

Critical aspects of the sustainability of care for the senior population in Slovakia

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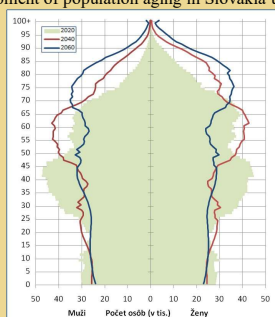
Abstract: One of the biggest challenges of today's global world is the aging of the population. From the information published by the WHO, we can expect that the proportion of the world's population aged 60 will almost double by 2050 and will constitute almost 22% of the world's population. For the age category 80+, the WHO forecasts up to a three-fold increase, which would bring this age category to 426 million individuals. Accordingly, it is necessary to reflect the fact that these are persons who need increased health and social care. Another fact that needs to be taken into account when trying to ensure the necessary care for the senior population is the continuing decline of the so-called productive part of the population in the economically developed countries of the world. Individual states perceive the trend of population aging as a socio-economic and political problem. At the same time, care for the senior population needs to be understood systemically, i.e. not only from the perspective of the needs of the seniors themselves, but also of their family members or professionals providing services for seniors, and above all, the availability of financial resources to cover this care.

The aim of the contribution is to present the most serious risks in the field of sustainability of care for seniors

Introduction:

The increasing proportion of elderly people in society represents a global challenge in planning the care of the senior population. Population aging is a consequence of the demographic development of society. When planning future social services, experts work with concepts such as aging index, economic burden index, life expectancy, etc. According to current forecasts, from the point of view of the aging index, according to Bleh, Šproch and Vaňo (2018), Slovakia ranks among the EU countries with the highest proportion of seniors in the population. Some forecasts expect this state to occur around 2050.

Graph 1: Projected development of population aging in Slovakia until 2060



Source: : Bleha, Šprocha a Vaňo (2018)

Bleha, Šprocha and Vaňo (2018) expect that the Slovak Republic will have one of the highest indices of economic burden around 2060, which means that the productive part of Slovakia's population will be the most burdened among EU countries.

These facts indicate that the state will have to reevaluate its policy in the field of care for the elderly in a short period of time. The expected result in this direction would be the adoption of an integrated strategy for the care of the elderly.

The current state of care for seniors in Slovakia is divided into the following sections:

- a) Area of social life - intended for active seniors who do not need help and support in managing everyday life;
- b) Caring for seniors who are partially dependent on help and support in managing everyday life;
- c) Caring for senior citizens who are dependent on help and support in managing everyday life;

On a practical level, this care is distributed between the departments of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, which cooperate insufficiently.

Methodology: When processing the obtained data, we used an inductive thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, 2006) of the data contained in government documents of the Slovak Republic focused on the care of seniors. The object of our research interest was the strategic documents of the Slovak Republic, which deal with the care of the senior population. (The analyzed documents are listed in Chart 1. We compared the intentions contained in the strategic documents with the real situation in the given area in order to identify the most significant threats and their causes.

Results:

We have identified several risk factors that may threaten the maintenance of current care quality for the elderly in the future.

- 1) Lack of a comprehensive concept that would be based on integrated care for this age category. Integrated care at the minimum level should be a link between social and health care, which is currently absent in the Slovak Republic.
- 2) Problems that are the result of non-conceptual care for seniors
- 3) Personnel and financial under-dimensioning of social services

National documents:

National program of active aging for the years 2014-2020, The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MLSAF SR)

National program of active aging for the years 2021-2030, MLSAF SR.

Vision and strategy for the development of Slovakia until 2030 - long-term strategy for the sustainable development of the Slovak Republic - Slovakia 2030 (2020) - Government of the Slovak Republic

Regional implementation strategy

Partnership agreement for the years 2021-2027 (2020).

National health promotion program (Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic), update from 2021)

National program for the development of living conditions of persons with disabilities for the years 2021-2030

National priorities for the development of social services for the years 2021-2030 - The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic

Source: Own, 202

Proof:

Based on the content analysis of the individual national programs developed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic and the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, we conclude, that these documents act as two strictly departmental documents. Proof: They do not address the difficult life situation for a senior citizen, when a lonely senior citizen cannot return to his own household after being hospitalized due to his health condition. We lack transitional institutions (remedial institutions). We have insufficient numbers and unresolved funding for hospice care. Two basic documents from the workshop of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of the Slovak Republic are also not connected in terms of content: the National Program of Active Aging for the years 2021-2030 and the National Priorities for the Development of Social Services for the years 2021-2030.

For a better arrangement of care for seniors, integrated care should also include economic issues such as the amount of pension, retirement age, protection of seniors from poverty, etc.

2) Problems that are the result of non-conceptual care for seniors

The traditional way of caring for the elderly in the Slovak Republic was based on intergenerational solidarity. The vast majority of seniors stayed at home with the support of their adult children. Extending the retirement age also means that the so-called the sandwich generation does not have the opportunity to provide round-the-clock care for their aging parents. Based on a comparison of the statistics of the Slovak Republic and EU countries, we conclude that the life expectancy of people in Slovakia is significantly lower, especially the healthy life expectancy, which increases the demands for ensuring the care of seniors dependent on the help of another person. In the Slovak Republic, it is not possible to provide care 24 hours a day in the form of a nursing service. In the case of employed adult children, even a solution based on a combination of the senior's stay in the form of daily service and then care in the family is not always possible. This fact increases the pressure to provide all-day care in facilities for the elderly. We know from the information provided on the pages of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic that there are currently more than 11,000 applicants for the provision of social services in residential facilities. All these applicants have problems with providing care for their own person, so they are dependent on all-day care. As the retirement age increases, we can reasonably expect the number of applicants to increase.



3) Personnel and financial under-dimensioning of social services

In the Slovak Republic, by law, the state contributes to social services according to the standards set by the state. Another source of funding are fees for provided social services directly from users of social services/seniors. Even before COVID-19, directors of facilities for seniors pointed out the long-term underfunding of social services. The financial problems of these facilities have worsened over the past 2 years. The insufficient funding of social services is also reflected in the area of salaries, which is one of the reasons for the lack of employees in the area of social services. There is especially lack of nursing staff in Slovakia. Slovak health visitors and nurses prefer to work in the Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, etc., the reason is the incomparably better salary conditions. The situation is similar with the service personnel such as chefs who go into the commercial sphere. If the Slovak Republic wanted to satisfy 11,000 applicants, we would need to build and equip 275 facilities for seniors in Slovakia. The currently valid Act 448/2008 does not allow us to establish new facilities with a capacity of more than 40 places. This would mean that everything from the acquisition of land to the purchase of the last spoon must be ensured. In parallel, SR will also have to build community services for seniors and look for support options for informal caregivers. The question is: Can the Slovak Republic provide enough financial resources to ensure the social services provided by existing facilities so that people are willing to work in these facilities and will it have the funds to build new facilities?

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