

# The Professional Practices of Social and Employment Services Providers

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## Abstract:

The present study is based on the results of the project<sup>2</sup> entitled *Practicile profesionale ale furnizorilor de servicii sociale și de ocupare, la nivel de instrumente de monitorizare, management de caz, informare, evaluare și consiliere, în vederea ocupării grupurilor vulnerabile. Studiu calitativ.*

The project had as general objective the knowledge of the professional practices of the social and occupational service suppliers concerning the vulnerable groups and implied the elaboration of a complex diagnosis of the current situation regarding the proceedings and the results obtained by the authorized institutions in mediating the interaction between the vulnerable groups on the labour market. Besides the analysis of some relevant aspects regarding the factors facilitating or obstructing their access on the labour market, it has been also approached the identification of some profiles of those vulnerable from the perspective of interacting with the labour market.

The suggested analysis approaches the main results of the field research where the qualitative data have been collected by interviewing the social services suppliers, focusing on the support services for integrating into the formal labour market, and with (potential) beneficiaries of these social services, unemployed persons belonging to some groups considered vulnerable on the labour market, focusing on the Roma and, respectively, the unemployed women, as well.

Analysing the interviews with the institutions' representatives and the beneficiaries of the social services some specific profiles of vulnerable groups' perception have been shaped.

On the other side, these specific profiles are associated with diverse patterns of institutional behaviours defined through the phrase *professional practices of the social services suppliers*. Undoubtedly, we may consider the institutional frame with all its administrative-bureaucratic components as the one outlining the area of action and manifestation of these professional practices. But analysing the interviews one can notice the relative importance of other factors in defining certain patterns of development for these professional practices. Among these factors a large part is represented by those regarding the manner of perceiving the beneficiaries of the provided services and which structure the institutional representatives' attitudes.

At last, the analysis of the interviews shows, beyond any typology, the importance of the human factor regarding the clear manner of interaction with the social services' beneficiaries.

There are several elements which are common to all those interviewed:

- they appreciate the condition of some categories, like Roma or Roma women, as precarious in relation with the labour market;
- the existence of some structural factors of exclusion for the Roma population, of which the lack of education being considered the factor with the most important negative impact;
- the need of increasing the importance of the active measures in supporting the vulnerable groups;
- the need of providing passive assistance for those who are considered dependent by their nature (children, old people with very low income and persons with severe disabilities).

Roma people are considered by the majority of the institutions representatives as one of the groups with multiple social vulnerabilities, among which the vulnerability in the interaction with the labour market is the more important as it generates other related vulnerabilities.

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Some categories of women, especially those having small children, are considered vulnerable as they are facing difficulties in re-integrating on the labour market. Truly vulnerable are considered the women with cumulative types of vulnerabilities, some of these being subjected to the so-called transversal discrimination (present on the labour market, as well). The Roma women are identified as one of the most vulnerable groups on the labour market.

As regards the description of their own professional practices, the institutional representatives had an approach based on the administrative description of the procedures by constantly referring to the job description and, with a much smaller reference to the actual impact of this institutional behaviour upon the beneficiaries.

There is the opinion of the representatives of NGOs that this type of highly bureaucratic approach is the result of the way the employees of these institutions evaluate their own institutional role closely connected to the way their activity is controlled and evaluated. According to one of the NGOs' representatives the control refers to the administrative-bureaucratic legality and compliance of the procedures, which in the end is reduced to the control of the manner of elaborating certain *papers* and it seems that apparently "*we are good at papers*".

**Recommendations for improving the institutional suppliers of social services** concern both the beneficiaries of these services and the suppliers of services, as well.

The identified solutions for improving the system of these social services are generally oscillating between the active-passive measures axis. Even if the majority of those interviewed consider that the number of the active measures should increase, they also take into account that the passive measures should not be totally abandoned, and the economic-social context continues to claim the prevalence of these measures.

Analyzing the interviews it has emerged the hypothesis that the post-mediation moment is the one that may become critical and in many situations the vulnerable person is significantly abandoned by the social services suppliers.

Focusing on the activities of informing, counselling and mediation represents a professional practice of the social services suppliers integrated in a certain pattern of social intervention. The surveillance of the post-mediation situation and the evaluation of the entire process, including the final step, seem to represent the weaknesses of this model of supporting the vulnerable categories.

The successful models appear where the professional practice exceeds the bureaucratic determinations of the job description; such an example is the development of an informal relation, beyond the formal institutional cooperation with the potential employers. In order to make the social services suppliers' activity more efficient it is necessary to increase the relative importance of the final stage (post-mediation) of the occupation matter, as well as to change the strategic orientation regarding the employers, from the role of neutral mediator to the role of active actor in the common effort of building a strong institutional relation, consolidated by a network of good informal relations.

**Keywords:** professional practices, social services, employment, institutional relation.