

EXPERIENCING SOCIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND EFFICIENCY MEASUREMENT

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Abstract

The paper examines some of the most important criteria and indicators for social efficiency. Fundamental ideas of the Bulgarian and foreign economic science for the specifics of social efficiency in the activity of the subjects of institutional governance, including the bodies of state power are discussed. The paper applies a comprehensive (interdisciplinary) approach suggesting integration of sociological, theoretical and management, socio-economic and other aspects of the study is related to the system analysis. The social governance is seen from the perspective of a system method, being the regulation of the relations between the subject and object of management as a purposeful impact on the social system in order to bring its operation and development in accordance with socially significant goals.

Keywords: social policy, social program, social efficiency.

1. INTRODUCTION

In analyzing the national social policy, it is necessary to make a comprehensive review and analysis of the efficiency of state social services. In relation to the programs for social protection of the population realized by the state social services for employment in Bulgaria, we shall note that today the existing system of social protection of the population and its social services is primarily focused on the «process». The authorities for control of the social protection, the social institutions and offices typically plan and assess their work exclusively in such concepts as quantity of the beneficiaries, amount of services rendered and the amount of resources spent by the budget or drawn from extra-budgetary sources such as operational programs, etc. Moreover, the result of the services provided (how they affected behavior, capabilities and self-perception of the customer group, etc.) is beyond their attention. Irrespective of the transition to a program-target method of management, the issues for measuring achieved results by this or that social program and their reference to the spent resources remain out of sight of the management bodies for social protection or finance.

2. EXPERIENCING SOCIAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND EFFICIENCY MEASUREMENT

In recent years, the implemented programs and measures for training and employment cover a relatively large number of unemployed people, but still the number is insufficient compared to the huge unemployment

in the country. As a share of the GDP, the spending seems quite modest – between 0,23-0,25 %. In comparison with the member-states of the EU, the average spent for active policy there is between 3,0-5,0 % of the GDP. Proving the efficiency of the implemented programs and measures for employment and training is one of the main factors for the increase in the funds for active policy. The conclusions made from the assessment on the implemented programs and measures for employment in 2001 have been taken into account in the development of new programs and measures to their optimization. As a result, the funds for active policy of the state budget for 2003 are over 300 million leva, which represents a rate about three times larger than the previous year. The funds stipulated for the national program «From Social Assistance to Employment» account for 217 million leva of them.

It is not a secret that the one of the most acute problems in the social sector is the problem of insufficient funding of the existing and developing programs. One tends to forget that despite the relevance of this problem, its funding is just a resource necessary to achieve the end result – reducing the social tension in the society, increasing prosperity, etc.

The insufficient transparency of budgets and the additional attention to resources may refer to the most important factors influencing the efficiency of political decisions and the ability of the state to improve the quality of the social services. Even if the actual results in the service or provision of social support are known to the social services, the social worker or assistant in the office of employment, the control bodies as a rule do not require them to report and therefore to pay for no result, and in the best case for a process or in the worst case for a demonstration of the process. At the same time, there is lack of effective mechanisms for motivation of the service provider or support to achieve the results and also security of the responsibilities for their achievement.

One of the instruments available to amend the situation and transfer the attention to the efficiency of budget expenditures is the assessment of social programs. The assessment not only attracts the attention of state bodies to the diagnostics of the results achieved and the resulting effect (both quantitative and qualitative methods), but also improves the analytical base, increases the knowledge of the social services. It allows you to ask the right and timely questions, to develop analytical approaches to the decisions for spending budget funds and in the development or adjustment of the social policy. Does the program reach the set goals? Is the social assistance provided specifically to those for which it has been intended? Is there a leak of budget funds to those who do not need assistance? Are there administrative barriers to the access to public welfare? How do the achieved results relate to the money spent? All these and other questions formulated during the assessment of the social program outline the circle of really meaningful, clear and scalable tasks within the intermediate or long-term development of the social protection of the population.

Budget constraints are only one of the external factors determining the need to assess the efficiency of spending of the budget funds. Public pressure from the population, being the potential voters, is another key factor in stimulating the deployment of the assessment. Each of the developed social programs reflects particular interests of society, for example, to reduce the number of homeless people on the streets and the number of young people suffering from drug addiction, to increase the number of socially active old people in the local community, etc. The political pressure from voters on the one hand and budgetary constraints on the other determine the need for analysis of the concrete results from the social program funded by the local budget and control of targeted use of funds. The assessment provides to the regional state authorities complete, reasonable, objective information about the program results and the efficiency from the course of its implementation. Thus, the assessment is a tool for feedback between the representatives of the authorities and the program recipients. Information obtained during the assessment also allows promoting a specific program in the local community.

Interim assessment, which sets as objective an analysis of budget expenditures in the implementation of the program, allows revealing the reasons for the discrepancy between the estimated and actual data. Sometimes the error can be hidden inside the estimates of unrecorded number of external factors affecting the cost of the program. The assessment allows timely detection of such factors for impact, allowing adjusting the forecast budget expenditure under the program based on accurate factual data.

The assessment also serves as a foundation for the adoption of weighted economic and political rational decisions concerning the implementation of the program, as well as its timely correction. Specifically important seems to us the possibility to compare social programs with other forms of social support in situations of budget cuts and the need to adopt decisions on the extension of funding.

Very often in the course of realization of the social program, new mechanisms for provision of services are used – systems for search and selection of clients, collection schemes for payment, structures and

schedules to provide this or that service, etc. A well-conducted assessment can detect errors in the design of the program or arising in the course of its implementation difficulties, which allows improving the mechanism for the provision of services, achieving their greater efficiency at lower cost. Furthermore, assessment allows managers and specialists of the program to provide more clearly a comprehensive picture of the program implementation, including means to attain the final results. We will also highlight the opportunities for assessment on removing barriers between business and local authorities insofar, if the assessment results allow dispelling the bias in government efficiency and control. Not only the population, but also business structures sometimes have a too remote idea of what local authorities do to improve the prosperity of the residents of the city or region. The assessment causes the different groups of economic agents, in particular the business, to think about the efficiency of social programs, the possible ways to improve them in terms of the local population, opportunities to bring their own contribution to solving local problems.

What are the requirements brought to the assessment? The efficiency assessment of the program should be based on precise criteria, specific landmarks determining the efficiency of the social program with specific indicators. The given landmarks may constitute formally accepted standards for social services, but may also appear as parameters developed specifically for this program, for example the minimum quality standards of social services in England are developed by the Ministry of Health and there is constant verification of compliance of the services provided by these standards that is carried out by government agencies such as the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and the Audit Commission (AC / SSI), 2001-2002.

In order for the assessment to be efficient, it should not depend only on the opinions of the managers of the program. In other words, the decision to conduct or order an assessment should be within the competence of people standing over the management of the specific program. An important method of keeping the objectivity is the attraction of independent experts, having no personal or professional interest in the results of the assessment. In order to have practical orientation and useful results, this assessment must take into account the opinion of specialists – practitioners (e.g. social workers at social services receiving people on certain issues), as well as the mandatory requirement – clients of the program. Collaborators and customers provide relevant information on various aspects of the program implementation, arising difficulties and ways to overcome them.

In order for the assessment to be reliable, it should be carried out by specialists, using consistent standards of modern methodology: in addition the information on the assessment results should be available to the main interested parties and should be considered from as a wide range of specialists as possible, who are involved in the implementation, financing or development of the social program. Thus, the primary method used in this study to determine the efficiency of government programs for social support of the population, is the assessment study of various performance indicators at all stages in the implementation of the program.

At the stage of development: the program project is assessed by qualitative indicators of the fixed in it basic value landmarks (degrees of compliance with the objectives of the creators of the program with the objectives of the socio-economic development of the country, the declared legal norms and principles, as well as the expectations of the subjects of the program).

At the implementation stage: the efficiency of the program, expressed in qualitative indicators of the organizational, legal and management components in the implementation of the program (a condition for the efficient social state government is the presence of an effective mechanism for coordination of the social impacts in state social service – executor of the program).

At the final (assessment) stage: the program is assessed by quantitative indicators of the economic component of efficiency (referencing the volume of services and their value in terms of the limited human and material resources) and qualitative indicators (the degree of compliance with the objectives of managers and organizers of the program to the needs of the subjects of the program).

The presence of a wide range of objectives of the active programs shows that at the efficiency assessment all possible aspects of performance should be analyzed, as well as to measure and compare all the effects – increasing employ-ability, improving the level of payment, the social impact etc. Secondly, it is important to analyze the benefits and costs, which will make it possible to give a clear answer to the question of how the spent funds are economically and socially justified.

In the global practice, mainly four types of assessment of active policies are applied:

- Current monitoring and control of programs;
- Assessment of the net impact of the programs;

- Analysis of the costs and benefits;
- Assessment of the institutional and organizational capacity of the programs.

Full research means the realization of four of the above mentioned assessments. In practice, this is extremely expensive and therefore assessments of the net impact are most often applied. Most governments carry out continuous monitoring and control on the implementation of the programs. Even in the world practice there are few comparative analyzes of costs and benefits, although this type of assessments prove the economic efficiency of money spent on employment programs.

The efficiency of each program is measured by the realization of the set goals. A program is efficient when at its implementation it covers a significant part of the target group.

Furthermore, interest is the immediate impact of the active policies on employment and income levels. To calculate the net effect on employment it is necessary to ascertain how many of the participants in the program were able to find a job after participation in it and how many of them would fail to do that, if they were not included in it. The net effect on earnings is measured as a proportion of the participants in the program, who after its completion report higher incomes than those received prior to enrollment in the program. Thus, the increase in income is explained by the inclusion in the program.

For the final efficiency measurement, it is necessary to compare the received net effects on the employment and income levels with the direct and indirect costs of the program. It is possible to assess also non-monetary effects, often called social.

In order for an active program to be fully efficient, at the macro level it is required to subtract the side effects from the resulting net effect on employment. Thus, we can ascertain the pure net effect or the real significance of the program as a means to reduce unemployment and increase new job positions.

Side effects are:

The effect of the deadweight: the results of participation in a program would have occurred without participation in it. For example, in the case where an unemployed person is employed under a subsidized employment program, but would receive the same job without the presence of this program (preference for employer), the effect of the dead weight is present

Substitution effect: such effect occurs when an unemployed person is employed in the subsidized employment program and received a job that would otherwise be given to another person, not included in the program. The net effect in this case is zero.

Effect of displacement: this side effect is observed in the production process when one company, benefiting from subsidized employment, displaces from the market other companies that do not have preferences under subsidized employment programs.

In Bulgaria, two assessments of gross and net impact of the active programs and measures have been conducted. Both are focused on the immediate impact of the programs on employment. The effects of some social programs have been outlined. In the first study, an attempt was made to measure the impact of programs on the level of payment of workers after their inclusion in active programs and measures. Due to financial constraints and lack of statistical data, a full analysis of the economic efficiency of the programs has been made, and this is particularly relevant in the allocation of the budget for active policy between the separate programs and measures.

The importance of comparing costs with revenues and benefits of each program can be illustrated by the following example. If the program for training and retraining of unemployed and the intermediary services give the same quantitative contribution (net effect) for increase of employment, but the money spent on training and retraining are two times higher than those for intermediary services, the first program will be twice less cost-effective than the second one.

The economic effect of the active policy can be sought in several directions. On the individual level, for the unemployed person the economic effect is the increased level of income due to job placement after participation into an active policy. At the level of the «Employment Agency», the economic impact can be measured by the savings on unemployment benefits in case of interruption of payments due to appointment of the unemployed person to a job. Government revenues appear as savings from unemployment benefits and increased revenue to the state budget of the NRA, which the unemployed person and their employer start paying at the time of entry into employment. For the society in general, the economic effect is the increased level of income.

Thus formulated the approaches should be compared with the costs made under the evaluated active policy at the appropriate levels. At an employment agency level, the costs are two types: direct (e.g., payment of a minimum wage and accrued insurance on it for each unemployed person included in the active program) or indirect (administrative costs under the service of the implementation of the respective active program). At the next two levels, namely the government and society, the costs are identical. That is why conducting an analysis of costs and benefits is possible only in case of valuation of the indirect administrative costs for the individual active programs and measures.

In an effort to implement the most informative and sustained assessment in respect of methodology, we are faced with a number of practical problems. The first is the problem of the consistent, temporal and territorial scope of the assessments. The complex character of the assessment of an active program and the related to its conduct considerable amount of financial resources often impose the common practice not to make simultaneous assessment of all or a large number of active programs. A further reason for holding separate and independent assessments of the programs is the difference in the times of startup, the peculiarities of manifestation and the life span of the program.

Choosing the critical moment of the study, i.e. when it should take place, is an important issue, since the macroeconomic conditions and the current state of the labor market can significantly affect the results of the assessment.

The existing practice shows that the results are influenced by the chosen method of assessment. The first choice in this respect is between the classic experiment and the quasi-experiment. The characteristics of the active policy in most cases determine the choice in favor of the quasi-experimental approach.

The essence of the latter consists in the formation of a sample of participants in the program. The two groups are interviewed at least one year after the participation in the program of the first groups.

The second methodological choice concerns the method of calculating the net effect on the employment. The choice is between an assessment based on an econometric model and an assessment under the «doubles method». In literature, there is no synonymous opinion on which one gives more accurate results. Often the «doubles method» is preferred due to its technical simplicity and the easy interpretation of the results.

There are constraints and difficulties relating to the statistical data for the survey. An essential condition to the success of an assessment is tracking the individuals in the sample of respondents under their residence, after participation in a certain active policy. The problem here is the fact that individuals are found at the address indicated by them at the time of their registration in labor offices. After the expiry of a certain period of time after the time of survey, it is objectively possible that some of the persons may not be found due to the change of domicile or because of errors and inaccuracies in the indicated address information to the labor office.

The positive initial steps in the assessment of the active policy should possibly continue taking into account all of the above mentioned aspects of the study. Particular attention should be paid to comparing costs with the realized economic effects and non-monetary benefits. It is more appropriate and economically feasible the programs to be assessed individually, regardless of their scope and the volume of invested funds (Terziev, Georgiev, 2018 a-h, Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018i-t, Terziev, 2018u-y).

3. CONCLUSION

The problem of studying the efficiency is one of the key areas of various activities of society, especially in production and management. Traditionally, the focus is on economic efficiency, reduced to simple enough and calculated «costresult» ratio. This is a fundamental principle, characterizing the concept of «economic efficiency». Social efficiency does not have so direct character. It is rather a more complex category and is difficult to express in one dimension. Certain contradictions and discrepancies may arise between different approaches and the task for reaching the aggregate social efficiency shall be formulated primarily as a task for optimization of the social managerial activity.

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