

## **PROFILE OF SOCIAL SERVICES FROM JIU VALLEY IN LIGHT PROFESSIONALS PERCEPTION. QUALITATIVE APPROACH**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aims to analyse Jiu Valley social services profile using a qualitative perspective – focus grup analysis, by investigating perceptions of social services professionals from Jiu Valley, Hunedoara County, Romania. The qualitative methods of investigation, particularly important in achieving a comprehensive profile of social services from the Jiu Valley was to achieve a focused discussion sessions on social services. The following objectives were targeted by focus group: analysis of social professionals' perception on social services from the Jiu Valley, Hunedoara County and identifying internal and external factors, to put their mark on the functioning of social services. Upon completion of discussions session focusing on social services in the Jiu Valley to conclude on the following aspects: social professionals perceive favorable development of social services in the Jiu Valley region in the period 2002-2008, and considering the dynamic development of these services is progressive. There are a number of elements which are seen by professionals as catalysts for the proper functioning and development of social services and factors inhibiting or blocking the functioning of these services.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Jiu Valley region; professionals; SWOT Analyses; social services; social-economical context.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** I38

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In response to changing needs and societal challenges, "social services is in an expansion process being activated services focused on the individual needs: rehabilitation, adult education, childcare or services focused on the collective needs, while new social risks (aging population, with implications of population mobility,

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changes in family structures, etc.). Today have created a new trend for other types of social services” (European Commission, 2009, p.20).

According to Commission of the European Communities in 2008, both at European level and in Romania, there have been recent increases in the diversity of services reflecting different orientations of the European economy and society as a result of the aging population, changes in gender roles and family structures change, technological change and globalization.

In România, need for social services, in the context of socio-economic changes after the post-December 1989 and in the legislative context of development of national social protection system, more elaborate and specialized, has generated an expansion of social services at national and regional or local level, before beginning global crisis in 2008. Research data provided by Holt Romania, stated that under the closure of many institutions in 2002, "the need for social services was growing" (Mărginean, 2003, p.10). Also, in the next few years, the normative acts relevant to the social assistance system adopted within 2004-2006 referring to Law 47/2006 on national social security system, the Law 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of child rights, the Government Ordinance 68/2003 on social services, Order 21/2004 - on minimum standards for child care services type residential, Order 24/2004 on minimum standards for day care centers, Order 48/2004 on minimum standards for the development of life skills, etc., governing the procedures and methodologies for the establishment and development of these services.

In another study conducted by UNICEF in 2006 "Children at risk of hope. An analysis focused on the situation of vulnerable children are excluded and discriminated against in Romania" is presented to many aspects of the situation analysis of vulnerable children in Romania and is explained some of the deficiencies that occur in connection with "accessibility and quality of existing national services for vulnerable children"(UNICEF, 2006, pp. 117-120), deficiencies that attract attention to the real needs of the establishment of truly effective social services in relation to social reality. Thus among the deficiencies of social services in Romania following issues were mentioned: failure to provide an optimal balance between financial support and social services, between family-centered services and solutions that support services outside the family, between the central and decentralized through a balanced system.

Roth M. and Rebeleanu A., (2007) refer to causality between needs, social problems and social assistance. The authors show, on the one hand, the social problem of the client system (individual) as “the result of complex interactions between environmental factors and the hereditary”, on the other hand, emphasizing "different view of causality in social work" which "highlights the culture values and mentality values which give rise to social problems”care “pune în evidență valorile culturale și de mentalitate care conduc la apariția unor probleme sociale” (Roth & Rebeleanu, 2007, pp. 52-53).

In Romania’s present social and economic context, in the process of transition to the market economy, affects large professional groups and represents a important aspect to professionals (Popp, 2010).

Socio-economic complex issue of population in the Jiu Valley has generated an emphasis on necessity and the needs of people living in this area monoindustrial

depending to age groups of people (children in need, adults with disabilities, poor families with many children, Elderly persons to at-risk, etc.) or according to their specific problems (poverty, housing debt, educational deficiencies, problems with relationships, employment gaps, etc.).

Successive stages of economic restructuring operate at the Hunedoara County and Jiu Valley area, the lack of viable investment alternatives are continuously generated a major negative impact among the population. Economic consequences have been fully reflected on the social increased poverty in the area damaging the quality of life. These negative aspects have induced an accumulated economic and psychological discomfort to the individual level.

Industrial restructuring in the area have brought serious social problems in the population that conditioned the creation of social services to meet the needs of the population area. Individual and social needs of the population in permanent dynamic have resulted evolution of the social services sector.

## **2. PROFILE OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE JIU VALLEY - QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

To achieve a comprehensive profile of social services in the Jiu Valley was used as a qualitative method of investigation focused discussion session (focus group) on social services with social professionals working in social services in the Jiu Valley, Hunedoara County.

*The following objectives were targeted focus group:* "analysis of social professionals perception on social services from the Jiu Valley, Hunedoara County" and "identifying internal and external factors, to put their mark on the functioning of social services" (SWOT<sup>1</sup> analysis for these services).

Focus group discussion session started with the *following research questions:*

What are the internal and external factors that contribute to the development of social services?; What are the positive elements perceived by professionals as catalysts (facilitator elements) in the development of social services in the Jiu Valley?; What is the perception of professionals on the negative elements that block the development of social services?; What are the main opportunities that contribute to the continuity of social services in the Jiu Valley?; What kind of risks facing social services in the Jiu Valley?; What are the social services function in the Jiu Valley, in the opinion of professionals?; How professionals see the causes that led to weaknesses and risks in social services?; What types of needs of the population covered by social services?

### **2.1. Methodological approach description**

A number of 12 professionals working in social services from Jiu Valley have participated in the focus group session was held as planned initial, after, in advance, expressed their intention to participate - included in the questionnaire - this group

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<sup>1</sup> SWOT- Strengths/ Weaknesses/ Opportunities/ Threats

discussion focused on the subject. Type of the group was homogeneous, closed. A discussion meeting was held which lasted for 115 minutes. Training period necessary for the application of this method was 1 month, during which, in addition prepare documentation set, were selected participants who have sent written invitations to participate in the discussion session that was to take place, they were contacted by phone to confirm participation. Have been sent several invitations to the discussion session, for there to be certainty participation to a number of 10 to 12 professionals that know the social services problems in the Jiu Valley.

To achieve this methods have been used three main instruments: Protocol focus group interview guide to focus group participants and podium technique.

Approach for conducting focused group discussions - according to the protocol focus group - the following development stage: a) the introductory section, b) addressing the questions and recording responses, c) completion of the session. After the first stage of the scroll, which was presented the topics covered by study and was facilitated presenting participants, followed the second step of addressing the key questions contained in the interview (1), followed by the presentation of professional responses. One of the basic ideas outlined at the beginning of the meeting was that "there is no right or wrong answers to questions will be addressed and that every opinion expressed by participants is extremely valuable for this study" and another made mention at the beginning of the meeting was on using information that were to be used only for scientific purposes. To centralize responses of professionals in order of importance was used the podium technique where each participant had to summarize the issues requested in descending order of their importance since analyzed aspects of the situation on first, second or third place. Also, it has been successfully used brainstorming technique (storm of ideas) on each item covered by research. Brainstorming technique was selected especially because, being a participatory qualitative technique its value generating very many significant ideas for the theme concerned.

Focus group session participants were selected from a large number of potential participants (63 professionals) have indicated their intention to participate in group discussions. To be selected participants were used several selection criteria: voluntary option to participate in group discussions of professionals, availability of professionals to participate during the scheduled focus group session, the topics covered interest, confirmation of participation in session discussion. To answer research questions concerned, *the first direction of discussions targeted at shaping of the SWOT analysis* Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats of social services from Jiu Valley from social professionals perspective. This SWOT analysis aimed *identifying internal and external factors favorable or unfavorable to put their mark on the functioning of social services* and *the second direction of discussions* focused on *shaping a social services profile based on the perception of professionals* participating in the focus group session.

To answer research questions concerned the following discussion topics were discussed:

a) For *SWOT analysis of social services from Jiu Valey* the following topics were addressed: a.1. Identifying the strengths / benefits of social services; a.2. Identifying

weaknesses in social services; a.3. Identifying opportunities; a.4. Identifying risks

b) In order to shape perceptions of professionals on the development of social services were targeted following items: b.1. identifying existing social services; b.2. elements that led to the development social services; b.3. causes that have led to Weaknesses and Threats; b.4. needs categories covered by the social services

## 2.2. Data analysis and interpretation of focus-group

a) ***The first round of discussions aimed shaping the direction of SWOT Analysis*** Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats of social services from Jiu Valley from the perspective of social professionals. The SWOT analysis aimed *identifying internal and external factors favorable or unfavorable which influencing the functioning of social services.*

SWOT Analysis used podium technique and brainstorming techniques for to collect relevant data.

Regarding *the strengths* of social services from the Jiu Valley were synthesized following points of view in order of their enunciation:

- Activism, motivation, perseverance and goodwill of volunteers *“volunteers who help are very kind and persistent in their actions, being helpful for social services and especially in difficult times and proved its utility ...”* (N.E., social worker, private service), existence of young employees, interpersonal communication, experience in implementation of social projects *“a real strength for the benefit of youth social services is determined by the communication team and team collaboration which delivers beautiful results for services”* (M.A., legal representant private service), diversity of actions, specific target group, organizational transparency, applicability of laws, *“ I wish to point out that social services in the Jiu Valley is a large palette of social actions generated by the target and beneficiaries of social service”* (C.D., psihologist, private service), , existence of financial resources *“...strengths of public social services are determined by the fact that they have the financial resources for social intervention and there are some clear legal rules that help them act”* (M.E., social worker, public service), wide range of target groups, prevention and limitation of risk situations, social support beneficiaries, replicable models of participatory at national level, recognition efficiency of social services at international level, development non-formal methods *“passion of social professionals in relation to social work and respect for professional ethics in relation to service users”* (C.T., psycho-pedagogue privat social service), efficient use of resources, the existence of specialized human resources, intervention professionalised, providing integrated services complex, the optimism of some beneficiaries, organizational collaboration with international entities, respondents social actions to the real needs of the population, infrastructure services - existing equipment, adapting financial resources at beneficiaries, information resources in child protection field.

Regarding the *weakness* of social services from the Jiu Valley were synthesized following points of view in order of their enunciation:

- The inability to counteract inadequate attitude of the beneficiaries, *“difficulty of co-optation of social beneficiaries in social activities”* (P.O., voluntary priest

coordinator private social service Petroșani), “*There is a lack of financing services to ensure their continuity*” (B.M., social worker private service Petroșani), dependence on social service beneficiaries, the limited number of beneficiaries of services, “*material and financial resources are limited for some services provided by the NGO sector*” (R.C., legal representant private social service Petroșani “*excessive bureaucracy in social services and staff are demotivated*” (A.C., professional public service Petroșani), “*insufficient legal information resources and legislative gaps*” (M.E., social worker public service Petroșani), “*communication with difficult beneficiaries, collaboration between public institutions and NGOs is difficult and centralization of social services is maintained despite the legal regulations of decentralization*” (N.E., social worker public service Petroșani), “*social action model of some types of private social services has been developed determined period of time and exponential growth best practice model generates organizational inability to ensure service quality*” (C.T., psycho-pedagogue private social service Lupeni), “*migration of young people in other areas with higher economic potential*” (B.O., voluntary private service Petroșani), lack of coherence in the actions of public services, “*political influences put their imprint on the development of services*” (C.A., educator public service Petroșani), results of intervention in relation to their work, “*number of beneficiaries is not provided in relation with the resources*” (C.D., psychologist private service Petrila), “*difficult procedure to access grants*” (N.E., social worker, private service Petroșani), “*insufficient involvement of public authorities on the issue of sustainability of social services*” (B.M., social worker private service).

It notes the following features regarding to identify *opportunities* from the social services:

- “The large number of funding programs” (C.D., psychologist private service Petrila), “*European opening, the exchange of experience of all social sectors, foreign voluntary resources*” (C.T., psycho-pedagogue private service Lupeni), permissive legislation, private/public partnerships, “*specialized of youth in social and human sciences segment lead to the professionalization of social services*” (N.E., social worker private service Petroșani), “*social cooperation*” (D.N., psychologist private service), “*partnerships with international organizations, there is already funded social programs*” (P.O., voluntary priest coordinator private social service Petroșani), “*experience in social services necessary to carry out fundraising activities*” (B.M., social worker private service Petroșani), “*NGOs flexibility to adapt to the needs of beneficiaries of social services*” (C.D., psychologist private service Petrila), “*Corporate social responsibility for youth services*” (M.A., representant private service Petroșani), “*social services have an excellent human potential*” (B.M., social worker private service), “*legislative changes easy sustainability of social services and also employment of graduates and young professionals in social work in public social services*” (A.C., educator public service Petroșani).

Regarding the *threats* of social services from the Jiu Valley were synthesized following points of view in order of their enunciation:

- “Closure of other mines in the Jiu Valley area will affect the evolution of social services and increase the number of beneficiaries in inequitable relation with resources” (N.E., social worker private service Petroșani), “currently socio-economic

crisis generates reducing social services budgets” (C.D., psychologist private service Petrița), “conditional financing that are directed only to some types of social action” (B.O., voluntary private service Petroșani), “the rigidity manifested by some public institutions in supporting private social services” (T.M., social worker Petrița), “the risk having the same low salaries of specialists will lead to demotivation social professionals” (C.T., psycho-pedagogue private social service Lupeni), “lack of accessing structural funds for social services is another major risk (C.T., psycho-pedagogue private social service Lupeni).

In achieving *the SWOT analysis* all statements made by the participants have been summarized and prioritized in order of decreasing highlighted by respondents in the podium technique, then have been centralized into analytical diagram only those considered most important by the professionals.

In order to achieve an objective analysis of information obtained and to respond to research questions was necessary to group pairs of variables to view to achieving a synthesis with which to identify the factors (internal or external) which facilitating the proper functioning of social services and risk factors that put their imprint on the functioning of social services.

The elements illustrated to the above matrix, we find that the strengths and weaknesses as a counterbalance to the opportunities and risks of social services. See that despite the fact that there are a number of risk factors related to the external environment *that can threaten the the proper functioning of social services* (mine closure, layoffs, demotivation specialists, increasing the number of beneficiaries of services, socio-economic crisis, budget reducing), *at the same time there are many external factors that determine positive some opportunities that can generate social service development* (possibility of new budgetary resources by accessing European funds, legislative changes that can support social programs, opening European who can facilitate access to updated information to field of social services that implicitly promote the development of social services, experience to accessing other social service resources may be the opportunity for partnership through an important resource for other social services which have not this capability).

Also, regards *strengths* generalized by respondents for social services from the Jiu Valley (manifestation of complex social integrative action, voluntary human existence, the existence of financial and material resources, large diversification of the target group or category of users of social services, organizational transparency, social service experience in the application of various social projects, functional models of good practice, experience to implementation of social projects, organizational transparency) *these will reduce vulnerability to potential threats or risks that could affect the functioning of social services in the Jiu Valley. Correlation between opportunities and strengths of social services concerns all the opportunities that best correspond to the strengths identified to order to optimize the operation of social services* (for example the strengths: „experience in applying previous social project” correlated with the opportunity „existence of a large type of European funding programs” will lead towards increasing efficiency and service quality social services to recipients of services).

SWOT analysis of social services in the Jiu Valley in general illustrates that elements concur to maximize and optimize the social services and what elements can minimize the challenges to social services in this area. (See graphic 1 )

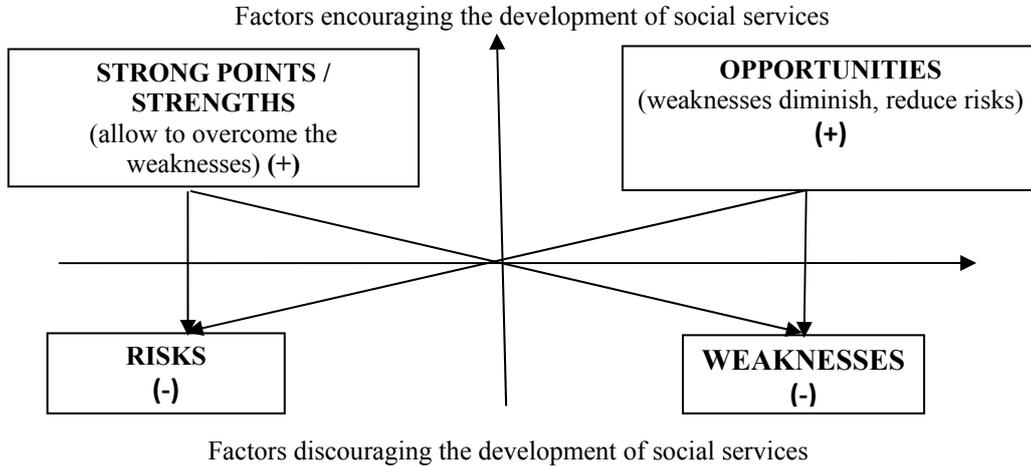


Figure 1. Synthetic SWOT Analysis

b) The second round of discussions was focused on outlining a profile of social services. Professionals were identified a number of 14 social service from the Jiu Valley cities. Concerning the development of social services in the period 2002 - 2008 from Jiu Valley Hunedoara County, the participants concluded that there is an progressive curve upward social services in the area (Figure 2).

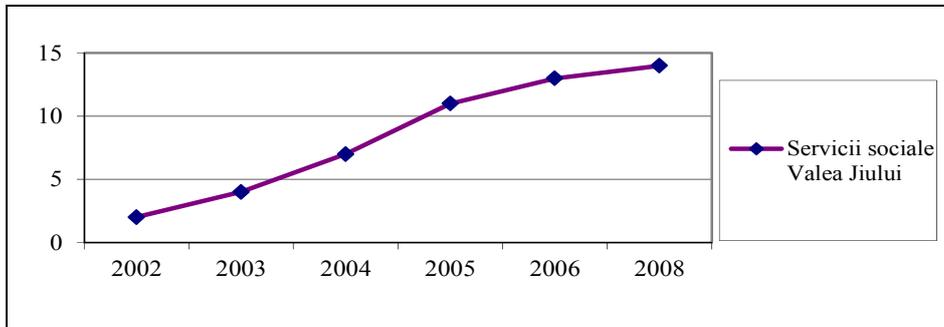


Figure 2. The dynamics of developing social services in the Jiu Valley (service number)

On the question “What elements do you think they competed in the development of these social services?” social professionals agreed on the following issues that generated dynamics of social services: “- *In my opinion need of social services was something very normal in the Petrosani and Jiu Valley community. Do not forget that during the closed mines in the area have been generated an explosion of social problems that caused the emergence and development of social services*” (N.E.,

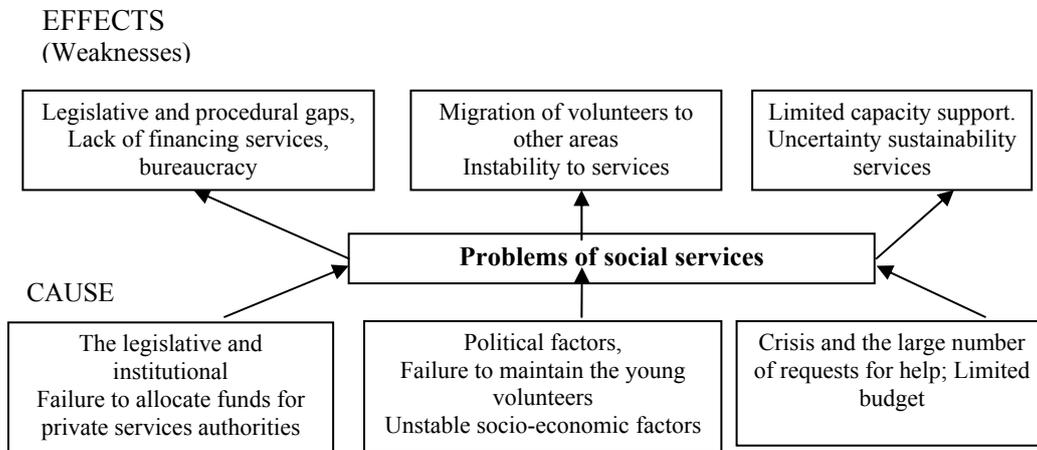
social worker, private service); “- *Legal frame competed on the development of these social services [...] for example 2%, and the law sponsored legislation supported to some measure social services* (T.M., social worker Petrila); “- *I believe that the legislation becoming more specific help us to perfect the social services*”(P.O., voluntary priest coordinator private social service Petroșani); “- *Coverage of the needs of service users has led to the creation of many social services in the Jiu Valley for example the need for food determined the creation social canteen or social assistance at home or the need for communication and relationship determined the creation counseling centers for parents or day care centers*” (B.O., voluntary private service Petroșani).

The main issues mentioned by professionals who have competed at the social services were, in addition to those listed above (the legal or legislative frames, needs of beneficiaries, geographical location or field of activity, adverse external conditions - the closure of mines) and ability for self-financial service capacity to attract private funds for these services and credibility of social services at community level.

To identify *internal and external factors that facilitate or make it difficult the development of social services*, and to understand what contributes to the development of weaknesses to social services was done an analysis 'cause - effect', using technique “tree diagram problems” through have been identified which the main causes leading to the emergence of weaknesses to social services. In this sense, the experts mentioned the following reasons: the limited budget allocated to social services system “*public authorities do not allocate funds for social services provided by NGOs and NGOs are forced to identify their own resources are not easy to obtain*” (N.E., social worker private service Petroșani), large number of calls for help coming from the community “*... social services face the problem of numerous requests for help coming from the people in the community, demands that can not be totally honored*” (M.E., social worker, public service), insufficient financial resources to meet the needs of social services and legal frame unfavorable “*even if made progress in legislative field, There are some methodological weaknesses for example increasing quality of social services the standards provided by law but by same resources*” (B.M., social worker, private service), institutional framework, political factors, socio-economic instability.

In the figure 3 is outlined the tree social services problems which presented graphically the relationship between the causes that have led to weaknesses in social services.

An interesting aspect of the discussion session was the passage of the subject items that have favored the development of social services subject to the needs of the population, from the discussion of participants distinguished very often the term "needs". The respondents agreed the idea that there is a direct relationship between the needs of beneficiaries and types of social services and after enunciating the main categories of needs: basic physiological needs (need for hot food or basic food, clothing, footwear, shelter, personal care plan), health needs (for drugs and primary care at home), affective needs and emotional needs, needs of family affiliation, safety needs, social utility needs, the need for respect, the need for self-fulfillment and spiritual needs, have been highlighted general types of services who cover needs described above.



**Figure 3. The tree diagram of social services problems**

In the closing session of talks focused on the theme of social services in the Jiu Valley was enunciated need to deepen the subject of social services from Valea Jiului to identify ways of cooperation between social service specialists conducive to improving the organization and operation of services.

*Data interpretation focus group is descriptive* revealing statements of participants as they were recorded to the session focused discussions *this analysis are not analytical*, particularly concerned by the perception of professionals on social services from Jiu Valley.

Focus group method was welcomed for direct extraction of objective information on social services, facilitating the identification of social perceptions of professionals on the dynamics of development of these services.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Upon completion of discussions session focusing on social services in the Jiu Valley to conclude on the following aspects:

a) *From the perspective of social professionals' perception on social services from the Jiu Valley.* Social professionals perceive favorable development of social services in the Jiu Valley region in the period 2002-2008, accentuating, in order of their development, 14 social services from the Jiu Valley cities and considering the dynamic development of these services is progressive. There are a number of elements which are seen by professionals as catalysts for the proper functioning and development of social services and factors inhibiting or blocking the functioning of these services.

*The main factors contributing to the development of social services from Jiu Valley* identified by experts are: *socio-economic context* (closure of mines in the area, staff restructuring) that triggered a complex social problem of population in the area, generating the need for social services and development of these services; *legislative*

*situation* becoming more specific favored the development of social services, *facilities of mining areas* contributed to the development of social services because the Jiu Valley region getting to be regarded as deprived area, providing institutions have access to more resources for the creation and development services; and not least was highlighted *areas of social activities* (particularly child protection) that generated the development of some segments of the services in detriment of other services (protection of older adults). By contrast, *the main inhibiting factors* identified by experts who have hindered the development of social services in the Jiu Valley are: *limited budget* allocated to private social services by local public institutions, *insufficient resources* to meet social needs of service users, *socio-economic instability* has made its mark on the functioning of social services, *institutional elements bureaucratic* procedures slowed social and *political factors* - frequent changes in political structures generated instability in social services.

b) *The SWOT analysis in terms of internal factors (strengths, weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities, risks) that contribute to development or stagnation of social services in Jiu Valley.* Creating a profile of the functional social services in the Jiu Valley is a need for the public and private providers of social services, in order to facilitate a better understanding of strengths but also the real problems facing these services. Proper functioning of social services in the Jiu Valley is clearly influenced by internal and external factors that put their mark favorably or unfavorably on such services. Analysis and knowledge of internal and external organizational factors leading to minimization of Jiu Valley social services risk and also contributes to maximizing existing resources in these services.

Regarding *the perception of professionals on internal factors* which affecting the proper functioning of social services, *are shown following strengths*, or positive aspects characterizing social services from Jiu Valley: *complex integrative actions* type of social services, *target group and category diversified* of service users, *the organizational transparency, resource efficiency, experience in implementation of social projects, social replicable models* of national level and *material and human resources* existence. Moreover, *the weaknesses* identified at the Jiu Valley social services refer to *the uncertainty of continuity and sustainability services, the difficult procedure access to EU funds, the growing number of requests for services* that generate incapacity to service all requests, *the bureaucracy, and the migration of young professionals* to other more developed areas with economic potential or *insufficient financial resources*.

Regarding *professionals perception on external factors* that put their mark on social services *are highlighted the following opportunities*: *European openness, exchange of experience between social sectors, social services flexibility and adaptability* to the changing needs of service users, some regulations *favorable legislation* (2% Law and sponsorship) but following *threats or risks* that could affect the proper functioning of social services: the current *socio-economic instability* that has repercussions on social services budgets decline, *the possibility of closing other Jiu Valley mines* which may affect the development of social services and increasing the number of beneficiaries services, *restructuring of public social services staff, rigidity* manifested by some public institutions to support private social services, *specialists*

demotivation risk caused by low pay levels and uncovered structural funds for social services.

Regarding *limits qualitative focus-group investigation*, including analysis of issues that may limit mention *restricted area of the investigated population, relatively small number of questions, the choice of analysis variables for the issue concerned quite limited analysis and interpretation of qualitative data obtained* can be objective or less objective, *time-limited resources* for data analysis and interpretation of data.

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