

## Tools for the active inclusion of the vulnerable groups in Romania

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### Introduction

#### Achievements in the field of social inclusion in Romania

The social policy in Romania has gone, during the last years, through an accelerated reform process determining the reconstruction of the entire system of social policy, promoting the principles of democracy and respect for human dignity.

Romania coordinates its priorities in the field of social inclusion and social protection with the UE guidelines and recommendations, it monitors and evaluates the social inclusion policies under the open coordination method and makes efforts to achieve the European objectives stipulated in the strategies of combating poverty.

In 2005 Romania signed the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion designed to be implemented through the open coordination method, contributing to the placement of the EU objectives in the social field into the national policies, by developing an integrated strategy aimed at combating poverty and social exclusion.

In 2006 several regulatory documents came into force, grouped into a legislative package on institutional reform (Social Inspection, The National Agency for Social Benefits, The Social Observatory) contributing to defining the principles of social assistance policies of and to the creation of a coherent framework to optimize the decision making.

Romania, as candidate country, elaborated and sent to the European Commission the *National Strategic Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion which covers the priorities in the field of social inclusion, pensions and health, as well as long term care, for the period 2006-2008*. In 2008 it was re-launched the second round of implementation of the Open Coordination Method in the field of Social Protection and Social Inclusion by which the Member States submitted the second National Strategic report, for the period 2008-2010.

In the new Report, Romania identified 3 priority objectives for the field of social inclusion, objectives that will be implemented through a series of actions:

### **Priority objective 1 – Increasing employment for vulnerable persons**

Real actions:

- Increasing the citizens' quality of life by stimulating participation to the labour market, as well as developing the entrepreneurial spirit of everyone and especially of the disadvantaged groups – developing social economy;
- Active inclusion on the labour market of the persons with disabilities by developing the tools necessary to assess the vocational abilities of the disabled persons and the development of proper social services so as to facilitate the employment of all the disabled persons who have not lost entirely the labour capacity and who want to develop and activity.

### **Priority objective 2 – Promoting integrated family policies.**

Real actions:

- Developing child care services network;
- Increasing investment in providing a quality and accessible pre-school education;
- Ensuring the access to a decent housing, including social housing; granting subsidies for young families with low incomes;
- Supporting families with dependent members;
- Supporting families with children by means of an adequate social benefits package;
- Developing health programmes to ensure maternal and child care addressing families, pregnant women and children under the age of 6.

### **Priority objective 3: Further efforts to improve the quality of life for Roma vulnerable ethnics**

Real actions:

- Enabling access to primary health services;
- Continuing the training programmes and preparing sanitary mediators and school mediators;
- Improving educational participation of Roma, reduction of illiteracy and dropping out of school;

- Developing national programmes aiming at the inclusion in the formal economy by means of developing paid jobs and increasing professional skills;
- Promoting anti-discriminating policies by achieving national awareness campaigns.

Currently, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection implements the PHARE 2006-funded project "Promotion of dialogue in the field of social inclusion" funded.

During 2009, 10 regional and 2 national conferences have been organized, this being in fact a vast consultation process. The project will end in November 2009, with an international conference. To the conference will take part representatives of GOs and NGOs active in the social area. The aim of this conference is to ensure the exchange of experience, of innovative ideas and best practices and to propose new cooperation modalities in social inclusion actions, by means of a consultation process between the governmental and non-governmental sectors. Also, the participants will work together in identifying the priority objectives for the period 2010-2012 in the view of elaborating the National Strategic Report for the coming period.

In the consultation process run so far there was a real need to correlate the educational system to the requirements of the labour market, a correlation of the activities and attributions of different public institutions active in the field of social inclusion. At the same time, the participants think it is very important to develop rather a more varied range of measures of active inclusion on the labour market of the persons belonging to vulnerable groups, than strictly financial measures. These aspects will be taken into consideration in the elaboration of the objectives in the new national report and will lead to a change in approaching the social policies.

In this context, the best practice example presented by Norway comes as a possible answer to the suggestions and recommendations received from the local stakeholders during the consultation process.

## **Romania's experience in developing active measures for the integration of vulnerable groups on the labour market**

The labour market went through substantial changes in the last decade. The changes that occurred lead to the need of a new institution, a modern one, flexible and having the capacity to answer to these challenges. The main institution with attributions in this field is the National Agency for Employment (NAE), together with the 41 county agencies, with the Agency of Bucharest municipality and with the 88 local agencies and 156 work points.

In accordance with Law No. 76/2002 on the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation, with its subsequent amendments and completions, the National Agency for Employment ensured the provision of information, counselling and vocational guidance services, vocational training, mediation, consultancy and assistance in starting an independent activity or for the starting up of a business. These services are granted free of charge, to all the job seekers.

The main objectives of the National Agency for Employment are:

- Institutionalization of social dialogue in the field of employment and vocational training;
- Application of strategies in the field of employment and vocational training;
- Application of social protection measures of the unemployed persons.

The active measures that the county and local employment agencies implement to increase employment opportunities for the job seekers are:

- **Information and vocational counselling** – provision of information on the labour market and the evolution of jobs, personality assessment and self-assessment in the view of professional guidance, developing the job seekers' abilities and self-confidence so that they can make a decision concerning their own career; training in job seeking methods and techniques;
- **Labour mediation** - providing information on the labour market (vacancies and job requirements) as well as mediating the relation with the employers;
- **Vocational training** – ensures the initiation, qualification, requalification, improvement and specialization of the job seekers:
  - provision of vocational training services, free of charge, to the persons who became unemployed, obtained the statute of refugee, foreign citizens of stateless, persons who could not get a job after being repatriated or after being released from custody, persons who develop activities in the rural area or who obtain incomes lower than the value of the social reference indicator in force; vocational training shall be ensured for different jobs needed on the local/county labour market.
  - the job seekers who benefit free of charge from vocational training services, have the following rights: a) they benefit from theoretical and practical training during the entire course, b) benefit from school and education materials, c) benefit from safety equipment for the practical training, d) benefit from free subscription for the public transport, for maximum 4 travels per month from their domicile to the training unit.
- **Consultancy and assistance to start an independent activity or to start up a business (art. 71 paragraph. 1)** – provision of legal, marketing, financial services and of other consultancy services.

**Granting financial incentives for the job seekers** – financial measures to stimulate labour force mobility, financial measures for the graduates of the education institutions and for the graduates of special schools, at least 16 years old, who are employed, financial measures for the unemployed who found a job before the termination of the unemployment period, subsidies for

employers under certain conditions, subsidizing jobs for the employment of persons over the age of 45.

The specialty personnel within the employment agencies draft a Capacity profile: the psychological profile, vocational interests, identification of the strong points as milestones in establishing the vocational route. The beneficiaries of the agency services are presented job seeking techniques and methods (Curriculum Vitae, letter of intent, presenting at interview, thank you letter). The career counsellor or the social worker fills in an Interview guide for the beneficiary. After assessment, it will be issued a written recommendation to participate to the vocational training courses or to participate to other types of measures (e.g. labour mediation – issuance of a job-placement certificate).

Starting with 2004, in Romania began the establishment of some Regional Centres for Adults Vocational Training subordinated to NAE by means of the programmes funded by the World Bank or by the Romanian Ministry of Labour. Currently there are 6 Regional Centres for Adults Vocational Training, each of them covering from 3 to 5 counties. Within these centres the following services are offered:

- adults vocational training in the view of getting, preserving and increasing the level of vocational competitiveness on the labour market;
- information and vocational counselling;
- vocational training assessment and monitoring;
- vocational training certification.

The entire process of theoretical and practical training is designed based on vocational charts (standard type), in a modular system ensuring the flexibility and adaptability of the training to the adults' needs. The modular system allows for a customized training, by adapting to the needs of each trainee and for resuming the process until the full acquirement of the knowledge stipulated in the training programmes. The centres have endowments for certain jobs (computer operator, hairdresser, manicurist etc.) so as to ensure also the practical training of the trainees in good conditions.

The employers are permanently involved in the identification of the training needs in the region, so as to meet the needs of the trainees belonging to the category of persons registered with the county agencies, but also the persons who want to improve their vocational training.

During 2008 a number of 610.597 job seekers benefited from information and vocational counselling services offered through the territorial agencies and external providers, out of which: 479.807 newly registered persons and 130.790 persons returning to counselling from other months. From the 479.807 newly registered persons counselled through NAE and external providers, at national level, 54,26% were men and the rest of 45,74% were women.

Analysing the information and counselling activity, at national level, for the period 2006-2008, it can be seen an upward evolution with regard to the number of beneficiaries of these services.

As a consequence of participation to the information and vocational counselling services, 38.150 persons attended vocational training courses, 2.108 persons benefited from consultancy services for the start up of an own business and 98.410 persons were employed. Out of these, 67,33% persons were employed directly through counselling, the rest of 32,66% were employed through another active measure.

In 2008 there were considered for vocational training programs 43.915 persons, out of which 39.448 unemployed (89,53% of the number established for 2008) and 4.467 persons who benefited from free vocational training services, other than the unemployed.

## Transferring the best practices example in Romania

Transferring the Norway experience is important taking into consideration the need for development of the assessment and counselling services addressed to the vulnerable groups and this is possible through the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013 funded by the European Social Fund, program funding especially the employment measures. To this must add the involvement of the decision making factors at central and local level, by being aware of the role and importance of approaching an inclusive policy on the labour market, reducing the focus on granting social benefits which result in depending on authorities and in discouraging integration. By replicating such projects, we hope we will succeed to create a society whose members benefit from equal opportunities for an independent life and from the capacity to decide on their own for their welfare.

## Questions

To what extent does the political control put on the public institutions may influence the reaching of the objectives of such a program? What are the possible tools that can be used in order to reduce possible negative effects?

## Recruiting the beneficiaries of vocational qualification/re-qualification courses

The option for the jobs, specialties, activities for which the job seekers' qualification, re-qualification, improvement is to be done, has as starting point the analysis of the needs for the moment and for the future in terms of labour force on the market, the express requirement of the economic agents or of the unemployed persons who will develop an authorized activity.

The job seekers can participate to vocational training programs which to ensure their vocational competences development and diversification, in order to ensure mobility and re-integration on the labour market. The courses are free of charge for the unemployed persons who unemployment benefits and for the job seekers (unemployed persons who do not receive unemployment benefits). These courses can also be attended by persons already employed, but, in this case, the trainee or his/her employer shall bear the related costs.

When recruiting the beneficiaries of the course, there will be taken into consideration criteria such as the options of the respective persons, their abilities for the respective job, medical recommendations (for instance, in the case of disabled persons it will be taken into account the disability degree, the residual functional capacity, the recommendations of the Complex Assessment Commission concerning the labour capacity), the compulsory minimum level of education in order to attend that course (secondary, high school, university), etc.

The beneficiaries' motivation to attend the vocational qualification courses is, first of all, an intrinsic one, coming from their wish to find a job. Also, another way of making them register and completing a course is the participation to these courses free of charge for the job seekers (both unemployed persons who receive the benefit, and the unemployed who do not receive the unemployment benefit).

## Examples of best practices in Romania

In 2009 there were launched three strategic projects funded by the European Social Fund (ESF):

**“SAPeRe** – studies, analyses and forecast on the labour market to build the capacity of Public Employment Services (PES) in Romania, at national and local level

**PROSELF** – the promotion of the self-service services aims at modernizing and ensuring the flexibility of the system of provision of public employment services by establishing 47 self-service centres within the territorial agencies for employment.

**SCOP – Specialization of vocational guidance counsellors** – strengthening and modernizing the system of vocational training for the personnel of the Public Employment Service, by offering efficient services.

Currently, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection is implementing two strategic projects with impact in the field of employment. These projects are funded by the ESF through the Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

### **„Social economy: innovative model for the promotion of active social inclusion of the persons in difficulty”**

The project overall objective is the development of a unitary, efficient and modern system of social economy which to contribute to the improve the Romanian citizens' quality of life by promoting active inclusion of the vulnerable groups, both on the labour market and in social life.

Main activities:

- The analysis of the current situation concerning the field of social inclusion, at national and European level, identification of the best practices
- The development of the national legislative framework;

- The development of a training programme in the field of social economy, as well as the promotion of the social economy module in the university curricula;
- Information campaigns addressed to possible initiators of social economy activities (vulnerable groups) and their partners;
- The development of social enterprises

### **„Equal opportunities on the labour market“**

The aim of the project is to promote the social inclusion of the disabled persons by facilitating their access to education and vocational training services and the increase in employment opportunities. The project will have a duration of 3 years and is implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection Bernard Brunhes International (France), European Platform for Rehabilitation (Belgium), the general Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection of Sector 1 – Bucharest, Arad and Iasi, the Directorate for Community Development and Assistance Arad and the National Agency for Employment.

The target group addressed by this project is the one of the disabled adults. Within this project it will be elaborated a vocational assessment tool for disabled persons in the view of their integration on the labour market. Also, following the European model, there will be developed integrated social services focused primarily on the labour market addressed to the disabled persons: vocational training services; integrated services for sheltered employment; integrated services for supported employment. At the same time, the purpose of this project is to strengthen the cooperation between various services at county level with attributions in the field of protection for the disabled (General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, The County Agency for Employment, The Public Service of Social Assistance within the town hall).

## **Cooperation with the non-governmental sector**

The public-private partnership (public institutions, NGOs and economic agents) in the field of social inclusion is continuously growing in Romania. An essential condition for receiving the financing from the structural funds is that of the creation of partnership projects, which encouraged very much this practice at national level.

There are a series of NGOs accredited as vocational training providers for the job seekers. These NGOs maintain a very close relation with the county agencies for employment (those from which can be collected information on the vacancies, the persons who can benefit from training courses), but also with possible employers.

NGOs implemented and continue to implement a series of projects, whose purpose is the integration on the labour market of the persons from vulnerable groups, often bringing innovative models of tools, of work procedures in this filed.