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**PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS IN BULGARIA**

**Venelin Terziev**

Russian Academy of Natural History, Moscow, Russia  
 “Vasil Levski” National Military University, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria  
 University of Rousse, Rousse, Bulgaria, [terziev@skmat.com](mailto:terziev@skmat.com)

**Simeon Simeonov**

University Hospital “Kaneff” - Rousse, Bulgaria, [sansiood@abv.bg](mailto:sansiood@abv.bg)

**Abstract:** Social policy as a set of principles, legal norms, activities and institutions, aimed at creating conditions that ensure the quality of life of the citizens of a country, is an expression of the social relations between the state and its citizens. Social policy determines safety (social, health, economic) and security of the individuals in society.

Social policy should be seen as an activity that guarantees the security of those affected by the risks of labour, family and life. In a broader sense, social policy regulates a very broad range of social relationships that relate to employment, income, education, and others. Social security can therefore be seen as the main objective of social policy. In modern concepts, social security is perceived as a system of public rules, institutions and social payments that enable the dignified existence of every person, who in an unusual state of vitality. Social security can therefore be seen as a set of measures to protect people in an unusual situation. Forms of social security: social security coverage; social assistance; social provision.

Apart from their nature, purpose and funding, social security and social assistance differ according to the principles of organization and management. Social assistance is a decentralized system, and social security can be centralized or decentralized depending on the principles adopted. Through these forms of social security, people receive material security for their existence on the basis of common and unified rules. In any case, however, not always will the indigent be covered by these forms of social security, regardless of their social protection needs. It is possible that even socially protected persons may be in need because of the low income received by this system. In such cases the intervention of social assistance is needed as a means of “plugging the holes”. For the sake of clarity, social security can be defined as the first defense net, and social assistance as the second defense net, i.e. social assistance must take on the part of the population which, for one or other reason, does not fall from or land either from the upper levels of the social protection system or when the level of this protection has been insufficient or it provides social protection from the last instance.

**Keywords:** social assistance, social protection, social policy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Social policy should be seen as an activity that guarantees the security of those affected by the risks of labour, family and life. In a broader sense, social policy regulates a very broad range of social relationships that relate to employment, income, education, and others. Social security can therefore be seen as the main objective of social policy. In modern concepts, social security is perceived as a system of public rules, institutions and social payments that enable the dignified existence of every person, who in an unusual state of vitality. Social security can therefore be seen as a set of measures to protect people in an unusual situation. Forms of social security: social security coverage; social assistance; social provision.

Apart from their nature, purpose and funding, social security and social assistance differ according to the principles of organization and management. Social assistance is a decentralized system, and social security can be centralized or decentralized depending on the principles adopted. Through these forms of social security, people receive material security for their existence on the basis of common and unified rules. In any case, however, not always will the indigent be covered by these forms of social security, regardless of their social protection needs. It is possible that even socially protected persons may be in need because of the low income received by this system. In such cases the intervention of social assistance is needed as a means of “plugging the holes”. For the sake of clarity, social security can be defined as the first defense net, and social assistance as the second defense net, i.e. social assistance must take on the part of the population which, for one or other reason, does not fall from or land either from the upper levels of the social protection system or when the level of this protection has been insufficient or it provides social protection from the last instance.

The reform of social assistance in Bulgaria aims to bring the system to the new realities, to strengthen public control, to improve the effectiveness of the measures, to better protect the poorest and most vulnerable members of society (Terziev, Simeonov, 2019-a).

## 2. SOCIAL PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE POPULATION GROUPS IN BULGARIA

The National strategy to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion 2020 aims to improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups in Bulgarian society and to create conditions for their full realization by reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion. The national target is to reduce the number of people living in poverty by 260,000 by 2020., defined by the National Reform Program: Bulgaria 2020.

Data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) from the Survey on Incomes and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) show that the social protection system is essential for reducing poverty in the country. According to the 2011 data, the relative share of the poor before social transfers is 41.8 per cent, the relative share of the poor before social transfers (including pensions) is 25.9 per cent, while the relative share of the poor after social transfers is 21.2 per cent (a decrease of 4.7 pp).

The strategic objective of social assistance policy is to ensure social protection for vulnerable groups of the population. The policy is aimed at individuals and families who are unable, by their own labour, by their own property or by the persons, obliged under the law to provide them with subsistence, to satisfy their basic living needs. For policy purposes, the following measures are envisaged: monthly, one-off and targeted social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and the family (2019b) , as follows:

Monthly social benefits that supplement the income of individuals to a specified differentiated minimum income and are granted after checking their income and wealth status, age, marital status and health state, education and employment status. The basis for determining the amount of monthly benefits is the guaranteed minimum income (GMI), which as of January 1, 2009 amounts to BGN 65;

Monthly family allowances for raising a child up to the age of 1 year (for a child with permanent disabilities - up to 2 years) and for a child until finishing secondary education, but not more than 20 years of age. Monthly allowance for a child with permanent disability up to 18 years and up until finishing secondary education, but not later than 20 years of age. The amount is determined by the Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria (LSBRB) for the respective year;

Monthly allowances for support of the child and the family for the purpose of raising it in a family environment in cases where the child is placed for raising with relatives and foster families under the order of the Child Protection Act. The basis for determining the amount of financial assistance is GMI;

Monthly supplements for social integration of people with disabilities - according to their individual needs and according to the type and degree of the disability and the degree of permanently reduced working capacity;

One-off social allowances to meet accidentally incurred health, education, household and other vital needs of individuals and families and granted once a year, up to five times the amount of GMI;

One-time allowances for the prevention of child abandonment and reintegration in a family environment for raising in families of relatives and close persons and foster families. The one-off allowance is granted to meet a particular need arising extraordinarily and unrelated to child support. It may be granted up to four times a year, with a total amount not exceeding five times the amount of GMI;

One-off family benefits during pregnancy; child birth (including additional one-time allowance for a child with permanent disability); for rearing twins up to 1 year old; for raising a child up to the age of 1 from a mother student, full-time education;

Targeted social benefits for renting municipal dwellings by single parents, lonely elderly people over 70 and orphans up to 25 years of age; for traveling by rail in the country of people with permanent disabilities, children under 16 with permanent disabilities and the disabled military personnel;

Target funds for the payment of the value of the provided hospital medical aid for diagnosis and treatment in the medical establishments of Bulgarian citizens, who do not have income and/or personal property, which will ensure their personal participation in the health insurance process;

Target funds and aids for the provision of medicinal products and dental assistance to war veterans and for medicinal products of disabled soldiers and war victims.

Targeted aids for the purchase and repair of aids, devices, equipment and medical devices for people with disabilities and for the purchase and / or conversion of a personal motor vehicle;

One-off targeted assistance for home redevelopment;

One-off targeted assistance for students enrolled in the first grade of a state or municipal school to cover part of the costs at the beginning of the school year and targeted assistance for free rail and bus travel in the country for mothers with multiple children;

Targeted assistance for heating is envisaged for the persons and families whose average monthly income for the 6 months prior to the month of submission of the application is lower than an individually determined differentiated

minimum income for heating and meet certain conditions. The basis for determining the differentiated minimum income for heating is GMI. The differentiated minimum income is determined by multiplying the individual coefficient of the person or family by GMI. Individual coefficients are determined by age and social status.

The organizational structures involved in the implementation of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families are the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Agency for Social Assistance and its territorial units.

The main issue on the agenda is the following: does providing social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support to children and families, guarantee social protection for the vulnerable groups of the population?

In order to answer this question, we have to answer the specific questions:

- Has the appropriate organization for the implementation of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families been established?
- ✓ Is the established organizational structure adequate towards the requirements for the implementation of the activities of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families been established?
- ✓ Is the administrative capacity appropriate for the implementation of the activities for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families been established?
- ✓ Does the existing information system provide sufficient data to make adequate management decisions?
- ✓ Do internal acts sufficiently ensure the application of equal practice in providing social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support to children and the family?
- ✓ Are the activities to provide social and family benefits, integration supplements and financial support for children and families properly planned?
- ✓ Are the needs for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families adequately assessed?

Is there enough financing for the implementation of the activities for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families?

- Are the activities for providing social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families performed effectively?
- ✓ What is the degree of implementation of the activities for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families?
- ✓ What is the impact of social payments on the number of people living below the poverty line?
- Do the unemployed decrease as passive users of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and family?
- Is the monitoring and control mechanism for the implementation of the activities for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families effective?
- ✓ Is there effective, periodic and post control at all levels of activity management of social protection for vulnerable groups?
- ✓ What are the actions taken by the management of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) to improve the effectiveness of social protection measures for vulnerable groups?

It is necessary to perform an analysis and evaluation of:

The organization for the implementation of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families been established;

The planning of the activity for the implementation of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families;

Effective performance of the activity for the implementation of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families, including its conformity with the law;

What is the monitoring and control mechanism for the implementation of the activities for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families.

The analysis and evaluation of the provision of social services, which primarily affect the quality of life of vulnerable groups of the population, remain outside the scope of the survey but do not affect the values of poverty indicators (Terziev, Nichev, Simeonov, 2018-b).

### 3. CONCLUSION

Ensuring the social protection of the population is linked to better targeting of social and family benefits, benefits for people with disabilities and financial support for children and families. There is a tendency of increase of the number of assisted unemployed persons with social benefits. Financial resources have been used to help people who

could meet their basic life needs by themselves. The reason for the increase in the number of assisted unemployed is the reduction of employment in times of economic crisis.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that the established organizational structure creates the conditions for the proper allocation of functions between the structural units and the employees, for distinguishing the levels of subordination and the reporting lines, and the execution of control.

There are lapses in the organization of the activity for payment of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families in regard to the assignment of control and methodological functions of the activities of the Social Assistance Directorate to the units in the structure of the Agency for Social Assistance and outside it - State Agency for Child Protection, the lack of sufficient training to increase the capacity of the employees, the non-compliance of the approved number of employees with their workload, the availability of contradictory guidelines on the implementation of laws and regulations that pose a risk for the effective implementation of the activities for social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families.

The created information environment ensures the adequate management of the risk of incorrect determination and disbursement of social and family allowances or benefits, but does not sufficiently ensure, at national level, the management of national policies and programs in the field of social and family support.

The strategic and annual planning of social protection measures for vulnerable population groups is carried out in different ways and under different restrictive conditions. Statistics on the demographic situation in the country and information on monitored national indicators used to measure the extent to which targets are being met are mainly used in strategic planning.

In medium-term and annual planning, the focus is shifted from the analysis and assessment of the real needs of financial resources to guarantee the social protection of vulnerable population groups to the available financial resources available for this purpose. This restrictive condition, coupled with the dynamic environment in which estimates of the number of persons to be supported are made, is a prerequisite for a discrepancy between the originally determined and the actually needed financial resources.

Sufficient financial resources are available in order to provide social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support to individuals and families, and deprivation of aid and benefits for users due to lack of funds is not allowed.

The Inspectorate of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the internal control bodies of the Agency for social assistance and the Regional Directorate of Social Assistance perform effective post control of the activities of the respective central and territorial administrative structures responsible for the implementation of the activity for providing social and family benefits, integration benefits and support for children and the family.

Effective protection of vulnerable groups of the population is ensured within the framework of the current legislation, through the identification and payment of social and family benefits and allowances, social integration benefits and other financial support for children and families, excluding social benefits provided by the Social Protection Fund (Terziev, Simeonov, 2019-a).

Measures to ensure the social protection of vulnerable groups of the country's population are implemented legally and effectively as:

There is the necessary financial resources for providing social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families;

Funds for the payment of social and family benefits, integration benefits and financial support for children and families are determined in accordance with statutory requirements.

It is possible to achieve the goals set in the Strategy Papers to maintain the rate of decrease in the number of people living below the poverty line regardless of the failure to fulfil part of the planned and monitored results indicators in the approved policies and programs.

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