

**NORMATIVE REGULATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES PROVIDED IN THE
COMMUNITY AND IN SPECIALIZED INSTITUTIONS FOR PEOPLE AGED 65
YEARS AND OVER IN BULGARIA**

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Abstract: Bulgaria is one of the most aging countries in Europe. The low birth rate, the emigration flow mainly from working-age people and the increasing life expectancy lead to an increase in the number of persons aged 65 and over in the country. Undoubtedly, the aging population in Bulgaria brings with it a change in the priorities of the state policy. The pace with which the population ages requires an adequate response from the community to meet the needs of the population in this direction. Increasing the share of elderly people requires the provision and development of services that meet the growing needs of the population for specialized social and medical care. Older adults have specific needs because of their reduced self-service capabilities associated with polymorbidity in many. Another problem that accompanies aging is loneliness. Many elderly people live alone, most often as a result of widowhood. This makes it more difficult to cope with everyday activities and the treatment of their illnesses. This article discusses the problems related to the normative regulation of social services provided to persons aged 65 and over in Bulgaria. The legal framework for the provision of such services in the country is presented. All kinds of social services for the elderly are described and systematized. The two main types of services are clearly distinguished according to the place of supply. The first includes all services provided in the community, and the second - the services in specialized institutions. After exhaustion of the possibilities of the social services provided in the community, it goes to institutionalization. Institutional social services for the elderly include elderly homes as well as homes for disabled adults. Specialized institutions are boarding-house homes where people are separated from their home environment. The legal framework for categorizing the sources of financing of the necessary social services has been considered. The mechanisms for financing by the state and municipalities are described in detail. The important role of the Social Assistance Agency as an executive body with the Minister of Labor and Social Policy is also presented. It is a secondary subcontractor for financial support for social assistance. Every aspect of the implementation of social services for people aged 65 and over is of great importance with a view to timely limiting the socio-medical problems of these persons. In order to ensure a decent life for people aged 65 years and over, it is necessary to have a good organization in the provision, control and financing of social services for the elderly in the country. In the future, the need for this will become more and more tangible given current demographic trends.

Keywords: persons aged 65 and over; social services; community-based services; specialized institutions; financing

INTRODUCTION

Aging is one of the greatest social and economic challenges of the 21st century. Population aging is particularly noticeable in the European region, with the share of elderly people in Bulgaria exceeding 20% in 2016 [4]. Estimates suggest that by 2060 nearly a third of the European population, or 517 million, will be over 65 [7]. The relative share of the Bulgarian population over the age of 65 has been constantly increasing. In 2017 it was 21.0%. This trend necessitates the prompt development of appropriate services to meet the growing health and social needs of older people [6]. These services are mainly aimed at meeting the basic needs of the most deprived persons. The provision of social services is inextricably linked to regulatory requirements as well as control by specialized bodies. The clear distinction between the different types of services sets the framework required for the more precise allocation of users to the relevant type of social structure.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present article explores the types of social services for people aged 65 and over in Bulgaria provided in the community as well as those offered in specialized institutions. The analysis is based on materials and statistics by the Agency for Social Assistance, the National Statistical Institute, the legal framework, incl. the Social Assistance

Act, the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, and the Action Plan for Implementing the National Strategy for Long-Term Care.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The increase in the relative share of persons over 65 years of age in the general population shapes the current demographic picture in Bulgaria. The trend has been developing since the mid-twentieth century until the present day. Two of the major factors at the root of this process are progress in medical science and economic prosperity. The rise in the average life expectancy and the fall in birth rates have led to unavoidable changes in demographic attitudes, namely an increase in the number of elderly people [8].

Aging inevitably leads to changes in the basic needs of the individual as well as in the society which is characterized by an aging population. Elderly people have an increased need for medical care and social support due to the onset of physical and personal changes caused by aging. Social adaptation in the family and society represents one of the most difficult transitions necessitated by old age [2, 4].

According to the European Social Charter, every elderly person has the right to social protection, which is to guarantee their full participation in society through the necessary means and information. Elderly people should be entitled to a free choice of independent existence through housing that meets their needs, appropriate care and healthcare relative to their condition [3].

Very often there is a need to provide specialized services for persons aged 65 and over due to the specificity of their complex health and social needs. The disturbances that occur often affect the motor activity and mental abilities of individuals in this group. Under these conditions, the family environment cannot always provide full care, which leads to the search for social services that help the people in need and their relatives.

Social services provided in the community

In Bulgaria, part of the statutory framework of social services comprises the following documents: Administrative Procedure Code, Social Assistance Act (SAA), Law on the Integration of People with Disabilities. Among them, the Social Assistance Act and the Regulations for the Application of the Social Assistance Act (RASAA) provide the main normative framework for the development of social services. The dynamics of the development of social services as a state policy as well as a territorial and municipal activity is in line with the needs of the people [5].

The provision of social services in Bulgaria is controlled by the Agency for Social Assistance. The Agency's activity is in line with the SAA and the Regulations for the Application of the Act. According to the SAA, the concept of "social services" is defined as activities in support of persons' social inclusion and independent living, which are based on social work and are provided in the community and in specialized institutions [9].

Social services for people over 65 provided in the community include: services provided by a personal assistant, a social assistant, a home assistant, home social patronage, day care centers for the elderly, and others. [10].

Under the legal framework, a **personal assistant** responsible for senior care is a person who provides part-time care for the elderly over 65 years of age. The service is provided to people unable to self-service to help meet their everyday household and social needs [10].

A **social assistant** is a person providing similar services to the same contingent, but also assisting the organization of leisure and social inclusion [10].

A **home assistant** is a person providing household services for the elderly in a home-based environment, unable to self-cater to domestic needs [10].

Home social patronage is a complex social service provided at elderly people's homes. It refers to: supply of food; maintaining personal hygiene and hygiene of the living quarters inhabited by the user; assistance for the provision of the necessary technical aids and facilities, etc. [10].

Day care center for the elderly is a social service that can be used only by persons who have reached the age of eligibility for a retirement pension under the Social Insurance Code. This service involves food provision and supports the social inclusion of older people [10].

All the services listed above are available in the community to ensure easier adaptation of the elderly in difficulty. When the possibilities of social services in the community are exhausted, such services are provided in specialized institutions [9]. Specialized institutions are a particular type of boarding houses where people are separated from their home environment [9].

Social services in specialized institutions

Specialized institutions for the provision of social services for persons aged 65 and over in Bulgaria include elderly homes and homes for adults with disabilities. These include the following institutions: homes for mentally retarded adults; homes for adults with psychiatric disorders; homes for adults with physical disabilities; homes for adults with sensory disorders; homes for adults with dementia [10].

Homes for mentally retarded adults are specialized institutions for people with a primary diagnosis of mental retardation as established by an expert decision of a Territorial Expert Medical Commission (TEMP). These institutions provide services which meet the daily, social and therapeutic needs of the users as well as organizing their leisure time activities and personal contacts. The other types of specialized homes are differentiated according to their users' primary diagnoses and function on the same basis.

Homes for adults with psychiatric disorders accommodate persons whose primary diagnosis falls within the scope of psychiatric disorders as established by an expert judgment of a TEMP.

Homes for adults with physical disabilities are specialized care institutions for persons with physical disabilities as established by an expert decision of a TEMP.

Homes for adults with sensory disorders accommodate persons with sensory impairments as established by an expert decision of a TEMP.

Homes for adults with dementia are institutions that provide a complex of social services to people with dementia or Alzheimer's disease [10].

Homes for the elderly are specialized institutions providing a complex of social services to persons who have reached the age of entitlement to a retirement pension, including those who are physically disabled and have reduced work capacity [10].

Financing

Financing social services for persons aged 65 and over is an important aspect of the problem of social services for the particular contingent.

The state policy in the sphere of social services is devised by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. The latter cooperates with the Ministry of Finance to establish the funding of social services as a state delegated activity. The Ministry of Finance allocates the funds for the entire social sphere in the annual budget of Bulgaria and sets the tariffs for funding social services in the country.

The Agency for Social Assistance is an executive body to the Minister of Labor and Social Policy and second-line spending administration for social assistance [5]. According to the mode of financing, social services in the country are divided into several main groups:

- from the state budget;
- local activities funded by municipal budgets;
- activities funded from other sources;
- donations from local and foreign natural and legal persons;
- funds from the Social Protection Fund;
- other sources [9].

The social activities delegated by the state are financed with funds from the republican budget. The financing model is centralized, regulated by the Law on the Structure of the State Budget, the Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for each year, the Municipal Budgets Act, the Local Taxes and Fees Act, and other subordinate legislation [2].

According to data from the Action Plan for Implementing the National Strategy for Long-Term Care, operations financed by the European Social Fund under Operational Program "Human Resources Development" were also implemented between 2007 and 2017. They mainly include home delivery services (Personal Assistant, Social Assistant and Home Assistant) to support elderly people unable to self-service and / or at risk of social exclusion. Home care services are provided under the framework of Family Care for Independence and Dignified Life for People with Different Types of Disabilities and Elderly People Living Alone - Social Assistant and Home Assistant activities; Improvement of the Personal Assistant Service for People with Different Types of Disabilities and Elderly People Living Alone; Home Help; etc. [1].

Municipalities fund social services that are municipal responsibility (home social patronage, public dining halls, etc.). The services which municipalities choose to provide are financed from local revenue sources. Municipalities can independently determine the amount of funds to use for different social activities and enter the respective amount in the municipal budget. Usually this depends on the objectives they have set in the field of social services and the financial resources at their disposal [2].

Social service users pay fees. The fees for social services financed by the state are set out in a tariff approved by the Council of Ministers. The fees for social services funded by municipal budgets are paid under the Local Taxes and Fees Act.

Every social service provider registered with the Social Assistance Agency may fund its activity by applying for funding from the republican and municipal budgets as well as through the revenue generated by the fees collected for the services it provides [2].

CONCLUSION

In today's society, the issue of an aging population is becoming increasingly popular. As the share of people aged 65 and over increases in a particular community, the need for social care and support grows in direct proportion.

In Bulgaria, there is a regulated legal framework for social services for the elderly, as well as specialized bodies responsible for the conditions and order of their provision. Properly defining each service also facilitates the correctness of the service implementation.

Financing social services for the elderly also requires attention. Above all, account must be taken of the financial situation of users. Most often these are lower-income people who have extra costs related to the treatment of one or more diseases.

To ensure a decent life for people aged 65 and over in Bulgaria, the processes of provision, control and funding of social services for the elderly in the country need to be very well-organized. In the future, this need will become increasingly tangible given current demographic trends.

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