

LEGISLATIVE ASPECTS OF POVERTY AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL PROVISION IN SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT: *Poverty as a global problem negatively affects the quality of life of individuals. The article deals with the most important legal regulations related to the issue of poverty and social exclusion in Slovakia, with a link to EU documents and conventions. It identifies definitions and concepts of poverty together with ways of measuring it in Slovakia. It determines the key factors that contribute to the deepening of poverty with an emphasis on regional disparities. The main goal of the article is to analyze the current legislative situation in the area of poverty and social exclusion through individual legislative elements and to identify the institutional provision of the issue in Slovakia.*

KEY WORDS: *concepts of poverty, legislation, measurement of poverty, poverty, social exclusion*

INTRODUCTION

Poverty was and still is a social phenomenon that is in the constant focus of attention of all members of society. It affects the lives of individuals and families in a fundamental way. It concerns all age categories of the population. It occurs in different forms and intensity in every country of the world. It is characterized by its complexity; therefore, it is necessary to understand the various forms and phenomena that are inherently related to it. Poverty as such is never a separate problem, a person living in poverty or at risk of poverty faces many other disadvantages and problems. Poverty is a permanent social problem which, due to the influence of various negative events, is currently on the rise. Following on from the above, the main goal of the article is to analyze the current legislative situation in the area of poverty and social exclusion through individual legislative elements and to identify the institutional provision of the issue in Slovakia.

LEGISLATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF POVERTY IN SLOVAKIA

Although poverty is considered a social phenomenon, it is necessary to emphasize its multidimensional nature and other aspects that are inherently related to it. Among these we can include economic and psychological manifestations. The problem of poverty must therefore be seen as a phenomenon that is not only manifested in the social sphere of the individual, but its effects also affect many other segments of a person's life. It is perceived as a measure that allows or does not allow an individual to satisfy his life needs. It is most often associated with a lack of individual or family income. In situations where the individual is not able to ensure the satisfaction of the necessary life needs by his own means, he becomes dependent on the help of the environment. The neighborhood can be represented, for example, with the help of state institutions or help from loved ones (Tokárová 2003). For society, poverty represents an important economic and political phenomenon because it creates social tension that can adversely affect the political and economic stability of society (Bočáková 2021).

It is poverty that is a significant obstacle to the application of human rights. Within certain limits, it deprives an individual of freedom and opportunities

for self-development, it manifests itself in the present, but its effects are also significantly reflected in the future of a person. Exclusion from access to basic rights to housing, social care, education, work, but also social exclusion in a general sense is intricately linked to the issue of poverty (Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic 2014).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), to which the Slovak Republic subscribes, is the first international document that enshrines the rights belonging to every person. It is a basic standard of human rights, which, although not binding, can be seen as the first international "catalogue" of human rights. From the beginning, it was considered a success because it united often not only different, but also opposing political regimes. It also serves as a model for other contracts and declarations (TASR 2018). Among the other international conventions to which the Slovak Republic declares and is a contracting party are, for example: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Revised European Social Charter, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (National Framework Strategy for Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty 2020).

Terms such as poverty or social exclusion do not have a direct definition in the Slovak legal system. This fact complicates the adoption and implementation of individual steps in the area of poverty reduction and elimination of social exclusion. Even the Constitution of the Slovak Republic does not provide a direct specification or provision on poverty as such, but some articles are relevant and linked to the issue of poverty. Basic legal protection against poverty is defined by Art. 39 par. 2 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, which guarantees the right of a citizen in material need to such assistance as is necessary to ensure his basic life needs. In the context of this article, the equivalent of the concept of poverty is the concept of material deprivation. Financial need is a state when the income of household members does not reach the amount of the subsistence minimum and they do not know or cannot ensure or increase their income through their own work, the exercise of property rights or other rights to property, or the application of claims (Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family

of the Slovak Republic 2024). Art. 12 par. 1 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic emphasizes equality and equal dignity for all citizens of the Slovak Republic.

A key tool in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is national legislation, which creates a legal and terminological environment, defines specific measures, the conditions of their use and utilization, and at the same time target groups. In this area, the Slovak Republic is one of the most advanced countries in the world with a long tradition of "social" legislation. National regulations cover a wide variety of situations and events that require the intervention of the state and other entities. Legislative regulations regulate in detail areas such as the labor market, employment services, the provision of state social benefits, social assistance and assistance in material need, the social insurance system, the functioning of social services, the social protection of children and social guardianship, the functioning of relevant actors and many others (National Framework strategy for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty 2020).

In the matter of concretization of individual legal regulations, the most significant legal regulation in the field of poverty is Act No. 601/2003 Coll. On the living wage and on the amendment of certain laws, Act no. 663/2007 Coll. on the minimum wage and Act no. 448/2008 Coll. on social services and on amendments to Act no. 455/1991 Coll. on trade entrepreneurship (Trade Act) as amended.

Tomeš (2010) understands poverty as a lack that can be manifested in several areas of the life of individuals, namely:

- poverty,
- insufficient income,
- insufficient health,
- insufficient education,
- inadequate living conditions (housing, environment).

CONCEPTS OF POVERTY

The way poverty is defined as a social phenomenon is also largely influenced by the conceptual concept from which the authors of the individual definitions are based. With authors, we can meet the classification of concepts

according to various criteria. The fact that some of them overlap in certain areas is no exception. A common feature is the efforts to combine these concepts into pairs that are in an oppositional position.

Table 1: Concepts of poverty

Access according to available funds	Approach according to life situation
Absolute poverty	Relative poverty
Objective poverty	Subjective poverty
Material poverty	Non-material poverty
Primary poverty	Secondary poverty
Permanent poverty	Temporal poverty

Source: own processing according to Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt, in: Ondrejko, 2009.

The elementary and currently the most frequently used classifications of poverty are its division into absolute poverty and relative poverty. Such a division is especially important for potential debates, but also for the setting of interventions and national policies to tackle poverty.

By the term absolute (extreme) poverty, the World Bank understands a situation where a person has to make do with less than 1.9 international dollars per day. The international dollar is a fictitious currency, indicating what one dollar can buy an American in the United States at a given time. For example, if a dollar were to buy a kilo of rice, in Cambodia this amount would be equivalent to a kilo of rice in their national currency. One international dollar is actually worth only a quarter of a US dollar in Cambodia. People living in absolute poverty cannot cover their basic life needs - food, accommodation and clothing. This poverty is often associated with hunger, malnutrition, disease and low life expectancy. This condition is most common especially in developing countries (Global Education 2024).

Although relative poverty is not as extreme as absolute poverty, it is still profoundly serious and harmful. Relative poverty is a product of social inequality (Mareš 1999). Indicators of relative poverty are factors such as:

- the need for social assistance and social services,
- unemployment and unstable employment,
- unpaid bills and loans.

In some publications, we can also come across the classification under the term moderate poverty, which represents a situation where the income and consumption of the individual and the household are higher than the costs of the so-called food basket, but they cannot reach the lowest level of well-being (Arnania-Kepuladze and Kepuladze 2021). The World Bank's international poverty line for moderate poverty depends on the classification of a country in a particular income group (low, lower middle or upper middle-income countries). These national poverty lines usually correspond to the minimum amount covering the basic consumption basket (Bargain and Aminjonov 2021).

People live in poverty if their income and financial resources are so insufficient that they cannot achieve a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. As a result of poverty, they may experience a significant disadvantage in the field of employment, low income, unsuitable housing, insufficient health care, lifelong learning. They can often be overlooked, marginalized and excluded from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are standard for other people and their access to basic rights can be limited (Slovak Poverty Network 2007).

Poor people perceive their poverty as social inequality and as society's reluctance to address inequality. Poverty is linked to social exclusion. It can be accompanied by depression and other negative feelings (Ondrejkoč, 2009). The most at risk of poverty in Europe are:

- large families,
- incomplete families,
- disabled persons,
- seniors,
- unemployed, long-term unemployed,
- people returning from serving a sentence,
- persons suffering from socio-pathological phenomena (drug, alcohol addiction, etc.).

In many countries with advanced democracies, social gaps, unemployment, social marginalization of entire population groups are growing (Bočáková 2021).

Poverty can be divided in terms of assessment. Such an assessment contains a kind of political decision in the field of social policy and assistance, in that the poverty line is the criterion by which it is decided which citizens are dependent on special benefits and benefits from the state to supplement their own income. It is important that poverty is based on some objective approach. However, it is important to perceive the subjective perception of poverty. In terms of assessment, poverty can be divided into objective and subjective.

Objective poverty is based on determining the poverty line based on specific objective criteria and regardless of the opinions of people who are considered poor. Objective poverty is a state where, in the opinion of society, basic human needs are not met at a socially acceptable level (Tokárová 2003). The basic idea is that a human being has certain basic needs that must be met - food, clothing, housing, etc. Therefore, the task of the competent representatives of the state is to determine, based on certain objective parameters and measurement results, the amount of income that is sufficient to meet all relevant needs.

Subjective poverty is a concept that is not based on objectively determined standards. It is based on the feelings of individuals or families who feel poor, regardless of what the official, determined poverty line is. The rate of subjective poverty in society can be and usually is higher than the rate of objective poverty (Bánovčinová 2023).

Other concepts of poverty: registered poverty, unregistered poverty, monetary poverty, structural poverty, chronic poverty, cyclical poverty, situational poverty, social poverty, political poverty, global poverty and others.

FACTORS OF PERSISTENCE AND DEEPENING OF POVERTY

Several authors (Seccombe 2000; Haughton and Khandker 2009) include in particular:

- a) geographical isolation of regions, insufficient level of resources, climatic conditions, economic, political and market stability, global and regional security - monitored at the regional level),

- b) level of infrastructure development - level of roads, electrification, availability of schools and medical facilities, development of human resources, access to employment, social mobility - with relation to the local level,
- c) demographic characteristics - age composition of household members, household size, number of economically active members, state of health, education - manifested at the micro level.

According to Ondrejko^{vič} (2009), in the conditions of Slovakia, the causes of the emergence and increase of poverty can be considered above all:

1. Significant changes in the age structure of the population, which were manifested by unfavorable demographic developments, namely a decrease in the population in the age group 0-14 years. For this reason, increased emphasis is placed on the care of this age group - for example, on the support of health care and education. An increased number of residents in the post-productive age is recorded, which means that the state must pay attention to pension health care, but also to social care for the elderly.
2. Unsolved issues of the integration of the Roma population into the official labor market, obstacles to their economic and social integration, and the tension between minority and majority culture.
3. Extensive changes in cultural values, social relations, families and the nature of work - significant changes in the perception of the family were noted. In the past, the extended family was a natural protection against poverty. Currently, we can observe the disruption of family ties, the weakening of belonging and responsibility of family members.

Among the causes of the increase in poverty in our country, it is currently possible to include the global economic and energy crisis and inflation. These significantly contribute to the growing number of individuals and families who find themselves in a state of threat of poverty.

Among the groups of persons who are more exposed to the risk of poverty, we can include individuals who are carriers of some key negative factors. These factors include:

- unemployment or low-quality (underpaid or insecure) employment - limits access to adequate financial security, which can lead to social isolation,
- low educational attainment and skills - negatively affect the possibility of quality employment, which also affects potential self-development and participation in society,
- size and type of family - large families and families with one parent (single parent) are more at risk of poverty - they have higher costs and lower incomes and it is also more complicated to get a well-paid job,
- gender – women are more at risk of poverty, evidence is unequally financially valued jobs, lower pensions,
- belonging to an ethnic minority (EAPN 2007).

INSTITUTIONAL PROVISION OF THE ISSUE OF POVERTY IN SLOVAKIA

The elimination of poverty and related social exclusion is included among the long-term priorities of public policies in the conditions of the Slovak Republic. According to the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (2024), this issue is contained in legal regulations, but also in conceptual and strategic documents of the Slovak Republic. In the mentioned documents, the Slovak Republic declares its obligations in the field of protection of human, economic, social and cultural rights, as defined in an entire range of international agreements and conventions. It defines a set of relevant principles, goals and tools for solving the problem.

The issue of solving poverty and social exclusion falls under the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. In the field of employment services, the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family ensures the implementation of policies. In the field of social affairs, the competence is divided between the state administration and local government. However, it is important to emphasize the cross-sectional nature of this issue. It is therefore necessary to involve all relevant authorities and entities at the national, regional and local level in order to achieve the most effective results in the solution of poverty and social exclusion. It is necessary to emphasize not only multi-ministerial interventions in the issue, but also multi-sector ones -

not only the aforementioned entities, but also non-governmental non-profit organizations cooperating with persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion must participate in the creation of complex strategies and legislative measures.

The National framework strategy for promoting social inclusion and combating poverty is a strategic document that systematizes approaches to solving poverty and social exclusion and develops them under a unified framework. It has the nature of a non-legislative document, which is not directly legally binding and is informative in nature. It imposes on the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family the obligation to coordinate the activities of the central bodies of state administration and other organizations in fulfilling the tasks arising from it. Due to the multi-sectoral nature of poverty, the draft resolution imposes the obligation to ensure the fulfillment of the tasks arising from the strategy on several central state administration bodies (Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic) (Pagáčová 2020). Its content is based on the Europe 2020 strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights and national conceptual and strategic materials related to social inclusion. The European Pillar of Social Rights emphasizes the needs of social Europe more intensively and calls on individual states to fulfill them. It was announced in 2017 and became the strategy for social Europe. Its purpose is to introduce new and more effective rights for citizens. It contains twenty key principles, divided into three areas, namely:

1. Equality of opportunities and access to the labor market includes 4 principles, which include: education, vocational training and lifelong learning, gender equality, equality of opportunities, active employment support.
2. Fair working conditions - these principles include: safe and adaptable employment, wages, information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissal, social dialogue and worker involvement, work-life balance, healthy, safe and adapted working environment and data protection.
3. Social protection and inclusion are dedicated to the principles of: childcare and child support, social protection, unemployment benefits, minimum income, old-age income and pensions, health care,

inclusion of people with disabilities, long-term care, housing and assistance for the homeless, access to basic services.

Table 2: The main goals of the Europe 2020 strategy in the European Union and Slovakia

Goals at EU level	National goals for Slovakia
Increasing the employment rate of persons aged 20-64 to 75%.	Increasing the employment rate of persons aged 20-64 to 72%.
Increase the level of investment in research and development to 3% of GDP.	Increase the level of investment in research and development to 1% of GDP.
Reduce CO2 emissions (compared to 1990) by 20%.	Reduction of non-ETS CO2 emission (non-ETS) by 20%.
Obtain 20% of energy from renewable sources.	Use of energy from renewable sources in final energy consumption 19.2%.
Increase efficiency in energy use by 20%.	Energy efficiency 30.3%.
Reduce the dropout rate of compulsory schooling below 10%.	Reduce the dropout rate of compulsory schooling below 6%.
Increase the share of residents aged 30-34 with completed university education to at least 40%.	Increase the share of residents aged 30-34 with completed university education to at least 40%.
Reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million.	Reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 170,000.

Source: own processing according to the National Framework Strategy for the Support of Social Inclusion and the Fight against Poverty (2020).

The main tool for reducing the risk of poverty is work, the possibility of employment and income from work.

In the issue of institutional security for the elimination of poverty and social exclusion, the aforementioned cooperation is necessary not only at the international level, but also at the national level. All levels of administration in Slovakia should be effectively and adequately involved in solving the problem of poverty and social exclusion. The issue of poverty is one of the areas where it is neither very possible, nor appropriate, nor meaningful to separate the tasks and competences of individual subjects of state administration and local self-

government, and therefore it is adequate to leave the joint responsibility of all levels of the state in this area. However, according to the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic (2023), in order to increase the efficiency of public administration, the competitiveness of Slovakia, increase the quality of life of citizens, ease the tension between the state administration and territorial self-government, and create prerequisites for their more effective cooperation, there should be an expansion and division of competences at the territorial level. self-government. They also appeal to the need to explicitly define the scope of territorial self-government in the constitution to ensure the stability of the system.

According to the authors of the Guidelines for a Successful Slovakia (2023), changes in competencies should primarily concern 11 areas, and these may have an impact on the development of poverty not only in individual areas, but also in Slovakia as a whole. Within the poverty issue, these key areas are:

1. Economic functions - social and economic development, territorial planning, tax and fee policy in local taxes and fees, compilation, approval and control of the budget.
2. Housing - construction, management and maintenance of communal apartments, social housing.
3. Healthcare - establishment, construction and administration of ambulatory care, regional hospitals, health centers.
4. Social assistance - social services, nursing service, provision of social assistance benefits.
5. Education - network of regional education, construction, establishment, cancellation and management of kindergartens, elementary schools, gymnasiums etc.

Poverty and social exclusion are, in spite of the mentioned potential changes, a very extensive, society-wide problem, the solution of which requires a holistic approach of all competent entities in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, but also at the international level.

CONCLUSION

Despite the aforementioned absence of a uniform definition of poverty, it is important that the concept of poverty be defined. A suitable definition should serve three purposes, namely:

1. identification of a group of the poor population, which can be characterized by a different structure (age, education or in terms of gender, location) and also to measure the extent of poverty in a given society,
2. it should make it possible to identify the funds necessary to support the poor, who are entitled to these funds from the state, and at the same time determine their scope,
3. from the point of view of comparison at the international level, it should create comparable conditions for comparing different accepted solutions to this problem (Valná 2002).

In the conditions of the 21st century, the joint action of all actors at the international level, but also within the state, is of inherent importance in the fight against poverty and exclusion. The joint approach must be based on the adopted interventions and measures that will positively influence economic growth and employment, considering the system of modern and more effective social protection. A crucial factor for eliminating poverty and social exclusion is the support of an active labor market and employment policy (Bočáková 2021).

Existing interregional disparities significantly complicate more even regional development, which has an impact on several other areas in society. They require the application of effective tools and policies to reduce them. Within the EU member states, Slovakia has long been one of the countries with significant regional differences, which represent a large-scale structural problem. Regional disparities prevail mainly in the area of jobs, income and unemployment rate, level of education and access to services. Ways to eliminate these disparities can be, for example, strengthening the competences of regions, cities, municipalities, more effective financing through adequate decentralization, increasing European funds for regions, supporting competitiveness. The European funds have proven to be one of the most important tools for mitigating regional disparities since Slovakia joined the EU. An important fact is also the approval of the change

to the map of Slovakia for the provision of regional aid in the years 2024-2027 with higher amounts for investments from the Just Transformation Fund (European Parliament 2023).

According to the National Framework Strategy for Promoting Social Inclusion and Combating Poverty (2020), the following policy measures in this area are key:

1. Support for the integration of the long-term unemployed.
2. Support for increasing the targeted and individualized provision of public employment services and increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of active measures on the labor market.
3. Support for the employment of young people.
4. Supporting the balance between work and family life.
5. Support of access to quality services.
6. Support for the integration of marginalized Roma communities.
7. Support for increasing addressability in the system of social transfers.
8. Support for solving food and material deprivation (providing food, nutrition and material aid for the most dependent groups of people). This measure was supplemented in the interest of eliminating the worst form of poverty through the provision of food, nutrition and material assistance for the most deprived persons. The reason for the creation of this measure was a reaction to the negative impacts of the COVID19 pandemic.

Research is of irreplaceable importance and contribution in the field of solving poverty and problems related to it. Investigating the causes, the current situation, monitoring and evaluating implemented programs and interventions and adopted legislative changes to the quality of life of the affected persons can significantly help in improving the quality and efficiency of the steps implemented to solve this problem.

In order to ensure the highest possible effectiveness of the policies implemented with the aim of eliminating poverty and social exclusion, I recommend above all:

- - ensure a minimum income for all citizens, which will adequately respond to economic changes in society so that the amount of this income ensures the necessary necessities of life,
- increase the availability of housing for vulnerable population groups,
- support the creation of new jobs,
- improve the quality of the education system,
- increase financial support for non-profit organizations dedicated to persons at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

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