

## **REVIEW**

**by**

**Prof. Vaska Stancheva-Popkostadinova, MD, MPsy, PhD – Professor at SWU "Neofit Rilski"**

of the materials submitted for participation in the competition

for the academic position of "Professor"

of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

by: field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences,  
professional field 3.4. Social activities (Social Protection and Social work)

In the competition for the academic position of "Professor", announced in the State Gazette, issue 92 of 18.11.2022 and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Associate Professor Luydmila Vekova, PhD from PU "Paisii Hilendarski" participates as the only candidate.

### **1. General presentation of the received materials**

By order № RD-21-67 of 18.01.2023 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU) I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury of the competition for the academic position of "**Professor**" in PU in the field of higher education. 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.4 Social activities (Organization and management of social work), announced for the needs of the Department of Social activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

As a member of the Scientific Jury, I confirm that I have received scanned copies of the following documents electronically:

1. Application form to the Rector for admission to participate in the competition;
2. Curriculum vitae in European format;
3. Diploma for higher education with acquired educational qualification degree of "Master";
4. Diploma for educational and scientific degree of "Doctor";
5. Certificate of the academic position "Associate Professor";
6. List of scientific works;
7. Copy of the publications;
8. List of citations and copies of the publications with citations;
9. Information on compliance with the minimum national and additional faculty requirements;
10. Annotations of the materials under art. 65. from RDASPU (in Bulgarian and in English);
11. Self-assessment of contributions (in Bulgarian and in English);
12. Declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;

13. Certificate of work experience;
14. Certificate for educational work;
15. Reference for work with undergraduate and postgraduate students;
16. Proof of Involvement in projects.

The presented by Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Vekova, PhD set of materials is in accordance with the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of Plovdiv University.

A total of 33 scientific works are presented: 1 monograph, 30 articles , 2 textbooks. They do not repeat and duplicate the publications submitted in the competition for the PhD and the academic position of Associate Professor and are accepted for review. Five (5) publications, which are outside the scope of the competition, have also been submitted. The distribution of scientific works is as follows: in the country (Bulgaria) - 29 and abroad - 4.

## **2. Brief biographical data of the candidate**

Assoc. Lyudmila Vekova was born on 21 July 1961. She received her Master's degree in Labour Economics from the Higher Economic Institute - Sofia in 1983.

In 1988 she defended her PhD thesis on "Mechanism for stimulating the use of labour potential (territorial aspects)" at the Institute of Social Management, and in 2011 she was habilitated and held the academic position of Associate Professor in Economics (Social Insurance and Social Assistance) at the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Plovdiv University, where she has been working so far. She has conducted short-term specializations and trainings on social policy, social and pension insurance, income policy, tax policy, investment policy, human resources management, marketing and sales skills.

Assoc. Vekova has teaching experience in the field of organization and management of the social protection system, organization and management of social security funds, organization and management of social work, problems of education in the field of "Social activities".

From 1988 to 1992 she was an assistant professor at the Department of Economic Policy of the Institute of State and Economic Management of the Council of Ministers.

She was a guest lecturer at Varna Free University (1995-2001), Sofia University (1997-2015), UNWE (2006-2011), NBU (2006-2012).

From 1994 to 2021, he held various management positions (Chief Expert in the Directorate of Analysis and Forecasting in the Department of Social Security (1994-1995), Director of the Directorate of Strategy and Planning and Member of the Board of Directors of the Pension Security Company "Doverie AD" (1996-1998), Executive Director and Member of the Board of Directors of Pension and Insurance Company DSK - Rodina AD (1998-2004), Executive Director and Member

of the Board of Directors of Pension and Insurance Company Saglasie AD (2004-2007), Secretary General, Director of the Secretariat Department of the Economic And Social Council of the Republic of Bulgaria (2008-2011), Executive Director and Member of the Board of Directors of the Life Insurance Institute JSC (2012-2014), Executive Director and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Institute JSC (2012-2018), Member of the Board of the State Fund for Guaranteeing the Sustainability of the State Pension System (2017-2018), Member of the Insurance Relations Committee of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Since 2015 the candidate has been Head of the Department of Social Activities at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Plovdiv university.

Assoc. prof. Vekova is the Chairman of the Bulgarian Association for Social Work Education.

Assoc. Prof Vekova speaks English, Russian and German.

### **3. General characteristics of the candidate's activity**

*Assessment of educational and pedagogical activity and preparation of the candidate*

Assoc. Vekova has rich and varied research and teaching experience of over 30 years in various universities in the country. Since 2011 she has been a tenured lecturer at the Paisii Hilendarski University.

She has developed 18 lecture courses, of which in the bachelor's degree in Professional field 3.4. Social Activities - 4; "Special Pedagogy"-1; 10 - in the Master's degree in professional field 3.4. Social Activities, 1 in MA "Psychology of Management" and "School Psychology".

Assoc. Vekova teaches the following lecture courses:

- Bachelor's degree: Social Protection System, Social Insurance, Public Administration, Social Entrepreneurship in a Market Environment, Social Policies for People with Disabilities

- Master's degree (lectures and seminars): Social Protection System, Fundamentals of Management in Social Organizations, Human Resources Management in Social Activities, Social Management and Social Marketing, Social Competence, Management of Social Services, Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship, Social Economics and Economics of the Social Sphere, Social Entrepreneurship, Management of Social Organizations (both Bachelor's and Master's degrees), Management of Organizational Behavior (Master's degree - School Psychology and Psychology of Management).

The candidate has developed and published 2 textbooks for students of social work and other fields of studies related to social protection and social security.

Assoc. prof. Vekova has been a scientific supervisor to 24 graduates in professional field 3.4. Social Work (13 in Bachelor's degree and 11 in Master's degree) and 1 in Applied Psychology.

Assoc. Prof. Vekova is a supervisor of three PhD students in the field of higher education 3. Social Activities, Doctoral Programme "Social Policies and Social Work". The topics of the dissertations research current problems of social work. One of the PhD students is due for formal defense on 31.03.2023, one is in the process of defense, and the third is discharged with the right to defense.

Under the guidance of Assoc. Prof. Vekova, the curricula in professional field 3.4 Social Activities - Bachelor and Master are developed and regularly updated. She is also the founder of the doctoral programme "Social Policies and Social Work".

Assoc. Prof. Vekova works very actively with undergraduate and postgraduate students and stimulates the career development of the academic staff of the Department of Social Activities she heads.

The candidate also holds an administrative position at Faculty of Pedagogy: Head of the Department of Social Activities.

Information on participation in 9 projects is presented, including 8 national projects (funded by: Human Resources Development OP, Research Fund, Science, Education and Smart Growth OP - Functional Expert and Academic Mentor, ARMSP - Competitiveness OP) and 1 international project.

*Evaluation of the scientific and scientific-applied activity of the candidate*

The report on the implementation of the minimum national requirements and the additional faculty requirements for holding the position of "associate professor" shows that the candidate Dr. Nona Glushkova fulfills and significantly exceeds the requirements.

Group indicators	Content	Minimum number of points	+ Additional points of (Faculty of Pedagogy)	Real number of points of the candidate
A	Indicator 1	50	xxx	50
B	Indicator 3	100	xxx	100
Г	Sum of indicators from 4 to 10	200	+80	400
Д	Sum of indicators from 11 до 13	100	+30	340
E		100		215
Total		550	+80	1105

The additional requirements of the Plovdiv university for teaching activities are also significantly exceeded - 131 points out of the required 30.

In addition to the evidence of scholarly activity, the candidate has submitted 1 independent monograph, 30 scholarly articles and reports. Of these, 26 are in Bulgarian and 5 in English. A total of five (5) articles have been published in journals refereed and indexed in the world-known databases of scientific information. In all publications, Assoc. Vekova is the only author.

The presented scientific production was published after 2015 and corresponds to the thematic direction of the competition.

*Contributions (scientific, scientific-applied, applied) and citations*

The habilitation work (monograph) "Social protection in case of unemployment. Social work with unemployed persons" is the result of the author's many years of rich experience in the researched field. It is 396 pages long and consists of 17 chapters divided into 6 parts and 3 appendices.

Each part of the monograph includes an overview of the existing research on the issue under consideration, a summary of the relevant legislation and analyzes of the dynamics of the processes characteristic of each subsystem of social protection in case of unemployment.

Based on a theoretical-methodological and practical-applied analysis, the system of social protection in case of unemployment is presented, integrating social insurance and assistance in case of unemployment and social work with unemployed persons. A large array of statistical data from National statistical institute, Agency for social support, Agency of employment and Eurostat for the period 2004-2021 was analyzed.

Throughout the text, the personal position of the author is apparent, and the main conclusions of the presented analysis and available strategies and practices in the field of unemployment, with an emphasis on social work with unemployed persons, are drawn. Alternative forms of providing employment are presented (centre for sheltered employment, centers for employment and social assistance). The challenges are outlined and basic guidelines are formulated for improving social work with unemployed persons, with the aim of overcoming the negative social and economic consequences of unemployment, as well as responding to the challenges of "meeting public expectations for adequate and individually oriented support". The main weaknesses and unsolved problems of the social assistance system, reflecting on the system of social protection of the unemployed, are pointed out, while a proposal is made for alternatives for a more adequate support of the unemployed, "in line with the dynamically changing economic conditions and the state of the labor'market" (p..217).

In accordance with the realities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the author devotes a special place in the monograph to the measures related to "limiting the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market and the unemployment rate in Bulgaria" (p. 254).

The monograph presents a comprehensive analysis and study of social protection in case of unemployment, the results of which "are the basis for developing theoretical concepts and complex practical approaches" (p.13). Recommendations are given to overcome the problems and alternative solutions regarding the current situation are presented.

The presented scientific production is divided into several thematic areas: social protection, incl. in case of unemployment (1,2,4,5,11,17,21); social insurance with an emphasis on pension insurance (6,8,10,12, 22, 23,25); social innovation, social entrepreneurship and social enterprises (3,7,19); social work - organization, management, competencies (14,16,20,26,27,30,31); social work education (2,9,13,15, 18, 24, 28, 29) .

Besides those presented in the analysis of the monograph, the main contributions of the publications in the field of social protection refer to:

- A conceptual model of social protection has been developed in terms of its content, scope and characteristics, on the basis of which the main challenges and possible solutions are outlined (1,21).
- Based on an in-depth analysis of the legislation and the dynamics of unemployment insurance for a 17-year period, the main problems and challenges facing the unemployment protection system have been identified. Alternative forms of employment for the risk groups have been presented (1).
- Measures to limit the negative impact of the health crisis on the labor market have been evaluated.
- A concept of social work with unemployed persons is presented with an emphasis on the specifics of the activities in the individual elements of social protection in case of unemployment (insurance, social assistance and active measures on the labor market).

*Summarized contributions from the field of social protection with an emphasis on pension provision:*

- A comprehensive study of the pension insurance system is presented, as the main element of social protection (8), the dynamics of changes in the legislation are traced and the main problems in the functioning of the Bulgarian pension model are identified (12,22,23,25).

*Contributions in the field of "Social Innovation, Social Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprises":*

- The potential of social innovations is outlined, based on the presentation of good practices from European countries, emphasizing the role and importance of social entrepreneurship and social enterprises for improving employment and facilitating the social inclusion of risk groups (3).
- Main problems are highlighted and opportunities for the development of social entrepreneurship in Bulgaria are outlined. Emphasis is placed on the need for intensive multisectoral cooperation and multidisciplinary work of specialists from the helping professions to implement innovations in social work (7,19).

*Contributions to the field of "Social work - organization, management, competences:*

- The main factors influencing the organization and management of social work in Bulgaria are presented. The main challenges for social work in the context of the social protection system are also outlined (21,30).
- The influence of socio-demographic processes on the work of social workers is studied and the key competencies for good professional realization are described. Special emphasis is placed on the approach to developing the competency model in social structures when determining the main positions and defining key competencies for the respective position (14).
- A critical analysis of the legal changes in social assistance is presented. with an emphasis on the regulatory framework of social services (16,27).

*Contributions to the field of Social Work Education:*

- A vision for the development of education in PN 3.4. Social activities is presented, based on an analysis of the scope of students in the country and criteria for the quality of education and from the standpoint of modern requirements for social work and the balance between theoretical and practical training (15).
- The specifics of social work with unemployed persons as a set of social activities and diverse social interventions in relation to individuals, families or groups with the aim of providing material support and guaranteed employment (2) are derived. Based on this, reference is made to basic requirements in social work training in relation to unemployed persons.
- Based on a study on the education and realization of students in PN 3.4. Social activities in Bulgaria are identified as major problems, with the potential to reflect on the functioning of the social protection system (9).
- The factors for motivation and adaptation in practical training in social work during the COVID-19 pandemic (mostly in remote form) were studied to adapt the learning process to new conditions(29).
- After an analysis of the regulations regarding possible jobs in the field of social work, recommendations were formulated to complement the existing positions and to increase the requirements for the educational level of those working in the social protection system(13).
- Innovative solutions are offered to overcome the challenges facing social work education(18), incl. „lifelong learning“ and improving the education-business link (24,28).
- Two textbooks on the pension system have been published, which can be used both by students of social work and other areas of the helping professions.

With her studies, analyzes and publications, Associate Professor Lyudmila Vekova makes a serious contribution to the education and practice of social work in Bulgaria.

*Citations*

A reference is presented for 34 citations, of which 5 are in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in the world-famous databases with scientific information; 4 - in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review; 25 - in peer-reviewed journals and collections. Citations are substantive and reflect publications from the last five years, with those from 2021 and 2022 predominating.

### *Member of editorial boards*

Assoc. Prof. Ludmila Vekova is a member of the Editorial Board of the Yearbook of the Faculty of Pedagogy, the book "Social Activities" and a member of the Editorial Board of the journal National Security.

The candidate meets the set of criteria and indicators for holding the academic position "Professor", according to the Law on Academic Staff Development of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", the Regulations for its implementation;

#### **4. Assessment of the personal contribution of the candidate**

The personal contribution of the candidate Assoc. Prof. Vekova in the publications is indisputable, categorical and established, and the obtained results and formulated contributions are without a doubt her personal work and merit.

#### **5. Critical remarks and recommendations**

I recommend to Assoc. Vekova to expand her publication activity in specialized scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information, as well as to expand the thematic spectrum of study materials for students of Social Sciences.

#### **6. Personal impressions**

I have known Associate Professor Vekova for almost 10 years as a business-like, ethical and dedicated colleague, supporting the academic development of his team and a supporter of increasing the quality of education in Social Activities in the country and raising the prestige of social work.

### **CONCLUSION**

Assoc. Prof. Vekova is a recognized scientist and teacher among the scientific circles in the country, a respected colleague and supervisor.

The documents and materials presented by Assoc. Prof. Ludmila Vekova meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the implementation of the LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of the University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski".

The candidate in the competition has submitted a sufficient number of scientific papers published after the materials used in the defense of ESD "Doctor" and receiving academic degree Assoc. Professor. In the works of the candidate there are original scientific and applied contributions, with a representative part of them published in journals and scientific collections published by the university publishing houses of PU "Paisii Hilendarski" and other universities.



Theoretical developments have practical applicability, as some of them are directly oriented to the education work. The scientific and teaching qualification of Assoc. Prof. Vekova is undoubted.

Achieved by Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Vekova results in teaching and research activities fully comply with the minimum national and additional requirements of the Faculty of Pedagogy, adopted in connection with the Regulations of the University of Plovdiv for the implementation of Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria.

After getting familiarized with the materials and scientific works presented in the competition, analysis of their importance and the scientific, scientific and applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend the Scientific Jury to prepare a report-proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy for the election of Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Vekova for the academic position of "Professor" at the University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.4. Social activities ().

03. 2022 г.

Reviewer: .....

(Prof.Vaska Stancheva-Popkostadinova, MD, PhD)