REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Dr Stoyanka Gineva Cherkezova

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on the scientific works for participation in a competition for the academic position of associate professor in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences, professional field 3.1. Sociology, anthropology and cultural sciences (Social and demographic imbalances and inequalities, methodology of sociological research), announced in State Gazette No. 56 of 11.07.2025, with candidate Senior Assistant Professor Dr Lubomir Ivov Stoytchev /Ref. No. CHR-01-231/28.08.2025/.

Senior Assistant Professor Dr Lubomir Stoytchev is the only candidate. This review has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the LDASRB and the Regulations for its implementation and the Internal Regulations and Procedures of the IPHS. The set of materials submitted by Lubomir Stoytchev is in accordance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation, the Regulations on the conditions and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and the Regulations on the conditions and procedures for occupying the academic positions of "assistant", "senior assistant", "associate professor" and "professor" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies – BAS. The documents include: Applications, CV, diplomas for degrees and positions obtained, certificate of work experience, copies of the list of publications for participation in the competition with attached copies of the habilitation monograph and 22 other publications, reference to the minimum requirements, reference to scientific contributions and summaries of publications in Bulgarian and English, list of citations and declaration of originality and authenticity.

Lubomir Stoytchev completed his higher education at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a bachelor's degree (in 1999) and a master's degree (in 2003) in Political Science and Pedagogy of Deviant Behaviour, respectively. Meanwhile, he successfully completed a specialisation in Management (Economics) of Education at the University of Oslo, Norway, under the supervision of Prof. Arild Tjeldvol in 2000. After completing his master's degree, he undertook a second specialisation in Criminology and Sociology of Deviant Behaviour at the Department of Sociology and St Cross College, University of Oxford, UK, under the supervision of Dr Heather Hamill in 2006-2007. He defended his doctoral dissertation in 2016 at the Institute for Population and Human Studies in the field of 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies with a dissertation on "Juvenile crime in Bulgaria after 1990, dynamics, conditions and factors, and its impact on the quality of human capital in the country," supervised by Assoc. Prof. Maria Belcheva.

In parallel with his education, Lubomir Stoytchev has accumulated extensive research experience over more than 21 years, including 16 years at the Institute for Criminological Research as: interviewer and assistant researcher at the Council for Criminological Research at the Chief Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria (1997); technical editor – databases at the Investment Information Agency Ltd. (2001-2005); sociologist-penologist at the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (2007-2008); consecutively (from 2009 to present) research associate III, assistant and senior assistant in field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies, scientific specialty "Sociology", initially at the Centre for Population Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and then at its successor, the Institute for Population and Human Studies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

His biography, as well as my personal impressions of the candidate, testify to his accumulated skills in various fields of research and diverse research roles – field skills in structuring and conducting interviews, focus groups and surveys in socio-demographic, sociological and criminological research, mastery in processing, systematising and analysing qualitative and quantitative data using a variety of

methods and a multidisciplinary approach, expertise in developing methodological and methodological tools, brilliant abilities for interpretation and scientifically based generalisations, as well as for scientific writing, editing, translation and compilation.

Over the years, Senior Assistant Professor Stoytchev has demonstrated a high degree of detail, accuracy and responsibility when working with data, as well as precision and attention when working with sensitive information. Beyond his typical research skills, he has demonstrated excellent abilities for effective communication, collaboration in multidisciplinary teams, and communication of research information in a variety of formats for all types of audiences and purposes – fundamental, popular science, and managerial-pragmatic.

I. Research (creative) activity and results.

For the purposes of this competition, Senior Assistant Professor Stoytchev has submitted a habilitation thesis – a collective monograph in which he is the author of three chapters and co-author of the introduction and one chapter, with a 29.3% contribution, equivalent to 164 pages according to BDS. A division protocol signed by all authors has been provided with the monograph. The contribution of Senior Assistant Professor Stoytchev meets the definition of a monograph, according to which he must independently have a minimum of 100 standard pages in § 5, item 9 of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for occupying academic positions of "assistant", "senior assistant", "associate professor" and "professor" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, respectively in item 5 of the notes to the Annex to the Regulations for the implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (latest amendment to the Annex – State Gazette, issue 23 of 2025). The submitted work thus fulfils the requirements for a habilitation thesis.

Separately, Senior Assistant Professor Stoytchev has submitted a total of 22 publications, as follows:

- 9 articles and reports published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes, 6 of which are independent;
- 1 study in a Q1 publication;
- 6 studies published in non-refereed peer-reviewed journals or published in edited collective volumes, half of which are independent;
- 8 chapters from collective monographs, 1 of which is independent.

1. Assessment of the candidate's monographic work and scientific and applied scientific contributions

In the collective monograph, the candidate has developed the following topics: the housing situation and housing needs of vulnerable ethnic and religious communities, the attitudes of Bulgarians towards Roma, and attitudes towards immigrants in Bulgaria. The precision, attention to detail, scientific ethics, careful handling of facts and professionalism with which Lubomir Stoytchev has worked are impressive. The analyses and conclusions made systematically and thoroughly examine vulnerability and the context in which it occurs. The housing situation of vulnerable ethnic and religious communities, Bulgarians' attitudes towards Roma, and attitudes towards immigrants in Bulgaria are examined as part of a larger system – that of exclusion, disintegration and vulnerability in various aspects of the lives of ethnic and religious communities in Bulgaria. This systematic approach is evident in his work and in the interrelationship between theoretical frameworks, approaches and indicators used, empirically derived scientific facts and pragmatic policy proposals.

In Chapter 5, "The Housing Situation in the Republic of Bulgaria. The Housing Needs of Vulnerable Ethnic and Religious Communities," the following contributions can be highlighted:

- ***Theoretical-conceptual:*** It places a new focus on the housing situation among vulnerable groups, going beyond traditional economic and cultural explanations. It introduces an interpretative approach based on poverty and social inequalities as the root causes of housing

problems. It reveals the interrelationships between housing conditions and other social processes – economic, educational, health, demographic. It offers an interdisciplinary reading of the housing issue – from a sociological, demographic, legal and political perspective. In this way, it overcomes the framework that attributes housing problems to the "cultural characteristics" of vulnerable groups and considers them as a structural social problem. It lays the foundation for a new analytical model that integrates data on poverty, inequality, access to infrastructure and the quality of the housing stock. This refocusing offers a new understanding of the social function of housing – not simply as property, but as a basic element of human dignity and social integration.

- ***Scientific-empirical:*** It enriches academic knowledge about citizens' perceptions of social justice and the effectiveness of housing policy by presenting new scientific facts based on an empirical study of public attitudes towards housing policy, conducted specifically for the purposes of the research. For example, it shows that housing policy has a strong potential to influence social trust and the sense of justice in society. Another example is that it finds a link between socio-economic status, education and support for different policies – legalisation of illegal housing or sale of municipal housing: the tendency of the less educated and poorer sections of society to support policies of legalisation and state intervention, while the more educated express greater tolerance towards market solutions.
- ***Methodological:*** Based on the above theoretical framework and clear arguments for the need to develop new indicators for the housing situation, Stoytchev developed a system of interrelated indicators and introduced new indicators for measuring the effects of housing policies, especially on vulnerable ethnic groups. This allows for an original and in-depth assessment of the effect of these policies, which goes beyond narrow understandings of what housing policy is. In addition, he formulates recommendations for the introduction of indicators for monitoring discriminatory practices in the housing sector.
- ***Scientific - applied:*** It offers a reasoned critique of existing housing practices that exacerbate social inequalities. It reveals systemic deficiencies in public policies – lack of control, uneven implementation of measures, inadequate tax and licensing regulations. Justifies the need for structural and administrative reforms in housing policy management. Emphasises the need for state intervention in the rental and vacant housing market to protect the interests of poor and marginalised citizens.

  It puts forward specific proposals for housing policies, such as increasing the state and municipal housing stock through construction and purchase of housing, rather than through vouchers and temporary financial assistance; redirecting energy efficiency funds to vulnerable households that cannot maintain their homes on their own. **In Chapter 11,** these practical contributions are supplemented with further ones. Specific recommendations are made for measures and housing policies aimed at reducing demographic imbalances and as part of a comprehensive system of social inclusion policies.

In Chapter 8, "Attitudes and distances of Bulgarians of childbearing age towards Roma," the following contributions can be highlighted:

- ***Theoretical and conceptual:*** The candidate frames sociological prejudices and stereotypes towards ethnic groups as the result of socialisation processes, media influence and cultural heritage, adapting them to the Bulgarian social environment and interpreting them in depth:
  - age and generational differences in attitudes towards ethnic groups as a result of the influence of socialisation in different political regimes (totalitarian socialism versus democratic transition);
  - gender differences through the reflection of social roles on tolerance (somewhat original for the Bulgarian context);
  - educational effects on distances in the context of "educational inflation" and "educational pseudo-product" as it introduces a local sociological meaning of the devaluation of the educational product in conditions of demographic decline and institutional fragmentation.

- ***Scientific-empirical:*** A number of confirmed scientific facts can be derived, as well as new ones based on the proposed empirical analysis of the influence of age, gender, education and degree of urbanisation on ethnic distances and attitudes. These include empirical confirmation of persistent negative attitudes towards Roma, the recording of differences in tolerance according to the degree of urbanisation, verification of the stability of attitudes comparable to processes observed in other countries, etc. The following scientific **contributions with higher originality, which are related and have a strong theoretical charge**, could be highlighted:
  - The idea that formal education does not guarantee social tolerance is not entirely new in theory. Research shows that formal education is often associated with higher tolerance, but this association is not universal and depends on the country, social context, type of minority, etc. (e.g. in Borgonovi, 2012; Isac, 2015). However, there is insufficient evidence for this specifically in the Bulgarian context. The present study quantifies this idea, links it to the concept of "educational pseudo-product" and empirically demonstrates its relevance.
  - The finding that younger generations are less tolerant of minority groups (Roma) than older generations contradicts the common hypothesis in sociological discourse in Bulgaria that younger people are more open and integrative.
  - Another interesting scientific fact is that the distances and attitudes towards their integration in an educational context are not influenced by whether the respondents have children or not.
- ***Scientific - applied:*** The chapter provides guidelines for formulating realistic integration policies and offers an empirical basis for planning policies that take into account actual public attitudes, rather than just normative goals. In addition, it makes some recommendations for educational policies and comments on the introduction of the so-called "education board".

The following contributions can be highlighted ***in Chapter 9, "Attitudes towards immigrants"***:

- ***Theoretical and conceptual:*** as a theoretical contribution that is original to the Bulgarian context and public discourse, the identification of the double standard of "wanted – unwanted immigrant" and the fact that tolerance depends not on migrant status but on origin, religion and economic "usefulness" can be singled out.
- ***Scientific - empirical:*** Here, a number of new scientific facts can be listed, such as intolerance as an economic rather than a cultural fear in the 28–33 age group with secondary education, that employment status is a stronger factor for tolerance than education, that income influences tolerance, but the result is not solid, that family status and parenthood increase tolerance towards joint education with migrant children, that people with lower education show a higher tendency towards empathy as they identify with the social vulnerability of migrants, etc. An original contribution is the establishment of a link between the proportion of migrants and GDP in a country, which calls into question the dominant public narrative that immigrants are an economic burden.

As a general practical contribution, chapters 8 and 9 repeatedly argue in different ways that the social attitudes of the majority are not simply a background factor, but a decisive context for the success or failure of integration policies.

In Chapter 11, "Measures to reduce demographic imbalances and social inequalities related to ethnicity," although it is difficult to separate the contributions of Assoc. Stoytchev from those of Prof. Tomova, several scientific and applied contributions stand out, which are a clear and direct result of the author's work in chapters 5, 8 and 9. These include the proposed measures for the introduction of education on children's rights and human rights at all levels of education, as well as elements of civic and intercultural education in primary and secondary education the creation of regulatory, organisational and financial conditions for the collection and provision of current statistical information on various characteristics of the population by ethnic origin, and 7 measures for housing policies. The proposed measures are of a legal, strategic and operational nature.

In summary, I can confidently confirm that the habilitation thesis presented by Senior Assistant Professor Lubomir Stoytchev has many merits and significant scientific and applied scientific contributions. It also brilliantly demonstrates his diverse skills

2. Assessment of the contributions in the other publications submitted

The 22 publications submitted for the competition meet the requirement for peer review of the publications in which they are included. The two publications presented, which at first glance are related to the topic of the candidate's dissertation, do not include texts that are part of his dissertation and go beyond its scope. For this reason, they are included in the review. The review also includes co-authored publications, with conclusions drawn only for those publications authored by Senior Assistant Professor Stoytchev .

The publications presented show a consistent and continuous focus on social inequalities and the vulnerability profiles of different population groups - young people in Bulgaria who are not in education, employment or training, Roma, Bulgarian Turks, migrants, the unemployed, young people placed in correctional educational institutions and juvenile offenders, etc. The other main theme in the candidate's research is social distances, attitudes and ethnic relations. This fully corresponds to a profile focused on socio-demographic imbalances and inequalities.

The numerous publications are mainly based on primary empirical data (national representative surveys, pilot studies, international comparisons) and professional mastery of quantitative methods (regression models, standardisation, correlation analyses, tetrachoric correlations, multivariate models), as well as skills in qualitative research, are key to a profile oriented towards the methodology of sociological research.

The candidate's work is multidisciplinary and mainly includes elements from sociological, demographic, economic and political studies, which allows the author to develop the contexts very well and to frame the structural features in which the studied processes and phenomena are observed. The maximum length of the review does not allow for a complete list of the author's contributions from the presented studies. In summary, the scientific contributions include **the enrichment of academic knowledge** by presenting new scientific facts related to:

- Quantitative profiling of young people outside education, employment and training, short-term returnees, juvenile offenders;
- Revealing systemic inequalities and/or structural barriers in education, employment/unemployment, income and housing conditions between ethnic groups (Roma, Bulgarians, Turks);
- Empirical evidence of factors and determinants that reproduce poverty and social exclusion;
- Quantitative research on social distances and intolerance towards different groups, attitudes towards interethnic marriages;

Among **the new scientific facts**, the following can be highlighted: differences in racism between Bulgaria, Italy and Slovenia; empirical evidence that 1) the similarities in the profiles of Roma and Bulgarian juvenile offenders outweigh the differences; 2) growing income inequality stimulates interest in higher education as a means of social mobility; 3) returning young emigrants are predominantly secondary school graduates, and the proportion of university graduates among them is below the national average; 4) a disproportionately high share of Roma NEETs (53.6% compared to 19.3% of the total population), as well as gender differences; 5) poverty is an important but not the only factor for the inclusion of Roma youth in education and the labour market; 6) the finding that if poverty among Roma is reduced to the national average, the proportion of NEETs will fall by 17.4 percentage points.

A significant **methodological contribution** is the development of new indicators for assessing the integration of Roma youth (e.g. percentage of young people not in education, employment or training with access to a computer/tablet, reading habits). These allow for more accurate monitoring of policy

effectiveness. Another **methodological and, at the same time, applied contribution** is the adaptation of statistical indicators for tracking the dynamics of inclusion, applicable in policy monitoring.

Among **the scientific and applied contributions**, the following can be highlighted: 1) recommendations for integrated policies to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training among vulnerable ethnic groups by combining anti-poverty measures and social interventions; 2) demonstrating the need for desegregation policies; 3) profiles of at-risk youth groups, helping institutions to target programmes; 4) the analytical basis for anti-discrimination policies created through social distance data; 5) research findings that provide a academic basis for diverse equal access policies.

3. Citations from other authors.

The candidate has presented the citations correctly and with exceptional precision, including those in which he is a co-author, by including only citations of his own texts. The information provided shows that he is recognised among the academic community in Bulgaria and abroad, with 6 citations in publications indexed in Web of Science and Scopus.

4. Assessment of the results of participation in research and creative projects and application of the results obtained in practice.

Senior Assistant Professor Lubomir Stoytchev has extensive experience in research, but for the purposes of the competition he has presented only some of his participation. According to the list, the candidate has participated in 16 projects, 7 of which are international, funded by the World Bank, the European Commission, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, and the European Union Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture. Among his projects implemented in Bulgaria, the project "Measures to overcome the demographic crisis in the Republic of Bulgaria" and "Problems of Roma integration in Bulgaria", which he heads, stand out.

5. Scientific contribution, originality of the presented works and reliability of the presented scientific data.

The summary of contributions adequately reflects the achievements of Senior Assistant Professor Stoytchev in the publications submitted for the associate professor competition. I would say that they are even presented more modestly than his actual achievements. He has made a scientific contribution to the enrichment of working theories in the field of social inequalities, social exclusion of representatives of ethnic minorities and migrants, as well as to research findings, new facts in interethnic relations and social distances. By linking empirical data with socio-historical analysis, he has made a significant contribution to the creation of a comprehensive model for understanding ethnic relations in contemporary Bulgaria. With its integrated model for understanding the relationship between education, social attitudes and the effectiveness of integration policies, his work enriches both the sociology of education and the sociology of ethnic relations. The empirical results presented are reliable and well-founded. The research tools, methods of analysis and statistical parameters of the analysis used are correctly indicated. This ensures transparency and the possibility of reproducing the research. All academic publications presented by the candidate are entirely his own work. Nowhere in his publications and in his activities as a scientist have I noticed plagiarism or other deviations and/or reprehensible behaviour from the point of view of scientific ethics.

II. Teaching and lecturing activities.

Senior Assistant Professor Lubomir Stoytchev does not have any formal teaching activities. Although this is not mentioned in his CV, as Academic Secretary of the Institute for Population and Human Studies, I have observed his consistent activity over the years in various training seminars at the institute for doctoral students, scientists and representatives of the NGO sector. I can confidently state that the candidate has excellent teaching skills and undoubtedly has the capacity for academic leadership.

III. Administrative and public activities.

Lubomir Stoytchev has extensive expertise, with 26 expert reports, opinions and consultations for various institutions over the years. His expertise is sought after by various agencies, government bodies, non-governmental organisations and experts from international organisations. In his participation in a number of projects outside his research competence, he has demonstrated a high degree of organisation and discipline in their administration.

IV. Fulfilment of the requirements for the academic position

Senior Assistant Professor Lubomir Stoytchev fully meets the minimum requirements for the academic position of associate professor in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies. With the publications presented outside the habilitation thesis, the candidate not only meets the requirements of Art. 2b, paras. 2 and 3 of the LDASRB, resp. Art. 27 of the Regulations on the conditions and procedure for occupying academic positions of "assistant", "senior assistant", "associate professor" and "professor" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, respectively, and the requirements of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences under Article 2b, paragraph 5 of the LDASRB. He exceeds the minimum required points for group G of the indicators for the various scientific degrees and academic positions for Area 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences (220 points) with his 249.58 points. The candidate has submitted 24 citations for the purposes of the competition, which are sufficient in volume and meet the minimum required points (220) from the above-mentioned documents. The findings presented for the fulfilment of the minimum requirements were established at the first meeting of the scientific jury and confirmed by its members.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate (if any).

My personal impressions of the candidate are more than excellent and are based on the last 17 years during which I have had the opportunity to work with him on joint projects, and in recent years I have been following his work in my role as Academic Secretary of the Institute for Population and Human Studies. He has demonstrated research depth, innovation, and a continuous desire to develop new research skills in quantitative analysis and methodology design in sociological research. He is an extremely reliable scientist. He pays serious attention to the clear and precise presentation of methods for data collection and processing, as well as to the possibilities for data analysis and interpretation. He is trustworthy – disciplined, motivated, and produces high-quality research.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and comments on the candidate's activities and achievements.

In conclusion, the candidacy of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Lubomir Stoytchev in the current competition for the academic position of "Associate Professor" fully meets the requirements of the LDASRB, the regulations for its implementation, and the requirements of the BAS and the IPHS. The methodological precision, depth and systematic approach of the candidate's publications reviewed at are undoubtedly a merit. His research work has already established him as a scientist. My recommendation for the next stage of his development is mainly focused on his ability to pass on the valuable knowledge and experience he has accumulated over the years. He has the capacity to supervise doctoral students and form research teams. Receiving the title of "Associate Professor" will be a well-deserved step in the formalisation of his successful career.

I vote with full conviction "YES" the awarding of the academic title "Associate Professor" to Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Lubomir Stoytchev in the professional field of 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies (Social and Demographic Imbalances and Inequalities, Methodology of Sociological Research).

Sofia,
09.11.2025

Assoc. Prof. Stoyanka Gineva Cherkezova