

IMPROVING CITIZENS' SATISFACTION CONCERNING THE SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES AT URBAN LEVEL

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Abstract

The integrated social services system is a component of the social protection system through which the state, the local public authorities and the society assure the prevention, limitation and elimination of the temporary and permanent effects of the situations generated by the poverty and big vulnerability. The integration of the social services system assures many approaches such as: policy level integration, the integration of all the social service types for all the beneficiaries in a unique system, the correlation of the social services with the social offerings, family level integration, unifying the system work methodology and the multidisciplinary integration on group level. The paper relies on an extensive research over the social welfare system services offered by the General Direction of Social Welfare of Bucharest. The research grounds on an extensive sample of beneficiaries of the social services from Bucharest. The main aim of this research was to identify the key actions for improving the social welfare services at the level of Bucharest. Other specific research objectives were: to find out the degree of satisfaction of the services beneficiaries; to identify the main problems and the ways of improving the social services in Bucharest. The main method used for collecting the data was the on-line questionnaire. The research results can constitute a reference base for the local and central authorities that should do substantial revisions of the social service policies and elaborate a clear and coherent local and national social welfare strategy able to ensure a sustainable development of the social welfare services in Romania.

Keywords: social welfare services; satisfaction; vulnerability.

1. INTRODUCTION

The social welfare system is facing a deep crisis all over the world. In Romania, the social problems are more serious than in other countries, mainly caused by a chronic economic crisis, on the background of the inefficient social policies measures taken in the last decade. Those affected mostly the vulnerable groups from Romania, in general as well as from Bucharest. In Romania, two different systems coexist; one is of social welfare and the other one of social protection. As a component of the social protection system, the social welfare system offers money or goods independently of the social protection system, but complementary it.

The purpose of the social welfare is very important in all the states. The social welfare system in Romania offers customized services to people with social integration problems orients them into understanding and

utilizing the social protection legal frame, mobilizes the community, people and groups in difficulty to directly participate at the preparation of the social policies. Through social welfare, the beneficiaries receive financial support, psychotherapy and counseling. In the social welfare programs, some activities for preventing an unbalanced lifestyle, stressful from an economic, cultural, psychological and moral point of view, for the individuals and vulnerable groups, are included. (Chromjakova, 2016).

Social welfare is an essential part of the social protection and ensures a partial attenuation of existing inequalities by helping people with problems to regain their own autonomy and to integrate them in the local community. The social welfare system offers services that are being financed by the social assurance budget. Mainly the social welfare system aid is set in overall limits by law, being customized from case to case after specific analysis (Chromjakova, 2016).

The social welfare problems can be approached on different levels: on individual level through economic, psychological and moral welfare for the unemployed person, the drug and alcohol addicts, those with work integration problems, for any type of abuse victims etc.; on interpersonal and group level through family therapy, couple-therapy and that of marginalized groups; on community level through the resolving of group, ethnic conflicts, through mobilizing the individual and collective energies for rebuilding the necessary resources for their normal integration (Buzducea, 2005).

The set of public policies that aim to realize the social protection and of wellbeing are reunited in the concept of social policy. With their aid, the social welfare includes concepts from the economy, sociology, psychology, management, philosophy and law.

In Romania, The Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection has attributes in the domains of social policy joint with The Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation as well as The Ministry for Regional Development and Administration. The legal and institutional frame establishes the principles and general rules for offering the social welfare services in Romania. The legal framework for social assistance services in Romania is composed of the following normative acts:

- Ministerial Order no. 392 /10.03.2017 for amending and supplementing the annex to the Order of the Minister of Labor, Family, Social Protection and the Elderly Persons no.1887/2016 regarding the setting of the monthly maintenance contribution due to assisted adults;
- Law 197/2012 on quality assurance in the field of social services;
- Law no. 292 of 20 December 2011 - Social Assistance Law;
- Emergency Ordinance no. 124 of December 27, 2011 for amending and supplementing some normative acts regulating the granting of social assistance benefits;

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- Law no. 47 of 08 March 2006 on the national social assistance system;
 - Law no. 74 of 3 May 1999 on the ratification of the revised European Social Charter, adopted in Strasbourg on 3 May 1996

This legal frame has generated a lot of confusion through reducing the state social functions and through the externalization of public social welfare services. The beneficiaries of the social welfare in Romania await a new law that has a rational basis for organization, functioning and development of the social welfare system. From this perspective, the results of our research presented in this paper can be considered as a basis in the process of elaborating a new social policy in Romania. The changes from the last years made in the legal frame have not responded enough to the social policy requirements. The last amendments brought to the social welfare law aim the following two aspects that can be found also at the level of social welfare policies: (1) the limitation of public services through their externalization; (2) the massive reduction of the number of beneficiaries and their amount or value. Practically, social welfare services were replaced by programs with two objectives: (1) diminishing the number of social aid categories from 54 to 9 and (2) the drastic reduction of the budget for social welfare services. The externalizations of some of the social welfare services to associations and foundations financed by the state have been implemented by numerous ministerial orders published in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

According to the INS (National Institute of Statistics) data, Romania has assigned in 2016 1% from the total of 17% of the GDP allocated for social welfare expenditures. This assignment sets Romania on the last place of social welfare expenditure from the European Union. This situation has remained unchanged also during 2016. At the beginning of 2017 more financial resources were assigned for the social welfare area, but those have covered mainly the needs for the salary growth of the social services personnel involved in the social welfare services and less for quality and social welfare service diversification.

In this context, we considered that a research on the social welfare services offered by the General Directorate for Social Welfare of Bucharest (DGASMB) is needed for getting to know the problems that the beneficiaries face in order to identify the main changes needed in the social welfare services in Bucharest and Romania too.

2. SOCIAL WELFARE IN THE LITERATURE

Social welfare appeared as a response to the needs and problems of the people, as well as the groups facing difficulties. The opinion of Elena Zamfir (2009, p.127) is that: „the social welfare designates an assembly of institutions, programs, measures, professional activities, specialized individual and group oriented protection services, to communities with special needs, that are temporarily in difficulty, because

of various reasons such as economical, social-cultural, biological or psychological and do not have the possibility of realizing a decent lifestyle through their own means and efforts.”

According to law nr. 292/2011 for social welfare services, this service has the scope of developing the individual, group-wise and collective capacities of the beneficiaries for satisfying their own social needs, rising their life quality and promoting the principles of cohesion and social inclusion.

The various support forms for the people in need through charity acts, and that can be found in all the human communities, can be considered primary forms of the social welfare practices (Lazaroiu, 2016).

Modern societies were in a decisive point on developing and institutionalizing the social welfare. At the beginning of the XVII century, in England a suggestively named law “Elizabethan Poor Law” was applied. That law imposed a poverty tax for the first time and because of that it can be considered a debut of institutionalizing the social welfare (De Gregorio, 2017). From the paid tax by the ones that owned land, funds were raised for the ones that were poor and disadvantaged: elders, handicapped, sick, abandoned children, orphans etc. Later, in the XIX century in England, France, Germany and USA, the first social protection systems appear in the sphere of the social assurances (mainly focused on health, elders, orphans, labor accidents). The social welfare system, like any other system needs organization for proper functioning in order to have the expected results. The need to organize was felt from the beginning of the social welfare, in 1775 when the first law for child protection was adopted. Later on, in 1831 a structured social welfare system has developed. At the end of the XX century and beginning of the XXI century, we could talk about a complex and systemic development of social welfare services in many states. The social welfare was transformed in a professional activity.

The opinion of Daniela Virjan (2004, p.116) is that: “the social welfare is recognized by the majority of worlds governments as an important social service for community development together with all the other public services such as health, education and social protection. The social welfare exists because the world is not perfect. The social workers come in helping the people that confront themselves with various social problems.”

In Romania, the main activities from the area of social welfare (Buzducea, 2005) are as follows:

- Identifying and registering the population segment that should benefit from social welfare;
- Diagnosing the vulnerable people and high risk groups problems;
- Developing a coherent system of programs, measures, professional activities for support and protection of the beneficiaries of the social welfare;
- Identifying the financing sourcing of the support programs;

- Establishing the rights and the specific ways to access social welfare services;
- Support through counseling, individual and group therapy;
- Promoting strategies that will prevent the critical situations in which the unfortunate might find themselves;
- Developing some programs and social welfare policies that will be implemented nationally and locally.

According with the specialized literature (Mathis, 2017; Strielkowski, et al., 2017), the activities from the social welfare are being exercised on individually, group and collective level.

On individual level an economic, psychological and moral welfare is granted to those who, for example, lost their job and have problems in integrating themselves on the labor market, or those who are drug or alcohol addicts.

On group level (families) a couple of therapies are offered with the purpose of solving the problems they are facing with.

At the community level for solving the ethnic problems for regaining the necessary resources for integration of the targeted people.

The main objective of social welfare services is to help the vulnerable people in need to benefit from a normal life.

2. SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES IN ROMANIA AND THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES

In Romania, the responsibility of development, administration and granting the social welfare services is divided between the central administration that elaborates the legal framework, the policies, the national strategy and programs in the area of social welfare services and the local public administration in whose responsibility are the organization, administration and delivering of the social services. To those two, the associations and the foundations were added in the last years. The financing of the social services in Romania is being made from the central social insurance budget, from the local budgets as well as from other sources.

The main beneficiaries of the social welfare in Romania are: poor families, minors, delinquents, disorganized couples, unemployed people, misplaced youngsters, drug and alcohol addicts, children that live in a social adverse environment, abandoned children, homeless and institutionalized people, elders, HIV infected people and other.

The main providers of social welfare in Romania are: (1) administration institutions; (2) associations and foundations; (3) social assistants; (4) branches of international associations and foundations recognized and compliant with the law; (5) international specialized organizations.

In Romania, all the external social services providers must be accredited in compliance with the applicable law.

The main types of granted social welfare benefits are:

1. Aid offered to families with low income:
 - a. Social aid;
 - b. Heating aid;
 - c. Allowance for sustaining the family;
2. Family policies:
 - a. State allowance for children;
 - b. Placement allowance;
 - c. Raising the child compensation and insertion incentives;
3. Aid offered to people with disabilities:
 - a. Rights offered for challenged people in compliance with the Law no. 448/2006;
 - b. Complementary budgets given monthly to challenged people;
 - c. Food allowance for the HIV/AIDS infected children and adults;
 - d. Monthly allowance given for people with severe and accentuated handicap;
 - e. Monthly allowance given to attendants for the people with visual handicap;

Following an extensive documentation in the literature and a systematic data analysis process, we have identified many problems of social welfare services in Romania. Some of the most serious issues are the following:

- The limited capacity of the administrative body on central as well as on local level to deliver a diversified and good quality social welfare services according with the needs of the poor and vulnerable people in Romania;
- The lack of a medium and long term strategy regarding the social welfare services in Romania;

- The diminishing trust of the beneficiaries in the service providers;
- The externalization of an important number of social welfare services;
- The lack of an effective control and monitoring over the way the provided social welfare services are realized delivered and of the allocated funds distributed.

The main effects of those deficiencies are:

- The progressive weakening of the social functions of the state institutions;
- The bureaucratization of the social welfare public system and limiting its dialogue, communication with the actors implicated in the system;
- Incoherent policies that are decisively limited by the budget allocation for financing the social welfare services in Romania;
- The massive polarization of the society and pushing it in an extreme poverty, without hope.

According to the study made by the INS, in 2016 the poverty rate has increased for the main age groups (Fig. 1.)

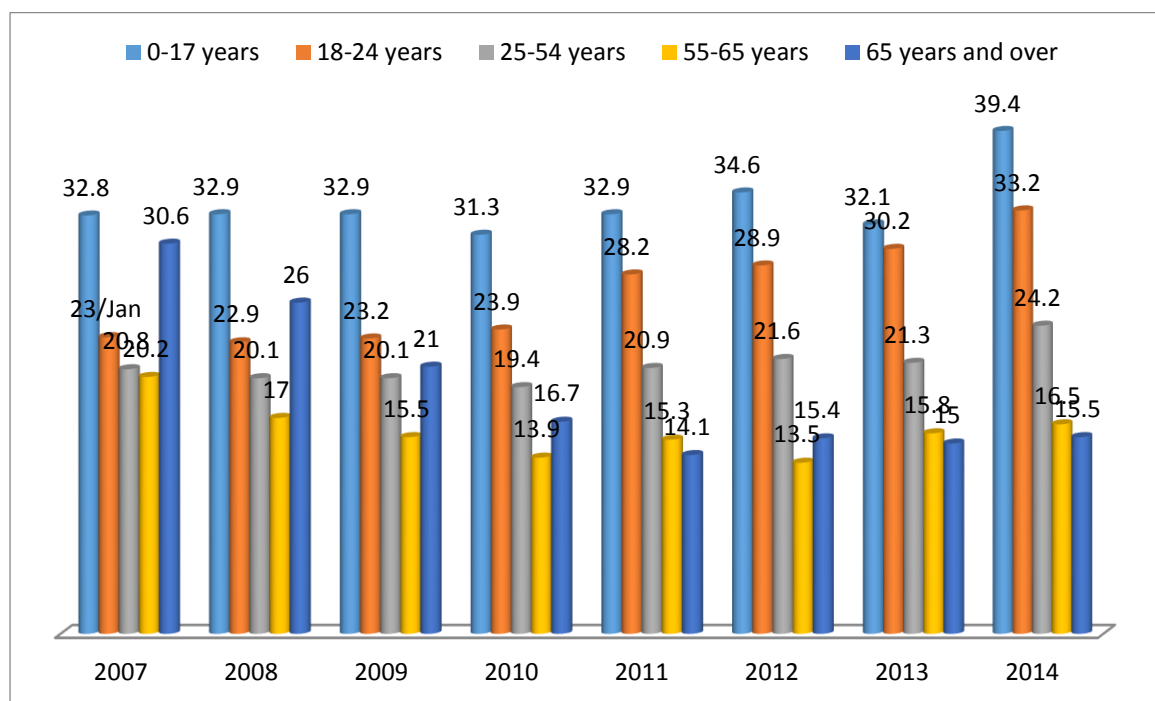


FIGURE 1 - THE EVOLUTION OF THE POVERTY RATE IN ROMANIA ON AGE-GROUPS IN THE FRAME OF 2007-2014 (SOURCE: POPA D, 2016)

According to INS, in Romania are 8.5 million people that lie in risk of poverty or social exclusion. Based on the dates published by European statistics, in 2014 approximately 40,2% of the Romanian population

was exposed to poverty risk and social exclusion, situation that placed Romania on the first position in the European Union, under the circumstances that, at European Union level, 122 million people or 24,4% of the population, were in similar situations. Unfortunately, this situation persisted also at the end of 2016.

Those statistic data show that in Romania, the social welfare system becomes more and more vulnerable, through the lack of response to the new dramatically situations of the population. It becomes more costly, through the continuous desire to reform it, without a clear perspective of future development.

The high deficit of clarity and sustainability of the major policy objectives becomes an aggravating factor for the current social welfare state. For example: the social aid was established in 1995, through the Law no. 67, then was revised by the Law no. 416/2001 regarding the minimum guaranteed income (VMG) and applied since 2002. Insuring the minimum guaranteed income was always considered a base for fighting poverty and promoting social inclusion. Few years later, the law regarding the minimum guaranteed income was modified and amended by the Law no. 276/2010. Starting from 2010, the paying of the rights for social aid was moved under the responsibilities of the Ministry of Labor. The established quantum was calculated as follows:

- 125 Ron for a single person;
- 225 Ron for the families formed of two members;
- 313 Ron for the families with 3 members;
- 390 Ron for those with four members;
- 462 Ron for the families formed of five members plus 31 Ron for each person that exceeded the number of five members per family.

The Law no. 416/2001 as well as the amended one from 2010, the calculation methodology was hard and restrictive according to the basic needs that could insure a decent lifestyle, to the challenged people and families (Nica and Molnar, 2016).). Many times, based on this aid, we can observe that most of the beneficiaries of the VMG live at the subsistence level, in extreme poverty or under the poverty level. A quarter a million of Romanians receives the minimum guaranteed income, meaning social aid given by the state. More precisely, according to the data provided in May 2016 (most recent available) from the Ministry of Labor, 248.987 of Romanians have received social aid. Reported to the number of inhabitants from the Romanian Ministry of Labor evidence, 1.17% of the whole population receive this minimum guaranteed income. Most of them (approximately 15600 persons) are from southwestern Romania (Dolj county), and the smallest number is from Bucharest (277 persons). Starting in February 2017, the conditions of the Law no. 416/2001 were modified for the families and singles have the right to receive a

minimum income under the form of social welfare. Since 2017, the monthly level of this income is being reported to the Social Reference Indicator (ISR) and its quantum is 500 Ron) and has the following values:

- 0,283 ISR (141,5 Ron) for singles;
- 0,510 ISR (255 Ron) for families formed of two members;
- 0,714 ISR (357 Ron) for families formed of three members;
- 0,884 ISR (442 Ron) for families formed of four members;
- 1,054 ISR (527 Ron) for families formed of five members;
- 0,073 ISR (36,5 Ron) for each person exceeding the number of five members of a family.

The social allowance is designed in order to offer a minimum income to retired people. According to OUG no. 6/2009, as well as the amendments brought to it by OUG no. 2/2017, the retired people receive a minimum pension of 520 Ron/month. In this context, we have decided to conduct a research about the social welfare services provided by the General Directorate of Social Welfare of Bucharest.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES IN BUCHAREST

The research was determined by the fact that the Social Welfare Directorates of the city districts of Bucharest are facing serious problems, such as: (1) the lack of a diversified social welfare services in accordance with the needs and complex requirements of the citizens; (2) the unequal distribution of social welfare services on a district level, that doesn't allow a equitable access to social welfare services; (3) the under-financing of the social welfare services; (4) insufficient human resources. However, we have identified a constant concern of the Bucharest Social Welfare Directorate (DGASMB) for ensuring the equitable and indiscriminately access of the citizens of Bucharest districts to social welfare services adapted to the current needs in order to raise the life quality and promote the cohesion and social inclusion principles on city level, in accordance with the national and European standards in the field.

3.1. *Scope of the research, the specific objectives and methods*

The scope of the research was to identify the main ways to improve the social welfare services from Bucharest and Romania too.

The main specific objectives of the research were the following:

- Getting to know the degree of satisfaction of the beneficiaries of the social welfare services from Bucharest;

- Identifying the main problems of the social welfare services from Bucharest;
- Making some proposals for improving welfare services delivered by the DGASMB.

For the data collection we used an online questionnaire with 13 questions.

The selected population was formed from the beneficiaries of the social welfare services offered by the DGASMB. DGASMB was founded in 2003 and organized as a public social welfare service, with judicial personality, subordinated to the General Council of Bucharest. DGASMB ensures the implementation of the social welfare policies and of the social protection measures for the disabled people, the elders, the singles, families, children as well as citizens in need through the specialized services for the disfavored categories of people in accordance with the laws and the basic strategic documents (Direcția de Asistență Socială a Municipiului București, 2017).

In this research, we started from the premise that the social welfare does not target the social performance (also called benefits, in form from allowances, different aids, financial and/or material) and the providing of social welfare services that sustain and help the citizens in need.

For establishing the dimension of the sample, we used the formula proposed by Mathis (2017). The main parameters on which the size of the sample was determined are the following:

- The trust degree: 95%;
- Error level: 5%;
- Total population: 1.678.000 citizen.

According with them, a number of 384 questionnaires were filled out, but only 208 were validated. All the respondents are beneficiaries of the social welfare services provided by the DGASMB, meaning: elders, people with disabilities, adult homeless citizen, drug addicts, roma citizen, unemployed people, victims of domestic violence and children in need. The age of the respondents was between 14-80 years old, as it can be observed in figure 2. It shows that more than 75% of the respondents have an age between 30 years and over 70 years old. That percentage shows an inequality in comparison with those groups with the age between 14 and 30 years old (27,5%).

This reality proves that, the medium aged citizen as well as the elders are the ones that benefit most of the social welfare services in Bucharest. As can be observed in figure 3, 34% of the DGASMB beneficiaries have an income under 500 Ron. This represents 36,5% from the total number of the beneficiaries, as can be observed from Figure 3. A small number of beneficiaries (5%) have a higher income, meaning over 2000 Ron. Also, in Bucharest is registered a high number of elders with small and very small incomes. This has become an increasingly serious problem in the last years.

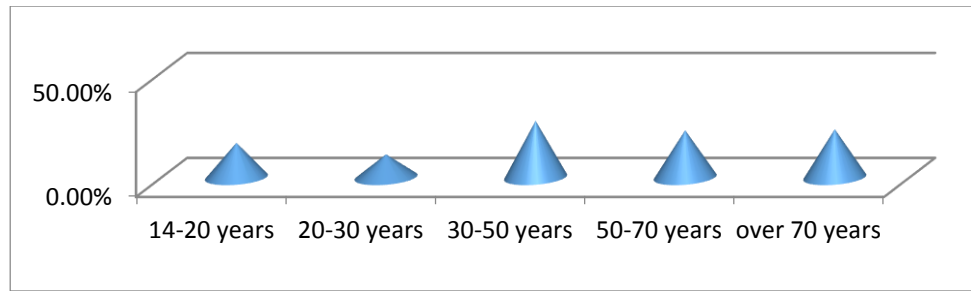


FIGURE 2 - STRUCTURE OF THE SAMPLE AFTER THE RESPONDENTS' AGE (Source: our determination)

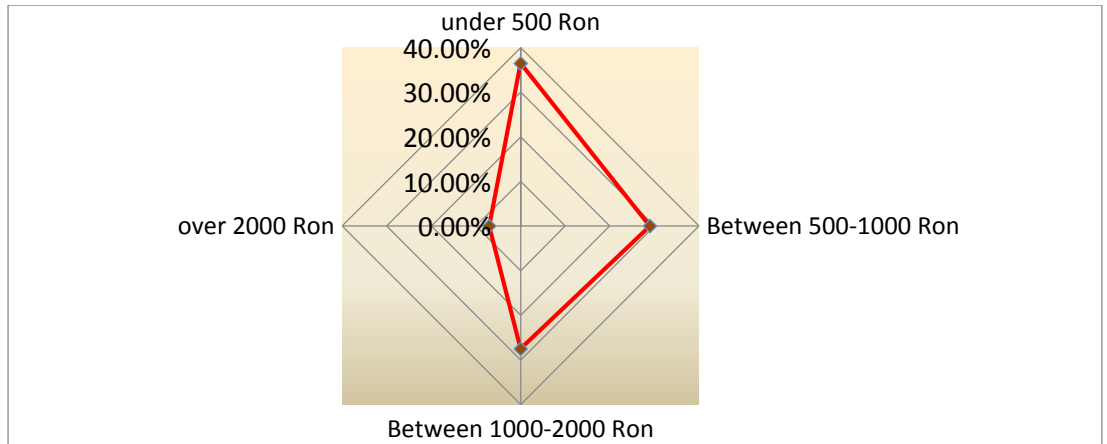


FIGURE 3 - SOCIAL WELFARE BENEFICIARIES INCOME (Source: our determination)

The main categories of beneficiaries of social welfare services that were involved our research are presented in Figure 4.

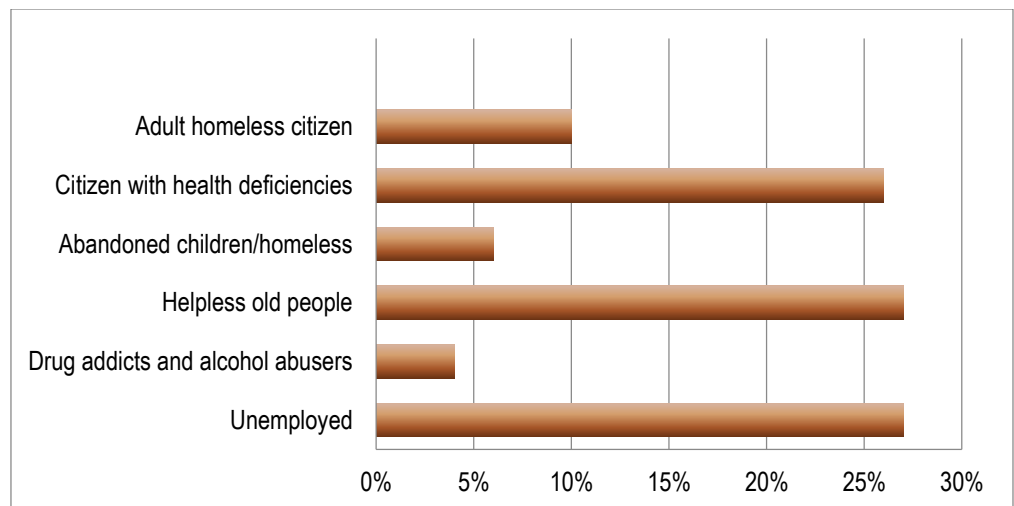


FIGURE 4 - THE MAIN CATEGORIES OF BENEFICIARY OF WELFARE SERVICES OFFERED BY DGASMB (Source: our determination)

3.2. Main results and analysis

The research is complex and multidimensional, but for this research paper we chose to present only the important results which refer to:

- Beneficiaries satisfaction degree and the main causes of expressed dissatisfactions;
- The main problems of the social welfare system from Bucharest in the opinion of the respondents;
- The opinion of the respondents in regard with the quality of the social welfare services offered.

Concerning the first aspect, the results are presented in Figure 5. According to the study, a small number of those declare themselves satisfied of this service, meaning 18.5% and very satisfied 5%.

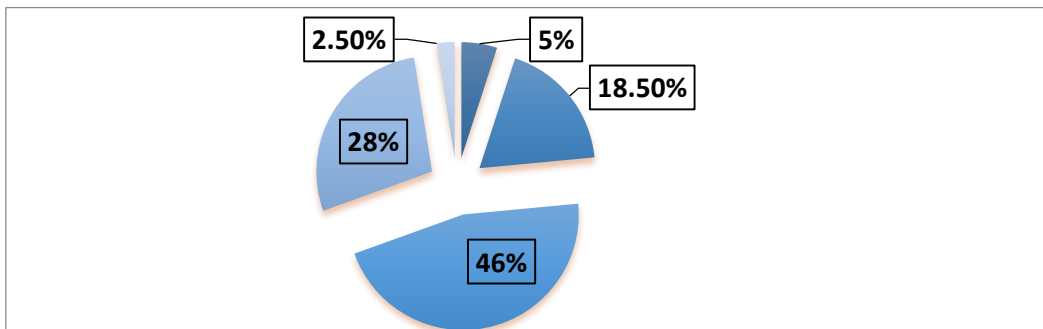


FIGURE 5 - THE DEGREE OF SATISFACTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES OF THE WELFARE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE DGASMB (Source: our determination)

The results show that the most (46%) respondents are unsatisfied, and their main reasons are: the insufficient resources (financial and human) allocated for welfare services in Bucharest as well as the long response time of the authority to the needs of citizens (Belás et al., 2016). As we have found through this research, only 23% of the beneficiaries are satisfied with the services provided by DGASMB. The research shows that, in the opinion of the beneficiaries, the services provided by the DGASMB respond to a medium level of needs in a percentage of 45% and in a percentage of 31% in a high and medium extent. The main needs of social welfare services for which the respondents have applied at the DGASMB are presented in Figure 6.

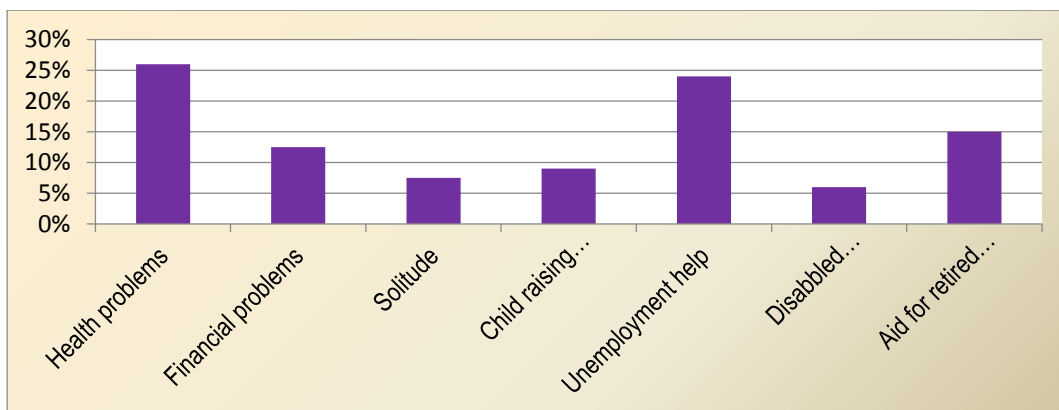


FIGURE 6 - THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE DGASMB (Source: our determination)

The research has underlined the fact that the first three categories of social welfare beneficiaries that are sustained for getting financing by the DGASMB must be: citizens with disabilities (34%), elderly persons (31%) and children in difficulty (27%). According to research results (figure 7), a very small number of respondents (1%) believe that the Roma population should benefit from social services; 3% of the respondents think that the victims of domestic violence should benefit by welfare services and only 2% think that the drug addicts should benefit from social welfare services offered by the DGASMB.

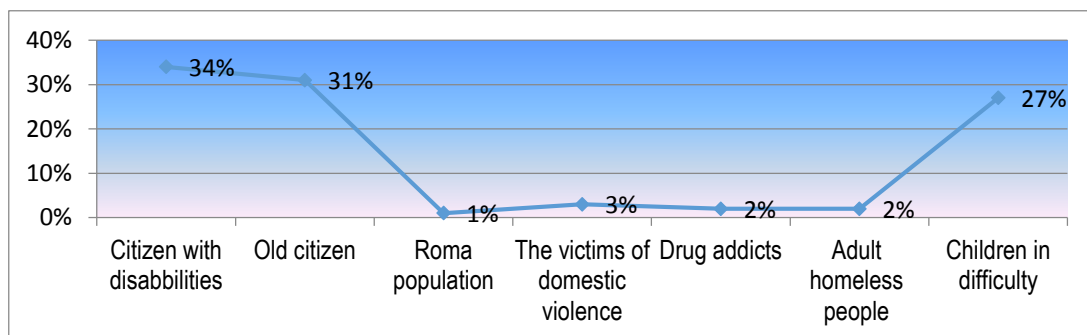


FIGURE 7. THE MOST IMPORTANT SOCIAL WELFARE CATEGORIES ACCORDING TO THE RESPONDENTS OPINIONS (SOURCE: OWN CONTRIBUTION)

In the opinion of the respondents who participated in our research, the main problems of the social welfare services provided by DGASMB are presented in figure 8. On the basis of the answers received, we can identify the main problems of DGASMB and the order of priority that should be considered in the opinion of the respondents.

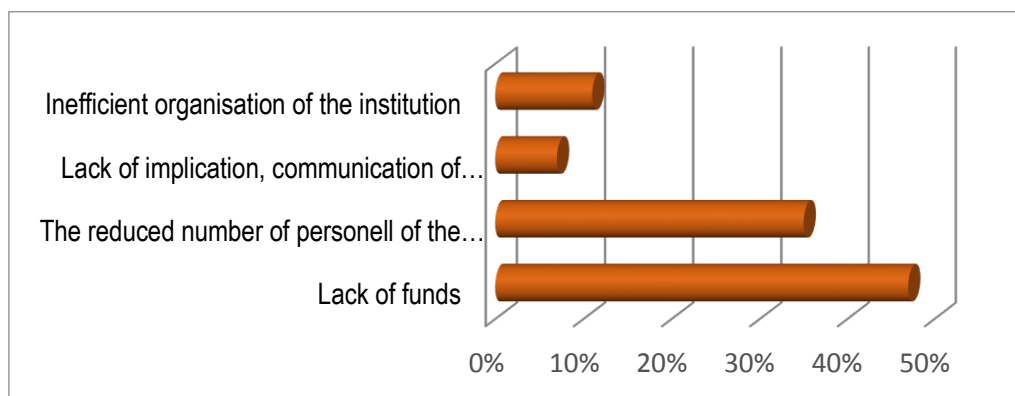


FIGURE 8 - THE MAIN PROBLEMS IN THE OPINION OF THE BENEFICIARIES OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE DGASMB (SOURCE: OWN CONTRIBUTION)

Based on these research results, the main changes that should be taken into consideration in the field of social welfare offered by the DGASMB, according to the respondent's opinions, are the following:

- Increasing the budget of the social welfare services provided by the DGASMB (60%);
- Increasing the number of providers (associations, foundations, other national and international organizations) of the welfare services in Bucharest (14%);

- The digitalization of the services and the online access to services and documents (10%);
- Setting up a new local strategy and an effective actions plan for developing social services in Bucharest (6%).
- The diversification of the social services offered by DGASMB (5%);
- The specialization of the civil servants that work in this field (5%);

It is important to mention that the beneficiaries of the social welfare services would like to receive new social services. According to the respondents' opinions, the new services expected to be offered by the DGASMB to assisted persons are the following: dental services, medicine and specialized assistance, psychological counselling, medical assistance, organization of excursions, free access to public libraries and other cultural activities.

4. PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVING THE WELFARE SERVICES IN BUCHAREST

The European social welfare system is based on the following strategic actions:

- Expanding the type of social problems that becomes the object of social policies in general and of inclusion on a specific level;
- The orientation of social services towards objectives funded by European programs;
- The decentralization, as a process that has been extended rapidly in the entire Europe, is being accepted with its positive and negative consequences;
- The development of a productive capacity of people with minor disabilities and social problems;
- Developing a structured social welfare network, centered on needs for individuals and groups in difficulty, with the aim of rebuilding their own capacities for a normal integration in the community;
- Developing some efficient social welfare services for preventing the exclusion and marginalization primarily focused on children and youngsters at risk.

The main proposals for improving the social welfare services provided by the DGASMB are the following:

- Developing the system of continuous support and controlling of the social welfare beneficiaries;
- Creating an electronic database with the beneficiaries of social welfare services;
- Increasing the budget for social services;
- Effective coordination of the social welfare services at the level of Bucharest;

- Improving the quality of social services by investing in technical infrastructure mainly (specialised software and digital equipments) and human resources training;
- Developing of an integrated management system for the social welfare services in Bucharest (Strielkowski et al., 2017);
- The improvement of the management instruments needed for organizational development and its relationship with the beneficiaries of DGASMB;
- Stimulating the increase in the number of associations and foundations offering social services in Bucharest;
- Implementation of documents management application containing electronic file of each beneficiary and internal and external online communication.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The main aspect that the research revealed is that the beneficiaries are primarily unsatisfied by the welfare services and await major changes in respect to the services provided by the DGASMB. Through the research, the beneficiaries have stated the changes that should be made at the DGASMB level. The results of the research highlighted the fact that in the past years important progress has been made in the social welfare system, especially regarding the legal framework, but unfortunately very little positive changes in the delivered social welfare services. The proposals formulated in the last part of the paper can contribute to the optimisation of the social welfare policies with considerable impact on the social reintegration of a part of the current beneficiaries of social welfare.

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