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*SOCIAL POLICIES IN ROMANIA AFTER 30 YEARS.
EXPECTATIONS AND ANSWERS*

PUBLISHING HOUSE OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMY, BUCHAREST, 2020

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Abstract

Excerpt from the book review: *Social Policies in Romania after 30 Years: Expectations and Answers* is the latest in a series of books dealing with this topic, which have been published successively by various researchers from the Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, in 1995, 1999, 2002, 2004 and 2005. The editors of the current volume are three experienced scholars with long publication records in the areas of social policy, the welfare state, and the post-socialist transition. Professor Elena Zamfir is well-known for her academic contributions and initiatives in organizing the social work curriculum at the University of Bucharest. Mălina Voicu has a rich publication portfolio around modernization theories applied to Romania, while Simona Stănescu has published extensively on the welfare state in Romania, before and after its EU integration.

Keywords: Social policy, Research Institute for Quality of Life, marginalized groups, social work.

Social Policies in Romania after 30 Years: Expectations and Answers is the latest in a series of books dealing with this topic, which have been published by various researchers from the Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL), Romanian Academy, in steady succession between 1995 and 2005 (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1995; Zamfir, 1999; Pop, 2002, 2005; Mărginean, 2004; Cace, 2004).

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More recent but also more focused contributions to the social policy literature, by researchers within our outside RIQL, have been those by Ionescu (2012), Stănescu (2018) and Raț and Szirka (2018). The editors of the current volume are three experienced scholars with long publication records in the areas of social policy, the welfare state and the post-socialist transition. Professor Elena Zamfir is well-known for her academic contributions and initiatives in organizing the social work curriculum at the University of Bucharest as well as for her research on social work in post-1989 Romania. Mălina Voicu has a rich publication portfolio around modernization theories applied to Romania, while Simona Stănescu has published extensively on the welfare state in Romania, before and after its EU integration.

The volume's introduction outlines the main focal points of the book. One of them is the normative approach to social policies, which assumes that all sectoral policies (covering all areas from social work to housing) should be geared towards improving the social inclusion of vulnerable groups. The authors duly recognize the increasing social inequalities in Romania after 1989 and warn against the risk of deeper marginalization for the already marginal groups (children living in poverty, single-parent families, unemployed Roma etc.). A second focus of the volume is historical, covering both the chronological changes in the welfare mix since 1990 as well as the shifts from modern to post-modern policy designs.

The book consists of sixteen substantive chapters, written by the editors (chapters 1 and 3) and by eighteen other researchers. The first chapter by Elena Zamfir entitled "Towards an integrated social policy in Post-December Romania - between aspiration and reality" traces the trajectories of social policies in Romania with an eye to their social desirability and a critical look at their actual unfolding. Among other observations, of interest are the author's detailed descriptions of the political decisions and debates, involving various political actors, in which social policy topics have surfaced, in particular, in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The second chapter by Bogdan Voicu offers a sociological study of "Post-modern social policies in Romania – between needs and expected changes of the welfare supply system". The chapter provides an interesting social policy analysis starting from observed demographic and structural changes, such as the shifts in migration patterns (both historical and those following Romania's EU accession in 2007) and the transformation of family and gender roles. All these pose new challenges for the traditional welfare roles of the state.

The third chapter is jointly written by two of the editors (Voicu and Stănescu). The analysis undertaken under the title "The welfare supply system - Romania for the past thirty years" foregrounds the notion of welfare supply system. This social policy analysis supports the conclusion that Romania belongs to a family-based minimalist welfare regime, as do most other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. This regime implies low social spending and high involvement of the family in the provision of welfare.

Sebastian Fitzek's chapter is the fourth of the volume and bears the title "Welfare as application model in the governing ideology and programs of the centre-left Romanian political parties after '90s." The author provides a detailed analysis of how various social policy provisions were shaped by the social-democratic parties and their discourses. The analysis closely follows the political fortunes of these parties over thirty years and provides contextual explanations for their relative achievements.

The fifth chapter is written by Sebastian Țoc and Bianca Buligescu under the title "Impact of the social assistance provision policies for ensuring guaranteed minimum income on poverty diminishment in Romania." It provides a highly trenchant sociological analysis of the minimum guaranteed income (MGI) in Romania. The authors used statistical data on the beneficiaries of MGI as well as the analysis of the political economic context of poverty emergence and entrenchment. The authors point out that most recipients are under severe material deprivation and only 2% of them are above the relative financial poverty line. This means that the poverty-reduction effect of the MGI is almost non-existent, which should provide a stark lesson for scholars and practitioners.

Adina Mihăilescu is the author of the sixth chapter and her analysis bears the title "Evaluating population needs by the normative method: Romania 1989-2018." The author has long-standing expertise in developing and applying the normative method for poverty assessment, or the so-called consumption basket. Her conclusion is that between 1989 and 2018, the income levels of families with children have not been sufficient to cover the required expenses. This has had a negative impact on the quality of life of these families. More serious challenges are identified for the pensioners living in urban and in especially in rural areas.

Daniel Arpinte's seventh chapter deals with "Planning and evaluating public policies in the field of social assistance." Social work in Romania has a relatively low degree of professionalization and the services available at the local level are weakly connected to those at county-level. The author concludes that the progress achieved since 1990 was fragmentary and mostly the result of uncoordinated initiatives.

The eight chapter is entitled "Social inequity as a product of public policies in the fiscal field and in the one of incomes in post-communist Romania" under the authorship of Mihnea Preotesi. The author explores income inequalities in the public sector, in particular those that have been built into the public pension system. Employing social justice theories, the author shows how socially unjust and highly discriminatory policies persist and are left unchallenged over time, thus eroding the moral grounding of social policies in Romania.

The chapter written by Manuela Sofia Stănculescu and Monica Marin bears the title "Evolution of the child protection system in Romania for the past 30 years." The authors' institutional analysis reveals that the child protection system has undergone significant changes, from the fragmentary and uncoordinated

regulations of the early 1990s to the Government Strategy of Child Protection in 1997. On the one hand, new values, norms and standards have been implemented, which have modernized child protection. On the other, however, many challenges remain at the interface with the community and the family.

Ionuț-Marian Anghel is the author of the tenth chapter of the volume, with the title “Public policies addressed to the Roma minority in the post-socialist period - between Europeanization and de-responsibilization.” The chapter tackles the main institutional developments and public and social policies developed during post-socialism in the field of (ethnic) minority protection and the improvement of the socio-economic well-being of Roma in Romania. Whereas in the 1990s the focus was on cultural and political rights, since 2001 attention has shifted towards social policy. Policies were devised to reduce gaps in education, health, housing and employment between Roma and non-Roma.

The eleventh chapter dealing with “The need of a national policy for supporting parenting in Romania” is written by Ștefan Cojocar. The author discusses parenting support in different European countries, followed by the challenges encountered by parenting as regulated field of activity in Romania. The author also reviews the history of parenting in Romania and the current priorities and policies in Romania. The final part of the chapter outlines a strategy for parenting in Romania, including objectives and cost assessments.

Luminița Ionescu’s chapter on “The place and the role of social services in the life of monoparental families” analyses the various circumstances (unmarried, divorced, widowed, with the spouse in prison etc.) in which single-parent families might find themselves in. The author also provides a historical overview of the social work provisions in this field. Special attention is devoted to the risk of poverty that affects single-parent families.

The thirteenth chapter is written by Mariana Stanciu under the title “Social policies addressing the population ageing phenomenon.” The author introduces demographic projections to outline the challenges posed by population ageing in Europe and in Romania. The income levels and structure of the 65+ population of Romania, based on OECD and UN data, are compared with those from other EU countries and the EU-average. The problems identified are far-reaching and require adequate but possibly uneasy policy responses.

The fourteenth chapter by Dan Banciu and Lucian Rotariu is entitled “Social policies for population protection against the risk of victimization.” The authors provide a sociological analysis of the risk of crime by analyzing the victim-perpetrator relationships for different types of crime, such as manslaughter, robbery, rape and theft. They also outline a set of social policy measures that are meant to reduce the risk of victimization.

The chapter by Daniel Popa and Sorin Căce deals with the “Social economy in Romania: evaluation and development directions”. It first provides a social policy-oriented overview of the organizational forms of social economy in Romania

and of its development path in this country in comparison to similar forms in the EU. The authors also probe the social and economic contributions of the social economy in Romania.

The final chapter is entitled “What future model of society for Romania?” and is written by Cătălin Zamfir. It provides a sociological overview of different transition strategies – both indigenous (Postolache) and foreign (World Bank) - that have guided the transition in Romania either in explicit or implicit terms. The analysis is closely attuned to the debate between a minimal and a more developed social role of the state. It provides a fitting closing of the book.

Different categories of readers can find valuable and usable information in this volume. For example, scholars and practitioners interested in the specific impacts of different policies can find up-to-date information in historical or comparative perspective. In terms of content, the volume covers a range of important topics, from poverty, single-parent families and Roma to social inequality and the long-term challenges of population ageing. What a more theoretically-inclined reader may miss in this book is a more or less unitary framework of interpretation. In general, however, the book is a useful and timely addition to the social policy literature in Romania. The main reason is that the analysis of social policies in Romania has not received any extensive treatment since 2005. The book can thus be said to offer an overview of the state of the art of social policy research as well as a historical review of the changes that have occurred over the last 15 years.

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