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Providing social services in Romania, during the pandemic generated by Coronavirus

Sicrea Cosmin¹, Chirugu Gianina²

¹University of Craiova, ²Ovidius University of Constanta

cosmin_sicrea2005@yahoo.com, chirugu.gianina@yahoo.com

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the influence of the pandemic on the provision of social services in Romania that have experienced a development only in recent years, so the institutional organization at central level contributed to the elaboration of the first legislative regulations that took into account a number of beneficiaries such as: children in difficulty, the elderly, people with disabilities, users of banned substances and victims of domestic violence. Social services are mainly aimed at people who are in an unfavorable social situation and who cannot have a basic basis for their lives or who urgently need help for other serious reasons. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on social services, with massive outbreaks being reported in all care facilities around the world, affecting not only residents, but also caregivers and visitors .

Keywords. Pandemic, social services, beneficiaries, planning, management.

1. Introduction

On February 26, 2020, TV stations across the country confirmed the first case of COVID-19 infection in Romania. Since then, the evolution of the daily life of the Romanian people has experienced various twists, the Government taking a long series of preventive, restrictive or relaxation measures, in an attempt to manage the crisis of the last two years. For almost two years, restrictive measures in countries across the globe appear to be effective in limiting the spread of COVID-19. But behind this apparent improvement, the disruptions caused by the restrictions for such a long time already have important implications for health and well-being [1]. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased concern for the safety of others, and people with higher conservation levels have more easily complied with restrictive measures.

The pandemic context in Romania has put the entire administrative system to the test, because the rural area has always faced economic problems, and in some localities people have had to face poverty and lack of any kind of resources, or poor infrastructure. Support for all vulnerable groups was thus needed, and during the state of emergency many difficulties and challenges were encountered which had to be addressed, on account of the psychological well-being of people.

2. The social services system in Romania

The expansion of social services at the Euro-pan level is forced by some general

trends such as: the mondialization, labor movement, demographics, economic and social movements that are manifested differently from country to country, and the providers of social services are currently experiencing such things as: the demand for social services is increasing as resources are reduced and competition between organizations providing social services is increased [2].

At European level, a number of changes have recently appeared in the strategy to address social services, which are recognized by the fact that they create new jobs as ways to promote growth, in addition to the fact that social services were considered tools for the social integration of disadvantaged groups [3]. Considered structural parts of the national social assistance system, social services contribute together with social benefits to the reduction of the poverty rate and implicitly to the improvement of quality of life, economic growth and social development, all leading to the social integration of vulnerable categories of beneficiaries and the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Discrepancies also arise in terms of clients of these services, in most countries, the beneficiaries are children and their families, seniors, people with disabilities, but also those with mental health problems and other beneficiaries in need, thus through social services alongside education, health, social services, social services, the provision of a minimum maintenance income and adequate housing, thus providing a basis for the welfare of its citizens.

The state, non-governmental organizations, community and volunteer organizations and families are the main providers of social services. The author Esping-Andersen believes that at the moment the needs of the person become problems of public systems because there is no system for protecting citizens against all social risks [4]. The European Social Model has social services as its central element, so in 2011, the contribution of social services to achieving the objectives of employment and growth at European level was officially recognized.

Social services have as main objective the access of individuals, groups and communities to solving problems, identifying causes that disrupt the normal functioning of society, improving the socio-economic conditions of vulnerable groups in the context of adaptation to the evolving society.

In Romania, social services have developed only in recent years, so the central institutional organization has contributed to the elaboration of the first legislative regulations that have taken into account a number of beneficiaries such as: children in difficulty, the elderly, people with disabilities, users of banned substances and victims of domestic violence. According to Article 1 of Government Ordinance no. 86/2004, social services are presented as a set of actions and measures that are carried out in order to meet the social needs of individuals, families or groups, in order to prevent and overcome situations of vulnerability and difficulty, or dependence, to ensure the autonomy and protection of the individual, to promote social integration in order to improve the quality of life, to avoid marginalization and social exclusion, and to respect uniqueness, the privacy and dignity of the person are the fundamental ideas underlying the provision of social services based on the active participation of beneficiaries in the process of providing services.

Matousek et al. (2012) characterize social services as a form of assistance that society provides to disadvantaged people. Social services can be divided into social services social support, social care and social prevention. They are provided in the form of accommodation, ambulatory or field services [5].

The density and typology of social services existing at a given time in a given country depends on a number of factors such as cultural, social and legal traditions, the general regulatory and labor market framework, protection and social assistance, the socio-

economic structures of the population, the general level of income, strategic priorities and financial resources available to central and local authorities, availability of private operators and non-governmental organizations for involvement in the social sphere. These complex interdependencies shape and define the main vulnerable groups in the society, prioritize their needs, identify, define and regulate the legal levers and specific tools related to the capacity of the entire economic and social system to respond to these needs. Social services are services that provide support to beneficiaries and their family members in vulnerable situations.

Social services as a field of social sciences is based on the philosophy of human well-being and solidarity. Although social cooperation and solidarity are as old as human history, social cooperation and solidarity represent the acquisition of a professional orientation that was achieved since the 19th century, with the industrialization and development of institutional social assistance. The target audience of social services are people who are faced with various economic, spiritual or social needs and cannot meet their needs alone or alone or meet their needs insufficiently. The holistic structure of human beings requiring care for their health and physical, mental needs, such as poor living conditions and social change, has increased the need for social services. Social services are activities that improve and expand people's capacities to lead independent lives. Services can be provided in specialized institutions and in the community. Social services are based on an understanding of social work and a complex of support activities aimed at achieving a better quality of life, dignity and responsibility of individuals based on individual skills, interpersonal relationships and community outcomes. Social services are organized in different forms or structures according to the needs of each group of beneficiaries, according to the activities carried out and are of general interest and involve an integrated approach to the needs of the people depending on the living environment, the level of education and the socio-economic and health situation. Another characteristic of social services is their proactive nature. At the community and group level, depending on the needs of each person, social services may have a higher degree of demand.

In Romania, the need for social services, in the socio-economic context of the changes that occurred after the post-December period of 1989 and the legislative context for the development of the national social protection system, becoming more elaborate and specialized, generated an expansion of social services at national regional or local level, And Government Ordinance 68/2003 stipulates that social services as a set of measures and actions that meet the needs of the population are provided by service providers. During the communist period, social assistance in Romania was passive and bureaucratic. Social security was a swordman, and the entire social security system must be solved through socialist mechanisms that were doubled by the socio-economic mechanisms of the communist regime.

Qualitative personal social work, designed to solve acute human problems, has been virtually eliminated by denying or ignoring the real problems of individuals and society as a whole.

Social services and their provision have been redefined to include public and private entities the responsibilities of social services have been decentralized so that local authorities can be held accountable by the public for the quality of services provided, with local communities being more involved in identifying and solving social problems. Social services are part of the national social support system and aim to help vulnerable people overcome difficult situations, prevent and combat the risk of social exclusion, improve their quality of life and promote their social inclusion.

3. Planning of social services

The process of drafting planning documents for the development of the social sector in general and social services, in particular, is associated with a number of challenges. Strategic planning of social services is a priority issue in the policies of all governments. Social practice needs models because the cost of social services is an essential tool for governments to redistribute revenues, and any decision that is not subject to a thorough strategic analysis can have negative long-term consequences for all stakeholders. The EU's social policies are the responsibility of each country, and each country develops its own national legislative initiatives, including how to plan social services. However, in order to coordinate the social policies of the EU Member States, the so-called open method of coordination applies. An important part of the approach applied in the EU is the allocation of funds to achieve the objectives of social services and social assistance. The lack of a generally accepted definition of regional social service planning creates a wide range of possibilities in terms of objectives, planning process, monitoring and evaluation tools, stakeholder involvement. Therefore, there is a variety of national and local practices in the EU, determined by the traditions of each country and region, by regulations, by the needs of local communities. While at European and national level social aspects are more policy-driven, at local level, the focus is on strategic planning of specific social programs and services. The collection of data on social service needs and their mapping is carried out using different technology platforms. In one of the municipalities of Tel Aviv, Israel, mapping the needs of the most vulnerable groups is carried out through a geographical information system. A similar practice has been applied in South Australia. Preparation for the use of a geographical information system (in particular the creation of a database with the necessary information) takes more than 5 years. It is not yet systematically applied in many countries. This creates a serious problem both in terms of the relevance of the services provided and their financial insurance.

In the planning processes of social services, different practices are also observed. As a rule, planning depends on the type of services and the groups of users to whom these services are intended. Two main planning models are most often used, namely project planning and cyclical planning. The first type is usually applied when introducing a new social service into the community. In general, the planning phases are as follows: Needs assessment, service implementation, monitoring and evaluation of effects, dissemination and exploitation. Cyclical planning applies when assessing needs for services already established. The planning model includes the following steps: Data collection and monitoring; data management and evaluation; data analysis; summary report, plan, design; discussion, negotiation and adoption; presentation; decision-making or implementation. Joint cooperation in the planning and implementation of social services is becoming increasingly necessary, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. As in other sectors, technologies can be widely used, for example through online and mobile applications for virtual access to information centers, so that the process can be fully carried out remotely. In a broader sense, a complete reorganization of the work will likely be necessary, which will include remote monitoring of the implementation of planned services and the application of cross-sectoral and cross-departmental approaches between service providers, representatives of authorities, medical staff and others. In some cases, this means a complete redesign of service delivery processes, adequate training and the ability to implement digital services. In some cases, it is necessary to amend the regulatory framework, which is not fully adapted to these new approaches to the provision of services. In the framework of a common European social policy recognizing the important role of social services as key players in the partnership for the welfare of the

population, in promoting equality and social inclusion of all citizens of the European Member States, Romania, There has been a visible development in public or private social services at national, regional or local level, both during the pre-accession period and after accession to the European Union, And current practices in Romania in terms of social services planning include developing strategies for a five-year period and specifying them later in annual programs implementing strategies at local level. When developing policies to care for older people, we need to know why people seek health and social care and what factors are related to equitable access to care.

4. Management of social services

The management of social services institutions is one of the important links in the mechanism of implementation of the state social policy. Therefore, it is important for a head of institution to have certain qualities, knowledge and skills. The process of evaluating the social service, the performance of social service institutions is based primarily on statistical data characterizing a certain period of activity of the institution. These are the basis for the judgment on effective performance. At the same time, these statistical data do not reflect the impact of the professional and personal qualities of the leader on the efficiency of management, as well as on the performance of the entire institution, the degree of customer satisfaction with the services offered, the level and quality of solving social problems. The main problem is that all the criteria and performance indicators developed by the authorities allow only an overall assessment of the performance of the institution. Unfortunately, the efficient management institution and, directly, the activity of its leader are assessed mainly on the basis of the analysis of the statistical data presented in the reports, which, of course, do not allow to identify all the shortcomings in the driver's activity and do not contribute to the improvement of the existing indicators. It is now stated that the management of the social services institution depends on the level of development and the competence of its staff in many respects. Therefore, the staff becomes a strategic factor that determines the future development of the institution. This transforms the staff of a modern social services institution into human resources - a set of personalities; the implementation of the institution's goals and objectives depends on their professional competence, civic spirit and culture. Thus, the management of the staff of the social services institution becomes the most important field of activity of its leader. The head of the social services institution must implement certain functions and roles on the basis of the professional standard.

A head of a modern institution must not only have professional skills, but also be an efficient manager, who: Has a huge energy reserve and can energize others, has the ability to manage people; it has the ability to create a competitive team of people with the same mentality; it has competitive advantages over its followers, is proactive and constantly seeks new opportunities; they take risks and innovate, set goals and motivate employees to achieve them, take responsibility and learn not only from their own mistakes, but also from the mistakes of other bosses. Thus, the personality of the boss, his leadership qualities, professional training for the organization of the activity and the management of the team determine, in fact, not only the image of the institution, but also its actual performance. Each such function and role involves necessary knowledge and skills, as well as well as well defined personal qualities. In addition to the professional functions and roles, the director must be able to combine and fulfill the social roles of a family person, husband-wife, father-mother, grandfather-grandmother, daughter-son, friend, neighbor, etc. Successful conciliation of these roles depends largely on the personal qualities of the boss. On the other hand, successfully reconciling these roles and functions has a significant impact on the effective

professional performance manager. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the requirements of the manager's professional and social qualities, knowledge and skills should not at least contradict each other and preferably complement each other, increasing the effectiveness of his performance. Social assistance is a special type of social activity, which makes it necessary to impose special requirements on the qualities of the person working in the relevant institutions. Having personal qualities can not only ensure effective contact and trust between social workers, but also between the social worker and the client, but also have an impact on the overall efficiency of social work. Such similar qualities of a person may be necessary in any field of activity in which a direct contact with a customer specialist is made.

Social services are mainly aimed at people who are in an unfavorable social situation and who cannot have a basic basis for their lives or who urgently need help for other serious reasons. The issue of management in social services has become topical and its importance is underscored by the fact that it is a fundamental condition for the professional performance of providing these social services to people, groups and communities in a difficult social situation. Social services are a dynamic field of activity with considerable heterogeneity of their target groups, which increases the difficulty of social management at different levels of management throughout the system of practical implementation. Social service experts confess that social management is not yet sufficiently developed and, in order to practice their performance, new management approaches are needed to promote the sustainability of the effectiveness of the professional and service activities that define social activities.

5. The impact of the pandemic on social services in Romania

The During the coronavirus pandemic, social connection and social support became limited due to increased mandatory physical distancing, social isolation and quarantine measures. The pandemic has been associated with overcrowding healthcare facilities as well as depletion of medical staff, leading to disruption of routine care for patients with other diseases. The pandemic affects individuals differently; the resulting negative effect may be more pronounced on marginalized populations. At the beginning of the pandemic generated by coronavirus, the legal provisions in Romania made the workers in the social assistance system to spend 14 days in isolation at work. A preventive measure of isolation at work for two weeks has been implemented by the government for persons employed in social assistance and child protection units. They were the only workers forced to leave their families and homes for such a period, and were later forced to isolate themselves for two weeks when they returned from work. The government has tried to offset these strict measures by providing a risk incentive. However, the payment for workers has waited to be approved, which in turn is dependent on the reimbursement of European funds. Beneficiaries or risk groups, those in social centers and hospitals, are vulnerable groups that have to cope with the fight against the virus. Aiming at providing quality social services and protecting their own health and the health of their customers, social services have faced new situations in their daily work that is related to compliance with the authorities' requirements in terms of social distancing, technology-mediated communication, meeting bottlenecks and finding in solutions.

Changing the mechanisms for providing social services by switching to online communication (video and phone calls, etc.), where possible, working from home and reducing some activities in institutions also involves managing alternative methods and ensuring access to services for all, disadvantaged groups, having regard to the necessary and available resources [6]. The limited resources in some communities, the lack of access to technology, which deepened the problems of vulnerable groups, were arguments underlying

the decision to continue face-to-face work with beneficiaries or reopening services in accordance with physical distancing measures [7]. The provision of social services for those in need continued during the isolation period however, activities involving direct contact, such as group counseling or other joint activities, have been redesigned so that the new rules can be respected. The main changes imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic involved reducing direct contact with beneficiaries, respectively with collaborators and partners. Undoubtedly, the state of emergency and the state of alert period were extremely difficult given the changes that affected the work in all areas, but also in the field of social assistance.

The elements related to the personal characteristics that influenced social workers during this period were stress, mental tension and concern for their own health and the health of others, while those related to organizational characteristics refer to uncertainty about the rules, the fact that they do not receive prompt information, lack of communication, pressure from management. One of the major effects of the restrictions during the state of emergency was moving the activity online. In this respect, one of the positive implications concerns the digitalisation of some activities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has called into question the management of addiction care in institutions with accommodation, and measures aimed at reducing the risk of infections will need to be taken into account to improve care for dependants. The risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2 in people living in accommodation facilities was linked to the infection rate among staff of these hostels, and the risk of mortality by SARS-CoV-2 was linked to sex and dependence. Day care centers are a form of long-term care at Community level that addresses fragile people who deal with social, educational and health needs. Many day centers were forced to temporarily close during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not known how closures affected the provision of services in day centers. They found creative solutions to take care of the participants despite the restrictions, creating, in their words, centers without walls. The staff developed virtual programs and carried out door visits to support productive engagement and combat loneliness. Despite countless COVID-19 issues, day care centers have shown resilience and creativity in managing the needs of participants and provided respite for carers. Further research into the effectiveness of remote programming and the plea for sustainable reimbursement by payers is needed to ensure that day centers can continue to provide quality services to their beneficiaries and families. The pandemic has stressed the need to correctly identify existing needs and provide adequate resources to adapt to the digitalisation of the work of social workers and also to provide social services under the new conditions. In this regard, UNICEF believes that in order to overcome the pandemic crisis in the best possible way, the institutional capacity of the public sector providing social services must be developed by supplementing, professionalizing and equipping its staff, by establishing functional collaborations between the relevant institutions at the county and community level, digitalization, where possible, the development, at local level, of the partnership with civil society.

Particular attention must be paid to how the digital alternative methods (technology) used in the intervention can ensure the smooth conduct of work with vulnerable categories, under professional values and principles, so that the rights and principle of fairness in access to services are respected. The most important aspects in this new context are the improvement of communication channels with vulnerable groups and the design of intervention according to the prioritization of social needs. In order to successfully meet the challenges and maintain best practice in the field, it is necessary to inform and train social workers on an ongoing basis and also to be supported to develop new skills. Social workers should receive assistance from both professional associations and their employers.

6. Conclusions

SARS-CoV-2 has caused a high mortality in institutionalized people. There are very few studies on the real involvement and impact of COVID-19 in social care institutions, but adequate management of staff in social services institutions and attention to infection control measures, especially for people with higher dependence, it is the key to successfully managing future pandemic situations.

The pandemic will certainly leave its mark on the way in which work is carried out in many areas. As regards the provision of social services to vulnerable groups, account will be taken of the need for social workers to pay attention to the following issues, with a focus on the changes that need to be made to continue their work: maintaining hygiene measures and greater involvement by authorities to distribute resources, greater involvement by all social actors in this field and greater collaboration, responsiveness to new methods of intervention, changes in management, flexibility in work and working hours.

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