

Social Services in Lithuania

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Organisation of social services in Lithuania

On 1 July, 2006 new edition of Law on Social Services¹ (hereinafter referred to as the Law) entered into force. This law was based on the principles stated in the conception of social services' provision reform², which was approved in 2002. According to this conception the functions and the responsibility between the ministry, counties and municipality were clearly distributed, the competition between social services' providers encouraged, the order of the social services' financing changed from direct financing of institutions, to direct financing of social services, the payment of social services differentiated according to the principle of social solidarity, the quality requirements for social services settled.

Many of changes which have impacted the new edition of Law are related to the much bigger role played by the quasi market in social services organisation and delivery. Particularly, a market - oriented approach manifest with introducing the new rules for payment for social services (everybody have to pay according to the person (family) income and property), introducing the services quality assurance system and licensing of social services providers etc.

The Law described the services aimed at providing assistance to a person (family) who, by reason of his age, disability, social problems, partially or completely lacks, has not acquired or has lost the abilities or possibilities to independently care for his private (family) life and to participate in society.

According to the Law social services are managed, granted and provided so as to ensure that a person (family) can access social services as close to his place of residence as possible. Therefore, a municipality is in charge of the ensuring of provision of social services to residents of its territory by assessing needs, planning, organising and controlling the quality of social services of general interest and social attendance. The big challenge is carefully establish the person's (family) need for social services in order to provide adequate services. Entitlement to the social services depends upon the assessed need; the amount of payment for social services depends on financial possibilities of a person (family).

In order to satisfy the needs of ever changing society, it is vital to develop not only conventional social services but also new types of social services but also its organisational forms ensuring efficiency, uptake, complexity, accessibility of social services. Residential care as an exclusive integrated help requiring permanent assistance of professionals is very costly thus should be granted solely in the case where other kinds of assistance could not help. The much more efficient and effective social care is the one that is provided to a person in a familiar setting,

¹ Law on Social Services, (*Official Gazette*, 2006, No. 17-589);

² Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 171 of 6 February 2002 on the Approval of the Conception of Reform on Social Services' Provision (*Official Gazette*, No. 15 - 564, 2002);

community, i.e. social care at a person's home. Changes in the financing model of social services, regarding state grants allocated to municipalities and designed for the financing social care of people with heavy disabilities, prompted municipalities to organise social care at home. Consequently, this create possibilities to organise complex integrated nursing and social services rendered to elderly or disabled people at home.

1. The most important challenges Lithuania faces within the field of social services

Implementing the Law and subordinate legislation, municipalities deal with the problem of precise planning, because there are no methods to evaluate true number of people going to apply for social services, and what particular services they will need. As a result of imprecise planning, the municipalities cope with the problem of inadequate planning of finances and incapability to finance timely services' provision.

Though we have a lot of services described in the *Catalogue of the social services*³, in practice the majority of the municipalities apply only limited list of services, not providing some clients with relevant services.

We could indicate that recently our country have coped with the increased demand for institutional care, especially for elderly people and deprived children. The municipalities are in favour to provide institutional care instead of providing with alternative community based services such as settlement of the children in social or foster families, day care services at person's home etc.

The demand for residential care is increasing every year because of a bigger demand of people willing to take up residency care. In 2005, 62 percent of all applicants were accepted, whereas in 2007, 85 percent of all applicants wishing to take up residency in a social care institution for the elderly were accepted.

According to the statistics 379 elderly people are waiting in the queue for settlement in the stationary social care institutions, in 2007 about 4971 elderly people received social care in various types of social care institutions, whereas about 8189 elderly, including disabled people, received social care and help at home, as for children – in 2007 about 5363 lived in various types of social care institutions, 258 lived in the social families, 7240 – in the foster families.

To infer, although requirements in the Law stated priority to create conditions for person to live at home, in his family, clients often prefer institutional social care and municipalities accept such preferences. As a result elderly, children care homes or homes for disable people are overcrowded.

³ Order No. A1-93 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 5 April 2006 On the Approval of Catalogue of Social Services (*Official Gazette*, No. 43-1570, 2006);

2. Private and public providers of social services

According to the Law, mixed economy of care, where either private or public providers could provide social services for different clients groups, is established. Clients have free choice of service provider. To emphasize, undertaking such as public limited liability company, private limited liability company, individual enterprise, an establishment (public establishment, budgetary institution), organization (association, charity and sponsorship fund, religious community or society (centre)) or a social family can provide social services, to sum up, only legal persons are accepted as services' providers. Although the Law entered into force in 2006, the market of social services providers is not yet the reality and county and municipal services providers still dominate in Lithuania (See Table1). In this connection could be mentioned such reasons as non-profit-making nature of the services or as vulnerable people are not attractive consumers group to private sector etc.

Table 1. Number of care institutions for the elderly by type of institution and year

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Total by type of institution	93	94	94	94	95	97	100	101
County care institution	8	8	8	7	7	8	8	8
Municipality care institution	52	52	53	54	55	55	55	55
Other care institutions	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3
Non-governmental care institution	30	30	30	30	30	32	35	35

3. General provisions of social services' financing and payment

Social services in Lithuania are fee-paying by a person and also partially financed by the state or municipalities. The amount to be paid for social services is established taking into consideration the type of the services provided to a person (family) and the financial capability of the person (family (income and asset level)). Sources of payment are: a person's (family's) income, property in money, funds of the person's adult children and other earnings. So, we use the personal budgets as the source of payment. The problem occurs, with adult paying for long-term social care from his/her property. Usually people are likely to cheat, thus they donate their property to the survivors; as a result they avoid paying from property and the amount financed by the municipality increases.

From the 1st of January 2007, after the implementation of new procedure of payment for social services, and pursuant to the methodology for financing social services and calculation of funds⁴, a new procedure of financing social services was applied. Thus currently all social services spring from three main sources: municipal funds, state special targeted grants, allocated to municipalities, and personal contributions paid for social services. This prompted the formation of a mixed social service market and competitive conditions for the social service institutions.

⁴ Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 978 of 10 October 2006 on the Approval of Methodology for Financing Social Services and Calculation of Funds (*Official Gazette*, No. 110-4163, 2006);

4. The quality of the services

In the 2007 the quality system of social services in Lithuania was introduced. Accordingly, social care services should be provided in comply with social care standards⁵. These standards place the major focus on a human right to privacy, preservation of dignity and honour, harmonisation of emotional needs and the environment created for a person, creation of conditions favourable for the self-expression and the development of interests, strengthening of social ties with a community and relatives, etc. In 2009 the aforementioned Social Care Standards will be supplemented with assessment criteria, thereby establishing the assessment of compliance of provided social care with the social care standards, which shall be carried out by the Social Institutions Supervision and Audit Department under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

Supposedly, a person has a possibility to choose the institution where the better quality of services is provided. But in practice one deals with the problem of self payment, usually the more amount of self payment means higher quality of services. The maximum amount financed by the municipality is stated by its local government, and if one chooses costly services one has to pay more from his own budget. The prices of social care services are not regulated in Lithuania, so theoretically the institution can ask quite a high price for services it provides. The quality of the services does not necessarily mean the demand for these services. In practice cheaper services are more favourable.

Moreover, what concerns long term care institutions and social families in future they will be obliged to receive licences which will be granted in case the social care is provided in comply with social care standards.

5. Direct financing of social services provision

As it was mentioned above, from 2007 the order of the social services' financing changed from direct financing of institutions, to direct financing of social services. A person who pays even partially for the services can expect the responsibility of the service provider to deliver good quality services. In future, only licensed social care institutions will be granted donations from state and municipal budgets.

According to the Law in the specific cases established by a municipality, where it is expedient to organise social services of general interest and social attendance in respect of a person (family) in cash, these services may be changed into a cash benefit – assistance in cash.

⁵ Order No. A1-153 of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania of 9 May 2008 On the Approval of Standards of the Development of Social Services for 2008 (*Official Gazette*, No. 55-2105, 2008)

6. Social justice principle in the system of social services

Establishment of person's (family's) need for social services guarantees the implementation of person's right to the services and thus real possibilities of the person (family) to receive adequate social services. Some danger that payments for social services restrict accessibility for services exist, but services for the most vulnerable who receive social benefits and whose incomes are low are guaranteed by the municipalities.

The transmission of the information regarding the accessibility of the services falls under the responsibility of the social workers.

7. Responsibility between the state and the local level

According to the Law the responsibility between state institutions (the Ministry of Social Security and Labour; county governors; the Social Services Monitoring Department under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour) and municipalities is clearly distributed. The major responsibility falls under the municipality which is in charge of the ensuring of provision of social services to residents of its territory by planning and organising social services and controlling the quality of social services of general interest and social attendance. Under the Constitution the municipalities have autonomy in creation local policy therefore regional disparities in the quality of social service, the infrastructure of services, award of resources for services etc. emerge. Because of the lack of municipal funds devoted to social services, some municipalities are not arranging relevant services especially those of long term care in social care institutions or they are providing with cheaper low quality services.