the law - from the local budget, from the beneficiary's contribution and/or, by case, from his family, the state budget, as well as from other sources.

The main areas where social services are organized and granted are the following:

- preventing and combating poverty and the risk of social exclusion;
- social assistance for the child and the family;
- social assistance for people with disabilities;
- social assistance for the elderly.

It is relatively easy to identify, on one hand, a lack of correlation between the organization and functioning of the system of granting benefits and the system of granting the primary or specialized social services and, on the other hand, a separate action of the two subsystems (benefits and services) to achieve objectives that should be treated unitarily (ensuring the "social health" of the community in question, providing the basic needs, and the fundamental needs for our fellows unable to provide themselves).

Social work, as it is normal in a state of law, is organized at the level of competence and limits of competence, mode of action (organization and performance of the activity), general and specific objectives, by a series of normative acts, namely:

- the normative acts of organizing the social assistance system;
- the normative acts regulating the method of action (methodological norms) of the institutions or the way of acting of the specialists;
- activity norms that define and regulate mandatory minimum standards regarding the quality of social services.

This general classification (we have not proposed a classification and a comprehensive enumeration, but only one as an example) of the normative acts in the field can lead us to the conclusion that it is necessary to codify the legislation in the field of social assistance for increasing efficiency to ensure a unitary approach to make it easier for both professionals and potential beneficiaries to understand.

On the other hand, in order to respond to social needs in order to overcome difficulties, the main responsibility lies with the specialized institutions, but they must actively collaborate with other public institutions holding information of interest in social causes. This type of collaboration must be one at an immediate operative level that does not hinder or prolong the identification of the solution and the decision making.

Databases are a very useful tool in identifying the needs of the population, the quantitative analysis of social phenomena, the dynamics of these phenomena and, of course, in establishing action strategies.

The legislation on the establishment and management of databases in Romania is not a unitary one that ensures consistency in the actions of the institutions both at the level of own actions and at the level of common actions.

In general, the official databases are regulated at the level of the establishment and management of normative acts which, beyond the provisions that make this information to be useful, also establish limitations on

the reports that may be generated, on direct or indirect users, and especially regarding interinstitutional communication.

Usually, databases are set up at national level by collecting data from institutions at the local level. Although local institutions collect this information, their access to reports, their own analyzes, comparative analyzes etc. is limited, being the attribute of the central institutions.

This access can still be made possible after wearing a correspondence and obtaining special agreements. This kind of correspondence takes time, and obtaining information after 30 days (general term) or more, may make it impossible to use them because, in the meantime, obviously they are no longer up to date.

A concrete example could be given by the steps to be taken by specialized institutions immediately after identifying an abandoned child in a sanitary unit:

- Address from the sanitary unit to the General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection (GDSACP) to file a case;
- Identification of natural parents (inter-institutional correspondence: DGASPC / Police / Population Records, etc.);
- Steps for child reintegration in the natural family;
- Steps in order to identify the extended family (relatives up to grade IV) (inter-institutional correspondence: GDSACP / Police / Population Records, etc.);
- Steps for child placements to the extended family;
- Steps for child placement to a professional nursing assistant by the court (again interinstitutional correspondence for finding civil status information, criminal record, etc.).

It should be noted that each institution has its own procedures, that the general response time to requests is 30 days, that the data thus obtained may change in the meantime, etc. All these aspects, on the one hand, delay the rapid identification of the best solution at a given time, and on the other hand make it possible to make a decision in the absolute knowledge of the case within a long term (3 to 6 months) from the abandonment. In the same sense it is worth mentioning that the intervention of specialists for prevention/avoidance of abandonment can be possible over a relatively long time since the action took place, which diminishes proportionately the chances of success.

Thus, we consider that it is necessary to analyze the way to set up and manage the official data bases in Romania and to identify solutions that will operationalize the interaction between the institutions regarding concrete, punctual case solving actions, but also in making strategies and public policies.

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