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ACTIVATION OF BENEFICIARIES OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Abstract *The purpose of this paper is to analyze the activation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance aimed at empowering users to enter the labor market as a basic precondition for their social inclusion and to reduce their dependence on the social security system. The instruments used to activate this target group of beneficiaries are analyzed and they are divided into three main groups: a) mandatory activation (establishing criteria for job search, mandatory participation in active employment policy, mandatory activation of beneficiaries), b) enabling (trainings, courses, education, provision of work experience, counseling) and c) financial incentives (job bonuses, subsidized employment, etc.). These measures target users in order not to be passive within the system of social protection, enabling them to be encouraged and provided with employment mediation services.*

The need for restructuring of the social security and employment system has been elaborated, with institutions in both systems remaining independent but would integrate the work through case management and data sharing. This method (principle) is based on a holistic approach in social work, through active participation of the beneficiaries themselves in the area of service planning, with applying empowerment methods, coordination of care by meaningful systems and taking responsibility in the change process. The monitoring system will enable meeting the individual needs of the beneficiaries, their empowerment to actively engage in the labor market through effective and efficient use of resources, organizations and staff on behalf of the beneficiary.

Analysis is made on the indirect intervention of the case manager who provides the necessary services and resources to the beneficiary and has impact on his/her capacity building, in order to provide a more meaningful and successful fulfillment of the beneficiary's needs. Within the case manager's indirect intervention, several types of strategies are applied in the practical work: brokerage; connectivity; advocacy, coordination, intervention in the social network to enhance existing resources; technical assistance and consultation to meet the beneficiary's needs.

The use of strategies that require techniques such as negotiation or bargaining has been elaborated, while others require management in case when he / she exploits the potential for conflict. However, all of these are part of the case management package and can be used to meet the beneficiary's need for his/her activation in the labor market.

The case manager works on systematic change on organizational level or on development level and delivery of new social services in the community, in order to activate the guaranteed minimal assistance for the beneficiaries and to enable their integration on the labor market.

Key words: guaranteed minimum assistance, enhancement of the capacities of the beneficiaries, labor market, and active measures.

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Guaranteed minimum assistance

The poverty rate in the Republic of North Macedonia according to official statistical data in 2017 is 22.2 and decreases in 2018 to 21.9 and to 21.6 in 2019.

If we take a look at the total number of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance it is evident that the number of beneficiaries increases, from 32.657 beneficiaries in July 2020 to 32.962 in October, the same year.

However, there is an evident trend of increased number of new applications for exercising the right to guaranteed minimum assistance. In March 2020 there are 480 new applications and 323 applications in June 2020 (Employment Service Agency, 2020).

Prior to the introduction of guaranteed minimum assistance in the Republic of North Macedonia, a comparative analysis of relevant regulations was undertaken in several developed European countries: Netherlands, Belgium and Croatia. Several useful indicators for reforming the financial assistance in the Republic of North Macedonia were taken in consideration, in direction that the guaranteed minimum assistance would enable overcoming certain restrictions and disincentives linked with other rights within the social protection system (Gerovska Mitev M., 2020). This would ensure creation of legal basis for guaranteed minimum assistance.

The guaranteed minimum assistance is the basic financial compensation that is provided to meet the living needs of families. The amount is determined depending on the characteristics of the family, such as the number of family members, age, disability, pregnancy, status of parents (single parent). The right to guaranteed minimum assistance for persons who are capable to work is conditioned by the obligation to register with the Employment Service Agency and active search for employment and participation in trainings.

Activation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance

The "activation reversal" is gradually evolving around the world, establishing different models of activation and activation strategies, with a particular focus on the development of active employment policy measures. At EU level, activation is contained in the Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Directive, and the modalities applied are diverse.

The concept of activation policies has emerged as a result of the inability of the social protection system, even in the most developed countries, to provide unlimited use of social assistance to beneficiaries.

The activation strategies aimed at the beneficiaries of guaranteed material assistance in the Republic of Northern Macedonia are in process of development, because it is about activating a group of beneficiaries that recently in 2019 became a target group towards which the activation policy is aimed. Pursuant to Article 37 of the Law on Social Protection ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 104/19), Rulebook on the manner of cooperation for inclusion of the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance in active employment measures was adopted, as well as the outlook and content of the individual plan form ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 109/19).

There are three broad categories of active labor market interventions, namely **services for employment** which are usually provided by the employment service and/or other public agencies, and these include services such as provision of information for the unemployed, monitoring individual cases, or provision of services for individual assistance (e.g. intensive counseling and guidance, job search assistance), etc.

The second group entails **employment measures** that include training, employment incentives, shelter or supported employment and vocational rehabilitation, job creation subsidies and incentives designed for starting own businesses for beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance (startup).

The third group encompasses **support for employment** (known as "passive measures") which covers different types of cash benefits / allowances paid to unemployed people in case of unemployment (so-called unemployment benefits).

The results of several studies have shown that the models of activation of beneficiaries of financial social benefits present in the countries of the region are very diverse and range from "fully conditioned" to "fully voluntary". As for the practice in the process of activating the beneficiaries of financial social benefits, they are grouped mainly around two basic models: *activation of beneficiaries*, which is the so-called expeditiously, which gives fast results (short-term approach) and others that are more difficult, long-term and fair, i.e. those that are *focused on the real needs*, interests and development capacities of individuals and aimed at long-term and sustainable problem solving of work capable beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance (long-term approach).

Research data suggest that short-term social assistance often leads to long-term, multi-generational dependence on the social protection system. For these reasons, the Centers for Social Work and the Employment Agencies, in

cooperation with relevant social stakeholders, develop a model for activating members of vulnerable groups, taking into account the individual needs of the beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, on one hand and the common, long-term interests of the social protection system on the other hand.

The key features of active the employment measures are the accurate assessment of the causes of employment problems and the creation of targeted employment services and programs. These causes usually fall into three broad categories:

a) Mismatch between the skill level of job seekers and the skills required by employers (mismatch between supply and demand of skilled workers);

b) Low demand for workers (the supply of job seekers exceeds the demand of available employers / jobs; there may also be other reasons such as high labor costs, which reduces the motivation of economic operators to invest);

c) Long waiting in the records - caused by insufficient information about the available jobs, discrepancy between the offered and required skills or low demand for workers. This leads to a loss of motivation and, subsequently, individuals reduce the job search activities and thus reduce the likelihood of losing their unemployed status.

Different solutions are needed for each of these factors. Unemployment caused by skills mismatch is more effectively addressed by training programs aimed at raising the qualifications of the unemployed; low market demand for workers can be addressed by measures which encourage employers to recruit new workers (employment subsidies); loss of motivation and low intensity of job search can be addressed by providing adequate labor market information, job search assistance, counseling and guidance, and conditional social assistance and unemployment benefits with an active job search obligation.

If we understand the planning of the intervention as a means that guides the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance towards the expected final goal, than the planning should incorporate a strategy that leads towards accomplishment of the desired objectives. Different strategies for assistance are applied for different vulnerable groups of population:

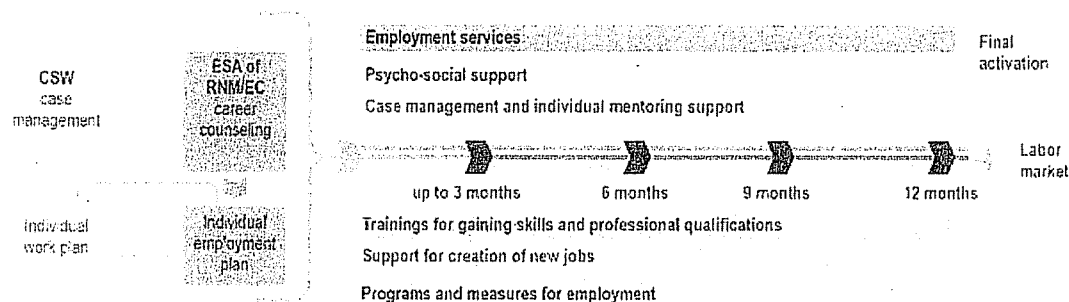
1) Unemployment represents a significant problem for the beneficiaries, due to long-term unemployment, low education level or age. The case manager may help the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance with training for job interviews and development of job-related skills training, as well as gaining more self-confidence, improvement of social skills and enhancement of abilities for finding employment.

2) Many vulnerable beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance have low self-esteem due to prolonged physical or mental disorder. The beneficiaries with low self-esteem may also benefit from developing appropriate interpersonal skills. The effective approach focuses on changing the image of oneself, from negative to positive.

3) The lack of social contacts represents a problem encountered by the beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, and they are not in position to develop their social interactions due to their living situation.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, a concept of social mentoring was piloted in the period of October 2016 - May 2017 in five regions of the country with conducted social mentoring training where the mentees were included in the labor market, as a result of increased desire to work. The results also indicated that there was an evident need for employment of additional personnel in the centers for social work and provision of technical and financial resources for implementation of mentoring activities for skill enhancement.

The new activation system promotes a new approach on the labor market, related to provision of support and development of individual skills and potentials of the beneficiaries of the programs and measures. The activation system for beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance offers intensive psycho-social and mentoring support (counseling and motivation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance) and trainings, lasting from 3 to 12 months for overcoming obstacles that prevent their participation on the labor market.



Source: Employment Service Agency, 2020

The conducted Labor Market Skills Survey in the Republic of North Macedonia for 2020 provides short-term indicators of employers' expectations regarding new employments and the necessary skills that people should have to be competitive in the labor market.

The project "Activation of vulnerable groups in the labor market" started on September 20, 2019 and will last 36 months and aims to reduce long-term unemployment and dependence on guaranteed minimum assistance, by means of ensuring effective inclusion in the labor market, through inclusion of people in specialized skills development programs and services.

Specialized programs and services for skills development (counseling and motivation services (so-called CaM program) and employment support program through trainings) are implemented. Required occupations and crafts trainings were completed by 116 beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum assistance for 14 required occupations (Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Report, 2020). 981 Individual plans for activation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance have been developed.

Integrated case management

In the Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of RNM No. 104/19, 146/19, 275/19) the term "case manager" is defined as an expert in charge of a specific case who in cooperation with the beneficiary determines his/her potentials and needs and uses professional and other resources from the center for social work and other institutions and organizations on the territory of the local self-government unit, which are necessary to meet the needs and overcome the problems, i.e. to provide appropriate services for the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance. The legal definition itself determines a large part of the role of the case manager in the implementation of the method of integrated case management.

For purpose of activating the beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, cooperation is established between the person who is the case manager at the center for social work and other responsible persons from the Employment Service Agency who are responsible for implementation of employment services (motivation trainings, career guidance, professional orientation, etc.).

The electronic real-time data exchange between the IT databases in the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is still an open issue.

The collective, or the integrated case management system enables best utilization of all available resources to the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance throughout the overall process of integration and inclusion (Scoppetta et al., 2017).

The key capacity for innovation of the integrated case management is comprised of: a) close institutional cooperation (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the centers for social work); b) provision of coordination and cooperation with other stakeholders (Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, secondary specialized schools, etc.) and c) integrated case management provides not only administrative management of beneficiaries, but enables strict care for provision of assistance for overcoming social exclusion on the labor market for persons beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance.

Therefore, in this specific case in the work with beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance, the introduction of integrated case management represents a twofold benefit for the overall social system. It enhances the work of the social workers as case managers, in two dimensions: a) the service provider / case manager is responsible for the family / household as a unit for analysis and unit that may request guaranteed minimum assistance; and b) the service provider / case manager leaves the daily administrative work (desk work, reception of documents) and focuses on the needs on the labor market and the social needs of the family-beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance. The case manager is focused on the field work with families - recipients of guaranteed minimum assistance, in order to make concise assessment of their needs, opportunities and obstacles on the labor market and their social integration.

The case manager from the center for social work and the service provider expert from the Employment Service Agency and the beneficiary jointly assess the needs and level of employability of all registered unemployed persons, beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance from one household, in order to select the most employable person, and his/her inclusion in the active employment measures and services, taking into account his/her age, acquired education, previous work experience, professional qualifications, acquired skills, and available jobs on the labor market. The employment of guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries includes several indicators of the nature and patterns of behavior and the way family members experience their employment and work experience or long-term unemployment.

Aspects that are taken in consideration are the stability of employment (before dismissal, seasonal work, no contract, etc.) and the organization of the household and working hours, how parents view their work or unemployment, and how this affects their relationship with their children.

Other things that are taken in consideration are difficulties in employment that do not meet the needs of the family life or if children have to take care of themselves while their parents are at work or if they have to take care of younger siblings. There is a need to strike a balance between work and parenting. Assessment is carried out no later than 30 days from the beginning of the cooperation.

The planning process itself is carried out with the participation of the case manager, the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance and the representative of the Employment Service Agency and can be also established by an interdisciplinary team for development of a comprehensive plan, coordinating multidisciplinary efforts and involving key representatives of the social environment.

The specificity of the service plan is a useful therapeutic tool for beneficiary service planning, including very deep in problem solving and decision making. The beneficiary's participation is needed at the earliest stage of his emancipation in the case management process (Veil, 1985, p.368).

Intervention planning is an important link in the chain of functions in the overall boot model and has, in fact, been identified as an essential case management function. Also, the involvement of guaranteed minimum assistance users in the planning process itself generates motivation for beneficiaries to use the services provided by the individual plan (Gerhart, 1990 p. 213).

The case manager and the service provider from the Employment Service Agency follow the implementation of the individual plan and the fulfilment of the obligations of the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance, and they document the implementation of individual activities and how successful they are and develop periodical quarterly report to monitor the success of the implementation measures. The case manager and the service provider from the Employment Service Agency, in cooperation with the beneficiary make the required adjustments for implementation of the individual plan.

Going through different stages of integrated case management, the case manager takes on different roles that should connect the beneficiary to the services and to represent the needs and interests of the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance. According to Woodside and McClaim, the primary roles of the case manager are advocate, mediator, coordinator, collaborator, community organizer, consultant, counselor, evaluator, executor, planner, problem solver, reporter, and system modifier (Zegarac, N., 2015: 32).

Indirect and direct service strategies of the case manager

The main concern of the case manager is to identify and organize *the potentials that can meet the needs of the beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance*. By engaging in change-seeking, and with an attitude that each meeting with a particular service is an opportunity for effective systematic change, the case manager can influence the development of new resources and programs for guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries.

The case manager uses indirect service strategies that enable the provision of services and professional assistance for guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries as well as to influence the capacities of these services and professional assistance in order to respond to the individual needs of the guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries.

Mediation and networking are two strategies that enable guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiaries to be provided with formal social services. The mediation involves the case manager in selecting appropriate professional services in the community which can appropriately and adequately focus on the needs of the beneficiary. Networking is a strategy used by the case manager in working with the guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiary in order to ensure the use of the required service. One of the main means of networking is referral (Hepworth, Larsen 1982).

The case manager also intervenes in the social network to improve the provision of professional assistance by the social system to support the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance, by using *technical assistance and consultation* with formal social services or members of the social environment.

Effective referral is a complex process that involves the case manager in mediating between the guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiary and the identified institution that has the necessary professional assistance.

The case manager coordinates the services and ensures that they are implemented in a harmonious and compatible way by the providers of social professional services and by the members of the social environment in order to respond to the needs of the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance.

The case manager takes care of the following matters: (1) ensures that all stakeholders strive to meet the objectives in a compatible manner, (2) takes care of the implementation of the service delivery plan in accordance with the established dynamics, (3) takes care all stakeholders to inform each other about their activities for providing services and support on a regular basis. The case

manager who works as a coordinator provides the necessary work support to all stakeholders who provide support for the beneficiary by organizing and maintaining the structure for achieving the objectives of the service plan and support for the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance.

Case managers often work with people who have a lot of problems, and it seems that such people have learned to be helpless. Acting against this "learned helplessness" is the greatest result of the direct service function of the case manager. However, self-guidance does not only focus on the disadvantages of the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance but it rather represents more positive conception of the potential of the beneficiary. Self-guidance is expected to change the situation of the beneficiary by using his/her skills, abilities and resources to meet his/her needs.

The basics of self-guidance go into four main areas of focus for the beneficiary and the case manager which promote the development of value base that emphasizes the individualization of the beneficiary by the case manager and the existence of trust between the case manager and the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance.

The case manager works with the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance, in the area of development of his/her cognitive and behavioral skills to achieve the desired goal and helps the beneficiary in the process of self-guidance depending on the nature of the relationship for provision of assistance that exists between these two persons.

The case manager also performs direct roles as an "implementer", and to a large extent provides directions and guidelines for the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance. It is not uncommon for a case manager to make contact with the beneficiary user who is facing a very stressful event in life and therefore faces a complete crisis and guides the implementation of the necessary activities.

The case manager as a teacher / instructor works directly with the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance in promoting his/her skills that are useful so he/she would be able to meet his/her own needs in future. One of the principles of case management is teaching the "beneficiary how to catch fish instead of giving him/her fish".

The case manager works as a guide / collaborator working with the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance in identifying the social services he/she needs to meet his/her needs and then guides the beneficiary through the process of providing these services and support.

As an information specialist, the case manager can guide beneficiaries how to use the information system and show them how to actually use it to find the appropriate tools, benefits or services in the community.

The establishment of the number of beneficiaries is another critical aspect of the program. The number of beneficiaries depends on a number of factors: the type of service offered, the intensity and duration of contacts between the case manager and the guaranteed minimum assistance beneficiary, and the number of human resources that the social work center can afford to employ.

Conditionally, the number of beneficiaries should be determined on basis of "program by program". During the duration of the program planning in general and the development phase, the number of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance is relatively low, later it gradually increases with the progress of the program implementation and there are empirical and rational reasons for a certain number of beneficiaries.

CONCLUSIONS

Employment is a key element of socioeconomic inclusion. Similarly, the number of people on social assistance relative to the population can be an indicative of the overall health of an economy.

The implementation of guaranteed minimum assistance through the process of integrated case management in the Republic of North Macedonia, requires reforms in the work portfolio of current social workers and their upgrading to case manager, and restructuring from mostly administrative work (checking that all documents are submitted) into field integrative work.

The indirect service function involves the case manager in using various strategies to develop a responsible network to support the beneficiary of the guaranteed minimum assistance. In some cases, such as mediation and networking, the indirect service function serves to connect beneficiaries to existing services and to ensure that these services are appropriately used and provided. On the other hand, as with the advocacy strategy, the case manager can use his/her influence and even conflict techniques as a means of getting feedback from service providers.

The direct service function provides a means of upgrading and strengthening the self-care capacity of the beneficiary of guaranteed minimum assistance.

The guaranteed minimum assistance program should collect sufficient indicators of success and set important objectives for the duration of the assistance for the recipients in order to be able to participate in the employment

activities. The effectiveness of programs in assigning appropriate employment preparation activities and encouraging individuals to follow the employment opportunities should also be closely monitored.

There is a need for establishing electronic data exchange between the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Employment Service Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia during the preparation of the Individual Plan for activation of beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance and continuation of the efforts for enhancing the cooperation between these two institutions in providing services for counseling and support within the CaM (Counseling and Mentoring) program (psycho-social support service and mentoring support service).

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