

## **PERSPECTIVE ON AN APPROACH TO THE PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION PROCESS OF YOUNG PEOPLE. ROMANIA WITHIN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

**Gabriela NEAGU <sup>a\*</sup>**

<sup>a</sup> Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, 13 September, 050711, Bucharest, Romania

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### **Abstract**

*Professional integration, especially in a period of economic crisis, is an extremely complex process. The level of complexity is supported by the fact that the persons seeking employment have a low level of education, they lack not only professional experience, but also the ability to identify opportunities on the labour market. In this situation are more and more young people in Romania. This article intends to analyse the professional integration process of young people in Romania from two modern perspectives: the professional integration as a rational process in job search and the multiple or multidimensional path perspective.*

**Key words:** education, labour market, multidimensional path perspective, young

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### **Introduction**

Professional integration is a complex and sometimes long-term process of the young who must find their way by themselves. The experiences of young people during this period may lead to poverty, marginalisation or, on the contrary, to understanding the labour market mechanisms, developing the capacity and skills needed to unleash the value of the market and the inclusion on a favourable socio-professional trajectory. That some of the youth are to be found in the situation of marginalisation and others manage to integrate socio-professionally depends on many factors. Some factors are of an individual type (socio-professional aspirations, lifestyle, socio-family environment etc.), while others are of a socio-economic type (level of development of the

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\* PhD Research Institute for Quality of Life, Bucharest, Romania  
E-mail address: gabi.neagu@iccv.ro

economy, public policy, education-occupation correlation etc.). However, whatever their type, understanding the process of professional integration of young people must be a priority objective for any country that considers the value of human resources at its disposal.

### **Objective and analysed data**

In this article we propose an analysis of the professional integration process of young people in Romania, from the point of view of the most recent theories, present in the literature. Whereas many countries (France, Germany, The United Kingdom, USA etc.) have a tradition in the analysis of the professional integration process, in Romania such research is still in the beginning. For this reason, the data used in this article from the research carried out in the last few years in Romania that also approached the process of integration focused on the following dimensions: the level of education of the population investigated, number of jobs, professional experience, attitudes, behaviour manifested in the relationship with labour market etc.

The research on which we are going to rely comprises: *PROACTIV - from marginal to inclusive*, 2009-2010 carried out by the Research Institute of the Quality of Life in association with Association Catalactica in Romania and Bolt and International Aitoliki Development S.A, *Higher Education for Social Cohesion - Cooperatives Research and Development in a Cross-Border Area* (HERD), University Debrecen camp (CHERD - Hungary) in partnership with University of Oradea and Christian University Partium, 2011-2012, *Sociologist on the labour market*, a project carried out by Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, University of Bucharest, 2012. Professional integration is one of the problems that can be analysed by resorting to statistical objectives data provided by institutions as well as INS, EUROSTAT, EURYDICE etc. The analysis of the data resulted from the research on representative samples of Romanian population or for population segments will be supported by objective data.

### **The integration of youth into working life – a problem with the entire society**

Not long ago, the socio-professional integration of the young generation did not present a special interest, the professional path of young people in life being linear and predictable: school graduation, employment, carrying out a professional activity, retirement. At present, there are few cases of professional predictable paths and what is now happening with the young generation from a social, educational and professional point of view has become a problem for most modern

societies. There are at least three arguments that make professional integration of young people one of the major concerns:

- *demographic changes in a society and the knowledge-based economy.* Modern society is characterized by a trend accentuated by the aging of the population, which means an increased pressure on the social insurance budget as well as long-term difficulties in relation to the labour economic growth. Progressive extension of the retirement age is a necessary but not sufficient measure. A sustainable economic growth, knowledge-based needs for highly-qualified labour, able to integrate innovation and technology into the productive process; young people have a greater availability and adaptability to the new requirements of the job market, compared to the older population.

- *social cohesion.* Sustainable economic development and social cohesion requires a low level of inequality of any kind between the different categories of people. An increase in the number of young people excluded from the education system or the labour market leads to the social development of conflicts between young people and adults, between those with and those without occupation, the decrease in civic participation etc.

- *respect for human rights.* A democratic society is a society in which there are respected the citizens' rights, the right to work being a universal human right. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and also in the European Social Charter (1965) there are provisions neither related to the people's right to work, nor to the right to be paid in relation to one's work, the right to decent conditions of employment, the right to be protected against unemployment etc. Most of the statistical data (see Eurostat, for example) shows that the employment rate is lower among young people as compared to other age categories, that young people are to be found most often in the situation of having poorly paid jobs, with a higher degree of uncertainty, occupations far below their level of education etc. These aspects determined both specialists in the field and representatives of the institutions directly involved in the professional integration process to wonder if we are dealing with a discrimination of young people in the labour market.

### **Theoretical and methodological framework**

Professional integration is a theme with a history of nearly half a century - the first studies were published in 1970 (Dubar, 2001) - but it is, at present, one that causes methodological disputes and controversies. Although the studies and work published so far have used many quantitative indicators (unemployment rate, employment rate, type of employment contract etc.) as well as

subjective indicators (satisfaction in work, perception of opportunities for access to the labour market, the importance of work in one's life etc.) there is no consensus among specialists on what professional integration means.

In general terms, professional integration means the interval between the moment a person leaves the educational system and the point in time at which the person obtains a job. The definition is criticized and challenged at least with the same frequency with which it is used.

Some specialists reproach the ambiguity regarding the beginning and end of the process of professional integration (Vincens, 1997; Trottier et al. 1997). Does beginning refer to the situation in which a person seeks a job for the first time? Does the end of the process of professional integration coincide with employment, regardless of the type of contract or of whether the occupation corresponds to the person's educational level? What position does job satisfaction hold within the process of professional integration?

Others (Freysinet, 1996 apud Sollogoub & Ulrich, 1999:36) highlight the fact that the definition describes a linear process - leaving school, getting a job - whereas at present, few people, especially the young, may have such a path. Most of them are marked by interruptions (unemployment, postponing to look for a job) and downs (resuming the search for employment, returning to the system of education and training) and this definition does not refer to those who are in these situations.

Other researchers (Dubar, 2001) use the concept of socio-professional integration instead of just professional integration. The argument with which they support their proposal lies in the fact that the occupation must not be considered only one dimension that defines the identity of individuals, but only one of them, besides family, free time, friends etc.

In conclusion, the literature on this issue reflects the fact that professional integration is “un objet de recherche en chattier” (Drancourt & Rouleau-Berger, 1995, apud Vincens,1997:21) and “l'analyste se voit confronté á un objet non totalement identifié qui recherche désespérément des éléments constitutifs de définition” (Plassard & Cahuyac, 1996 apud Vincens, 1997:21).

To compensate for a missing clear definition and also in order to support those who are proposing to analyse this process, the literature provides numerous perspectives for the approach. Some of them are included in the traditional category approaches and others are considered as modern approaches. Taking into account the objective we proposed and the data we have, we shall focus on the analysis of the integration process of young people in Romania, from the perspective of

two modern approaches: the professional integration process as a rational search for a job and the multiple or multidimensional path perspective.

## **Results and discussions**

### ***Professional integration – the behaviour of rational search for a job***

One of the characteristics of the modern society is that every person who intends to enter the labour market is required to prove the possession of at least a minimum level of education. In other words, professional integration goes through the school and the behaviour of rational search for a job, as J. Vincens argues, follows a rational behaviour of investment in education. The idea of rational behaviour expressed by individuals but also by the society to which it belongs, in connection with the future socio-professional, is to be found not only at Vincens, but also at Boudon, Becker, Shultz or Arrow.

That some people remain in the educational system just long enough to reach the level of the minimum price of education (usually basic education with a period differing from one country to another) and others leave the system only upon graduating the highest level of education is, according to Boudon (1973), the result of a cost/benefit analysis: how much does education cost and what benefits does it bring on the middle and long term?

Those who overestimate the costs and undervalue the benefits of education will decide to leave the educational system prematurely but, on the long term, they will have difficulties in finding a job.

Because the population has an indecisive behaviour regarding the investment in education, the public institutions have taken over an important part of this type of expenditure. Through his theory of human capital, G. Becker (1997) has shown that the investments made by society in education are the result of a cost-benefit analysis as well as of rational behaviour: in many countries, the public budget covers the costs of the basic education of the population to ensure that they bring benefits to the society, while investments in higher levels of education are more profitable for an individual only and, for this reason, the costs with the latter are greater at the extent of a population.

In many countries, including Romania, as a result of very low income levels, education is free at all levels. Recent surveys show, however, that at the level of the people there has been a change in the financing of the educational system. Thus, 76% of the population believes that it would be

appropriate to introduce a co-payment of education for the high-income categories of population and the granting of financial support to those in need. (IRES, 2012). The people's participation in the financing of the educational system may result in increased inequalities between the different categories of the population but may also have positive effects: population responsibility for their own investment in education.

**Table 1.** *Young people's perceptions of the time needed to enter the labour market after completion of formal studies*

Do you think you will be able to find a job after school, high school, faculty?*	%
I find my job immediately after graduation	38
Yes, I think I will find employment at some time after graduation	28
No, I don't think that I will find employment after graduation	13
I don't know	21

*Source: Report on young people in Romania, worries, aspirations, attitudes and lifestyle 2014:73*  
 (\* a percentage from the sub-sample of young people are still in the educational system)

As we can see, some young people who are still in the educational system exhibit an optimistic attitude regarding the likelihood of getting a job: most of them are convinced that, if not immediately after graduation, then in a very short time, they would find a job (Table 1). That most of the youth studies should continue to increase the likelihood of labour market and as a lot of people are convinced that the decision taken is the best, there seems to be no connection to the actual situation on the labour market: the economic crisis has affected young people to a greater extent as compared to any other age category in particular as far as access to employment is concerned. But young people's expectations are supported by objective data.

Eurostat data (Table 2) reveals that those who have undervalued the benefits and overestimated the costs of education have made the best possible decision: the employment rate is higher in the case of young people with a high level of education (ISCED 5-8) compared with those who have a medium and low level of education (ISCED 0-2 and ISCED 3-4).

**Table 2.** *Employment rate of young people (15-29 years) depending on the level of education (%)*

<b>2013</b>	<b>ISCED 0-2</b>	<b>ISCED 3-4</b>	<b>ISCED 5-6</b>
UE-27	<b>26,0</b>	<b>53,7</b>	<b>71,4</b>
Belgium	16,8	46,8	68,8
Bulgaria	9,5	44,4	70,7
Czech Republic	7,7	56,1	68,8
Denmark	46,1	70,4	77,7
Germany	45,9	70,5	84,3
Estonia	20,4	55,7	75,7
Ireland	12,8	48,6	75,2
Greece	13,4	24,8	50,9
Spain	26,2	30,5	56,2
France	18,3(b)	48,1(b)	71,3(b)
Croatia	3,3(u)	35,6	59,5
Italy	16,9	37,3	44,0
Cyprus	16,3	45,0	65,5
Latvia	18,3	54,1	80,4
Lithuania	8,0	46,2	83,8
Luxembourg	20,4	50,5	68,5
Hungary	9,7	47,1	73,5
Malta	47,5	57,8	85,3
Netherlands	54,2(b)	74,4(b)	85,5(b)
Austria	38,8(b)	75,5(b)	81,1(b)
Poland	8,5	51,5	71,9
Portugal	29,6	42,7	58,6
<b>Romania</b>	<b>24,9</b>	<b>46,4</b>	<b>66,9</b>
Slovenia	13,7	50,0	70,0
Slovakia	4,8	50,3	57,6
Finland	25,0	65,5	82,6
Sweden	23,4	68,7	74,7
United Kingdom	40,8	60,5	81,3
Iceland	67,8	75,7	87,9
Norway	48,8	72,7	81,3

*Source: Eurostat, 2013*

On the whole, at the level of all EU countries, the average length of the market entry is much lower in the case of persons with high level of education compared with those with a low level of education (Table 3). In Romania, there is retained the same trend with the difference that, for all categories of education graduates, the average length of entry on the labour market is higher than the average level for the EU-27. This difference does not result from the relevance given by the population to investment in education, but is rather the result of the characteristics of the socio-economic context.

**Table 3.** *Average duration of entry in the labour market*

2009	ISCED 1997	ISCED 0-2	ISCED 3-4	ISCED 5-6
UE-27	6,5	9,9	7,3	5,1
Romania	10,0	12,5	12,0	7,3

*Source: Eurostat 2010*

To overcome the effects of the national socio-economic context and increase the opportunities for professional integration, younger Romanians do not limit themselves to attending school. The rational behaviour for professional integration means establishing an early contact with the labour market, a reason for which many young people start looking for a job while still attending school. Attending education and carrying out work is a situation specific to the modern society, whereas “in the past, the transition process typically involved leaving school and then looking for a job. Today, large proportions of students are working part-time while attending school”.(Krahn, 1991:47, apud Anctil 2006:24).

Recent research in Romania shows that some students have already begun the process of finding a job during their studies: 39,4% of students claimed that they started this process and some of them already conduct a professional activity in parallel with university studies - 15,4 % of students claim that they worked during college years. Also, the fact that the young people enter the labour market in order to become familiar with the mechanisms of the labour and not necessarily to make a career in the field in which they work is supported by the fact that more than a quarter of those who carry out professional activities in parallel with school - 26,1% - claimed that the activity they carry out or have carried out has no connection with the studies they attend/ have attended. (Higher Education for Social Cohesion - Cooperatives Research and Development in a Cross-Border Area, HERD, 2011-2012). If failing or not wanting to carry out a professional activity during studies, young people have the opportunity to carry out professional



stages, optional laboratories or internships. For a significant proportion of the students, this type of activity has had an important role (Table 4). The practical activities carried out at school not only build practical skills at future employees, but are also an opportunity for students to establish direct contacts with employers and even to obtain a job in the institutions in which they pursue their stage. Getting a job is not always the same with completing the process of professional integration, especially in the case of young people.

**Table 4.** *Evaluation of the school activities from a professional standpoint (%)*

To what extent did this help you in your professional development	optional laboratories	internships
to a very small extent	4,2	10,8
to a small extent	23,1	31,7
to a large extent	27,0	27,5
to a very large extent	9,8	16,3

Source: "Sociologist on the labour market" database, 2012

That the process of professional integration continues also after leaving school, even when the population has managed to get a job, is best demonstrated by those who have atypical occupations. Eurostat data (Table 5) emphasizes that the main reason for which young people do not have a place of employment with indefinite period contract was largely due to the labour market situation and not their options.

**Table 5.** *Reasons for the young people who are employed in a part-time work*

Can't find a place work with standard program	2013
<b>UE 28</b>	<b>34,1</b>
<b>UE 27</b>	<b>34,1</b>
Belgium	19,7
Bulgaria	55,6(u)
Czech Republic	18,4
Denmark	12,0
Germany	13,8
Estonia	8,3(u)
Ireland	42,0
Greece	72,3

Spain	68,2
France	54,4(b)
Croatia	32,9(u)
Italy	79,6
Cyprus	67,0
Latvia	25,8
Lithuania	24,6(u)
Luxembourg	22,3
Hungary	55,6
Malta	20,0
Netherlands	12,8(bu)
Austria	14,6(b)
Poland	35,4
Portugal	57,1
<b>Romania</b>	<b>73,7</b>
Slovenia	9,8(u)
Slovakia	40,4
Finland	23,1
Sweden	43,7(u)
United Kingdom	28,8
Iceland	10,8
Norway	15,9(u)

Source: Eurostat, 2013

Also, if some of the youth know exactly what they will do after leaving the educational system, others are totally unprepared, and not necessarily from the educational or professional point of view. In Romania, the studies have established that there are young people who do not have a job because they do not know how to look for one: 6,1% of the young people aged between 18-24 years old and 14,8 % of those aged between 30 and 34 years claim that they do have a job because they do not know how to look for one, as compared to 3,8 % of those aged 35-39 years, 8,7% for the age group 40-44 years old and 3,6% for those aged 49 years. (PROACTIVE -from marginal to inclusive, 2009-2010). For these categories of young people, the professional integration process is far from over. There is to decide which directions they would take in order to get a job.

***Professional integration - a process with multiple or multidimensional paths***

Abandoning the linear perspective for the analysis of the professional integration process to the benefit of a much more complex one, which includes not only several types of trajectories, but also several different social systems (the educational system, the economic system, the system of social protection etc.) took place as a result of socio-economic changes.

On the one hand, the labour market, regardless of whether we are talking about members with developed economy or developing economy, as is Romania's case, is no longer able to respond to all employment applications coming from the population and particularly young people. Persons who are not able to get a job in the classic acceptance - employment contract for indefinite period - are either unemployed, or mainly inactive, or accept atypical occupations (part-time jobs, for example).

On the other hand, there occur changes at the level of the population's options: many elderly persons choose to establish the work schedule by themselves, or choose to spend more time with the family and less at work, others choose to continue education but want to ensure an income so that they work while also attending school, others choose to leave school and enter the labour market etc. Researchers and analysts of professional integration cannot ignore the studies performed on a considerable part of the population only on the basis that they do not fall within the traditional perspective for the study of the process.

Some researchers are of the opinion that the professional approach admits multiple trajectories and perspective, making it easier to understand a phenomena, especially in relation to young people. Sollogoub & Ulrich propose even an extension of the definition of professional integration in the sense that this should include clear reference to the sequence of contracts of employment and periods of inactivity that young people experience (Sollogoub & Ulrich, 1999:37).

In the classic acceptance, completion of studies is followed by employment on indefinite duration. In the multiple trajectories acceptance, this is only one of several possibilities even if it is the one that most people desire, irrespective of age.

In Romania, the results of such research has shown that what people want most is occupational stability, namely, an occupation with a contract of employment for indefinite duration. Other features of the employment (working conditions, opportunities for promotion, relations with colleagues etc.) are less or not at all important (Comsa, 2008: 17).

Not all persons seeking employment get one with a high degree of stability, especially those at the beginning of their career. Occupational stability joins multiple variants of professional integration. The option for one or the other variant is related to the national socio-economic context but also to the particular characteristics of people. The most inappropriate decision, with negative socio-professional implications, is the one in which young people are neither involved in a form of education (young NEETs) that may offer them the chance to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to obtain a job, nor are they to be found in the economic system.

**Table 6.** *Young people who are not covered by a form of education and do not have an occupation (%)*

NEETs	<b>2013</b>
<b>UE 28</b>	13,0
<b>UE 27</b>	12,9
Belgium	12,7
Bulgaria	21,6
Czech Republic	9,1
Denmark	6,0
Germany	6,3
Estonia	11,3
Ireland	16,1
Greece	20,6
Spain	18,6
France	11,2(b)
Croatia	18,6
Italy	22,6
Cyprus	22,2
Latvia	18,7
Lithuania	13,0
Luxembourg	11,1
Hungary	5,0
Malta	15,4
Netherlands	5,1
Austria	7,1
Poland	12,2
Portugal	14,2
<b>Romania</b>	<b>17,2</b>
Slovenia	9,2
Slovakia	13,7
Finland	9,3
Sweden	7,5
United Kingdom	13,3
Iceland	5,5
Norway	5,6

Source: Eurostat, 2013

As compared with the other EU-28, Romania is characterised by a high percentage of young people in the category of NEETs. In Romania, an analysis of the way in which this category of the population has evolved from the beginning of the economic crisis and up to the year 2013 has made analysts to conclude that young people belong to the category of the population most affected (*National Strategy in the field of young people*, 2014:19).

Whether they are forced by the socio-economic context, or because they have other priorities (family, health status) some of the youth, even with an average level of education, have occupations with partial work contract or for a fixed period: at EU-27, 31% of the young people are involved in temporary activities (in Romania only 3,5%) and 22,2% in activities with partial contract (11,1% of the young people in Romania are in this situation) (Eurostat, 2012).

Some specialists claim that this situation is not to be regarded only critically: it is important for a young person, especially in the present economic conditions, not only to get the desired job, but also to avoid unemployment. (Trottier et al., 1997:64). Others have come to the conclusion that for most of the youth today unemployment or an occupation for a fixed period or part-time work experience is natural or normal. (Anctil, 2006) Their opinion is supported by the fact that at the level of the Member States there is encouraged the idea of flexibility of the labour market, the flexisecurity (Lapošek & Dolenc, 2011:129), but a fault of this type of occupations is the fact that they may not be a springboard to a full professional integration or they may lead to poverty. The conclusion arrived at was that the fact that young people are not necessarily influenced by atypical work, but rather by the perception of the society on this type of occupation. (Booth et al, 2002, apud Blasco et Givord, 2010:75)

For example, in the USA, having such an occupation does not bring benefits to individuals on the middle and long term and, as a rule, such occupations are intended as a general rule for former prisoners, or illegal workers (Chauvin, 2010 apud Blasco et Givord, 2010: 76). At the EU level, the situation differs from one state to another. In some European countries, to have such an occupation is a way to gain professional experience, as one becomes familiar with the mechanisms of the labour market, finds out if a certain career suits him or not, or if a trend will change with another. (Couppié et Mansuy, 2004; Preoteasa, 2013) In others, however, part-time employment or contract for a fixed period is a step closer to social marginalisation. An analysis of the relation between the type of employment contract and the standard of living of the population in Romania shows that the largest number of persons who are engaged with the part-time work program obtain lower revenues and have a higher risk of poverty. (Preoteasa, 2013:142) In conclusion, for the people from Romania, especially the young ones, having a part-time job or

one with a fixed-term contract is rather a step towards poverty than a springboard towards professional success.

### **Conclusions**

The process of professional integration of young people is complex but of interest for the entire society, since it impacts the modern human resources. In Romania, young people show a rational, active behaviour on the labour market but they lack guidance, counselling in their actions. Also, because of the socio-economic context (the national educational mismatch between supply and demand in the labour market, lack of cooperation between the main players on the market), young people have a limited number of professional integration options.

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