

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Parenting in France

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Comments Paper - Romania

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The balance between family life and professional career of Romanian women using child care facilities

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1. Introduction

This paper is focusing on the short comments of the French parenting model (Parenting in France: access to a wide range of facilities for a better reconciliation of work and private life) from a comparative perspective and discusses the Romanian women- related issues with regard to the professional and family life, child care and labour market participation.

In Romania, after 22 years, education, health care, habitation, social inclusion and gender equality are still facing major challenges and risks due to lack of coherence, predictability and clear-cut directions of development of social policies. The social policy system increasingly loses its basic function in developing major impact strategies in long-term qualitative changes within the community life.

It seems to alienate more and more from the efficiency and efficacy standards. Therefore, a better focus of reform strategies on the structure of community's and population's needs by establishing and ranking priorities according to their specific actual demands in the context of the current crisis would certainly lead to pragmatic solutions adapted to the scarce financial budgetary resources.

In Romania institutional fragmentation of the social protection, social security and assistance system resulted in a lack of communication between the actors directly involved in policies and programmes of change and support for families and children. The category of working women with children becomes increasingly vulnerable under the constraints of the budget cuts.

The transition to a market economy, with all the profound reorganisation involved, affected not only individuals, but also large segments of the population, gradually leading to social exclusion.

From this point of view, Romania appears as a particular case in the context of the European countries, with high poverty and severe poverty for children and families.

Even the legislative framework, after 22 years, still represents a weakness in the reform of the social protection and assistance system. In many ways it has remained inflexible, unstructured, sometimes incoherent burdening the effective and fast action of the forms of support and types of social assistance services for children and families. In spite of the fact that Romania has some concrete laws focused on the equal rights of men and women, as the Law no.202/2002 on equal opportunities which establishes the legal framework in the field of gender opportunities, the Law no.272/2004 on the child rights protection and promotion, specified that the child provisions are guaranteed for all children, without any discrimination, we noticed many barriers and incoherence actions/disorders in implementing them. For instance, in December 2011 the social assistance law no.292/2011 was issued, replacing the law no.116/2002. The new law has generated extensive controversy

from the very beginning, being criticised by many social actors for its claim of reform. In fact, it had not been subject to a normal public debate, but adopted instead under the urgency procedure. The fundamental objection around which major complaints are built about the purpose of the new law refers to the attempt to privatise the public services of social assistance.

2. Policy debate

2.1. Romanian Gender policies during the socialism regime: Historical Background

The history of women on the labour market in the period after the World War II, in Romania as in France, is quite similar. But a particular stage of women labour market participation in Romania refers to their contribution during the socialist regime. This was made, sometimes even forced, in order to illustrate the efforts of an anti-discriminating ideology and to ensure equal opportunities. Even hiring women in hard work conditions, but well paid, manlike jobs (heavy industry, metallurgy, machinery, etc.) was stimulated in order to distinctly highlight equal opportunities. Women's participation in the labour market also had another meaning though: keeping a decent family budget. As an immediate reaction child care and education services were created within the public system: nurseries, kindergartens, weekly care centres, after school, etc. This was aiming to keep active even those mothers who had young children. The incentives were doubled with those in services for children, even if sometimes their quality was questionable. Using all these, the intention was to encourage an aggressive pro-natalist policy, which had a painful long-term impact in promoting women's right to intimate life, often being retrieved in the low quality of child births. A few characteristics of the socialist regime on gender equality can be recalled here:

- Promoting non-discriminatory treatment for women at workplace related to: respect for individual, equal pay for equal work, the presence of women's organisations, and political election in share system for better representation of women in politics;
- Stimulating school participation in all forms and grades of education, without any gender discrimination;
- Encouraging women to participate with equal rights in all areas of the social, professional and political life;
- Promoting a policy to modernise family life in order to eliminate traditional patterns.

Starting with these characteristics, it might be assumed that socialism provided a legal basis for major changes in the scope of gender equality. At a deeper analysis, however, if we look at the real content of the existing opportunities then, it is only partially true. In reality, these changes had mostly a more formal content, remaining simply promises/appearances, because the woman was forced to submit to an authoritarian ideology. She was prisoner to some stated rights which in fact weren't providing a good private/family life. On the contrary, to the multiple challenges and risks she was facing daily in her own household, there were added also those leading activities of public work, made of obligation/under the pressure of the

ideological rules, required by the party. In Romania the socialist regime created easier access to child care facilities for the parents, the prices being more affordable also to those with low incomes. Social polarisation still was not obvious at average level and wasn't creating pathological frustrations for the poor ones. But even then there were not enough places in nurseries, care centres for children under 2 years old, kindergartens, given the birth rate derived from constrained pro-natality policies. However, a better coverage in child growing and education support was attempted for families with many children and low income comparing to nowadays.

2.2. Women on the labour market

At the present, European practices increasingly insist on introducing effective measures for activating on the labour market the population at risk to be excluded, as an active support in gaining economic autonomy, truly believing that active employment policies are those able to achieve in time an economic/financial independence for the people at risk of being marginalised and exclusion. Romania also has many governmental programmes for creating jobs, training and retraining people for the labour market insertion. But, unfortunately, they are not convincing at all effective for unemployed people, not through the decency/quality of the jobs on-offer nor by the stability over time of the employment contracts. The move of the resources is not heavily oriented toward actually creating much diversified jobs for categories having different professional qualifications, toward innovating flexible solutions in the work programme, toward establishing clear rules and responsibilities of the Code of Labour; hence, a high demotivation of those who must return to the labour market or wait to be hired for the first time. The dramatic decrease of the number of jobs is a chronic problem in recent decades. The economy has failed, through its mechanisms, to create significant employment opportunities. In this context, a great importance was given to active employment policies. In recent years almost half of the budget for combating unemployment was dedicated to active policies. The result was not visible nor as it was expected. There is a public perception that too many resources are wasted on programmes that do not have significant effects in finding a suitable and stable job. In other words, the efficiency of the active programmes for finding a job is low. There have been many attempts to evaluate the programmes in this field. The vast majority of the assessments used excessively opinions collection about the effectiveness of different programmes or about the feasibility assessment and possible effects of various measures. Of course, opinions are important. But they also have important limits. It is necessary, for a more effective evaluation, to pay more attention to objective data collection in order to enable more accurate assessments measuring the concrete results.

Along with the collapse of the economy, the family living standards in Romania underwent a severe deterioration. All family income types, both primary incomes (from the economy) and secondary incomes (from social transfers) suffered an important erosion. As it is expected, the value of incomes from social transfers- child allowances, social welfare benefits, pensions deteriorated much faster. It is a reduction not only in number of employed people, but also a big decrease of the real incomes of employees.

The employment rate in the last decade comes down slowly until 2005 and starts to grow since 2006 to 2008. As a consequence of austerity policy, the employment rate stopped its growth in 2009 and rose again in 2012. If we refer to the activity rate we can observe a slight tendency of increase approximately equal both for women and men. But still there is a visible difference between men and women. In 2009, men 70.9%, women 55.4%. In 2012, men 72.1%, women 56.4% (NIS).

The figures for employment rate by gender, according to NIS- Amigo source, were as following: 65.2% (men, 2009), 52% (women, 2009), 66.5% (men, 2012), 52.6% (women, 2012). Here there is a slight increase over the past four years approximately equal for both women and men. In 2011, the proportion of men within the employed population is higher, 54.8% comparing to 45.2% for women, but with a decrease of about 4%. There is a growing trend in the evolution of men's employment rate and a slight decline in the case of women when we consider the 25-44 age group, in which there are many mothers who must return to the labour market. One can explain this as the involvement of women in raising the child and her inability to return to the labour market.

In 2012, the percentage of unemployed women represented 42.7% within the registered unemployed people. The proportion of unemployed women is much lower among those with low education (primary, middle, technical education: 37.7% in this category), but it increases along with those with high school and post-secondary education (51.8%), graduate education (62.2%). In fact, I consider it not a paradox that women having a lower level of education and/or lower professional level find jobs more easily than men. In reality, the women with higher level of education and/or with higher professional levels can find jobs with more difficulty. This might reveal the propensity of hiring men in highly skilled or the best political and managerial positions. The percentage of women in top management positions in politics, public administration, scientific institutions, this is lower than that of men although their level of higher education is higher, on average.

In Romania the lack of systematic, accessible information about the opportunities on the labour market to all categories of beneficiaries is a very weak point in the employment policies. Compared to Romania, the way in which the visible information is available/appears in the French model for the employees, but also for the employers, as institutional structured, constant/explicit issues for gender policy could be a guide for us in this field. More, it could be considered as a preliminary guidance to stimulate intrinsic motivation for work for the beneficiary who often comes psychologically/emotionally unprepared on the labour market, dominated by competition, without any certainty for his or her successful integration on professional work (I refer, especially for the least qualified/ competent, accentuates long-term unemployment for both women and men and also for youth).

In Romania, a recovery strategy for the labour market for those with sordid and poorly paid jobs is missing. There is a general impression among specialists about the current programme of employment policies suffering from a lack of clarity for the direction of socio-economic development on specialised sectors and from a lack to conformation to the specifics/peculiarities of each professional category and age group.

2.3. Assessment of the child policy measure: Benefits and services/facilities for family and child

Unlike France, where various types of child minder training are available even since 1977, accompanied by allocations (AFEAMA then PAJE, the payment being by parents), in Romania, during the same period, the options of the parents for child care possibilities were rather narrow both regarding diversity of the services and possibility of education/development of the child under high quality standards. We may speak of private, informal arrangements between the parents and the child-minders, home-based care, etc. There was no concern for the professional training of the people providing such services at home or at the parents' home. In Romania,

the professional standards of employment were not clear, like in France; it was up to the parents to decide. The quality of the care could be determined by the parents only in time, by monitoring. The collective care system, however, was very developed, the institutional arrangements being predominant: crèches, kindergartens, childcare centres, family placement (very little, only in exceptional circumstances). In France, the pattern discussed here brought a variety of childcare forms, differentiated by age and supplied by specialists trained according to quality standards. The big range of childcare facilities impressed by their diversity and access to their information, as they appear in the French parenting model (traditional nursery schools, pre-schools and child minders, day cares, kindergartens, the babysitting type care, family nurseries, foster homes, collective childcare, parent nurseries, babysitter teams, child care at parents' home, cooperative nursery schools, mini-nursery schools, early learning activities, learning classes for 2-3 years old, etc.). All French child facilities illustrate over time real and responsible concerns for developing gender policies related with family life. Last but not least, the French pattern is one very well formal and systematic structured based on legal framework regulations. All of these confer to the parenting French model the visibility for parents, the transparency information for both employers and employee and the stability on time for balance between professional and family life. A brief description of these brings many differentiations from the Romanian model until 1989 and after the Revolution.

In Romania in the past communist regime the nurseries belonged to the institutions/enterprises and they were better managed to meet mothers' needs. After the Revolution they were subordinated to the Ministry of Health (nurseries) and the kindergartens to the Ministry of Education. In a first stage after the revolution we are witnessing a massive reduction in their number from 847 to 573 (1989-1995) and to an incapacity to meet the demands of the children's parents. The percentage of the children in kindergartens also decreased from 63% to 55% in 1996. This is reflected in the employment rate of women which has decreased during 1991-2003, and gradually continuing until 2011. This represents a real obstacle for women in returning to the labour market after maternal leave. Although the public sector in Romania is the leading provider of care services, it is still more under-developed and can't respond to the requests of the parents with pre-school children.

The data published in 2011 by NIS shows that in Romania there were 1,367 independent kindergartens (as a legal entity). A decrease is noticed comparing to 2010, when there were 1,498 kindergartens. Of the 1,367 kindergartens, 254 (18.58%) are in the private sector. Along with the kindergartens as a legal entity there are also 10,830 divisions within school groups (72 in the private sector) and 1,160 divisions (22 in the private sector) focused on care, education, training. Data coming from the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP) points out in the 2011-2012 school year a total of 541 primary schools (of which only 105 units were accredited to operate and 436 units were temporary authorised). Within these primary schools there were 17,761 children integrated. Noticeable, preschool funding is only made for units with legal entity whose number crashed in the period 2003-2010, from over 7,000 to 1,367.

According to official data (coming from NIS and from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly), if in January, 2011 in Romania there were 1,508,535 pre-school children, with the age 0-6 years old, only 46.6% of them were registered in formal care institutions, the others being left in the care of parents, grandparents, relatives or babysitters without a legal contract. The Romanian childhood services system for pre-school children is reduced both in types/forms of care, and also in its

number in order to meet parents' needs. It regards both public sectors, which is dominant and private sector, in the first stages of its development. This includes: nurseries, kindergartens, day care centres, foster families (more for children in institutions) and starting 2012 services using nannies and baby-sitters. The kindergartens are the main form of education and child care from age 3 to 6. According to the National Education Law 1/2011 (art. 28), these can function with normal, long, or weekly programme, as independent units with legal entity, or as structures within other educational institutions. They have as the main objectives the physical development, personal hygiene, emotional development, training communication skills and the premise for reading and writing.

In 2011 in Romania only 5% of the children under the age of 3 were registered in nurseries, very much under the European average which is 27%. 63% of them are in kindergartens, also much lower compared to the European average of 84%. From this point of view, Romania is on the last place related to the Barcelona target assumed in 2010. The evolution of public and private nurseries and kindergartens between 2006 and 2011 (NIS source) indicates that their number is far from enough for parents with children. Private nurseries' number is extremely small, only few of them being accredited by quality standards. Government Decision no.251/17.03.2011 includes nurseries and kindergartens in the modernisation strategy for the villages, which will not bring more in their development. There will be vast inequalities between geographic areas and those under-developed rural areas will suffer. By assuming the Barcelona target (2002), in 2012 there are introduced by law forms of care and education for children from 3 months to 3 years, during the day, which also brings a legal framework for the work of nannies and baby-sitting in institutions or at the residence of the accredited persons. The registration rate in public nurseries and kindergartens it is very small compared to the demands and to the number of children of pre-school age. For example : According to NIS source, between 2003 and 2010, the gross registration rate in nurseries was 2.7 in 2010 compared to 2.1 in 2003, which indicates a reduced capacity of the system to meet the need of children of age 0-3.

In Romania, the system of community care and education services for families and children, in fact a consistent and reliable support in time for mother and their careers is very much underfinanced. In fact, specialised social services by needs profile of children are under-developed through progressive chronic abandonment of public responsibility.

Over time there were large discrepancies between the new responsibilities at county/local level and the available financial resources for developing public services. This has become perceptible also through a severe deficiency in the development of active social policies for public child care services. Serious under funding the system of financial support for the segment of population in severe poverty conditions meant sharp cuts in social costs as a percentage of GDP, long-ranged from the other European countries. Generally, it is a complete lack of integrative vision of the system of childcare and social assistance services and monitoring it nationwide.

There are such geographic areas marked by general problems of extreme gravity related to childcare, youth, families for which we find no answer at the social policies strategies proposals. All of these problems raise uncertainties about the stability of the family in time, its moral values and future evolution. This issue is closely related to the balance between work and private life of women. Therefore, the reorientation of the major objectives of the policies to protect family and child in this stage should

be focused on active forms of support/quality social services for child growth and education, in order to avoid future re-appearance of modern society's own risks. Even the types of proposals generating solutions should now be readjusted to these new demands, and adapted to the current context of budgetary restrictions.

After 2008, we could observe some changes in policy employment, but not clear visibility for gender equality. Also there are undesirable effects for a normal balance between working/professional life due to the underdeveloped social support for women in growing up children and working time at home. The economic crisis accompanied by the financial, social and moral changes brings for Romanian Society many additional threats to women and their children. They are related with losing their autonomy, dramatically decreasing their participation at the highest level of political and professional decision makers.

In Romania the crisis manifested through a fast impoverishment of the population and by the multiplication of forms of social exclusion, aggravated by a major political confusion and even chaos.

Therefore a degradation of social and moral fibre of solidarity is registered, the disappearance of community spirit significance as a resource of evolution. Also it is visible an erosion of moral values in Romanian society, in relationships and family life, just where the connections should be very strong and supportive. Frequently ignoring dissemination of good practices models at the community level by fragmenting support networks, through all kinds of pressure, seriously affects social solidarity between generations and also towards disadvantaged groups. The safety feeling given by the affiliation to a community, badly needed in extreme times such as crisis or those brought by natural disasters, decreases. Perhaps the most dangerous aspect is that large segments of population have been removed from their traditional balance and pushed in a poverty state and despair without hope of exit.

3. Transferability issues

The French proposal to evaluate its own model of services/child care facilities and to encourage relying on that a balance between work and private life can be analysed also from the perspective of a serious challenge both for policies related to gender equality and to the employment policies. This model (in spite of the fact it could have some barriers in its implementation in the other countries into the real family life due to the cultural family traditional pattern), in my opinion it should permanently stay in the attention of decisions makers and politicians when they are developing childcare policies. Many of the results obtained in structuring a complex system of education and child growth in France can also be extended to Romanian community, taking into account the social-economic and cultural context, as well as to other geographic areas. I place this study also in the alarming context of the increasing rate of unemployment (particularly for women) and the withdrawal of women, especially of those with low-skilled and poorly paid qualification from the labour market after giving birth.

It is interesting that the French study finds at public, private and community level some incentives/motivations not only to bring back women into the labour market after maternity leave, but also to create an intrinsic satisfaction/motivation for both private and work life. In this respect diverse, systematic, quality facilities are provided for childcare for which parents can make an informed proper choice. This

appears to be a safe solution, although is not the only one, for releasing women of their most important responsibilities in the child upbringing, education and development and for keeping in the same time the high standards for their professional career.

The French model has several strong points in protecting mother and child that can be taken into account in its transferability process.

- The diversity of care types with many choices possibility for different groups of families;
- The complexity of family profile needs that can and should be covered by structured public and private forms of services through a coherent public policies;
- Maintaining a balance in the work of raising a child and the professional life through the saved/rescued time by the firm for hiring an adequate child care service;
- A clear system of fast information about child care facilities, about forms of employment of the specialist, making a call to associations;
- The presence of clear legal rules and principles of employment and setting quality standards for the employee (see the Code of Social Action and Families);
- Adjusted costs to family income;
- Focus on training specialists for child care/education system;
- Introducing inner motivations for the woman in order to return them to the labour market after maternity leave;
- Establishing a special form of financial incentive for employers (CESU);
- Simplifying the allowance system starting with 2004, only one PAJE, allowance for young children that can actually support the needs of this age group.

In the context of the current situation in Romania (taking into account our public traditional pattern of child care facilities and low family income) we could easily transfer as an adequate model for child care and educational facilities helping the working parents some public diversified forms of collective child care, such as: municipal child care services, parental nurseries, part-time child centers for care and education, targeting also inactive women, maternal schools at age 3 - free of charge for parents), compulsory accompanied by one main Center of Information such as CNAF website, which could offer parents clear information about childcare opportunities and especially cost simulation tools.

In Romania the developing private child services should be related to a legal framework concerning contracts and quality standards. Regarding the child allowances reform, Romania likewise France, has started to prepare for the near future strategies of improving family policies having a goal to simplify the manner of receiving support allowances for children (after the model in France of Young children Allowance PAJE, Prestation D'Accueil du Jeune Enfant 2004).

In Romania home care as a classic form of care is mostly adopted both by wealthy families and the poor ones who can't afford another solution due to lack of money. If for the families with many children living in poverty the improvisation and lack of attention for the child is accepted (the child is left to grow on its own like an unwater weed, being looked at in some cases as a source of income and not as a real value in itself, a valuable asset in the family), for the wealthy families home care is a well selected service, often changed along the way in order to find the best and suitable one for the child. Furthermore, the most modern techniques for monitoring home child care are being used. Unfortunately, in Romania, often most of the hiring in family of the nannies or babysitters is not based on a formal legal regulatory framework, being left to the negotiating parties, sometimes encouraging black market work. No place for the cost per day/hour of the employee is stipulated, nor yet any restrictions for the employer. It is an informal arrangement based on negotiation between the parts that often affects the children by lack of their real supervision, difficulties in their socialization, suspicious and irresponsible services that have no precise quality standards.

As in France, many analysis suggests that Romania needs to have in the near future increasing the birth rate as a priority but immediately accompanied by a real compensation of the child costs for families/women oriented towards work and harmonizing family life with the professional life. In this regard, progress must be done, in establishing an additional budget for maintaining school/care opportunities for the preschool aged group of children, especially for 0-3 years old, in order to fulfill the Barcelona objectives that Romania has accepted in 2002. For this it is necessary to establish a special independent institutional unit for family, child and women and to advance the policies and strategies in order to reform the domain.

4. Conclusion

As in the French model, I believe that the encouragement by giving the mother higher benefits for child care during the maternal leave creates a large discrepancy of professional opportunities for women with an underpaid job, with less skilled occupations. Thus emphasise gender discrimination related to the economic situation. These groups, who for a period of time may raise their child at home, decently due to the level of the allowance and of the postnatal leave can become in the future, after the end of the maternity leave, potential dependent on social help/assistance. Even more, those women can end up in groups at risk of poverty and crime due to the lack of economic independence, without a steady income from wage. I liked the proposal and argumentation in the French text and it could be transferred also in Romania, but after clear information on the benefits of the presence of intrinsic motivation for women to return to work after post natal leave or even faster. And my opinion is that the accent should be on mother's return to the profession as soon as possible after birth considering that she will have a steady secure income along with her continuous professional improvement. It is well known that the harmonisation of work and private life requires no disconnections for long periods of time in professional practicing.

While in France the childcare facilities supply is constantly increasing starting with 1970, both under a very big diversity in terms of specialized services and in terms of available places for working parents, and also in improving their quality requirements under law, in Romania we can observe after 1989 a decrease in the number of childcare/education facilities services and a low responsibility for working women and their professional careers. The child care facilities system for children

aged 0-6, obviously has been underdeveloped in the last years (no attention given to the special children at high risk of social exclusion, missing after school supervision forms for small children and as a consequence many sources of children accidents etc.) .

Unfortunately, in Romania women's problems and their professional careers do not represent a priority for the decision makers, nor the politicians.

The major risk situation for Family and Child in Romania is the outcome of constant poverty and inadequate Social Policy of the socialist regime which still continues to a certain degree up to the present day. From the economic crisis perspective, the economic aspect is only one factor, very important, but not the only one, in solving the serious problems of Child and Family at the moment.

In the Social Policy field it is still compulsory to reconsider the political options regarding:

- Establishing priorities within gender equality and Child Care Protection System;
- Stipulating by law the institutions, funds and community specialized care for preschool aged children;
- The need for a new explicit and coherent legislation to be approved and implemented in order to increase women's opportunities to harmonize their family life with their professional life;
- The great need for a better coordination of all the programs for children and families within Child Care and Education policies.
- Promoting the professionals in the field of the childcare and education system.
- Developing and improving family and child care services by using more benefits in kind instead of cash benefits;
- Encouraging by law the private sector of care and education for child, especially the one concerning preschool aged group of children.

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