

A much-needed development of personal social services is gaining momentum in Lithuania – or is it?

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The institutional infrastructure and quality of Personal Social Services in Lithuania do not ensure sufficient access to social services or fully meet the needs of vulnerable people (e.g. persons with disabilities, dependent elderly, long-term unemployed, etc.). The COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated numerous amendments to existing laws or boosted new regulations aimed at addressing these issues in 2020. The Programme of the new Government, approved after the October 2020 Parliament elections, sets two priorities: "social services that meet individual needs of service recipients" and "the development of services for people with disabilities and protection of their rights". However, the lack of emphasis on further deinstitutionalisation of social care services comes in for criticism.

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Description

Surveys and evaluations highlight the poor accessibility and inadequate quality of Personal Social Services (PSS) in Lithuania, especially the lack of empowerment services (i.e. coaching services for the long-term unemployed or disabled, development of youth social skills, etc.) (National Audit, 2020; NSMOT, 2020). Furthermore, community-based services are underdeveloped, there is a lack of integrated home care, and dissatisfaction with the quality of services (National Audit Report, 2019 and 2020; Zalimienė et al., 2020). Shortages of information, the fragmented nature of service planning at municipal level, and the lack of interdepartmental collaboration are also stressed in some evaluations (NSMOT, 2020). Many of these problems were addressed in recent amendments to PSS legislation, introduced in 2019-2020.

First, these include new case management protocols, which aim at ensuring more effective organisation and coordination of the services provided to vulnerable families with children. This has also generated new positions of case managers, established by PSS providers.

Secondly, changes to the Law on Employment provide for a new service of assisted employment. The Employment Services try to use PSS to provide coaching and mentoring services as well as case management for unemployed persons who are particularly vulnerable

(e.g. people with disabilities, young adults who leave foster homes, etc.).

Third, the official "Catalogue of Social Services" (which defines the content of social services according to specific types of services as well as types of social services establishments) has been extended by the addition of services provided to young people, such as open, mobile and street work, which seek to develop personal and social competences, and improve the labour market integration of young people.

In addition, funding procedures for PSS have been improved, stipulating that municipalities must ensure continuous financing of the accredited child day centres run by NGOs and other service providers.

The issue of insufficient awareness of available PSS among disadvantaged groups was also addressed in recent changes in legislation. According to amendments to the Law on Social Services, municipalities and social service providers should now provide more information on their official web pages about the number of settings, lists of services provided, and their prices.

Finally, steps were taken in 2020 to improve quality control of PSS. A procedure was adopted for the accreditation of social care services, and only accredited services are now eligible for funding from municipal or state budgets.



Outlook and commentary

The Programme of the 18th Government of Lithuania, which came to power following the October 2020 elections, shows a welcome continuation of the recent work aimed at the development, accessibility and quality of PSS. The Programme lists several priority projects, two of which highlight the development of PSS.

The first priority project refers to “social services that meet personal needs of service recipients”. It stresses access to services based on assessment of personal needs, ensuring that financial assistance is combined with high quality social services that support social inclusion. It also highlights the need for technological development in the sphere of PSS, implementation of common quality standards, and creation of a quality-evaluation system for accredited social services.

The second priority project aims to develop services for people with disabilities and for the protection of their rights. The plan is to create a package of services for people with disabilities, with priority given to empowerment services. This has

been done in response to a recommendation of the 2019 National Audit that municipalities need to place greater emphasis on the development of empowerment services.

Whereas these developments are definitely positive, the Programme does not address the need for further reforms on deinstitutionalisation of social care services for people with disabilities. The current process of establishing small residential houses for disabled people in communities is criticised for being only a partial deinstitutionalisation that does not produce substantial changes in the process of social inclusion (Ruškus, 2019 and 2020).

To summarise, the developments in PSS legislation in 2020 demonstrate the importance attached by the State to improving social inclusion of vulnerable groups by increasing the accessibility and quality of PSS. The two priority actions included in the Programme of the new Government are consistent and ensure continuity of the recent legislative changes, but the concrete results of the implemented and new reforms are yet to be seen.

Further reading

Catalogue of Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, URL: <https://bit.ly/39boeCt> (in Lithuanian)

Law on Employment of the Republic of Lithuania, URL: <https://bit.ly/3a0gaUi> (in Lithuanian)

Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, URL: <https://bit.ly/3iFg3kH> (in Lithuanian)

National Audit. Report (2020), Social integration of persons with disabilities. No. VAE-9. URL: <https://bit.ly/39Vdzut> (in Lithuanian)

National Audit. Report (2019), Does social assistance ensure the minimum income of the poor and their labour market participation. No. VA-5. URL: <https://bit.ly/3qLhpqu> (in Lithuanian)

NSMOT (2020), Poverty and social exclusion in Lithuania. Report of the Lithuanian Anti-poverty Network. URL: <https://bit.ly/3qMf851> (in Lithuanian)

Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania. 11/12/2020. No. XIV-72. URL: <https://bit.ly/3p9KdyW> (in Lithuanian)

Ruškus, J. (2019), Deinstitutionalisation? Continuing the pessimistic thought of Dainius Puras. URL: <https://bit.ly/3obIp7b> (in Lithuanian)

Ruškus, J. (2020), The Human Rights Standards for a Full Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities: the UN Perspective. In T. Dietze, D. Gloystein, V. Moser, A. Piezunka, and L. Röbenack (Eds.), *Inklusion – Partizipation – Menschenrechte. Transformationen in die Teilhabegesellschaft?* Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, pp. 28-46.

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