

The Impact of Social Scholarships and of Reserved Places for Graduates from Rural High Schools in Improving Access to Higher Education and Academic Performance



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Abstract Although the level of tertiary education attainment as a share of the population aged 30 to 34 increased in Romania up to 26.3% in 2017, it is still modest in comparison with the EU average (39.9% in 2017) (Eurostat, 2021). Therefore, while the rate of young people exposed to the risk of poverty and exclusion increased in the last decade in Romania, there is a need to evaluate the support measures for students from disadvantaged categories. The paper presents the results of two impact studies for two public policies, social scholarships and reserved places for graduates from rural high schools. In order to find out to which extent the two public policies fulfil their aims in supporting students from vulnerable social categories to graduate higher education, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods has been used. The quantitative analysis used data extracted from two national databases for higher education and data collected by a survey to which about half of the Romanian universities responded. The data for qualitative analysis were collected by face-to-face interviews (with professors in management positions and students beneficiary of the two policies) from eight universities with different profiles, located in five regions of Romania. The results of the quantitative analysis revealed that the social scholarships policy fulfils its objectives of improving academic performance and increasing the chances of graduation for beneficiaries. The results of the qualitative analysis

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revealed a high level of satisfaction of beneficiaries with both policies and a positive evaluation of both policies by the management of universities.

Keywords Education policy · Impact · Equity · Higher education

1 Introduction

The evolution of the significant indicators for evaluating the higher education situation in Romania in the last two decades showed an improvement. However this improvement was modest in comparison with the EU average. For example, the tertiary education attainment in population aged 30–34, a key indicator in the EU policy, increased from 14% in 2007 to 27.3% in 2017 (while EU policy was 39.9 in 2017).¹ Also, the share of young people aged 16 to 29 at risk of poverty and exclusion increased from 23% in 2010 to 26.1% in 2018.²

Moreover, there is a considerable gap between the rural area and the urban area in regard to the level of educational attainment. About 65% of high school graduates from rural areas did not enrol in higher education, compared to approximately 35% from urban areas. (UEFISCDI-CNFIS, 2019). In 2017, 31% of the adults in urban areas graduated from higher education compared to only 6.1% in rural areas.

The two public policies that are the focus of this study are the social scholarships for students and the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools. Social scholarships are available for students from disadvantaged families, with low income or with medical and social problems, in order to secure a minimum standard of living. The scholarship amount is fixed by each university, starting from the minimum level proposed each year by the National Council for the Financing of Higher Education. An important change was introduced by the 3392 Order of the National Education Ministry in 2017, by which the amount of the social scholarship increased, being connected with a minimum level of accommodation and meal. According to the Policy Brief on social scholarships in higher education (UEFISCDI, 2020), the largest increase in social scholarships between 2014 and 2019 was 149.4%. In the academic year 2018/2019, the recommended average value of the social scholarship was 580 RON (equivalent to 117.4 Euros). However, for the same year, the average value of the social scholarship was below the recommended national value at 11.4% of universities.

With regard to the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools, starting with the academic year 2018–2019, 2,000 fully subsidized places were distributed each year to the universities, only for the undergraduate level.

¹Eurostat (2020) The share of higher education graduates in adults aged 30–34 years (variable tgs00105).

²Eurostat (2020). The share of young people at risk of poverty and exclusion (variable ilc_li02).

In this context, this study aims to investigate the impact of the two policies on increasing access and retention in higher education for students from vulnerable social categories.

2 Literature Review

In the field of education, a clear distinction was made between programmatic measures (individual measures) and systemic approaches (De Witte and Cabus, 2013, p. 157). The first approach aims to identify students in risk situations on an individual basis and to create alternative programs in order to keep them enrolled in schools, while the systemic approach includes multiple levels of analysis, including the family, the school and the community. Therefore, the systemic approach was preferred by several authors (Di Maggio et al., 2020; Osgood, 2012; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010).

Retention and dropout from higher education can be conceptualized by several perspectives. Thus, the psychological perspective explains dropout as individual response, emphasizing the internal factors influencing the decision to remain or not enrolled (Bean & Eaton, 2000). By contrast, the sociological perspective considers that the decision to leave school is a consequence of social attributes. Dropout and retention are considered an effect of the social strata (Bourdieu, 1977; Hauser & Featherman, 1978), meaning that the social status of the student's family influences its level of educational attainment and employment status. At the same time, the institutional perspective focused on the impact of the academic environment on the behaviour of students (Berger, 2001). Institutional elements as structure, resources, communication, climate can have an important effect on socializing models and consequently on retention. Finally, the interactionist view aimed to integrate the three perspectives (psychological, sociological and institutional), considering dropout as a result of the dynamic interaction between individual and environment (Tinto, 1992). Thus, in this approach, dropout and retention are considered results of serial interactions between an individual with distinct psychological and socio-economical characteristics and an institutional system (Braxton et al., 2011).

Using this approach, the study proposed the following research questions:

RQ1. How has the number of beneficiaries for the two policies evolved in the last years?

RQ2. To what extent did the social scholarships and, respectively, the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools increase access to higher education of candidates from disadvantaged social categories?

RQ3. To what extent did the social scholarships and the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools reach their aim to reduce dropout and increase performance and chances of graduation for beneficiaries?

RQ4. What are the factors that influence the academic performance of students (including social scholarships, residence in the rural area or graduation of rural high schools)?

3 Methodology

A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods has been used. The quantitative analysis has been carried out as secondary analysis on data collected from two databases, the National Student Record (NSR) and the National Platform for Higher Education Data (NPHEd), and a survey to which approximately a half of Romanian public universities responded (N=25). The qualitative analysis relied on a series of interviews in eight universities with beneficiaries of the two policies and management representatives.

In the case of the first database (NSR), for social scholarships, the authors considered the cohort 2015–2019, but only on a sample of 6 universities that shared the necessary data. For the reserved places of graduates of rural high schools, a sample of universities was built according to the reliability and consistency of data and included 6 universities with an engineering profile (a total of 17,694 students in the cohort enrolled in 2015), 6 universities with a medical profile (a total of 6,453 in the cohort enrolled in 2015) and 7 comprehensive universities (39,159 students in the cohort enrolled in 2015).

In the case of the second database (NPHEd), the analysis was performed on a total of 318,315 students for the academic year 2014–2015, 342,395 students for the academic year 2015–2016, 337,669 students for the academic year 2016–2017, and 406,675 students for the academic year 2017–2018. The data belonged to a total of 56 universities from Romania, from which the greatest part were public universities. Among these universities, more than a third had a comprehensive profile (19 universities), while the others had various profiles (agronomical, engineering, artistic, and medicine).

The survey focused on the data not collected in the two databases, i.e. the number of applications for social scholarships and accommodation, degree of selectivity in the admission examination, including the competition for the reserved places for graduates of the rural high schools. Twenty-five universities (approximately a half of the public universities from Romania) responded to the survey: 13 comprehensive, 4 agronomical, 3 engineering, 2 medical.

The qualitative research was performed in December 2019–February 2020 in eight universities placed in five regions of development and having different profiles (comprehensive but also specific—technical, agronomical, medical). Ninety beneficiaries of the two policies participated in collective interviews in the eight universities, together with 17 interviews with professors in management positions (vice-rector, dean or vice-dean), who responded individually.

4 Findings

4.1 *Evolution of the Number of Beneficiaries of the Two Policies and Aspects of Implementation*

Relying on the data extracted from the National Platform for Higher Education Data (NPHEd) database, the average number of student beneficiaries of public places increased from 60.1% in the academic year 2014–2015 to 66.1% in the academic year 2017–2018. The total number of scholarship beneficiaries (regardless of category) increased from 22.1% in 2014–2015 to 28.52% in 2017–2018. On average, 31.8% of students come from the rural areas.

The share of social scholarships in the total number of scholarships increased. While study scholarships and merit scholarships are granted on performance criteria, social scholarships are granted solely on socio-economic criteria to students from families with no income or a very low income or to students with a chronic disease or disability. The total number of 11,788 social scholarships allocated in 2016–2017 increased to 26,798 social scholarships allocated in 2017–2018 (a quarter of the total 103,195 scholarships in all categories). Thus, a change in the procedure ordered by the National Education Ministry in 2017 had a substantial effect on the share of social scholarships in the total of scholarships. As a result, the number of students who benefitted from social scholarships grew from 4.8% in 2014–2015 to 7.1% in 2017–2018.

The universities with a medical education profile presented the lowest number of standard students³ who received a social scholarship, followed by comprehensive universities and universities with an engineering profile. The universities with an agronomic profile and the universities with an artistic or sport profile had a higher number of beneficiaries of social scholarships. There was an increase in the number of beneficiaries for all types of universities, starting with the academic years 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 (Table 1). As mentioned in the introduction, starting with the academic year 2016–2017, the amount of social scholarships increased, being connected with a minimum level of accommodations and meals.

The average amount of the social scholarship increased from 237 RON (S.D. = 86) in 2014–2015, to 588 RON (S.D.= 43) in 2017–2018 (Table 2). Also, the minimum amount is three times greater in 2016–2017 in comparison with 2014–2015, increasing to a minimum quantum of 434 RON in 2017–2018.

As far as the number of graduates of rural high schools is concerned, there is no increase in their number in the universities in the sample in the five years (Table 3).

³The social scholarships were allocated according to the university decision: 4 months, 5 months, 10 months or 12 months in one or two semesters. Therefore, to have a common comparison basis, the indicator has been calculated for “standard student” that benefits from a 12-month scholarship, using the formula: number of social scholarships x number of months of benefit of social scholarship x 100/12 (months) x total number of students in the university. For example, in the academic year 2014–2015 4.78% of standard students from all universities of the sample benefitted from the theoretical 12-month social scholarships.

Table 1 The share of standard students who received social scholarships, by types of universities

	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018
Comprehensive universities	2.98	2.44	4.85	5.68
Agronomic universities	5.18	4.8	8.84	12.16
Engineering universities	4.82	4.23	4.83	6.55
Art/sport universities	5.48	3.01	6.95	6.1
Medicine universities	2.37	2.53	3.78	4.07

Table 2 Average quantum of social scholarship

	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018
Universities	46	37	47	48
Missing values	9	18	5	7
Average	237	244	480	588
Standard deviation	86	89	69	43
Minimum	100	133	317	434
Maximum	650	650	620	700

Table 3 The evolution of the number of graduates of rural high schools

		2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020
N ^r	Valid	17	18	18	21	21
	Missing	9	8	8	5	5
Average		55	56	53	55	58
Standard deviation		69	64	59	56	57
Minimum		0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		199	192	174	168	207

According to the survey, there are universities where there is a competition for the reserved places for the graduates of rural high schools. The average competition increased from 0.85 students per subsidized place (in the first year in which it was implemented) to 0.96 (for the second year). This increase shows that the policy is needed and has an immediate effect, even if the places are not yet fully used (Table 4).

In regard to the number of applications for social scholarships, there is an increase in the academic year 2017–2018 in comparison with the previous academic year 2016–2017 in all the 25 universities that responded to the survey (Table 5).

Table 4 Competition at the admission contest for the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools (candidates on one place)

		2018–2019	2019–2020
N ^r	Valid	24	25
	Missing	2	1
Average		0.85	0.96
Standard deviation		0.47	0.49
Minimum		0.00	0.00
Maximum		1.55	2.00

Table 5 The evolution of the average number of applications for social scholarships

	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020
Mean	326.3	363.9	570.6	562.2	531.7
Standard deviation	387.3	390.1	477.3	436.5	460.8

Table 6 The share of allocated social scholarships in the total number of applications for social scholarships, on academic years

	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018
Mean	0.72	0.78	0.77
Standard deviation	0.19	0.23	0.24
Minimum	0.45	0.35	0.3
Maximum	0.99	1.00	1.00

The data collected by the survey have been connected with the data extracted from the NPHEd database in order to see the percentage of a positive resolution of the applications to social scholarships. The share of allocated social scholarships in the total number of applications for social scholarships increased by 5–6% starting with the academic year 2016–2017 (Table 6).

4.2 *Specific Analysis of Individual Data Relevant for the Two Policies*

4.2.1 **The Impact of Social Scholarships on Performance and Retention**

Only six universities registered complete data in the National Student Record (NSR) database regarding the number of social scholarships for all the three (or four years, in some cases) years of undergraduate study. The total number of students in the six

universities was 15,296. Of the six universities, five are comprehensive, and one has an engineering profile, while the undergraduate studies last for three or four years.

For the first year of study, 22.3% of the students without social scholarship have problems (as dropout, repetition of the year, expulsion), while only 7.6% of the students with social scholarship were in this situation. Among the students without a social scholarship, 46.4% of the students passed the exams integrally, while 61.3% of the students with social scholarship passed the exams integrally (Annex 1).

In the second year of study, 9.8% of the students without social scholarship encountered problems in comparison with only 4.9% of the students with social scholarship (Table 8). Among the students without social scholarship, 39.2% passed the next academic year relying on credits, while among the students with social scholarship, the similar share was 36.3%. The latter passed the exams integrally to a greater extent (58.8%) in comparison with only 51% among the students without a social scholarship.

In the third year of study, the tendency for the beneficiaries of social scholarships to have fewer problems and pass the exams integrally to a greater extent was maintained. Thus, from the beneficiaries of social scholarships, only 3.9% encountered problems in comparison with 14.2% of the students without a social scholarship. 28.9% of the students without social scholarship passed to the next year relying on credits, in comparison with only 17.6% of the beneficiaries of social scholarship. Also, 78.4% of the beneficiaries of social scholarships passed the exams integrally in comparison with only 57% among the students without a social scholarship.

In the fourth academic year, only 5.6% of the students with social scholarship were registered with problems, in comparison with 12.1% among the students without a social scholarship. 17.8% of the students with social scholarship passed the exams integrally, in comparison with 14.4% of the students without a social scholarship. Also the percentage of graduation is higher in the case of students with social scholarships, 73.6% in comparison with 69.3% among students without a social scholarship.

If the residence of the high school is taken into account, the beneficiaries of social scholarship are, to a greater extent, graduates of high schools from rural areas than urban areas. Among the graduates of rural high schools, 12.3% received a social scholarship for one year, while 9.1% received it for two years, and 5.8% received it for three years in comparison with the graduates of urban high schools. Among this last category, 6.8% received a social scholarship for one year, 5.2% received it for two years, and 3.3% received it for three years (Table 7).

Additionally, students from rural areas were, to a greater extent, beneficiaries of a social scholarship in comparison with students from urban areas. Thus, among students from rural areas, 9% had a social scholarship for one year, 7.7% for two years, 4.9% for three years, and 3.1% for four years. Among students from urban areas, only 5.4% received a social scholarship for one year, 3.6% for two years, 2.3% for three years, and 1.1% for four years. In total, 87.6% of students from the urban area never received a social scholarship in comparison with 75.3 of students from the rural area (Table 8).

Table 7 The number of years in which students received a social scholarship related to the graduated high school

		.00	1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	Total
High school Urban	Count	4,248	346	264	167	99	5,124
	%	82.9%	6.8%	5.2%	3.3%	1.9%	100.0%
Rural	Count	110	19	14	9	2	154
	%	71.4%	12.3%	9.1%	5.8%	1.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	4,358	365	278	176	101	5,278
	%	82.6%	6.9%	5.3%	3.3%	1.9%	100.0%

Note. The relationship between the numbers of years in which students received social scholarships and graduated high school is significant (Chi-Square = 16.841, df = 4, p < 0.01)

Table 8 Numbers of years in which students received social scholarships related to their residence

		.00	1.00	2.00	3.00	4.00	Total
Residence Urban	Count	3,109	192	129	80	39	3,549
	%	87.6%	5.4%	3.6%	2.3%	1.1%	100.0%
Rural	Count	1,418	169	146	93	58	1,884
	%	75.3%	9.0%	7.7%	4.9%	3.1%	100.0%
Total	Count		361	275	173	97	5,433
	%		6.6%	5.1%	3.2%	1.8%	100.0%

Note. The relationship between the numbers of years in which students received a social scholarships and their residence is significant (Chi-Square = 141.939, df = 4, p < 0.01)

In conclusion, the social scholarship had a significant impact on academic performance, increasing the possibility that the students from families with low income or medical issues (students eligible for social scholarships) could successfully finish the undergraduate academic studies. The correlation between social scholarship and academic performance was positive. The beneficiaries of social scholarships passed exams integrally to a greater extent and registered fewer dropout cases during their academic route. Also, students from rural areas and students who graduated rural high schools received to a greater extent social scholarships in comparison with students from urban areas or students who graduated an urban high school.

4.2.2 Factors that Influence the Academic Performance of Students and Graduates from Rural Area High Schools

In order to find out the factors that influence academic performance, several variables have been taken into account: the final score at the baccalaureat exam, ethnicity,

the rural vs. urban high school, age, residence, gender. The variables were tested separately on categories of universities, using linear regression analysis. The results were different according to the profile of the university, as follows.

(a) Universities with an engineering profile

For universities with an engineering profile, the variables with significant predictor value were: the residence in the rural or urban area, the final score of the baccalaureate exam, the gender—women having a better performance than men, and ethnicity (Annex 2).

(b) Universities with a medical profile

In the case of medical universities, among the variables tested as predictors for the academic performance, only the score of the baccalaureate exam, the ethnic group and the gender were significant as predictors. In the case of these universities, the number of students from rural areas was very small.

(c) Universities with a comprehensive profile

Among the variables analyzed as predictors of academic performance, only the final score of the baccalaureate exam, the graduation of urban versus rural high schools, residence in the urban area versus the rural area and year of birth were significant predictors.

4.3 Perception and Evaluation of the Two Policies by the Interview Respondents

The interviews with beneficiaries and management representatives showed complementary insights. A prominent result was that universities allocate a distinct place to social policies in their strategy of management and promotion and are more flexible in this regard. They reveal a strong interest in helping students who belong to disadvantaged social categories through a large range of complementary support measures financed by the universities themselves. As a consequence, the universities collect various benefits (financial or reputational). By attracting candidates from vulnerable social categories, they can reach to a maximum use of the allocated budget places, using the funds from the public budget entirely. At the same time, by presenting the social policies in their promotional communication with potential students, they benefit from a public perception as an advanced university, which offers a variety of options for the support of students, becoming thus attractive for all the categories of candidates.

As far as the social scholarship policy is concerned, the fact that it was launched many years ago was useful for its notoriety. However, among the factors that repositioned the social scholarship in the perception of beneficiaries was the substantial increase in the scholarship amount after 2016 and the possibility for students to benefit from multiple categories of scholarships.

Integrating the responses of beneficiaries of social scholarships with the responses of the management representatives, the policy was positively evaluated. Both cat-

egories of respondents emphasized the support role of social scholarships in the continuation of studies. Three types of evaluations were expressed: a part evaluated the policy as being effective as it is, while others considered that more social scholarships (or in a greater quantum) should be available; a third category of respondents considered that some conditions should be introduced (for example, the obligation of frequenting courses or passing exams integrally).

In regard to the effect of social scholarships as a policy, the respondents considered that they are effective in supporting students to obtain a satisfactory level of performance during undergraduate studies. However, the social scholarships did not influence them in choosing a specific specialization. The factors that influenced the option for a certain specialization were the profile of the high school, recommendations of family or friends, passion for a certain field or occupation, or the reputation of the desired occupation on the job market.

Most of the interviewees stated that the information regarding the application to social scholarships were accessible and known before the admission exam. Thus, even if the social scholarships do not have a direct influence in attracting candidates to some specializations, they have an indirect effect, because candidates perceive them as an element in a range of support measures offered by universities. Even though students could choose a program based on the scholarships it offers, this never happens, according to students interviewed in this study.

The other aim of social scholarships, to support students from disadvantaged groups to graduate higher education, is reached. Students and management representatives mentioned that the social scholarships contribute to reaching a satisfactory level of performance.

Regarding the perception and evaluation of the second policy, the situation is slightly different. Due to its novelty, the policy is little known by the potential beneficiaries. Among the student respondents, some found out after the admission exam. Thus, the perception of the policy is positive, even if the effectiveness cannot still be evaluated. However, the management of the universities considered it a useful policy, which will prove its effectiveness over time.

5 Discussion

The results of the quantitative research showed important differences among universities. As the survey results showed, in some universities, the number of applications for social scholarship is smaller (as in the universities of medicine), while in other universities, the number of applications is greater than the available funds, or some applicants do not fulfil the conditions. Overall, the data showed an increase of the average number of applications for social scholarships and an increase in the number of scholarships granted. This evolution shows an increase in the number of students from disadvantaged social categories, but also an increase in the capacity of the university to integrate and to maintain them in the system. On the other hand, the fact that approximately the fifth part of applications do not have a positive outcome

suggests that there is a need for additional measures because some students from disadvantaged social categories do not receive support, even though they need it.

One of the core results of the quantitative research was that academic performance is correlated with social scholarships: the beneficiaries of social scholarships have better results and less issues related to dropout or repetition in comparison with the students without social scholarships.

These results are similar to other studies. Angrist et al. (2009) tested alternative systems to enhance retention and academic performance in a university from USA (the system of stimulus for increasing performance versus the scholarship system). As a result, a mixed system consisting of allowances combined with orientation services was the most effective, but also the system that relied only on financial allowance had a positive impact on performance. In the same line, Barrow et al. (2012) observed that the allowance of a scholarship determined the decrease of dropout and increase of performance among the beneficiaries. In the case of an Australian university (Zacharias et al., 2016), by internal monitoring of the system of scholarships, it was discovered that the beneficiaries had a higher level of performance than the other students.

Though the universities have complex mechanisms to make sure the scholarships are distributed both on merit and to those who need them the most, there are situations in which students drop out because they do not have the means to support themselves throughout college. However, the policy regarding the social scholarship has helped many students finish their studies throughout the years. Additionally, even though the policy regarding the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools has started being implemented only two years ago, this study shows its potential to add to the supporting system offered by the scholarship policy. Benefitting from both, a student from a poor family from a rural area could have a better chance of graduating from higher education in the next years.

6 Conclusions

This is the first study that used the recently implemented databases, namely the National Student Record (NSR) and the National Platform for Higher Education Data (NPHEd), which allowed the collection of statistically representative data. Based on these data, the statistical analysis showed that the beneficiaries of the social scholarships had better academic performance and lower dropout rates. The potential impact of the two policies has been influenced by the different periods of application. Thus, while the social scholarships have more than two decades of implementation, the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools were implemented only in the last two academic years.

Referring to the first research question, according to the data, there was a visible increase in the number of applications for social scholarships beginning with the academic year 2017–2018. In consequence, there was an increase in the number of beneficiaries of social scholarships (together with other types of scholarships) starting

with the academic year 2016–2017 and in the quantum of the social scholarships. The beneficiaries of social scholarships reside in the rural area to a greater extent, and that justifies the connected analysis of the support policies for vulnerable groups and for students from rural areas in the future. Additionally, there was an increase of the competition on the reserved places for graduates of rural high schools in the second year of implementation (the academic year 2019–2020).

The third research question explored the extent to which the two policies reach their aim, to facilitate the access of students from vulnerable groups to higher education and to support them until graduation. From the statistical analysis of data, it appears that the beneficiaries of the social scholarships passed the exams successfully to a greater extent in comparison with the control sample. Moreover, the qualitative research results demonstrated that both policies are positively perceived and offer effective financial and psychological support for students from disadvantaged social categories.

For responding to the second research question, the qualitative data revealed that the social scholarships do not represent the most important facilitator of access to higher education of students from vulnerable social categories (the decision to enrol relies on a more complex set of factors). Still, the qualitative research showed that the integrated perception of support measures offered by universities contributed to the decision to enrol in higher education.

The academic performance of students is predicted by the score of the baccalaureate exam for all types of universities. In the case of universities with an engineering profile, the academic performance is also predicted by residence and ethnicity. In the case of universities with a medicine profile, gender and ethnicity are also predictors of academic performance. In the comprehensive universities, the additional predictors are residence and year of birth.

As a recommendation for future evaluation of support policies, monitoring instruments would be useful in order to allow an effective intervention in individual cases. Other suggestions are the improvement of information for the potential beneficiaries and connection of multiple social support measures for students from social vulnerable categories. Finally, reducing bureaucratization by digital applications, reducing the number of documents in the application and clarifying information would increase the success rate of the policies.

The research showed that not all the applications received a positive response in some universities on the ground of limited funds. Covering all the eligible applications would increase predictability and trust of potential beneficiaries in the support received until graduation. In the medium and long term, the equity perspective should be developed in Romanian universities, considering the fact that students come from a social background in which inequality and deprivation are increasingly present and need support at all levels.

Annex 1: Relationship between social scholarship—academic performance

IN YEAR I		Problems	Passed next year on credits	Passed integrally	Total	
Social scholarship	No scholarship	Count 3234 % 22.30%	4533 31.30%	6713 46.40%	14480 100.00%	
	With scholarship	Count 61 % 7.60%	249 31.10%	491 61.30%	801 100.00%	
Total		Count 3295 % 21.60%	4782 31.30%	7204 47.10%	15281 100.00%	
IN YEAR II		Problems	Passed next year on credits	Passed integrally	Total	
Social scholarship	No scholarship	Count 1104 % 9.80%	4427 39.20%	5758 51.00%	11289 100.00%	
	With scholarship	Count 31 % 4.90%	230 36.30%	373 58.80%	634 100.00%	
Total		Count 1135 % 9.50%	4657 39.10%	6131 51.40%	11923 100.00%	
IN YEAR III		Problems	Passed next year on credits	Passed integrally	Total	
Social scholarship	No scholarship	Count 855 % 14.20%	1744 28.90%	3443 57.00%	6042 100.00%	
	With scholarship	Count 24 % 3.90%	108 17.60%	480 78.40%	612 100.00%	
Total		Count 879 % 11.50%	1852 27.80%	3923 59.00%	6654 100.00%	
IN YEAR IV		Problems	Passed next year	Passed integrally	Graduated	Total
Social scholarship	No scholarship	Count 550 % 12.10%	190 4.20%	652 14.40%	3138 69.30%	4530 100.00%
	With scholarship	Count 25 % 5.60%	14 3.10%	80 17.80%	331 73.60%	450 100.00%
Total		Count 575 % 11.50%	204 4.10%	732 14.70%	3469 69.70%	4980 100.00%

Note. The relationships between the social scholarship and the academic performance is significant in all four academic years (Chi square test)

Annex 2: Predictors of academic performance

Predictors of academic performance (linear regression) in engineering universities.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	p
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	9,255	2,380		3,888	0,000
	score_baccalaureate	0,403	0,039	0,187	10,448	0,000
	rural_high school	0,222	0,277	0,014	0,800	0,424
	Residence	0,267	0,081	0,058	3,292	0,001
	Gender	0,492	0,082	0,107	6,002	0,000
	ethnic_group	-0,431	0,198	-0,038	-2,170	0,030
	birth_year	0,000	0,001	-0,003	-0,179	0,858

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance; Adj Rsqare = 0,058

Predictors of academic performance (linear regression) in medicine universities.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	-35,642	26,793		-1,330	0,184
	score_baccalaureate	0,255	0,026	0,269	9,826	0,000
	rural_high school	0,178	0,153	0,030	1,162	0,245
	Residence	0,040	0,045	0,024	0,881	0,379
	Gender	0,129	0,043	0,077	3,011	0,003
	ethnic_group	0,249	0,038	0,181	6,560	0,000
	birth_year	0,022	0,013	0,043	1,671	0,095

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance; Adj Rsqare=0,089

Predictors of academic performance (linear regression) in comprehensive universities.

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	-84,074	33,399		-2,517	0,012
	score_baccalaureate	0,753	0,040	0,437	18,842	0,000
	rural_high school	-0,363	0,184	-0,042	-1,972	0,049
	Residence	-0,191	0,084	-0,049	-2,279	0,023
	Gender	0,075	0,083	0,020	0,897	0,370
	ethnic_group	-0,429	0,290	-0,031	-1,480	0,139
	birth_year	0,045	0,017	0,057	2,698	0,007

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance; Adj Rsqare = 0,226

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