The situation of young people in Europe and policy answers: ROMANIA

1. What are the three main urgent areas of policy action that you have identified in your research? For example, are there instances where disadvantage is identified but not addressed by government policy? What is the most important policy-relevant information the project has produced?

The fieldwork and policy/documents reviewing process drove to some significant, particular findings (conclusions) regarding social exclusion/disadvantage the Romanian youngsters are facing nowadays. The actual high rate of social exclusion of young people is a cumulative result of some structural/systemic factors the adversely affected this social group\(^1\). The three main factors (and consecutively areas of urgent intervention) are:

- **There is an urgent need to increase public social expenditures**, mainly in the area of education/labour market/jobs creation. Currently there are few effective public policies and programmes which really and effectively address the issue of social inclusion (education/labour market) for disadvantaged youngsters but mainly in the benefit of the better off ones. In the last years only ~ 50% of the new university graduated are finding a job (not necessarily in their specialized area) in the first 12 months after graduation; the percentage of graduated coming from rural area is just ~ 10\(^2\).

- Employment policies should **focus on disadvantaged individuals living in deprived areas**, such as rural area (46\%)\(^3\), small towns\(^4\) and the deprived neighbourhoods of big cities (such as Ferentari in Bucharest). Reducing youngsters’ dependency by the social support/welfare through active employment is a key factor not only for avoiding dependency trap but for a flourishing independent way of life which could be a strong example to follow for the next generations. The youngsters is most affected social group by unemployment – 32.5% in urban area and 17% in rural (lower than in urban because many of them are working in subsistence agriculture producing only for self-consumption and are recorded as self-employed)\(^5\). Employment rate of young people 15-24 YO is ~ 24.3%.

- **There is a huge gap/lack of correlation between what educational systems are producing as outcome** (graduated with various professions/diploma but not relevant skills/abilities) and **what the labour market is looking for**. 80% of new university graduated in

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\(^1\) The ratio of 15-24 YO population in Romania was 12.3% (Census 2011) and 14.9% (Census 2002). The ratio of 15-29 YO population in Romania is 18.8% (Census 2011).

\(^2\) The ratio of overall rural active population with university degree was in 2009 of 4.0% while in urban 25.4%.

\(^3\) From the total population living in rural area, the group 15-29 YO represents 17.9%, while in urban 19.5%. In total 15-29 YO population the ratio of rural represents 43.8%.

\(^4\) Romania has 320 cities, from which only 47 have 40.000+ inhabitants. There are ~200 towns with less than 15.000 inhabitants, which are very similar to rural localities as development and market opportunities.

the last years are performing in other fields than they graduated (Vlăsceanu, 2011)\(^6\), most of them in low-skilled jobs.\(^7\).

2. Are there examples of success or good practice that you have identified? What makes these examples a success? What role does social innovation play in the delivery and development of youth policy?

Because there are few initiatives it is difficult not to consider them as examples of good practice but not necessarily a success. Examples:

1) “Meetings of youngsters with decision makers involved in policy design” and “Involvement for Development”\(^8\) had as objectives: building awareness among decision makers of real concerns and needs of young people, involving them in making decisions and shaping the future policies; a direct consultation of youngsters at national level in identifying and solving socio-economic and cultural problems they are confronting. The expected result was a deep involvement of youngsters in sustainable development of local/ regional/ national policies for young people and to ensure a better understanding of their complex needs in a global context. The governing principle was “Think globally, act locally!” and the core topics were focused on employability of youngsters, active citizenship, social inclusion and non-discrimination.

2) “Be active!” was developed by an NGO\(^9\) at local level, with the purpose to empower 10 young journalists by developing their capacity to correctly reflect and write about the youngsters social problems in mass media. Then the 10 participants presented the project & results to other youngsters from community all together becoming much more aware about community problems and the common way of action.

The “social innovation” was perceived as a fuzzy concept for many youngsters and they were unsure of what it really meant and how is working in practice. Usually most of them generally felt that within public policies (national/ local) there is a less innovative approach but rather an incremental one, while the private / NGO initiatives are at a smaller scale but much more innovative and effective.

\(^6\)http://www.aracis.ro/fileadmin/ARACIS/Publicatii_Aracis/Publicatii_ARACIS/Romania/Calitatea_invatamantului_superior_Romania_1_.pdf 2011
3. What should be the content of "new" policies (e.g. development of capability friendly policies) and what resources would be needed to develop and implement these policies? What is the role of social innovation?

Due to economic crisis/ cuts on public funding but also lack of experience/ tradition in formulating & implementing effective policies, it seems that the dictum “Think big, act big!” is not anymore proper in the actual circumstances. National policies should create a very flexible framework and to encourage / support local social partners to develop projects adjusted accordingly from two other different perspectives: “Think big, act small!” which diminish the risk of failure but increase the chances of learning and replicate the small successes to a bigger one; “Think Small, Act Big (but be prepared to think big)!” in the main sense of using resources as effective as possible.

4. Which actors should be responsible for the development and delivery of these policies and what role should young people play in this process?

All the traditional actors should be involved, but there is a need of a real involvement of young people and civil society not only in identifying the problems and solutions but also in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programs.