

TRAINING IN SOCIAL WORK – AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS WITHIN ”ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI

Mihaela RĂDOI *
Gabriela IRIMESCU **

Abstract

Emerged in late 19th century, social work has a particular specificity among current professions; it has evolved continuously to respond to the multiple challenges triggered by issues of the ever-changing society. Because it is a profession of many faces (Sheafor, Morales, Scott 2011) but also a socially constructed profession (Payne 2011), social work acquires distinct notes from one society to another, from a historical and from a geographical, social, economic, political and cultural standpoint. Social work was influenced by various social, political and theoretical circumstances, which determined a constant modification of functions and practices in general. Because it is a rather new profession evolving and changing at a fast pace, social work must respond to the multiple challenges concerning the quality of professional training and the quality of provided services, implicitly.

This study represents an analysis of the social work school in Iași from the perspective of undergraduate and master students within the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences. The main directions of analysis were the following: access to the education establishments and previous experience/volunteer work, the training of competences in social work – the education process and the educational resources, the challenges of social worker profession, the access to the national and international labour market, the Erasmus experience and the migration of workforce. The study shows that it is necessary to adapt the curriculum to the new social issues, to get practitioners more involved in the education process, to allocate more time for practical/applied disciplines to the detriment of theoretical ones. The study also reveals the desire of young social work graduates to work in the system and to change whatever does not work (based on their experiences) for both themselves and those around them.

Keywords: students, professional training, education system, social work

Résumé

Apparue à la fin du XIX^e siècle, l'assistance sociale a un spécifique particulier parmi les professions actuelles, qui a eu une évolution continue, pour répondre aux multiples provocations causées par les problèmes de la société qui change toujours. Puisque cette profession a

* Associate professor, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Carol I 11, 700506, Iași, Romania; email: radoi.mihaela73@gmail.com.

** Associate professor, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Carol I 11, 700506, Iași, Romania; email: gabriela.irimescu@gmail.com.

plusieurs facettes (Sheafor, Morales, Scott 2011) mais elle est aussi une profession construite socialement (Payne 2011), l'assistance sociale acquiert des notes distinctes d'une société à l'autre, autant du point de vue historique, que géographique, social, économique, politique et culturel. L'assistance sociale a été influencée par de différentes circonstances sociales, politiques et théoriques, ce qui a déterminé de manière constante une modification des fonctions et de la pratique en général. Tout en étant une nouvelle profession qui se modifie et qui évolue rapidement, l'assistance sociale doit répondre aux multiples provocations qui concernent la qualité de la formation professionnelle et la qualité des services offerts, implicitement.

L'étude est une analyse de l'École d'assistance sociale de Iași, de la perspective des étudiants de licence et master de la Faculté de Philosophie et Sciences Social-Politiques.

Les principales directions d'analyse ont été les suivantes : l'accès dans les établissements éducationnels à travers l'expérience offerte par la participation aux activités antérieures de volontariat ; l'accès dans les établissements éducationnels à travers des activités de mentorat réalisées par les étudiants de la dernière année. La formation des compétences dans l'assistance sociale, le processus d'éducation et les ressources institutionnelles, les provocations du métier d'assistant social, l'accès sur le marché national et international du travail, l'expérience Erasmus et la migration de la force de travail sont d'autres aspects explorés.

L'étude montre qu'il est nécessaire d'adapter le curriculum aux nouveaux problèmes sociaux, d'allouer plus de disciplines pratiques/appliquées au détriment des disciplines théoriques, qu'on a besoin d'impliquer plus les praticiens dans le processus d'éducation.

Mots-clefs: étudiants, formation professionnelle, système d'éducation, assistance sociale

Rezumat

Apărută la sfârșitul secolului al XIX-lea, asistență socială are un specific aparte printre profesiile actuale, ce a evoluat continuu pentru a răspunde multiplelor provocări ridicate de problemele societății în continuă schimbare. Fiind o ocupație cu multe fețe (Sheafor, Morales, Scott 2011) dar și o profesie construită social (Payne 2011), asistență socială capătă note distincte de la o societate la alta, atât din punct de vedere istoric, cât și din punct de vedere geografic, social, economic, politic și cultural. Asistență socială a fost influențată de diferite circumstanțe sociale, politice și teoretice, ceea ce a determinat, în mod constant, o modificare a funcțiilor și a practicii în general. Fie o profesie nouă ce se modifică și evoluează rapid, asistență socială trebuie să răspundă multiplelor provocări ce privesc calitatea formării profesionale și implicit calitatea serviciilor oferite. Studiul este o analiză a școlii de asistență socială din Iași din perspectiva studenților și masteranzilor Facultății de Filosofie și Științe Social Politice. Principalele direcții de analiză au fost: accesul în instituțiile de învățământ prin experiența dată de participarea la activitățile anterioare de voluntariat, accesul în instituțiile de învățământ prin acțiuni de mentorat realizate de studenții din anii terminali. Formarea competențelor în asistență socială, procesul de învățământ și resursele instituționale, provocări ale profesiei de asistent social, accesul pe piața națională și internațională a muncii, experiența Erasmus și migrația forței de muncă au fost alte aspecte explorate. Studiul arată că este necesară o adaptare a curriculumului de învățământ la noile probleme sociale, o mai mare alocare a disciplinelor practice/aplicate în detrimentul celor teoretice, o mai mare implicare a practicienilor în procesul de învățământ.

Cuvinte cheie: studenți, formare profesională, sistem de învățământ, asistență socială

1. The social work school in Romania. Historical perspective

In our country, social work in general, as well as social worker profession had an evolution characterized by difficulties, different from the one of the western world. This was due exclusively to historical circumstances.

In Romania, the social work system, social worker profession and the social work education developed simultaneously, based on the ideas coined by Dimitrie Gusti. The 1919 constitution of the Ministry of Labour and Social Provisions marked the emergence of this service as a State organization. In 1920, after merging the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Health, the legislative and institutional framework of social work was created and it evolved in close connection with the one of public health. The health law of 1930 regarding the organization of public health system also included social work (from the central to the local level) and it stated the creation of social work offices besides the shelter office, within the health organization of cities (Manuilă 1938, 37).

The State assumed the main role in the training of social workers. The first social work school was the “Principesa Ileana” Superior School of Social Work in Bucharest, founded in 1929 under the coordination of the Romanian Social Institute. In fact, the initiative of the development of social worker profession and the content of the syllabus belonged to Dimitrie Gusti, Henri H. Stahl and to their collaborators. The school functioned under the leadership of Veturia Manuilă and of Xenia Costa-Foru, two of the collaborators of Professor Gusti, both of them specialized in social work in American universities (Șoitu, Rădoi 2008).

Dimitrie Gusti believed social work to be a branch of concrete sociology, with the mission of:

- “knowing all worrying situations of social life, by using the methods and techniques of sociological investigation, namely interdisciplinary monograph researches; research is necessary not only for knowing the villages and cities, but also for identifying and understanding all individual, anomic phenomena”,
- elaborating direct intervention techniques, by using “closed” social work means (through specialized units and establishments), and mostly “open” social work (i.e. individualized) (Costa-Foru Andreescu 1980, 339).

This form of social work comprised three elements: knowledge of social environment, investigation of causes why people fail to earn their living and identification “the means necessary for the development of a person’s

personality, thus helping him/her become a normal, valuable social member, integrated in the society” (Costa-Foru Andreescu 1980, 340).

The process of social worker training was initially conducted within a four-year higher education program, in the period 1929-1959; subsequently, between 1959 and 1969, the version of three-year post-secondary school was preferred. The training syllabus comprised courses of psychology, sociology, methodology and intervention techniques, public health and legislation (Mănoiu, Epureanu 1996). Throughout its functioning, the Romanian social work school has been considered innovative in Europe (Radulescu 2007). This statement is supported by the fact that in 1962 one of the few social work manuals in the world in that period – *Prevederi sociale. Metode și tehnici în asistența socială* [Social Provisions. Methods and Techniques in Social Work] – was penned by I. Matei and H.H. Stahl.

Following the Second World War (1944), while the Communist Party held the power, social worker profession was gradually left aside. The idea of a perfect society promoted by the ideology of that period made social worker profession become no longer “necessary”. Considering these circumstances, in 1969 a decision was made to dissolve social work (Zamfir 2002). Social workers turned to other fields, while social work school disappeared. Social worker profession was eliminated from the list of profession and of labour market jobs.

The social, economic, cultural and political changes post 1989 created a favourable context for relaunching the social work in Romania and social worker profession. Therefore, in 1990 – considered the foundation of the scientific status of social work in Romania (Neamțu 2007) – at the University of Bucharest, the Social work specialty was created. Starting with 1991, the Universities of Iași, Cluj and Timișoara also constituted this specialty. In 1991, some of the Faculties of Theology choose to include a specialty called Theology-Social work. In the subsequent years, the higher education training network for social extended to more universities: Oradea, Alba Iulia, Sibiu, Brașov, Târgoviște, Bacău, Suceava. As a method of inclusion in the education system of persons already active on the labour market, the distance learning forms were created.

2. Design of study. Method, sample and data collection instruments

Our research is included in the spectrum of qualitative researches, because it uses the focus-group method; the technique is the semi-structured interview. We have chosen this research technique because it is able to multiple

aspects of the research, namely it provides information – from the perspective of the students – regarding the quality of training within education establishments for social workers and hiring perspectives in the field. The data collection period was November 2016 – January 2017. The duration of focus groups ranged between 60 and 90 minutes. After signing the informed consent forms, the interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim and then subjected to a thematic analysis.

The sampling was theoretical, while the selection criterion was the presence of practical experience for the undergraduate and master students (i.e. volunteer activities or a type of work in the field of social work for at least 6 months). The participants to the focus group are second-year undergraduate students (11 students) and third-year undergraduate students (15 students) of Alexandru I. Cuza University Iași, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, Specialty Social work. The focus group also included second-year master students (Family and Management of Family Resources – 11 master students, Community Security and Violence Control-9 master students) within the same faculty. The age of respondents ranges from 19 to 21 for the undergraduate students and from 21 to 52 for the master students. The volunteer/work experience varies between 1 year and 20 years.

The discussion topics focused on the following aspects: the access to the education establishments, the previous experience/volunteer work, the training of competences in social work, the education process and educational resources, the challenges of social worker profession, the access to the national and international labour market, the Erasmus experience and the migration of workforce.

3. Results

3.1. Access to the education establishments and previous experience

Concerning the quality of the “candidates” to social worker profession, access to the education establishments based on the results obtained in the pre-university cycle does not represent an advantage. The assessment based exclusively on the results of testing candidates regarding the skills and motivation necessary to access this training cycle. The mission of the social worker consists of participating to the solving of community social problems, of ensuring a decent minimum living standard, of increasing the quality of life for vulnerable social groups, and of improving the social

functioning of individuals (Buzducea 2005). This is why a social worker must acquire certain specific skills and theoretical knowledge (psychology, sociology, law, etc), but most importantly, he/she must have a calling for it. In fact, this represents a primordial condition for practicing this profession.

I was already working in the field and I enrolled in this faculty out of necessity. I needed the studies, the degree. (Master studies, FMRF, second year)

Generally, there are two categories of students in Social work. A first category is the one of those with a life story that motivates them to follow the courses of this faculty in order to change something in themselves or in others, (young people previously in foster care, with special needs or with a difficult family situation).

I wanted to change something in the system, because I saw many things that were wrong. I want to change something in the system also for people who are in the same situation as myself and who never managed to get past it. I have a life story and experience that I can use in order to change something. (Undergraduate student, third year)

My path has been reverse. I have a degree in Economics, but I have worked a lot in the foster care system and I felt the need [to acquire] a theoretical background. (Master studies, second year, SCCV)

A second category comprises the persons who had a second chance and took it, (i.e. they did were not admitted to other faculties: Law, Medicine, Psychology and Education Sciences; they were admitted to other specialties but with a fee to pay; they wanted to avoid certain disciplines).

I did volunteer work throughout my high-school years in an elderly care home, but I never thought I would have a career in social work. I wanted to follow the Military Academy, but I was rejected at the physical exam. Afterwards, I thought of finding a job. I did not think I would go to university. I had two more days to apply when the social worker within the centre where I did my volunteer work encouraged me to enrol. (Student, second year AS)

A distinct category is represented by students who – besides volunteering activities in high school – also had a role model (undergraduate student /master student or social worker in the establishment where they volunteered) who inspired them and made them want to follow his/her steps.

I initially knew nothing about this faculty and I had no desire to find out. I did volunteer work, but since the 10th grade, I wanted to attend the Police Academy. But blame it on fate or life, I was rejected on medical grounds. The enrolment period for university was almost over and I was still doing volunteer work. The plan was to find some kind of job. The volunteer coordinator at the centre persuaded me to enrol in this faculty. (Student, second-year)

A friend of mine, who was already at this faculty for she was older than me, convinced me to enrol in this faculty, and I don't regret it. (Student, second-year).

At the admission exam, besides the assessment of knowledge, candidates must present a proof of volunteer work. This is meant to avoid situations where, after the first semester or the first year, students realize that this profession is not for them and that they will never have a job as social workers.

It is far too easy to be admitted to the faculty, based on high-school grades; it is not normal to come to the University and to have no idea what you are doing there. I am sure many candidates do not know what they are to study and we are the happy case; we like it, but consider how many students came here to avoid [studying] mathematics and who stay for no reason other than to graduate from a faculty. (Master studies, SCCV, second year)

3.2. The training of competences in social work

The development of professional competence in social work is a fundamental necessity of a qualitative system. The legal regulations of social worker profession – through the *Law 466/2004* and the constitution of the National College of Social Workers (2005) – created the organizational infrastructure and the support necessary to represent the social worker profession at local, national and international level.

The professional training of social workers includes the initial training conducted in the higher education system and the lifelong professional training done through specific forms.

The initial professional training of social workers has the purpose of ensuring of the professional competences necessary to access this profession and it is conducted within the national education system. The competences and standards in the field of social work are elaborated by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

Regarding the quality of professional training of social workers in Romanian universities, it is worth highlighting several aspects. Namely, admission to higher education has the feature of accessibility – in some areas, there was an excessive institutional supply (Neamțu 2007) – and professional training in social work can be improved especially by shifting the attention towards the students and their training.

I wish we had a course of personal training and development, a course of communication, a course of European projects, and more psychology. (Undergraduate student, third year)

I personally anticipated a lot of practice. We have signed and sealed certificates proving we did this and that, but concretely, internships – at least in public institutions – are not what we would have expected or what they should be. (Master studies, SCCV, second year)

The problems identified by students concern mainly the weighting of specialized disciplines in the university syllabus, as well as the introduction of new disciplines adapted to the new realities.

We would like a reorganization of the courses. I think it would be better to have the specialty courses in the first two years; in the last year, we would want to have modules, while seminars should be interactive, applied and applicative, in order to transpose theory into categories of beneficiaries. I don't believe our teachers are satisfied of the fact that many of us graduate from the faculty but don't know how to work with the beneficiaries. (Undergraduate studies, third year)

Practical perspectives in Social Work may be either similar or different, depending on their focus. Some are different in terms of the main assumptions (through the manner and cause of change), while other are distinct through the characteristics of clients. A long-term activity of social workers is to choose carefully the scheme of perspectives, theories, and models that mark his/her practical style and that satisfy the best the clients' needs. One cannot posit that a method is superior to another and that a social worker must acquire only some of them. Good practice must include multiple perspectives and a high number of practice theories and models (Irimescu 2002).

University training allows a graduate to work in the following professions acknowledged by the Classification of Occupations in Romania 2013: Social worker higher level (263501); Social work researcher (263510); Social work research assistant (263511); Social inspector (263512); Counsellor for public institutions (111204); Human resources specialist (242314); Counsellor in the field of addictions (263502); Social worker with mental health skills (263505); Specialist in the vocational evaluation of disabled persons (263506); Specialist in assisted employment (263507); Career-orienting counsellor (242306); Professional orientation agent for unemployed / agent for career-related information (235903); Instructor-educator for re-socializing activities (263508); Counsellor for workforce and unemployment (235903); Probation counsellor (261921); School counsellor (235903); Doping control officer (263503); Art-therapist (263504). However, few of these specialties are known by students. Mainly, the professions

to be accessed belong to the field of family and child protection, protection of disabled persons, and assistance in prisons and remand custody.

I am a little scared when I think that the social worker is 100 people in one and that he has to do many, many things. (Undergraduate student, third year)

We have noticed a preference for the NGOs to the detriment of public institutions.

I did volunteer work in both public institutions and NGOs. Now I would prefer to work for an NGO. The work environment is different. It is more cheerful, more dynamic. But after a certain age I would go back to the State system because I would need more time for myself and for my family; hence, I would need a fixed schedule and financial stability. (Undergraduate student, second year, AS)

Students can continue their bachelor's studies with master studies with a duration of two years (120 credits), followed by postgraduate studies and doctoral studies. At this point, (pursuant to Government's Decision 580/2014) master studies comprise the doctoral fields. The result is that master studies in the field of social work are classified in the domain of sociology. We are currently making efforts to change this situation, in order for social work master studies to reprise their rightful place, thus to constitute doctoral schools in social work as soon as possible.

3.3. Challenges of the profession

This profession was relaunched in a confused and unstable social context, when neither the population nor the political decision factors of the period knew the role of the social worker within the social welfare system, reason for which the role of the social worker was misinterpreted and underestimated.

For a long period, the role of the social worker was limited almost exclusively to crises interventions especially in the field of family and children and to the granting of benefits and services with short-term impact. Because the social worker was ascribed roles mainly in the field of social services/benefits, the important of specialized training diminished. Hence, the role of the social worker became merely formal; it has taken over by administrative staff members, regardless of their profession or training. This made it even more difficult to present and promote the social worker profession.

I did volunteer work in the city hall. They told me: you are in the first year, quit while you can or do whatever you can to work abroad. There is too much responsibility here for our wages. (Undergraduate student, second year AS)

In order to prevent these situations, the National College of Social Workers, which elaborates the norms regarding the competence levels of social workers, should collaborate better with the ARACIS, which elaborates the standards. Hence, the professional training of social workers should meet the market requirements and the need of professionalized services adapted to ever-changing problems.

I found no accessibility in institutions when I did my internships. I refer here to the internships per se, not to the volunteer work I conducted. Most of the times, they just gave us some files, and the social workers were very happy when we went there because we took some of their responsibilities. But I understand them somehow. At the end, we simply filled out some forms in a file and that was it, but nobody explained to us the necessity of certain procedures, the approach to the case and how or why certain instruments were applied. You had to figure it out on your own. (Master student, FMRF, second year)

There is a study by the National College of Social Workers, through the Commission of Social Work Research (“The Rebirth of a Profession or about Being a Social Worker in Romania”) conducted in the period October-November 2015 on a representative sample of 1,057 social workers members of the CNASR, with a margin of error of $\pm 2.7\%$. According to this study, 48.2% of the social workers graduated from master studies in the field of social work, while 5% have a PhD. Social workers need lifelong training so that they can reorient their support services to respond to the new issues generated by the crisis. From among them, 83.6% participated to lifelong training programmes in the past two or three years; 3 out of 4 social workers propose to acquire an additional qualifications in the field (Lazăr, Degi, Iovu 2016). A study of World Bank shows that 34% of the local administrations did not constitute public services of Social work, though the Law 292 stipulates this since 2011. Many local authorities still failed to constitute specialized public services mostly in rural communities, where this need is actually acute. Another problem of the system is that many persons without specialized training are employed in the system to the detriment of the social workers with training in the field; hence, 1 out of 5 employers recruit persons without a degree in social work to occupy the vacant positions in the field of social work (*Ibidem*).

In order to conduct in optimal conditions the activity of lifelong professional training and of qualified exercising of social worker profession, the

CNAS comprises the Commission of Lifelong Professional Training and the National Institute of Social Work (INAS). The lifelong professional training of social workers represents a set of planned educational activities meant to maintain or develop the skills, system of knowledge and competences, professional values and attitudes necessary to a social worker. The purpose is to conduct efficiently the professional activity and to increase professional expertise at the same time. The training functions through a system of quantification using unique credits for assessing and certifying the knowledge of social workers. Based on the accumulated credits and on the years of employment, social workers acquire their professional competence levels.

The lifelong professional training of social workers is conducted based on the Norms regarding the lifelong professional training of social workers (adopted through Decision no. 3/2009 of the Executive Bureau of the CNAS). This training is done by the professional training providers in social work (registered within the National Register of Training Providers) or by a higher education establishment accredited by the law and approved by the CNAS.

According to the CNASR website, 26 lifelong professional training providers in social work were approved by the National College of Social Workers (in 2016). From among them, nine associations failed to apply their documentation for reapproval in order to obtain the accreditation. The only higher education establishment accredited in the present is Transilvania University in Braşov. (<http://www.cnasr.ro/registrul-furnizorilor-de-formare>)

3.4. Access to labour market and mobility of social workers in the European Union

Our country needs around 11,000 social workers, and this demand is still not covered, taking into account that, now, there are only 5,500 active social workers, out of the 30,000 graduates in the last 25 years. The greatest needs for social workers are registered in the rural environment. Over 70% of the social workers have a job in the public system of social work, while the rest activate within nongovernmental organizations (*Ibidem*).

Social work in Romania has faced numerous problems, but maybe the most visible ones are related to salaries (8 out of 10 social workers consider their wages are low and very low at 1,500 lei, 2 out of 10 social workers state that their monthly income is under 1,000 lei). Another important issue is the over-working of practitioners, caused by insufficient staff. Social workers face stress and professional exhaustion because of the great number

of cases allocated to them. In terms of climate in workplace, students appreciate a job in which they can use their creativity, based on equality, where decisions can be made democratically (Șoitu, Rădoi 2012).

I did an internship in a public institution, where I was given a pile of files and I was told that, by the end of the internship, I have to know the contents of those files. On one hand, these situations are understandable considering the overloading of the social worker and the great number of students who choose internships in order to get a grade. I went in the field only one time. Then I did the internships I chose, thus opting for NGOs, where I learned far more. (Master studies, second year, SCCV)

Though progresses have been registered since 2014, over a third (34%) of local public administrations in the rural environment and 8% of those within small towns (with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants) had not constituted public social work services, but they added duties to the job descriptions of the existing personnel. This percentage varies significantly, from 47% among small communes (under 2,000 inhabitants) to 18% of the large communes with at least 5,000 inhabitants (World Bank 2016). Starting from this study, we may state that such measures deny the role of the social worker and refuse the citizens' rights to quality social services.

Social worker profession has a high degree of mobility on the territory of the European Union. Therefore, 5,639 European social workers work in another EU State. The cause of the mobility of social workers may be, on one hand, the significant number of immigrants and their need for a support person to help them integrate socially and professionally. On the other hand, a cause may be the perspective of social workers of having a professionally and financially acknowledged job. 7 out of 10 social workers reported they would want to keep their jobs despite the difficulties (at the workplace), while 6 out of 10 social workers reported they did not find it a burden "at all" to work with people all day (Lazăr, Degi, Iovu 2016).

According to the European Commission site – EU Single Market – Database regarding regulated professions, the countries with the highest rates of Romanian social workers are also the countries with the greatest number of Romanian immigrants: France, Italy, Ireland and Great Britain. Alongside Germany, Romania is among the top five countries in the European Union with the highest number of social workers who had their training acknowledged in another State¹.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/qualifications/regprof/index.cfm

In our study, the perspective of students is to remain in the country and to change something.

I see myself part of a team of specialists working on a set of legislative measures or having my own NGO. (Master studies, second year, FMRF)

4. Discussions

The interwar evolution of social work as a profession places Romania among the innovative countries in Europe in that period; Romanian social work education benefited, on one hand, from the valuable contribution of the sociological School in Bucharest, and on the other, the specialization in the USA of some teaching staff members who founded the first social works. The same thing can be noted after 1989: the first measure for reconstructing the social work system is to prepare the necessary human resources, the social workers and the social work trainers. Throughout the development as a profession, a series of issues emerged. We can point out solutions for improving the insufficiently developed or less effective aspects as professional training in social work.

It is also necessary to acknowledge volunteer work and internships as professional experience (Șoitu, Rădoi 2012). The individual facilitation built on the individual approach is meant to sustain change, participation, innovation, voluntary actions with the purpose of developing and improving the social capital and the prosperity (Mihalache 2011). Considering the rapid transformations of each nation – including the increase in unemployment rate –, only those people and companies with high creative potential and ability to adjust rapidly to the changes in the outside environment will survive. The entire Romanian education must allow the formation of an autonomous and creative personality for the future actors of the labour market (Cojocaru, Rădoi 2013). The active participation of the non-governmental organizations to the implementation of some projects of a major social impact, and why not, to the solving of some crisis situations, seems to be the new strategy of the present (Stan *et al.* 2011).

It is necessary to have effective collaboration between the Ministry of Education – as initial professional training provider for social workers, the Ministry of Labour, Family, social Protection and Elderly – as the authority issuing documents in the field and managing the social work system and the National College of Social Workers. The last is a professional community of social workers in Romania, which approves access to the profession,

elaborated the norms regarding the exercise of the profession, the standards of exercising the profession and its ethical code. The elaboration of professional standards and initial and lifelong professional training must start from the Global Standards, which can be perceived as a minimum requirement.

A special importance should be granted to the promoting of social worker profession at national level and to the quality of human resources, by supporting the hiring of well-trained professionals in key-positions of the system.

The adjustment of Social Work system to the contemporary context has imposed multiple changes in specialty traineeship curriculum. Its contents have diversified and multiplied, thus providing the students with the possibility of acquiring and developing basic abilities and skills in the social worker profession. Practical instruction was designed as gradual traineeships, throughout the semesters of study and as a three-week period at the end of the university year. Based on the learning needs of students, practical activity provides the opportunity of assessing, applying, and integrating the theoretical knowledge obtained during classes within the social reality in the field (Miftode, Irimescu 2002, 3).

The public and the State institutions fail to understand the role of social workers in contemporary society; there is a lack of support for the interests of the profession and of professionals; the insufficient information of the public opinion regarding the specifics and importance of this profession. All of the aforementioned reasons determine graduates to find other jobs that are better paid or they go abroad. It is thus very important to have a much more active presence of resource-persons and of persons responsible with the promoting of social worker profession in public life.

I had an experience in Helsinki at a centre for disabled children where I met many young people from Germany who come to do volunteer work. That is the system there, where one year after finishing the studies young people try to find something that suits them. It is a year of searching or struggling. I believe that, at least for certain professions – social worker, priest, physician – this year is very good, in order to realize if you are made for what you will do. (Master studies, SCCV, second year)

It is necessary to adopt the law of unique salary in the public system and to clarify the status of the social worker in such a way as to eliminate the situations allowing the employment of persons with different qualifications in the rural environment. In order to respond properly to the needs of

beneficiaries of social services, well-trained professionals are necessary. Highly qualified workforce is truly a need, in order to meet the requirements of the Romanian society. Social work school can enhance future practice competencies by increasing diversity of students, evidenced based practices, increasing use of technologies, “leadership, knowledge of diverse funding sources and marketing skills” (Franklin 2005, 178).

5. Conclusions

Concerning training in universities, several measures are required:

- The modification of the curriculum constructed for such a long time depending on the personal resources at local level, with a tendency of overloading and over-theorising approaches, with a focus of the acquisition of knowledge to the detriment of competences (Neamțu 2007).
- The modification of curricula based on prospective studies regarding trends in social work – areas of action depending on the latest problems.
- The introduction of new disciplines in the curricula, such as International Social Work, which would allow a multicultural approach to social problems.

I like social work because it is an active field; you always see new cases and you have to research permanently in order to keep up. I don't see myself in an office, doing the same thing. (Master studies, FMRF, second year)

Specialty internships and social works should be studied in the first years, in order to know the types of beneficiaries and their characteristics. The allocation of a higher number of internship hours supervised by an experienced social worker who should only deal with students is also necessary. Currently, 18 credits (out of 180) are allocated for the discipline Internship in the curriculum. A higher number of hours allocated to Professional Ethics, courses, workshops, seminars held by specialists in the field and the implication of teachers alongside students in volunteer activities are also a necessity.

The students' implication in mentoring activities, the creation of peer groups as a resource for promoting access to university learning, the implication in peer education activities, the use of volunteering activities as a learning experience and as a means to accomplish and promote charitable activities – according to the respondents, all these elements contribute to the optimization of the education system. The desire expressed by young Social Work graduates of changing what does not function (based on personal

experiences) both for them and for the others, in an important motivational factor in the revitalization of professional training.

By becoming social workers we work with people, we change destinies or we help the others change their destiny and we cannot afford to be anything but “professionals”. (Master studies, FMRF, second year)

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