

SOCIAL INCLUSION – KEY WORD IN THE PROCESS OF ADJUSTING THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA’S SOCIAL POLICIES TO EUROPEAN VALUES

Dorin VACULOVSCHI*,
Elena VACULOVSCHI

Abstract: *This paper intends to be an analysis on social exclusion and social inclusion. The theoretical perspective starts from the fact that the terms of social exclusion and social inclusion come rather from the institutional environment, becoming later subject of the academic debates, too. We will present the theoretical considerations on the two concepts and promotion of the social inclusion in the social policy of Moldova.*

Keywords: social inclusion, social exclusion, inclusion policies, social policies.

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1. Introduction

In the last two decades the European social policies the landings regarding vulnerable and disadvantaged groups was extended by subjoining of social exclusion and inclusion concepts, given them a new content. Hereby, the term social exclusion has been used more and more frequently in political debates and in studies of poverty and social inequality, often replacing the term poverty. The social exclusion concept is more recent than poverty and it is more comprehensive as it includes not only *lack of material resources*, but also the *impossibility of being included in different social, economic, political and cultural „networks”*. This concept implies a deficit of normal participation in daily life and different social activities in the society.

Nowadays the fight of social exclusion is recognized by EU and UN as a main task in ensuring economic growth and sustainable development¹,

* Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova, Chisinau, dorinvaculovsky@yahoo.com, valena@mail.md.

while *participation* became a key development objective. Therefore social policies should focus mainly on ensuring social inclusion capacities of people in difficulty, meaning these should be social inclusion policies for which *participation* is also a key word.

For Republic of Moldova, country with European vocation, the transformation of social policies into inclusive policies represent a provocation in the process of fitting of policies and institutional and legal frame to the European values.

The elaboration and facilitation of inclusive social policies presume the definition of social exclusion and respectively social inclusion concepts.

2. What is social exclusion?

The social exclusion concept is more recent in social studies. It developed independently from the term *poverty*, being connected to the idea of rights based on citizenship. While poverty was defined initially in relation to *income*, social exclusion was defined in relation to *social rights*, such as the right to employment, the right to housing, the right to health care, the right to education. Some authors consider poverty an effect of social exclusion and not exclusion as the final point of poverty. Anyway, the two concepts are interdependent.

The popularity of „social exclusion" term and the existence of several definitions do not suggest a common understanding of the meaning concept. However, several attempts were made in the specialized literature to synthesize the existing approaches to this concept, which is rather important for a good understanding of social exclusion, as well as to find viable monitoring mechanisms.

But even if there is no generally accepted definition, there are three topics recurring in the debates on social exclusion:

- Social Exclusion is directly related to society norms within a certain period. A disadvantaged person is perceived in different ways in different societies, both from the cultural and economic point of view. The societal norms change in time and with them, the attitude of the “majority” towards a specific marginalized or vulnerable category changes as well.

¹ The Third Poverty Reduction Program launched by the European Commission (1990-1994) „Poverty 3”, Human development Report – 1994.

- Exclusion is generated by the action of a person, a group or an institution. A person can exclude himself/herself or can be excluded as a result of some acknowledged or unacknowledged, intended or unintended decisions of other people, organizations or institutions.
- Exclusion is not only the result of certain specific current circumstances, but also an impact on the future perspectives of the affected person.

Another defining aspect of exclusion is that it manifests itself especially on the geographical or social community level, because it affects mostly groups, not individuals. Social exclusion is a mix of strongly correlated causes and contributing factors. It should be viewed as a process, not only as a result defined in time, for example, as a strict result of poverty (Bîrcă, A., Vaculovschi, D., 2010, p.9).

The notion of “social exclusion” has its origin in the 1970s in France in vague references made in public speeches to “excluded ones”. In 1974, Rene Lenoir, the Secretary of State for Social Issues in the Gaullist Government led by Jacques Chirac, published the study “*Les Exclus*”. According to Lenoir, ‘the excluded’ were people representing all social categories not included in the social insurance systems specific to the *welfare state*: people with physical and mental disabilities, suicidal people, invalid veterans, abused children, families with divorced parents, drug users, socially unadapted people and other categories of people that did not find their place in the society (Arpinte D., 2008, p.339).

At the European level, the notion of “social exclusion” emerged at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 90s during the presidency of Delors. Since 1975, a number of programs addressing poverty were initiated and implemented by community institutions.

The common features of social exclusion were synthesized in the third Poverty Reduction Program launched by the European Commission (1990-1994) „Poverty 3”. According to this program, social exclusion:

- Is a dynamic and multidimensional process, an often cumulative phenomenon leading to multidimensional deprivation;
- Is presented as a lack or deficit of individual’s participation in social life, as well as a deficit of access to main social systems (labour market, education, health care, social protection etc.);
- Is a process that can impede social cohesion, cause society fragmentation, including breaking of family relationships, loss of

the feeling of belonging to the country the individuals live in and of the feeling of national identity;

- Is a process that can compromise the connections between generations and therefore result in intergenerational social exclusion.

Social exclusion can take different shapes. It depends on the diversity and the quality of life that a society can offer. Some of the main forms of exclusion are:

- economic (based on primary incomes, social transfers);
- from education;
- from healthcare services;
- from social assistance services;
- from the labour market;
- from dwelling and decent housing conditions;
- from participation in political life;
- caused by delinquency;
- caused by alcohol or drug addiction;
- caused by improper functioning of justice, police etc.
- caused by limited access to opportunities depending on the region;
- caused by limited access to transportation, communication means;
- caused by family abandonment or lack of family (children, elderly people, people with disabilities);
- based on gender or sexual orientation;
- base on ethnic origin/race;
- cultural and informational etc. (Zamfir, C., 2007, p.242).

This list of social exclusion types is permanently evolving and can be continued depending on the complexity and diversity of socio-human life in the society. For example, among the new forms of social exclusion caused by socio-human situation are those caused by the degradation of marginal neighbourhoods, by family collapse, by social isolation or by the integration of immigrants' communities etc.

All types of social exclusion are interdependent and, as a result, the marginalization of the individual in difficulty is deepened. Consequently, a state of multidimensional social marginalization results in the exclusion of the individual from the main areas of social life.

Marginalization and social exclusion as a result of social and economic policies often originate structure the structure of social, political

or economic relationships existing in a society. Social exclusion is also often determined by macro-social transformations, modernization of the society, urbanization etc. These processes can result in the exclusion of the most vulnerable social groups or individuals from social integration. Social exclusion can also be determined by other institutional factors. These factors include both the existence of a discriminatory legal framework, which cannot fully protect the basic rights of all individuals, and the process of exercising these rights when the respect of human rights is limited. This situation results in limited access to resources, institutions, social „networks”.

Depending on its main sources, social exclusion can be (Zamfir, C., 2007, p.241):

- *Structural exclusion* – the result of some structural processes caused by the effects of socio-economic transformations in a society, such as high unemployment rate, deficit of a sustainable social policy, lack of an adequate reaction of the social system when it is necessary;

- *Exclusion caused by regional belonging* – the result of some deficiencies in the development of a community, usually manifested in insufficient development of social infrastructure, poor public services system etc., which do not allow satisfying certain social needs that are regularly satisfied by other communities;

- *Self-exclusion* – is determined by the personal option of an individual to reject any form of participation in social life. Self-exclusion is directly linked to such concepts as „*marginal*” or „*underclass*”. In the 1970’, *the marginals* were groups of young people without relevant class belonging, half-bohemians, who were rejecting social acceptance and were participating in social unrests such as in France in May 1968. Gradually marginalization started being used in the West-European states to describe a process whereby certain groups were removed temporarily or permanently from social life. The term *underclass*, of American origin, refers to people who exclude themselves by not participating fully in the society. These are poor people, whose defining element is the engagement in the so-called deplorable behaviours, such as refusal to work, committing offenses in order to earn for a living or giving birth to children outside the wedlock.

Thus, social exclusion can be considered a result of structural, cultural and behavioural processes, as well as mechanisms limiting the access to public goods available in a society and not ensuring equal opportunities for

everyone, pushing the most vulnerable people to the edge of society. A high level of social exclusion impedes social cohesion and causes social instability.

While in case of developed countries the sources of social exclusion are determined by certain marginal, accidental situations within a well structured coherent and functional social system, when it comes to the Republic of Moldova, a country in transition to market economy, the sources of social exclusion are determined, to a great extent, by the legacy of the old social system based on planned and centralized economy and by the difficult systemic transformations process, as well as by social disaggregation processes accompanying it, such as: poverty increase, compromised social protection system, social disorganization processes, imperfect legal and institutional framework etc.

Indeed, the Republic of Moldova inherited its economic system from the Soviet Union, the labour productivity of which at that moment was 2 – 3 times lower than in the industrialized states¹. During the first years of economic transition the labour productivity decreased even more as a result of economy reorganization processes, leading to a significant deterioration of real employment incomes of the population but also to an increase of social polarization. The salaries in the Republic of Moldova today are considered the lowest in Europe because of the unfavourable economic situation. Thus, a high share of active people work in the sectors with low labour productivity with no growth perspectives and which do not need investments in human capital.

On the other hand, the decrease of employment level persisting during the entire economic transition period, besides economic losses results in the deterioration of the quality of people's life, stress, anxiety, human degradation, deviant behaviours etc. The decrease of the employment level is accompanied by low quality, caused by a high level of informal employment, especially in the rural areas, high underemployment, as well as by work conditions not corresponding to normal work circumstances. In 2008 the share of informal employment of the total employed population amounted to 31.4 percent. This figure made up 43.6 % in rural areas (<http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ro&idc=263&id=2204>). A significant share of informal employment is covered by people working in their households for their own consumption, engaged in „survival agriculture”. At the same time the share of

¹ Mentioned during the 27th Summit of CPSU in 1986

people employed without an employment contract, both in formal and informal sectors, is rather high. The unattractiveness of jobs available in the republic, low salaries, the lack of career perspectives and, not least, facilitation of professional integration in labour markets of other countries lead to the intensification of international labour migration.

Transition to market economy has also affected the social protection system. Thus, the decrease of employment rates increases economic dependency (the economic dependency ratio in 2008 was 185 %). On the other hand, reduction of salaries, the decrease of the share of salaries in the total population incomes, as well as the acute deficit of budget resources cause the reduction of resources necessary to ensure the mechanism of functioning of the social insurance and healthcare system, as well as the social assistance system which is strongly dependant on salary incomes of employed population.

Another potential source of social exclusion is the degradation of human capital as a result of low salaries at the work places where enormous investments in human capital are necessary (education, health, culture, public administration) and relatively higher salaries at the work places where investments in human capital are not so necessary. On the other hand people leaving abroad for work perform unskilled work. This process leads to massive disqualification of the entire human capital of the republic, which is also determined by lack of motivation of young people to undergo professional training, as they consider that it only causes unjustified expenses, and reduction of requirements in the training process both in schools and in professional training institutions at secondary and tertiary level. Such a situation can result in assigning to the Republic of Moldova the status of an underdeveloped country in the future (Bîrcă, A., 2010).

Today social exclusion has become an important social and political category given the threats it imposes on the society. Firstly, social exclusion undermines the efforts of the society in achieving sustainable human development and causes many obstacles to social progress. This is reflected in almost all strategic documents of the European Union and UN. Thus, it is stated in the UN Security Report (2005) that social exclusion is the highest threat for human and social development. Social exclusion is a challenge for international order and security, particularly in the context of modern globalization.

Social exclusion imposes a direct threat to social stability as well, especially due to social inequalities and differences it creates. These differences are usually caused by inequality in the distribution of population's

incomes, inequality of opportunities or discrimination of different groups of population and by society polarization. These differences can also be the result of some deviant behaviours, systems of moral values or life styles of some individuals who are often not able to deal with difficult situations. As a consequence, marginalization and social exclusion of these people can develop attitudes of discontent and intolerance towards people who can be considered real threats to social stability and human security. At the same time, the increase of poverty and marginalization of the mentioned categories of people in a democratic electoral system, can result in more political power of certain political forces which build their electoral programs on populist promises only, which cannot in any ways result in sustainable human development of the country, nor in mitigation of poverty and social exclusion. Their electorate consists of poor and marginalized people and the high number of such allows them to maintain the power.

Other important threats imposed by social exclusion and marginalization are directly linked to the compromising of social cohesion and to social disintegration. The lack of activism and participation in society life, self-isolation and indifference of a significant part of the population can also affect the democratic order, thus creating a totalitarian government system in the society.

Given all this, the social inclusion policies must target the mitigation of social consequences of social exclusion by removing system imperfections. The main way of initiating such policies is implementing anti-discriminatory legal measures, as well as measures supporting the full enforcement of human rights.

Institutionalization of social life in a way that could allow people to influence social inclusion policies seems to be an equally important condition in the management of social exclusion processes. When designing policies which promote social inclusion it is necessary to perform a detailed analysis of factors causing social exclusion and undermining social development and integration of the communities. An efficient social exclusion monitoring system is necessary in order to shape these processes and to design an efficient social policy.

3. Definition of Social Inclusion

The term social inclusion is much more recent than social exclusion, being defined in the documents of the Council of Europe of 2000, of which one of the most important is Lisbon Strategy as a policy responding to social

exclusion situations. During the years which followed the development of this Strategy, *promotion of social inclusion as a public policy line* replaced the *combating of social exclusion*.

According to the European Union definition, **social inclusion** is a *process* that ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion have the opportunities and resources necessary to fully participate in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society they live in. Under these circumstances, these persons participate more in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights (<http://eurlex.europa.eu/ro/treaties/dat/32007X1214/-htm/C2007303RO.01000101.htm>).

Taking into consideration various definitions and interpretations of social exclusion and inclusion, *participation* and *integration* into the social structures are the most important categories included in the social inclusion concept. Thus, *social inclusion* can be defined as participation of individuals in the functioning of social „networks”, including those dealing with supporting marginalized persons. The degradation of social networks can result in a gradual process of excluding people from social systems and different sectors of social life. Marginalization, in its turn, results in social disintegration of people and, as a consequence, in apathy, depression, anxiety etc.

Social inclusion policies meant to support the most vulnerable people by providing access to resources and improving the social protection system, should be focused on collective actions of the members of the community. Thus, the basic objective of social inclusion policies would focus on creation of favourable conditions to ensure a normal life from the perspective of existing living standards to all citizens.

The institutional framework for the promotion of social inclusion was approved in Copenhagen Declaration and Copenhagen Program – final documents of the World Summit in 1995 for social development within which the heads of states participating in the Summit requested the creation of stable and safe conditions for sustainable development of societies. The governments engaged in the process of social exclusion elimination in order to help the creation of a society „for everyone”, in which each individual, depending on his/her rights and responsibilities, plays an active role. The basic principles of social inclusion reflected in Copenhagen Declaration are focused on ensuring social stability and security of people into the context

of promoting protection of human rights for everyone. The declaration underlines the values of non-discrimination, tolerance, and respect for diversity, equal opportunities, solidarity, security and everyone's participation. A particular emphasis is placed on the principle of creating a „society for everyone”. At the same time the respect for basic human rights, including social rights, is considered a guarantee in ensuring the access to social resources and institutions, as well as participation and social integration of all members of society.

4. Social Inclusive Policies in the Republic of Moldova

As a state in economic transition, the Republic of Moldova also pays significant attention to problems related to increasing the efficiency of poverty mitigation policies and creating a state with socially-oriented market economy. Though social exclusion issue and promotion of inclusive social policies have not been placed on the agenda of public authorities yet, elements of inclusive measures are present in official documents related to social policies in the republic.

Thus, in 2000 the *National Poverty Reduction Program* which defined objectives, tasks, main stages and specific activities aimed at poverty alleviation in the Republic for 2000-2003 was approved. Among the main objectives of the Program were: creating and implementing the system of minimal state social protection standards; implementing the comprehensive program of creating and preserving jobs; reforming the system of social protection of the population which was most in need; and liquidating or avoiding salary arrears, pensions and indemnities. In the course of implementation of the above-mentioned objectives a special emphasis was given to the effective use of funds assigned for poverty alleviation activities, reinforcing the social protection of the most impoverished end of the population, and rising large-scale off-budget funds.

In order to create a system of indicators for defining the causes of poverty and the impact of the program for reform and decentralization of the social sector on population's living conditions, in 2002, the *Action Plan for strengthening the poverty monitoring and evaluation capacity* was approved. The Plan was designed for three years and included activities aimed at monitoring and evaluating poverty in Moldova.

In December 2004, the Parliament of Moldova approved the Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (EGPRSP) for 2004-2006, which was the overarching policy framework for the medium-term sustainable development of Moldova. The Government of Moldova made a commitment to ensure sustainable economic growth, which was a fundamental prerequisite for poverty reduction. The main objectives of the EGPRSP were: improving the population's living conditions, increasing the social protection of the lower-income population, including by developing the social safeguards system, creating new jobs, especially for the poor population, providing the population with accessible, high-quality medical services, developing human capital that is able to achieve higher results by developing science and education system.

In 2007, the National Development Strategy for 2008-2011 was developed and approved, with an overarching objective to create conditions for improving the quality of population's living conditions by strengthening the foundation for a robust, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The strategy aims at aligning Moldova to the European standards and, therefore, achieving the European integration objective. The priority development directions established in the strategy pursue bringing the relevant National policy in line with the European standards. The document is based on the following principles: *participation, bringing the existing National strategies and programs in line with the National priorities and reiteration of external commitments*. In order to achieve the general objectives, the strategy puts forward five midterm National priorities: strengthening of the democratic state by the rule of law and observance of human rights, settlement of the Transnistrian conflict and country reintegration, increasing of the national economy competitiveness, human resources development, increasing of the employment level and promoting social inclusion and regional development. In the course of strategy implementation, ongoing monitoring of implemented activities and obtained results will be carried out to amend, if necessary, the promoted policy and the implemented activities. The strategy shall be revised every four to five years in order to reconfirm or amend its objectives and main directions. It must be mentioned that the poverty reduction objectives focused mainly on increasing the poor groups' access to the key sectors: education, healthcare, social protection and the employment market. Based on the situation in these sectors it is possible to measure the level of social inclusion and inequality, including the level of social cohesion at community level.

5. Conclusions

By determining a vocation based on European Integration the frame of analysis and solution of poverty problem and social exclusion in Republic of Moldova acquires a new dimension. The set problem supposes the realization of the poverty and social exclusion reduction targets in the Republic of Moldova nearby other European states, through the prism of facilitation of inclusive social policies.

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