

Equality of chances in the context of inclusive education in Romania. Case study

Gabriela Alina Anghel
Valahia University Târgoviște, Romania
anghelalina2002@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Inclusive education in Romania is realized if the principle of equality of chances for all children is respected. In this framework, a series of measures and strategies specific of an educational process centered on the student and on his special educational needs have been designed and implemented. The educational policies in Romania promote and implement equal access to education for all children with no discrimination. For this, the integrated approach for the problems of the child with special educative demands in the context of a multisectorial and pluridisciplinary intervention will successfully assure a high-quality education for people with special educative demands.

Keywords: *education, inclusion, equal chances, educational policies, inclusive education*

1. Introduction

The functional paradigm of the postmodern society postulates the need to be considered in its dynamics, namely that of a social system marked by universal principles, where equal chances represent a desideratum. In this framework, an active participation to social life imperatively calls for actions based on non-discrimination from all perspectives: ethnic, gender, age, disability, religion, social condition etc. Actually, the assertion related to the operationalization of the fundamental human rights in a cohesive society, explicitly delimits the principles of non-discrimination and equality of chances.

The commonsensical examination of the social level highlights the existence of social behaviors based on stereotypes and value judgements, on discriminating attitudes bringing serious prejudices to human dignity. In a research report realized in Romania, at the beginning of the year 2012, concerning the perceptions and attitudes regarding discrimination in Romania (beneficiary: the National Council for the Fight against Discrimination, on a probabilistic, stratified sample, of 1400 people, aged over 18, it has been highlighted that 51% of the Romanians admit discrimination as a socially active fact manifested mainly according to ethnic criteria (discrimination towards people of Romani ethnic origin) and disability (people with physical, psychic or somatic handicap).

At the same time, the research highlights the fact that despite the harmonization of the national policies concerning the fight against discrimination with those of the European Union, this phenomenon is present in the Romanian landscape both on the individual level and on the level of groups, organizations and institutions. In this context, it is appreciated that an early education, centered on the recognition and respect of values by all the participants to the social life, must be seen as a driver of social cohesion. Next, the discourse will focus on the problems of the children with special educative needs and on the inclusive education needed for these categories of people. One of the active measures for fighting discrimination and preventing the social exclusion of people with somatic, physical or psychic deficiencies is instituted on the level of the educational system of Romania by promoting and supporting integrated education in mass education. The analytical framework of the dimension “school integration of children with special educative needs in mass education” postulates the following values: equality, acceptance, respect, solidarity, dignity.

2.The problem of integrated education in Romania

Integrated education in Romania relies on the principle of equal chances for all children. This is completed by the measures and strategies specific of an educational process centered on the student and on his special educational needs.

According to the statistics provided by the National Statistics Institute [2], in the families of Romania there grow on average 1.08 children, and women give birth on average for the first time at the age of 26.5. At 1 January 2013, the total population of Romania was of 20,020,074 inhabitants resident in Romania. 21.1% out of this total is represented by the population aged between 0 and 19, corresponding to a number of 4,230,964. The distribution of the number of children on age groups is represented as follows: Fig.no 1.

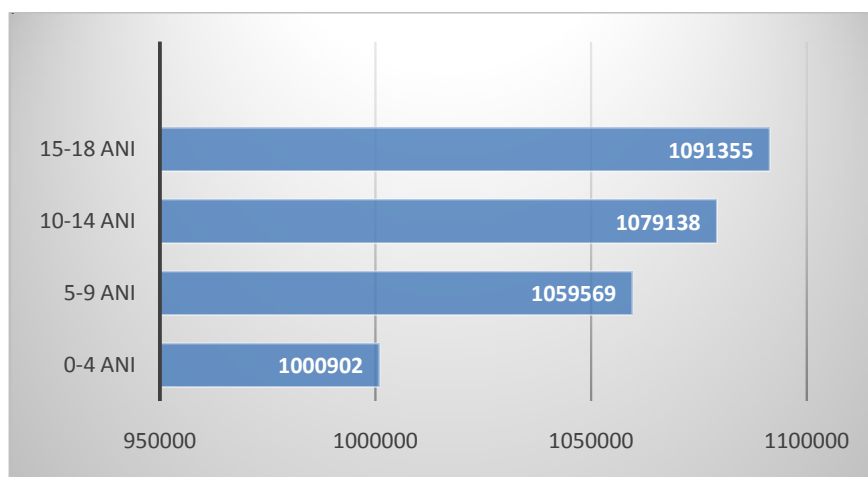


Fig. no. 1. Distribution of the number of children on age groups in Romania

Source: National Statistics Institute (INS), 2014

According to the statistics provided by the National Authority for the Protection of the Child's Rights and Adoption, the children's situation appears as follows: out of a total of about 4 mil. children identified on the level of Romania, 72,777 are children with disabilities. Most of them are children with profound disability, about 34,683; with moderate disability 21,320; with mild disability 2,113; and the rest with severe disability.

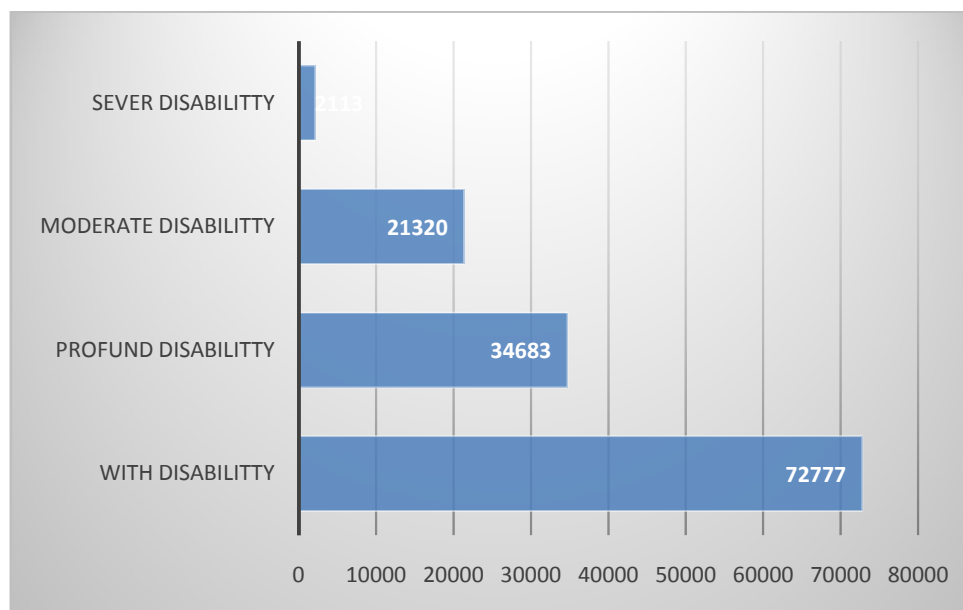


Fig. 2. Distribution of the children's cases on disability level: light, moderate, severe, profound

Source: ANPDCA, 2013

The educational policies in Romania promote and implement equal access to education for all children without discrimination. In this sense, the preoccupations of the Romanian state have concerned as well the development of an integrated education meant for children with disabilities, as well.

Thus, at present, in Romania, the situation of the children integrated in a form of education appears as follows: out of the total of children identified with a disability, most of them can be found in mass education - about 24,258; a part of them are beneficiaries of special education 12,219; and a number of 3,158 are beneficiaries of special integrated education. (Fig.no. 3).

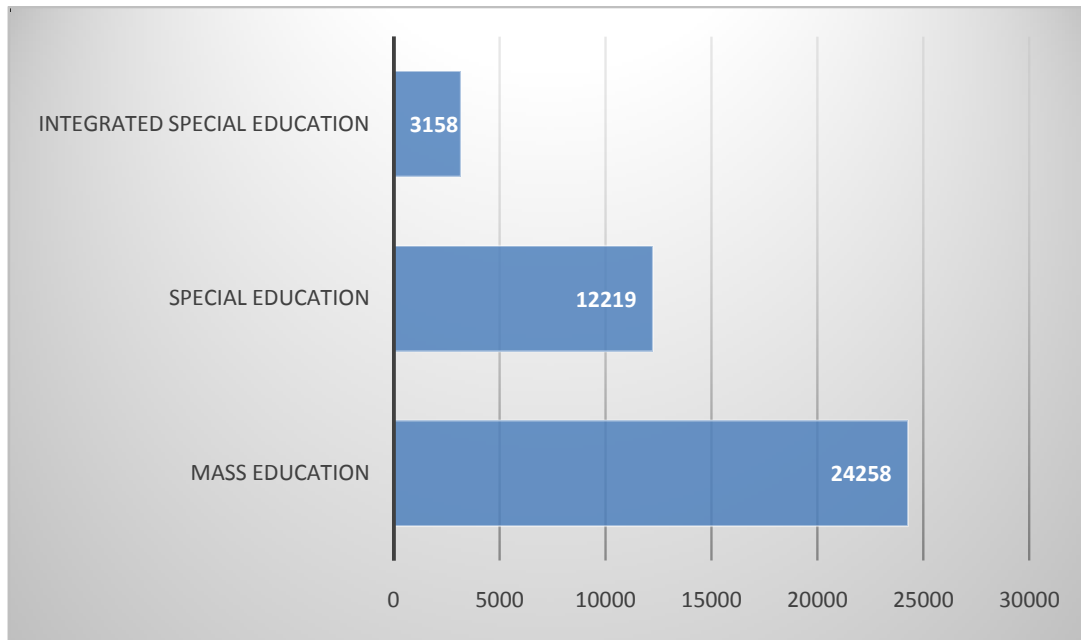


Fig. no.3 Form of education the children with disabilities benefit of:
Source: ANPDCA, 2013

On the level of the educational policy, in Romania, the preoccupations related to the implementation and realization of education have been contextualized in normative acts (Special Education Regulation, 1996) which stipulate the following forms of organization of this education: special groups/classes in common school units, integration groups/classes and programmes foreseen as structures and services meant to support the inclusion of some students with special needs in a small group of 2 to 4 students, or individually in regular groups or classes, direct individual integration with no support.

All these solutions have imposed special implementation measures that concern especially the framework and the human and material resources necessary for the development of an education process centered on socioprofessional habits and competences. Consequently, what was needed was a global and integrated approach of the education needs of children with special educative needs by all the structures involved in the educational system: school, local community, family. Their active participation has taken place on the background of the awareness of the education need, as a factor preceding social integration. In this sense, the preoccupations regarding the awareness of the importance of education have been identified in the organization and structuring of special integrated education.

According to the statistics provided by The National Authority for the Child's Rights and Adoption, by mid-2013 in the Romanian educational system one could identify forms of organization of special education on a group level and on an individual level. Thus, special compact classes have been realized (beneficiaries: a number of 253 children out of the total of 3158), special groups (beneficiaries: a number of 406 children), 2499 children benefit of individual education, and the rest of 1157 turn to other forms of education. (Fig.no. 4).

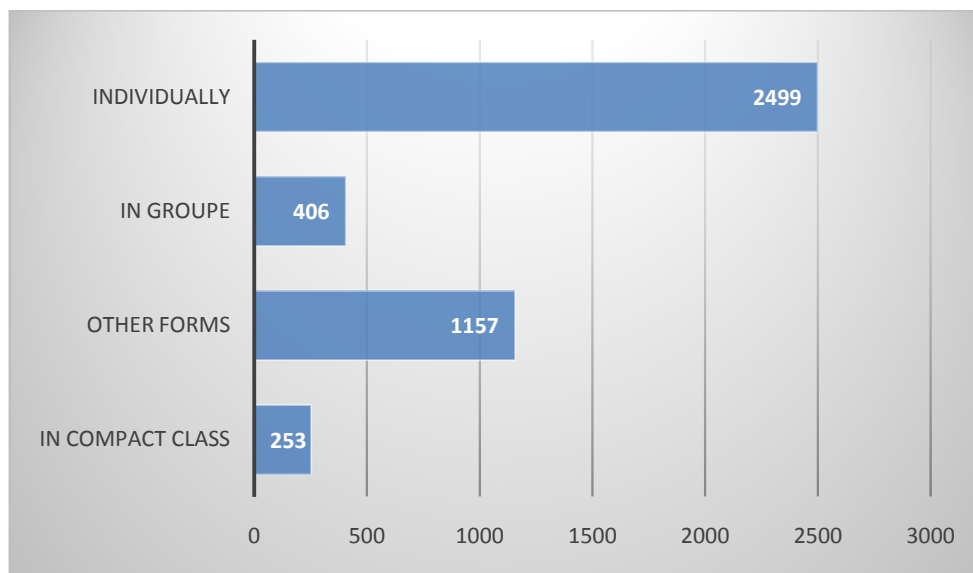


Fig.no. 4. Distribution on the level of the education forms

Source: ANPDCA, 2013

Analyzing the data presented previously, we can notice that the option for the individual form of education for the persons with special educative needs is preferred. This fact determines us to appreciate that on the level of the educational system, the education process is realized in the context of the humanistic paradigm for which respecting the uniqueness and the dignity of the person represent essential conditions in assuring school success. The teaching methodology (Esi, 2010, pp. 41-50) needs to answer the requirements for a high-quality education.

3.Evolutions and implementations worldwide for an inclusive education

The right to education is a fundamental right of the child. Article 28 in the UN Convention on the rights of the child mentions the following aspect: *“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular, make primary education compulsory and available for all”*.

In this framework, “education for all” represents the desideratum of the educational policies for most world states. According to the UNESCO documents, the definition of inclusive education has been delineated in the Salamanca Conference, in the year 1994, when they emphasized the need to develop *“education answering the education needs of all children, young people and adults, with a special accent on those vulnerable in point of marginalization and social exclusion”*.

On the same occasion, it was appreciated that “*community school is the most important means for fighting discrimination, creating welcoming communities, developing an inclusive society and offering access to education for all*”.

Later, in the framework of the World Forum *Education for All* (Dakar, 2000), was highlighted the need for educational inclusion of all minorities, be they ethnic, cultural, linguistic, from nomadic groups, street children, children with disabilities or talented children.

In the Romanian legislation [6], the definition of inclusive education postulates:

“*Inclusive education supposes a permanent process of improvement of the school institution, its aim being to profitably use the existing resources, especially the human resources to support the participation to the education process for all the students in a community*”.

Table No. 1. Directions of inclusive education – international juridical framework

Declaration of the World Conference of Jomtien adopted in 1990, regarding *Education for All – central ideas* – learning starts from birth; need for services integrating the domains: health, nutrition and hygiene with the child’s cognitive and emotional development;

Salamanca Declaration (1994), concerning the realization of the inclusive type of school, accessibility, participation and quality in the context of education for all;

The Millennium Development Goals until 2015, reiterated in the framework of the World Summit (2005) of New York, i.e.: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, compulsory primary education, promoting gender equality and women emancipation, reducing infantile mortality rate, improving prenatal health, fighting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, constructing a global partnership for development;

Global Movement for Children: eliminating social exclusion and discrimination of all kinds against children, respecting children’s rights, stopping children’s exploitation, access to education for all children, boys or girls, fight against HIV/AIDS, children’s and young people’s right to expression and participation in making the decisions that concern them, protecting children from wars, protecting the earth and last but not least, fighting against poverty by investing in children;

Convention on the Fight against Discrimination in the Domain of Education (UNESCO, 1960), which, in Art.1 defines "discrimination" as any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference, which, based on race, color, gender, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, national or social origin, economic situation or birth, has as object or as result the suppression or alteration of the equality of treatment regarding education and especially:
a) removing a person or a group from the access to diverse types or degrees of education; b) limiting to an inferior level the education of a person or of a group; c) instituting or maintaining separate educational systems or institutions for persons or groups (under certain reserves); d) situating a person or a group in a situation incompatible to human dignity.

4. Evolutions and implementations in Romania

In the history of the evolution of the educational services for children with special educative needs, we find extremely diverse educational institutions distributed almost in all the country regions. Thus, in Bucharest, in 1862, Elena Doamna creates an orphanage for “found children” – then in the year 1863 a number of deaf and dumb children are brought here, benefiting of integrated services. At the beginning of the 20th century, there appear the first institutions protecting and educating categories of deficient children: The School for Dumb of Focșani (Vrancea), The Center for Blind People “Vatra Luminoasă”, the School for Deaf People of Bucharest, the orphanages of Cluj, Iași Constanța, etc. In the context of the evolution and progress of the research in the domain of special psychopedagogy, one could feel the need to develop the network of educational institutions for children with deficiencies and to systemically reorient them. The problem of the creation of a unitary national system, of institutions of protection and education emerged in an increasingly pressing manner. Until 1984, one cannot talk about a certain way of organization of special education as subsystem or component of mass education.

After the reform of the child care and protection system (priority goal in the social policy for children in the years 1990-2004), one could note, increasingly frequently, discussions of the educational actants regarding inclusive education. This fact was substantiated later on in a series of special measures concerning the development of the process of education centered on the students’ needs, for those with special educational needs, which today, in our opinion, represents an educational ideal. Why do we say this? Out of the interviews with preuniversity teachers, their opinion is that the realization of a high-quality education in the context of integrated education depends on a series of factors whose representativeness on the level of the education process is debatable. This happens because the material endowments needed for an integrated instructive-educative process is precarious or absent, most of the mass education teachers do not have any or have minimal knowledge about the specific of special education, the training of trainers in the sense of the cultivation of the acquisitions of special didactics is poorly represented, and the representativeness level of the pluridisciplinary teams on the level of the special educational curriculum is minimal or absent.

Consequently, it is necessary to start sets of specific actions meant to support quality in special education: training programmes for teachers on the theme of didactic strategies, integrated approach of the problems of the child with special educative needs, conclusion of functional educational partnerships.

5. Conclusions

Inclusive education needs to meet, on the level of the persons with special educative needs, the need for development, achievement and self-improvement in the context of equality of chances. Inclusive

education can successfully facilitate the positivization of the social attitudes towards people with special needs and support the realization of social behaviors in the sense of prosociality.

Reference

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