

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE DEGREE OF SATISFACTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES ROMA TOWARDS SOCIAL SERVICES IN TIMIȘ COUNTY

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Abstract: *The research focuses on the problems of the Roma ethnic group in Timiș County, with a particular focus on the Roma who access social services, trying to rank and establish the problems they face in relation to social services. The research is of a mixed type, containing both quantitative items and open-ended, qualitative questions, aimed at clarifying the major problems faced by ethnic Roma who interact with the social services system in Romania, at the level of Timiș County, both from the perspective of the services public but also from the perspective of non-governmental organizations as well as local public authorities. The conclusions of the research offer the perspective of a strong social system, which, however, presents some gaps, although the problem-solving process proceeds relatively smoothly, in the view of the majority of respondents. However, there are still areas of interest and action that require improvement. From a procedural perspective, the beneficiaries do not always have access to information regarding the operation of the respective social service.*

Keywords: *Roma, problems, social services, satisfaction, system.*

1.Introduction. Social context

The ethnic Roma have lived for centuries alongside other populations on the territory of Romania. Exercising a fascination over the majority population through curiosity, and often awakening rejection, this ethnic group, perhaps too little known and understood, is still the victim of stereotypes and prejudices deeply rooted in the collective psyche.

Prey of some dismissive attitudes or contrary to curiosity, the ethnic Roma certainly represent a surrounding reality. Traditions, customs and certainly a rich history make this ethnic group the target of curiosity and sometimes rejection by other ethnic groups. One thing is certain, the Roma ethnic group is part of the surrounding reality with its own problems, joys, troubles.

The historical Banat is known and perceived as a land of acceptance, ethnic and religious tolerance. The place where many ethnicities coexist, the place where inter-ethnic and religious conflicts were not possible. This is why the way the Roma feel integrated or not in the historical Banat is all the more important. From a territorial perspective, Timiș County represents a significant part of the historical Banat, and these patterns of behavior specific to the historical Banat are certainly characteristic of Timiș County as well.

The presence of ethnic Roma in Banat is constant, according to some sources, these communities appeared around the 16th - 17th centuries, Roma communities being found both in the lowlands, but also in the mountainous area of the historical Banat province (Țigău, 2015:42). According to the cited source, there is the possibility that the presence of ethnic Roma in Banat is much older, but the absence of documentary evidence from the period of the 14th - 17th centuries regarding the existence of Roma communities remains an unresearched topic and a challenge for the future.

The Roma from Banat were mentioned for the first time five centuries ago, and the first documentary mention of them refers to the Roma from Timișoara (Țigău, 2015:43). The testimony comes from the royal chaplain György Szerémi, He lived the event of the Crusader Uprising of Dózsa, mentioning the existence of Roma. After this first mention, documentary information about the Roma of Banat becomes more and more numerous. These reflect, according to the quoted source, the attitude of the authorities and the population in general towards the ethnic Roma, which is not tolerant but rather rejective and exclusionary.

In the first centuries of documentary attestation, the nomadism of the Roma was clear and obvious and their settlement near the big cities represented a visible phenomenon. This continuous displacement of the Roma ethnic group created the impression of a social disaggregation of an ethnic group that did not find its place in the middle of a community and in the collective mentality of the past eras, the Roma were affected by a certain feeling of antipathy.

In the medieval Banat, the situation of the Roma was a marginal one, the Roma were not owners of land to cultivate, but were oriented towards various types of business and were also involved in the processing of metals, especially iron. Historical sources recognize the inclination, craft and true talent of the Roma in metalworking, especially for blacksmithing, and documents mention their use in gold sands washing activities. The Roma were sometimes also involved in illegal activities starting from their talent in metalworking, it is possible that they ended up forging currency (Țigău, 2015:43).

However, the Roma from Banat became sedentary, this process being a lasting one, and their peaceful coexistence with other ethnic groups is attested and mentioned by bibliographic sources, in this sense following the classic pattern of the ethnically and religiously tolerant Banat.

In relation to these data, although many theorists (Grebeldinger, D – customized to Lugo) are of the opinion that there are no conflicts between other ethnic groups and the Roma in Banat, this does not mean that we do not face the social exclusion of the Roma population. During the documentation, no relevant studies were identified regarding the social exclusion of the Roma population from the historical Banat or Timiș County. We identified, however, studies on the Roma population in general in Romania. The fact that 3.1% of Roma do not have any identity document creates the conditions for the exclusion of approximately 47,000 people, half of whom are children, from all the rights of citizens of the Romanian State (Cace, Stelian, Ilie, et al, 2002:29) this includes education services, free health services, child allowance, emergency aid type aid, other types of services or social benefits offered, all of this in relation to the cited source. At the same time, in accordance with the cited source, an opinion to which we fully subscribe, these ethnic Roma will not be able to benefit from the right to vote to participate in the democratic political life of the country, they will not be able to be elected and they will not be able to participate in any way at any kind of electoral poll due to the fact that they do not have identity documents.

This fact adds to the social handicap, these citizens will not be able to be included in a form of education, then depriving them of the rights to carry out legally profitable activities or to benefit from health insurance, for example. Despite the fact that they do not benefit from health insurance, the Roma are exposed to a higher risk of developing mental health problems due to discrimination and social exclusion, showing a predisposition to chronic conditions as well. However, the poor health of the Roma is not determined exclusively by socioeconomic factors, but is rather related to ethnicity, due to genetic predispositions and poor hygiene (Robison et. al. 2022).

Thus, the lack of identity documents contributes to a chain of exclusion, without identity documents you cannot attend school, without attending school you cannot find a legal job, without a legal job, the person is socially excluded, marginalized , thus living on the

periphery of society and living from today to tomorrow, not being able to have access to a quality home, a bank loan or a quality life.

The quality of life of the Roma is also reflected in their diet, which is considered inferior compared to the rest of the population. About 40% of Roma in the European Union suffered from hunger at least once a month. The quality of the food they consume can be explained by socio-economic factors such as poverty and education. However, Roma consumption patterns can also be determined by their informal traditions. Thus, income levels and their volatility, compared to the majority population, are reflected in their access to sufficient and good quality food, hence the few options of diversified diets (Ciaian et. al. 2018).

Another very important fact is that a significant percentage of 21% of the Roma, in relation to the cited bibliographic sources, live in buildings for which they do not have ownership documents, often built houses and sometimes even illegally occupied houses, a fact that on the one hand it generates legal problems and on the other hand it contributes to the amplification of a risk of social exclusion. The risk of social exclusion is certain, even taking into account the loss of housing. At the same time, the living conditions are closely related to the state of health of the Roma. Thus, housing is considered a determining factor, being able to negatively affect vulnerable and marginalized populations, such as the Roma. Air pollution caused by energy sources inside Roma settlements (excess carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide) has a strong impact on their health (Majdan et. al. 2012).

In this context, a research highlighting the degree of satisfaction of Roma beneficiaries with the social services in Timișoara and Timiș County, which are intended for citizens in difficulty, is all the more important because social services can directly contribute to increasing the degree of integration social, reducing vulnerability, decreasing the risk of social marginalization, implicitly in reducing the social exclusion of ethnic Roma. In the particular context created, the degree of satisfaction and perception of ethnic Roma on social services, we can, in the future, research how these services really respond to the problems of ethnic Roma and how these services are prepared to really provide the premises for a good social reintegration, the reduction of vulnerability, the risk of social marginalization, implicitly contributing to the good social functioning of communities.

2. Methodological considerations

The purpose of the research: Identifying the perception of the beneficiaries of social services from Timișoara and Timiș County, of Roma ethnicity, towards these services.

Research objectives:

1. Identifying vulnerabilities related to these services
2. Identifying how these services respond to real problems of Roma ethics
3. Determining how social services provide a good response to Roma problems

3. Demographic considerations

In Timiș county, the large urban communities where there are Roma communities are Timișoara and Lugoj. In addition to the two municipalities, there are a number of smaller rural communities, in which there are numerically significant Roma communities. Pesac, Periam, Saravale, Sânpetru Mare, Satchinez, Checea, Uliuc and Berini from Sacoșu Turcesc commune and Măguri locality belonging to Lugoj municipality are just some examples of localities where there are numerous Roma communities.

Due to the limitation of material resources for the implementation of the research, the urban communities of Timișoara and Lugoj were included in this research, respectively ethnic communities from two rural communities, Berini and Uliuc.

As a first remark, from a demographic perspective, the Roma respondents were under 35 years of age, this is a general characteristic of the Roma ethnic group, the Roma population having a young demographic structure compared to the majority population in Romania (Zamfir and Preda, 2002:15).

The pilot research focused on a number of 30 people of Roma ethnicity, 15 males and 15 females, who answered the questions, affirmatively residing in Timiș County and under the age of 35. As for the level of education, two people of Roma ethnicity had completed secondary school education, respectively, the rest stated that they had not completed secondary school education.

4. The target group

The target group was deliberately chosen from among the ethnic Roma who benefited from social benefits or accessed social services in the last 5 years or are in the assistance of social services at the moment. By social services we refer both to residential services with accommodation and to social services belonging to local public authorities, for the benefit part, but also social services that are of the non-governmental organization type or are patronized by religious cults or are under their organization. Practically, an important condition for participating in this study was that the respondent had benefited from social services.

Institutional communication

The participants in the study are mostly satisfied with the way in which they are communicated with within the social services, 65% state that they had no difficulties communicating with the representatives of the social services, while 23% of the participants in the study believe that this communication could be improved but does not report major complaints related to communication with representatives of social services. A percentage of 13% believe that this communication is carried out in a difficult and cumbersome manner and they feel disadvantaged in the relationship with the representatives of social services.

Professional attitude: 67% of the respondents are of the opinion that the professionals had an impeccable and impeccable attitude, while 20% of the respondents are of the opinion that the professionals had a good attitude. A percentage of 13% believe that the attitude of professionals could be significantly improved towards people who benefit from benefits or social services.

The solution to the problem: a percentage of just over half, i.e. 54% of the respondents, state that the problem for which they accessed the social service was solved from the first meetings, while 33% of the respondents claim that the problem for which they accessed the social service and found resolution after several meetings, i.e. after more than four or five meetings or sessions with the social service professional. A percentage of 13% of the participants in the study claim that the problem for which they accessed the social service did not find any solution and accessing the service was done without any obvious benefit.

The labour market in each country may refer to a locality, a smaller or larger area, or the entire economy, with different phases: in the case of unqualified labour force or with inferior qualification, the scope is small, the labour force needs can be satisfied in a locality; as the qualification level of the labour force increases, the highly-qualified labour force is more rare, and the necessity occurs to expand the scope of the labour force to larger areas or even to the entire territory of the country.

The labour market is a heterogeneous ensemble, made of the individualised labour markets down to each trade of profession, operating distinctly and with the possibility of mutual influence by professional requalification.

After Popp(2013), the disappearance of jobs triggered among certain social-professional categories affected by unemployment the reduction of material gains and the change of social

statuses and roles. Starting from the fact that "labour is the most powerful connection between individual and society" (S. Freud), unemployment means not only a loss of income, but also the loss of self-confidence, erosion of the connections with the community and the occurrence of the sentiment of exclusion from normal life, which may constitute a true menace for democracy (Codin, 1990). Under these circumstances, the essential goal of social policies in Romania consists in guaranteeing a job and guaranteeing a decent living, either resulted from the direct labour of the respective person, or by means of the services of social protection and assistance. It is necessary to reinstate an environment favourable to learning and labour, meant to make it possible that labour become the main source of living, and the person who works in order to dispose directly of part of its results "feels it is worth working, that he can live from the earnings of his labour" (Stegăroiu, 1993).

Stereotypical attitude / discrimination: a percentage of 70% of the respondents state that they have not been the victim in any way of a stereotypical attitude or during the ancillary period of the social service, while 20% of the respondents believe that they did not pay attention to these aspects but that they did not see any signs of discrimination or did not feel discriminated in any way while accessing the service. All of them, a percentage of 10%, are of the opinion that the professionals of the service discriminated them through gestures, attitudes, even through inappropriate jokes related to the social situation, not being able to specify whether they did it in bad faith or whether these jokes had an innocent character. However, when detailing the question, 10% continue to claim that they felt discriminated against in the situation in which they accessed the social vice and the attitude of the professionals left much to be desired towards them.

Availability of the professional / orientation to problems: a percentage of 73% of the respondents consider that the social service professionals acted impeccably and that they proved a good response to the reported problem, while 20% consider that the professionals had a good performance. Only 7% of the respondents declare that they are totally dissatisfied with the attitude of the professionals towards the reported problem and implicitly with the response of the social service to the problem they themselves are facing.

Work procedures and their explanation: regarding the working procedures of the social service, 53% of the respondents believe that they were explained or understood well enough the working procedures underlying the provision of the service or social benefit so that they left fully enlightened of the problem or situation they are facing, while 47% of the respondents believe that the work procedures were not sufficiently explained to them or were not sufficiently well understood. They state that they do not understand the organization and operation of the system or the social service.

Hierarchical social problems: 47% of the respondents believe that the main social problem they face is the lack of money or its insufficiency, related to the fact that they fail to meet their needs. This is attributed to a non-existent job/job or a poorly paid job. Among the occupations practiced by the respondents are casual daily workers so that the amounts of money received do not provide them with the necessary subsistence. 33% of the respondents are of the opinion that a big problem is the housing problem under the aspect of housing possession of the housing facilities or the insufficiently equipped and organized / built housing, so the housing problem represents a stress being ranked among the main problems. 20% of respondents believe that the main problem is the lack of jobs in the communities of which they are a part, respectively the difficulty of commuting to a job in big cities correlated with the high cost of transportation.

Family problems encountered: 47% of respondents declare themselves worried due to the absence of financial resources to ensure the goods necessary for family life, 40% of respondents declare they are worried about the future of children and the lack of opportunities

for them in the communities they belong to, 13% of respondents declare that he does not encounter any kind of problem at the family level.

3 of the responding beneficiaries are people who were or are part of the Child Protection system, being adults with full legal capacity and who declare that the current child protection system is clearly superior to the one in the past, respectively the home-type system family is a gain and an addition compared to the old placement centers because in the family home the beneficiaries are more united, communicate better and it's a different atmosphere and attitude. The actual situation of care and assistance is beneficial in relation to the fact that there are far fewer children in these family-type homes and the respondents declare that this is a good thing and the Child Protection system responds much better at the present moment to their needs. Regarding schooling, offering opportunities on the labor market and other types of problems that young people in the protection system face, the degree of satisfaction and satisfaction expressed by the beneficiaries of the protection system with the services offered within it is good.

Violation of law by respondents: at the percentage level, 97% of the respondents state that they have not broken the law, respectively 3% claim that they have committed a crime.

From a numerical level point of view, this represents 29 out of a total of 30 respondents who have not committed any criminal act during their life, respectively only one person states that he has committed a crime.

One of the beneficiaries participating in the study states that he served a custodial sentence, as a result of driving an unregistered car and without a driver's license on public roads, repeatedly. A non-violent crime that sent him behind bars. He also states that he also consumed alcoholic beverages with a very high blood alcohol level. However, he believes that the punishment was disproportionate to the act committed and believes that it was not appropriate for him to receive a custodial sentence for such an act because he did not cause any kind of accident. However, he does not believe that it is the court's fault and that he was not discriminated against because of his ethnicity, but rather the fault belongs to the lawyer who did not work hard enough on the case.

The other respondents state that they had no contact with the prison system and that they did not break the law at the level of crime.

Conclusions

The social protection system largely responds to the overall overall needs and requirements of the ethnic Roma respondents. The representatives of the social services show good communication with the beneficiaries and a professional attitude, in most of the cases. On the other hand, the problem solving process offers a fairly easy solution from the first meetings. However, despite this, there is a constant percentage, between 10% and 13% of respondents who declare themselves dissatisfied with the institutional communication framework, with the attitude of the professionals, as well as with the fact that the problem for which they accessed the social service did not find a solution. This percentage is also significant for those who believe that there are stereotypical or discriminatory attitudes in the social services towards ethnic Roma. There are also dissatisfactions and people who declare themselves totally dissatisfied. A small percentage of respondents are dissatisfied with the social service, because the problem they are facing has not been solved. However, a much larger percentage of respondents believe that they do not always understand the working procedures of a social service and that no one explains these procedures to them in a way that they understand.

The persistent problems faced by ethnic Roma participating in the study are the lack of money, respectively obvious concerns for the future of the children. Also the existing jobs in their communities or their absence is a cause for concern.

Regarding criminality and violation of the law, only one person among the respondents states that he violated the law and served a custodial sentence. What is significant, the crime for which he states that the custodial sentence was executed is a non-violent one and not directed against the patrimony although it represents a violation of the law with criminal consequences and repeatedly.

The answers given to this pilot research create the premises for a better adaptation of some social services to the ethnic Roma and their needs. Although the problems find a solution which is a positive fact and a certain quality of the services provided, not always the working procedures of the social services are known and understood by the service seekers. Social services respond to real problems to a great extent and provide a good response to them.

However, better procedural adaptation would be needed, so that service seekers understand how they work and how these services can be involved in the problem-solving process.

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