

DETECTION AND PREVENTION OF RISKS OF PUBLIC AND NATIONAL SOCIAL POLICIES

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Abstract

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The present research effort attempts to achieve the detection of issues involved in the exercise of public/national social policy in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece. The data was collected in May–October 2019, through the Community Centers of the social services of the region's municipalities. The main method of analysis was clustering (two-step cluster analysis). The survey will also attempt to monitor the coverage of the needs not only of vulnerable population groups but also of the general population in need of social policy services (Center for Healthy Aging, 2004). Social welfare in the countries of Southern Europe appears, as far as funding is concerned, as a neglected pillar of social protection. It is a commitment of the state to meet the needs of all population groups. These needs are not standardized, do not have a defined problem framework and have a high degree of differentiation. New social risks cannot be dealt with by passive forms of intervention. These risks create enough insecurity and uncertainty in maintaining a minimum level of decent living (Velte, 2023). The exercise of social policy means all statutory measures and applied policies or informal practices aimed at preventing and addressing the needs not only of vulnerable population groups but also of the general population of the territory, both at the reception stage with the state services and at the stage of integration or "rehabilitation" of individuals.

Keywords: Vulnerable Population Groups, Profile, People in Need, Social Policy, Welfare State, Greece

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1. INTRODUCTION

Until now, there was a widespread view that social services were oriented towards meeting the needs of

vulnerable social groups, groups that constituted the outcasts of society who were exposed to social risks and faced problems of social exclusion and poverty. Nevertheless, it seems that the period after

the economic crisis in Greece has brought significant changes not only in the scope of meeting the needs of the population but also in the composition of the groups that are now addressed to social services. This fact is also verified by the research conducted in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, which is included in the twenty poorest regions of the European Union (EU) in which the lowest percentages of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita are recorded. It should not escape our attention that this region is suitable for this kind of research, because of the multiculturalism, the minorities living in its territory and the low income of its citizens.

Therefore, the main subject of this research is the broader investigation of the use of social services by ordinary citizens of the regions under consideration. Having collected a fully objective, representative and quantitatively sufficient and reliable sample, the researcher can utilize this sample by any scientific means and method, aiming at the analytical and extensive investigation of the research questions. Speaking of research questions, as mentioned, the main subject of the study is the evaluation and assessment of the use of social services, but at the same time immediately and indirectly any statistical correlation with demographic-social factors, professional as well as geographical. Through the use of classical and statistical machine learning algorithms, an attempt will be made to investigate the profile of the respondents of the sample, resulting in compact, homogeneous groups of respondents which are expressed and mapped through the corresponding semantic pillars. Based on the specific segmentation process as well as the broader statistical controls that will be applied through the various foreseen techniques to the various entities of the questionnaires, the researcher will try to draw causal conclusions that will build a realistic depiction of the perception that citizens and executives have of the use of social services. Through this research we will be able to qualitatively and quantitatively assess the perception, the range of education and information of the country's citizens regarding the subject of social services.

At this point, the logic of applying the cluster analysis method to the questionnaire data of the present research will be explained. First of all, let's mention that we consider a cluster to be a collection of elements that have selectively similar or related characteristics to each other and are correspondingly differentiated from elements that belong to other clusters, e.g., the respondents of a survey questionnaire. Cluster analysis aims to separate a collection of observations into groups so that each group and heterogeneity between items belonging to different groups are homogeneous. Additionally, it may aim to organize clusters hierarchically by sequentially grouping them, so that at each level of hierarchy, clusters belonging to the same group are more similar to each other than those belonging to another group. The most basic terms for cluster analysis are the terms of distance and similarity. Similar observations will have high similarity and low distance and vice versa. These terms are very useful as they allow us to measure how similar the observations are to each other and therefore to place them in the same group.

One of the characteristics of modern economies is that population groups that were not previously considered to be at risk of poverty are now exposed to poverty and social exclusion. The new economic and social framework that has formed in Greece, both during and after the period of the financial crisis and its consequences, as well as the fact that poverty is passed from generation to generation and is linked to economic factors, led to the formation of "new urban forms of poverty" through interconnected negative factors such as loss of work, income, housing, a divorce, exclusion from insurance coverage (Balourdos, 2012).

The inability or limited ability of the welfare state to protect vulnerable social groups, the prolonged recession, as well as the crisis of informal support networks create favorable conditions for individuals not to escape from long-term poverty. It has been observed that children who grow up in poverty may be affected in terms of their development, future opportunities, and socio-political behavior and may not be able to "escape" poverty as adults (Hellenic Parliament, 2012)

The crisis highlighted homelessness, financial exclusion, energy poverty, and over-indebted households as new forms of poverty, while it seems that women are more exposed to social risks than men. The population groups most affected and experiencing multiple and disproportionate forms of deprivation appear to be the elderly, large families, people with disabilities, single-parent families, people with chronic serious conditions, immigrants, low-income people, and minorities.

In the medium term, poor households with few assets are likely to experience deeper or even extreme poverty due to limited access to banking services and products, as they have limited capacity to react. It should be noted that with the conditions created due to the economic crisis, maintaining work employment is not a criterion in order to remove the risk of poverty, as factors that lead to poverty through work should be taken into account. These factors include family structure, low-income or self-employed earnings, and precarious work. The above also includes those employed in uncertain and low-quality secondary jobs, which have low wages, i.e., it is a working population that experiences the structural regulations of the labor market and is limited to the cycle of poverty (Economic and Social Committee of Greece [OKE], 2014).

In addition, there is the so-called hidden poverty, which is associated with households that are forced to choose to cover certain expenses in order not to face an accumulation of debts, as a result of which their resources are limited to cover their basic living needs (Balourdos, 2012).

Specifically, through the processing of the data, it emerges that the population addressed to the social services is socially active with skills and abilities and mainly motivated to improve their living conditions. Therefore, what should be of concern is the formulation of social policy measures, oriented to cover this population and not just a sterile benefit policy.

The questions that are reasonably asked focus on how a region in recession can develop a social policy capable of leading its population to development and whether this can be done autonomously or within a national and European framework taking into account its particular characteristics.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on the investigation of the use of social services by ordinary citizens of the regions under consideration. Section 4 reviews the results of the survey, Section 5 deals with the discussion of the field and Section 6 is referring to the conclusions that can be made.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As can be seen from the results of Kalaitzoglou's (2017) research on the provision of social services during the period of economic crisis, it appears that as the needs of citizens increase, the demand for social services also increases, as most requests for it is for meeting basic needs and the need to look for work (Stathopoulos, 2012). Specifically, the age group between 30–44 years old of age turns more to social services at a rate of 39.1% ($n = 277$), with women seeking help at a higher percentage (77.8%) than men. The educational level of those entering the social services is low, as it can be seen that high school graduates — Labor Training Institute — attend more with a percentage of 40.1%, while the unemployed (51.3%), the married (66.8%), large households of more than four people (38.4%) and annual family incomes $< 5,000\text{€}$ (49.9%) precede accessibility to social services. The reasons why citizens come to social services seem to be related to work support (22%) and social support (17%), while the frequency of visits seems to be “frequent” (24.2%).

In addition, the data obtained from the report of the Directorate of Social Integration for the year 2017 (Ministry of Labor Social Security and Social Solidarity, 2018), on the operation of the Community Centers of the municipalities of the territory, appear to be useful. In particular, it appears that men (51.29%) attend social services ahead of women (48.71%). While the age group of 25–44 years old (60%) attends social services more, with the main requests for attendance being Social Solidarity Income (38.8%) and Fund of the European Aid to the Poor (FEAD) (19.3%), while in a state of poverty, the citizens who attended they are 63.9% of those joining the social service.

Next, for the year 2018, the data obtained from the report of the Directorate of Social Integration (Ministry of Labor Social Security and Social Solidarity, 2019) show that men (51.26%) are ahead

in terms of accessibility compared to women (48.74%), with the age group of 25–54 years old (55.61%) to attend social services more. From the report's data, it appears that 80% of the 25–64 years old age group are unemployed, while the reasons for visiting are linked to Social Solidarity Income (54.57%) and FEAD (22.77%).

According to the data of the Solidarity Social Income program, for the period May–October 2019, the approved applications were 419,497, of which the unemployed were 290,267 (69.19%), the employed 100,222 (23.89%), pensioners 7,217 (1.72%) and those unable to work (elderly and disabled) 20,564 (4.90%) people.

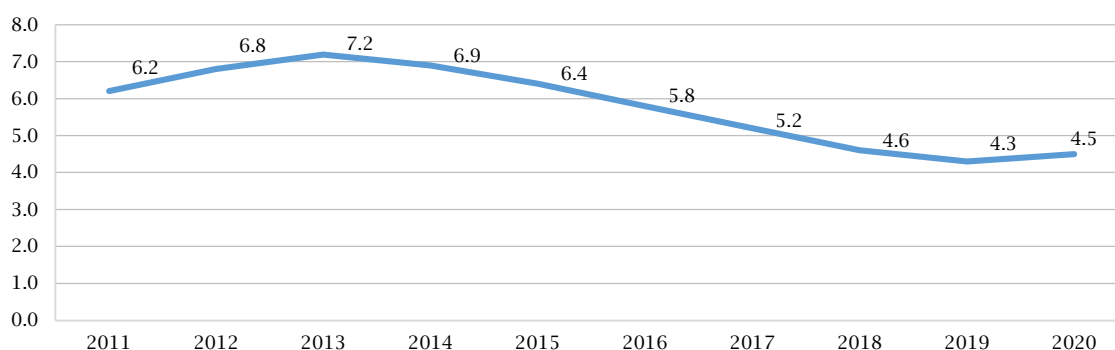
As far as the educational level is concerned, it seems that among the unemployed, the highest percentage is gathered by those who have finished elementary school (23.60%), followed by graduates of general high school (20.79%). Among the employees, the highest percentage is gathered by those who have finished a vocational high school (6.42%), followed by those who have finished some vocational school (3.99%). The majority of retirees who submitted a Social Solidarity Income application were without any education (44%), followed by high school graduates (17.59%). In the category of those who are unable to work, primary school graduates (40.02%) lead, followed by high school graduates (19.49%).

In order to have a comprehensive picture of poverty, beyond the theoretical framework, it is particularly important to quantify its magnitude and characteristics. A question that arises is “*In the end how much of the population is experiencing poverty?*”.

For 2020 in the EU 96.5 million people (21.9% of the population of the EU) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Between the two sexes, women faced a higher rate of risk (22.9%) than men (20.9%). What was observed was that apart from gender, young adults, the unemployed and people with a low level of education were at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion. As far as employment is concerned, it appears that employment status significantly affects the risk of poverty or social exclusion, as 11.8% were employed, 19.2% were retired, 66.2% were unemployed and 42.9% were other inactive persons (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2023).

In Figure 1 below, it can be seen that the unemployment rate of the EU population, while in recent years, especially after 2013, has been on a downward trend, shows a slight increase.

Figure 1. The EU unemployment rate of the total population during 2011–2020



Source: Eurostat Statistics Explained (2023).

Table 1 below shows the relative median poverty risk gap in the EU, based on 60% of the average equivalent income. As can be seen over time, Greece is above the EU rate, while there is

a percentage increase in the median poverty risk gap of 3.5%, while for the EU it is only 1.4% (in the absence of data for the year 2020).

Table 1. Relative median at-risk-of-poverty gap (60% of average equivalent income) in the EU, 2010–2020

Countries	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EU-27	23.1	23.2	23.8	24.4	25.3	25.4	25.4	24.7	24.5
Greece	23.4	26.1	29.9	32.7	31.3	30.6	31.9	30.3	29.1

Note: EU-27 — 27 member states of the European Union.
Source: Eurostat Statistics Explained (2023).

It is important to mention that for the same period, social transfers reduced the poverty risk rate in the EU by 8.3 percentage points, i.e., from 25.4% before social transfers to 17.9% after social transfers

excluding pensions. Table 2 below also shows the difference in risk that exists over time between the two sexes, with women facing a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion.

Table 2. Percentage of population, by sex, at risk of poverty in the EU after social transfers, 2009–2020

Countries	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
EU-27	-	15.6	16.9	16.9	16.8	17.3	17.4	17.5	16.9	16.8	16.5	17.1
Men	-	15.7	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.8	17.0	16.8	16.3	16.2	15.8	16.3
Women	-	17.1	17.6	17.6	17.3	17.7	17.8	18.1	17.5	17.5	17.1	17.8

Note: EU-27 — 27 member states of the European Union.
Source: Eurostat Statistics Explained (2023).

Regarding the age group, it appears that the highest risk of poverty is faced by young adults aged 18–24 years old (27.8%) and the age group under 18 years old (24.2%), while those over 65 years old are at lower rates years old (20.4%) and the category 50–64 years old (22.2%). As mentioned above, the educational level seems to have a significant effect, as 34.7% of people over the age of 18 with a low educational level are at high risk of poverty compared to people of the same age group but with a high educational level (10.5%) and average educational level (19.9%).

In addition, the populations living in households with three or more children were at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion across the EU for the year 2020 at a rate of 29.6%. As the data between the EU states show with households that have dependent members, the risk of poverty or social exclusion is experienced by 36.1% in Romania, 31.5% in Bulgaria, 29.7% in Greece and Spain, 11.7% in Denmark, 11% in the Czech Republic and 10.6% in Slovenia (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research that follows studies the effectiveness of social services in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The data was collected in May–October 2019, through the Community Centers of the social services of the region's municipalities. The selection of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace was made as the largest number of Community Center structures are concentrated in this region, in full and continuous operation for a long time. Specifically, it is a total of 22 Community Center structures in the Municipalities of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. Therefore, one reason that this particular region was chosen is that there are a number of structures that can collect a representative sample of the population of their territory. Also, another reason for choosing the specific region is because these structures, due

to the sufficient period that they are in full operation, have gained experience in the implementation of social policy measures. Finally, it should not escape our attention that this region is suitable for this type of research, due to its multiculturalism, the minorities living in its territory and the low income of its citizens.

The research consisted of two questionnaires:

- the questionnaire of the recipients of social services (citizens) that were given to them when they visited the structure for some of their own case;
- the questionnaire of the social service executives (employees) which concerned both their needs and their views on improvements of the social policy system in the 1st level local government.

The main method of analysis was clustering (two-step cluster analysis). The choice for this method was made due to the sample number and content of the dataset, which contained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative variables. All analyzes were performed using the IBM SPSSV 23 statistical package.

For the concise and effective presentation of the data, the method of descriptive statistics was used. Specifically, the four groups formed were associated with social characteristics (such as age, gender, marital status, contribution to income, role at home, number of children, and grammatical knowledge), as well as other characteristics such as occupation stability, type of occupation, monthly family income, main or other sources of the income, main and additional allowances, insurance coverage, the economic level before the financial crisis, decrease in income, monthly financial income.

Cluster analysis is applied in such a way that elements (observations) that are more similar to each other than to any others are included in the same clusters (groups) (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984; Everitt et al., 2011). In other words, it is a statistical model whose purpose is to find the optimal solution of groups in which the respondents of this research are grouped.

This is achieved by carefully selecting and arranging the elements into groups of observations with related characteristics and with the following properties:

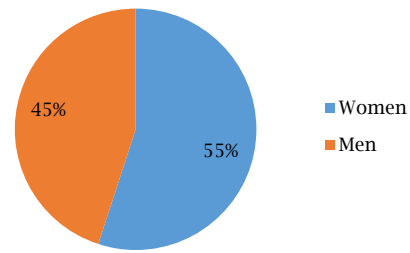
- Each group has a similar composition in relation to some characteristics, i.e., the observations in them have values almost similar to each other.
- Each group should differ from the rest in terms of the same characteristics, that is, the values of one group should differ in scale size from the values of other groups.

A total of 1050 citizen questionnaires and 124 executive questionnaires were sent. They were received 577 questionnaires of accepted social services — citizens and 106 questionnaires of social services executives were received. The results showed that the distribution of the number of observations is 178,83,126 and 106 in a total of 493 observations. From the four groups emerges the profile of the people who request help from the structures.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

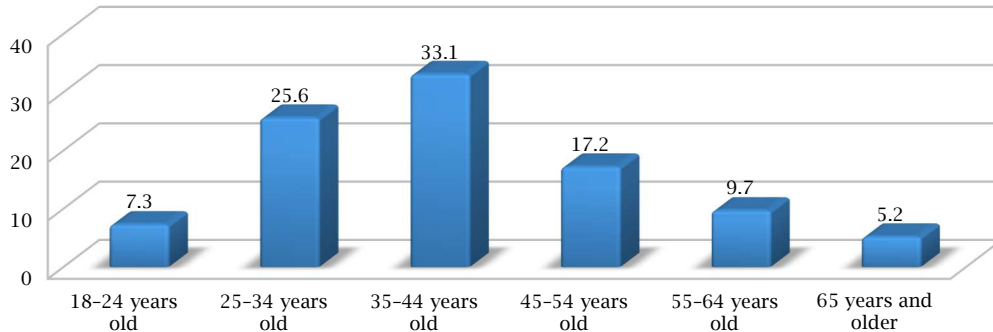
In relation to the gender of the participants, the results of the research showed that in all 4 groups, there were more women than men. It was also observed that in the fourth group, the female-to-male ratio was higher compared to the rest of the groups. 577 people participated in the survey, of which the majority are women at a rate of 55% and men at 45%.

Figure 2. Sex of the participants in the survey



Examining the groups in terms of age showed that the first and fourth groups consisted mainly of people aged 35 to 44 years old ($n = 47.2\%$) and ($n = 34.5\%$) respectively. The second group had a similar distribution of all age categories and the third consisted of people aged between 25 and 34 years ($n = 46\%$). The comparison of the distribution by age category of the compared groups showed that the first group had the closest distribution to that of the general population. The ages most of the respondents as shown in Figure 3 belong to the age group of 35-44 years old at a rate of 33.1% and the immediately youngest is the age group of 25-34 years old (25.6%) and follows by a lower rate of 17.2% the age group 45-54 years old.

Figure 3. Age category of citizens who come to the social services of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace



Examining the categories by the group in relation to the participant's contribution to family income showed that the first, second and fourth groups consisted of people who were the main contributors within the household at rates of 57.9%, 48.2% and 42.5% respectively.

According to the results, the first group consisted mainly of people who were high school graduates ($n = 36.5\%$), the second group of people who did not go to school ($n = 33.7\%$) or elementary school graduates ($n = 30.1\%$), and the third and fourth groups of university graduates at 45.2% and 56.6% respectively.

Table 3. Summary of demographics by the group

Social characteristics	Gravamen								Closest group to overall	
	1st group	2nd group	3rd group	4th group	Total	1st group	2nd group	3rd group		
Sex	Women	54%	Women	52%	Women	52.8%	Women	55%	Women	1st, 2nd, 3rd
Age	35-44	47.2%	25-34	33.4%	25-34	46%	35-44	34.5%	35-44	1st
Marital status	Married	70.8%	Married	61.4%	Unmarried	85.7%	Married	77.4%	Married	1st
Role at home	Parent	67.4%	Parent	50.6%	Child	57.3%	Parent	60.4%	Parent	3rd
Number of children	2	42.1%	2	30.4%	None	87.3%	2	34.9%	None	1st
Contribution to income	Main	57.9%	Main	48.2%	Main	38.1%	Main	42.5%	Main	1st
Grammatical knowledge	High school	36.5%	None	33.7%	HEI/TEI	45.2%	HEI/TEI	56.6%	High school and HEI/TEI	1st

Note: HEI — Higher Education Institute, TEI — Technological Educational Institute.

According to the results of the survey, only the fourth group had a stable income ($n = 80.2\%$), while the first group presented the highest percentage of casual employment ($n = 22.5\%$).

In relation to the type of occupation, in the 1st group, the occupation was a farmer ($n = 20.7\%$), in the second household — retired ($n = 48\%$), in the third self-employed — scientific staff ($n = 25\%$) and the fourth — civil servant ($n = 57.6\%$).

The first (41%) and the third group (32.5%) had the highest percentages in the income category of 501 to 800 euros. In the second group, the highest percentage was in the category 201-500 euros ($n = 45.8\%$) and in the fourth category more than 1000 euros ($n = 90.6\%$).

In the first, third and fourth groups, the main source of income was salaried work with percentages of 44.9%, 39.7% and 93.4% while in the second group benefits ($n = 66.3\%$).

Benefits were the most frequently appearing category in the first three groups with percentages of 40.7%, 25.0% and 25.9% respectively, while in the fourth group, it was self-employment ($n = 30\%$). Finally, the first group presented the greatest similarities with the general group.

The solidarity and welfare allowance was the category with the highest percentage of appearance in the first three groups with percentages of 32.9%, 42.0% and 34.2% respectively, while in the fourth group, it was the category other ($n = 20.8\%$).

The main additional allowance was the multi-child allowance in the first two groups with an occurrence rate of 21.4% and 25.0% and the disability allowance in the third group ($n = 15\%$).

5. DISCUSSION

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, which needs a multi-level approach and comprehensive approach. Of course, this multidimensional phenomenon should be analyzed in order to be understood by all those who do not experience poverty with the help of a non-arbitrary system of categories and concepts, which will describe poverty in such a way as to allow the possibility of intervention. (Ulrich & Rieg, 2021).

Through the social intervention programs in combination with the social reality, it is possible to ascertain all the factors associated with poverty, as well as the different degrees of the contribution of each factor to the specific poverty situation. An integrated intervention, regardless of successful or unsuccessful results, must have full knowledge of all the dimensions and factors that shape the specific poverty situation. The development of skills and abilities is the means for the individual to escape from the limits of poverty (Franzoi et al., 2021).

Institutions act as shapers, they establish the framework for the synthesis of local strategies. In particular, for regions with significant problems of economic backwardness, the coherence of formal and informal institutions creates conditions for improving local well-being. A network between local groups and public bodies can favor the creation of infrastructure and the provision of public services (Trigilia, 2001). The more effective the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the local productive circuit,

the more the efficient use of public goods by local collective actions increases, and they expand through the local economic circuit in investment activity. Cooperation, as the basic output of networks of trust and reciprocity, is also employed as a means of compensating for risk and uncertainty (Jouirou & Lakhali, 2020).

In the last decade, the number of population groups facing issues of social exclusion has increased (Chebri & Bahoussa, 2020). Social integration and labor market integration programs are considered increasingly important for ensuring social cohesion. At the same time, Greece presents a high rate of aging of its population, resulting in the future need to create new support units. In order to have a timely and valid reversal of the phenomenon, appropriate family and child support policies should be implemented (Symeonidou, 2012).

The crisis highlighted homelessness, financial exclusion, energy poverty, over-indebted households as new forms of poverty, while it seems that women are more exposed to social risks than men. According to the results of the research, the population groups that are most affected and suffer from multiple and disproportionate forms of deprivation seem to be the elderly (7.1%), large families (16.1%), people with disabilities (6.59%), people with chronic serious diseases (20.4%), people with low income (53.9%).

Based on the research data, it seems that some points that work in a dual way are of particular interest. On the one hand, while they “overturn” older beliefs in the provision of assistance by the welfare state, on the other hand, they do not depict a new modern reality. At this point, of course, it is important to mention that there are some perennially stable needs in specific population groups.

An important element of the results is the fact that social needs are now covered by population groups that in the past would not have turned to social services, i.e., on the one hand, we have people with skills (60.7%), with a motivation for personal development for the which a social inclusion policy should be formulated and which individuals will “give back” to society the help they received, as they are motivated to develop. This is also confirmed by the literature, based on which investments in human capital but also the promotion of social participation with activities aimed at overcoming the social and psychological effects of poverty and social exclusion, are key concepts for the design of intervention programs aimed at the comprehensive approach, i.e., the analysis of the phenomenon into simpler known phenomena, in the combination of a set of measures from different fields of human activities and the cumulative treatment through the complementarities of the selected measures (Tsiakalos & Kogidou, 1991).

On the other hand, those vulnerable population groups still appear who lack skills and live in a repeated cycle of poverty. In this case, different social policy measures should be implemented for integration and integration into the social fabric, e.g., a different kind of policy should be followed for the unemployed person who owns a home than for a homeless person.

Women seem to come more to social services to meet their and their family's needs. These

percentages are in correspondence both with the figures of the general population of Greece and with the general figures of the population concerning the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, according to which women make up 51% of the population. The findings of the thesis are also confirmed by Eurostat data (Eurostat Statistics Explained, 2023), in which it appears over time that in the EU women face a higher risk of poverty after social transfers, compared to men. So they are the ones who turn to social services to meet their needs.

However, it is useful to mention that the age group of 65 years old and over has increased in recent years. Therefore, the planning of the social policy should also include this vulnerable population group, which according to the available data addresses a much smaller percentage (7.1%) the social services to cover their needs, while it is necessary to get help

Another element of interest is the fact that in the sample of the thesis, both citizens with a low educational level and citizens with skills and academic studies turn to services to meet social needs. This means that the scope for meeting needs has widened, as more and more people now seem unable to meet their needs. But someone without skills and education needs a different kind of intervention and with a different kind of policy, the welfare state should deal with a citizen with skills.

In addition, it appears that people with a higher level of education are employed in the public sector, while in the private sector, they use less human capital and therefore there is a differentiation in the quality of the staff employed. This is a particular feature of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, as the private sector is underdeveloped. In this region, the range of businesses and services that employ people with a high educational level is not observed.

Another element that reinforces the image of the change in the characteristics of people who need to meet social needs is that, based on the results of the research, it is not about large households with many dependent members or single-parent families, but about largely small households with a small number of residents.

6. CONCLUSION

The main subject of this research is the broader investigation of the use of social services both by ordinary citizens of the regions under consideration and by the executives of social services. Having collected a fully objective, representative and quantitatively sufficient and reliable sample, the researcher can utilize this sample by any scientific means and method, aiming at the analytical and extensive investigation of the research questions. Speaking of research questions, as mentioned, the main subject of the study is the evaluation and assessment of the use of social services, but at the same time immediately and indirectly any statistical correlation with demographic-social factors, professional as well as geographical. Through the use of classical and statistical machine learning algorithms, an attempt will be made to investigate the profile of the respondents of the sample, resulting in compact, homogeneous groups of respondents which are

expressed and mapped through the corresponding semantic pillars. Based on the specific segmentation process as well as the broader statistical controls that will be applied through the various foreseen techniques to the various entities of the questionnaires, the researcher will try to draw causal conclusions that will build a realistic depiction of the perception that citizens and executives have of the use of social services. Through this research we will be able to qualitatively and quantitatively assess the perception, the range of education and information of the country's citizens regarding the subject of social services. At this point, the researchers would like to point out that the results of the executive questionnaire will proceed to future further analysis.

In essence, the sample/data analysis shows that there are two categories of people, on the one hand, the people who have always belonged to the so-called vulnerable population groups, such as Roma (gypsies), immigrants, users of addictive substances, disabled people, unemployed, elderly, etc.) and on the other hand to people who are experiencing the effects of a change in their financial situation either due to losing their job or due to a change in their financial status. Social policy intervention for the aforementioned categories is different, as different inclusion policies are required for a person who has lost his job or whose income has been reduced (e.g., retraining in the use of modern technologies) than for a person (e.g., Roma) who experience multiple levels of social exclusion (education, health, work, etc.). Specifically, the results of the survey showed that 60.7% of citizens who turn to social services to meet their needs are people with skills (e.g., high school diploma and advanced studies), while 48% of the sample did not have a stable occupation. The state of new poverty is linked to the lack of employment and income. The radical social changes that have occurred have led to situations of deprivation, which have as their main characteristic their multidimensional character, i.e., individuals or groups experience deprivation in more than one area. These people are on the fringes of a more general well-being and now poverty takes the form of social exclusion.

It should be noted that there is a direct connection between the concepts of poverty and social exclusion according to the theoretical traditions in poverty research in Europe (Petmesidou, 1996; Room, 1995). The modern concept of poverty is mainly associated with the redistribution of income and the lack of available resources of the household or individual and leads to a low level of consumption of goods or services. On the other hand, social exclusion is linked to social relationships, lack of social cohesion and limited social participation (Room, 1995).

Based on the above data, it seems that the region is called upon to implement social policy measures which should be primarily aimed at supporting the citizens to meet the needs they face and on the other hand to lead the citizens to develop their individual motivating them to develop and prosper the individuals themselves, while also offering to the local community.

Interaction between participants in an economy even contributes to finding effective solutions to local problems. It is important to mention that

the ever-intensifying competition changes the forms of work so far and creates intense pressure towards the research field and specialized studies, as a result of which it is considered that new technologies are the ones that will secure new jobs in the future. Therefore, it seems that the continuous (lifelong) updating of the skills and abilities of the individual (and potential employee) can meet the ever-changing needs of the labor market. For this reason, the role of university institutions in the production of knowledge and the formation of the network is judged to be particularly important, as they are key institutional factors in the promotion of collaborative practices. The terms of their connection with the regional community directly determine the latter's inclination towards learning and the inclusion of knowledge in the production process. More specifically, the benefits arise through improvements in the production process, in the codification of the generated knowledge and therefore in its easier integration, in the upgrading of the human capital of the region and the strengthening of the cohesion of the cooperation and learning network (Boucher et al., 2003).

It is commonly accepted that the social services of the local government operate in a constantly changing environment, as social developments combined with the reforms that are taking place shape a new framework for the operation of social services. It seems that a new operating framework is required, which includes modern management techniques and is based on the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided. The integration into the operation of Local Government Authorities (LGAs) types of strategic thinking (Georgopoulos, 2013; Kalaitzoglou, 2017) such as policy strategy, organizational strategy and

managerial strategy will contribute to the utilization of the material and immaterial resources of the local government more rationally to achieve the goals set by the administration.

In addition, the services must integrate the culture of the administration in the consultation processes, in the joint process of formulating goals — actions and communication which are examples of a change in the mentality and operation of the administration and the services (Stewart, 2004).

This is the direction in which the current effort was launched, motivated by the contribution of the financial tools of the EU in the exercise of national social policy, with an emphasis on the possibility of interaction that can bring about both at the level of services and in the local community, so that the state becomes capable of preventing and dealing with modern methods of exercising social policy the needs of citizens.

It is important to mention that the researchers are continuing this research in depth. Specifically, the qualitative and quantitative data of the research, allow the future comparative analysis of the profile of the served social services with the satisfaction they derive from the use of the services. Also, the efficiency of social services is investigated, i.e., to what extent the implemented national social policy is capable of helping individuals to get back on their feet. In addition, it should not escape our attention that the analysis of the executives' questionnaire will contribute to the holistic approach to the effectiveness of social services. That is, the research effort revolves around capturing the two sides of the same coin. In this particular case, it is about the users/recipients and the executives of the social services.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1. Summary of occupational data by group

Social characteristics	Gravamen									Closest group to overall
	1st group		2nd group		3rd group		4th group		Total	
Stable occupation	No	22.5%	No	20.8%	No	21.3%	Yes	24%	No	1st
Type of occupation	Farmer	20.7%	Household	48%	Freelance	25%	Municipal employee	57.6%	Municipal employee	1st
Monthly family income	501-800 EUR	41%	201-500 EUR	45.8	501-800 EUR	32.5	> 1000 EUR	90.6%	> 1000 EUR	1st, 3rd, 4th
Source of income	Job with payment	44.9%	Allowances	66.3%	Job with payment	39.7%	Job with payment	93.4%	Job with payment	1st, 3rd
Other sources of income	Allowances	40.7%	Allowances	25%	Allowances	25.9%	Freelance	30%	Allowances	1st
Allowances	Social Solidarity Income	32.9%	Social Solidarity Income	42%	Social Solidarity Income	34.2%	Other	20.8%	Social Solidarity Income	1st
Additional allowances	Money for a family with many children	21.4%	Money for a family with many children	25%	Disability allowance	15%	-	-	Money for a family with many children	1st
Insurance coverage	Yes	100%	Yes	53%	Yes	100%	Yes	99%	Yes	1st
Economic level before the crisis	Medium	60.2%	Medium	58.7%	Medium	57.1%	Medium	63.5%	Medium	1st
Decrease in income	Yes	100%	Yes	100%	Yes	100%	Yes	100%	Yes	1st