

Social Policy and Social Work in Serbia under Reform and Austerity Pressures

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Background

- Transition(s) and transformation(s) of the context of social policy and social work
- Frequently, consequent transformations of social policy and social work have been *ad hoc* and adaptive reactions to challenges
- Reforms have been guided by principles of tightening eligibility criteria and imposing obligations to result in serious narrowing of the scope of social policy and social work and disempowering of target groups

Challenges

- External and internal challenges to social policy and social work
 - External: economic shocks and financial crises, low employment rates, ageing population, Europeanization, migration...
 - Internal: ideological disorientation (extreme market fundamentalism), low modernization impulses, serious involvement of foreign donors with clear requests, decreasing workforce with high caseloads...

Social Policy Today in a Nutshell (1)

- It is most frequently identified with social insurance, family and social protection
- Long-term care is fragmented, while housing and population policy, as well as labour relations and ecological matters are absent from social policy
- Migration, education, gender, and disability do not seem to be the genuine part of social policy
- Informality plays an important role

Social Policy Today in a Nutshell (2)

- Economic concerns are at the forefront of policy-makers
- The field is dominated by economists and sociologists
- Social policy analysis and evidence-based policy do not obtain impulses for development
- With low co-production, participation and consultations with stakeholders, while user perspective is not obtained from users themselves
- Redistributive outcomes are controversial

Social Work Today in a Nutshell

- Case management approach
- De-institutionalization and decentralization of services
- Diversification of stakeholders
- Low benefits combined with alleged activation paradigm
- The social work profession is in the shadow of other professions in the field

Situation

- Neoliberal and pragmatic approaches have been leading towards reductionists views of social justice
- Therefore, increasing inequalities and high poverty in society are normalized
- Stricter conditions, reduced coverage and humiliating procedures for access to benefits and services

Social insurance and social protection

(1)

- Old age and disability insurance – high but decreasing coverage, inadequate pensions, extremely low sustainability
- Health insurance – high coverage with anecdotal evidence of challenges of geographical and financial unavailability, low quality and unsolved financing
- Insurance in case of unemployment – low coverage of unemployed, short duration of benefits, without portfolio of developed ALMP

Social insurance and social protection

(2)

- Long-term care – shared among health care, social protection and old age and disability insurance, with extremely low coverage and developing services
- Family policy – pronatalist, with peaks of generosity combined with modest benefits for poor families
- Social protection – extremely low coverage, extremely low benefits, developing services

Benefits and services (1)

- In 2021:
 - at risk of poverty rate 21,2%, at risk of poverty or social exclusion rate 28.5%, at risk of poverty rate threshold 24064 RSD
 - average pension accounted for 29377 RSD
 - social welfare benefit accounted for 8781 RSD
 - child allowance accounted for 3569 RSD

Benefits and services (2)

- Residential services for the elderly covered 0,80% of the population of the elderly
- In-home care covered 1,25% of the population of the elderly
- Support services for independent life in community are provided in 8% of the total number of local communities in Serbia

What now?

- Solidarity – lost paradigm?
- Bottom-up approaches – how citizens and professionals cope with changing realities?
- Rights based approach