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OPINION

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concerning the materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova for participation in the competition for the academic position of "Professor" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field 3.2. Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology).

The competition was announced in the State Gazette, issue No. 65 of 17 July 2026, for the needs of the "Developmental and Health Psychology" Section at IPHS – BAS. By Order No. RD-6-541 of 16 September 2026 of the Director of IPHS – BAS, I was appointed a member of the scientific jury for the competition.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

The submitted documents characterize Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova as an established researcher in the field of health and developmental psychology, with systematic scientific activity, thematic continuity and participation in large-scale empirical studies. According to the certificate of employment dated 17 July 2026, the candidate held the position of Chief Assistant Professor at IPHS – BAS from 1 November 2013 to 14 June 2020, and has held the position of Associate Professor since 15 June 2020. The certified total length of service at the institute as of the date of the document is 12 years, 8 months and 16 days.

The curriculum vitae further documents the candidate's work as a research psychologist and research project coordinator from 2003 to 2013. She was awarded the doctoral degree following the defence, on 8 May 2013, of her dissertation entitled "The Influence of the Media on Body Image and Its Personality Moderation in Adolescents." From 2020 to 2025, she headed the doctoral programme "Developmental and Educational Psychology"; in 2025 she participated in developing a new doctoral programme in "Health Psychology," described as undergoing accreditation. Since September 2021, she has been Director of the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers in the Social Sciences.

According to the author's statement of scientific contributions, 21 publications have been submitted for the competition: one monograph, one chapter in a collective monograph, 12 studies in refereed and indexed scientific publications, five studies in non-indexed peer-reviewed publications or edited collective volumes, and two articles in such publications. This body of work provides a sufficiently substantive basis for evaluating the research activity within the thematic

scope of the competition. Data on compliance with all quantitative scientometric indicators should be compared with the complete competition statement and the accompanying evidence.

The submitted statement of compliance with the BAS minimum requirements reports 1,168.75 points against a required total of 590. The reported points by indicator group are: A – 50 against a minimum of 50; B – 100 against 100; G – 308.75 against 220; D – 600 against 120; and E – 110 against 100. The statement specifies that the submitted publications do not duplicate works used for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor. Accordingly, the submitted competition statement provides grounds for concluding that the stated minimum requirements have been met.

2. General characteristics of the scientific and applied research activity

Five interrelated research areas stand out in the candidate's scientific output: the complex effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents and adults; the mental and physical health and well-being of young people; risky and healthy behavior; positive aspects of psychological functioning in adolescence; and biopsychosocial determinants and coping resources in chronic health problems. These areas outline a coherent research program combining developmental psychology, health psychology and applied aspects of prevention.

A central place among the submitted works is occupied by the collective monograph "COVID-19 and Adolescents: Growing Up During the Pandemic" (Alexandrova-Karamanova et al., 2026), published by the BAS Publishing House "Prof. Marin Drinov". The work contains ten chapters and a conclusion and examines the impact of the pandemic crisis on adolescents' mental health, health behavior, social interactions and school functioning. A biopsychosocial theoretical framework is adopted and a mixed quantitative–qualitative approach is applied. According to the abstract, the monograph presents a nationally representative study of 3,523 adolescents aged 11–17, including a qualitative module with open-ended questions. Separate publications within this thematic research program analyze subsamples of different sizes, which should be taken into account when comparing the results.

I positively assess the combination of large-scale empirical data with an analysis of risk and protective factors. The studies distinguish the consequences for perceived stress, anxiety, loneliness, psychosomatic complaints, risky substance use, relationships with close others and academic motivation. The consideration of personality characteristics as moderators of these effects, as well as the identification of resources for resilience and adaptive coping, is also of substantial value. This allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the pandemic effects without reducing them solely to negative consequences.

The scientific achievements should also include participation in international comparative studies of health literacy, mental well-being and the behavior of young people. The chapter "Bulgaria" in the collective volume "Bullying: Global Case Studies in Policy and Prevention for Young People" (2026) extends the applied scope to the problem of bullying, its prevalence and prevention policies. Publications in indexed scientific journals demonstrate the visibility of the research findings beyond the national scientific context.

The candidate's project work demonstrates her capacity to organise and lead research. She directed the national project on adolescent health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic, funded by the Bulgarian National Science Fund (Agreement No. KP-06-N55/7 of 16 November 2021; completed on 26 December 2025), and was Principal Investigator of an ANSO-funded international project on the long-term health and psychosocial effects of severe COVID-19 and coping resources (2022–2025). Her CV also records leadership and participation in other national and international research initiatives, including the HBSC network, for which she has served as Co-Principal Investigator for Bulgaria since 2020.

Her international and professional recognition is further supported by expert appointments: national delegate for Bulgaria to the European Health Psychology Society since 2007; member of the Scientific Council of IPHS–BAS since 2023; member of programme accreditation expert groups in 2022; member of an international research evaluation panel in Portugal in 2024; and service on editorial boards and scientific committees. These activities demonstrate sustained professional engagement beyond her own publications.

With regard to the contributions, I would highlight: (1) systematization of evidence on the biopsychosocial effects of health crises on development; (2) identification of psychological, family and social predictors of health-related and risky behavior; (3) analysis of protective resources and positive adolescent development; and (4) formulation of practical guidelines for psychological and educational support, prevention and intervention. The content of the author's statement and the abstracts provides grounds for regarding these contributions as significant for the advancement of research in health and developmental psychology.

Particularly indicative of the applied research value are the proposed guidelines for preventing problems related to mental health, substance use and academic motivation. The findings can be used in the development of psychological programs and to inform the work of school specialists, healthcare professionals and social services. In collaborative studies, the candidate's individual contribution should be assessed in light of her specific authorship and the evidence submitted for the competition; the abstracts themselves do not allow the contribution of each co-author to be distinguished quantitatively.

The additional competition documents provide concrete evidence of the candidate's academic and research-organisational activity. The statement of minimum requirements records her supervision of doctoral candidate Vanya Stanislavova Slavova, who successfully defended her dissertation on 25 June 2026, as well as the leadership of a national and an international research project. Together with her leadership of doctoral programmes and of the National School for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers, these activities demonstrate an active role in the training and development of early-career researchers.

The list submitted for the competition contains 52 citations: 28 in journals indexed and abstracted in international databases, 12 in peer-reviewed monographs and edited volumes, and 12 in non-indexed peer-reviewed journals. The minimum-requirements statement records 600 points under Group D against a minimum of 120. The CV lists broader bibliometric indicators for the candidate's overall research output (87 publications, an h-index of 6 in Scopus and Web of

Science, and 8 in Google Scholar); these should be distinguished from the publications and citations specifically submitted for this competition.

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no fundamental objections to the thematic focus, methodological approach, or scientific significance of the submitted works. For future work, I would recommend continuing longitudinal and cross-national comparative studies, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed prevention and intervention guidelines in real educational and healthcare settings. These recommendations concern future development and do not alter my positive assessment.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the materials provided, I positively assess the scientific activity of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova. The submitted publications demonstrate in-depth thematic specialization, methodological competence, significant empirical findings and a clearly expressed applied research orientation. The scientific output and certified professional experience are consistent with the profile of the announced competition in health and developmental psychology.

On the basis of the submitted competition documents and the statement reporting 1,168.75 points against a required 590, I consider that the candidate meets the BAS minimum requirements as documented in that statement for the academic position of Professor. I therefore give a POSITIVE OPINION and recommend that the scientific jury support the appointment of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova to the academic position of “Professor” in professional field 3.2. Psychology (Health and Developmental Psychology), for the needs of the “Developmental and Health Psychology” Section at IPHS–BAS.

Date: 2026

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