

SOCIAL WELFARE STATE BUILDING AND SOCIAL POLICY PRIORITIES IN AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract

In the paper the nature, content, and structural elements of the social state are discussed considering that the social welfare state has become a human tendency. Here, the mechanisms of the transition to social state building in Azerbaijan, social policy priorities are analyzed, and the tasks ahead are discussed, social support programs for the socio-vulnerable groups, as well as national priorities for social economic development of the country are analyzed. In an excursion into the history of social policy and social services of the Azerbaijan state is made using the method of double comparison and historical comparative analysis.

Keywords

Social state, social welfare state, social policy, social-legal state, targeted social assistance, social protection.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, social state building on a global scale has become a human trend. A number of states have set the goal of establishing a social welfare state with a high level of social security and have established this in their constitutions and laws. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) noted that “the state is created not just to live, but to live prosperously” (Aristotle, 1983; p.142).

German scientist Ludwig von Stein (1815-1890) presented the idea of the social state in his work “History of the social movement in France since 1789” in 1850. By the social state, he meant the complete legal equality of all social classes and individuals. According to Lorenz von Stein, the welfare state should serve the interests of the people. Thus, the social state acts as an institutional guarantor of human dignity (Kochetkova, 2008, p. 71).

Although it is noted that the term “social state” was widespread after the Federal Republic of Germany declared itself a social state in 1949, let us note for the sake of historical justice that remarkable steps were actually taken in this direction during the predecessor of the modern Azerbaijan state, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920). During the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, progressive works were carried out in the direction of social policy and social work. These reforms indicate the social nature of the GDR state. First of all, let's note that the GDR was the first democratic republic in the East to grant women the right to vote even before a number of European countries. Moreover, at that time it was especially noted that the burden of the state budget should not be carried by the poor, but by classes with high financial means (Rustamova, 2007; p.150). During the Republic, a society was created to fight child mortality. This society provided food products to children from poor families, provided free medical care

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at home and in hospital, sent children to kindergartens, orphanages, institutions for children deprived of parental care, sanatoriums.

Sometimes donations for the poor took a rather peculiar form. Thus, at the beginning of November 1918, the Council of Elders of Baku established a tax on playing cards in Baku for the benefit of children's institutions (Rustamova, 2007; p. 188). Also, during the republican period, the Baku Muslim Charity Society was active. This society also provided vocational training to orphaned children (Rustamova, 2007; p. 188). Another large non-governmental organization is the Central Housing Committee. The committee provided the city population with food, cheap bread, and first aid tools to fight epidemics, and organized food stations (Rustamova, 2007; p.184).

In general, we can talk about two types of political and social approaches of the welfare state: According to this model, the state is the institution that is primarily responsible for creating prosperous living conditions for citizens. For those who are too poor to buy their own house or pay the high rent in the private rental market, the state can either provide subsidized house rent or build low-cost houses and rent them out at a certain price. In this regard, one of the most important social projects of recent years is the project related to the construction of social houses. For this purpose, the establishment of the State Agency for Housing Construction (SAHC) is one of the commendable steps.

H. Heller, another German scientist who further developed the idea of the social state, introduced the concept of “Social - legal state” into the political arena. Of course, it is impossible to create a social welfare state without legal guarantees and regulation. The provision regarding the establishment of a social welfare state was reflected in the additions and changes made to the Constitution in 2002 that one of the main goals of the Azerbaijan state is a social state. In our constitution, one of the main tasks of the state of Azerbaijan is to improve the social protection of citizens. Article 16 of the constitution is called “Social development and the state”. Paragraph 1 of this article states that the state of Azerbaijan takes care of the improvement of the welfare of the people and every citizen, its social protection and a decent standard of living (<https://president.az/articles/28737>). At the same time, the adoption of the law “On Social Service” in the Republic of Azerbaijan in the social sphere is one of the important steps for the legal regulation of the activity.

As a result of the successful socio-economic policy conducted in recent years, many parameters of the welfare state have been confirmed in our country. The fight against poverty in Azerbaijan has produced serious results, since 2001, the poverty level has decreased from 49% to 5.2%. Observations indicate that social protection measures are implemented by the state of Azerbaijan in approximately 38 directions. In order to implement complex measures in the field of fighting poverty in our country, which joined the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, “State Program on poverty reduction and economic development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for the years 2003-2005”, as well as “Poverty reduction in the Republic of Azerbaijan in the years 2008-2015” and sustainable development State Program” was developed and approved. According to the classification of gross national income per capita of the World Bank, Azerbaijan was included in the group of “upper middle income” countries, and according to the 2010 report of the United Nations Development Program on human development, it entered the group of “high human development” countries. Today, a number of international organizations emphasize the desirability of spreading the innovative social services and technologies implemented in Azerbaijan in other countries as examples. Of course, this

is a matter of pride for us. Our country is already recognized globally as a country that exports innovative social service ideas and humanistic values.

In 2013, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev declared that Azerbaijan is a state of social character and stated "... I have mentioned many times, and I want to say it again, that the state of Azerbaijan is a social state. The citizen of Azerbaijan is at the center of our policy." On February 5, 2014 at the conference dedicated to the implementation of "Regional Socio-Economic Development State Programs" Ilham Aliyev said: "I am the first servant of the people and all public officials should work like this".

With the aim of improving the quality of services provided to citizens in the fields of social protection and security, increasing transparency, introducing innovative solutions and accelerating the transition to electronic services, increasing citizen satisfaction under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Azerbaijan and President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on the creation of a public legal entity "DOST Agency" on August 9, 2018. Today, the level of citizens' satisfaction with the services provided in DOST centers is 98.2 percent.

As the initiator and executor of megasocial projects in Azerbaijan, the head of state considers it expedient that not only the state, but also the non-state sector should participate more actively in the implementation of social projects. During his speech at the opening of the "Gobu Park" residential complex built for internally displaced persons, the Ilham Aliyev made an extremely important message about charity, philanthropic activity and social work: "... Companies with opportunities should create conditions for those living in need. I am sure that this wonderful initiative will spread widely in Azerbaijan"

Our republic joined the Sustainable Development Goals approved for the years 2016-2030 at the Sustainable Development Summit of the UN member states held on September 25-27, 2015. In the policy for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, more attention is paid to the issue of eliminating the causes. The adoption of a number of laws in this regard, and the making of appropriate additions and changes to some laws, is a clear expression of this. For example, the law on "iodization of salt for mass prevention of iodine deficiency diseases" has led to a 7-fold decrease in endocrine diseases in the country. In addition, the laws "On the protection of the health of the population", "On the donation of blood and its components", "On medical insurance", "On the transplantation of human organs and tissues" have been adopted.

On October 30, 2018, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Protection of Children from Harmful Information was adopted. This has an important meaning in terms of insuring the healthy future of the society.

One of the parameters characterizing the social state is the consistency and level of security of social protection measures. As is known, social protection measures are implemented in 38 directions by the state of Azerbaijan. The Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated February 9, 2018 was the next important step in the direction of strengthening the social protection of pensioners. According to the information provided by the State Statistics Committee, the pensions set until January 1, 2023 by order of the President were increased by indexing by 14.7 percent in accordance with the annual growth rate of the average monthly nominal salary for 2022.

As it can be seen, both the insurance part of pensions and the amount determined together with those supplements in relation to pensioners who have been assigned pension supplements based on length of service, as well as the financial assistance included in the

composition of labor pensions from January 1, 2023, have been increased on the basis of indexation. The indexation growth introduced by the decree exceeded the average inflation rate for 2022 (13.9 percent). Of course, there are questions in the society about the change of the retirement age

Starting from 2004, the “Socio-economic development programs of the regions” operating every 5 years were adopted and implemented. Of course, the more efficient implementation of the program depends on the responsibility of local executive officers, their honest approach to their work, and their ability to respond to new challenges. According to statistics, More than 30 state programs in the field of education and 20 in the field of healthcare have been adopted by the government of Azerbaijan. During this period, more than 20,000 kilometers of roads were built, bridges were built, hundreds of culture houses, sports Olympic complexes were built, and parks were opened.

Corresponding documents have been adopted in the direction of strengthening the legal-normative base aimed at solving the problems of the disabled, who are a socially sensitive group of society. Adoption of the “State Program on Prevention of Disability and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons for 1999-2002” by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated May 14, 1999 was another step forward in this field. Since 1995, all-republic exhibition-competitions have been held every year in the country in order to make the leisure time of disabled people more interesting and to reveal creative talents among them. Paralympic and Special Olympic movements are being developed. In order to solve the employment problems of able-bodied disabled people, a quota is applied to employers in a specified manner. At the same time, allowances for persons with disabilities were increased from 150 manats to 220 manats for the first degree, from 130 manats to 180 manats for the second degree, from 110 manats to 120 manats for the third degree. Allowances for children with limited health opportunities were increased from 150 manats to 200 manats, pensions for them from 50 manats to 80 manats. In general, their monthly social payment has increased 3.4 times compared to three years ago.

Social workers provide services to the disabled, lonely and elderly citizens at home, providing comprehensive assistance to them. In order to develop the field of social services, the legislative framework related to this field is being improved. Of course, it would be good to increase the number of social workers and social workers in the relevant structures. The legislative framework for licensing the activities of social workers should be formed. Taking into account the moral and physical weight of their work and the risk of emotional burnout wages must be provided at a high level.

Following the platform and programs adopted at the Beijing World Conference and the Copenhagen World Summit in the direction of ensuring women's legal equality, some work has been done in recent years in the field of women's more active participation in society and public life. In connection with the implementation of the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” to which the Republic of Azerbaijan has joined and the commitments accepted at the IV World Conference on Women, the “National Action Plan on Women's Issues” and “On the Implementation of the State Women's Policy in the Republic of Azerbaijan” in the Republic of Azerbaijan “The implementation of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan continues.

Caring for young people, who make up 22.1 percent of the country's population, is an important component of state policy. In connection with the implementation of the “Action Plan on the Implementation of the State Youth Policy in the Republic of

Azerbaijan” approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 29, 1999, important works have been done in the social, labor and employment fields. In 2002, the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan “On Youth Policy” was adopted, in 2005, 2011 and 2017 the “State Programs of Azerbaijan Youth”, and in 2015 the “Development Strategy of Azerbaijan Youth in 2015-2025” was approved.

The “Strategic Roadmap for the perspective of the National Economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan” was approved by the decree dated December 6, 2016. This program, which defines the development line in the main 11 directions of our national economy, clearly envisages that Azerbaijan will become a social welfare state in the period after 2025.

The main priorities of social policy are the creation of citizen welfare and satisfaction. Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for socio-economic development, approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated February 2, 2021, will make important contributions to the construction of a social welfare state by realizing the following five National Priorities for the socio-economic development of the country:

1. Sustainable growing competitive economy;
2. A society based on dynamic, inclusive and social justice;
3. Competitive human capital and modern innovation space;
4. Large return to territories freed from occupation;
5. Clean environment and a country of “green growth”.

The Decree of President Ilham Aliyev dated October 16, 2021 “On additional measures in the field of protecting the social welfare of the population” enabled the successful continuation of social reforms.

In 2021 77,640 unemployed and jobseekers were provided with jobs by the State Employment Agency under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population. 16 thousand 232 people were involved in the self-employment program. This is 13.8 times more than in 2017, when the program was implemented. At the same time, the “ABAD” institution created under the “Asan xidmed” brand creates favorable conditions for employment of young people, housewives, and disabled people. The self-employment system has already become a branch of social protection in the country aimed at the creation of small businesses.

In only one year, 10 million applications were registered to the “e-sosial.az” portal created by the Decree of the Head of State on September 5, 2018, and 15 million 212 thousand applications to the ministry's e-services. At the same time, last year 22.6 thousand pensions, 120 1000 allowances and pensions were determined in e-rules, 153 thousand individual accounts were opened in e-rules. In the last three years, about 30 e-reference services of the Ministry were created, and last year about 570 thousand e-references were issued through those services.

One of the important social programs implemented in our country, the program of caring for the families of martyrs and the war disabled, and providing them with housing, is expanding every year based on the instructions of President Ilham Aliyev. The decree signed by President Ilham Aliyev on April 19, 2018 is an important document in the social direction as well. According to the document, a one-time payment of 11,000 manats is provided to the heirs of military personnel who died for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan until August 2, 1997, and who were declared dead due to military operations.

By the Decree of the Prezident dated January 25, 2021, provision of 11,000 apartments or private houses to the families of martyrs and war disabled in 2021-2025 allowed for further expansion of the program. As a result of this, in 2021 alone, the program of providing 3,000 apartments to families of martyrs and war disabled people, which is 5 times more than three years ago, was implemented.

At the same time, in 2021, another 164 people with war disabilities were provided with passenger cars, and up to now 7,400 senior war disabled people have been given cars.

The employment issues of the families of martyrs and war participants are also taken into consideration. 610 employers joined the “Employment Marathon” that started in June 2021 and presented 4,005 vacancies. More than 1,550 members of the families of martyrs and war participants have already been provided with jobs for those vacancies.

At the same time, psychocorrection work was carried out with 5 thousand people, rehabilitation and social-psychological services were provided to 1300 people in rehabilitation institutions. 184 servicemen were provided with 193 pieces of high-tech modern 4th generation prostheses, 955 people, most of whom were war disabled, were provided with motorized wheelchairs, 1197 people were provided with 12948 rehabilitation.

In general, social support measures that are still ongoing in the post-war period have covered more than 45,000 people, including family members of martyrs, war participants and victims of Armenian terrorism, and 50,000 services have been provided to them and it is one of the main priorities of the state policy despite the economic and financial difficulties.

Every nation and society is lucky when the leader it chooses is wise and careful, able to adequately appreciate the spirit of the time and its connotations. From this point of view, the people of Azerbaijan are very lucky people. Because it has a head of state with rational leadership qualities. This proved itself once again during the corona virus pandemic, which threatens the whole world house that we have already left behind. Although it is a bitter truth, it is not a secret to anyone that when the virus had not yet reached the level of a pandemic, a number of state leaders did not adequately evaluate it, showed a frivolous attitude towards it, and did not take any preventive social security measures. In a very short time, the virus turned into a pandemic, and the countries in question faced deep losses, and the heads of those states later admitted that they were wrong about the virus. It can be said without exaggeration that the head of state of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, who took cardinal steps in the direction of building a social state, not only managed to survive the harsh test of history in these fateful moments, but also exhibited the experience of Azerbaijan in the fight against the coronavirus, which can serve as an example for the leaders of a number of states that consider themselves to be a social state. This was embodied not only in relation to its own citizens, but also in its support and contributions to its near and far neighbors and to the world as a whole. Thus, from the first days of Azerbaijan's fight against the pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) visited our country on March 9-13, 2020, when a team of leading experts from the WHO visited our country, got acquainted with the situation, gave a positive assessment of the work done, and praised Azerbaijan for the measures taken against the pandemic evaluated as a model country.

Since February 28, 2020, when the first coronavirus patient was detected, while Azerbaijan has acted independently in the fight against the coronavirus, more than 80

countries of the world have applied to the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance in the fight against the coronavirus.

It should be noted that a working plan was implemented in Azerbaijan in the fight against the pandemic in 3 main directions - education, strict prohibitive measures, social protection and support.

“Stay at home!” of WHO in Azerbaijan his call was strictly followed. The historical address of the First Vice President of the country Mehriban Aliyeva signed “Your Mehriban” in the first days of the pandemic was also important in educating citizens, coming to terms with reality, involving them in social responsibility, inviting them to civic solidarity, and preventing civic indifference. Addressing her people as a child, a wife, a mother and a grandmother, the first lady of the country polished the feelings of solidarity of every citizen, “Immunity against the virus will arise after the vaccine is found. Everyone should develop immunity against indifference.” idea had an important meaning for the inculcation of civic social responsibility. The Cabinet of Ministers has prepared an action plan in accordance with the order of President Ilham Aliyev dated March 10, 2020 on reducing the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the country's economy and the standard of living of citizens. Support for employment and social welfare has a special place among these measures. In the approved Action Plan for the implementation of the Decree of the Head of State dated March 19, 2020, 10 measures in 4 directions were reflected in order to support employment and social welfare. The Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population has taken over all the social and household services provided to lonely people over 65 years of age so that they do not leave their homes. These services were carried out with dignity by social workers and volunteers on a daily basis. Targeted state social assistance was given to 330,000 people. If we take into account that in developed European countries, at the same time in the United States, thousands of elderly people fell victim to the virus, then the result achieved thanks to security measures related to the elderly in our country is amazingly commendable. It should also be emphasized that the dedicated activity of social workers and servants during the quarantine did not escape the attention of the head of the country. That is why, in order to effectively organize the provision of social services to persons in difficult situations and citizens over 65 years of age who live alone during the special quarantine regime announced in the country in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic, the head of the country “Social protection of workers involved in the provision of social services during the special quarantine regime in the Republic of Azerbaijan” At the same time, the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population, together with other social partners, implemented the program of providing food assistance to 45,000 families. The Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan On providing a one-time monthly payment in the amount of 190 (one hundred and ninety) manats to persons registered as unemployed in the “Employment” subsystem of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Azerbaijan during the special quarantine regime due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The President considered that the number of people belonging to this category should be increased to 600 thousand, taking into account the general situation and in order to strengthen the social protection of people. Thus, instead of 200,000, it was decided to give 600,000 people 190 manats per month for two months. One of the social projects of the quarantine period was the paid public workplaces program announced by the President. 50,000 social jobs with a monthly salary of 250 manats were opened to provide social security for unemployed and job-seeking citizens, especially those who worked illegally and without employment contracts during the

quarantine period. Commenting on this issue in an online meeting with the ministers, the head of state said that he did not agree with 50 thousand public workplaces, but considered it necessary to increase it to 90 thousand. The decision to pay tuition fees for 17,000 students who are members of families belonging to the socially vulnerable population group was one of the events that presented the social nature of our state.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has once again shown that Azerbaijan stands by its citizens as a social state. This is proven once again by the fact that the majority of respondents (87.8 percent) express confidence that the state will support them if they encounter any problems, as reflected in the analytical report of the Center for Social Research “Fighting the pandemic in public opinion in Azerbaijan” (Kochetkova, 2008).

We hope that with the truly existing President-People unity in the country, the unwavering determination and iron will of the head of the country, we will fully succeed in building a social welfare state, “We are strong together!” with the wisdom of the slogan, we will achieve all our strategic goals.

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