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Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Social Problems and Poverty of the Elderly in Slovakia

Abstract

This article analyses the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the social problems and poverty of the elderly. Quarantine measures caused increased isolation, loneliness, psychological problems and limited access to medical care, which negatively affected their physical and mental health. The demographic shift towards an aging population presents seniors with complex challenges, including the struggle to meet basic needs and live on the poverty line. These related problems, associated with a lack of attention from the environment, have a negative impact on their quality of life. In the article, we analyse the state of poverty development, based on current statistics. The current isolation, loneliness and loss of independence are intertwined with low income and the possibility of institutionalization, which has increased with the advent of the pandemic situation and the economic crisis.

Keywords

poverty of seniors, pandemic Covid-19, statistical analyses of poverty, ageing

1. Introduction

Over the past two years, the world has found itself struggling with an unprecedented global pandemic that has significantly affected all spheres of human life. The economic crisis caused by the Coronavirus brought with it not only challenges in the field of public health, but also fundamental economic and social impacts on almost all groups of the population; those most affected are women, seniors, single mothers or long-term employees over 55 years of age. The group mostly at risk of poverty are seniors, who are not included in the labour market and are dependent on the social services system. As a result of their low income, they cannot secure adequate health and social care. Another group at risk of poverty are the Roma people, who due to reduced mental health, become unaccepted by society. Their level of poverty is inherited from generation to generation, which we call intergenerational poverty. The study revealed a positive correlation between family environment, social environment conditions and poverty. The identification of these relationships, in the context of the marginalized Roma environment, points to the need for specially targeted and culturally sensitive interventions. Social factors such as discrimination, poverty and lack of access to resources can negatively affect their quality of life.¹ Other study research studies² figure out the correlation between age and gender, psycho well-being and pandemic crisis. To a greater extent, women showed lower emotional resistance and deteriorated psychological health compared to men during the pandemic, while women (45.4%) experienced worse social isolation compared to men (34.6%).

The Covid-19 pandemic has put a lot of pressure on the provision of social services for vulnerable groups. The closure of some services and restrictions on movement have limited the access of vulnerable groups to important basic services; the number of day-patients has decreased and deaths have been observed in social care facilities.³

¹ L.L. Cintulová, Z. Budayová, I. Juhásová, *Health of Roma People living in marginalized Communities in Slovakia*, "Clinical Social Work and Health Intervention" (2023) 14 Nr 1, pp. 7–15.

² L.L. Cintulová, L. Radková, Z. Budayová, *Mental health of Roma women in post-covid era*, "Acta Missiologica" (2022) 16 Nr 2, pp. 116–129.

³ L.L. Cintulová, Z. Budayová, S. Buzalová, *Historical development and transformation of senior social services in Slovakia* (monography), Ireland 2022, International scientific board of catholic researchers and teachers in Ireland.

The struggle to provide basic needs and living on the poverty line represent serious challenges for seniors, which can have a negative impact on their physical and mental health. These difficulties are often accompanied by a lack of attention from those around them, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and loneliness in older individuals. Low income and the possibility of institutionalization only compound the complexity of this situation. It is apparent that seniors face many difficulties, including the loss of independence and the need to cope with the possibility of the disintegration of their previous life values. These values were created and shaped during the productive period of their lives. The fact that they have to cope with difficult life situations in the late stages of life can lead to increased stress and emotional burden.

It is important to realize that the negative impact of these factors on the health of seniors does not only have individual consequences, but can also have broader implications for society. Adequate support and care for seniors, with an emphasis on their social, psychological and economic needs, can play a key role in ensuring their dignified and quality life in the face of these significant challenges.

The fact that there is a positive correlation with poverty, suggests that family environment and social conditions may be important factors in shaping the economic situation of individuals and families. For example, limited access to social, economic or educational resources in the family environment can contribute to poverty, while the transition to seniority becomes more complicated in terms of financial security. The long duration of the coronavirus pandemic also has an impact on the risk of poverty⁴. The pandemic has had significant effects on mental health. Study has explored how age and gender intersect with mental health outcomes, including stress, anxiety, and depression. Women are more likely to report higher levels of psychological distress, especially at senior age.⁵

⁴ K. Bundzelová, L.L. Cintulová, S. Buzalová, *Sociálna práca s osobami vyššieho veku*, Bratislava 2023, Vysoká škola zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce sv. Alžbety v Bratislave.

⁵ L.L. Cintulová, P. Beňo, T. Pavlovičová, *Aspects of social services and wellbeing in postcovid era*, „Int J Health New Tech Soc Work“ (2023) 18 Nr 3, pp. 106–114.

2. Risks of an aging population and aspects of poverty

In line with Eurostat's 2011 forecasts, by 2050, the world's demographic structure will change fundamentally, when the number of people over 60 exceeds the number of children under 15. This demographic shift means that every inhabitant of the planet will be a member of the older generation. Specifically in Slovakia, it is expected that by 2070 the share of seniors in the total population will increase to 35%, which undoubtedly represents a challenge for the social and health system. The current Slovak pensioner, as a result of his living situation and quality of life, faces the risk of social exclusion, gradually becoming a marginal figure in various areas of social participation. Leškova⁶ stated that basic living costs are a source of stress and worry for seniors, as their financial resources are insufficient. This reaction is understandable, given the given economic situation. Pensioners are a vulnerable group at risk of poverty, due to low incomes and high living costs and rising prices. For them, poverty is a concrete reality that affects their daily life. Some seniors therefore have to completely change their lifestyle.

Study based on the analyses of the impact of pandemic crisis on the stigmatization of vulnerable people, have shown that they face increase rate of poverty due low living standard and lack of health care. During the pandemic, many of inhabitants did not access to health care in the time they need it, it caused more social exclusion.⁷

In Europe, children and the elderly, who had limited opportunities to earn income from work, were traditionally considered at-risk groups for poverty. This phenomenon is called old poverty and was typical of the first half of the 20th century. The old poverty was replaced by a new poverty.⁸ Authors⁹ in the study expressed that the new poverty is a phenomenon which arose in connection with industrialization and globalization, and which changed the conditions of people's existence. The new poverty applies mainly to those

⁶ A. Lešková, *Príbeh staroby alebo život seniora optikou sociálnej zraniteľnosti*, „Slovenské pohľady na literatúru, umenie a vedu“ (2018) Nr 10, pp. 29–33.

⁷ Z. Budayová, L.L. Cintulová, *Stigmatization and harm reduction of drug users in post-covid era*, „Acta Missiologica“ (2023) 17 Nr 1, pp. 122–130.

⁸ A. Banovčinová, *Chudoba a sociálne vylúčenie*, Trnava 2023, TypiUniversitatis Tyrnaviensis, p. 185.

⁹ S. Miháliková, E. Bútorová (eds), *Starší ľudia medzi nami. Kde sme, kam smerujeme*, „Sociológia—Slovak Sociological Review“ (2023) 55 Nr 3, pp. 370–374.

who are marginalized in the labour market or have low incomes from paid activities. The new poverty is manifested by material and social deprivation and is characterized by developed and transforming countries. New poverty is a phenomenon that occurs in the 20th and 21st centuries, in countries with a high level of industrial development and social protection. It is poverty that is born in contrast to wealth and that is associated with exclusion from the labour market, education and health care.¹⁰ Bočáková¹¹ states that differences in one's wealth and low employment income are the main determinants of poverty and emphasises that low income has a direct impact on poverty, but is also related to low old-age pensions.

3. Influence of pandemic on the poverty

Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, global progress in poverty reduction has stopped. More than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty in the previous three decades. The incomes of the least developed countries grew. By 2015, it was possible to reduce the global rate of extreme poverty by more than half. Subsequently, the pace of reduction slowed down due to weak global economic growth. The economic recession caused by Covid-19 and later, the war in Ukraine destroyed this progress. The global goal of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030 is unrealizable. According to current trends, in 2030, 574 million people—almost 7% of the world's population, mostly in Africa—will still live in extreme poverty. The largest annual increase since global poverty monitoring began in 1990 was recorded in 2020, in which the number of extremely poor people increased by more than 70 million. If we use a broader definition of poverty, almost half of the world—more than 3 billion people—live on less than \$6.85 a day, the average of national poverty lines for upper-middle-income countries. According to this criterion, poverty is widespread and persistent even outside of Africa. Poverty threatens the prospects of billions of people around the world. The data confirms that the income losses of the poorest 40% of the world's population were double that of the

¹⁰ K. Bundzelová, L.L. Cintulová, S. Buzalová, *Sociálna práca s osobami vyššieho veku*, Bratislava 2023, Vysoká škola zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce sv. Alžbety v Bratislave, p. 119.

¹¹ O. Bočáková, *Pohľad na chudobu cez prizmu súčasnej rodiny, chudoba ako teoretický a praktický problém*, zborník vedeckých štúdií, Trnava 2021, Trnava university, pp. 71–95.

richest 20%.¹² According to the World Bank in 2020, the pandemic has become a factor in global inequality, which has increased again after a long period. Its negative effects were felt most by those who were already in the greatest poverty. Their incomes fell twice as much as the incomes of the richest. In addition, they faced serious obstacles in health and education, which could have lasting consequences on their future standard of living. Based on the available information, it is clear that the pandemic caused an increase in poverty, especially among people of retirement age, which also affected Slovakia.¹³

4. Research and statistical analyses

The aim of the study is to analyse statistical data that includes the effects of inflation and the pandemic situation on poverty and the quality of life of older groups of citizens who are most at risk of social exclusion. Inflation, coupled with the coronavirus pandemic, poses a complex challenge to the economy and social stability. The effects of these factors on the elderly population are subjected to careful analysis to understand how these trends affect their financial situation and overall quality of life. Statistics on poverty among older people in the context of inflation and the pandemic allow us to identify increased risks in terms of income, access to health care and social integration. High inflation can lead to the devaluation of money and, consequently, to the loss of the purchasing power of pensions, which has a direct impact on the living conditions of senior citizens.

The results of this analysis should serve as a basis for the creation of targeted policies and measures that should mitigate the effects of inflation and the pandemic on the elderly population. According to the data of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter ŠÚSR), there was a gradual increase in inflation measured by the consumer price index. In 2020, the average annual inflation was 1.9%, which represents a slight increase compared to the previous year. The following year, in 2021, inflation rose to 3.2%, signalling an acceleration in price growth. In 2022, the situation worsened significantly, when inflation

¹² A. Widuto, *Energy poverty in the EU*, European Parliamentary Research Service 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/> (23.12.2023).

¹³ World bank group, *Correcting course. Poverty and shared prosperity 2022*, Washington DC 2022, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, p. 271.

reached an average value of 12.8%, which indicates a significant increase in the price of goods and services in Slovakia.¹⁴

In January 2022, inflation increased to 8.4%, driven mostly by rising energy and food prices. Year after year price growth in January 2022 reached the highest monthly inflation value in the Slovak Republic for more than 17 years (since July 2004). Both month after month and year after, the prices of the most important items in the consumer basket of Slovak households moved, namely rising food prices by more than 8%, housing and energy prices, and fuel prices by 12.6%. Only the price reduction of clothing and footwear had a moderate dampening effect on a month after month basis. The largest item in the expenditure structure of Slovak households—housing and energy—increased the price growth to a value of 12.6%, which was primarily caused by the increase in regulated energy prices.¹⁵

According to the latest Eurostat statistics (2023), in August 2023, the Eurozone saw annual inflation fall to 5.2%, a slight improvement on the 9.1% recorded the previous year. In the broader context of the European Union (hereafter EU), inflation in August 2023 was set at 5.9%, which represents a decrease compared to 10.1% in 2022. In Slovakia, a decrease in annual inflation was recorded to 9.6% in August 2023, in compared to 13.4% in the previous year, ranking Slovakia third in the EU and first in the eurozone in terms of annual inflation rate.¹⁶

Year-on-year, aggregate inflation reached 7.1% in October 2022. Food was 8.9% more expensive year-on-year, so after 20 months, the growth in their prices fell below the level of 10%. Only bread and cereals had a double-digit rate of price growth, as well as less important food components by weight—such as fish, sugar and confectionery, as well as spices and ingredients. Only oils and fats were cheaper year-on-year by 8.2%. The growth of prices in the housing and energy sector moderated to 5.8% compared to October 2022,¹⁷ which was the lowest

¹⁴ R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, *EU SILC 2020 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia—životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2020, ŠÚ SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

¹⁵ R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2021 indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia, životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2022, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, <https://slovak.statistics.sk> (20.12.2023).

¹⁶ R. Vlačuha, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2023 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*, Bratislava 2023, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

¹⁷ R. Vlačuha R., Y. Kováčová, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2021 indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia, životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2022: Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, <https://slovak.statistics.sk> (21.12.2023).

value since the end of 2021. A more significant slowdown in the growth rate was recorded by prices in transport, mainly due to the continued decline in fuel prices, which were by 6.3% cheaper than in October a year ago. In October 2023, the consumer price index increased year-on-year for households of employees by 7.2%, for low-income households by 7.3% and for households of pensioners by 6.8%. In summary for the ten months of 2023, consumer prices increased by 11.5% year-on-year (for households of employees by 11.4%, for low-income households by 12.1% and for households of pensioners by 11.9%).¹⁸

According to the latest Eurostat and ŠÚSR statistics, due to the pandemic, there was a sharp increase in inflation, which had a significant impact on the economic conditions of lonely seniors. This population group has become particularly vulnerable, due to the rising cost of living. In the next section of our article, we will focus on the analysis of the factors that determine the occurrence of poverty and the identification of groups that are most exposed to the risk of poverty. We assume that the segment of lonely pensioners is also the group of people most at risk of poverty.

Analyse: risk of poverty rate and demographic indicators

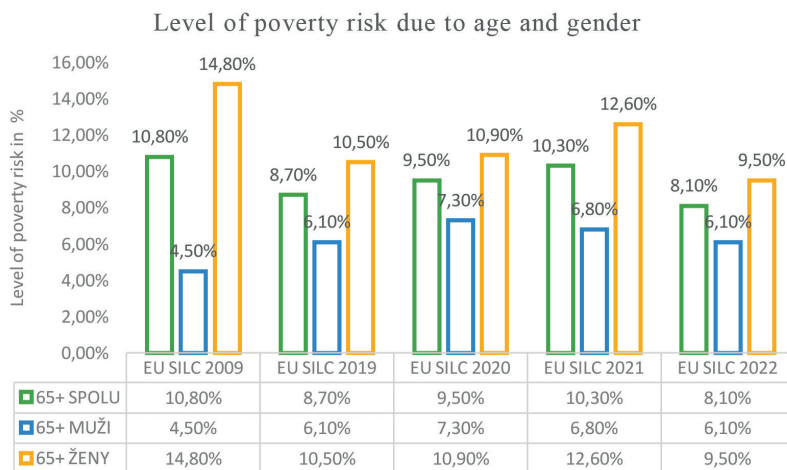
Vlačuha and Kováčová¹⁹ define the poverty risk rate as “the share of persons (in percentage) in the total population whose equivalent disposable income is below the poverty risk threshold”. They further state that this fact has also been picked up by the harmonized statistical survey of the member states of the European Union (hereafter EU)—“Survey on income and living conditions—EU SILC, which is the official source of data with which we obtain a comprehensive picture of poverty and social exclusion.” In Slovakia, the EU SILC sample survey has been implemented since 2005.²⁰

¹⁸ R. Vlačuha, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2023 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*, Bratislava 2023, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

¹⁹ R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2021 indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia, životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2022, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, <https://slovak.statistics.sk> (21.12.2023).

²⁰ R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, J. Velčická, *EU SILC Vývoj chudoby a životných podmienok v SR 2009–2014*, Bratislava 2015, Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, september 2015 č. 900—0075/2015, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (23.12.2023).

Our opinion is in accordance with the authors of Vlačuha et al.²¹ claimed that according to statistical data from the EU — SILC, which are visualized on Graph 2, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for the 65+ demographic group confirms the existence of gender differences, meaning that women, including single pensioners, are at a higher risk of poverty than men. When comparing the years 2009—2019, the poverty risk rate for women decreased by 4.3%, which represents a decrease to 10.5%. However, the impact of the pandemic in 2021 caused the highest increase in this rate to 12.6%. The graphic data showed that when comparing the years 2009 and 2022, there was only a slight change in the poverty risk rate for persons aged 65+. Despite the fact that the impact of the pandemic increased the poverty risk rate, lower values were recorded in 2021 and 2022.²²



Graph 1. Level of poverty risk based on age and gender

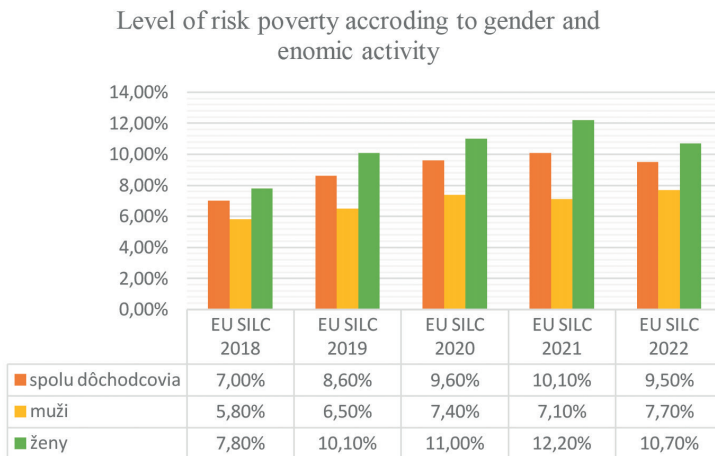
Based on the available statistics, we conducted an analysis that revealed that 2021 saw the greatest increase in poverty in the general population and affected women the most, while 2020 was more difficult for men. In our view, this data points to significant gender differences in the risk of poverty rate and signal the

²¹ A. Widuto, *Energy poverty in the EU*, European Parliamentary Research Service 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/> (23.12.2023).

²² R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, *EU SILC 2020 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia—životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2020, ŠÚ SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

need for further research and policy action. Next, we analyse the percentage differences in the rate of poverty risk among single pensioners, in the context of economic activity, with an emphasis on gender differences.

Graph 2 explicitly shows an upward trend in the percentage of at-risk-of-poverty, which is correlated with economic activity and gender in the group of pensioners in the time frame from 2018 to 2022. In 2018, the overall at-risk-of-poverty rate reached 7% and in 2022 it increased to 9.50%. The most significant increase was recorded in 2021, where the total value reached 10.1% and for women 12.2%. Gender inequality was again on display, with women of pensionable age at higher risk of poverty than men. Furthermore, from the graphical display, we can assume that the impact of the pandemic began to show slightly from 2020, while the peak was reached in 2021. However, the annual overall percentage ratio is 0.6% smaller and for women 1.5% lower compared to 2021. This data indicates that the impact of the pandemic on the economic situation has eased slightly, but the situation is still worse than in 2018.²³



Graph 2. Poverty risk rate by economic activity and by gender

²³ R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2021 indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia, životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2022, Štatistický úrad SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk> (20.12.2023).

Income is redistributed between individuals and households through social transfers and taxes, which can have a significant impact on poverty and income inequality. This means that poverty and social exclusion can be reduced with the help of social protection measures. This goal can be achieved, for example, by providing social benefits. One of the methods of evaluating the effectiveness of social protection measures, is the comparison of poverty risk indicators, before and after social transfers.²⁴

In the EU SILC survey, the following are considered social transfers: family benefits and allowances for families with children, housing allowances, unemployment benefits, old-age benefits, survivors' benefits, sickness benefits, disability benefits, education allowances, allowances and allowances within social exclusion.²⁵

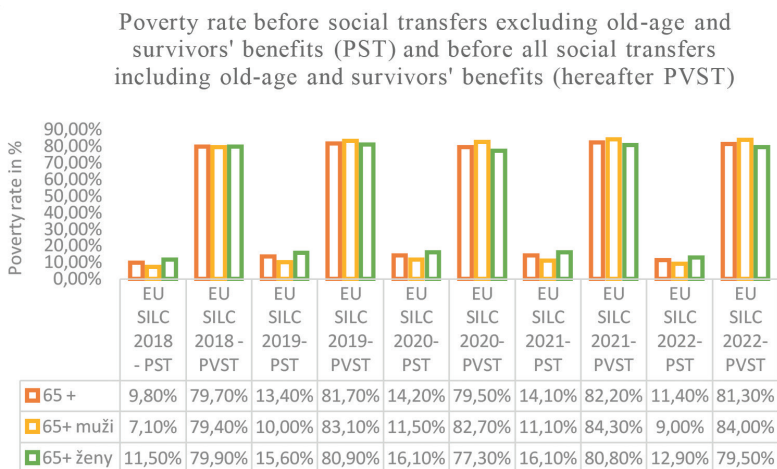
Graph 3 presents the level of the risk of poverty through the implementation of social transfers, with the exception of pension and survivor benefits, and in parallel shows the level of the poverty risk rate before all social transfers (including pension and survivor benefits) from 2018 to 2022. The graph shows that the poverty risk rate of persons 65+ has gradually increased over the five-year period, and despite the decrease in 2022²⁶, the percentage difference is still 1.6% higher than in 2018. The gender gap is evident, but it is interesting to note that according to the graph, women over 65 are exposed rate of poverty risk before social transfers (except pension and survivor benefits) more than men, and vice versa before all transfers, i.e. including pension and survivor benefits, men are more exposed to the risk of poverty than women. This points to the fact that women in the past had lower salaries or stayed at home, which is still reflected in their pension. According to Graph 3, social transfers are vitally important, because without social assistance from the state, the poverty risk rate for both sexes exceeded the 80% mark. Without state welfare, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for women reached a maximum of 84.30% in 2021, and with survivor benefits and pension benefits, the highest value was 16.10% in 2020 and 2021, a 68.2% increase. For men, the highest value before social transfers was in 2020, reaching

²⁴ R. Vlačuha, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2023 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*, Bratislava 2023, Štatistický úrad SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

²⁵ R. Vlačuha, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2023 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*, Bratislava 2023, Štatistický úrad SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

²⁶ R. Vlačuha, Y. Kováčová, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2021 indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia, životné podmienky*, Bratislava 2022, Štatistický úrad SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk> (20.12.2023).

11.5%, and before all social transfers, including survivors' and old-age benefits, in 2021, it increased by 72.80%, reaching a value of 84.3%.²⁷



Graph 3. Poverty rate before social transfers excluding old-age and survivors' benefits

In our opinion, social transfers for people over 65 years of age, who are often exposed to a higher risk of the poverty rate, are cardinal for ensuring basic living conditions. Although social transfers contribute to poverty reduction, they are not always adequate. The key tool in the fight against poverty and social exclusion is national legislation, which creates a legal and terminological environment, defines individual measures, the conditions of their use and exploitation, and target groups.

²⁷ R. Vlačuha, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2023 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*, Bratislava 2023, Štatistický úrad SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

5. Discussion

The study²⁸ claims that in 2022, there was a tendency for energy prices to rise, which escalated after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022. This phenomenon caused serious consequences for a large part of the European population, which was already affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to him, the European commission (2022) analysed other factors such as high inflation rate, inadequate growth of energy prices, low level of income and suboptimal energy efficiency in households, which influenced the increase of EP. Widuto²⁹ states, that according to the European index of domestic energy poverty (hereinafter EDEPI) in 2022, EP is the lowest in Slovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria, that is, these countries are the most affected by EP within the EU. Data according to Eurostat (2024) are also not positive for Slovakia. The Harmonized Index of Consumer Prices (hereinafter HICP) is a standardized indicator for evaluating inflation dynamics within EU member states. From July 2023 to December 2023, the Slovak Republic achieved the highest monthly inflation rate in the eurozone, based on HICP measurement. This result indicates that the growth rate of prices of goods and services in Slovakia in the given time period exceeded the growth rate of prices in other eurozone countries.

Although Vlačuha³⁰ states that there is an inverse relationship between the risk of poverty and age, but according to the EU — SILC 2023 statistics, individuals of retirement age were the least at risk of poverty at 8.10%, while the highest rate of poverty risk was registered by children under 17 years of age (22, 10%). In the breakdown by economic activity, the employed were followed by individuals of retirement age with 9.50%, while the unemployed were the most exposed to poverty (53.40%). The at-risk-of-poverty rate before social transfers, excluding old-age and survivors' benefits, was lowest for individuals of retirement age at 11.40%. Only before all social transfers, the group of individuals of retirement age was most at risk of poverty. Based on this data, we decided to include in our research, a sub-question focused on this area,

²⁸ S. Miháliková, E. Bútorová (eds.), *Starší ľudia medzi nami. Kde sme, kam smerujeme*, „Sociológia—Slovak Sociological Review“ (2023) 55 Nr 3, pp. 370–374.

²⁹ A. Widuto, *Energy poverty in the EU*, European Parliamentary Research Service 2023, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/> (23.12.2023).

³⁰ R. Vlačuha, M. Kubala, *EU SILC 2023 Indikátory chudoby a sociálneho vylúčenia*, Bratislava 2023, Štatistický úrad SR, <https://slovak.statistics.sk/> (21.12.2023).

to discover how pensioners themselves perceive the level of poverty risk after the pandemic and whether their opinions, subjective feelings coincide with the results of the EU — SILC 2022. This topic is very important and relevant for understanding contemporary society and the situation of the oldest generation in Slovakia. We analysed how the pandemic affected the risk of poverty among single pensioners, who undoubtedly, in our opinion, belong to the vulnerable groups exposed to the risk of poverty.

In Slovakia, there is a low rate of preventive programs in the fight against poverty among various population groups. Social distancing measures and lockdowns have contributed to increased feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially among the elderly and those living alone. Social services are required to maintain their mental health, eliminate poverty and provide emotional support.³¹

6. Conclusion

The impact of the pandemic on the risk of poverty of the citizens of the Slovak Republic is inevitably complex and affects many aspects of life. The conclusion of this analysis suggests that the economic and social consequences of the pandemic have caused an increased risk of poverty for some population groups. Unemployment, interrupted education, deteriorating working conditions and health insecurity have contributed to the vulnerability of many people. Government measures aimed at restoring the economy and providing social support can play a key role in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on poverty. It is important to create policies that ensure fair access to opportunities in order to minimize social inequalities. At the same time, it is necessary to pay attention to psychosocial health and the promotion of mental well-being, because long-term stress can have a negative effect on the ability of individuals to escape from poverty. Overall, there is a need to integrate different sectors of society, including public, private and non-profit organizations, to create a comprehensive and sustainable approach to addressing the risk of poverty. Church institutions can play an important role in this matter, including the ‘socially significant’ Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia, and in some regions of the country also the Greek

³¹ L.L. Cintulová, Z. Budayová, S. Brédová, *Sociálna prevencia a príprava sociálnych pracovníkov v oblasti prevencie*, vysokoškolská učebnica, Bratislava 2022, Vysoká škola zdravotníctva a sociálnej práce sv. Alžbety.

Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Churches. This experience should serve as a lesson for the future and inspire the creation of more resilient societies that can face similar challenges with solidarity and effective measures.

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