SOCIAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES AND INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT IN BULGARIA

Venelin Terziev
Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Natural History, Moscow, Russia, Prof. D.Sc. (Ec.), D.Sc. (National Security), D.Sc. (Social Activities), Ph.D., National Military University, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria; University of Rousse, Rousse, Bulgaria, terziev@skmat.com

Abstract
The article presents the implementation of the project for establishing Centres for Employment and Social Assistance in Bulgaria in the period 2015-2017 as a model of the provision of integrated employment and social assistance services aiming at increasing the efficiency of coordination and work in Employment Agency and Social Assistance Agency and enhancing social inclusion. Services and provided support are analysed and conclusions and recommendations are drawn on the need of better evidence and data on their functioning so that to create reliable instruments for assessment of activities and outcomes.

Keywords: Employment, Unemployment, Labour Market.

1. INTRODUCTION
Current paper presents an analysis of the activities implemented under the project entitled ‘Face To Face services in CESA (Center for employment and social assistance)’ on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria with the support of the Human resources development Operational program 2014-2020. The beneficiary is the Ministry of labour and social policy with a Union co-financing rate of 85% for the sum of 33 000 000 BGN.

The project’s goal is the improvement of coordination and interaction between the Social Assistance Agency (SAA) and the Employment Agency (EA) in the Republic of Bulgaria by applying a pilot project for mutual services for the citizens of vulnerable social groups and individualization of services.

Centers for Employment and Social Assistance (CESAs) are envisaged to provide advice, orientation and information so that to facilitate the access of unemployed persons and those relying on social support to employment and opportunities of social inclusion through more active servicing and shortening the period of social assistance.

The realization of the project activities has anticipated making an approbation of a model of integrated administrative services.

The following activities are described into the project description in the Information system for management
and monitoring of EU funds in Bulgaria 2020 - 
http://2020.eufunds.bg/bg/1/0/Project/PrintProject?contractId=84:

- Study and analysis of applied methods and processes;
- Preparation of a Methodology for the operation of CESAs in relation to the provided administrative services;
- Establishment of premises for comprehensive servicing of citizens in the CESAs and their technical provision;
- Creating an accessible environment for people with disabilities, if applicable;
- Trainings of the employees in CESAs, incl. mutual learning at the workplace;
- Activities for exchange of experience among the employees in CESAs;
- Providing a new integrated service model by CESAs through a collaborative approach and interaction between the structures of social assistance systems and employment promotion;
- Performing inspections by CESA’s staff on the persons serviced by the center;
- Interim evaluation of the effectiveness of the applied pilot model through a comparative analysis of the activities of CESAs and the other service units in the EA and SAA system;
- Analyses of the efficiency and the effectiveness of the new model and making proposals for system change and reform.

CESAs are designed to provide the following services:

Employment services provided to job-seekers and employers

Intermediary services for jobseekers include: information and/or consultation on their rights and obligations under the Employment promotion act; job vacancies and the requirements for their occupation; the opportunities for participation in programs and measures for employment and training; opportunities for education for adults; opportunities of changing the profession and working outside the boundaries of the place of residence; terms and conditions for work in other countries under intergovernmental agreements, etc.

Along with that the following are provided: acceptance of applications and registration of job seekers and related services; targeting and helping to start work, including elsewhere in the country or in other countries within the EURES mobility network; psychological support and motivation for an active behavior on the labour market; targeting and engagement into appropriate programs and measures for employment and training; professional information, counseling and guidance; providing access to public information; answers to queries received through different access channels, etc.

Intermediary services for employers include: providing information on registered jobseekers in certain professions, specialties, professional experience, additional skills and readiness to start work; providing information on programs and measures to preserve and promote employment and training of hired personnel; providing information on the rights and obligations in the mass dismissal of employees; recruitment mediation through providing information on the procedures and ways of announcing vacancies; accepting vacancies; processing and disseminating information about the vacancies; selection of suitable candidates, meeting the requirements of the employer; directing suitable candidates to the relevant workplace; requiring feedback on the results; choosing appropriate employment and training programs and measures; providing information on the issuance of employment permits to foreigners, etc.

Social assistance services provided include:

Informing, advising, targeting and providing assistance to vulnerable citizens according to their individual needs in search of opportunities for their social inclusion and employment: informing, guidance in the procedure of the provision of social services, reception of applications, complaints, alerts and inquiries; providing clear, accurate, reliable, systematized and complete information on the opportunities of social support - conditions, order and method of support, in accordance with the current legislation; targeting and liaising with other institutions responsible for the problem; displaying on prominent information boards normative documents, up-to-date information, sample forms for filling in, important announcements and changes in legislation, “hot” telephone; accessible information for people with disabilities, etc.

Acceptance and processing of applications / declarations and the necessary documents for support on the
different legal bases, use of social services and issuance of certificates; reception of requests/declarations, verification of the declared and for the necessary documents; processing of the received documents: distribution by regions, conducting a social survey (verification at the person’s home, investigation and collection of information), electronic processing, issuing an administrative act and notifying the person concerned about it; methodological and control activities; carrying out on-the-spot checks.

Vulnerable groups on the labour market are regulated in the supplementary provisions of the Employment promotion act as follows: Disadvantaged groups on the labour market are groups of unemployed with lower competitiveness on the labour market which include: unemployed youths; unemployed young people with permanent disabilities; unemployed youths from social institutions who have completed their education; long-term unemployed; unemployed persons with permanent disabilities; unemployed persons - single parents (adoptive parents) and/or mothers (adoptive parents) with children up to 5 years of age. Each year, the National action plan for employment sets the target groups for which the active policy is directed.

The main expected result is the established CESAs to introduce new and/or updated processes and models of planning and implementation of policies and services on the labor market in Bulgaria.

2. AIM OF THE ANALYSIS

Assessment of the provision of integrated services at the Centers for employment and social assistance (CESAs) in Bulgaria and their comparison to the provision of non-integrated services, as well as analyses on the measures taken and the process.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Under the project 73 CPPPs were established, employing EA and SAA staff offering ‘one-stop-shop’ services for citizens. Centers provide counseling, guidance and information to unemployed and people receiving social support through a new flexible, individualized and integrated approach (Terziev, 2017, 318 str; Terziev, Arabska, 2016, 312 str; Terziev, 2018, 307 p.; Terziev, 2015, 110 p.; Terziev, 2015a, 434 p.; Terziev, Arabska, 2015b, 198 p.; Terziev, Arabska, 2015c; Terziev, Arabska, 2014, str. 3-57; Terziev, 2015d; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018a, str. 970-975; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018b, str. 959-969; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018c, str. 951-958; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018d, str. 188-193; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018e, str. 177-187; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018f, str. 169-176; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018g, pp. 935-944; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, pp. 973-980; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018i, pp. 1275-1281; Terziev, Georgiev, 2018j, pp. 6-15; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018k, s.93-98; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018l, s. 99-104; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018m, s. 104-109; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018n, s. 110-115; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018o, s. 116-121; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018p, s. 122-127; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018q, s. 127-131; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018r, s. 132-137; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2018s, s. 137-142; Terziev, Georgiev, 2017a, pp. 94-101).

Data about the establishment and functioning of CESAs, as well as the implementation of the project, could be found in the annual reports of the Ministry of labour and social policy, particularly those of the Employment agency. However, the information provided is not complete and well-structured and thus could not be used in making analyses and comparisons of the impact of the provision of integrated and non-integrated services.

The results which can be presented and discuss are the following:

- The project activities are implemented according to the plan and the changes imposed in it substantiated by appropriate decisions.
- The number of established CESAs in 2015 is 65, and following the decision of the monitoring committee of the Human resources development Program 2014-2020 the number is now 73.
- In 2015, as a result of CESAs' operation and the services provided by them, 69 812 persons were employed, out of which 45 066 - on the primary labour market. 11 823 long-term unemployed persons are employed which have been registered in the labour offices for more than 12 months. During the period January - December 2015 complex services were provided to a total of 408 106 persons and families with unemployed members (Table 1) among which 181 009 persons with disabilities and their families and 155 999 families with children.
Table 1. Results of CESAs’ operation for 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of support / persons benefiting consulting and information services provided by CESAs</th>
<th>Number of persons / families involved in the support measures as a result of CESAs’ functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed persons</td>
<td>69 812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. on the primary labour market</td>
<td>45 066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed persons among the long-term unemployed having a registration in labour offices for more than 12 months</td>
<td>11 823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex services for families with unemployed members</td>
<td>408 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly support under the Social assistance act of the country</td>
<td>11 756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly support for children</td>
<td>155 929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>targeted support for heating</td>
<td>57 403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly supplements for social integration of persons with disabilities</td>
<td>181 009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appointed personal assistants for persons with permanent disabilities</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- In 2016, as a result of the work of CESAs, 76 552 persons were employed, of which 52 404 on the primary labor market. 14 436 long-term unemployed have started work. 19 091 unemployed persons have been benefiting of social support, out of which 7 658 were employed (5 419 persons - on the primary labor market, 1 021 - under programs and measures according to the Employment promotion act, and 1 017 persons - under Human resources development Operational program schemes); 226 persons were enrolled in training, and more than 27 800 have received services for an active labor market behavior (job search, psychological assistance, etc.) (Table 2).

- In 2016, in the municipalities on whose territory the project is being implemented, the average monthly number of persons and families with unemployed members who have been supported as a result of consulting and information services provided by CESAs shows a clear orientation towards people with disabilities and their families (177 105) and families with children (134 918) (Table 2) as is the case for 2015 (Table 1).

Table 2. Results of CESAs’ operation for 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of support / persons benefiting consulting and information services provided by CESAs</th>
<th>Number of persons / families involved in the support measures as a result of CESAs’ functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed persons</td>
<td>76 552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. on the primary labour market</td>
<td>52 404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed persons among long-term unemployed</td>
<td>14 436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly number of persons / families with unemployed members supported</td>
<td>379 866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under the Social assistance act</td>
<td>10 094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monthly support for children</td>
<td>134 918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>targeted support for heating</td>
<td>57 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>support for people with disabilities</td>
<td>177 105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appointed assistants for persons with disabilities</td>
<td>592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons / families benefiting social assistance</td>
<td>19 091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in training</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons / families benefiting of services for an active labour market behavior</td>
<td>27 800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Available data for 2017 are not complete – presented till 30.09.2017 (Table 3).
Table 3. Results of CESAs’ operation for 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of support / persons benefiting consulting and information services provided by CESAs</th>
<th>Number of persons / families involved in the support measures as a result of CESAs’ functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of registered unemployed</td>
<td>60 849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incl. those benefiting social support</td>
<td>2 282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed persons receiving social support becoming employed</td>
<td>8 077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the primary labour market</td>
<td>6 529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under program and measures according to the Employment promotion act</td>
<td>899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under Human resources development operational program schemes</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in training</td>
<td>706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefiting services for an active labour market behavior</td>
<td>14 301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeted support for heating</td>
<td>29 358</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- From the information available it is clear that the project implementation continues in 2018 with some new services while the priority in the work of CESAs is the servicing of long-term unemployed persons with registration in the labor offices of over 12 months who are also a subject to social assistance. The package of individualized labor market measures is upgraded with new services focused on education, training and social inclusion. The main goal is to provide a comprehensive service to unemployed people from regions with high levels of unemployment, as well as hard-to-reach and remote settlements.

The main conclusion that could be drawn from the review of the available information and data about the project implementation is that there is a profound lack of public on-line information on the results of the activities. The analyses of the work and the processes, the methodology for the operation of CESAs, interim project reports, etc. are unclear.

Regarding their establishment it is observed that the most often case is that in labour offices (where unemployed or others interested in employment go to register or search for information) an additional desk for an officer from SAA is placed which provides information and forms for the social support services which does not corresponds in fully to the main idea of integration of services.

As it was already mentioned, the data collected are not enough to conclude on the effects of the work of CESAs and to make comparisons with the situation before their establishment and with the places without such centers during the project implementation.

In addition, short interviews according to a unified template of questions with 11 respondents participating in CESAs’ activities were conducted. The summarized answers are presented in Annex 1.

### Annex 1. Summarized results of the interviews conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>№</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>What is the value added of the CESA provision of services compared to separate provision by PES and Social Assistance Agency?</td>
<td>4 of the respondents can’t answer, 7 of respondents think that they provide services and advice to the unemployed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>Is there a difference in the effect of integration on the different groups of clients (unemployed, long-term unemployed, GMI beneficiaries, inactive? (One should make a differentiation between GMI (Guaranteed Minimum Income) beneficiaries and the other inactive) Is there a proper case management for LTU thanks to the centres?</td>
<td>5 respondents can’t answer or do not know; 5 respondents respond with YES; one respondent thinks that there are serious ethnic, education and qualification issues which affect the integration process and its impact. To this question respondents can’t answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>Can a targeted benchmark for integration be provided?</td>
<td>3 of the respondents do not know, 7 think that further analysis is needed, one considers that such indicators are: employment rate, unemployment rate, percentage of the unemployed found a job</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://ijasos.ocerintjournals.org | 682
How is the integration working in practice and can the “distance” of actual from the benchmark be assessed?  
6 of respondents thinks that will be through cooperation between the different institutions, 5 believe family and relatives have a major role in integration.

How is establishing of social assistance rights and provision of benefits complemented with social service provision?  
One of the respondents considers the provision of training vouchers to the target groups, 10 respondents answered: through interaction between different institutions and interaction between SAA and EA.

How could the municipalities be involved?  
One respondent believes they should be involved and participate in more programs, 10 respondents think this could be with the participation of social assistance subdivisions, social activities directorates or related social departments and units.

IV. Could the expert provide a clear description of the measures which are effective and which could be further developed?  
One of the respondents thinks by controlling each level of service delivery, 10 respondents think that measures can be further developed and cooperation between different institutions is needed.

How could the integration be improved and bring more people into the labour market?  
Through legislative changes, by increasing confidence in the institutions and improving the work of different institutions, creating an integrated system for more efficient work and coordination in different institutions.

Are the integrated centres making the most of the advantages of an integrated approach?  
4 of the respondents can’t answer, 3 answered with YES, 4 of the respondents consider that their efforts are not enough, more publicity, disclosure and more skills in the provision of services, including counseling and training, are needed.

What is lacking?  
Lack of will in the legislature and the executive powers, and greater publicity.

Your recommendations for improvements:  
Respondents believe that greater publicity, disclosure, accountability and media empowerment are needed.

V. What is the state of integration of CESA within the existing network of stakeholders/ institutions (public, private, third sector organizations)?  
Half of respondents can’t answer, others think that there is a low degree of integration, institutions act on the presumption of stakeholders.

What will be the best model of the services functioning?  
All respondents believe that more coordination and interaction, cooperation between all participants (different institutions) is needed.

Number and profile of the respondents: 11 respondents participating in CESAs’ activities

Specific questions about the efficiency of the integration in CESAs in offering integrated services for disadvantaged groups

- What is the added value of the provision of services by CESAs in relation to their individual provision by labour offices and SAA Centers?

The added value of provision of integrated services lies in the way of work with target groups and the provision of consulting and information about different opportunities of employment and social assistance in one place. If implemented properly, such activities would lead not only to raising the number of beneficiaries of different services as a quantitative impact in result of better information provision and facilitation of access to employment and social assistance for inclusion. The most important would be the raising in the effectiveness of work of officers, now divided in two agencies – for employment and for social assistance. However the implementation of the discussed project as a model is not the best example because of a number of reasons among which the main is the following: the project is designed so as to answer the specific requirements of the operational program and EU funding and there is a little space for flexibility in the framework of the project implementation – if something needs to be changed or done in a different way, there are lots of constraints because of the targeted financing of certain activities as described in the project proposal. But the analyses of the project work and the models could provide the needed basis for subsequent administrative changes in both agencies and the ways of providing employment and social support to vulnerable groups.
• Is there a difference in the effect of service integration on different groups of clients (unemployed, long-term unemployed, inactive ones, etc.)? Are there suitable models for long-term unemployed support through these centers?

As it was already stated at this moment there is no enough information and data from the project to make comparisons. Moreover, the information and consulting in CESAs (i.e. the results) is dependent on the programs and measures for each year as set by the ministry. This means that the targeted measures, some of the priority target groups and budget vary from year to year and in such case it is impossible to assess the impact or to foresee the effects anticipated in next years. The numbers presented in reports about CESAs so far should not be the only one indicator, neither the project implementation in itself at all. It is undisputable that the long-term unemployed are a group of special treatment as a whole. and in CESAs in particular, but if the prevention measures and the analyses of the reasons for this situation are not available, the problem will stay and grow.

• Can a measurable level of service integration be set? How does service integration happen in practice and can the “degree of discrepancy” between actual and planned integration levels be assessed? How do social assistance entitlements and benefits provided complement the provision of social services? How can municipalities be involved?

Once again, it should be emphasized that in the project implementation (as CESAs are designed) a complete integration could not be achieved. In this case it will be very difficult to set certain indicators, to plan, measure and compare the outcomes and the impacts both quantitatively and qualitatively. However, as initial and piloting steps the project activities are valuable from the point of view of capacity building in the administrative structures in municipalities involved but the decisions for continuation and next development should be based on profound analyses and broad public consultations. As already some discussions go, future reforms (incl. structural ones) in the agencies of the Ministry of labour and social services can be expected to be oriented namely to their integration.

3. CONCLUSION

The provision of comprehensive services in support of vulnerable groups through multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches by joint teams of the EA and the SAA in CESAs aims at preventing social exclusion and improving the quality of life as well as building a smooth transition between passive receiving of support to lasting employment.

Regarding their specific objectives’ implementation as they are set in the project of their establishment in Bulgaria (financed under Human resources development Operational program) the following main outcomes are achieved:

Applying in pilot a new administrative service model integrating employment with other social policies;

Gaining experience and enhancing the capacity of staff in institutions responsible for developing and implementing policies for socially vulnerable groups, as well as developing their knowledge and skills to undertake and implement activities, solutions and policies that are adequate to identified needs.

At this moment of crucial importance is to perform a study on the satisfaction of service providers (institutions as a whole, and officers involved) and their beneficiaries – target groups, to collect their assessments and opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of the integrated model and its probable introduction in the whole system. For that a comprehensive methodology is needed which to serve not only the needs of the project reporting but the needs of information and analyses for the decisions which should be taken for further development of policies and structures (Dimitrova, Georgiev 2017b, s. 204-235; Dimitrova, Georgiev, 2017c, s. 235-258; Terziev, Georgiev, 2017d, pp. 1418-1437; Terziev, Georgiev, 2017e, pp. 24-31; Terziev, Georgiev, 2017f, pp. 32-34; Georgiev, 2017g, pp. 139-143; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2017h, s.64-69; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2017i, s.70-75; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2017j, s.76-81; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2017k; s. 103-106; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2017l, s. 100-103; Terziev, Banabakova, Georgiev, 2017m, s. 97-100; Terziev, Banabakova, Latyshev, Georgiev, 2017n, pp. 773-791; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, 2017o, pp. 707-710; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, Bogdanov, 2017p, pp. 701-706; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, 2017q, pp. 695-700; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, 2017r, pp. 690-694; Terziev, Latyshev, Georgiev, 2017s, pp.754-772; Terziev, Latyshev, Georgiev, 2017t, pp.638-659; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, 2017u, pp. 888-892; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, 2017v, pp. 893-898; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, Bogdanov, 2017w, pp. 903-908; Terziev, Nichev, Stoyanov, Georgiev, 2017x, pp. 909-912; Terziev, Banabakova, Latyshev, O., Georgiev, 2017y, pp. 1056-1074).

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