

VOLUME PRESENTATION
SOCIAL POLICIES IN ROMANIA 30 YEARS AFTER:
EXPECTATIONS AND ANSWERS*

ELENA ZAMFIR

It is much harder to introduce a collective volume than a one-author book. As I assumed the introduction of the volume on behalf of the coordinators, I won't enter into detailed analysis for each study, leaving room to your questions for the authors of the book.

I will resume myself only to the general and ultimate intent of the book, and to some of its conclusions regarding the impact of the policy strategies' in creating social and individual welfare in post-December Romania.

The book provides an integrative vision about the social policy models in their dynamics, over the 30 years from the Revolution. In fact, the 16 studies, though independent, have the backbone of shared unity regarding the thematic structure and methodology. The studies, one by one, are an analysis of the sectorial social policies over the 30 years of transition, for outlining the specific profile of the policies in Romania as compared with the ones of the EU-member-states.

A characteristic of the studies is given by the fact that the analysis and evaluation of social policies in post-December Romania is realized in a comparatively wide framework, by referring to the European standards and policies.

The methodology applied by the researchers is supported by the comparative approach of the social policies from post-December Romania, substantiated by data/ reasonings provided by national and international statistics, secondary data analyses from research, research reports and empirical researches of IQLR, and scenarios proposed in the post-December evolution based on Country Development Strategies

Address of the corresponding author: Elena Zamfir, Research Institute for Quality of Life Romanian Academy, Calea 13 Septembrie, nr. 13, sector 5, 050711, București, România, e-mail: ezamfir1@gmail.com.

* "Social policy in Romania, after 30 years. Facts and expectations", coords. Elena Zamfir, Mălina Voicu, Simona Maria Stănescu. Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 2020. The readers who are interested by this work after reading the presentation in the Quality of Life Review, after book releasing, are invited to read the studies and original texts of the authors.

The analyses of the authors are focused on three common goals:

- Pursuing the changes occurred in Romania in the dynamics of the past 30 years' process of reconstructing the country. Mentions are made in the context about the actual specific stages of the Country Development Strategies.

- Evaluating the efficiency of the mitigation by public social policies to the complex social issues of the transition during the reform process, and the changes brought by social and individual welfare.

- Pragmatic suggestions of changes to social policies, according to actual requirements of the individuals and vulnerable groups.

The authors highlight that over the past 30 years of post-communism Romania underwent a **difficult transition from the planned economy to the market economy**. The country accessed the European Union. The effects of the population ageing process began to be felt, and the country is faced with a massive migration wave, especially of the active skilled labor force. The social polarization became more marked, and wide vulnerable groups were pushed into marginalization and social exclusion. Poverty grew more obvious, along with severe poverty. All these risks of economic, social and political order required firm mitigation at the level of some active social policies.

Hence, we considered as necessary **identifying and analyzing the new social order risks and vulnerabilities**, as well as the analysis of the impact of the existing policies and their capacity of satisfying the needs faced by the **Romanian society nowadays**. The present volume is circumscribed to this context, as it focuses on evaluation and impact of social policies for the past 30 years since the Revolution. The contributions of the studies included in the volume highlighted the general trends of the welfare development in Romania, but also the assessment of the **impact of social policies on some potentially vulnerable segments**. The social risks to which these segments are exposed were identified, along with their needs and policy measures that would alleviate these needs. Thus, there were considered preponderantly **three segments of population: elderly, children and youths**.

Why these groups?

Children have always aroused special interest for social policies and, in spite of the policies implemented over the past thirty decades, poverty and disparities between rural and urban still affect strongly the equality of chances among children. To these are added the effects of their parents' migration for working abroad, which implies a series of additional risks and needs among children.

The youths represent another segment exposed to specific social risks. Those finishing secondary education and not entering into tertiary education are a group subjected to multiple risks and vulnerabilities. Even though Romania is faced with

the highest labor force deficit within the European Union, the unemployment rate among youths aged below 24 years with only secondary education is very high. It is necessary to study the factors that hinder the professional insertion of these youths, and to identify measures that would stimulate their integration on the labor market in Romania, for avoiding their migration for labor abroad.

Elderly are a category exposed to some high social risks, and with specific needs. By the beginning of the 2000s, the number of pensioners exceeded the one of the active persons, putting particular pressure on the state's social insurances budget. The phenomenon became acute because of the massive migration of active labor force to other EU member-states. Moreover, the migration of health-care workers, doubled by the migration of the younger members of the Romanian families who were traditionally the support ensuring care for the elderly emerge as detrimental factors for the quality of life for the elderly, and as increasing the risk of poverty. The low level of the pension, especially in the rural area, as well as the lacking access to medical and health care services emphasize their vulnerability degree.

(In this respect of the above mentioned issues, the IQLR researchers proposed the realization of a volume that would combine quantitative and qualitative methods of data gathering, regarding the impact of social policies in Romania, based on **the comparative analysis of European statistics about Romania's positioning within the system of social protection and assistance policies in the EU member-states.**

The aims of the volume:

The volume is focused on individual and collective welfare policies in their dynamics, but also on the need of active support measures for vulnerable groups. The approach was comparative from both longitudinal and cross-sectional perspective. The contributions of the researchers were based **with priority on the relevant data** generated and gathered in time by our institute, regarding the main social policy fields, with emphasis on vulnerable individuals/groups.

The contributions of the 21 researchers highlighted the general trends of the welfare evolution in Romania for the past 30 years since the Revolution in December, by evaluating the impact of social policies on some potentially vulnerable segments (unemployed youths, monoparental and poor families, elderly, and Roma with marginalization risks). The social risks to which these segments were exposed have been identified, and also the needs that they have, along with the policy measures most suited to address these needs.

The idea of the book is dedicated to the assessment of social policies, and is, in fact, closely linked to the research projects and institutional reconstruction programs in which IQLR participated directly after 1990. Therefore, the initiative of a volume of author studies on social policies in

Romania is not at all circumstantial, nor singular among the publications in the social policy field.

Mention worthy is that at the time of beginning the transition, the academic research environment answered to the requests of the decision-making political factors by direct participation to the national construction programs regarding the institutional administrative system for social assistance and social protection.

The volume, though consisting of independent studies, these are organized in the logical order of content unity regarding the analyzed sectorial policies, attempting to complete as realistically as possible the general profile of the social policies in their dynamics for the past 30 years.

The readers should understand that the transition brought with it the multiplication of social risks turning more marked by the shift from plan economy to market economy. To these were added many other unsolved issues of the communist regime.

In the process of European integration, Romania was forced to relate to indicators and quality standards established within the agreement of the European states. Unfortunately, Romania was placed always on the last positions, or on marginal position within the EU for almost all indicators regarding social state, for a long period of time: poverty and extreme poverty deprivation, functional illiteracy and school abandon, the lack of decent housing and secure jobs, child poverty, the lack of health-care services for all, gender and ethnic discrimination, the increasingly marked polarization between rich and poor, the massive deepening of income inequalities, the multiple forms of inequality generated by social injustice, etc., all of these affected the social state of children, youths, and vulnerable persons. The studies in this volume make a review of the way in which post-December public social policies have faced these challenges and given specific answers, differentiated on stages, depending on the governmental programs.

The volume emphasizes the new orientation of social policies, of shifting from limited strictly antipoverty policies to dynamic programs directed on inclusion and social justice, equality of chances and equal opportunities for all, etc. This vision is increasingly more present in the field of European social policies, and it was dominant in the process of accessing the EU. Here are underpinned the new trends in social policies which, in their entirety of satisfying human requirements/ needs, take account also of the impact of noneconomic social factors on the individual and collective welfare. In fact, these complete a complex-multidimensional profile of the quality of life and of the requirements of human development. Thus, at the core of development is placed “socially inclusive economic growth”, and not economic growth *per se*. In the process of European integration, European welfare standards exercised pressure on determining sectorial public policies in the member-states. Many of these

recommendations, however, were placed for Romania more at the level of stated public policies displayed merely ideologically, but without any actual correspondence in visible changes in the situation of the social support beneficiaries. The individual contributions of the IQLR researchers contribute/add to the awareness about the **need within the system of public policies for a structured vision, of integrated type regarding individual's needs and the ones of the vulnerable groups**. Unfortunately, this requirement remained unaddressed over the transition period.

Throughout the volume, the reader is familiarized with some new and multiple forms of social exclusion. Clear milestones are specified, marked by objective and subjective indicators of the quality of life regarding types of risks generating new and multiple forms of marginalization and social exclusion. The factors, conditions, and actual reasons of social exclusion emerge as major challenges for sectorial and global inclusion policies. In the 16 studies, the social risks of transition are brought to light, one by one, in the context of an inefficient economy that generated and reproduced **poverty and extreme poverty, social exclusion, underemployment, marked social polarization, administrative incompetence, high-level corruption, marginalization for large social disfavored groups, underfinanced social assistance services, high inequities in the incomes' distribution in households, low wages and poor working conditions, illicit income sources for some categories, increasing mistrust in the political class and its decisions, etc.** All these place Romania on one of the marginal positions in the hierarchy of EU member countries. The analyses of the authors and statistical data at European level underpin that **inequality and social polarization** increased over the past years, and that the forms of social exclusion have reached increasingly higher shares for Romania, as compared with the EU member-states.

Thus, **striking social imbalance** gained field gradually over the past 30 years, because of these multiple issues that were not controlled at the right time. On the background of bureaucracy, of non-performant management, and of an economy periodically undergoing a crisis, but also of low social accountability, **the new identified issues were always postponed, becoming chronic**.

Many of the studies emphasize that during transition major changes were not recorded regarding sectorial social policies with positive social impact, as we had imagined in the nineties. All in all, **the construction of a culture of democracy and responsible participation** was hard to achieve, being placed more in the sphere of desiderates.

It is underpinned that the failed outcomes of some social changes were due to **lacking accountability in determining the priorities within the country development strategies**. Moreover, **the effects of economic growth/development on the satisfaction with life were systematically underestimated**. The individual with his/ her concerns is absent in the imperative of economic

growth. At the core is placed the “soulless economy” disconnected from the issues of the individual that are not related with the western/ capitalist model with human face as foreseen in the promises and expectations at the beginning of the transition. On this path, the impact analyses/ studies that could have avoided the considerable risks of some irrational, populist-type decisions and which have affected severely entire collectivities and individuals, lacked also.

In epistemology, it is a clear **deontological norm** forbidding any types of experiments made on individual or collectivities for the sake of knowledge or social changes. Therefore, any action/ country project strategy should answer first to major questions:

- *what type of future development is foreseen based on a country project in agreement with the human/ population requirements;*
- *which is the best way for us to pursue, according to a life cultural model;*
- *in what direction do we intend to act (how are the milestones and targets selected);*
- *how to act responsibly for avoiding the Machiavellian dictum of the purpose excusing the means, etc.*
- *which is, finally, the significance of the economic-social changes for the individual.*

In fact, social policies of inclusion for groups and individuals must adopt a **complex-structured approach of specific needs**. These should be found again, in a structured package of *policies that would integrate harmoniously all*. In this context, **social assistance**, together with education, health, housing and employment has a core place in sectorial policies. Thus, the concern for preventing and reducing the various forms of marginalization and social exclusion becomes, currently, a core tool of a *new culture of social solidarity of promoting inclusion*. **Thus, the compulsory presence of an integrated vision in elaborating and implementing social policies emerges as imperative of social changes, in line with some active, succeeding actions. In fact, only an integrative perspective on all social and human issues, prioritized correctly in the system of public policies can ensure adequate mitigation to their increasing complexity.**

It should be stipulated that social policies appear not only as research and vocational training objective, but also as **requirement in elaborating a new Program of Social Reconstruction based on an own Governmental Strategy.**

The analyses of the authors based on statistical data at European level emphasize that **inequality and polarization increased** in the past years, **and that the forms of social exclusion have reached increasingly higher shares for Romania, as compared with EU countries.** In spite of the high financial costs used for building the new postcommunist system, and of the human sacrifices made over the long periods of crisis, the **post-December governments failed to identify properly the causes of these social risks and to attenuate or eliminate their effects based on viable solutions and in time.**

In Romania, the **democratization process of the social system**, at all levels, was slow, emptied of the content of competent and responsible participation to the collective decisions of reform and social changes. Many of the studies underpin that, during the transition, the sectorial social policies did not record any major changes with positive social impact, as we had imagined in the nineties. **All in all, the construction of a culture of democracy and responsible participation** was difficult and remained more in the sphere of expectations.

In the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic new challenges open up for social research. Therefore, the idea of a new volume on social policies will be directed on “changes occurred in social policies during the COVID-19 pandemic”.

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