

SOCIAL POLICY IN GREECE: THE STATE REGULATIONS AND THE REASONS BEHIND THE PEOPLE'S SATISFACTION LEVEL

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Abstract

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The purpose of this article is to investigate the efficiency of social services provided at the regional level in Greece, not only from the point of view of the bodies planning social policy measures but also from the perspective of the population (Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023). The research effort is linked to the issues of implemented social policy measures, as relief measures for citizens. Through the use of statistical methods, an attempt is made to outline the profile of the citizens of the sample. This results in the creation of homogeneous groups that are mapped through the corresponding semantic pillars (Everitt, 1993). Having collected a representative and reliable sample, the researchers focused on the analytical and extensive investigation of the research questions (Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023). The research findings demonstrate that there are citizens who in the past would not come to social services for the problems they face, citizens who are motivated to increase their personal skills and expand their abilities, as well as citizens who will “give back” to society for help that they received. This study raises questions about the way social policy is implemented in the country.

Keywords: Satisfaction, People in Need, Use of Social Services, Vulnerable Population Groups, Social Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

The investigation of the efficiency of social services provided at a regional level in Greece, especially in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace is a case study due to the social characteristics of the residents. It also attempts to study the new social policy from the point of the bodies planning and implementing

social policy measures, but also from the perspective of the people who receive social services policy.

The researchers attempted to identify issues concerning the implemented social policy measures. In this context, social policy is understood and treated as an example of national social policy and is linked to formal or informal forms of recovery

measures. As an ultimate goal, the research effort dealt with the evaluation of the use of services by both citizens and executives.

The research data comes from a reliable sample both qualitatively and quantitatively. Researchers can utilize the database by any method, with the ultimate goal of a comprehensive evaluation of the questions under study. The collection of data on the effectiveness of social services was done through the 22 community centers of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, which are now the new dominant model of social policy (Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023).

Factors affecting access to services are related to individual characteristics, personal beliefs, etc. and important factors associated with the gap between personal ethics and legislation i.e. perceptions, behavior, preferences of professionals towards citizens, and limited available resources (Saleem et al., 2019; Derose et al., 2009).

The research consisted of a questionnaire of the citizens and a questionnaire of the employees.

The research questions include the assessment and evaluation of the use of social services, which are statistically correlated with different social characteristics. The statistical analysis using classical and statistical machine learning algorithms outlines the profile of the citizens of the sample. The result of this is the formation of homogeneous groups of the sample that are mapped through the corresponding semantic pillars. Based on the specific segmentation process as well as the broader statistical controls, the researchers attempt to draw conclusions that will create a realistic depiction of citizens' and executives' perceptions of social services.

An important element of the results of this research is the fact that citizens who in the past would not have turned to social services to meet their needs turn to social services, i.e. people with skills (60,7%). The information about "motivation to grow" is a very important element that emerges and this can be seen in the results of the research, as they believe that with the "help they receive" people will get on their feet. These elements are also confirmed by the existing literature, as investments in human capital and the promotion of social participation are the cornerstone in the design of social intervention programs (Tsiakalos & Kogidou, 1991).

It should be pointed out that the research continues in-depth, as the qualitative and quantitative data require the comparative analysis of the citizens' profiles with the satisfaction they derive from the use of social services (Chatzikonstantinidou et al., 2023). Also, through the degree of effectiveness of social services, it is investigated whether social policy measures mobilize individuals to get back on their feet. The analysis of the questionnaire of the executives will contribute to the holistic capture of the effectiveness of the social services, i.e. the citizens and the executives of the social services.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyzes the research methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research on the data collection relevant to the effectiveness of social services. Section 4 analyzes the research results of the use of social services. Section 5 reviews the discussion of the collected data. Finally, Section 6 refers to the results of the research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The increase in poverty in recent years has arisen due to the large rise in unemployment and the failure to meet the needs of the social protection system, as it was preceded by a deep and prolonged economic recession at the same time the social protection system itself was not able to support the unemployed and poor families. Within the general climate that was formed, it should be mentioned that the crisis did not create the anchorages of the social welfare system, but highlighted in the most demonstrative way the consequences that these have brought about (Petmesidou, 1996).

As is now reflected in modern economies, population groups that in the past did not face the risk of poverty appear at an ever-increasing rate, while now exposed to poverty and social exclusion. In Greece, on the one hand, poverty is intergenerational, and on the other hand, the new economic and social framework that has been formed has shaped the "new urban form of poverty" through interrelated negative factors such as the loss of work, income, housing, exclusion from insurance coverage (Balourdos & Naoumi, 2010; Velte, 2022).

The economic crisis highlighted new forms of poverty such as the lack of housing, financial exclusion, over-indebted households, etc. While there seems to be a gender difference in exposure to the risk of poverty. In this case, women seem to be more exposed to social risks than men. The population groups experiencing multiple 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 (Celentano et al., 2020).

In the medium term, poor households are likely to experience deeper or extreme poverty due to limited access to goods and services, while exhibiting limited capacity to respond (Osemeke et al., 2020). It should be noted that due to the economic crisis, the factor of employment does not ensure the removal of the risk of poverty. That is, there are factors that lead to poverty (even if there is work) and are linked to family structure, low income, and precarious work. The above also includes those employed with secondary jobs and low wages. That is, it concerns workers who experience the structural arrangements of the labor market and are trapped in the cycle of poverty (Economic and Social Committee of Greece [OKE], 2014).

In addition, hidden poverty is associated with households that choose to cover certain expenses in order not to face an accumulation of debts. These households have limited resources to cover their basic living needs (Balourdos, 2012; Lahjie et al., 2021).

Understanding the patients' point of view has become highly important following the sociological interest that has developed in interpersonal relationships, resulting in an increase in related research activity (Cartwright, 1964, as cited in Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023). It is a fact that services are recipients of criticism from service users, who demand rights as active citizens and recipients of services and wish to participate in their planning and evaluation (Van Maanen, 1984; Pisano et al., 2022).

A general definition concerning the quality of services provided is given by Juran (1998, as cited in Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023), who defines quality as the extent to which a product or service meets the needs of a specific user and points out that quality must be designed and not leave it to chance.

McIver (1991, as cited Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023) argued for the importance of patient satisfaction in Great Britain in the 1980s, which formed part of the orientation of the general interest towards the consumer/user of all public services. An extremely important question is whether and to what extent the users of the services feel satisfied with the services provided and the agencies that provide them. The answer concerns both the users themselves and the providers of the services provided. Among them are the bodies of the central administration, the local government organizations (LGOs), the insurance organizations, and the staff of the services who have a direct interest in the degree of satisfaction of the users of the services on the one hand because it is linked to the recognition of the offer and on the other hand to the improvement of all those “elements” linked to user satisfaction (Nagalingam et al., 2022).

In Greece, the economic crisis forced the citizens to change their behavior regarding receiving health services and they were directed towards the use of public health services in order to reduce the financial costs of health, which they previously paid to private individuals. For the years 2009–2012, there is a continuous increase in inpatient admissions. Satisfaction with the use of health services is moderate/bad/very bad in 42% and

in 22% a problem of access to the public health system was declared due to the financial cost. For the years 2019–2020, 39,5% of the population with the lowest income did not meet their health needs, while the corresponding percentage for the population with the highest income corresponds to 7,8%. An increase in income is associated with an improvement in health. It has been observed that up to 2/3 of the differences in health indicators between different populations are linked to economic causes (Hellenic Statistical Authority [ELSTAT], 2021).

The relative percentage for the poor population is 36,2% and for the non-poor population is 21,8%. In addition, 9,4% of the population aged 16 years old and over said there was an occasion in the past 12 months that they needed a medical examination or treatment for a health problem and did not undergo it because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The relative percentage for the poor population is 11,0% and for the non-poor population, it is 9,0% (Table 1).

It is a fact that services are recipients of criticism from service users, who demand rights as active citizens and recipients of services and wish to participate in their planning and evaluation (Van Maanen, 1984).

According to recent figures in Greece (2021 year), 24,0% of the population aged 16 years old and over said there was an occasion in the last 12 months when they needed a medical examination or treatment for a health problem and did not receive it (Table 1).

Table 1. Non-submission of medical examination or treatment of the population aged 16 years old and over, when actually needed, by poor and non-poor households, in Greece (2021 year)

Reason for attendance	Population		
	Total	Poor/unprivileged	Not poor/unprivileged
Medical examination or treatment	24,0	36,2	21,8
Due to COVID-19	9,4	11,0	9,0

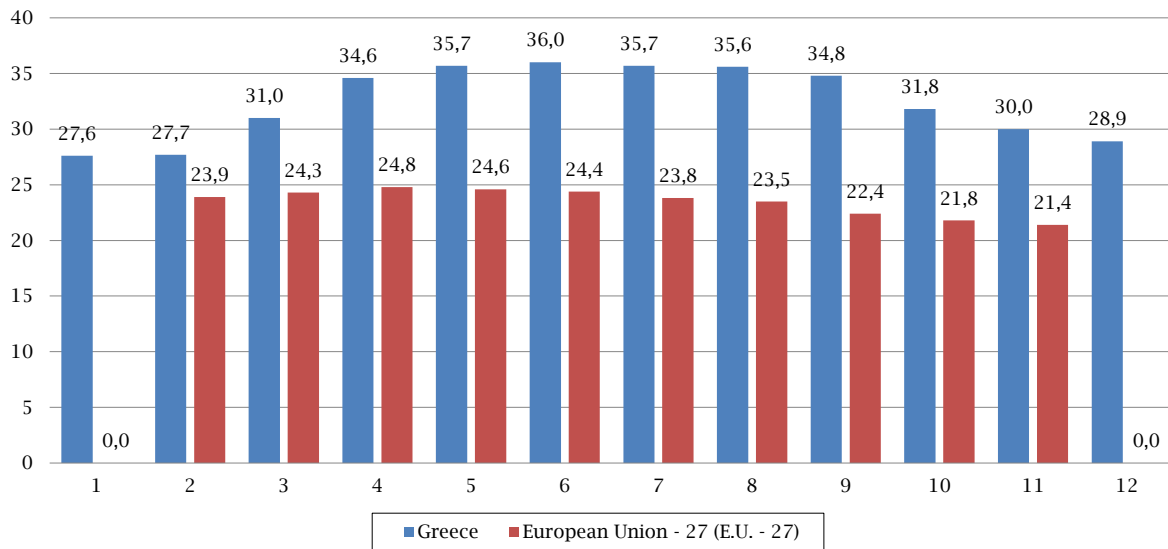
Source: ELSTAT (2021).

The increase in income leads to the improvement of health since it provides the possibility for better living conditions, adequate nutrition, and a healthy environment. It is also linked to other socio-economic factors related to health. Higher income means more resources for prevention, care, and other social services. Health affects income and investment in health is indirectly

linked to growth, e.g. a year of increase in life expectancy results in a 4% increase in gross domestic product (GDP) (ELSTAT, 2021).

In Figure 1 below, it is evident that in the last 11 years, Greece had much higher percentages of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to the average of the European Union (EU).

Figure 1. Population (%) at risk of poverty or social exclusion, 2009–2020



Source: ELSTAT (2021).

In the period from 2009 to 2020, people with a lower level of education are more likely to experience poverty, compared to other levels of education (Table 2). Nevertheless, for the same period of time, it appears that there is a downward trend in the risk of poverty by 6,4%, from 27,2% (2009) to 20,8% (2020). On the other hand, the data show that people who have an average level of

education, i.e. have skills and training, show an increasing tendency to face the risk of poverty by 2,2%, from 16,4% (2009) to 18,6% (2020). The percentages for people with a high educational level are quite low, nevertheless, they have an increasing trend of 2%, from 5,3% (2009) to 7,3% (2020).

Table 2. Poverty risk by level of education, 2009–2020

Education level	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Preschool primary and the first stage of secondary education	27,2	27,0	29,5	28,7	31,6	27,2	27,1	24,5	24,3	22,8	22,7	20,8
The second stage of secondary education post-secondary education	16,4	18,5	19,8	18,9	21,3	22,6	21,5	21,7	18,2	18,2	18,0	18,6
First and second stages of higher education	5,3	5,8	7,1	12,5	9,0	8,7	9,3	10,2	9,4	8,6	7,7	7,3

Source: ELSTAT (2021).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research effort is linked to the issues of implemented social policy measures, such as relief measures for citizens, which should be able to meet the needs of the population of the territory. It also attempts to study the new social policy that is being implemented, to approach the way of managing and meeting the needs of citizens from the point of view not only of the bodies planning and implementing social policy measures but also from the perspective of the people who receive social services policy. Through the use of statistical methods, an attempt is made to outline the profile of the citizens of the sample. This results in the creation of homogeneous groups that are mapped through the corresponding semantic pillars.

The collection of data on the effectiveness of social services was done through the social structures of the 22 community centers for the area of responsibility of the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace in Greece. The research consisted of a questionnaire of the citizens and a questionnaire of the employees.

The main method of analysis was clustering (two-step cluster analysis). All analyses were performed with the help of the IBM SPSS V23 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). 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, 1993).

Descriptive statistics was used for the concise and effective presentation of the data. The data was collected in May–October 2019. A total of 1050 citizen questionnaires and 124 executive questionnaires were sent. Of these, 577 questionnaires of citizens and 106 questionnaires of executives were received.

From the four groups emerges the profile of the people who request help, which is associated with characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, contribution to income, role at home, number of children, grammatical knowledge, type and stability of occupation and etc. (Chatzikonstantinidou et al., 2023).

The collection of more research data from other regional units of Greece could contribute to the use of alternative statistical methods such as factorial analysis, so as to study the phenomenon. This question could further concern our analysis.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the results, all four groups answered that they use the services of the social service. The summary of the results showed that (Table 3)

the second group visits the social services more often for several reasons and mainly for processing their cases. On the contrary, the fourth group will visit the social services much less often but mainly for more serious health issues. Finally, the first and third groups are expected to visit social services less often compared to the second group and the main reason for visiting is their information.

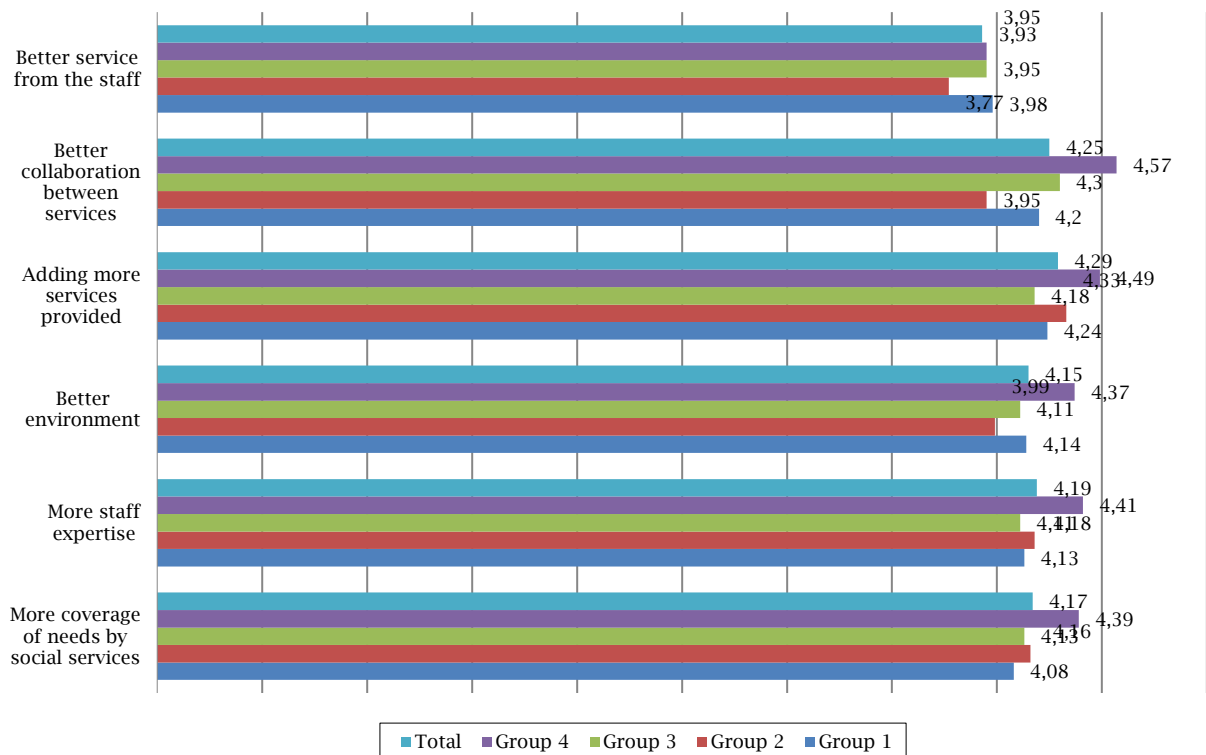
Table 3. Use of social services by group

More general assessments of citizens	Gravamen					The closest group to the overall
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Total	
Use of social services	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	3rd
Frequency of visits	At least 2-3 times a year	At least once a month	At least 2-3 times a year	More rarely or wherever there is a problem	At least 2-3 times a year	1st
Last visit	Until a month ago	Until a week ago	Until a week ago	Until a week ago	Until a week ago	3rd
Type of social service	Social center	Social center	Social center	Hospital	Social center	1st
Reason for the last visit	Update	Handling cases	Update	Health problems	Health problems	2nd

In the last part of the analysis, the views of the research participants on the service quality of the social services are examined. According to the results of Figure 2, the fourth group agreed more, compared to the other three groups, about

the need to improve the services provided in all questions. In contrast, the third group had higher mean scores on opinions about the need for a better environment, better collaboration between services, and better service from staff.

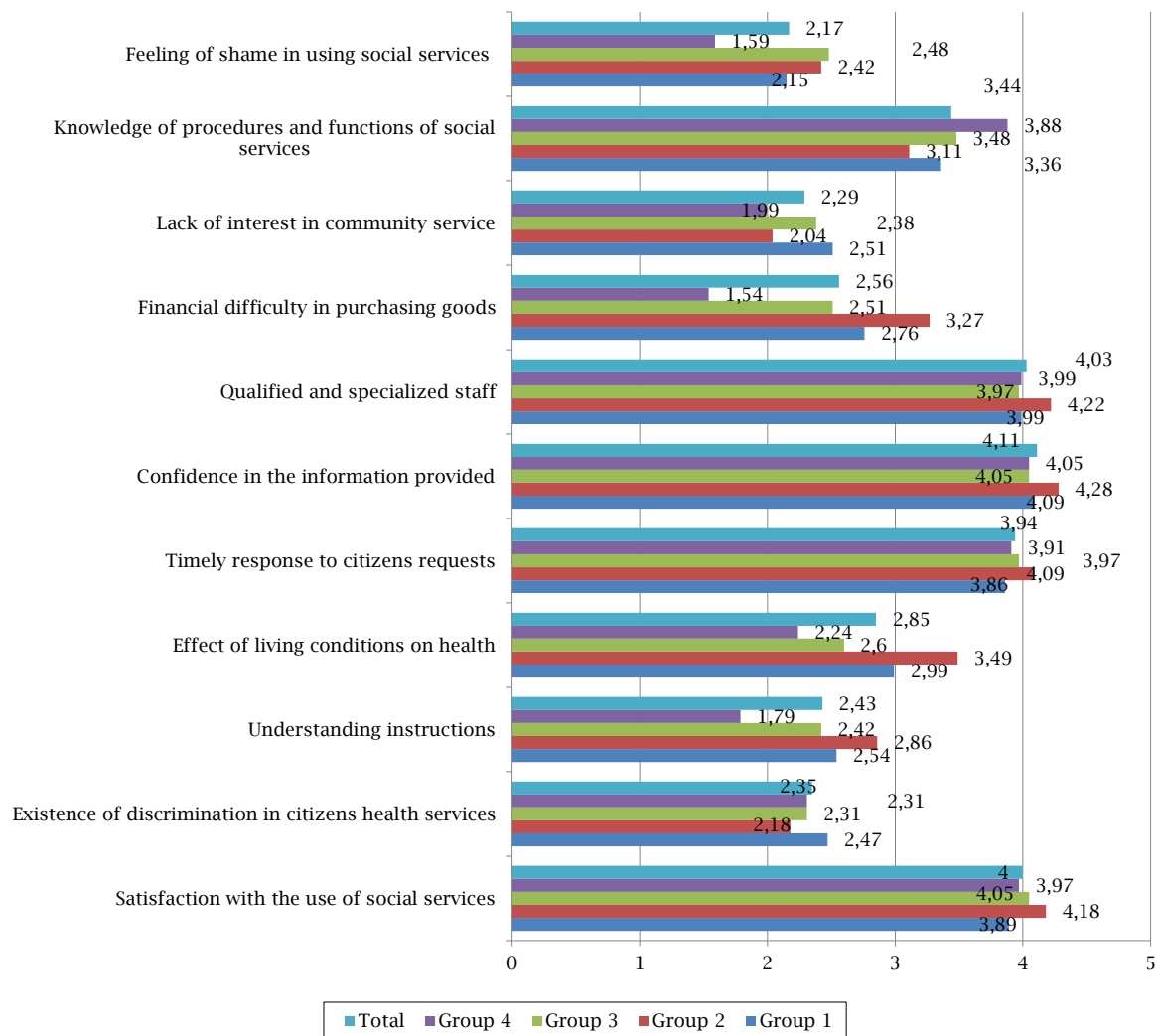
Figure 2. Average values for satisfaction with social services



In the questions about satisfaction with the use of social services, all four groups disagreed that there is discrimination in health services. In relation

to the effect of living conditions, a moderate agreement on health was found in the second group (mean = 3,49) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Average values of general questions for social services



In relation to the social safety net and the coverage of citizens' needs, the responses of the survey participants showed similar views in all four groups with minor differences (Table 4).

Table 4. Social safety net

<i>Citizen's views</i>	<i>Group 1</i>	<i>Group 2</i>	<i>Group 3</i>	<i>Group 4</i>	<i>Total</i>
The social safety net is sufficient to cover basic needs	1,70	1,46	1,83	1,63	1,67
The implemented social policy is socially justified	3,16	2,96	3,33	3,05	3,14
The social policy implemented covers basic economic needs	3,11	2,69	3,15	2,89	3,00
Individual needs are met with the help received	3,06	2,66	3,13	2,88	2,97
There are people with bigger problems	2,86	2,49	2,87	2,92	2,80
The help received corresponds to the existing problems	4,20	3,93	4,18	4,65	4,23
With the help received, people will "get on their feet"	3,05	2,75	3,11	3,28	3,05
Cessation of assistance means an improvement in the person's condition	2,84	2,32	3,08	3,19	2,86

5. DISCUSSION

Social intervention programs that respond directly to the social problems of citizens can contribute to the individual association with the cycle of poverty. An integrated intervention must have full knowledge of all the dimensions and elements of those that shape poverty. The development of citizens' skills and abilities is the means to lift the individual out of poverty (Labarere et al., 2001).

In the last decade, the number of population groups with issues of social exclusion has increased. Social integration and labor market programs are

ensuring social cohesion. At the same time, Greece presents a high rate of aging in its population. In order to have a timely and valid reversal of the phenomenon, appropriate family and child support policies should be implemented (Symeonidou, 2012).

Based on multidisciplinary and holistic approaches, alongside biological factors, socio-economic, psychological, and environmental factors have a significant impact on the development of the health of the general population. The effects of social capital and especially social networks on health status, the demand or use of health services,

and the quality of life of the population have attracted the interest of the international research community (Hawe & Shiell, 2000).

Social capital is a relatively new and very important concept, as it includes a number of factors such as social cohesion, trust, participation, and reciprocity while contributing to the understanding and interpretation of various behaviors that have an effect on indicators of social-economic development, but also in health indicators. In the international literature, there is a largely documented relationship between social capital and health, socioeconomic development, quality of life, and the very functioning of a democratic society (Sarracino & Mikucka, 2016; Sotiropoulos, 2005).

In Greece, the local government has taken on more responsibilities, with the result that it now essentially carries out the actions that previously belonged to the central administration. The reforms made in order to achieve this change aimed at the regional decentralization of the services provided by the state. The LGOs have a broad institutional framework for social protection interventions, without of course this being linked to the corresponding adequacy of resources given that in Greece (in contrast to EU countries) the LGOs do not have their own tax resources that would increase their autonomy, as they rely exclusively on their financing from the central administration or from the community structural funds.

What should be taken into account in the service of users is that the evaluation criterion of satisfaction is not only the positive result. An important role in the level of user satisfaction is played by the staff of the services and the interaction they have with the citizens (Krowinski & Steiber, 1996).

There are many factors that contribute to and shape the degree of satisfaction or the degree of dissatisfaction of users, as this is also influenced by subjective goals. Therefore, satisfaction indicators record citizens' personal evaluations, while reflecting preferences and expectations (Ware, 1983).

The opinion of service users is the main indicator of service quality (Oikonomopoulos et al., 2000). The quality of care and the satisfaction of citizens are linked to the characteristics of a service that distinguish it from other services. Therefore, it is easier to describe quality dimensions than to define quality itself (Raftopoulos, 2005).

According to Deming (1986), real profit comes from loyal customers and not from satisfied ones. The degree of satisfaction depends on factors such as the expectations that users have from the service they turn to, socioeconomic characteristics, and the influence of psychosocial factors (Galanis et al., 2020).

Social intervention programs that respond to the difficulties of everyday life can precisely outline the way each individual factor is interconnected and contributes to poverty. An integrated intervention must have full knowledge of all the dimensions and factors that shape the cycle of poverty (Locker & Dunt, 1978).

6. CONCLUSION

This study raises and deals with questions about the way social policy is implemented in the country, the effects of the economic recession on the planning and implementation of population relief measures, the degree of involvement of the EU in the formulation

and implementation of social policy, the possibility of Greek and European social policy bringing cohesion to the social fabric of the country so that there is prevention in the new social reality experienced by the country's population, the political will to solve basic social problems that plague the country.

The data of the research focused both on the citizens/served by the services, as well as on the executives working in the same social services. In simple words, the two aspects of the same situation were studied, i.e. how the service provided by the social policy service is perceived by the person served who is in need at the given time and how the executive of the service who at the given time represents the welfare state and the planned social policy. In addition, the social characteristics of the sample were taken into account and the satisfaction derived by the citizen from the use of the specific services was studied. It is important to mention that the researchers would like to mention that the results of the executives' questionnaire will be further analyzed.

The interest in the present study is focused on the real conditions experienced by citizens and mainly on the lack of possibility of full participation in the society in which they live. Limited or insufficient income is only one factor in the deprivation experienced by the "socially excluded". In addition, the fact of access and the services provided are of the utmost importance. These include health, education, housing, welfare, etc. Therefore, one direction of social policy, that can be considered effective, is the targeting and implementation of multidimensional measures that will not only promote income policy but will strengthen the social integration of citizens.

The results of the research showed that citizens derive satisfaction from the use of social services, and this may be due in combination to the fact that they know the procedures and operation of the services, with the short waiting time, the specialized staff, and the trust in the information provided. In the survey questions about satisfaction with the use of social services, the second group of the sample presented the highest average value which was equal to 4,18 (five-point scale). The third group followed, with a mean value of 4,05, and all the others had a mean score below 4 corresponding to the agreed category (Figure 3). In the more recent literature, there has been no positive response to citizen satisfaction. Specifically, the population with a lower income did not satisfy their health coverage needs in relation to the higher incomes, while the satisfaction with the use of health services was characterized as moderate/poor/very poor. There appears to be a link between income and improved health, as higher income means more resources for prevention, care, and access to social services. At this point, there is a convergence of the literature with the findings of the thesis based on which, the general picture that exists is that it consists of people with low motor activity, health, vitality, and low psychology, while higher income is associated with higher values on all scales physical and mental health (Chatzikonstantinidou, 2023).

The research findings demonstrate that there are citizens who in the past would not come to social services for the problems they face (we have people with skills (60,7%), citizens who are motivated to increase their personal skills and expand their abilities, as well as citizens who will "give back" to society for help that they received. The information about "motivation to grow" is

a very important element that emerges and this is reflected in the results of the survey, as they believe that with the “help they receive” people will get back on their feet.

Satisfaction is assessed by the difference between the expectation that the consumer/user has from the services and what he enjoys. According to LeVois et al. (1981), there is a large percentage of patients who declare that they are more satisfied than they really are in order to have more favorable treatment from the medical and nursing staff, in contrast to patients who express indifference to the evaluation process as they consider that there will be no long-term or short-term change in their health status (LeVois et al., 1981).

Based on the above and taking into account the research data, we can on the one hand focus on the positive and encouraging elements, such as the fact that all groups in the sample derive satisfaction from the use of social services, do not consider that they experience discrimination, trust the information provided, on the other hand, we should focus on the chronic plagues the Greek services, such as the better cooperation between the services and the addition of additional services provided, as it seems that there is a neutral attitude to the adequacy of the coverage of the needs from the received social protection assistance. The latter

can be linked to the needs of citizens that are not covered and therefore the corresponding social policy should be redefined, not only in the direction of strengthening the benefits policy but mainly towards the strengthening of measures to help individuals get back on their feet and offer new actively in society.

The limitations of this specific research effort are located in the spatial aspect, as the data collection comes from the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. It would be of particular interest to conduct a comparative analysis with a representative sample of another Regional Unit of Greece.

It should be pointed out that the researchers continue to process the data in depth, as both quantitative and qualitative data can illustrate the analysis of the profile of social services users regarding the satisfaction they derive from their use in Greece. In addition, the degree to which implemented national social policy relief measures allow individuals to stand on their own feet is studied. The analysis of the executives' questionnaire is expected to make a decisive contribution to this. Therefore, it is reasonable to understand that the research captures the perspective of both social service users and staff.

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