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(SERIE NOUĂ)**

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SUMMARY

IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE WORLD AND THE ROMANIAN SOCIETY. AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH Alexandra APETRĂCHEOAE, Cristina GĂLĂȚANU, Elena-Andreea BOITAN, Iulia-Gabriela ALEXANDRU, Roxana CUREA, Alexandra MAFTEI, Cornelia MĂIREAN, Lucian SFETCU	5
THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL SKILLS, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION Ciprian IFTIMOAEI, Angela ACHIȚEI	29
THE EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ADOPTABLE CHILDREN WITH A PUBLIC PROFILE WITHIN THE SPECIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM IN DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT REGIONS IN ROMANIA Sergiu-Lucian RAIU, Anca BEJENARU, Mihai-Bogdan IOVU	55
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (AA) IN ROMANIA: AA'S BEGINNINGS IN ROMANIA, A QUALITATIVE STUDY Adriana Lavinia BULUMAC	73
PROCESS OF INTEGRATING ADOLESCENTS INTO DRUG DISTRIBUTION AND SALES NETWORKS. CASE STUDY IN ABIDJAN Ismaila BAKAYOKO, Patrice M'Betien KONE, Doppon Ali COULIBALY	89
SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF CAREER ORIENTATION IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION Delia KRECH	109
REFUGEES BETWEEN FAMILY CRISIS AND RESILIENCE. CASE STUDY ON UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ROMANIA Lorena-Dina NISTOR	121
FAMILY CRISIS CAUSED BY MIGRATION Cosmina-Ioana MOTRIUC	137
RESILIENCE VS. DISABILITY: EFFECTIVE COPING APPROACHES IN THE CONTEXT OF A FAMILY CRISIS Viviana-Sorana DERSCARIU	149
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CAUSES AND EFFECTS. WOMEN'S PERMANENT STRUGGLE FOR THE WELFARE STATUTE Carmen-Gabriela LĂZĂREANU, Vlad LEONTIE	159

RISK PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES. THE LISBON EARTHQUAKE (1755) AND ITS REFLECTION IN LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES Elena VELESCU, Roxana MIHALACHE.....	173
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BOOK REVIEW

Ștefan Ungurean, <i>Eseuri sociologice</i> [<i>Sociological Essays</i>] Adrian NETEDU.....	185
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IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN THE WORLD AND THE ROMANIAN SOCIETY. AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

**Alexandra APETRĂCHEOAE¹, Cristina GĂLĂȚANU¹, Elena-Andreea BOITAN²,
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Cornelia MĂIREAN⁴, Lucian SFETCU⁵**

Abstract: This article examines how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected mental health while the virus was spreading and governments took measures around the world, in Europe and, more specifically, in Romania, while paying particular attention to vulnerable categories of individuals, parent-child interactions and distress, educational changes and adaptive behaviours, work-related stress and communication, digitalization and lack of proper social contact. The impact of the pandemic on several facets of mental health as well as its impact on the situations is evaluated using data from current literature.

The findings demonstrate that the pandemic has had a profoundly negative influence on mental health, resulting in higher levels of stress and anxiety, lower overall life satisfaction, and a higher likelihood of developing a depressive disorder. Additionally, it shows several modifications in the child-parent connection, including a decline in communication and an uptick in conflict, as well as comparable tendencies in the educational field. While digitalization sure was a solution and it made things easier, it also led to a bigger gender gap and work-family balance issues which put more pressure on women and their career development. Cyberchondria now replaces hypochondria, efficiency in education hits a peak but we lack effectiveness and, while the solutions found were appropriate and best for diverse situations, they also outlined more problems that overtook the advantages. We need

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to develop and adapt but we must not forget about what technology cannot yet replace: emotion, empathy, warmth and all that keeps us mentally healthy and wealthy.

Keywords: pandemic, health crisis, mental health, vulnerable populations, parent-child relationship, education.

Résumé : Cet article examine comment la pandémie de COVID-19 a affecté la santé mentale alors que le virus se propageait et que les gouvernements prenaient des mesures dans le monde, en Europe et, plus spécifiquement, en Roumanie, tout en accordant une attention particulière aux catégories d'individus vulnérables, aux interactions et à la détresse parents-enfants, aux changements éducatifs et aux comportements adaptatifs, au stress et à la communication liés au travail, à la numérisation et au manque de contacts sociaux appropriés. L'impact de la pandémie sur plusieurs facettes de la santé mentale ainsi que son impact sur les situations sont évalués à partir des données de la littérature actuelle. Les résultats démontrent que la pandémie a eu une influence profondément négative sur la santé mentale, entraînant des niveaux plus élevés de stress et d'anxiété, une satisfaction de vie globale plus faible et une probabilité plus élevée de développer un trouble dépressif. En outre, il montre plusieurs modifications dans le lien enfant-parent, notamment une baisse de la communication et une augmentation des conflits, ainsi que des tendances comparables dans le domaine de l'éducation. Alors que la numérisation était une solution et facilitait les choses, elle a également conduit à un écart plus important entre les sexes et à des problèmes d'équilibre travail-famille qui ont mis plus de pression sur les femmes et leur développement de carrière. La cybercondrie remplace désormais l'hypocondrie, l'efficacité dans l'éducation atteint un sommet mais nous manquons d'efficacité et, si les solutions trouvées étaient appropriées et les meilleures pour diverses situations, elles ont également souligné davantage de problèmes qui ont dépassé les avantages. Nous devons nous développer et nous adapter, mais nous ne devons pas oublier ce que la technologie ne peut pas encore remplacer : l'émotion, l'empathie, la chaleur et tout ce qui nous maintient mentalement sains et riches.

Mots-clés: pandémie, crise sanitaire, santé mentale, populations vulnérables, relation parent-enfant, éducation.

Rezumat: Acest articol examinează modul în care pandemia COVID-19 a afectat sănătatea mintală în timp ce virusul se răspânda și guvernele au luat măsuri în întreaga lume, în Europa și, mai precis, în România, acordând în același timp o atenție deosebită categoriilor vulnerabile de indivizi, interacțiunilor și suferinței părinte-copil, schimbărilor educaționale și comportamentelor adaptative, stresului și comunicării legate de muncă, digitalizării și lipsei unui contact social adecvat. Impactul pandemiei asupra mai multor fațete ale sănătății mintale, precum și impactul acesteia asupra situațiilor, este evaluat folosind date din literatura actuală.

Descoperirile demonstrează că pandemia a avut o influență profund negativă asupra sănătății mintale, ducând la niveluri mai ridicate de stres și anxietate, o satisfacție generală mai scăzută cu viața și o probabilitate mai mare de a dezvolta o tulburare depresivă. În plus, arată mai multe modificări în relația copil-părinte, inclusiv o scădere a comunicării și o creștere a conflictului, precum și tendințe comparabile în domeniul educațional. Deși digitalizarea a fost cu siguranță o soluție și a ușurat lucrurile, a dus, de asemenea, la o diferență mai mare de gen și la probleme de echilibru între muncă și familie, care au pus mai multă presiune asupra femeilor și asupra dezvoltării carierei lor. Cybercondria înlocuiește acum ipohondria, eficiența în educație atinge un apogeu, dar ne lipsește

eficacitatea și, deși soluțiile găsite au fost adecvate și cele mai bune pentru diverse situații, au conturat și mai multe probleme care au depășit avantajele. Trebuie să ne dezvoltăm și să ne adaptăm, dar nu trebuie să uităm de ceea ce tehnologia nu poate înlocui încă: emoția, empatia, căldura și tot ceea ce ne menține sănătoși și bogați mintal.

Cuvinte cheie: pandemie, criză de sănătate, sănătate mintală, populații vulnerabile, relație părinte-copil, educație.

1. Introduction

It all started on December 31st of 2019 when, in Wuhan, the first case of COVID-19, „a respiratory disease” was observed (Munot et al., 2021, p. 1). From this „the most disturbing event in the lifetime of most of our planet's citizens” (Alexa et al., 2022, p. 19) started to develop: the pandemic made its way to Asia in January 2020 (Zhu et al., 2022, p. 2) and, by March 2020, the virus had spread to other countries in the region such as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Japan. The first case of COVID-19 in North America was officially identified on January 20, 2020, in Washington State (Capainolo & Chase, 2022, p. 330). In South America and Africa, the pandemic started developing in late February with the first cases being identified in Brazil (Martines et al., 2021, p. 7) and Egypt (Samir et al., 2021, p. 2).

With the first cases being recorded in France on February 26, 2020, the pandemic spread across Europe over the following month and in June 2020 we already have a European Parliament report on most of the member state situation regarding the state of the emergency legal frame and specific measures taken: the Netherlands declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020, the UK on March 19, 2020, and Germany on March 22, 2020 (Bentzen et al., 2020, pp. 2-11). The pandemic had greatly worsened by April 12, in nations like Italy (Fochesato et al., 2021, p. 3), France, Spain, and the UK. In an attempt to slow the virus's transmission at this time, social isolation policies and other limitations were implemented.

The Romanian pandemic episode also began on February 26. By March 16, 2020, the government of Romania had proclaimed a state of emergency to stop the spread of Covid-19 and imposed stringent rules: a nationwide lockdown on March 21, 2020, closing all non-essential businesses and educational institutions. It was originally planned for this lockdown to conclude on April 30, 2020, but it was postponed until May 15, 2020. In addition, the government also implemented various measures to help combat the spread of the virus. These measures included ordering citizens to wear face masks in public, introducing contact tracing measures, banning travel outside the country, and setting up quarantine facilities to isolate those who had tested positive. The Romanian government has also made testing more widely available and set up medical facilities to provide care to those infected with Covid-19. All measures impacted the life standard of the population (Arpinte et al., 2020, p.7), access to medical care services, access to educational services, emotional support, lack of socialization, change in working, parenting, teaching also brought new perspectives on life priorities.

2. The social impact of COVID-19

2.1. *The impact of the health crisis on vulnerable urban populations*

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all social structures by imposing social distancing, limiting interactions and transforming direct communication into mediated communication in all the socio-economic spheres where it was possible, presumably exerting severe pressures on the social and economic lives of the individuals. How women, the elderly and children have responded to the need to interact with others is of increasing interest to this theoretical approach, which aims to present several studies that address the effect of the pandemic on the relationships of these categories of people who have been regarded as physically, socially or culturally vulnerable.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary 1997, the word vulnerable is derived from the Latin word *vulnerable* which means *to wound*, the definition also includes *being capable of being wounded* and open to attack. Why have we included women in the category of vulnerable people? Addressing the issue of relationships and social interactions, we start from the studies showing that women are more vulnerable to violence in general, compared to men, which also sensitizes them to other risk situations (Wägnerud et al., 2019), showing a greater tendency to anticipate negative outcomes (Stockemer et al. 2021) thus, their type of crisis response is different, in line with their psycho-emotional elements.

Studies showed that women are oriented towards others, are anchored in an ethic of care and connection (Jordan, 2017) as predominant themes in their lives, and women's sense of empowerment is defined by the quality of relationships they have with others (Miller, 1988, cited in Salisbury, 2009). In the case of women, relationships are seen as the primary context for psychological growth and healing, having the capacity to be empowering in women's developmental process (Kerr, 2009, p. 6). Seeking relationships is not a sign of weakness (Jordan, 2017), it is the fundamental model by which all people are strongly drawn to each other, by the desire for connection, belonging, and social inclusion (Comstock et al. 2008). During the pandemic period, women's response to the connection and relationship dimension, important aspects of their lives, has been associated in the literature with stricter compliance with imposed rules and measures, due to strong fears about the lives and health of those around them (Stockemer et al. 2021) while also expressing other negative feelings about the future effects of the pandemic. Dang and Nguyen (2020) showed that women worry more about the losses related to the Covid pandemic; they are worried about losing their jobs or that their income will decline, and feel the risk more acutely than men in a variety of situations, converging on women's characteristic of being more cautious, especially in life-threatening situations (Maxfield et al. 2010, cited in Stockemer et al., 2021).

According to the relational sociological perspective, each process of uncertainty creates changes in social networks and relationships, and these changes affect the identities and roles of the individuals, as well as the strategies for dealing with relationships (Babuç, 2022). In the case of women, and the context

of this ambiguity and uncertainty, we observe that their predisposition towards care took the form of strategies that aimed to protect others, making sacrifices that affected all aspects of their lives. Women were also exposed during the pandemic to other negative consequences, with studies showing that in any crisis, the incidence of violent behaviour towards women increases. We point out in this regard that New Zealand reported a 53% increase in domestic violence following the 2010-2011 earthquakes, and research following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 led to the conclusion that violence against women increased by 98% during that period (Morley, 2021). In this new social normality, where isolation from the usual social network has become common, the search for adaptive states that provide security has become central. However, the pandemic has left women facing a complexity of problems that have manifested themselves in many forms, including greater financial hardship, insecurity or loss of employment and its associated social network, increased levels of stress, substance use and mental health problems, and not least, increased levels of domestic violence (Morley, 2021).

During the pandemic, at the level of family groups, some studies show a *re-rationalization of gender roles* (Allmendinger, 2020, cited in Müller, 2023, p. 184), which has generated opportunities to reduce gender gaps and expand the horizon for sharing of responsibilities between women and men (Dey et al., 2021). However, women's role as primary caregivers for children has remained unchanged (Müller, 2023), which, in the context of the concern about job loss or new job-related demands, has led to an exacerbation of stressors associated with the pandemic and the experience of strong negative emotions. A study on the situation of women in academia during the pandemic (Bender, 2022) shows that they felt the need for supportive professional structures, and felt overwhelmed by their inextricably linked roles as parents and women in academia, each serving as a fundamental component of their identity. Beck (2020) has stated that the new risks are more democratic because they affect everyone, yet the context of the pandemic has had important implications for the situation of women, as they are vulnerable to the effects of the crisis, physically, emotionally but also socially.

In a study on the US population, women had higher percentages than men in all areas that looked at the negative effects of the pandemic on people's mental states. Thus, 95% of women had a clear perception that social isolation has a significant impact on people's mental health, reporting higher percentages than men both in the areas related to anxiety created by isolation, but also in connection to the efforts undertaken to maintain social bonds. Women's frame of mind during the pandemic was aggravated by the age variable, with the same study showing that women over 50 felt social isolation and its negative effects more strongly than men. Between March and June 2020, four in ten US adults aged 50 to 80 felt a negative sense of social isolation, with the rate being much higher among women (47%) than men (35%), and women also reported more symptoms of depression (84%) (Elflein, 2021).

In the absence of studies in Romania, we refer further to another study on the US population (McCarthy, 2020), which shows that the COVID-19 pandemic

had the most severe impact on the elderly population. The pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on the population by age worldwide, with the elderly being classified as a risk group since the onset of the health crisis, with hospitalizations and deaths hitting the hardest in this category. This classification as a risk group has reinforced the stigma among the elderly population, generating unease among this category about the use and proliferation of the mentioned label and its associations (Hopf, 2021). The mentioned study (Hopf, 2021) also shows the situation faced by the elderly population, who has been labelled as the culprit of society's blockage. Older adults were advised throughout the pandemic, all over the world, to avoid interactions, an aspect that exacerbated the loneliness of the elderly who were prone to isolation anyway, due to the physical and social conditions associated with this stage of life. Studies of adults in the United States and Australia confirmed that people aged over 60 were particularly prone to loneliness throughout the virus' bans (Carr et al., 2021). Overall, the discourse surrounding the pandemic has reinforced the homogeneous view of older adults as vulnerable, a negative age-based stereotype already widely embedded (Cohn-Schwartz & Ayalon, 2020), further emphasizing the psychological distance between generations and adopting a perspective that can disrupt intergenerational cohesion (Abrams et al., 2011, cited in Swif et al. 2021).

To strengthen our understanding of those factors that increase vulnerability in the face of the pandemic crisis, we consider the multiple axes of inequality because the pandemic is not only a health crisis, but also an ecological, economic, social, cultural and gender crisis of vast complexity that has placed a huge burden on communities, households and individuals wherever they may be (Lemkow-Tovías et al., 2023). A 2020 United Nations communiqué draws attention to the fact that the harmful effects of this pandemic will not be evenly distributed and are expected to be most damaging to children in poor countries. While health and mortality rates among children are less affected by COVID-19 compared to the adult population, their mental health and well-being, as well as access to education and various social interactions are likely to have been affected, the degree to which they have been impacted depending on the socio-economic conditions of their background. Evidence from previous epidemic crises shows that women and girls are among the most affected, especially if they have histories of poor social and economic status, disability, mental health problems or other types of physical or social barriers (Fore, 2020).

The current crisis has had a significant negative impact on women, single mothers, who have been affected by the pandemic, but also by the social and economic measures adjacent to it, and this is certain to have a significant negative impact on their children, as it is well known that the well-being of children depends very much on the social and economic circumstances of the home environment (Lemkow-Tovías et al., 2023). We have previously shown that women have experienced a high degree of stress in the face of changes brought about by the pandemic, and this cannot remain without repercussions on the children in their care, who are more vulnerable in the context of parents who have not adequately

fulfilled their responsibilities. In a paper on child protection (Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2018, 2019, cited in Lemkow-Tovías et al., 2023) it is shown that stressed parents suffering from fatigue and depression are unable to adequately fulfil their parenting role, a situation that exposes children to risks, including accidents. Moreover, when children have had to stay at home in isolation, parents have had to take on additional responsibilities for their children's upbringing; these additional responsibilities have most likely been reflected in changes to the children's daily schedule and the whole family dynamic.

Finally, we reiterate that the COVID-19 pandemic quickly turned into a global health crisis with economic, social, interpersonal and emotional implications, generating risks and uncertainties that particularly affected vulnerable groups, this characteristic being important concerning age and gender.

2.2. The impact of the health crisis on the parent-child relationship

COVID-19 Pandemic has affected life in almost all its aspects and, while it is generally admitted that parenting, „the oldest profession in the world” (Sherr et al., 2017, p. 145.) has, by itself, difficulties and presumes stress (Rivas et al., 2021, p. 27) and burnout comparable with the job related one (Mikolajczak et al., 2020, p. 674), the pandemic period surely aggravated the situation: parents started working online (Andrade & Lousa, 2021, p. 1), children enrolled to online lessons (Levine et al., 2023, p. 1) and nobody could go out for a breath of fresh air, a change of view or movement (Kharel et al., 2022, p. 1).

Working from home, in all of its aspects, while an opportunity and a solution, also brought an aggravation of the work-family conflict. No matter how we name or define work-at-home, work-from-home, telecommuting, and teleworking (Agbakwuru & Ejakpovi, 2022, p. 80) or if they were implemented before the pandemic times or not, the options of doing it while the children left for educational purposes disappeared. Moreover, during lockdown, even the possibility to vent, to organize, to finish a task while children played outside disappeared and mental distress started to take over (Lai et al., 2021, pp. 1-2). Because this relationship is two-dimensional, the children also, besides adapting to online learning, felt little to no freedom, with no time away from their parents' presence.

In 2020 Sclafani outlines the importance of adapting parenting and adjusting to see our children holistically, so that we can compensate for the multi-dimensional exposure and experience that completely lacks during the pandemic times (Sclafani, 2020, p. 2) while, later, de Jong et al. (2021, p. 2) sees the parent-child conflict during the mandatory home-schooling as an opportunity for mothers to develop self-efficacy in teaching while providing a more suitable home learning environment.

So, while we have research that shows how the pandemic created chaos that ruined the children's sleep, diet and behaviour (Auðardóttir & Rúðólfsdóttir, 2020, p. 1), affected the children's lifestyles and anxiety levels (Zengin et al., 2021, p. 1), sleep habits, chronotype and health-related quality of life (Genta et al., 2021,

p. 1372) we also have research that correlates the children stress during the pandemic with parental emotion regulation and parental playfulness (Shorer & Leibovich, 2020, p. 8), parent emotional intelligence (Adams-Sadiqi & Jiang, 2023, p. 42) and even state that parents emotion suppression exacerbates the effect of COVID-19 stress on youth internalizing symptomatology (Cohodes et al., 2022, pp. 3-5). Extrapolating, besides juggling with working for the job in an inappropriate space, while being teachers and parents for children with little to no access to nature and open spaces, parents are also responsible for all stress and stress consequences brought by changes, lockdowns and online learning so parental guilt is even more present and destructive.

Both male and women parents suffer from the effects of the pandemic period and Baker outlines that men are more likely to take on domestic tasks while on breaks (2022, p. 4) while Hjalmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir use the term „gender paradise” to outline the aggravation of gender gap during COVID that helped reveal and exaggerate „strong gender norms and expectations toward mothers” (2021, p. 268). Hagan et al., (2022, p. 131) bring forward how the pandemic brought to light the mother's adverse childhood experiences as traumatic stress reactions in their children and Chauhan states that „work-from-home is not gender neutral” and it affects and discriminates women even more than before (Chauhan, 2022).

In conclusion, the changes in work-family balance for women (Adisa et al., 2020, p. 1) and men parents brought more time spend with their children but this time is not necessarily quality time but rather cause guilt, distress, violence and trauma because the parents had to fill positions for which were not necessarily qualified for or without specific period allocated. Probably the most realistic view on the subject is the one that sees „risk and resilience” in the family well-being during the pandemic (Prime et al., 2020, p. 631).

3. Mental health symptomatically

Various scholars examined the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially regarding the impact of self-isolation and quarantine, on people's mental health (Kupcova et al., 2023). The detrimental effects of the pandemic have been examined in studies around the world among children (Deng et al., 2023), adolescents (Magklara et al., 2023), and adults (Chandola et al., 2022), and results generally suggested significant increases in psychological distress, anxiety, anger, hopelessness and loneliness (Takács et al., 2023), fear and sadness (Ahorsu et al., 2022), confusion and posttraumatic symptoms (Khan et al., 2013).

Studies among the Romanian population also aligned with the results suggested by scholars worldwide, highlighting the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at various levels (Curşeu et al., 2021; Dominte et al., 2022; Enea et al., 2022; Măirean et al., 2023; Zancu et al., 2022). For instance, COVID-19 healthcare workers reported high levels of exposure to potentially morally injurious events, which were related to physical and emotional self-reported distress (Maftei & Holman, 2021b). Similar findings were reported by scholars examining the moral stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic (D'Alessandro et al., 2022),

highlighting the need for long-term emotional support for healthcare front-line workers (Litam & Balkin, 2021). However, studies have also shown that, at least at the beginning of the pandemic, younger Romanians were more likely to consider some potential positive outcomes following the pandemic at various levels, including interpersonal relationships and overall personal growth (Maftai & Holman, 2020b).

Cyberchondria (i.e., the excessive and repetitive search for medical information using online sources; Starcevic et al., 2021) is one of the pathological behaviours widely examined within the pandemic context. Studies have found that this type of behaviour significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jokic-Begic et al., 2020), resulting in elevated stress, depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive disorder symptoms (Vismara et al., 2022). Research also suggested that younger females, with a history of mental disorders might be at higher risk to develop cyberchondria (Vismara et al., 2022). Also, people high in neuroticism and impulsivity, with low self-esteem and high intolerance of uncertainty might be more prone to experience cyberchondria (Mestre-Bach & Potenza, 2023). Studies among the Romanian population during the COVID-19 pandemic also suggested that people high in neuroticism – especially older, female individuals, are at higher risk of developing cyberchondria (Maftai & Holman, 2020a). Also, among the Romanian population, cyberchondria was positively associated with prospective negative behaviours during the COVID-19 lockdown and with positive behaviours after the lockdown, highlighting the role of prospective moral licensing and cleansing, and health anxiety in shaping moral decisions during the pandemic (Maftai & Holman, 2021a).

Studies examining the COVID-19-associated mental health symptomatology among children and adolescents generally highlighted depression, anxiety, stress, and fear as commonly related outcomes (Racine et al., 2021), and studies among the Romanian youth population aligned with this general overview. For instance, (Maftai et al., 2022) found that sadness was commonly reported by children and adolescents aged 10 to 13 as the most frequently associated emotion with the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Stevanovic et al. (2022) suggested that Romanian children, similar to those from Georgia, Lithuania, Serbia, and Turkey, reported significant alterations in the overall quality of mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some other previous studies conducted in Romanian samples reported results about mental health symptomatology. For example, a sample conducted with young adults attending college in the first and second year of study aimed to assess the longitudinal relation between psychological distress (depression and anxiety symptoms) and positive mental health in two-time points, at the end of the initial lockdown in Romania and six months later. Moreover, the study evaluated the relationship between COVID-19-related factors with psychological distress and positive mental health. Among the COVID-19-related factors, the authors included risk perception of COVID-19, COVID-19 preventive behaviours, perceived efficacy of preventive behaviours, knowledge about COVID-19, fear of COVID-19, COVID-

19 experience in the last six months (Măirean et al., 2023). The results showed that preventive behaviours and perceived efficacy of these behaviours showed a decrease over a six-month period of time, while risk perception about contracting the disease and knowledge about COVID-19 did not present changes during this period. Concerning mental health, the result indicated that positive mental health decreased, while psychological distress did not change during that period. Further, psychological distress, positive mental health, risk perception at the first time, and fear of COVID-19 at Time 2 of measurement are significant predictors of psychological distress in the second wave. Moreover, a high level of positive mental health, as well as a low level of psychological distress and risk perception in the first moment predicted positive mental health at the second time.

Another study conducted in a Romanian sample, mostly comprised of young adults, aimed to identify the relation between time perspective, COVID-19 risk perception and preventive behaviours, over six months. The results showed that participants with a positive orientation toward the future reported more preventive behaviours six months later, while the perceived severity of the COVID-19 pandemic was positively related to preventive behaviours during the second wave (Zancu et al., 2022). The practical implications of these results consist of focusing on the effectiveness of preventive behaviours in protecting against the risks of the pandemic, by highlighting the positive implications of compliance to health protective behaviours.

4. The implications on the educational level

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all areas of activity. The education system could not escape untouched, and the consequences are significant in the medium and long term. In a matter of weeks, the educational landscape has fundamentally changed. The crisis reconfigured educational practices from face-to-face interaction to online teaching and learning. Thus, in March 2020, training institutions all over the world closed their doors and moved quickly to online learning. The UNESCO report (July 31, 2020) showed the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on all levels of education and learning around the world. In early April 2020, schools closed in 194 countries, affecting an estimated 1.5 billion students at preschool, primary, secondary and high school levels, representing 90% of all students enrolled in the education system. As Sternadel (2021) stated, „In most EU countries, the period of school disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic has led to more than one-third of the school year being lost; in Romania and Malta it was more than half (51%)” (p. 19). According to a UNESCO report, in Romania, school closures lasted 36 weeks: 22 weeks of full closure and 14 weeks of partial closure.

This new challenge has highlighted the role of digital education as a key objective for a high-quality, accessible and inclusive teaching-learning-assessment process. In Romania, the digitization of the education and training system before the COVID-19 crisis was at an early stage. According to the analysis „Integration of Technologies in the Romanian education system” published before the pandemic

and cited by the Ministry of Education and Research in the „Strategy for the Digitization of Education in Romania” (2020), most of the teachers participating in the focus group mentioned that they rarely use technology in teaching, and when they do it, they limit themselves to presentations played on a video projector. The same investigation stated that most students did not have access to a computer or mobile device during classes, and if they did, it was almost exclusively in Computer classes. Also, nine out of ten students didn't know any other way to reach information than using a specific search engine and the majority of teachers didn't encourage pupils to use the resources available on the Internet, nor did they systematically present reliable online resources, such as virtual libraries, educational platforms, online magazines etc. The COVID-19 crisis has revealed other significant gaps and deficiencies in infrastructure and connectivity, protocols and online working methods, digital skills and the use of technology in Romanian education.

Despite all these lacks, teachers, students and their families quickly adapted and continued to learn, showing determination and perseverance. The closure of educational establishments and face-to-face educational activities led to the need for each entity to determine the appropriate ways to continue courses, and the management teams decided how they would organize online learning activities and communication with parents and students. There is a large consensus that e-learning or online learning refers to courses delivered partially or fully online (Gedik et al., 2013) or, as Allen and Seaman (2011) stated „online courses are those in which at least 80 per cent of the course content is delivered online. Face-to-face instruction includes courses in which zero to 29 per cent of the content is delivered online; this category includes both traditional and web-facilitated courses” (p. 7).

Over the years, online teaching and learning had many classifications. Twigg (2003) found five types: supplemental, replacement, emporium, fully online, and buffet; Picciano (2017) added two more: HyFlex and multimodal. The most common classification is that of Martin and Oyarzun (2017). They presented five types of online courses: asynchronous, synchronous, Massive Open Online Courses, blended/hybrid, and blended synchronous. An asynchronous course is the one where most of the information is delivered online and students may participate from anywhere, anytime. It doesn't imply real-time online or face-to-face meetings. Learning may include interactive online activities, readings, practice exercises, quizzes etc. On the other end, a synchronous course involves real-time online meetings. The content is delivered online and students can participate in courses from anywhere but at the same time. Learning is guided and monitored by the teacher for the whole duration of the online class and may include: video conferences, question-and-answer sessions, debates on pre-announced topics, evaluation sessions etc. To best support the learning objectives, asynchronous and synchronous online activities may be used complementary.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) are partly related to the open and online component of education. This type of class assumes that an unlimited

number of students can access the open-source content free of cost, in a flexible learning environment. There is evidence that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, MOOC enrolment increased (Tlili et al., 2022). A blended or hybrid course involves a combination of face-to-face and asynchronously online delivery. A variation of this type is when the class is divided into two groups that take turns doing one day/week in school, and one day/week online. This model was recommended in alert situations when multiple cases of COVID-19 were detected nationwide. The Romanian education system developed all those models according to the gravity of the situation, during the pandemic. To get an overview of how formal education was done during the pandemic period, we will unfold the results of some investigations.

In a large study carried out two weeks after the first closure of educational institutions (March 25-31, 2020), a team of researchers and professors from the University of Bucharest, Timișoara West University, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Iași, and the Institute of Education Sciences conducted evaluative research on teaching practices and difficulties in carrying out activities with students. This research shows that in online learning, teachers and students most frequently used simple applications for communication such as WhatsApp or Messenger (91%), phone calls (83%), open educational resources and digital content (e.g. information and illustration sites, online libraries, simulations, educational software, virtual labs, virtual museums, Digitaliada, LearningApps), but also specialized e-learning platforms and videoconferencing applications as Webex, Zoom, Meet, Teams. For meetings and discussions with colleagues, teachers said they use asynchronous discussion groups such as Whatsapp (94%), phone calls (75%), email (72%) and video conferencing via Zoom, Webex, Skype, Meet etc. (58%). For classroom and learning activity management, almost three-quarters of the respondents said they use e-learning platforms such as Google Classroom (68%), Moodle (3%), Edmodo (3%), and Easy Class (2%). Teachers also reported receiving guidance predominantly from the school principal (35%), the Ministry of Education and its institutions (25%), colleagues (23%), the IT teacher (9%), NGOs and private companies (4%), parents (2%) and pupils (2%).

The Romanian Institute of Educational Sciences report (August 2020) found that almost all principals surveyed (96%) said that school continued during the first lock-in period, March-June 2020. Schools that failed to organize such activities were from small urban towns or villages. In the same study, it is said that the use of electronic means and new technologies was predominant in learning activities. 91% of the school principals mentioned that the transmission of learning resources and tasks was mainly done through various digital means of communication. Some schools used alternative, non-digital forms of distance learning: phone communication (50% of the principals, 5% of the students), sending learning resources or tasks in printed form by post in rural areas (3% of the teachers, 2% of the students), watching TV broadcasts as „Tele-School” (5% of the students). According to the mentioned study, 75% of the teachers worked with all the students, more than 20% - with more than half of the pupils, and the rest - with

smaller groups of pupils. The teachers who most often reported working with higher proportions of their pupils belong to the following categories: come from urban schools, have at least a final/teaching degree, have more seniority in teaching, work at primary or secondary level, and have digital skills. The respondents from the study reported great difficulties in organizing online learning for students with disabilities and/or special educational needs.

As in many other situations, the COVID-19 pandemic implications are not just good or just bad for the educational system. It is more like a tapestry in which the negative elements are doubled by the positive. In the following, we will discuss these positive and negative facets.

4.1. Technology and Education

The role of technology in education and training has always been important, they enhanced each other, capitalizing on each other and always being at the starting line of evolution: technology has helped to address how the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system are complemented by options that allow an inexpensive, fast and very good quality training process. On the other hand, education has always supported and contributed to the development of technology by stimulating people's creativity and training skills. The ardent topic of the speech on the advantages and disadvantages of education and training conducted online has always been efficiency and effectiveness. Based on the experience and expertise of over 60 years of research in the field, Stolovitch et al. (2017: 276-277) offer a convincing positioning regarding the impact of technology on vocational education and training:

*Media and technology can substantially improve the **efficiency** of the training and learning process (e.n. faster, inexpensive), which is extremely important. However, they have an almost negligible impact on the **effectiveness** of (e.n. performance, quality) learning process. (...) On the contrary, the way the course is designed is the one that influences the effectiveness of the learning process, not the technology used to transmit and communicate the instructional message.*

Therefore, technology can contribute to the efficiency of training, providing opportunities for access to skills training and development and the acquisition of knowledge quickly and inexpensively, if the quality standards of the training program are met and it is designed correctly. Along with accessibility, among the possible advantages of using digital technologies in the training/learning process, we mention:

- Simultaneous training for a large number of beneficiaries (removing the limits imposed by space and time and opening to beneficiaries the opportunity to participate in training without these conditions);
- Fast teaching of the courses (for the same reasons for the limitation caused by time and space, plus costs and variables related to a large number of

guides/trainers that would be needed in the version with a physical presence in the classroom (on site), training through digital technologies allows much faster access to courses and certification;

- Consistency of the message (the teaching material transmits the same content, regardless of how many times it needs to be run to each new series of learners; thus, the message sent to students) can be controlled more efficiently;
- Immediate response and feedback (the beneficiary can request help or feedback when needed, giving him definitions or examples for support);
- Immediate testing and feedback (before starting a course, the content can be presented according to the student's answers to the test questions; in this way, personalization and individualization of learning are achieved);
- Interactivity (beneficiaries can ask questions through messaging/e-mail, can solve problem situations, can perform incentive activities);
- Adaptability (in use): ease in changing and updating courses, providing the opportunity to participate while the course is taught (synchronous participation) or whenever it has availability (asynchronous participation);
- Possibility of reuse (parts of the courses can be recycled, thus saving the time required to recreate them) (Stolovitch et al., 2017: 279-283).

From the perspective of the aspects related to the financial, human and time resources involved, we find that the alternative of courses conducted through digital technology can be more productive. However, the success of a training program involves correlating and complying with the activities with the performance objectives pursued and reporting to appropriate standards in the organization and conduct of the activity. The promises that online education makes to beneficiaries need to be tempered by a few precautions inspired by the benefits of face-to-face training. The potential benefits of online training listed above can quickly become limitations on it, which must be taken into account when opting for such a program. Issues that cannot be neglected in online training are the level of digital skills of users (and, implicitly, the existence of the necessary infrastructure) and the compatibility of the beneficiaries with this way of going through the courses (the personal relevance of the activities, the learning style, the ability to remain active and involved, etc.).

Familiarizing future teachers with the use of digital technologies in learning and, to an equal extent, the training of their digital skills are priorities for each Member State of the European Union. In 2018, only 40% of teachers considered that they were ready to use digital technologies in teaching, and more than 1 in 5 young people failed (European Commission, 2021). The crisis caused in education by the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the proportions of the discrepancy regarding the digital skills of teachers. Following a public consultation in 2020, the Commission has drawn up the new *Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)*, a document whose central objective is to adapt education and training to the digital age. To this end, the strategic priorities and measures to be taken at Member State level have been established:

Priority 1: Encourage the development of a high-performance digital education ecosystem

Measures:

- a) strategic dialogue with Member States on online and distance education;
- b) a Council Recommendation on online development of a European framework on digital education content; conducting a feasibility study on a possible European platform for the exchange of certified online resources;
- d) support for schools' connectivity and in-school connectivity;
- e) support for digital transformation plans at all levels of education and training; encouraging teachers to use digital pedagogy and knowledge in the field when using digital tools through the Erasmus Teacher Academies platform; launching a self-assessment tool for teachers-SELFIE (Self-reflection Effective Learning by Fostering the use of Innovative Educational technologies);
- f) development of artificial intelligence ethics guidelines (AI) and use of teaching and learning data for teachers; supporting research and innovation in the field through the Horizon Europe project.

Priority 2: Development of digital skills and competencies relevant to digital transformation

Measures:

- a) updating the European Digital Competence Framework (EDSC); support for the development of pedagogical resources in the field of artificial intelligence for schools and institutions responsible for vocational training;
- b) development of common guidelines for teachers and staff in educational institutions, to encourage digital literacy and combat misinformation through education and training;
- c) creation of a European digital skills certificate (EDSC);
- d) proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the supply of digital skills in education and training (professional development of teachers, exchange of good teaching practices in high-quality IT training, collaboration with industry to constantly identify and update training needs as) occurs;
- e) development of advanced digital skills for learners and apprentices in the field of vocational education and training (ex: extension of the Digital Opportunity trains program);
- f) encouraging participation in the international study on IT skills (ICILS);
- g) encouraging women's participation in STIM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics; elaboration of higher education programs that attract women in engineering and ICT).

The European Commission's previous action strategy (the one proposed for the period 2018-2020) already aimed at developing digital skills and abilities, efficient and effective use of digital technologies in teaching and learning and improving education through more reliable data analysis and designing next steps

by anticipating the directions of evolution of the society's domains. Education is an area as stable as it is susceptible to the discoveries and innovations brought by research in the field. Change in education, in our times, involves the integration of technology into teaching-learning-evaluation, and those involved in the teaching act (teachers and students) need tools that allow them to keep up: continuously developed and refined digital skills.

4.2. Education Policy in Romania

Due to the global situation of SARS CoV2 virus infection, education has been conducted for a long time online worldwide. This measure also produced effects at the level of education policy documents, to cushion and value as well as possibly the effort to adapt to the new reality of education. As an annexe to *Order no. 4135 on the approval of the instruction for the creation and/or strengthening of the capacity of the pre-university education system through online learning*, in Romania, an Instruction has been approved that draws parameters and provides action guidelines for conducting the online learning process. Some of the measures have brought open educational resources and digital learning platforms to the fore:

(1) The Ministry of Education and Research, through the National Center for Policies and Evaluation in Education (CNPEE), operationalizes the Digital portal on [educated.ro](https://digital.educated.ro) (<https://digital.educated.ro>) as a whole of the online learning platforms and resources provided and, where appropriate, validated and recommended by the Ministry of Education and Research.

(2) The Digital educated.ro portal will contain a section with tutorials and other learning materials, intended for teacher training and support, to design, achieve, evaluate online learning activities and manage students' activities on online learning platforms.

Given that, in this variant, the teaching process requires teachers' skills that were previously optional (digital skills), the Methodology for the annual evaluation of the activity of the auxiliary teaching and teaching staff, approved by the *Order of the Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sport no. 6.143/2011* has been modified and completed. A direct consequence of this measure is the need to add new performance criteria to some of the areas for the annual evaluation of teaching staff activity, most being inserted at „Activity Design Domain”, „Field of Conducting teaching activities” and „Evaluation of learning outcomes Domain”. Thus, professional standards for teachers suddenly brought them face to face with the latest developments in the field of digital technologies, which they were forced to discern to carry out their professional activities.

4.3. Negative implications

Certainly, the total or quasi-total replacement of physical teaching with online teaching was, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the only chance to continue the education process, under the conditions of compliance with sanitary rules. The identified limits were multiple and severe and moved from the extrinsic aspects, of infrastructure, connectivity, and equipment to the intrinsic, human ones, related to

personal difficulties of understanding, digital training, reduced personal interaction, depersonalization of the educational process, and decreasing educational effectiveness and efficiency. Good knowledge, an x-ray of the disadvantages of online education has been in the attention of education politicians, considering that good knowledge also brings with it the identification of appropriate measures to minimize the disadvantages and increase the quality of the educational act.

In existing studies, the boundaries of online learning appear well structured in different registers. Thus, technical problems, download errors, connectivity, lack of equipment, and high costs of purchasing software and hardware (Dhull & Sakshi, 2017, Curelaru et al, 2021) appear to be acute and difficult problems to overcome. As a result, a multitude of minimization strategies have appeared, including at the level of European policies. The action plan for digital education (<https://education.ec.europa.eu/ro/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>) has a distinct dimension aimed at solving this disadvantage, by „encouraging the development of an ecosystem of high-performance digital education”, which ensures the development, with the help of specialists but also of European funds, the development of the digital infrastructure and its transformation into a facility easily accessible to all social categories. This would also solve the social issues of equity, the imbalances between those who come from or live in disadvantaged environments and do not have access to the Internet and those for whom access to the Internet is not a problem. A corollary problem, located on the border between technical and human limits, is the lack of technical skills, online knowledge and training, intensive and efficient use of applications and platforms”. (Holt et. al., 1998). A report made by the National Council of Students highlights exactly this problem, the lack of digital skills, e-teaching and digital assessment among teachers. This limit is also present in previous studies (Dhull & Sakshi, 2017), with the lack of initial and continuous training in the use of various digital tools and platforms being considered one of the factors that massively affect the quality of the online teaching-learning act. (Raboca and Cotoranu, 2020). And this reality is analyzed and evaluated in educational policy documents (Action Plan for Digital Education), along with other themes, the conclusion is that the development of digital skills and competencies relevant to digital transformation is a priority of the European Commission. Thus, the pandemic revealed that digital training is a challenge for education systems in terms of teacher training and that the high degree of digital skills and competencies of teachers will bring with it an increase in the quality of online teaching.

The disadvantages related to the human dimension, of personal skills, are also frequently mentioned in the specialized literature. Thus, at the level of psychic functions, we find references to lack of attention, decreased concentration and weak involvement in activities on the part of the educated (Dhull & Sakshi, 2017, Radha et. al., 2020), to the reduction of student motivation, closely related to the lack feedback and student control during assessments (Tamm, 2019). The reduction of social interaction between teacher-student, but also student-student (Bączek et

al, 2021), which inevitably leads to a reduced time and support allocated to learners, i.e. to a transfer of responsibility (emphasis on increasing the weight of the individual learning process, increasing the volume of individual work), which causes an increase in the degree of student dissatisfaction) (Raboca & Cotoranu, 2020) are another dimension of the table of diagnosed limits of online education. In the same register, isolation, and lack of social interaction seem to be closely related to students' mental health, their learning ability and exhaustion (Ensmann et al., 2021). There are serious studies that identify, in addition to psychosocial problems (stress, anxiety, boredom, low work efficiency) and a wide range of physical health problems, which appeared or developed with the transition to online schooling, namely various eye conditions, eye pain head, back, exhaustion (Curelaru et al., 2021). The same study identifies the problem of deepening discrimination between those without skills or digital equipment and those with advanced digital skills and modern equipment, resulting in even greater digital inequality.

So, the online teaching-learning process seems to be an area of inferiority compared to the classic, face-to-face system. The reality, however, has shown us that, on the one hand, many of the identified limits have found their solution (including in local and international educational strategies and policies, objectified in important documents and educational realities), and on the other hand online teaching has come with a tremendous innovation in the ways of understanding learning, with a paradigm shift in terms of new forms of teaching technology-mediated learning. The learning efforts of teachers and students had positive consequences the formation of new sets of skills, the opening of horizons for new ways of interaction, authentic knowledge and understanding of digitization, and increased responsibility for teachers and students (Muste, 2020.)

Undoubtedly, investment in digital infrastructure and good teacher training programs (both in the initial and continuing training stages), as well as the consistent and creative call for blended learning are ways to offset the risks and maximize the advantages of online education.

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THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES. THE ROLE OF DIGITAL SKILLS, ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

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Abstract: The present study is the result of an empirical research about the role of digital skills, accommodation and technological assistance for the employment of people with disabilities. This research was conducted by the „Alături de Voi” (ADV) Romania Foundation to identify and analyze the challenges faced by people with disabilities on the labour market in Romania as part of a project carried out by the European Disability Forum (EDF), an organization that works at the European level to promote the rights of people with disabilities. More than half of people with disabilities in Europe do not have a job, even though many of them are willing to work. People with disabilities who wish to work are not aware of all the facilities provided by the European and national legislative framework. Sociological research takes as its starting point the right of people with disabilities to work, irrespective of their location, to equal opportunities in the labour market, to decent working conditions, including through the use of modern technologies. The following methods were used to conduct this sociological research: (1) desk research, which involved reviewing national strategies, programs, and public policies related to the education, training, and employment of people with disabilities; (2) secondary data analysis based on statistics provided by Eurostat and National Institute of Statistics regarding the conditions of the persons with disabilities on the labour market; (3) applying a total of 27 questionnaires to companies/organizations to collect information on the education and training level of people with disabilities in digital skills, programs and initiatives related to lifelong learning opportunities, human resources policies of organizations in Romania regarding the employment of people with disabilities, and best practice models in the application of technology to facilitate the work of individuals with special needs. This sociological study does not represent the official position of EDF, nor of ADV.

Keywords: *persons with disabilities, employment, hiring and training policies, assistive technology, reasonable accommodation.*

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Résumé : La présente étude est le résultat d'une recherche empirique sur le rôle des compétences digitale, de l'hébergement et de l'assistance technologique pour l'emploi des personnes handicapées. Cette recherche a été menée par la Fondation roumaine „Alături de Voi” (ADV) pour identifier et analyser les défis rencontrés par les personnes handicapées sur le marché du travail en Roumanie dans le cadre d'un projet mené par le Forum européen des personnes handicapées (EDF), une organisation qui travaille au niveau européen pour promouvoir les droits des personnes handicapées. Plus de la moitié des personnes handicapées en Europe n'ont pas d'emploi, même si nombre d'entre elles sont prêtes à travailler. Les personnes handicapées qui souhaitent travailler ne connaissent pas toutes les facilités prévues par le cadre législatif européen et national. La recherche sociologique prend comme point de départ le droit des personnes handicapées au travail, quelle que soit leur localisation, à l'égalité des chances sur le marché du travail, à des conditions de travail décentes, y compris grâce à l'utilisation des technologies modernes. Les méthodes suivantes ont été utilisées pour mener cette recherche sociologique: (1) la recherche documentaire, qui consistait à examiner les stratégies, les programmes et les politiques publiques nationales liées à l'éducation, à la formation et à l'emploi des personnes handicapées; (2) analyse de données secondaires basée sur les statistiques fournies par Eurostat et l'Institut national des statistiques concernant les conditions des personnes handicapées sur le marché du travail; (3) l'application d'un total de 27 questionnaires aux entreprises/organisations pour collecter des informations sur le niveau d'éducation et de formation des personnes handicapées dans les compétences numériques, les programmes et initiatives liés aux opportunités d'apprentissage tout au long de la vie, les politiques de ressources humaines des organisations en Roumanie concernant l'emploi des personnes handicapées et les modèles de meilleures pratiques dans l'application de la technologie pour faciliter le travail des personnes ayant des besoins spéciaux. Cette étude sociologique ne représente pas la position officielle d'EDF ou d'ADV.

Mots-clés: *personnes handicapées, politiques d'emploi, d'embauche et de formation, technologies d'assistance, aménagements raisonnables.*

Rezumat: Acest studiu este rezultatul unei cercetări empirice privind rolul competențelor digitale, a dispozitivelor de acomodare și a tehnologiilor asistive în angajarea persoanelor cu dizabilități. Cercetarea de față a fost realizată de o echipă de cercetători din cadrul Fundației „Alături de Voi” România pentru a identifica și analiza problemele cu care se confruntă persoanele cu dizabilități pe piața muncii din România, parte a unui proiect de mai amplu derulat de *European Disability Forum (EDF)*, organizație care activează la nivel european pentru promovarea drepturilor persoanelor cu dizabilități. Mai mult de jumătate din persoanele cu dizabilități din Europa nu au un loc de muncă, deși multe dintre acestea au disponibilitatea de a munci. Persoanele cu dizabilități care doresc să lucreze nu cunosc toate facilitățile furnizate de cadrul legislativ european și național. Cercetarea sociologică are ca punct de plecare dreptul persoanelor cu dizabilități de a munci, oriunde s-ar afla, de a beneficia de șanse egale pe piața muncii, de condiții decente la locul de muncă, inclusiv prin utilizarea tehnologiilor actuale. Pentru realizarea acestei cercetări sociologice au fost utilizat următoarele metode: (1) documentarea (desk research) privind strategiile, programele și politicile publice național referitoare la nivelul de educație, formarea și ocuparea persoanelor cu dizabilități; (2) analiza secundară bazată pe datele furnizate de Eurostat și Institutul Național de Statistică privind situația persoanelor cu dizabilități pe piața muncii; (3) aplicarea unui număr de 27 de chestionare la companii/ organizații prin care s-au colectat informații referitoare la nivelul de educație și de formare a persoanelor

cu dizabilități în domeniul competențelor digitale, programele și inițiativele privind oportunitățile de învățare pe tot parcursul vieții, politica de resurse umane a organizațiilor din România față de angajarea persoanelor cu dizabilități, modele de bună practică în aplicarea tehnologiei pentru facilitarea muncii acestor persoane cu nevoi speciale. Acest studiu sociologic nu reprezintă poziția oficială a EDF, nici a ADV.

Cuvinte cheie: *persoane cu dizabilități, ocupare, politici de angajare și formare, tehnologii asistive, dispozitive de acomodare.*

1. Introduction

Romania is one of the poorest countries in the European Union (about 24% relative poverty rate), with an employment rate (69%) lower than the EU-27 average, with 15% of employed people at risk of poverty, affected of the lack of labour force in the context of a massive migration after the country's accession to the UN (2007). Under these conditions, disabled people who have the availability to work do not find vacant jobs adapted to their special needs and are not always helped to integrate into the labour market.

A study published in the *International Archive of Medicine* shows that, in 2015, the total number of people with disabilities was 759,019 (3.41% of the Romanian population), of which approximately 415,852 (54.8%) were aged between 18 and 64 years old. The employment rate of people with disabilities was 14%. People with physical disabilities represent the most employed category (38.4%); the least employed were the mental (3.1%) and psychiatric (5.2%) categories. In the period 2011-2025, the percentage of employment of people with disabilities in Romania evolved from 12.26% (in 2011) to 14% (in 2015). In Romania, the share of people with disabilities employed, compared to developed European countries (Norway 61.7%; Switzerland 62.0%; Austria 41.9%; Germany 46.1%; United Kingdom 38.9%) or North American ones (Canada 56.3%; USA 38.1%) was quite low at that time. (Anghelescu et al., 2016).

In a study about the condition of people with disabilities in Romania, in a European context, E.-L. Baciuc & T.-A. Lazar (2017), shows that there are problems regarding ensuring equal opportunities, in accordance with the objectives stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), respectively in the European Disability Strategy (EDS) 2010-2020. The two authors criticize the official statistics regarding the way they present the data describing the situation of people with disabilities on the labour market, from a legal and financial point of view. They believe that the most reliable data are provided by the General County Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection and centralized at national level by the Ministry of Labour, which refer exclusively to disabled persons for whom a disability certificate has been issued and which represent only a proportion of the total number of Romanian disabled people. One of the conclusions of the study shows that the discrimination of people with disabilities is a problem that belongs to the culture of the majority of citizens, encountered as an institutional practice, in employment on the labour market.

The above conclusion is also shared by S. Bungău, D. Țiț et al. (2019), who state that, after Romania's accession to the EU, the national legislation on the protection of the rights of people with disabilities was amended taking into account the requirements of European legislation. However, in Romanian society there are still areas, institutions, practices that have remained impregnated by the residual discriminatory mentality from the communist period.

According to an investigation carried out by Angela Achiței (2022), based on official data published by the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ANPD, 2021), there were officially registered 865,573 people with disabilities (adults and children). At that time, of the total population, people with disabilities represented 4.48%. Unfortunately, in the ANPD statistics, there are no data on two very important indicators that describe the situation of disabled people on the labour market: the number of disabled people with work capacity and the number of employed disabled people.

To find out what is the employment rate of people with disabilities in Romania, A. Achiței requested information from the National Tax Administration Authority (ANAF) under the coordination of the Ministry of Finance. After a series of calculations based on the data obtained, it turned out that, in December 2021, a number of 35,213 people with disabilities were employed. Compared to the number of adults with disabilities from which those with severe disabilities were excluded, it follows that the employment rate in Romania was 7.3%, extremely low compared to the European average which is around 35-40%. According to the Register of Authorized Protected Units (2021), a number of 1189 people with disabilities were employed in 283 protected units. This number could increase, if more companies with more than 50 employees and more would hire people with disabilities or support employment by purchasing products and services from protected establishments. The legislation in force allows half of the tax that employers pay to the state because they do not employ disabled people, to be used for purchases of products and services made by the disabled people in these protected units. The companies/institutions/organizations must ensure that these products and services are not intermediated by the protected units, because they are not allowed to do so, according to the legislation in force from 2020, but are produced within them (Achiței, 2022).

Regarding disabilities and the labour market, Oana-Georgiana Girlescu (2021) in the report *European Semester 2020-2021 Country Fiche on Disability Equality in Romania*, lists the following problems: there is a lack of collection of relevant data, as well as research on the inclusion of people with disabilities on the labour market and their social integration at the workplace; there is no cross-sectoral approach to policies aimed at stimulating the employment of people with disabilities, linked to educational and health policies; public policies must prioritize the inclusion of people with disabilities in the general labour market, rather than in protected places, in order to reduce their dependence on social measures and their segregation in work.

In an article about disability and poverty in Romania, Emma Tkacz (2022) states that the employment rate of people with disabilities would be 17.97%, according to the European Semester report. In 2018, the European Semester found that around 45.5% of people with disabilities were employed, but organizations may use different metrics to define disability and employment. Therefore, data from official statistics do not agree with those from reports and policy documents of various institutions or organizations that have duties in the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities.

People with disabilities are more likely to find themselves in lower-skilled and lower-paid occupations (Meager, & Higgins, 2011). In Romania, support for people with disabilities is mainly focused on the provision of medical assistance and less on the development of independent living skills. People with disabilities and other vulnerable categories are forced to retire in case of illness, obtaining a limited income pension, provided by the state social insurance system, rather than looking for a job vacancy according to their education and/or professional training or accessing professional training services. In the absence of adequate support (technical skills, assistive technologies, accommodation devices at work), people with disabilities are exposed to the risk of failure in integration into the labour market (Achiței, Tompea, Ateșoaie, 2019).

In Romania, people with disabilities who want to work face the following obstacles: (1) lack of integrated services for evaluation, recruitment, selection, orientation towards vacant jobs, mediation between employers and selected persons; (2) not all disabled people looking for a job, having the availability to start working immediately, are registered with the county employment agencies; (3) the insufficiency of assistive technologies and accommodation devices to support employees with disabilities in the workplace; (4) the persistence of a discriminatory mentality of some employers who are not aware of the role of people with disabilities in increasing employment; (5) employers do not always communicate job vacancies to county employment agencies.

2. Research methodology

This sociological study is about how digital skills, assistive technology, and reasonable accommodation can contribute to the increasing of the employment of the persons with disabilities on the labour market using the following methods: policy analysis, secondary analyses based on official statistics, and data interview analyses. It is rather a case study/ exploratory research in Romania and the conclusions can be used in proposing legislative changes or even new public policies to increase the employment of people with disabilities.

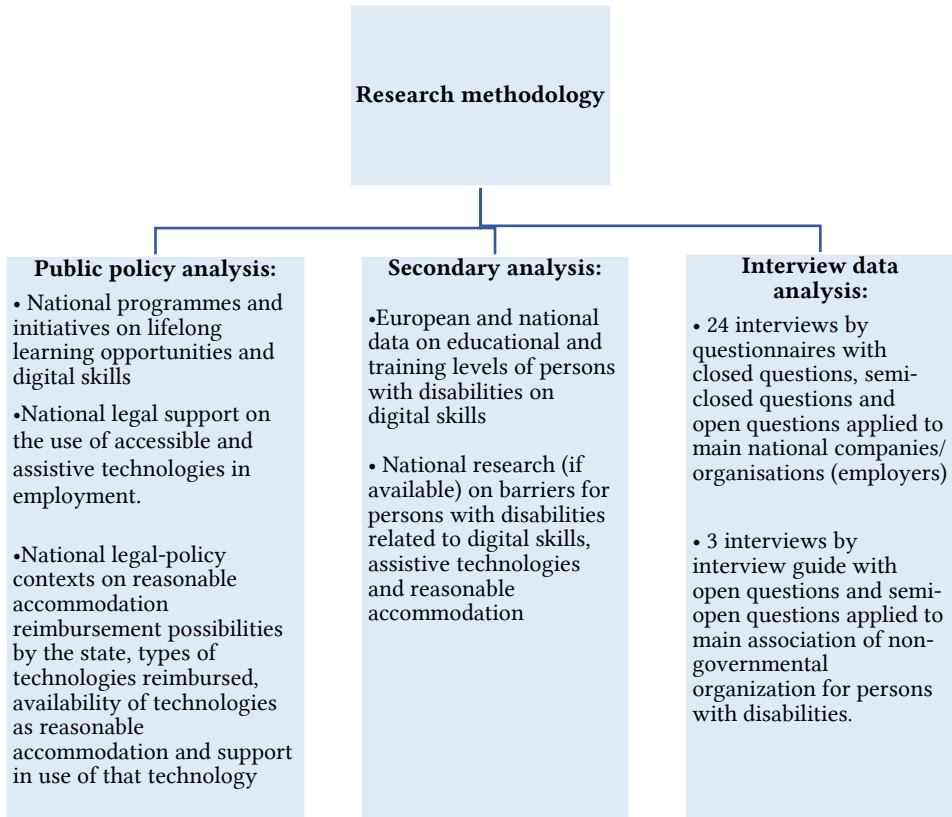


Figure 1. Research methodology, techniques used and working tools

Table 1. Research questions by research levels

	Research Levels	Research Questions
1	Hiring and training policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the Human Resources policy from your company/organisation have specific guidelines about hiring persons with disabilities? ▪ Does your company participate in any programme aimed at improving employment of persons with disabilities? ▪ Are you aware of the public support systems for the promotion of employment of persons with disabilities in your country/region? ▪ Do you believe lack of digital skills are a burden when your company/organisation plans on hiring persons with disabilities? ▪ Does your company/organisation develop training programmes for employees related to digital skills?
2	Internship policies; digital skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has your company/organisation ever hired, or considered to hire, interns with disabilities?

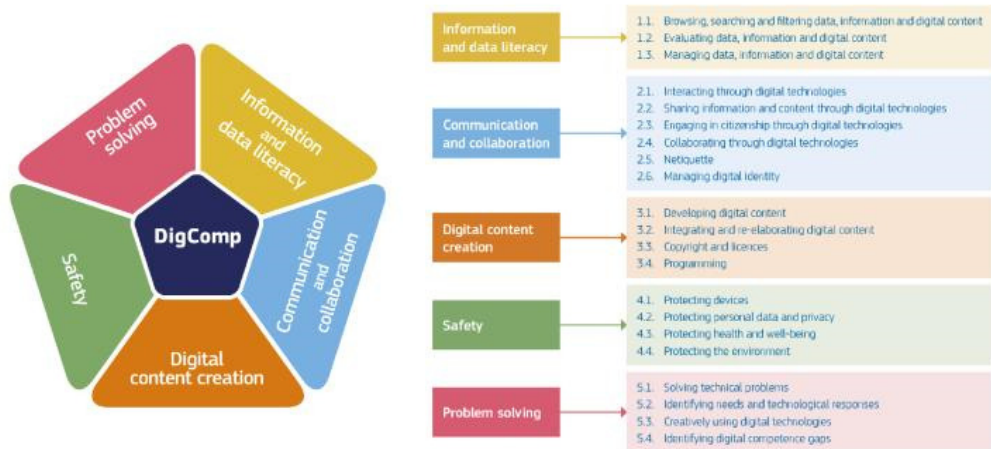
THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

	Research Levels	Research Questions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In general, which do you consider to be the most relevant skills for interns with disabilities? ▪ Do you consider having interns with disabilities would help hiring employees with disabilities on later stages? ▪ Are you aware of any support from State or universities for companies/organisations when hiring interns with disabilities?
3	Assistive technologies and devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is your company/organisation aware of the use of assistive technologies by employees with disabilities? ▪ Does your company/organization have policies implementing support for the acquisition and use of assistive devices and technologies by employees with disabilities? ▪ Are you aware of the public legal framework and/or public programmes supporting the acquisition of assistive technologies for persons with disabilities – either direct, by persons with disabilities themselves, or indirect through the company/organization?
4	Reasonable accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the Human Resources policy from your company have reasonable accommodation of employees with disabilities as a standardised procedure? ▪ Does your company have any policy regarding the accessibility of recruitment processes? ▪ Which are the current accommodations applied by the company for employees with disabilities? ▪ Which are the main costs for the provision of reasonable accommodation? ▪ Which are the main limits in the provision on reasonable accommodation – the disproportionate burden-? ▪ Are you aware of the public legal framework and/or public programmes supporting the provision of reasonable accommodation in the workplace for employees with disabilities?

Considering the rapid technological advancement in most fields of activity, digital skills are necessary for the smooth conduct of work processes within companies and in communication with other partners (companies, organizations, institutions). Technology companies aim to attract highly skilled workforce, and digital skills are particularly important in advanced industries.

For many of us, digital skills are not very complicated and/or are limited to using internet-connected mobile phones for music, movies and messaging. Obviously, to acquire digital skills you need electronic devices connected to the

Internet. To better understand the nature of this competence, the European Commission designed the *European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp)*, structured in five areas: digital literacy, communication using information technology, including creation of digital content, cyber security and problem solving. The five domains count 21 skills, as can be seen in figure 2.



Source: EU Science Hub, https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcomp_en

Figure 2. The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp)

According to the World Health Organization & UNICEF (2022), assistive technologies are particularly important for people with permanent or temporary activity limitations/disabled people, contributing to the improvement of their functional capacities and their social and professional insertion. Definitions of assistive technologies differ from one country to another, depending on their scope, how they are used. By extension, assistive technologies include accommodation devices. Assistive technologies can also include devices such as wheelchairs for immobile people, hearing aids for people with hearing impairments, prostheses for people with mobility impairments, special glasses, pads for urinary or other incontinence, applications to improve interpersonal communication, digital devices for access to information, time management, rehabilitation programs and professional training, etc. At the limit, assistive technologies also include systems for adapting the physical environment (access ramps in buildings or rooms, adapted toilets, grab bars, etc.) which are part of what are called „reasonable accommodations”.

According to the Article 3 of the Directive (EU) 2019/882 on the accessibility requirements for products and services, assistive technology means „any item, piece of equipment, service or product system including software that is used to increase, maintain, substitute or improve functional capabilities of persons with disabilities or for, alleviation and compensation of impairments,

activity limitations or participation restrictions”. Assistive Technology industry Association (ATiA) mentions the following examples:

- “communication boards made of cardboard or fuzzy felt;
- special-purpose computers;
- hardware systems: prosthetics, mounting systems, and positioning devices;
- computer hardware devices like special switches, keyboards, and pointing devices;
- computer software, screen readers and communication programs;
- inclusive or specialized learning materials and curriculum aids;
- specialized curricular software”.

Assistive technology can be much more than those mentioned the above: electronic devices, wheelchairs, walkers, braces, educational software, power lifts, pencil holders, eye-gaze and head trackers, and others.

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Article 2, „Reasonable accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

3. Public policies analysis

In the document „Educated Romania – Vision and Strategy 2018-2030,” a project developed under the coordination of the President of Romania, education is envisioned to be developed based on the following guidelines: (1) personalized learning and ensuring quality for all students; (2) flexibility of the education system to effectively respond to the changing profiles and roles of beneficiaries and stakeholders involved; (3) adapting the system to external changes and future trends. The document emphasizes the digitalization of the education system and vocational training. The COVID-19 pandemic has given a boost the implementation of digital technologies in the education system, prompting stakeholders such as teachers, educators, trainers, pupils, students, etc., to develop their digital skills to meet the new demands of the job market.

In the National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – „An Equitable Romania”, 2022-2027, there are no specific mentions regarding opportunities for developing digital skills for persons with disabilities. This strategy is based on data and information from the report *Diagnosis of the Situation of Persons with Disabilities in Romania* – a document prepared within the framework of technical assistance provided by the World Bank (2021). The World Bank Report about peoples with disabilities states that „Romania has the lowest employment rate compared to other European Union countries for persons with severe limitations (with a difference of over three times between Romania and the best-performing countries)”. This research evaluates the issues and needs faced by persons with disabilities in Romania from the perspective of complying with the provisions of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

(CRPD) in eight main areas: (1) improving the accessibility and mobility of persons with support needs, (2) protection of the rights of persons with disabilities, (3) employment of persons with disabilities, (4) social protection (including rehabilitation), (5) social services and independent living (including community integration), (6) education, (7) health, and (8) social participation (political and public).

The development of assistive technologies for persons with disabilities is a priority in the 2022-2027 Strategy. Within the *National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - 'An Equitable Romania' (2022-2027)*, developed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, priority is given to the development of access technologies and assistive devices that enable people with disabilities to achieve and maintain maximum autonomy, to develop their physical, mental, social, educational, and professional potential, for full integration and participation in all aspects of life. In accordance with this document, assistive technologies are defined as 'any item, equipment, software application, or product used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.' Regarding employment and the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market, the provision of equal opportunities for employment is foreseen through the development of qualifications and competencies, in an occupation of their choice, within an inclusive, accessible, and adapted work environment.

The National Strategy for Employment 2021-2027 aims to increase employment through measures targeting inactive individuals who are capable of work, unemployed individuals, especially the long-term unemployed, and young people, including NEETs, by promoting a competent, qualified, and adaptable workforce, with the goal of combating social exclusion and reducing territorial disparities.

Romania's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) proposes specific investment projects that address common aspects among all member states, in areas that create jobs and economic growth, and are necessary for the green and digital transition. This document provides a framework for financing the projects that propose hiring and training measures, tools, and activities to develop employment opportunities for people with disabilities facing difficulties on the labour market.

The Operational Programme for Education and Employment (OPEE), which focuses on the key challenges in the field of education and employment, aligned with the priorities of the European Union's policy objectives, the European Skills Agenda, the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), and other European documents, aims to promote equal access to quality education and training, conducive to inclusion, as well as graduation, especially for disadvantaged groups, starting from early education and care, continuing with general and vocational education and training, up to tertiary education, as well as adult education and learning, including facilitating mobility for learning purposes and accessibility for people with disabilities.

The National Implementation Plan for Initial and Continuous Vocational Education and Training (NIP-VET) defines the national measures to achieve the objectives set at the European level, as outlined in the European Council Recommendation of November 24, 2020 on Vocational Education and Training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social equity, and resilience. This document details aspects related to the digitalization of education, including the adoption of a legislative framework for digitalization in education, workplace training for teaching staff, and the provision of digital equipment and technological resources for educational institutions.

Order no. 924/2022 of the Minister of Labour amending the Methodology for granting and distributing vouchers exclusively for the purchase of assistive technologies and access technologies, other than those financed through the National Single Health Insurance Fund within the social health insurance system, approved by Order no. 1263/2019 of the Minister of Labour and Social Justice, provides that people with disabilities can benefit from vouchers with a maximum value of 23,000 lei (4,600 euros) if they are in one of the following situations: (1) the person with disabilities has the status of unemployed or inactive person seeking employment; (2) the person with disabilities is between 18 years old and reaching the retirement conditions; (3) the person with disabilities is between 18 and 30 years old and is enrolled in a vocational training program or in the education system (non-NEETs).

The *National Strategy for Research, Innovation, and Smart Specialization for the period 2022-2027*, developed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation, and Digitalization, includes the development of 'technologies for independent living' for people with disabilities/impairments (physical, cognitive, perceptual), illnesses, or injuries, in all relevant aspects - domestic life, social interactions, mobility, leisure time. Technologies for enhancing the autonomy of people with disabilities encompass devices, sensors (including wearables) for activity monitoring, physiological or environmental parameters, robots (companion robots, collaborative robots, exoskeletons), and artificial intelligence algorithms.

The National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ANPDPD), in partnership with the National Employment Agency, is implementing a project aimed at facilitating the integration of people with disabilities into the labour market. The project, which runs from May 2019 to October 22, 2023, targets approximately 7,000 people with disabilities and is funded under the *Human Capital Operational Program (POCU) 2014-2020, Priority Axis 3 - Jobs for All, Specific Objective 3.1 - increasing the employment of unemployed and inactive individuals*, with a focus on long-term unemployed, older workers (aged 55-64), persons with disabilities, and individuals with low levels of education. The project provides funding for initiatives that aim to increase the employment of individuals who face difficulties in finding work through vocational training courses, considering the available job opportunities. One of the expected outcomes of the project is to have at least 700 beneficiaries of assistive technology vouchers with disabilities successfully employed in the labour market.

The protection of rights, social assistance, services and benefits offered to people with disabilities are regulated by Law No 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of people with disabilities. In summary, Law No 448/2006 defines and regulates the following aspects:

- ensuring and facilitating the access of people with disabilities to the physical, informational and communication environment;
- affirming and protecting the rights of people with disabilities in society;
- implementation of assistive technologies and accommodation devices to make physical space accessible for people with disabilities;
- making jobs accessible, implementing assistive technologies in companies and organizations to facilitate the employment and professional integration of people with disabilities (acquisition of equipment, devices, adjustment of work schedule, etc.);
- supported employment for persons with disabilities, which facilitates access to vacant job positions and provides support in job search, transportation, assistive technologies, training and specialization measures, and reimbursement methods for social and professional integration expenses for persons with disabilities.

Article 62, paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) of *Law no. 448/2006* provide clarifications regarding the reimbursement of adaptation/accommodation measures and technologies for persons with disabilities: „Public utility buildings, access routes, residential buildings constructed with public funds, public transportation and its stations, taxis, railway passenger cars, main station platforms, parking spaces, streets and public roads, public telephones, the informational and communication environment shall be adapted in accordance with the legal provisions in the field, so as to allow unrestricted access for persons with disabilities. (2) Heritage buildings and historical buildings shall be adapted, respecting their architectural characteristics, in accordance with the legal provisions in the field. (3) The costs of the necessary works for the adaptations provided in paragraphs (1) and (2) shall be borne by the budgets of central or local public administration authorities and by the own resources of legal entities with private capital, as applicable.”

However, in national legislation (*Article 84 of Law 448/2006*) there are a number of provisions that can contribute to facilitating the employment of people with disabilities: (a) the deduction, when calculating the profit tax obtained by companies, of the amounts spent on the implementation of assistive technologies and accommodation devices for people with disabilities at workplaces; (b) deducting the expenses related to the transportation of disabled persons from home to the workplace, the expenses related to the transportation of raw materials and finished products to and from the home of a disabled person employed for work at home, from the profit tax obtained by the company; (c) reimbursement from the unemployment insurance budget of specific expenses for training, professional guidance and job placement of disabled people; (d) granting a subsidy from the state, under the conditions provided by *Law no. 76/2002 regarding the*

unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation, with subsequent amendments and additions.

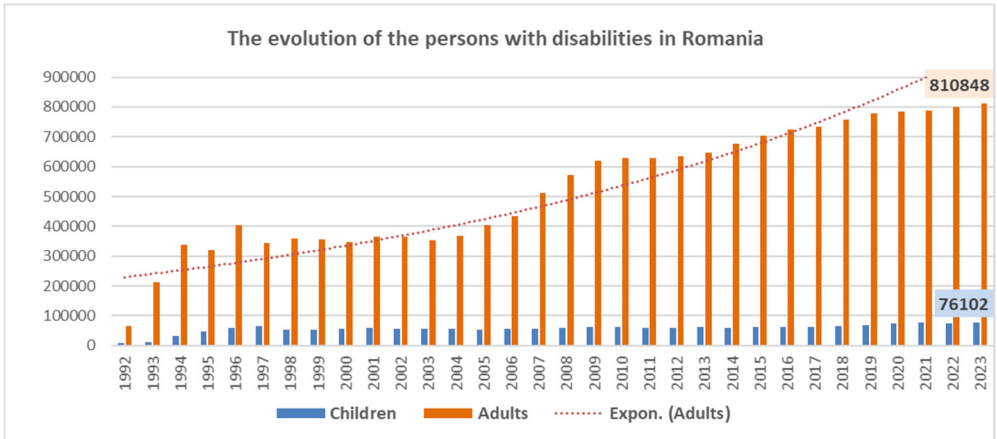
In *Law no. 448/2006, Chapter V* regulates all aspects related to guidance, vocational training, employment, and labour integration of persons with disabilities. Any person with a disability who wishes to integrate or reintegrate into the workforce has free access to vocational assessment and guidance, regardless of age, type, and degree of disability. Persons with disabilities have the right to all conditions necessary to choose and pursue a profession, trade, or occupation, to acquire and maintain employment, as well as to advance professionally.

Order of the Minister of Labour no. 924/2022 regulates the aspects related to the methodology of granting and distributing vouchers exclusively for the purchase of assistive technologies and devices, and access technologies, other than those financed through the National Single Health Insurance Fund within the social health insurance system, approved by the Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Justice no. 1263/2019 – aspects that have been detailed in the previous sections.

Law no. 76/2002, Article 80, paragraph 2 and Article 85, paragraph 2, regulate the procedure for granting subsidies to employers who wish to hire persons with disabilities. Employers can receive a monthly subsidy for a period of 12 months for employing persons with disabilities on an indefinite term basis, and for a period of 18 months for employing graduates with disabilities, provided that they maintain their employment for 18 months. In the research/report of the World Bank on „Diagnosis of the Situation of Persons with Disabilities in Romania” (2021, p. 117), it is mentioned that the subsidy system granted to employers is insufficiently known, and some employers consider it financially unattractive because it does not cover all the costs involved in hiring a person with disabilities (costs of workplace adaptation and costs resulting from the lower productivity of employees with disabilities).

4. Secondary analysis

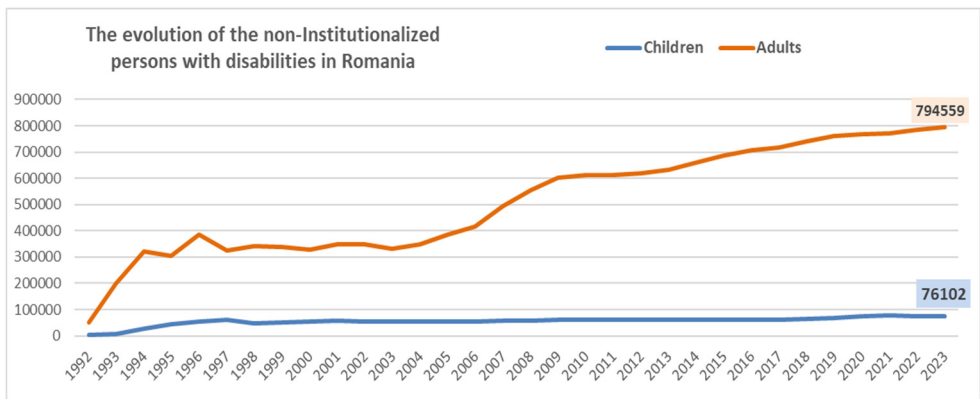
According to Law no. 292/2011 on social assistance, the term 'persons with disabilities' refers to 'those individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. *Law no. 448/2006 on the protection and promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities*, republished, describes the types of disabilities that a person may have: physical, visual, auditory, deaf, blindness, somatic, intellectual, mental, HIV/AIDS, associated disabilities, and rare diseases. According to the data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection – National Authority for Persons with Disabilities, as of March 31, 2023, there were 886,950 registered persons with disabilities in Romania.



Source: own processing based on data from National Authority for Persons with Disabilities

Figure 3. The number of persons with disabilities in Romania (1992-2023)

In relation to the resident population of the country, persons with disabilities represent 4.7% of the total population of Romania. Currently, the number of persons with disabilities recorded by the Romanian authorities is 12 times higher compared to 1992 when the number was 74,053 persons with disabilities. Out of the total of 886,950 persons with disabilities registered in 2023, 870,661 persons with disabilities are non-institutionalized (98%) and 16,289 persons with disabilities receive services within the institutionalized system (2%).



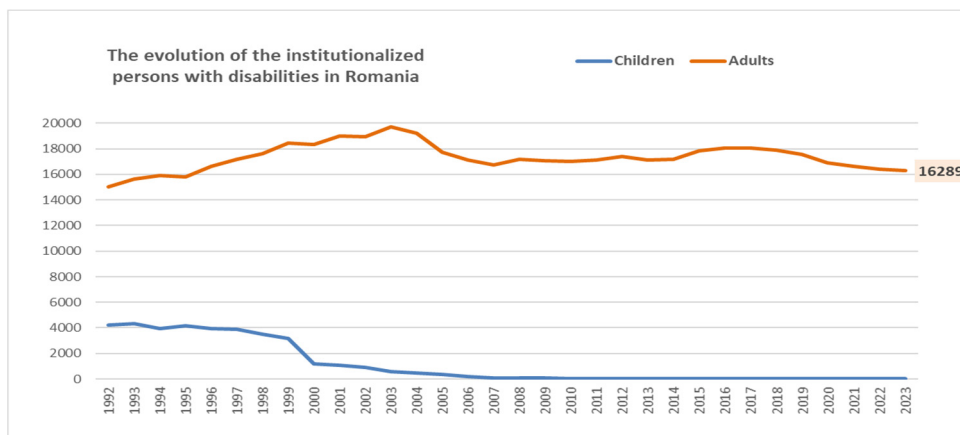
Source: own processing based on data from National Authority for Persons with Disabilities

Figure 4. The number of non-institutionalized persons with disabilities

People with non-institutionalized disabilities, without severe activity limitations, are an important labour resource, considering the fact that, currently, Romania is facing a labour shortage, with entrepreneurs increasingly bringing people from outside the European Union to fill job vacancies.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Out of the total number of persons with disabilities registered by the authorities, 810,848 were adults with disabilities (91%) and 76,102 were children with disabilities (9%). Currently, there are no children with disabilities in the institutionalized system of protection and social assistance.

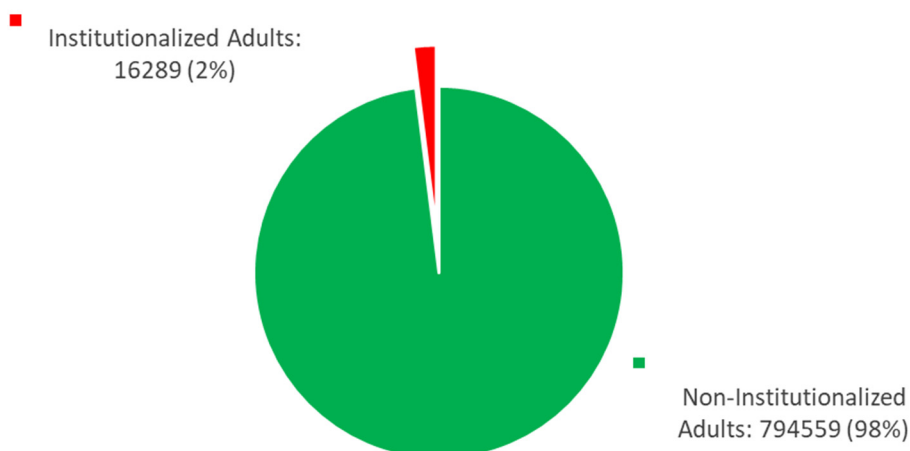


Source: own processing based on data from National Authority for Persons with Disabilities

Figure 5. The number of institutionalized persons with disabilities

Out of the total of 810,848 adults with disabilities, 16,289 individuals receive services within the institutionalized system, accounting for 2% of the total; while 794,559 adults with disabilities are non-institutionalized, representing 98% of the total adults with disabilities.

Adults with Disabilities in Romania, 2023

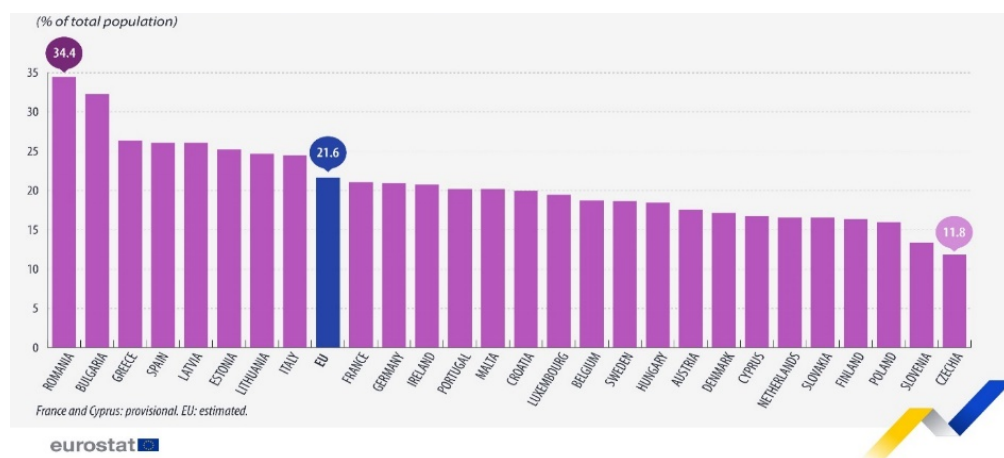


Source: own processing based on data from National Authority for Persons with Disabilities

Figure 6. The number of non-institutionalized persons with disabilities

According to Eurostat (2021), 21.7% of the EU population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, meaning they lived in households facing at least one of the three risks: poverty, severe material deprivation, or living in households with very low work intensity. Persons with disabilities are more affected by poverty compared to individuals without any activity limitations. In the EU, 29.7% of persons with disabilities aged 16 and over were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 18.8% of persons without disabilities. According to the same European statistics, in Romania, 45% of persons with disabilities aged 16 and over are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 30% of persons without activity limitations.

Recently, Eurostat (2022) updated the statistical indicator describing the situation of poverty or social exclusion, with Romania being the poorest country in Europe, with a share of 34.4% of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion - a social context that further exacerbates the situation of persons with disabilities.

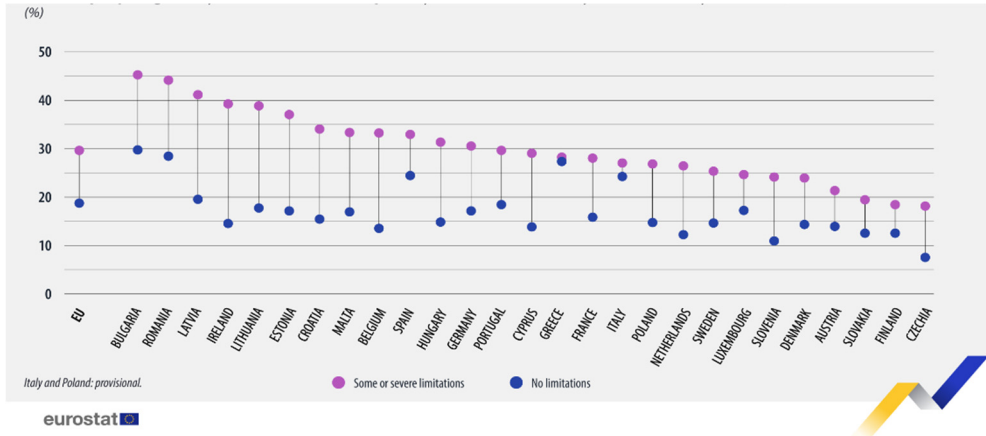


Source: Eurostat

Figure 7. The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in EU (2022)

Eurostat (2021) also show that 45% of people aged 16 years or over from Romania are at risk of poverty or social exclusion by level activity limitation, according to the figure 8. The integration of people with disabilities on the labour market is very important, not only from the perspective of respecting the rights stipulated by international, European or national regulations, but also because their employment in vacant jobs contributes to reducing the labour shortage. Official statistics show that households with low labour intensity (unemployed people who are not looking for a job even though they have the availability to work) are affected by poverty. Households with higher labour intensity (employed persons) are less likely to be exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusion.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



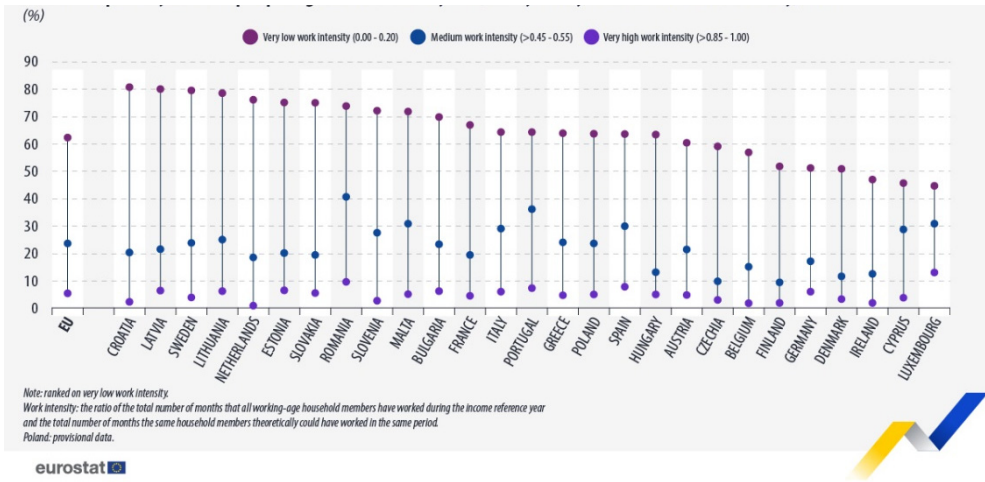
Source: Eurostat

Figure 8. The share of people aged 16 years or over at risk of poverty or social exclusion by level activity limitation (2021)

Low pay, underemployment (part-time work), low education is among the causes influencing this aspect of work. The issue of poverty, severe material deprivation, and the lack of policies and assistive technologies for persons with disabilities constitute barriers to employment in comparison to individuals without any activity limitations. Although a job does not guarantee an escape from poverty, it does create conditions for improving the quality of individual life (in terms of independence/autonomy) and community inclusion. Increasing the employment of persons with disabilities reduces their dependence on the support of others, as well as social marginalization or exclusion. Currently, Romania is facing a labour crisis due to declining birth rates, emigration, and an aging population. Therefore, the socio-professional integration of persons with disabilities could generate economic benefits in the medium and long term.

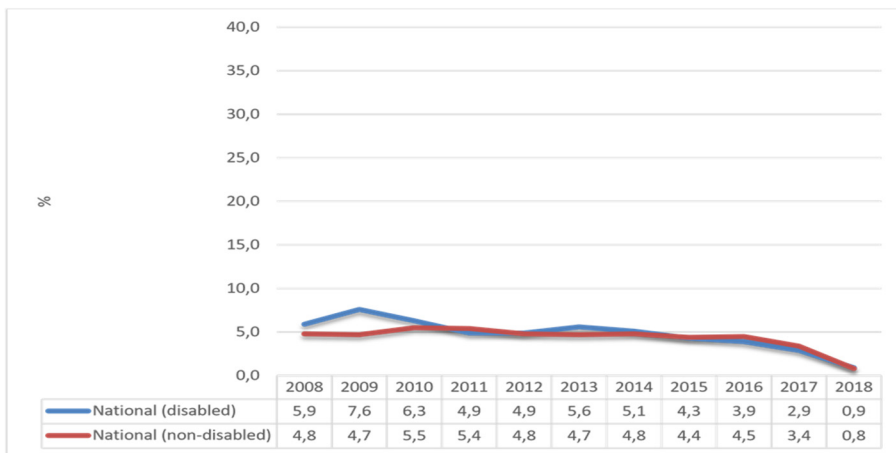
The latest data from the European Commission/Eurostat shows that only 51.3% of people with disabilities in the European Union are employed, compared to 75.6% of people without disabilities. For women with disabilities, the figure is even lower, with an average employment rate of only 49%. Young people with disabilities aged 20-29, meanwhile, have an average employment rate of just 47.4%. Only 20% of women with disabilities work full-time, compared to 29% of men with disabilities. The employment rates among persons with disabilities are significantly lower in each EU member state. Data presented in the European Commission's 2022 report on people with disabilities, cited by the European Disability Forum, shows that 51.3% of people with disabilities are employed, compared to 75.6% of those without disabilities. The employment situation for persons with disabilities varies widely among EU member states. The employment rate of people with disabilities is lowest in Ireland (32.6%), Greece (32.6%) and Croatia (37%). In contrast, the highest employment rates of people with disabilities are in Denmark (60.1%), Latvia (60.8%) and Estonia (64.9%). According to the same EDF report, in Romania, the

employment rate for persons with disabilities is 46.3%, and the disability employment gap compared to the employment rate of persons without any limitations is 30.4 percentage points (which is 6 percentage points higher compared to the EU average of 24.4 percentage points).



Source: Eurostat

Figure 9. At-risk-of-poverty rate for people aged less than 65 years, analysed by household work intensity (2021)

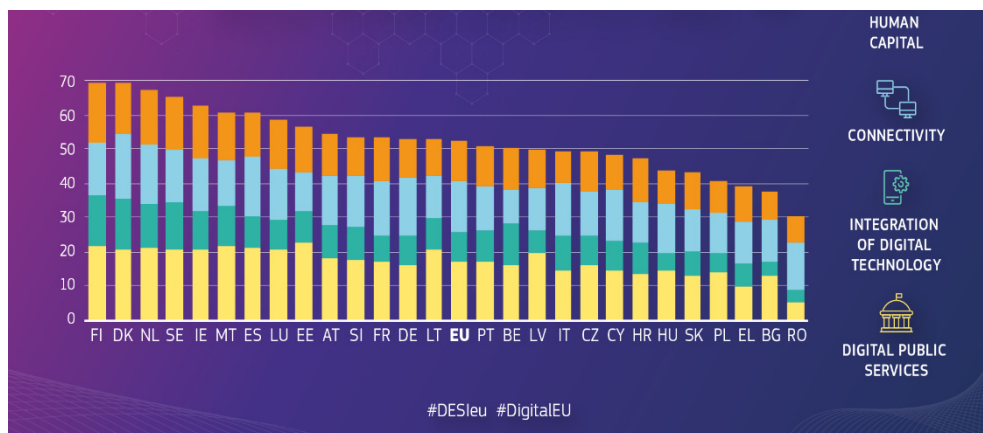


Source: Gîrlescu’s processing by EU-SILC 2018 Release 2020 version 1

Figure 10. National trends in unemployment rate, by disability status (aged 20-64)

According to the 2022 edition of the *Digital Economy and Society Index* (DESI), Romania ranks last among the 27 EU member states in several indicators in the „human capital” category, with the lowest share of individuals with basic digital skills (28%) in the EU. In 2021, the highest percentage of people aged 16-74 with

minimum basic digital skills was recorded in the Netherlands and Finland (both 79%), followed by Ireland (70%). At the other end of the scale, the lowest percentage was recorded in Romania (28%), Bulgaria (31%) and Poland (43%). As for the positive aspects mentioned in the DESI 2022 Report regarding Romania, it stands out for its high positions in terms of the proportion of women employed as ICT specialists (2nd place) and ICT graduates (4th place) in the EU.



Source: European Commission <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/ro/policies/desi>

Figure 11. The Digital Economy and Society Index (2022)

The National Institute of Statistics (INS) conducts an annual survey on the population's access to information and communication technology. According to the 2022 edition of the research (data collected in 2021), we learn that 80.8% of households in Romania have access to home internet, showing an increase of 2.6 percentage points compared to 2020, with 60.2% of these households concentrated in urban areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the population's interest in internet connectivity and accessing online services provided by commercial or public digital platforms. Households with dependent children have a much higher frequency of internet connectivity, with 98.8% of households with children accessing the internet at home, compared to only 70.8% of households without dependent children.

In 2021, the majority of internet users in Romania were constant users, with 94.3% of individuals aged 16 to 74 using the internet in the three months prior to the research. Among them, 82.3% use the internet daily or almost daily, and 15.6% use it on a weekly basis. A percentage of 86.8% of users have performed file copying or moving (e.g., documents, data, images, videos) between folders, devices (e.g., via emails, Messenger, WhatsApp, USB, cable, or cloud), 62.5% have downloaded or installed software programs or applications, and 42.1% indicated that they have modified the settings of software, applications, or devices (e.g., language settings, colours, text size, menu). Pupils and students primarily use the internet for social networking (93.1%) and making voice or video calls over the internet (90.9%).

Currently, there are no available official statistics or research on the level of education and digital skills training for people with disabilities in Romania. However, despite Romania having a high-quality digital infrastructure (advanced equipment and high-speed internet accessible to 80% of households), over 70% of individuals aged 16 to 74 lack basic digital skills, including people with disabilities. This situation creates a barrier for accessing decently paid jobs in an increasingly technology-driven labour market.

5. Data analysis from the interviews

The analysis of the data from the interviews is structured on the following levels: (1) the role of digital skills in the employment of people with disabilities; (2) the impact of assistive technologies in ensuring quality at the workplace for employees with disabilities; (3) how employers contribute to ensuring reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities in Romania.

5.1. The role of digital skills in the employment of people with disabilities

Out of the 24 respondents from participating companies in the research, 15 (63%) believe that the lack of digital skills is not a barrier to the employment of people with disabilities, while 9 (38%) respondents consider that the lack of these skills can be a problem in the labour market. Overall, the representatives of the interviewed companies do not reject the idea of hiring people with disabilities but condition their selection and recruitment on the necessary skills required for the vacant positions. One respondent suggests that their own company could create a retail store for their products and hire individuals with hearing disabilities. In this context, to perform job duties such as communication, customer relations, and product sales, digital communication skills and the ability to operate information systems (online platforms) for customer relationship management are necessary.

When asked about the development of training programs in the field of digital skills, 8 respondents (33%) stated that their own companies conduct such activities, while 16 (67%) stated that they have not organized such programs for employees. Respondents/company representatives who organize training programs in digital skills state that these programs are intended for all employees, not just those with limitations or disabilities. For individuals with disabilities in protected units, training courses for using the Microsoft Office package have been provided. One of the participating organizations in the research has organized vocational training courses specifically for individuals with intellectual disabilities. One company is a provider of authorized courses by the National Qualifications Authority (ANC) in the field of information and communications technology (ICT). One respondent stated that their organization utilizes Artificial Intelligence (AI) algorithm-based technologies for software development.

Interview respondents have appreciated that, in terms of digital skills related to internet usage and digital devices (such as tablets, smartphones, etc.), young people, including those with disabilities, have basic competencies. The

process of developing/learning digital skills is often carried out independently or through knowledge transfer from individuals who already possess the required knowledge and skills to others who are willing to learn.

At present, public authorities and employers are not fully aware of the potential of the workforce represented by people with disabilities who are available and actively seeking employment. Increasing the employment of people with disabilities can contribute significantly to addressing the growing demand for labour in Romania, a country heavily affected by declining birth rates, external migration, and an aging population.

5.2. Assistive technologies and the impact on employment of people with disabilities

Out of the total of 24 respondents in the interview survey, 6 (25%) respondents stated that their company/organization has information about the use of assistive technologies, while 18 (75%) do not have such information. Regarding the use of assistive technologies, the respondents who answered „yes” indicated the following situations:

- in manufacturing, employees use assistive technologies mainly for communication, but they are also used for documentation processes;
- in a company/organisation where assistive technology (mime-gesture interpretation application) is available for those employees and customers with hearing disabilities;
- there is also the situation of a company where out of 35 employees, 19 (55%) benefit from assistive technologies in the workplace.

One of the interview respondents believes that employees with disabilities cannot perform at their full potential because the institutions and organizations they work for lack assistive technologies and adapted workplaces to meet their needs. The case of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is given as an example, for whom electronic tablets or picture-based communication boards could be acquired to facilitate communication. Additionally, the suggestion is made to develop communication programs in the Romanian language, similar to those available in English.

Adapting to the workplace depends on individual needs and the specific nature of each person's disability. Equally important is the support provided to employers by experts in adapting the workplace for people with disabilities.

The acquisition of assistive/medical equipment is still problematic, and the current legislation does not fully cover these needs. The reimbursement process is excessively bureaucratic, and employers do not make use of this reimbursement system.

To enable individuals with disabilities to access vacant job positions, it is necessary to provide basic assistive devices, such as accessibility devices (ramps, low curbs, adapted restrooms), mobility aids, navigation/orientation/guidance devices in the environment, tactile materials for floors and stairs, hearing devices,

including facilities for free and adapted transport from the disabled person's home to the workplace.

5.3. Reasonable Accommodation

Out of the total of 24 respondents in the interview survey, 11 (46%) stated that their company/organization has a standardized procedure for reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities, while 13 (54%) of the respondents said that they do not have such a human resources policy/procedure. The respondents who answered „yes” to the question regarding the human resources policy for standardizing accommodations for people with disabilities made the following clarifications:

- employees with disabilities in the institution have all the necessary facilities as per the current legislation;
- the company/organization provides a work schedule adapted to the needs of employees with disabilities, with reasonable accommodations in the workspace (office), as well as other devices (laptops) that are adapted;
- one respondent stated that their organization does not have sufficient funds to implement the human resources policy that includes reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities;
- the workspaces of the organization are made accessible with ramps, wheelchairs, adapted elevators, personalized markings for employees with Down syndrome, and accessible cash registers for employees with disabilities working as cashiers.

In response to the question 'whether the organization/company has a policy for making the recruitment processes accessible, 13 (54%) respondents answered affirmatively, while 11 (46%) stated that there are no such provisions. In order to make the selection and recruitment processes accessible for people with disabilities, the following tools are highlighted:

- the recruitment process involves a telephone interview, practical assessment at the company/organization's premises, and a final interview. The adapted recruitment procedure considers the physical and motor abilities of the candidates;
- for young people with disabilities from the public protection system, a recruitment procedure tailored to their special needs is utilized;
- the evaluation of candidates with mobility disabilities takes place in accessible workspaces, and job interviews include questions presented in Easy Reading format;
- the interview guide for hiring, job descriptions, and work schedule are made accessible;
- easy-to-understand language is used, work samples are adapted for individuals with disabilities, interviews are adapted (with support persons), accompanied visits to occupational health, and the adaptation of safety and security instructions in the workplace.

The following facilities provided to companies/organizations for employees with disabilities are also worth mentioning:

- provision of mentoring by a team trained in the inclusion of people with disabilities;
- screen reader for individuals with visual impairments/blindness;
- specific working conditions are ensured for inclusion, considering the vulnerability/disability of the person, as well as fair remuneration (proportionate to the work performed) compared to other team members in similar positions;
- employees with intellectual disabilities receive psychological counselling, social assistance services, and medical support;
- free transportation from home to the workplace is provided.

Regarding the level of awareness among companies/organizations about the public legal framework and government programs that support the provision of reasonable workplace accommodations for people with disabilities, 7 (29%) respondents stated that they are familiar with the relevant legal provisions, while 17 (71%) respondents stated that they are not familiar with such information.

6. Conclusions

In order to inform public policies, strategies, and programs aimed at increasing the employment of people with disabilities, there is a need for statistical data and research focused on the needs of people with disabilities. The available official statistics do not provide a comprehensive description of the issues and needs faced by people with disabilities in Romania. The exact number of employed individuals with disabilities and how many of them have the status of „employee” is not known. There is a need to maintain a form of training by attracting trainers/teachers who understand the issues related to the socio-professional inclusion of people with disabilities.

Currently, most departments within a company require employees with basic and advanced skills in the field of information and communications technology. Computer literacy, internet navigation, and online communication are considered basic digital skills. In other words, it is believed that disability itself is not an obstacle to employing individuals with special needs, but rather the lack of technical/digital skills adapted to the requirements of the vacant position. Currently, individuals with disabilities who possess digital skills can engage in remote working.

The development of digital skills among people with disabilities is typically conducted within the associations/organizations they belong to, rather than through formal training courses within the public education system. In addition to these programs, there are vocational training courses offered through non-reimbursable funded projects by various NGOs or employment agencies, where individuals with disabilities are eligible as a target group.

To address the integration of people with disabilities into employment, the development of a system of counselling services, vocational guidance, mediation, and job placement in the labour market is necessary. To increase the employment of people with disabilities, the interview respondents propose the following steps:

- assessing competences and professional skills from a young age to identify the individual's potential and guide them towards fields of activity where they can fully realize their potential;
- developing qualification programs in a profession (trade) and continuous professional training, taking into account the socio-psychological assessments from the previous point.

The idea that the associative environment promoting the rights of persons with disabilities in Romania is not sufficiently developed is accredited. It does not represent a unified, coherent, and strong voice capable of advocating for legislative changes. Additionally, the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ANPDPD), under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity, lacks sufficient power to initiate and support proposals for public policies aimed at protecting the rights of persons with disabilities.

The limitations in implementing reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities resulting from the analysis of the interviews conducted are summarised as follows:

- the bureaucratic and insufficient reimbursement system to cover the needs of people with disabilities;
- regulation of reimbursement requests for hygiene and sanitary materials, medical devices;
- reimbursement of expenses related to education and vocational training programs adapted to the needs of people with disabilities;
- obstacles generated by the mentality of people with disabilities: passivity and dependence on the public welfare and social assistance system, lack of good practice models regarding employees with disabilities, lack of parental support, the need for scholarships and educational incentives for children with disabilities;
- low level of awareness among employers regarding current legislation, lack of knowledge about incentives for hiring people with disabilities, ignorance of the role played by people with disabilities in increasing workforce participation;
- public authorities show concern for the issues faced by people with disabilities but often fail to effectively address many of their problems.

The main limitations/costs mentioned for providing reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities are as follows: lack of financial resources, lack of a dedicated workspace, insufficient workspace, outdated social infrastructure requiring costly renovations and modifications, high prices of

equipment purchase, bureaucracy, and difficult communication with public authorities.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF ADOPTABLE CHILDREN WITH A PUBLIC PROFILE WITHIN THE SPECIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM IN DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT REGIONS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Since 2016, Romania opened the path to the adoption of adoptable children in the special protection system, creating a distinct section in the National Adoption Registry (R.N.A.), called public profile. The purpose of this study is to observe the evolution of the number of children from the special protection system for which a public profile was created, the evolution of the number of adoptions from the public profile, as well as the failed matches of children adopted from the public profile, in the period 2016-2021, depending on the development regions of Romania. We used as a research method the secondary analysis of the data provided by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption. The results of the analysis show that although between 2016-2021 the North-East Region had the highest number of children in the special protection system, it also had among the lowest rates of children enrolled in the public profile out of the total number of children in the system from that region. Bucharest-Ilfov is the region with the fewest children in the protection system, but also with the fewest children with a public profile and the lowest rate of children with a public profile compared to the total number of children in the system. And yet, the data show that at the level of developing regions, there is no connection between the high number of children in the special protection system and the high number of children with a public profile. If we look at the figures reported at the county level, there are counties such as Iași, Vaslui, Dolj, Olt, Timiș, Bihor, Satu-Mare, Mureș, which have both the most children in the system and the most children with a public profile. We believe that other explanations should be sought and we recommend expanding research in the field, possibly through qualitative research to identify the criteria used by DGASPCs to create public profiles and the strategies to stimulate adoptions.

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Keywords: distribution adoption, children with a public profile, evolution by development regions.

Résumé : Depuis 2016, la Roumanie a ouvert la voie à l'adoption d'enfants adoptables dans le système de protection spéciale, en créant une section distincte dans le Registre national des adoptions (R.N.A.), appelée profil public. Le but de cette étude est d'observer l'évolution du nombre d'enfants issus du régime de protection spéciale pour lesquels un profil public a été créé, l'évolution du nombre d'adoptions issues du profil public, ainsi que les échecs d'appariement des enfants adoptés issus du profil public, dans la période 2016-2021, en fonction des régions de développement de la Roumanie. Nous avons utilisé comme méthode de recherche l'analyse secondaire des données fournies par l'*Autorité nationale pour la protection des droits de l'enfant et l'adoption*. Les résultats de l'analyse montrent que bien qu'entre 2016 et 2021, la région du Nord-Est avait le plus grand nombre d'enfants dans le système de protection spéciale, mais aussi avec le moins d'enfants à profil public et le taux d'enfants à profil le plus bas par rapport au nombre total d'enfants dans le système. Bucarest-Ilfov est la région avec le moins d'enfants dans le système de protection, mais aussi avec le moins d'enfants avec un profil public et ayant le plus faible taux d'enfants avec un profil public par rapport au nombre total d'enfants dans le système. Et pourtant, les données montrent qu'au niveau des régions en développement, il n'y a pas de lien entre le nombre élevé d'enfants dans le système de protection spéciale et le nombre élevé d'enfants à profil public. Si nous regardons les chiffres rapportés au niveau des comtés, il y a des comtés tels que Iași, Vaslui, Dolj, Olt, Timiș, Bihor, Satu-Mare, Mureș, qui ont à la fois le plus d'enfants dans le système et le plus d'enfants avec un profil public. Nous pensons que d'autres explications doivent être recherchées et nous recommandons d'élargir les recherches sur le terrain, éventuellement par des recherches qualitatives dans le but d'identifier les critères utilisés par les DGASPC pour créer des profils publics et les stratégies pour stimuler les adoptions.

Mots-clés : distribution adoption, children with a public profile, evolution by development regions.

Rezumat: Începând din 2016, România a deschis calea spre adopție a copiilor adoptabili aflați în sistemul de protecție specială, creând o secțiune distinctă în Registrul național pentru adopții (R.N.A.), denumită profil public. Scopul acestui studiu este de a observa evoluția numărului de copii din sistemul de protecție specială pentru care a fost creat un profil public, evoluția numărului de adopții din profilul public, precum și a potirvirilor întrerupte ale copiilor adoptați din profilul public, în perioada 2016-2021, în funcție de regiunile de dezvoltare ale României. Am utilizat ca metodă de cercetare analiza secundară a datelor furnizate de Autoritatea Națională pentru Protecția Drepturilor Copilului și Adopție. Rezultatele analizei arată că deși între 2016-2021 Regiunea Nord-Est avea cel mai mare număr de copii în sistemul de protecție specială, avea printre cele mai mici rate ale copiilor înscrși în profilul public raportat la numărul copiilor din sistem, din regiune. București-Ilfov este regiunea cu cei mai puțini copii aflați în sistemul de protecție, dar și cu cei mai puțin copii cu profil public și având rata cea mai mică a copiilor cu profil raportat la numărul total al copiilor din sistem. Și totuși, datele arată că la nivelul regiunilor de dezvoltare, nu există o legătură între numărul mare al copiilor din sistemul de protecție specială și numărul mare al copiilor cu profil public. Dacă privim cifrele raportate la nivel de județ sunt județe, precum Iași, Vaslui, Dolj, Olt, Timiș, Bihor, Satu-Mare, Mureș, care au atât cei mai mulți copii în sistem, cât și cei mai mulți copii cu profil public. Deși în unele

regiuni se observă că numărul mai mare de adopții din profilul public implică și un număr mai mare de potriviri întrerupte, asocierea dintre cele două nu poate fi generalizată. Considerăm că ar trebui căutate alte explicații și recomandăm extinderea cercetărilor în domeniu, eventual prin cercetări calitative, cu scopul de a identifica criteriile folosite de DGASPC-uri pentru a crea profilurile publice și strategiile pentru a stimula adopțiile.

Cuvinte cheie: adopții întrerupte, copii cu profil public, evoluția pe regiuni de dezvoltare.

Introduction

The National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption (ANPDCA) provides annual reports on the situation of the child in the special protection system. On the institution's website, you can find statistical data on children and adoption, annual statistics by county and region regarding the number of children in family-type services (with professional foster carers, with relatives up to the fourth degree, with other families/persons), children in public residential services. Data on adoptions by year are made public by the National Adoption Registry, showing data on the number of children adopted according to the national and international adoption procedure by gender, and age group. There is also available data on the number of adoptable children nationally by gender, age group, and how many of the adoptable children are included in the public profile of adoptable children, by gender and age group. Another category of available information is that which refers to the annual number of adoptable children in foster care according to the 5 possibilities: with a professional foster carer, with another family/person, with relatives up to the fourth degree, with guardians or in residential type services. However, there is no data on the number of adoptable children in the protection system by county and region, as well as on the number of children with a public profile or failed matches according to county and region.

In this article, based on the data available on the institution's website, as well as those received following a request to ANPDCA regarding the number of children included and adopted from the public profile, as well as the number of matches by counties and regions, to observe for how many children in the special protection system the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPC) has generated public profiles and if there is a link between the number of children in the special protection system in the county/region and the number of children with a public profile, but also a link between the number of children adopted from the public profile and the number of failed matches in each region. The analyzed period covers 2016-2021. Starting in 2016, Romania opened the path to the adoption for adoptable children in the special protection system, creating a distinct section in the National Adoption Registry (R.N.A.), called public profile.

About adoptable children from the special protection system in Romania

In 1989, in Romania, after the fall of the communist regime, it is estimated that almost 100,000 children were institutionalized, out of which 30,000 were adopted internationally by families saddened by the conditions in which they were kept (Mihăileanu, 2021). In different countries, there are various forms of adoption, from closed, open, national (domestic) to international adoption. The form of adoption recognized and practiced in Romania is closed national (or domestic) adoption (Bejenaru & Roth, 2011).

Due to a legislative vacuum, until 2004 in Romania some adoptions raised suspicions because of the lack of transparent information and a centralized database that could be monitored. The first laws in the field of child rights protection passed in 2004 (Law 272/2004) and of the legal status of adoption (273/2004, with subsequent amendments from 2016), while the methodological norms for the implementation of the law were published only in 2021. Although the laws were in conjunction with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, children deprived of parental care were kept in the state's protection system indefinitely at the disposal of the biological parents even if many of these parents no longer maintained contact with their children.

In Romania, each year, fewer children were adopted compared to the number of eligible children and certified adopters and adoptive families. Between 2014 and 2017, almost half of abandoned children were reintegrated into their biological families and more than a third were placed in foster homes. Many children found a home in a foster family or stayed with relatives or in foster care with families supported by NGOs. A small number of children (3.4%) were placed in institutions. Since 2004, the number of children in the protection system and those placed in institutions has decreased substantially. The number of children eligible for national and international adoption decreased between 2014 and 2017, while the number of parents certified for adoption increased (Popescu et al, 2019).

Even with the legislative changes of 2016, when a parallel matching system was introduced by opening the list of „difficult to adopt” children, later, in 2020, becoming the „public profile of adoptable children” accessible to all certified adopters, the problem of providing adopters and/or adoptive families to children in the system persists. In Romania, from a social point of view, adoption is still not seen as an option for the child, but rather to meet the needs of the adopting families. The studies (Buzducea & Lazăr, 2011) show that among the motivation to adopt very rarely appears the idea of giving a child the chance to have a family, the main motivation being either infertility or the inability of the couple to have more children. Adoption is seen as a „remedial” action against infertility or against the inability of a couple to have another biological child, often due to medical reasons (Buzducea & Lazăr, 2011). In Romania, we do not have enough families to adopt the children already declared adoptable and almost half of the adopters and/or certified families are waiting for a match with a child other than those already declared adoptable (Mihăileanu, 2021). A 2021 study of (neo)Protestant religious

communities shows that the main obstacles to encouraging families to adopt are lack of exposure (they never thought about these issues), ignorance of the process and fear of excessive bureaucracy. Other reasons cited in the same study include fear that they will not cope with challenges, fear that the families will not be able to love the child as much as the biological children, fear of negative spiritual influence, and fear that they will return to their biological parents when they grow up (Mihăileanu & Sârbu, 2021).

The percentage of children declared adoptable is extremely low, if we compare it with their retention rate in the system. We have 3000 children declared adoptable annually by court order and only about 1200 are adopted each year. The recovery of children depends on the time between the moment of abandonment and the moment they are integrated into a family. The faster the children's integration is done, the better the children recover, both on biological (cerebral) and psycho-emotional levels. In the absence of adopters and/or adoptive families accepting the currently available adoptable children and analysing the trends and the direction towards which Romania is heading by encouraging individuals and families to become professional foster carers, we notice how, instead of looking for a solution to encourage adoption, the development of a group of specialized people is desired - the training of professional foster assistants, which partially solves the need for family integration of children, through the measure of family placement, but not as a final solution like adoption. In these conditions, the risks of adverse effects on the psycho-emotional and physical development of children remain high, and their well-being and best interests remain partially ensured. The care and upbringing of children deprived of parental protection should be done in adoptive families and their upbringing in foster families should not be encouraged, which has a temporary character according to L272/2004, art. 62, para. 1. The lack of direct interaction with children in the protection system may be one of the reasons why adopters/adoptive families wait years to be matched with a child. Perhaps one of the solutions for adopters and/or families certified as adopters (according to L273/2004) in order not to wait many years, would be for the state to provide the legal framework and encourage them to make a minimum mandatory number of visits to the foster care centres, to temporarily host children during the holidays or to facilitate simply sporadic holiday actions. Some studies show that the chances for families that are involved in any way in the situation of abandoned children to take a child in foster care or adoption increase to 50% (fostering), respectively 65.5% (adoption) (Mihăileanu & Sârbu, 2021, p. 92). Poverty, lack of knowledge about child development, pregnancy and family planning, but also limited access to health services, especially for rural residents, are among the reasons that play an important role in the field of child and family well-being. And the cultural aspects, the framework and the traces left by the communist legacy should be taken into account when considering the analysis of the development of children's abandonment and adoption in Romania (Popescu et al., 2019).

Research Methodology

The purpose of the research was to observe how many children in the special protection system the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPCs) generated public profiles.

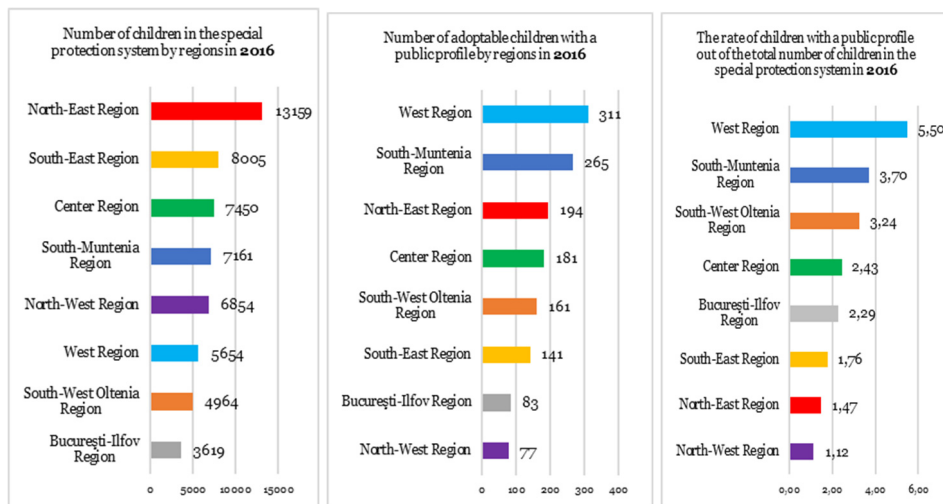
The objectives of the research were to (Obj.1) identify a connection between the large number of children in the protection system and the large number of public profiles generated, depending on the development regions and to (Obj.2) observe a connection between the number of adopted children from the public profile and the number of failed matches of children adopted from the public profile, depending on the development regions of Romania. The research method used is the secondary analysis of the data made available by the National Authority for the Protection of Child Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) in 2022. The 2 research questions from which we started the analysis are (1) Why do some regions have more children registered in the public profile than others? and (2) Why are there more failed matches in some regions than in others? Please see below the results of the analyses based on the quantitative data obtained from ANPDCA.

Research results

Since the data provided by the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption (ANPDCA) were distributed by county, in the first phase of the analysis, we centralized the number of children in the protection system on the 8 development regions of Romania. Romania has 8 development (classified as NUTS-2 level) as follows: West Region (consisting of Arad, Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara and Timiș counties), N-W Region (consisting of Bihor, Bistrița-Năsăud, Cluj, Maramureș, Satu-Mare and Sălaj counties), The N-E Region (composed of the counties of Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Neamț, Suceava and Vaslui), the S-E Region (which includes Brăila, Buzău, Constanța, Galați, Tulcea and Vrancea), the S-M Region (with the counties of Argeș, Călărași, Dâmbovița, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Prahova and Teleorman), S-W Oltenia Region (where Dolj, Gorj, Mehedinți, Olt and Vâlcea counties are included), B-I Region (which contains the 6 sectors of the Municipality of Bucharest plus Ilfov county) and Center Region (with Alba, Brașov, Covasna, Harghita, Mureș and Sibiu counties). After the data centralization by region, both the number of children in the special protection system and the number of children for which a distinct section was created in the R.N.A. for a public profile, we calculated, for each of the 8 regions separately, the rate of children enrolled in the public profile out of the total number of children in the protection system. The results and graphs are shown and explained below.

In 2016, the year in which the system with the public profile of adoptable children was implemented, no connection is observed depending on the development regions between the number of children in the protection system and the number of children with a public profile. If the North-East Region had the most children, 13,159 in the protection system, this region was the third region with the most children enrolled in the public profile in 2016. The West Region was in 2016

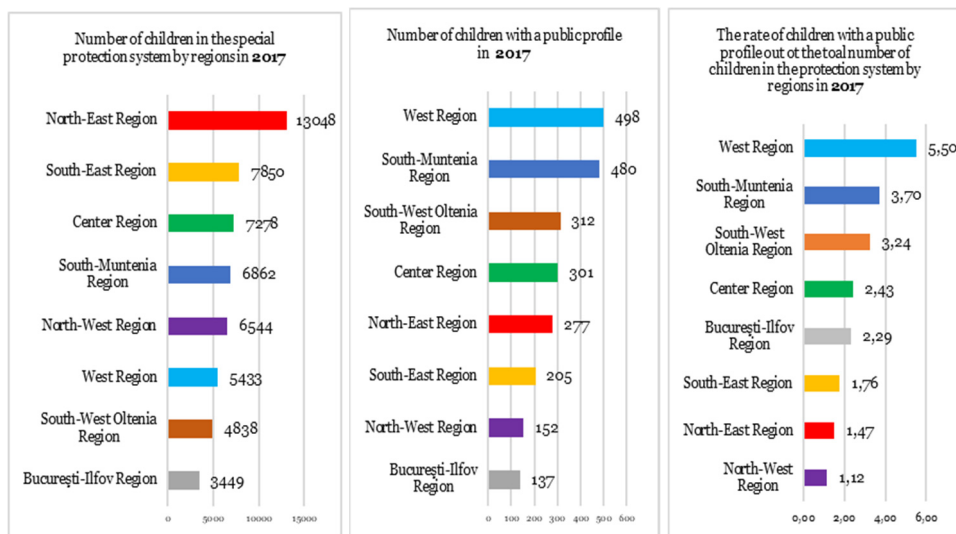
the region with the most children enrolled in the public profile with 311 children, although, in terms of the number of children in the protection system, it was the sixth region, with 5654 children in the system. The West Region had in 2016 the highest rate of 5.5%, of children enrolled in the public profile out of the total number of children in the system of protection, but did not have the highest number of children in the system (Fig. 1).



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 1. Distribution of the number of children in the protection system, the number of children with a public profile and the rate of children with a public profile, by region, in 2016

And in 2017, the North-East Region had the highest number of children in the protection system, with 13,048 children, followed by the South-East Region with 7,850 and the Center Region with 7,278 children in the system. But most children registered on the public profile in 2017 were not in any of these 3 regions. The West Region also had the most children with a public profile in 2017, 498 children, followed by the South-Muntenia Region with 480 children in the public profile and the South-West Oltenia Region with 312 children in the public profile. The highest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the system was the highest in 2017, in these 3 regions: West Region with 5.5%, South-Muntenia Region with 3.7% and South-West Oltenia Region with 3.2%. In 2017, the Bucharest-Ilfov Region had the fewest children in the protection system and the fewest children enrolled in the public profile, but the lowest rate of children in the public profile compared to the number of children in the system were in the North-West Region and North-East Region, the region that also had the highest number of children in the protection system (see Fig. 2).



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

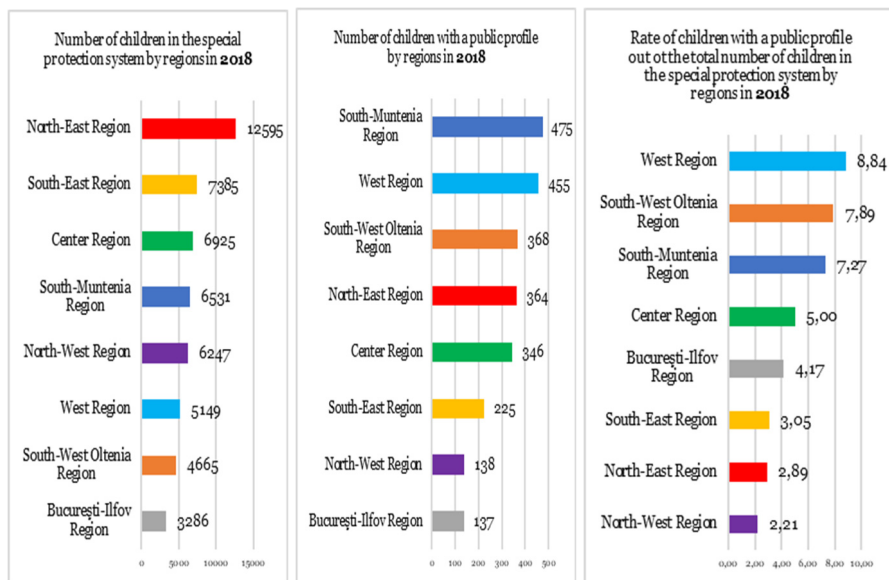
Figure 2. Distribution of the number of children in the protection system, the number of children with a public profile and the rate of children with a public profile, by region, in 2017

In 2018, the North-East Region also had the highest number of children enrolled in the public profile, 12,595 children, followed by the South-East Region with 7,385 children in the system and the Centre Region with 6,925 children. But most children registered in the public profile were not in any of these 3 regions. In 2018, the South-Muntenia Region was the region with the most children for whom a public profile was opened, namely 475 children, although it was the fourth region with the most children in the protection system.

The West Region was the second region with the most children enrolled in the public profile, with 455 children, and the third region was Southwest Oltenia with the most children with a public profile, 368, although it was the second to last region in terms of the number of children in the system of special protection with 4665 children in the system. The fewest children in the protection system, but also children registered in the public profile, were in the Bucharest-Ilfov Region in 2018, with 3286 children in the system, respectively 137 children with a public profile. The lowest rate of children with a public profile about the total number of children in the special protection system was in the North-West Region at 2.2% and the North-East Region at 2.8% (see Fig. 3).

In 2019, the North-East Region remained the region with the most children in the protection system, with 12,020 children in the care of the state, but it had the third highest number of children for whom a public profile was opened, 423 children, after the South-Muntenia Region with 456 children enrolled in the public profile and the South-West Oltenia Region with 446 children registered in the public profile. Although the South-West Oltenia Region was 2019 the second to last

region in terms of the number of children in the protection system, it was the second region with the most children enrolled in the public profile and had the highest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the system, 10%. In 2019, the Bucharest-Ilfov Region was the region with the fewest children in the protection system, with 3,029 children, but also with the fewest children with a public profile, 128 children registered in the public profile, but the lowest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the protection system, was in the North-West Region (2.7%).



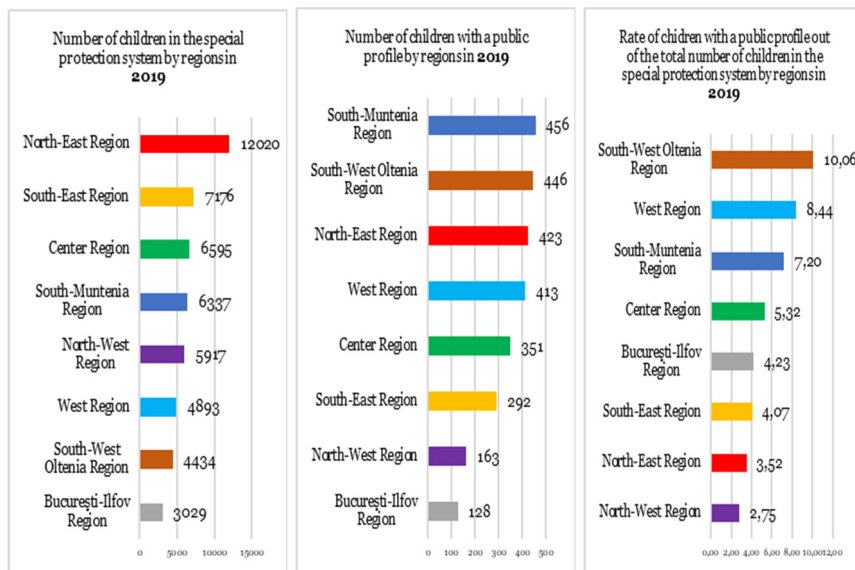
Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 3. Distribution of the number of children in the protection system, the number of children with a public profile and the rate of children with a public profile, by region, in 2018

The highest number of children enrolled in the public profile was in 2019 in the South-Muntenia Region, with 456 children, being also the region with the third highest rate of children with a public profile compared to the total number of children in the system, with 7.2% after the South-West Oltenia Region with 10% and the West Region with 8.4% (Fig. 4).

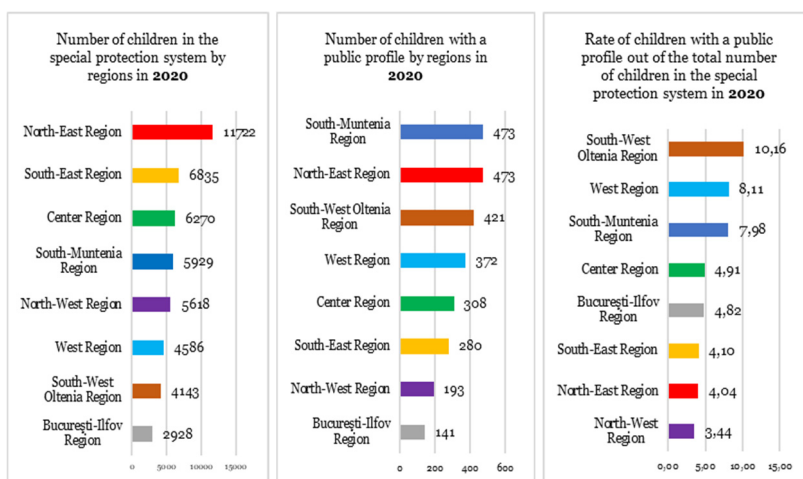
In 2020, the North-East Region had the most children in the special protection system and the most children enrolled in the public profile, with 473 children with a public profile, along with the South-Muntenia Region, but it had among the lowest rates of children with a public profile compared to the total number of children in the system, 4%. The South-West Oltenia Region, which was the second region with the fewest children in the system, had the highest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the system, 10%. The Bucharest-Ilfov Region was the region with the fewest children in the protection system, with 2928 children, and the fewest children with a public profile,

with 141 children, but it was the fifth region with the highest rate of reported children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the protection system (Fig. 5).



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

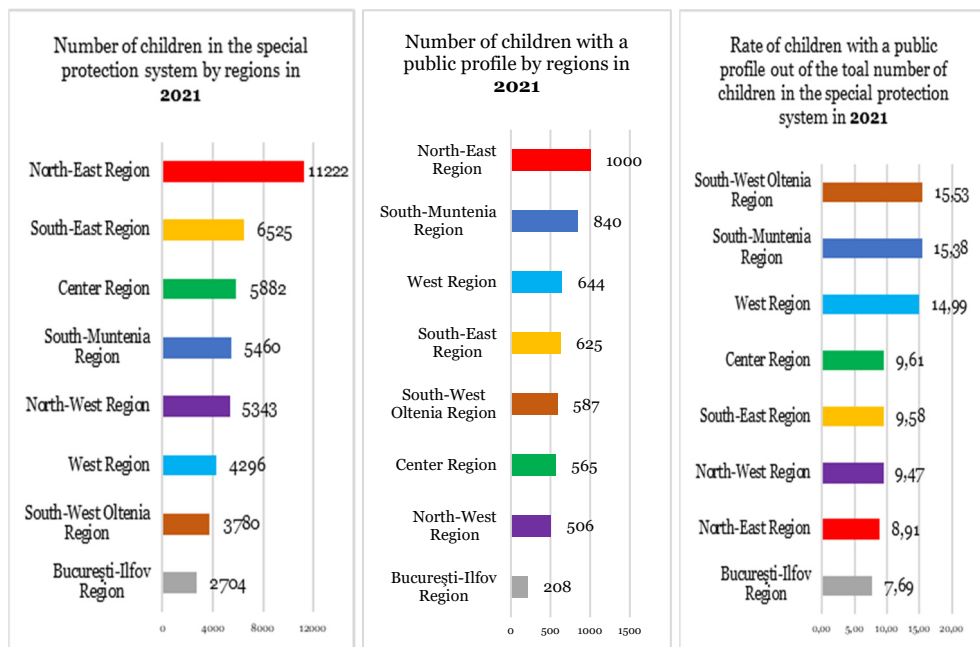
Figure 4. Distribution of the number of children in the protection system, the number of children with a public profile and the rate of children with a public profile, by region, in 2019



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 5. Distribution of the number of children in the protection system, the number of children with a public profile and the rate of children with a public profile, by region, in 2020

In 2021, the North-East Region was also the region with the most children in the protection system, with 11,222 children, and it was also the region with the most children for which a public profile was opened, with 1000 children, but it had among the lowest rates of children with a public profile compared to the total number of children in the system, with 8.9% children with a profile out of the total number of children in the protection system in the region. The second region with the most children with a public profile was the South-Muntenia Region with 840 children, which is also the second region with the highest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the system, among the regions, having a rate of 15% with children with a public profile of the total number of children in the system per region. The South-West Oltenia Region has the highest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the system per region, 15.5%, although it is the second to last region in terms of the number of children in the protection system with 3780 children in the system in 2021. The Bucharest-Ilfov Region was in 2021 the region with the fewest children in the protection system, 2704 children in the system, the region with the fewest children with a public profile, 208 children, and the region with the lowest rate of children with a public profile out of the total number of children in the protection system with a rate of 7.6% (see Fig. 6).

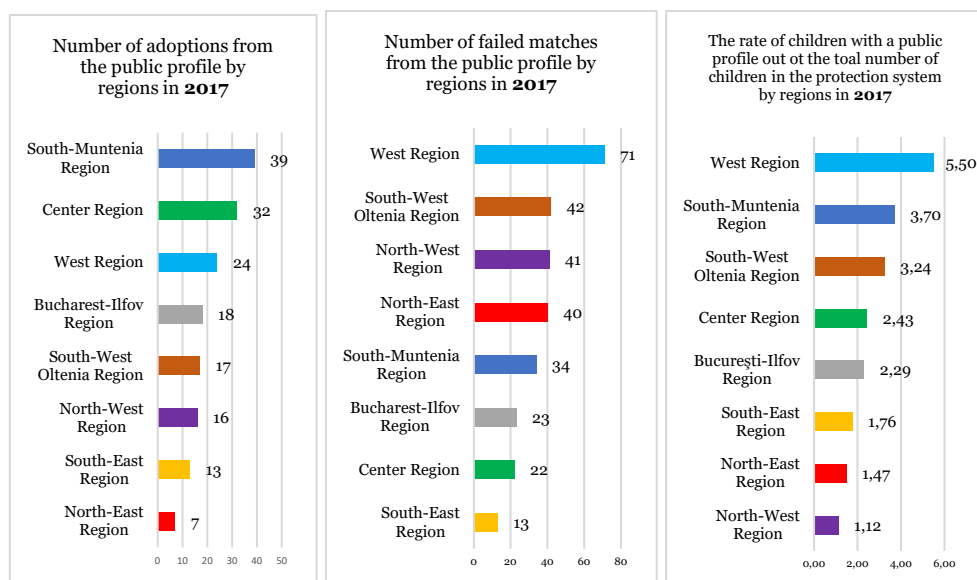


Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 6. Distribution of the number of children in the protection system, the number of children with a public profile and the rate of children with a public profile, by region, in 2021

After the first year of implementing the public profile section in R.N.A. (National Adoption Registry) in 2017, no relationship is observed between the number of children adopted from the profile and the number of failed matches of children adopted from the profile.

The most adoptions from the public profile were in the South-Muntenia Region, with 39 adoptions, but the West Region had the highest number of failed matches of children selected from the public profile, with 71 failed matches, at 24 adoptions of children from the profile. The Northeast Region had the fewest public profile adoptions but had 40 failed matches. The South-East Region had a special situation, wherein 2017, although it had among the fewest adoptions of children from the public profile, 13 adoptions, it also had the lowest number of failed matches of children selected from the public profile, 13 failed matches (Fig. 7).



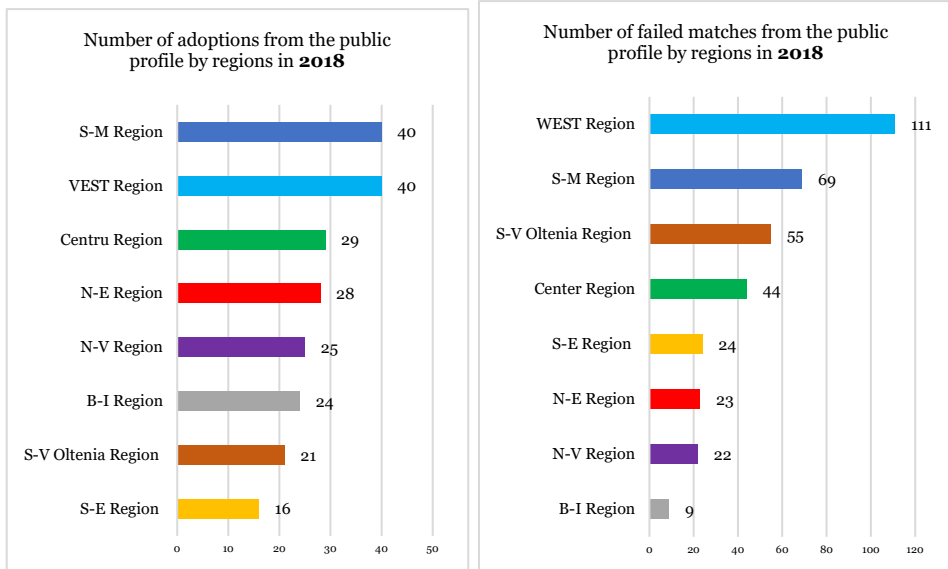
Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 7. Number of adoptions from the public profile and number of failed matches from the public profile, by region, in 2017

In 2018, the South-Muntenia Region and the West Region were the regions with the most children adopted from the public profile, each with 40 cases of adoption of children from the public profile, but they were also the regions with the most failed matches of children selected from the profile, with 111 cases in the West Region, respectively 69 cases of failed matches in the South-Muntenia Region (Fig. 8).

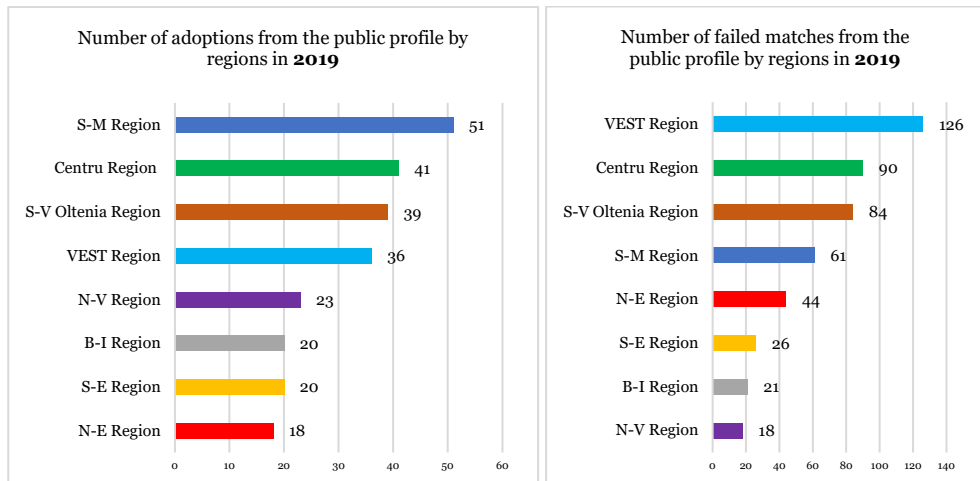
In 2019, although the South-Muntenia Region also had the most children adopted from the public profile, with 51 adoptions, it had the fourth-highest number of failed matches. The Center region was the region with the second most adoptions of children from the public profile and the second region with the most

failed matches of selected children from the profile, namely 90 failed matches. The West Region had the highest number of failed matches from the public profile, with 126 failed matches in 2019 at 36 adoptions from the public profile. The North-West Region had the fewest failed matches of children selected from the public profile with 18 cases (Fig. 9).



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 8. Number of adoptions from the public profile and number of failed matches from the public profile, by region, in 2018

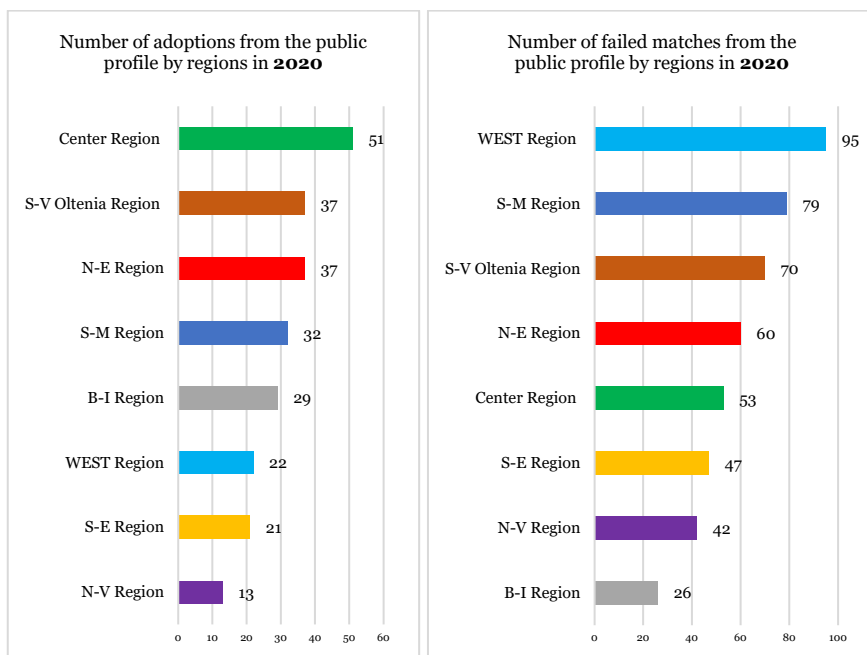


Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 9. Number of public profile adoptions and number of failed matches from a public profile by region in 2019

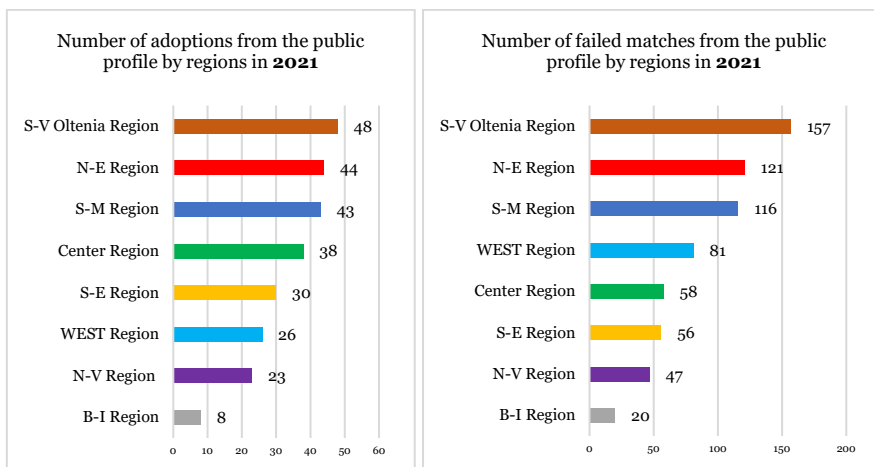
In 2020, the West Region had also the most cases of failed matches, with 95 situations, but it was the third region with the fewest adoptions of children from the profile, with 22 adoptions. The most adoptions in the profile in 2020 were in the Centre Region, with 51 adoptions and 53 failed matches. The North-West Region had the fewest adoptions of children selected from the public profile, 13 adoptions, which was also the second to last region with the fewest failed matches selected from the public profile, 42 cases (Fig. 10).

In 2021, a connection is again observed between the number of children adopted from the public profile and the number of failed matches of children selected from the public profile by development regions. Thus, South-West Oltenia, North-East and South-Muntenia Regions, despite having the highest number of children adopted from the public profile, 48, 44 and 43 adoptions, also had the highest number of failed matches selected from the public profile, namely 157 failed matches in the South-West Oltenia Region, 121 failed matches in the North-East Region and 116 failed matches of children selected from the public profile in the South-Muntenia Region. The North-West and Bucharest-Ilfov regions had 2021 the lowest number of children adopted from the public profile, 23 and 8 children adopted from the public profile, but they also had the lowest number of failed matches, 47 in the North-West Region and 20 failed matches from the public profile (Fig. 11).



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 10. Number of public profile adoptions and number of failed matches from the public profile by region in 2020



Source: ANPDCA, 2022

Figure 11. Number of public profile adoptions and number of failed matches from a public profile by region in 2021

Conclusions and discussion:

Trying to answer the question of why some regions have more children registered in the public profile than others and setting as our objective to identify a connection between the high number of children in the special protection system and the high number of public profiles generated for adoptable children in the system, depending on the development regions of Romania, the hypothesis that the regions with a large number of children in the system are also the regions with more children for which a public profile was created was not confirmed. Analysing the data reported by DGASPCs to ANPDCA in the period 2016-2021, except 2021 when indeed the North-East Region was the region with the most children in the system, over 11,000 children, and it was also the region with the most children with a public profile, 1000 children, although it did not have the highest rate of children with a public profile from the total number of children in the protection system in the region (being only 8.91%, in the penultimate place among the 8 development regions), in all other years there is no relationship between the total number of children in the system in each region and the number of children with a public profile per region. In the period 2016-2021, although the North-East Region had the most children in the system it was the second to last in terms of the rate of children with a public profile in the region out of the total number of children in the system. In 2016-2018, the West Region had the highest rate of children with a profile (5.5% in 2016 and 2017 and 8.84% in 2018) although in terms of the number of children in the system, it is the third region with the fewest children in the system. The South-West Oltenia Region had the highest rate of children with a public profile per region compared to the number of children in the system, per region, in 2019 10.06%, in 2020, 10.16% and in 2021, 15.53%, although in these 3 years, the South-

West Oltenia Region is in the penultimate place in terms of the total number of children in the system per region, before the Bucharest-Ilfov Region which had the fewest children in the protection system among all 8 development regions.

Although if we do not take the region as a reference point to analyse the connection between the high number of children in the system per region and the high number of children with a public profile, take the county as a reference, we observe, for example, that in the most recent year taken into analysis, 2021, in some regions there is a connection between the total number of children in the system per county and the total number of children with a public profile per county. For example, in the North-East Region, in 2021 the counties of Iași, Vaslui and Bacău were the counties with the most children in the system, but also the counties with the most children with a public profile (Iași - 3131 children in the system and 210 children with a public profile, Vaslui – 2667 children in the system and 337 children with a public profile). In the South-West Oltenia Region, Dolj and Olt's counties were the counties with the most children in the system, but also the counties with the most children with a public profile (Dolj had 1166 children in the system and 197 children with a public profile, Olt had 814 children in the system and 193 children with a public profile). In the West Region, Timiș County was 2021 the county with the most children in the system, 1715, and the county with the most children with a profile, 294. In the North-West Region, the counties of Bihor and Satu Mare were the counties with the most children in the system, 1420, respectively 951 children in the system and 153 children in Satu Mare with a public profile and 124 children with a public profile in Bihor, being both the counties with the most children in the system in the region and the counties with the most children with public profiles. In the Central Region, Mureș county was the county with the most children in the system, 1420 children, and the county with the most children with a public profile, 179 children. The conclusion is that at the county level, in some regions, there is a link between the number of children in the special protection system and the number of children for whom a public profile was also opened, but if we consider the figures at the regional level, the link is no longer preserved.

Regarding the second research question, namely why in some developing regions, the number of failed matches is higher compared to other regions, and having as our objective is to observe if there is a connection between the number of children adopted from the public profile and the number of failed matches of children adopted from the profile, depending on the development regions of Romania, the hypothesis that the regions with more children adopted from the public profile are also the regions with more failed matches was partially confirmed. Thus in 2018, the South-Muntenia Region and the West Region were the regions with the most children adopted from the profile, 40 children per region, but they were also the regions with the highest number of failed matches, 111 in the West Region and 69 failed matches in the South-Muntenia Region. And in 2021, the regions where the most children from the profile were adopted were also the regions with the highest number of failed matches, thus the South-West Oltenia

Region and the North-East Region where the most children were adopted from the public profile, 48 children, respectively 44 children, had 157 failed matches, 121 cases. The South-Muntenia Region was in third place in terms of the number of children adopted from the profile, with 43 children adopted from the profile, and also in third place in terms of the number of failed matches, with 116 cases.

In conclusion, we believe that we need to seek other explanations and we recommend extending the research in the field of children's adoptions from the public profile and failed matches from the public profile. We aim to carry out qualitative research to be able to identify the criteria that the General Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection (DGASPCs) use to create public profiles and what strategies they use to stimulate adoptions. At the moment, we can assume that there is a possibility that some DGASPCs create more attractive profiles for children while others open profiles mainly for healthy children with more chances of adoption. The explanations can vary considerably.

Acknowledgement

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ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (AA) IN ROMANIA: AA’S BEGINNINGS IN ROMANIA, A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Adriana Lavinia BULUMAC¹

Abstract: This paper aimed to trace the evolution of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in Romania from its establishment there in 1991, focusing on the experiences and efforts of early members to develop the fellowship, disseminate the AA message and create relationships of cooperation and trust with existing religious and healthcare institutions. A qualitative ethnographic study was conducted between March and April 2021 and included 7 participants from the first two AA groups founded in Romania. Data were collected using ethnographic interviews and content analysis was used to obtain a comprehensive synthesis of the data. In addition, archival research was used. Four research categories emerged: AA’s founding moments in Romania, AA’s development in Romania, AA’s relationship with professionals, and perceptions of the disease of alcoholism, then and now. Results suggest that AA’s development in Romania was slow due to the political context, lack of information and professionals’ reluctance to support AA. In addition, there is a need to build strong relationships with professionals in the area of substance abuse, social work and religious institutions to facilitate recovery for those who suffer from alcoholism.

Keywords: Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Romania, Communist Regime, Disease Concept of Alcoholism, Perceptions on Alcoholism.

Résumé : Cet article visait à retracer l'évolution des Alcoolistes Anonymes (AA) en Roumanie depuis sa création en 1991, en se concentrant sur les expériences et les efforts des premiers membres pour développer la fraternité, diffuser le message des AA et créer des relations de coopération et de confiance avec institutions religieuses et sanitaires existantes. Une étude ethnographique qualitative a été menée entre mars et avril 2021 et a inclus 7 participants des deux premiers groupes AA fondés en Roumanie. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'entretiens ethnographiques et une analyse de contenu a été utilisée pour obtenir une synthèse complète des données. De plus, la recherche d'archives a été utilisée. Quatre catégories de recherche ont émergé : les moments fondateurs des AA en Roumanie, le développement des AA en Roumanie, les relations des AA avec les professionnels et les perceptions de la maladie de l'alcoolisme, hier et aujourd'hui. Les résultats suggèrent que le développement des AA en Roumanie a été lent en raison du contexte politique, du manque d'informations et de la réticence des professionnels à soutenir les AA. De plus, il est nécessaire d'établir des relations solides avec des

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professionnels dans le domaine de la toxicomanie, du travail social et des institutions religieuses pour faciliter le rétablissement des personnes qui souffrent d'alcoolisme.

Mots-clés : Alcooliques Anonymes (AA), Roumanie, régime communiste, concept de maladie de l'alcoolisme, perceptions de l'alcoolisme.

Rezumat: Această lucrare și-a propus să urmărească evoluția Alcoolicilor Anonimi (AA) în România de la înființarea sa în 1991, concentrându-se pe experiențele și eforturile primilor membri de a dezvolta camaraderia, a disemina mesajul AA și a crea relații de cooperare și încredere cu instituțiile religioase și sanitare existente. Un studiu etnografic calitativ a fost realizat în perioada martie – aprilie 2021 și a inclus 7 participanți din primele două grupuri AA fondate în România. Datele au fost colectate folosind interviuri etnografice; analiza de conținut a fost utilizată pentru a obține o sinteză cuprinzătoare a datelor. În plus, s-au folosit cercetări arhivistice. S-au conturat patru categorii de cercetare: momentele fondatoare ale AA în România, dezvoltarea AA în România, relația AA cu profesioniștii și percepțiile despre boala alcoolismului, atunci și acum. Rezultatele sugerează că dezvoltarea AA în România a fost lentă din cauza contextului politic, a lipsei de informații și a reticenței profesioniștilor de a sprijini AA. În plus, este nevoie de a construi relații puternice cu profesioniștii din domeniul abuzului de substanțe, asistență socială și instituții religioase pentru a facilita recuperarea celor care suferă de alcoolism.

Cuvinte cheie: Alcoolicii Anonimi (AA), România, regimul comunist, conceptul de boală a alcoolismului, percepții asupra alcoolismului.

1. Introduction

Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935 and it is one of the oldest and most popular mutual-help organizations which aims to help individuals who suffer from alcoholism to attain and maintain sobriety by spiritual means (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001; Rose, 2021). It is a fellowship of men and women who share their experiences, strength and hope with each other, as well as a program of recovery from alcoholism based on the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (Kurtz, 2010; Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001). As Makela et al. (1996) state, AA is one of the great success stories of our century which started as a mutual-help movement, an untraditional organization where affiliation is based on individual life experiences, auto proclamation and identification. However, the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, Bill W. and Doctor Bob refer to AA as a fellowship, not as an organization (AA Grapevine, Preamble, 1946).

AA's origins and the early years of AA in the United States (US)

Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in 1935 in Akron, Ohio, USA, by two men suffering from alcoholism, William Griffith Wilson (Bill W., the AA name), and Robert Holbrook Smith (Doctor Bob, the AA name). Bill W. and Doctor Bob first met in Akron, in the lobby of the May-flower Hotel, where Bill W. was alone on a failed business trip which left him worrying about a possible relapse. To avoid a relapse, he knew he needed to talk with another alcoholic, who turned out to be Doctor Bob. Although Doctor Bob agreed to meet him for only a few minutes to talk due to his reluctance, their meeting lasted for more than ten hours and the

discussion remains anonymous until today. A few weeks following this meeting, on the 10th of June 1935, Doctor Bob became sober and this date is considered to be the founding moment of Alcoholics Anonymous (Makela et al., 1996). However, Kurtz (2010) in his book, „Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous”, has a different perspective on the founding moment of AA. The author identified four „founding moments” different from the official founding date of the AA fellowship: the meeting between Rowland H. and Dr Carl Gustav Jung in 1931 (the idea of a vital spiritual experience as the solution for alcoholism), the visit of Bill’s W. schoolmate, Edwin in November 1934, Bill’s spiritual experience in Towns Hospital a month later, in December 1934 and the meeting between Bill W. and Doctor Bob in May 1935) (Kurtz, 2010; White & Kurtz, 2008). In the US, AA’s development started after the main AA textbook (the Big Book) was published in 1939 and its fast growth was considered to be due to mass media support and the support of influential figures of the time such as John D. Rockefeller Jr. who became involved in The General Service Board (the headquarters of AA) (Kurtz, 1995). AA's roots reside in The Oxford Group religious principles which served as a basis for the 12 Steps spiritual program of Alcoholics Anonymous (Peterson, 1992; Trice & Staudenmeier, 1989).

AA outside of the US, AA's expansion elsewhere

Alcoholics Anonymous expansion began at the end of World War II and after the AA literature was published, spreading across the Atlantic and the Pacific Rim, in the south borders (Makela et al., 1996). Given that the AA literature was originally written in English and the US had a strong Protestant culture it was only natural that the diffusion of AA began in Anglo-Saxon countries and the Protestant world (Makela et al., 1996). The diffusion of AA outside the US followed the same pattern as its foundation. As Bill W. travelled for business in Akron, where he met Doctor Bob and they founded AA, other AA members from the US, generally middle-class workers, carried the message of AA when travelling for work, tourism or when moving to a different country, founding AA groups (Kurtz, 2010). Highly economically developed countries which reported strong ties with the US and gained independence after World War II were the first ones to embrace AA groups (Makela et al., 1996). On the other hand, countries with French colonial backgrounds reported a lack of AA groups shortly after World War II ended, so Makela et al. (1996) concluded that these differences between countries with French and British colonial backgrounds could be partially explained by internal social and cultural differences.

The diffusion of AA in European countries

The first European Alcoholics Anonymous support group was founded in Ireland, an English-speaking country, in 1946. The Irish Connor F., a former tavern owner who became an AA member in Philadelphia travelled to Ireland with his wife and during their vacation, they visited a Dublin sanitarium. The two were introduced by a doctor to a patient from Belfast suffering from alcoholism, called Richard P, with whom they shared the AA message of hope. After reading the Big

Book, Richard P. contacted AA members from Australia and with their help, the first AA group was founded in Ireland at the Country Shop on Dublin's St. Stephen's Green (Butler & Jordan, 1997). Among the challenges that AA has faced in Ireland were the Catholic Church, the dominant religious institution in Ireland, and the health care system which did not support AA at the beginning (Butler and Jordan, 2007). Finally, the Catholic Church accepted AA and by the end of 1970, AA could be found in all counties of Ireland and had become part of Irish social and cultural life (Sharma, 2011). One year later after the foundation of the first European AA group in Ireland, in 1947, the expansion of AA in Europe began. AA groups were founded in Rome, Italy and Paris, France, England, Norway and Sweden. The next year, the first AA groups in Germany and Finland were founded and in 1949 AA reached Scotland and Netherlands. Denmark (1950) and Austria (1963) followed. AA's expansion was strongly supported by direct contacts with the US AA members, who helped their fellows to start AA groups and sometimes even sponsored countries to receive AA (Makela et al., 1996).

The founding moments of AA in Romania in the context of the Communist regime

In a country with a history of dictatorship, terror, and institutionalized violence under the communist regime which started in 1947 and lasted until 1989, social control, repression and censorship were a common reality (Curtois et al., 1997; Cesareanu, 2005; Bichescu et al., 2005) and the disease concept of alcoholism was unknown to both professionals and commoners. Alcoholics Anonymous was also unknown in Romania, „no Romanian had ever heard of Alcoholics Anonymous” according to an article which reveals the story of the beginning of AA in Romania (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p.1). As a consequence, the first AA mutual-help group from Romania was founded only in 1991 in Timisoara city and currently, there are 66 AA groups in 35 cities. There are believed to be around 1000 recovered alcoholics and unlike other countries, there are no AA mutual-help groups in prisons and psychiatric hospitals, except the Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Dr Al. Obregia and, recently, the St. Stelian Center for the Evaluation and Treatment of Toxic Addictions for Young People are both located in the capital city of Romania, Bucharest. Only in 2018, the first women-only AA group in Romania was founded by two recovering ladies and it is located within the St. Stelian Youth Addiction Evaluation and Treatment Center. Within a developing country which fought the communist regime and still faces some of its consequences, the foundation and development of AA have faced and still face barriers which could explain its slow expansion. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to document the founding moments of AA in Romania and to identify the barriers that stood in the way of its development, focusing on the experiences and efforts of early AA members to found the first AA mutual-help groups and to develop the fellowship, as well as to disseminate the AA message and create relationships of cooperation and trust with existing religious and healthcare institutions.

2. Methods, participants, and instruments

The present study used qualitative methods. Seven in-depth interviews were used in gathering the data. In addition, archival research was used, mainly drawing on primary sources in AA archives in Romania. This method seemed most suitable for gaining insight into the founding moments of AA in Romania and its development through early AA members' experiences. The interviews were recorded between March and April 2021 using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of 10 open questions. Each interview lasted between 20 and 70 minutes (an average of 40 min.). The open questions were related to members' first contact with AA and their first AA meeting, AA's beginnings in Romania, the AA meetings format, questions about the AA founders of the first two AA groups from Romania (Timisoara and Bucharest), AA's non-alcoholic supporters and trustees, about people's information and perceptions regarding AA and about the disease concept of alcoholism as well as questions related to AA's development and evolution in Romania. Even though a semi-structured interview guide was used, the interviewer allowed participants to participate proactively to understand their perspective and perception of the founding moments of AA in Romania and the life context at the time.

The early AA members participating in the study

The study included 7 men aged between 60 and 80 years old. Most of them have been founders and/or members of the first two AA groups from Romania from their beginning in 1991 (Timisoara) and 1993 (Bucharest). Some of them have attended AA meetings for a period reaching almost 30 years and some of them have retired from AA. They have different ages, sobriety ages, and time in AA and residential environments, as listed in *Table I*. (see in the Annexes). The name of all the men has been changed to protect their anonymity.

Analysis and categorisation

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed following the research objectives, seeking to establish the founding moments of AA in the Romanian context, to gain insight into AA's development, to understand people's mindset regarding AA and alcoholism, then and now, and its impact on the development of AA in Romania from the views of the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Content analysis was performed to obtain an intelligible, interpretative and comprehensive synthesis. Following this process, four categories of analysis have emerged: AA's founding moments in Romania, AA's development in Romania, AA's relationship with professionals, and Perceptions of the disease of alcoholism, then and now. *Table II* (see in the Annexes) provides a summary of the final themes and theoretical codes.

Ethical issues

The data presented in this paper derive from ethnographic interviews recorded and transcribed. All participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study and all reports were kept completely anonymous ensuring

confidentiality. To ensure participants that their identities are not revealed, the name of the participants have been changed and the data related to their profile description was restricted to data on age, sobriety age and setting. The study was conducted following the Declaration of Helsinki, and the protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the UB-FSAS (anonymized for peer review), Doctoral School of Sociology.

3. Results

a. AA's founding moments in Romania – archival research

In the context of the communist regime of Romania, the authorities did not allow Alcoholics Anonymous to operate before 1989. The history of AA in Romania began in Timisoara city, in the 1980s, when Fran P., an American AA member temporarily relocated from the US and established in Romania as an English Literature teacher at the University of Timisoara. As Fran P. himself wrote in a Grapevine article, he lived in Romania along with his wife, both recovering alcoholics, between 1984 and 1985. At the time there were no AA groups in Romania so the two of them started AA meetings in their apartment and called themselves Group Number One. His wife and children had to return to Washington State, so he found himself alone and with no support for his disease (Grapevine, Grupa Una, July 1990). Fran P. recalls he saw many people who could benefit from AA, but he „was quite hesitant to say anything to anyone in a country where suspicion and fear were a daily fact of life” (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 1). In addition, he was quite sure that his apartment and phone were bugged and that his letters were verified before being sent. He had to be very careful about what he said or wrote because, „ the government was very hostile toward any new or different club or organization, fearing that such structures might be a cover for „subversive” political activities” (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 1). One night, Fran received a strange visit from a young Romanian woman, called Rodica. She wrote him a note arguing that she needs to talk to him secretly. The two of them met and the woman asked him about the message he brings from America. Fran initially thought that she is interested in his work at the university because she was a teacher as well, so he started to talk about it. He mentioned alcohol and drinking in his speech and saw Rodica's reaction. He figured out she was interested in AA and started to share his experience with AA. At the time, Rodica was struggling with alcoholism and trying to find a solution for her troubles. Fran borrowed her the AA literature and they started to have secret AA meetings almost daily. Fran and Rodica used to meet in her apartment, in the park, on benches or even walking, so the first AA group in Romania „proved to be a travelling group-meeting from place to place as circumstance dictated” (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 3). They met this way for five months until Fran had to return to Washington State. The day he had to live he found his apartment was searched and that his personal and AA tapes were erased by the Securitate. He told these facts to Rodica and took the train to leave Romania, but at the borders, the train stopped and he was taken to interrogation by the

Securitate. Fran was finally released and was able to return home. Since the event, he and Rodica agreed on a simple code for the letters and their phone conversations (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 4). This lasted for four years when in 1989, the Romanian revolution took place and AA could be brought to light. This was the moment when Fran found out from Rodica that six months after his departure, the Securitate had visited her and they had asked her different questions about him and their activities. He also found out that she was „permitted to correspond without reporting the topic of every letter and every one of her phone calls” (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 4) and that „the words *fellowship*, *cooperation*, *group* and *God* had to be avoided at any price, as illegal” (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 4). Although their first attempt to create the first Romanian AA group had failed, because of the Communist government which could not accept the spiritual ideas of Alcoholics Anonymous, relying upon a Higher Power to recover from alcoholism, they did not give up. At the time, „no Romanian had ever heard of Alcoholics Anonymous” (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1990, p. 1). Before Fran returned to the USA, Rodica took The Fifth Step with him and afterwards they started a long-term correspondence - Fran taught Rodica all he knew about AA and the 12 Steps. She started to work the 12 Steps program as a loaner. Rodica managed to maintain her sobriety as a loner with Fran`s help. At the time, in Seattle, in the 90s between the 5th and 8th of July, there was to come „AA's Ninth International Convention – „Fifty-five Years – One Day at a Time”, an anniversary AA convention where Rodica was invited to represent Romania. AA members from the USA gathered money and facilitated her participation. That was the first year when the Romanian flag was waved and Rodica`s story has been heard by all participants (AA delegates and members from over 71 countries). During her stay in Seattle, Rodica attended as many AA meetings as she could to learn about AA and the 12 Steps program. She returned to Romania determined to find the first AA group. It was not until February 1991 that the first AA Group in Romania was to be set up in Timisoara. It was founded by two ladies and called „Group One”. By 1992 Group One had already gathered 14 AA members and two different locations. „Group One” has been operating without interruption since 1991 and it is the basis of the entire AA community in Romania. To share the 12 Steps program with other alcoholics, Rodica translated and copied different AA materials she had from the USA AA members. Between the 26th and 27th of November 1992, an informal conference was organized at the University of Timisoara. Students, police officers and psychiatrists from Timisoara and Arad were invited. The purpose of the conference was to share information about AA. The same year marked the publishing of the first Romanian AA magazine, edited by Rodica, and called „Noi Înşine” – written by alcoholics for alcoholics. On the 27th of November 1992, a second AA group was founded in Arad. In 1993, a third AA group was founded in the capital city of Romania, Bucharest by Petrica and Damian, two alcoholics hospitalized in Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Prof. Dr Alexandru Obregia, with the help of Dr Doina Constantinescu and Patricia and Lee, an A.A. couple from the U.S.

AA's founding moments in Timisoara city – interview data

The interviews revealed information about the first contact with AA of the early AA members and founders and their experience and perception of the events that preceded the foundation of the first AA groups from Romania. In an interview, an early AA member from Timisoara recalls:

„It was in 1992 when I first heard about AA from an old drinking companion, an AA member at the time, who gave me some AA materials which seemed to be interesting, but at the time I thought it was too simple for me to work. It was only in 1997 that I first got to an AA meeting... Unofficially I know that the first attempts to find an AA group in Romania were started in Timisoara in 1987 by Rodica and another woman, called Viki who no longer lives. Rodica no longer lives in Romania and I don't have any information about her. They were the first two AA members of Group One, Timisoara.” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA, Timisoara)

His story validates the results of archival research regarding the foundation of the first AA group from Romania since there wasn't possible to contact the two founders of Group One, Rodica and Viki. Catalin, an early member of the first AA group from Bucharest emphasizes the story told by Stan.

„Two years after my first AA meeting I contacted Lucia, one of the founders of the first AA group from Romania, Timisoara. She told me the story behind the founding moments of AA in Romania. Lucia and Rodica, both teachers, have learned about AA from a Mormon family from the US who gave them AA materials. The two of them met as an AA group secretly in university classrooms until the end of 1988 when Securitate found out about their meetings and forbade them to meet again. Two years after the fall of the communist regime, in December 1989, they were able to meet again as „Grupa Una” (in 1991), the first AA group from Romania.” (Catalin, 58 years old, 21 years in AA, Bucharest)

The birth of the first AA mutual-help group in Bucharest, the capital city of Romania – interview data

Information about the founding moments of the first AA group from Bucharest was easier to obtain since one of the founders of this group was available and willing to share his experience. In addition, we were able to interview early members of this group and this allowed us to create a clearer picture of the AA's founding moments in Bucharest. Marius, one of the founders of the first AA group from Bucharest, recounts in an interview:

„The foundation of the first AA group in Bucharest was possible with the help of two Mormons, Patricia and Lee, and with the help and support of Dr Doina Constantinesc, the Head of the 8th Section at the Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Dr Al. Obregia. There, I met Petrică and we were the first two AA members from Bucharest. At the time, we were only five or six people attending the AA meetings, Petrică and myself along with men hospitalized for treating their

alcoholism. We barely had any AA materials." (Marius, 65 years old, 28 years in AA, Bucharest)

An early AA member also recalls the way the AA meetings were held at the time:

„When I first came to AA, there was no AA literature and no Preamble, so we were reading the 12 Steps and the 12 Traditions from loose papers translated from different languages. Later we were able to copy the Big Book and read it. Since 1996 AA some materials came from GSO and only after 2000-2002 we started to have AA literature." (Catalin, 58 years old, 21 years in AA, Bucharest)

The interviews have highlighted the difficulties faced by the AA founders and early members in conducting the AA meetings without proper AA materials and literature and their shared efforts in obtaining and providing the AA meeting and participants with these materials.

b. AA's development in Romania – interview data

In an interview, Stan shared his enthusiasm about the development of AA in Romania since its beginning:

„Since I began to attend AA, I think AA's development was fulminating. When I first came to AA, I think there were five or six AA groups in Romania and now I believe there are around fifty-nine." (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA, Timisoara)

Perceptions of the development of AA in Romania were different. An early AA member from Bucharest pointed out some of the barriers AA encountered in those early years.

„AA's development in Bucharest was not fast or easy. When the hospital location went into renovation we had to meet at our homes or in public locations such as parks, but this was difficult since we had to find unpopulated areas. We were able to hold AA meetings at the American Library and the Anglican Church for short periods. People were reluctant when hearing about AA." (Dan, 52 years old, 29 years in AA, Bucharest)

Although Timisoara was the city where AA was born on Romanian soil, it seems that presently Bucharest, the capital city of Romania, holds the first place when it comes to the number of AA groups. In this regard, an early AA member shares the following:

„Here, in Bucharest, we are truly blessed. We can attend AA meetings daily if we want to. We can even choose which AA group we want to go to on a certain day as there are two AA meetings on the same day, in different locations." (Sandu, 68 years old, 28 years in AA, Bucharest).

c. AA's relationship with professionals – archival research and interview data

Healthcare institutions

The interviews revealed that only a few psychiatrists and physicians knew about AA and were willing to support its development. In addition, their reluctance in cooperating with AA has had a great impact on its development.

„There were some physicians who supported AA in Timisoara, such as Georgeta Cădărean and Lucia, who was also an AA member. She no longer attends AA meetings after around 25 years of active involvement in AA, she retired to the countryside.” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA, Timisoara)

In this regard, archival research provided data about the implication of psychiatrist Georgeta I. Cădărean who asked the Christiana Association to provide a small location in which the AA meetings could be held, in 1991 (Noi Înșine, 2021). As a result, the first AA meeting in Romania took place on 27th February 1991; four participants attended that meeting. One year later, on July 1992, the first AA group from Romania accounted for fourteen sober AA members (Noi Înșine, 2021).

In addition, in a public lecture at the Annual AA Conference (November 1992, Timisoara), psychiatrist Georgeta I. Cocian (previous name Cădărean) shared her experience about the disease concept of alcoholism as a result of her experience in an addiction treatment facility from the United States, where she deepened her studies on alcohol and drug addiction. In this regard, she underlines the tremendous difference in approaching alcohol addiction in the US compared to Romania. Even from the year 1971, in the US, that facility was providing individuals who were struggling with alcohol and drug addiction, with individual and group therapy, medical care, 30 beds with 120 qualified staff (many of them recovered alcoholics who were able both to share their own experience with alcoholism as well to offer their professional help). Furthermore, AA participation was highly encouraged. Moreover, she explained the disease concept of alcoholism from both the scientific view, as well as of the AA view. What AA states, that alcoholism is a disease characterized by the lack of control and obsession over alcohol (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001), was clearly explained by psychiatrist Georgeta I. Cocian, to be a result of genetic predisposition and a different biochemical brain metabolism related to alcohol (Noi Înșine, 2021).

In Bucharest, the first AA group was born and developed with the help and great support of psychiatrist Doina Constantinescu who has constantly told and guided her patients towards AA. The interviews revealed her contribution as follows:

„I found out about AA from a psychiatrist, Dr Doina Constantinescu, in 2000 when I have been hospitalized for treating my alcoholism. She suggested I should attend AA meetings. In Bucharest, the first AA group was founded by Marius and Petrica B with the support of Doina Constantinescu and was located at Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Dr Al. Obregia.” (Catalin, 58 years old, 21 years in AA, Bucharest)

„I found out about AA in 1993 when I was hospitalized at the 8th pavilion of the Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Dr Al. Obregia to treat my alcoholism. Dr Florin Ene told me about AA. At the time, Dr Doina Constantinescu was Head of Section 8th and she was the one who supported AA along with Dr Florin Ene.” (Valeriu, 75 years old, 24 years in AA, Bucharest)

Religious institutions

Religious institutions have had different attitudes towards AA and their support and influence in the development of AA haven't been the same in Timișoara and Bucharest. Group One from Timișoara has had the support of the Orthodox Church from the beginning. An Orthodox priest was the first religious representative who supported AA in Timișoara and the one who provided them with a permanent and safe location.

„I know they were supported by a Romanian Orthodox priest who allowed them to organize AA meetings in his church, but I don't recall his name.” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA, Timisoara)

In Bucharest, on the other side, religious institutions started to support AA only years after its foundation. In this context, AA's development in Bucharest followed different paths than that of Group One from Timișoara. In an interview, an early AA member from Bucharest reported the following:

„Only after fourteen years after the foundation of the first AA group in Bucharest, we were able to attain a second location at Monastery Radu Vodă, where we had the support of Father Fieraru who advocated the development of AA in Romania. Then other religious representatives became open to the idea and willing to help AA and cooperation between AA and religious institutions has begun.” (Catalin, 58 years old, 21 years in AA, Bucharest)

Perceptions of the disease of alcoholism, then and now

Alcoholism is a disease characterized by the obsession with alcohol and the allergy that the body experiences when ingesting alcohol (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; Kurtz, 2002). However, the disease concept of alcoholism is little known among commoners and specialists as well. The interviews revealed the perceptions of the disease of alcoholism when AA first came to Romania, as well as the ones in the present.

It seems that in 1991 when the first AA group from Romania was established, little information about the disease concept of alcoholism was available. This shortage was reported to both commoners and professionals and affected those who suffered from alcoholism in terms of a lack of treatment options. The interviews revealed the mindset regarding alcohol abuse and dependence since most people thought that alcoholism was a moral weakness, a vice or a sin. In addition, people had no information about AA.

„When I first came to AA only my physician knew about AA. Until he suggests I should go to AA, I had no idea about its existence. People at the time knew

nothing about AA and alcoholism was a taboo” (Leon, 59 years old, 28 years in AA, Bucharest)

Despite this situation, AA members were struggling to disseminate the AA message.

„People knew little or nothing about AA at the time although AA leaflets were spread in trams or other public places, and that situation is no different than now. About alcoholism, few people knew that it was a disease.” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA, Timisoara)

Small changes in people’s perceptions towards AA and alcoholism can be noticed today according to early AA members and founders.

„I can notice a small change since people became more informed but most of them have that information from movies; they think AA members stand in a circle and share about their drinking and this is it” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA, Timisoara)

However, the situation is far from ideal since both healthcare and religious institutions are still reluctant in building strong relationships of trust and cooperation with AA.

„I have noticed that quite many AA participants find out about AA not from professionals, but on their own through online resources. There are still addiction specialists who do not suggest those suffering from alcoholism attend AA meetings and other specialists who have no idea that there are AA meetings available in Romania. I think this is due to people's mindset regarding alcohol dependence and lack of information.” (Sandu, 68 years old, 28 years in AA, Bucharest)

4. Conclusions and discussions

While research on AA in Romania is just getting started (Bulumac, 2022), this paper met its purpose and managed to unveil, on one hand, the founding moments of AA in Romania, and on the other, the barriers that stood in the way of its development. Nonetheless, results should be regarded carefully since they concern a theoretical sample, thus they cannot be generalized. Although the number of early AA members who participated in the present study is limited due to the passing or disappearance into the anonymity of some of them, the interviews have been proven to be of great importance since they allowed a glimpse into the experiences and efforts of early AA members to found the first AA mutual-help groups and to build the fellowship. In addition, the interviews unveiled how the AA message was disseminated in Romania, as well as how AA managed to create relationships with existing religious and healthcare institutions. Archival research was also useful since it completed and confirmed the data from the interviews. Among the difficulties that emerged while conducting the study, worth noting, on one hand, the AA anonymity principle which hindered access within AA, and, on

the other, the difficulty of identifying and contacting the early AA members. Yet, the open and friendly attitude of Romanian AA representatives and that of the participants facilitated this research. Bottom line, this study was able to fill a gap in the AA literature, since no previous studies are addressing the founding moments of AA in Romania and may constitute the basis for further research into the Romanian AA community. The significance and validity of this study are sustained by the fact that the study was performed within AA and is based on both interviews with early AA members as participants, as well as on archival research, which confirmed the data from the interviews.

Although the foundation of AA has faced barriers such as the communist regime, people's and professionals' reluctance towards AA and poor cooperation with healthcare and religious institutions, its development was possible with the support of open-minded professionals and religious representatives. However, AA's development in Romania is still conditioned by the society's mindset towards alcohol consumption and alcoholism, which is still perceived as a vice, a moral weakness of the individual or even as a sin, not as a disease. In this context, we suggest building trust and cooperation between social work practitioners, mental health specialists, religious representatives and AA to better tailor interventions and advise clients on their options, as well as the order to disseminate the AA message. Hence, research on the lack of knowledge on alcoholism, AA and the 12 Steps Program among social workers, addiction specialists, religious representatives and physicians is essential and would improve treatment outcomes. In this regard, the inclusion of training programs across disciplines with special addiction units is also essential. Results suggest that AA's development in Romania was slow due to the political context, lack of information and professionals' reluctance to support AA. In addition, there is a need to build strong relationships with professionals in the area of substance abuse, social work and religious institutions to facilitate recovery for those who suffer from alcoholism.

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Annexes

Table I. Data on the identification of early AA members participating in the study (Bucharest, 2022)

Name	Age (years)	Sobriety (years. months)	Time in AA (years)	Residential environment
Catalin	58	21	21	Bucharest
Dan	52	28	29	Bucharest
Leon	59	28	28	Bucharest
Marius	65	28	28	Bucharest
Sandu	68	28	28	Bucharest
Stan	63	24	29	Timisoara
Valeriu	75	24	24	Bucharest

Table II. Final themes and theoretical codes

Theme	Example quote
<i>AA's founding moments in Romania</i>	
Timisoara	<i>„The foundation of AA in Romania was a late and difficult one due to the political context at the time and the restrictions that came as a result of the communist regime” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA)</i>
Bucharest	<i>„In 1993 the first AA group from Bucharest was established. Among pioneers there were Petrică and Dr. Doina Constantinescu who supported AA from the beginning and provided a location for the AA meetings within the 8th Section of the Clinical Psychiatric Hospital Prof. Dr. Alexandru Obregia.” (Marius, 65 years old, 28 years in AA)</i>
<i>AA's development in Romania</i>	
Timisoara	<i>“AA's development was fulminating in Romania.” (Stan, 63 years old, 29 years in AA)</i>
Bucharest	<i>“First years of AA's development were quite difficult in Bucharest since there were times we had no location for holding an AA meeting. We had to support each other and adapt to maintain sobriety.” (Sandu, 68 years old, 28 years in AA, Bucharest)</i>
<i>AA's relationship with professionals</i>	
Healthcare institutions	<i>“There is still reluctance among professionals towards AA and its activity, but there are specialists who know what AA is and does and they are the ones we cooperate with.” (Catalin, 58 years old, 21 years in AA, Bucharest)</i>
Religious institutions	<i>“It took time to create cooperation relationships with religious institutions due to the mindset regarding alcoholism and AA. However, in the present AA is better known among religious representatives and some support AA.” (Dan, 52 years old, 29 years in AA, Bucharest)</i>
<i>Perceptions of the disease of alcoholism</i>	

Theme	Example quote
Then	"The general opinion at that time was that alcoholism is a moral weakness, a vice or a sin."(Valeriu, 75 years old, 24 years in AA, Bucharest)
Now	"There is still a need to educate people and specialists regarding alcoholism since approaches towards this disease are still inappropriate in different environments. There is still a lack of information on alcoholism and AA." (Geanina, 54 years old, single, 12 years in AA and 3 years participating in the women-only AA group)

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PROCESS OF INTEGRATING ADOLESCENTS INTO DRUG DISTRIBUTION AND SALES NETWORKS. CASE STUDY IN ABIDJAN

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Abstract: The objective of the study is to analyse the causes of the integration of adolescents into various drug distribution and sales networks in the area of the city of Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. Young people are looking for survival strategies from a young age, aiming at the same time to integrate socially and to be accepted by peer groups or mature people. The field research focused on a theoretical sample of 61 young people and questionnaires and interview guides were applied to them. From the field research we were able to ascertain the extent of criminal activities within the drug distribution networks. All these realities start from the economic and social difficulties these young people face, actually reaching social exclusion. For my part, social exclusion becomes a strong reason to trigger the revolt of these young people in a situation of social vulnerability.

Keywords: Integration, networks, drug distribution and sale, marginality, crime, social exclusion, dysfunctional family.

Résumé : L'objectif de l'étude est d'analyser les causes de l'intégration des adolescents dans les différents réseaux de distribution et de vente de médicaments dans la zone de la ville d'Abidjan en Côte d'Ivoire. Les jeunes recherchent des stratégies de survie dès leur plus jeune âge, visant à la fois à s'intégrer socialement et à se faire accepter par des groupes de pairs ou des personnes matures. La recherche de terrain a porté sur un échantillon théorique de 61 jeunes et des questionnaires et guides d'entretien leur ont été appliqués. À partir de la recherche sur le terrain, nous avons pu déterminer l'étendue des activités criminelles au sein des réseaux de distribution de drogue. Toutes ces réalités partent des difficultés économiques et sociales auxquelles ces jeunes sont confrontés, atteignant même l'exclusion sociale. Pour ma part, l'exclusion sociale devient un motif fort pour déclencher la révolte de ces jeunes en situation de vulnérabilité sociale.

Mots clés : Intégration, réseaux, distribution et vente de drogue, marginalité, criminalité, exclusion sociale, famille dysfonctionnelle.

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Rezumat: Obiectivul studiului este de a analiza cauzele integrării adolescenților în diverse rețele de distribuție și vânzare de droguri în zona orașului Abidjan din Coasta de Fildeș. Tinerii caută încă de la vârste mici strategii de supraviețuire urmărind în același timp să se integreze social și să fie acceptați de grupurile de egali sau de către persoanele mature. Cercetarea de teren s-a concentrat pe un eșantion teoretic de 61 de tineri iar acestora li s-au aplicat chestionare și ghiduri de interviu. Din cercetarea de teren am putut constata amploarea activităților delincvente din cadrul rețelelor de distribuție a drogurilor. Toate aceste realități pleacă de la dificultățile economice și sociale de care se lovesc acești tineri ajungându-se de fapt la excludere socială. La rândul ei excluderea socială devine un motiv puternic pentru a se declanșa revolta acestor tineri aflați în situație de vulnerabilitate socială.

Cuvinte cheie: Integrare, rețele, distribuție și vânzare de droguri, marginalitate, criminalitate, excluziune socială, familie disfuncțională.

1. Introduction

The issue of drug trafficking among adolescents is the subject of multidisciplinary research in the scientific world. Proof of this is the North American school that produces abundant literature on drug trafficking. For this school, the fragility of legal norms is put explains the trajectories of drug use and trafficking among adolescents (Cousineau et al., 2000; Bertrand et al, 2007). This weakness in legal standards is a factor in the integration and reinforcement of the trafficking of adolescents in drugs since family dissensions are triggers for drug use or trafficking. In addition, it is the family environment that plays an important role in the conduct of social deviance, Tremblay et al., (2007). Other factors such as family crises, disunions between parents, and siblings, death of parents, and blended and single-parent family environments lead to the adoption of problematic drug trafficking and use behaviours (Barnes, 1986; Schiray, 2001; Kroubo, 2013; Youf, 2012). Socio-environmental, economic, political and institutional factors are highlighted as triggers for drug use and trafficking among adolescents.

For example, Cusson (1998) notes that gang and drug addiction have a common causality. According to him, most habitual offenders take drugs and most of the addicts known to the specialized services have committed shoplifting, burglary, robbery and other assault. The author believes that both drug addicts and offenders come from disorganized families, both of whom have had to endure irresponsible parents, deviant peers, frequent school misses and poor academic performance. In addition to the literature on the explanatory factors of delinquency and drug addiction, other studies have focused specifically on the relationship that may exist between drug use and the development of delinquency. Matray (2013) credits the drug market with a prominent role in the evolution of gangs. According to him, gang dynamics have changed in response to their ambivalent relationship with drugs. Initially, drug users and gangs have moved from social institutions to primarily economic structures. Violence would then have become a transactional tool in the service of drug-related profit. This evolution of the place of drugs in gang activities is a factor explaining the rise in violence, not related to drug use but to the struggle for control of the trafficking market describes the involvement of

gang members in drug trafficking, noting the place of gang members (trafficking) in all gang activities. The author notes that involvement in the sale of narcotics is not a mandatory activity inherent in gang membership. However, she is present in the gang and represents an important source of income for those who take part. Moreover, for the author, the sale of drugs as a criminal activity of gangs is equally accompanied by drug use. Duprez & Kokoreff (2000) observed that the nature, degree and forms of the link between drugs and delinquency are strongly differentiated according to the products. While most small cannabis users are supposed to participate in resale activities, in addition to engaging in public disorder, heroin users, sometimes touts or dealers, more often sellers, are forced to finance their consumption to daily delinquency. It is in this context that Barre et al. (2001) analysed the differences between users (simple users, user-dealer, user-offender, user-dealer-offender) and offenders (seller, seller-delinquent, simple offender) to verify whether, on average, users have more implications, for delinquency than non-users, and on the other hand, what is the weight of the accusations concerning users in all the accused. The author observes that users-offenders represent 14% of the population and 28% of those involved. It concluded that offenders were low drug users and that drug-using offenders were more likely to be delinquent than non-users. In light of the analysis of police activity data, the author believes that the thesis that drug users are more often delinquents would be confirmed.

Cohen et al. (1999) seek to be more specific by surveying the relationship between delinquency and drug use, to examine the more direct effects of drug use in the vicinity of the time of the commission of the offence. The analyses covered arrests relating to offences against the person (murder, homicide, rape, aggravated and simple assault), acquisitive offences (robbery with violence and burglary), theft and property offences (vehicle theft, fraud, concealment), drug offences (possession, production, trafficking) and public order offences (prostitution, gambling, nuisance) as well as the results of heroin screening tests, cocaine and phencyclidine (PCP). The data estimate crimes committed at various times, including when people are under the influence and when they are sober. The main results show that heroin and cocaine have mainly inhibitory effects on delinquency. Cessation periods with withdrawal symptoms for users of cocaine and mainly in the form of crack cocaine have aggravating effects on acquisitive delinquency. PCP is the drug that has the greatest aggravating effects on delinquent behaviour, including violent offences. Prevalence studies suggest a link between substance use and violence, particularly among young people. Indeed, numerous studies conducted with a youth population known to have committed acts of violence have reported high rates of drug use among these young people. Conversely, studies of young consumers have also indicated that they are regularly involved in situations of violence.

Other studies focusing on specific subpopulations of youth have found that substance use and violent behaviour are frequently recorded in the same individuals (Cousineau et al., 2000). Continuing this logic, a study by Ellickson et

al. (1997) indicates that adolescents known to have committed violent acts were ten times more likely to be involved in drug trafficking than those who did not have a history of violence. For perpetrators, the greater and more repeated the violence, the greater the involvement in the sale of drugs. So there seems to be some link between these two activities. This link is even more pronounced in certain subgroups of individuals. The leaders of these illegal groups, wanting to maintain their reputation with their colleagues and their company in a defined territory, have every interest in surrounding themselves with strong people with fiery temperaments who do not hesitate to institute a regime of terror when it can serve the causes of the company (Brochu, 2006).

Conceptual models are likely to be used to explain the simultaneous presence of violence and drug use in several individuals. The most classic and developed is the tripartite model developed by Goldstein (1985). This model is based on the different aspects of the role of drugs in the criminal act: the psychopharmacological aspect or the role of intoxication, the economic-compulsive aspect or the role of dependence and the systemic aspect of the role of illicit drug distribution. Based, among other things, on the high prevalence rates of psychoactive substance use reported by individuals who committed violent acts in the hours preceding the assault, the psychopharmacological model postulates that there is a causal relationship between psychoactive substance use and violence. The nature of this relationship lies in the effect that the product consumed has on the individual. This effect is at the origin of the criminal act that would not have taken place otherwise.

As for the European School, the studies show that the weakening of social ties promotes social exclusion. Social disqualification and disaffiliation are thus considered by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs to have a direct link with dissociability. In this perspective, drug trafficking and use are the expressions of survival of a (socio-economic) reality considered too difficult (Dubar, 2010).

In Côte d'Ivoire, some authors such as (Brou, 2005; article BBC, 2021) focus on the circulation of drugs, the disintegration of habitats, and family and institutional factors as a factor in drug use and trafficking. This juvenile drug trafficking highlights two dimensions of trafficking. The first dimension places the adolescent in the position of the object of trafficking. Here, the individual is the applicant, that is to say, a drug user. The second dimension presents the individual as the subject of trafficking. It is the individual who possesses, transports, distributes or sells the drug. It is two dimensions that highlight the circulation and marketing of drugs.

This phenomenon is a real endemic not only because of the quality of the population of individual users but especially because of seizures and the presence of smoking rooms in the majority of Abidjan municipalities and cities in the interior are of concern. According to the Interministerial Committee for the Fight against Drugs (CNAD 2011), 2891 individuals, including 1974 Ivorians, or 68.28% and 917 of other nationalities, or 31.72% were referred. Among them are 59% young people (15-35 years old with a predominance of young people aged between 15-18

years) at the national level. According to current statistical data from the Blue Cross (2012-2017), 80% of drug-dependent patients are between 10 and 17 years old. According to the Directorate of the Police of Narcotics and Drugs, in 2014, 1466 individual drug users including 440 young people or 30% of young people aged 20 and 15 years were arrested. With regard to the *Direction de la mutualité et des œuvres scolaires* (DMOS) (2016-2017), there is a presence of young traffickers and drug users in the majority of schools in Abidjan; San-pédro; Abengourou etc. The average age of the pupils concerned is 15 years, which is worrying for the future of these young people.

From the above, it should be noted that most young people who are involved in drug distribution and sales have themselves been victims of violence and social exclusion. Beyond this fact, cultural factors are evoked in the explanation of the emergence and expression of violence. These are the loss of identity or cultural alienation, the lack of respect and recognition of cultural specificity and especially religious ones, socio-economic inequalities. The appearance of the phenomenon is therefore linked to several causes, the first of which is the failure of the basic (family) framework. The family unit is the first circle within which the child's life unfolds. However, in the case of adolescents who join drug distribution and sales networks, it is clear that their homes of origin are unable to provide them with adequate supervision. Thus, socio-political conflicts with their perverse effects offer young people the opportunity to strengthen their capacity for harm and accentuate their immorality (Essis, 2007).

Several studies have been done on the link between drugs and crime. This previous work has led to a better understanding of the phenomenon and to establish a relationship between drug use and delinquency. However, these studies tell us less about the link between the integration process of adolescents and the difficulties encountered during their life trajectories. Indeed, even if these writings evoke the drug-crime relationship in a global context, it should be noted that the relationships maintained by adolescents integrating drug networks in an Ivorian context are not taken into account by previous work. The phenomenon of drug integration and distribution among adolescents is subject to a perfect organization that follows a path that begins with the drug and ends there. What is the relationship between the process of drug integration and distribution and the social context experienced?

2. Objective and hypothesis

The objective of this study is to understand the ends, and the means of marginal activities according to the social contexts experienced. To achieve this objective, the following hypothesis has been formulated: about their experiences, the integration or drug distribution behaviours adopted by adolescents in urban areas are variously the expression of intentions sought such as the search for means for survival, proof of the capacity for domination and acceptance by others as well as revenge.

3. Reference theory

We have favoured the theory of social exclusion (Merton, 1938). According to this theory, social exclusion is perceived as a profound mark of dysfunction in society, taking a multiplicity of forms and characterized by a temporal process. For example, early family breakdown and childhood abuse frequently lead to social exclusion. This is why it is better to talk and reflect on social exclusion in the plural.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Field of study, Survey population and survey sample

Our investigation was conducted in the REMAR (Rehabilitation of Marginals) centres in Abidjan. The choice of this centre is explained by its mission to provide psychosocial care through rehabilitation or rehabilitation and reorientation of individual drug addicts. At REMAR, some teenagers use drugs and supervisors, many of whom are former users. For us, former users and young users have frequented trafficking networks and drug use. With them, we believe we can obtain answers related to the process of integration of trafficking and consumption networks, especially through the triggers and motivations of adolescents. The study population was composed of adolescents aged between 10 and 21 years chosen using the reasoned choice sampling technique supplemented by the quota method. The adolescents selected for the study should all be volunteers, and therefore, give their consent to participate in the study. Thus, our sample consists of 61 teenagers.

4.2. Research Methods, Collection Techniques and Data Analysis Methods

The present research included two approaches: quantitative and qualitative (see Cresswell & Plano, 2011). To these we added the content analysis. Considering the novelty of the studied theme, we decided that the quantitative analysis should be primarily descriptive and that we use contingency tests where appropriate. If we refer to the qualitative part of the research, we extracted from the interviews a series of answers that we considered relevant and we also resorted to the analysis of some personal files (the purpose being to decipher the discourse structures which in many cases were difficult to decrypt). In all situations, the interviewed persons signed a protocol ensuring the confidentiality of their answers and no personal data, e-mail addresses, etc. were requested. Data processing was done with Microsoft Excel and SPSS (version 20).

5. Research results

The results of the field survey revolve around the description of the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks. And then the analysis of the causes of integration about the social conditions experienced.

5.1. Description of the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks

This description presents a similar socio-demographic profile that takes into account age, age of entry into violence, level of education, nature of entry into the drug distribution network, and adolescents' perception of the offending guardian within the drug distribution network.

Table 1. Distribution of adolescents surveyed by age group

Age categories	Frequency	Per cent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
[8-12 [years	1	1.6	1.7	1.7
[12-15 [years	12	19.7	20	21.7
[15-18 [years	38	62.3	63.3	85.0
[18-21 [years	9	14.8	15	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing system	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

Taking into account the methodological limitations related to the mode of choice of this sample of adolescents/young people integrating drug distribution networks, such a table suggests that individuals whose age varies between 12 and 18 years constitute 82% of adolescents involved in the distribution and sale of drugs. This means that beyond this age, we can wonder what becomes of them in society. Do they integrate into society professionally, or become chronic or even careerist offenders? Although the age group between 12 and 18 years of age constitute the modal class of adolescents involved in drug distribution networks, it becomes important to know the age of entry of adolescents into the world of violence visible in **Table 2**:

Table 2. Age of entry into the world of violence

Age categories	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
[5-12[years	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
[12-15[years	40	65.6	65.6	68.9
[15-18[years	19	31.1	31.1	100
Total	61	100	100	

The statistical distribution indicates that the adolescents from our sample - involved in drug distribution and sales networks - have experienced entrance in this violent environment in a great proportion between the ages of 12 and 15. This proportion represents 65.6% of the distribution. Based on the data contained in the statistical table, it can be assumed that 96.77% of adolescents have experienced a violent environment between the ages of 12 and 17. This reflects the early onset of

violence among adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks. What about their level of education? The results are in the next table:

Table 3. Distribution of adolescents by educational level

Level of education	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Illiterate	6	9.8	10	10
Primary School	30	49.2	50	60
Lower secondary school (Grades 7-9)	10	16.4	16.7	76.7
Upper secondary school (Grades 10-12)	3	4.9	5	81.7
Quranic school	11	18	18.3	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing system	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

Regarding their level of education, it should be noted that most young people reported not completing primary education (49.2%), while 21.3% said they had interrupted their education in the secondary cycle (4th and 3rd grades). 9.8% are illiterate and 18.0% have attended Quranic school. The analysis of Table 3 shows that the majority of adolescents who are members of drug distribution networks, 70.5% have received education during their life course, while only 27.8% have not received or have not been educated. Among this group of students, those enrolled in the first cycle of secondary education 16.4% are more involved than those in the second cycle of secondary education (4.9%). Our observations based on these results led us to investigate the nature of the entry of adolescents into drug distribution networks. This reality allows for the tracing of the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks.

Table 4. Nature of entry into the drug distribution network.

Who introduced you to the network?	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Myself	19	31,1	31,1	31,1
A friend	41	67,2	67,2	98,4
Brother	1	1,6	1,6	100,0
Total	61	100,0	100,0	

The process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks informs us about the nature of adolescents' entry into these networks. The distribution clearly shows that (41: 67.2%) of adolescents have joined drug distribution and sales networks through a „friend”. These adolescents represent more than half of the distribution. The analysis of this reality raises questions about the immediate environment of the adolescent that is dominated by marginal peers whom they present here as their friends. This leads us to question the living environment of adolescents involved in drug sales and distribution networks, as follows:

Table 5. Housing type of adolescents involved in drug sales and distribution networks.

Type of housing	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Shared courtyard	49	80.3	81.7	81.7
Villa	1	1.6	1.7	83.3
Block of flats/Terraced houses	10	16.4	16.7	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing System	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

Based on the distribution, it appears that over half of the adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks live in communal⁴ courtyards, with a score of (49: 80.3%). These are precisely the types of housing with the highest human concentration (6-9 people or more), in the smallest and most unsanitary spaces. Such precarious housing types with high human concentration tend to push the young people who live in them towards the streets. On the streets, exposed to various dangers and risks, they often have no choice for self-defence and survival other than resorting to violent behaviour. Regarding the neighbourhood of origin, the situation is presented in the next Table:

Table 6. Place of origin of adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks.

Neighbourhood of origin	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Residential neighbourhood	2	3.3	3.3	3.3
Low-income/popular neighbourhood	13	21.3	21.7	25
Spontaneous/precarious neighbourhood	44	72.1	73.3	98.3
Reception centre	1	1.6	1.7	100
Total	60	98.4	100	
Missing system	1	1.6		
Total	61	100		

The neighbourhoods of origin of these young people are as follows: spontaneous/precarious neighbourhood (44: 72.1%), popular-economic neighbourhood (13: 21.3%), residential neighbourhood (2: 3.3%), and reception centre (1: 1.6%). These figures show that the concentration of those involved in drug distribution and sales networks is in the most populated neighbourhoods. However, although it is noted that high-end residential areas are hardly represented, it is more the typology of housing that is the most operative factor for analysing the municipalities of Abidjan from this point of view. Thus, the hypothesis is put forward that the most rudimentary habitats were the neighbourhoods of origin of undereducated, idle, and marginalized youth.

⁴ The urban courtyard is often defined as a habitat that reproduces the organization of the village space: the buildings are organized around a central courtyard where most of the daily activities take place.

This reality deserves special attention because within these spontaneous/precarious neighbourhoods, social relations in the Bronx⁵, graffiti, tattoos, clothing styles, as well as the adoption of a language and gestures that are specific to them, constitute identity markers that allow adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks to distinguish themselves from other social groups. In a context of instability of values and a resurgence of individualism within society, it demonstrates that young people struggle to find a model that lives up to their expectations, especially youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, these young people always recognize themselves through the image of the „gangster hero” who has risen from poverty to become a feared and respected person. This model of action promotes violence, drugs, money, and crime as the ultimate means of emancipation for oppressed populations.

A more nuanced analysis is necessary regarding the residential neighbourhoods. Indeed, the variable of the commune of origin does not discriminate finely enough about the relationship of these children to the construction of their potential for violence. It is necessary to refer instead to the type of neighbourhood of origin within the commune, and then to the type of housing within that neighbourhood. The spontaneous and economically popular neighbourhoods are the ones that provide the battalion of young people involved in drug distribution and sales networks, representing 72.1% and 21.3% respectively. This relationship is strong with a coefficient of contingency = 0.60.

Why is this so? Our explanatory hypothesis appears to lie in the fact that these neighbourhoods are aggressively constructed with poor-quality buildings, making them unattractive and not valued by residents or any outside visitors. While it is true that not all adolescents involved in drug distribution and sales networks come from problematic neighbourhoods, the vast majority are associated with these neighbourhoods.

The delinquent activities are coordinated by some so-called tutors/old fathers. For us is important how were characterized thus 'tutors' by young people recruited into delinquent networks. The answer can be seen in the following table:

Table 7. Perception of Adolescents Regarding the Role of the Delinquency Tutor in Drug Distribution Networks

The character of the tutor	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Attentive	6	9.8	9.8	9.8
Affectionate	2	3.3	3.3	13.1
Protective	26	42.6	42.6	55.7
Our creditor (he lends us money).	27	44.3	44.3	100
Total	61	100	100	

According to **Table 7**, our survey participants justify their relationship with the delinquency tutor as being a creditor ('he lends us money') and this

⁵ An area, a neighborhood, a place that exhibits urban decay and where unemployment, insecurity, crime, delinquency, drugs, and other ills prevail.

represents (27: 44.3%) of the distribution. For them, ‘the old father’ lends them money to allow them to meet their existential needs. In addition, in this relationship, ‘the old father’ goes as far as protecting them against any unpleasant situations: 26 responses on this subject were reported during the survey and this represents (42.6%) of our distribution. The purpose of identification and belonging to the distribution network is not only to produce violence and the lure of profit. Integration into the group allows for its protection, but also the creation of social ties (solidarity, emotional and financial support). The group is a recreation of a familial order, with a „father” and „brothers”, elders, and role models.

5.2. Analysis of the causes of integration about the experienced social conditions

Another issue that followed in our research was the analysis of causes of social integrations in the specific delinquent networks. As the respective causes are very complex, we decided to refer briefly to two of them: the family of origin (and their socio-cultural environment), the social exclusion and the role of places dedicated to consumption (smoking dens).

5.2.1. Family environment and adolescent integration

Table 8. Marital status of adolescents involved in drug distribution networks.

The character of the tutor	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Close-knit families	12	19.7	19.7	19.7
Single-parent broken families	15	24.6	24.6	44.3
Blended broken families	20	32.8	32.8	77
Other (homeless)	14	23.0	23.0	100
Total	61	100,0	100	

Regarding the marital status of their parents, the survey reveals that 57.4% come from broken families, compared to 19.7% from intact families. However, 23.0% are without a family, meaning they are on the streets. This may lead us to say that contrary to what many authors, NGOs, and international institutions think and advocate for, family imbalances are not the primary factor explaining the marginalization of young people in urban environments.

The sociocultural and economic environment from which they originate is the first factor in structuring their paths towards integration into drug distribution and sales networks. Strong pressures are exerted on certain young people to engage in violence within the narrow family circle of the adolescent. These pressures are built around perceptions associated with children and youth in certain communities and are driven by the idea that the child is the primary „wealth” of their family. In fact, in pre-colonial village economies, the need for domestic labour to accompany parents in daily activities led some communities to value multi-nativity within couples and the contracting of polygamous unions within lineages. The change in the political economy of the family did not necessarily lead to the

abandonment of these perceptions associated with the child as a labour force capable of contributing to the subsistence of the family. For most of the surveyed children from the Abobo municipality, for example, the role of economic resource provider assigned to children remains prevalent. Mrs. H.F. a mother met at the COM during visits to detainees, expressed herself as follows:

„Women [...], our sisters there, exploit their children. They see the immediate benefit; the five or ten francs they earn is what they see [...]. There is no future, and this is also a cause. And then our fathers, who marry multiple women: polygamy. The man doesn't work, or he doesn't have a stable job, and he has four wives and each of these wives has at least five or six children. And each of these women, to take care of their children [...], often engage in small trade. How can these children not become [violent] because they want to be like children from good families” Moussa, encountered at the COM, said, „In any case, I did not join the rebellion because I liked it. No, it's because I was working for my parents. What I needed to give them, so they could meet their needs, I could not give.”

Thus, deprived populations construct their resilience based on survival strategies that place a significant emphasis on children and their potential for violence production. This setting clearly shows that families live in conditions of strong social despair, due to a lack of alternative economic opportunities in an informal sector that lacks diversity. A significant part of adults builds their subsistence strategies around contracting numerous marital unions, with women being called upon to seek resources through local trading activities to provide for the family. Due to the lack of assistance from men, who are heavily affected by unemployment, many women are thus abandoned and forced to assume alone the educational and food-related responsibilities for their children. Furthermore, as the bulk of formal economic activity requires relocation from the place of residence, children often find themselves without parental supervision and thus resort to forming their groups in the street.

Some parents rely on their children to bring back „on their means” enough to satisfy the needs of their younger siblings, and children are urgently invited to „ fend for themselves” to help the family, as in the case of K. Yaya:

„Parents relying on their children to bring back, 'by their means,' what is needed to satisfy the needs of their younger siblings, children are urgently invited to 'figure it out' to help the family. Like the case of K. Yaya: 'It's me who hustles so that my mom can eat a little, she is disabled so she cannot move, my dad too [silence] he passed away, so now I can't look for anything, my uncles also don't care, so being a minor at the COM where I am now is a waste of time. I want to leave to take care of my mom, that's it.'”

This resourcefulness is even socially valued and contrasted with the perceived lack of initiative and inability to become self-sufficient under parental guardianship attributed to young people. As a result, some girls are often forced

into prostitution or risky street trading at a very young age, while a significant number of boys join violent gangs. The latter are regularly mobilized as violent combatants in brutal battles between transport unions or as „small-time thugs” selling drugs for smokehouse owners who are one of their privileged customer bases.

„When the head of the household is unable to provide for his children's daily bread, the children are called upon to fend for themselves. Some become hustlers, some load cars, some join unions... Each one fights to find their daily bread. For these children who have no education, no guidance... Whatever they can get their hands on, they will take it: whether it's drug dealers, alcohol vendors... But we are all guilty at this level.” These are the words of Mr Séka, a resident of Akéikoi in Abobo.

An important characteristic of the family of origin of these young people is the reason for which the family was deprived/broken. Some causes are in the next table:

Table 9. The origin of familial dissociation*.

The situation in the family	Frequency
Separation of parents	28
Death of one parent	15
Lack of knowledge of the existence of parents (mother/father)	1
Total	44

*only the valid answers

Regarding this statistical distribution, it should be noted that the family environment of these adolescents who are involved in drug distribution and sales networks is marked by the separation of parents with a score of 28 from 44 cases. However, there is also the death of a parent (mother/father) which contributes to a non-negligible proportion of adolescent integration into the drug distribution and sales process (15 cases).

The analysis of these results shows that the integration of adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks is part of a struggle against family poverty. Indeed, after the 2011 political-military crisis, Côte d'Ivoire is in a shining economic situation, with a growth rate of 8%, but not all social categories seem to be receiving the dividends. As demonstrated by a survey on household income in Côte d'Ivoire (INS-ENV, 2015), poverty has increased with the post-electoral crisis of 2010-2011. The poverty rate is estimated at 46%. The field survey shows that in neighbourhoods of the Abidjan agglomeration, where families are plagued by poverty and unemployment, there is deficient supervision of children. These children, generally left to their own devices, will in most cases join the drug distribution and sales networks in the neighbourhood that can enable them to meet the needs of money and food that parents cannot offer them.

Investigations show that the integration of adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks is essentially to cope with family poverty. They

join these networks and the income from the marginal activities they carry out, therefore, benefits the whole family, including food, healthcare, and children's education, as evidenced by the statements of the adolescents interviewed at REMAR -Y. S. (16 years old):

„Before, it was difficult to have enough to eat at home, but today the work I do allows me to give money to the family to buy food” (K.B, 15 years old) „We are forced to sell drugs to 'earn for ourselves' [to have enough to survive]. We know ourselves that it's not good, but in 'this country' it's every man for himself” (Y.S, 16 years old).

„When I sell drugs, I send the money home without saying where I got it from, but I know that everyone knows 'what it's about' [they have an idea of the source]. But they 'don't ask, so they don't get involved' [they don't dare ask so they don't feel like accomplices], because the work we do is not too good” (Z.T., 17 years old).

In light of the above, we can say that families experiencing economic and social difficulties are an important risk factor associated with adolescent involvement in drug networks. It is in these families that gangs recruit most of their members. The survey also reveals that many adolescents consider the marginal activities they engage in as their work and therefore legitimate, as illustrated by the statements of the interviewees above.

5.2.2. A social exclusion that leads to the integration of adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks.

The survey results indicate that most adolescents come from a difficult childhood. They have not experienced childhood, and as a result, have not received love, family protection, or learned how to live harmoniously. Typically, these children come from poor families, have limited access to education, and have had to drop out of school early due to their parent's lack of financial means. They are therefore largely unschooled and spend much of their time in drug trafficking networks within the neighbourhoods where they live. Here, they often receive a criminal education. These children survive hunger, thirst, dangerous work, and police harassment thanks to their cognitive skills. These young people do not experience a real childhood or family and consider themselves excluded from society. In this regard, we have gathered the following testimonies:

„We were not born 'drug addicts', we became so because we did not have the chance to go far in school and to be well-educated like other children. No one wants us anymore, so we do with our lives as we please.” (S.P, 18 years old)

„We saw our friends with nice mobile phones, beautiful clothes, but we couldn't have them too, so we decided to look for money to pay for ourselves, that's why we sell drugs in smoking rooms” (K.T, 16 years old).

These statements reflect the vulnerability of these children, who are desperate in life and develop anti-values. We are witnessing a radical and justified use of the integration of adolescents into drug distribution networks. As evidenced by the statements of these smoking den leaders

„The police try to kill us without understanding us, while it is because we have nothing to live well that we become drug dealers. And besides, we are not afraid of dying [getting caught], because we have nothing to lose, and since we know that we can be killed at any time, we also maintain our involvement in drug distribution to the fullest. When we get caught, we pay our ransom to be free, or the babatché pays for us and sets us free.” (H.M, 17 years old)

„We didn't go to school. Since we were young, we've been in poverty, and people do nothing for us [without the state coming to our aid]. 'Since we started selling drugs, everyone is interested in us, we've become stars (laughs)'” (F.S., 18 years old).

The statements of these young people reflect a strong sense of exclusion from the so-called 'normal' society. The distribution and integration of adolescents into violent groups then appear as a social revolt, a response to the suffering they experience and a characteristic of poor integration.

This perception of injustice, indifference, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion explains the integration of adolescents into drug distribution networks. They accuse the social system of not giving all children an equal chance to succeed. The drug trafficking networks in which they become involved are nothing but an expression of discontent, frustration, and even a rejection of the pro-social values they no longer believe in.

5.2.3. Role of smoking dens in the process of integration and distribution of drugs among adolescents.

Young people have a clear representation of places of consumption (dense smoking) as shown in the following graph:

The data from **Figure 1** informs us about the role that smoking rooms could play in the development of gang phenomena (construction of criminal careers) among adolescents. It is observed that 15% of gang members perceive the smoking room as a place for gathering and planning attack strategies. The smoking room serves as a refuge for 35% of these adolescents, and for 50% of those surveyed, it is a place for drug consumption.

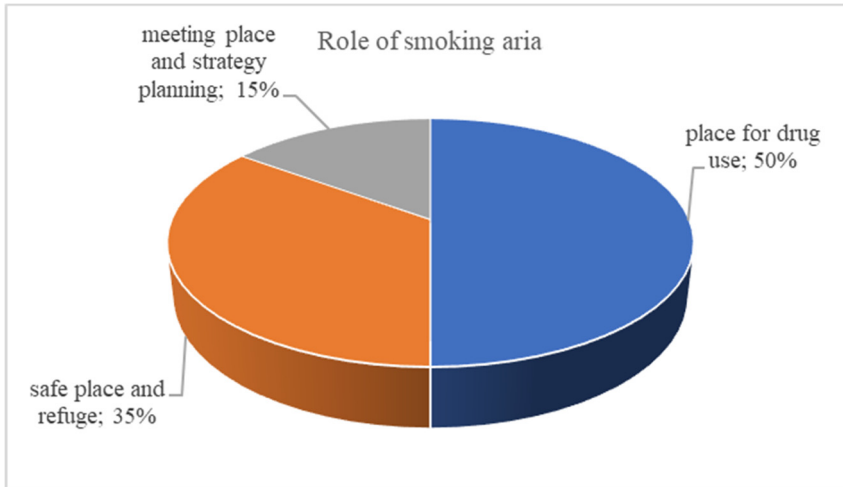


Figure 1. Perception of the smoking area by the young people

Thus, it can be deduced from the observation of this graph that smoking rooms contribute to exacerbating the phenomenon of youth involvement in gangs. As a place designed for drug sales and consumption, the smoking room is used for other purposes by young people. In addition to providing the necessary dose of drugs for them to hit the streets, the smoking room also serves as a laboratory for them. This is the perfect place where adolescents meet before any attack. It is in the smoking rooms where all the strategies and target areas for attacks are planned. The smoking room offers them a sense of security, allowing young people to discuss freely about their intended targets and potential victims. They take stock of past actions and inventory the weapons they have at their disposal. They are well organized. Some are tasked with posing as beggars to distract the intended victim, while others are specifically responsible for attacking with weapons. Generally, the leader of the group always carries a firearm. The supply of weapons is obtained from the smoking room. This is because enough weapons, especially small calibre firearms and bladed weapons, circulate in these places.

In this context, K.B., an influential member of the young „microbes” of Abobo, states:

„In the smokehouse, we meet to plan our attacks. Roles are assigned and everyone knows their role. There, we are taught solidarity within the group. We do not act randomly. We respect the instructions of the leader. The motto is 'One for all and all for one'. If you act randomly and when there is a 'remba' (a turning point), you manage alone. The smokehouse is our HQ, the rear base.”

In addition to its role as a gathering and planning spot for attacks, the smoking room also serves as a refuge for adolescent gang members. As the smoking room is considered an outlaw place and offers a sense of security, these young

people will take refuge there after committing various offences. They even go as far as sleeping there, waiting for a period of calm before resurfacing.

The statements of Commissioner K. Y., Director General of the National Police, shed light on this issue:

„The microbes who are active in Abobo are mostly minors aged 10 and above. They are usually armed with bladed weapons and find refuge in the smoking rooms created during the post-election crisis... But, what is important to note is that as soon as they take their dose in the smoking rooms, they have machetes, axes that they use to attack.”

In summary, it should be noted that the role played by the fumoir for young people is not negligible. The fumoir serves as a place for planning, refuge, and drug consumption. As such, it plays an active role in the delinquent activities of gangs.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The exploratory study shows that the process of integrating adolescents into drug distribution and sales networks is a prevalent reality of criminal activity in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire. It is the result of vulnerable individuals whose age ranges from approximately 10 to 20 years old, although it is not uncommon for both younger and older individuals to participate in the actions of these criminal networks. These adolescents, victims of delicate family conditions, precariousness, illiteracy, and dropping out of school, integrate into drug trafficking networks, spontaneously and in impressive numbers frequenting the smoking dens and often, under the influence of these drugs, violently attack passers-by whom they dispossess of their belongings.

The exploratory survey results show that the integration of adolescents into drug networks is linked to the economic destitution of families, which leads children to engage in trafficking to meet their basic needs. This antisocial behaviour is also the result of young people who denounce through their reprehensible actions an exclusion from society at large. Drug distribution is thus also an expression of the dissatisfaction of child soldiers used during the post-electoral crisis and reintegrated into civilian life without being properly re-socialized.

The study also shows that the fumoirs serve as spaces where adolescents can replenish their drug supplies for distribution. This location is the origin of the ultra-violent behaviour of the youth by exacerbating their psychopathological and social problems. Thus, criminal networks thrive thanks to a network of receivers who enable the rapid and discreet distribution of the product with impunity.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that it is mainly economic and social difficulties that lead to the exclusion of many young people, which explains their integration into drug distribution and sales networks in Abidjan. These findings are consistent with theories of exclusion, particularly Robert Merton's theory of social inequality as the source of exclusion developed in 1938, which suggests that social inequalities hinder individuals' aspirations for social success.

This form of social injustice helps us understand the emergence of rebellion against society, as seen in the children involved in drug networks whose actions are directed against society.

The results of our empirical research are similar to those of Mucchielli (2004), whose work shows that it is economic and social processes that create exclusion and contempt, which are the logical springs of violence among young people in France. It is also recognized by these authors (Jankowski, 2003; Brochu et Parent, 2005; Jones et al., 2004) that adolescents in drug networks come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Drug dealing can then be seen as the ultimate solution for economic enrichment in the eyes of young people living in precarious conditions (Hamel et al., 1998; Perrault et Bibeau, 2003; Chatterjee, 2006). Furthermore, for these authors (Perrault, 2005; Chatterjee, 2006), the pursuit of mercantile interests leads adolescents to adopt a particular mindset and code of conduct.

Studies have revealed the role of conformist peer groups and adult educators in the entrenchment of delinquent behaviour in terms of „phagocytosis” and institutional rejection (Koudou O., 1994, 1996, 1997), as well as the role of school in the emergence of delinquency in terms of differential schooling and school exclusions (Koudou O., 1993). Thus, while the family environment is key to understanding adolescent delinquent behaviour, other agents of socialization or resocialization, such as peers, school, and interactions in observation or rehabilitation institutions, should also be taken into account as close criminogenic factors, but intervening at different stages of delinquency development. De Latour (2001) examines the ghettos of the Ivory Coast and identifies the reasons why young people join gangs. She conducts her study in slums and high-risk neighbourhoods to better understand the phenomenon and observes that young people „refuse the relay of socialization through work or schooling that require money and demand time (...); they prefer risk and the immediacy of gain over effort” (De Latour, 2005, p. 151). Thus, they create a space called the „ghetto” where they can take refuge and express their singularity. The notions that emerge from the concept of the ghetto are creation, autonomy, independence, solidarity, keeping one's word, forgiveness, blood ties, friendship, and success, which are achieved through the excesses of hierarchies, affective places, and rules.”

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SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF CAREER ORIENTATION IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Delia KRECH¹

Abstract: The social dimensions of career choices represent a theme that is discussed internationally, having however only a few research in Romania. In the present article, I wish to examine to which degree social factors influence school and job-related decisions, on a sample consisting of last year's high school students from Hunedoara County. The present study is quantitative, not experimental, done by applying an online questionnaire and manipulating the results in SPSS. Association analyses and a univariate Chi-Square test have been used for testing the hypotheses. The results have indicated major differences between the level of satisfaction concerning career orientation counselling between boys and girls, 11th-grade students and 12th-grade students and the 3 high schools in which the questionnaire was done. Moreover, there is a significant statistical correlation between gender stereotypes regarding jobs and the educational path chosen by the students. An extra conclusion of the study is that career choices are not a result of an orientation process that is happening in schools, but significant influence upon such decisions belongs to the parents.

Keywords: career choices, career orientation, gender stereotypes regarding jobs.

Résumé : Les dimensions sociales des choix de carrière représentent un thème qui est discuté au niveau international, ayant cependant peu de recherches en Roumanie. Dans le présent article, je souhaite examiner dans quelle mesure les facteurs sociaux influencent les décisions relatives à l'école et à l'emploi, sur un échantillon composé d'élèves du secondaire de dernière année du Comté de Hunedoara. La présente étude est quantitative et non expérimentale, réalisée en appliquant un questionnaire en ligne et en manipulant les résultats dans SPSS. Des analyses d'association et un test Chi-Square univarié ont été utilisés pour tester les hypothèses. Les résultats ont indiqué des différences importantes entre le niveau de satisfaction concernant l'orientation professionnelle entre les garçons et les filles, entre les élèves de 11^e et élèves de 12^e et les 3 lycées dans lesquels le questionnaire a été réalisé. De plus, il existe une corrélation statistique significative entre les stéréotypes de genre concernant les emplois et le parcours scolaire choisi par les étudiants. Une conclusion supplémentaire de l'étude est que les choix de carrière ne sont pas le résultat d'un processus d'orientation qui se déroule dans les écoles, mais qu'une influence significative sur ces décisions appartient aux parents.

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Mots-clés : choix de carrière, orientation professionnelle, stéréotypes de genre concernant les emplois.

Rezumat: Dimensiunile sociale ale alegerii carierei reprezintă o temă discutată pe plan internațional, având însă puține cercetări dedicate în spațiul românesc. În prezentarea de față îmi propun să examinez în ce măsură factorii sociali ai alegerii de carieră amprentează alegerile școlare și profesionale, pe un eșantion constituit din elevi din anii terminali de liceu din județul Hunedoara. Studiul de față este unul cantitativ, non-experimental, realizat prin aplicarea online a unui chestionar și prelucrarea datelor în SPSS. Pentru testarea ipotezelor s-au folosit analize de asociere și un test Chi Square univariat. Rezultatele au indicat diferențe semnificative ale satisfacției legate de consilierea de carieră percepute, între fete și băieți, între elevii de clasa a XI-a și cei de a XII-a și între cele trei licee de proveniență. Totodată, există o corelație semnificativă statistic între nivelul stereotipurilor de gen ocupaționale și traseul educațional ales. O concluzie suplimentară a studiului este aceea că alegerea de carieră nu este rezultatul unui proces de orientare și consiliere de carieră derulat instituțional școlar, influența semnificativă în decizia cu privire la alegerile de carieră fiind cea a părinților.

Cuvinte cheie: alegere de carieră, orientare în carieră, stereotipuri de gen ocupaționale.

1. Short literature synthesis

The problem of student career orientation remains an incredibly complex social issue in which multiple variables intervene: the characteristics of the student's family, the competence of the school counsellors, gender distribution of teachers, fluid situations (hardly predictable) on the job market, informational flow mediated by the internet etc. In this context, good counselling of the students is a premise for professional success, especially if the recommendations are aligned with the student's talents. For Dumitru (2008, p. 204) the respective counselling starts with school and professional counselling, which is only then to be followed by career counselling. If on the first level, the identification of a possible profession is relatively static and directly related to the job market, on the second level the focus is on the path that will be chosen to fulfil legitimate aspirations. Paraphrasing the same author, we can conclude that professional and school orientation is a momentary one, while career orientation is looking at the entire life. Career orientation requires three action directions: knowledge about yourself; knowledge about the job market; the building and realisation of the career (Dumitru, 2008, p. 206). All of these are a decisional chain which belongs to the student, but in which the role of the school counsellor can be decisive (to find the balance between intentions, aspirations and possibilities). If we refer to the theories that lay the ground for career orientation, the aforementioned author splits them into two big categories: not psychological (with the indication of external factors which intervene in the decisions) and psychological (different questionnaires and tests about interests, value and abilities). In this article I will analyse the first category trying, from a sociological perspective, to analyse the factors that are truly relevant in career decisions.

The complexity of career orientation can also be seen in the analysis of OECD concerning „career guidance”², OECD suggests some 11 important indicators, split into 3 thematical axes:

1. Exploring the future (conversations about careers, interactions with employees, visiting different jobs, practising the skills to apply for a job, short programmes based on occupation)
2. Experiencing the future (working part-time, volunteering)
3. Thinking about the future (career certainty, the ambition to follow a specific career, career alignment, the motivation to study).

About the role of career counselling, the specialists from OECD underline „The students find it easier to find a job in those education systems in which career orientation is present in schools”. The correlation is inverse: the more students participate in career orientation the lesser unemployed students are there („Career Readiness Study”³).

Without a doubt, career orientation brings individual benefits, but also social ones: it helps individuals progress in the process of studying and working, but it also contributes to the efficient functioning of the job market and social mobility (from geographic mobility to the phenomenon of „brain drain”). The more time students spend in education and the more the job market becomes more complex, the stronger become arguments for career orientation.

To position the role of career orientation more precisely we will agree, like Sultana (2017) that the respective orientation „supports individuals and groups to discover more about more, free time and studying, to take into consideration their place in the world and to plan their future. The key to this is the development of the individual and communal capacity of analysing and debate the hypotheses and the relations of power, creating networks, building solidarity and creating new and common opportunities. It empowers individuals and groups to fight in the world as it is and to imagine what it could be like. Career orientation can take various forms and is based on diverse theoretical traditions. But, in essence, it is an opportunity to study intentionally which supports individuals and groups to take into account and to reconsider work, free time and studying in the light of the new information and experiences and to act both individually and in groups as a consequence.”

Not a few are the studies that underline the persistence of gender differences concerning personal objectives and interests. For example, for the ones that are interested in STEM the gender differences are notable, although there are no (or minimal) differences based on gender concerning academic abilities. In this point we can exemplify the study coordinated by Petersen and Hyde (2014), in which it is noted that there is very little difference in academic abilities: in favour of males- some spatial abilities and qualities in leader roles; in favour of female’s verbal abilities; concerning mathematics, the respective differences were very

² <https://oecdeditoday.com/preparing-youth-for-work-what-works-career-guidance/>

³ <https://issuu.com/oecd.publishing/docs/how-youth-explore-experience-think-about-their-future>

small or non-existent. Other authors, such as Zell, Krizan and Teeter (2015) similarly describe small differences between academic abilities.

In an article, Su et al. (2009) analyse the gender differences related to professionals' interests. The authors conclude that men prefer to interact with *objects*, whereas women choose to work with people. Moreover, Hyde (2005) shows that socializing forces transmit to kindergartners ideas about the differences between boys and girls and the careers that fit both these genders. Bourdieu (1998/2017) underlines that schools, together with the church and the state, represent an agent of preserving structures that express male dominance.

Studies by OECD point out that these differences between boys and girls concerning their interests are big starting with the first years of school. The study „Drawing the Future” (2018) confirms the conclusion of Su et al.: boys prefer to work with objects and girls work with people. Another study by OECD (2019), which compares the results from PISA 2000 and PISA 2018, reveals big differences between boys and girls, aged 15, regarding the wanted professions.

The last EIGE report, from October 2020, points out some differences between genders even when discussing study areas at the university level. When we look at the adult population of Romania with finished studies, we notice an evident balance (13% females and 12.5% males), however, the differences occur when looking at the domains in which these studies were finished. Thus, our students in education, healthcare, humanities and arts are mainly female (26.8% compared to 14.8% for males). These differences are spread across the European Union as well (45% for females, compared to 22% for males). A part of these domains has low pay, a fact that is interpreted as gender segregation. On the other hand, the feminization of the education sector and the masculinization of some „peak” sectors is underlined in many studies (Nesse Network of Experts, 2009; EURYDICE, 2010; The European Commission, 2017; Han et al., 2020).

When they join the job market, women are met by the phenomenon of occupational segregation, horizontally but also vertically. Some sectors are still considered „masculine”, having higher pay compared to those considered „feminine” (OECD, 2019). The same study concludes that all these domains where women are found in a vast majority have a low economic status, which „undermines their trust and self-confidence”. Even though in many European countries career orientation already has a gender dimension, this is limited to special programmes for girls, which encourage them to follow STEM careers, with a lack of similar initiatives for boys, which would guide them toward feminized domains (education, healthcare, humanities) (EURYDICE, 2010).

An extra incentive to tackle this subject is the fact that there are relatively few studies on this theme in Romania (if we exclude the already published university courses). We can point out a study by the Institute for the Sciences of Education (2004), which underlines that the educational process (through curriculum, didactic strategies, and ways of interaction between certain agents) creates and preserves, directly and indirectly, occupational gender stereotypes. Another study (A.L.E.G., 2018) had as its purpose the identification of attitudes and

behaviours from the educational system which preserves gender stereotypes, between four European countries: Italy, Romania, Lithuania and Cyprus. The qualitative research focused on the role of schools, teachers and the curriculum in the preservation of stereotypical behaviours of students. The same study has explored the impact of gender stereotypes when making career decisions. The last gender barometer, published in 2018, proves the coexistence of four viewpoints on the gender problem, basically „four segments of the population”: „the segment of gender modernity”, „the segment of compliant traditionalism related to gender equality”, „the segment of classic traditionalism” and „the segment of parochial behaviour” (p. 16). Bucur and Miroiu express that: „women have started to challenge inequalities between genders way more in the political sphere but rarely explicitly in the family” (2018, p.169), according to the hypothesis of the „cultural gap” (Ridgeway, 2011): frequently, the economic level of a society is in no relation to perceptions about gender, these being present inside family life, where a strong resistance against the equality of the genders is manifested.

In Romania „counselling and career orientation” has a well-defined institutional in the respective legislative documentation. Thus in Annexe 2 of „The common order” M.E.C.T.S-M.M.F.P.S nr.4469/12.06.2012/ nr.1804/03.07.2012, it is specified that counselling and orientation services in the pre-university education are guaranteed by „a) School or interschool offices for psychological and pedagogical assistance, school centres for inclusive education, coordinated by County Centres for Resources and Educational Assistance (CJRAE) [see order 5555/2011]; b) school programmes specifically to the curriculum „Counselling and orientation”; c) special programmes for counselling and career orientation organized by the school institutions partnered by other state or non-state institutions”.

About these counselling offices, we must note that they have a limit of 800 students or 400 kindergartners per office. We remind however that starting with the 2021-2022 school year the number of students per counsellor was supposed to be limited to 600, respectively 300 kindergartners, but these changes were never applied (probably for financial reasons).

What are the roles of these counsellors? They must do psychological and pedagogical counselling, but also career counselling. They have to cover a complex problem, starting from the self-development domain (knowing yourself, harmony in relationships, stress control, techniques for efficient learning etc.), to promoting health and healthy life, to preventing risk behaviours (from dropping out to bullying to substance abuse), to career orientation, parent counselling, but also the counselling of other teachers.

In practice, the number of students and kindergartners assigned to such a counsellor is way above what the law specifies. At this point I wish to add that career orientation in Romania is not practised at a satisfactory level. Such activities are supposed to be part of the norm that class teachers and the school counsellor have, thus career orientation is fragmented and random.

2. Methods, participants and instruments

The questionnaire was fulfilled with the help of the Google Docs platform with juniors and seniors (11th and 12th year) from 3 high schools in Hunedoara County (to be seen in the next table). The data collection took place in February and March of 2021. The final volume of the sample was 245 students distributed as follows:

Table 1. The structure of the sample split into high schools

Highschool	Gender	Answers	Percentage
National Collegium „Iancu de Hunedoara”	Male	60	52.6
	Female	54	47.4
	Total	114	100
Pedagogical National Collegium „Regina Maria” Deva	Male	18	23.4
	Female	59	76.6
	Total	77	100
Theoretical Lyceum „Avram Iancu” Brad	Male	38	70.4
	Female	16	29.6
	Total	54	100

A part of the result of this research has been used in a research programme, that happened during the master's programme *Educational Counselling and Integration*, at the Western University from Timisoara. The objectives of the aforementioned project were much broader, in this case, we will limit ourselves to the problem of starting a career. For the present research, the following main concepts have been used:

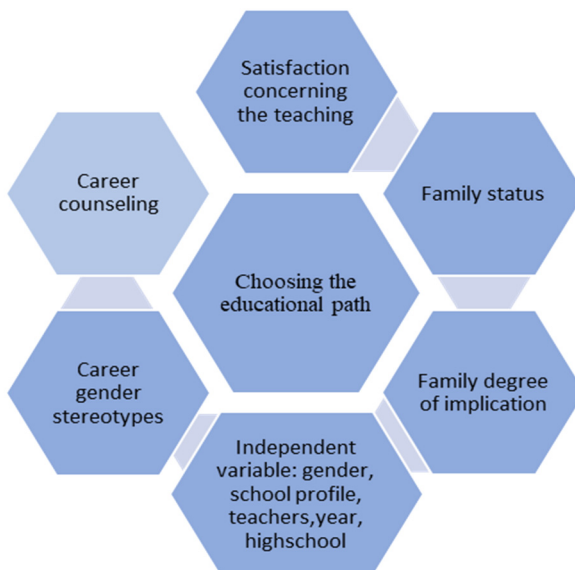


Figure 1. Choosing the educational path

From the graph, we conclude that the process of choosing a career is complex, which starts with choosing an educational path. This path must correspond to a future career, which the student represents based on direct influences (a proposed/discussed model in the family, a model proposed by the school counsellor, the model for parental control through direct implication and the family status). On the other hand, the student faces gender stereotypes in the educational environment, firstly in school path choices and later in career choices: aware or not, he will take into account these norms of social control (boys and girls have a higher probability of dedicating themselves to a traditional educational trajectory). The satisfaction concerning the teaching act is also a factor that intervenes subjectively (a significant incentive related to the reasoning of a career choice).

4. Results

For this analysis, I defined a series of variables as follows:

a. *The variable „Certain educational path” (Educsigfin) or „chosen career path”* is a variable which rises from the item through which we wanted to find out whether the students know for certain the educational path they want to follow. This variable can be defined as dichotomous or trichotomic, starting from the answers to this question which differentiates the ones that know precisely what they want to study, from the ones that are not sure yet. For the statistical analysis, we preferred a split into 3 categories (3. Yes, I know what I want to study; 2. Yes, I know the path, but I am not sure (multiple paths can be chosen); 1. I do not know the path). We point out that 8 students refused to answer this question. A positive is that 65.4% of students declared that they know precisely what they want to study, and the rest had partial or total hesitations regarding their educational path.

b. Independent variables as follows:

Level of satisfaction concerning the education they received (satisfice) – is a variable that unifies questions related to the level of education on Likert-type scales with values in the interval [1-4]: the lower the value, the greater the level of satisfaction. The following things have been put under evaluation: the teacher's work, the communication between teachers and students, features of the school, extracurricular activities, the relationship between the school and the parents, and the grading system.

The level of career stereotypes based on gender- is a statistical variable that grades the ability of boys and girls of pursuing certain educational paths. The questions addressed, for example, the increased probability of boys following technical/technological fields, same as girls supposedly have a higher probability to enter the humanities or have difficulties in entering the job market. The statistical variable has values in the interval [6,30]: the higher the value, the more pronounced the gender stereotypes (in other words there is a perception of a difference between genders regarding possible careers). For different statistical analyses, the variable has been modified (0. Low gender stereotypes, 1. High gender stereotypes).

Degree of family involvement- is a Count type variable which adds up the different types of involvements of the family regarding career orientation. The students have evaluated to what degree the family support or even controls the school activities, invest financially in extra tutoring or plays an active role in the communication with the school or with other parents. The variable takes values in the interval [1,5], where a value close to 5 signifies a strong involvement of the family. The variable can be used as a numeric continuous statistical index modified into 3 categories (1. Weak involvement, 2. Medium involvement, 3. Strong involvement).

Satisfaction concerning the effect of career counsellors is a variable with 3 possible answers (Positive effect, No effect, I don't know).

Based on the constructed variables I hypothesized and tested those hypotheses:

H1. The students have consciously chosen their career paths.

To test this hypothesis, I have applied a univariate Chi-Square test, and the results can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Univariate Chi-Square test of choosing the educational path

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual		
Yes, I know the way forward for future studies	155	79	76	Chi-Square	111.291
I know the way to go but I'm not sure	49	79	-30	df	2
I don't know the way to go	33	79	-46	Asymp. Sig.	0.000
Total	237				

As one can notice, our data are significantly different from the theoretical ones (Chi Square=111.29, df=2, p=0.00). In other words, the respondents have chosen the answers consciously (not randomly). From the residual column, we observe that the highest value matches the first option, through which the students declare that they know with certainty what path they want to follow. As we have already mentioned, more than 65% are in this situation. The hypothesis is confirmed.

H2. The satisfaction regarding teaching, the level of career stereotypes and the satisfaction regarding counselling are associated with the chosen educational path.

The crosstabulations analysis gave the results in the following table:

Table 3. The analysis of the association between the chosen educational path and satisfaction regarding teaching, career stereotypes and satisfaction regarding the school counselling

Association of the variable „Certain educational path” (Educsigfin) with the variables	χ^2	df	p
1. Satisfaction regarding the teaching	4.61	2	0.09
2. The level of career stereotypes	5.37	2	0.05
3. Satisfaction regarding school counselling	6.52	4	0.16

As one can notice from the first and last case the p limits pass the 0.05 limit, thus the hypothesis is not confirmed. For the second case, the limit $p=0.05$ is acceptable. Nonetheless, the table of frequencies is important, that is where we observe that the students with a certain educational path (even in the case of choosing multiple paths) are associated with a lower level of gender stereotypes. In other words, the ones with a known career path do not take into account gender differences when choosing a career.

The conclusion of the H2 hypothesis is only partially confirmed because *the satisfaction regarding teaching or the satisfaction regarding career counselling* does not match with choosing a future educational path: happy or not with the teaching or the counselling, the students decide their priorities alone or influenced by other sources.

H3. The degree of involvement of the family is associated with the level of career stereotypes (declared by the respondents).

The involvement of the family in the future career of the student, while very diverse (from imposing a model to follow to strict control of the educational evolution or high payments for extra tutoring), is correlated to career stereotypes (the family can impose some careers which are traditionally addressing boys or girls).

From the association analysis, we cannot conclude that the involvement of the family correlates with the perception of career stereotypes based on gender (Chi Square=5.00, $p=0.08$). However, we notice the fact that the intensity of familial control is directly proportional to the intensity of gender stereotypes (a sign that gender stereotypes concerning careers are transmitted between generations). The fact that the hypothesis is not confirmed is strictly tied to the type of sample that was researched (on other samples this hypothesis could be confirmed).

H4. The school profile, the classroom and the gender of the students are associated with satisfaction regarding school counselling

The crosstabulation analysis gave the results in the following table:

Table 4. Analysis of association between the satisfaction concerning the career and the high school, year and gender of students

Association of the variable regarding the 'satisfaction concerning counselling' with the variables...	χ^2	df	p
1. Profile of the high school	20.41	4	0.00
2. The year	10.52	2	0.00
3. The gender	19.31	2	0.00

We notice that the hypothesis is confirmed in all three cases, with the following observations:

- there are significant differences in perception regarding the competence of career counsellors (the first position is held by National Pedagogic College „Regina Maria”)
- the 11th grade students are the ones perceiving the career counsellor rather positively, which is a surprise (the career counsellor should rather be more present in the last year of high school)
- the positive effect of career counsellors is clearer in the answers of the girls rather than the boys.

4. Conclusions and discussion

The theme of this article is complex, suggesting new directions for research. In another research (still happening), I wish to intersect the gender dimension with the issue of social-cultural reproduction upon career choices.

Moreover, an objective is to extend the research to new target groups, a group of school counsellors, one of the class teachers and another one of parents. The analysis done from three perspectives (students, teachers, parents) would offer a broader picture concerning career orientation.

The empiric research underlines the fact that choosing a career is not an exclusive result of a process of orientation and counselling but is influenced by other social factors. The school counsellor has a small influence, almost useless, being last in the list of agents of influence, with a percentage of just 2% of all answers. With a percentage of 98%, the parents are indicated as main career counsellors.

Last but not least, this is another argument for changing the role of school counsellors, or even the coexistence of career counsellors inside educational pre-university institutions, as it happens in many European countries. According to an OECD study (2021), a mandatory condition for career counselling at the pre-university level is „the career guidance must be done by impartial and well-trained professionals”.

The rethinking of career orientation in Romanian schools could, by taking an example from other countries, offer the students more support in career counselling, but would also give career counselling from a new dimension (gender dimension). We could hope that educational choices, practically career choices,

would not be done anymore based on family influence or according to some social trends, but based on the interests, values, abilities, and personality of the student and also on the development of the job market. Moreover, we can hope that career choices would no longer reflect gender bias so much. This fact is explained by the fact that when children evolve, they already internalize gender stereotypes, including occupational ones, and start to exclude from their ideas the occupations considered incompatible and, most of the time, they only consider such occupations if they are encouraged to do so (Oliveira et al., 2020). The same authors consider that school counsellors should be the people that oppose such limitations.

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REFUGEES BETWEEN FAMILY CRISIS AND RESILIENCE. CASE STUDY ON UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ROMANIA

Lorena-Dina NISTOR¹

Abstract: The phenomenon of forced migration due to the war in Ukraine generated enormous flows of population that moved to European countries and therefore also to Romania. A particularly complex and constantly evolving social phenomenon - the problem of refugees - is only at the beginning of sociological and social assistance investigations. In this article, we intended to detail the situation of Ukrainian refugees from a small sample selected in the north of Romania following three axes of analysis: the refugees' perception of their situation, the identification of the factors that contribute to the development of the refugees' resilience and the evaluation of the perception of the humanitarian aid received since leaving the country of origin by refugees. Exploratory research (undertaken as part of a master's thesis) can be a good start for wider research carried out in several areas in Romania where the reception and assistance of war refugees is in full swing.

Keywords: refugees, families in crisis, resilience, adaptation, integration into the labour market.

Résumé : Le phénomène de migration forcée dû à la guerre en Ukraine a généré d'énormes flux de population qui se sont déplacés vers les pays européens et donc aussi vers la Roumanie. Un phénomène social particulièrement complexe et en constante évolution - le problème des réfugiés - n'en est qu'au début des enquêtes sociologiques et d'assistance sociale. Dans cet article, nous avons voulu détailler la situation des réfugiés ukrainiens à partir d'un petit échantillon sélectionné dans le nord de la Roumanie selon trois axes d'analyse: la perception par les réfugiés de leur situation personnelle, l'identification des facteurs qui contribuent au développement de la résilience des réfugiés et l'évaluation de la perception de l'aide humanitaire reçue depuis le départ du pays d'origine par les réfugiés. La recherche exploratoire (menée dans le cadre d'un mémoire de maîtrise) peut être un bon début pour une recherche plus large menée dans plusieurs domaines en Roumanie où l'accueil et l'assistance des réfugiés de guerre bat son plein.

Mots clés : réfugiés, familles en crise, résilience, adaptation, insertion sur le marché du travail.

Rezumat: Fenomenul migrației forțate datorate războiului din Ucraina a generat fluxuri enorme de populație care s-au deplasat spre țările Europei și deci și spre România. Fenomen social deosebit de complex și în continuă evoluție -problematika refugiaților- este abia la

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începutul investigațiilor sociologice și de asistență socială. În acest articol am intenționat să detaliez situația refugiaților ucraineni dintr-un eșantion restrâns selectat în nordul României urmărind trei axe de analiză: percepția refugiaților asupra situației personale, identificarea factorilor care contribuie la dezvoltarea rezilienței refugiaților și evaluarea percepției asupra ajutorului umanitar primit din momentul părăsirii țării de origine de către refugiați. Cercetarea de explorare (întreprinsă în cadrul unei teze masterale) poate fi un bun început pentru cercetări mai ample efectuate în mai multe zone din România unde primirea și ajutorarea refugiaților de război este în plină desfășurare.

Cuvinte cheie: refugiați, familii în criză, reziliență, adaptare, integrare pe piața muncii.

1. Introduction

The issue of refugees from war zones has unpredictably returned to the news with the outbreak of the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022. With the outbreak of this war, an impressive influx of refugees crossed the border into our country either to settle in Romania or order to cross to other European countries appeared at the borders of Romania, and not only - an impressive influx of refugees who crossed the border into our country. In general, a refugee has lost the protection that the state of origin (in our case Ukraine) granted by switching to an international protection regime. A new state (in our case Romania) becomes a protective state that will maintain relations with refugees in what has been called 'surrogate citizenship'. Kneebone et al, 2014; p. 98; Vegatti, 2009). *1951 Geneva Convention* On the status of refugees, defines a refugee as a person who „as a result of events (...) and well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of which he is national and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to protect that country; or who, having no nationality and being outside the country of former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return'. The 1951 Convention was supplemented by a 1967 Protocol which stated, inter alia: refugees should not be penalised for entering or being present in the country illegally, as long as they make this known to the authorities without delay; refugees are obliged to comply with the laws and regulations of the country of asylum; Humanitarian work to protect refugees should not become a source of tension between countries.

In addition, there are many other aspects related to refugees' right to documentation, access to work, public education, access to court, freedom of movement, and freedom to practice their religion, among others (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2011). By Law 46 of 1991, Romania acceded to the Convention on the Status of Refugees as well as to the Protocol on the Status of Refugees. A directive on temporary protection has been established at the European level (European Council, 2023), with the initiative having a start in the displacement generated by armed conflicts in the Western Balkans.

Psycho-sociological research on the refugee situation has identified four general responses to stressful experiences: anticipation, devastating events, survival, and adaptation (Fazel, Stein, 2002). The intention to leave ('flight') is

accentuated by various social unrest and chaos of social life in general. Limited access to schools disrupts education and social development, and at family and individual levels, refugees often face threats to their safety and that of family members. Before leaving, refugees anticipate and then cope with devastating events, and young refugees may witness or engage in scenes of violence (Gonsalves, 1992).

During the 'flight', refugees must survive displacement from their homes and places of transit or transition (e.g. refugee camps) amid great uncertainty about the future. They are often at the mercy of external sources to meet their basic needs and determine their asylum options. Children born in this phase undergo important stages of psychological development amid turmoil, and separation from parents and caregivers is encountered (Papadopoulos, 2001).

Other authors emphasize the phenomenon of acculturation that occurs against the background of the meeting of at least two different cultures when four types of phases can occur: contact, conflict, crisis, and, finally, adaptation (Williams and Berry, 1991).

Once refugees resettle in a host country, new belief systems, values, and mores challenge their adaptation (Papadopoulos, 2001). New roles and family models disrupt resettlement, and refugee children's cross cultures old and new. Because of their educational experiences and faster language acquisition than parents, they can act as cultural links for older generations (Coll and Magnuson, 1997).

2. Refugees from Ukraine in Romania and specific problems

The number of refugees in Europe doubled in 2022 and the number of those who were internally displaced rose to almost 9 million, creating significant humanitarian needs. Millions of people who have fled the international armed conflict in Ukraine will also need support in 2023, inside Ukraine, in the Republic of Moldova, and throughout the region. In 2022, Europe demonstrated that fair and swift protection is possible if all actors work together in a whole-of-society approach, promoting inclusion and solidarity from the outset (UNHCR, 2022a).

In the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, on February 24, 2022, the number of refugees in Romania increased considerably. Since the beginning of the conflict, more than 1.6 million Ukrainians have arrived in Romania. Of these, some 83,748 people are still in the country (UNHCR, 2022b).

As of December, there were 4.8 million refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection or similar regime in the European Union (UNHCR, 2022b). In February 2023, according to UNHCR data, 115,047 people were registered for temporary protection or other forms of protection in Romania. All these people face a complex set of personal/social issues that are difficult to review exhaustively. We can mention, among others, the stress and trauma felt in the pre-and post-migration period, which may be related to harsh living conditions, erosion of social support mechanisms, reduced access to basic needs and services, and lack of opportunities to maintain livelihoods and education. On the other hand, forced migration has considerably weakened the capacity for self-help and mutual

support, and separation from families and communities has encouraged violence and mistrust (Malia, 2006). In this context, it is necessary to analyse family stress as a consequence of stress felt from the outside (Hill, 1949).

The experience of migration itself necessarily disrupts family and cultural systems, as well as separations from family and ethnic communities or stays in refugee camps. In the process of migration, refugees suffer numerous losses, such as economic stability, familiar environment and previous relationships, which hinder their ability to thrive in their new place of settlement. The literature highlights one of the strongest stressors refugees experiences after arriving in their host country as social isolation, usually associated with continued family separation, loss, and a breakdown of social, community, and family structures (Lambert & Alhassoon, 2015).

Regarding the issue of resilience, it refers to a person's ability to successfully adapt to acute stress, trauma or chronic forms of adversity (Masten, 2014). From another perspective, resilience is associated with a person's ability to „involve inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility, and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity” (Wagnild & Collins, 2009, p. 1).

Domestic resources have been identified in the literature as a major contributor to refugee resilience. Studies of refugee women suggest that personal qualities such as optimism, adaptability and perseverance helped them cope and survive. Belief in one's inner strength to face life's challenges, a positive attitude and hope for a good future helped refugee women cope. A study by Shakespeare-Finch and Wickham (2009) suggests that looking to the future strengthens refugees' resilience. One study participant stated, „I will lay a good foundation for myself, for my children, for my family” (Shakespeare-Finch & Wickham, 2009, p. 38).

In addition to personal qualities related to refugee resilience, external forms of support have also been prominent in building resilience. Several qualitative studies have highlighted the importance of family (including extended family), friends and community in building refugees' resilience in the resettlement process. In a qualitative study, Bosnian refugee women cited the support they received from their husbands, children and family as a key factor in building their resilience. As one participant stated, „Once you have family, you can't give up, you have to stay strong for them” (Sossou, Craig, Ogren & Schnak, 2008, p. 378).

In addition to receiving support from friends and family, refugees also used their ethnic community to help them cope and adapt to their new way of life (Schweitzer et al., 2007). Not receiving outside support is a trigger for family crises (Irimescu, 2004).

Religion and spirituality are strongly identified as other major contributing factors to refugee resilience. Several studies have shown that religion in its various forms is linked to improving a person's psychological and physical well-being (Green & Elliot, 2010).

Numerous other types of research discuss other factors that may support resilience: „the role of volunteering, work, and activism for refugee causes, social support, experiencing migration as an opportunity generally and for women in

particular, being a parent, being young” (Walther et al, 2021). For other researchers, the factors for improving resilience were „future orientation, coping strategies, social support, opportunities, religiosity, and cultural identity. In addition, positive emotions constituted a key feature of refugees' resilience” (Fadhliya et al., 2022).

Concerning the support provided to refugees, let us recall that the *National Strategy on Immigration* (Government of Romania, 2021) is enshrined in Romania, which includes the policy on the social integration of foreigners. The objective of the policy is to support the integration process of refugees by helping them to become self-sustaining and independent, not dependent on assistance provided by the state or non-governmental organisations, and to participate in an active cultural, social and economic manner. The National Strategy on Immigration implies the observance of a facilitating legal and institutional framework for integration, through the possibility to participate in integration programs carried out and by developing a multicultural environment.

Among the services offered by Romanian institutions in favour of refugees who have received a form of protection, we find information and counselling, cultural accommodation, Romanian language course, accommodation in regional centres, subsidizing the rent of the house with approximately 50%, offered by the General Inspectorate for Immigration. In terms of obtaining a job, professional counselling, professional training courses, and identification of jobs with employers are provided by the National Employment Agency. Children are offered allowances by the Social Assistance Directorate and diplomas can be recognized upon request, to obtain jobs and integration, by the National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas. In addition to state or supra-state bodies, numerous non-governmental organizations aim to support refugees in integrating and adapting to the new environment and community (Buzducea, 2010, pp. 606-609).

Buzducea (2010) recalls the social policies for refugees, which aim at diminishing and even removing procedural impediments to access social services through equal treatment, eliminating disadvantages about others through equal opportunities and the possibility of suppressing disadvantages created by the social and economic environment through equality of results.

3. Methods: participants, instruments

The field research conducted in May-June 2023 was qualitative using semi-directive interviewing and sociological field observation. The sub-themes pursued in the interview guide were the following: perception of one's condition as a refugee and of war; environmental, cultural or family factors contributing to the development of resilience of Ukrainian refugees, perception of humanitarian aid received. The observation guide proved to be a useful tool that could complement some information obtained in interviews (mimicry, gestures, clothing, language, behaviours, etc.) were recorded.

The research group consisted of 10 women refugees for over five months in Suceava County, Romania coming from Chernivtsi Region, Ukraine (named in

the analysis with initials from „I no.1” to „I no.10”). Due to geographical proximity, respondents knew the Romanian language at a conversational level. Their ages ranged from 26 to 48. Nine out of 10 respondents have children with them. The respondents signed an informed consent form, were assured of the anonymity of their answers (they were not asked for personal data: names, email addresses, series of documents, etc.) and accepted the recording of conversations.

4. Results

For most of the interviewees the last completed studies are university, only two women out of the ten have completed secondary education (one year of high school education, respectively nine grades). Among the current professions, we found: teachers, social workers, psychologists, beauticians, educational facilitators, gastroenterologist doctors (in Ukraine, online), and nurses. Two of the interviewees kept their occupation in Ukraine and Romania, namely that of beautician, the others (with one exception) were employed in various jobs in Suceava (for example, an interviewee found a job as a translator at an NGO). We will follow relevant excerpts from interviews grouped on major research topics:

A. Perception of personal situation

The moments of the outbreak of war and the decision of forced migration were intensely felt by the interviewees:

„I felt at that time that I had run away, and I felt somehow traitorous...” (I. No. 2, 41 years);

“At first it even seemed to me that it was a joke, I told myself that it scares us a bit and this is what it ends with. When I saw that people all started going to shops, taking products, having water, oil, everything necessary, taking money out of the ATM, not losing money, that is, it was such a kind of fear” (I. No. 4, 34 years);

„It was an ordinary day when I thought that the next day I would leave for work, and the children to school, it all started at 5 in the morning, when my husband, being a journalist, was contacted by colleagues in Bucharest with a phone, to comment on the beginning of the war about which I knew nothing at 5 in the morning, but I found out from them... it seemed such a horror movie. It was like it wasn't true.” (I. No. 5, 38 years).

One respondent reported that while heading to Romania, standing in a 10 km queue, through mud, thorns, among cars, she made a correlation between her life at the outbreak of war and the life of her grandparents:

„Without realizing it, I began to remember what my parents told me about, about my grandparents who fled during the Second World War, how they passed, how hard they crossed to Romania. Because unfortunately, I repeated the story of my grandparents. Practically the whole family ended up in

Romania, except for my grandfather who was detained, could not leave the country and was deported by the Russians to Siberia.” (I. No. 5, 38 years).

For one of the interviewees, life was arranged to the last detail, as she was going to give birth to a child shortly:

„I was pregnant, I just went on maternity leave for a week, then the war started and all day I spent on the road and saw what was happening. Sirene. Row. Panic. A panic started in my country, my parents and my husband, sent me to my brother in Romania who has been working for several years. And so I got out of the country, to be safe. First of all, to keep the pregnancy and the baby.” (I. No. 8, 32 years).

All 10 interviewees share that the first day was a shock, they could not believe what was happening, and they felt panic and fear:

„I couldn't believe this was happening. I thought it was a dream, a movie, something I watch, on the internet, on Instagram, it seemed to me that these were a video, something that did not happen in reality (I. No. 6, 26 years).

They thought about what they would do and those who had children thought about how to ensure their safety, how to prevent the occurrence of diseases of the development of the mental and emotional part:

„Clearly I left motivated, the reason that stimulated me to leave was the 3-year-old child. which I didn't want to be affected, mentally, because mental health comes first (I. No. 2, 41 years);

„And we decided that even for the child's psyche and mental health it wasn't okay to stay and he could resist, that it was the alarm, we had to go, go down to the basement, stay in the cold, and he could get sick. He began to say such words about death: Mommy, you leave me if you go to work, what do I do if he comes and you are not? And that's why we decided to come to Romania” (I. No. 1, 31 years old).

In addition to the panic, fear, anxiety, and stress felt by mothers crossing with children, one respondent, being a mother, recounts an event from the moment she waited in front of the barrier separating Ukraine from Romania:

„At one point, someone who heard that the husband couldn't get out started screaming very loudly behind us, me with the babies by the hand, and pushed us in front a little bit, because she probably wanted to stand out, that maybe the customs officers would see her and feel sorry to leave her husband. And it pushed us into the barrier. Then, the customs officer aimed at us with the vending machine, the children were very scared because he aimed at my 9-year-old boy. I was speechless, paralyzed so on the spot, that I didn't know how, I just grabbed him, but he was so targeted for about 15 minutes on us, that we were the ones who leaned against that barrier. And he was yelling at us terribly.” (I. No. 5, 38 years).

All interviewees wanted to help Ukrainians who left their country of origin and settled in Romania, so they either got a job or volunteered in non-governmental organizations that carry out projects with this target group. Respondent number 10, although she does not volunteer for any NGO because she stays in the Refugee Camp, is sometimes asked to assist Ukrainians who are transported to the hospital and cannot manage their linguistically:

„I liked the Romanian language, but I mostly go, sometimes the ambulance takes me to the hospital, for those who do not know the Romanian language, and I go and translate” (I. No. 10, 33 years old).

During their stay in Romania, respondents felt good, helped, and warmly received by Romanians:

„The situation was quiet because we knew that no bomb would arrive here, we had a lot of support from Romania, the people were welcoming, they helped us” (I. No. 4, 34 years old).

„The Romanians met us with a lot of warmth, so the Romanian customs officers from the start took all my bags, and helped me get to the passport control. There it didn't even take a few minutes, we got to the other side, everyone met us with hot tea, with food, but we were in such a state that we were happy to arrive as if we didn't want to eat, drink, or anything absolute, we just thanked everyone. I could hear people in the back saying: I give them everything but they don't want to take anything, what do they want? And that's when I realized that it's not okay to refuse in a way that I was upsetting people...” (I. No. 5, 38 years).

Currently (at the time of the field research) the interviewees feel more confident, they feel safe, they have integrated into Romanian society, and they have enrolled children in school but also in programs/activities supported by various NGOs for Ukrainian children. The spirit of self-help is dominant: *„Slowly, I began to recover and began to look for a way to help others like me” (I. No. 9, 29 years).*

One of the interviewees admits that she commutes to Chernivtsi with a student boy there: *„I am here during the week, on the weekends I go home. I have to divide myself and that's very difficult, I stay here for a weekend, my mind is still in Chernivtsi, the children are there, it's quite difficult” (I. No. 7, 48 years old).*

B. Factors contributing to building the resilience of Ukrainian refugees

The first factor that facilitates the resilience of refugees is the geographical proximity of Suceava-Chernivtsi (proximity that makes customs and lifestyle in general similar). Another important reason is that refugees have some acquaintances or even friends in Suceava County. For some of the interviewees, staying in Suceava makes it possible to meet relatives from time to time:

„My husband deals with humanitarian aid from Romania, Poland, Germany and so on, and he can sometimes come to Romania for work, and that was still a moment because it is easier to meet in Suceava” (I. No. 2, 41 years old).

„In case of anything, I can go home and I have support when I'm homesick, I go meet my father and my in-laws, and we can still see each other if we went further it would be rarer, harder to see each other” (I. No. 8, 32 years old).

Two of the interviewees initially went to other parts of Romania, to Cluj and Bucharest, either because when they left the country they opted to leave as far away from home as possible, *„because I didn't want to be close to the war, to be far, farther and farther” (I. no. 2, 41 years old)*, or because, *we thought it would be easier to find work there” (I. No. 5, 38 years)*. However:

„We needed more peace at this time, we decided to go back closer to the border, to be closer to home and we chose Suceava, our Bukovina, then others followed” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).

Suceava was also the city where they found jobs and this was a reason for settling in this county, so that 9 of the 10 interviewees are in the workforce. Satisfaction with the current occupation can be seen from the interviewees' statements:

„It is the most beautiful thing I have done in my life and I do it with great love” (I. No. 8. 32 years).

„Now I teach Romanian and Ukrainian to refugee children and... (smiles) is very demanding because I have to prepare constantly and occupies almost all my free time. And on one side it's very good for mental health I think” (I. No. 2, 41 years).

At the same time, by finding a job, they felt safer, and even *„apart from the energy I can say that as a ... I feel at home” (I. No. 4, 34 years old):*

„Finding a job where I could develop my capabilities, skills and profession I think influenced for the better, I felt safer. And the financial part plays a role, that it is a security” (I. No. 3, 31 years).

However, the job also hurt one respondent because she had different expectations, especially working in an organization that focuses on doing good:

„Being an ethnic Romanian from Chernivtsi we always looked at Romania as our soul country, the mother country, where for us everything was ideal and perfect. And for me, it was a whole tragedy when I met colleagues from Romania, who intentionally harmed me or sought to harm me. And that's what I have to this day. Such an inner divergence, I cannot understand these things and more than that, that it happens in an organization meant to do good” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).

Although opinions are divided, responses about the impact of the workplace prevail with a positive impression of the interviewees, the workplace offering them not only financial security but also a distraction from what is happening on the other side of the border.

Resilience is complemented by the intention to know more about Romania and even to settle here:

„At the moment we were organizing ourselves to visit, to relax, not to be just tied to work and the apartment, or school and kindergarten” (I. No. 3, 31 years old).

„All the places in Romania for me are the places of my soul and the place where I found myself and I am happy and I decided that here I will stay and nowhere else” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).

„All places in Romania I think offer a state of well-being. I couldn't understand this state of well-being until the war, while we couldn't even think once that we would live in Suceava, we would change everything, and to tell you honestly, even if the war ends, I don't know if I want to go back to Ukraine. I don't seem to see myself in Ukraine anymore because of the laws that were made there, and which will be I don't know, but I don't know, I want to stay in Romania, that's my idea, that's how I feel” (I. No. 4, 34 years old).

„Sucevita village, where my ancestors come from, there is also a house there, but they are no longer alive. I don't know why, but when I'm there, it's like there, there's an energy that keeps me there. That I believe that relatives there were born, lived and that's where my mother's family comes from.” (I. No. 8, 32 years).

Resilience is also facilitated by shared cultural customs:

„When the Ukrainians came and when it was March 1, when Martisor were given, they were all learning „Martisor” – meaning for them it was something new, something wow, „there is no such thing in our country”. While in our village, in Chernivtsi, we celebrated this holiday, for me it was nothing new” (I. No. 4, 34 years).

„I wouldn't see much difference from what I saw in Chernivtsi... even Suceava is also a mix, and I can't say it was something extraordinarily different. No culture, no customs, that is, for me, it would be religion, what I am as values, family, I saw these things here and it was not unknown to me” (I. No. 3, 31 years old).

There are also cultural differences due to differences in Orthodox rite and even food/culinary differences:

„We eat more beef, pork here and I can't find beef. The biggest problem. But culture, traditions are alike” (I. No. 6, 26 years).

From the point of view of language, although not all interviewees encountered such great difficulties, they still felt that they needed to improve their language:

„Yes, even though I am a teacher and since childhood, I spoke in the Romanian language, it seems to me that we speak an old language in Chernivtsi, I meet it only in people from Romania who are older, people who live in the countryside speak like us, but from the city and Radauti speak as in the book, meaning the accents differ, that is, I have a lot to learn” (I. No. 8, 32 years).

Some of the interviewees say that although they are from Chernivtsi, it was still necessary to learn Romanian:

„Well, I had to learn the language, I didn't go to school Romanian, I don't know how they say, when I went outside with the child, that's how I learned it. I don't know quite right, but I can handle it, as best I can. Yes, they start learning new words. I have to translate a lot in my head first and then say (laughs)” (I. No. 1, 31 years old).

The crisis of refugee families cannot be blurred, however. The family of origin was supported before leaving, and some family members left Ukraine with respondents. But for the most part, (extended) families remained in Ukraine. The role of the family can be found in all the testimonies of these women:

„I think my family was that place of support, encouragement, motivation, I think here I have the greatest resource to go forward, to make things good” (I. No. 3, 31 years).

„They supported this, more I think morally they helped me because that's what it was: keep the baby, keep the money for longer, that's it, leave. They knew that I alone could do everything” (I. No. 6, 26 years).

Some of the interviewed women managed to pass with their husbands, this gave them the security they needed, *„first of all that the husband is safe, I knew that the family is also safe” (I. No. 3, 31 years).*

Respondents tell about their families and how they cope with the situation generated by the war with sadness, as most members are determined to stay there, especially because they have certain assets and a life they do not want to give up:

„They worked a lifetime and built the house and stayed, they also bought an apartment, they keep all these things they have worked on all their lives” (I. No. 8, 32 years).

Discussing how families left behind feel, respondents tearfully describe the stress their relatives feel:

„My family now at home is under a lot of stress, like, na, there is war in the country and we don't know, today is quiet, thank God it's a year since it's quiet but we don't know what can be tomorrow, what can be another day.

And they are stressed and it is noticed a lot, when I talk to them on the phone: today it passed well, it's ok (I tear up in my eyes) and you feel this stress in them. I also told them to come to Romania, but they said no, it's quiet, and they don't want to leave their house. They've gotten used to it, they've done everything to make it comfortable, but it feels like it's not good." (I. No. 4, 34 years).

C. Perception of humanitarian aid received since leaving the country of origin

The first impression of the interviewees about the people who offered them support when they entered Romania is a particularly good one:

„The world was too good, so I think, only nobody owes us to help us” (I. No. 1, 31 years).

„First thought: what a good, understanding, decent world. I had no words, nor would I express. It was something I couldn't figure out existed” (I. No. 9, F, 28 years).

All interviewees were greeted from the border by people who wanted to offer support, which caused them emotions and tears:

„A customs officer told me everything would be fine, supported me, I know I cried in the car alone” (I. No. 3, 31 years).

„I told you I didn't cry all day, I was scared but I didn't cry, not even in customs. In customs there was an ideal silence, there were many people, there was a big row, everyone didn't know what to say, they were sitting as if they had taken water in their mouths, nobody said a word, everyone was thinking. When I entered Romania and saw that everyone wanted to help us, I started crying. I seem to have everything and I have to leave, to be safe, to preserve our life first of all because it is more precious than everything” (I. No. 8, 32 years).

The aid received was necessary and often exceeded expectations:

„Oh, it helped me a lot because there were a lot of unforeseen expenses because you can't take in a suitcase what a family need. I had something taken from home, but it can't reach you, it helped me a lot” (I. No. 2, 41 years old).

„Oh, I've always turned her down, but... Mmm... I don't know. When I received help and even brought home those who knew I was staying with my brother, everyone helped me and gave me, took me to the family doctor, to the doctor where to give birth in Suceava, I know it's very difficult to get to a doctor here in Romania, he took me without a turn. I said that so many people helped me that I don't know how to help them in the future and I am always happy for the help they have given. I don't know how to help if in the future I can, I will gladly help too” (I. No. 8, 32 years).

Some interviewees decided not to seek help, as they felt others needed it most. Many refugees depended 100% on this aid. Special programs have successfully helped arriving refugees:

„Mmmm about everything I can say that I have a good opinion because the country Romania helps people and no matter how, how little, they try with the 50/20 program, they try with money and vouchers. Help people, even if there is no war in their area, they could come, and look for work. In Ukraine there are no jobs, men stay hidden so as not to take them to war. Women came with their children and had support and help. Romania helped a lot, with everything it does” (I. No. 9, 28 years).

„It's okay because in these programs they also give food and take care and that's very. I think for the mother who has a child, this is very helpful. That at least you can sit freely, relax with your child for 24 hours and you're in a foreign country and you don't know anything, you don't have friends, you don't have so much support, you don't have your family by your side, it's kind of hard. A helping hand is great” (I. No. 1, 31 years old).

The future is quite uncertain for the interviewees, because if before they had their lives arranged for 2/3 years, now things are not like that. For some, the future sounds like a settlement in Romania:

„No one knows, everything is changeable (laughs). But, my family decided to stay in Romania, we even decided to continue school here, my husband got a job, I have temporary jobs, but I also hope to legalize my medicine” (I. No. 5, 38 years old).

„To have a stable job and I think I would like to stay here in Romania” (I. No. 7, 48 years).

With great emotion, the interviewees hope for an end to the war as soon as possible:

„I hope that Ukraine will resist, that every people has, I would say, the right to exist, to develop and probably they will understand a lot from this war, I hope in the right direction. I wish them to resist so that all the sacrifices of this war may not be in vain. All these families lost their sons, who lost their father, and their grandfather because it left an imprint on their lives forever. It will not be possible to erase the trace of this war for these families. And very much I wish that everything that happened to them would not be sudden because it will be very difficult for them to know that what their husbands, brothers or parents died for was in vain or forgotten” (I. No. 5, 38 years).

5. Conclusion and discussions

The present study was exploratory and followed three descriptive axes: perception of refugees' situation, identification of factors contributing to the

development of refugees' resilience and assessment of the perception of humanitarian aid received by refugees.

Ukrainian refugees perceive the personal situation generated by the war as one in which life began from scratch in a new country. The appearance of war generated in each of the interviewee's feelings of fear, shock, panic, stress, uncertainty of tomorrow or even life. Refugees feel betrayed for leaving their country to save themselves or compare to grandparents who fled during World War II. Forced migration brought financial instability, separation from the extended family and cultural/societal context. It was the children who were motivated especially to leave the environment affected by the emergence of war.

The elements that contribute to the resilience of the new arrivals identified geographical proximity, cultural similarities (traditions, customs, religion), positive perception of Romania and Romanians in general, perception of genealogical developments with roots in Romania, involvement in lucrative or volunteer activities, constant connection with the family of origin.

Regarding the topic of perception of the humanitarian aid they have received since leaving their country of origin, respondents express their gratitude and emotional wonder at the support provided by civil society and public authorities in Romania.

The outlook for the future remains uncertain among all 10 interviewees. For now, we want an end to the war, even for those who do not want to return to Ukraine.

Respondents want peace for the part of the family left there and for the rest of the families who have to endure something that can never be erased from the memory of Ukrainians.

Research on Ukrainian refugees is still in its infancy and will certainly continue. The phenomenon itself is extensive and concerns all counties of Romania neighbouring Ukraine or the Republic of Moldova. Romania's effort in this situation was perceived directly by refugees, but also by countries across Europe as truly exemplary.

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FAMILY CRISIS CAUSED BY MIGRATION

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Abstract: The migration phenomenon represents a current social issue. Often, migration is motivated by the desire for a better life, and the effects experienced by children affect most areas of reference: behavioural, social, emotional, and educational. Going abroad involves sacrifices both from the children's perspective and from that of their parents, and the crisis is felt by each family member individually, in a different way. In the absence of the departing parent, especially if they are the sole provider, the child feels abandoned and seeks attention through atypical behaviour, such as a strong cry for help. In this article, I have tried to detail how children left behind in the country perceive their parents' departure for work abroad, what are their adaptation methods, alongside the strategies parents use to support their children from afar. The exploratory research, undertaken within a master's thesis, may represent a starting point for further research on the proposed topic.

Keywords: family crisis, migration, child, parent, abroad, strategy.

Résumé : Le phénomène de la migration représente un problème social actuel. Souvent, la migration est motivée par le désir d'une meilleure vie, et les effets ressentis par les enfants affectent généralement tous les domaines de référence : comportemental, social, émotionnel et éducatif. Le départ à l'étranger implique des sacrifices tant du point de vue des enfants que de celui de leurs parents, et la crise est ressentie par chaque membre de la famille individuellement, de manière différente. En l'absence du parent parti, surtout s'il est le seul pourvoyeur, l'enfant se sent abandonné et attire l'attention par un comportement atypique, tel un cri de détresse puissant. Dans cet article, j'ai essayé de détailler comment les enfants laissés derrière eux dans le pays perçoivent le départ de leurs parents pour travailler à l'étranger, quelles sont leurs méthodes d'adaptation, ainsi que les stratégies utilisées par les parents pour soutenir leurs enfants à distance. La recherche exploratoire, entreprise dans le cadre d'une thèse de master, peut représenter un point de départ pour de futures recherches sur le thème proposé.

Mots-clés : crise familiale, migration, enfant, parent, étranger, stratégie.

Rezumat: Fenomenul migrației reprezintă o problemă socială de actualitate. Adesea, migrația este motivată de dorința unui trai mai bun, iar efectele pe care copiii le resimt afectează de cele mai multe ori toate ariile de referință: comportamental, social, emoțional și educațional. Plecarea în străinătate implică sacrificii atât din partea copiilor, cât și din cea a părinților, iar criza este resimțită de fiecare membru al familiei în parte, într-un mod

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diferit. În lipsa părintelui plecat, mai ales dacă acesta este unicul susținător, copilul se simte abandonat și atrage atenția printr-un comportament atipic, ca un puternic strigăt de ajutor. În acest articol am încercat să detaliez cum percep copiii rămași în țară plecarea părinților la muncă peste hotare, care sunt modalitățile acestora de adaptare, alături de strategiile părinților de susținere a copiilor de la distanță. Cercetarea de explorare, întreprinsă în cadrul unei teze masterale, poate reprezenta un început pentru cercetările ulterioare privind tema propusă.

Cuvinte cheie: criză familială, migrație, copil, părinte, străinătate, strategie.

1. Introduction

The family remains the most important institution, and the family crisis caused by migration is felt by each member individually. While the children left behind try to adjust to the absence of their parents and the people who have remained in the country, the parents also undergo a long process of acquainting themselves with the new territories, struggling with longing for their loved ones.

In this sense, from an etymological point of view, migration refers to „the movement of people and their geographic relocation, either permanent or temporary” (Held, 2004, p. 326). In a broader sense, migration not only represents the movement to other territories but also the effects it has on cultural, religious, economic, social, and demographic aspects (Andreescu, 2016, p. 29).

Sociological theories of migration explain the causes, support methods, and consequences at the cultural, economic, and social levels. The role of social networks is considered a factor in the initiation, continuity, and completion of the migration process. These theories are based on the hypothesis that the integration of migrating individuals is closely related to social capital, and immigrants are influenced by both the country of origin and the destination country (Haas, 2010, p. 230).

According to the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption, in September 2022, there were 56,407 families with parents working abroad. Among them, 9,089 families have both parents working abroad, 40,293 families have only one parent working abroad, and 7,025 families have a single supporting parent working abroad.

The phenomenon of migration can be identified with multiple causes and at various levels, which reciprocally influence each other. Thus, the level of immediate causes refers to the parent's desire for higher incomes and improving the family's economic situation. The level of underlying causes refers to social services, attitudes, practices, and knowledge of the involved families and the community regarding the phenomenon and their rights. For example, the level of deep causes highlights values and opinions about migration, as well as roles and behaviours within the family (UNICEF, 2008, p. 3).

Migration as a phenomenon will undergo new characteristics and will never disappear, which will also happen in our country. For Romanians, the predominant motivation for leaving the country is the desire to improve living conditions both for themselves and for the rest of the family left behind. Among

the most popular destinations chosen by Romanians based on various criteria are: Italy, Spain, Germany, England, France, and Israel (Feraru, 2011, p. 152).

Even though people have always migrated, since the 19th century, the migration phenomenon has acquired a new trait, the migration of the workforce to financially attractive areas (Pavelescu, 2004, pp. 84-100). It can be said that the effects of migration involve numerous aspects, both negative and positive. These effects become evident in a short period (Tufan, 2007, p. 132).

Migration influences both emotional and physical relationships between family members. The mobility of parents leads to a new distribution of family roles and changes in the relationship between children and their parents. Certainly, there are numerous imbalances at the behavioural level of the children. For example, behaviour differs based on the family environment, level of education, and the ability to cope with imposed changes (Cătărău, 2019, p.11-19).

The departure of parents provides children with an improvement in basic needs satisfaction: food, better living conditions, clothing, or other things that can be purchased with new material resources. However, these cannot compensate for the emotional and social deficiencies. The process of socialization is affected by both intra-family and extra-family (Lupu, 2006, p. 45).

The socialization relationships within the family affected by migration largely depend on the ability to communicate from a distance. The confirmation of established connections is conditioned by the frequency and regularity of communication through modern means (Carling, 2012, p. 198). Family members use smart devices connected to the internet, combining interaction with communication with the family members who have remained at home, providing them with a general sense of unity (Tingyu, 2012, p. 152).

Some children exhibit numerous negative behavioural changes due to the physical absence of their parents. Before the migration process, children received primary care from their parents, but after the physical distance, primary care is provided, in the best cases, by grandparents, distant relatives, neighbours, or even older siblings (Merla, 2014, p. 90).

Certainly, migration impacts both the family and the psychological development of children. When parents migrate, children develop an insecure, disorganized, or ambivalent attachment. Another negative effect is the lack of trust in autonomy, which often reflects disorganized behaviour. Some adolescents, in particular, may exhibit aggressive or depressive behaviour (Barista-Pinto Wiese, 2010, p. 146). The mobility of parents deprives children of emotional support and parental affection. Furthermore, it has been found that „the pain of family separation as a result of parental migration creates various feelings: loneliness, helplessness, regret, guilt, vulnerability, and insecurity” (Maruja, 2013, p. 49).

The vast majority of families with members working abroad go through periods of crisis. These generate stress and thus affect the person's ability to act efficiently in such situations. Succumbing to emotions, the specific states and reactions of individuals going through a crisis include desperation, helplessness,

discomfort, apathy, impatience, impasse, confusion, surprise, and more (Dumitru, 2008, pp. 88-90).

Moreover, Holdevici (2011) defines a crisis as „a situation in which a person faces a major obstacle that blocks their life goals.” Furthermore, a crisis can be characterized as a crucial moment, and its outcome depends on how the individual reacts to resolving it. If the crisis is resolved, it is considered that the individual has evolved, and learned something new, while if not, the crisis can evoke numerous maladaptive reactions and can lead to mental disorders.

As a result of parental migration, children have developed certain behaviours to cope with the changes. These behaviours can be summarized as coping strategies adopted by children and play an important role in explaining the manifestation of negative behaviours in transnational families (Cătărău, 2019, pp. 48-49).

2. Methods: Participants, Instruments

The field research conducted between March and June 2023 was qualitative and utilized semi-structured interviews and sociological field observation. The interview guide focused on the following sub-themes: family situation, causes and effects of migration, modes of communication among transnational family members, strategies of adaptation for children left alone at home, and ways in which parents support their children. The observation grid proved to be useful in complementing information obtained during interviews through facial expressions, gestures, clothing, etc.

The research group consisted of 11 children, both male and female, aged between 9 and 17 years (referred to in the analysis as „Respondent 1” to „Respondent 11”). These are beneficiaries of *Save the Children Iași Association*, from two Educational Centers, that have at least one parent working abroad for a minimum of two years. Parents of the children signed an informed consent form, were ensured of the anonymity of their responses, and agreed to have their conversations recorded. Additionally, three specialists – a psych pedagogue, a psychologist, and a social worker – working within the *Save the Children Association Iași*, participated in the research (referred to in the analysis by their respective roles).

3. Results

We will list the results obtained respecting the previously stated sub-themes. We make it clear that the data collected primarily represent the perspective of the young people interviewed and only some information was rechecked with the specialists from the *Save the Children Association Iași*.

Family Situation

The vast majority of respondents come from single-parent families, a situation caused either by the death of one parent or by divorce. They strongly feel

the absence of the parent who is not present in the family, especially if the sole provider also goes to work abroad.

Material Situation of Families

The material situation of the families is modest, with a significant portion of the income coming from the earnings of the parent working abroad. Moreover, the jobs they have are mainly in the agricultural sector, and they are individuals with a medium level of education who aspire to improve the situation of their children.

Common Family Crisis Due to Migration

All families to which the children belong are experiencing a common crisis caused by migration. In this regard, all family members, from children to parents and other involved members, go through a process of adaptation and often require external and specialized support for an extended period.

Causes of Migration

Migration abroad involves sacrifices both for children and parents. In most cases, migration is motivated by the desire for a better life. Often, in other countries, it is easier to find well-paid jobs even without specialized training in that field.

„Although it affects me a lot, I know that my dad left to earn more and provide everything we need for me and my brother” (Respondent 11, 17 years old, female).

Unfortunately, in the vast majority of cases, parents do not take into account the risks that the family faces when they decide to work abroad. They do not balance the financial resources with the harmonious development of the child and the family imbalance; instead, they focus mostly on improving the material situation, which they believe will cover other deficiencies. Moreover, going abroad, in some cases, is like a decision that follows the parents' separation.

„I know that mom and dad used to argue a lot, and after mom left, she didn't even tell me and my brother. I found out later from grandma that they had separated” (Respondent 1, 9 years old, male).

Effects of Migration

Children whose parents have left and are left in the care of others feel the longing for a complete family and compare themselves to those around them who represent the ideal image of a family: mom, dad, and child/children. Through this comparison, the child feels different, and their self-esteem decreases, leading to communication problems, difficulties in forming relationships, and attention issues.

„When I was in kindergarten, my uncle had to come and pick me up, and we were always the last ones to leave, watching how all the other kids were being

picked up by their parents, except me. I always hoped that my mom and dad would come for me at least once, and I would feel like I belong to a normal family” (Respondent 10, 17 years old, female).

In the majority of cases, the departure of parents negatively affects the educational journey of the children left behind. Often, there is a lack of interest in completing school tasks, and a refusal to learn, or even to attend school. Moreover, the need for family belonging shifts to the need for group belonging.

„After my mom left, and my brother and I stayed with our dad, we tried to fill up all our free time: we started playing rugby, we come to the centre to get involved in various activities, and we focus more on school” (Respondent 6, 12 years old, male).

„It affected me a lot from an educational point of view when I saw other kids with their parents, and I couldn't concentrate. Now I managed to control myself better and understand the situation differently” (Respondent 10, 17 years old, female).

In fortunate cases, the sacrifice of parents working abroad is understood, and the children comprehend the departure for financial reasons. In this regard, children in this category focus more on school, even though it is difficult for them, as a way to please the parent who left, as a kind of gift.

„In the beginning, after my dad left, I struggled at school, and got a few lower grades, but then I improved. I managed to turn things around at school because I knew I needed to study, and my dad left for me and my brother, so we wouldn't lack anything” (Respondent 11, 17 years old, female).

Educational problems are attributed to the assumption of multiple roles by some children after the departure of the parent who was responsible for those tasks. This is more common in cases where the mother is the one who left abroad.

„Since mom went to the Netherlands, and my brother and I stayed with our dad, I take care of everything related to the house: cleaning, preparing meals, cooking. I do this every day because dad goes to work from morning till evening” (Respondent 6, 12 years old, male).

In this regard, during the age of 13-17, children are in adolescence, a period that comes with many more challenges, physiological and hormonal changes, and educational changes. At this age, children need much more attention, viewing things with the extra baggage of vulnerability to avoid adopting risky behaviours and getting involved with negative influences. On the other hand, in the period of 9-13, there is greater tolerance towards the migration process of parents. Due to the excitement of the promised material goods, children more easily accept their parents' departure, especially if the remaining family member or parent fosters communication and a good relationship between the child and the parent who left.

Ways of communication between transnational family members

In the majority of cases, parents stay abroad for several months, and communication becomes increasingly difficult. Most of the interviewed children keep in touch with their parents through social media networks and talk to their mother or father who is abroad, in the happiest cases, through video calls, and phone calls as well. These calls take place daily, and in this way, the longing is not felt as much; parents participate in the stages of growth their children go through, and the children do not feel abandoned but rather experience the support and involvement of their parents, despite the distance that separates them.

„I talk to my mom several times a day, starting with the morning call when I let her know I'm going to school, and she tells me about her work that day, until we say goodnight and go to sleep. Throughout the day, we talk whenever something comes up and we need to know about each other” (Respondent 5, 11 years old, male).

Despite technological advancements and numerous communication possibilities available today, children still feel the longing for physical presence and face-to-face communication, as is the case with respondent 10, especially when the period since they last saw each other is very long.

„I talked to my mom more before; we had periods when we talked every day, but I would like her to come more often. I don't even remember how many years it's been since she was home to see me” (Respondent 10, 17 years old, female).

Unfortunately, there are situations where communication between children and their departed parents does not exist in any form: phone calls, video calls, etc. The departure abroad was an escape for some family members, leading to the family's breakup. As in the case of respondent number 7, the father started a new life, with another family abroad, forgetting about the loved ones left behind, contributing to a feeling of abandonment.

„I don't even remember when my dad left; I was too young. I know we talked to him for a while, but now I don't even know if he's still alive or not. We don't talk about this at home; I know he left, started a new family abroad, and he doesn't care about us, so why should we care about him?” (Respondent 7, 14 years old, male).

Strategies of adaptation for children left alone at home

The phenomenon of migration has always existed, and if family members do not handle the situation well, major imbalances can arise, even leading to the breakup of the family. The relationships between partners cool down, and here it would be preferable to give the greatest importance. As specialists working with children in educational centres assert, the most emphasis should be placed on maintaining a strong emotional bond, even despite the distance.

„Unfortunately, many parents often say, 'It's okay; my child is young, and he/she doesn't understand what's happening.' But what do you think he/she feels when they wake up and see that their mom, dad, or another important person is absent? At that moment, the child feels a sense of abandonment, and the better we prepare the ground and build a family plan, the less these changes will affect children who experience the situation of one parent leaving abroad” (Social worker, 54 years old, male).

Age is a very important aspect to which the child is subjected during this change. In some cases, children have been left at home in the care of other people from a very young age, without projecting the image of a complete family, and in this sense, they do not feel the absence of parents as strongly.

„I always imagine what it would have been like with both parents; I can't feel the longing because I have never lived with them. I was too young when they left, and my memories are very vague. My grandparents are like parents to me, and my uncle is like an older brother” (Respondent 10, 17 years old, female).

The strategies adopted by children differ, and the feeling of abandonment is common in most cases. Some children are forced to take on the roles that the absent parent left unfulfilled. Regardless of the strategy applied, no child is not affected at least to some extent by the departure of their parents. Even so, to minimize the negative impact, the child needs to be prepared in advance for the changes that are about to occur and be informed about the reasons behind this decision.

Methods of parental support for the children

Parents can support their children who are left at home from a distance through various methods, but especially with the help of current technology. Nowadays, we have applications that allow video calls with just a click away, and the longing is diminished. However, regular visits and spending quality time together are preferred, so that the child feels valued and important.

„The meetings between children and parents should be moments of celebration, filled with games and good bonding. Sharing emotions, thoughts, and feelings should be essential. Parents should assure their children that they are away for a while, but they are still with them and working for a better future” (Psychologist, 49 years old, female).

The support that parents offer is mostly material, and emotional relationships are put on the back burner. To prevent relationships from cooling down and to maintain a functional family dynamic without a crisis, material resources must be complemented with emotional ones. Families going through the process of adaptation due to the departure of one member abroad need more than ever mutual support, words of encouragement, and appreciation.

When the parent returns home, even for a short period, children are extremely happy, but the adaptation is lasting and difficult. Often, until the adaptation occurs, the parent is forced to return to work. Other children may not succeed in adapting to the parent being at home and may express that things are better when the parent is away.

Communication is essential, and the child needs to know that the parent left to work but will return after a predetermined period. It is very important to know who will take care of the child and to complete all legal formalities in this regard. Parents can supervise their children from a distance with the help of technology and trustworthy individuals remaining in the country. Often, especially in single-provider families, grandparents take on the role of the mother or father.

„I always imagine what it would have been like with both parents; I can't feel the longing because I have never lived with them. I was too young when they left, and my memories are very vague. My grandparents are like parents to me, and my uncle is like an older brother” (Respondent 10, 17 years old, female).

Recommendations for managing family crises

The common feeling that children experience is abandonment. In this regard, it is recommended to provide explanations to the child. The family plan and the changes that occur within the family should be made together with the child, regardless of their age. The child should know what to expect, rather than being confronted with a fait accompli without prior preparation. Additionally, the child should know who will be taking care of them at home, and that person should take responsibility for the role they have assumed.

The departure abroad involves sacrifices for both the children and the parents, and special attention should be given to the methods of support that parents adopt, even from a distance. Thanks to technology, phone calls and video calls are accessible to everyone, and they help maintain relationships and diminish the longing for loved ones to some extent. Communication is even more crucial, as the lack of it can lead to the cooling of relationships between partners, which may result in the dissolution of the family.

Another recommendation refers to involving children in age-appropriate tasks and responsibilities, as excessive demands and over-responsibility can endanger their future. The child should feel that they are experiencing childhood, and their tasks should largely involve educational progress.

The majority of children show disinterest in school, and their educational progress is negatively influenced. Moreover, the need for family belonging shifts towards group belonging. In this regard, the recommendation is to involve children in activities that promote and consolidate life skills, creative stimulation, recreation, and age-specific socialization. All these aspects favour adaptation in the absence of a parent and increase the chances of recovering educational gaps, social integration, and self-esteem. In this sense, all individuals involved in activities with children, from teachers to social workers, psycho-pedagogues, and psychologists,

should pay attention to the changes the child is going through. Many behaviours may go unnoticed, which hinders the appropriate intervention.

Unfortunately, many parents do not take into account the risks that the family is exposed to when deciding to go abroad. The money earned is not balanced with the children's development, and relationships deteriorate over time. Therefore, in situations where children or parents feel overwhelmed, the recommendation is to seek help.

4. Conclusion and Discussions

This study was exploratory and aimed to explore children's perception of their parent's departure abroad, their adaptation methods, and the strategies parents adopt to support their families from a distance. The array of changes that each child and parent go through is different, but common elements are found in the vast majority of cases.

In this regard, I refer to the recommendation of involving the child in socializing activities, spending leisure time, and developing skills. Constant communication, even from a distance, with the child is essential, along with providing explanations and informing them about the changes that will occur at the family level, namely, the departure abroad. Moreover, it is important to leave the children in the care of trustworthy individuals with whom the child feels safe.

The child should be informed that the parent is leaving for a temporary period and will return, motivating this decision, which is usually economic. It is also crucial for material possessions to be complemented by strong emotional relationships despite the distance. Children need to know they are loved and appreciated, thus eliminating or reducing the feeling of abandonment, which is common when parents leave and children stay at home.

Although migration brings many changes, the process of adaptation can be eased through extensive communication and involving children in age-appropriate tasks. As evidenced by the respondents in this research, the majority stated that attending activities within the Educational Centers has had a tremendous impact on their daily lives and made their adaptation in the absence of parents much easier by spending leisure time in a secure environment that offered them the help that parents usually provide.

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RESILIENCE VS. DISABILITY: EFFECTIVE COPING APPROACHES IN THE CONTEXT OF A FAMILY CRISIS

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Abstract: Disability represents a complex condition involving physical, intellectual, or sensory limitations, resulting in significant restrictions in daily activities and social participation. Adapting to the needs of a child with disabilities involves additional financial resources, amplifying financial pressures and uncertainty about the family's economic stability. Besides the consequences at the family level, society as a whole experience the repercussions of this issue. Stigmatization and marginalization of children with disabilities and their families constitute an unacceptable reality, generating exclusivity and social inequities. In this article, I intended to detail the coping strategies of families facing a crisis related to their child's disability. The exploratory research (conducted within a master's thesis) was carried out on a sample of 10 parents whose children receive free services at a Day Center in Iasi. The results of this preliminary research offer a significant perspective on the coping methods of families facing their child's disability and familial crisis. These findings can serve as a solid foundation for the development of larger-scale studies that contribute to identifying effective intervention strategies and tailored support for the specific needs of these vulnerable families.

Keywords: coping, family crisis, disabilities, adaptation skills, resilience, strengths, weaknesses.

Résumé : Le handicap représente un état complexe impliquant des limitations physiques, intellectuelles ou sensorielles, entraînant des restrictions significatives dans les activités quotidiennes et la participation sociale. L'adaptation aux besoins d'un enfant en situation de handicap nécessite des ressources financières supplémentaires, ce qui amplifie les pressions financières et l'incertitude concernant la stabilité économique de la famille. Outre les conséquences au niveau familial, la société dans son ensemble ressent les répercussions de cette problématique. La stigmatisation et la marginalisation des enfants en situation de handicap et de leurs familles constituent une réalité inacceptable, générant l'exclusivité et les inégalités sociales. Dans cet article, j'ai l'intention de détailler les stratégies d'adaptation des familles confrontées à une crise liée au handicap de leur enfant. La recherche exploratoire (réalisée dans le cadre d'une thèse de master) a été menée sur un échantillon de 10 parents dont les enfants bénéficient de services gratuits dans un Centre de Jour à Iași. Les résultats de cette recherche préliminaire offrent une perspective significative sur les méthodes d'adaptation des familles confrontées au handicap de leur enfant et à la crise

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familiale. Ces constatations peuvent servir de solide base pour le développement d'études de plus grande envergure contribuant à l'identification de stratégies d'intervention efficaces et de soutien adapté aux besoins spécifiques de ces familles vulnérables.

Mots-clés: adaptation, crise familiale, handicap, compétences d'adaptation, résilience, forces, faiblesses.

Rezumat: Dizabilitatea reprezintă o stare complexă ce implică limitări fizice, intelectuale sau senzoriale, având ca rezultat restricții semnificative în îndeplinirea activităților cotidiene și a participării sociale. Adaptarea la nevoile copilului cu dizabilități implică resurse financiare suplimentare, ceea ce amplifică presiunile financiare și incertitudinea privind stabilitatea economică a familiei. Pe lângă consecințele la nivel familial, societatea în întregul său resimte repercusiunile acestei problematice. Stigmatizarea și marginalizarea copiilor cu dizabilități și a familiilor lor constituie o realitate inacceptabilă, generând exclusivitate și inechități sociale. În acest articol am intenționat să detaliez care sunt modalitățile de coping ale familiilor, care traversează o situație de criză legată de dizabilitatea copilului. Cercetarea de explorare (întreprinsă în cadrul unei teze masterale) s-a realizat pe un eșantion format dintr-un grup de 10 părinți, ai căror copii beneficiază de servicii gratuite în cadrul unui Centru de Zi din Iași. Rezultatele acestei cercetări preliminare oferă o perspectivă semnificativă asupra modalităților de coping ale familiilor care se confruntă cu dizabilitatea copilului și criza familială. Aceste constatări pot reprezenta o bază solidă pentru dezvoltarea unor studii ulterioare, de proporții mai mari, care să contribuie la identificarea unor strategii eficiente de intervenție și sprijin adaptat nevoilor specifice ale acestor familii vulnerabile.

Cuvinte cheie: coping, criză familială, dizabilitate, abilități de adaptare, reziliență, puncte tari, puncte slabe.

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the surrounding environment has become increasingly threatening to human existence, with depression, disabilities, and incurable diseases becoming frequent themes of this century as we strive to survive. From a social perspective, disability is seen as an anomaly of society, not of the individual. Society plays a crucial role in defining the context in which individuals with health problems face difficulties in performing daily activities. Health issues become a real barrier and can limit an individual's ability to fully participate in social, professional, and personal life. From this point of view, concerning the disadvantage that people with disabilities have in society, the term „handicap” is frequently used. This term is used to describe the difference or discrepancy between a person's abilities and the social requirements and expectations, so handicap is not an intrinsic characteristic of the individual but rather of the individual-society relationship. The number of children with „different abilities” has alarmingly increased in recent years, and the families of these children face exceptional situations. Families going through a crisis are destabilized, dynamics and roles change, and resources are often minimized. Moreover, these families may also face other social phenomena such as stigmatization, discrimination, or the breakdown of the family structure.

2. Theoretical Aspects

The recognition of the rights of people with disabilities and the fight for their inclusion in society have gradually been achieved over time, as the consciousness and perceptions of society have evolved. Individuals with different physical or mental conditions did not receive the same treatment as other members of society. According to Neagoe (2014, p. 7), „in the Stone Age, people with disabilities were driven out of tribes, in Antiquity, they were thrown off cliffs, and in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, they were treated very poorly, behavior mainly stimulated by the attitude of the Catholic Church, which led to their rejection, considering them as the satanic side and the consequence of their parents' mistakes.” According to Verza (2002, p. 14), the term disability is „the generic term for impairments, limitations of activity, and restrictions on participation,” and these „functional limitations are due to physical, intellectual, or sensory deficiencies, medical conditions, or mental illnesses, which can be permanent or temporary” (Neagoe, 2014, p. 9). Neagoe (2014) mentions that disability is closely related to respecting human rights because people with disabilities are discriminated against in education, the labour market, and social participation. Additionally, the vulnerability of these individuals makes them susceptible to violence and abuse. To avoid these phenomena, families of children with disabilities have the mission of developing their children so that they can integrate into society and acquire independent living skills. This mission is much more challenging in such cases than in general. Hence, the crisis begins.

Family crises are represented by acute situations that cause stress within the family and threaten its stability, as noted by Ciofu (1998). „Crisis is a turning point, where unforeseen events lead to increased stress, which disrupts the balance where coping mechanisms were functioning to solve problems” (Payne, 2011, p. 118). The relationship between disability and family crisis is close and complex because the appearance of a child's disability can cause significant disruptions in the family's dynamics and functioning. To support families in stressful situations, specialists have developed specific intervention methods. „A crisis intervention model is one that naturally incorporates the intervention's purpose, principles, and a set of techniques that lead to reducing distress, resuming coping efforts, and regaining the subject's normal functioning” (Vrasti, 2012, p. 9). Coping strategies are the main means to overcome the crisis. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984, p. 118), coping is defined as „actions that control irreversible environmental conditions in order to limit psychological/physiological disorders.” Therefore, coping represents any type of action, laden with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral efforts, aimed at overcoming tense situations.

3. The Purpose and Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this research is to analyse the ways in which these families overcome inevitable family crises. The choice of this topic is related to the increased incidence of the number of children with disabilities, as well as families

that struggle to restore their balance following such a crisis. Within this research, four objectives have been proposed, which include: identifying the types of reactions families have in the face of this crisis, exploring the adaptation strategies used by families, evaluating the involvement of family members in resolving the situation, and identifying the resources utilized by these families to overcome the crisis.

Additionally, through the initiation of the research, the following questions were aimed to be addressed:

- What are the experiences that families have gone through when a child with disabilities is born into their family?
- What are the common characteristics of families in which a child with disabilities is born?
- How do families overcome the crisis caused by the birth of a child with disabilities?
- What is the opinion of families with children with disabilities regarding their current situation?

The collected responses to the research questions aim to create an enriched perspective on the ways in which families adapt to the situation when a child with disabilities is born.

4. Methods, Participants, Instruments

The interview was used as a research technique, which is „a psychological and sociological measuring instrument” (Chelcea 2001, p. 267) for phenomena in society, through which information about the experiences, feelings, and opinions of the interviewed individuals can be collected. The research was conducted in April 2023. In accordance with the Interview Guide, 55 questions were addressed to a sample of 10 individuals. The questions were structured starting from the general framework, leading to the specific crisis situation, and covered aspects related to: identification information, financial situation, family structure and roles, relationships between family members, the health status of the child/children, reactions to the crisis situation, and opinions about it, perspectives on the current situation.

Through collaboration with specialists from the *Bethany Iasi Foundation for Social Services*, ten individuals were interviewed (all being women), whose children suffer from either autism spectrum disorders or other cognitive disorders. According to Table 1 (from Appendix 1): Socio-demographic data of research participants, the interview participants reside in the Iasi County area and benefit from the organization's free services. Mostly, the interview participants are the personal caregivers of the children and their ages range from 32 to 58 years. Regarding their origin, five of the interviewed individuals are from rural areas, while the other half is from urban areas. To protect the identity of the interview participants, they were denoted with the letter X, followed by numbers from one to ten, based on the order of their interviews (from X1 to X10).

5. Results

We grouped all the significant responses on some relevant issues as we can identify in the following subtitles:

A. Income. Financial status

Most participants in the study described their financial situation as modest. Mainly, their primary source of income comes from salaries, with three respondents mentioning that their main source of income is the child-rearing allowance. As for the main expenses, these include household maintenance, instalments, and groceries, but for four of the participants, the payment of therapies and treatments for their children is a major concern. Many respondents indicated that they experienced financial difficulties during the crisis period.

B. Family Structure and Roles

Regarding family structure, participants described the family as characterized by „unity” and „resilience.” The number of members in the analyzed families ranges from two to six individuals, of which seven out of ten individuals live only with their nuclear family, while three participants live together with their extended family, benefiting from the support of other family members.

C. Relationships Between Family Members

After analysing the relationships between family members, it was found that six participants described these relationships as good or very good. As for activities and time spent together as a family, participants engage in relaxing activities and involve family members in actions that contribute to the development of the child with different abilities. Furthermore, in terms of the relationship with their partners, the interviewed individuals who are married characterized this relationship as very good and good, based on respect and mutual love. Moreover, at the time of the child's diagnosis, the presence of the partner eased their transition through the crisis period: „When we found out that we have a child with special needs, I was devastated. He encouraged me, supported me, and told me that everything will be fine, that together we will succeed” (said X2). Also, participant X6 mentions that: „After we received the child's diagnosis, I had problems at work and at home. He was there for me, offering the balance I needed. Without him, I wouldn't have succeeded.”

D. Health Status of the Child

According to the responses obtained in this set of questions, approximately 90 percent of the children were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Most parents became aware of the diagnosis before the child reached preschool age. However, seven out of the ten interviewed individuals were not aware of this disorder before the diagnosis. Additionally, the majority of the interview participants mentioned that they administer medication to their children.

Analysing the responses of the interviewees, the moment when parents found out about the child's diagnosis represented a family crisis for all participants, significantly impacting the dynamics and functioning of the family.

E. Reactions to the Crisis

The crisis was described by interview participants as „a moment of imbalance.” Participant X6 said, „The crisis is an imbalance, things were functioning normally maybe in that system, but something happened, which made the family feel stressed and anxious. We all have such moments in life, some more often, others more rarely, but all families face these situations. The important thing is to realize that they are only temporary periods and not to get lost in them.” The crisis period was characterized by a high level of stress, shock, and concern for most participants. Among the most frequent reactions were refusal or denial of the diagnosis, expressing the difficulty of accepting the situation and coping with the associated emotional impact. Throughout the crisis period, the family experienced changes in their lifestyle dynamics. Family members collaborated to change their lifestyle and adapt it to the needs of the child. Similarly, families sought information on caring for a child with such a diagnosis. The emotional component was managed through emotional ventilation and accessing psychological support services. All these actions by the family contributed to the development of new resilience skills. Regarding the reactions of the members, it was observed that nuclear family members worked together to overcome the family crisis through various means. Mainly, they provided emotional support, communicated actively, and took on new roles. As a result, the family was able to build a harmonious family environment favourable to the development of a child with different abilities.

Analysing the coping mechanisms of the interviewed individuals, two types of coping were identified. The first type is problem-focused coping, which involves actively seeking relevant information, accessing specialized support services, and adapting the living environment based on the specific needs of the child. Essentially, this type of coping focuses on action, i.e., finding practical and functional solutions to cope with daily challenges. The second type is emotion-focused coping, which consists of open and sincere communication within the family, expressing feelings and emotions associated with the difficult situation, and seeking psychological support to manage emotional burdens. Essentially, this type of coping focuses on emotional regulation.

F. Perspective on the Current Situation

Currently, after going through the crisis period, the interviewees consider themselves part of functional families. Participant X3 mentions, „The current situation is stable and progressive. We are all doing well, we have adapted, learned what to do, and are evolving.” Additionally, most of the participants (eight out of ten) claim that the family's situation has improved, as they see progress in the child's development, the atmosphere within the family is no longer tense, and the family feels more united at present. For two of the interviewees, the family

structure has changed due to divorce, and thus, these families faced another challenging moment. However, the two families that went through a divorce have developed an optimistic perspective on their current situation. Participant X7 mentions, „When we found out about the diagnosis, we used to have frequent fights with my ex-husband. We were shocked; we didn't know what to do. He eventually found a solution and stopped coming home. I think he had a relationship before deciding to leave us. It is painful that he left because he is not the father of a sick child. The pain was twice as great. Now, things have settled down; there is harmony at home, and I have learned to support my child without anyone's help, and that makes me happy.”

When asked to give a message to families facing similar situations, the interview participants provided the following responses: „The family is obliged to create a supportive environment for this child, offering security, acceptance, and patience. They should accept and fight for the child without wasting time lamenting their situation; there will come a day when everything will change. The umbrella may not remove the rain, but it will protect you from it. Faith may not remove suffering, but it will help you go through it” (Participant X6). Additionally, participant X2 added, „They must move forward, fight for their child, seek solutions for the child's recovery. Accept and think positively. After every storm, the sun will come out, and after all the efforts made for the child, they will be rewarded.”

Based on the information obtained in this study, it can be observed that families facing a crisis due to the birth of a child with disabilities go through complex and demanding experiences. However, they demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability to difficult situations. Financial status is an important aspect, and most of the interviewed families face limited financial resources, which can add additional pressure in managing the child's needs and associated expenses. Family structure and dynamics play an essential role in crisis management, and families are characterized by unity and mutual support. The relationships between family members are evaluated as good and have adapted to the new requirements and responsibilities generated by the presence of a child with disabilities. Life partners play a crucial role in providing emotional support and approaching the situation, contributing to problem-solving and family adaptation during the crisis.

The diagnosis of the child represents a significant crisis moment for the interviewed families, causing stress, worry, and anxiety. Nevertheless, families managed to find resources and strategies to cope with the situation. Identified coping mechanisms include problem-focused approaches, such as seeking relevant information and adapting the living environment to the child's needs, as well as emotion-focused approaches, such as open communication, freely expressing feelings, and accessing psychological support. These adaptive strategies contribute to stress and uncertainty management and facilitate the development of resilience skills in facing challenges. Currently, the interviewed families report a more stable and improved state, where progress is observed in the child's development, and the family atmosphere is more harmonious. Although families went through difficult

periods and experienced significant changes, they managed to find a balance and redefine their roles and priorities within the family.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, the birth of a child with disabilities generates a crisis within the family, affecting both family dynamics and roles, as well as available resources. These families face significant challenges but seek support and treatment for the child, acquiring new skills to actively participate in the child's therapeutic process. They also learn how to engage in activities that support the emotional and mental well-being of the child. Although family stability may be threatened, families rely on resilience and commitment to manage these challenges and create an environment conducive to the child's development. Despite the difficulty of the situation, families demonstrate a high level of adaptability and determination in meeting the child's needs and maintaining family unity.

Based on the research results and the initial objectives, the following have been observed: the reactions of families facing a crisis following the birth of a child with disabilities are influenced by factors such as culture, education, level of information, and interpersonal relationships. Common reactions include shock, sadness, denial, guilt, and despair. The coping methods of families are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, both of which are correlated and interdependent. Communication and support within the family, seeking information about disabilities, and resorting to specific intervention methods are among the most frequently mentioned coping strategies. Additionally, family members' involvement in resolving the crisis situation is influenced by family roles and dynamics. Partners emotionally engage and share responsibilities, while siblings are directed towards understanding and supporting the child with disabilities.

The birth of a child with disabilities impacts the family's resources, including emotional, social, and financial resources. Families rely on internal support from family members, faith, and love for the child, as well as external support, such as specialized services and moral support from other families in similar situations. Families develop new personal resources, such as resilience and optimism, to cope with the difficult situation. The research also addressed the initial questions, thus observing that family reactions include negative emotions and negative social phenomena, but there are also common characteristics such as love for the family and commitment to the child and the family. Families overcome the crisis through action, seeking support and resources, adapting family dynamics, and creating support networks with other families in similar situations. Moreover, families develop an optimistic perspective and become aware of their adaptability and the changes brought about by the child with disabilities.

The birth of a child with disabilities profoundly affects families, but they manage to overcome the crisis through the use of adaptive strategies and emotional and practical support. In reality, Romanian society does not have sufficient infrastructure to support families through the crisis period caused by the birth of a

child with disabilities. Access to services and treatment is extremely difficult, even impossible in areas with limited resources. The institutions and organizations that offer free therapy are inadequate compared to the number of children in need of help. Additionally, the level of awareness among the population regarding the signs and symptoms of developmental disorders is low, negatively affecting the child's development process, as specialized intervention needs to be initiated as early as possible. Parents of these children must realize the importance of involving all family members in the therapeutic process and interacting with the child in a way that fosters their development. It is not enough to rely solely on specialist intervention; children need a supportive environment and trust from those around them to integrate into a society that often seems limited. From society-level to family members, all these networks must collaborate to ensure that these special children do not lose their brightness and uniqueness, but rather contribute to the vibrant and inclusive modern society where each individual has their place and is valued for who they are.

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Appendix 1:

Table of Participants

Id number	Age	Occupation	Residency	Education	Marital status	Child's diagnosis
X1	38	Personal assistant	Urban	University	Married	Autism
X2	47	Personal assistant	Rural	University	Married	Autism
X3	46	Personal assistant	Rural	High school	Divorced	Down Syndrome
X4	43	Personal assistant	Rural	High school	Married	Autism
X5	32	Household	Urban	Gymnasium	Married	Autism
X6	45	Social Worker	Urban	University	Married	Autism
X7	50	Household	Urban	University	Divorced	Autism
X8	57	Household	Rural	Gymnasium	Married	Autoimmune encephalitis
X9	48	Schoolmistress	Urban	University	Married	Down Syndrome
X10	58	Household	Rural	Gymnasium	Married	Autism

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CAUSES AND EFFECTS. WOMEN’S PERMANENT STRUGGLE FOR THE WELFARE STATUTE

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Abstract: In this article, we reviewed the main theoretical dimensions of the phenomenon of domestic violence, after which we continued a series of previous investigations on a theoretical sample of victims of domestic violence, being interested in three directions of analysis: highlighting the personal perception of violent situations, evaluating the weight of the level of education in choosing the protective environment and identifying the specific problems generated by the recent pandemic situation. The conclusions can be useful to initiate more extensive research on extended samples, even in a situation where part of the phenomenon of domestic violence remains unknown.

Keywords: domestic violence, victim, symbolic interactionism, functionalism, conflict theory, aggressor, education.

Résumé : Dans cet article, nous avons passé en revue les principales dimensions théoriques du phénomène de la violence domestique, après quoi nous avons poursuivi une série d'enquêtes antérieures sur un échantillon théorique de victimes de violence domestique, en nous intéressant à trois directions d'analyse : mettre en évidence la perception personnelle des situations de violence, évaluation de poids du niveau d'éducation dans le choix de l'environnement protecteur et identifier les problèmes spécifiques générés par la situation pandémique récente. Les conclusions peuvent être utiles pour initier des recherches plus approfondies sur des échantillons étendus, même dans la situation où une partie du phénomène de la violence domestique reste méconnue.

Mots clés : violence domestique, victime, interactionnisme symbolique, fonctionnalisme, théorie des conflits, agresseur, éducation.

Rezumat : În acest articol am trecut în revistă principalele dimensiuni teoretice ale fenomenului violenței în familie, după care am continuat o serie de investigații anterioare pe un eșantion teoretic de victime ale violenței în familie, fiind interesați de trei direcții de analiză: evidențierea percepției personale asupra situațiilor violente, evaluarea ponderii nivelului de educație în alegerea mediului protector și identificarea problemelor specifice

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generate de recenta situație de pandemie. Concluziile pot fi utile pentru a iniția cercetări mai ample pe eșantioane extinse, chiar și în situația în care o parte a fenomenului violenței domestice rămâne necunoscută.

Cuvinte cheie: violență domestică, victimă, interacționism simbolic, funcționalism, teoria conflictului, agresor, educație.

1. Introduction

The current work presents the results of quantitative and qualitative research that highlights the negative effects of domestic violence both for the health of the individual and for family life. The number of cases from classical literature in the form of journal documents, specialized literature and practice try to sensitize the reader that these phenomena, and customs must be stigmatized and limited as „harmful habits”. It is also necessary for society to be involved in not remaining passive to the harmful effects of this practice.

From the very beginning of mankind, the forms of social organization, the different forms of production or the living spaces have manifested and still manifest violent interpersonal behaviours. The regulations, the social and legal norms, had and have in mind the fight against and prevention of violence. It can be mentioned that „Violence destroys lives and destinies, violence can be found in every country, at any level of society, regardless of the level of education or the level of economic development. Violence is often a taboo subject, and those involved avoid openly discussing, tolerating and silently enduring these violent actions. Every time, violence makes a good home with fear and leaves emotional scars for the whole life” (Irimescu & Rădoi, 2017, p. 10).

2. Defining the concept. Theories on violence in general and domestic violence as a common form

Starting from the concept of violence, it can be stated that „Violence describes behaviours that are not acceptable in society, which are disapproved and sanctioned by rules that establish not only the general rules of conduct for the individual in society but the threshold beyond which society must intervene to maintain order and to defend values such as the right of children to a free and harmonious development, peace, tranquillity, family and respect for others” (Gătej, 2021, pp. 5–6).

If it is not aware, „the phenomenon of violence acts as a perpetual motive in the life of an individual and a family through transgenerational transmission and by creating an atmosphere that tolerates or even stimulates violence” (Munteanu & Munteanu, 2011, pp.14).

In a generic sense, violence is the use of force and coercion by an individual, group, or community to impose its will on others. The individual can be violent towards himself, towards those close to them, towards another individual, by larger or smaller groups. Violence against neighbours, towards other families, tribes, and clans usually turns into vendettas that are transmitted to

intergeneration, a fact highlighted by Shakespeare in the famous play „Romeo and Juliet”, where violence is defeated by love, considered the antidote to hatred.

As a historical course, violence has been known since the beginning of mankind, the Bible (1991, p. 14) mentions in this sense the case of Cain and Abel when „And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother, and slew him.”(Genesis 4:8). Abel's death occurred as a result of his brother's violent manifestation.

Starting from the hypothesis that violence is a universal characteristic of human society, infiltrated in all areas of life, sociologists and other specialists in other fields are interested in their research to find its causes. The problem that frequently arises and the question that comes up is why some individuals are more violent than others in similar situations. To find the causes of violence and answer these questions, a series of theories were formulated: non-sociological and sociological. Non-sociological theories have: theories focused on biological factors and theories focused on psychological factors. Social theories have been formulated from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, functionalism and conflict theory.

From a **biological** perspective, Lombroso (1911, pp. 23–24), an Italian physician, concluded, after examining prisoners of war, that violent people are atavists, which implies a return to a lower evolutionary stage. Individuals look different: narrow foreheads, larger ears and retracted chin. His student Ferri (1913) added other causes such as madness, learning behaviours, mentioning circumstances and passions. Anthropologist Hooton (1939) stated that body shape is the response to violence: „Short and heavy men tend to commit sexual crimes” while „tall and thin men tend to be murderers” he concludes. A widespread biological theory was the XYY chromosome, which points out that men normally have an X and a Y chromosome, with some men still having an extra Y chromosome that is believed to be the cause of the violence.

Other doctors mention brain damage as a result of a tumour that can promote violence. Bylinsky (1973) points out that because 10 out of 20 million Americans suffer from various brain injuries, there is a possibility that over 200,000 of them are potential presidential assassins.

Theorists also support the explanations of violence based on the fact that in the struggle for existence, the individuals who survived were violent, so the genes that were passed on to offspring also contained this characteristic. The anthropologist Balandier (1986) concluded that by human nature we are violent but that the lack of its manifestation is determined by the ability to retain this natural tendency.

Psychological theories claim many of them that violence is innate. Dollard et al. (1939) proposed the frustration-aggression theory of violence. People get frustrated when they can't reach their goals.

Lorentz (1966) stated that in general individuals are poorly equipped for very aggressive lethal behaviour and therefore have not developed an inhibitory mechanism - as in the case of wolves and baboons (in the animal world) - that prevents killing by automatically stopping violence when an enemy becomes

submissive. In humans, in the absence of a locking mechanism, when anger or the desire for domination arises, they have at their disposal the weapons that can be used to destroy each other.

Another psychologist, Skinner (1948), points to learning as the cause of violence. Theorists point out that if people are rewarded when they are violent, the negative behaviour is „reinforced” and they tend to become violent again.

Bandura and Walters (1963), argued that violence is learned by modelling, and copying another person's behaviour, so children are prone to imitate them.

Most sociologists are not impressed by these theories of violence; they look for their causes in the social space. Sociologists mention that not all men, for example, with XYY chromosomes commit acts of violence, and if biological factors are involved, they are largely influenced by social factors.

Sociologists explain violence starting from the social context that is more extensive, they do not look for causes of violence within the individual, whether they are genetic predisposing factors or inhibiting or favouring psychological mechanisms. Of particular interest to sociologists is the determination of the causes for which some societies are more violent than others, and how some societies channel their violence in specific forms of manifestation in social roles: warriors, boxers or footballers.

From this perspective, three such theories have been developed:

- symbolic interactionism;
- functionalism;
- conflict theory.

Symbolic interactionists point out that groups have different ways of managing problems. In this sense, we can mention two theories developed by interactionists, *the theory of differentiated association* (Sutherland, 1947) and the *theory of violent subcultures* (Wolfgang, 1958).

The first *theory of differentiated association* mentions that violent, even criminal behaviour is learned from interactions with other individuals who are also violent. Associations with individuals who break the law stimulate violence; hence the use of the term *differentiated association* (Henslin, 1996).

The second theory of violent subcultures emphasizes that in subcultures that approve of violent behaviours, there is a chance that violence will be learned faster.

Wolfgang (1958) found that the homicide rate is high among young African-American lower-class men on which the study was conducted. The sociologist concluded that these young people grew up in a subculture of violence that teaches them to be violent (Wolfgang & Ferracuti, 1967).

Functionalists point out the social conditions that lead to violence such as the *anomie* mentioned by Durkheim (1897, 1904) who studied suicide rates in Paris and was amazed by the regularity of the figures indicating such violence. The sociologist mentioned that the past can be used to predict the rates of violence (suicides) in the coming years. This violence was called by Durkheim, *normal*

violence and the impulses and desires of individuals in society, the sociologist considered, that they are regulated by the characteristics of a society.

Another functionalist Merton (1968) developed the *theory of tension* that argues that violence tends to be increasing among individuals in groups whose access to important, culturally approved goals. The balance between violence and control and even the attraction to violence that people experience does not always lead to violence, the result is influenced by the control inside or outside (the social environment) of the individual.

Conflict theorists, including Reckless (1973), point out that two systems work to control the attraction and rejection of violence. The first system refers to the inner capacity called *inner insulation* to withstand the pressures of being violent. The second system, *external isolation* refers to close groups such as family, friends and the state that presses the individual to give up violence. The likelihood of a person being violent depends on the power of these two systems to exercise control over the individual's tendencies. If control is weak, violence occurs.

Conflict theorists point out that the exploitation of social classes underlies individual violence. The working class is found to have higher rates of violence against oppressors. It is noteworthy that violence is less among the oppressors because they hold the levers of power and use them to protect themselves and occupy privileged positions. Those in control use this power to suppress riots and strikes as well as abroad to control the army and use it to protect markets and resources (Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, Haiti, etc.).

3. Domestic violence and its forms of manifestation

Domestic violence, as mentioned by the *Legal Resource Center* and Institute for Research and Crime Prevention (2003) includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence), verbal violence and economic violence (by encouraging the economic dependence of the victim).

According to Romanian law 217/2003, domestic violence can be defined as „physical or verbal action committed intentionally by a family member against another member of the same family that causes physical, mental, sexual suffering or material harm. Domestic violence also prevents a woman from exercising her fundamental rights and freedoms. For the law, a family member means a spouse, close relative and persons who have established relationships similar to those between the spouses or between the parents and the child, proven based on the social survey” (According to Council of Europe documents No. R (85) on domestic violence).

The term „domestic violence” includes „domestic violence (violence that occurs between partners, whether they are spouses or cohabitants, including cases of violence against the ex-spouse or conflict situations within consensual relationships) and violence against children, the elderly and other family members”. Depending on the characteristics of violence against women in the case of domestic violence that is included in the concept of domestic violence, the U.S.A.I.D. (1999) classified these manifestations into six categories: physical

violence, sexual violence, psycho-emotional violence, economic violence, relational violence and moral violence.

Physical violence is a high indicator in all research, being visible in all situations and representing violent reactions causing mental trauma and physical injury, directed against a family member. Violence against women is deeply rooted in the popular mentality in some areas there are even certain dogmas, customs and cultural norms that allow women to be beaten.

To these customs are added forms of female masochism to endure physical violence and even to silence it.

Other causes of violence can add the education of the man (which can be limited), the exercising authority only through violence or taking over the conflict model from the family of origin to the newly created family, favouring the occurrence of divorce.

An extremely severe case of physical violence is the vitriol or acid attack of a person mentioned in the literature, causing great physical and mental suffering; few people manage to survive these inhuman attacks. A few drops, a bottle, or whole litres thrown at a woman, turn the victim into an anonymous, faceless person. The survival of these people is the chance at the second life that takes place in a new, deformed, mutilated body. This form of violence makes victims in Uganda, Ethiopia, Zambia, Yemen, South Africa, Colombia, Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, Nepal, Malaysia, Great Britain, Nepal, Bulgaria and so on.

An example in this sense, in the literature, is the case of Naziran, a 20-year-old victim who, after an acid attack and atrocious suffering, completely changes his life. This woman's story is a flagship of the struggle for freedom, tolerance and modesty.

„I wake up suddenly, and a liquid is flowing on my face, it burns me, I rub my face, but my skin crumbles under my fingers, and the pieces of meat come off. I scream in pain; I scream but I see nothing. I don't understand what's happening to me. I cry for help; I scream that I am burning alive! My face is washed with water....”

The problems that arise in the case of these victims are with accommodation with their deformed faces.

„In the days after the transplant, the nurse removes my bandages. I ask her if I have regained my features. She doesn't say anything. I touched my head. I have a shock. I don't have a face anymore. My traits melted. I feel the seams, the sewn pieces of skin, the knots and the swellings. My nose almost disappeared, only the bone line remained. One of the orbits is open, the other eye glued under the eyelid.” (Mercier, Naziran, 2020)

Depending on the medical and social effects, Mitrofan (1996) considers two forms of aggression: *chronic* and *explosive (familial violence)*.

Chronic violence has its roots in norms, traditions, and level of education, while explosive violence comes from the impossibility of controlling one's violent behaviour

Gelles (1987) mentioned a particular form of violence directed against the pregnant woman, favoured by several factors: „sexual frustration; family transition and stress; biochemical changes in the wife's body; prenatal abuse of the child; inability to defend the wife”.

Sexual frustration is favoured by incorrect information on sex life during pregnancy. Here comes what has been called the 'myth of Chronos' generated by the man's fear of being emotionally replaced by the newborn.

Family transition, stress and fatigue refer to the fact that a pregnancy implies a new role, a new status with norms and tasks that can appear as a constraint, a stress for the family, favouring the emergence of conflicts.

Biochemical transformations in the woman's body can accentuate states of nervousness, irritability that sometimes led to conflicts. Violence against pregnant women is derived from prenatal child abuse.

The inability to defend the wife as a result of altered physical conditions may encourage violence.

Affective violence cannot be quantified, research in this regard highlights six behaviours of this abuse: degradation, fear, economic and social deprivation, overloading with responsibilities and distortion of reality by inoculating doubt in one's perceptions (Kirkwood, 1992).

Economic violence is another form of constraint on women, consisting in controlling the resources intended for the household, not involving the partner in maintaining the family, preventing the wife from obtaining a job and selling common or personal things by the partner.

An example of economic violence is also the story of Betty Mahmoody who had a painful life experience (2018). Betty is a woman born in the United States, a mother of two children from a previous marriage, and remarries an Iranian doctor who worked in America. After seven years of marriage and the birth of a child, she decides with difficulty to pay a visit to her husband's parents in Iran. Betty opposes this visit because of the place occupied by women in Iranian society as well as the existing relations between the United States and Iran at that time.

The woman feared that once „my husband took me and Mahtob (their daughter) to Iran, he would try to keep us there forever. He had lived in the United States for two decades. All his affairs, his medical practice – the sum of the present and the future – were in America, why would he think of resuming his past life?”

However, the first form of economic violence was the confiscation of the American passport by the husband under the pretext of possible searches because he is an American citizen. „They will search your purse because you are American. Leave them to me, for they are less likely to search me.”

Not knowing the Farsi language, the lack of friends and passports, the cultural differences between the two worlds, the different food, the impossibility of making phone contact with her relatives in America, the relational violence

through isolation, the ignorance of her husband's relatives, are all problems that make Betty she wants and even succeeds in very difficult conditions, after countless physical and mental violence endured, to return as soon as possible together with her daughter, to America.

Relational violence consists of isolation from friends, family of origin, sequestration and invasion of intimate space.

Moral violence can take the form of severe constraint to adhere to a different religious system or the imposition of another religious system.

An example of the significance of religious violence and the imposition of adherence to other spiritual systems and practices is the story of Asia Bibi, who became the symbol of those who fight against violence committed in the name of religion. The story takes place in Pakistan in the year 2009 when four women who toil to collect the harvest in a heat of 40°C bring water for others. Asia Bibi is a Christian who „quenched her first thirst” and was accused of „contaminating the water of the well that was reserved for Muslims”. A conflict arises for this reason and the woman is accused of blasphemy; a fact equivalent to a death sentence. Almost lynched by a mob of ultra-radical Muslims, she is arrested and after a year and a half receives the verdict of death sentence and execution by hanging. Attempts are made by various Pakistani officials to help her, but they are assassinated by religious fanatics. Anne-Isabelle Tollet, a French journalist manages to get the heroine released after 8 years in prison, after which she receives refugee status in Canada, her life being in danger in Pakistan (Bibi, Tollet, 2019).

4. Victims of domestic violence in action

In Romania, the victims of domestic violence must go through a series of steps to receive help from competent institutions in society. If a victim faces a situation of domestic violence, they can contact: *the 112-emergency service*, informing the operator that they are being assaulted by a family member; at *the police station* to which it belongs, by filing a criminal complaint against the aggressor, and there is also a *Call Center* service with a continuous schedule, with a free telephone line intended for these victims of domestic violence.

Police agencies register the victim's complaint and refer it to the *Forensic Medicine Service* or a hospital emergency unit. Provisional protection orders are also issued at the *Police Agencies* (<https://projurista.ro/preventing-and-combating-violence-in-the-family/>).

Within the prosecutor's office, the prosecutor confirms the need to maintain the protection measures ordered by the police body through the provisional protection order, applying an administrative resolution. At the same time, it can order, if necessary, the termination of protective measures with the mention of the moment. The prosecutor may communicate confirmation of the need to maintain protection measures to the protection unit that submitted the provisional order and issues the protection order.

The judge is meant to issue the order and states that the duration of the measures should not exceed 6 months. The application for the issuance of the order

can be submitted by the victim personally or by the legal representative and can be introduced on behalf of the victim, by the prosecutor, the representative of the local authority with powers to protect victims of domestic violence or by the representative of the social services in this field, accredited according to the law and accepted by the victim (<https://projurista.ro/prevenirea-si-combaterea-violentei-in-familie/>).

Through this protection order, a series of measures imposed by the court are issued with a provisional character: „obligations or indications of the temporary evacuation of the aggressor from the family home regardless of whether he is the owner of the property right; reintegration of the victim, children into the family home, limiting the aggressor's right to only one part of the home, obliging the aggressor to keep a minimum distance from the victim, children, residence, workplace, educational institution. Prohibition for the aggressor to move to certain localities or determined areas frequented by the protected person, prohibition of any contact, including by telephone, by mail or any other form with the victim, obliging the aggressor to hand over the weapons in possession to the police and entrusting minor children or establishing their residence” (<https://projurista.ro/prevenirea-si-combaterea-violentei-in-familie/>).

Another institution authorized to help these victims is the *Emergency Reception Unit* or the *Forensic Medicine Service*, to which the victim can go if he has suffered any physical or mental trauma, and the emergency medical consultation is free. This institution must issue a medical letter for the victim that will help her obtain the medical-legal certificate (<https://projurista.ro/prevenirea-si-combaterea-violentei-in-familie/>).

If the protection order is violated, the victim can make a new request for issuing a new protection order, the procedure being similar to the previous one.

The victim can turn to the following social assistance institutions for advice, psychological support and information: the general social assistance and child protection departments in each county residence, the social assistance departments attached to the town halls, the public social assistance system and non-governmental organizations. Victims can also turn to counselling services to be accommodated with their children in a shelter (Emergency Reception Centers, Recovery Centers) and can also call a law office for guidance, protection order and divorce action. In these situations, legal assistance is free and people who cannot financially cope with the costs of a divorce can request the granting of public judicial aid according to the provisions of OUG no. 51/2008 (<https://dgaspc4.ro/servicii/prevenirea-violentei-in-familie/>).

5. Field research. Methods and results

To highlight the difficult problems generated by domestic violence, research was carried out based on a qualitative analysis conducted on 200 victims selected from a *Women's Shelter* from Iași (we preferred to use this generic name to keep data and location confidential) and the *Spiridon Hospital* from the city of Iași, over two years and a half (from March 2018 to September 2020). In certain cases,

the quantification of the cases also allowed specific quantitative analyses. Our research has three main axes:

- recording the traumatic experiences of women exposed to domestic violence and how they came to turn to specialized organizations even though the risks remain high;
- evaluation of the general level of education and how specialized help is sought depending on it;
- identifying the additional difficulties generated by the Covid 19 pandemic.

The type of interview used was structured and focused on personal experiences, educational level and the consequences of the pandemic (surprise in the beginning period). The sample was homogeneous with victims from rural and urban areas.

The physical consequences of domestic violence are difficult to reproduce or to be detailed. The interviews (and the participant's sociological observations) revealed that physical violence can have serious consequences such as fractures of bones, disfigurements or can take the form of real torture. Some declarations are revealing:

- „...he beat me for no reason, out of the blue, when he was drunk...he broke my eardrum the last time he beat me. My eye and face are livid even now. Because of fear, I don't even respond to challenges anymore. Our little girl is sick, she has heart disease and she is not allowed to be under stress, so I decided to get a divorce...” (female, born in 1996, worker);

- „... when he comes drunk he beats me very often.... I was hit with a club, with the tail of an axe and burned with a cigarette... once he poured alcohol on me and tried to set me on fire...” (female, born in 1980, housewife).

From these examples, it appears that the aggression is directed only at the wife and can take different forms with serious bodily harm that can go up to attempted murder.

From the point of view of the level of education of the victims (the second axes of the research) we used three levels of completed studies: superior (university diploma), secondary level (maximum high school diploma) and elementary level (maximum eight years of school or unfinished education). We made a difference between victims who chose the hospital as a strategy for protection and the victims that choose specialized institutions of protection. We observed that 27.7% of the victims from hospitals has higher education while only 5.6% of the victims with higher education were sheltered in special institutions. From the field research, we noticed that rather the victims with higher education consider that admission to the hospital can bring them additional documents that certify their health status to open possible legal actions. For secondary (secondary) studies, we observed the same concentration: we found 68.1% of the victims in the hospital, while only 27.1% identified them in protective institutions. On the other hand, 66.6% of the victims constituted the largest percentage of the persons questioned by the protection institutions. In other words, the lower the level of education, the more there is the possibility that conflictual social problems will persist and the more likely it is that

these victims will look for a place to withdraw from the family (a situation that cannot be ensured by the hospital regime). We also tested these assessments through the following statistical hypothesis:

H1. There are statistically significant differences in the choice of victim protection strategy depending on the level of education.

To test the hypothesis, we applied an association analysis (Chi-Square). The crosstabulation operation offered next results:

studies * Strategies Crosstabulation

			Strategies		Total
			Hospital	Specialized institution	
studies	Superior level	Count	30	5	35
		Expected Count	19.3	15.8	35.0
		% within studies	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
	Secondary level	Count	75	25	100
		Expected Count	55.0	45.0	100.0
		% within studies	75.0%	25.0%	100.0%
	Elementary level	Count	5	60	65
		Expected Count	35.8	29.3	65.0
		% within studies	7.7%	92.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	110	90	200	
	Expected Count	110.0	90.0	200.0	
	% within studies	55.0%	45.0%	100.0%	

We concluded that there was a significant association between the variables (Chi Square=88.2, df=2, p=.000). The strength of the effect was also high (Phi=.664, p=.000). In other words, there was a strong influence between the level of education and the type of protection strategies chosen: if the education is advanced, there are more chances that the victims will be found in hospitals, and if the level of education decreases, the strategies focus on identifying specialized institutions (because they can also offer temporary shelter). The hypothesis is confirmed.

Our results confirm the research carried out by Gelles (1987) and Pegelow (1981). We draw attention that the research was limited to cases that are officially registered, with a large number of cases remaining unknown. (see for details Mândrilă, 2009).

Another important conclusion resulting from the interviews was that the level of education influences women's decision to maintain the abusive relationship, the level of schooling being associated with a professional status that gives them material independence.

Regarding the beginning of the pandemic in Romania, we found a series of additional difficulties declared by the interviewed victims:

- an alarming increase in the intensity of violence with the ban on leaving homes (we remind you that starting from March 16, 2020, a state of emergency was established in Romania, which was then extended by several official acts);

- the obligation for the victim and the aggressor not to leave the homemade that in some situations the victim left the home at any risk to save his life;

- the victims interviewed confirm that they used the emergency telephone lines more often (something also confirmed by official statistics);
- the number of requests for temporary protection has increased (we have found numerous statements confirming the violation of Law 217/2003 in which consistent punishments are stipulated for aggressors);
- in many situations, the physical violence was accompanied by rape (due to the forced physical proximity).

Most of the research conclusions confirmed a series of data collected at the national level (for example the report produced by the FILIA Center entitled „Women during and after the coronavirus: Information, Research and Advocacy for Gender Equality” and published in 2021). In fact, during the Covid pandemic, a report published by the European Commission in March 2021 mentioned the fact that the rate of domestic violence increased in many states of the European Union. Thus, in the spring of 2020, 32% more victims were registered in France, with almost 20% more than the previous reports in Lithuania and Romania a report published by the *Filia Center* for the year 2021 indicates that 33 women were killed by their partners, former partners or family members between January and August 2021 and in the last 8 years approximately 426 were killed - it was mentioned that there are 16 times more victims in peacetime than the total number of Romanian soldiers killed in the war in Afghanistan.

During the same period, 1212 calls from victims of domestic violence were taken by operators and 7120 temporary protection orders and 6901 protective orders were issued of which 2206 were violated by the abusers.

The executive director of the *Filia Center*, an NGO that fights against gender equality, stated: „Very often, the aggressors took advantage of the fact that if they had left the house at night or during the day without the completed declaration, they would have received a fine. Or in the case of that form, until 2021, no point could have been ticked in the situation where they had a safety problem,” said A. Rusu for the site *Free Europe* (<https://romania.europalibera.org/a/drama-femei-abuz-domestic/31521522.html>).

Another impediment to accessing services and programs for judgment or court applications during the Covid pandemic, although they have been moved online, has been that women from disadvantaged backgrounds lack access to electronic means.

For the period of the pandemic, the lockdowns had to allocate a special room for isolation according to the law and offer tests, everything is supported by NGOs and the social workers had to work in shifts of two weeks, one at the centre and the other at home.

In conclusion, it can be mentioned that combating and preventing domestic violence faces problems regarding the lack of information about these women, the quality of services that cannot adapt quickly enough to a new situation, such as that determined by Covid, and an insufficient number of shelters.

6. Conclusions

In practical research we followed only three research axes: the experiences of the victims of domestic violence, the relevance of the level of education in choosing the protective environment and the possible additional costs caused by the recent pandemic situation. We formulated hypothesis H1 (There are statistically significant differences in the choice of victim protection strategy depending on the level of education) which was confirmed.

Our article is a plea for the continuation of research in the field, primarily because the magnitude of the phenomenon is far from diminishing in Romania. By the way, the statistics for Romania about domestic violence remain worrying, the Prosecutor's Office attached to the *Bucharest High Court of Cassation and Justice* published the following data for 2020 (the year of our research): the total number of victims of family violence was: 1331 (defendants sent to court for family violence); 1512 (victims of domestic violence); 619 (among the victims of domestic violence were minors); 158 (parents); 13 (grandparents); 236 (husbands); 552 (sons, daughters); 465 (sons, daughters that are minors); 117 (brothers, sisters); 14 (brothers, sisters that are minors); 118 (other relatives); 43 (among the relatives are minors); 23 (father-in-law, mother-in-law); 13 (sons-in-law, daughters-in-law); 82 (spouses) [see on mpublic.ro/sites/default/files/PDF/Vf_2020.pdf].

In this context, the sociological and social assistance analyses must be continued and corroborated with the required legal measures. Perhaps the new context of research and action at the European level already has new dimensions: from the improvement of the methods and techniques of action of all those involved in protecting victims (with the establishment of complex databases regarding both victims and aggressors) up to the contribution brought by the new digital technologies (with remarkable results in the GPS identification of the victim's location or by equipping the victim with additional electronic devices to alert the Police). In this context, the phenomenon can be easier to control if it cannot be eradicated

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RISK PERCEPTION AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES. THE LISBON EARTHQUAKE (1755) AND ITS REFLECTION IN LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES

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Abstract: The discourse on the disaster from the mid-eighteenth century could provide us with elements of understanding about the society that produced it, placing it in the field of the history of representations since the earthquake of Lisbon in 1755 allowed the analysis of naturalists from a scientific point of view and provided the basis for a conception of scientific nature, according to which man's intervention in nature was considered legitimate. Thus, the perception of natural disasters allows for a gradual change in the position of consciousness and the change in values of man, who renounces his passivity towards nature in modern times and begins, through technical-scientific mastery, to consider himself competent and empowered in the management of risks and natural hazards. The literary account of disasters takes on a critical role, thematizing nature as a social catastrophe, and the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, or Heinrich von Kleist, referring to the Lisbon earthquake, demonstrate the secularisation of disaster, opening the way to the concepts of risk and responsibility.

Keywords: natural hazard, risk society, risk perception, Enlightenment period, conception of nature, cultural history.

Résumé : Le discours sur la catastrophe à partir de la moitié du XVIII^e siècle pourrait nous fournir des éléments de compréhension sur la société qui l'avait produit, l'inscrivant dans le champ de l'histoire des représentations, car cette calamité a permis l'analyse des naturalistes d'un point de vue scientifique et a fourni les bases d'une conception de la Nature scientifique, selon laquelle, l'intervention de l'homme dans la nature a été considérée comme légitime. Ainsi, la perception de la catastrophe naturelle permet une modification de la position graduelle de la conscience et du changement des valeurs de l'homme qui renonce à sa passivité envers la nature dans les temps modernes et commence par une maîtrise technico-scientifique à se considérer compétent et habilité dans la gestion des risques et le management des dangers naturels. Le récit littéraire des catastrophes prend un rôle critique, en thématissant la nature comme catastrophe sociale et les écrits de Voltaire,

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Rousseau ou Heinrich von Kleist, qui se sont penchés sur le cas du séisme de Lisbonne font preuve de la laïcisation du désastre, en ouvrant la voie sur les concepts de risque et de responsabilité.

Mots clés : aléas naturels, société du risque, perception du risque, période des Lumières, conception de la nature, histoire culturelle.

Rezumat: Discursul asupra catastrofei de la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea ne poate oferi elemente de înțelegere asupra societății care a produs-o, plasând cercetarea în domeniul istoriei reprezentărilor, deoarece cutremurul din Lisabona din 1755 a permis naturaliștilor să îl analizeze din punct de vedere științific și a oferit baza unei noi concepții despre Natură, potrivit căreia, intervenția omului era considerată legitimă. Astfel, percepția dezastrului natural permite o modificare a conștiinței și o schimbare a valorilor omului, care renunță la pasivitatea sa față de natură și începe cu ajutorul mijloacelor tehnico-științifice să dobândească noi competențe în gestionarea riscurilor și în managementul catastrofelor naturale. Literatura pe care se bazează cercetarea capătă un rol critic, convertind natura în catastrofă socială, deoarece scrierile lui Voltaire, Rousseau sau Heinrich von Kleist, cu privire la cutremurul din Lisabona, demonstrează secularizarea dezastrului, deschizând calea spre apariția conceptelor de risc și de responsabilitate.

Cuvinte cheie: hazard natural, societate de risc, percepția riscului, perioada iluminismului, concepția despre natură, istorie culturală.

1. Introduction

The famous Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755, whose tremors were felt from Iceland to Morocco, and from the German states to Boston, succeeded in amplifying the multiple debates about disasters, whether moral, ethical, or scientific. How contemporaries of the earthquake used the Lisbon disaster as an object of interrogation in their philosophical arguments has been the subject of much research in recent years (Velescu 2017). It is worth noting that the concept of vulnerability and seismic risk was raised for the first time on the occasion of the Lisbon earthquake, as was the perception of natural disasters as a sociological problem, an issue, and concepts that would be taken up later in the twentieth century (Fonseca 2005, p. 110). On the one hand, there is the process of secularisation of nature, which allows the passage from divine plagues to physical phenomena, and on the other hand, there is the rise of the modern state, which prefigures the actions of man when he becomes aware of the threat and the measures of protection (Favier 2006). The „risk society”, a term coined by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Patrick Lagadec from the 1980s onwards (Boudia & Jas 2007, p. 318), is based on the society of the catastrophe, that is to say, a society from the past, before the nineteenth century, which had to suffer misfortunes without being able to protect itself or have access to standards of prevention. „Risk is not synonymous with catastrophe but with the anticipation of catastrophe—this is what I set up in my initial treatment of the scaffolding of risk” (Beck 2009, p. 67). This context has been brilliantly illustrated above all by the historian Jean Delumeau, whose work on fear has mapped out all the mentalities of a mediaeval society under constant threat from epidemics, God, and witches (Delumeau 1978).

Thus, the Lisbon earthquake appears as the catalytic event that put an end to this paradigm (Fabiani & Theys, 1987), leading from fatalism to action, from religious models to rational explanations, from the powerlessness of populations to the protective measures of the state.

Already in the 18th century, there were two models of interpretation of natural disasters, be they tidal waves, earthquakes, or tsunamis: on the one hand, they were interpreted as divine punishment for sins, licentiousness, or vicious behaviour of people. The theological interpretation of punishment was soon replaced by a physical-theological one, according to which natural disasters, such as the tidal wave of 1717 (Jakubowski-Tiessen 1986) or the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 (Lauer and Unger 2008), were a demonstration of divine omnipotence. In the new meaning of perdition as 'blessing', natural disasters fulfil a cathartic function. On the other hand, it was the naturalists who tried to interpret natural disasters from a scientific point of view by appealing to the laws of nature. With a new view of scientific laws, another conception of nature was established, according to which human interventions in nature would be seen as legitimate. When one starts to understand nature as a well-organised and accomplished machine, the correction of undesirable effects that appear in a natural disaster is not only seen as justified but also as ordered to avoid a foreseeable calamity for the population or at least mitigate it, for example by technical measures such as the construction of a dam. Thus, the perception of the natural disaster allows for a gradual change in the position of consciousness and the change of values of man, who renounces his passivity towards nature in modern times and begins to empower himself for risk management and natural hazard management through technical-scientific handling.

2. Disasters - journalistic, scientific, literary or philosophical subject

The secularisation of the catastrophe lies less in the rejection of religious interpretations, which is still relative in this period, than in the amplification of the tension between the feeling of fragility and the promise of the triumph of nature. The catastrophe becomes shaped into a narrative, which is one of the landmarks of its modernity. If, after the Lisbon earthquake, there is no real information at first moment, the magazines of the time try to collect details to tell the story of the event and the reactions of contemporaries in different parts of the world. These articles include scientific explanations, observations of similar phenomena, details of the victims, and rescue operations, and for the first time, this information crosses spatial and temporal boundaries. It is not only a question of making a history of an event; one can also speak of writing the history of one's reception of the event. On the other hand, the catastrophic event is constructed in such a way as to provoke intense feelings in the reader, touching his curiosity as well as his compassion.

The clear dividing lines between curiosity and voyeurism are not always very clear, and the tendency to play on the emotional aspect of the disaster is revealed by the birth of journalism that is organised around the sensational. Thus,

the strong reactions expressed against the text of the editor of the *Gazette de France*, Marin, in 1772, relating the fire of the Hôtel-Dieu as the „most magnificent and most appalling spectacle” (Pfister 2002), explain this approach. In a broader sense, we can look for the reasons for writing about misfortunes. The press discourse, despite its ramblings, finds its primary justification in its mission to inform; the other texts contain yet other considerations and fears of the humanity of an era. The experience of writing is carried out not only to inform but also to make people think, to soothe pain, to horrify, and to delight a public that unconsciously manifests the desire to explain itself and to see the catastrophe up close, questioning its safety. This is a period in which there is an awareness of the fragility of the human condition and an unprecedented desire to protect human knowledge against a possible collective catastrophe, expressed by the multiplication of the publication of dictionaries and encyclopaedias and the opening of large libraries. This anxiety about the tragic end of a civilization through a terrible catastrophe appears, for example, in the *Prospectus* of the *Encyclopaedia*: „ Que l’encyclopédie devienne un sanctuaire où les connaissances des hommes soient à l’abri des révolutions. [...] Faisons donc pour les siècles à venir ce que nous regrettons que les siècles passés n’aient pas fait pour le nôtre. Nous osons dire que les Anciens eussent exécuté une encyclopédie comme ils ont exécuté tant de choses, et que ce manuscrit se fut seul échappé de la fameuse Bibliothèque d’Alexandrie, il n’eût été capable de nous consoler de la perte de tous les autres.” (“Let the encyclopaedia become a sanctuary where the knowledge of men is safe from revolutions. Let us, therefore, do for the centuries to come what we regret that the past centuries did not do for ours. We dare say that the ancients would have produced an encyclopaedia, as they have produced so many things, and that if this manuscript alone had escaped from the famous Library of Alexandria, it would not have been able to console us for the loss of all the others”).

The direct testimonies of travellers or the reflective texts on past and present, near and far disasters by writers and philosophers of the Enlightenment herald the craze of the time to appropriate the strangeness of disaster in some way. This new attitude makes it possible to take the disaster out of the religious discourse and to adopt another approach in the form of a „culture of risk”. Writing, alongside the collection of information and testimonies, facilitates the understanding of past and present disasters, possibly to prevent future ones or to warn posterity. On the other hand, it is also a way for man to oppose the disaster and the mental ruin that befall him; one writes, therefore, to fight against fear, against despair, and against the contamination of evil that approaches madness. The disaster isolates and breaks up contacts and unions, forms of communication, because an earthquake destroys the paths and mountains, the information relays that are part of the social organisation. (Mercier-Faivre & Thomas 2008).

In *Candide*, one of Voltaire’s most savoury and biting satires, he succeeded in transforming the drama into an event, changing the degree of risk previously accepted by mankind and rendering the teleological concept of explaining natural disasters inadequate and obsolete. It is a new programme of rationalisation and

management of nature that heralds the development of the concepts of risk, responsibility, and pollution in the 19th century, the seeds of which are to be found in the reformulation of dangers and the new apprehension of fears in the Enlightenment period. The novel *Candide* is thus not limited to a polemic with the philosophical doctrine embodied by the character of Pangloss. Above all, *Candide* presents a catalogue of possible positions on evil, a representation of the world devoid of meaning, and the inevitability of evil confirmed in every corner of the world and the course of the adventures of all the heroes of the tale (Baczko 2008, p. 62). One of the most insistent messages of *Candide* is to warn against the conviction that it would be possible to build a world without evil. Even Eldorado is a parody of utopia in a happy land of nowhere. Candide and his companion soon flee from it because they are bored. They do not recognise themselves in an Eden where everything is good, but in a cruel world where the Inquisition is rampant and wars and fanaticism are ravaging. The only suitable attitude to get out of the dilemma in which man, by his condition, seems to be trapped is to „vivre dans la convulsion de l'inquiétude ou dans la léthargie de l'ennui” [“live in the convulsion of anxiety or the lethargy of boredom”] (Voltaire 1759). Through *Candide*, Voltaire opposes Leibniz's optimism and his idea of the best of all possible worlds. The depth of this quarrel lies in the problem of evil, which Voltaire refuses to resign himself to, adhering to a theodicy that explains that the worst evils are necessary ingredients in the order of the whole. The distinction between the 'physical world' and the 'moral world' is revealed by the idea that while theoretical reason has progressed, the moral world, which is the work of man, offers the desolate spectacle of evil and injustice. Leibniz's answer to the problem of evil asserts that evil comes from the imperfection, limitations, and obscurities that condition the existence of every created being. The creaturely condition implies before it is created, these limitations, without which the human being would have cancelled itself out in its coincidence with God. Thus, according to Leibniz, good comes from God and evil from the creaturely condition. But this evil is for the human being the condition of the good because, without this lack, there would not have been the principle of aspiration, freedom, or hope towards clarity and truth. (Hersch 1981)

Natural disasters are, therefore, for Rousseau only a part of the natural circumstances designated to solicit human perfectibility, which, in responding, engages man in the arts, sciences, and society in general. In chapter IX of his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Rousseau alludes to the role of natural disasters in the constitution of human societies: „Les associations d'hommes sont en grande partie l'ouvrage des accidents de la nature : les déluges particuliers, les mers extravasées, les éruptions des volcans, les grands tremblements de terre, les incendies allumés par la foudre et qui détruisent les forêts, tout ce qui dût effrayer et disperser les sauvages habitants d'un pays dût ensuite les rassembler pour réparer en commun les pertes communes. Les traditions des malheurs de la terre si fréquentes dans les anciens temps, montrent de quels instruments se sert la providence pour forcer les humains à se rapprocher.” („The associations of men are largely the work of accidents of nature: particular deluges, extravagant seas, eruptions of volcanoes,

great earthquakes, fires set by lightning and destroying forests – everything that should frighten and disperse the savage inhabitants of a country should then bring them together to repair in common the common losses. The traditions of the woes of the earth, so frequent in ancient times, show what instruments Providence used to force humans to come together”). (Rousseau 1969, p. 1060).

Rousseau prefigures a new conception of the balance between the environment and society in which human responsibility is valued (Walter 2008, p. 120).

With the Lisbon earthquake, the unfortunate accident of nature seems to belong fully to human history, so the historical break distributes accidents between a history of perfectibility and a history of self-love. Rousseau notes that earthquakes ‘in the depths of a desert’ are not spoken of because they do not harm, whereas those in cities are. (Rousseau 1969, p. 1062). The earth is a medium of human genesis. When Rousseau speaks of „particular deluges, extravagant seas” and „volcanic eruptions”, he is thinking of what frightened and dispersed men. It is a philosophy of the genesis of men, and since history is the history of man, then evil is only moral. This is Rousseau’s modernity, of which Jean-Pierre Dupuy said: „Pour que le chemin frayé par Rousseau entre vraiment dans la modernité, il suffira d’une dernière chiquenaude, faisant de la Providence ou de Dieu une hypothèse dont on peut se passer en mettant l’homme à sa place. Il n’y aura alors de mal que moral, et les hommes en seront seuls responsables”. [“For the path blazed by Rousseau to enter modernity, all that is needed is a final flick of the wrist, making Providence or God a hypothesis that can be dispensed with by putting a man in his place. There will then be only moral evil, and men alone will be responsible for it”]. (Dupuy 2007, p. 34–35).

Rousseau’s intuition certainly constitutes a break in the perception of risk. It highlights the interactions between nature and society: „Convenez, par exemple, que la nature n’avait point rassemblé là vingt mille maisons de six à sept étages, et que si les habitants de cette grande ville eussent été dispersés plus également, et plus légèrement logés, le dégât eût été beaucoup moindre, et peut-être nul”. (“Consider, for example, that nature had not assembled twenty thousand six- or seven-story houses there, and that if the inhabitants of this great city had been more evenly dispersed and more lightly housed, the damage would have been much less, and perhaps none at all”). (Rousseau 1969, p. 1061).

It is no longer God who punishes but the frenzy of human intervention in the world, which becomes counterproductive when it endangers natural balance.

„[...] car je montrais aux hommes comment ils faisaient leur malheur eux-mêmes, et par conséquent comment ils pouvaient les éviter. Je ne vois pas qu’on puisse chercher la source du mal ailleurs que dans l’homme libre, perfectionné, partant corrompu” (“[...] for I showed men how they made their own misfortunes and consequently how they could avoid them. I do not see that the source of evil can be sought elsewhere than in a free, perfected, and therefore corrupted man”). (Rousseau 1969, p. 1061).

Continuing Rousseau's reflection, Jean-Pierre Dupuy considered that „nous vivons désormais dans l'ombre portée de catastrophes futures qui, mises en systèmes, provoqueront peut-être la disparition de l'espèce. Notre responsabilité est énorme, puisque nous sommes désormais la seule cause de ce qui nous arrive”. [“we are now living in the shadow of future catastrophes, which, if put into systems, will perhaps cause the disappearance of the species. Our responsibility is enormous since we are now the sole cause of what happens to us”] (Dupuy 2005, p. 30). This new present that has fallen to us begins at the time of the Enlightenment: if religion is never entirely absent, man's responsibility for his history is born at this time („Mais que signifierait un pareil privilège? Serait-ce donc à dire que l'ordre du monde doit changer selon nos caprices, et que, pour lui interdire un tremblement de terre en quelque lieu, nous n'avons qu'à y bâtir une Ville ? „[„But what would such a privilege mean? Would it mean that the order of the world must change according to our whims and that, in order to prevent an earthquake in some place, we have only to build a city there”] (Rousseau 1969, p. 1061).

If Rousseau removes catastrophe from the order of the divine to make it the prerogative of humanity, it is in a purely catastrophist reading of human history. According to Rousseau, there are no multiple catastrophes; according to Rousseau, there is only one: the act of founding civil society, by which man loses his natural freedom and alienates himself from social life and its inequalities of possession, wealth, power, oppression, and violence. Nature is always good, but society is vicious. It is necessary, writes Jean-Pierre Dupuy, „inscrire la catastrophe dans l'avenir d'une façon beaucoup plus radicale. Il faut la rendre inéluctable. C'est rigoureusement que l'on pourra dire alors que nous agissons pour la prévenir dans le souvenir que nous avons d'elle”. [“to inscribe the catastrophe in the future in a much more radical way. It must be made inescapable. It is rigorously that we can then say that we are acting to prevent it in the memory that we have of it”] (Dupuy 2002, p. 164). In other words, the narrative of the catastrophe must make it an event that is always already accomplished so that it appears as a reality and is treated as such (Jonas 1979). Dupuy continues the work of Hans Jonas, who perceived the ethical dilemma facing humanity: „It gains self-consciousness at the very moment when its survival is in question” (Jonas 1979, p. 63). In terms of the anthropology of the imaginary, this imperative is part of what Gilbert Durand calls 'future hypotyposis' (Durand 1969, p. 408): it is a question of making the future present, of putting it before our eyes, to master it through the imagination. The disaster thus reveals the image that societies construct of themselves, the place and role they assign to men, and the values they attribute to themselves. This advent of modernity helps to disqualify public debates on divine injustice and, at the same time, to undermine the religious interpretation of the most violent phenomena of nature: Ce tremblement de terre [de Lisbonne], (...) „a eu un rôle dans l'Europe dont je ne vois d'équivalent que dans les camps de concentration nazis, à savoir - la question qui a retenti après la guerre: comment est-il possible de croire encore en la raison une fois dit qu'il y a eu Auschwitz, et que un certain type de philosophie devenait impossible, qui avait pourtant fait l'histoire du dix-neuvième siècle. Il est

très curieux que, au dix-huitième siècle, ce soit le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne qui assume quelque chose de cela, où toute l'Europe s'est dite: comment est-il encore possible de maintenir un certain optimisme fondé sur Dieu ? Vous voyez, après Auschwitz retentit la question : comment est-il possible de maintenir le moindre optimisme sur ce qu'est la raison humaine. Après le tremblement de terre de Lisbonne, comment est-il possible de maintenir la moindre croyance en une rationalité d'origine divine?" ["This earthquake [of Lisbon] (...) had a role in Europe whose equivalent I can only see in the Nazi concentration camps, namely, the question that resounded after the war: how is it possible to still believe in reason once it is said that there was Auschwitz and that a certain type of philosophy became impossible, which had nevertheless made the history of the nineteenth century". It is very curious that in the eighteenth century, it was the Lisbon earthquake that assumed something of this, where the whole of Europe said to itself: „How is it still possible to maintain a certain optimism based on God? You see, after Auschwitz, the question resounds: how is it possible to maintain any optimism about what human reason is? After the Lisbon earthquake, how is it possible to maintain any belief in the rationality of divine origin?"] (Deleuze, 1987) explained Gilles Deleuze in his lecture on Leibniz. The destruction of the Portuguese capital will have served to decouple religion from reason in matters of natural phenomena and thus contribute to sending the man back to his responsibilities, which Rousseau did not fail to do in his response to the *Poem on the Lisbon Disaster*. J.-P. Dupuy is especially concerned about the opposite tendency, that of systematic human responsibility, which sends Rousseau's metaphysics back to the Lisbon earthquake in 1755: it exonerates God from any responsibility, which then falls to man and becomes mortal. „Man, no longer look for the author of evil”, we read in *Emile*: „This author is yourself. There is no other evil than that which you do or that you suffer, and both come from you”. (Dupuy 2005, p. 64).

In Rousseau's time, the natural disaster was transformed into an event; it was no longer seen as a sign but „as a social, political, and media issue” (Mercier-Faivre and Chantal 2008), as well as „an aesthetic object that challenges the arts to compete with it” (Mercier-Faivre and Chantal 2008). Its exceptional character (unpredictable, incommensurable with human powers of action) immediately transforms us into mere passive spectators of an event that is beyond us, for which we can only feel passion, curiosity (the news item), or pity (the tragedy). This central status of the accident in our collective imagination is described by Paul Virilio in the following terms: „la catastrophe a ceci de terrible que non seulement on ne croit pas qu'elle va se produire alors même qu'on a toutes les raisons de savoir qu'elle va se produire, mais qu'une fois qu'elle s'est produite elle apparaît comme relevant de l'ordre normal des choses” [„The terrible thing about the catastrophe is that not only do we not believe that it will happen even though we have every reason to know that it will, but once it has happened, it appears to be part of the normal order of things”] (Virilio 2005, p. 84–85).

The solution proposed by Paul Virilio consists of „projecting oneself into the post-disaster,” i.e., „inscribing the catastrophe into the future” by considering it « inéluctable » [‘inescapable’] (Virilio 2005, p. 84–85). It is therefore, paradoxically, by treating the disaster as inescapable that we will be able to act in such a way as to be able to (hopefully) avoid it (Dupuy 2002, p. 164). „Instead of incriminating singular man on the moral level through sin, the contemporary societal vision indicts the collective fault inscribed in the way of life”, writes the historian François Walter, and he continues, „This is why disasters are displaced onto a register that denounces the irresponsibility of human activities”. (Walter 2008, p. 210).

By asking „whether secularisation is not ultimately one of the great myths of modernity” (Walter 2008, p. 340) and by affirming in his conclusion that „rational analysis is not superior to affective, emotional, or symbolic consideration” (Walter 2008, p. 340), we are invited to see the disaster from multiple angles: that of facts, that of models (for thought), and that of ethical, political, and historical issues (*Revue Internationale Esprit* 2008).

Rousseau proposes a new relationship to the catastrophic event and to action, marked not only by memory but by reparation, not only by precaution but by preparation: „l’ordre du monde doit changer selon nos caprices, que la nature doit être soumise à nos lois, et que, pour lui interdire un tremblement de terre en quelque lieu, nous n’avons qu’à y bâtir une ville ?” [“The order of the world must change according to our whims, that nature must be subject to our laws, and that, in order to prevent an earthquake in some place, we have only to build a city there?”] (Rousseau 1969, p. 1064).

3. Conclusions: from the representations of human security to the human condition

As a sudden break in the ordinary course of history with incalculable effects, the catastrophe attains the status of a pure event. The idea of catastrophe seems to occupy the place occupied in the 19th century by the idea of revolution. Faced with disasters (or rather, discourses on disasters), we must try to escape both lamentation and fascination, lament and amazement. Nature and politics are in fact, in each case in a different way, two dimensions present in each disaster, allowing not only to think about them but also the change towards an era that establishes the foundations of the idea of ‘security’, in the sense of the Latin term ‘security’, which comes from the contraction of *sine* and *curate*. It means the absence of trouble or worry, which corresponds to the Greek *ataraxia*. Thus Seneca can write: „The characteristic of the wise is security.” (Seneca 1873, p. 200)

This spiritual meaning of ‘security’ has been attested to in French for a very long time, as can be seen by consulting the major dictionaries. The *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française*, which, until the 1832 edition, gave the only meaning of ‘security’ as „confidence, peace of mind,” In *Emile*, Rousseau speaks of „security of innocence” and in *Nouvelle Héloïse* of „security of virtue”. It is only from the 19th century onwards that ‘security’ will mean in French, in addition to

the mental state of serenity, an absence of dangers or objective protection against possible threats.

The lesson that men have had to learn about evil since the Lisbon earthquake reminds us all too often of Peter Sloterdijk's sad observation: „The only catastrophe that seems clear to everyone would be the catastrophe that no one survives.” (Sloterdijk 2000, p. 108). The experience of disaster will never be enough to awaken people's minds, but awareness of this limitation prevents us from embarking on the morally problematic path of pedagogy through catastrophe, which leads us to hope for the advent of a catastrophe of sufficient magnitude to finally bring about a salutary awakening. The solution that Jean-Pierre Dupuy rejects more than any other is the hope that the catastrophe will only be partial, as it has been up to now in the history of humanity, and the gamble of salvation through technology (Dupuy 2002). This recent fortune of Rousseau's attitude, as well as the return of the Leibnizian theodicy in the form of nature's revenge following savage urbanisation, testifies to the contemporary incapacity to think about „systemic evil', which is neither moral nor natural. The controversy between Rousseau and Voltaire over the interpretation of the divine will about the Lisbon earthquake is also central to Heinrich von Kleist's short story *Das Erdbeben in Chili*. As Thomas Bourke points out, „The Chilean earthquake recalls the Lisbon earthquake and the scepticism it aroused in Voltaire and foreshadows the pessimism of Schopenhauer, who was to revisit the controversy between Voltaire and Rousseau on this subject and to be the first German to side with Voltaire against Leibniz's excuse for the calamities in the world, according to which evil sometimes begets good.” (Bourke 1983, p. 248).

In the face of catastrophe, truth is not enough to provoke action. It is also necessary to create conviction and avoid panic, which is what Rousseau reproaches Voltaire for. The threat is thus twofold, concerning both survival and values, in the sense that the panic resulting from a sudden awareness of the imminence of the catastrophe could lead to a relapse into barbarism in the name of survival (Dupuy 2007, p. 34–35). His approach is to 'obtain an image of the future that is sufficiently catastrophic to be repulsive and sufficiently credible to trigger the actions that would prevent its realisation, give or take an accident' (Dupuy 2002, p. 34). (Dupuy 2002, p. 213-214). One could say that the profile of our disasters reflects our condition. Man is reembraced as fragile, a core of vital capacities susceptible to impediments and injuries, a vulnerability that calls on the authorities to assume their „responsibility to protect”. Every disaster is characterised by its procession of ruptures, mourning, and separations because a disaster is always the destruction of vital links, the links that make life possible.

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BOOK REVIEW

Adrian NETEDU¹

Ștefan Ungurean, *Eseuri sociologice [Sociological Essays]* (2022), Art Soleil Publishing House, Ghimbav; 2 volumes

Recently, a double volume of essays by sociologist Ștefan Ungurean appeared at Art Soleil Publishing House, until recently working as an academic at the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Transilvania University of Brașov. Ștefan Ungurean's personality is a special one through the diversity of professional interests (television, company management in the field of business and human resources) as well as academic, but especially through the style, verve and intensity of the writing. Many research and analysis topics are already familiar to Romanian sociologists because Ștefan Ungurean has always had the openness to send for years articles and essays written directly, by email, to all those interested, all of which are part of the texts that the author has published since 2016 in a series symbolically entitled *Deleuzian Romania* (see also on the romanasocială.ro website).

Born in 1952, Ștefan Ungurean graduated in Sociology at the University of Bucharest in 1975, and in 1999 he completed his doctoral studies at the same university (on a topic of conflict theory). Between 1975 and 1982 the author of the essays was a sociologist at the *Project* Institute in Brasov (within the urbanism collective). The life and scientific experience of this institute is presented in the opening of the first volume of *Essays* in an autobiographical text written with talent, sociological verve and humour (a fragment also appeared in *Rev. Social Psychology*, no. 45/2020, pp. 145-156, presentation belonging to Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu). The author of these memories is distinguished by a special style: any significant event is narrated and then analyzed from a sociological perspective with valuable/novel personal contributions. I will give just one example here. As is known, before 1989 (a period called by the author *the Old Regime*), graduates of higher education received a state assignment for a certain job (the idea of the government at that time was that any young person who is eighteen years old or completes his studies must have a job). After all, says the author, the state imposed on a productive collective a position (here we are talking about that of a

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sociologist), a position that had to be implicitly accepted (through a *sui generis* translation from meritocracy to a relational mechanism - possibly corrupt - because there was no solid economic justification for imposing that post). The reaction of the receiving team is judged by Stefan Ungurean in the key of M. Weber ("If participants expect the admission of others to lead to improvement of their situation, an improvement in degree, kind, security or value of satisfaction, their interests will be to keep the relationship open"; *Economy and Society*, 1978, p. 43). Similarly, the author's speech swings between memoir notations (in which we discover a real talent as a storyteller) and appropriate explanatory sociological theory.

Following the academic path of the author, let us mention that in 1982 Stefan Ungurean begins his academic career at „Transilvania University” in Braşov, ending it in the position of associate professor. The disciplines in which he was assistant and then, with the emergence of the faculty of Brasov (co-initiator of this institutional project) he coordinated/developed were very diverse: industrial sociology, political science, philosophy, political economy, enterprise organization, and then general sociology, history of sociology, urban sociology, sociological paradigms, sociology of organizations, organizational development. All these academic themes justify the broad fields that appear as early as the next chapter of Vol I of the *Essays*, the chapter entitled *Readings*. Here are devoted substantial essayistic pages to L. Tolstoy (*The Death of Ivan Ilyich*), Edgar Lee Master (*Spoon River Anthology*), A. Tocqueville (*On Democracy in America*), P.A. Chekhov (*The Student*), J.L. Borges (*The Gospel According to Mark*), The Marquis de Custine (*Letters from Russia. Russia in 1839*), Z. Rostás, T. E. Văcărescu coord. (*In honorem Sanda Golopenția*), L. Rebreanu (*Uprising*). It is difficult to make even a summary presentation of these essays. However, I note their ideational density, the author being at the same time sociologist, philosopher, literary critic, and anthropologist, in each case with remarkable mobility of the sources used. The next chapter of vol. I am an essay *On Mercy*. This time Stefan Ungurean starts from Dostoevsky's idea that „compassion is the main, maybe even the only law of existence for all humanity”. The author resorts to a tortuous path to develop his ideas by appealing in turn to the authority of the Bible or of some Fr. Dolto, N. Steinhardt, J. Donne, etc., developing at the same time an eloquent typology according to several dimensions: mercy and sufferings of conscience, mercy and forgiveness, mercy as a gracious state, the last hope: mercy of God, mercy face to face with the Law, mercy enemy of the state, mercy and responsibility, saving mercy, mercy and faith, mercy as an opposition force, etc. All these elements are supported by literary, religious, philosophical, sociological sources, etc. in an attempt to finally demonstrate the human dimension of a particularly complex concept advanced as a universal principle by Dostoevsky.

The last part of the first volume of essays has a surprising title: *About the Child, the one who goes to the Future with the Past on his shoulders* is an essay, about childhood, about parenthood having again unique and surprising bibliographic resources.

The fourth essay entitled *Human Ages* opens the second volume signed by Stefan Ungurean. This essay is the result of long qualitative oral history research and the research universe was made up of rural elders. The interview guide included several thematic axes from a longitudinal perspective: childhood, adolescence, youth, adult life and old age. These 'stories of life' refer stylistically and thematically to the volumes of Z. Rostás, who built a true tradition of recording oral histories, imposing the urgency of recovering social memory, otherwise endangered. The essay *On Birds and Animals* brings into debate an increasingly visible issue in contemporary social research, from the analysis of people's relationships with the animal world to animal-assisted therapies. The author resorts to various sources to illustrate the presence of animals at the forefront of social, philosophical or political thought. The author then transgresses this theme into a genuine sociological analysis with a starting point in JJ Rousseau ("What to hunt: the deer or the rabbit?"; concerning game theory), Machiavelli (elites as representations of animals) or various fables (animals as representations of human ethics and morals). The author annotates while opening new vanishing lines (as he likes to remember).

A consistent chapter entitled *Socio-humanities* contains a series of essays with more marked sociological themes: *On Justice* (in which a sequence in which certain justice bodies facilitate injustice and legalize it is critically presented, as well as a warning: do not enter in such institutions unaccompanied!), *Roma drama (sections I-III)* [in which the author starts from various concrete situations in which minorities/Roma are exposed to reach reflections of social philosophy], *About Schools of thought* (starting from the dichotomy 'faith in' and 'his faith' highlighted by Martin Buber), *About care and suffering* (in which the author recalls the personal transition into field research, from the 'functionalist paradigm' to the qualitivist one through the use of *oral history* and exemplified by the dramatic confessions of a former survivor of the massacre of Romanian civilians by the Soviet army at the White Fountain). One of the best essays written by Stefan Ungurean is entitled *On Trauma and Domination*. This report is analyzed by the author starting from a story narrated by L. Wolff in vol. *The Invention of Eastern Europe-Map of Civilizations in the Age of Enlightenment*, Humanitas Publishing House, 2000). The meeting in 1784 between a French diplomat, a Turkish officer and an old leader of a village in Moldova from whom he tries to get help (a situation solved by violence) gives Stefan Ungurean a subtle analysis of East-West differences, differences visible even today in what we call the „European project”. The second volume continues with other essays: *About the gift* (with an analysis of the gift 'as a proof of being and as a problem of the relationship'), *About friendship* ('friendship as salvation in the essential'), essays with a strong philosophical imprint (in fact, in one place Stefan Ungurean draws attention to the fact that 'it is not a sociologist who does not have philosophical sense!').

Finally, we will recommend future readers to read other interesting essays at the end of the second volume that we review here. We also recommend the use of these physical volumes for reading, having the advantage of a selection and

BOOK REVIEW

ordering that the author has imposed. Otherwise, the volume of essays can be accessed using the Internet address of the Research Institute for Quality of Life, the domain being the library of the institute in question. In the same virtual space, we are waiting for a third (promised) volume of essays!