

Considerations Regarding Students' Social Protection

Iuliana Cenar

“1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia

cenar_iuliana@uab.ro

Abstract

The paper entitled “Considerations Regarding Students' Social Protection” addresses the main forms of support offered to students and their families, divided in relation to the aim pursued, which may relate to stimulating students' performance and discipline, material and financial support (social assistance), supplementing family income. For these components there were taken into account: the circumstances in which it acquires to status of beneficiary, evolutionary dimensions in terms of beneficiary numbers, the amounts awarded, the need to ensure the complementarities with the informal side of social protection.

Key words: education, social protection, students, scholarship

J.E.L. classification: H75

1. Introduction

Education represents all measures applied consciously and systematically in order to mold the human being, its intellectual, moral and physical characteristics. The school aims to shape the human capital, so that he/she can face the challenges of the contemporary society.

The subject of social protection of students is heavily regulated, but it has not been the subject of a holistic approach in the specialized literature. It is why the aim of this paper is to outline a spectrum of social protection forms for the students with references to several quantitative dimensions, which can serve as a starting point for future investigations on the size and scope of this phenomenon, as well as the path to follow in order to optimize it.

2. Incentives for performance and discipline

The scholarship represents simultaneously a form of social protection and a way of stimulating students to obtain good results at school and discipline.

The number and amount of scholarships is established by decisions of Local Council and the financing source is the local budget, from the amounts deducted from certain revenues of the state's budget. From structural point of view students who attend to frequency courses at the pre-university state education level can benefit from the following types of scholarships: performance scholarships, merit scholarships, learning scholarship and welfare scholarship.

The criteria according to which the performance scholarship is granted concerns (Order of the Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sports no. 5576 /2011): getting any of the first three places at the Olympiads in the national level and national school competitions/ cultural – artistic contests, sports-related or technical-scientific, nationally organized by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research, the qualification for training organized by this institution for international competitions.

The performance scholarships are granted during the school year that follows year following the year in which those results were obtained. Consulting some of the local Council's Decisions we observed that their size is generally situated between 100 and 200 lei.

Students who achieve very good results in school (minimum 8.50 average) and those who obtained one of the first 3 stages of the county school Olympiads and school competitions or

cultural - artistic, sports-related and technical nature scientific competitions / contests receive a merit scholarship. Their size is located generally between 50 and 100 lei.

The learning scholarship is given to students from families with an average monthly income per family member in the last 3 months at most equal to the minimum wage and who: have overall average over 7.00 and 10 for discipline in the previous semester the scholarship is granted. This scholarship varies between 35 lei and 85 lei.

The grant recipients of social assistance scholarships are children orphaned by both parents, those who are suffering from various diseases, the dispensaries have their evidence, students from rural areas who attend school in another town, students from families that do not provide a monthly net income on average for the last 12 months per family member, more than 50% of the net minimum wage per economy and do not have agricultural land with an area exceeding 20,000 square meters in hills and plains, and 40,000 square meters, in mountainous areas. In terms of value, these scholarships range between 35 lei and 85 lei.

Students attending vocational education shall, on request, benefit from a *professional scholarship* in the amount of 200 lei, during school classes, practical training and during training and certification exam qualifications (Government's Decision no.1062/2012). There are also some restrictions on this social benefit, summarized in the figure below:

Figure no. 1. Causes and periods when the professional scholarships are not granted

Causes in which the professional scholarship is not granted	The period
More than 10 unexcused absences in the previous month.	1 month
- The committed serious disciplinary violations, which leads to reduction of conduct mark under 7 - At least 20 unexcused absences in total hours of study or at least 20% of the total hours in a single discipline study / one section, cumulated per school year.	3 months
At least 40 unexcused absences in total hours of study or at least 30% of the total hours in a single discipline study / one section cumulated per school year.	6 months

Source: Government's Decision no.1062/2012

Statistics regarding the number of beneficiaries have not been realized at a national level.

3. Discounting forms regarding students

Discounting the travel tickets or subscriptions during schooling, without holidays, for the students who cannot be schooled in their localities, is made by schools to pupils who are the beneficiaries based on the subscriptions issued by transport providers.

Until October 2016 the amounts to be claimed based on subscriptions of transportation for students were limited, respectively, not more than 26 lei / subscription / month for the distance of 3 km., and for distances exceeding 3 km, to the limit 50 km, the amount mentioned above is increased by 2 lei per km., without exceeding the monthly subscription. Prior to this period, the legal provisions (OUG 29/2013) had the effect of creating large discrepancies in the rates charged by public transport operators for the same distance (for example from 29 lei to 228 lei for a distance of 10 km).

The current legal framework (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 69/2016) is a desired instrument correction of these factors affecting social equity and causes early school leaving, located at an alarming rate in Romania - (19.1% of the population aged 18-24 years) who ranks third in the Member States of the European Union (<https://www.edu.ro/abonamentele-de-transport-rutier-pentru-elevi-decontate-integral>).

The national program of social protection "High School Money" has as beneficiary pupils attending the courses, high school or vocational education and completion year and who are dependents of families whose gross income per month per family member, conducted in the last three months prior to filing the request, is of maximum 150 lei, or they are found under its supervision or guardianship, if the conditions of income are respected (Government Decision 1488/2004). In determining the gross income per family member there are taken into account all

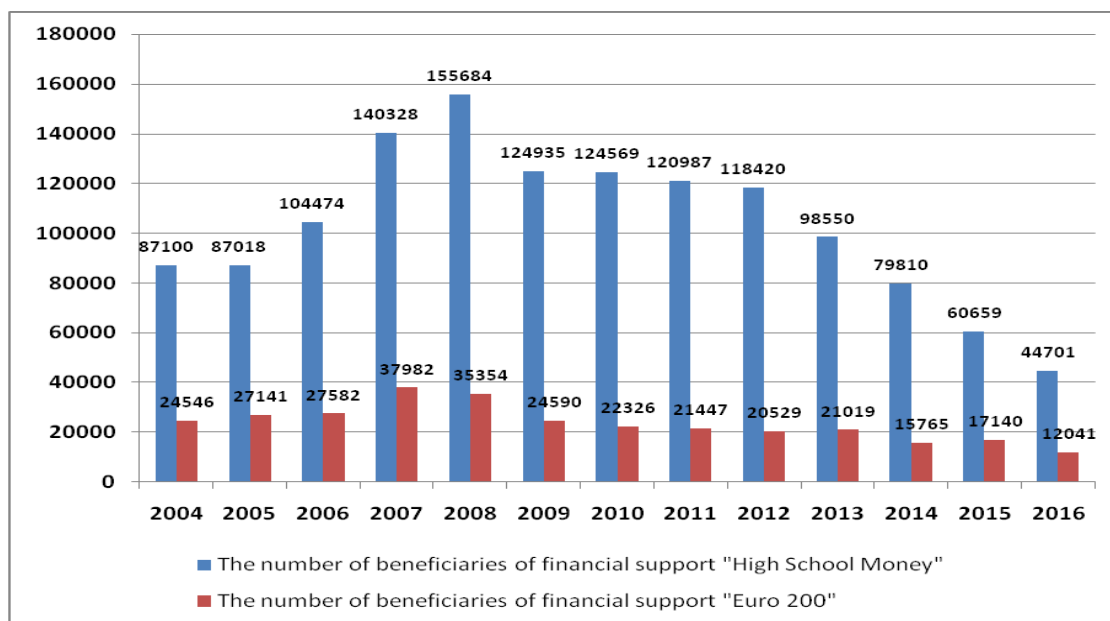
permanent income, except the state allowance, supplementary allowance for families with many children, scholarships and social scholarships and other aid granted to students that have a social character.

The financial support, currently worth 180 lei, is given during school classes, including the period of preparation and having the baccalaureate exam or diploma, and during production practice, keeping in mind the number of days that these activities require.

The criteria which are taken into account for the tie students with the same income are legal status or medical (orphans, the descendants of the heroes of the revolution, students who are found in the evidence of dispensaries, school students suffering from diseases expressly mentioned by the legal framework) or residence with a priority for students from rural areas who attend school in another town. This form of financial support to students can stop in the following situations: the unjustified absence of the student at least 20 hours in different subjects; removing from school for a period of 3-5 days, the candidate achieved 7 in conduct and he is no longer attending the school or he was expelled (Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4.747/2001).

Another form of financial aid on social established on social criteria is the *Program Euro 200*. Under the law (Law 269/2004), families with pupils and/or students of public education or private accredited aged up to 26 years from families with gross monthly income not exceeding 150 lei (s.n.) per family member, receives financial support represents the equivalent in lei of 200 euro (calculated at the exchange rate published by the National Bank of Romania for the last day of the preceding month) to purchase a new PC, which they must not alienate at least 3 years.

Figure no. 1. Evolution of the number of beneficiaries of the financial support for students "High School Money" and "Euro 200" in the period 2004-2016



Source: www.edu.ro

Financial aid is performed in the increasing order of the gross monthly income per family member, limited by the amounts allocated for this purpose in the budget of the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research.

School supplies granted, starting with the school year 2001 - 2002, students from state primary and secondary school, day courses, who live in dependent families whose net monthly income per family member, conducted in July of each year is up to 50% of basic salary minimum wage (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 33/2001).

The indicators according to which are set annually the amounts distributed to school inspectorates and the maximum price of parcels of school supplies are the actual number of beneficiaries from the previous school year and they represent the estimates submitted to the ministry by the school inspectorates.

Currently the maximum value of each package of school supplies is worth 25 lei /package/pupil in primary and 30 lei/package/ student in secondary education (initially this price was 5 lei less than in the present for both categories of packages).

Between 2008-2016 the number of beneficiaries of school supplies and the corresponding amounts allocated are presented in the table below:

Table no. 1. Evolution of the estimated number of beneficiaries of school supplies and the corresponding amounts allocated in the period 2008-2016

School year	Number of beneficiaries	Amount of money allocated
2008 - 2009	767.894	18,078,422
2009 - 2010	769.210	17,970,827
2010 - 2011	727.826	18,181,997
2011 - 2012	712.425	18,000,000
2012- 2013	742.098	20,529,869
2013 - 2014	722.198	18,246,923
2014 - 2015	680.260	16.624.201

Source: <http://www2.edu.ro/index.php/resurse>

For the school year 2016-2017 the estimated total number of beneficiaries is 742 098 and the corresponding allocation amounts 11.83967 million lei.

Students and teachers in public education and in particular compulsory education, accredited / approved, receive *free textbooks*, both for the Romanian language education and for the national minority languages (Law no. 1/2011). Except for 2015-2016 school year when pupils in upper secondary level were granted textbooks limited to the price of 55 lei, this feature targeted only compulsory general education.

The “*Second Chance*” offers adolescents, young adults, coming from varied backgrounds and age range, who have not attended or have not completed primary and secondary education and who have passed at least four years schooling age appropriate to these levels, providing for these individuals the possibility to continue and complete of the compulsory education without having to interrupt any professional or family activities in which they are involved. Beneficiaries for primary education, have the opportunity to go through this level in 2 years. The duration of schooling can increase or decrease for each student, based on proven skills in basic education.

Program “*School after school*” aims at developing and diversifying alternative education services through a series of activities including the provision of informal and non-formal specialized education, the reduction of the factors generating risk, in order to reduce school drop out, improving school performance of children from marginalized families and socially excluded or exposed to such risks.

As financial resources for this program, the various projects submitted by the schools to the inspectorate units mention the parental financial support, volunteering, local authorities’ budget, social assistance directorates support etc.

According to a research study (Marin, 2015, p.1), schools from disadvantaged areas, the rural schools and the schools where there are Roma children who have almost zero chance to benefit from after-school services, although the national education reform has taken place a couple years ago. Data show that in 2014, less than 20% of schools benefited from additional educational support programs.

It appears that (and) this aspect is particularly sensitive is not clearly regulated, to meet some goals such as: the prioritization of funding depending on the vulnerability of students and involving state and local community in this endeavour, by carrying out some national campaigns information on program benefits for students, parents, community etc., setting up a database to enable a transparent multi-criteria analysis with beneficial effects on multiple finalities of the education, including from the social and economic point of view.

The program “*Roll and milk*” (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 96/2002) was introduced in the context of the National Plan against poverty and social inclusion which targeted children who were in extreme poverty or from families experiencing cronical unemployment or lack of

employment opportunities, children from large families, being designed so as to support the vulnerable categories of children, but also as a way to promote some minima forms to supply food for children during a school program.

4. Supplementing the family income

State allowance for children is a form of monthly money help granted by the State to families with children. It is a universal right for all children under the age of 18, which is covered from the state budget. The state allowance is determined in relation to the reference social indicator, its size being 0.168 ISR for students up to 18 years old (Government Emergency Ordinance no. 25/2015). The social indicator of reference (ISR) is the unit expressed in lei (from 2011 until now 500 lei) which is reported to the social security benefits, paid from the state's budget, granted both to ensure the protection of persons within the social care system.

The family support allowance is a form of support for low-income families who support children aged up to 18 years old (Law no. 277/2010). The monthly amount of the allowance is determined by the social indicator of reference and varies depending on the type of beneficiary (family with children, single person and dependent children) and the size of net monthly income per family member (up to 0,4 ISR and between 0.4 and 0.74 ISR). For example, in the case of beneficiaries whose monthly net income per family member fall up to 0.40 ISR inclusively, the monthly allowance varies between 0.06 and 0.124 ISR, depending on the number of dependent children (1 - 4 and more).

The placement monthly allowance is granted for each child given to placement. Its amount is of 600 lei (1.2 ISR) and is paid to the person or family representative who took the child into foster care, caregiver or the private accredited representative. The money is paid also to the tutor, for children whose tutelage was instituted (a form of child protection which is temporarily or permanently deprived of parental protection or to protect his interests, cannot be left in their care).

As a form of social protection for students we can also mention the health social insurance; their status is of insured without being required to pay a contribution.

In achieving social protection of students we could not neglect the *co-financed projects* by the Social European Fund and conducted by the Operational Programme for the Development of Human Resources, which although do not have a general character, they have contributed to the improvement of qualitative indicators in education, namely: prevention / decrease of school dropout, scholarships for outstanding results during a year of study, promoting and establishing innovative educational programs to increase interest in education, and preventing juvenile delinquency etc.

In today's society, it is necessary to realize how much can quality schools achieve for the formation of good citizens. Money spent wisely for a better education of students will return a hundredfold for the use of community.

Beyond all forms of material support mentioned above, we believe that school and family needs to activate the formal and informal levers, in the highly complex and responsible vocational and human training of students. „Valuing non-formal education occurs due to the fact that formal education systems are adapting too slowly to the socio-economic and cultural changes of the world in which we live in” (Costea, 2009, p.9). Informal education's main actor is the individual, including student which he teaches. It is a process that involves exploring and broadening experiences; being achieved mainly through conversation as a means of sharing and confrontation of ideas. Informal learning is not always deliberate because purpose of learning is not very clear from the perspective of the subject involved in the work, but stimulates self-evaluation and reflection on every individual's way of learning.

5. Conclusions

In terms of the role that the components of social protection targets we can mention the completing of material resources of students (the state allowance, the „Roll and Milk” program) or the promotion of quality and discipline in the educational activity (scholarships) in order to prevent/reduce school dropout (settlement transportation costs, “Roll and Milk” programs, “Second

chance”, “School after School”, providing school supplies, various European funding programs, scholarships etc.). Some of these components have a multiple role, for example, granting free the textbooks, scholarships (excepting the social scholarships) as well as the institutions’ concern to improve the quality of the educational process, given the period of time necessary to generate the current regulatory framework in the field. Naturally, the regulatory side, must be completed and with a greater degree of practical applicability and the exact coordinates on funding (for example the activities within the program “A Different School”).

As future research directions we can mention the following: a comparative approach (structural and dimensional) of the social support forms given to pupils at an European level, the analytical research for every form of support, linking them with other social indicators from the pre-university medium (such as school population, the dropout rate) identifying and supporting the non-material forms of supporting students (organizational climate, non-formal education, informal learning, transmitting experiences of best practices, promotion of positive initiatives, etc.).

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