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**UNIVERSITY OF RUSE HELD A REGIONAL FORUM
WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION FOR GOOD
EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES
IN THE SOCIAL WORK FIELD**

On March 28th and 29th 2019 at the Angel Kanchev University of Ruse for the third consecutive year the regional forum “Good Educational and Professional Practices in the Social Work Field” was held. The topic discussed at this year’s event was “The Social Worker’s Profession in the 21st Century – Challenges and Opportunities for Development”.

The forum was realised by the partnership of the University of Ruse (professional field Social Work and Social Worker’s Club) and Municipality of Ruse (Health and Social Activities Directorate). Social Assistance Directorate – Ruse, Center Dynamika Association – Ruse, Friendly Support Foundation – Ruse, Equilibrium Association – Ruse, Children and Space Association, Ruse Association of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, National Alliance for Social Responsibility, Bulgarian Association of Social Workers, and Bulgarian Association for Social Work Education were all co-organisers.

The Regional forum has been gradually validating itself as a traditional one for Bulgaria. This is the first initiative in Bulgaria in which total 210 Social Work students and professors, social workers, experts from Social Assistance Directorates, users of social services, providers of social services, and politicians join their efforts to improve the social prestige of the social work education, the profession of the social worker as well as to highlight their visibility and identity in Bulgaria.

In the foyer of the building where the forum was held an exposition of pieces of applied art made by users of social services from Ruse Municipality and other municipalities was presented.

The Rector of University of Ruse Professor Hristo Beloev, DSc welcomed all guests and pointed that it is great honour for the university to host this international forum. He expressed his opinion that the over 30 presentations included in the forum are a premise to the



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even faster development of the social work education and the social worker's profession and that the University of Ruse sets the task to be the moving power in this area as its goal.

Associate Professor Ana Radulescu, PhD – President of International Federation of Social Workers – Europe, Professor Florin Lazar, PhD – member of the Executive committee of the European Association of Schools of Social Work and Regional coordinator for Bulgaria, Herbert Paulischin – Austrian Association of Social Workers – OBDS, professors from the University of Pitesti, Romania (Department of Psychology, Communication Sciences and Social Work) were guests and participants in the event.

Associate Professor Ana Radulescu, PhD opened the regional forum and focused the attention of all participants towards the role of social work and the social workers for sustainable social protection in Europe. She highlighted the fact that in order to achieve improvement in the quality of the human resources in the field of social work Bulgaria needs to have more changes carried out.

The participant of the forum from universities and social services presented in their presentations good educational and professional practices as well as their views on the problems and the profession of social worker in the 21st century as well the perspectives for its development. During the discussion panel experience was exchanged and some questions about the education in social work in Bulgaria and Romania, motivation for the realisation of graduates in social work, crediting of social workers as a factor to encourage their professional development and growth, the hardships in the work of social workers in villages etc. were discussed. Professor Florin Lazar, PhD greeted the participants on the behalf of the president of the European Association of Schools of Social Work Professor Nino Zganek, PhD. He presented a presentation about the European dimensions of the Social Work education in Romania to the participants.

The presentation of Herbert Paulischin about Social work and human dignity as means to overcome barriers in the relationship between social workers from different countries and consolidation in the name of human rights and well-being, no matter the conflicts between their countries was of great interest to the audience.



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During the first day of the event the results from the Essay Competition on a Socially Significant Topic which was held in connection to the World Social Work day, March 19th 2019 and within the framework of the Regional Forum were announced. Out of 66 essays in total submitted by high-school students, students from Bulgarian and Romanian Universities and social workers were ranked in different categories. All participants received certificates. Eleven participants were ranked on first place, ten on second and five on third. All of them received diplomas and awards.

At the end of the forum Assoc. Prof. Ana Radulescu, PhD – President of IFSW-Europe together with the President of the Bulgarian Association of Social Workers – Valio Hristov, the coordinator of the event – Assoc. Prof. Sasho Nunev, DSc of Social Work, Assoc. Prof. Lyudmila Vekova, PhD – Chairwoman of the Bulgarian Association of Social Work Education and the participants in the forum joined around the view that its necessary to take measures to protect and develop the social work education and social work profession as a crucial factor to the quality of human resources in social services and the institutions for social assistance as the following goes:

Inclusion of professional field 3.4 Social Work in the list of priority professional field in the country that require protection and adequate financing. Reasons for this are the following:

- Not enough specialists who are qualified and have the needed education in social work with bachelor and master's degree in the field of social work. The tendencies predicted that indicate the need for delivering social services to people in the following 20 years on national and European level, hence the rising need of specialists in the field of social work;
- High share at national level of people who occupy the position of workers but have education in a field different of that in social work and does not provide the expertise needed as well the adequate quality and effectiveness of their work. Tendencies for deprofessionalisation which may worsen to a significant degree not only the quality of human resources but also the functioning of the social work system;



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- Not enough motivation for graduates in social work to develop in that field due to low salaries and low public prestige. This creates a serious lack in competent and qualified worker and together with that quick leaving from the system of educated and qualified workers.

Regulation of the social work education and the social worker profession. Bulgaria is one of the few countries in Europe that does not have regulation to a field of vital importance to the welfare of the society and to the sustainable functioning of the system for social protection. Take actions to protect the social worker profession and improve the quality of social services and users service.

Adoption and introduction of standards for the social work education based off a competent approach that guarantees the status of a social worker as a specialist with specific education and qualification.

Adoption of legislation for the creation of a system for the registration of those who have acquired the educational degrees Bachelor and Master's in social work and their licensing for their right to practice the social worker profession as well as their career development based off accumulation of credits.

Creation of a Council of Social Work as a non-governmental, independent nationally represented and with a certain legal status organisation of the academic and professional social workers society in Bulgaria, which unites them and creates the conditions needed for quality education, practice, and possibilities for professional development and realisation of social justice. Creation of structures in the frames of the Council that evaluate and certificate the competence in social work in accordance to the international and European classifiers.

Organising and realising public and media campaigns for promotion of good educational and professional practices in the social work field and promotion of the social work education and the social worker profession and improvement in the public awareness about their humane and socially responsible mission and function.

Creation of an electronic catalogue for good educational and professional practices in the social work field and formation of the basis of and information bank which contributes to



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the exchange of ideas and practices for improvement in the relationship between education and practice in the social work field.

Promotion of the cross-border exchange of good educational and professional practices in the social work field.

Organising and realising an annual national conference of social work for the academic and professional social workers society in Bulgaria, which unites their actions in the names of scientific and methodical justification of social work in an educational and practical dimension.

Adoption and application of standards for work environment and professional ethics with the participation of all stakeholders.

Creation and application of standards and a system for supervision during the training of social work students and in the professional activity of social workers.

Associate Professor Sasho Nunev, DSc of Social Work
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Coordinator of the Regional Forum with International Participation – 2019
Angel Kanchev University of Ruse

