


Summer School Programme: Reference Budgets and their Application in Economic and Social Research

 Location: Varna, Bulgaria

 Dates: 16–20 June 2025

Target audience: PhD students in economics and social sciences

Main speakers:

- Marcel Warnaar & Gitta Van Den Enden (NIBUD – Netherlands Institute for Budget Information, NL)
- Matt Padley (Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, UK)
- Bérénice Storms & Daan Deferm (Thomas More University of Applied Sciences, Centre of Expertise on Budget and Financial Well-being, BE)

Day 2 – Tuesday 17 June

Theme: Foundations of Reference Budgets

- Programme:
 - 09:00 – 10:00 | Registration
 - 10:00 – 11:00 | Lecture: What Are Reference Budgets? (Speaker: Bérénice Storms)
 - 11:00 – 12:30 | Lecture: Methodologies for constructing Reference Budgets in the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium (Speakers: Bérénice, Marcel, Gitta, Matt)
 - 14:00 – 15:30 | Workshop: Bulgarian Reference Budgets: relevance and available data (in small teams)
 - 16:00 – 17:00 | Case Study Session: Reference Budgets levels across countries (Bérénice, Marcel, Matt)

Day 3 – Wednesday 18 June

Theme: Social Policy Applications

- Programme:
 - 09:00 – 10:45 | The use of reference budgets as social indicators in research (focus on poverty, affordability and income adequacy) Speakers: Bérénice Storms - Gitta van den Enden - Matt Padley)
 - 11:00 – 12:30 | Lecture: Innovative Approaches to updating and rebasing budgets (Speaker: Daan Deferm)
 - 14:00 – 15:00 | Roundtable: Inflation and Societal Change (Moderator: Matt Padley)
 - 15:15 – 17:00 | Workshop: Developing a Reference Budget for Bulgaria including mentoring circles and feedback from experts

Day 4 – Thursday 19 June

Theme: Societal Applications of Reference Budgets

- Programme:
 - 09:00 – 10:00 | Lecture: Financial Education – The NIBUD Approach (Speaker: Marcel Warnaar)
 - 10:00 – 11:00 | Lecture: Developing tools and instruments for social policies BE-NL-UK (Speakers: Bérénice, Marcel, Matt)
 - 11:15 – 12:30 | continuation of lecture: Developing tools and instruments for social policies BE-NL-UK (Speakers: Bérénice, Marcel, Matt)
 - 14:00 – 15:45 | Workshop: Finalizing Bulgarian Budget models including mentoring circles and feedback from experts
 - Group Work: Prepare Final Presentations

Day 5 – Friday 20 June

Theme: Final Presentations and Future Collaboration

- Programme:
 - 09:00 – 11:00 | Final Group Presentations: Bulgarian Reference Budgets
 - 11:15 – 12:30 | Open Feedback and Reflection Session
 - 14:00 – 15:30 | Panel Discussion: Future Trends & Collaborative Research
 - 15:30 – 16:00 | Wrap-up and Certificate Ceremony

Invitation

We are pleased to invite PhD students in economics and social sciences to participate in the international Summer School on Reference Budgets and Their Application in Economic and Social Research, hosted in Varna, Bulgaria, from 16 to 20 June 2025.

This intensive, research-focused programme offers participants a comprehensive introduction to the theory, construction, and practical application of reference budgets—priced baskets of goods and services that define the income needed for a socially acceptable standard of living. Through a balanced combination of expert lectures, comparative case studies, and interactive workshops, participants will gain methodological skills, analytical insights, and applied knowledge essential for integrating reference budgets into academic and policy research.

The programme features contributions from leading scholars and practitioners from Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, and includes hands-on sessions

focused on developing a reference budget tailored to the Bulgarian context. Opportunities for networking, group collaboration, and mentoring are built into the agenda to foster peer learning and international exchange.

This summer school is particularly valuable for PhD students at the Business University of Varna and similar institutions, as it provides concrete tools to analyse income adequacy, poverty, and minimum living standards using real economic data from Bulgaria and other European countries. Participants will explore how reference budgets can support social policy design, inform financial education, and assess the affordability of essential goods and services in both national and comparative frameworks.

Through direct engagement with international experts and applied workshops, doctoral students will not only deepen their theoretical understanding, but also enhance their ability to conduct research with societal relevance and policy impact. The programme also serves as a gateway to broader European research networks in the fields of well-being, poverty, and inclusive growth.

Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of how reference budgets can be used to assess income adequacy, inform social policy, and contribute to the measurement of poverty, affordability, and social inclusion—key themes in both academic research and evidence-based policymaking.