



ORIGINAL PAPER

Dynamic and Diverse Issues of Social Europe

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Abstract:

This research addresses issues related to the concept of social policy and the design of social policy in the context of ever-changing challenges in the economic, social and political fields. The complexity and variety of social problems that manifest themselves at the national level have required the capture of the objectives and role of social policies whose evolution has led to changes in state functions, which assume responsibilities in ensuring collective welfare, in order to provide goods and services for the whole community. In this approach, issues related to social justice and efficiency were addressed, which must be met, considered together, harmonized resulting in a compromise between efficiency and equality, between the market economy and the moral arguments of redistribution, a result which consists in social equity. At the same time, we considered it necessary to present the structure of social policy to allow the successful design and implementation of social policies, being presented in this regard the factors involved and its structural components.

Keywords: *social policy; Social Europe; equal opportunities and discrimination; poverty and social exclusion.*

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Dynamic and Diverse Issues of Social Europe

Introduction

Building on the social policy models of the Member States, the Brussels supranational authorities have sought to formulate and implement a common social policy at EU level. This concern practically reflects the social dimension of community integration, being synthesized by the relatively recent concept of social Europe.

The need for the European Union's social policy systems from the essential functions that social policy can play in modern society, such as economic development, social development, integration and social inclusion, aid for disadvantaged people, improving living standards and living conditions, and, more generally, the quality of life for all members of society. There are several national social alternatives to the welfare status in Europe, but despite the different national social configurations, it can be seen that debates and social interests are common and reflect the concern of European policy makers to ensure a better standard of living for all citizens.

Reviewing the diversity of existing social problems in the European Union, from its inception in the form of the European Economic Community to the present, and presenting the pros and cons of each stage of the interventions of States or the Community as a whole, we emphasized, therefore, the importance given by the European Union to issues of equal opportunities and discrimination, poverty and social exclusion, as well as the concrete ways in which Member States' national policies are guided in these areas by applying the open method of coordination.

Social policy revolves around a set of actions aimed at the dynamic interaction between economic, social and employment policy and attracting all the benefits of these policies. The central message is that economic development and growth are not goals in themselves, but first and foremost means of achieving a growing standard of living. As such, social policy influences economic policies, and employment presupposes not only economic but also social values.

A quality social policy also includes adequate social protection, the access of all European citizens to adequate social services, real opportunities for all individuals, the guarantee of fundamental social rights. The viability of social and employment policies stimulates productivity and facilitates adaptation to change. At the same time, they play a key role in the transition to a knowledge economy.

Conceptual Aspects of Social Policy and Social Protection

Even today, after many decades of study in the field of social policy, we cannot say that an absolute consensus has been reached on the areas of social coverage (more precisely, on the intrinsic content of social policies) in the wider public policy framework. Thus, "the term social policy" is sometimes identified with that of public policy. However, the latter is broader and includes in its content, in addition to social policies, economic policies, foreign policy, urban policies, etc., all actions of political actors in all other public policies have a substantial influence on social policies, which means that the broadest definitions of social policies often include most public policies, which makes the two terms often used interchangeably. In reality, the notion of social policy refers only to an important part of public policy. An attempt to define social policy could be made by exclusion: it is in the field of social policy all that remains of the policy of a government or local authorities, after the exclusion of public policies without direct social impact (Chindarkar, N.:13-14)." However, such a definition only meets, to a small extent, the requirements of the study of social policy. More appropriate

for understanding these concerns would be a positive, affirmative description that aims at the common core of all possible types of social policy.

Thus, one of the answers tries to illustrate social policy "through the fields in which public policy operates", which he considers included in social policy. Another answer starts from defining the proportion of social policy, explaining what makes it different from other types. From this point of view, it seems that the difficulties on the subject of social policy are more difficult to overcome.

Authors and researchers have agreed on the inclusion of social policy areas as a fundamental element of the definition. However, this point of view also seems debatable, because one cannot consider any social policy as part of social policies only on the basis of its particular features. Often neglecting aspects that have a considerable impact on the well-being of society leads to arbitrary assessments.

The answers to the question in most cases start from a common set of criteria that take into account certain elements characteristic of the concept of social policy: social security, social services and social programs. This response shows the primordially of the individual interest, which relates social policy to their own needs. While the population has no doubts about the recognition of these areas as social, the terminology triggers some confusion. The existence of government departments specialized in groups of problems and activities does not exclude the cohesive formulation of a unitary conception, generalized at the level of the whole society about the social policy. We must not forget the fact that together with the state that takes care of the social, the enterprises, through their social functions, make a contribution in addition (Romanian Academy, 2003)."

There are real areas of private interest in the field of social policies, which are not only avoided so as not to disturb the sector of private economic agents, but moreover, are excluded as not having a socio-political character. An example is the educational policy which, according to some authors, due to the fact that the field of education is one of the sectors that requires the highest public spending, far beyond the services considered to contribute to public welfare, education policy deserves more or less to be included in social policies. If we define social policies in terms of public spending, then the inclusion of education as a social policy is the consequence of an arbitrary decision to define this social policy as public spending that contributes to public welfare "(Pîrvu Gh., 2007: 134-146).

"The difficulty of accurately framing the object of social policy as part of public policy stems on the one hand from the different cultural and political traditions on the continent and on the other hand from the dynamics that" social has known as meaning and as an impact, even at the level of the same society, over the last few decades. Even this is, a relative consensus, given primarily the sharp interdependencies between economic and social policies, between which it is increasingly difficult to draw precise boundaries, or the social consequences that sometimes flow from politics foreign and defense of a country. (Romanian Academy, 2003; Pîrvu R., 2019: 6).

British sociologist T.H. Marshall defines the meaning of this concept as simple as it is comprehensive: "The essential goal of social policy in the twentieth century is to ensure the well-being of its citizens." In general, there are two approaches to the motivation behind a social policy. Traditionally, the ideological approach is based on the assumption that the welfare state is based on "political reasons" (related to doctrine), and the much more recent pragmatic approach promotes the function of "social problem solving" of social policy. Emptying it of such ideological content and giving it solid

Dynamic and Diverse Issues of Social Europe

technocratic valences. Going, obviously, in the first direction, neo-Marxists in Western democracies claim that "advanced capitalist societies need an infrastructure of welfare policies to maintain social order, to bribe workers, and to prevent them from resorting to protests, to - provide a workforce with acceptable standards of education and health".

For neo-Marxist theorists, the term "welfare capitalism" has, of course, a pejorative connotation, suggesting a form of social control, of measures to combat disorder and crime, as well as measures taken by the police or the judiciary and not lastly, having the role of legitimizing and promoting the capitalist system. Moreover, it has gone so far as to consider that welfare policies are not supported for humanitarian reasons and to meet the real needs of workers, but only to respond - conjunctural - to social unrest. Thus, social policies are initiated or expanded during outbreaks of discontent and social disorder during mass unemployment, and then they are abolished or restricted when political stability has been restored. Non-ideological, unloaded with doctrinal contents, the pragmatic approach emphasizes the technical, punctual solution of social problems.

In the Romanian literature, this approach is summarized by Mihaș (1995) as follows: "Social policy is, or should be, an answer to the social problems of a certain community, respectively of certain groups more exposed to different risks". There are, of course, intermediate approaches between these conceptions, which try to reconcile ideology with pragmatism, respectively principles with solutions. Joan Higgins considers that both options are, however, based on rational models of political intervention, in which attention needs to be paid to the complex connection between the objectives of policy makers and the consequences of their interventions. Thus, it seems justified to consider that social intervention cannot be isolated from a set of major objectives, enshrined in political decision-making, just as the solution of community problems through concrete social action cannot be broken by a certain direction of development of society as a whole development that must be based on a global vision and have a well-defined, politically legitimate meaning.

Contemporary studies in this field bring into question the relationship between the two categories of agents involved in social policy: the initiators, the makers of social policy and the implementers of social policy. Among them is a system of relationships that start from the extremely different and mixed goals of those who can influence social policy. Many social policies, through their content, invoke the need for marginal adjustments compared to some previous situations, the motivation being the need to correct the negative consequences of the planned policies "(Radu, R., 2005:116).

In a reference book for the development of profile studies in Romania after 1989, "Social policies. Romania in the European context", Zamfir (1995) states that "social policy can be understood as state intervention in shaping the social processes characteristic of a particular community in order to change them in a direction that is considered desirable by political actors, it seeks, through its own mechanisms of distribution and redistribution of existing resources in the community at a given time, to achieve collective well-being." In specific legislative provisions, administrative decisions and regulations, social programs, transfers of income (taxes, fees, respectively pensions, allowances, scholarships, etc. within the insurance and social assistance systems) financing, production and provision of goods and services social security for the population.

The comparison of social policies results in social programs subordinated to national goals and there are two guidelines on the concept that underlies the construction of social policy:

- the utilitarian orientation "that considers man as a rational and responsible being, in this sense the social policy entailing a system of incentives that will mobilize the individual in the possibility of controlling goods with the help of the legal means that society provides;

- therapeutic social orientation, which calls for greater government intervention in restructuring its level of action and applicability (Preda M, 2002)."

Given these definitions and approaches to social policy, we can say that it includes: activities and principles of society that guide the way the state intervenes and regulates relations between individuals, groups, communities and social institutions.

As we can see from the experience of the Member States in recent decades, social policy can play a number of important roles in modern society, such as economic development, social development, integration and social inclusion, aid for disadvantaged people, improving living and working conditions life, and, in general, the quality of life of the population (Avram, C., et al., 2007: 63-75). The aim is to obtain quality standards for the lives of citizens, which will allow the best possible representation in society of each person, based on free access to education and employment, easy access to material living resources and care services health, respect for the individual rights and freedoms of citizens, a high degree of inclusion, integration and social participation, personal satisfaction and happiness.

The shaping of social policy involves taking into account not only the components and rules for arranging them according to a predetermined plan but also the algorithm of their operation, which is based on the relationship between economic and social. There is a consensus in the literature presented on the need to include a permanent dialogue between the political analyst, the one who elaborates the social policy and the one who implements this social policy (Pîrvu, Gh. et al, 2011: 168-170). It is often considered that a social policy is not appropriate in its application even if the one who initiates it and makes decisions is trained in the field, which ensures his knowledge and understanding of the social phenomenon. The final assessment of social policy is made only by the individual or by society as a whole.

Various Issues of Social Europe

In terms of enlargement, the European Union has traveled from 6 to 28 (now 27) Member States. The European Union can only be extended to European countries that respect the principles of "human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities". Each country must also organize itself through institutions that ensure high standards of "pluralism, reduction of discrimination, increase of tolerance, fair justice, solidarity and equality of women and men" (TFEU, 2012).

Equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men "is found in the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht Treaty, in force since 1993), in secondary legislation - the Community directives on equality between women and men"- to which is added the case law Luxembourg Court of Justice (Avram, C., et al., 2007: 56).

With the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), the European Union has made a decisive commitment to promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in all community activities. (Blakemore K, Warwick-Booth L., 2013)."

Dynamic and Diverse Issues of Social Europe

Segregation is also found in the education system: Although in the future women will represent the majority of new graduates in higher education (59%), the fields of study are significantly in certain patterns. Education, humanities and arts and health comprise almost half of licensed women, but less than a quarter of licensed men, while technical studies attract only one licensed woman out of ten and four out of ten licensed men.

One of the consequences of these differences and inequalities affecting women in the labor market is reflected in maintaining the pay gap between women and men. "Women earn on average 15% less than men for every hour worked. Socially, women are at greater risk of exclusion and poverty, especially among the elderly and separated parents. The risk of poverty for women over 65 is 20%, i.e. 5 points higher than men, while the risk for families is 34%. On the other hand, long-term unemployment affects 4.5% of women, i.e. 1 point more than men (Crespy, A., 2019) ".

Women are also the majority of inactive people, so they are especially vulnerable to the risk of poverty. Thus, it is important:

1. Eliminating gender gaps in the labor market.
2. Promoting a better balance between women and men by sharing private and family responsibilities.
3. Ensuring full support for equal opportunities policies for women and men through cohesion and rural development policies.
4. Ensuring the effective implementation of the legislative framework (Vandenbroucke F. with Vanhercke B., 2014).

Poverty is on the political agenda of all Member States, but the broader concept of social exclusion is insufficiently defined. The main factors contributing to the emergence of social exclusion are unemployment, the extension of non-traditional families, the limited capacity of social protection and employment to ensure an adequate level of income. In addition, inadequate levels of coverage and performance of social assistance systems often make it difficult to address issues of social exclusion.

A very important concept for the approaches of recent years is that of social exclusion. Through this concept, the transition from poverty as a way of measuring the need for social protection (lack of income or insufficient consumption) to social exclusion as a lack of opportunities of more types than opportunities for gain or consumption was achieved. Therefore, I consider it important to analyze its significance, because it changes the image of the values that underlie the social protection of individuals, through diversification and nuance. Thus, the lack of income or insufficient consumption become only a part, a type of exclusion, the financial one, and the responsibility of the state changes from providing a necessary minimum (of income) in eliminating the causes, the restrictions that exclude the individual from their procurement.

Social exclusion is a concept that goes beyond the marginalization and must be defined in terms of incapacity / failure of one or more of the following four systems:

- the democratic and legal system, which implies civic integration;
- the labor market, which promotes economic integration;
- the "welfare state" system, which promotes what can be called social integration;
- the family and community system, which promotes interpersonal integration (Berghman J., 1996:328).

Whether or not a person belongs to a society depends on the four systems. Civic integration presupposes being an equal citizen in a democratic system; economic integration means having a job; social integration means having access to services provided by the state; interpersonal integration involves belonging to a family, a group of friends, neighbors, interpersonal networks to provide company and moral support to those who need them.

It can be said that social exclusion is a more comprehensive concept than poverty, which includes not only the lack of material means but also the impossibility of being included in various social, economic, political and cultural networks. In addition to the deficit of income or consumption compared to the general trends in society, which throws the individual into poverty, social exclusion implies a deficit of participation in social life and activities.

A closer look shows that there is a significant equivalence between the structure of the concept of exclusion and that of citizenship, described by Marshall (Marshall T.H., 1950). The four systems in the structure of the concept of exclusion actually correspond to the three types of rights that Marshall speaks of, plus the system of supportive relationships that determine interpersonal integration. Marshall himself uses the term exclusion when referring to the privileges of certain social groups and the use of apprenticeship as a tool of exclusion rather than recruitment. Social exclusion can be said to be a failure of the full realization of civil rights, the symbiosis of concepts being thus clear.

Exclusion presupposes the process of exclusion, while at the same time encompassing its direct result, which is social deprivation. Exclusion therefore has a predominantly dynamic component, as opposed to poverty which is predominantly static. Bruto da Costa (in Preda M., 2002:100) links the concepts of poverty, relative deprivation and social exclusion, adding the concept of impoverishment as a process that leads to the static result of poverty.

In practical terms, exclusion allows for different ways of combating it. Whether it refers to income or consumption, poverty can be combated at some point only through redistribution. Reducing exclusion does not necessarily mean redistribution. Giving someone a right, enticing them to participate in certain processes, does not mean eliminating another. Many exclusionary mechanisms are triggered by a lack of resources. However, it is not mandatory and the emergence of resources does not automatically imply the disappearance of exclusion. That is why it can be seen that putting the issue in terms of social exclusion allows for much easier interventions, perhaps even with greater chances of effectiveness than the discourse and action focused on poverty and combating it.

Conclusions

Recent Member States' experiences (application of the open method of coordination, national action plans against poverty and social exclusion) have shown that the central aim of social inclusion policy is to ensure the functioning of key mechanisms that "distribute" opportunities and resources (labor market, tax system, social protection, education and other services) in such a way as to meet the needs of individuals affected by the risk of poverty and exclusion and to enable them to exercise their fundamental rights.

Therefore, promoting social inclusion involves taking into account some remarkable structural changes in the EU. If appropriate responses are not put in place,

Dynamic and Diverse Issues of Social Europe

these changes could lead to new risks in the area of poverty and exclusion for vulnerable groups. More specifically, these transformations refer to: major structural changes in the labor market; the rapid growth of the knowledge economy and information and communication technologies; increasing dependency rates as a result of demographic trends; cultural, ethnic and religious diversity structure.

Although the extent of the difficulties differs substantially from country to country, some crucial components of EU-wide anti-poverty and social exclusion policy can be identified, namely: developing an inclusive labor market and promoting employment as a right and an opportunity for all European citizen (Jianu E, et al., 2021: 3); guaranteeing adequate income; attacking the disadvantages of some individuals in the educational system; maintaining family solidarity and protecting children's rights; ensuring decent living conditions; guaranteeing equal access to quality social services; investments in social services; regeneration of economically and socially declining regions.

Member States' social inclusion policies recognize the importance of promoting access to the labor market, not only as a way of reducing poverty and exclusion, but also as a means of preventing it. Therefore, measures to increase the attractiveness of jobs and assistance to the unemployed and other groups of the active population also reduce social exclusion.

However, increasing the degree of integration or reintegration into the labor market is insufficient to blur social exclusion. Of course, for young people below the legal age limit, for people with severe disabilities who completely lose their ability to work, employment is not a realistic option. Therefore, these groups must have access to an adequate income, decent living conditions, quality services (health protection, education and training, recreational and cultural activities, transport, etc.). As children and young people face higher risks of poverty and social exclusion than adults, investing in policies that promote the inclusion of children prevents intergenerational poverty and recurrent cycles of poverty.

Acknowledgement:

This work was supported by the grant POCU380/6/13/123990, co-financed by the European Social Fund within the Sectorial Operational Program Human Capital 2014 – 2020.

Authors' Contributions:

The authors contributed equally to this work.

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Article Info

Received: February 20 2022

Accepted: March 03 2022

How to cite this article:

Toma, O., Gruescu, R.M. (2022). Dynamic and Diverse Issues of Social Europe. *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 73/ 2022, 52-60.