

**MODERNIZATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA –
KEY FACTOR TO AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF SOCIAL WORK***Aliona ONOFREI**Moldova State University*

The author makes a critical analysis of the current sistem of social services, characterized by inadequate development, centering on intervention in difficult situations rather on prevention etc. The author analyzes Government steps taken in creating Integrated Sistem of Social Services, but promotes the necessity of modernizing this system by some concret action. In conclusion the author mentions that the Republic of Moldova is fully engaged in the process of adjusting to European values and standards, the reform of social services being in this context one of the most important.

Keywords: *social services, beneficiaries of social services, the integrated system of social services, modernization of social services.*

**MODERNIZAREA SERVICIILOR SOCIALE ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA –
ELEMENTUL-CHEIE PENTRU UN SISTEM EFICIENT DE ASISTENȚĂ SOCIALĂ**

Autorul realizează o analiză critică a sistemului actual de servicii sociale, caracterizat printr-o insuficientă dezvoltare, centrat mai degrabă pe intervenție în situații de dificultate și mai puțin pe prevenție. Sunt analizați pașii Guvernului întreprinși în scopul creării Sistemului Integrat de Servicii Sociale, fiind promovată ideea necesității modernizării acestui sistem. În concluzie se accentuează că sistemul moldovenesc de asistență socială se află într-un proces intensiv de reconstrucție și aliniere la sistemele de asistență socială din țările europene cu tradiție în domeniu și, în acest context, reforma serviciilor sociale este una dintre cele mai importante.

Cuvinte-cheie: *servicii sociale, beneficiarii serviciilor sociale, sistem integrat de servicii sociale, modernizarea serviciilor sociale.*

Social services are a component of national social protection systems, alongside with social benefits. Social services are activities performed in the community to prevent risk situations or respond to some needs of social intervention identified in the community. These activities can be very different organized and provided at central and local levels. Studying the experience of different countries, we noticed that there is no uniform definition of social services at EU level or a definition that we can constantly find in legislation of these countries. Although social services in Europe are described by characteristics they have in relation to services of general economic interest. Currently, the provision of social services of high quality, affordable and reasonable in terms of costs is seen as a fundamental pillar of the European social model, as a basis for quality living and economic objectives of the EU.

National legislations attempt to describe the area of social services and to define them as some activities or measures to prevent or control risk situations and social exclusion. According to Moldovan legislation *social services represent the measures and activities performed to satisfy the social needs of the person or family in order to overcome the difficult situations and to prevent marginalization and social exclusion* [1].

The main categories of individuals identified as potential target groups of social service systems are: children, youth at risk and juvenile delinquents, people with disabilities, older people, drug, alcohol or other toxic substances addicted persons, victims of domestic violence, persons and families without income, some groups like refugees, immigrants and others.

The role of a social service is to help the person in a difficult situation to enjoy the same opportunities and resources enjoyed by everyone in the community: to participate in education, to be employed, to have access to health services, leisure, sports, transport, etc. Thus, the social services are „trampolines” for the person who can not overcome with own force this situation of difficulty. For some people, social services contribute to overcoming various states of difficulty or social vulnerability. On the other hand, they actively contribute to increasing the participation of all people in a community to the economic, political and social life.

In these times of economic crisis, social services are not only an instrument to fight poverty and maintain social cohesion, but also an additional source of employment. If well planned, organized and funded, social services can considerably alleviate the negative impact of the economic crisis and can generate welfare and economic growth in communities.

Along with benefits in cash or nature, social services contribute, in a specific manner, to the goal of social work - to prevent, reduce or eliminate the effects of temporal or permanent situations that lead to poverty and social exclusion of people. These services correspond to a modern vision of what social work means, assuming the active involvement of persons, groups and communities in difficulty, encouraging them to mobilize resources and to solve the problems they face. Contemporary concept of social work, requires active involvement of persons, groups and communities in difficulty, encouraging them to mobilize resources first of all at the local level (through local authorities, families) to solve the problems they face, and then at central level.

Social services can be provided differently, either as a home care or a personal assistant, either as a day care or residential ones (on a short or long term). Its can be organized in the form of support services for education or mediation for labor market integration for different categories of beneficiaries who can not easily access these services. I want to specify, that social services are not a type of support that is required for groups traditionally considered vulnerable. They are designed to help anyone who is in a difficult situation or crisis at some moment of his life.

The purpose of social services is to help people in difficulty to overcome those situations, felt that critical circumstances to operate normally in socially. All social services perform the following functions:

1. *development of own capacity*: to provide professional support in the process of development of individual capacities, of families and communities to solve, through their own effort, difficult problems (of a personal nature, family or situational) facing by them;

2. *professional support*: based on professional knowledge and techniques to solve personal, family and community problems that exceed the natural capacity of response. Professional support is provided through counseling, individual and group therapy for people who can not exceed difficult situations through their own effort;

3. *flexibility of social support absorption* provided by the public or private / community systems. Many individuals / families situated temporary in difficulty do not know the forms of financial / institutional support they are entitled, therefore social worker's mission is to inform about social benefits and social services available to them;

4. *focus and effectiveness of social support*: social work is a tool into focused and selective use of various forms of social support for families / persons in difficulty, and also to ensure effective use of resources allocated to the need envisaged.

5. *defending the interests and rights of people in need / difficulty* if they are threatened, and the victim is unable to resolve effectively the problem. In this case social worker must ensure compliance of these rights [3, p.246-247].

To these five essential functions which social services fulfill, we can add two other equally important:

✓ *diagnosis of social and human problems*: social work establishes a "map" of social issues at the community level, identify and record the vulnerable population segment. At the community level there will always be the vulnerable social groups at risk of marginalization and social exclusion;

✓ *prevention*: social services is preventing the installation of pathological social processes (drug abuse, delinquency, school dropout, child neglect, domestic violence) [3, p.247-248].

The system of social services in the Republic of Moldova covers both the institutional and the professionalized activities, programs of action, intervention carried out to achieve the measures provided for social policies which aim to increase social welfare.

Social services have the aim to restore and develop the individual and family capacity, required to overcome with their own forces the situations of difficulty. These services are professional services performed by persons skilled in field of social work, who use the specific methods and techniques to identify and to diagnose the need for social intervention. Social services consist primarily of:

- Information;
- Counseling;
- Individual and group therapy.

Depending on the location where these services are granted, there is a distinction between:

- ✓ social services provided to beneficiaries in their natural environment (family, school, workplace) and
- ✓ social services provided in specialized institutions
- ✓ temporarily (counseling centers, day centers)
- ✓ permanent (residential institutions)

Depending on the circumstances which social services are addressed, we can distinguish:

- *social services in emergency situations* and
- *social services in situations of chronic difficulty*.

Social services can be also classified according to normative acts of the Republic of Moldova, according to the degree of specialization:

- a) primary social services;
- b) specialized social services;
- c) highly specialized social services [2].

If we make a critical analysis of Moldavian social services system, we must first realize that a significant part of the population is not adequately covered by the social work systems due to the large informal sector or because of the insufficient coverage of vulnerable groups. Although reforms have been launched, a number of laws still exist only on paper or are poorly implemented. The system of social services and its implementation are nontransparent. Rural areas are at a disadvantage to urban areas in terms of social services, but also regarding the labor market and access to education.

In this context arises the question; what can we do? First of all there is a need for clarification of the legislation framework in the field of social services and also in the construction of coherent and articulated regulatory documents in this field, expected by the social service providers from many years. Secondly, we need to unblock the work posts in the social system (which are occupied by people from other fields) and trained professionals for this sector, with good skills in social work, who will work directly with beneficiaries. Then it is very important that the person in difficulty to be actively encouraged to be involved in those measures which are intended.

The basic element in the promotion of a coherent reform in the area of social work at national level is the development of a diversified system of integrated social services at the community level. These services are designed to mobilize the community in developing local mechanisms to support people and families in difficult situations in relation to local needs and to prevent institutionalization.

The development of integrated social services system is related to the concept of decentralization and community development and aims to create general welfare of all members of the community. In this context *National Programme on creating integrated social services* provides the expansion of specialized social community services and the improvement in efficiency and effectiveness of highly specialized social services. Combining preventive and rehabilitation measures, as well as solving cases at the community level, before they are getting worse, the system becomes more efficient in terms of cost, giving impetus, in the last years, to the participation of civil society in social life, and also to the involvement of the community, as an active actors, in the process of solving of occurred problems.

The integrated system of social services has the following objectives:

1. To ensure the quality and efficiency of the integrated system of social services;
2. To develop, strengthen and integrate social services oriented to groups of persons in difficulty.

The development of integrated social services creates better opportunities for social inclusion of disadvantaged people, ensuring the respect for their fundamental rights.

The integration of social services involves several approaches: streamline and modernize of social services, comprehensive approach to family needs, and integration of social services for all groups of beneficiaries in a single system. The integration of social services system is achieved also through intersectoral programs based on the promoting of strategic policies aimed at social services.

The specific objective of the social services modernization is to improve the infrastructure for social services, in order to ensure equal access of the citizens to such services through:

- the improvement of communication and information on the rights, benefits, social services;
- facilitation the exercise of social rights for all citizens;
- ensuring the authenticity and quality of information;;
- monitoring the delivery of social services, in order to follow the respect for the rights of beneficiaries;
- ensuring the financial control and supervision of the quality of social services provided by public authorities and / or private sector organization.

Current debates in Moldovan society are concerning how to develop social service systems in relation to a number of criteria of efficiency and effectiveness. The main actions refer to:

- the development of mixed market of social services;

- the modernization of social services systems;
- the development of integrated services;
- the participation of beneficiaries and free choice.

Regarding the improvement of the management and organization of social service delivery system we can noted that:

- internal organization of social service providers, public and private, should be adapted to the needs of beneficiaries;
- increase the accountability of all actors involved in the delivery of social services for the efficient operation of the entire system;
- encourage partnership between public authorities, NGOs and other civil society actors;
- encourage the participation of people in vulnerable situations to social policy development and effective delivery of social services.

What result should we get, applying an effective regulatory system in the service sector?

- Available services;
- Accessible services to all who need them;
- Efficient services, transparent and well managed;
- Services at a reasonable cost to users;
- Service with good quality.

In conclusion we can mention that the Republic of Moldova is fully engaged in the process of adjusting to European values and standards, the reform of social services being in this context one of the most important.

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