

# Social Assistance Models in the European Union

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*Abstract: Although, in general in terms, the main focus of social protection is social insurance, the globalization challenges and the wide, macro and micro level spread of all major economic, both positive or negative trends, highlight the vital importance of social assistance as the means to address material deprivation and an instrument to promote social inclusion. While social security acts as a pillar of public welfare, social assistance is the way through which citizens are being provided with support beyond the boundary of social insurance.*

**Keywords: social policy, welfare, social aid, social assistance models**

**JEL Classification: I, I3, I30, I38**

## 1. Introduction

Despite its overall importance, social assistance is nowadays a social instrument which can lead to dual outcomes. While the main positive consequence of social assistance is that of an increase of human potential, with a subsequent but direct impact on future economic growth, the sometimes insufficient regulation of the field creates the premises for uncontrolled and universal access to social assistance benefits, which, in turn, may cause an array of disadvantages. In this respect, the unrestricted access of the population to the sometimes too generous benefits is likely to diminish welfare by *„discouraging productive reintegration and competitiveness and cause a premature withdrawal from the labor market”* (ILO, 2001, p. 16).

Thus, we believe that social assistance is able to influence social behavior and ultimately the dynamics of economic recovery and growth. While in highly industrialized countries, social assistance is extensive and is working based on an appropriate resource allocation, developing economies work with small scale social mechanisms and instruments that only target certain social groups. Therefore, in developed countries, where social protection systems are comprehensive and are able to provide extended protection, the trend is that of a pronounced dependence. Meanwhile, in developing countries, under the impact of a lower level of development and lack of confidence in the system, the dependency is often reduced due to *„the psychological factor, which creates a parallael between social assistance beneficiaries and the icon of social stigma, the insufficient access to relevant information, the extensive bureaucratic requirements and the unlimited freedoom of action of public servants which restrict the access to information and benefits”* (ILO, 2001, p. 34 ).

In addition to all this, economic literature brings to the fore, the three current challenges that social assistance faces and should manage so that is can operate efficiently, namely *„the consequences of an aging population, globalization and scarcity of resources”*(ILO, 2001, p. 48). Under these circumstances, with the correlation of aging and globalization, the sustainability threat of social assistance systems become obvious. Ageing acts in two ways: on one hand, it emphasizes the profound dependence between the population and the social security system, with immediate

effect on the volume of expenditure, while, on the other hand, it determines a withdrawal from the labor market, which in turn diminishes the volume of the funds that can be collected through mandatory contributions to the system and the average level of individual, personal income which decreases the budget of the social assistance system. Moreover, globalization itself poses additional negative consequences to the aged (and often more expensive) workforce by removal through substitution from the labor market.

Despite these challenges and threats, as previously stated, the pursuit of social welfare is of major importance, especially in Europe, where the aim „to ensure that all citizens benefit from a minimum living standard” (Eardley, T., et. al., 1996, p. 47) were included in both the specific legal provisions and constitutions, as the vital premise for future economic.

## 2. Social assistance models in the European Union

In general terms, social work practice in the European Union is founded on three basic principles, namely: ensure a minimal standard of living for social groups that earn what is considered to be an insufficient income; support those who lack the physical and mental capacity to ensure their own means of living and welfare; promote individual autonomy and independence. In relation to these guidelines and based on generic the acknowledgement that there is no universal social assistance model within the European Union, certain authors (Eardley, T., et. Al., 1996, p. 47 ) bring forward four elements that distinguish the practice of social assistance at European level, namely:

- the existence, in certain countries, of universal systems that provide a minimum income for all persons facing a state of material deprivation;
- the focus of social policies income preservation for certain social categories who are at or below the poverty line, but without taking into account aspects related to social inclusion;
- the level of balance that can be achieved balance between ensuring access to social benefits and the actual outcomes;
- the level of decentralization of the system, between central and local public bodies and the subsequent responsibilities undertaken by each party involved.

In relation to these elements that distinguish between the European social assistance experiences, the economic theory (Eardley, T., et. Al., 1996, p. 47) has laid the fundamentals for four basic social assistance models, namely: the scandinavian model, the mediterranean model, the continental model and the british model.

➤ **The scandinavian (nordic) model** – is found in the Scandinavian countries and its main characteristic is that of high decentralization. Thus, local authorities enjoy a high degree of autonomy and focus on universal access for all those who are „socially disadvantaged”;

➤ **The latin (mediterranean) model** – can be found throughout sothern Europe, including France, where welfare systems are comparatively less developed than those of Scandinavian countries and their practices are mainly based on of social inclusion;

➤ **The continental model** - is found in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany etc. and it has been developed in close accordance to Chancellor’s Otto von Bismarck social guidelines and principles. In practice, the focus is mainly on social insurance, without however denying the need for the universal right to social assistance for those groups of persons for whom the level of personal poverty can be quantified. Still, in comparison to social insurance, social assistance is considered of secondary importance, making it less developed than that in scandinavian countries.

➤ **The british model** - with a long tradition, the social assistance patterns of the United Kingdom, of Beveridge inspiration, focus, as in the case of the continental model, on the importance of social security, but do acknowledge the need for and provide extended benefits in terms of social assistance. With a major concern for the importance of the right to social welfare, the British social assistance system aim at providing a minimum level of income for those in need and only briefly address social matters through social services.

To the four models described above an additional one can be discussed, namely the one that is found in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Although it can not be considered a model per say, the social practices of the former socialist countries combine, in an atypical manner, a whole array of features that are found in other states. Based on the fact that, until recently, the social needs of the more vulnerable social groups was not considered a priority, the path of social assistance development was founded on observation and the implementation of those practices that lead to positive experiences and positive effects in other countries.

The characteristics of the social assistance models in the European Union are shown in Table no. 1.

**Table 1** The main characteristics of social assistance in the European Union

<b>The model</b>	<b>Types of social assistance benefits</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Eligibility</b>
<b>Scandinavian</b>	Youth allowances	Persons between the ages of 18 and 24	Age criteria, citizenship or residence
	Allowances for the preservation of living standards	Persons older than 18	Citizenship or the right to reside
	Housing allowances	Persons older than 18	Citizenship or the right to reside
	Single parent allowances	Parents with children below the age of 10	Citizenship or the right to reside
<b>Mediterranean</b>	Orphan allowances	Parents of legal guardians for children below the age of 16	N/A
	Social pensions	Persons over 65 years old who earn a pension below the minimum level	Citizenship or the right to reside for at least 2 years
	Material assistance for employment	Persons older than 20	N/A
	Single parent allowances	Persons with no income who have underage children in their care	Right to reside
	Social benefits for the disabled	Persons who have no income due to disability	Right to reside
	Social integration benefits	Persons over 25 years old	Right to reside

<b>Continental</b>	Material assistance for the unemployment	Unemployed persons who are no longer entitled to unemployment benefits	Age criteria and the legal right to reside
	Supplementary social pensions	Persons who earn pensions below the minimum level	N/A
	Disability allowance	Persons with disabilities	Age criteria and the legal right to reside
	Family allowance	Large families in which the average income per family member is below the threshold	N/A
	Social welfare	Persons without income	Citizenship or the right to reside
	Other types of financial social aid	Self-employed who can, due to objective reasons, cannot earn an income	Age related criteria
<b>British</b>	Material assistance for orphans	Persons until the age of 18 or 21, if students	N/A
	Single parent allowances	Parents of legal guardians for children below the age of 20, if students	N/A
	Material assistance for employment	Unemployed in search of employment	Legal right to reside
	Material assistance for the disabled	Persons over 16 years old	Pre-existing medical condition
	Social loans	Persons who are unable to earn an income that can ensure a minimum living standard	Citizenship

Source: working of the authors, based on Eardley, T., Bradshaw, J., Ditch, J., Gough, I., Whiteford, P. – Social assistance in OECD countries: Synthesis Report, Department of Social Security Research Report, University of York, London, 1996, pp. 76-77

As can be noted in terms of the discussed models, social assistance does not have a universal significance, nor does it address homogeneous issues in all states. Although in general, the emphasis is on managing problems and the lack of basic welfare means for certain social groups, in some countries monetary benefits are not considered of utmost importance. Also, even in the case of the mechanisms through which the actual allocation of social assistance benefits is being done, one cannot acknowledge universality. In this regard, at the first level of the social assistance mechanisms, in some countries, social assistance benefits are allocated automatically as a means of neutralizing a situation considered of extreme urgency. At the next level,

in other countries, social performance is always linked to the employment status of the applicant, because the the last and third level, the total amount of the benefits received by an individual is strictly correlated with his or her income.

Therefore, for a better understanding of the social assistance practices in the European Union, their advantages and disadvantages at country level, as a source of inspiration and improvement for Romania, we consider it to be necessary to present and analyze the social assistance mechanisms in Germany, Great Britain and France.

### 3. Social assistance in Germany

The social assistance practices in Germany are centered around the objective of „*respecting the right to human dignity*” (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2014, p. 3) which aims to ensure a minimum level of income so that everyone be guaranteed with an acceptable standard of living and compensate for losses incurred by other limitations, such as disability, poor health etc. The system is divided into two main pillars where the first targets „to neutralize social impediments derived from material deprivation, [while the second] takes the form of social assistance for special circumstances~ (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2014, p. 119) and has the following characteristics:

- benefits must be tailored according to individual needs, taking into account the personal circumstances of the beneficiary;
- social assistance benefits are granted only after all forms of social protection arising from social security have been exhausted;
- social assistance are not to be applied for and should automatically be granted as soon as the eligibility criteria is met;
- social assistance may take the form of social services, payments and benefits in kind and monetary form;
- social assistance should be coupled with additional social assistance arrangements (counseling, education, guidance etc.).

After a long period of reform and readjustment to increasingly diverse social needs arising from aging and immigration, the German social assistance system currently comprises the following forms:

✓ Financial support for the minimum living standard - given in cash, as a lump sum, to all those who can not preserve or establish a minimum level of welfare. In accordance to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2014, pp. 119 -124), the amounts are settled as follows: for singles or adult in a single-parent families - 391 euro / month; for married or cohabiting adults - 353 euro / month per person; for married adults or cohabiting adults in with one adult earns an income - 313 euro / month per adult earning no income; for those aged between 15 and 18 - 296 euro / month; for children aged 7-14 years - 261 euro / month; for children up to 6 years old - 299 euro / month. In addition to this financial aid, other means with aim at ensuring a minimum living standard may include integration services targeting children and adolescents, rent coverage for up to 6 months and, in some cases, the payment of mandatory social insurance contributions for those who, due to temporary and objective reasons, cannot cover those sums from their income;

✓ Supplementary social pension for people with low income or those who have lost their jobs - this form of social assistance targets, on the one hand, people over 65 whose pension is below the minimum level established by law and, on the other hand, people who have totally lost ability to work due to medical reasons and who are at least 18 years old. The value of the supplementary social pension is determined in

relation to the income of the beneficiary (if applicable) and can not exceed the highest value of the allowance granted as financial support for the minimum living standard ;

- ✓ Financial support to cover health costs - this social assistance benefit is intended to cover expenses arising from the payment of individual contribution to the health insurance system so that people can maintain their insured status ;

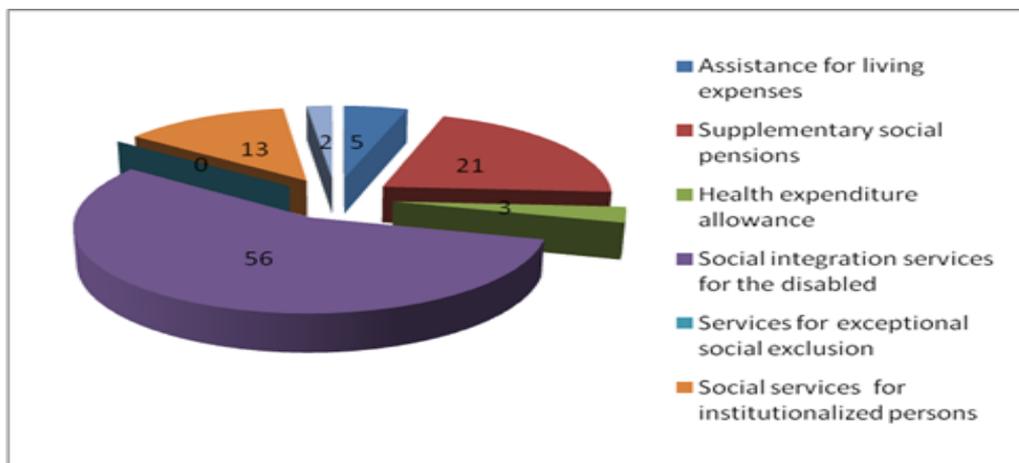
- ✓ Social integration services for the disabled – aims, on the one hand, to neutralize or reduce disability and, on the other hand, to foster the social integration of the individual in need;

- ✓ Relief services for social groups facing temporary social exclusion – takes the form of various measures through which the state tries to counterbalance the difficulty deriving from the lack of affordable housing;

- ✓ Support services and institutional care for people (regardless of age) – targets the social need of institutionalized persons. Thus, this form of social assistance covers expenses related to the care of institutionalized persons with disabilities and the elderly who are hospitalized in permanent care centers;

- ✓ Other forms of monetary and non-monetary support for cases, other than those discussed above, of social disadvantage that adversely affect social welfare and have a negative impact on the ability to maintain a minimal living standard - these forms of welfare take both monetary and non-monetary form and are targeted so that relief is offered to those in need, who go through difficult situations such as those generated by death, complete or partial loss of vision etc.

In the year 2013, public expenditure on social assistance in Germany totaled 25 billion (Bundesamt Statistisches, [www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de), accessed 02/10/2015). The share of expenditures for each of the 7 main pillars is presented Graph no. 1.



**Graph 1** The share of social assistance expenditure in Germany in 2013, the categories of benefits (%)

Source: *working of the authors, based on the data provided by Statistisches Bundesamt, [www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de), accessed on 10.02.2015*

As can be seen in Graph no. 1, the largest share of expenditure, namely 56%, was targeted towards social integration services for people with disabilities, followed by the expenditure to the supplementary social pension. Since the share of expenditures to the financial support for the minimum living standard benefits was, in 2013, limited to only 5% of the total expenditure, we can certainly say that, at least at first glance, the German welfare system focuses on efficiency. Thus, according to the graph above,

it becomes clear that the federal social policies in Germany have and use effective mechanisms for the assessment of eligibility under the social assistance system, being able to primarily target those social groups who face real and measurable social threats.

#### 4. Social assistance in Great Britain

Based on the Beveridge model, which focuses on the free market mechanisms and direct forms of support offered to the socially deprived, the British welfare system links rights to the participation of the individual to the labor market and aims at „ensuring a fair distribution of the added value created within the economy” (Esping-Andersen, 1990, pp. 21-27).

In other words, there is a strict dependence settled between the social insurance system and social welfare system, due to the fact that the compulsory contributions collected through the insurance system ( as share of individual income) create the financing basis for all forms of social support. Although social assistance benefits are universal, their allocation is conditioned by the existence of a state of social emergency, one that can be verified and measured. The social welfare system in the UK provides 11 categories of benefits, as follows: employment allowance, housing allowance, social loans for social emergency, social welfare allowance, family allowance, tax subsidies, financing through the social fund, tax credits, loans for pensioners, welfare for people with disabilities, rent allowance.

- **Employment allowance** – is provided to the unemployed and other people of working age who prove that they are actively seeking employment and that they make no more than 24 working hours per week. The allowance is granted until legal employment is found;

- **Housing allowance** - is granted to persons who have difficulties in supporting the payment of the expenses related to housing and takes the form of subsidies for interest paid on a mortgage. In exceptional cases, the household allowance and the consideration may finance certain costs related to housing (utility costs);

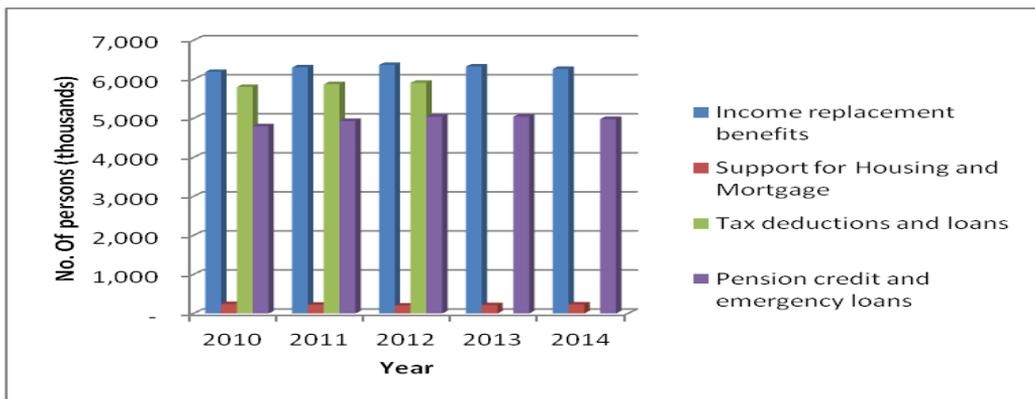
- **Social loans for social emergency** - these types of benefits are aimed at relieving difficulties deriving from unforeseen circumstances such as material losses incurred as a result of natural disasters. Also, in exceptional circumstances, social loans can benefit homeless people who have difficulties in making proof of having enough personal funds to purchase a home. Although this benefit is considered to be a form of social assistance, it is temporary one, meaning that the amounts borrowed must be returned in accordance with the amortization schedule set at the time of grant;

- **Social welfare allowance** - is granted to individuals who earn an insufficient income which can not help maintain a basic level of living standards. The amounts given are not standard, meaning that is a inverse dynamics between the amount of the allowance and the income level of each person. To qualify for this benefit, applicants must provide proof regarding the total weekly hours they work (a minimum of 16);

- **Family allowance** - parents or guardians caring for children or young people below the age of 20 (if students) are granted this type of benefit. As far as this benefit is concerned, there is no dependency between eligibility and the parent's employment status or income level. However, the actual amount of the family allowance, for large families, is set in a manner that a higher sum is granted for the first while the amount granted for any additional children is capped. Under these circumstances, for 2015, the amount paid for a single child is 20,5 pounds per month and the amount for a second child is 13,55 pounds per month (<https://www.gov.uk/child-benefit-rates>, accessed 10/02/2015);

- **Tax subsidies** - are granted, as local tax exemptions, to persons earning below a certain threshold;
- **Financing through the Social Fund** - is offered to those who earn a low level or no income at all. The financing is granted as a single payment for urgent circumstances, such as unforeseen medical expenses;
- **Tax credits** - is an additional form of social assistance benefit, which acts as an income deduction that diminished the taxable income;
- **Loans for pensioners** - are granted to people over 65 years old, whose income is not sufficient to cover all the basic living expenses;
- **Welfare for people with disabilities** - is a form of allowance which targets the disabled who are unable to carry out a productive activity;
- **Rent allowance** – it is intended to cover rent expenditure for certain social groups living at or below poverty level and it does not include additional housing expenditure such as maintenance, repairs, heating and electricity expenditure etc.

Although, as can be seen from the discussion above, the social assistance benefits in the UK are extensive, they differ from those in Germany, for example. Firstly, social assistance benefits are only rarely cumulative. In this regard, for example, social welfare allowance recipients are not eligible for the employment allowance. The employment allowance is not granted to persons whose legal partner is holding a longer than 24 hours per week employment. Secondly, the social assistance solicitor can only be enrolled as a beneficiary if he or she holds the legal right to reside within the UK. Thirdly, while the benefits granted in Germany have a profound social nature, given that they are based on the Bismarckian model of social policy, social assistance benefits in the UK are obviously much closer to market requirements and expectation, given the fact that their design is based on the objective of avoiding the creation of a dependency between the beneficiaries and the system itself (as is the case of benefits such as subsidies and temporary loans).



**Graph 2** Number of persons receiving social assistance benefits in the UK between 2010 -2014 (thousands)

Source: working of the authors based on

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-expenditure-and-caseload-tables-2014> (accessed on 20.02.2015)

Thus, as can be noticed from Graph no. 2, the number of persons receiving social assistance in the UK has seen a modest variation between 2010 and 2014.

According to Graph no. 2, the number of people who benefited from various forms of social assistance in the UK did not vary significantly, although some increases

were recorded for all categories of beneficiaries. This variation of less than 1,5% for all categories can be accounted for strictly on the basis of the economic downturn of the recent years, who has continued to spread even beyond 2010. Given the low increase in numbers during 2010-2014, we can therefore say that the social welfare system in the UK, which focuses on preserving and enhancing the productive potential of all citizens, leads to positive social consequences and it provides the necessary support for the welfare of the population.

## 5. Social assistance characteristics in France

In line with the Mediterranean model, the social assistance system in France focuses on social inclusion through the following general categories of social assistance benefits:

- social programs for children;
- social programs for the elderly;
- social programs for the disabled;
- minimum income allowance- as a means of social integration.

Starting off from these four main categories of benefits „a subordinated breakdown into nine other sub-secondary forms of benefits can be performed” (European Commission, 2013, pp. 23-25):

✓ additional allowance for the elderly (Allocation supplémentaire viellesse) – granted to persons over 65 years old who receive low pension income or do not benefit from any type of income;

✓ additional disability allowance (Allocation d'invalidité supplémentaire) – the beneficiaries of this category of financial support are disabled persons, under the age of 60 years old, whose social insurance allowance has a reduced rate;

✓ invalidity support (Allocation adultes handicapés) - given to disabled adults who are not entitled to the standard, contribution based, disability allowance;

✓ single parents allowance (Allocation de parent isolé) - is granted to people who take care of one or more children and have no other source of income;

✓ survivor benefits (Allocation veuvage) - beneficiaries of such support are the surviving spouses of the sole breadwinner in the household;

✓ solidarity allowance (Allocation de solidarité spécifique) – granted to the unemployed who are no longer eligible for contribution-based unemployment benefits and have worked for at least 5 years during the last 10 years prior to the social assistance application;

✓ integration allowance (Allocation d'insertion) – is granted to former prisoners and refugees;

✓ minimum income for social integration (Revenu minimum d'insertion) – a type of benefit granted to all french citizens over the age of 25 years old who are sole breadwinner in their households;

✓ retirement allowance (equivalent Allocation relived) - beneficiaries of this form of social assistance are the unemployed, aged 60 years or over and who have contributed to the public pension system for at least 40 years.

In addition to the above forms, the french social assistance policies (European Commission, 2013, p. 23) puts emphasis on the importance of family, so additional social assistance benefits are granted for newborns, children, families, enrollment in various forms of education etc.

The amount of the benefits vary between a maximum of 1.208,14 euro/ month, as it is the case with the minimum income for social integration and a minimum of 471

euro/ month, as is the case with the solidarity allowance, in accordance with the date presented in Table no. 2.

**Table no. 2** The type and grant period of social assistance benefits in France

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Amount of the benefit</b>	<b>Grand period</b>
Minimum income for social integration	483,24 euro for single persons – 1.208,14 euro for couples with more than 3 children	3 months
Invalidity support	776,59 euro/ person	1-10 years based on the disability degree
Solidarity allowance	15,7 euro – 22,82 euro / day	6 months, renewable
Retirement allowance	777,16 euro/ month	1 month , renewable for a maximum of 12 months
Additional disability allowance	396,2 euro/ month	The benefit is granted for an unlimited period of time

Source: working of the authors based on the data available at <http://www.missoc.org/> (accessed on 20.02.2015)

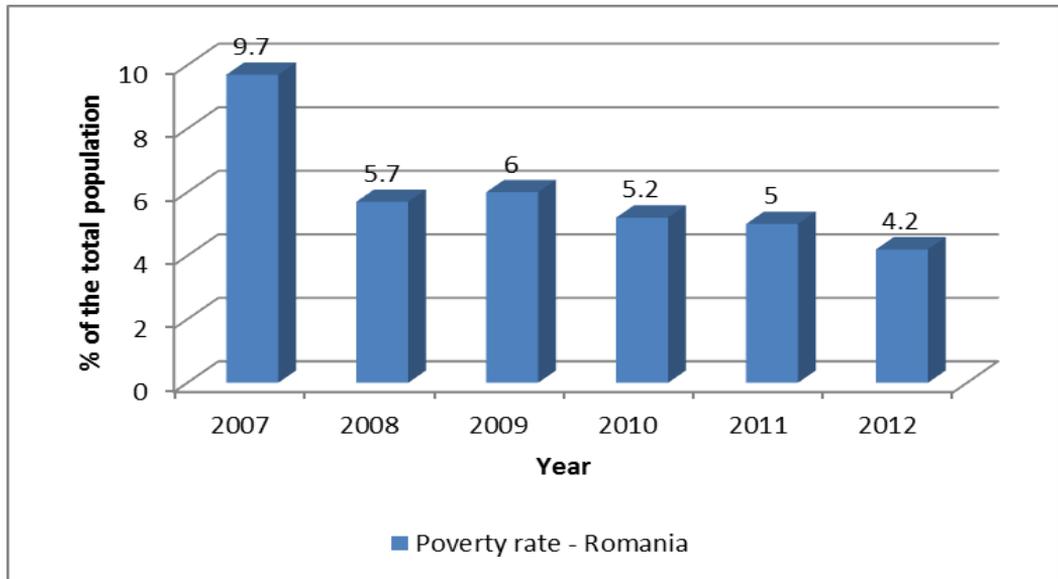
Given the analysis of the social assistance system in France, it becomes obvious that as far as the basic features are concerned, there are a number of similarities with the continental model, for instance with the system in Germany. The emphasis on the benefits in cash reveals the profound social orientation, although this aspect points out a clear downside, namely the high dependency risk system, which could, over time, lead to a failure of the overall inclusion measures and objectives.

## 6. The characteristics of social assistance in Romania

Although one cannot talk about too broad of a reform as far as the post-socialist social assistance practice in Romania are concerned, the current standards have been founded on three main laws: Law no. 705/2001 regarding the national social assistance system (Official Monitor no. 814 of 18.12.2001), Law no. 47/2006 regarding the national social assistance system (Official Monitor no. 239 of 16.3.2006) and The social assistance law no. 292/2011 (Official Monitor no. 905 of 20.12.2011). With an initial focus mainly directed towards monetary transfers (social benefits for preventing and combating poverty and the social exclusion risk, social benefits for child and family support, social benefits to support people with special needs, social benefits for special situations) (<http://legeaz.net/noutati-legislative/noutati-legea-asistentei-sociale>, accessed 10/02/2015), the importance of social services was introduced in the legal framework in 2003, when based on the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 68/2003 (<http://legeaz.net/og-68-2003-serviciile-sociale/art-1-dispozitii-generale>, accessed 10/02/2015) it was agreed that social services in their capacity as „a complex set of measures and actions” were essential in order to „address the social needs of an individual, family or group of people as to prevent and overcome difficult situations, vulnerability and dependence, to preserve autonomy and protection, to prevent marginalization and social exclusion, to promote social inclusion and quality of life” (<http://legeaz.net/og-68-2003-serviciile-sociale/art-1-dispozitii-generale>, accessed 02/10/2015).

In the aforementioned context, the absolute poverty rate in Romania, namely „the share of poor people in the total population - are considered poor those living in

households with an disposable income per adult-equivalent (including the value of consumption from own resources) lower than the poverty threshold e.g. 60% of median income per adult-equivalent” (insse.ro accessed on 02/10/2015), decreased continuously from 36% in 2000 to 5,7% in 2008 and 4,4% in 2009, with a slight increase during the economic recession, but only up to a maximum of 5,2% in 2010, as can be seen in Chart no. 3.



**Graph 3** Poverty rate in Romania between 2008-2012 (% of total population)

Source: working of the authors based on the date provided by The World Bank ([www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)) and [http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/filepicker\\_users/cd25a597fd-62/2014-](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/filepicker_users/cd25a597fd-62/2014-)

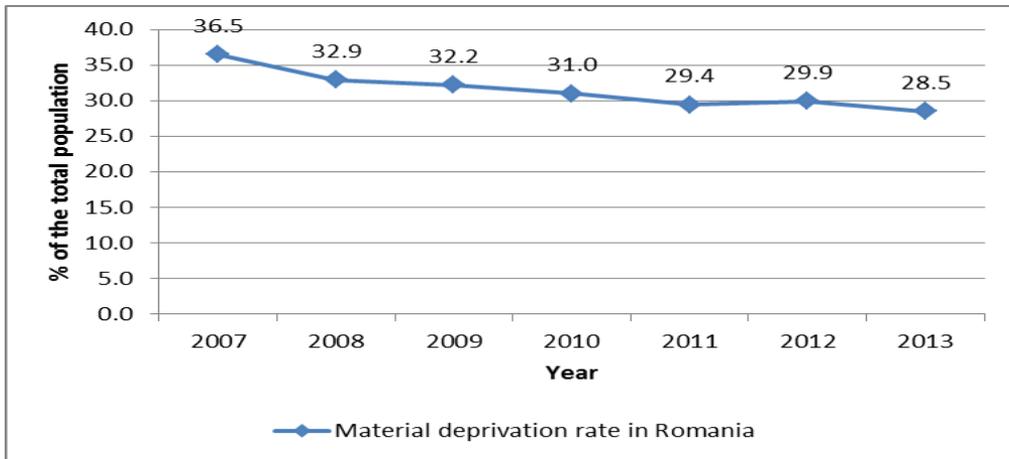
2020/Dezbateri%20parteneriale/Rezultatele%20analizei%20documentare/03.06.2013/7.Social%20inclusion\_23%20mai.pdf accessed on 10.02.2015

In contrast, the severe material deprivation rate, which is „the number of people living in households where a certain and acceptable standard of living is not affordable, thus the household experiences a precarious economic status” (insse.ro accessed on 02/10/2015) is at high levels, although some decreases have however been recorded between 2007-2013 (according to Chart no. 4).

As can be noted, the severe material deprivation rate still stands around 30%, with only slight annual variations that mark a downward trend. However, the values that have been recorded are still significant, among the highest in the European Union, whose average was of just 9,6% in 2013 (compared to 28,5% in Romania, during the same year).

In this context, on the basis of Law no. 292/2011 The National Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Inclusion 2014-2020 was drafted, through which a set of main priorities were set as to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens so that they can participate in society, be appreciated and valued and live in dignity. The main social categories targeted by the strategy are: children from dysfunctional families, including young people coming from orphanages; people who have no income or an income below the minimum subsistence level, especially people from rural areas; older people who have no income from pensions and are in a situation of economic dependence in the household, including the elderly who are institutionalized; vulnerable groups

composed of various ethnic minorities; people with disabilities, including those in specialized centres or those only partially integrated in the society; other categories of people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.



**Graph 4** The severe material deprivation rate in Romania between 2007-2013 (% of total population)

Source: working of the authors based on [http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/filepicker\\_users/cd25a597fd-62/2014-2020/Dezbateri%20parteneriale/Rezultatele%20analizei%20documentare/03.06.2013/7.Social%20inclusion\\_23%20mai.pdf](http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/res/filepicker_users/cd25a597fd-62/2014-2020/Dezbateri%20parteneriale/Rezultatele%20analizei%20documentare/03.06.2013/7.Social%20inclusion_23%20mai.pdf) accessed on 10.02.2015

The aim of this strategy is to achieve the Europe 2020 targets of reducing the number of persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 580,000 people by 2020, so that at least a partial alignment with the expected level of welfare is ensured, as a major motor of the country's level of future economic development long term sustainability.

## 7. Conclusions

Based undertaken on the analysis, we believe that in Europe, social assistance puts on many forms which differ from one another in strict relation to the objectives of national social policy. Taking into account the variety of histories and political orientations, resulting in the absence of universal social model, each European country has its own practice and promotes whatever is necessary so equality, social justice and solidarity are obtained.

In countries where social policies are aligned to the continental and mediterranean models, the strong Bismarckian influences, as in the case of Germany and France, direct social assistance benefits in the direction on immediate welfare. Seen as instruments of the social tactics, social assistance benefits are aimed at balancing the temporary shortage of income. In contrast, in countries with a Beveridge influence, social assistance measures are designed closer to a social strategy, which, on the one hand, seeks to satisfy current needs of the population, and, on the other hand, aims to encourage the disadvantaged towards self-recovery and self-sufficiency.

However, at some point, effectiveness of the adopted social measures and that of the current practices could be questioned, despite the various advantages that arise from mere theoretical comparison. The numerous social challenges that

governments have to manage, their immediate consequences and the institutional inability to identify and quantify them in advance, can cause a breach in strategy and a departure from the overall guidelines and legal provisions of the system.

Regarding our country, we consider it to be of major importance to continue with the necessary steps so that the objectives of social welfare are ensured, as prerequisites for a sustainable growth.

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