Personalised Public Services for People in Vulnerable Situations in Lithuania

TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATED APPROACH

OECD

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BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES

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Foreword

The action was funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the OECD, in co-operation with the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission.

The Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania features specific commitments to strengthening personalised social services tailored to the individual needs of people in vulnerable situations and encouraging the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in policy design and service delivery. Lithuania's Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) requested the support of the Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) of the European Commission and the OECD for technical support to develop a new approach to personalised services for people in vulnerable situations in Lithuania as well as increase the involvement of NGOs in policy design and service delivery. This report brings together the information, analysis and good practices that were gathered and developed to inform the assessments and recommendations set out in the proposal in Chapter 1. The next stage of the project is to develop an implementation roadmap based on the recommendations in the proposal.

The report starts with a proposal to ensure that services for people with disabilities, young people leaving care and people leaving prison in Lithuania are well-integrated and tailored to meet their individual needs (Chapter 1). The proposal is based on an analysis of the overall governance structure of public service provision and NGOs' involvement (Chapter 2), an assessment of current operating models and the IT infrastructure of Lithuania's employment and social services (Chapter 3), and a comprehensive mapping of existing public services for people in vulnerable situations (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 is a descriptive analysis of how service users and those who work with them (NGOs, social workers, and municipality representatives) experience public services, based on workshop discussions held with service users and providers in three municipalities.

The report was jointly prepared by the Social Policy Division and the Skills and Employability Division in the OECD's Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (ELS), and the Governance Reviews and Partnerships Division with input from the Open and Innovative Government Division in the OECD's Public Governance Directorate (GOV).

The project is funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the OECD, in co-operation with the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission. The OECD Secretariat wishes to express its gratitude to Oana Dumitrescu from DG REFORM and Rasa Genienė, Tautvydas Vencius and Goda Žvaliauskė from the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour, whose co-operation has been instrumental for the project and the report.

The report has greatly benefited from the information, assessments and feedback received from many stakeholders in Lithuania, in particular representatives from the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, Public Employment Service, Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania, Kaunas region, Švenčionys municipality and Marijampolė municipality, local offices of social services, employment services, health services and

housing services, non-governmental organisations, civil society organisations and other advocate groups, as well as services users from the three target groups.

The report contributes to the OECD's programme of work on matching social policy to emerging social needs across the life course (institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation) that falls under the auspices of the OECD Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee and the Working Party on Social Policy. The report also contributes to the OECD's programme of work on public sector effectiveness and public governance for inclusiveness. The analysis on public governance was carried out under the auspices of the OECD Public Governance Committee and it is informed by the work and legal standards of the OECD Public Governance Committee, the Committee of Senior Budget Officials, the Regulatory Policy Committee and their sub-bodies.

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Executive summary

Over the last 25 years, Lithuania has experienced strong economic performance, introduced bold reforms, modernised its public administration and substantially improved the well-being of its citizens. Despite rapid growth over the past few decades however, Lithuania has a higher share of its population at-risk-of poverty than other EU countries (21.4% in 2020 compared to an average of 16.3% among EU countries), with some people, often people with multiple and complex needs, being more at risk of living in poverty than others. People in vulnerable situations tend to rely more on public services and so timely access to personalised public services is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of public policies aimed at improving their well-being.

This report assesses options to strengthen public service provision for people in vulnerable situations, specifically for people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care, and to increase the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the design and delivery of those services. Across these three groups people who may require personalised public services is higher than the OECD average. However, in comparison with other OECD countries, Lithuania allocates fewer resources to the delivery of social services. Public social expenditure for in-kind services amounted to about 5.8% of GDP in 2017, compared to the OECD average of 8.0%.

There have been significant administrative reforms to improve service provision for the three groups in recent years. However, while the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders supporting people with disabilities are now well defined in legal frameworks, this is not the case for the other two groups. Government strategies in employment and social policy areas include objectives, measures, and targets for some vulnerable groups but remain limited for others. Furthermore, while co-ordination at the national level for people with disabilities is well-developed, institutional mechanisms for co-ordination remain weaker in the case of people leaving prison and young people leaving care. Lack of institutional capacities is also a challenge and there remains significant scope to strengthen monitoring and evaluation activities.

The involvement of NGOs in policy design and service delivery can inform policy and service design, help outreach to target groups, promote their access to services and increase government accountability. The involvement of NGOs relies on a protected civic space, a strong NGO sector and enabling governance structures. While co-ordination between NGOs and public institutions is enabled through national and municipal councils of NGOs, and an NGOs Fund is being set up to further support development of the sector, a lack of awareness and skills among public officials for engaging NGOs in decision making, a lack of capacity in the NGOs sector, and difficulties for NGOs to take part in public procurement processes remain barriers to greater involvement.

Overall, the Lithuanian Public Employment Service and many social service centres in the municipalities have the essential prerequisites for providing services according to individual user needs and co-operating with other service providers to offer holistic support. Day-to-day implementation of these approaches can however be insufficient. Primary difficulties include an absence of guidelines for social service provision in many municipalities and a lack of integration of employment and social services and/or referral processes. In addition, the current IT infrastructure does not support a sufficient level of service provision: data

exchange is difficult, interfaces are not very user-friendly, digital coverage of core business processes is limited, and solutions for monitoring reports and supporting evaluation activities are inadequate.

The Catalogue of Social Services of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour sets out a list of clearly defined services that can be provided across Lithuania. While the Catalogue is comprehensive, municipalities are free to provide additional services, although, in practice, they rarely do. The planning of municipal social services relies on information gathered retrospectively about service use, that is neither comprehensive nor accurate. In addition, municipalities do not have detailed and up-to-date data about people who are not accessing services (i.e. target populations), which means planning and implementation decisions are often made without good information about the real need for services.

Workshop discussions with service users and those who work with them revealed that, although many public services are available, there can be shortcomings in those services and/or in the way they are provided. Specific challenges include a lack of co-operation among public institutions, exacerbated by poor information flows, a lack of preparation and planning for independent living, inadequate support for family members, and stigma.

To ensure personalised services are well integrated and tailored to meet individual needs, Lithuania should consider actions that address both the general challenges to delivering effective, well-integrated public services as well as specific challenges relating to each of the three groups. Specifically, the OECD recommends that Lithuania considers:

- Improving public governance arrangements to deliver integrated policies and services by assigning clear responsibilities through legal frameworks, mainstreaming consideration of vulnerable groups, providing solid bases for institutional co-ordination, ensuring adequate institutional capacities, and enhancing monitoring and evaluation processes.
- Strengthening the role of NGOs by investing in measures to protect and promote a civic space, strengthen their participation in policy and service design, facilitate their access to public procurement opportunities, and enhance the impact of the NGOs Fund.
- Increasing co-operation and co-ordination across public services, particularly between employment and social services providers, by establishing formalised proactive referral processes and improving existing IT infrastructure to support data exchange and case management activities.
- Requiring all providers of social and employment services to develop, implement and systematically revise individual action plans jointly agreed with every client, to guide the service provision and integration journey.
- Investing in the IT infrastructure of both social and employment services by implementing the plans to change the digital infrastructure in the Public Employment Service and initiating a replacement of the Social Protection and Services Information System with a modern IT system.
- Strengthening existing services and addressing service gaps by regularly reviewing the Catalogue of Social Services, developing a methodology and related guidance for municipalities to systematically assess the use and need for social services in their territories.

1 Proposal for a more personalised approach to public service provision in Lithuania

The OECD is assisting Lithuania to develop a new approach to personalised services for people with disabilities, young people leaving care and people leaving prison. Following an assessment of the governance of personalised services including NGO involvement; operating models and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure of employment and social services; and the services currently available to the three target groups, the OECD prepared a series of recommended actions. This chapter sets out an approach drawing on the most relevant recommendations that will help Lithuania to ensure that services for people with disabilities, young people leaving care and people leaving prison are well-integrated and tailored to meet their individual needs and strengthen the involvement of NGOs in the provision of those services.

1.1. Introduction

The provision of personalised, integrated services is fundamental to addressing the multiple and complex needs of people in vulnerable situations and to improving their socio-economic outcomes. Achieving this objective requires accessible, ethical and equitable public services that prioritise user needs that deliver with impact, at scale and with pace and that are accountable and transparent (OECD, 2022[1]). In the context of the ongoing de-institutionalisation process and the transfer of service provision from large institutions to community-based services, the Government of Lithuania is committed to ensuring services for people with disabilities, young people leaving care, and people leaving prison are well-integrated and tailored to meet their individual needs. The Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania, which outlines key national priorities, features specific commitments to strengthening accessible, effective, timely and personalised social services (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[2]).

The government also aims to increase the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in policy design and service delivery. The Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania encourages a partial transfer of public service provision to NGOs as well as the establishment of "innovative, more efficient models of public service provision" (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[2]).

These two commitments reflect long-term efforts of Lithuania to make the public administration more result-oriented, more effective in the provision of administrative and public services, and more transparent and open towards its citizens (OECD, 2015[3]). They also reflect the government's concern that, despite rapid growth over the past few decades, one-fifth (21%) of the Lithuanian population still lives below the relative poverty threshold with some people more at risk of living in poverty than others. For example, the at-risk-of-poverty rate for people with disabilities was 31% in 2019. While similar data are not readily available for young people leaving care and people leaving prison, evidence suggests they too are at a higher risk of poverty than the wider population. Not only does poverty increase the likelihood of a child being placed in out-of-home care, but young people are also often exposed to poverty when they "age out" of care (McNamara, Harvey and Andrewartha, 2019[4]). People leaving prison can also be particularly vulnerable, often facing numerous challenges when reintegrating into society, as society can view them as dangerous and unworthy of help, making it very difficult for people leaving prison to find a job and escape poverty.

To illustrate how many people across the three groups may require personalised public services, in 2020, 128 400 people or 7.4% of the working age population were receiving a work incapacity pension, which compares to an OECD average of around 6% (acknowledging that not all people receiving a work incapacity pension will require personalised services). Lithuania's prison population in 2020 was 6 138 (or 220 per 100 000 of the total population, compared to an OECD average of 150 per 100 000 population in the late 2010s); 3 037 people left prison that year. On average, in 2020 or the most recent year, children in out-of-home care across the 26 OECD countries for which data are available represented 0.8% of 0-17 year-olds, in Lithuania that percentage was closer to 1.4%. 924 young care leavers reached the legal leaving age or were emancipated in 2020. In comparison with other OECD countries, Lithuania allocates fewer resources to the delivery of social services: Public social expenditure for in-kind services amounted to about 5.8% of GDP in 2017, compared to the OECD average of 8.0%.

Lithuania's Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) requested technical support of the Directorate General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM) of the European Commission and the OECD to develop a new approach to personalised services for people in vulnerable situations in Lithuania including through increased involvement of NGOs. As part of the project, the OECD undertook: (1) an analysis of the governance of services for people in vulnerable situations and NGOs' involvement; (2) a mapping of the different services across policy fields; (3) an analysis of operating models and Information Technology (IT) infrastructure of employment and social services; (4) a series of in-country focus group discussions with service users and service providers (NGO representatives, social workers, and municipality representatives) to hear first-hand their experiences with those services; and (5) a series of workshops

and notes on international good practices. Based on these different activities, this report makes a series of recommendations to strengthen the delivery of integrated services in Lithuania for people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care.

The evidence to inform the different activities was collected through virtual consultations with Lithuanian stakeholders, desk research, a review of administrative data, a series of questionnaires (Box 1.1) and focus group discussions. The OECD also organised two virtual learning events with experts from different EU/OECD countries and a study visit to Norway for representatives of the MSSL, municipalities and NGOs to share knowledge on good practices.

Box 1.1. OECD questionnaires used in this project

Questionnaires for Ministries

A policy questionnaire on personalised services for people in vulnerable situations was administered to the MSSL, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Health. The questionnaire focused on the governance of public services for people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young care leavers – where public services include social, employment, health, housing and legal services. The questionnaire gathered information to support the mapping of the administrative set-up and the roles and capacities of key government stakeholders involved in the design and delivery of services to the target groups. It compiled evidence about the underlying governance processes and gaps in the capacity to set and steer strategy/policies, design programmes, co-ordinate across departments and levels of government, and effectively monitor and evaluate service provision. The questionnaire also contained questions around opportunities and barriers for the integration of NGOs in the design and delivery of public services.

A second questionnaire was sent to the MSSL to gather information on the IT infrastructure that support providing social services, and more specifically the Register of social protection and social services (SPIS). The questionnaire collected information about the main characteristics of the infrastructure, the operational database and user interfaces, data collection for monitoring, evaluation and research, and the processes to share microdata with other parties.

Questionnaires for the public employment service (PES)

Two separate questionnaires were administered to the Lithuanian PES to gather information for the mapping of the operating models of the organisations delivering employment and social services in Lithuania, as well as the IT infrastructure that supports service provision. The first questionnaire collected information on the promotion of services, outreach, identification of individual needs, case management, and IT infrastructure and processes. The second questionnaire entered in further detail on the IT infrastructure of the main register of the Lithuanian PES (UT) and the register of social enterprises used by the Lithuanian PES (SEDA). In doing this, the questionnaires sought information on general approaches towards people in need of support, as well as any approaches specific to the defined groups.

Survey for municipalities

Finally, the OECD, with the collaboration of the Lithuanian MSSL, designed and implemented a municipality-level survey between the second week of December 2021 and the third week of January 2022. The objective of the survey was to obtain a better understanding on the provision of social services in Lithuania. The assignment included the administration of a "social services questionnaire" to representatives of the Social Services Divisions of the 60 Lithuanian municipalities. The questionnaire was structured under 12 different modules, and covered topics such as planning of service provision, social services offer and providers, funding, outreach to target groups and

identification of individual needs, case management, IT infrastructure, Monitoring and Evaluation, and co-ordination with national government, NGOs and other public and private entities. The survey was administered using a Computer Assisted Web Interviewing software, which allowed to monitor completion progress and the quality of the data provided in real time. As a result, the survey response rate reached 95% (57 out of 60 Lithuanian municipalities).

1.2. Improving public governance arrangements to deliver integrated policies and services for vulnerable groups

Supporting people in vulnerable situations with integrated, personalised public services requires close co-operation across different policy and service areas. Such co-operation, in turn, relies on the roles and responsibilities of relevant ministries and service providers to be well-defined, which is not the case currently in some parts of the public service for people in vulnerable situations. While the support structures for people with disabilities are defined in the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, no such framework exists to clarify roles and responsibilities for the actors supporting people leaving prison and young people leaving care, including social, housing, employment, health, justice and education services. Lithuania could undertake consultations with key stakeholders across the government, sub-national authorities, civil society organisations, service providers and target groups to understand their service needs, expectations and capacities and map their current contributions. Building on these consultations, legal frameworks can be revised/formulated to assign clear roles and responsibilities to key stakeholders across relevant policy and service areas, particularly for people leaving prison and young people leaving care.

Government action in the areas of employment and social policies and services is guided by the Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) of the MSSL and the strategy of the Public Employment Service (PES). The current SAP includes objectives, measures, and targets for some groups, including people with disabilities and young people with fewer opportunities. However, the use of strategy documents to plan and co-ordinate actions for people in vulnerable situations beyond those two groups is limited. A more joined-up approach could be promoted by broadening the focus of government action for people in vulnerable situations beyond social and employment policy and services to other relevant areas such as housing, health, justice, and education. In this sense, stakeholders responsible for these policy areas could also define specific objectives, measures, targets, and key performance indicators for target groups.

While the MSSL plays a leading role in the design and delivery of social and employment policies, all relevant stakeholders must work together to achieve a coherent and co-ordinated approach. Co-ordination at the national level is often supported by inter-ministerial action plans and ministerial orders, but these can be hampered by a lack of institutional mechanisms and human and financial resources to execute the plans and orders. While the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities has strengthened co-ordination across relevant stakeholders, the activities and scope of the inter-institutional working group for the implementation of procedures for people leaving prison remains limited. Moreover, there is no institutional mechanism in place to promote a more integrated and cross-sectoral approach to policy design and service delivery for young people leaving care. Lithuania could consider developing cross-sectoral policy frameworks and implement them effectively by ensuring inter-ministerial action plans and inter-ministerial orders are supported by adequate institutional capacities and mechanisms. For instance, the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of frameworks and action plans could be supported through the creation/strengthening of effective, dedicated inter-institutional bodies for different target groups bringing together stakeholders at the adequate level.

According to survey replies, greater co-ordination and co-operation between national-level ministries and municipalities is reportedly hindered by a lack of political will and leadership in some ministries and

municipalities, insufficient interest and incentives for staff, as well as a lack of institutional capacities and mechanisms. Increased co-ordination could be achieved by including selected municipalities in national inter-institutional bodies for different target groups as well as by conducting broader consultations with municipalities. Co-ordination at the local level could also be enhanced by strengthening the role and capacities of local inter-institutional co-ordinators.

Designing and delivering tailored and integrated services requires that institutions at both the national and local levels have adequate financial and human capacities. For instance, only 3.5% of the total municipal budgets was devoted to social services in 2020 on average and 1.4% of the planned budget of the MSSL was dedicated to the provision of social care to people with severe disabilities. Ensuring an adequate number of staff with appropriate skills and competencies is seen as a key challenge by ministries, municipalities, and the PES for service delivery. For instance, in 2020, around 25 social workers co-ordinated reintegration services for more than 2 100 inmates released over the course of the year, under the oversight of one staff member in the re-socialisation unit of the Prison Department. Service users and providers also pointed to a shortage of professionally qualified staff such as psychologists. To deliver the services required for people in vulnerable situations, Lithuania could ensure there are adequate numbers of staff in policy design and service co-ordination and delivery roles. Staff should have the appropriate mix of competencies, managerial skills and specialised expertise, and in the case of staff working directly with service users the necessary qualities and communication skills, provided through methodological assistance tools, manuals, regular training and capacity-building activities.

1.3. Strengthening the role of NGOs in policy making and service delivery for vulnerable groups

The Government of Lithuania aims to encourage the involvement of NGOs in policy design and service delivery and establish "innovative, more efficient models of public service provision." Indeed, stakeholder participation in the policy cycle increases government accountability and improves the evidence base for policy making (OECD, 2017[5]). According to survey replies, NGOs are currently involved in the provision of social services in 96% of responding municipalities: for instance, they play a prominent role in running day care centres and in providing leisure activities and other "soft services" to people with disabilities. Yet, the lack of human and financial resources in NGOs and the lack of NGOs themselves are highlighted as key challenges. Promoting the development of the NGO[1] sector and taking measures to protect and promote the civic space in which NGOs operate is critical to achieving the government's aim of increasing their impactful involvement in the design and delivery of services to people in vulnerable situations. The definition of NGOs, together with the assignment of roles and responsibilities for developing the NGOs sector, is generally well-established in Lithuania. However, there is a lack of information about NGOs and their different types (e.g. total number, number of NGOs involved in delivery of different public services, capacities of NGOs, type of NGOs by legal definition, etc.). To improve the information available about NGOs, a mapping exercise could be undertaken in collaboration with municipalities and umbrella NGOs to inform the development of a database that contains high-quality and up-to-date data and information about NGOs, including their legal status, focus of activity, capacities, and involvement in public service provision.

Greater participation of NGOs in the development of the strategic documents of the MSSL, the PES and other ministries could inform the design of national policies and services for people in vulnerable situations. The Council of NGOs appears to have been strengthened in recent years as a mechanism for co-ordination between public authorities and NGOs, although its role in policy areas beyond the development of the NGOs sector remains rather narrow. At the municipal level, while NGOs are commonly consulted on Social Services Plans (SSPs), their engagement in defining the strategic objectives of SSPs is limited. Municipal councils of NGOs remain under-used and lack of awareness among public officials remains a challenge. Lithuania could strengthen the participation of NGOs in policy and service design at national and local

level, with specific efforts to reach out to NGOs advocating for or serving relevant target groups, by conducting consultations, leveraging Councils of NGOs and promoting awareness and relevant skills among public officials (e.g. through manuals, workshops and capacity-building).

Municipalities involve NGOs to some extent in the provision of social services and some local PES offices have also signed co-operation agreements with NGOs for the provision of employment services. However, a more significant role for NGOs in providing public services is hampered by public procurement procedures favouring lowest-price proposals. The Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider measures to facilitate NGOs' access to procurement opportunities, such as through reserved procurement provisions or by buying public services targeted at specific groups through performance-based pricing.

NGOs also need the necessary human, technical and financial capacities to make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of public services. The NGO sector is supported by the MSSL and municipalities mainly through financial support, premises/equipment and, to a lesser extent, training and capacity-building activities (especially at the national level). An NGO Fund is currently being developed and, once fully operational, is expected to further support development of the NGO sector. Lithuania could take the opportunity to enhance the impact of the Fund through a series of measures, including: (1) adopting participatory approaches in setting the focus and scope of the Fund with the involvement of NGOs and other ministries; (2) ensuring an unbureaucratic application process to make the Fund attractive to NGOs; (3) considering multi-year grants for NGOs to enhance long-term sustainability of service provision and to encourage innovation in line with changing (service) user needs; (4) promoting awareness and skills among NGOs to apply for funding to foster competition and increase the quality of applications, including through guidelines, factsheets, templates, tutorials, and seminars/webinars; (5) securing adequate financial and human resources for the Fund; (6) putting in place effective inspection, reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and processes on the outputs, outcomes and impact of financed projects; and (7) ensure this evidence is fed back into the prioritisation of initiatives supported by the Fund to strengthen impact and accountability.

1.4. Improving service design and addressing service gaps

The provision of social services in Lithuania relies heavily on the Catalogue of Social Services issued by the Minister of Social Security and Labour, which sets out a list of services that can be provided across the country and clearly defines what each service must consist of; who can access it; and under what conditions. The Catalogue was introduced in 2006, and although the Minister of Social Security and Labour can approve additional services, very few services have been added since its introduction. Municipalities are free to provide additional services outside of the Catalogue, but in practice they do not tend to deviate from the pre-existing list.

The planning of municipal social services relies heavily on information about service use in the previous year, which is problematic because plans are largely based on retrospective service use rather than looking forward to understand what services may be needed in the future. Information about the total number of social service users is spread across different sources, with the two most important ones being the reporting tool in the Social Protection Information System (commonly known as the SPIS showcases) and the national survey of social services. In addition, available data on the number of service users are neither comprehensive nor accurate, which can hinder both the planning for and implementation of social services.

Furthermore, municipalities do not have detailed and up-to-date data about the total population who meet the criteria for social services but are not accessing them (i.e. target populations), which means decisions on social services are often made without information about the real need for those services. Measures to improve information about service demand and use could be taken, starting with developing a methodology and related guidance that municipalities can use to systematically assess the need for social services in

their territories. Current efforts to collect individual and household level data on service users could be reviewed to ensure all essential information – such as the intensity and frequency of service use and the socio-economic characteristics of the service user – is captured. These data could be supplemented with targeted research projects and information gathered from consultations with key stakeholders including NGOs and service users to better understand communities and the evolving needs of target groups. Furthermore, the Catalogue of Social Services could be reviewed on a regular basis to improve existing services and include new ones as necessary.

For personalised services to meet the needs of those who require them, it is important to involve service users in their design. Workshop discussions with service users and those who work with them (NGOs, social workers, and municipality representatives) revealed that people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care in Lithuania face significant challenges, some unique, many the same, in receiving the supports and services they need to live the lives they want to live, the lives most people take for granted. While many improvements have been made in recent years, there is still a lot more that can be done.

While service users described gaps in service provision more as shortcomings in available services or in the way those services are provided, one specific service gap that was identified is a lack of support and services for families of service users, such as counselling. For example, social workers observed that parents of children with disabilities often expect social workers to undertake tasks with their children because they are not confident to do those tasks themselves. With the right support, social workers believe parents could do more for their children. Lithuania could consider reviewing and where necessary improving the supports available to the families of service users.

There was a strong view expressed by service users and providers that an earlier start to planning and preparation for independent living outside an institution is necessary, with the start time depending on the needs of each person. For instance, young people in institutional care need to learn how to live independently, look for a job, cook their own meals and manage their finances, while people leaving prison may additionally need to work on their social and technical skills after a long term in prison. While some service users shared positive experiences of their early days living outside an institution, consideration could be given to improving preparation and planning support for young people leaving care and people leaving prison to smooth their integration into both society and the labour market, including ensuring consistent implementation across municipalities.

A lack of appropriately qualified staff ranging from a shortage of professionals, such as psychologists, to simply a need for more staff with the right experience and qualities is having an impact on the effectiveness of services provided. Service users want the people who work with them to have the right qualities and communication skills, people who are ambitious for them and encourage and support them to progressively make more decisions and choices for themselves. Ensuring services meet the needs of service users requires the skills and competencies of staff, especially those at the front-line to be strengthened, through greater guidance, regular training, and capacity-building activities.

Service providers also described how collaboration and co-ordination between institutions relies more on personal relationships and informal communication channels than on formal mechanisms. These challenges are exacerbated because information cannot be shared across institutions because of data protection reasons. In addition, information about services can be difficult to find and/or be overly bureaucratic and complicated, resulting in overlapping or duplication of services and/or unawareness of service users about the services they might be entitled to. Creating more opportunities for formal collaboration between institutions (including formalised referral processes and modern IT infrastructures), addressing barriers to information sharing, and improving information for service users would contribute to a better, collective targeting of efforts.

Occurrences of stigma and discrimination are common. Most service users described experiences of it, while service providers reported observing it. Examples included service users being denied housing,

fewer job opportunities and a sense that some service providers lack empathy when working with them. Service providers have observed discrimination being displayed by a range of institutions and actors including schools, medical facilities, banks, employers and landlords. If public and institutional attitudes are to change, actions that raise public awareness and change perceptions, such as disseminating "good news" stories, i.e. stories of successful experiences, are required.

1.5. Applying a more consistent approach to individual action plans and case management

Public employment services (the PES) in Lithuania use jointly agreed individual action plans (IAPs) that set out a service user's integration pathway and necessary support measures following a needs assessment. By contrast, only two-thirds of social service providers in municipalities use them. In remaining municipalities, IAPs are either not used at all or are standardised i.e. generic, and not tailored to the individual and their needs, which means that an individual's progress cannot be comprehensively and systematically planned for or closely monitored. To improve service provision, all service providers could be required to develop and implement a jointly agreed IAP with the service users they work with, tailored to their individual needs. Service users could be fully involved in the development of their IAP. The use of jointly agreed IAPs can enhance transparency and strengthen the mutual obligations between the service provider and service user.

Reviewing progress is an important component of the IAP process, an activity that is carried out by the PES (albeit not very frequently), but is not widespread across other service providers, with only one-in-five municipalities engaging in reviews on a regular basis. IAPs could be routinely reviewed to ensure the service user is receiving the supports and services that were originally identified and that those services are making a difference, as well as to make sure that any emerging needs are identified and addressed in a timely way.

Case management is a well-developed and commonly used approach for integrating services for individuals with complex needs, such as people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care. The PES and almost all municipalities have dedicated case workers to support service users – including the involvement of in-house specialists to assist with more complex cases. However, beyond in-house support, holistic services involving co-operation and collaboration between various providers is lacking, with services generally provided in isolation of each other. When service users are referred to specialists in other organisations, the system often relies on the service users themselves having to contact the specialists.

The lack of institutional co-ordination mechanisms at the local level can give rise to duplication and fragmentation of services. Some municipalities have taken steps to promote better co-ordination across service areas via inter-institutional co-ordinators, a role that has proved effective despite a lack of dedicated financial and human resources in some municipalities. However, the scope of their work is very narrow and primarily focuses on services for children and young people. Increased co-ordination and collaboration at the local level could be improved by strengthening the role of inter-institutional co-ordinators, introducing them for people in vulnerable situations more widely, and supporting them through a clear definition of their responsibilities and adequate human and financial resources.

Co-ordination at the local level could be further strengthened with the introduction of a framework for co-operation across public service providers to reinforce the need to work together in a holistic way rather than in separate silos. The framework would establish a practice through which service providers can identify the needs of service users' that can be met by the PES, social services and/or other services. Co-ordinated activity would ideally be supported through formalised referral processes and improved IT infrastructure that supports data exchange and case management activities (including referrals and monitoring of service provision).

1.6. Upgrading IT infrastructure and processes to support service provision

Modern IT infrastructure and processes are important foundations for the provision of effective and efficient public services that are targeted to the right people and delivered in a timely way. The IT infrastructure of the Lithuanian PES facilitates client information and communications management (booking meetings and sending messages to clients), identification of client needs, development of action plans, and referrals to specific services. In contrast, the IT system for social services (SPIS) provides somewhat less support for social workers, as it focuses predominantly on the application process and does not support the case management process or the development of IAPs.

Both the SPIS and PES IT systems have inadequate functionality and value for users due to limited data exchange across registers. Data exchange in social and employment services covers basic needs, such as checking client eligibility for services, but does not go far enough to support pro-active outreach, holistic service provision or monitoring and evaluation activities. The primary IT infrastructure for both social and employment services does not generally contain sufficient information to distinguish target groups such as people with disabilities, people leaving prison, or young people leaving care. Another challenge is the low user-friendliness of the IT infrastructure. It is outdated, not always intuitive for users and, in some cases, not well integrated internally.

Furthermore, the IT infrastructure for social and employment services is not well equipped to facilitate the production of monitoring statistics; only some aggregate reports can be generated across service provision. However, these reports are not considered to be detailed or flexible enough to support service provision and potentially contain errors.

Digitalisation represents a significant opportunity to provide services more efficiently and effectively, via improved interfaces for service users and enhanced back-office infrastructure for service providers to deliver knowledge-based services and automate administrative processes. Lithuania is currently in the process of significantly renewing its PES digital infrastructure, whereas for the SPIS it will persist with minor, continuous improvements. The MSSL could take this opportunity to consider more fundamental changes to the SPIS and ideally develop an altogether new, modern system to support the provision of social services.

A successful replacement of the IT infrastructure that currently supports employment and social services requires the adoption of modern, agile development methodologies. Agile software development practices emphasise and support collaborative efforts and cross-functional teams and it is therefore important to involve end-users in development processes to ensure digital tools provide value for users and are user-friendly. Lithuania could involve end-users throughout the adoption process – in the exploration and experimentation phases, and after deployment – to ensure their insights inform any fine-tuning.

As well as the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, agile development practices require strong business guidance accompanied by skilled IT system developers, sufficient investment(s) in IT developments, as well as a supportive and agile organisational culture in the MSSL and the PES. Furthermore, some legislative changes may be required to ensure service providers and sub-national systems are compatible with a national system of social services.

As important as the technology itself is the data it enables. To map its data needs Lithuania must analyse its social and employment service streams (including by different target groups) to generate an understanding about: (1) data received from other registers that could be improved by an additional or different kind of data exchange; (2) data collected from service users that could be more efficiently and/or accurately collected from other registers; and (3) data not received at all currently but relevant for better services that could be received from other registers. The data mapping exercise could also identify when and how the data are needed to consider the most appropriate type of data exchange (mass data exchange, for example, or queries for single service users, push or pull data, storing the data in internal systems or only rights to see the data in an external database, etc.).

An assessment of the legal basis for any new data exchange(s) is also necessary. Legislative amendments may be needed in cases where data exchanges are required for service provision, but current legislation does not provide a sufficient legal basis, or the legal basis is not sufficiently explicit (i.e. data exchanges need to be compliant with the General Data Protection Directive and Lithuanian data protection regulations). Lithuania could also consider following the "once-only" data collection principle, i.e. any data relevant for a public sector organisation should be collected only once and consequently shared with others securely if needed for service provision.

1.7. Enhancing monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating policies and services is crucial to understanding what works, for whom, under what conditions and at what cost. At the national level, the MSSL monitors the implementation of its bi-annual SAPs and to some extent, action plans and programmes for specific target groups. At the local level, the scope of monitoring activities varies significantly across municipalities. Furthermore, evidence produced through monitoring activities at the local level is not systematically used to inform decision-making. Significant challenges to monitoring efforts at both the national and local levels include a lack of monitoring frameworks, guidelines, and manuals and staff with the necessary skills.

To strengthen monitoring and evaluation of policies and services for target groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider establishing and disseminating national monitoring and evaluation frameworks, including quantitative and qualitative metrics, key performance indicators, benchmarks and user-satisfaction surveys. There is also significant scope to include consideration of the needs and experiences of service users in ex-ante and ex-post policy evaluations at national and local levels.

A functional monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be supported with high-quality and comprehensive data and the digital infrastructure to generate and disseminate evidence. As the current IT infrastructure for social and employment services does not include modern data analytics solutions, it is crucial to invest in these systems. To support policy research and evaluation activity more generally Lithuania could consider extending the capacity of Statistics Lithuania to share data securely with (external) researchers for research and evaluation purposes.

Key recommendations

Improving public governance arrangements to deliver integrated policies and services for vulnerable groups

- Conduct consultations with national and sub-national government, civil society organisations, service providers and target groups to understand their service needs, expectations, capacities and map current contributions of stakeholders across policy and service areas.

- Assign clear roles and responsibilities to key stakeholders across policy and service areas to support each of the three target groups and formulate/revise legal frameworks as necessary.

- Broaden the focus of government action for people in vulnerable situations beyond social and employment policies and services and ensure that other stakeholders (notably in the housing, health, justice and education areas) also define specific objectives, measures, targets and key performance indicators, where relevant and as appropriate.

- Provide a solid basis for institutional co-ordination by establishing cross-sectoral policy frameworks and strategies, using inter-ministerial action plans for implementation and creating/strengthening formal inter-institutional bodies for different target groups.

- Promote co-ordination between the national government and municipalities on policies and services for people in vulnerable situations by including selected municipalities in national inter-institutional bodies for target groups and by conducting broader consultations with municipalities.

- Ensure adequate numbers of staff in policy design and service co-ordination and delivery in all relevant institutions at national and local level and ensure the appropriate mix of competencies, managerial skills and specialised expertise, and, in the case of staff working directly with service users, the necessary qualities and communication skills, supported through methodological assistance tools, manuals, regular trainings and capacity-building activities.

Strengthening the role of NGOs in policy making and service delivery for vulnerable groups

- Develop a database with high-quality data and information about NGOs, including their legal status, focus of activity, capacities, and involvement in public procurement by mapping NGOs in collaboration with municipalities and umbrella NGOs.

- Strengthen the participation of NGOs in policy and service design at national and local level, with specific efforts to reach out to NGOs advocating for or serving relevant target groups, by conducting consultations, leveraging Councils of NGOs and promoting awareness and relevant skills among public officials (e.g. through manuals, workshops and capacity-building).

- Consider measures to facilitate NGOs' access to procurement opportunities (e.g. by extending reserved procurement provisions, by integrating social value considerations in procurement, or by buying public services through performance-based pricing).

- Take measures to enhance the impact of the NGOs Fund, including by:

  o adopting participatory approaches in setting the focus and scope of the Fund with the involvement of NGOs and other ministries;

  o ensuring an unbureaucratic application process to make the Fund attractive to NGOs;

  o considering multi-year grants for NGOs to enhance long-term sustainability of service provision and encourage innovation in line with changing (service) user needs;

- o promoting awareness and skills among NGOs to apply for funding to foster competition and increase the quality of applications, including through guidelines, factsheets, templates, tutorials, and seminars/webinars;
- o securing adequate financial and human resources for the Fund; and
- o putting in place effective inspection, reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and processes on the outputs, outcomes and impact of financed projects and ensure this evidence is fed back into the prioritisation of initiatives supported by the Fund to strengthen impact and accountability.

Improving service design and addressing service gaps

- Improve service design at the municipal level by:
  - o Developing a methodology and related guidance that municipalities can use to systematically assess the need for social services in their territories;
  - o Systematically involving NGOs and service users in developing, designing and implementing services, to ensure the services offered meet the needs of target groups;
  - o Ensuring systematic collection of individual and household level data on service users through the IT system for social services (SPIS) to monitor not only the number of users of different services but also other relevant information such as the intensity/frequency of usage and the socio-economic characteristics of the user; and
  - o Undertaking/commissioning new analyses to obtain information on service need, to assess whether more and/or new services are required and how to reach people who need services but are not making use of them.
- Strengthen existing services and address service gaps, by:
  - o Regularly revisiting the Catalogue of Social Services in line with evolving needs;
  - o Improving preparation and planning support for independent living for young people leaving care and people leaving prison to smooth their social and labour market integration, and ensuring consistent implementation across municipalities; and
  - o Reviewing and, where necessary, improving supports available to families of service users.

Applying a more consistent approach to individual action plans and case management

- Require all service providers to implement and monitor individual action plans that are jointly developed with service users and tailored to their individual needs.
- Increase co-ordination and collaboration at the local level by strengthening the role of inter-institutional co-ordinators, supported by a clear definition of their responsibilities and adequate human and financial resources.
- Support co-ordinated activity across public services with formalised referral processes and improved IT infrastructure that supports data exchange and case management activities (including referrals and monitoring of service provision).

Upgrading IT infrastructure and processes to support service provision

- Invest in modernising the IT infrastructure of both social and employment services to better support front line workers, by implementing the plans to change the digital infrastructure in the Public Employment Service and initiating a replacement of the SPIS IT system for social services with a modern IT system.

- Involve end-users throughout the revision and adoption processes – in the exploration and experimentation phases, as well as after deployment to ensure their insights inform any fine-tuning.
- Enhance data exchange to better support service provision, by mapping the additional data needed to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of social and employment services; amending data exchange legislation where necessary; and implementing a "once only" data collection principle throughout public services.

Enhancing monitoring and evaluation

- Develop and disseminate national monitoring and evaluation frameworks that include quantitative and qualitative metrics, key performance indicators, benchmarks and user-satisfaction surveys for policies and services for people in vulnerable situations.
- Extend the capacity of Statistics Lithuania to share data securely with (external) researchers for research and evaluation purposes.

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Note

[1] While some of the recommendations may also apply to Civil Society Organisations more broadly (e.g. charities, and foundations), this document focuses on NGOs, as requested by the Lithuanian authorities. While NGOs are defined by law in Lithuania, different legal forms exist, which, in turn, has an impact on the rules and regulations that apply to them. The legal system in Lithuania differentiates between "associations" (i.e. member-based organisations; at least 3 people are needed to create an association; members can be individuals or other NGOs); "public institutions" (can be created by anyone; can be an NGO but not necessarily); and "support funds" (which, for instance, cannot borrow money from banks).

2 Delivering for people in vulnerable situations: public governance for integrated policies and services

This chapter assesses Lithuania's public governance arrangements that support the design and delivery of integrated public policies and services for people in vulnerable situations, with a specific focus on people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care. Significant reform efforts in Lithuania have advanced the integration of services for people in vulnerable circumstances and strengthened the role of non-governmental organisations. At the same time, lack of clear roles, limited capacities and weak co-ordination mechanisms risk limiting the impact of reforms. Ensuring accessible, effective and integrated public services can support those in vulnerable situations, strengthen their trust in government institutions and promote inclusive growth. This chapter analyses and provides targeted policy recommendations on Lithuania's legal frameworks and institutional set-ups to support vulnerable groups, practices for strategic and participatory design of policies and services, mechanisms for co-ordinated action across stakeholders, institutional capacities and governance processes for monitoring and evaluation.

2.1. Context

Lithuania has undergone significant political, economic, social and administrative reforms since the re-establishment of its independence in 1990, transitioning since then towards a modern public administration (OECD, 2015[1]). Important administrative reforms have been initiated by the Law on the government (1994), the Law on Local Self-Government (1994), and the Law on Territorial Administrative Units and their Boundaries (1994), which together define the composition, competences and roles of the different levels of government in Lithuania, i.e. its central government and its 60 municipalities (Box 2.1). According to the Decentralisation Index developed by the European Committee of the Regions,[1] Lithuania ranks 17 out of 27 EU Member States in terms of its political, administrative and fiscal decentralisation, with decentralisation remaining especially limited in the fiscal area.

Lithuania has also invested in the modernisation of its public administration in the lead up to EU accession and thereafter. The Public Administration Development Strategy (2004-10) and the Public Governance Improvement Programme (2012-20) were adopted with the objective to make the public administration more result-oriented, more effective in the provision of administrative and public services, and more transparent and open towards its citizens (OECD, 2015[1]).

Box 2.1. Distribution of competences across levels of government in Lithuania

Division of powers. Lithuania is a decentralised unitary state, composed of a central government and 60 municipalities. The regional administrations were abolished in 2010. Local authorities perform independent functions and functions delegated by the state.

Independent functions include, among others: budgeting and raising taxes; management of municipal property; establishment and maintenance of municipal agencies and companies; planning and provision of social services; facilitating social integration of the disabled; housing support; social allowances; contributing to employment, primary healthcare and public health services; sports and recreation; education of children; provision of educational assistance; organisation of non-formal education and activities (children and adults); vocational training and contribution to protecting children's rights; family support.

Functions delegated by the state include, among others: provision of statistical data; participation in the implementation of labour market measures; social benefits administration; social care for the severely disabled; organisation of compulsory education (pre-school, primary, secondary and vocational); youth policy implementation; and provision of state guaranteed primary legal assistance.

Source: https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/default.aspx

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In 2021, 30% of respondents to the Gallup World Poll in Lithuania expressed trust in their national government compared to 48% of people surveyed across 34 OECD countries on average.[2] According to the OECD Framework on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions, citizens' trust in government is driven, among others, by the availability of efficient, quality, affordable, timely and citizen-centred public services that are co-ordinated across levels of government and satisfy users (Brezzi et al., 2021[2]). These drivers are even more significant for those in vulnerable situations who tend to rely on public services to a larger extent. In this sense, investing in developing personalised and integrated quality services for vulnerable groups can support those most in need, promote inclusive growth and help strengthen democratic institutions, in particular in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Ensuring integrated services to people in vulnerable circumstances is a clear commitment in the Programme of the Government of Lithuania. This is also recognised by Lithuania's National Recovery and

Resilience Plan, which includes specific commitments to deliver services to vulnerable groups, in particular for people with disabilities (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021[3]). Similarly, the Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania, which outlines key national priorities, features commitments on empowering vulnerable groups and priority projects in the areas of strengthening accessible, effective and timely personalised social services tailored to individual needs, on the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, and on the protection of the rights of the child, the latter by strengthening alternatives to institutional childcare among others (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[4]). Achieving these objectives requires accessible, ethical and equitable public services that prioritise user needs that deliver with impact, at scale and with pace and that are accountable and transparent (OECD, 2022[5]).

A second important government objective is to increase the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)[3] in policy design and service delivery. The Programme of 17th Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2016-20) aimed to include NGOs in at least 30% of municipal public services by 2030; the Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania similarly encourages the transfer of part of the provision of public services provided to NGOs as well as the establishment of "innovative, more efficient models of public service provision" (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[4]). The involvement of NGOs in policy design and service delivery for people in vulnerable situations (in particular those NGOs representing these groups) can support evidence-based policy making, inform policy and service design with a variety of perspectives, help reach out to target groups, promote their access to services and increase government accountability. In the context of its membership in the Open Government Partnership (OGP),[4] Lithuania is currently implementing its fifth Action Plan for 2021-23, which includes a commitment for the Ministry of Social Security and Labour to establish a platform for disseminating funding opportunities for NGOs, and to develop an NGOs database collecting high-quality data on NGOs (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021[6]). The strategic importance of giving NGOs a more prominent role in the delivery of public services for people in vulnerable circumstances is also recognised in Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030" (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2012[7]), which stipulates that public services shall be provided with the help of citizens, the private sector, local communities and NGOs.

These high-level commitments on delivering effective, accessible, timely, integrated and personalised services to vulnerable groups and on the involvement of NGOs in the delivery of public services have been advanced by significant reform efforts in recent years. In 2020, for instance, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) enacted an order on the social reintegration of people released from correctional institutions ("ex-prisoners"). The order entered into force on 1 January 2021 and serves as a co-operation instrument among municipalities, NGOs, correctional institutions and probation offices for the provision of integrated and personalised services to ex-prisoners (Minister of Social Security and Labour and Minister of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[8]).

The National Programme for the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (2013-19; extended to 2020) was set up to create the conditions for a dignified life for persons with disabilities, with actions in policy areas such as social security, education, healthcare, employment, culture, sports, and leisure activities. Co-ordinated and monitored by the Department of Disability Affairs under the MSSL, the Programme brought together a number of ministries, including the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Agriculture. At the level of service provision, the "Accompanying service for young people" was added to the Catalogue of Social Services at the end of 2021. It provides a set of inter-connected and cross-sectoral services and measures to young people leaving care to facilitate their social integration in the community and their transition to an autonomous life.

The process towards personalised and integrated service provision has been mirrored by the de-institutionalisation process and transfer of service provision from large institutions to community-based services and policies. For instance, the process of de-institutionalisation of services to persons with

disabilities and children without parental care can be traced back to the adoption of the Strategic Guidelines for De-Institutionalisation in 2012 (Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, 2012[9]). Further to that, the Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care (2014-20; extended to 2023) aims to establish and strengthen a system of integrated service provision to provide care and support to vulnerable groups within their family and communities, providing an alternative to institutional care (Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, 2014[10]). Further insights on institutionalised care provision are provided in Chapter 4, which highlights, among others, that all Lithuanian municipalities currently provide "social rehabilitation services" to people with disabilities through NGOs.

At the legislative level, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the unicameral parliament of Lithuania composed of 141 members, works on policies for vulnerable groups in particular through its Committee on Social Affairs and Labour and its Committee on Human Rights where policies for vulnerable groups are discussed, formulated, amended and monitored.

Against the background of the strategic objectives set out by the Government of Lithuania, this chapter analyses the existing governance arrangements to the design and delivery of integrated and personalised services to vulnerable groups (with a specific focus on people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and young people leaving care) and NGO engagement in the process. It analyses and provides policy recommendations on the legal frameworks that define responsibilities and institutional set-ups, the governance arrangements for the design of policies and the delivery of services, the mechanisms for co-ordinated action across ministries and departments and across different levels of government, the financial and human capacities of stakeholders, and the governance processes for monitoring and evaluation.

The chapter's assessment builds on the replies of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania to the OECD policy questionnaire on personalised services for vulnerable groups in Lithuania, as well as the replies of Lithuanian municipalities to the OECD's municipality survey (further details in Chapter 1). The information from questionnaire responses is complemented by insights from fact-finding meetings undertaken as part of this project between September and November 2021. The chapter includes good practices drawn through desk research and complemented by insights gathered from public officials through interviews conducted in July-September 2022 and during an international virtual workshop held on 13 September 2022. The policy recommendations included in this chapter were discussed with relevant stakeholders (including relevant ministries, target groups and selected municipalities) in a virtual workshop on 6 December 2022 and they are informed by OECD legal instruments, notably the OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People, the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, the OECD Recommendation on Public Procurement, the OECD Recommendation on Public Policy Evaluation and the OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability OECD (2022[11]; 2017[12]; 2015[13]; 2022[14]; 2019[15]).

2.2. Defining target groups and roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders

Supporting vulnerable groups through the provision of integrated and personalised public services by nature requires action across different policy and service areas, from social to employment, health, education, housing and legal policy and services. Defining target groups as well as assigning clear roles and responsibilities of stakeholders is hence crucial for effective action.

2.2.1. Ensuring a common understanding of the target groups

The promotion of integrated and personalised services for vulnerable groups in Lithuania is not underpinned by a single overarching framework covering all vulnerable groups; attention is rather focused on specific target groups. Co-ordinated action across government departments, agencies and other relevant stakeholders for the benefit of specific vulnerable groups requires a common understanding of the target group(s). Replies to the OECD Policy Questionnaire show that such common understanding is lacking in some cases in Lithuania, in particular in Ministries that are not considered "in the lead" for providing support to the respective target group.

Persons with disabilities

A common understanding of the target groups is hindered by different definitions in existing laws. For instance, as for a "person with disabilities," the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (Republic of Lithuania, 2005[16]) identifies as disabled a person if their level of disability or level of working capacity or level of special needs has been established in accordance with the procedure established under the Law. Instead, under the Law on Social Services (Republic of Lithuania, 2006[17]), an adult with a disability is a person of working age who, due to a disability, has partially or completely lost the ability to take care of his/her personal (family) life independently and to participate in the life of society. This Law also defines children with disability as those under the age of 18 who, due to a disability, have not partially or completely acquired age-appropriate independence and whose opportunities for education and participation in public life are limited. While the two definitions are not necessarily contradictory or mutually exclusive, differences in identification may hinder common understandings and approaches.

Ex-prisoners

"Ex-prisoners" are defined as those who have been in correctional institutions for at least one year and who (1) have one year left before their conditional release (or until the end of the sentence imposed, if probation is not an option), or (2) have been released for less than a year (Minister of Social Security and Labour and Minister of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[8]). While the ministerial order on the social re-integration of ex-prisoners has clarified the target group fairly precisely for the purpose of its specific action areas, it does not have the legal weight of a law and hence does not create a general definition of the target group that is "universal" in its application.[5] For instance, ex-prisoners are not a specific target group in the Catalogue of Social Services. Furthermore, the existing definition limits the dedicated support provided to ex-prisoners after release to only one year, after which they will access public services as any other person (and, if needed, receive dedicated support as any other person at risk). On the other side, the definition contained in the order entails that the first stage of re-integration, conducted with social workers in correctional institutions, shall start at least one year before release, while keeping open the possibility of starting re-integration even earlier (although this appears not to occur due to lack of human and financial capacities).

Young people leaving care

The definition of "young people leaving care" as a target group remains vague. In 2021, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour added in the Catalogue of Social Services an "Accompanying Service for Young People" and young care leavers who benefit from it are defined as people aged 18-24 who have been provided with social care in a social care institution. Some of their characteristics may also make them potentially eligible to benefit from other social services dedicated to "young people with fewer opportunities" or "adults at risk of social exclusion." However, young people leaving care are likely to require specific measures and support in other public service areas beyond social services, where no common definition exists yet. These findings are reflected in the replies from line ministries to the OECD Policy Questionnaire, which did not express a precise understanding of this target group. It can also be

noted that the age bracket used for the definition of "young people leaving care" is more narrow than the age bracket used for the definition of "young people" in general, which has been previously identified by the MSSL to be 14-29.[6] It also diverges from the age bracket used for social housing policy, which provides targeted support for young people leaving care in the age bracket 16-36.

2.2.2. Defining clear roles and responsibilities through legal frameworks

Providing access to the various public services and targeted measures needed requires action to avoid policy and service fragmentation as well as potential duplication. For instance, while the Ministry of Social Security and Labour plays a leading role in supporting people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and young people leaving care, other ministries and agencies as well as municipalities have significant responsibilities.

Legal frameworks can be used to identify key stakeholders in delivering for vulnerable groups and assign clear roles and responsibilities. For instance, the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (Republic of Lithuania, 2005[16]) lays the foundation for the provision of integrated services to people with disabilities, including medical, professional and social rehabilitation services, special assistance, support to employment, social assistance, pensions and benefits, education services, and participation in cultural activities, sports and public life. The Law identifies the main stakeholders and their respective roles and responsibilities in the most detailed way when compared to the group of ex-prisoners and young people leaving care (Table 2.1).

The Ministerial Order on the social re-integration of ex-prisoners outlines detailed steps of the procedure and assigns responsibilities across stakeholders (notably the MSSL, the Ministry of Justice and its Prison Department, municipalities and non-governmental organisations) with the aim of ensuring that, on the day of release from prison, ex-prisoners will have easy access to public services they may need, hence supporting their re-integration and reducing the risk of criminal activity. However, as it is only focused on the procedure itself, the Ministerial Order does not assign responsibilities to stakeholders for the benefit of ex-prisoners more broadly. This can create a lack of understanding of various stakeholder's competences and a lack of political ownership. For instance, while the MSSL identifies the Ministry of Justice as a co-leading government entity in delivering for ex-prisoners, the Ministry of Justice does not seem to identify itself as such and it reports not participating in the implementation of the procedure.

Policies and services for young people leaving care are not supported by any underlying legal framework. The MSSL has competence on the regulation of provision of social services to young people leaving care. However, there is no legal document that identifies the competences of different ministries and stakeholders in areas such as employment, housing, education, health and legal services.

Table 2.1. Responsibilities of key stakeholders in delivering for people with disabilities in Lithuania

	Main responsibilities
Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL)	The MSSL formulates the policy of social integration of the people with disability (PWD); participates in the preparation of the National Progress Plan on the setting of strategic goals and/or progress targets for the integration policy of the PWD; prepares national development programs, and plans, organises, co-ordinates and controls their implementation; and it is responsible for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.
Department of Disability Affairs of the MSSL	The Department of Disability Affairs under the MSSL, involving associations of PWD, organises the implementation of the social integration policy for PWD and co-ordinates the implementation of measures and projects for the implementation of social integration policy; and it prepares monitoring reports on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
Disability and Working Capacity Assessment Service (under MSSL)	The Disability and Working Capacity Assessment Service participates in the formulation and implementation of the social integration policy for PWD; it is responsible for the assessment of level of disability, level of working capacity, need for vocational rehabilitation services, and special needs.
Ministry of Education and Science (MES)	The MES, in co-operation with the MSSL and the Ministry of Health, is responsible for the training and professional development of vocational rehabilitation specialists. It is also responsible for ensuring quality education to PWD and for establishing the procedure to identify and meet the needs for special education for PWD.

	Main responsibilities
Ministry of Health (MoH)	The MoH is responsible for the organisation of the provision of medical rehabilitation services and for ensuring the quality of these services. The MoH, together with the MSSL, is also responsible for establishing the procedure for determining special needs for permanent/constant care.
Ministry of Environment	The Ministry of the Environment is responsible for the preparation of normative technical documents for the adaptation of the environment to the special needs of PWD.
Municipalities	Municipalities are responsible for: • providing information to PWD and their families on social integration policies, projects, services and support; • the adaptation of facilities to the special needs of PWD; • the provision of social rehabilitation services and ensuring their quality, together with the MSSL; • the provision of quality education to PWD, together with the MES; • measures and projects for the social integration of the disabled, including cultural, recreation and sports activities; and • organising the provision of personal assistance and ensuring its quality.
Associations/non-governmental organisations	Associations of PWD represent the interests of PWD; they help to implement measures and projects for the social integration of PWD; they organise the provision of social rehabilitation services for PWD, recreation of PWD, sports, tourism, cultural activities and international co-operation. In organising their activities, associations of PWD co-operate with state and municipal institutions and bodies and may receive financial support from these institutions and bodies.

Source: (Republic of Lithuania, 2005[16]), Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.2319/asr.

2.2.3. Legal system to regulate the access of vulnerable groups to social, housing, employment and other policy and service areas

Legal documents in sectoral public service areas, most notably social services, but also employment, housing, education and legal services, further lay out the support for which the vulnerable groups identified by this project are eligible.

Social policy and services

Social services are central in supporting vulnerable groups. Responsibilities in this area are defined by the Law on Social Services. While the MSSL is the lead government entity and policy maker at the national level, municipalities are responsible for the delivery of social services. The MSSL formulates, organises, co-ordinates and monitors overall social policy (including the social services system and the process of determining social services needs) and is responsible for its financing. It is also responsible for licensing social care institutions and for supporting the capacities of social workers. In turn, municipalities are responsible for planning, funding, providing and implementing social services at the local level, in particular through annual social services plans. The Law on Social Services also mandates municipalities to create a dedicated unit to monitor the quality of social services provided (see section "Monitoring and evaluating policies and services for vulnerable groups"). The Ministry of Health is responsible for the provision of long-term care.

Housing policy and services

Housing policy and services are also particularly important for vulnerable groups. The Catalogue of Social Services includes "sheltered housing" as well as "houses for independent living" as a social service for adults with disabilities, young people who left institutional care and people at social risk. Housing policy in Lithuania more widely also takes into account considerations for specific vulnerable groups. For instance, the Law on Support for the Purchase or Rental of Housing (Republic of Lithuania, 2014[18]) includes provisions in support of people with disabilities (and their families) and people left without parental care (and their families) for instance in the form of targeted financial support for housing. Notably, the definition for young care leavers adopted in this law adopts a wider age bracket than the definition used in the Catalogue on Social Services: it considers eligible for support persons between the age of 18 and 36 who

have been left without parental care, as well as persons without parental care who are not younger than 16. The Law also clarifies roles and responsibilities for the MSSL, which is in charge of policy design, organising, co-ordinating and monitoring its implementation and co-ordinating the allocation of funds to municipalities. Municipalities implement housing policy at the local level and run municipal housing facilities.

Employment policy and services

Beyond social and housing policy, the services and support measures available to specific vulnerable groups are less defined. For instance, studies on the de-institutionalisation of support for people with disabilities in Lithuania find that the process has mainly focused on social services with little impact on other service areas, such as employment (Genienė, 2021[19]). The same may also apply to services for other vulnerable groups. For instance, as further discussed in Chapter 4, the Employment Law (Republic of Lithuania, 2016[20]) outlines a list of vulnerable groups that are entitled to receiving additional employment support services. These groups include, among others, disabled people of working age. It also provides for the possibility of specific programmes to increase employment among ex-prisoners (defined as people who have spent more than 6 months in prison and who reach out to the PES no later than within 6 months from release): however, no dedicated PES programmes for ex-prisoners currently exist. While the Employment Law includes special considerations for unemployed people under 29 years of age, there are no specific measures for young people leaving care. While employment measures and policies do not necessarily need to specify each and every vulnerable group, their design and provision should be sensitive to individual needs and vulnerabilities people may face. The Law also identifies responsibilities for the MSSL and its Public Employment Service (PES). The MSSL is responsible for formulating, co-ordinating and monitoring the implementation of the overall employment policy as well as for financing employment support measures. The PES is an agency of the MSSL and is mainly responsible for implementation of labour market policies, supporting especially those who are long-term unemployed and those who have particular difficulties in finding work. However, stakeholders highlighted the existence of ambiguities in roles and responsibilities between the PES and the division of the MSSL in charge of the social integration of people with disabilities.

Health and justice policy and services

The specific needs of vulnerable groups in health and justice services are also not clearly defined. The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice do not report undertaking specific efforts for the promotion of personalised and integrated services for vulnerable groups. For instance, the Ministry of Justice is responsible for the implementation, organisation and monitoring of the policy for state-guaranteed legal aid (Republic of Lithuania, 2000[21]): vulnerable groups can apply for legal aid as any other person, without discrimination but also without benefitting from dedicated support measures. Some stakeholders highlighted that vulnerable people may not be aware of their rights in the first place and would hence need special considerations, measures or programmes to ensure their effective access to legal services. Similarly, in the health sector, which is regulated by the Law on the Health System and Law on Public Healthcare, the main provisions in favour of "socially sensitive groups" relate to free access to some healthcare services and coverage by the state of individual compulsory health insurance contributions. The Lithuania Health Programme 2014-25 also refers to the development of a monitoring system of health inequalities aimed to target at-risk populations and promote an integrated health policy approach involving health, education, and social institutions. Chapter 4 provides further insights on the provision of health services to vulnerable groups, in particular prisoners, as well as on the provision of education services to vulnerable groups such as pupils with special needs.

2.2.4. Legal frameworks for the promotion of NGOs and their involvement in service design and delivery

A key objective of the reform efforts undertaken by the Government of Lithuania to provide more personalised services to vulnerable groups is to strengthen the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in public policy and service delivery (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[4]), including when it comes to policy and services to deliver for people in vulnerable settings. Achieving such objective relies on a protected civic space (OECD, 2022[22]), a strong NGOs sector and enabling governance structures. This section assesses the legal frameworks that define NGOs in Lithuania, assign responsibilities for the promotion of NGO development and that, at the time of writing, provide the legal basis for the involvement of NGOs in public service delivery.

In Lithuania, NGOs have been defined since 2013 through the Law on Development of Non-Governmental Organisations (Republic of Lithuania, 2013[23]), which states that NGO "shall mean a public legal entity, independent from state and municipal institutions and agencies, which acts on a voluntary basis for the benefit of society or its group, and which does not have the aim to seek political power or purely religious goals" (Article 2). While NGOs are defined by law, different legal forms exist, which, in turn, has an impact on the rules and regulations that apply to it. The legal system in Lithuania differentiates between "associations" (i.e. member-based organisations; at least 3 people are needed to create an association; members can be individuals or other NGOs); "public institutions" (can be created by anyone; can be an NGO but not necessarily); and "support funds" (which, for instance, cannot borrow money from banks). Some stakeholders pointed out that these differences in legal definition may generate difficulties for the involvement of NGOs in policy design and service delivery. Within the framework of Lithuania's fifth Action Plan for the Open Government Partnership for 2021-23, the MSSL committed to develop an NGOs database collecting high-quality data on NGOs, which could be beneficial in identifying and mapping NGOs across the territory (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021[6]).

In terms of roles and responsibilities for NGOs promotion, the 2013 Law on the Development of Non-Government Organisations (and its 2019 amendments) and the 2010 government Resolution no. 330 on the Areas of Management Delegated to Ministers identify the Ministry of Social Security and Labour as the lead entity for the formulation, implementation and co-ordination of an NGOs development policy. Municipalities have the responsibility to promote NGOs development at the local level.

The involvement of NGOs in the provision of public services for vulnerable groups is regulated by different frameworks. The Law on the Social Integration of People with Disabilities, the Ministerial Order on the procedures for the re-integration of ex-prisoners, the Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care and the Law on Social Services all include commitments for state authorities and municipalities to privilege NGOs in the provision of services (Republic of Lithuania, 2005[16]; Minister of Social Security and Labour and Minister of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[8]; Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, 2014[10]; Republic of Lithuania, 2006[17]). The Law on Public Procurement also includes clauses on reserved procurement procedures that could be leveraged to privilege NGOs in procurement of public services (Republic of Lithuania, 1996[24]). However, as further discussed in the section on "a co-ordinated approach to supporting vulnerable groups," lack of awareness and competences among public officials, lack of capacities in the NGOs sector and other practical difficulties for NGOs to take part in public procurement processes constitute barriers for a stronger involvement of NGOs in public service delivery. In the United Kingdom, the government has adopted a legal framework, elaborated operational documents and conducted capacity-building activities to strengthen NGOs' involvement in public procurement by promoting the integration of social value considerations in public procurement (Box 2.2). The experience of the United Kingdom demonstrates the importance of cultural and institutional change, implementation support for public officials and capacity-building for NGOs in order for legal frameworks to have an impact.

When it comes to registering an NGO, stakeholders expressed that procedures are fairly easy and requirements feasible to meet, for instance as there are no requirements on starting capital. In order to participate in service delivery, NGOs need to be licensed by the MSSL or accredited by municipalities to provide the service in question: 30% of the municipalities that responded to the OECD municipality survey reported that administrative challenges, including licensing and accreditation rules, pose a significant challenge in involving NGOs in the provision of social services in their municipality.

Box 2.2. United Kingdom: Social Value in Public Procurement

The UK Government has made considerable efforts to promote the integration of social value considerations in public procurement to strengthen the involvement of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs) in public service delivery. VCSEs hold up to 70% of the market share in service delivery in the United Kingdom in some sectors and they play a significant role in delivering services for vulnerable groups. In 2016-20, VCSEs won 43% of the value of contracts to deliver services to people with disabilities (GBP 2.4 billion), 20% of the value of contracts on youth services (GBP 0.3 billion) and 6% of the value of contracts on services for the rehabilitation of offenders (GBP 0.3 billion).

Social Value Act

The 2012 Public Services (Social Value) Act sets out a statutory requirement for public officials procuring public services to consider wider social, economic and environmental benefits through the performance of the contract. The Act applies to every public authority contracting services and it encourages commissioners to consider social value, although it does not constitute an obligation for local authorities, many of which however have been adopting this approach on a voluntary basis.

Social Value Model

The implementation of the Social Value Act has been supported through the elaboration of an operational Social Value Model, which applies since 1 January 2021 and serves to streamline and standardise the integration of social value in the procurement process in the central government. The Model provides detailed information on desired policy outcomes and provides evaluation questions, guidance for tenderers, funding award criteria and reporting metrics. Once calculated, the Social Value of a bid should weight for at least 10% in the final awarding decision.

Building capacities of public officials

Officials in charge of public procurement are provided with a procurement lifecycle guide which explains the different steps to follow to ensure social value considerations are included in all steps of the process, from building awareness of the Social Value Model, to drafting contracts, managing deliverables, monitoring and reporting. In addition, they have access to a Social Value Model Quick Reference Table, which outlines evaluation questions, award criteria, illustrative examples of activities that deliver social value by sub-criteria as well as reporting metrics.[1] The Government of the United Kingdom has also deployed efforts to support its 4 000 commercial buyers at the central level through online and in-person training programmes. Social Value champions in different government departments regularly come together as a network to exchange best practices, discuss common challenges and learn from case studies.

Building capacities of VCSEs

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the UK Cabinet Office have issued an online guide for VCSEs to provide them with information and guidance on how to bid and win public service contracts with the government, notably through social value considerations. DCMS has also

recently run a grant competition for a VCSE Contract Readiness Fund to enable VCSEs engagement with public service procurement in England.[2.]

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/940828/Social-Value-Model-Quick-Reference-Table-Edn-1.1-3-Dec-20.pdf
2. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vcse-contract-readiness-fund-2223-2425
Source: (UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2022[25]), The role of Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations in public procurement, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-role-of-voluntary-community-and-social-enterprise-vcse-organisations-in-public-procurement; (UK Cabinet Office, 2021[26]), Social Value Act: information and resources, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources; (UK Government Commercial Function, 2020[27]), The Social Value Model, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/940826/Social-Value-Model-Edn-1.1-3-Dec-20.pdf; (DCMS UK ; UK Cabinet Office, 2021[28]), VCSEs: A guide to working with government, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vcses-a-guide-to-working-with-government; interviews conducted by the OECD with public officials from the UK DCMS.

2.2.5. Policy recommendations

Defining clear roles and responsibilities through legal frameworks

Supporting vulnerable groups through the provision of integrated and personalised public services requires close co-operation across different policy and service areas. A co-ordinated approach to policy design and service delivery relies on a clear definition of target groups and their needs as well as well-defined roles and responsibilities of different ministries and service providers. There is no single overarching framework covering all groups considered "vulnerable" in Lithuania. In terms of policy design and service delivery, the governance arrangements in place are specific to each target group.

The lack of clear and common definitions of target groups across policy and service areas risks impeding co-ordinated action. The report finds that definitions of "people with disabilities" differ between the Law on Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities and the Law on Social Services; "ex-prisoners" are defined for the purpose of the social re-integration procedures but not through a legal instrument providing a common definition; and the definition of "young people leaving care" as a target group of public services remains vague and diverges across policy and service areas.

There is also a lack of clearly assigned roles and responsibilities in some areas: while the support structures for people with disabilities are defined in the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, no such framework exists to clarify roles and responsibilities for the support to ex-prisoners and young people leaving care, both in terms of policy design and service delivery, notably for social, housing, employment, health, justice and education policies and services.

To support the definition of roles and responsibilities and target groups, the Government of Lithuania could consider:

- Conducting consultations with national and sub-national government, civil society organisations, service providers and target groups to understand service needs, expectations, capacities and map current contributions of stakeholders across policy and service areas.
- Building on the consultations, working with key stakeholders in the formulation/revision of legal frameworks to define target groups and assign clear roles and responsibilities to stakeholders across policy and service areas (notably social, employment, housing, health, justice and education), in particular for ex-prisoners and young people leaving care.

Legal frameworks for the promotion of NGOs and their involvement in service design and delivery

The Government of Lithuania aims to increase the involvement of NGOs in the design and delivery of policies and services for people in vulnerable circumstances, as highlighted in the Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania and in Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030." The protection and promotion of civic space and of the NGOs sector and governance structures to ensure its impactful involvement are crucial for the achievement of this objective. The definition of NGOs and the assignment of roles and responsibilities for the development of the NGOs sector are generally well-established. At the same time, there is a lack of information around existing NGOs and their different types (e.g. total number of NGOs, number of NGOs involved in delivery of different public services, capacities of NGOs, type of NGO by legal definition, etc.). Several sectoral laws include commitments for state authorities and municipalities to prioritise NGOs in the provision of services for vulnerable groups (e.g. for people with disabilities, for ex-prisoners and for children without parental care, as well as more broadly for social services) and the Law on Public Procurement provides the possibility for reserved procurement for social enterprises which could be leveraged to privilege NGOs in procurement of public services for vulnerable groups. However, there are no legal requirements for public officials procuring public services to consider wider social value and benefits in the procurement process.

To strengthen evidence on the current and potential role of NGOs in providing services to vulnerable groups and facilitate their access to procurement opportunities, the Government of Lithuania could consider:

- Taking measures to protect and promote the civic space in which NGOs operate, defined as the set of legal, policy, institutional, and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise, and participate in public life.
- Developing a database with high-quality data and information about NGOs, including their legal status, focus of activity, capacities, and involvement in public procurement by mapping NGOs in collaboration with municipalities and umbrella NGOs.
- Evaluating the possibility of taking measures to facilitate NGOs' access to public procurement opportunities on service provision for vulnerable groups, for instance by extending reserved procurement provisions, by integrating social value considerations in procurement (e.g. through legal requirements, operational documents, guidance material, tools and regular trainings and capacity-building activities) or by buying public services through performance-based pricing.

2.3. Strategic planning of policies and services for vulnerable groups

A strategic approach is critical to the planning of policies and services for vulnerable groups. Evidence-based and participatory strategies and action plans can set common objectives, define measurable targets and outline specific measures and programmes to ensure coherent and co-ordinated action across stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

2.3.1. Strategic and participatory planning for vulnerable groups

Commitments targeting vulnerable groups in the MSSL's Strategic Action Plans and other government programmes

The action of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is guided by Strategic Action Plans (SAP), which are approved by the ministry each year and which set out its strategic priorities for a two-year period. The SAP for 2022-24 (2022[29]) includes objectives, measures and targets for vulnerable groups, in particular for people with disabilities and young people with fewer opportunities. For instance, the second priority of

the SAP for 2022-24 is the protection of the rights of the people with disabilities and the development of dedicated services, including through the development of one-stop shops for assistance to children with disabilities and their families as well as through the development of a new model for social rehabilitation services. The SAP also includes considerations for people with disabilities and young people with fewer opportunities in the tasks related to improving the well-being of vulnerable groups and in the priorities and tasks related to increasing employment opportunities. Young people leaving care and ex-prisoners do not seem to be specifically targeted in the SAP for 2022-24. The SAP also includes a list of key performance indicators to monitor progress on outcomes. For instance, the SAP aims to increase the proportion of people with disabilities in housing (as a percentage of all those who applied for housing support) from 60% in 2022 to 65% in 2024.

The Strategic Action Plans are formulated by the MSSL on the basis of the government Programme Action Plan (GPAP), which sets out objectives and targets across government. According to the MSSL, NGOs are involved in the formulation of the GPAP during discussions on issues to tackle, such as through public consultations, virtual meetings and correspondence, but they are not consulted on the specific objectives, targets or measures. It remains unclear to what extent NGOs are involved in the design of the Strategic Action Plans of the MSSL.

The implementation of the strategic objective on well-being and inclusion, included in the Strategic Action Plan 2022-24, is also supported by five development programmes prepared by the MSSL.[7] In particular, the Social Inclusion Development Programme (2021[30]) includes a number of high-level response measures to strengthen the inclusion of vulnerable groups, including people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and young people with fewer opportunities. These documents do not include for the time being specific measures or detailed information on financial resources. The MSSL involved a variety of stakeholders on the draft programmes through a public consultation (carried out between 30 March and 16 April 2021): it included a number of ministries (such as the Ministries of Finance, Justice, and Economy and Innovation), government agencies (such as the State Labour Inspectorate), social partners (such as trade unions and business confederations), NGOs (such as the National Network of Poverty Reduction Organisations) and experts.[8] The MSSL made a significant effort for "closing the feedback loop" by making publicly available online all the comments received by stakeholders and the respective explanations on whether and how each comment was integrated in the successive draft.

Strategic approaches to deliver for people with disabilities

In addition to overall strategic planning, the MSSL has adopted strategic approaches to the planning of policies and measures in support of people with disabilities. Since 2013, the MSSL has formulated and implemented four action plans (2013-15, 2016-18, 2019 and 2020) to support the implementation of the National Programme for the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (2013-20), covering a variety of policy and service areas including social protection, healthcare, education, culture, sports, and environmental adaptation. According to the responses to the OECD questionnaire, other relevant ministries and institutions beyond the MSSL were involved in the formulation and implementation of the Action Plans: such inter-institutional approach has been considered beneficial by the MSSL to plan tailored interventions in areas where the social integration of people with disabilities was slower. The extent to which other ministries, notably Ministries of Justice and Health, were involved in the formulation and implementation of the National Programme and action plans remains unclear.

Strategic approaches to de-institutionalise services

The process of de-institutionalisation of support to vulnerable groups was guided by the Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care (2014-20; extended to 2023). The extent to which other ministries, notably Ministries of Justice and Health, have been involved in the Action Plan remains unclear.

The MSSL is currently preparing for a new phase of the de-institutionalisation process and a new action plan, which shall be informed by evidence from municipalities on needs and available resources for the intended reform. While the MSSL has encouraged municipalities to involve local NGOs in their mapping process, it is unclear to what extent this will take place.

2.3.2. Strategic and participatory planning in selected policy and service areas

Social policy and services

The Social Services Division of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the Primary Healthcare and Nursing Department of the Ministry of Health (MoH) are responsible for the design of national policies and programmes in the respective social service areas. Stakeholders noted how NGOs are often the initiating force behind policy changes and proposal of new services at the national level. For instance, NGOs reportedly had an important role in bringing into the policy debate the need to regulate personal assistance, the need for temporary respite services for care-givers, the need for foster care for young people leaving care and the need for assistance for people leaving prisons. More insights on the involvement of NGOs in policy making more widely are included in the section on "a co-ordinated approach to supporting vulnerable groups."

Municipalities are responsible for designing and approving social services plans. Chapter 4 highlights how the planning of social services by municipalities heavily relies on the Catalogue of social services, which could in turn generate service gaps as the Catalogue is seen as a rather static tool. It also finds that the planning activity is largely based on information gathered retrospectively from service usage rather than forward-looking on service needs.

The national methodology for the development of municipalities' social services plans recognises the role of NGOs in contributing to their preparation. According to the methodology, municipalities should include all stakeholders and budget institutions in the formulation of the plan and discuss it publicly, including with NGOs. The OECD municipality survey finds that 89% of the responding municipalities consulted service providers (such as NGOs) to collect their views on the needs for additional services. For instance, Jurbarkas municipality reported sending questionnaires to service providers to gather their vision and goals in their service area before preparing the Social Services Plan. However, while NGOs are commonly consulted on the needs and priorities of the target groups they represent (in 74% of responding municipalities) and they are often invited to provide comments on the draft Social Services Plan (61%), their engagement in defining strategic objectives and the promotion of their co-ownership, for instance at the presentation of these plans, remain limited (Figure 2.1). For example, in Švenčionys district municipality and Marijampolė city, stakeholders highlighted the municipalities' efforts to engage NGOs early in the process, for instance by pro-actively informing them that a plan will be drawn up, drawing data, analysis and statistics from them, and gathering information on what measures they are implementing and planning.

Figure 2.1. Participation of NGOs in planning social services at the municipality level

Share of responding municipalities relying on a given approach
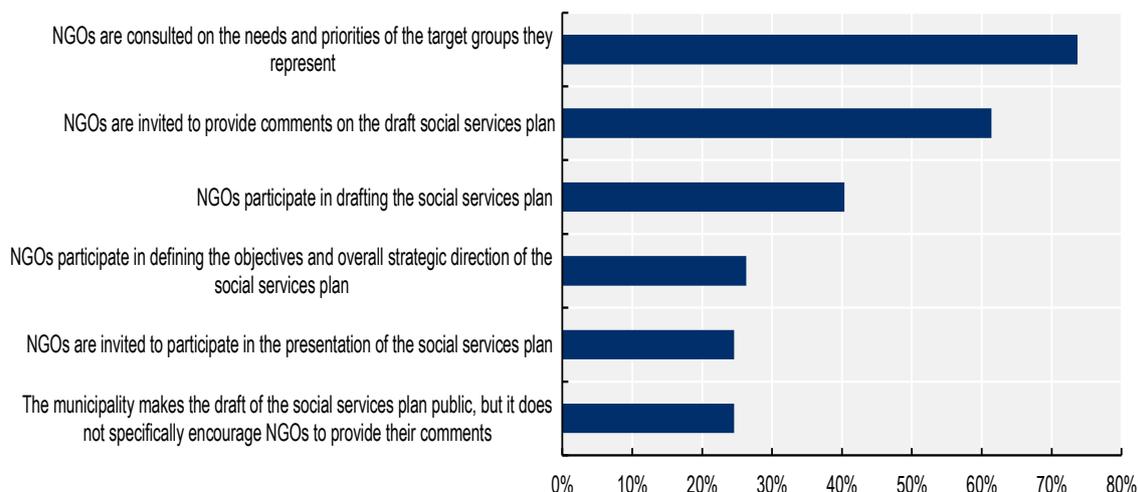
Note: The figure shows the percentage of municipalities reporting relying on a given approach in involving NGOs in answering the question "How does municipality involve Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the design of the annual Social Service plan?" The figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities.
Source: OECD municipality survey.

Municipalities mainly rely on written exchanges and public meetings organised by the municipality to involve NGOs in the preparation of their social services plans (65% of municipalities report each of these methods). However, only 37% of municipalities reported involving NGOs via their municipal council of NGOs and 25% of municipalities reported not having such council in place, which could instead represent a more established and structured forum for discussion (see section on "a co-ordinated approach to supporting vulnerable groups" for further information). In some cases, an NGO delegate is part of the group that prepares the social services plan (as reported by Prienai and Joniskis municipalities). In some cases, for instance as reported by Visaginas, the municipality does not make specific efforts to involve NGOs in the preparation of the social services plan, but an NGO participates in a working group that annually evaluates the results of the implementation of the social services plan, identifies problems, and makes proposals for improving the quality of social services: it remains unclear to what extent such evaluations feed into the preparation of the following social services plan.

Employment policy and services

The Employment Division of the MSSL is responsible for designing employment policies. The Tripartite Council of the Republic of Lithuania[9] brings together public authorities (notably the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Ministry of Economy and the Office of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania), trade unions and employers' organisations to issue recommendations, prepare studies and reports and draw up collaboration programmes in the areas of labour relations, employment policy and social security, among others. The Council, meeting at least once a month, includes 7 representatives for each of the three entities gathering a total of 21 members. The MSSL assures the functions of the Secretariat of the Council, including formulating proposals, implementing decisions and preparing meetings. Representatives of NGOs and local communities may be invited to take part to meetings of the Tripartite Council with the right of a consultative vote.

Employment policy is implemented by the Lithuanian Public Employment Service. The central PES office plans its work and efforts through an annual strategic document that includes objectives, measurable

targets and key performance indicators. Social partners are involved in the preparation of the PES strategy via the Tripartite Council (Lauringson and Lüske, 2021[31]), but it remains unclear to what extent NGOs are engaged, especially those working with and for specific vulnerable groups. Based on the annual strategic document, the heads of the local PES offices are responsible for contextualising the national objectives and targets to their local circumstances, providing detailed objectives, targets and tasks to the units of the local office. The assignment of tasks in the local PES offices is reportedly carried out on a monthly basis.

Health policy and services

The Primary Healthcare and Nursing Department, the Specialised Healthcare Department and the Mental Health Division in the Ministry of Health are responsible for the design of health policy and services at the national level. Health policy and services are structured through bi-annual Strategic Action Plans[10] that include strategic objectives, outline programmes and define planned appropriations, taking into account long- and medium-term planning documents and further analysis. At the same time, the current Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Health does not include specific goals, targets or programmes in support of specific vulnerable groups. Furthermore, it seems such strategic planning is not based on an ex-ante assessment of needs for healthcare services nor it is informed by consultations of stakeholders such as NGOs.

Legal services

The Legal Services Group is in charge of policy making within the Ministry of Justice, while implementation of legal services is assured by the State-guaranteed Legal Aid Service. The Ministry of Justice did not report assessing the needs for legal services to feed into policy setting and service design. It also did not indicate whether its action is supported by an operational strategy or action plan; state-guaranteed legal aid services also do not seem to include specific programmes or measures for vulnerable groups.

2.3.3. Policy recommendations

Strategic planning of policies and services for vulnerable groups

Strategic, evidence-based and participatory approaches are critical to the planning of policies and services for vulnerable groups. General government action in the areas of employment and social policies and services is guided by the Strategic Action Plans (SAPs) of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) and the strategy of the Public Employment Service (PES). The current SAP includes objectives, measures and targets for vulnerable groups, in particular for people with disabilities and young people with fewer opportunities. At the same time, the use of strategy documents to plan and co-ordinate action for vulnerable groups across the whole-of-government remains limited mainly to efforts in support of people with disabilities.

To strengthen strategic planning of policies and services for a wider spectrum of groups in vulnerable circumstances, including young people leaving care and ex-prisoners, the Government of Lithuania could consider:

- Broadening the focus of government action for people in vulnerable situations beyond social and employment policies and services and ensuring that other stakeholders (notably in the housing, health, justice and education areas) also define specific objectives, measures, targets and key performance indicators, where relevant and as appropriate.

- Investing in the formulation and implementation of evidence-based, transparent, participatory, inclusive and cross-sectoral policy framework and strategies to promote whole-of-government action across government departments and service providers in support of vulnerable groups, in

particular young people leaving care and ex-prisoners, setting out common objectives, clarifying mandates and setting inter-institutional procedures covering all relevant policy and service areas.

Participatory planning of policies and services for vulnerable groups

The participation of NGOs, especially those working with and for specific vulnerable groups, to the formulation of the strategic documents of the MSSL, the PES and other Ministries in key areas of public service delivery remains limited. At the municipal level, while NGOs are commonly consulted on the Social Services Plan and the needs and priorities of the target groups they represent, their engagement in defining strategic objectives of the Social Services Plan remains limited. Furthermore, the municipal councils of NGOs appear to remain under-used as a forum of consultation in this area.

To promote participatory planning of policies and services for vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Conducting consultations with NGOs, organising deliberations in the Council of NGOs and including NGOs in the policy groups in charge of government strategic planning on key public policies and services for vulnerable groups, including within the new phase of the de-institutionalisation process, with specific efforts to reach out to NGOs advocating for or serving vulnerable groups.

- Strengthening the participation of NGOs in all phases of the preparation of municipalities' Social Services Plans, including in providing the evidence-base on the evolving needs and expectations of vulnerable groups, in innovating the services provided and in setting overall objectives of the plans, with specific efforts to reach out to NGOs advocating for or serving vulnerable groups.

- Using in-person as well as digital means, consultations with local NGOs, deliberations in the municipal council of NGOs and considering including NGOs in the groups in charge of the preparation of Social Services Plans to strengthen their participation.

2.4. A co-ordinated approach to supporting vulnerable groups

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour plays a leading role in the design and delivery of policies and services for vulnerable groups in Lithuania, in particular people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and young people leaving care. At the same time, the various legal frameworks, strategies and policies, discussed in the previous sections, that cover relevant support measures for specific groups underline the importance of a coherent and co-ordinated approach. The section below therefore assesses existing mechanisms and challenges for co-ordination across stakeholders, including with non-governmental organisations. The assessment presented below is complemented by Chapter 3, which provides a more detailed review of co-ordination measures in case management among professionals involved in supporting clients of employment and social services.

2.4.1. Co-ordination across state institutions at the national level

Exchange of information and inter-ministerial action plans and orders

The Government of Lithuania has put in place different mechanisms to promote policy co-ordination and coherence in its support to vulnerable groups. In terms of information exchange, the Department of Disability Affairs of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour has created a specific section on its website to publish information received from other ministries that is relevant to people with disabilities; it has also designated a specific staff member responsible for taking care of this task. Similarly, when planning measures for people with disabilities, other ministries shall inform the Department of Disability Affairs

accordingly and provide relevant information, including regarding the public consultation they are planning for the specific item.

Guidance on co-ordination is also provided through relevant Action Plans and ministerial orders. For instance, the Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care (2014-20; extended to 2023) and the ministerial order on the procedures for the social re-integration of ex-prisoners have been highlighted by stakeholders as useful documents for co-ordinating interventions and support measures across ministries and agencies. More generally, Lithuanian ministries can make use of inter-ministerial action plans: directly attached to the budget, they are planning documents covering horizontal goals and objectives that can promote inter-ministerial action (OECD, 2015[1]).

Inter-ministerial working groups on vulnerable groups

Inter-ministerial working groups are oftentimes established to develop, implement and monitor such inter-ministerial action plans. For instance, an inter-institutional working group has been established to monitor the implementation of the procedures for ex-prisoners. It is composed of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and its Prison Department, the MSSL, the Probation Service as well as representatives of municipalities and NGOs. This is highlighted as the only mechanism for the MoJ to co-ordinate with the MSSL and municipalities on vulnerable groups. Despite the inclusive composition, the working group's activities seem to remain limited (more information in section on "Monitoring and evaluating policies and services for vulnerable groups"). While it creates a forum for monitoring the procedures for ex-prisoners, the working group has been established on an ad hoc basis and it is not tasked with wider policy co-ordination on developing and strengthening policies and services for this target group.

To co-ordinate policies and services for people with disabilities, the Law on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities established the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities, an important forum for policy co-ordination (Box 2.3).

While the Department of Youth Affairs under the MSSL is charged with co-ordination policy and services targeting young people, including young people leaving care, no institutional mechanism appears to be in place. According to survey replies, the lack of institutional mechanisms remains a major challenge for the MSSL when co-ordinating with other ministries and national-level agencies on the design and delivery of public services for vulnerable groups.

Box 2.3. Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities

The Council consists of 20 members: nine representatives of state institutions (for 2022-24 it includes the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Office of the President of the Republic, the Office of the government, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Health), one representative of municipalities, nine representatives of associations of people with disabilities and one representative of the academic community. The Minister of Social Security and Labour presides the Council. The composition of the Council is renewed every two years.

The Council meets regularly (normally once per quarter) to examine the issues of social integration of people with disabilities and submit proposals on policy and draft legal acts to the MSSL, as well as to the government, specific ministries, and other state and municipal institutions and bodies. It can also provide recommendations to planned actions presented by the MSSL, in particular discussing and reviewing action plans of relevant ministries. The Council also aims to involve non-governmental organisations representing people with disabilities in policy making.

> The Department of Disability Affairs of the MSSL assures the functions of the secretariat of the Council, in particular in terms of human and financial resources for its activity. It is also responsible for implementing the decisions and recommendations of the Council. Every year, the Council submits a report of its activities to the Minister of Social Security and Labour, which is then presented and discussed at a Council meeting.
>
> Source: https://www.ndt.lt/neigaliuju-reikalu-taryba-2/; OECD Policy Questionnaire on Personalised Services for Vulnerable Groups.

Challenges to co-ordination across state institutions at national level

The Ministries of Health and the MSSL also reported using cabinet meetings, standing committees and ad hoc meetings for general policy co-ordination. Overall the Centre of Government (CoG), which includes the Office of the government and the Ministry of Finance in Lithuania, does not appear to play a prominent role in co-ordinating ministries' efforts in support of integrated policies and services to vulnerable groups.

Inter-institutional action plans, dedicated co-ordination bodies and CoG involvement can facilitate cross-sector and cross-stakeholder co-ordination by clarifying roles and responsibilities and creating incentives for officials in public institutions. The lack of clarity and incentives, however, are considered major challenges to inter-institutional co-ordination by the MSSL, according to survey replies. Another important barrier for inter-institutional co-ordination identified by the MSSL and MoH is the lack of human and financial resources in the lead ministry and in other ministries and agencies, according to survey replies.

At the legislative level, representatives of the national government and municipalities, as well as representatives of NGOs and service providers may be invited to take part in hearings organised by the Seimas Committee on Social Affairs and Labour and the Committee on Human Rights. No significant challenges were reported by ministries in terms of their co-ordination with the Seimas.

Co-ordination of measures and initiatives

Beyond policy co-ordination, ministries and agencies at the national level may also co-ordinate for specific programmes, measures and initiatives. For instance, the Ministry of Education (MoE) delivers professional education services to prisoners through vocational education providers in direct collaboration with the Prison Department of the Ministry of Justice. The MoE is also launching the project "Career Guidance Equal Opportunities for Everyone" which aims at ensuring that every student from first grade and through lifetime will be able to receive career guidance consultation. The project will include the recruitment of 475 career specialists (one in each school, including vocational education schools) providing career information, guidance and counselling and guide to internship opportunities, including for people with disabilities and young people out of the education system. The MoE also discussed the project with the Prison Department to ensure that prisoners will be able to access the services as well, which could be helpful for preparing their social reintegration once they will be released. The MoE is also collaborating with the MSSL on the establishment of 11 regional career centres, which will bring together a variety of professional profiles providing career services, including psychological services, career orientation, and opportunities for internships. The initiative will also be supported by staff from the Youth Affairs Department of the MSSL working with young people with fewer opportunities. While ministries seem to co-ordinate and collaborate on specific measures and programmes, there is a risk of such co-ordination taking place on an ad hoc rather than more systematic basis.

2.4.2. Co-ordination at the local level and across levels of government

Driving impactful change for vulnerable groups requires co-ordinated action in the implementation of policies, programmes and measures at the local level. Such co-ordination however can prove difficult. For

instance, Chapter 3 highlights that co-operation across service providers is not systematic nor sufficient and that effective co-operation practices are missing between the local offices of the Public Employment Service and the Social Services Divisions in municipalities. Similarly, stakeholders reported co-ordination challenges between municipalities and the Probation Service in the implementation of services for the second stage of social reintegration of people on parole and ex-prisoners (i.e. the 12 months after release). Indeed, the Probation Service was already providing services for prisoners released on parole before the introduction of the new procedures, which instead assigned significant responsibilities in this area to municipalities. As highlighted by this example, the lack of clear responsibilities and of institutional co-ordination mechanisms at the local level can give rise to duplication and fragmentation of services for vulnerable groups.

Inter-institutional co-ordinators as a model for local co-ordination for vulnerable groups

Some municipalities aim to promote integrated approaches to the delivery of services for children and young people at risk through inter-institutional co-ordinators. The role and responsibilities of the co-ordinators are defined in the Description of the Procedure for Co-ordinated Provision of Educational Assistance, Social and Healthcare Services (2017[32]), adopted jointly by the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Social Security and Labour and Ministry of Health. These municipality officials are tasked with co-ordinating the provision of services for people aged 0-18 (the range is extended to 0-21 for people with high and very high special needs). They co-ordinate the provision of educational assistance, social and health services, collecting and analysing the application information, processing requests, co-ordinating across institutions and divisions, handling complaints, co-operating with service provides, and chairing meetings of the commission deciding on the applications for co-ordinated services, among others. While divergent interpretations of the responsibilities of these co-ordinators and questions of financial and human capacities impact their effectiveness, stakeholders overall agreed with the high value added provided by these functions. During the interviews conducted by OECD, respondents agreed that it could serve as a possible model to ensure a co-ordinated delivery of services at the local level for vulnerable groups. For example, Kaunas district municipality is reportedly considering the establishment of an inter-institutional co-ordinator for people with disabilities. At the same time, respondents discussed the possibility of establishing inter-institutional co-ordinators targeting people in vulnerable situations more broadly, to ensure effective use of resources and avoid duplication of efforts.

Co-ordination across levels of government

Effective co-ordination across levels of government is indispensable to translate national policies and frameworks into programmes and tailored services at the local level, as well as to inform national policy making with the perspectives gathered and needs identified in different local contexts. The Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (ALAL) represents the interests of Lithuania's 60 municipalities vis-à-vis the national government and international organisations and it promotes collaboration across municipalities. It is recognised as an important stakeholder in informing national policy making: representatives of the ALAL are often part of national-level co-ordination bodies, including the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities and the Working Group monitoring the implementation of the procedures for the social reintegration of ex-prisoners. The ALAL also co-ordinates consultations with municipalities on draft laws and other legal acts in the field of social security. The Ministry of Health similarly reported conducting consultations with the ALAL on health policies and services for vulnerable groups. Within the ALAL, the Social Affairs Committee is particularly relevant for vulnerable groups as it is responsible for making proposals to the ALAL Board in the field of social security. In this field, ALAL also organises trainings and events targeting municipal staff in charge of social security issues and it publishes thematic publications and training material.

However, besides ad hoc meetings, no formal mechanisms exist to ensure co-ordination between the MSSL and municipalities on policies and services for vulnerable groups. Surveys results from

municipalities and the MSSL indicate that significant barriers persist to vertical co-ordination, due to, among others, the lack of political will and leadership in ministries and municipalities, insufficient interest and incentives for staff, as well as the lack of institutional capacities and mechanisms (Figure 2.2). The MoJ does not report any challenge; the MoH reports lack of financial and/or human capacities in the ministry as the only (moderate) challenge.

Figure 2.2. Reported challenges in co-ordinating the provision of public services across levels of government

Extent to which the following elements represent a challenge for co-ordination of public services across levels of governments, on a scale from1 to 5 [1: it is not at all a challenge; 5: it is a major challenge]
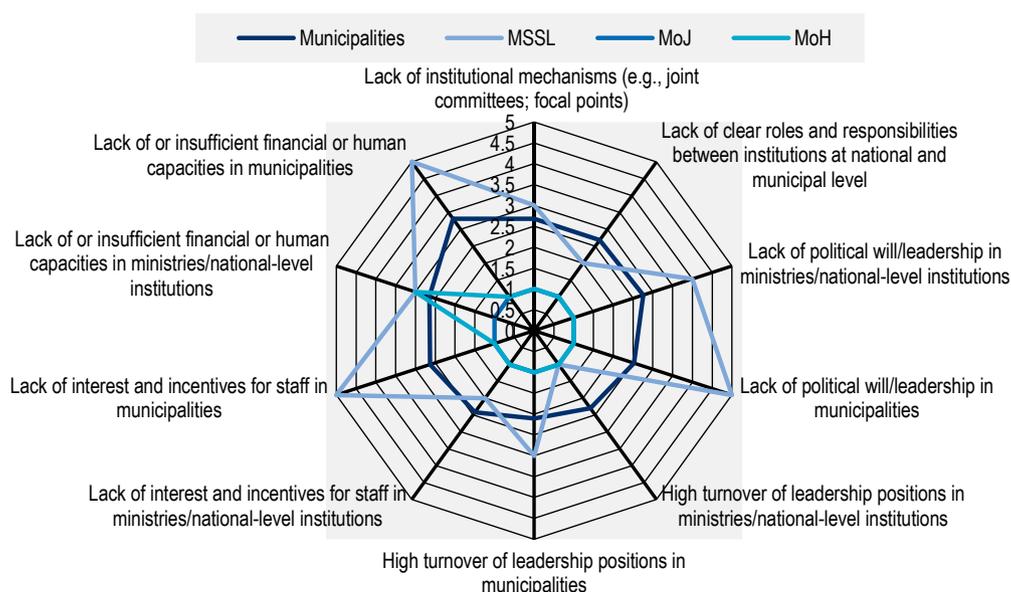
Note: The figure shows the replies of the Ministries of Social Security and Labour (MSSL), Justice (MoJ) and Health (MoH) and the average score across the replies of 57 municipalities to the question "In your municipality/ministry's opinion, from a scale from 1 to 5, to what extent do the following elements represent a challenge when co-ordinating the design and provision of public services with national-level institutions (notably Ministries)/municipalities? [1: it is not at all a challenge; 5: it is a major challenge]."
Source: OECD municipality survey and OECD Policy Questionnaire on Personalised Services for Vulnerable Groups.

2.4.3. Co-ordination with non-governmental organisations

NGOs' involvement in identifying service needs and policy making

The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government (2017[12]) recognises that stakeholder participation in the policy cycle increases government accountability and improves the evidence base for policy making, among others. While this chapter focuses on the involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in policy making and service delivery for vulnerable groups, it is important to recognise that, for NGOs to fulfil this role, they rely on protected and promoted civic space and targeted support.

The Law on the Development of NGOs (2013[23]) established the Council of NGOs, consisting of 20 members and meeting approximately once a month. The Council has advising functions on policies for the development of NGOs and other policies that are relevant for the NGO sector (Box 2.4).

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Box 2.4. Lithuania's Council of NGOs

The Council includes nine representatives of state institutions (Office of the President of the Republic, Office of the government and Ministries of National Defence, Culture, Social Security and Labour, Justice, Interior, Agriculture and Education, Science and Sports), one representative of the Association of Lithuanian Municipalities and ten representatives of NGOs identified by umbrella NGOs among their member organisations. For instance, the Council includes representatives of the Lithuanian Disability Organisations Forum (which unites 15 organisations collectively representing the interests of around 300 000 people with disabilities),[1] of the Lithuanian Youth Council (the biggest umbrella structure for Lithuanian national youth organisations, uniting 67 member organisations collectively representing more than 200 000 young people)[2] and of the Coalition of Human Rights Organisations.[3] The Council is responsible for evaluating legal acts regulating NGOs, submitting proposals on the development of NGOs to state and municipal authorities, submitting proposals in regards to projects in support of NGOs, and advising authorities on drafting laws on NGOs.

1. https://www.lnf.lt/en/about-ldf/
2. https://lijot.lt/en/
3. https://ztok.lt/

Source: (Minister of Social Security and Labour, 2021[33]), Order on Approval of the Staff of the Council of Non-Governmental Organisations; (Republic of Lithuania, 2013[23]), Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Development of Non-Governmental Organisations.

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While the Council of NGOs is an advisory body to the whole government, its work is supported by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, which provides Secretariat functions by appointing one secretary who co-ordinates and organises meetings and prepares the agenda and relevant documentation. The Council does not have its own budget to organise its meetings and conduct activities: instead, the MSSL provides funding for the organisation of an annual forum event with local councils of NGOs and covers some expenses for conducting surveys. According to the interviews conducted by OECD, the Council has been significantly strengthened and has gained relevance in the policy debate over recent years. For instance, through the creation of a dedicated working group, the Council participated in the revision of the volunteering law of Lithuania and contributed with proposals. However, it remains unclear to what extent the Council is leveraged as a forum to gather information, evidence and advice from NGOs on policy areas beyond the development of the NGO sector: for instance, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice did not report any engagement with the Council of NGOs. In Finland, the government established the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy (KANE) in 2007, with the purpose of fostering interaction, co-operation and collaboration between civil society and the government. Finland's experience points to approaches to enable the impact of such councils in policy making processes (Box 2.5).

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Box 2.5. Finland: Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy (KANE)

In January 2022, the government appointed the fourth Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy for the period 2022-26. The Board is currently chaired by the Secretary General of the Finnish Red Cross and works under the auspices of the Ministry of Justice. KANE is responsible for overseeing the general conditions in which civil society is engaged with the government.

Composition

KANE consists of a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman and a maximum of 19 other members, including representatives from civil society, research, the business sector, ministries and other public agencies. The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities is also a member of KANE. When evaluating

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applications of civil society organisations (CSOs) to become a member, attention is paid to the scope and versatility of the applicant's networks and its possibilities to participate in the activities. KANE also aims to provide a platform for smaller CSOs and organisations representing vulnerable groups.

Operations and activities

KANE is involved in the preparation of government policies and programmes, holds public debates with decision-makers and CSOs and takes part in government negotiations and parliamentary committees. It also prepares or participates in studies, reports and guidebooks. For instance, in 2018, KANE issued a guide for public officials working at a municipal level on building partnerships with civil society. The guide highlights good practices, maps existing partnership models in municipalities and provides a practical checklist to support public officials to prepare their engagement with CSOs.

KANE is consulted on legislation that impacts the operation of civil society as well as the overall government's programme. KANE also seeks to appoint delegates to and is invited to participate in law-drafting inter-ministerial working groups and working groups formed to deliberate on policy and regulatory changes and service provision set up by other organisations and Ministries. This practice helps KANE shape strategic objectives and overall structure of new proposed legislation and policy.

Two civil servants in the Ministry of Justice provide Secretariat functions to KANE. KANE's operations are also supported by a specific budget line in the State budget, although it remains reportedly limited.

Co-operation with ministries and with the local level

To tackle potentially low interest of members, the agenda of KANE is designed by the members to ensure that the issues discussed are of interest to them. Integrating regional and local voices remains one of the priorities for KANE to strengthen its work and impact. While a few small NGOs based outside the capital are directly involved in KANE, others are involved through surveys, meetings and seminars.

Planning and evaluating activities and informing the next cycle

At the beginning of its mandate, KANE must adopt a strategy lasting for the duration of its term. Priorities and strategic vision for the term are set through member statements, meetings and workshops. The current board also aims to complement its multi-year strategy with annual work plans. KANE monitors, reports and evaluates its activities. It delivers mid-term and final reports, evaluating the results of its work, tracking successes and providing recommendations for the next board. In some cases, evaluations are outsourced to external evaluators.

Sources: (Ministry of Justice of Finland, 2022[29]), Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy (KANE); (Association of Finnish Regional Authorities, 2018[34]), *Organisations as a partner of the province*; (Ministry of Justice of Finland, 2021[35]), *Final report of the Advisory Board on Civil Society Policy 2017-2021*; interviews conducted by the OECD with public officials from Finland's Ministry of Justice.

The Law on the Development of NGOs also mandates for similar Councils of NGOs at the municipality level, with responsibilities on providing advice and proposals to municipalities on the development of NGOs, participating in the preparation of legal acts in this field, but also participating in monitoring public services and participating in the development of policies in other relevant fields. Yet, 25% of municipalities responding to the OECD municipality survey reported that a Council of NGOs does not exist in their municipality, a significant share of respondents that may also depend on lack of awareness among public officials about these Councils even when they exist. Furthermore, among municipalities where such Council exists, 26% of them indicate that the Council does not meet regularly. Almost all the local Councils of NGOs (95%) are supported by an official of the municipality for administrative purposes (i.e. secretariat functions), but very few (9%) have their own budget. Equipping the Councils with an official of the municipality has been highlighted as useful in co-ordinating the work of different divisions of the municipality with NGOs. The extent to which these Councils play a significant role in local decision-making

also varies across municipalities. Indeed, 88% of the municipalities that have a Council of NGOs involve it to discuss policies and programmes to support the development of NGOs and 77% to discuss the design and delivery of public services. However, the share decreases to 63% when it comes to involving the Council of NGOs in monitoring public services in the municipality. Some stakeholders suggested that the role of local Councils of NGOs might be undermined in cases in which the municipality major chairs the Council: this appears to be the case in 7% of the local Councils of NGOs, according to survey replies. The impact of these local Councils may also vary depending on the existence and capacities of local NGOs to participate in decision-making. Advocacy and participatory activities indeed require time, resources and capacities that smaller, local NGOs may not have. Furthermore, stakeholders highlighted that in some municipalities there may also be an outright lack of NGOs, while in other municipalities the number of NGOs and their engagement in policy making is reported to rise.

Involving NGOs that advocate for and work with vulnerable groups can support evidence-based policy making that is informed by a variety of perspectives. Article 7 of the Law on Legislative Framework provides the basis for public consultations. It recognises that the purpose of public consultation shall be to ensure openness and transparency in legislation, to get feedback from the public on the issues of legal regulation and their solutions, to allow the public to influence the content of a draft legal act and to submit proposals relating to the legislative initiatives and draft legal act, among others (Republic of Lithuania, 2012[36]). All draft laws have been systematically published on the website of the Seimas for public comments since 2009 through the legislative information system, giving citizens the possibility to comment on draft laws (OECD, 2015[1]). Institutions also have to present arguments in case they are not taking into account citizens' comments. When it comes to policy making for vulnerable groups, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education reported conducting public consultations with the wide public as well as targeted consultations with NGOs. Yet, every institution seems to apply its own methods and practices for public consultations, using their own means to announce them and their own tools and methodologies to conduct them and report about them, if at all (OECD, 2015[1]).

Ministries can also involve NGOs via dedicated mechanisms and channels, beyond general public consultations. For instance, stakeholders highlighted that large umbrella NGOs have good opportunities to interact with ministries on policy issues at the national level and pointed to the example of NGOs advocating for people with disabilities and their engagement in the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities (Box 2.3). In particular, among others, the Council works to ensure that NGOs for people with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in relevant policy making and have access to governmental support (e.g. funding), together with other NGOs. While the MSSL and the Council encourage other ministries to involve NGOs when dealing with issues relevant to vulnerable groups, the awareness on the importance of consulting NGOs may vary across ministries, with some more sensitive than others. For instance, the Ministry of Justice did not report any engagement with the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities and did not report any specific co-ordination mechanism to co-operate with NGOs more generally. On the other hand, the Ministry of Health reported undertaking consultations with the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities in relation to healthcare policy making and indicated, more widely, involving NGOs through targeted public consultations. The Ministry of Education (MoE) also reported efforts to consult NGOs and students' associations in its policy making, although they largely collaborate with large umbrella organisations. For instance, consultations often place at national and regional level with the Adult-Learning Association. On vocational education, the MoE reported co-ordinating with service providers, while also holding monthly meetings with employers' associations and confederations at leadership level. Challenges in co-ordinating with NGOs on the design and delivery of public services for vulnerable groups are explored below.

NGOs' involvement in service delivery

The Programme of the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania encourages the transfer of part of the provision of public services to NGOs (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[4]). Involving

NGOs in the delivery of public services for vulnerable groups can help inform their design as they may be more aware of the issues faced by the groups they work with; they can also help reach out to target groups, increase their awareness and promote their access to the services. For instance, according to survey replies, 89% of responding municipalities co-operate with NGOs to get in contact with target groups. NGOs may also provide services for vulnerable groups themselves and clients may prefer receiving services from NGOs in some cases: however, questions of financial and human capacities as well as accountability and service continuity arise in this area as further explored below.

According to survey replies, NGOs are currently involved in the provision of social services in 96% of responding municipalities. Furthermore, stakeholders reported that NGOs play a prominent role in running day care centres and in providing leisure activities and other "soft services" to people with disabilities. For instance, Kaunas district municipality reported that 16 NGOs provide social care services and that, in addition, nine childcare day centres and one elderly care centre in the municipality are operated by NGOs. Similarly, Marijampolė city municipality highlighted the involvement of NGOs in running childcare centres and community homes. However, as highlighted in Chapter 4, state and municipal institutions have traditionally been the predominant provider of social services. This is confirmed by survey replies from municipalities: while 62% of municipalities buy some social services from NGOs, only 56% of them involve them directly in the provision of existing or new social services.

Beyond social services, for which municipalities are responsible, public institutions can involve NGOs in the delivery of other public services to vulnerable groups. For instance, as highlighted in Chapter 4, the Ministry of Justice and its Prison Department, with the support of Norway Grants, are implementing a pilot initiative aiming to strengthen the availability and access of reintegration services to inmates and probationers provided by NGOs. The MSSL also launched a tender process for EUR 100 000 to provide social integration services to ex-prisoners, including individual aid and assistance, and to raise public awareness and positive attitudes in society toward ex-prisoners: the tender process was won by NGO Caritas. In the field of employment services, the Public Employment Service local offices direct clients to NGOs in case specific services are not provided by the PES or other service providers, or in case job-seekers are looking to take part in volunteering activities. In some cases, for instance in Kaunas district municipality, the local PES office has signed co-operation agreements with NGOs for the provision of services, exchange of information and participation in joint projects. The central PES office also reported having in place a strategy of co-operation with social partners outlining modes and tools of co-operation. However, co-ordination between local PES offices and NGOs for the delivery of employment services to vulnerable groups does not appear to be carried out in a structured way.

A number of factors appear to pose significant challenges for municipalities in involving NGOs in the delivery of services, in particular when it comes to social services (Figure 2.3). Lack of human and financial capacities of NGOs is by far the most common challenge identified by municipalities (75% of them); it is also considered a major challenge by the MSSL, according to survey replies. The lack of capacities also risks generating a vicious cycle when combined with the current procedures to involve NGOs in delivering services. Indeed, public service delivery is largely organised through public tenders and open competitions that favour lowest-price proposals. As NGOs tend to have more limited financial capacities and as they tend not to own premises, infrastructure and equipment (rather often renting at market price), NGOs may face more difficulties in proposing a lower price for a given service and hence lower chances of winning competitions compared to other private sector providers, public institutions and municipal institutions. In turn, these factors might limit the involvement of NGOs in the delivery of services and prevent them from consolidating their internal financial and human capacities.

Share of municipalities reporting elements as a challenge in involving NGOs in the provision of social services
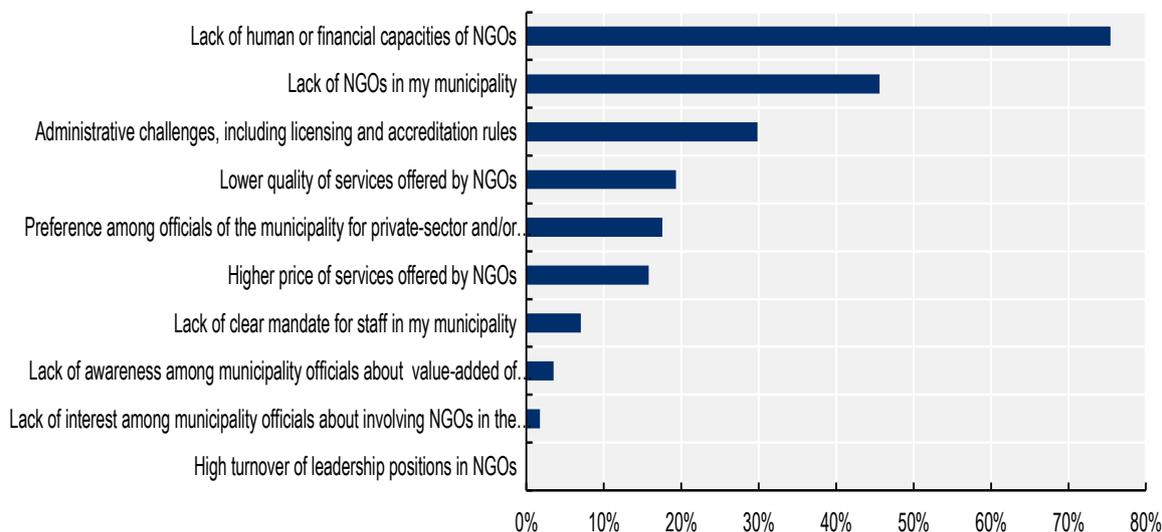
Note: The figure shows the share of municipalities (among the 57 responding ones) that reported each element to be a challenge when answering the question "In your opinion, what are the main challenges in involving NGOs in the provision of social services in your municipality? Please select ALL options that apply."
Source: OECD municipality survey.

Issues of capacities are also linked to the project-based approach taken to service delivery: when NGOs are involved in the delivery of services, they are often involved on the basis of projects and/or time-bound contracts. This approach entails risks for all sides. On the side of NGOs, gaps between one project and another constitute a risk for the sustainability of its operations. Stakeholders also highlighted that, while exempt from income tax, NGOs are required to reinvest any accumulated funds within specific timeframes, hence preventing them from building up financial reserves as buffers between projects. These dynamics, in turn, make it difficult for them to retain skilled and trained staff, posing a risk to the financial and human capacities of NGOs. On the side of clients, the approach and dynamics outlined generate the risk of disruptions in service delivery, in particular for vulnerable groups who rely most heavily on the continuity of support measures. On the side of the government, this approach might prove unsustainable and undermine the implementation of policies and services. For instance, the MSSL reported the project-based approach to the involvement of NGOs as a key issue that hindered the implementation of the process of de-institutionalisation of care for people with disabilities and children without parental care.

Stakeholders from selected NGOs and municipalities suggested an alternative system where municipalities would "buy given services at a given price" from service providers, be it public, private or non-governmental ones. According to the survey results, 62% of responding municipalities already buy social services from NGOs. For instance, Švenčionys district municipality reported starting to buy services from NGOs directly. Similarly, Marijampolė city municipality reported having used open competitions to award service contracts while prioritising NGOs. Furthermore, while it may prove more difficult to redistribute existing services from municipality providers to NGOs, the role of NGOs could be strengthened by involving them in the provision of new services: 56% of responding municipalities reported involving NGOs directly for the provision of new social services. In Marijampolė city, for instance, the municipality reaches out to NGOs when they intend to start providing a new service that the municipality and other providers are not delivering. The municipality also reported supporting the NGOs with "start-up funding" and methodological assistance to deliver new services. At the same time, as also emphasised in Chapter 4

municipalities may be reluctant to provide, or fund NGOs' provision of new services that are not included in the Catalogue of Social Services.

46% of responding municipalities highlighted the lack of NGOs as a problem in itself; this is considered a moderate challenge by the MSSL as well, according to survey replies. This is an underlying issue that underscores the importance of strengthening the development of NGOs more widely at the national and local levels, and not just their involvement in service delivery. The next section explores further the type of support provided to NGOs for their development. The extent to which national and local institutions are willing to invest in strengthening the NGO sector depends, among others, on the awareness of the value-added brought to the policy and service areas by NGOs. Lack of political will, leadership, interest and awareness in national ministries and in municipalities might pose significant challenges in this regard. While only 6% of responding municipalities indicated that lack of awareness or interest among municipality officials represent a challenge to involving NGOs in the provision of social services, other stakeholders highlighted these as significant barriers. This is sometimes coupled with other factors that make officials prefer municipality providers for the delivery of services: 16% of responding municipalities highlighted higher price of services offered by NGOs to be a challenge, 19% reported that the quality of services offered by NGOs is lower and 18% expressed that municipality officials may have a preference for private-sector and/ow municipality service providers for other reasons.

On the practical side, stakeholders also shared further elements that might limit effective co-ordination between municipalities and service providers, including NGOs, such as on data-sharing. These aspects are further explored in Chapter 3.

2.4.4. Policy recommendations

Co-ordination across institutions at national and local levels

While the MSSL plays a leading role in the design and delivery of social and employment policies, including for vulnerable groups, co-ordination across various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders is crucial for a coherent and co-ordinated approach. Co-ordination at the national level is often supported by inter-ministerial action plans and ministerial orders, but it is hampered by lack of institutional mechanisms and lack of human and financial resources in the lead ministry and in other ministries and agencies. While the Council for the Affairs of People with Disabilities has strengthened co-ordination across relevant stakeholders, the activities and scope of the inter-institutional working group for the implementation of the procedures for ex-prisoners remain limited. Moreover, there is no institutional mechanism in place to promote a more integrated and cross-sectoral approach to policy design and service delivery for young people leaving care.

The lack of clear responsibilities and of institutional co-ordination mechanisms at the local level can give rise to duplication and fragmentation of services for vulnerable groups. Some municipalities have aimed to promote integrated approaches to the delivery of services for children and young people at risk through inter-institutional co-ordinators, which are considered to have facilitated co-ordination despite a lack of dedicated financial and human capacities in some municipalities to support this function.

Finally, the lack of political will and leadership in some ministries and municipalities, insufficient interest and incentives for staff, as well as the lack of institutional capacities and mechanisms have been reported as significant barriers for co-ordination between national-level ministries and municipalities.

To strengthen a co-ordinated approach to supporting vulnerable groups at the national and the local level and across levels of government, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Ensuring high-level political commitment on the provision of integrated and co-ordinated policies and services for vulnerable groups, in particular for ex-prisoners and young people leaving care.

- Supporting the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of inter-ministerial action plans and orders to operationalise policy frameworks and long-term strategies through formal inter-institutional bodies, in particular by strengthening the functions, activities and capacities of the inter-institutional working group for the implementation of the procedures for ex-prisoners and by establishing an inter-institutional body for youth affairs, under the leadership of the Department of Youth Affairs, and taking procedural and practical measures to ensure active participation of all members in such inter-institutional bodies.

- Strengthening co-ordination on policies and services for vulnerable groups at the local level, for instance by strengthening inter-institutional co-ordinators for specific target groups or establishing them for people in vulnerable situations more widely, supported by clear definition of their responsibilities and adequate human and financial capacities.

- Promoting co-ordination between the national government and municipalities on policies and services for vulnerable groups by including selected municipalities in national inter-institutional bodies for vulnerable groups and by conducting broader consultations with municipalities through in-person and digital means, with methods tailored to the availability and needs of municipalities.

Co-ordination with and involvement of NGOs

Councils of NGOs can provide an effective mechanism for co-ordination between public authorities and NGOs on matters linked to the development of the NGOs sector as well as more broadly to gather information, evidence and advice in other policy areas. At the national level, the Council of NGOs appears to have been strengthened over recent years, although its role in policy areas beyond the development of the NGOs sector remains limited. At the sub-national level, the lack of NGO councils, the lack of awareness among public officials and the ad hoc nature of the councils' meetings are identified as important challenges.

NGOs are involved in the provision of social services and some local PES offices have signed co-operation agreements with NGOs for the provision of employment services. However, a more significant role of NGOs in public services provision is hampered notably by lack of awareness or interest among municipality officials and public procurement procedures favouring lowest-price proposals.

To strengthen co-ordination with NGOs in public service provision to vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Equipping Councils of NGOs at national and municipality level with adequate resources and ensure active participation of government and municipal officials in the Councils of NGOs.

- Strengthening the operations of Councils of NGOs at national and municipality level, for instance by setting strategic objectives and following progress through annual working plans to enable co-operation across stakeholders and enhance impact.

- Strengthening the engagement of Councils of NGOs at national and municipality level in policy areas beyond the development of the NGOs sector by inviting them to consultations on relevant draft laws, policies and strategies and to inter-institutional bodies and by consulting them consistently at the municipality level on policy and service decisions relevant to vulnerable groups.

- Promoting awareness among public officials at both national and local level about the importance of involving NGOs and Councils of NGOs in the design and delivery of policies and services relevant to vulnerable groups and strengthen their skills to do so, by elaborating and disseminating guidance material (e.g. manuals) and conducting capacity-building and awareness-raising activities (e.g. workshops, conferences, communication campaigns, etc.).

2.5. Securing adequate financial and human capacities to deliver for vulnerable groups

Designing and delivering policies and services that are tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups requires relevant ministries, agencies and municipalities to be equipped with adequate financial and human capacities. Public institutions can also support non-governmental organisations in building their capacities to ensure they can be effectively involved in policy making and service delivery.

2.5.1. Financial resources in state institutions

According to Lithuania's Constitution, the state budgetary system consists of an independent state budget and independent municipal budgets (Art. 127). Public budgets are submitted to the Seimas for approval and are executed by the government. Each year, the Ministry of Finance prepares draft financial indicators of the state budget and municipal budgets. Each Ministry then prepares the respective budgets on the basis of the financial indicators for a certain year and in co-ordination with respective subordinate institutions and the Ministry of Finance.

In the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the preparation of the draft budget is informed by information on the estimated needs to implement existing and new programmes, measures and laws and by discussions at the management level. The draft Strategic Action Plan is submitted to the Ministry of Finance and the Chancellery of the government for negotiations on the maximum appropriations limits for the coming year and the identification of priorities, based on which the ministry then adjusts the strategic activity plan and draft budget. Once the state budget is approved by the Seimas, the activity plan and budget are revised accordingly if necessary and implemented by the ministry and its subordinate institutions.

Municipalities have the right to draft and approve their own budgets, to impose local duties and levy local taxes, with a certain degree of autonomy within the limits set by law (e.g. in relation to balanced budgets) and by the annual financial indicators, and in line with the responsibilities and tasks for which they are responsible (European Committee of the Regions, 2022[37]). Municipalities can raise revenues through shared taxes (personal income tax) and local taxes (e.g. land tax, real estate tax, and stamp duties) as well as through municipal charges, fees and duties. At the same time, revenue autonomy at the municipality level remains below the EU average: only 12% of municipalities' total resources are raised by municipalities themselves, compared to 53% on average across the EU in 2017. Similarly, local revenues represent 3% of total government revenues in Lithuania compared to the EU average of 13%, with an overall limited fiscal autonomy compared to the EU average (European Commission of the Regions, 2022[38]).

In particular, poorer municipalities find it difficult to provide targeted policies and services for vulnerable groups. For instance, only 3.5% of the total municipal budget was devoted to social services in 2020 on average: Chapter 4 provides further information on the financing of social services. The central government manages a mechanism of fiscal equalisation across municipalities by transferring resources, based on natural persons' income taxes, to less wealthy municipalities through general grants from the state budget to local ones (European Commission of the Regions, 2022[38]). In addition, the central government can transfer funds from the state budget to municipalities specifically for the provision of public services delegated to municipalities. For instance, in 2022, the MSSL provided municipalities with KEUR 171 544 in the form of special target grants for the delivery of public services (and benefits) under the Ministry's competence, including among others for the provision of social services, measures for the protection of the rights of young people and employment support programmes. These grants are equivalent to 3.8% of the total appropriations planned for the MSSL in 2022. The Ministry of Health also provides grants to municipalities to ensure specific healthcare functions: in 2022, these amount to KEUR 28 465, which is equivalent to 2.4% of the budget of the ministry.

The implementation of laws, frameworks, models and action plans to design and deliver integrated services to vulnerable groups require stakeholders to be equipped with adequate financial capacities. For instance, 1.4% of the planned budget of the MSSL for 2022 is dedicated to the provision of social care to people with severe disabilities. For the social integration of ex-prisoners, the MSSL has allocated EUR 100 000 for 2021 and EUR 100 000 for 2022 for the recruitment of social workers working in prisons on the first stage of social integration. After 2022, however, the responsibility to fund these posts will lie with the Ministry of Justice and its Prison Department. For young people leaving care, the MSSL has planned to transfer 0.12% of its total 2022 budget to municipalities to support young people leaving care. Furthermore, the MSSL, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health currently fund the municipalities' inter-institutional co-ordinators for youth at risk in equal shares: the creation of co-ordinators for other vulnerable groups would require adequate financial resources.

2.5.2. Human resources in state institutions

The development of human resources in state institutions is a key element to ensure an effective delivery of policies and services for vulnerable groups. The OECD Recommendation on Public Service Leadership and Capability (OECD, 2019[15]) underlines that a professional, capable and responsive public service is a fundamental driver of citizens' trust in public institutions. Ensuring that civil servants working for and with vulnerable groups have the right skills and capabilities is thus crucial to deliver on their needs and interests.

As discussed above, the lack of human capacities is often considered a key challenge for ministries, municipalities, agencies and NGOs alike. Figure 2.4 shows data on the reported composition of the workforce in the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health. In both the MSSL and the MoJ, the ratio between official staff working on policy and official staff working in administrative functions is slightly higher than 2 to 1. The MSSL also has dedicated staff working on vulnerable groups, which is line with the fact that it is the leading entity in delivering for these groups. In particular, the MSSL reported having one staff member working in the horizontal policy and project management group on ex-prisoners, and two staff members working for young people leaving care (one in the Social Services Division and one in the Equal Opportunities, Equality between Women and Men Division), on top of staff who works on young people more broadly. The staff working for these two target groups are fewer than those working for people with disabilities, which include five staff members in the Targeted Assistance Division, one staff member in the Family and Child Rights Group (with a focus on children with disability), the Head of the Social Services Division and the Head of the horizontal policy and project management group. Beyond numbers, building human capacities necessitates reinforcing the technical skills, experience and expertise of existing and future staff.

Figure 2.4. Composition of the workforce of selected ministries

Number of official staff employed by each Ministry, by area of work/job function
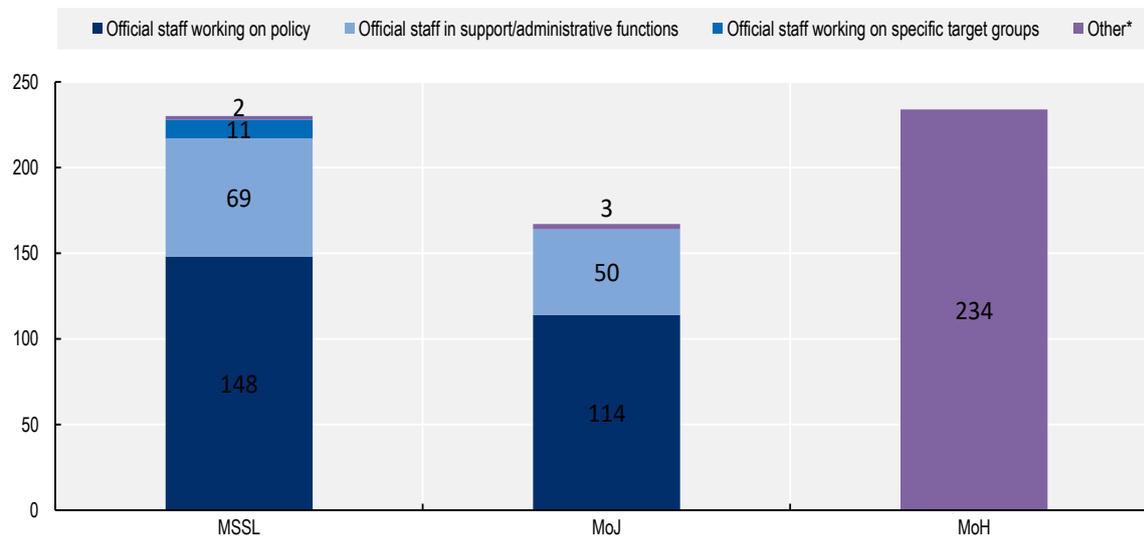
Note: The figure shows data for the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and the Ministry of Health (MoH). For the MoH, the category "other" is equivalent to the total official staff employed by the ministry as data is not available broken down by area of work/job function.
Source: OECD Policy Questionnaire on Personalised Services for Vulnerable Groups.

Adequate human capacities are necessary in Ministries as well as in implementing agencies that have significant responsibilities in delivering policies and services to vulnerable groups. For instance, staff of local offices of the Public Employment Service reported being supported through manuals and trainings on all relevant processes by the central PES office and the MSSL. At the same time, stakeholders highlighted staffing challenges in the PES, in particular in terms of capacities to deal with specific vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities. Chapter 3 includes further information on the human capacities of Lithuania's Public Employment Service.

When it comes to ex-prisoners, one staff in the re-socialisation unit of the Prison Department co-ordinates all the social workers that provide services in prisons for the first stage of the reintegration of ex-prisoners, prepares statistical reports, ensures training and development opportunities for social workers and takes care of any immediate issues. Furthermore, as also highlighted in Chapter 4, in 2020 there were around 25 social workers for an inmate population of over 4 500, according to data provided by the Ministry of Justice. While social reintegration services focus on those who are about to leave prisons, more than 2 100 sentenced persons were released over the course of 2020, according to the Ministry of Justice. It is unclear to what extent social workers assigned to prisons receive methodological assistance and trainings from the Prison Department. The MSSL reported organising trainings for social workers in municipalities (responsible for the second stage of reintegration), to which social workers assigned to prisons also take part at times. Limited human resources and training opportunities, compared to significant responsibilities, might pose a challenge to effective implementation of policies and services.

Lack of human capacities at the local level, notably in municipalities, has also been underlined as an important challenge as discussed in the sections above. As an example, inter-institutional co-ordinators for young people at risk are normally one staff for the whole municipality. Furthermore, stakeholders reported that the profile of the staff in charge of this post may vary significantly across municipalities, highlighting the need to strengthen regular trainings and methodological assistance tools. The National

Agency for Education under the Ministry of Education is responsible for organising and delivering training activities for the inter-institutional co-ordinators.

2.5.3. Government support to building NGOs' capacities

The transfer of delivery of some services to NGOs is a clear priority for the Government of Lithuania (Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020[4]). While involving NGOs in the delivery of public services for vulnerable groups can generate a number of benefits, it also requires that NGOs have the human and financial capacities needed to support government in this crucial area of work.

Given the challenges reported in this area (see previous sections), the government and municipalities can consider supporting NGOs in strengthening their capacities. Figure 2.5 shows the type of support provided to NGOs by municipalities for the provision of social services, according to survey replies. In particular, financial support is provided by 85% of responding municipalities, while premises, equipment, and logistical support is provided by 67% of them. Methodological assistance and capacity-building opportunities are more limited as only 56% of municipalities provide such support to NGOs. Only three municipalities did not report providing any of these support measures.

Figure 2.5. Municipalities' support to NGOs for the provision of social services

Share of municipalities reporting different types of support provided to non-governmental organisations
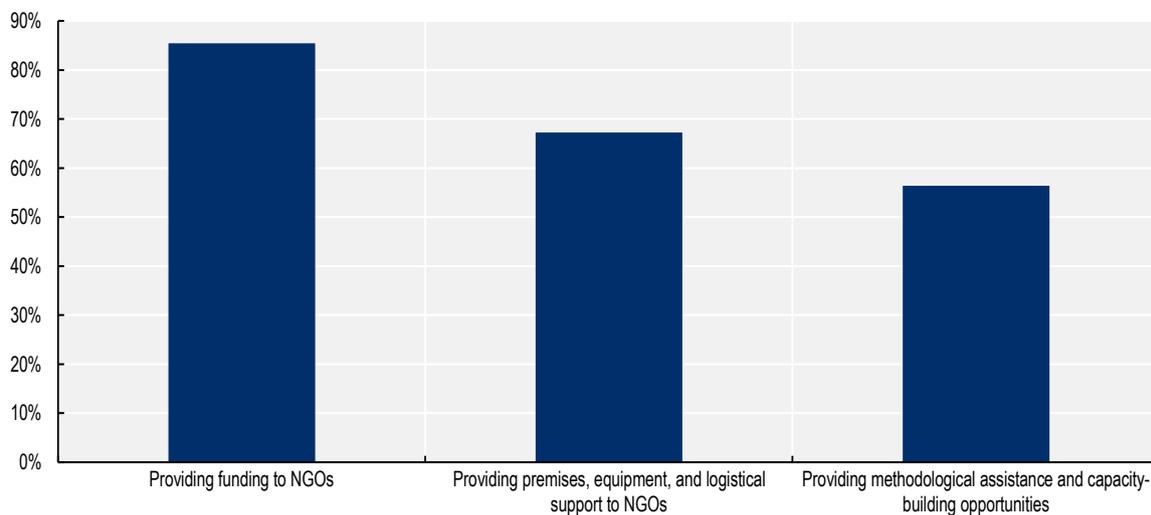
Note: The figure shows the share of municipalities (among the 55 responding ones) that reported each type of support provided to NGOs when answering the question "How does your municipality support NGOs in the provision of social services? Please select ALL options that apply." Source: OECD municipality survey.

At the national level, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is responsible for the development of NGOs. Indeed, the MSSL provides financial support to NGOs, for instance via competitions for project implementation. As an example, the MSSL's budget for 2022 includes EUR 100 000 to finance projects of NGOs aimed at the implementation of social integration activities of ex-prisoners. According to survey replies, the MSSL also provides trainings and capacity-building activities to NGOs, while it does not provide methodological support nor premises, equipment and other logistical support. The Ministries of Justice and Health did not report providing any type of support to NGOs.

During the COVID-19 crisis, the MSSL also assured three waves of special government subsidies to support NGOs in their response to the COVID-19 crisis, helping them in the areas of personal protective

equipment, wages of new employees hired due to increased workload or bonuses paid to existing employees for additional work, and trainings on safe provision of services during the pandemic. At a more structural level, the establishment of a NGOs Fund was mandated in February 2020 to implement relevant provisions of the Law on the Development of NGOs. Once fully operational, the Fund is mandated to support the development of NGOs, regardless of their focus area and without linking financing to the provision of services. The Fund will be financed by the Ministry of Finance and the MSSL and managed by a Fund Council whose composition will be decided by the MSSL in consultation with the Council of NGOs. In Latvia, the government established a fully-government-funded NGOs Fund in 2015 with the purpose of strengthening the sustainable development of civil society, mobilise stakeholders in a more cohesive and effective way and ensure equal access to funding for NGOs (Box 2.6). The experience of Latvia demonstrates that a government-financed NGOs Fund driven by participatory and bottom-up approaches and with light administrative processes can play a significant role in strengthening the NGOs sector and its capacities to take on public service responsibilities.

Box 2.6. Latvia: NGOs Fund

Since 2016, the NGOs Fund is managed by the Society Integration Fund (SIF), a public foundation under the institutional supervision of the Prime Minister's Office. The SIF works primarily with and receives funding from the Ministry of Culture when it comes to NGOs.

Purpose and objectives of the Fund

The creation of a horizontal NGOs Fund aimed at providing opportunities for support to all NGOs, regardless of focus area. It aims at strengthening NGOs institutional and human capacities, fostering democratic values, promoting co-operation and building NGOs advocacy capacities.

Key outcomes and impact

By 2020, the NGOs Fund had enabled 153 organisations to implement a total of 254 projects, and issued contracts for the implementation of projects for nearly EUR 3 million in total. The amount of state budget financing has also increased from EUR 400 000 in 2016 to 1 888 088 in 2022. In 2022, 43% of the selected projects focused on civil society, 23% on vulnerable groups and 15% on young people. An impact report commissioned by the government found that the NGOs Fund has a unique and growing role in developing the non-governmental sector and in building the capacity of a wide diversity of NGOs.

Micro and macro projects

The NGOs Fund distinguishes between micro and macro project tenders, which helps promote competition among equally experienced organisations and provide more opportunities to smaller NGOs. Micro projects receive maximum EUR 10 000 in funding for projects lasting maximum 10 months, while the limits are raised to EUR 33 000 per year for a maximum 22 months for macro projects.

Monitoring and evaluation efforts

The SIF is mandated by law to regularly evaluate the NGOs Fund and report to the SIF Council. In addition, the SIF has introduced ex-post monitoring and evaluation in collaboration with external researchers, which is carried out on a yearly basis. Findings from monitoring and evaluation efforts are used to maintain accountability towards governing bodies, enhance trust within government and in society and inform changes in the design of the NGOs Fund.

Providing guidance to NGOs

In 2021, out of 162 total applications to the NGOs Fund, 19.7% were rejected due to lack of funding, while 16% were rejected for low quality and 8.6% were rejected for compliance reasons. Administrative

complexities and limited awareness may also limit applications in the first place. To tackle these issues, the NGOs Fund provides guidelines on the application submission and eligibility requirements as well as on the administrative procedures once the contract is awarded. This practical guidance is organised through factsheets, instructions and guidelines as well as video tutorials. The NGOs Fund also organises (virtual and in-person) seminars to promote awareness about the Fund among NGOs and prepare them for the application process, as well as for NGOs that are recipient of funding on how to prepare and submit interim and final reports.

Sources: (Government of Latvia, 2015[39]), *Conceptual Message "For a state-funded NGO Fund"*, http://tap.mk.gov.lv/doc/2015_12/KMKonc_301015_NVO_fonds.2433.docx; (Latvian Academy of Culture and SIA, 2020[40]), *Evaluation report on the activities (results and contribution) of the program "NGO Fund" financed from the state budget*, https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/petijums-nvo-fonds-kluvis-pieejams-plasakam-sabiedribas-grupam; (Social Integration Fund, 2021[41]), *Regulations of the competition of the programme "NGO Fund"*, https://www.sif.gov.lv/lv/nvo-fonds; interviews conducted by the OECD with officials from the Society Integration Fund.

2.5.4. Policy recommendations

Financial and human capacities in state institutions

Designing and delivering policies and services that are tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups requires relevant ministries, agencies and municipalities to be equipped with adequate financial and human capacities. Poorer municipalities find it difficult to provide targeted policies and services for vulnerable groups, with limited budgets to dedicate to personalised services and inter-institutional co-ordinators. The lack of human capacities is considered a key challenge by ministries, municipalities and PES, in terms of ensuring both adequate number of staff and appropriate skills and competences. For instance, in 2020, around 25 social workers co-ordinated reintegration services for an inmate population of over 4 500 under the co-ordination and oversight of one staff in the re-socialisation unit of the Prison Department. Municipalities also reported facing challenges in recruiting staff equipped with the appropriate skills and methodological tools.

To secure adequate financial and human capacities to deliver services for vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Assessing budget needs for relevant ministries, agencies and municipalities to deliver on the needs of vulnerable groups and ensuring adequate financial resources to meet them, including through the transfer of funds from the state budget to municipalities for specific functions.
- Ensuring adequate numbers of staff in policy design and service co-ordination and delivery in all relevant institutions at national and local level and ensuring the appropriate mix of competencies, managerial skills and specialised expertise, and, in the case of staff working directly with service users, the necessary qualities and communication skills, supported through methodological assistance tools, manuals, regular trainings and capacity-building activities.

Government support to building NGOs' capacities

While involving NGOs in the delivery of public services for vulnerable groups can generate a number of benefits, it also requires that NGOs have the human and financial capacities needed. The NGOs sector is supported by the MSSL and municipalities mainly through financial support, premises/equipment and, to a lesser extent, trainings and capacity-building activities (especially at the national level). Once fully operational, the NGOs Fund is expected to provide further support by the MSSL to the development of the NGOs sector.

To secure that NGOs have adequate financial and human capacities to deliver for vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Providing clear information (e.g. on procurement evaluation and award criteria), implementing trainings and capacity-building programmes and providing methodological guidance for NGOs, especially at local level, to participate in service delivery for vulnerable groups.

- Taking measures to enhance the impact of the NGOs Fund, including by:

  o adopting participatory approaches in setting the focus and scope of the Fund with the involvement of NGOs and other ministries;

  o ensuring an unbureaucratic application process to make the Fund attractive to NGOs;

  o considering providing multi-year grants to NGOs to enhance long-term sustainability of service provision and encourage innovation in line with changing (service) user needs;

  o promoting awareness and skills among NGOs to apply for funding in order to foster competition and increase the quality of applications, including through guidelines, factsheets, templates, tutorials and seminars/webinars;

  o securing adequate financial and human resources for the Fund; and

  o putting in place effective inspection, reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and processes on the outputs, outcomes and impact of financed projects and ensure this evidence is fed back into the prioritisation of initiatives supported by the Fund to strengthen impact and accountability.

2.6. Monitoring and evaluating policies and services for vulnerable groups

This section looks at efforts in place to monitor the implementation and delivery of policies, services and programmes to vulnerable groups, which is key in understanding what works and what does not, identifying bottlenecks or duplications and taking appropriate action. It also looks at efforts in the area of policy evaluation, i.e. the structured and evidence-based assessment of the design, implementation or impacts of a planned, ongoing or completed public intervention to assess its relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. This section is complemented by findings from Chapter 4 on data gaps in the area of social services; and from Chapter 3 on data exchanges and IT infrastructure and tools to support monitoring activities.

2.6.1. Monitoring policies and services for vulnerable groups

Monitoring efforts at the national level

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour monitors the implementation of its bi-annual Strategic Action Plans (SAP). Data is collected through surveys that are prepared by employees of the ministry and co-ordinated across departments: the quality of surveys and data hence critically depends on the competences of employees. Yet, according to survey replies from the MSSL, the lack of trained, specialised staff in the ministry is identified as a major challenge to monitoring efforts. The MSSL also reported the lack of a monitoring framework and the lack of guidelines, manuals and methodological tools as major shortcomings.

Monitoring the implementation of policies, services and programmes for vulnerable groups requires collecting and analysing data and evidence from a variety of stakeholders. For instance, the Employment Law (2016[20]) clarifies that the Public Employment Service is responsible for monitoring developments in the labour market as well as monitor the implementation and assess the efficiency of employment measures. The MSSL also provided general guidance on the PES' monitoring activities through a

ministerial order. Based on this and on an internal order of the director of the PES on the detailed set-up of monitoring activities, the central office of the PES monitors advancement on the objectives and targets included in its annual strategies quarterly as well as annually and it makes its monitoring indicators publicly available.

To improve cross-stakeholder co-ordination in monitoring efforts, the implementation of the Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care (2014-23) is monitored by an inter-institutional monitoring group, which includes representatives of the MSSL and other line ministries, municipalities and NGOs. The inter-institutional monitoring group meets on a quarterly basis. Similarly, an inter-institutional monitoring group, led by the MSSL and the Ministry of Justice, has been established to monitor the implementation of the procedures for the reintegration of ex-prisoners. It is composed of representatives of the MoJ and its Prison Department, the MSSL, the Probation Service, municipalities and NGOs. During interviews conducted by the OECD, stakeholders explained that the group works primarily as a forum for all involved stakeholders to find solutions to practical issues and to discuss proposed adjustments but does not conduct regular monitoring activities per se.

For policies and services targeting people with disabilities, the existing monitoring system is more elaborated than for the two other groups covered by this project. Key indicators and monitoring indices exist to keep track of the implementation of programmes and delivery of services. In particular, the Department of Disability Affairs of the MSSL monitored the implementation of the National Programme for the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities (2013-20) by collecting and presenting evidence in the form of two indices. The Disability Quality of Life Index is based on indicators on accessibility of physical and digital infrastructures, employment, participation to cultural and sports activities and on the protection of the rights of people with disabilities. It is complemented by the Equal Opportunities Index, which is based on indicators on equal opportunities for people with disabilities in the fields of education, employment, consumer protection and participation in society. According to survey replies, the monitoring information was leveraged to inform the preparation of an Action Plan for Social Inclusion that outlines objectives, targets, measures, timelines, appropriations and responsible executors. However, reportedly, the monitoring exercise has been hindered by co-ordination challenges. A 2020 Audit Report on the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities, conducted by the National Audit Office of Lithuania, found that the information that the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled received from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Transport and Communications was insufficient to assess the level of accessibility of public buildings and transport facilities for people with disabilities (part of the Disability Quality of Life Index) and hence to plan appropriate measures to improve the situation (National Audit Office of Lithuania, 2020[42]). At the same time, the Audit Report clarifies that the two Ministries are not directly obliged to collect data and evaluate the accessibility of all public buildings and transport facilities (National Audit Office of Lithuania, 2020[42]).

Overall, information on the monitoring efforts of other ministries and agencies remains scarce. For instance, according to survey replies, the Ministry of Justice does not monitor either the implementation of its strategies or the quality of legal services provided in Lithuania. While the Ministry of Health reports conducting such activities, information on their monitoring efforts remains scarce.

Monitoring efforts at the local level

The Law on Social Services (Republic of Lithuania, 2006[17]) mandates municipalities to create dedicated units to monitor the quality of the social services provided in the municipality's territory. 7% of responding municipalities reported they do not monitor the provision of services at all, and only 9% of responding municipalities reported having a dedicated monitoring unit. The lack of dedicated units can pose significant challenges in terms of lack of human capacities (as reported by 67% of responding municipalities) and in terms of lack of trained, specialised staff (as reported by 44% of responding municipalities).

The scope of monitoring also varies significantly across municipalities: for instance, during interviews conducted by the OECD, some municipalities explained their monitoring activity only consists in dealing with complaints received by users of specific services. The lack of clear roles and responsibilities is considered as a key challenge by 28% of responding municipalities. The quality of monitoring activities at the municipal level is also hampered by lack of methodological guidance: 65% of responding municipalities highlight the lack of monitoring frameworks, guidelines, manuals, and other methodological tools as a key challenge for their monitoring activities. This is matched by survey data showing that only 25% of responding municipalities have their own monitoring framework and only 15% of them follow a national monitoring framework.

Monitoring activities appear not to be carried out in a structured way in most municipalities. As shown in Figure 2.6, slightly less than half of responding municipalities (49%) prepare monitoring reports on a regular basis (e.g. at least annually) or gather information on key performance indicators. Furthermore, only 15% of municipalities have established a system to collect data on key performance indicators. In light of the lack of specific systems to collect data and the lack of mechanisms to ensure the quality of data collected (which exist only in 21% of the responding municipalities), the availability and quality of data and information might be severely hampered, with risks for the quality of monitoring results. Notably, 60% of responding municipalities do not use the evidence produced through monitoring activities to inform decision making, showing challenges in closing the feedback loop between monitoring activities and decisions taken in response.

Figure 2.6. Elements of monitoring activities in municipalities

Share of municipalities reporting different elements that apply to their monitoring activities
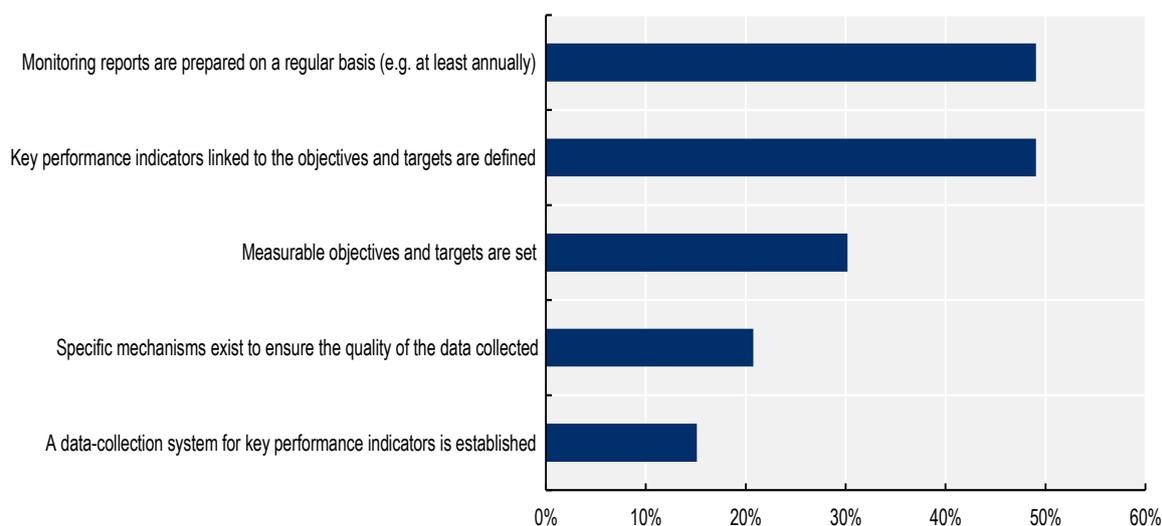
Note: The figure shows the share of municipalities (among the 53 responding ones) that reported different elements that apply to their monitoring activities when answering the question "Which of these statements apply to your monitoring activities? Please check all that apply."
Source: OECD municipality survey.

2.6.2. Policy evaluation

Policy evaluation aims at providing a structured and objective assessment of a policy or reform initiative, its design, implementation and results. In most central ministries in Lithuania, analytical capacities are dispersed through line departments and understaffed policy units (OECD, 2021[43]). The Strategic Decision

Support and International Co-Operation Division of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is instead considered a good example to promote quality policy evaluation (OECD, 2021[43]). This division can be consulted by any department of the MSSL if it needs to assess the fiscal impact of a draft legislation, including redistributive impacts through microsimulation. The division is also responsible for developing regular ex-ante and ex-post policy evaluations (e.g. on poverty and income inequality) as well as specific evaluations for the ministry to ensure evidence-based policy making when planning reforms. The division uses data mainly from the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and EU tax-benefit microsimulation model (EUROMOD). Considerations of specific vulnerable groups could be included in ex-ante policy evaluations on planned reforms or draft laws as well as on the ex-post evaluation of policies. For instance, the MSSL conducted an ex-post assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 mitigation package (2020[44]), considering its impact on, among others, the risk of poverty among people with disabilities.

To assess cross-sector impacts of policies, evaluations rely on effective co-ordination measures between ministries and stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations. For instance, according to survey replies, the MSSL involved NGOs in the preparation of different reform scenarios on child benefits. The MSSL then conducted an assessment of the various reform scenarios, which was then presented to NGOs. However, overall, co-ordination with other institutions remains fragmented and largely dependent on the content and purpose of the specific policy evaluation. The same issue appears also at the level of municipalities, where only 10% of responding municipalities reported conducting services evaluations in collaboration with other government institutions and 17% with non-governmental organisations. There appears to remain significant scope to strengthen the use of policy evaluations in relation to the needs and concerns of vulnerable groups at the national and local levels.

2.6.3. Policy recommendations

Monitoring and evaluating policies and services for vulnerable groups is critical to understand what works and what does not, identify bottlenecks or duplications and take appropriate action. At the national level, the MSSL monitors the implementation of its bi-annual Strategic Action Plans (SAP) and, to some extent, action plans and programmes for specific vulnerable groups. At the local level, the scope of monitoring activities varies significantly across municipalities. Significant challenges to monitoring efforts at either level concern the lack of specialised staff, monitoring frameworks, guidelines and manuals. Cross-stakeholder co-ordination in monitoring efforts remains ad hoc, despite the existence of inter-institutional monitoring groups for ex-prisoners and for the de-institutionalisation process for services for persons with disabilities and children without parental care. Moreover, evidence produced through monitoring activities at the local level do not systematically inform decision-making. There also remains significant scope to include considerations of the needs and user experiences of vulnerable groups in ex-ante and ex-post policy evaluations at national and local levels.

To strengthen monitoring and evaluation of policies and services for vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Establishing and disseminating national monitoring and evaluation frameworks to be applied to policies and services for vulnerable groups, including quantitative and qualitative metrics, key performance indicators and benchmarks.
- Strengthening institutional skills and capacities to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities on policies and services for vulnerable groups, including by recruiting and retaining specialised staff, elaborating and disseminating guidance material (e.g. manuals, guidelines) and conducting regular trainings and capacity-building activities.
- Reinforcing cross-stakeholder co-ordination in monitoring and evaluation efforts on policies and services for vulnerable groups by defining and assigning clear institutional responsibilities,

providing a clear framework, establishing appropriate institutional mechanisms for stakeholder participation and strengthening sharing of data and inter-operability of systems.

- Establishing institutional mechanisms and processes to ensure that the evidence produced through monitoring and evaluation activities informs decision-making on policies and services for vulnerable groups.

2.7. Key policy recommendations

This section brings together key policy recommendations from this chapter on how to improve public governance arrangements to deliver integrated policies and services for vulnerable groups and to strengthen the role of NGOs in policy making and service delivery for vulnerable groups. Detailed policy recommendations are included in each of the above sections.

Key policy recommendations

Improving public governance arrangements to deliver integrated policies and services for vulnerable groups

To improve public governance arrangements to deliver integrated policies and services for vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:

- Conducting consultations with national and sub-national government, civil society organisations, service providers and target groups to understand service needs, expectations, capacities and map current contributions of stakeholders across policy and service areas.

- Assign clear roles and responsibilities to key stakeholders across policy and service areas to support each of the three target groups and formulate/revise legal frameworks as necessary.

- Broadening the focus of government action for people in vulnerable situations beyond social and employment policies and services and ensuring that other stakeholders (notably in the housing, health, justice and education areas) also define specific objectives, measures, targets and key performance indicators, where relevant and as appropriate.

- Providing a solid basis for institutional co-ordination by establishing cross-sectoral policy frameworks and strategies, using inter-ministerial action plans for implementation and creating/strengthening formal inter-institutional bodies for different target groups.

- Promoting co-ordination between the national government and municipalities on policies and services for people in vulnerable situations by including selected municipalities in national inter-institutional bodies for target groups and by conducting broader consultations with municipalities.

- Ensuring adequate numbers of staff in policy design and service co-ordination and delivery in all relevant institutions at national and local level and ensuring the appropriate mix of competencies, managerial skills and specialised expertise, and, in the case of staff working directly with service users, the necessary qualities and communication skills, supported through methodological assistance tools, manuals, regular trainings and capacity-building activities.

- Developing and disseminating national monitoring and evaluation frameworks that include quantitative and qualitative metrics, key performance indicators, benchmarks and user-satisfaction surveys for policies and services for people in vulnerable situations.

> **Strengthening the role of NGOs in policy making and service delivery for vulnerable groups**
>
> To strengthen the role of non-governmental organisations in designing and delivering policies and services for vulnerable groups, the Government of Lithuania and municipalities could consider:
>
> - Developing a database with high-quality data and information about NGOs, including their legal status, focus of activity, capacities, and involvement in public procurement by mapping NGOs in collaboration with municipalities and umbrella NGOs.
>
> - Strengthening the participation of NGOs in policy and service design at national and local level, with specific efforts to reach out to NGOs advocating for or serving relevant target groups, by conducting consultations, leveraging Councils of NGOs and promoting awareness and relevant skills among public officials (e.g. through manuals, workshops and capacity-building).
>
> - Considering measures to facilitate NGOs' access to procurement opportunities (e.g. by extending reserved procurement provisions, by integrating social value considerations in procurement, or by buying public services through performance-based pricing).
>
> - Taking measures to enhance the impact of the NGOs Fund, including by:
>   - adopting participatory approaches in setting the focus and scope of the Fund with the involvement of NGOs and other ministries;
>   - ensuring an unbureaucratic application process to make the Fund attractive to NGOs;
>   - considering multi-year grants for NGOs to enhance long-term sustainability of service provision and encourage innovation in line with changing (service) user needs;
>   - promoting awareness and skills among NGOs to apply for funding to foster competition and increase the quality of applications, including through guidelines, factsheets, templates, tutorials, and seminars/webinars;
>   - securing adequate financial and human resources for the Fund; and
>   - putting in place effective inspection, reporting, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and processes on the outputs, outcomes and impact of financed projects and ensure this evidence is fed back into the prioritisation of initiatives supported by the Fund to strengthen impact and accountability.

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Notes

[1] https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Decentralization-Index.aspx

[2] Gallup World Poll, database.

[3] While some of the assessment and recommendations contained in this chapter may also apply to Civil Society Organisations more broadly (e.g. charities, and foundations), this chapter focuses on NGOs, as requested by the Lithuanian authorities.

[4] The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is a multilateral initiative composed of 78 national members, a growing number of local governments and thousands of civil society participants that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote open government. Lithuania adhered to the OGP in 2011.

[5] https://e-justice.europa.eu/6/EN/national_legislation?LITHUANIA&member=1

[6] According to the MSSL responses to the 2019-20 OECD Youth Governance Surveys.

[7] These programmes together form Lithuania's long-term (2021-30) strategy in the areas of income inequality reduction, reduction of social exclusion, inclusive labour market, family policy and accessibility of the environment for people with disabilities.

[8] https://socmin.lrv.lt/lt/administracine-informacija/planavimo-dokumentai/pletros-programos.

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3 Operating models and IT infrastructure to support the provision of employment and social services in Lithuania

This chapter maps and assesses the operating models and IT infrastructure that support the provision of employment and social services in Lithuania, and makes recommendations for improvement in these areas. The chapter explores four key elements of the delivery of employment and social services: promotion of services and pro-active outreach to target groups, identification of individual needs and action plans, case management practices, and IT infrastructure and processes to support service provision. The Lithuanian public employment service and the providers of social services (within municipalities) have the prerequisites to reach out to target groups pro-actively, consider individual needs in service provision and co-ordinate support, but the current implementation of these approaches falls short of their full potential. Furthermore, the IT infrastructure is not sufficiently supporting service provision, particularly in terms of data exchange between registers, user-friendliness and functionality of user interfaces, and data analytics tools for monitoring purposes.

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the current operating models and IT infrastructure of the Lithuanian Public Employment Service (PES) and social services centres present at the municipality level, paying particular attention to three vulnerable groups: people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and youth leaving care. The chapter provides an assessment of the following four key dimensions of current employment and social service delivery in Lithuania:

- Promotion of services and pro-active outreach to target groups,
- Identifying individual needs and proposing action plans,
- Case management practices (including the co-operation of external organisations and specialists),
- IT infrastructure and processes that support service provision.

Following this assessment, each section puts forward a series of recommendations designed to enhance the work of Lithuanian employment and social services in each area. This chapter makes use of various questionnaires (completed by the Lithuanian PES, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and municipalities) and consultations with a wider range of stakeholders involved in providing employment and social services (see Chapter 1 for an overview).

3.2. Promoting services and outreach to target groups

To ensure that services reach the people that need them, providers need to engage in both the promotion of services and pro-active outreach to target groups. This section seeks to provide an overview of the ways in which providers of employment and social services in Lithuania raise awareness of available supports and engage in pro-active outreach efforts with individuals in target groups who are not yet clients, while also putting forward a series of recommendations for Lithuania to enhance their work in these areas.

3.2.1. Raising awareness about available support

In the case of the Lithuanian PES, a number of methods are employed to promote the services on offer. These are typically in the form of traditional media (such as TV, radio, newspapers), social media, public events, and engaging with both employers and representative organisations of target groups. While this represents a significant promotion effort, these efforts seek only to promote services in general, usually with no tailored promotion activities in place to cater towards specific target or vulnerable groups. Considering that the groups of ex-prisoners and care leavers are relatively small groups, with very specific needs, reaching out to them individually rather than via general promotion can be more effective and efficient.

In the case of social services, the general promotion of services consists of, above all, discussions with the representative organisations of the target groups (organisations representing people with disabilities, youth organisations). Direct dissemination of information about the services via visits to homes and institutions concerns above all other target groups than those of interest of the current report (elderly, nurses of people with severe disabilities and no work capacity).

More direct promotion of services available for people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and youths is occasionally done by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as by the umbrella organisations of associations for people with disabilities or NGOs to support social inclusion of ex-prisoners, often without public sector funding. In addition, the PES, municipalities and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour promote and discuss available services in meetings with the representative organisations of different target groups. This serves as a more direct means of channelling information to the target groups, although

potentially reaching only a limited number of people. All these organisations provide some information about the available services also on their websites, although to a different degree of detail.

In raising public awareness of the needs of target groups, fighting against stigmatisation and for equal treatment, a strong role is also played by NGOs, such as the representative organisations of people with disabilities. The Ministry of Justice and its Prison Department aim to tackle the promotion of social inclusion of ex-prisoners, although changing society's perception of ex-prisoners has been difficult. The PES monitors that individuals are not discriminated against more generally, such as monitoring the provision of services to different cohorts, the behaviour of employers the PES co-operates with and the activities of external service providers. However, this monitoring does not generally lead to actions, with no intervention taking place in cases where discrimination is identified. Further awareness initiatives are conducted for people with disabilities, whereby the PES organises public awareness campaigns to highlight the needs of this group.

3.2.2. Pro-active outreach

Both the PES and municipal social services engage in some ways to get in contact with potential clients, although these activities are not implemented necessarily systematically and across all groups in need of support. Formal referrals from other service providers, contacts from informal co-operation with other organisations and the use of contacts available from the provision of benefits are the primary avenues through which the PES can get in contact with those in need of support for social and labour market integration. These channels could be employed by the PES in general to all potential clients, including specific target groups, although the use of these channels is not systematic and does not happen to the same degree across all local offices and target groups. In addition, this approach will not enable the PES to get into contact with individuals not in receipt of benefits or participating in services provided by other organisations. At municipal level, social services centres also engage in these same means of contacting the people in need of their supports and services. However, 26% of social services centres in municipalities also visit organisations, such as residential care homes for young persons, prisons or care centres for people with disabilities, to get in contact with those in need of their services. Also, NGOs providing social services (with public funding, as well as without) contact these institutions themselves to identify people in need of their services. This allows for at least some level of outreach and contact with those in key target groups, that may not be reached through other channels.

Most commonly the clients contact the PES and municipal social services on their own initiative. This initiative is not necessarily tied to receiving employment and social services, but instead is often linked to various benefits available through these organisations, such as unemployment benefits and social assistance. Furthermore, registering with the Lithuanian PES provides jobseekers with health insurance coverage. This is also believed to be the reason why the share of jobseekers registered with the PES is higher than in any other EU country (86% compared to 43% in the EU in 2020 according to Labour Force Survey data) and could be also the reason why the PES is reluctant to engage in significant additional efforts to reach out to potential clients.

In gaining information beyond what is available in-house in order to get in contact with potential clients, both the PES and Municipal social services use some information provided or generated by other organisations (Figure 3.1). For the PES, the exchange of contact information from other organisations is not an automatic process but is still supported by built-in queries in the IT system. Such a system allows for a regular and efficient generation of requests for data, rather than occurring in an ad hoc fashion. The vast majority (68%) of municipal social services centres conducts these exchanges of information and client referrals without support of any digital system or process. Instead, these centres rely solely on in person meetings, phone calls and mail or paper forms of sharing in order to facilitate this information exchange. Just over one-fifth (21%) obtain this data by digital means, either via a dedicated information system (9%) or electronically without an IT system (e.g. via emails or files uploaded on an online platform).

The large reliance on non-digital and informal means of data exchange increases the likelihood of information gaps, with potential clients missing out. A particular example for this concerns information exchange regarding social services for ex-prisoners. The recently introduced social workers in prisons discuss and advise the prisoners about to be released on their pathways to social and labour market integration, and the municipalities where the prisoners are planning to return are informed by these social workers, although not systematically and not via a dedicated digital platform. In practice, those informed municipalities do not try to make contact with the ex-prisoners but rely solely on the initiative of ex-prisoners themselves.

Figure 3.1. Ways in which service providers receive information from other organisations in order to identify whom to contact in their target groups

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) relying on a given approach and the approach used by the PES
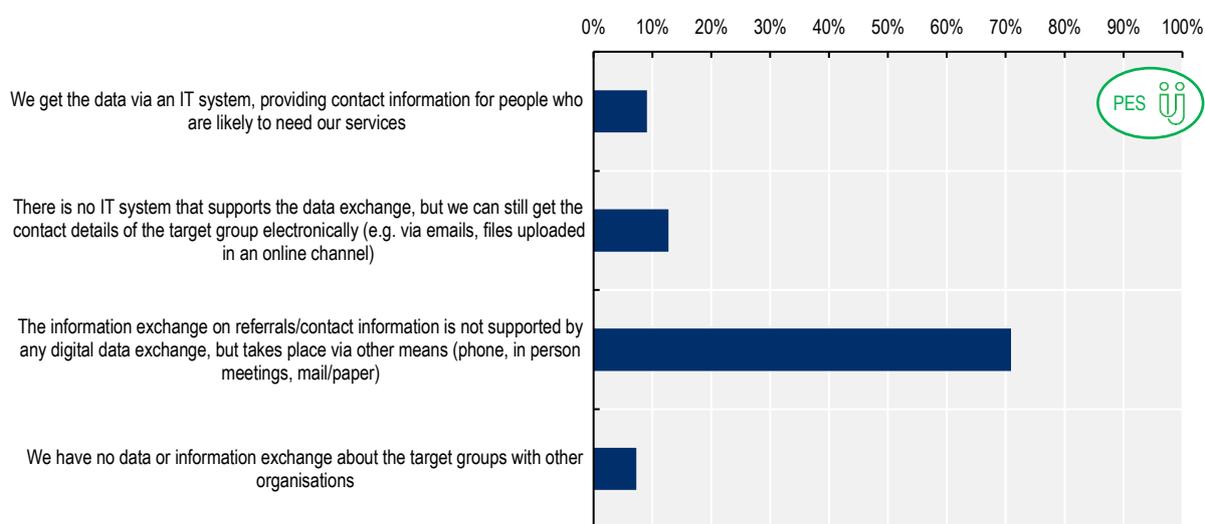
Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 55 municipalities and the PES Head Office. Non-responses are not included in the figure. The PES icon refers to the approach used by the PES. The approaches for receiving information are ranked by how easy it is to access information from other organisations (the approach where accessing information is the most facilitated is on the top).
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES, see Chapter 1.

For both the PES and municipal social services centres, the co-operation with other organisations to get in contact with the target groups is most commonly with (other) Municipal Governments, NGOs and other private-sector providers, and public institutions, such as prisons, institutional care providers for people with disabilities and foster care providers. However, social services centres tend to cast a comparatively wider net, as in limited cases they co-operate also with the police, the probation service, hospitals and other health services. Some co-operation to reach the target groups exists also between the PES and municipalities (54% of social service centres co-operate with the PES for this purpose).

Pro-active outreach to people receiving institutional care (foster care, care homes, prisons) is missing in the PES, as well as in the majority of municipalities (Figure 3.2). Providing employment services for people receiving institutional care largely relies on these individuals contacting the PES after they have left the institution. On the side of social services centres, the approach to those in receipt of institutional care can vary across target groups, as well as case by case. In total 47% of social services centres contact some groups of people still in the institution, although most of them will only discuss the individual's needs but will not start providing support before the client has exited the institution. The majority of municipalities are also contacted sometimes by people still receiving institutional care to ask for support, but only some of

municipalities (25% of all Municipalities) are able to start providing some of their social services before the person has exited the institution. Of situations where contact is made by the social services centre, the majority of service provision only starts when the person has left the institution. Furthermore, in case the first contact with the client takes place only after exiting the institution, it is more likely due to the initiative of the person, rather than the initiative of the municipality. For both the PES and social service centres, the lack of or uneven provision of services to individuals while they are still in institutional care mitigates the potential for individuals to benefit from early intervention and to better facilitate their social and labour market integration. In addition to the varied approach, there is a large reliance on the side of both the PES and social services centres on these individuals making the contact themselves, with limited efforts placed on effective outreach attempts to this group.

Figure 3.2. Patterns of contact with people receiving institutional care

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) engaging in each approach and the approach used by the PES
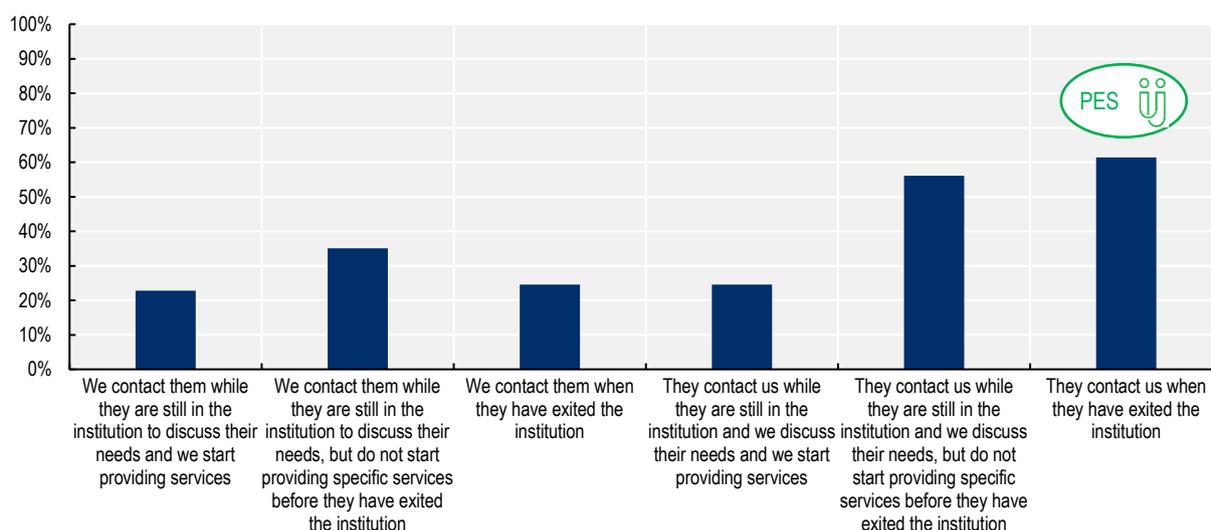

Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities and the PES head office. A given social services centre often engages in multiple approaches. The PES icon refers to the approach used by the PES. The categories of getting in contact with the people in need is ranked by their level of pro-activeness and swiftness (the most pro-active approach on the left, the least proactive on the right).
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

3.2.3. Challenges in reaching out to people in need

The primary challenge identified by the PES in reaching out to the target groups is a lack of incentives for individuals to make contact (Figure 3.3). This means that the benefits and services offered by the PES are assumed not to be enough to attract the potential clients and engage them in job search (the small fraction of unemployed that are not registered with the PES, and potentially a larger number of inactive people). However, this could also suggest potential shortcomings in the outreach and promotion activities of the PES, in order to increase awareness of and interest in the services on offer. For social services centres, this issue is less prevalent, faced by less than one-fifth (18%) of municipalities. Instead, the three greatest challenges identified by social services centres are deemed to be insufficient background information on the people in the municipality in order to identify those in need of support, a lack of contact information for individuals in target groups who are not yet clients and a shortage of capacity (both staff and budget) to contact target groups.

Figure 3.3. Greatest challenges faced in getting in contact with the target group

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) facing a given challenge and the challenge(s) identified by the PES
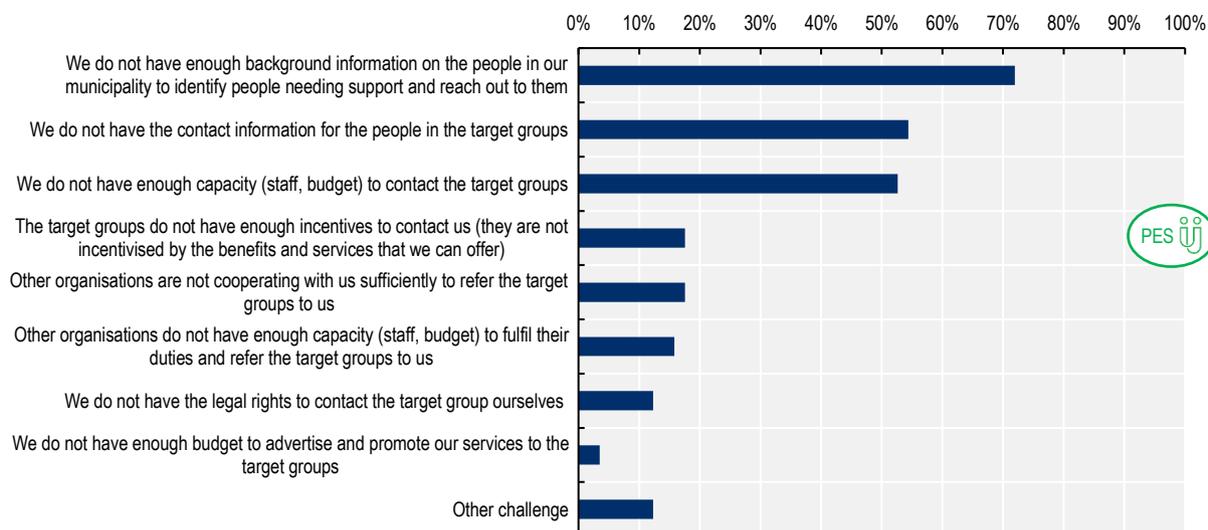

Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities and the PES head office. The PES icon refers to the situation for the PES.
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

3.3. Recommendations on the promotion of services and pro-active outreach to target groups

Overall, promotion activities and outreach efforts to target groups fall short of adequate in both Lithuanian employment and social services. This section outlines key areas for action to improve these activities, including enhanced targeted promotion that is needed along with pro-active outreach and early intervention for the key target groups, in order to ensure that these services reach those who need them most.

3.3.1. Both employment and social services providers should improve promotion activities, with particularly attention paid to target groups

To raise awareness of services on offer (both employment and social services), both the PES and providers of social services in municipalities should engage in more active promotional activities. This includes dedicated promotional activities aimed specifically at target groups and continued engagement with representative organisations. Increased awareness would help overcome the challenge identified by the PES relating to a perceived lack of incentives for individuals to make contact with the PES to receive support (including unemployed individuals not registered with the PES and inactive individuals).

While general advertising efforts are useful, more targeted promotion is useful in the case of vulnerable groups. For example, Estonia opted to not use traditional advertising methods to promote the Work Ability Reform,[1] but instead focussed on informing affected groups (OECD, 2021[1]). Information was disseminated by the Estonian PES and the responsible Ministry (Ministry of Social Affairs) in co-ordination with the Social Insurance Board to raise awareness of the (new) services available for people with reduced work ability and the organisations to contact. Furthermore, representative groups of people with reduced work ability were directly involved in the design of the reform, creating a greater awareness of available supports and services among these groups through this process. As a part of its social security reform,

Finland is implementing the Future Social and Health Centre programme to strengthen the multidisciplinary approaches and interoperability of services, as well as improve equal access and continuity of services, increase proactivity and ensure quality and effectiveness (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2022[2]). Also the Finnish reform is supported by intense systematic and co-ordinated communication, on national level via the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (including organising networking days), and on regional level by regional co-ordinators who act as supporters of the implementation of the reform, information brokers and networks with all stakeholders. Furthermore, involving service recipients in public service design is encouraged in the Finnish constitution (Munday, 2007[3]). In introducing new integrated services and approaches, Lithuania needs to involve the representatives of the affected user groups systematically in developing, designing and implementing the changes, to ensure the new approaches meet the needs of the groups, as well as will be taken up by them.

To ensure information reaches the target groups, it is key to use face-to-face channels in addition to other formats of communication. For example, the Estonian PES organises mobile counselling (called *MOBI*) in remote areas, in co-operation with the relevant stakeholders (including municipalities, social workers, schools, representative groups, NGOs, etc.). Such mobile counselling is targeted at individuals furthest from the labour market and is conducted roughly twice per year in each county, in co-operation with different municipalities. The main goal of the mobile counselling is to directly disseminate information on services and supports available to these vulnerable groups from different service providers. There is scope for Lithuania to engage in similar activities, particularly through collaboration between both employment and social services, to make contact with at risk and vulnerable groups in municipalities through a form of mobile counselling and outreach. This approach will help create a shared responsibility for service providers to also make contact, a role which typically falls on the client at present and will improve awareness and provision to vulnerable groups who are unlikely to present for support themselves.

3.3.2. PES and social service providers should develop systematic and pro-active outreach strategies for the target groups

Effective outreach strategies should be developed and followed by both the PES and social service providers. These strategies need to prioritise co-operation and data exchange with relevant stakeholders, other service providers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to assist in the mapping of target groups and identification of people in need of support. Such agreed guidelines for outreach can better establish consistency of approach across service providers and localities. Furthermore, given the comparatively small size of some target groups in Lithuania (in particular care leavers and ex-prisoners), individualised outreach could be more efficient and effective than promotional activities for these specific groups.

A key enabler of effective outreach is sufficient data exchange with relevant institutions and stakeholders, to enable the identification of individuals in target groups. An international example, relevant to the challenges faced by Lithuania, is that of Estonia's Youth Guarantee Support System (YGSS). The YGSS was established in 2018, building on the EU-wide Youth Guarantee initiative and addressing the need for better data in Estonian municipalities to facilitate the identification of young people in need of support (Estonian Social Insurance Board, 2022[4]). This system pools data from nine separate registers, resulting in a comprehensive dataset containing the contact information and education level of young persons who are not employed, registered with the PES, in education or otherwise not available for the labour market (e.g. military service, maternity leave). Using this contact information, case workers contact the young people and offer case management to those who require support for their entry (or re-entry) into education or the labour market. The YGSS tool has greatly assisted the mapping, identification, outreach and in turn case management of young people in Estonia, with its proven effectiveness showing its potential to be applied to other target groups – including in the case of Lithuania. Similarly, social and employment services in Lithuania should better utilise available data to engage in systematic and pro-active outreach

to target groups. This should be supported by a dedicated IT tool or system to support the identification, outreach and track engagement with potential clients.

In Bulgaria, "Youth Mediators" and "Youth Activators" are used to reach out to unemployed and inactive young people (OECD, 2021[5]). While "Youth Mediators" are hired by the municipalities and "Youth Activators" by the PES, central to both of these roles is fieldwork, identifying and making contact with young persons, particularly those far from the labour market. Some of the mediators hired have themselves experienced similar periods of inactivity and have a shared understanding of the clients' situation. Co-ordination between the mediators and activators is indispensable for effective outreach and subsequent service provision, and co-operation with a wide range of other stakeholders to further facilitate these tasks is common (schools, labour offices, local social assistance offices, mayors of small settlements and NGOs). In addition to onsite visits, the youth workers use social media to raise awareness on job offers, services and events. While interinstitutional youth co-ordinators do exist in some Lithuanian municipalities, with their work primarily focussing on advising on youth and child services, their roles could be bolstered by additional youth workers doing the fieldwork and pro-actively reaching out to inactive youth.

3.3.3. Early intervention for key target groups could enhance outreach efforts

In the case of vulnerable groups (including the three target groups of this project), early intervention and engagement from the PES and social service providers could be greatly beneficial – guiding those in need towards the relevant services and ensuring vulnerable persons do not become further removed from society and the labour market. Lithuania recently placed social workers in prisons to engage and advise prisoners close to release. While this is a promising step, some hurdles remain. These dedicated social workers typically liaise with the municipality in which the prisoner is to be released – however, this exchange of information is not done systematically and is not supported by any dedicated digital platform. Furthermore, in practice once released, making contact is left to ex-prisoners. Therefore, early intervention activities have significant room for improvement, including in implementing an agreed protocol and system for relaying information between staff in prison and service providers in municipalities and employment and social service providers themselves reaching out to individuals once they have left the institution. Furthermore, there is a role for social workers and PES staff to engage in such early intervention beyond prisons to cover their other target groups, including in care institutions and in health services.

A relevant example is the collaboration between the Swedish PES, criminal services and municipalities. Here, PES staff engage with people in prisons and probation centres nearing the end of their sentences, with the aim of enhancing their societal and labour market integration once they have exited the criminal system (Arbetsförmedlingen, 2022[6]). Case management sees the production of an action plan jointly agreed between the case manager and client, education opportunities, coaching, work experience opportunities and support to increase the work ability of clients with disabilities. This co-operation and early intervention, although currently unsupported by an IT system or associated data exchange, has yielded positive results, including 20% of clients being in employment within three months of completing their sentence or probation period. With the support of municipalities, an increasingly popular dedicated programme (called *Krami*) aims at a pathway to labour market integration via preparatory activities and guidance, internships, wage subsidies and follow-up support. Similar services to Sweden exist in Belgium (OECD, 2013[7]), Estonia (OECD, 2021[1]) and Norway (Fafo, 2017[8]) where people close to release from prison are supported by employment counsellors to facilitate their integration into labour market. While Lithuania is taking steps in the right direction in this area – namely regarding ex-prisoners and young people leaving care – there is room for further improvement. This improvement can come from expanding the target groups, ensuring follow-up after people leave different types of institutions, implementing agreed case management protocols and systems and ensuring co-ordination and referrals area between social and other service providers (including employment services). There is potential also for this to be linked to the role of interinstitutional co-ordinators already in place in some Lithuanian municipalities for youth,

aiming to cover all municipalities and expanding target groups, particularly regarding those that more likely need support from several different organisations.

3.4. Identifying individual needs and proposing action plans

In delivering employment and social services, identifying the needs of clients is a crucial first step in service provision. This section will explore the ways in which individual needs are identified and taken into consideration in providing social and employment services in Lithuania. This includes exploring the use of guidelines surrounding service provision, the process to decide what supports are given to a given client and the development of individual action plans by employment and social service providers. Finally, this section outlines a number of recommendations on how providers of employment and social services in Lithuania can make improvements in this area, including through the formulation and implementation of guidelines for service provision and the use of individual action plans where they are currently lacking.

3.4.1. Guidelines for harmonised service provision

In guiding the way in which their staff support their clients, the Lithuanian PES has a set of internal guidelines that govern service provision. The PES takes measures to ensure that regulations and internal guidelines are followed in order to provide a sufficient level of services to clients. These measures include both internal and external training options for staff and monitoring practices to ensure regulations and guidelines are followed, with action taken as needed. In addition, the IT system of the PES incorporates controlling mechanisms that do not permit deviation from the prescribed regulations. These guidelines are applicable to all clients, with no particular guidelines in place to instruct the delivery of service to specific target or vulnerable groups.

At the municipality level, social services centres often do not have clear and formal guidelines. This creates a risk of differentiated (but not necessarily best fitting) approach to service provision, provides no means by which issues can be identified and can lead to varying service quality. Only 53% of municipalities identify that they have such internal guidelines. The remaining 47% of municipalities instead solely rely on what is prescribed in the legal regulations, foreseen in the Social Service plan or set out by the bodies such as the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. At least some of the NGOs co-operating with municipalities to provide social services have adopted international guidelines to support their service provision, particularly concerning people with disabilities.

3.4.2. Identifying individual needs

In deciding what supports are to be provided to a specific client, Lithuanian PES employment counsellors discuss with the client their needs and then make the decision on support needs based upon all available information about the client (data in the IT system, information from interview, etc.). More specifically, the PES counsellors are supported by a digital tool (a jobseeker profiling tool using individualised statistical assessments) that predicts the probability of employment for each client, advising the counsellors about the potential needs of the client.

Within municipalities, social services are not necessarily provided according to the individual needs. Less than half (42%) of municipal social services centres take the same approach as the PES, with case managers making the decision on necessary supports based on available information and discussions with the client (Figure 3.4). Instead, over half (56%) of municipal social services centres let the client decide for themselves what support they require. Within this group, two-thirds (or 37% of total municipal centres) cover the self-prescribed needs of the client. The remaining third (or 19% of total municipal centres) do not have sufficient financial resources to fully cover the needs of clients, requiring clients to join the waiting

lists for their desired services. One municipality provides everybody in a given target group with the same services and supports, with no consideration given to individual needs.

Figure 3.4. Process to decide what support to provide to a specific person

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) engaging in a given approach and the approach used by the PES
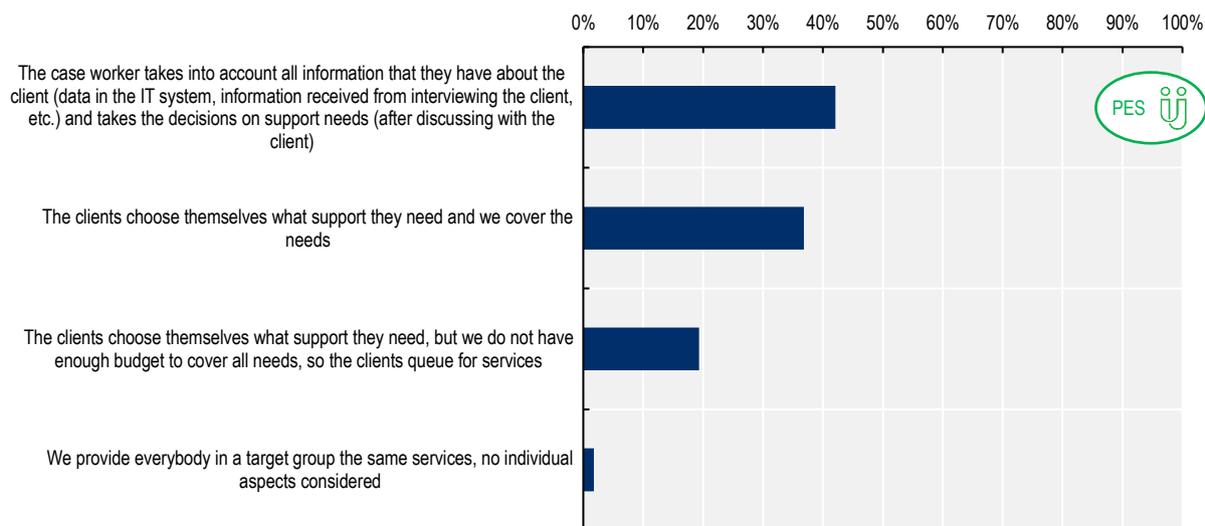
Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities and the PES head office. The PES icon refers to the approach used by the PES. The categories of approaches are ranked according to how much the service provision takes into account the individual needs of the clients. The approaches to service provision are ranked by how much individual needs are considered in service provision (the approach where the individual needs are taken into account the most is on the top).
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

3.4.3. Individual action plans

Individual action plans (IAPs) are a widely used component of effective support for labour market and social integration. The creation of an IAP allows for the goal of integration to be defined and to establish the activities to be engaged in on the individual's integration pathway (Tubb, 2012[9]). Their definition and use are based on the principle of "mutual obligations", both on the part of the client and that of the case manager or employment counsellor. Therefore, the jointly signed agreement clearly defines the commitments of the client and the service provider and, if used correctly, allows for effective monitoring of the integration process.

In Lithuania, IAPs based entirely on the client's individual needs are a central component of the case management process in PES offices and the majority (68%) of municipal social services centres. A number of municipalities (16%) also propose action plans, however these follow the standard for the person's target group. The use of a standardised, rather than individual, action plan would not be a recommended approach, as it fails to account for an individual's unique circumstances and needs. This is particularly relevant in case of clients from vulnerable groups, where well-targeted and individualised interventions are key feature of successful provision of services to these individuals (OECD, 2021[10]). The remaining 16% of municipalities that do not develop action plans or agreements with clients, only discuss next steps with the client orally – either in person or by phone call. Of these, only one-third insert potential next steps into their IT system. This informal approach, without compulsory recording of the plan, makes it difficult for an individual's progress and progression through services to be monitored and addressed. Also, social

workers in the prisons do not develop IAPs with their clients, but simply record needs for services that could be later picked up by social workers in the municipality (but not necessarily will).

The successful and effective use of IAPs also requires regular review and renewal, something that is in place in Lithuanian employment services but lacks co-ordination within municipal social services centres. Within the Lithuanian PES, action plans are reviewed at regular intervals although not very frequently; every four months for people up to 29 years of age, but only every 12 months for other age groups. Within municipalities, the approach for renewal of action plans is much less clearly defined. Less than one-fifth (19%) of municipalities review action plans at regular intervals. Instead, three-quarters of municipalities review action plans solely on an as-needed basis. The remaining 6% of municipalities also have no defined process for review and renewal, and thus reviewing action plans only rarely. The effective monitoring and review of individual action plans allows for the dynamic support of clients, that evolves in response in the changing needs or situation of the client and allows the service provider to continually check the jobseeker's ongoing compliance with the services or measures the client is participating in (Tubb, 2012[9]). Without a clear and defined process for setting and reviewing IAPs, Lithuanian social services centres can yield neither of these benefits.

3.4.4. Challenges in providing services according to individual needs

In providing services according to the individual needs of the clients, the PES and municipalities face similar main challenges – too limited resources (staff and budget) and lack of appropriate services matching the individual needs (Figure 3.5). To some extent, the underlying reason for seemingly missing services can be the complexity of needs, requiring a combination of services from different providers. In addition, further challenges are identified by municipalities, with 30% of municipal social services centres experiencing both insufficient background information to identify the needs of client and inadequate IT systems that do not support the drawing up of action plans.

Figure 3.5. Greatest challenges faced in proposing pathways to social and labour market integration that consider the individual needs of clients

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) facing a given challenge, and the challenges identified by the PES
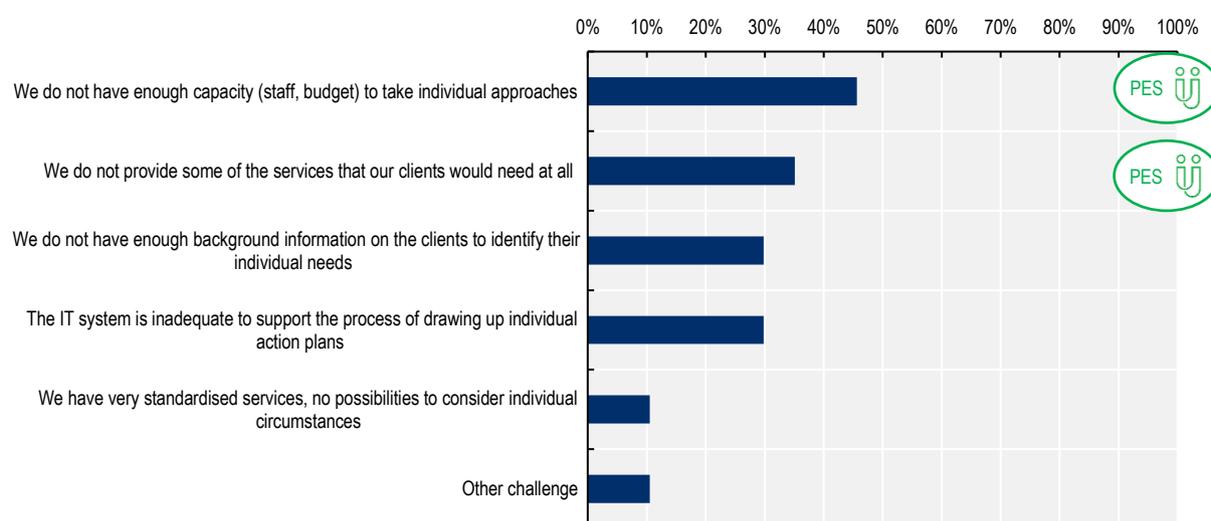
Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities and the PES head office. The PES icon refers to the situation for the PES.
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

3.5. Recommendations on the identification of individual needs and use of action plans

The provision of services according to individual needs and the use of action plans are central components of effective case management. To ensure consistent service delivery across municipalities and support that is tailored to the needs of the individual, Lithuanian social services should undertake a number of key actions. This includes developing and implementing guidelines for service provision that can ensure coherent provision of social services across municipalities, including the utilisation of jointly agreed individual action plans.

3.5.1. The work of social workers should be informed by guidelines for social service provision

While employment services in Lithuania are subject to guidelines for service provision, an uncoordinated approach exists in social service provision. Efforts should be made to establish and implement guidelines for social service provision across all of Lithuania. The updated Lithuanian Law on Social Services, enacted in July 2006, establishes – inter alia – the principles for the management, granting and provision of social services.[2] Building upon this law and these principles, Lithuania should adopt guidelines for service provision in order to ensure standardised and co-ordinated support to all clients, irrespective of the provider or municipality. Such guidelines should also cover contracted-out service providers, to ensure consistency of approach and quality across all providers.

Such service guidelines and strategies should outline the general principles of social services that apply to all clients, irrespective of age or background (e.g. counselling, jointly developed action plans, follow-up), and targeted (often more intensive) interventions for specific target or vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the guidelines should establish clear processes for social workers to follow in terms of referrals to and co-operation with other organisations and service providers. Guidelines are key to ensure the quality and effectiveness of service provision. For example, extensive guidelines is one of the pillars of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model that is an evidence-based approach to support people with serious mental illnesses and integrates mental health treatment and support, and employment support. IPS has been evaluated comprehensively and credibly across countries, the evaluation results strongly indicating significant positive effects on the labour market outcomes of the participants compared to other support schemes (IPS Employment Center, 2021[11]).

3.5.2. All clients of Lithuanian social services should benefit from the development and implementation of individual action plans

The development and implementation of IAPs should be a central component of the recommended guidelines for social service provision across Lithuania and in turn a crucial step in setting out a client's integration pathway and the support measures they will receive, after the identification of their needs. The use of jointly agreed IAPs enhances transparency and strengthens the mutual obligations between the social worker and client. Action plans tailored to the individual client and their needs are crucially important but should also be guided by overall principles for action-planning to ensure action plans reach the required standards and expectations (Tubb, 2012[9]). The IAPs could be of even greater benefit to the clients if these would be developed and implemented in a co-ordinated manner or even jointly between the different service providers in case a person needs different services. Québec's (Canada) PRISMA programme involves individualised service plans involving social and healthcare services for people with disabilities and elderly, in addition to integrating other aspects of providing social and healthcare services (MacAdam, 2015[12]).

An example of quality assurance in the use of IAPs in public services is seen in Estonia's PES. This assessment procedure aims to ensure action plans correspond to the needs of clients (OECD, 2021[1]; Radik, 2016[13]). A dedicated internal unit of the PES take a sample of IAPs twice annually, with each IAP rated (on a four-point scale) against a set of criteria.[3] The average score for the region and PES as a whole is one of the central performance indicators of the PES in the area of service quality. The assessment process also sees feedback on IAPs, which helps case workers improve their work in this area and has seen an improvement in quality of IAPs over time according to the scoring system. Systems to establish quality assurance procedures should also be implemented in the use of IAPs in Lithuania. This should include the timeframe by which each client should be issued an IAP and an agreed minimum frequency of review. Regular review of IAPs allows the changing individual needs and situation of the client and their experience of support measures to date to be taken into consideration and can assist in the identification and addressing of any issues that may arrive (including monitoring an individual's participation with services provided).

3.6. Case management

Concerning case management, this section focuses on the aspects of expertise and co-ordination of professionals involved in supporting clients of both employment and social services in Lithuania. Across OECD countries, the case management process is typically led by an employment counsellor in public employment services and a social worker in the case of social services, ideally co-operating with each other in a formal or informal set-up to ensure holistic and seamlessly integrated service provision. In some countries, the provision of employment and social services for the most complex target groups is fully integrated into one-stop-shops, with a wide spectrum of services and supports provided under one roof. Regardless of the set-up for co-operation between employment and social services, the involvement of experts and specialists from outside organisations to assist the case management process and delivery of supports to clients is often necessary to the provision of holistic services. In assisting clients from vulnerable groups, such co-operation with other service providers is particularly important (OECD, 2021[10]), with evidence suggesting that shortfalls in co-ordination among different service providers is a leading obstacle to the provision of effective services (Eurofound, 2017[14]). Such holistic provision can be a difficult task, requiring enhanced attention and efforts by case managers and established patterns of co-operation and data exchange with partner organisations. In mapping these elements of case management and co-operation (including with employers), this section concludes with a series of recommendations to improve this central component of service provision in both Lithuanian employment and social services.

3.6.1. Professionals and organisations involved in case management

The Lithuanian PES aims to provide specialised case management to its clients. While the majority of clients receive support from an employment counsellor who is equipped with more general support tools, the more complex cases are referred to case managers with more specific expertise and working methods. The more specialised case management is used for example when a person with disabilities needs more advanced support to their reduced working capacity, or when a young person needs support beyond job search support to achieve labour market integration. Furthermore, support for the most complex cases is provided jointly by several case managers and specialists in-house.

The vast majority of municipalities (92%) provide a dedicated social worker to each client, most of them involving other types of in-house specialists from within their organisation to support clients as needed. Only one municipality engages in an approach whereby a group of experts are jointly responsible for each client. The remaining municipalities do not use dedicated case managers for each client.

Although effective integration of vulnerable groups into society and labour market would requires co-operation across service providers, this is not systematically and sufficiently done in Lithuania. Tight co-operation practices are missing even between the PES and the Social Services Divisions in municipalities, which would be key in ensuring integrated social and employment services to the most vulnerable.[4] Within the Lithuanian PES, counsellors can advise clients to contact specialists from other organisations, but this is not done systematically and generally they do not actively get into contact with other specialists themselves. Occasionally, these external specialists can be from a range of organisations, depending on the needs of the client, including Municipal Governments (and their social services centres), NGOs and other private organisations, education providers (e.g. vocational education providers, universities, training centres) and the Disability and Working Capacity Assessment Office.

In one-quarter of municipalities, the social workers in the social services centres co-operate systematically and formally with some other service providers to ensure more holistic support, while the rest contact other organisations more occasionally or only suggest the clients to contact specific service providers. As the clients of social workers might face an even wider and more complex range of challenges to integrate into society, the social workers can at times reach out to additional stakeholders compared to the PES – external specialists from municipal enterprises, prisons, foster-care institutions, institutional care providers for people with disabilities and healthcare providers.

Some municipalities aim to ensure better co-ordination between the different services available in the municipality as well as nationally by using interinstitutional co-ordinators. These co-ordinators are not necessarily situated in the Social Services Departments, but in other divisions of the municipality, and their main task is to co-ordinate the provision of educational assistance, social and health services. Although the perception of the usefulness of the support of these interinstitutional co-ordinators is very high, their work is currently limited to services for children and young people.

While external organisations and experts are involved by municipalities above all to co-ordinate service provision and propose more suitable integration pathways to the client, a similar approach is followed in the PES only regarding people with disabilities. For other groups, the PES primarily engages with other organisations to support a client after successful integration into the labour market (checking in and follow-up support).

3.6.2. Co-operation with employers

In pursuing the goal of labour market integration of the client, the Lithuanian PES co-operates with employers intensively throughout the integration process. These employer engagement activities include referring clients to open vacancies, engaging with employers to identify their needs and referring suitable clients, soliciting certain PES clients to employers and assisting the employer to adjust the tasks to meet the needs and/or abilities of the client, providing employer support services to employers to enable hiring and retaining of clients, providing follow-up supports to employers in the first months after hiring the client, as well as organising job fairs to enable jobseekers and employers meet.

Within the provision of social services at municipal level, employer engagement is significantly less widespread and extensive. Close to half (40%) of social service providers do not work with employers at all, and do not even mediate vacancies. One-quarter (26%) of municipalities operate a very light touch approach, solely referring clients to open vacancies but without any direct contact with employers. The remaining municipal social services (33%) do work with employers, but potentially using somewhat less developed and intensive approach than adopted by the PES.

3.6.3. Challenges in case management

Regarding case management, the PES itself identifies two distinct main challenges (Figure 3.6). First, in working towards providing a more holistic support to clients, the PES does not have enough different

specialists available to clients in-house. As noted earlier, the PES does have some specialised case managers, but the number of these specialists is not sufficient to cover the needs for more specialised and intensive approach. In addition, the PES might not have in-house all expertise that could be needed to support labour market integration. Second, the PES highlights capacity issues more generally – in terms of both budget and staff – that limit their ability to involve all relevant specialists from other organisations.

Figure 3.6. Greatest challenges in the case management process

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) facing a given challenge, and the challenges identified by the PES
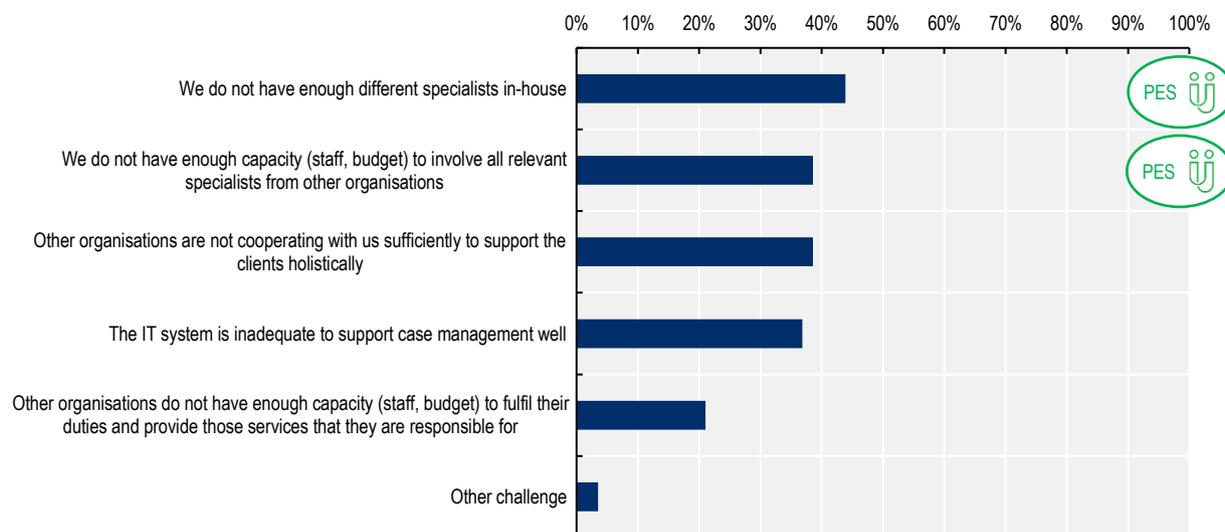
Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities and the PES head office. The PES icon refers to the situation for the PES.
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

Regarding social services, municipalities each identify numerous simultaneous challenges in the case management process, the three largest being the lack of in-house specialists (44%), capacity restraints to involve all relevant specialists from other organisations (39%) and insufficient co-operation from other organisations (39%) which limits the ability of their organisation or social services centre to support clients holistically (Figure 3.6). A significant proportion of municipalities also identify facing challenges as a result of an IT system that is inadequate to support case management (37%) and capacity issues in other organisations that affect their ability to fulfil their duties and provide the services for which they are responsible for (21%).

3.7. Recommendations on case management

To promote enhanced case management within employment and social services, Lithuania can take a number of important steps. This includes enhancing the co-ordination across public service providers by establishing guidelines for co-operation across public services, to encourage greater co-operation and to facilitate more formal referral routes for clients who require multi-disciplinary support and services from more than one provider. In addition, employment services can benefit from enhanced employer engagement activities, particularly in supporting the labour market integration of vulnerable groups facing more complex barriers to employment.

3.7.1. Steps should be taken to enhance the co-ordination and collaboration across public services

Co-ordination and collaboration between stakeholders are key to ensure comprehensive service provision and thus successful integration of vulnerable groups into society and labour market (OECD, 2021[10]). To promote enhanced service provision to clients, Lithuania should make efforts to implement a framework for co-operation across public service providers – particularly employment and social services. At present, integrated public service provision enabling a holistic overview of a client's needs does not exist in Lithuania. This is particularly important in the case of the vulnerable individuals and those in the target groups (people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and young people leaving out-of-home care), who often have more complex situations requiring support and assistance from various service areas (e.g. employment, education, housing, health and social services). This framework for co-operation should see an established practice through which social workers identify clients' needs that can be met by the PES (and vice versa), establish formalised referral processes (ideally supported by integrated IT systems / data exchange) to track service provision to clients and progress along their employment and social integration pathways. Such framework would support enhanced co-operation between social and employment services, encouraging them to work together rather than in separate silos as is the case at present.

An example of such close co-operation between the PES and social services is that of *L'accompagnement global* (Global support) in France. This initiative sees support jointly provided by PES case managers and social works to jobseekers facing multiple simultaneous challenges or barriers to work (Pôle emploi, 2022[15]). PES workers provide assistance to directly promote the labour market integration of the individual, while the social worker assists in finding solutions to other problems faced (e.g. financial, legal, housing, health or mobility solutions). An evaluation of this initiative found it to be particularly beneficial for those jobseekers facing complex situations and distant from the labour market and has seen a 27% increase in exits to employment within 6 months of registering (Pôle emploi, 2018[16]). Similarly, Slovenia's Social Activation Concept (Lemaić and Juvan, 2020[17]) provides co-ordinated services to those furthest from the labour market, including the long-term unemployed and vulnerable groups. The programme aims to support both social and labour market inclusion and involves the integrated provision of various services (including employment, social, education and health). A similar solution is possible in Lithuania and would be greatly facilitated by the establishment of co-operation guidelines between the PES and social service providers and enhanced shared IT solutions (including data exchange).

Alternatively, Lithuania could consider more fundamental changes in the institutional set-up to facilitate co-ordinated service provision similarly to the example of Finland. Finland has successfully created a system of holistic services for young people via its Ohjaamo centres – though the implementation varies considerably across regions, (OECD, 2019[18]). Ohjaamo centres represent one-stop-shops for young people, where services from the public, private and third sector are all provided side-by-side under the one roof, bringing together experts from the PES, social workers from municipalities, health service professionals and sometimes other services as well. Furthermore, understanding that the most vulnerable young people are not likely to voluntarily present at the centres, dedicated outreach staff (typically from municipalities) are in place. The operations of the Ohjaamo centres are supported by a common online digital engagement tool (Ohjaustaverkossa.fi), where this multi-disciplinary engagement and guidance can be provided online. While due to the population density, similar set-ups might not be efficient throughout Lithuania, these could be considered in some locations for population groups with more likelihood for multi-professional support (e.g. NEETs).

3.7.2. As social services providers do not engage with employers, co-operation with PES is critical for labour market integration

The Lithuanian PES engages in a variety of employer engagement activities to promote the labour market integration of clients, whereas the majority of social service providers have little to no such co-operation

with employers. While a lack of interaction between social services and employers is understandable, the problem lies in the lack of co-ordination with the PES in this area. Social services should have in place a process through which clients with labour market potential are identified and systematically referred to the PES. This includes clients who no longer require intensive social services and clients who can receive less intensive social services simultaneously with participation in active labour market policies (ALMPs) or employment.

3.7.3. Engagement with employers should be further improved in the Lithuanian PES

While employment incentives (via subsidies) represent a significant share of Lithuanian ALMP expenditure and can have significant positive effects on labour market outcomes, comprehensive support is lacking and tackling clients' barriers to employment is not given enough priority (OECD, 2022[19]). Therefore, in supporting clients from vulnerable groups, there is scope to provide more comprehensive support to clients in this process – including in job mediation and job design. This can include job carving and job crafting which can be done to varying degrees to tailor the job to the individual and can be outsourced to third party organisation – for example, the Flemish PES works closely with the non-profit organisation GTB in providing job tailoring and other supports to jobseekers with disabilities (OECD, 2022[20]).

A similar example is seen in Malta, where the Lino Spiteri Foundation (LSF) – a public-private partnership organisation between the Maltese PES and a private company – provide dedicated employment services for jobseekers with disabilities and employers (OECD, 2022[20]). PES clients with disabilities are referred to LSF for intensive support. In 2020, LSF successfully placed 237 clients with disabilities into employment, with 80% sustaining in this employment and 52% of workers placed in carved jobs. Job carving is the responsibility of the LSF's Corporate Relations Executives (CRs), who work directly with employers to carve jobs for prospective clients. There is scope for the Lithuanian PES to further enhance its existing work with employers in this area, including in combination with employment subsidies and job mediation.

A further relevant good example is the Candidate Explorer in the Netherlands, a tool developed by the PES in co-operation with municipalities to increase the visibility of profiles of clients with disabilities among employers, pooling client data from both the PES register and the databases of municipalities (Kampers and van der Krogt, 2022[21]; Breedveld, 2020[22]). This transparency tool assists employers looking to fill vacancies, showing them anonymous profiles of potential candidates ranked against the criteria input by the employer. When interested in a candidate, case managers follow up with the client to explore their availability. At present, such a tool would not be possible in Lithuania – limited by the absence of sufficient IT infrastructure and data exchange between registers. However, this example highlights one of the many opportunities that advancements in the IT infrastructure could create for the provision of employment and social services and the engagement of employers in Lithuania.

3.8. IT infrastructure to support service provision and monitoring

This section of the chapter provides an overview of the IT infrastructure in place to support the provision of employment and social services. It explores the main characteristics of the current IT systems, the data collected on target groups, the level and detail of data exchange with other registers, the functionality and user-friendliness of the systems and, finally, the degree to which the existing IT infrastructure supports the monitoring and evaluation of services. Finally, the section puts forward a series of recommendations to improve the supporting IT infrastructure to Lithuanian employment and social services.

3.8.1. Main characteristics of the IT infrastructure

IT systems used in the PES

The Lithuanian PES uses two different IT systems to provide its services: 1) the central IT system of the PES (UT), and 2) the register of social enterprises (SIDA). While the UT is the backbone of the PES to provide services for jobseekers and employers, SIDA is dedicated to specific services to support jobseekers with disabilities through so-called social enterprises (above all wage subsidy schemes for a specific type of enterprises that create jobs for people with disabilities).

The UT and SIDA systems employ a rather similar IT architecture, consisting of an operational database (MS SQL platform) and web-based user interfaces for both internal users (staff in local employment offices) and for clients (such as jobseekers or service recipients). Back-up copies of the two systems are made for storing and archiving purposes and test environments are used for new developments in the operational IT systems.

Although both UT and SIDA have been introduced within the past ten years and have been subject to constant new developments to support changes in the policy design and in the legal environment,[5] they will soon be replaced by a single combined system. Currently, the PES identifies considerable difficulties with both of the systems, due to the interfaces and systems themselves being outdated. Furthermore, the current systems are lacking such essential layers like classification and code list management and metadata management in the operational IT systems, as well as solutions to support data analytics well (data warehouse, data lake or data hub solutions).

IT systems in social protection and social services

To support the provision of social services and benefits and centrally collect the related data, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour has developed the Social Protection and Services Information System (SPIS). As it is mandatory to use this system when providing services listed in the Social Services Catalogue, 100% of social services centres at municipal level use this system,[6] as well as NGOs and other private providers to whom the social services are contracted out to. Nevertheless, it does not mean that all municipalities and other providers use SPIS in its full capacity (all services and benefits in SPIS) and insert all data requested by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. For two-thirds (67%) of municipal social services, this is the sole IT infrastructure used by their organisation. Of those organisations that use multiple other systems, 21% of municipal social services use an internal IT system unique to their organisation and 19% use other shared IT systems that are also used by other organisations.

SPIS does not support (yet) social workers working with the prisoners while still in the correction institutions, as well as NGOs providing similar services. In addition, access to the internet as well as personal computers is currently limited at least in some of the prisons. Hence, the social workers in the prisons work mostly with papers, and share information with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Labour and municipalities via snail mail or an electronic document management system (i.e. not an IT system dedicated to support service provision).

SPIS consists of an operational IT system database (*Sybase ASE* and *MongoDB*) and user interfaces (*ASP.NET*) for internal users (staff in municipalities and social services centres), external service providers (contracted service providers) and clients (recipients of services). In addition, it comprises Web APIs to link to external IT systems/databases, and tools for classification and code list management, and metadata management in the operational database. SPIS is close to ten years old and under constant developments to keep up with changes in policy design and legal environment.

Although the architecture of SPIS has several major challenges, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour does not currently plan to significantly redesign it. It is problematic that the version of the *MongoDB* platform used for the operational database is currently not supported by its developer company. Furthermore, this

platform has been criticised over the past years due to its security risks and technical challenges. In addition, SPIS does not include solutions to support data analysis well (data warehouse, data lake or data hub solutions), similarly to the IT systems used in the PES. SPIS does include a test environment, but not a back-up copy to store and archive data.

3.8.2. Data collected about the target groups and data exchange with other registers

As the provision of social and employment services is often not directly linked to the specific target groups that are the focus of this report, the three main IT systems (operational databases) do not generally contain specific variables to distinguish these groups, or at least not necessarily in a structured way that would support data analysis or the use of these data systematically in service provision (Table 3.1). SIDA, being a dedicated IT system for services for people with disabilities, contains data that enables also identifying them and their more specific circumstances, received from Disability and Working Capacity Assessment (Table 3.2). Also, SPIS users can access some data related to disabilities to support service provision, but not store these data in the SPIS itself. SPIS has also some data on foster-care institutions and foster families through related service provision. Employment counsellors insert some data on young people from foster-care and ex-prisoners in the UT register but based on the information received from the clients and not other administrative registers – potentially not covering all clients and not being collected in a structured way.

Also, data exchange to support holistic service provision is rather limited. SPIS itself contains information on social services and housing services, and SPIS users have access to view some data related to employment services. The UT register contains information on employment services, some information received externally on health services, and has some access to information on employment services provided by other organisations than PES. The PES does not have access to any information on social service provision that could help them to understand the needs of their clients better.

Table 3.1. Data specific to people with disabilities, care leavers and ex-prisoners in the IT systems used to provide employment and social services

Register reference	UT	SIDA	SPIS
Groups that are distinguishable in the database (e.g. the database contains a variable that enables to identify if a person belongs to this group)			
People with disabilities	Inserted by internal staff	Received from other register(s)	Staff can query these data from other registers, but not save in this system
… work capacity	Inserted by internal staff	Received from other register(s)	-
… special needs	Information received externally from the IT system	Information received externally from the IT system	-
Young people who are or have recently been in foster-care institutions or in foster families	Inserted by internal staff	-	Inserted by internal staff
… from foster care institutions	Inserted by internal staff	-	-
… from foster families	Inserted by internal staff	-	-
People who are or have recently been in prison	Inserted by internal staff	-	-
… people about to leave a prison	-	-	-
… people in half-way houses or open-houses	-	-	-
… people on parole	-	-	-
… people recently released from prison (in the past 12 months)	Inserted by internal staff	-	-

Register reference	UT	SIDA	SPIS
Groups that are distinguishable in the database (e.g. the database contains a variable that enables to identify if a person belongs to this group)			
Services that the operational IT system database has information on			
Employment services and active labour market policies	Received from other register(s)	-	Staff can query these data from other registers, but not save in this system
… targeting people with disabilities	Inserted by internal staff	-	-
… targeting youth leaving foster-care	-	-	-
… targeting ex-prisoners	-	-	-
… provided by external organisations (such as NGOs)	Staff can query these data from other registers, but not save in this system	-	-
Social services	-	-	Inserted by internal staff
… targeting people with disabilities	-	-	Staff can query these data from other registers, but not save in this system
… targeting youth leaving foster-care	-	-	-
… targeting ex-prisoners	-	-	-
… provided by external organisations (e.g. NGOs)	-	-	-
… social services that are not in the Social Service Plan	-	-	-
Health services	Received from other register(s)	-	-
Housing services	-	-	Inserted by internal staff
Legal services	-	-	-

Note: Green shade – data received from other registers; yellow shade – data inserted in the IT system by staff providing services; orange shade – no data in the IT system. UT – central IT system of the PES. SIDA – register of social enterprises. SPIS – social protection and services information system.
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities, the Lithuanian PES and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

The data collection and exchange between operational databases is in place solely for the purpose of service provision and covers most of the essential needs for this purpose. The operational databases for employment and social services receive for example data from the employment register, tax register and the disability and working capacity assessment register, as well as provide some data for these registers themselves. Nevertheless, SPIS does not currently receive all data it needs to enable full check of benefit eligibility regarding some of the benefits. Also, data from other registers are possibly too limited to support pro-active outreach to potential clients, identify their needs properly and provide services holistically across public sector. Furthermore, the operational databases of employment and social services do not receive any data from other registers specifically for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation, and data warehouse (or other similar) solutions to accommodate data exchange for data analytics do not exist.

Direction of data exchange	Organisations/registers from which this register regularly receives personal level data			Organisations/registers that regularly receive personal level data from this register		
Register Reference	UT	SIDA	SPIS	UT	SIDA	SPIS
SPIS	+			+		
UT		+	+			+
SIDA				+		
Disability and Working Capacity Assessment Service		+	+			+
Department of Prisons under the Ministry of Justice						
SODRA (employment data)	+	+	+	+		+
VMI (State Tax Inspectorate)	+	+	+	+		+
ŠMMITC (education services)	+		+			+
Health service providers						+
Researchers, universities						

Note: UT – central IT system of the PES. SIDA – register of social enterprises. SPIS – social protection and services information system. Grey cell – N/A. "+" – some data are exchanged between the respective registers (not necessarily covering all needs for data exchange).
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities, the Lithuanian PES and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

3.8.3. Functionality and user-friendliness of the IT infrastructure to support service provision

Functionalities present in the IT systems

In terms of user interface functionality, the two primary systems used by the PES support various elements of service provision. Both the UT and SIDA facilitate the managing of client information and communication (booking meetings and sending messages to clients). However, SIDA also facilitates supporting the identification of people (with disabilities) who are not yet clients. The UT system is the primary system used for the PES case management process, thus supporting the identification of client needs (based on data in the IT system), development of action plans, application processes for clients (for services, measures and benefits) and the referral of a client to specific services and measures. Both the UT and SIDA include some functionality to track the progress of specific clients, such as the status of service participation (i.e. are they still participating in the given programme, including some services provided by external organisations). As the primary objective of SIDA is to support managing wage subsidies for people with disabilities in social enterprises, it enables additionally the submission of payment requests by the social enterprises.

Unlike the systems employed by the PES, the functionality of the user interface of SPIS is rather limited. Instead, the SPIS mostly assists in identifying people to reach out to (i.e. provides contact details for people not yet clients) and in facilitating the application processes for clients. The systems in PES and SPIS also enable collecting data on clients and service provision through the service provision process.

Assessments by the users

While the IT systems used by the Lithuanian PES support service provision in wide functionality, there is scope for significant improvements (Figure 3.7). In relation to outreach efforts, the existing IT infrastructure is essentially not supporting the PES in identifying and accessing contact details for individuals not yet clients as the UT system does not receive relevant data from other registers. In addition, the IT systems do not sufficiently support the case management process. This includes insufficient support to key case

management activities such as the development of client action plans, tracking the status of clients referred to external organisations and the receipt of data from external organisations on the background information of the client. The PES central office, as well as users in the local PES offices, recognise the need to replace the IT infrastructure with a more modern one that would enhance user experience, enabling taking better use of the available data and support more effective and efficient service provision.

Figure 3.7. Segments of service provision that are insufficiently supported with IT infrastructure

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) facing a given challenge and the challenges identified by the PES
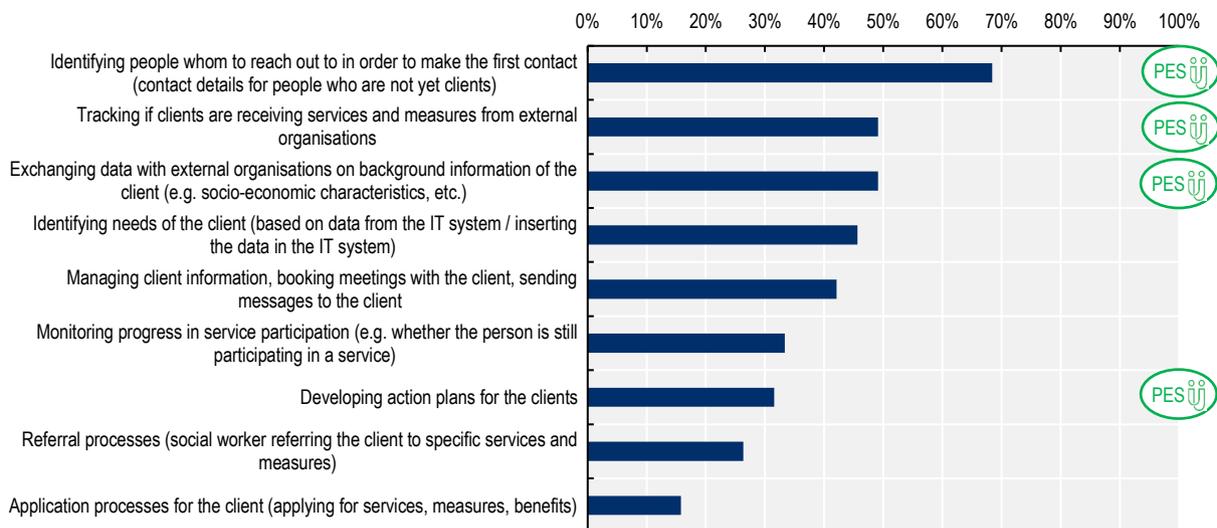
Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities and the PES head office. The PES icon refers to the situation for the PES.
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

At municipal level, social service providers too face many problems in areas of service provision due to insufficient or lack of supporting IT infrastructure (related to SPIS as well as potentially other IT systems that they use). The three largest areas where the IT infrastructure does not support the users sufficiently, are outreach to individuals not yet clients (experienced in 68% of municipalities), tracking the status of clients referred to services and measures provided by external organisations (49%) and exchanging data on clients with outside organisations (49%).

The underlying reason for many of the challenges identified by the users are partly related to gaps in data exchange between registers. In some cases, the organisations have found alternative ways to exchange information, such as via emails and Excel tables), which is however inefficient, as well as provides lower security than data exchange taking place between IT systems. As such, these working methods have managed to overcome to some degree the technical challenges in data exchange, but not the legal challenges related to data protection.

3.8.4. IT infrastructure supporting monitoring and evaluation

Both the UT and SIDA include limited functionality to generate some monitoring statistics (such as overviews of counsellors' portfolios or summaries of local office client profiles). In addition, SPIS facilitates the generation of some essential statistics.

Tools for monitoring and evaluation in the IT systems

As highlighted in the previous sub-sections, none of the IT systems used to provide employment and social services involves modern solutions to support data analytics (such as monitoring statistics, evaluation, research). Staff providing services, as well as statisticians and analysts can query data and statistics for monitoring directly from the operational databases. In the UT and SIDA, the queries are integrated in the user interfaces that are also used by employment counsellors to provide the services. SPIS uses a Business Intelligence (BI) tool to enable querying statistics (*Sybase IQ* (current product on the market called *SAP IQ*) and *Information Builders Web Focus* products taken into use in 2013-14). The PES has also tested *MS Power BI* for monitoring and statistics purposes, also directly linked to the operational databases, but has currently no specific plan to adopt it.[7]

As the current IT systems do not use Data Warehouse or similar solutions, the current data management practices are potentially not well fit for data analysis needs. Regardless of which systems the data originates from, these have to generally go through the transformation process (in addition to the ETL[8] process), because the original data are rarely straightaway in a suitable format for analysis. The less modern is the system used to collect the data (e.g. legacy IT system), the less likely are the data readily fit for analysis and the more likely there are data quality issues that have to be first dealt with. For this reason, the data have to ideally undergo several processes before they can be loaded, such as quality control, re-classification (in case data are not classified correctly), coding in case data stored in a long text format), cleansing, processing duplicates, transforming into suitable formats for analytical and statistical purposes, imputing missing values, and linking the data from different sources. With the current solutions, the PES and SPIS are able to transform the data for analysis only to a small degree, likely largely only manually (i.e. not automated and efficient processes).

The current solutions to query data for statistics and analysis directly from the operational databases can be burdensome for the IT systems (e.g. can slow the system down for all users). While built-in queries are relevant for staff providing the services to access the live data, queries for the purpose of statistics and analysis should be ideally facilitated by a Data Warehouse or similar solutions, or a copy of the operational database as a more immediate sub-optimal solution. The operational database (or preferably a copy of it) could enable exceptional queries and data discovery, but not regular monitoring and production of statistics.

The solutions used for monitoring statistics in the PES allow access to their internal staff only, and not for example other organisations in the public sector for whom some parts of the monitoring data could be relevant as well (e.g. the Ministry of Social Security and Labour). SPIS on the other hand enables access to their web based BI tool to anybody, without any limitations. While access to such open data can be generally good, the system should ideally authorise different types of users to access different reports according to their tasks and skills, and prevent generating reports (access to such data) where individuals can be directly or indirectly identified.

As the current solutions to support data analysis are somewhat limited and not flexible enough to cater to the needs of more advanced evaluation and research activities, ad hoc queries can be made directly to the (copies of) operational databases for tailor-made queries. However, these queries need programming in SQL, which is why these cannot be easily by done by statisticians and analysts, but rather by the relevant IT departments in house.

Furthermore, the current version of the web interface of the BI tool used for SPIS is not up to date. In any case, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour is planning to significantly redesign its solution for monitoring statistics as the current one is not meeting their and the users' needs.

In addition to the challenges in the technical solutions for data analytics, also the data themselves are limiting the possibilities to generate sufficient monitoring statistics. As noted earlier in this chapter, there are no (regular) data exchange practices for the purpose of statistics and analysis. In addition, the content

of data exchange is noted by the users to be too limited even for the implementation of services. The data needs for service provision, as well as monitoring and evaluation have potentially not been so far sufficiently mapped and analysed, and sufficient legal basis for such data exchanges has not been established.

Assessments by the users

Close to half (44%) of municipalities assess that the IT infrastructure for service provision is insufficient to generate appropriate monitoring statistics. While SPIS users can generate some reports directly in the system, these are often not detailed enough to meet the users' needs (e.g. the users cannot apply filters they would need). The contracted-out service providers who are obliged to use SPIS as well, highlight that the statistics reports also do not necessarily match in aggregate results. It can be either indeed there are errors in the built-in reports, or that metadata and guidelines for the users are not sufficient (the users do not have full information about what exact statistics each report is generating).

The PES central level does not highlight the ability of the IT infrastructure to support monitoring as a particularly challenging area. Also, the staff in the local offices highlights rather the needs for improvement in the other segments of the UT and SIDA systems. A specific area of concern is regarding queries for suitable job opportunities, which is not done for purposes of analysis, and which should be addressed within the operational system, rather than data analytics solutions.

3.8.5. Overall challenges of the IT systems identified by the users

Regarding the overarching challenges of the IT infrastructure, both the PES and municipalities identify low user-friendliness and data exchange issues as the main challenges (Figure 3.8). While the PES finds exchanging data with external organisations particularly challenging, municipalities see problems both regarding providing data to other systems (56%), as well as receiving data from external systems (46%). Furthermore, the UT and SIDA are not currently integrated, which means that some PES staff need to use simultaneously two different systems, which is also causing efficiency losses.

Some municipalities assess the IT infrastructure to be particularly problematic – 35% of municipalities see essential parts of service provision not being supported by the IT infrastructure and 9% assess the IT system being outdated and not cater to the current service provision. Furthermore, some municipalities find the IT infrastructure to be not intuitive (requiring significant time to be spent training staff – 19%) and is slow or breaks down often (14%). Nevertheless, municipalities highlight that regardless of some drawbacks, SPIS is still essential for them to manage and provide social services and generate monitoring statistics. Therefore, they use SPIS because it supports them, not just because it is mandatory to use SPIS.

Figure 3.8. Greatest challenges of the IT infrastructure that hinder the provision of social and employment services

Share of municipalities (Social Services Divisions and their social services centres) facing a given challenge and the challenges identified by the PES
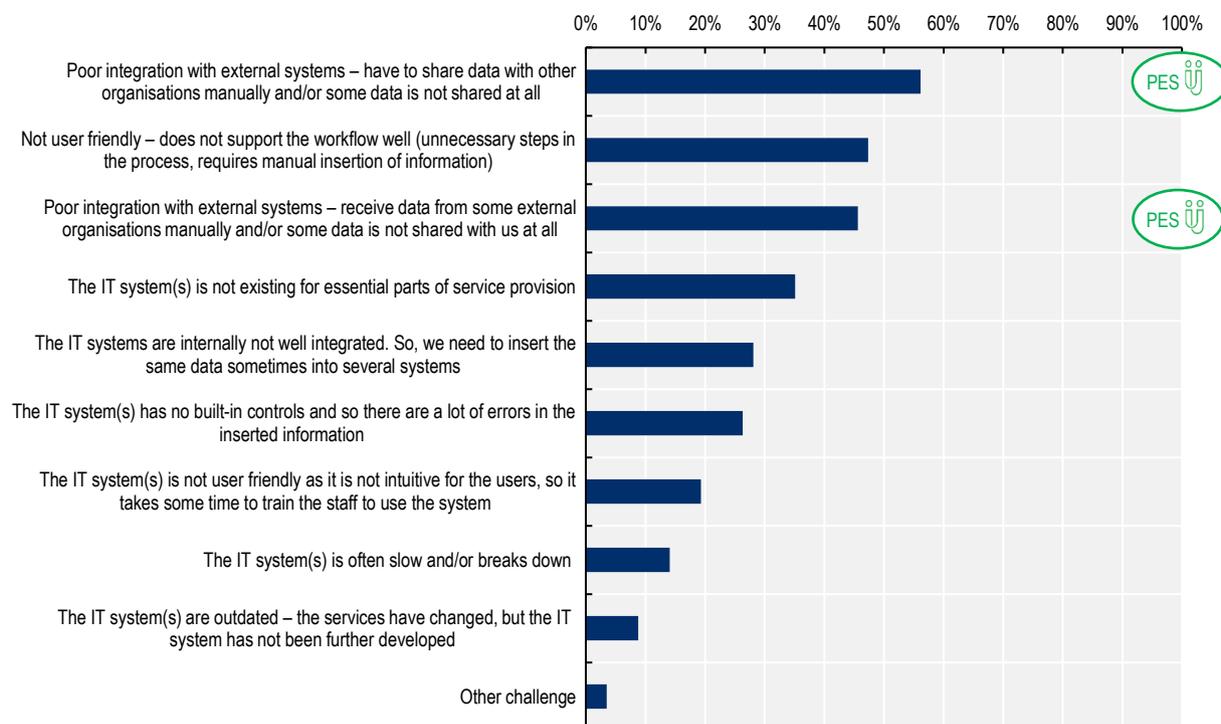
Note: This figure is based on responses received to this question from 57 municipalities. The PES icon refers to the situation for the PES.
Source: OECD questionnaires to municipalities and the Lithuanian PES.

NGOs that provide contracted-out social services, highlight that SPIS is archaic, technically inflexible, not user friendly and has some specific technical issues to use the system for service delivery well (e.g. regarding foster care service providers). While they have the possibility to propose changes for improvements, the queues for necessary changes are long and implementing them tends to take time.

Although the PES does not identify many overall challenges in their IT system besides data exchange limitations, they see many specific needs for improvements, which have also pushed them towards the plan to fundamentally change the UT and SIDA systems. Partly, these challenges come from the changing needs of the labour market as well as changed PES business model (a reform that has been taking place over the past five years). As such, some of the core processes of PES service provision need to be modernised, and need support from appropriate digital tools. These include tools to match jobseekers and vacancies, jobseeker profiling tools and implementing ESCO classification for skill mapping. Some specific needs for the digital systems emerged also due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the need to check sanitary passes automatically to access PES premises, or support fully remote registration of jobseekers.

3.9. Recommendations on IT infrastructure

Based on the current set-up of the IT infrastructure to support social and employment services in Lithuania and the challenges faced by users, a number of steps should be taken to modernise the infrastructure. This includes improving the functionality and user-friendliness of the IT systems to better support the work

of employment counsellors and social workers, prioritising enhanced data exchange to better identify people in need of support but not yet clients and developing the necessary pre-cursors to support elevated data analytics, policy monitoring and evaluation.

3.9.1. Invest in modernising the IT infrastructure of both social and employment services to better support social workers and employment counsellors

Digitalisation represents a major opportunity to provide services efficiently and effectively, both via interfaces for people using the services, as well as the back-office infrastructure for service providers to deliver knowledge-based services and automate administrative processes. The extent to which the benefits of digitalisation are realised in practice depends crucially on how the digital infrastructure is implemented. Digitalisation cannot be an objective of its own, as digital solutions only improve the provision of services if they are fulfilling their objectives well and are adopted by the users, thus added value and user-friendliness being critical factors for digital platforms supporting service provision (OECD, 2022[23]).

Regardless of the IT infrastructure of both employment and social services being somewhat outdated, currently only the IT systems of the PES are planned to be fundamentally changed, while SPIS would carry on with continuous minor improvements. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour needs to also consider more fundamental changes in SPIS and ideally develop a new modern system to support the provision of social services altogether, as SPIS suffers from low user friendliness and value added in supporting service provision.

Modern agile development methodologies need to be adopted to successfully replace the current IT infrastructure of employment and social services. For examples, the Swedish PES adopted the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) for managing the development of the information technology functions in 2021 and has made good progress in developing a modern technology stack to meet its business needs (OECD, Forthcoming[24]). SAFe methodology aims to achieve a lean and agile organisation focusing on key principles like alignment, collaboration and delivery across many agile teams, generally leading to productivity benefits (Scaled Agile, 2021[25]). Australia introduced a contracting-out programme of employment services *Workforce Australia* in July 2022 representing a new approach to online employment services and for which the utilisation of agile DevOps-based development tools and practices had been key (OECD, Forthcoming[24]). DevOps is a set of IT development practices aiming to provide continuous delivery with high software quality and is tightly related to agile development practices.

Agile software development practices emphasise collaborative efforts, cross-functional teams and involving end-users in the development processes to ensure that digital tools provide value for the users and are user-friendly. It is key for Lithuania to involve end-users throughout the adoption process – in the exploration phase, experimentation phase, as well as after the deployment – to collect their insights and feedback enabling to fine-tune the design. In developing the digital infrastructure for social workers and employment counsellors is thus important to involve them in the development, while in developing user interfaces for service recipients, the development processes need to consider the insights of jobseekers, employers and recipients of social services. For example, the national level PES in Spain (SEPE) involved employment counsellors in the development and piloting phases of a digital tool for employment counsellors called SEND@, as well as kept a tight communication with the counsellors to rigorously evaluate the tool via a randomised controlled trial and fine-tune it accordingly (OECD, 2022[23]).[9]

To modernise the IT systems successfully, the agile development practices involving all relevant stakeholders and strong business guidance need to be accompanied by skilled IT system developers, sufficient investments into IT developments, as well as supportive and agile organisational culture in the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the Lithuanian PES to facilitate the modernisation. Furthermore, some changes in legislation can be relevant to ensure all service providers and sub-national systems need to be compatible with a national system of social services. In Finland, the digital infrastructure for social welfare and healthcare services by municipalities and other providers became fully functional after a

lengthy process only in 2021, when a new act made the integration with the Kanta system compulsory for all providers of social and healthcare services (Fernández, Kups and Llena-Nozal, 2022[26]). At the moment, Kanta system supports both service providers and service recipients, and is being continuously further developed, involving users in the development process (Kanta, 2021[27]).

3.9.2. Enhance data exchange to better support service provision, particularly in aiding the identification of people in need of support and providing comprehensive services efficiently

In addition to the technology and architecture of the digital infrastructure, a key component for successful performance of IT systems is data – including data that are received from external registers through the infrastructure (OECD, 2022[28]). Lithuania could significantly improve the reach of social and employment services if applying a similar approach as the YGSS in Estonia to identify people in need of support (see Section 3.3.2). More comprehensive and integrated employment and social services (and potentially health, education and other services) could be provided similarly to Slovenia for the vulnerable groups within its Social Activation concept, Finland for NEETs via the Ohjaamo centres (Section 3.7.1) or Austria for the recipients of the minimum income scheme and youth (Hiebl, 2020[29]). In all of these three frameworks, integrated IT systems (extensive exchange of data between the IT systems) is a key pillar of integrated employment and social services.

Lithuania should analyse its service streams of social and employment services (including by different target groups) to map the data needs for maximised service effectiveness and efficiency. The analysis needs to generate an understanding about: 1) data received from other registers that could be improved by an additional or a different kind of data exchange, 2) data collected from the clients that could be more efficiently and/or accurately collected from other registers, 3) data not received currently at all and relevant for better services that could be received from other registers. The mapping of data needs should also identify when in the service process and how the data would be needed to consider the most appropriate type of data exchange (mass data exchange or queries for single clients, push or pull data, storing the data in the internal systems or only rights to see the data in an external database, etc.). Lithuania should consider following the "once-only" data collection principle that is increasingly popular among the OECD countries, e.g. in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, with a varying degree of implementation to date. Once-only principle (particularly cross-border once-only principle) is also encouraged by the European Commission in its Single Digital Gateway Regulation to support Digital Single Market.[10] Once-only principle aims at more efficient administrative processes for both the government and the citizens and at a higher data accuracy, as any data relevant for a public sector organisation should be collected only once and consequently shared with others securely if needed for service provision.

Following the mapping of data needs, an analysis of legal bases of the relevant new data exchanges is necessary. Amendments in the legislation are needed in those cases where data exchanges are needed for service provision (also in terms of ensuring service complementarity and avoiding duplication), but the current legislation does not provide a sufficient legal base or the legal base is not sufficiently explicit (i.e. data exchanges need to be compliant with the General Data Protection Directive and the Lithuanian data protection regulation). For new social and employment services, data needs and legislative changes to enable relevant data exchanges should be analysed already in the service design phase before implementation. Once a legal base for a relevant data exchange is established, a secure data exchange should be set up following the security standards for IT systems required in the public sector organisations in Lithuania.

More specifically, Lithuania should consider how to ensure a smooth support to people who are being released from prison. The social worker assisting the person in the prison could securely share the agreed social integration plan with the social worker of the assumed residency municipality to help the social integration process, potentially with the option for the prisoner to opt out from this data exchange. If the

social integration plan considers integration to the labour market a viable possibility, similar secure data exchange could take place vis-à-vis the Lithuanian PES. Similar secure data exchanges could be considered also for other groups in institutional care to ensure their smooth transition to more independent social and labour market integration. A tool like the Estonian YGSS requiring data exchange across administrative registers could be a complementary option to identify those people in need of support who are not (anymore) in an institution.

3.9.3. Develop capabilities for data analytics, policy monitoring and evaluation

A monitoring and evaluation framework is a key integral part of any service provision, as monitoring enables policy designers and implementers in performance and quality management and taking operational decisions while evaluation activities help to design effective and efficient policy packages. A functional monitoring and evaluation framework needs to be supported with high-quality and comprehensive data and digital infrastructure to generate and disseminate evidence.

As the current IT infrastructures of social and employment services do not include modern data analytics solutions, it is crucial to invest in these systems. Data Warehouse or similar solutions together with Business Intelligence tools enable using data fitted for data analytics, setting up pre-defined queries for an efficient production of monitoring statistics, visualising data for faster comprehension of trends and correlations, and creating dashboards to channel information across data user groups. As the Lithuanian PES is in the process of significantly renewing its digital infrastructure, it provides a good opportunity to develop a modern data analytics system along with other changes (see further discussion and recommendations on this in (OECD, 2022[30]; OECD, 2022[19]). A similar need for modern data analytics tools is in the field of social services (in SPIS). Additional data from other registers described in the previous point would further extend the usefulness of such data analytics platforms.

To support policy evaluation and policy research more generally and to share data securely with (external) researchers for these purposes, additional digital solutions might be necessary in Lithuania. First, these solutions would enable researchers to use data that are not available respectively in the databases of the PES or in SPIS, as these data might not be relevant for operational purposes and are thus not exchanged with external registers, or sensitive data that can only be linked for research purposes. Second, these solutions can ensure secure data access for external researchers.

Lithuania could further develop the system of sharing data for research purposes via the national statistics office (Statistics Lithuania) similarly to many other countries (such as Denmark (Svarer, 2019[31]), Estonia (OECD, 2021[1]), Finland (OECD, 2023[32]), the Netherlands (Kartopawiro, 2019[33]), Sweden (OECD, Forthcoming[24])) or alternatively via a dedicated initiative similar to the Crossroads Bank for Social Security in Belgium including a Data Warehouse of labour market and social protection data for analysis and research (Bevers, 2019[34]). Sharing data via Statistics Lithuania would be the more efficient solution, as it already processes many administrative and survey datasets, has secure data processing solutions and processes in place, and already shares some datasets for research purposes. Lithuania could learn from Finland where Statistics Finland is able to securely share rich data for research purposes, as well as link ad hoc datasets in addition to the core datasets upon needs (OECD, 2023[32]). In addition, an initiative called Findata has been set-up to support collecting, linking and sharing administrative data for secondary use in the field of social and health services. In case a research project needs data beyond Findata, these data are also made available via Statistics Finland to enable linking these with other datasets.

3.10. Conclusion

The Lithuanian PES, as well as a share of municipalities, do have the prerequisites for service provision that would enable reaching out to target groups pro-actively (including the specific vulnerable groups of

people with disabilities, ex-prisoners and youth leaving care), considering individual needs in service provision and co-ordinating support with other organisations to provide holistic and comprehensive support across different public services. Nevertheless, the current implementation of these approaches falls short of their full potential and hence the vulnerable groups might not receive the full support they need in order to integrate into the society and labour market. Furthermore, the IT infrastructure is not adequately supporting the provision of employment and social services, particularly in terms of data exchange between different public sector registers, user-friendliness of user interfaces, the coverage of all core business processes within the functionality of the IT infrastructure, and modern solutions for data analytics to monitor and evaluate service provision systematically.

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Notes

[1] The Work Ability Reform was introduced in 2016, aiming to improve the co-ordination of social, health and employment policies. The reform introduced new active labour market programmes to assist the labour market integration of people with health obstacles and increased the funding for both employment and social services targeting health obstacles.

[2] See the translated version of the Law on Social Services 2006: https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.277880

[3] The criteria used by the PES include: the accuracy and consistency of information about the client; coherence with the individual's opportunities and obstacles faced; relevance of agreed actions; progress reporting (and analysis of results); record of appointments; relevance of services and measures to the needs of the client.

[4] A more systematic co-operation between the PES and municipalities has been piloted in a project aiming to improve social and labour market integration of long-term unemployed people. In this project, which

began in 2018, systematic co-operation took place between the PES and 23 municipalities, as well as involved other organisations when necessary.

[5] Modernising the platforms of operational IT systems every ten years is also advisable to avoid legacy systems.

[6] According to the information received from the Social Service Divisions of municipalities responding to the OECD questionnaire, although data are missing for some municipalities in the SPIS public reporting tool (statistics provided via a Business Intelligence tool).

[7] In addition, the PES uses a Business Intelligence tool Tableau to disseminate some of the statistics on its website, but is not integrated with the UT and SEDA IT systems.

[8] ETL – Extract, Transform, Load. The first step in the ETL is extracting the data from an operational database or a data store. The second step is data processing producing a cleaned and transformed dataset. After the successful data processing, the system loads the data for example to a Data Warehouse or other destinations. SPIS and SIDA systems involve currently also an ETL layer, although not for the purposes of data analytics.

[9] The OECD was providing technical support to SEPE through the European Commission's Technical Support Instrument and in co-operation with the EC's Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support to design and implement a randomised controlled trial of SEND@ tool.

[10] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018R1724&from=EN.

4 Mapping of services for people in vulnerable situations in Lithuania

This chapter provides a comprehensive mapping of public services and programmes in Lithuania, with close attention to regional disparities and the attention devoted to people with disabilities, young people leaving care and people leaving prison. The chapter starts with a detailed overview of social services across municipalities, covering the planning, availability, targeting, uptake, providers, and funding of social service provision. The chapter then continues with a brief overview of other types of public services, including education, employment, and health services, and concludes with a set of recommendations to improve social service design in Lithuania.

4.1. Introduction

Many services are available for people in vulnerable situations in Lithuania. However, for some people with multiple and complex needs who require a range of services, such as people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care, more comprehensive, integrated services, tailored to meet individual needs are required. This chapter provides a detailed overview of public services provision in Lithuania, focusing not only on social services, but also other types of public services, including education, employment, and health services. The information provided in this chapter is based on virtual consultations with Lithuanian stakeholders, desk research, administrative data review, and a survey for Lithuanian municipalities (see Chapter 1 for further information).

4.2. Social services

4.2.1. Planning of social services provision

The Catalogue of social services (hereinafter referred to as "the Catalogue"), which was introduced in 2006, sets out a list of services that can be provided in Lithuania, and describes them in terms of content, purpose, beneficiaries, place of supply, and duration of the service, among others. The Catalogue serves to harmonise the provision of social services across the country by clearly defining what each service must consist of, who can get access to it, and under which conditions. The Catalogue contains a comprehensive list of social services, but such list is not exhaustive.

According to the Law No X-493 on Social Services, each year, municipalities are responsible for designing and approving a social services plan, which determines the extent and types of social services that will be provided in the municipality during the upcoming year. Theoretically, municipalities are free to decide on the provision of services that are not part of the Catalogue, although this does not seem to be common practice. Municipalities rely heavily on the social services Catalogue for the definition of their annual plans and do not often deviate from the pre-existing list of services. In fact, according to OECD's municipality survey, 54% of Lithuanian municipalities never include social services outside of the Catalogue in their annual plans, or only do so exceptionally.

This practice is problematic, because the Catalogue is seen as a rather static tool that has barely evolved over time. The list of social services enumerated in the Catalogue has hardly changed since it was approved in 2006, which could trigger gaps in service provision when new societal needs arise.

In addition to consulting the Catalogue, municipalities report conducting additional research and statistical analyses to decide on the type and extent of social services to include in their annual plans. However, it seems this planning activity is largely based on the information gathered retrospectively from service usage rather than forward-looking: while 96% of municipalities assess the social services plan of the previous year for the design for their annual plan, only 40% report conducting additional statistical research to analyse the need for providing additional or different services.

When planning the provision of social services, municipalities do not explicitly target each of the vulnerable groups of interest for this project. Indeed, while the majority of municipalities (91%) included specific indicators and/or needs assessments for people with disabilities in their 2020 social services plans, no specific reference was made for the groups of young people leaving care and people leaving prison. The OECD analysis of the governance of public services and involvement of NGOs in public services in Lithuania provides further insights on the involvement of NGOs in municipality social services planning.

4.2.2. Availability of social services across municipalities

According to the Law on Social Services, social services are aimed at "assisting a person or family who, because of age, disability, or social risk and challenges, have not acquired or have lost the ability to independently care for their private life and participate into society". In line with the Catalogue, Lithuanian municipalities can provide both "general" social services, as well as "special" services to those vulnerable individuals and families who present needs that are more acute.[1] A comprehensive list of the social services included in the Catalogue can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. General and special social services listed in the Catalogue

General services	Special services	
	Social assistance services	*Care services*
Information	Home assistance	Day social care
Counselling	Support to develop or restore social skills	Short-term social care
Mediation and representation	Support for independent living	Long-term social care
Provision of food	Accommodation in night shelters	Temporary respite (care)
Provision of clothing and footwear	Accommodation in hostels	
Transport	Accommodation in other forms of temporary accommodation	
Socio-cultural activities	Intensive-crisis resolution assistance	
Personal hygiene	Psychosocial assistance	
Open youth work	Temporary respite (assistance)	
Youth work on the street	Support for carers, adoptive parents and guardians	
Mobile youth work	Day-care services for children	

Source: Order No 43-1570 on the Adoption of the Catalogue of Social Services.

General social services include information, counselling and mediation services; provision of food, clothing and transportation; personal hygiene services; socio-cultural activities; and a variety of youth targeted services delivered across youth centres, youth gathering spaces (parks, cafes, sports clubs, etc.) and mobile infrastructure. The availability of general social services is highly polarised across Lithuanian municipalities. Almost one-third of municipalities offer all general social services included in the Catalogue, while most of the remaining municipalities offer less than half of the general services listed there (Figure 4.1, Panel A). The most common general services are youth work on the street and mobile youth work, which are provided in 70% and 90% of the municipalities, respectively (Figure 4.1, Panel B). Youth work on the street is provided at public youth gathering spaces such as parks, cafes, or sport clubs. It is aimed at engaging with young people who might be experiencing difficulties related to criminal behaviour or substance abuse, in order to help them rebuild links with their social environment and facilitate their access to other services provided to young people in their municipality. Instead, mobile youth work is delivered where there is no youth work infrastructure and it aims to help young people solve problems and difficulties (educational, employment-related, etc.) by creating a secure, open and informal environment where they can develop their social skills together with other peers and engage more actively with their community.

Figure 4.1. Availability of general social services across Lithuanian municipalities

A. Classification of municipalities by number of general social services provided at the end of 2021
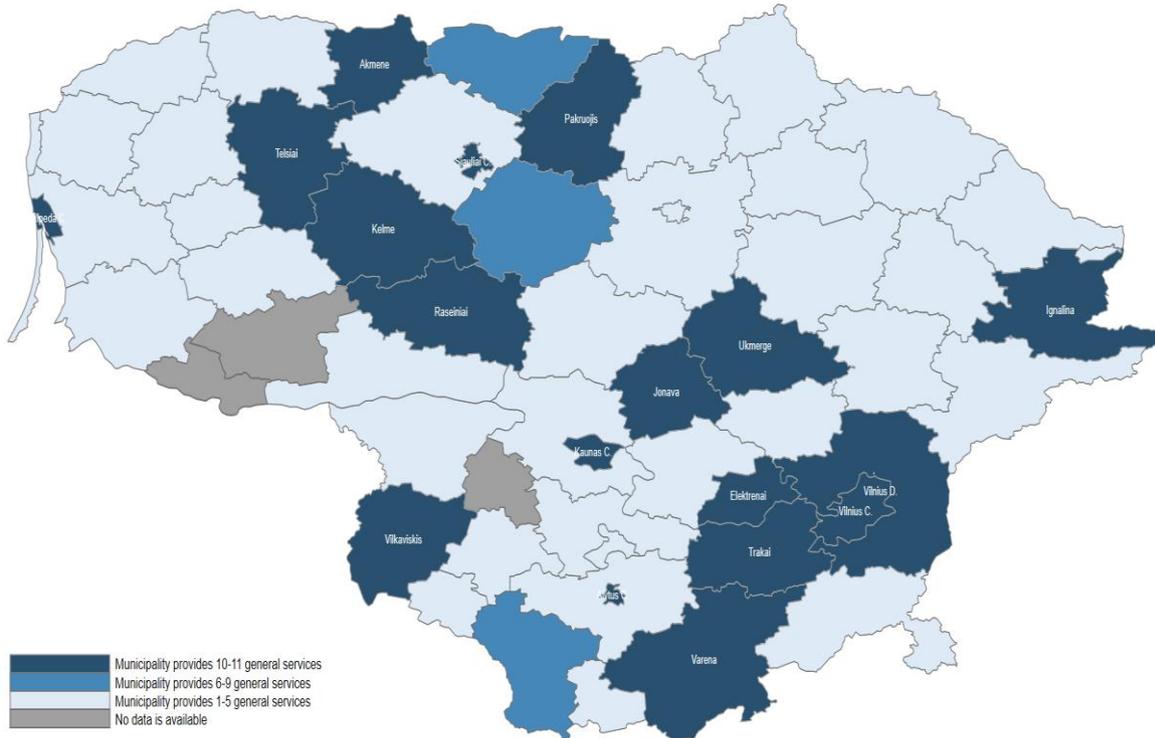
B. Proportion (%) of municipalities that provide general social services at the end of 2021, by type of service
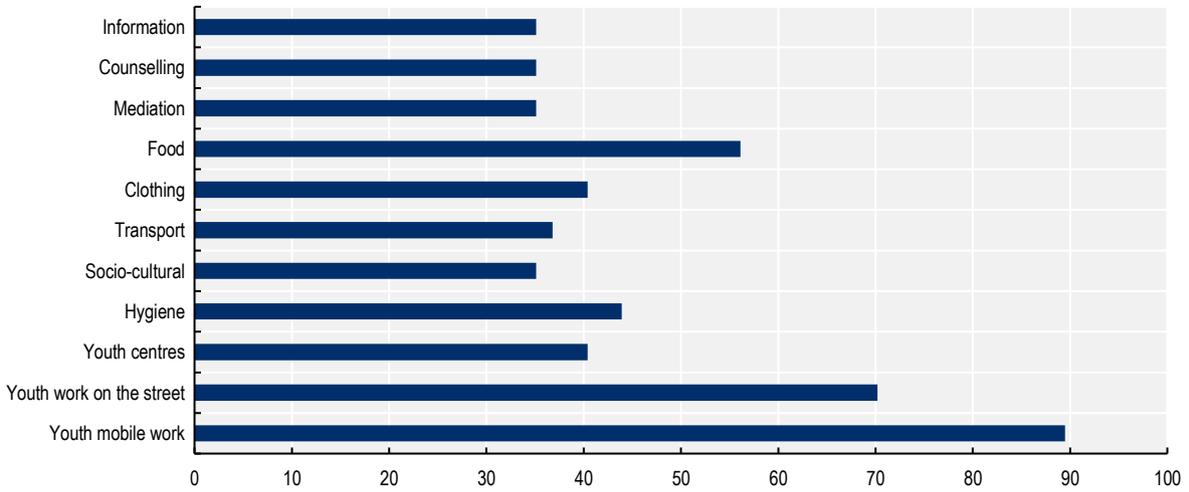
Source: OECD's municipality survey (see Chapter 1).

Special social services can be provided either in the form of temporary "social assistance", or more permanent "social care". Social assistance services include measures such as home visits, support to develop or restore social skills, support for independent living, accommodation at night shelters or other forms of temporary accommodation, psychosocial and intensive crisis-resolution assistance, support and assistance for carers, adoptive parents and guardians and day-care services for children. Social care, on the other hand, includes the complete range of services provided to a person who requires constant care

from a specialist. Social care can be provided at varying frequency (day care, short-term care, or long-term care) and it can be arranged either at the beneficiary's home or at institutions created for that purpose.

As it is the case with the coverage of general social services, the municipal offer for social assistance services hides considerable variation across municipalities. Only 23% of municipalities offer all social assistance services available in the Catalogue, while most of the remaining ones offer four or less (Figure 4.2, Panel A). The most common services of this type are accommodation in hostels and other forms of temporary accommodation, which are provided in 65% and 79% of municipalities, respectively (Figure 4.2, Panel B).

With regards to social care, most municipalities (91%) have all services described in the Catalogue available. Among those that do not offer all social care services (5 municipalities), temporary "respite care" appears to be available in most of them. Respite care is a social service targeted to the carer of a person with disabilities who already benefits from other social assistance services. This service allows the carer to take a break from their caring responsibilities and achieve a better life and family balance, while resting assured that the person they take care of is being looked after by someone else. The help comes from short-term care or help at the house (up to 2 times a week), to day-care (up to 2 times a week), to longer-term care (up to 14 days, and in exceptional cases, up to 90 days a year).

Figure 4.2. Availability of social assistance services

A. Classification of municipalities by number of social assistance services provided at the end of 2021
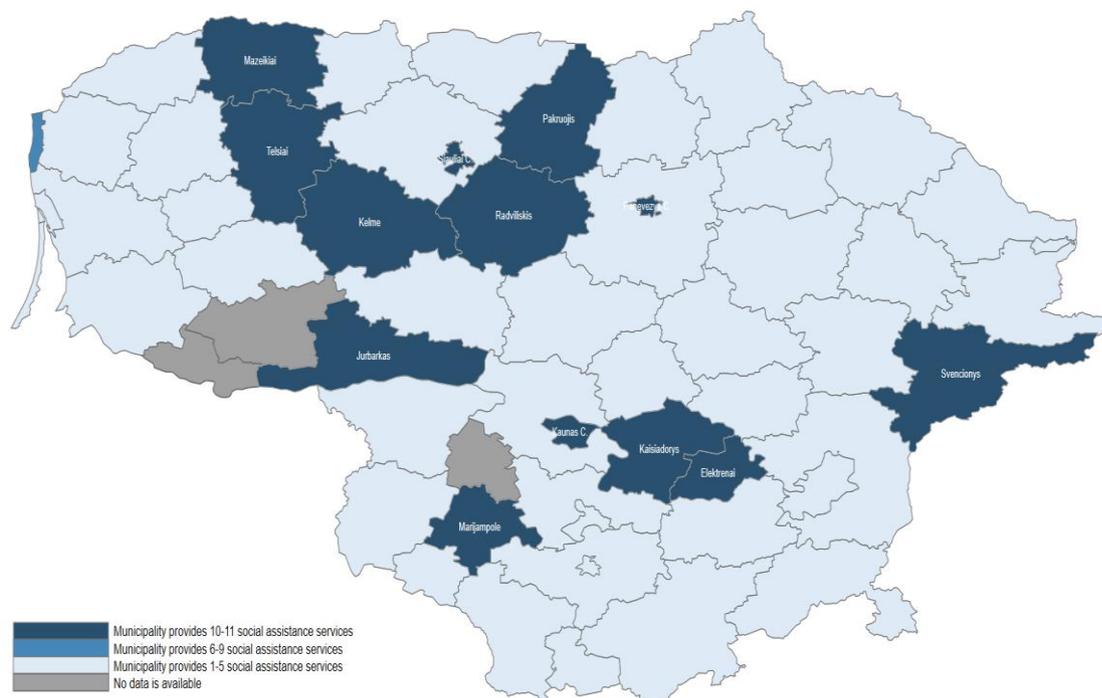
B. Proportion (%) of municipalities that provide social assistance services at the end of 2021, by type of service

Service	Value
Home assistance	
Support for independent living	
Accomodation in night shelter	
Accomodation in hostel	
Accomodation in sheltered accomodation	
Development/restoring of social skills	
Intensive crisis-resolution assistance	
Psychosocial assistance	
Temporary respite care	
Assistance to guardians and adoptive parents	
Children day-care	
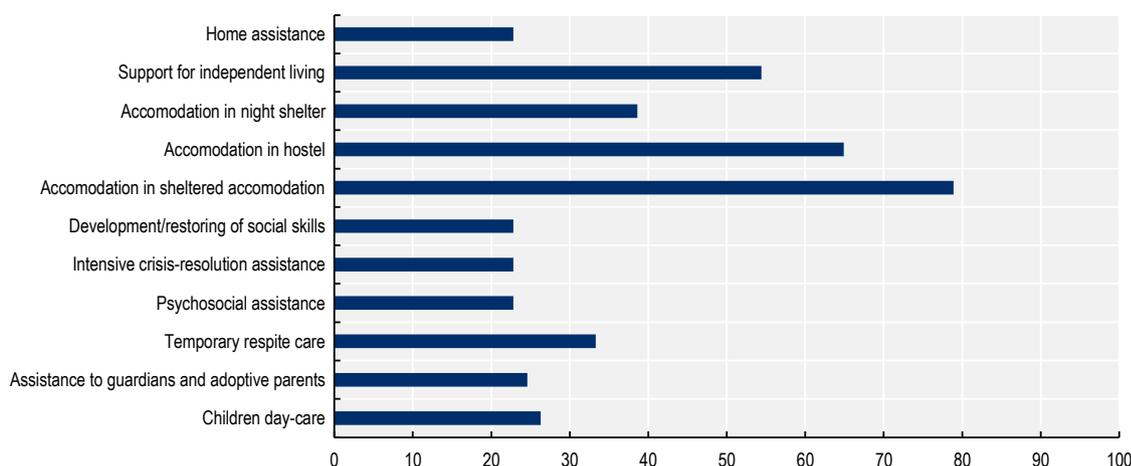
Source: OECD's municipality survey.

4.2.3. Targeting of social services

Each of the general and special social services described in the Catalogue is linked to a list of vulnerable groups who are entitled to benefit from that service in particular. The definition of some of these groups can be considered relatively broad, and as indicated in the Law on Social Services, the need for social services of an individual or a family is ultimately determined by the social workers appointed by the municipal authority according to the official procedure. The OECD analysis of the operating models and IT infrastructure in providing employment and social services in Lithuania provides further insights on the processes of identifying needs for services. The definition of some the most recurrent beneficiary groups listed in the Catalogue is provided in Box 4.1.

While children and adults with disabilities are clearly defined as specific target groups for most social services in the Catalogue, young care leavers and people leaving prison do not constitute specific target groups *per se.* However, they can, depending on the evaluation by the social worker, fall under the categories "adults at social risk" or "young people with fewer opportunities". Instead, people with disabilities are listed as target beneficiaries for all specialised social services listed in the Catalogue (both social assistance and social care), as well as all general services, except for temporary accommodation at night shelters and other forms of temporary accommodation, intensive crisis-resolution assistance services, and support for adoptive parents and guardians. The OECD analysis of the governance of public services provides further insights on the extent to which vulnerable groups are clearly identified across areas beyond social services.

Box 4.1. Potential beneficiaries of social services according to the Catalogue

Adult with disabilities: A person of working age who, due to disability, is partially or totally deprived of the ability to take care of personal (family) life and participate in society independently.

Child with disabilities: A person under the age of 18 who, due to disability, is partially or totally deprived of autonomy appropriate to his or her age, and whose opportunities to develop and participate in society are limited.

Elder: A person who has reached the retirement age, and who, due to age, has been partially or totally deprived of the ability to independently take care of personal (family) life and participate in society.

Individuals and families at social risk: "Social risk of exclusion" can refer to a variety of circumstances. These include: lack of social skills of adult family members to provide appropriate care and education for minor children; impossibility of adult family members to ensure the full physical, mental, spiritual, and moral development and safety conditions for minor children; involvement in the perpetration of criminal offences; abuse or addiction to alcohol, narcotics, psychotropic substances or gambling; and homelessness, among others.

Young people with fewer opportunities: Lithuania follows the Erasmus+ definition of young people with fewer opportunities (European Comission, 2019[1]). This concept refers to young people who are at a disadvantage compared to their peers because they face one or more of the following exclusion factors: disability, health problems, educational difficulties, cultural differences, economic obstacles, social obstacles or geographic obstacles. These exclusion factors are considered to represent barriers for their inclusion in society (Council of Europe, 2017[2]).

Furthermore, data from the Department of Disability Affairs (2022[3]) shows that all Lithuanian municipalities currently provide "social rehabilitation services" to people with disabilities. These services are provided by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have been operating in the field of social integration of people with disabilities for at least a year. These services include, among others: individual assistance to develop and/or maintain independent living abilities, social and work skills, cognitive functions, and cultural and artistic expressions, escorting or transportation services to public institutions, information and counselling services, and emotional support for family members. The implementation of social rehabilitation services is part of Lithuania's long-term strategy to better integrate people with disabilities in their communities through a transition from institutionalised care to community services (Box 4.2). For this purpose, these types of services have been provided across Lithuanian municipalities since the approval of the Order No A1-1211 in 2014 on the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care.

Data from the Department of Disability Affairs (2021[4]) also shows that in 2021, 49 Lithuanian municipalities provided "personal assistance" services to people with disabilities, which are not included in the Catalogue. A personal assistant is an individual made available to all disabled people for whom this need has been identified, regardless of their age, and severity or nature of the disability. The need for personal assistance is assessed individually and determined for one year in accordance with the procedure established by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Priority is given to those who are in formal education, working, looking for a job through the public employment service (PES) or other organisations, or living alone. Personal assistants provide help related to personal hygiene, accompany the person to healthcare visits and other state or municipal institutions, and assist in establishing and maintaining social relations, among others.

Up to 2021, young care leavers did not constitute an independent target group of the social services described in the Catalogue, but their defining characteristics made them potentially eligible to benefit from

most of those services. Indeed, "adults at risk of social exclusion" and "young people with fewer opportunities" are listed as target groups for most general and social assistance services. Since November 2021, however, a new "leaving care" service was included in the Catalogue, and young care leavers are clearly defined as a beneficiary group for it. In particular, the Catalogue establishes that adults up to the age of 24 who have been provided with social care in a social care institution can benefit from this service.

Box 4.2. Action Plan 2014 – 2023 for the Transition from Institutional Care to Family and Community-Based Services for Persons with Disabilities and Children without Parental Care

The Action Plan 2014-23 envisages a set of consistent and co-ordinated actions aimed to provide an appropriate emotional and social environment for people with disabilities (including children and youth) and children deprived of parental care, encouraging their independent living and personality development, and increasing their possibilities of a successful integration into society. The strategic goal of the Action Plan is to develop a system of integrated service provision with a clear focus on preventing both people with disabilities and children deprived from parental care from entering institutional care.

As a result of the Action Plan, the number of adults with disabilities in care homes decreased by 10% between 2016 and 2020, and at the same time, alternative and additional services were established for people with disabilities who live in their communities. By the end of 2021, 33 group-living homes had been established in the country, providing accommodation to 257 adults and 28 children with disabilities (Globa Šeima Bendruomenė, 2022[5]). Such group-living homes can accommodate up to 10 independent adults with disabilities who receive regular specialised assistance. Residents in group-living homes receive the necessary services in these homes and enjoy other community-based services aimed at restoring and developing their social and independent living.

Similarly, the number of institutions for children deprived from parental care decreased from 90 in 2016 to 61 in 2020, while the number of children in these institutions decreased by 70% during that period. The implementation of the Action Plan also led, in 2018, to the recognition of professional foster care as an official form of alternative care (Opening Doors, 2018[6]). Since then, children under the age of three who are left without parental care are placed directly in professional foster care. Furthermore, Lithuanian municipalities are now responsible for developing a network of care centres responsible for recruitment, training and support of professional foster carers.

Despite the advances made, discussions with stakeholders revealed that this deinstitutionalisation process has been short-lived, and only focused on the restructuring of the largest care homes. As a result, people with disabilities and their families continue experiencing a lack of support services, which often leads to large shares of informal care within the household. This substantial involvement in the care of people with disabilities is often highly problematic for the labour market integration of family members, especially women.

The "leaving care" service consists of a set of interrelated measures provided to help young people leaving care settings in adapting to their social environment and in developing their social skills and ability to deal with potential challenges. The ultimate goal is to facilitate their social integration within the community. According to the OECD's municipality survey, six municipalities offered such service in 2021.

Unlike people with disabilities and young care leavers, people leaving prison are not a specific target group of the social services described in the Catalogue. Their defining characteristics, however, make them eligible for benefiting from those services targeted to "adults at risk of social exclusion" and "young people with fewer opportunities". Moreover, "persons released from correctional bodies who have not elapsed for

more than 12 months from the date of their release from the correctional body" are eligible for benefitting from temporary accommodation at night shelter, support to develop or restore their social skills, and intensive crisis-resolution assistance services. Regarding social care services, adults who suffer from psychoactive substance abuse disorders are entitled to receiving psychological and social rehabilitation services in the short-term.

In 2021, 11 municipalities provided additional social services for people leaving prison, with "social reintegration or rehabilitation" being the most recurrent one. Social reintegration services are provided to people released (or close to be released) from correctional institutions to help them establish or restore their social connections and to encourage their participation in the community. The ultimate goals of these services are to promote the resocialisation and reintegration of the inmates into society, as well as to reduce recidivism rates. Social reintegration services often consist of two stages: the first one handled within the correctional institution prior to the prisoner's release, and the second one implemented by the municipality or NGOs once the person has left the penitentiary.

However, according to a study conducted by researchers at the Law Institute of Lithuania, social rehabilitation services provided in Lithuanian correctional facilities tend to be incomplete and short lived (LIL, 2018[7]). The study concludes that social workers in Lithuanian prisons have too many duties and responsibilities, which has a negative effect on the implementation and quality of the reintegration services provided. This finding is line with the statistics provided by the Ministry of Justice, which state that in 2020 there were around 25 social workers for an inmate population of over 4 500. Moreover, the research considers that the time provision for the preparation and implementation of the individual social rehabilitation plan is too short, which makes it very difficult to deliver rehabilitation services that are effective and of good quality.

As a response to this situation, the Prison Department under the Ministry of Justice is currently implementing the pilot initiative "Development of Quality Based Lithuanian Correctional Service System" (Prison Department, 2022[8]). The project aims to improve the provision of reintegration services by providing professional training to Lithuanian penitentiary staff, investing in the construction of halfway houses, and developing an innovative release model from correctional facilities in co-operation with NGOs. Through the implementation of this new release model, it is expected that NGO services will be made more accessible to both inmates and probationers. In particular, it is estimated that around 1 000 people serving their sentence in the pilot institutions will get access to reintegration services provided by NGOs. Among those, around 240 inmates could be released on parole or transferred to halfway houses as a result of a more successful rehabilitation process.

4.2.4. Uptake of social services

As indicated above, Lithuanian municipalities are responsible for the planning and provision of social services in their territory. To undertake this planning activity, most of them largely rely on the information gathered retrospectively from service usage in the previous year. This is problematic, because there is a generalised lack of sufficient and reliable data on services provided to vulnerable groups, which translates into the development of services being carried out without a comprehensive and realistic assessment of the population needs in the territory.

Data on the use of social services is not centralised, but spread across different sources. Furthermore, each institution reports on a different set of indicators, and makes use of different disaggregation categories and data collection methods, making data comparison across institutions not feasible.

One of the key sources of information on the uptake of social services in the country is the Social Protection Information System (SPIS), which aggregates administrative data on the provision of public benefits and services at the municipal level. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the statistics obtained from the data analytics layer within the SPIS IT system, commonly referred to as SPIS showcases.[2] The

OECD analysis on operating models and IT infrastructure in providing employment and social services in Lithuania describes the SPIS in more detail, including data collected in its operational database and the showcases tool.

SPIS data is disaggregated by four types of beneficiaries: elder people, families, people with disabilities, and people at risk of social exclusion. Young care leavers and people leaving prison do not constitute separate disaggregation categories for this dataset.

According to SPIS data, around 13 000 people at risk of social exclusion received general social services in 2021. This figure increased up to almost 24 000 in the case of social assistance services. There were also more than 5 400 beneficiaries of social care, out of which around 70% were people with disabilities (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Number of recipients of social services in 2021, by type of service and beneficiary group

Service	Social exclusion	Disabilities	Total
General services			
Information	3 799	-	3 799
Counselling	3 819	-	3 819
Mediation and representation	2 147	-	2 147
Provision of food	630	-	630
Provision of clothing and footwear	6	-	6
Transport	2 071	-	2 071
Socio-cultural activities	235	-	235
Personal hygiene	562	-	562
Total	**13 269**	-	**13 269**
Special services – social assistance			
Home assistance	6 193	-	6 193
Support to develop or restore social skills	15 562	-	15 562
Support for independent living	290	-	290
Accommodation in night shelters	229	-	229
Accommodation in hostels	451	-	451
Accommodation in other forms of temporary accommodation	6	-	6
Intensive crisis-resolution assistance	591	-	591
Psychosocial assistance	371	-	371
Temporary respite (assistance)	3	-	3
Total	**23 696**	-	**23 696**
Special services – care			
Day social care	1 561	1 392	2 953
Short-term social care	164	147	311
Long-term social care	-	2 211	2 211
Temporary respite (care)	2	-	2
Total	**1 727**	**3 750**	**5 477**

Source: Lithuania's SPIS.

As it occurs with service provision, the number of recipients of social services per 1 000 people hides considerable variation across municipalities. In the case of services for persons at risk of social exclusion, there are only five municipalities where the number of recipients of social services per 1 000 people is larger than 50 (Figure 4.3, Panel A). In another quarter of the municipalities, however, this number drops to less than 20 service recipients. Similarly, there are only five municipalities where the number of recipients with disabilities who are recipients of social services is larger than five (Figure 4.3, Panel B).

Figure 4.3. Number of recipients of social services across Lithuanian municipalities in 2021

A. Number of people at risk of social exclusion who benefited from social services, per 1 000 inhabitants
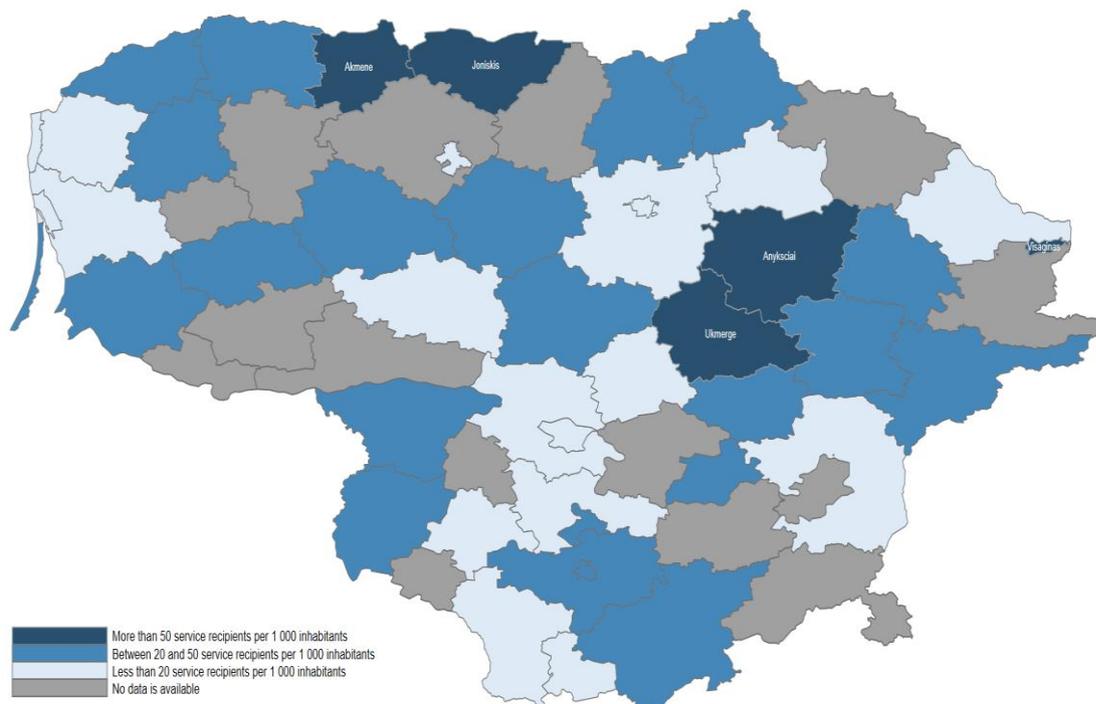
B. Number of people with disabilities who benefited from social services, per 1 000 inhabitants
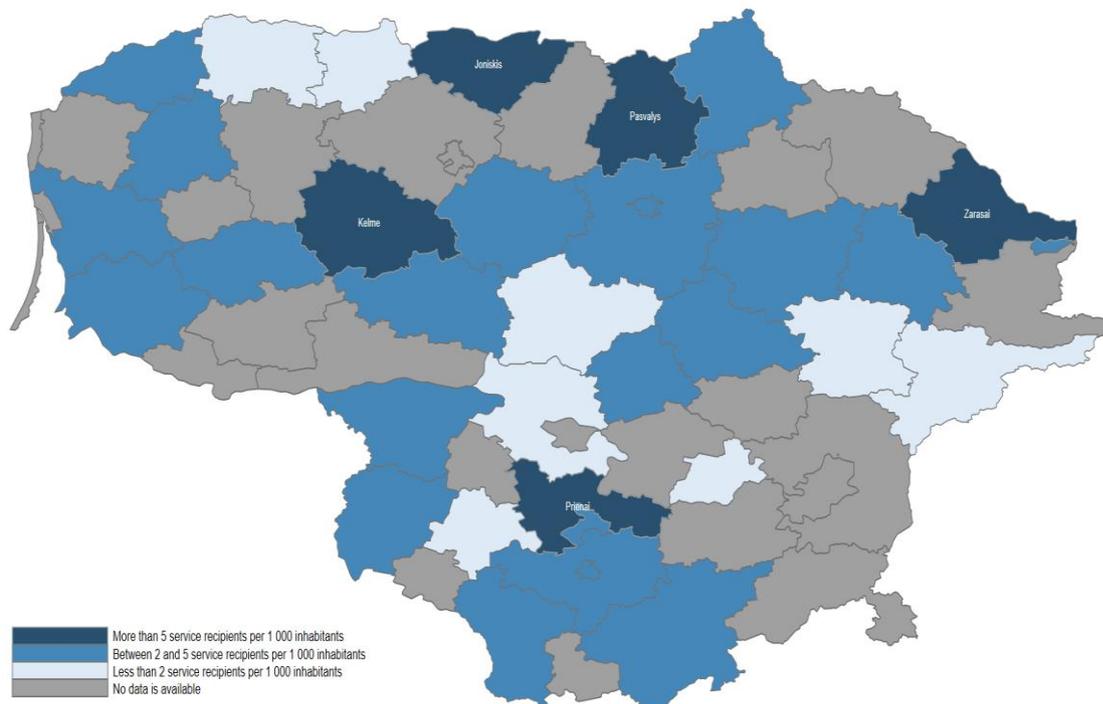
Source: SPIS.

In general terms, however, the data obtained from the SPIS reporting tool does not seem to be comprehensive. First, and despite the fact that the SPIS collects information on public support measures that go beyond the Catalogue (e.g. one-time benefits for pregnant women, benefits for the children of military staff, etc.), not all the social services listed in the Catalogue are included in the showcase reports. For example, the reports do not provide information on the number of beneficiaries of youth work services – which is one of the services most frequently provided in municipalities (Figure 4.1). Secondly, as shown in Table 4.2, the SPIS reports do not provide information on the provision of general social services or special assistance services for people with disabilities. Data is only available for social care, and even then, the numbers of service recipients appear to differ from those provided by other statistical sources such as the national survey of social services. The OECD analysis on operating models and IT infrastructure in providing employment and social services in Lithuania provides further information on the users' feedback on the SPIS reporting tool.

Another key source of information on the recipients of social services is the Lithuanian Department of Statistics' portal.[3] Statistics on social services from this source are based on the results from the annual national survey of social services. Data is disaggregated by the same beneficiary groups as in the SPIS (older people, people with disabilities, and people at risk of social exclusion). Young care leavers and people leaving prison do not constitute separate disaggregation categories for this set of statistics.

Regarding people at risk of social exclusion, the national survey of social services estimates that around 18 000 people received social assistance at day centres in 2020. Moreover, around 7 250 people received social services in crisis and psychological and social rehabilitation centres. More than 4 000 people made use of accommodation at temporary living facilities. Almost 1 500 people stayed in shelters, out of which 122 were people leaving prison. The latter figure implies an 85% increase with respect to the previous year.

Furthermore, according to the portal, 4 465 adults and 932 children with disabilities received social support services in their homes in 2020. Around 16 000 adults and 4 000 children with disabilities received care support at day centres, and 6 000 adults and 73 children resided in social care institutions for people with disabilities. Additional information obtained from the Disability Affairs Department (2022[3]) shows that more than 24 000 people with disabilities benefited from social rehabilitation services in 2019.

In conclusion, available statistics on the number of social service users is neither comprehensive nor accurate, which can hinder the planning and implementation process of social services. Furthermore, municipalities do not have detailed and up to date information on the total population who meet the criteria to benefit from certain social services but are not currently making use of them (i.e. target population). This discrepancy means that many decisions on the development of social services are made without information on the real needs for social services, which can lead to exclusion errors in the targeting process. For example, in a recent assessment of services conducted by the National Audit Office of Lithuania (2020[9]), with 416 people of working age with disabilities, it was demonstrated that municipalities did not have any information on the 35% of individuals who had not applied for support services.

4.2.5. Providers of social service

According to the Law on Social Services, both private and public institutions can provide social services in Lithuania, and individuals can choose freely among all accredited or licensed service providers. Nevertheless, and although the law entered into force in 2006, a free market of social services providers is not yet the reality, and state and municipal institutions have traditionally been the predominant provider of social services in the country. For example, in 2020, the proportion of state and municipal care institutions providing care to adults with disabilities was 77% and 18%, respectively (Figure 4.4). Similarly, 90% of people who made use of shelters in 2020, stayed in a municipal facility (Statistics Lithuania, 2022[10]). Only 162 people stayed in a shelter run by an NGO.

Figure 4.4. Types of institutions providing care services to adults with disabilities

Number of institutions providing care services to adults with disabilities, by type and year
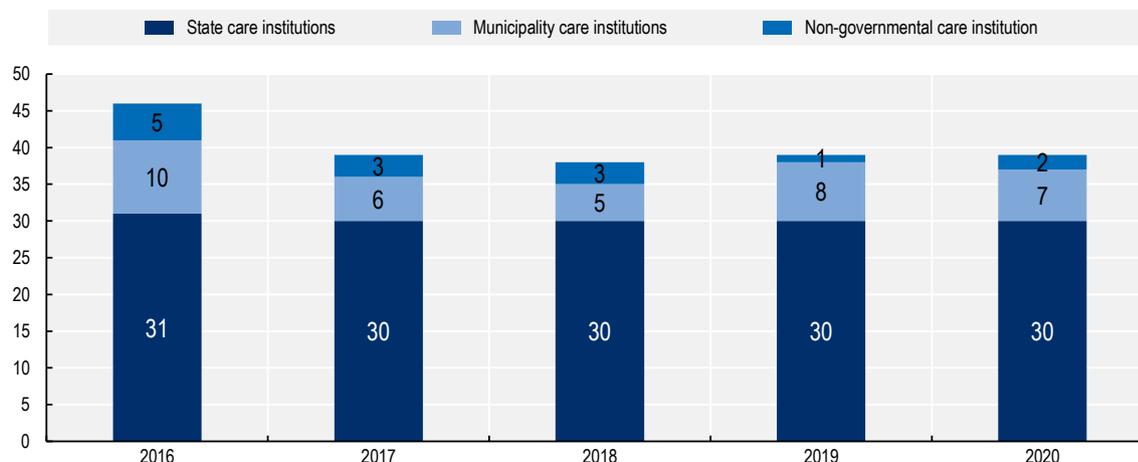
Note: Group-living homes are not included because data is not available prior to 2019. A total of 29 and 33 group-living homes existed in 2019 and 2020, respectively.
Source: Statistics Lithuania (2022[10]), Database of indicators, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize#/.

The strong prevalence of municipal institutions in the delivery of social services is confirmed by the OECD's municipality survey: all but one Lithuanian municipality confirmed that municipal institutions are involved in the provision of social services in their territory. Furthermore, 80% and 96% of municipalities mentioned public institutions and NGOs as social service providers, respectively.[4] On the contrary, only half of the Lithuanian municipalities confirmed that the private sector (not NGOs) is involved in the provision of social services in the municipality. One of the key reasons behind this situation is that the outsourcing of social services provision to private institutions needs to follow a public procurement process where price considerations are often determinant for the contract award. This process puts private institutions, and in particular those which do not yet have the necessary infrastructure in place, in a disadvantaged position for competition. The OECD analysis of the governance of public services and involvement of NGOs in public services in Lithuania provides further insights on the key challenges limiting NGOs' delivery of public services.

Despite the fact that the law guarantees individuals' freedom in the choice of service provider, self-payment of social services is in reality a key determinant of such a decision (Radišauskienė and Žalimienė, 2009[11]). Prices for social services are not officially regulated and therefore different institutions can ask for different prices even when providing the same service. Given that the maximum amount that can be financed by the municipality and/or the state is determined, if a person decides to select a more expensive service, the out of pocket payment will be larger.

To guarantee minimum quality standards in the delivery of social services regardless of the service provider, Lithuania introduced a quality assurance system for social services in 2007 (Radišauskienė and Žalimienė, 2009[11]). Accordingly, social services are required to be provided in compliance with a set of social care standards that place a strong focus on the principles of privacy, dignity and honour, as well as on the consideration of emotional needs, the encouragement of self-expression and the strengthening of social ties with the community, among others.

4.2.6. Funding

Lithuania devotes comparatively few resources to the delivery of social services. Public social expenditure for in-kind services amounted to about 5.8% of GDP in 2017, compared to the OECD average of 8.0% (Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5. Public social expenditure for in-kind services

Proportion (%) of GDP in 2019, or latest available year
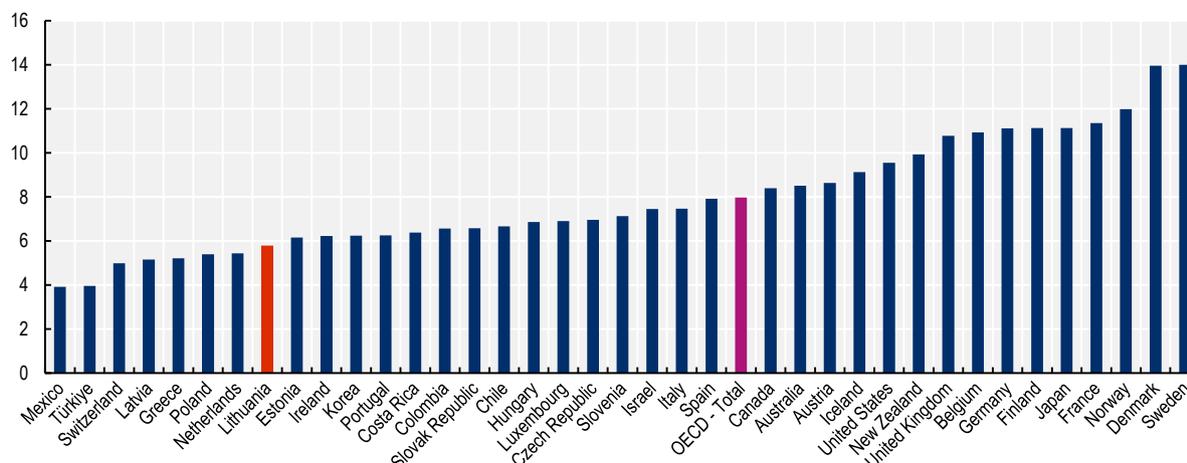
Note: Social expenditure on in-kind services refers to the direct in-kind provision of social goods and services. To be considered "social", programmes have to involve either redistribution of resources across households or compulsory participation. Social expenditure is classified as public when general government (central, state, and local governments, including social security funds) controls the relevant financial flows. Data refer to 2017 for Australia, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Türkiye and the United Kingdom; 2018 for Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, Hungary, Korea, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States; and 2019 for Chile, Israel and Mexico.
Source: OECD Social Expenditure Database.

Since the approval of the Law on Social Services in 2006, the financing scheme of social services in Lithuania changed from the direct financing of institutions to the direct financing of social services (Radišauskienė and Žalimienė, 2009[11]). Financing of social services in Lithuania is now a shared responsibility of the municipalities, the central government, and the beneficiary. In particular, social care for the elderly, the disabled (except for people with severe disability) and those at risk of social exclusion is financed from the municipal budget. Social care for severely disabled people and social care services for families are financed through the targeted subsidies from the state budget to municipal budgets. The amount to be paid for social services by the beneficiary ranges from 20% to 80% of the price of the service. The exact percentage is established taking into consideration the type of the service to be provided, as well as the financial capability of the person or family (in terms of income and property).

Although the share of municipal budget allocated to the provision of social services has modestly increased in the past decade, only 3.5% of the total municipal budget was devoted to social services in 2020 (Figure 4.6). This figure hides, however, certain cross-municipality variation: the largest share of budget devoted to social services was 5.9% in Kelme District, while the lowest share only reached 1.1% in Druskininkai.

Figure 4.6. Municipal budget allocated to the provision of social services

Total amount (in thousands of EUR) and proportion (%) of municipal budget allocated to the provision of social services, by year
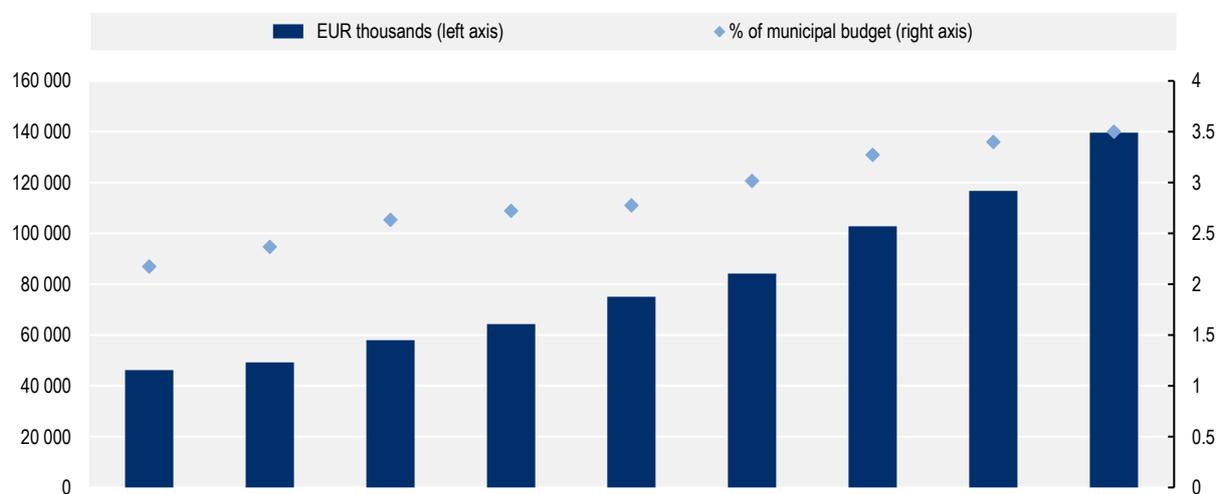
Source: Data provided by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour.

Municipalities consider that funding for social services is overall limited, which directly affects the planning and implementation of social services in their territory. Consequently, prioritisation of certain social services is always necessary at the planning stage, and it has been demonstrated that some municipalities do not have the capacity to arrange certain necessary services in their municipalities, or the ones provided are of lower quality than desired (Radišauskienė and Žalimienė, 2009[11]). To tackle this issue, municipalities often apply for additional funding sources such as European Structural Funds or special nationally budgeted programmes.

According to the OECD's municipality survey, 50 municipalities received funding from European Structural Funds in 2020, for an approximate total amount of EUR 16 600 000. An example of a project co-funded by state grants and European Structural Funds is the project "From Care to Opportunities: Development of Community-Based Services", which is being implemented by the Department of Disability Affairs since April 2020 for an expected duration of three years. The project is aligned with the Action Plan 2014-23 for the transition from institutional care (Box 4.2), and its core objective is to create a system of complex community services that will allow every person with disabilities and their families, as well as every child left without parental care, to receive all necessary assistance in a safe and development-friendly environment.

In addition to state targeted grants and European Structural Funds, around a third of municipalities mention receiving funding from alternative sources. The total amount of funds from these sources reached approximately EUR 4 300 000 in 2020. For example, the aforementioned project "Development of Quality Based Lithuanian Correctional Service System" is being co-funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-21.

4.3. Other public services and programmes

4.3.1. Education services

In Lithuania, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and general education services are mostly delivered through public schools under the control of Lithuanian municipalities, which follow the guidance and policy framework established by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Private sector education providers are also recognised and regulated by national legislation, but its presence within the education system is almost negligible. In the 2020-21 school year there were just 75 private schools providing general education services in Lithuania, compared to 977 public schools (Statistics Lithuania, 2022[10]).

ECEC and general education services are mainly publicly funded by state and municipal budgets (Eurydice, 2022[12]). Prior to 2018, the financing system was based on a per-capita model ("pupil basket"), whereby the central government allocated "pupil basket" funds to municipalities as targeted grants. Each year, the central government established the basic education allocations per pupil, and the total amount of funds per school was dependent on the number of pupils enrolled in the school. In 2018, however, this financing principle was replaced by a mixed "class basket" model. Through this system, funds for the implementation of the general education curriculum are calculated per class group instead than the number of pupils. These funds mainly consist of teachers' salaries and represent around 80% of the "class basket" to schools. In addition, a small percentage of funds is calculated for the provision of textbooks and other education supplies according to the actual number of pupils. The state allocates these amounts as a targeted subsidy for schools. The less than 20% of the "class basket" funds are allocated by municipalities for the organisation and management of the education process, the provision of education aid, and the assessment of learning achievements, among others. This new funding principle aims to encourage city schools to avoid overcrowded classes and give smaller schools financial stability.

ECEC is divided into two phases: the first part is non-obligatory pre-school education (until the year the child turns 6), while the second part consists of a compulsory year of pre-primary education. Attendance to primary and lower secondary education (up to the age of 16) is also compulsory. Access to all compulsory education services is universal, and although upper secondary education is not compulsory, its access is guaranteed by the state as well.

The Lithuanian state also guarantees access to Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes that result in the acquisition of an initial qualification. VET programmes can be undertaken at vocational schools and other VET providers, such as companies or general education schools that have been licensed for that purpose by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Although the offer of VET studies is more varied in larger urban areas, nowadays it is possible to access VET programmes in every municipality. Unlike general education, VET and higher education institutions are funded by the state on the principle of the "pupil basket", whereby the central government provides the institution with a fixed state subsidy that is calculated according to the number of pupils at the beginning of the school year.

Although the early school leaving rate in Lithuania remains one of the lowest in the European Union (5.6% compared to the EU average of 9.9% in 2020), the incidence of school dropout is larger among certain population groups (European Comission, 2021[13]). In 2011, for example, the proportion of early school leavers among pupils with disabilities was more than 10 percentage points higher than for pupils without disabilities. In order to tackle early school leaving rates, Lithuania has developed early warning systems that identify and respond to emerging signs of early leaving. Students who, over the period of a month miss more than half of the lessons prescribed by the compulsory curriculum are registered in the "National Information System on Children's Absenteeism and Pupils' Truancy". This data is subsequently transmitted to the information systems of other institutions providing social and healthcare services in the country. Most VET providers have also developed their own student attendance tracking systems and action plans to improve attendance, and many have established child welfare commissions to work with potential dropouts, their families, and their teachers to tackle early leaving. Other relevant measures to prevent early

school leaving are youth homes for students aged 12 to 17 who have completed a course of treatment for and rehabilitation from dependence on psychotropic substances and alcohol, as well as for those who have behaviour and emotional development challenges and need to improve their mental well-being and motivation for learning.

According to the Law No I-1489 on Education, pupils with special education needs (SEN) can complete their compulsory education in general education schools or in separate special education schools for SEN pupils. For the former option, general schools must however undertake a series of adaptations in terms of facilities, curriculum, teacher training, and additional support for the integration (partial or full) of SEN pupils. This need for adaptation means that a proportion of SEN pupils completes their general education in special schools. According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018[14]), around 89% of pupils with SEN enrolled in primary and lower secondary education attended inclusive education settings in Lithuania in 2018, compared to the EU average of 65% (Figure 4.7).

It is important to highlight however, that this proportion presents considerable variation across the different categories of special education needs.[5] In fact, at the start of the 2020-21 school year, around 40% of pupils with disabilities were enrolled in one of the 43 special schools that exist in the country, rather than inclusive education settings (Figure 4.8). This proportion has remained almost constant in the past six school years, and it raises concerns about the full integration of pupils with SEN into society and potential inequalities in their access to quality schooling.

In order to improve the integration of pupils with disabilities into society, an amendment was introduced in the Law on Education in 2020 with the objective to gradually increase the inclusion of children with SEN in the general education system by September 2024. The aim is to keep special schools only for the most severe cases. Like general education services, VET for SEN students can be delivered according to individual learning plans at general VET institutions or at specialised VET institutions for SEN pupils. In 2019, there were approximately 1 300 pupils with disabilities enrolled in an initial VET programme (Cedefop, 2018[15]).

Figure 4.7. Access to general education services for pupils with special education needs

Proportion (%) of pupils with special education needs enrolled in primary and lower secondary education attending inclusive education settings in 2018
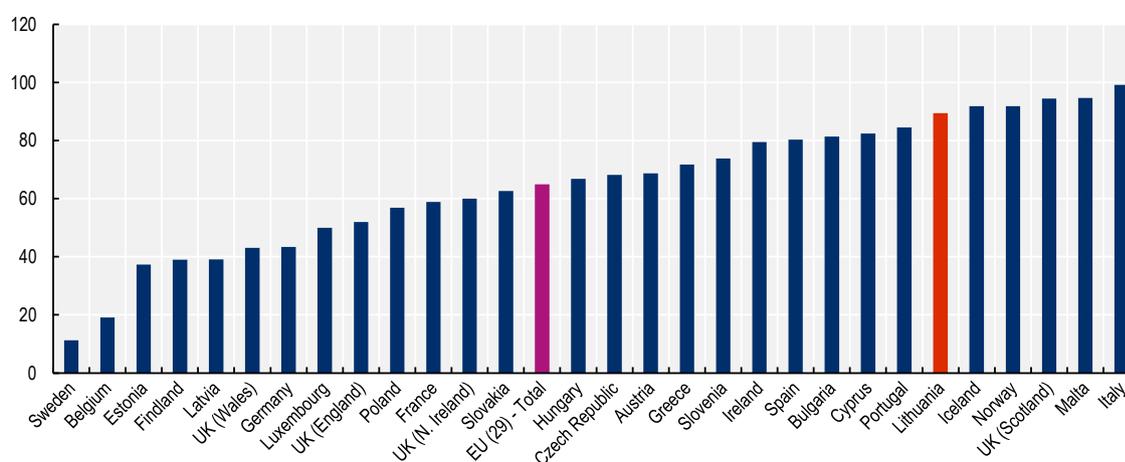
Source: European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2018[14]), *2018 Dataset Cross-Country Report*, https://www.european-agency.org/activities/data/cross-country-reports.

Figure 4.8. Access to general education services for pupils with disabilities

Number of pupils with disabilities enrolled in primary and lower secondary education in Lithuania per type of school, by year
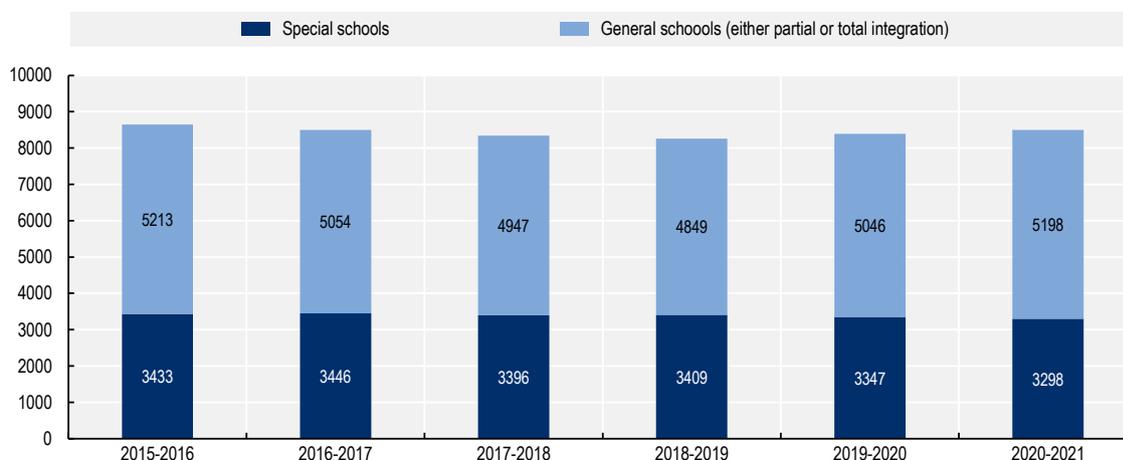
Source: Lithuania Education Management Information System (ŠVIS) (2021[16]), General education statistics, http://svis.emokykla.lt/bendrasis-ugdymas-2/.

Although no separate general education services are exclusively targeted to young care leavers, access to general education services is guaranteed for all Lithuanian adults who have not completed their education. These education programmes can be accessed through one of the 14 adult general education schools available in the country, or at general education schools that offer special classes for adults. These types of services provide a further opportunity for adult people to complete their general education and develop their general competences, which promotes their resilience and other positive outcomes, especially in the case of the most vulnerable groups. For example, an analysis of data from the Swedish national register showed that in comparison with young people in the general population, care leavers who did poorly at school had a 6- to 11-fold risk for suicide attempts, substance abuse and criminality from age 20 and a 10-fold excess risk for welfare dependency at age 25 (Berlin, Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011[17]). For young care leavers, who can often be at greater risk of social isolation, school can also provide opportunities to make friends, find natural mentors and build long-lasting social networks (Gilligan and Arnau-Sabatés, 2017[18]).

In the case of prisoners, the provision of general education and VET services is regulated in the Procedure for the Organisation of General Education and Vocational Training of the Detained and Convicted, which was approved in 2016. According to the ruling, the general education of prisoners under the age of 16 must be guaranteed under all circumstances. In the case of prisoners over 16 years of age who wish to attend school, a written request and official approval is necessary.

4.3.2. Employment services

The Lithuanian PES is responsible for the delivery of active labour market policies (ALMPs) in Lithuania. A comprehensive list of the existing ALMPs is defined in the national Law No XII-2470 on Employment. There is at least one local PES office in each municipality, and all of them have the same catalogue of services.

ALMPs can be divided into two categories: labour market services (or ALMP services) and employment support services (or ALMP measures). The former category is regulated in section four of the Law on Employment, and it includes the registration of job opportunities and job seekers, information and

counselling services, individual assessment of employment opportunities and planning of activities, and employment mediation services. ALMP measures, on the other hand, refer to programmes for the promotion of employment. ALMP measures are regulated on section six of the Law on Employment and described in more detail in Box 4.3.

Since 2019, the Law on Employment includes a list of vulnerable groups of people who are entitled to receiving additional support services for their integration in the labour market. These targeted groups include, among others, disabled people of working age, unemployed persons without any professional qualification, long-term unemployed people under 25 years of age, unemployed people under 29 years of age, and unemployed people older than 50 years of age. As such, people of working age with assessed disabilities that limit their capacity to work and unemployed youth are giving priority to benefit from certain unemployment services, but as of today, no dedicated programmes or measures exist for people leaving prison and young people leaving care.

The Law on Employment implemented since 2017 aims to make ALMPs more accessible and meet the labour market needs better, particularly by strengthening and modernising training programmes for jobseekers. However, according to the OECD report evaluating ALMPs in Lithuania (OECD, forthcoming[19]), the coverage of ALMPs has remained low and focused on employment incentives, with the exception of significant additional allocations for the employment maintenance scheme during the COVID-19 crisis. The employment incentives supporting labour market integration of vulnerable groups more generally have been evaluated to have positive impact on the labour market outcomes of the participants. However, the rather well-funded scheme targeting people with disabilities via employment in social enterprises has not been recently evaluated and the stakeholders (policy makers and the social partners alike) believe that this scheme does not help the target group sufficiently. In addition, Lithuania allocates only marginal resources for sheltered and supported employment and rehabilitation, which could be essential for the most vulnerable groups, and particularly people with disabilities, to help them integrate into the labour market (OECD, 2021[20]).

In international comparison, Lithuania spent less than half of the average of OECD countries on ALMPs in 2019 (0.21% versus 0.45% of GDP), and the difference in ALMP coverage was even more drastic (1% of labour force participated in ALMPs in Lithuania but 5% in the OECD) (Figure 4.9). Furthermore, the ALMPs in Lithuania are mostly financed via the European Social Fund resources, which is not necessarily ensuring sufficient flexibility to meet the changing labour market needs and is not sustainable in the long term (OECD, forthcoming[19]).

Box 4.3. Active Labour Market Policy measures

Active labour market policy measures are aimed at assisting job seekers in increasing their employment opportunities and achieving the balance between labour supply and demand, and include learning support, mobility support, supported employment, and support for job creation.

Learning support services are provided to help unemployed people restore, acquire, or improve their qualifications and skills. Learning support includes vocational training, apprenticeships, and other forms of advanced training.

Since 2012, the PES has funded vocational training for all unemployed people (and since 2017 for certain employed people) through a voucher system that allows jobseekers access training at vocational education and training (VET) providers approved the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. After the completion of the training programme, the unemployed person undertakes to work in the position offered by the either the local PES or the employer for at least six months, or start their own business (Cedefop, 2018[15]).

Furthermore, employment under an apprenticeship employment contract may be organised for those who take part in vocational training. In such cases, the new Employment Law approved in 2017 stipulates that the employer is responsible for ensuring that the apprentice acquires the learning outcomes defined in the VET programme. Employers are compensated 40% of the pay specified in the contract.

Support for local mobility commuting is provided to registered unemployed people who found a job in geographical areas other than their current place of residence, as well as to those who incur in travel expenses for their participation in counselling sessions organised by the PES.

Supported employment measures include subsidised employment and support for the acquisition of work skills. Subsidised employment consists of wage subsidies paid to employers hiring certain groups of people registered in the PES. These targeted groups include, among others, disabled people of working age, unemployed persons without any professional qualification, long-term unemployed people under 25 years of age, unemployed people under 29 years of age, and unemployed people older than 50 years of age. Similarly, support for the acquisition of work skills consists of wage subsidies paid to employees hiring people who are taking part or have completed vocational training, or unemployed individuals who start working on a job related to their acquired qualification for the first time. The length of the support can be extended up to 12 months.

Measures to incentivise job creation include subsidising the creation or adaptation of jobs for people with disabilities, assisting with the implementation of local employment initiative projects, and subsidising self-employment initiatives led by those preferential groups also targeted by supported employment measures.

Figure 4.9. Public expenditure and participants stock for active labour market policies

Panel A: Public expenditure on active labour market policies, 2019 (or latest available year)
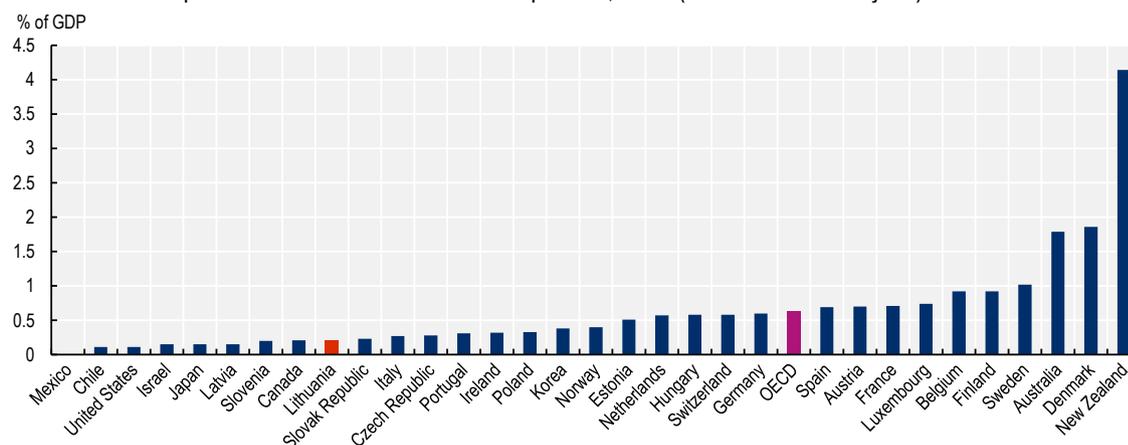
Panel B: Participant stocks for active labour market measures, 2019 (or latest available year)
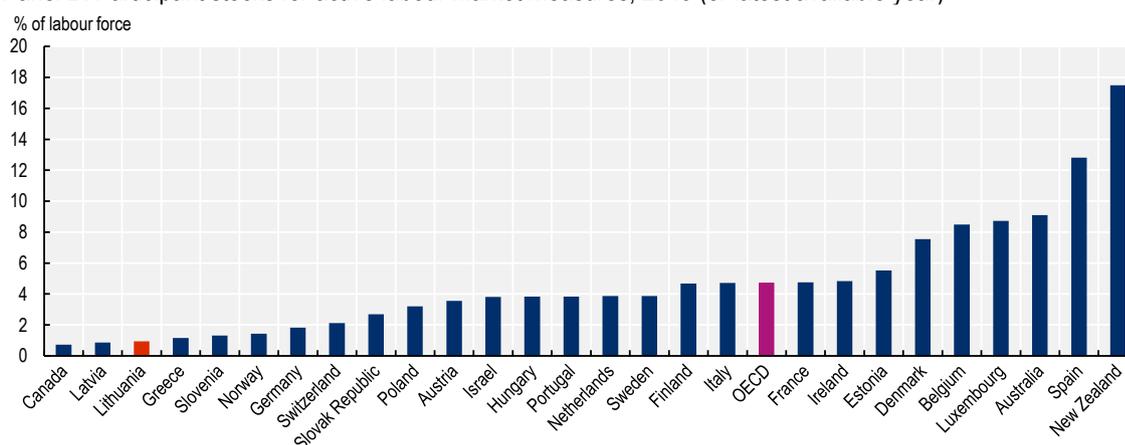
Note: OECD average is an unweighted average. Panel A includes the following services and measures: Public Employment Services and administration, training, employment incentives, sheltered and supported employment and rehabilitation, direct job creation, and start-up incentives. Panel B, on the other hand, does not include Public Employment Services and administration.
Source: *OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics database,* https://doi.org/10.1787/data-00312-en.

4.3.3. Healthcare services

In the late 1990s, Lithuania moved away from a health system mainly funded through state and local budgets to one funded by the National Health Insurance Fund (OECD, 2018[21])Through this system, employed residents must pay a compulsory health insurance contribution, while the state is responsible for covering the contributions of other groups, resulting in a universal coverage system. It is estimated that the other groups account for about 60% of the Lithuanian population and include children, the elderly, people with disabilities, women on pregnancy and maternity leave, individuals registered with public employment services, and other individuals receiving social assistance.

The compulsory health insurance is a guarantee for all insured that, when needed, their healthcare expenses will be compensated from the budget of the National Health Insurance Fund, irrespective of the contributions paid by the specific insured individual. Compulsory health insurance provides a standard benefits package for all beneficiaries. As a result, access to healthcare services is widely universal and

compares well with the OECD average in terms of coverage for outpatient and inpatient care (Figure 4.10, Panel A).

Figure 4.10. Access to healthcare services

A. Government and compulsory insurance coverage
% of total paid, 2018 or latest year

B. Out-of-pocket payments as a share of total expenditure, by function
%, 2018 or latest year
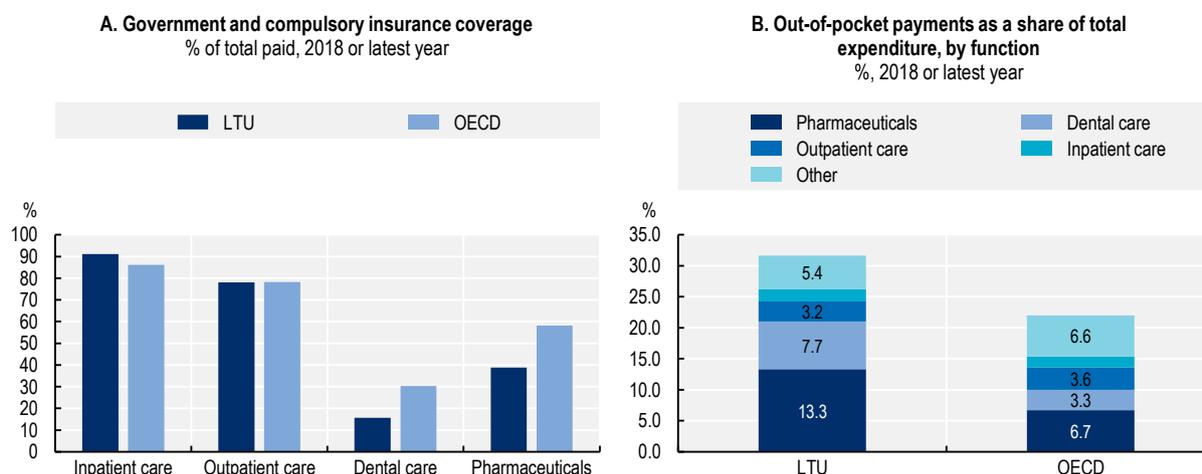
Source: OECD Health Statistics database; and EU-SILC.

Despite the large coverage for inpatient and outpatient care, the coverage for dental care and pharmaceuticals is relatively low: 16% and 39% of the population, respectively. The lower public coverage of dental care and pharmaceuticals translates into a comparatively larger share of healthcare costs being born by patients. Indeed, out-of-pocket payments represented around a third of health spending in Lithuania in 2018, well above the OECD average (Figure 4.10, Panel B). This high level of out-of-pocket disbursements are likely to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups and lead to significant inequalities in access to healthcare services, and therefore, in health outcomes.

Reforms have been introduced in the past years to improve the availability and accessibility of healthcare services for the most vulnerable groups. Since July 2020, those aged 75 and over, low-income pensioners, and people with disabilities are exempted from co-payments for pharmaceutical and medical expenses. Furthermore, children, pensioners and people with disabilities are also granted access to free dental services. The Lithuania Health Programme 2014-25 also refers to the development of a monitoring system of health inequalities aimed to target at-risk population and promote an integrated health policy approach involving health, education, and social institutions. The programme describes specific actions targeted at municipalities with the highest rate of premature mortality and population at-risk, and since 2014, public healthcare activities have been promoted in pre-school education, general education, and VET programmes.

Primary-level (outpatient) healthcare services for prisoners are provided in penitentiary institutions by healthcare professionals employed there. Secondary-level healthcare services are provided at the Central Prison Hospital or at public healthcare centres, while tertiary-level services are exclusively accessible at public healthcare centres. Although primary healthcare services are available in all penitentiary institutions in the country, inmates tend to suffer from substandard healthcare provision. Indeed, a visit to Lithuanian prisons undertaken by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2018 demonstrated that healthcare teams in most Lithuanian prisons were understaffed (Council of Europe, 2019[22]). This situation impeded to ensure optimum healthcare for prisoners, and to observe the general principle of the equivalence of healthcare in prison with that in the wider community. The visit also confirmed that prisoners were at high risk of becoming drug dependent

and contracting HIV and hepatitis C while in prison, due to the widespread presence of drugs in the facilities and the common practice of sharing injecting equipment.

This lower quality of healthcare in penitentiary institutions is problematic, as it deteriorates the health of the inmates (Brinkley-Rubinstein, 2013[23]; Massoglia, 2008[24]) and makes them more likely to have worse socio-economic outcomes (Dyb, 2009[25]; Western, Kling and Weiman, 2001[26]) as well as health outcomes (Cutcher et al., 2014[27]; Kinner, 2006[28]) when they return to the community. Regarding the latter, research shows that the incidences of substance dependence, mental illness, and communicable disease, including sexually transmitted infections, hepatitis, and HIV, are particularly high among people leaving prison, making it essential to facilitate their access to healthcare services after their release (Thomas et al., 2015[29]).

4.4. Conclusion

The provision of social services in Lithuania relies heavily on the Catalogue of social services, which sets out a list of services that can be provided in the country and clearly defines what each service must consist of, who can get access to it, and under which conditions. Theoretically, the Catalogue is comprehensive although not exhaustive, and Lithuanian municipalities are free to decide on the provision of additional services outside of the Catalogue. In practice, however, this is not common practice and municipalities do not often deviate from the pre-existing list of services. This practice can be problematic because the list of social services enumerated in the Catalogue has hardly changed since it was approved in 2006, which could trigger gaps in service provision when new societal needs arise.

In line with the Catalogue, Lithuanian municipalities can provide both "general" social services, as well as "special" services to those vulnerable individuals and families who present needs that are more acute. Special services can be further disaggregated into social assistance and care services. Overall, the availability of social services is highly polarised across Lithuanian municipalities. For example, while almost one-third of municipalities offer all general social services included in the Catalogue, most of the remaining municipalities offer less than half of the general services listed there. Similarly, only 23% of municipalities offer all social assistance services available in the Catalogue.

Each of the social services described in the Catalogue is linked to a list of vulnerable groups who are entitled to benefit from that service. While children and adults with disabilities have always been clearly defined as specific target groups for most social services in the Catalogue, young care leavers and people leaving prison did not constitute specific target groups per se. Instead, they could, depending on the evaluation by the social worker, fall under the beneficiary categories of "individuals and families at social risk" or "young people with fewer opportunities". Since November 2021, however, a new "leaving care" service was included in the Catalogue, and young care leavers are clearly defined as a beneficiary group for this service. The "leaving care" service consists of a set of interrelated measures provided to help young people leaving care settings in adapting to their social environment and in developing their social skills and ability to deal with potential challenges.

Statistics on the number of recipients of social services is spread across different sources, with the two most important ones being the public reports generated by the reporting tool of the Social Protection Information System (commonly known as the SPIS showcases) and the national survey of social services. Available statistics on the number of social service users is, however, neither comprehensive nor accurate, which can hinder the planning and implementation of social services in the country. Furthermore, municipalities do not have detailed and up to date information on the total population who meet the criteria to benefit from certain social services but are not currently making use of them (i.e. target population). This discrepancy means that many decisions on the development of social services are made without information on the real needs for social services, which can lead to exclusion errors in the targeting process.

According to the Law on Social Services, both private and public institutions can provide social services in Lithuania, and individuals can choose freely among all accredited or licensed service providers. Nevertheless, a free market of social services providers is not yet the reality, and state and municipal institutions are the predominant providers of social services in the country. Furthermore, prices for social services are not officially regulated, which makes self-payment of social services a key determinant on the individual's choice of service provider.

Financing of social services in Lithuania is a shared responsibility of the municipalities, the central government, and the beneficiary. Although the share of municipal budget allocated to the provision of social services has modestly increased in the past decade, only 3.5% of the total municipal budget was devoted to social services in 2020. Municipalities consider that funding for social services is overall limited, which directly affects the planning and implementation of social services in their territory. To tackle this issue, municipalities often apply for additional funding sources such as European Structural Funds or special nationally budgeted programmes.

In addition to social services, vulnerable groups in Lithuania can also benefit from other forms of public support, including education, employment, and health services.

With respect to education, the Lithuanian state guarantees universal access to all compulsory education services, as well as upper secondary and Vocational Education and Training programmes that result in the acquisition of an initial qualification. Pupils with disabilities can complete general education and VET studies in mainstream schools or in separate special education schools, although an amendment was introduced in the Law on Education in 2020 to promote the inclusion of children with special education needs in the general education system by September 2024. Although no separate education services are exclusively targeted to young care leavers, access to general education services is guaranteed for all Lithuanian adults who have not completed their education. General education of prisoners under the age of 16 is also guaranteed under all circumstances.

The Lithuanian Public Employment Service is responsible for the delivery of active labour market policies in the country. There is at least one local office in each municipality, and all of them have the same catalogue of services, regulated by the Law of Employment. Since 2019, this law includes a list of vulnerable groups of people who are entitled to receiving additional support services for their integration in the labour market. These targeted groups include, among others, disabled people of working age, unemployed persons without any professional qualification, long-term unemployed people under 25 years of age, unemployed people under 29 years of age, and unemployed people older than 50 years of age. As of today, no dedicated programmes or measures exist for people leaving prison and young people leaving care.

Finally, access to healthcare services in Lithuania is widely universal and compares well with the OECD average in terms of coverage for outpatient and inpatient care. Nevertheless, the coverage for pharmaceuticals and dental care is still relatively low and translates into a comparatively larger share of healthcare costs being born by patients. In order to improve the availability and accessibility of healthcare services for the most vulnerable groups, a series of reforms have been introduced in the past years. Since July 2020, those aged 75 and over, low-income pensioners, and people with disabilities are exempted from co-payments for pharmaceutical and medical expenses. Furthermore, children, pensioners and people with disabilities are also granted access to free dental services. Although primary healthcare services are available in all penitentiary institutions in the country, inmates tend to suffer from substandard healthcare provision.

Recommendations for improving social service design

- Elaborate a detailed methodology and related guidance that municipalities can use to systematically assess the need for social services in their territories.
- Conduct consultations with key stakeholders across the national government, municipalities, NGOs and service users to better understand the evolving needs of target groups, and to obtain a comprehensive and realistic assessment of the population needs in their territories.
- Systematically collect individual and household level data on social service users to monitor not only the number of users of different services but also other relevant information such as the intensity/frequency of usage and the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the user.
- Undertake/commission new research projects to obtain information on the size of the target population for different social services, that is, people who meet the criteria to benefit from those services but are not currently making use of them, to assess whether more and/or new services are required.
- Regularly revisit the Catalogue of Social Services to improve existing services and include new ones if considered necessary.

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Notes

[1] It is important to note here that at the time of writing this report, the Catalogue exclusively differentiated between "general" and "special" social services. In June 2022, a new category of "preventive" social services was included in the Catalogue. These types of social services entered into force on 1 July 2022, and are thus not covered in this report.

[2] http://vitrinos.spis.lt:8080/

[3] https://www.stat.gov.lt/en

[4] According to the Law on Public Establishments, a public institution is a public legal entity with limited liability, the aim of which is to satisfy public interests by implementing educational, environmental, cultural, social or legal assistance activities, as well as other activities that are beneficial to society. Stakeholders of a public institution can be natural and legal persons, the state, municipalities, and other entities that do not seek benefit to obtain benefit from the activities of the institution.

[5] Pupils with SEN are divided into three separate groups: i) pupils with disabilities (mental, vision, hearing, cochlear implants, motion and positional, neurological, varied developmental disorders, deaf, and complex and other disabilities); ii) pupils with difficulties (learning disorders, behavioural and/or emotional, impaired speech and language, and complex and other disorders); and iii) pupils with disadvantages in learning (e.g. learning a second language or living in another cultural/linguistic environment, suffering from the adverse effects of environmental factors or experiencing emotional).

5 The perspective of service users and those who work with them in public service provision in Lithuania

To ensure personalised services meet the needs of those who require them, it is important to take a person-centred approach to service design and delivery. This chapter complements the service mapping exercise described in Chapter 4 and provides a perspective of service users and those who work with them on what has or is working well as well as the challenges. Focus group discussions in three different locations in Lithuania revealed that people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care all face significant challenges, some unique, many the same, in receiving the supports and services they need to live the lives they want to live. While many improvements have been made in recent years, there is more that can be done. Future improvements were suggested during the discussions, many of which align with the recommendations outlined in the other chapters of this report.

5.1. Introduction

This chapter describes how service users and those who work with them – non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social workers, and municipality representatives – experience public service provision in Lithuania. The information collected during workshop discussions with people with disabilities, people leaving prison and young people leaving care in three locations complements the service mapping exercise described in Chapter 4, which outlines the different types of public services available for these groups. After describing the challenges, successful experiences and elements of the current system that are working well, the chapter concludes with insights about how to improve the delivery and quality of services based on the views of those who participated in the focus groups.

5.1.1. Research methodology

A half-day focus group was held for each of the three groups on a separate date and in a different location: the focus group for people with disabilities was held in Marijampolė on 24 May, for ex-prisoners in the Kaunas region on 25 May, and for young care leavers in Švenčionys on 26 May.

Focus group participants included service users and relevant service providers, i.e. non-governmental organisations (NGOs), social workers, and municipality representatives who work with the three groups of service users. Participants were invited based on their relevant experience and knowledge; their views were not intended to be representative of the stakeholder group of which they are a part. Participant numbers for each focus group are set out in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Participants across focus group discussions

Stakeholder group	Marijampolė – People with disabilities	Kaunas region – Ex-prisoners	Švenčionys – Young care leavers
Service users	6 (5 from Marijampolė, 1 from Švenčionys)	6 (All from Kaunas region)	4 (All from Švenčionys)
NGOs	6 (All from Marijampolė)	7 (6 from Kaunas region, 1 from Marijampolė)	2 (1 from Švenčionys, 1 from Kaunas region)
Social workers	5 (All from Marijampolė)	6 (All from Kaunas region)	6 (All from Švenčionys)
Municipality representatives	8 (2 from Kaunas region, 2 from Švenčionys, 4 from Marijampolė)	4 (2 from Kaunas region, 1 from Marijampolė, 1 from Švenčionys)	8 (2 from Kaunas region, 6 from Švenčionys)

The focus groups were held in person and the discussions were moderated by a professional moderator in accordance with an OECD discussion guide (attached as Annex 5.A.). The structure of the three focus groups was the same. At separate tables, each stakeholder group first discussed challenges relating to the provision of services for the relevant group before identifying successful experiences and elements of the current system they believe work well. Suggestions for improvements were made throughout the discussions. This part of the session lasted two hours. Following the individual table discussions, participants gathered for a joint debrief (one hour) where they presented the conclusions of their table and commented on the views of other groups.

The discussions took place in Lithuanian and the transcripts were translated for this report.

5.2. People with disabilities

5.2.1. Challenges experienced with service delivery

This section discusses the challenges experienced by people with disabilities accessing appropriate services starting with general observations made by all four stakeholder groups before moving to specific

challenges raised by each group. Supporting quotes from participants are included to help illustrate key points.

Mobility and adaptation of the environment for people with movement-related disabilities was widely discussed by all participants (which may reflect the specific backgrounds of the people in the room and their experiences of disability). There was general agreement that the situation is gradually improving with solutions benefiting not only people with disabilities but also parents with small children and older people with mobility issues. However, mobility remains problematic with participants pointing to existing challenges both in terms of the environment and service provision. For example, a service may exist but be very difficult to access or be implemented without paying attention to the real needs of service users (such as very steep slopes or curbs in parking lots for the disabled). Access to workplace and/or training institutions was also raised.

Participants observed there are many services provided by different institutions. For some disability groups there are so many services available that service users can choose a preferred provider. However, the information made available about services is not always adequate. Existing information channels are not always the most appropriate, the conditions to be met for accessing some services are not always clear, and there are a lot of formalities and paperwork required to access services. For example, in some cases part of the service cost may be covered nationally, another part covered by the municipality and the rest by the user. The distribution is not always clear and varies across services. In addition, issues are exacerbated because information cannot be shared across different institutions due to data protection regulations.

Lack of co-operation across institutions was also highlighted as a key problem by all four stakeholder groups. There was a sense of duplication of services and functions and not enough sharing of information. All participants believe there is a real need to consolidate existing services, and tailor them to the service user, rather than designing them based on the views of the institutions providing the funding. Service consolidation and tailoring could simplify outreach, reduce duplication, and make service provision more transparent and effective to plan (i.e. it would become apparent which services do not work and which are needed more). Furthermore, it would make clearer to service users what services are available to them.

Appropriately qualified staff with the ability to identify what services someone needs (e.g. personal assistance, or psychological support) was identified as being crucial for providing better targeted support and for improving service provision. There was a view that services that simply assist rather than empower service users are still dominant, while support should be oriented to helping service users better integrate into society. Psychological services and other supports that help service users become as independent as possible should be promoted, however, people's attitudes and behaviours toward people with disabilities continue to make fuller integration difficult.

Service users

Overall, service users viewed the provision of services positively, believing they should be content with the services they have access to rather than focusing on what they do not have. The main challenges service users identified related to socialisation, improving their quality of life, and being mobile, that is, those things that help them participate more fully in society and overcome exclusion rather than those things that focus them on their disability. It is important to note that most of the service users who participated in the focus group discussion had a mobility disability, one person had a physical disability, and one person had an oncological illness.

Accessibility

One of the most frequently mentioned issues during the discussion was the lack of disabled-friendly infrastructure, in cities but particularly in rural areas. Although participants said the situation is improving, they noted that in some cases the solutions are superficial.

Challenges regarding car parking were common. People with disabilities who drive themselves would like to see more parking spaces made available, particularly at public institutions, as well as improvements made to the car parking environment, for example, so that they can access a parking space when in a wheelchair. Service users also noted that parking spaces reserved for people with mobility issues are often occupied by other people.

> *Even if access to the municipality exists, reserved spaces in the car park are not always present. In addition, available spaces are not always suitable, as you do not only have to park your car, but you also need to be able to leave the car park with your wheelchair – people do not think about the need to adapt the environment as well. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

Service users believe that while public and government institutions are making efforts to adapt the environment for people with limited mobility, they would like to see these efforts extended to private institutions and public areas; they want to be able to participate fully in society, visit cafes and bars and move around more safely in pedestrian areas.

> *We want to go to a concert or a bar in the evening, but the ride service used to be only available until 6 PM. They have now extended it until 8 PM, which is very convenient, although I would like it to be available later. (Service user, Marijampolė)*
>
> *Even if you can sit on the terrace of a bar during summer because the door is too narrow to get in, you cannot go to the lavatory. Of course, you cannot force them to adapt but I wish they would think about us too. (Service user, Marijampolė)*
>
> *There is a serious lack of signage for people with visual impairment. Even with a wheelchair, you cannot go anywhere. (Service user, Marijampolė)*
>
> *It was very good to be able to study remotely, I hardly missed anything. I was able to participate like everyone else and I did not have to go anywhere or ask for a lift. It is a pity that when classroom teaching resumed, there was no opportunity to continue virtual participation, even if only partially. I could have been more involved. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

The difficulty of accessing workplaces and/or training institutions was raised and said to inhibit the desire to seek any kind of work or training. Difficult access to health services was also mentioned; registration with doctors is particularly complicated (with in-person registration no longer available, it is very difficult to get through on the phone to health facilities to make an appointment with the right specialist). While it was acknowledged this is a general problem, it is particularly important for people with disabilities, as they visit doctors more often. Furthermore, participants highlighted that healthcare facilities tend to be poorly adapted for people with reduced mobility, for example, doctors needing to consult patients in rooms not necessarily intended for that purpose. In hospitals particularly, this situation introduces additional accessibility difficulties.

Service users also said they lack access to cultural and other social events that would help them to get out of the home, where they could socialise with other people and not be alone and isolated. Suggestions for improving opportunities for socialisation included possible educational trips around Lithuania, concerts, and events.

Lack of other opportunities

All service user participants viewed their needs as being perceived in a very physiological way. However, their disability can also prevent them from being financially independent and deprive them of other opportunities not directly related to their specific disability, which requires a more holistic approach to the supports and services they need.

Some service users pointed out that those who have not been disabled from birth often face a drastic change in their quality of life when their circumstances change. The time needed for dealing with, in some cases illness or accident and treatment, the incapacity to work (fully or partially) and related changes in income levels require some people to have to restructure their lives in a significant way.

> *Before the illness, we were just like everyone else – working and able to take care of ourselves, but then things change a lot, and you need to readjust. It is not easy, there is a lot of tension. We want to relax, to take a break from the diagnosis, but we are only entitled to treatment and rehabilitation services. And I want to have a massage or sit in the salt room, although I do not have enough money. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

> *Some cultural services should be free for us, to compensate for the lost income and to avoid feeling left behind. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

Poor institutional co-operation and lack of adequate information

Poor co-operation between institutions was not raised by service users at first and was only discussed when raised by the moderator (it was a much more important problem for NGOs and municipal representatives, see following sections). Service users observed that information about services is often disorganised. Different institutions sometimes do not know what services they offer to a particular service user and/or what services a service user may be missing out on. Different institutions often offer overlapping services, and service users are not aware of what services they are entitled to.

> *They offered me rehabilitation, which I accepted, but then another institution offers it again. I told the institution that I had been there before, but they cannot see it in their system. I am offered twice the same service, while there are other services that I would like to receive but they are not offered because there is not enough money. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

NGO representatives

NGO representatives identified that the main problem in service provision for people with disabilities is the lack of co-operation between institutions, which leads to difficulties in accessing and understanding information and obtaining or providing services. Secondly, NGO representatives viewed bureaucracy as a barrier to providing more services and reaching more service users. NGOs believe they are used to being flexible and adapting to changing situations. They would like to see other institutions be as flexible and take a less formal approach to service delivery, incorporate more creativity, avoid bureaucracy and provide a wider variety of services.

NGOs view stigma as a systemic problem that requires the long-term and consistent involvement of everyone, including service providers, service users and other organisations to address. NGO representatives were the only group to observe that service providers, as well as service users can experience stigma, making it difficult to attract service users to their services.

Poor institutional co-operation and lack of adequate information

Lack of co-operation across institutions was highlighted as a key problem by all service provider groups but particularly by NGOs. There is a sense that services and functions are duplicated, and that there is a lack of information provided about changes to service provision and legislation, for example. Everybody "reinvents their own wheel".

> *Sometimes you cannot catch up – you hear about one problem from one institution, and about solutions from another. Moreover, our client does not find or understand that information at all. You end up drowning in that pile of information. You cannot even ask them to look it up themselves because you know they will not find it. If they do find it, not all professionals understand that bureaucratic language. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

Lack of co-operation between institutions also leads to poor information about services being available to service users. Since different institutions offer different services, service users do not know exactly which institution is providing which services on the one hand, and service providers do not know what services a person is already receiving or what services they need on the other hand. As a result, a service user could receive services they do not need, including situations where staff from different institutions offer the same services, or no services at all.

NGO representatives observed that it is difficult for them and their clients to understand what documentation is needed, for which authorities, or how requests must be addressed. Emphasis was placed on the misunderstanding between the Health and Social systems (e.g. what kind of illness code a doctor must use for a service user to be able to receive another service and/or what kind of prescription the doctor must issue to their patient to get to the right person and to receive the service needed). The fact that procedures constantly change and need to be re-explained was also raised as a problem.

This situation is thought to lead to an inefficient use of resources, with staff spending a lot of time on paperwork rather than with the people they are meant to serve. NGO representatives believe that when service users (or their representatives) try to find their way around the system, they often get frustrated, lost, and end up not using a service at all.

Excessive bureaucracy

The information that is provided about services, its format and language, was described as bureaucratic and complicated by all NGO representatives. The legal language of some documents can be particularly difficult for older people or people with mental disabilities.

> *It seems like a paragraph has been taken out of the legal document and inserted directly. And make of it what you will – what you can do and who can or cannot use the service. We do not have a legal background, and not everybody can consult a lawyer. If you interpret freely, then it is your responsibility. We have enough responsibilities as it is. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

NGO participants also identified excessive documentation as a problem, which they believe is created by too much bureaucracy and poor institutional co-operation. Service users must fill in many different forms and collect various certificates from different institutions to be able to access public services. Most of these certificates exist in digital form, but unfortunately, it is often necessary to collect them physically.

> *There is a lot of travelling around the city from institution to institution to collect when everything could be in one system, or the information could be accessed by a responsible person who could collect it all from the archives. People get lost, they do not always get it right, and they do not always understand what they need. It is a shame to have such complicated processes nowadays when everything is computerised. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

An excessive amount of documentation is also required to receive funding. NGOs feel they are constantly having to take part in competitions and write proposals to obtain funding, which can take a very long time to do, and services are often needed immediately.

> *We spend a lot of time filling in the paperwork, and then you receive the funding after 1.5 years. That would give us more time for the people and would allow us to have more time to use money in a targeted way. The state knows what we do, and sees our reports, it could be simpler. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

It is not only the project application process that is complex, but also during the execution of projects, no matter how large or small, the documentation and bureaucracy is very complex, time consuming and demanding.

Stigma

Stigma was also raised as an important issue. While other groups talked about stigma as a problem faced by service users, NGO representatives also talked about stigmatisation in relation to their services, for example, there is a perception that care services are a "beggar's bowl". NGO representatives said it can be difficult to attract service users (e.g. potential service users choose not to take up a service because they do not want it to be noticed by their neighbours) or they find it difficult to promote their services (e.g. negative comments on Facebook about why they are posting pictures of people with disabilities etc.). The issue of stigma also came up in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities in education or employment, with NGO representatives stating that negative attitudes from those around them make engagement in education or employment more difficult.

Other access barriers

In addition to the key issues outlined above, NGO representatives discussed a range of mobility problems faced by people with disabilities. A barrier to greater inclusion of children and young people with disabilities in schooling is a shortage of both specialists and additional help (special educators and teacher aids for example). In addition, there is a lack of clear methodological tools and common procedures for the integration of people with disabilities into the general education system. NGOs raised the issue of employment of people with severe mobility or other disabilities. For people who are physically unable to leave their homes there is a lack of so-called "mobile occupation" services, where service providers can deliver occupational activities in a service user's home.

Social workers

Many social workers who participated in the focus group discussion work with people they described as having complex disabilities, that is people with a mental disability as well another disability such as mobility issues.

Lack of appropriate training

Social workers believe they often lack the professional skills and necessary knowledge to offer the best support to the people they work with. They identified the need for continuous professional development as a key factor in the effective delivery of services, as it directly affects the quality of the services they provide. Social workers feel they are often required to act as specialists because there are simply not enough specialists who are willing to work for low salaries.

Social workers view the content of the training available to them to be of a very poor standard, moreover it focuses too much on more formal events. There is a particular lack of training for social worker assistants.

> *Qualification improvement is necessary, but the training is very poor, repetitive, and more focused on formal certification when you get your diploma. It takes a lot of psychological knowledge, you cannot always send someone to a psychologist, sometimes you just must resolve situations – and not all of us know how to do that. We also need to improve. It is difficult to get quality training. Without it, we cannot provide a good service. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

Also highlighted was that training that is currently available is often generic or based on international examples or experiences, which is difficult to put into practice in the Lithuanian context. It is very important to get training for social workers that is implementable or dedicated to target audiences (e.g. specifically adapted methodologies or practices for people with intellectual disabilities).

Poor quality of services

The second major problem, according to social workers, is the lack of quality services (services for people with mental disabilities or complex disabilities were highlighted). Social workers believe there is a wide variety of services available, perhaps too many, with many different organisations providing services. Social workers feel a duty to advise the service users they work with, but do not always feel they can do this well because the system is confusing and there are so many services.

> *We see that not everything is used because a person does not know that they are entitled to it, and the social worker does not offer it because they have no idea the person does not know. The system is very confusing system – we are barely getting by. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

Multiple services can also lead to competition between service providers with the service user becoming an instrument in that competition. There is also a high degree of formalisation and control over the provision of services (e.g. monitoring how many clients attend, how many hours of sessions are held, etc.). As a result, service providers often focus less on the effectiveness of the service and more on its formal implementation.

Current public procurement processes and standards also impact negatively on the quality of services. Social workers believe service provision tenders are often won by unqualified suppliers, and services are being implemented for the sake of the award, rather than for the recipient's benefit. Procurement procedures are not sufficiently regulated, and services are monitored from a bureaucratic process viewpoint, without assessing whether they are benefiting the service user.

> *Our clients cannot always stand up for themselves, so they receive services very formally. They will not complain. If parents or children stand up for themselves, then they have more finances. It is a shame when people do not get what they are entitled to and are thus disadvantaged. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

Social workers were more critical of the quality of services than other stakeholder groups. They observed that service users are less likely to be critical and officials are too distant from the reality of the situation. Social workers believe establishing common quality standards could help to improve quality.

> *There are all sorts of occupational therapies that are not in high demand – like beading for men. I do not want to sound sexist, but not many users want them. On the other hand, there are lack of interesting and necessary ones, dominating these created for the formality's sake. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

> *Social workers offer a lot of services, but users do not come. And then they wonder why – some have no idea, but some are not interested. Disabled people are not a "waste bin" to be offered things that others do not need. It is a question of attitude – you must try to create a good service. Maybe it does not have to be aimed just at a disabled person, maybe it just has to be tailored to them, as well as other people from the city. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

Social workers like NGO representatives believe the services provided by different service providers often overlap with service users receiving services that are not always appropriate or necessary. A smaller number of service providers would be better, with specific services targeted and tailored to meet the needs of specific groups. In addition, too many providers and services can confuse clients, who feel obliged to be involved in everything, or who simply do not understand where to get what services from.

Stigma

The negative perception of service users was identified as the third problem to be addressed. As social workers often mediate or accompany people with disabilities to different institutions, they notice that stigma occurs across a wide range of institutions, ranging from medical facilities to banks. They observe that stigma is particularly prevalent when it comes to recruitment. The most common problem is the lack of job opportunities for people with disabilities, due in large part to employers often being afraid to employ people with disabilities because they do not know what to expect, what to ask for, and how to communicate with

them (e.g. if they have a hearing impairment). To solve this problem, social workers consider it necessary to disseminate good practice information about the recruitment of people with disabilities and invest more effort in adapting environments where necessary, so people with disabilities are more integrated and visible in the labour market.

Municipality representatives

One of the greatest challenges identified by municipal representatives is documentation, i.e. the excessive number of documents, an unclear system for managing documents, and the application of different systems in different institutions. Related to this, municipal representatives observed there were missed opportunities for greater co-operation between service providers to deliver services more efficiently. Sharing expertise and bureaucratic burden could reduce the duplication of administrative functions undertaken by different institutions.

The second major problem identified was persistent negative perceptions towards people with disabilities. Stigma and discrimination were linked to many other problems that arise in working with disabled people (e.g. the impact on service users' own motivation, lack of qualified staff and the difficult integration of people with disabilities into the education system, labour market or social life in general).

The third problem that was raised is the lack of motivated and qualified staff to adequately assess service user needs, find the right combination of services, and motivate service users to be more active and autonomous where possible.

Poor institutional co-operation and lack of adequate information

As with other stakeholder groups, municipal representatives raised poor co-operation between institutions and a lack of adequate information as barriers to effective service delivery. Municipal representatives also provided the example of certificates having to be physically collected by service users from different institutions on the grounds of privacy. To speed up processes and not burden service users with unnecessary paperwork, municipal representatives believe service users should be able to provide their consent for a single bureaucrat to collect the certificates.

> *The system is still relatively complex, and I am not stating that everything must be done for them, I am simply in favour of autonomy. But a lot of formalities exist, a lot of inter-institutional complexities, which can certainly be done almost automatically by logging into the systems and just informing the person that these certificates will be collected, or these forms will be filled in. But this would require further integration of the systems of the different institutions, improving the user interface so that the person can see what they have already received and what they can still receive. (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

Poor or burdensome processes are particularly difficult for people who have recently developed a disability and their family members (e.g. parents who are "overwhelmed" with instructions and paperwork to fill in when they have not yet recovered from the "shock" of their children's disability.

> *The issue is that often, the paperwork and certificate need to be filled in at the start of the disability when the person is still in deep shock. They are vulnerable, do not remember what they are being told, and sometimes do not understand that they now need a book of certificates to be collected. It sounds like a punishment. They often do nothing. It would certainly be possible to help them here and make the process clearer, simpler, and more transparent. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

Municipal representatives echoed the views of both NGOs and social workers in that it is difficult for them to see the full range of services available making it difficult to offer targeted services to clients. Service users often receive services that are not specifically tailored to their needs (e.g. a parent caring for a disabled child needs a person to be with the child for a short period of time, but municipalities only have people with other specialisations). Another problem is that in the absence of common information about

the services available, service users may be offered services that are not relevant or necessary to them, i.e. an over-supply of services.

Stigma

Negative public attitudes towards people with disabilities was highlighted as the second most important problem by municipality representatives. Stigma still exists towards people with disabilities, in particular people with mental disabilities which impacts on their employment and integration into education or community life. For example, signatures to stop the building of group homes where people with disabilities could live independently were collected following an announcement they would be built in a particular neighbourhood). This raised the question of how much publicity should be given to such projects. Municipality representatives suggested that publicity might increase stigma, presenting people with disabilities as being different to other members of the community. Another municipality representative said they had no problem with public reactions to setting up group homes in their communities, after refraining from publicity campaigns.

Stigma was also associated with difficulties in integrating children with disabilities into general education. Resistance to the integration of disabled children in general education comes not so much from other children, but from their parents, who often react negatively to the presence of children with disabilities in the same classroom as their own child. It was also observed that special educators can discriminate against children with disabilities, especially children with mental disabilities.

Workshop participants observed that people with disabilities experience stigma differently. While the stigma faced by people with mobility or visual impairments has reduced and is less emphasised in society, the stigmatisation of people with mental disabilities (both adults and children) is a pressing problem, which poses challenges for the implementation of programmes to integrate them into society.

Shortage of qualified professionals

Municipal representatives echoed the concern of social workers that there are not enough qualified professionals to work with people with disabilities. There is both a shortage of staff and insufficient funding for ongoing training. Particular attention was paid to the lack of special educators who are prepared to work with different groups of disabled people.

> *Motivation is all sorts of things, but when you cannot invest in qualifications, you have what you have. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

> *It is important that appropriate qualification already in educational establishments exists, so they understand the career they are choosing. Because they come out of education, work for a few months, and say, "this is not for me". We need to make them understand more about what the job is when they are in training. More internships maybe? (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

Lack of services for families

Municipal representatives raised the issue of families with children with disabilities. Support for families is not well developed and there is a lack of services such as counselling for families with disabled family members. Parents for example often need time and support to adjust and accept that their child is going to have different needs compared to other children and that they will need to adapt to meet those needs.

> *The parents are shocked. They cannot believe it, sometimes denying the diagnosis and trying to live as if it does not exist. The child suffers. Other children also suffer if they are in the family. What the social worker does is give one to fill in a bunch of forms to get benefits, services, and advantages. That is not what people need – they need to be given time to come to terms with it, they need to be presented with it bit by bit, to be introduced to it, and to be there for it. However, social workers either do not have the time or the expertise or sometimes either. Conflicts arise, and people feel that they have been told the wrong thing, the wrong way. The social*

> *worker is angry for not being heard and not receiving filled-in documents in time. Everybody is in chaos. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

Situations were cited where parents expect more from a social worker or other service provider than they can or should provide. A parent may not feel confident to provide the right support for their child or young person and therefore expect the "qualified" social worker to do everything for them.

> *They simply do not engage with the child. A specialist comes in and works with the child, but then the family must continue educating, and if they do nothing, the progress becomes very slow and insufficient. There is an attitude in families that it is safer to give the child to the worker and then do no work at all. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

Other issues

The challenge of accessibility for people with disabilities was also raised by municipality representatives. To date, not all public infrastructure or old Soviet-era public buildings, especially in smaller towns are accessible to people with disabilities (e.g. narrow doorways that do not accommodate wheelchairs). Charging for services was also mentioned as a problem. People with disabilities are reluctant to pay for services especially if the services were previously provided free of charge. Finally, municipal representatives pointed out that there is a shortage of jobs for people with disabilities, all the "attractive" jobs are filled by others.

5.2.2. Successful experiences and elements of the current system that are working well

This section discusses the positive experiences people with disabilities (and service providers) have had when accessing or providing services (the "successes") and the elements of the current system stakeholders believe are working well. Again, the section starts with general comments made by all four stakeholder groups before moving to specific observations. Some of the examples provided were not of initiatives that have been implemented but rather of those that are keenly anticipated by participants.

Each of the four stakeholder groups highlighted different success stories, focusing on different aspects of service provision for people with disabilities, based on their specific roles in the system and their unique experiences as a result. However, all four stakeholder groups agreed there is a need to promote autonomy, for service users as well as for caregivers. There is a view that initiatives in which service users have played a role, be that in service design and/or in the promotion of a worthy idea, are more likely to be successful than those that have been imposed top-down.

Listening to service users was also viewed as important, to understand the challenges people with disabilities face so that their needs are clearly understood, and the right initiatives are implemented, in the right way. Regular meetings between municipalities, NGOs, service users and their representatives, for example, would help to ensure services are designed closer to the service user, and that the unique needs of people with disabilities are understood when designing universal services.

It is important to continue practices that may have been implemented in response to a specific event or have been aimed at a wider range of people but have proved to work particularly well for people with disabilities such as online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also important to understand why these initiatives have worked.

Participants from the service provider stakeholder groups (NGO representatives, social workers and municipality representatives) raised increased collaboration and co-operation as being particularly important to improving service provision for people with disabilities. For example, both NGO representatives and social workers highlighted the value of the support municipalities provide in creating employment opportunities. Publishing good news stories can also break down barriers and help provide better and correct information.

Service users

In general, while the service users group viewed everything to be working well, they struggled to identify specific success stories. They did express that a positive attitude is a critical requirement in anyone who works with them and service providers who have the necessary communication skills to work effectively with service users are more likely to be highly valued. However, service users recognised that a positive attitude is an intrinsic quality, not easily trained or selected for.

Educational programmes

Remote learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic was raised as being positive as it allowed more interaction with colleagues and more participation in the learning process for some groups, particularly those with mobility issues. Service users believe it would be desirable to keep educational programmes (as well as introducing cultural activities) online to allow people with reduced mobility to continue studying in this way, as they are often not able to attend lectures in person. This would not only improve access to education for people with disabilities but also improve socialisation and inclusion, which is sorely lacking for people with mobility issues.

> *When we connect via Zoom, we all become equal. We have a very big window to the world. I enjoy learning this way. Good intensity. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

Accessibility and mobility

Participants pointed out that having lists of places that are accessible to people with disabilities could be valuable. The idea of displaying accessible places on online maps, or creating a common register of cafes, bars and clubs was raised. Another idea could be to create an award for easily accessible places.

> *We could make lists like Wikipedia that others could see. Or Google could allow us to bookmark cafes that are accessible [to people with disabilities] for free because there is a charge to be displayed otherwise. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

> *Like with a Trip Advisor recommendation, there could be a recommendation for people with disabilities. (Service user, Marijampolė)*

Currently, free ride services are available for people with mobility issues. In Marijampolė, these services have been extended to 8 PM, a move that has been positively received by service users as it allows them to be more social. It was noted however that while these services are free of charge, people who drive their own, adapted car do not receive any compensation for fuel.

> *If a person does not have a car, they can get a lift, and if they have a car, they do not get any support, even though they are also limited in means, and for them, driving is a form of integration that is not encouraged by the policy. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

People with visual disabilities raised as a good practice the regular meetings they organise, where everyone gets together to talk and solve problems. During those meetings, social workers will help to fill in any paperwork and/or find out who needs what services (e.g. registering with a doctor or other assistance like buying food). As well as meeting immediate needs there are opportunities for socialising and sharing information.

NGO representatives

> *Success stories discussed by NGO representatives related mainly to positive co-operation and the exchange of information between institutions, networks and colleagues.*

Informal groups

The importance of informal groups, networks and connections was raised. For example, people with a hearing impairment have developed social connections with interpreters. They feel they can communicate more through interpreters, receiving more and different information than what they can receive on their own. Together they have formed a social network, with various social interactions occurring.

Peer organisations can also play a support, communication, and advocacy role. It is important to have a place where service users can meet and talk from time to time.

Regular meetings with local government representatives

NGO representatives believe it is important to co-operate with the municipality regarding employment opportunities. In the Kaunas region, thanks to the municipality, an employment initiative where people with disabilities have been employed in the production of notebooks has been implemented, and it is considered very effective. Both NGO representatives and social workers believe the municipality's support in creating employment opportunities is very important. They are the first to know about new jobs being created and can promote the creation of more jobs that are suitable for people with disabilities; real, meaningful jobs, not symbolic ones.

In Marijampolė an example of bringing representatives of the municipality, suppliers (clinics, hospitals, other companies) and NGOs, as well as patients' organisations together twice a year to discuss what has been achieved, what is planned, and what is getting in the way of progress was described as very useful.

> *Meeting together can help you design a more effective, customer-centric service. Now the government is on its own and we feel side-lined. Service users and service providers, through discussion, could find ways to spend money more efficiently, because users would give feedback. This is now being performed at the NGO level, with less formal gatherings to exchange ideas. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

A user-friendly information system

NGO representatives observed how hard it is to find useful information about services; if they can barely find it themselves, it must be very difficult for a service user to do so. Establishing a user-friendly information system was provided as an example of a highly anticipated initiative – making information simpler so that service users can find out what services a municipality provides at the click of a button.

> *The size of the information is overwhelming. People get lost. It needs to be structured, linking the services of several institutions so that the user chooses by need rather than by institution, or by a group of services. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

Training and educational programmes

NGOs believe they could valuably contribute to the training of professionals. At present, there is a shortage of professionals especially social workers, and they are often trained in a more formal way, far from the reality of frontline practice. NGOs could provide a training ground, for example, to help enhance skills in providing specific assistance.

NGOs could also perform educational activities, such as providing counselling for parents with children with diabetes – informal education, in simpler forms, including group meetings. Some municipality representatives agreed with this idea.

> *As many children with diabetes attend mainstream schools, and not all teachers and other parents understand how to live with the disease, we go to schools and give formal talks. And at the same time, we bring the parents of these children together, they support each other. It's so much easier for NGOs to get to those parents because we have different skills than the medical staff, there is less formal communication. (Municipality representative, Marijampolė)*

One NGO provided an example where they had organised training for public transport drivers on how to transport people with disabilities (particularly those with visual or mobility disabilities) including how to stop at bus stops, how far from the pavement to stop, and how to help people get off the bus.

The value of bottom-up services

One factor that NGOs believe contributes to successful service delivery is when a service need is identified in the community and/or by the target group, and the service is co-designed and co-implemented by the people who need it. One success story was the establishment of a day centre for children with disabilities in Marijampolė by mothers caring fulltime for children with disabilities. They decided that they needed a day-care centre where they could take care of their children. They wrote a project application and received funding. At the beginning there were minimal applications for the day centre but now they have 20 accredited places, for children with mental and intellectual disabilities. A similar example was raised by an NGO representative who had started their own NGO for people with speech and hearing disabilities resulting from having a hearing disability themselves.

Social workers

Social workers focused on examples of collaboration and opportunities to work as part of a team to support services users. For example, teams of social workers working together is proving successful, a practice that requires the right theoretical foundations and skills. Resilient teams that can build strong bonds can create quality services.

Shared living homes

Social workers believe they should not focus on doing the work for people with disabilities but teach them how to do the work themselves and that more facilities and programmes that help people with disabilities live independently are needed. Nowadays, social workers will often rush in and do everything for people, but service users need to be given the time, space, and support to learn how to perform tasks for themselves. The opportunity to live in a shared house for example, even if only part-time, where an individual can make more decisions and choices on their own, which currently are often made by others including relatives, would be valuable in many cases.

> *It requires them to choose their furniture, what they want to eat, whether they want to have a pet, etc., which develops independence and requires fewer services, while at the same time, makes the person feel more self-confident and more courageous in interacting with the external environment. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*
>
> *Encouraging independent living is not easy, it is not a mechanical process, and it is not necessarily smooth – it requires professionals, and well-thought-out methodologies. Nowadays it is done more intuitively, with fewer positive successes than there could be. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

Social workers viewed the introduction of group homes as a good practice. The co-operation of professionals, particularly those in health institutions, is important. One social worker working in a group home said they have a contract with a health institution so that different specialists (e.g. psychologists, physiotherapists, general practitioners) come and provide on-site services in a group home when required. Group homes not only help people with disabilities but also the staff who work in them, by strengthening their relationships and developing co-operation (e.g. informal meetings, common trips, supervision of workers).

Participation and representation

Social workers observed the value of people with disabilities being able to directly participate in municipality decision-making processes, so that their needs can be heard, and they can influence decisions. Involving

people with disabilities in municipal bodies such as commissions and committees is worth exploring to allow them to express their needs and monitor the implementation of services.

> *Practical representation and advice on implementation are needed on an ongoing basis. Similar co-operation could also take place with healthcare institutions to improve the tailoring and diversity of services. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

> *Stigmas exist and often lead to ineffective services because of a lack of consultation with direct service users. There are many requirements to meet or prove to be eligible. Life gets frozen and one can only return to it once the requirements are met. We need an easier route to services. (Social worker, Marijampolė)*

It is important that people with disabilities are not only involved in the decision-making process as members of certain commissions, but also have a real voice and influence (e.g. in the renovation of the city's infrastructure). Every year all the associations of people with disabilities are invited to submit proposals for the development of the municipality's social services plan for the following year. In this way, people with disabilities feel that they belong to society and that their needs are being heard and acted on.

Municipality representatives

Municipal representatives highlighted the employment of people with disabilities and the overall involvement of people with disabilities in more activities as their biggest success and ambition. Integration of people with disabilities into the labour market can help realise ambitions for self-fulfilment. Municipality representatives acknowledge that it is not possible to reach the same degree of integration for everyone, but it is still seen as something that should be continuously pursued. Currently, successes are rare, as employers tend to be uncertain about employing people with disabilities and are unwilling to take on potentially unknown and additional responsibilities. It is also important to seek funding actively and regularly for projects, including from European Union Funds for relevant projects.

Labour market integration

Municipal representatives provided an example where advocacy has helped improve employment prospects for people with a hearing impairment. In Marijampolė, people with a hearing impairment do not have a problem getting a job, however, this has not always been the case. Representatives of an advocacy organisation advocated strongly to employers, clarifying the possible challenges and highlighting what are often groundless fears, for example, employers had thought that communication would be a problem.

> *You try out one, then the other and it becomes normal. Now they hire without issues. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

> *Deaf people make souvenirs that we can buy and use as representative merchandise. The important thing here is that the person whose work has been bought is the one who receives the award for selling the item. It is not only about employment but also about value – that they learn money. They are not just making these dolls, they are studying what the national costumes of the region are, and what the colours are. They match everything and are involved enough in those activities. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

Municipal representatives believe publishing positive examples and practices is worthwhile, particularly the testimonies of employers, including what they expected and what happened when they took a risk and employed someone with a disability. Breaking down barriers requires the ongoing dissemination of good and positive information.

To help people with disabilities integrate into the labour market it was suggested that opportunities to engage in productive activities could be created, the results of which would be valued and sold (e.g. producing notebooks or making and selling bracelets to raise funds for Ukrainians, i.e. activities that create a sense of purpose as well as a financial return). Alternatively, people could sell the work they create (e.g. handicrafts, woodwork, knitting, etc.) on a dedicated website.

Co-operation between institutions

Municipality representatives also raised the value of identifying, encouraging, and supporting bottom-up initiatives such as in the establishment of the day-care centre discussed above recognising the particularly important role they can play. It was noted that in small municipalities like Marijampolė, this kind of co-operation is easier because municipal staff, applicants and organisations know what services are available, what is needed and how to help.

Fundraising

Municipal representatives believe their involvement in writing proposals for European Union-funded projects is essential. Projects are more likely to be sustainable if the municipality has been involved from the beginning.

> *Families of children with Down's syndrome have joined together in an association and we started a project to set up a day centre. They know what they need better, and how to organise everything, and we [the municipality] helped with the project and the funding. It is important to support initiatives that come from the bottom of the problem. They are now accepting children on the autistic spectrum because they have extra places. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

> *A social workshop where people come together and work together. A European Union project has made it possible to fund such activities. There was a project to knit socks for premature babies. We just ordered them and then brought them to the hospital. But the people were very happy to participate in such a project. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

The municipality's role in these cases is to facilitate. This could involve gathering information about needs from the public, assisting with fundraising, helping fill in applications, collecting documents, or contributing with some of the funding.

5.3. People leaving prison

5.3.1. Challenges experienced with service delivery

Focus group participants articulated the significant barriers people leaving prison face when re-integrating into society following release from prison. They struggle to find housing and employment and to establish or re-establish positive social connections, and as a result, are at higher risk of reoffending.

The four stakeholder groups raised similar issues during the workshop discussions; municipal representatives however had less to say about service provision for this group, most likely explained by municipalities only having been involved in prisoner re-integration processes for hardly more than a year.[1] Municipal representatives acknowledged their lack of experience in this area and consider training for their staff to be important.

The stigma faced by people leaving prison and the negative impact this has on re-integration was perhaps the issue that came up most in the discussions. Most service users reported having experienced stigma at some stage including from the service providers and other professionals that are supposed to help them.

A variety of accommodation and employment issues were touched on by the stakeholder groups. Participants' opinions were divided on employment opportunities for people leaving prison. Service users and NGO representatives thought that finding a job is not difficult for many people leaving prison but cited cases of service users struggling to stay in a job longer-term due to poor overall reintegration. Meanwhile, social workers and municipal representatives thought that employers were not willing to employ people leaving prison at all. Inadequate sharing of success stories and good practices means the opportunity to change the attitudes of employers and others is missed.

Accommodation options, particularly immediately on release are limited and/or unsuitable. In some cases, service providers can meet people leaving prison on release and take them to pre-arranged accommodation, in other cases however, service users are provided with an address and must find the accommodation themselves or may refuse the assistance of a service provider. In these cases, people leaving prison often simply disappear, and it can be very difficult to find them again and establish a relationship. Use of night shelters is common in some municipalities which participants viewed as unsuitable because of the environment and minimal support associated with them. Some service users reported not having anywhere at all to go.

A lack of co-ordination and/or co-operation between institutions resulting in duplication of processes and effort, or conversely in some cases, competition between institutions, overly formal and time-consuming bureaucracy with service users being sent from one institution to another can result in them losing their motivation to engage with the institutions meant to help them. These issues can be exacerbated by insufficient sharing of information which means service providers do not always have the information they need to support a successful reintegration.

Service users

People leaving prison identified three main problems, all of which relate to the immediate period after release and the process of reintegrating into society: implementation of probation services, difficulties with bailiffs and finding housing. Experiences of stigma were also discussed.

Implementation of probation services

Probation itself is generally considered necessary and effective, with a significant number of service users reporting that it helped them. However, its implementation is highly formalised, and not always aligned with service users' individual needs and experiences of integrating into society, resulting in probation often slowing or hindering their re-integration.

> *It is the same for everyone, whether you go out on the street, into the community for rehabilitation or into the family. The same template applies. This is often a hindrance when a person goes out into the community. There he has a home and a safe environment, and he does not go out alone. But probation is still done on a signed basis, where every trip must be co-ordinated. Probation considers whether he can go. It does not matter that you are in the community and under supervision. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

Service users stressed that probation services are applied to everyone equally, regardless of how psychologically ready a person is to adapt to society, what kind of environment they live in (e.g. in a rehabilitation home or elsewhere), or whether they have an addiction (alcohol or drug use or "long term clean"). Treating everyone the same results in issues such as some psychological assessments being seen as unnecessary (e.g. "*There is no real assessment of the persons or, their readiness to leave*") or "over-care" of those living in a rehabilitation centre, as they are already sufficiently cared for. For people without addictions, having to provide constant "proof" that they are "clean" feels excessive, creating a sense of mistrust and presenting a threat of "relapsing". More differentiation between service users (i.e. a more tailored approach based on need and circumstances) would be desirable.

Service users also reported duplication of processes, a lack of co-ordination between institutions, or conversely, competition between institutions, and sometimes an apparent lack of the necessary mandate(s). For example, a service user may be receiving all the help they need, say from a psychologist and/or social worker in a rehabilitation facility, however the probation service may also require them to attend a similar course(s) with them.

> *One has to go through the same programmes one goes through in the rehabilitation centre and repeat the same ones on probation. There is a difference between a person from the street and a person from the*

> *community – their living conditions are different; they could count those activities in the community. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

Service users noted that the requirement to report to the probation service once a week when they are working can create problems, as they must excuse themselves from work and their employer may not always be happy with this. The alternative is to wear an electronic monitor, but because of the strong stigma attached to this, people leaving prison report avoiding it.

Service users viewed the tendency of institutions to take responsibility for providing comprehensive assistance as excessive control which does not help with re-integration, but rather encourages service users to search for ways to circumvent this perceived control. Service users agreed that probation services and other rehabilitation institutions could support people leaving prison to take more responsibility for themselves for example by maintaining a map of activities they can access on their own.

Problems with bailiffs

Dealing with bailiffs is a major problem for some people leaving prison. It is not possible to repay debts while in prison or immediately after release because paid activities which would enable the repayment of financial obligations (e.g. consumer loans, etc.) are not available. Furthermore, there is no grace period once out of prison, which would enable a person to find a job and secure an income which would enable them to repay their debts with some service users saying an employer is less likely to employ someone they know to have a problem with a bailiff. Furthermore, payments to bailiffs can even be deducted from benefits. "The person becomes a hostage of the situation".

> *If you have financial obligations in prison, a year, a year and a half can go past and bailiffs show up; if you are in prison, there is nothing you can do. If you have financial obligations, you are financially burdened in prison. When a person is released, he or she becomes a hostage. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

While the problems with bailiffs were not discussed in detail, service users identified them as one of the most pressing issues hindering their integration into society.

Accommodation

Some service users raised the issue of accommodation and having a safe place to live as one of the most pressing issues in the first few days after leaving prison. Sometimes people released from prison have nowhere to go back to, in other cases, the environment they left is unsafe. People can end up on the "street", where they are not only faced with meeting their daily needs such as food, clothing, hygiene, etc., but also the psychological shock of not having the social skills to live in society (a lack of social skills, how to communicate or interact), often aggravated by the negative attitudes of others towards them.

> *Every time I leave, I say – it will be different now, 2-3 months, I am committing a crime. I want to go back in society, but I don't know how to go back, and there is a painful despair. Now I am in a community where there are psychologists, there are social workers and everything is free, they don't ask for anything, they support us, there is an adaptation centre. And I started to think that there is no other way but this. It's like salvation. (Service user, Kaunas)*

Accommodation, in a rehabilitation centre for example allows people to meet their basic needs, to receive the help they need from specialists (psychologists, social workers, etc.), to acquire social skills, and to feel accepted, acknowledged and psychologically safe.

Stigma

Although stigma was not identified as one of the most critical issues people leaving prison face, being constantly confronted by the negative attitudes of others was raised throughout the discussion. Service users described feeling unnecessary, rejected, like "lepers" which reinforce existing feelings of self-

depreciation and personal contempt during their time in prison; as one participant put it, "you are not a human being, you are an animal". Facing the indifference or contempt of society makes it extremely difficult to even try to re-integrate, to "cling" to life.

> *There must be a high level of resistance. Most people break down in society, if I am not needed, I am rejected. The person goes back [to prison], it's easier for him. (Service user, Kaunas)*

Service users sense a lack of empathy and positive attitudes towards them, not only at the individual level but also at the institutional level. Discrimination is not only experienced in the direct interaction between the service user and the service provider, but also from professionals involved in the service user's re-socialisation and re-adaptation processes. Service users feel they are often still seen as dangerous and unworthy of help, an attitude reported to be prevalent in public institutions like the police and medical institutions, as well as private institutions such as banks. The success of the re-integration process depends to a large extent on the quality of the contacts service users have with institutions and individuals and how positively professionals engage in the process.

> *Returning from prison, ex-prisoners feel like out-casts. Others look down on us. At the very beginning, most of the encounter with society is a request for help, and during that, we are often looked down. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

Other issues

Developing the necessary adaptation skills such as basic communication and social skills or simple computer literacy skills can be a challenge particularly for those who have been in prison a long time. The adaptation process should start earlier during imprisonment, and not at or near the end. Problems with employment were also raised, employers do not want to take on people who have been in prison and/or do not take account of a person's abilities. Service users also indicated that opportunities to learn specific skills or trades "a speciality" while in prison are limited. One service user also raised the lack of educational services in prison as a barrier to better preparation for employment once released.

> *In prison, a person can get a computer for two hours a week and play computer games that are not connected to the internet. Windows is banned, and downloads of programmes that allow you to learn something are also not available. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

NGO representatives

NGO representatives highlighted a variety of challenges to providing services that ensure effective and sustainable integration. Three challenges were identified as being the most important: accommodation, stigma and a lack of co-operation between institutions with the view that if there was stronger co-operation between institutions all other problems could be solved more easily. Participants talked about stigma as a wide-reaching problem that impacts all aspects of service provision (e.g. employment and accommodation), even when trying to attract professionals to work with this particularly vulnerable group of service users.".

> *Society sees him/her as a threat – you want to receive help and they are afraid of you. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

Poor institutional co-operation and lack of adequate information

NGO representatives view the long and formal communications between institutions including municipalities and the prison department as a means of shirking responsibility and not addressing problems. More frequent contact, greater flexibility and better alignment of responsibilities would allow for more effective action, particularly between the municipalities.

Furthermore, clients can be sent from one institution to another, their documents can move around in circles between institutions due to bureaucratic attitudes, all of which takes time and service users can lose their motivation to seek further help with reintegration.

> *The current policy settings slow down the reintegration process and waste time when the user is not yet involved in disruptive activities. Apart from their personal tragedy, it is also an inefficient use of public funds. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

NGOs also want better sharing of information, as it can be very difficult for service providers to find the right information for the ex-prisoner. Service users do not always have the skills to ask for what they really need and better co-operation between institutions would allow NGOs and social workers to target their efforts more effectively.

> *On the way to this meeting, I tried to find the information on the municipality's website, and I could not find it, so I called and found out everything quickly. And how an ex-prisoner, who is not used to work with computers, should find anything there. Moreover, it is hard for him to make a call because he expects not to be listened to. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

The probation period drew particular attention with NGO representatives, especially those working in rehabilitation centres, noting that probation procedures are often very formalised and overlap with what service users receive from them. Rehabilitation centres employ professionals (psychologists, clergy, social workers) to provide specialist services, but Probation can also require service users to attend courses they organise. Since attendance is compulsory, it duplicates what the service user is already receiving and complicates the work of rehabilitation workers, who must escort and wait for the service, which requires time and resources (e.g. transport).

The excessive requirements of probation were also noted, for example, when a person is in a rehabilitation centre, officers can come to check on them (even at night). This formal, "blind" compliance with procedures is a distraction for rehabilitation centre staff, for other residents and for the service themselves.

NGO representatives also noted that other institutions (e.g. law enforcement officials, municipal employees) look down on NGOs treating them as hierarchically "inferior", less valuable rather than as co-operating institutions or as partners.

> *Law enforcement officials feel superior to NGO representatives, and there is only formal, inflexible enforcement of legal laws. All services are available here [in rehabilitation centre], they must take that into account. We have a man, we have 24-hour surveillance, if something happens, we call them immediately, we inform them, we do their job, and they put conditions on it. Then we won't take those people. By interfering, they prevent such people and us from doing our job. (NGO Kaunas region)*

The lack of co-operation between social workers and NGOs was also raised. This results in NGOs not always knowing what services are provided in their region and by what organisations. It was also noted there should be more co-operation between municipalities, for example, it should be easier for a person leaving prison to change the municipality in which they live (this is discussed in more detail below).

Accommodation

NGOs observed they need to contact a person leaving prison from the very first hours of release. Representatives from Caritas (Kaunas region) reported they can meet service users when they are first released and immediately accommodate them at a pre-arranged address while representatives from Marijampolė and Švenčionys indicated that they do not always have this opportunity. Sometimes they meet the service user and escort them to their future place of residence, which they check in advance to assess for safety. Sometimes they just provide the address, and the service user must find it themselves. It was observed that in such cases, people often disappear, and it can be very difficult to find them again and establish a relationship.

There is a general shortage of suitable accommodation for example it is inconvenient (far from district centres, difficult to secure a vacancy in advance). In Kaunas district there are no hostels, so there is an agreement with a night shelter in Alytus. Although normally there is no shortage of beds there, its location means it takes a long time for a person to travel to find work or for other activities. In other municipalities, Marijampolė in particular, people leaving prison are often accommodated in night shelters which are only available for overnight stays. Most night shelters do not allow people to keep their belongings there if they stay longer. People are forced to carry their belongings with them wherever they go.

> *A person needs a place to live, not just a place to sleep. He needs to be in a safe environment in which he can begin to learn skills and develop the necessary social skills. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

It was also noted that the current system of registration of residence and the provision of assistance linked to that is not helpful. Currently, people leaving prison are required to return to the municipality in which they lived before they were imprisoned. If a person leaves prison in a place other than their original place of residence, they are often unable to get accommodation in night shelters.

A particularly critical issue that was raised is people leaving prison not being able to live in a different municipality from that which they lived in before being imprisoned. Re-registration is difficult which forces someone leaving prison to return to the same environment from which they left. This can be a particular issue in small communities where people know each other and there is a greater likelihood of negative attitudes towards the person returning from prison. One NGO representative said:

> *It is very important, if we are talking about successful integration, that I really want change and that he does not do the same. So why are we practically leading to a place where he did it [crime]? (NGOs, Kaunas region)*

NGOs believe that suitable and safe accommodation alone will not help a person integrate into society. For integration to be successful, a person must also be provided with a range of services such as specialist support, employment, community support, etc. as soon as they leave prison.

Stigma

Stigma can slow or hinder a service user's re-integration into society. NGO representatives noted there is a negative attitude in society towards people who have been in prison. This is particularly the case in small communities, where people who have just returned from prison are exposed to negative attitudes in everyday situations (e.g. in shops), they are feared, labelled as "criminals", and are expected to steal, commit crimes and be a threat to others. Participants believe that being able to change a previous place of residence would help with this.

The issue of negative attitudes from the people who are supposed to help people leaving prison re-integrate into society, namely municipal employees, law enforcement officials, etc was also raised. Discrimination makes it difficult to obtain information and get co-operation from representatives of the different institutions.

> *The representative of the municipality has a certain power, so if his attitude towards the ex-prisoner is negative, then you know in advance that a conflict will be coded. You immediately know that the person will not be satisfied, maybe he will open and close the door too loudly, if he does not know something, then the person will be sent on his way. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

NGO representatives believe the systems and procedures to facilitate re-integration exist and can be applied, but that negative attitudes become a barrier to the implementation of those systems and procedures.

> *The attitude of service providers toward service-users, which seem to be different, remains unchanged. It seems that if we had an attitude of acceptance [of ex-prisoners], if we were able not to exclude them, then everything else would work out. In many places, we find ourselves in an attitude that stops us from doing. (NGO, Kaunas region).*

NGO representatives said that the community itself can be a great resource for integration. If the community is accepting, open and helps people to adapt, it would solve many problems. At present, the attitude of communities remains negative towards initiatives related to people leaving prison.

> *When the plans to set up the community centres for ex-prisoners came to light, there was a great deal of resistance from the community (e.g. fear of falling real-estate property prices, children being frightened, etc.). (NGO, Kaunas region)*

Reintegration process

On integration issues, NGO representatives noted that integration is still too late. The very process of deprivation of liberty, of being in an institution, deprives people of social skills, especially in terms of work skills or motivation to work. It was noted that when one is dealing with those who have left, one is already facing the consequences. In the opinion of the NGO representatives, high expectations are placed on people leaving prison, they are expected to be motivated to work, to want to integrate into the wider community, but in prison expectations are very low and motivation to work is not developed at all. As a result, when they are released, they face not only objective problems but also subjective psychological and value-based problems. As one NGO representative said:

> *Prison deprives people of the skills to work because it does not give them a job. And therefore, to expect a person who has spent so much time not working (going out to eat, exercising and all that) to be able to integrate into the community after living in a "sanatorium" regime and to work from 8 to 5 is not possible, because the person is simply losing the skills to work in prison. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

In the opinion of the NGO respondents, integration should start as soon as they enter prison. This view was also expressed in the group of social workers.

Other problems

In addition to adaptation problems or a lack of motivation to enter the labour market, it was noted that people in prison are required to show a work certificate while still in prison, which guarantees them a job upon release. However, NGO representatives consider this practice to be unfair, as prisoners cannot reach or contact employers while in prison. It was acknowledged during the discussion that employers are now quite positive about employing people who have been in prison, and no negative attitudes had been observed by the workshop participants, it is the requirement to have a job before leaving prison that is perceived as the barrier.

> *When a person is awaiting parole from the Commission and is required to have a work certificate to guarantee his release to work. It is absurd when he cannot actually reach, contact employers. (NGO, Kaunas region).*

While there are many opportunities for people who have left prison to attend various training courses and to acquire a specialised vocation, it was stressed that such training should take place in a safe environment (e.g. in rehabilitation centres or night shelters). NGO representatives noted that if a person goes to general training, there is a chance that they will end up in a "negative" environment, "meet others like them", and reoffend.

NGO representatives raised the issue of a lack of some services, such as legal services (especially when people leave prison with former obligations – "bailiffs") and /or logistical problems accessing services (especially if clients must be transported to medical facilities or their place of residence is far from the service location). There was also a discussion about the lack of social workers working with this group. Many social workers are women and given many of the people leaving prison are men that can lead to problems such as security, communication, etc.).

Finally, NGOs representatives mentioned that it is still not clear what happens to a person who "drops out", for example, starts drinking or using drugs. Rehabilitation centres are not allowed to accommodate people

who are drinking or taking drugs and night shelters are for overnight stays only. This problem does not seem to have been solved, nor is the solution entirely clear.

> *People start working or going out, they start drinking, so you can't take them in (to a rehab centre). He must decide. If he decides that he will continue to drink, then you have to say goodbye to him and then it is a question of where he goes from there. He goes back to his environment again. Perhaps you should look at what you can do with this person, how you can continue to help him. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

Social workers

Social workers observed that they work with a variety of service users, all with different needs. This means they can lack the specific knowledge, acquired through practical training and experience to work with some service user groups. They also feel their ability to help the service users they work with is hindered due to the services available not necessarily being the services a service user wants or needs. Stigma was not widely discussed by social workers. It was noted however that people who have been in prison do experience different attitudes from the public or from the staff of some institutions (e.g. doctors) and there is more discrimination in the provision of services to people leaving prison (e.g. reluctance to provide health services).

Lack of cross-institutional co-operation

Social workers raised the lack of cross-institutional co-operation as one of the main problems. Firstly, it is very unclear which institution or worker provides which service(s). This includes municipal and district workers, social workers, NGOs, as well as the police, health workers (doctors) and financial services providers. This can cause difficulties when dealing with a specific situation and it is not clear which institution is responsible for providing the necessary service (e.g. in the case of a drunken client the police might take them to a temporary night shelter to see a social worker because the hospital does not accept them). It is not clear what services are provided by the staff of the municipalities (e.g. "*some documentations are supposed to be made by the municipality, but the municipality worker herself comes with the client and says "I don't know what to do, it's not my job*"").

Secondly, there is a lack of information about the services that are available, both for people leaving prison and for social workers who are supporting them, who are the intermediaries between service users and society. For example, what services are available to people leaving prison such as free ID. Moreover, poor co-operation between institutions leads to complicated and long-lasting procedures when accessing services, such as payment of benefits, finding accommodation services, etc.

> *They send the person to me, I send them to the municipality, they check, then they send them back to me, and it takes a long time. The information about the person leaving is "long-walking" through different institutions: social worker-municipality worker-social worker. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

The third aspect mentioned by the social workers relating to poor co-operation is the lack of feedback about how a client is doing, have they found a place to live or a job, how are they re-integrating into society more generally. Social workers do not always receive feedback from the intermediaries who communicate directly with people who leave prison. Social workers arrange benefits but do not do much else, they do not know how any problems are resolved.

Shortage of qualified professionals

Because social workers work with a variety of service users, not just people leaving prison, they must multitask and are not specialised in helping any one group. Social workers feel they must limit themselves to providing more transactional services such as securing accommodation, clothing and food certificates, and (albeit less often) escorting service users to institutions (e.g. the bank). However, service users often need other services, such as psychological counselling or help acquiring employment skills or basic

computer literacy courses and social workers do not feel as qualified to help with or advise on these types of supports or services.

This issue is exacerbated by a lack of skilled professionals willing to work with people who have been in prison. Social workers are aware of their lack of specialised knowledge and believe that it would be useful to have professionals in the field who specialise in meeting the needs of this group and in public education, without which successful reintegration is unlikely. However, there is a reported lack of professionals willing to work with these service users.

The lack of training programmes for social workers was highlighted, specifically programmes to help with changing behavioural mindsets.

Insufficient resources

Social workers noted they are used to making do with the resources they have. However, they, together with NGO representatives, raised a question about the total amount of resources made available to the sector. Even knowing this they believe would allow for a more effective planning of activities.

> *It is not clear how many resources are available; how many can be claimed and how to plan activities. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

Social workers also raised the issue of a lack of resources to access training and courses that would help them support service users to improve their motivation and change behaviours. Some people leaving prison are reintegrating into a completely changed world and social workers do not feel they always have the skills and/or experience to help with this transition and to truly empathise with their client's situation.

> *There is a serious lack of courses on behaviour change and re-motivation. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

> *The ability to empathise with the situation is also helpful in overcoming a lack of resources when you have a clear understanding of the client's life and can apply your knowledge to how the situation can be handled – when you need material support and when you need psychological support. Without trust and a good relationship with the client, especially in this target group where defensiveness is quite high, it is not possible to identify the problem and thus help solve it. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

One of the bigger problems highlighted by social workers about the lack of resources is the lack of accommodation services, or rather the problem of declaring one's place of residence. While NGO representatives also mentioned the problem of declaring a place, social workers highlighted a slightly different aspect of this problem. It becomes complicated when a person leaves prison and does not have a declared place of residence, in which case he/she cannot receive any services (not even benefits). The social worker is then forced to look for or check the place of declaration to be able to provide services to the client, which takes additional effort and time.

Reintegration process

Social workers consider that it is insufficient to start the reintegration process only six months before someone leaves prison. The process should start from the time of imprisonment and continue throughout the term of imprisonment to ensure that people leaving prison have at least the basic skills (including computer literacy) to live independently.

No party, society or the person leaving prison is prepared for re-integration. Starting to prepare people for their return to society only six months before release does not help because, particularly in cases of long-term imprisonment, people lose many social skills. When they are released, they behave defensively, avoid new challenges, or even ignore the opportunities offered, because of a lack of confidence in themselves and a high level of distrust in society.

> *Society isolates the ex-prisoner and lives on, but the ex-prisoner lives a different life, moving away from society and once freed, no longer knows how to find his place. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*
>
> *What you fail to learn in 15 years, you will not learn in six months. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

A lack of confidence can also contribute to a lack the motivation or the will to engage in social or employment activities and to integrate fully into society. As one social worker put it, "*The client seems to think that the most important thing is to get the benefit. He gets it and disappears. You don't even know what the person needs. There is a lack of willingness to adapt, employment, change of activities, etc.*"

Municipality representatives

Municipality representatives from all three municipalities struggled to identify the challenges faced by people leaving prison in accessing services, viewing just over a year (the amount of time they have been involved in re-integration processes) as too short a time to fully understand the sector and its challenges.

Participants instead focused on the challenges they are experiencing in coming to grips with their relatively new role such as not having a common understanding of how the re-integration system works and what role NGOs and social workers play, and what assistance they need from the municipalities to better support service users. Municipality employees see their role as more mediator-administrator, with only minimal contact with service users.

> *We receive information from the prison that such and such a person is going to be released, then we pass this information on to Caritas, and the person there takes care of it, contacts the client, finds out the client's needs, and then continues to interact with him/her. (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

It was identified during the discussion that the procedure for the re-integration of people leaving prison is still very new, and that municipality staff lack the knowledge and skills to handle it. There are still no clear procedures. Different municipalities have different approaches to how to deal with re-integration problems, an issue exacerbated by a lack of sharing of information and good practices between municipalities. Stronger co-operation not only between institutions but also between the staff of different municipalities would be valuable for improving knowledge and practices.

Reintegration process

One of the most important problems identified by municipal staff in the re-integration of people leaving prison is when the re-integration or adaptation process begins, which echoes what social workers and NGOs said. In the opinion of the workshop participants, being in prison does not give people the motivation to change when they leave and as a result, in many cases, people leaving prison do not know or specify what services they need, nor are they willing to approach municipal staff at all, even for cash benefits.

> *There was a case where a woman was released, the social worker assigned to her was very active, and we agreed with her that she should be contacted after she left, but she was not. I did not get in touch until a week later. She is back in her life and does not want to remember the institution. (Municipality representative, Kaunas region)*

Municipality staff believe that the re-integration process should not start when they leave or six months before they leave, but much earlier.

Accommodation

Not only is there a general lack of accommodation, but according to municipal staff, there should be specific places that are safe for service users once they have left prison. A place where they can feel safe and receive necessary services (e.g. psychologists, social workers) and/or be helped to find a job, to change their lifestyle. People leaving prison do not receive enough help from others when they return to their own

environment (friends, relatives, etc.) and are not sufficiently self-motivated to change their lifestyle and integrate successfully into society, which is why rehabilitation centres and half-way houses are so important. This view was echoed by service users and NGO representatives.

The introduction of a programme where social workers (from NGOs or the municipality) visit a person in prison six months before their release and ask them what help they need, can enable a partial arrangement of accommodation. Some prisoners refuse this help however, not because they do not need it, but because they do not fully understand the situation they are returning to. Some people plan to return to their own or friends' families, which are not necessarily safe environments, and they agree this can make reintegration more difficult. Service users themselves acknowledge it is difficult for them to make a realistic and adequate assessment of their prospects at the time of release, and that assistance to accompany them when they leave prison can therefore be very valuable if provided.

Furthermore, returning to live in a place where the person leaving prison has committed their crime(s) and where their victim(s) may still live, can make it difficult to find a job and settle back into society. One possible solution to this would be to help service users settle somewhere different where they are not known and constantly reminded of their background. Currently this is hampered by the loss of state benefits when people leaving prison change their place of registration.

Stigma

A further concern raised was the stigmatisation of people leaving prison. Some municipal workers noted that often people leaving prison are unwanted in society, shunned, and find it more difficult to find work, as it is expected they will cause problems. Although stigmatisation was not the key issue raised, the overall discussion suggested that stigmatisation was the challenge that has changed the least. People leaving prison suffer negative attitudes not only from the public, but also from the staff of different organisations (e.g. municipality workers, social workers), Even the number of NGOs that focus on the re-integration of people leaving prison is very limited.

Municipality representatives also raised the issue of a lack of professionals willing to work with people leaving prison.

5.3.2. Successful experiences and elements of the current system that are working well

Unlike the discussion about challenges where the stakeholder groups had a lot to say, the four stakeholder groups struggled to identify examples of positive service delivery experiences that have improved people leaving prison's reintegration into society. Only NGO participants, who have been working with people leaving prison for a long time were able to provide any concrete examples, such as the introduction of a law that allows them to meet with and take prisoners out of prison on a temporary basis six months before their release. As a result, while there are some good practices identified this section focuses more on the potential solutions identified by participants. Municipality representatives commented that while it was difficult for them to identify good practices, the fact that an integration programme has been launched is a positive thing.

Like the focus group discussion with people with disabilities, the four stakeholder groups each highlighted potential solutions to issues, based on their specific roles in the system. One solution raised by all four groups (in response to the issue of stigma) was the potential value of publicising success stories. There is a view that currently success stories are known only within the provider organisations themselves and while organisations alone could improve dissemination of these stories and good practices. The impact may be greater if there is a joint approach to improving public awareness and education and disseminating good practices and experiences within and across different municipalities and other institutions.

The need for more accommodation options both short and long-term, for male prisoners just leaving prison in particular was raised by most groups. Service users themselves said they would value an intermediate

environment where they have the space and time to adjust to living outside prison. NGO representatives advocated for halfway houses in which people leaving prison can live for a short time until they are more financially independent and have found their own housing while social workers suggested that housing could be provided by NGOs or non-commercial institutions into which case management and other services are incorporated. Rehabilitation centres were raised by all four groups as a success story.

Service users

People leaving prison focused on the value of having access to an "intermediate" environment following release from prison, provided in a community setting, where they have the time and space to transition safely to independent life.

An intermediate step between prison and independent life (rehabilitation centres)

Service users believe an intermediate step between prison and independent life, in a non-prison environment, is necessary. A place where they can realistically understand their potential outside prison, acquire practical skills and gradually increase personal responsibility. They do not believe they are ready for independence immediately upon release and need an environment in which they can "relearn" how society works and discover what opportunities are available to them.

> *It is important to feel safe in your environment. Then there is a willingness to change rather than defend and resist. There are few safe environments at the moment. When returning home, there are many temptations. Employment is also essential. There may be chess, pool, and music as this allows you to interact within the rehabilitation community itself, discuss similar experiences and learn to be together. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

The exit process is facilitated by a social worker who visits a person leaving prison before they are released. The social worker helps with things like finding accommodation and starts to bring the service user into closer contact with life outside prison. It is important that they, the social worker is not from the prison itself, but from the outside, which provides service users with a greater sense of security.

The Caritas organisation and its day centres where service users have access to food, clean clothes, and where Caritas staff can help them find somewhere to live was viewed as a success story. Service users also highlighted rehabilitation centres (e.g. "Tėvo namai" in Kaunas) as good experiences, where they can acquire the necessary skills (they get a place to live, food, clean clothes, and a place to shower). In such places they are also provided with employment, help from psychologists and social workers, and the necessary skills for integration. Moreover, as already mentioned, service users feel valued, accepted, and cared for. Rehabilitation centres create a safe environment where there is less chance of "backsliding".

Service users consider support to be most effective when it is delivered in a community-based setting. Many rehabilitation centres are run by people who have been in prison themselves, they have been through rehabilitation and are now providing services to others. Service users feel more information about these types of services should be available.

> *You come from an unsafe environment to a safe environment where you are given everything at the start – accommodation, food, supplies, rehabilitation. In that safe environment, you learn to live. If you want to change your life, then it is easy to do so. In the rehabilitation centre, you even get to know things like what the phones are like now and how the banks and e-banking work. They teach you how to work. When I left the prison, I had not worked, and I did not want to work. But there was occupational therapy, you learn how to make food, how to take care of others because you make food for everybody. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

Although most participants considered probation to be one of the most problematic periods, one participant mentioned it was during probation that it was suggested to him to contact Caritas because they were looking for staff. He got a job with Caritas, started to socialise with other people and eventually was offered

the opportunity to volunteer with refugees. Working with Caritas restored a sense of self-esteem as well as providing employment and new activities and experiences.

> *The second time I came to the probation office to sign off, a woman said there was a possibility to go to Caritas, and she offered me to take part in a project. There you discover something new; the communication is good. There you don't feel that you have come back from prison. (Service user, Kaunas region)*

Another success story that was shared was applying to the employment service for a subsidy to create a job. For example, one service user applied for and received funding to set up a "šakočių" (Lithuanian sweet cake) factory. Another participant recounted a similar experience where he was offered the opportunity to buy premises to produce children's toys.

NGO representatives

NGO representatives have been working with people leaving prison for a long time and were able to provide specific examples of successful experiences and/or good practices.

Good co-operation/trust between institutions

Despite one of the main problems being the lack of co-operation between institutions, better co-operation is what NGOs believe will help to solve many of the other problems. One success that was mentioned was the change in attitude of staff in institutions toward people leaving prison; the positive attitude of the staff of the Department of Prisons was particularly highlighted. The NGO representatives believe the change in attitude has created increased opportunities for communication and joint problem solving.

> *Young people are coming, and it is clear that they really care about change. The central team (of the Prison Department) is already strong. There may still be a "they" vs „we" attitude towards NGOs, but it is definitely changing for the better. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

NGOs thought that attitudes towards them are also changing, and they are starting to be seen more as valued partners; there is a greater willingness to share experiences and to consider the needs of NGOs. An NGO worker from Marijapolė said:

> *The change took place when the escort service came into being and the tender was launched. We [NGOs] ourselves made a list of the things that might be needed, because we knew from experience what might be needed for both clients and staff, because we had worked on it a lot before. And the success story is that for the first time we didn't have to cut the funds, but all the "lines" we needed (e.g. transport) were met. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

NGO representatives value the trust prison employees put in them and social workers, which has resulted in prisons issuing them with permanent passes and allowing them to take in food when they visit prisoners, so that communication with the prisoner is as informal as possible which helps to build trust. NGOs also invite prison staff to visit their premises to see how they operate, to get to know the other staff and to build a relationship of trust. This promotes a common approach to service provision and more effective communication. Organised meetings (specifically FGDs) have brought at least some NGOs closer together, they have learned about each other and what services they each provide.

Implementation of new integration law

NGO representatives viewed the introduction of a law that allows them to meet people in prison six months before their release date and take them out of prison on a temporary basis positively. It helps them to build a relationship with the service user, understand their needs and to integrate them into society one step at a time. While the law is already in place, it is how it is implemented that matters. It is very important to understand and clarify the individual needs of the service user and target supports accordingly.

> *We make contact, find out about their social needs and, if necessary, contact their relatives. When the person returns, he already knows what he will get when he returns and where he will need to go. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

> *NGOs are the bridge between prisons and society. And it is indeed a breakthrough that all the ministries have come together and worked together to build the system. (NGO, Marijampolė)*

NGO representatives see this law change as a real breakthrough, and it is important that it is not only implemented to the letter of the law but is used to really help people successfully and confidently transition from prison to life outside prison.

Addressing multiple and complex needs

A holistic approach needs to be taken to a person's situation. NGO representatives believe it is important to provide comprehensive support (psychological support, help finding employment and integration into the community). This requires the co-operation and support of more than one institution. By way of example, when there was a threat that a service user might reoffend, a worker from that service user's former prison got involved and talked to him, persuading him to stay in the rehabilitation centre. He was then given the opportunity to get a vocational training and a job in the rehabilitation centre and eventually managed to integrate successfully.

> *Now this man has been working for 12 years, has a home, a wife, a family, drives a car and has sober habits. He is still sober, but it was a very good situation that helped him. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

Family involvement

Although NGO representatives did not have any success stories related to family involvement in the reintegration process, they view working with and coaching families, for example on how to react and accept people who have been in prison coming home, to be important. This can make re-integration easier not only for the service user but also for their family. The importance of creating a safe environment was mentioned many times. The situation is new for everyone.

> *The approach of relatives needs to be more complex – no one includes them. The relatives are motivated, but they don't know how to guide the person. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

Social workers

Social workers focused on solutions they believed would help them to deliver better services and better understand where they and the services they provide fit in the system.

Information sharing and co-operation between different institutions

A feedback channel across service providers is needed – to exchange information on what works and what services are effective. In the absence of such information, social workers believe service providers can operate ineffectively, failing to understand how the services they provide work in the context of other services available. This sharing of information should also include information about relevant private and public institutions such as the police, banks and healthcare institutions. Service providers should be aware of the general services that are available for people leaving prison, including what forms of mediation and representation are available. This information would help service providers to better tailor services.

> *It is important to involve psychologists and NGOs that specialise in the provision of services specifically for ex-prisoners. They could more adequately assess the services planned or provided, give practical advice on how to communicate more effectively with this group, and how to navigate unusual emotional reactions. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

A positive experience that was shared was the example of Caritas workers, who act as intermediaries between a service user and society, acting as the service user's representative; they also provide information to the social worker about the service user and their needs. Intermediaries not only help to maintain the link between the social worker and their client, but also facilitate access to other institutions and their services.

Several social workers said it was often their calls to prisons, bailiffs, employment services and other institutions that helped to solve their clients' problems. Clients are often afraid to go directly to the services they need because they have a prior experience of being treated with disrespect, and social workers can often speed up the delivery of services because they have the relationships and understand the system.

Responsibilities

It is not always clear to social workers what responsibilities NGOs have and they do not feel there is a clear division of responsibilities and activities. Periodic meetings where responsibilities are reviewed and possibly redistributed according to current circumstances and the needs of service users would help (e.g. available funding or the expertise of professionals). Social workers believe the problem could easily be addressed by more frequent roundtables, where professionals working in the field share their experiences. Social workers were not the only stakeholder group who did not understand the responsibilities of NGOs, municipality representatives were also unable to clearly define the functions of NGOs and what services they provide.

> *NGOs are not as committed as social workers because they do not have permanent funding and can easily change the nature of their activities depending on the people working there at the time. Social workers feel some competition and duplication of services. It would be better if we would not compete but co-operate. However, this requires an agreement on resources – money, people and competencies. (Social worker, Kaunas region)*

A lack of inter-agency co-operation could be improved if the community was able to take on more functions or co-ordinate them better between themselves which would contribute to more on-the-ground solutions and a smoother re-integration experience for service users.

Up-to-date information

Proactively looking for who can provide the services required works, however proactivity often depends on a social worker's personal initiative and qualities. It is important to be able to link services to needs and opportunities so that the right services are delivered at the right time. Social workers viewed NGOs as more skilled in proactive inter-agency networking, which then allows them to react in a quick and timely manner. Social workers would like to acquire these networking skills.

Often there is a lack of information about the services provided. A "directory" of partners could be compiled and kept up-to-date by municipal representatives, who could then extend their activities to co-ordinating services and initiating the provision of missing services through projects or other forms of promotion.

Accommodation options

Social workers also raised the need for more accommodation options, housing and shelters, particularly for single males. Crisis centres for women are available and female service users are easier to find accommodation for but there is lack of accommodation for men.

Housing could be provided by either the public sector or NGOs. Accommodation could be bought from NGOs or non-commercial institutions which is provided together with case management and professional services.

Municipality representatives

Municipality representatives emphasised the value of publicising success stories as a stigma-reducing measure. They believe it is possible by highlighting success stories to start to change public attitudes, including a perception that people leaving prison are "dangerous and irredeemable".

Municipality representatives also raised the issue of greater representation for people leaving prison. They noted that while they often encounter organisations representing children with disabilities or care leavers and see their activities publicised, they are not as familiar with organisations representing people leaving prison. This may reflect how few organisations there are working with people leaving prison. To illustrate their point municipality representatives said that two years ago, when tenders were launched for the provision of services for people leaving prison, only one tender was received.

Municipality representatives believe there are lessons to be learned from other groups, such as people with disabilities, patients' organisations, or people with addictions, who have established organisations to represent their interests.

> *Other groups are somehow audible, but I do not know much about this group unless it is how they overcame addiction. However, this is only part of it, not all are addicts. (Municipal representative, Marijampolė)*

NGO involvement in the re-integration process

The success of Caritas and having NGOs involved in the re-integration process was highlighted. These organisations, according to the municipality representatives, have the necessary staff, specialists, experience to provide quality services to service users.

Information about services

Municipal representatives mentioned that leaflets are now being prepared and distributed in a targeted way that provide information on what services are available to help people identify the specific services they need.

> *The leaflets are a plus. The good thing is that more information is being gathered and information is being exchanged. Prisoners get more information on where to address. The leaflets are given to representatives of NGOs working with prisoners, so now there is a more targeted distribution of information. (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

One participant mentioned that in her municipality the services accessed by service users are captured in one database. They know the characteristics of person applying, what services they need, and what services they received and what outcomes are changing as a result.

5.4. Young care leavers

5.4.1. Challenges experienced with service delivery

As with the two previous sections, this section begins with a discussion of the challenges faced by care leavers transitioning out of state care to independent living. Common issues raised by the four stakeholder groups included insufficient preparation for living independently, the stigma experienced by care leavers, and inadequate resources to better support young people to transition successfully.

Service users talked about the fear they felt leaving the known for the unknown, feeling quite unprepared for "suddenly" having to look after themselves. The three service provider groups all stressed the importance of the transition process, with care leavers needing access to tangible and intangible supports like having a significant adult involved in their lives. NGO representatives viewed the transition process as

too spontaneous and informal, and when they got involved, service users were often not ready to start an independent life. Social workers said the transition process was the main problem from which all other problems arose, and municipal representatives said that while they have been working to improve the support, they provide to young people transitioning from care, more action is required.

Many examples of care leavers facing discrimination were provided, for example when looking for housing or a job, being paid less for unskilled work, or being employed without a contract. NGO and municipal representatives talked about the stigma they believe exists in educational institutions; care leavers are not encouraged to continue their education or to have professional ambitions. Some of the service users in the workshop viewed work and/or education as unnecessary, a view some other stakeholders believed resulted from the discrimination care leavers were subjected to.

Inadequate resources to help prepare care leavers live independently was expressed in a variety of ways, for example, service users said that a lot of the people involved in their lives e.g. teachers did not have the necessary characteristics to really help them, while service providers advised there is a shortage of qualified psychologists, not enough cross-sectoral services, and a lack of appropriate activities for young people in smaller communities.

Service users

Service users had difficulties describing their expectations for the future, they were more focused on the present and were reluctant to look or plan ahead. Participants told their stories without necessarily identifying them as successes or failures. It appeared too difficult for these young people to open up to a stranger (the moderator) in front of other young care leavers. Having said this, the participants did highlight several barriers to a successful or smooth transition from care.

The fear of exiting care

Service users observed it is very difficult to prepare for something you do not know anything about. All the young participants mentioned a strong sense of fear of facing the unknown, often reinforced by those in their immediate environment who work with them.

> *We live with having everything and the thought of having to go out and start something when you just do not know yet where to study, how to live, and you have to make decisions quickly. It is scary. I do not even want to think about it at the time. You do not think about it until the last minute. You have your room, it is all there, they give you everything, there is a kitchen, you have your own cup. And then you go out and there is nothing, and there is somebody else living in your room. You cannot even go back there, sit on the chair. There is nothing left. I was scared. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

> *When it was time for me to leave, I was so angry, so hostile, that even if someone tried to talk to me, I would not listen. It is not too scary about housing or a job at first, because you think you are going to get some kind of monetary support. But you are left with nothing, with no home of your own, where you used to live. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

> *We hear it all the time. For example, you go to the canteen and there is what they made today. And you do not always like everything. But if you say you do not want that dish, you are immediately told: "Oh, how it will be when you leave, you will be glad just getting one. You will not have anything." (Service user, Švenčionys)*

A successful exit from care relies not only on the right material supports being in place, but also on less tangible supports such as psychological support or better trained teachers (at common education institutions like secondary or professional schools). Currently, service users do not believe teachers are well qualified to support them during the transition period and that the characteristics they want in a teacher they find to be the exception rather than the norm.

Stigma

Care leavers noted that experiencing stigma is common after leaving care, for example when looking for a job or housing. Many examples of discrimination were cited, such as being denied housing or having their rent increased, being paid less for unskilled jobs, or being employed without a contract. Care leavers believe it is helpful to have a significant adult involved who can take the time to help with the challenges faced and to perhaps even accompany or represent them when looking for a job or a home.

> *When you work, you are offered less than others, only to find out that others get more. Sometimes they try to turn you down, or not pay at all. We are gullible, we do not always get it right. It is good when a carer intercedes. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

> *We are currently preparing to leave care and are already living in apartments. For example, when someone in the neighbourhood plays loud music, the police are called directly for us. Even if we are not at home at all. We do not expect anything else. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

Lack of information

Care leavers observed that they do not always have the information they need and do not always know where to turn with specific questions. There are likely to be several reasons for this, there is a lot of information to absorb when leaving a care home and until practically confronted with a situation such as paying a utility bill or applying for a health service the young person does not know where to find the information they need or remember having received it, if at all, because it was irrelevant at the time.

NGO representatives

NGO representatives focused on the challenges that arise from a lack of clear regulations and allocation of responsibilities. Given how important the transitional phase is, NGOs feel it is too spontaneous or informal; the Ministry's forthcoming regulation was highly anticipated as it should provide for better co-operation between different institutions and service providers including NGOs.

Poor institutional co-operation and lack of adequate information

NGO representatives observed that service procedures are currently interpreted and enforced differently by officials in different municipalities, making it difficult for volunteer support people to be effective with actions based more on personal initiative. For example, there is a lack of clarity about the procedures when a young person is transitioning out of care, which institution is responsible for what and who does what. This may be because the legal framework has only recently been adopted and the services available are still very new and so rules about what should happen have not yet been established. It was also suggested that there is competition between different institutions, e.g. between different NGOs and social workers which contributes to a lack of clarity.

> *These services are new in Kaunas municipality. So far, they are only listed in the Catalogue of Services, but there is no regulation for them yet, the ministry is still in the process of drafting it with those who carry out the work, it is not yet legal. For the system to work, be clear, there is a lack of common knowledge between institutions, and it is not clear who has to do what and when they do it. In a word, there is a lack of order as a lot of chaos and a certain amount of competition perhaps between NGOs and social workers exists. It is not clear what some do and what others do. There is no kind of co-operation and clarity in that co-operation. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

> *The experience in Švenčionys shows that it is very easy to get along with people. But it is just difficult for me to understand, from the services offered, what is going on, what is not, who is doing what, etc. Really, it is such a complexity. (NGO, Švenčionys)*

Lack of autonomy

NGO representatives believe too much is decided for children who are living in a shared house to ensure their maximum comfort. Lack of autonomy means that young people can lack basic life skills, from doing simple household decisions (what or where to buy), to financial literacy or education questions (where to enrol, what to study) etc. This means the skills to make decisions and choices and be responsible for those choices are not being sufficiently developed and so when NGOs step in, they find service users are not ready to start an independent life.

In the short term, residing in an institution may work, but in the longer term, it may prove unhelpful for both the person in care and the carer (the system). It is important to start developing a young people's autonomy skills earlier, i.e. before they reach adulthood, to allow them to carry out activities that will be important (e.g. filing documents, paying taxes, getting help from health professionals etc.).

> *Everything in the household is decided for them because it is easier that way. But then they lack basic domestic or financial literacy. They are told straight away: "You cannot do this", "You will not study there", and "You will be this or that". Children get used to it. Then we expect them to make up their own minds when they are 18. But they do not learn. (NGO, Švenčionys)*

> *Children from ordinary families are sometimes not very independent, but it is easier for them. While care leavers often even face such devaluation: "You cannot do it", "I will do it for you", "I will decide", "I will tell you". We need more education for social workers so that they do not stifle the desire to act, make mistakes, and learn from mistakes. They [social workers] may not always know how to do it themselves. But it is very important. (NGO, Kaunas region)*

NGO representatives believe a lack of independence is a problem that all stakeholders have a role in addressing. Teachers for example were identified as important agents in this area, as there appears to be a view that children in care or who have been in care are less able or capable, and teachers therefore make life easier by making verbal agreements: *"I will give you the minimum score because you will not be studying further anyway"*.

Stigma

NGO representatives also raised the issue of stigma, believing it to exist in educational institutions and in society more generally. Care leavers are often encouraged not to continue their education or to have professional ambitions.

> *At school, there are a lot of stories like that. For example: "Do not go to 11th grade because you are struggling", or "Will not study here with us, we will give you fours here". They often say then that they do not need an education, they do not need to do anything because their uncle, their parents get benefits and they survive, they go to construction and they earn money, they do not need an education. They often say: "Why do you want me to finish ninth grade when my aunt did six grades, and everything is fine". There is this continuity, and there is no incentive to go higher. It is such a systemic problem. (NGO, Švenčionys)*

Social workers

Lack of adaption skills

An important issue social workers raised, which was also raised by other service providers is about the adaptation skills of children when leaving a shared home. Social workers pointed out while children in shared homes learn skills for daily living (e.g. how to cook, wash clothes, etc.) they lack adaptive skills for adult life such as financial literacy, how to access health or other services (e.g. how to renew a disability certificate to get benefits or what is the procedure for changing your passport, which documents are needed etc.).

It was also observed that young people find it difficult to adapt due to the adoption of certain behavioural "scripts" that are present in their environment which they consider sufficient or even exemplary (e.g. they do not think it is worth going to school because their father has dropped out of school, works in construction, and survives or their parents are on benefits and live off them). Young people do not always have access to good role models or the opportunity to see a wider range of possible scenarios making it even more difficult to transition out of care into society and which can lead to antisocial or violent behaviour, and eventually into the criminal justice system.

> *They go from one system to another. Children are taken from their parents – they have seen the pattern in their family and for them this pattern is normal, and they return to the system. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

Shortage of qualified professionals

Social workers talked about a lack of qualified staff in several ways. First, they feel there is a need for more qualified staff who have the experience to support care leavers and work with them more generally. Secondly, there is simply a need for more staff, so that more and better attention can be paid to each child. It was stressed for example that there should someone to accompany the young person when they leave a care home, to help them to deal with the problems they face and to answer any questions they have. There is also a role for volunteers who could help care leavers for example navigate relationships with authorities, choose a place to live or settle into a new home once they have left a shared home.

> *We sometimes feel like single mothers of many children without a husband. The little ones need one thing, the big ones another. Then there is food and illness. Sometimes we do not know how to prioritise, how to keep up and how to involve them in activities. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

Social workers from Švenčionys also highlighted that they need a wider network of case workers as part of the recently introduced "leaving care" service. This service was added to the Catalogue of Social Services in 2021 by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, with the aim of providing a set of inter-connected and cross-sectoral services and measures for young people leaving care to facilitate their integration into the community and their transition to an autonomous life.

> *Other municipalities have more case workers as part of the "leaving care" service, but here in Švenčionys, there is a severe shortage. We do it ourselves as much as possible, but I would prefer it to be official, not between jobs. When it comes to accompanying and being together, we do not always have time together. In the families where they live, it is possible to continue it, not to say goodbye to them when they become adults. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

> *They want what they call a free life. Everybody wants that at that age. But they are more vulnerable because they often have relatives who live a life of disruption and often take advantage of them. And others have seen it, if a child is from foster care, he/she gets a more expensive flat to rent. All sorts of stories happen. They need to have adults they can talk to and consult, who will represent them if there is a problem. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

Insufficient resources

The unique challenges small communities face was highlighted in a discussion about resources. Švenčionys for example is not a big town and social workers often face the problem of encouraging young people to become interested in something, whether that be a hobby or sports where the number of available activities is limited.

> *They get bored of everything quickly. You do not know what to suggest. Everybody has been everywhere, and everything is known. It takes imagination to come up with something, but it also requires methodological tools to stimulate our imagination. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

> *We lack methodological tools to make our work more effective and interesting, to involve them, because children are specific – they are sensitive, they have been hurt – and sometimes we just lack the knowledge. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

Material resources are provided by various local employers, but social workers believe that fundraising skills are lacking on how to, for example, attract more potential donors and secure long-term sponsorship. Social workers also believe that involving employers and the general public more in activities with care leavers could help mitigate the problem of stigma.

Stigma

While not the most significant challenge raised by social workers, the issue of stigma was raised with a view that it is clearly present in society and eliminating it was seen as "*fighting windmills*". In general, there was a pessimistic attitude towards the possible elimination of stigma in society. Social workers observed that young people from shared homes are not always accepted by their peers and are more likely than others to be accused of various anti-social behaviours.

> *Our children are labelled that if they are from a care home, they are immediately accused of being the one who broke something, stole something, beat someone up or something like that. (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

Municipal representatives

Municipality representatives cited similar barriers to those raised by NGO representatives and social workers, that is, inadequate planning and preparation for independent living (e.g. financial, and legal literacy skills).

Sudden exit from care

A key issue raised by municipality representatives was the sudden exit from care which can cause considerably frustration and stress for care leavers. Young people not only lose their "home" where they have been relatively well cared for but also their friends and wider social circle (teachers and care home staff for example who have been part of their close environment).

All three municipalities involved in the focus group discussion indicated that they are improving the supports they provide to care leavers following the introduction of the new "leaving care" service. The municipalities believe supporting independent living is necessary and that it can take one of two forms: either the young person lives independently and is in regular contact with a counsellor or other professional support person, or they live next to a shared home and run their own household, visited periodically by a social worker, perhaps for counselling and other support when needed. There are some early results from the new service, but it is not yet widespread nor fully regulated.

> *It depends very much on their age. By law, they can be independent at the age of 18 years, but some of them are still at school at that age. What independence is there? They do not have a supportive network to fall back on. There are their families and relatives, but children have been taken into care, so it is clear what influence there is. They are better off away from them because they are also deprived of benefit money and their habits are damaging there. We try to keep in touch with them so that they know that they can go to us and can at least get some advice. (Municipal representative, Švenčionys)*

Shortage of qualified professionals

Representatives from the three municipalities echoed the views of social workers about the lack of skilled professionals. They believe there is a particular shortage of qualified psychologists who can work with the increasing number of children displaying experiences of deep trauma.

> *We need good psychologists. And I stress – good psychologists, not just any psychologists. We have a higher proportion of children who have been taken into care from full families. They were not orphaned or abandoned in infancy. They were taken from those families. They are going through a lot of difficult emotions, but there is no practical work on that. There is a desire to promote adoption so that, in the long term, there will be no such thing as a shared home, but we need to realise that no one takes these children in. Not only because of the stigma but also because they are very difficult. There is a need of qualified help, both for the child, in the first place, and for the professionals and foster carers who work with them. (Municipal representative)*

Stigma

Municipality representatives raised the issue of stigma in the context of schools, believing it to be commonplace. It was observed that in mainstream schools, there are problems with teachers or parents of other pupils who, because of prejudice or the behaviours of children in care, want to restrict their children's participation in common activities and contact with children in care. These experiences can contribute to confusion, fear and a resulting detachment for young people when preparing to leave care.

Municipality representatives observed that often, even when creating a shared house, some local communities and neighbours have a negative view and can try to prevent their establishment. There is a perception that children living in foster care are irresponsible and do not know how to protect property and will damage it and others' property. When young people leaving care try to rent a home and apply through advertisements, they are often confronted with a similar attitude.

> *As soon as they find out [young people] are from care, they immediately say they are not renting, or they raise the price so much [care leavers] cannot rent. And even if we go and try to talk, they often do not agree. In small towns, everyone knows everyone, it is hard not to hide that you are from care. (Municipal representative, Švenčionys)*

> *Big cities are no better. They sometimes try to make a profit by renting for twice the amount and then paying half of it back to the child. The child cannot get the money in cash, so they cash it in. And children are naive, they do not understand what they are doing sometimes. Sometimes landlords just say: "They will destroy the flat, then I will have to repair it". (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

5.4.2. Successful experiences and elements of the current system that are working well

Like the discussions with people with disabilities and people leaving prison, participants struggled more to identify and articulate successful experiences and things that are working well for care leavers than they did with the challenges. Of the positive examples provided, most appear to result from inter-agency and interpersonal co-operation, the creativity and commitment of staff working in the field, and personal initiative including utilising informal networks of people who are willing to help young people with their transition from care.

All four stakeholder groups talked about what is required to successfully transition a young person out of care. Creating a new home, a space of one's own was noted by all the service provider participants as a cornerstone for building an independent life, together with education and the ability to plan one's own resources. Ensuring adequate supports are in place was emphasised as particularly important for young people who may not have the same employment prospects as others.

Ensuring appropriate accommodation options for care leavers was a strong theme. The introduction of shared and "independent living" homes was viewed as a positive step forward, where a young person transitions gradually out of care to a life where they can take care of themselves. Renting in the private market appears more difficult, with some participants reporting that as soon as landlords discover that a potential tenant has been in care, their application is declined, or the rent is increased so much that the young person cannot afford it. Participants discussed state housing insurance as a possible solution to this problem. In this case, the landlord would know that any damage to the property or civil damage to neighbours would be covered by the state through an insurance company.

As in other focus group discussions, the value of publicising "success stories" to help reduce stigma, make employers and landlords less likely to exploit young people, and instil a sense of pride and self-confidence in young people themselves was raised. Participants also talked about encouraging communities to become more involved in the transition process for care leavers. The stakeholder groups felt that the potential for volunteering in this area is likely underutilised, particularly in activities aimed at reducing stigma.

Service users

Care leaver participants attributed the successes they have experienced to the opportunities they have had to access different types of support during the "preparing to leave" phase as well as after leaving care. Employment was not seen as an issue with service users saying they manage to find a job in one way or another. Financial literacy was also not seen as an issue because from the young people's point of view, the money they receive is quite tightly controlled by law, with very clear regulations on when they can spend how much and on what.

Familiarisation with public authorities

In Švenčionys, care leavers were taken on a field trip to the social assistance office before leaving care, not only to find out what services were available, but also to physically visit, get used to, and overcome any fear of the institution. This experience was viewed very positively.

> *They took us on that tour, and I may have listened carefully at the time, but then, when I needed to, it was only from that tour that I remembered where to apply for benefits. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

A support person

Care leavers talked about how valuable it would be to have a confidant they could talk to as an "adult", this could be the person organising their transition process or another significant adult who is involved in their lives; someone who has the time to help them with the challenges they face including helping them with activities such as renewing a disability certificate or applying for a passport. As discussed earlier, the person should be someone the young person knows and can trust, from a close environment, rather than a stranger (this could be a relative, a friend's parents or the like). This relationship should start early, while the young person is still in care, so that they can get to know them and establish a close relationship.

> *There is no one appointed now, so you find someone through friendships. For example, foster parents, parents of friends or classmates, who know, can give advice. It would be good that the carer from the shared home could, but she does not work with you anymore, so it does not always work out. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

Financial independence

Young care leavers said they are sincerely grateful for the financial support provided to them for independent living. It relieves fears about the immediate future, although it can become a target for unscrupulous individuals who try to take advantage of their ignorance. The first money earned on one's own is crucial to strengthening self-esteem and to becoming less dependent on others.

> *When we are already living on our personal earnings, it is very good, because we are already independent, whereas those who live on their parents' income are less independent. (Service user, Švenčionys)*

NGO representatives

Success stories shared by NGO representatives related to the personal involvement of staff, where one person passionate about solving a problem, has found a like-minded person in another institution and together and because of their personal networks and efforts, they have achieved positive change. This

may indicate that on the one hand, the system is open to innovation and local initiatives, but on the other hand, that there is not a systematic approach to supporting effective co-operation.

Inter-institutional co-operation

Effective co-operation between NGOs and municipality service companies is often based on personal relationships and informal communication. Trust is essential, but if there is staff turnover and practices are not at least partially formalised, initiatives can fall over. A more formal system of co-operation would prevent this, so when employees change, effective communication channels based on inter-institutional trust remain in place.

Clear rules for independent living homes

Independent living homes for young care leavers are viewed positively, however there is currently no clear framework or rules for how these should be managed. NGO representatives believe it is important to have rules that apply to everyone equally and are understood by everyone, i.e. what services are available, who needs them, and who is receiving them. By way of example, it is important that young people understand why escort services are needed, that they are not "guards" but intermediaries between the community and the care home, that they can provide a close, trustworthy link and are available to help in any situation.

> *They have a fear of moving from one care home to another. But they do not realise that they do not know how to be independent yet. That these "companions" can be just a close person, a counsellor who can advise and comfort if necessary. (NGO, Kaunas region).*

> *They are seeking independence, so it is important to agree on when and how that accompaniment helps them. To form a business-like relationship, so that they make their own decisions, but after consultation and thinking through the alternatives. (NGO, Švenčionys)*

It is important that information about available services is provided to the full range of professionals who work with care leavers and their companions. Companions require their own circle of advisors to advise them on the possible problems their foster children may face – financial, legal, psychological, etc. In addition to the general services of the companion, the young care leaver should also be provided with some direct advice on legal, financial, or other issues and psychological services.

Labour market inclusion

NGO representatives believe employment is crucial to a successful transition from care, particularly for those who do not progress to higher education. Employment is not just about financial independence or gaining social status, but also about creating and developing social ties. Internships and mentoring schemes can work well, where young people can try out different activities and get a feel for what works best for them. This can help care leavers and employers move past any misconceptions they have about each other. Several examples were provided of young people choosing careers or going on to work as employees after a summer internship.

> *Work is important, of course, but it is also important for them to gain new contacts and new relationships. They get involved in normal life. Feel more stable. (NGO, Švenčionys)*

NGO representatives did note however that care leavers must have the opportunity to consult with a trusted support person such as their carer or companion before signing an employment contract, to ensure the conditions are what the law says they should be.

Increased resources

NGOs also suggested that more resources would contribute to the more successful integration of care leavers. Services should be charged at a normal rate because working with young people, especially in

the case of "leading person" services, is not only time-consuming, but also requires a lot of emotional effort. There is also a shortage of professionals. Expanding the range of professionals and services that are accessible (e.g. lawyers, psychologists, financial consultants) is not only necessary for the young people but also for the staff of the NGOs, who do not always know how to deal with some situations.

Social workers

Social workers struggled to identify existing good practices and tended to reference their personal experiences of working with care leavers. Social workers referenced practices in other municipalities, but their knowledge was limited, which suggests there is limited sharing of best practices between municipalities.

Involvement of local communities, NGOs and the public

Social workers believe that many of the challenges that have been identified could be solved by the greater involvement of local communities, NGOs or the general public. People such as assistants or "leaving persons" who are available to assist young people develop their adaptions skills, not just once or for a short period of time but for at least a year.

Financial literacy training

All participants from the social worker stakeholder group pointed out that financial literacy is a big problem for care leavers, and it should be taught at school. In that setting, all children and young people could learn about budgeting in a non-stigmatising way i.e. situations not necessarily related to living at home, for example, budgeting to attend a camp or a study trip etc.

> *There are no good practices at the moment, but maybe they could be something that they would all do together in schools as challenges. I do not know if my children are very literate, but at least they can ask me, but for those children, there is not much help. They are very absorbed in such things. I have advised one girl when she came out of foster care: "When you get your salary, pay the utilities first, then the food money, and only then look at what is left and plan what you want to buy". So, I met her the other day, with a baby and she says: "I remember what you told me, I still do that". (Social worker, Švenčionys)*

Publication of good practices

As well as working with care leavers, service providers could work with the communities within which shared homes are located for example encouraging communities to become involved in a care leavers' transition process. Publicising good practices in neighbourhoods, to create a sense of ownership is very effective so that those "rare" success stories of children adapting, and succeeding are recognised as a success for the system, and there is recognition and pride in having succeeded to get a young person on a better path. This is particularly important for professionals, and potentially it would help them to attract volunteers for activities that are traditionally understaffed.

Municipality representatives

Municipality representatives focused on the importance of accommodation and getting it right. They talked very positively about being able to provide transitional accommodation closer to the institution a care leaver lived in so that contact can be maintained after they leave and reduced gradually rather than suddenly. Municipality representatives believe when this transition is successful, other processes are less fragmented, such as financial counselling and representation with landlords, employers and other organisations.

Independent living homes

Municipality representatives believe that the introduction of "independent living" homes, thereby moving away from large children's homes (residential institutions) can improve care conditions and the transition from care. This accommodation arrangement is considered very effective in creating a gradual transition, where the young person gradually moves from full care to a life where they must take care of themselves. This would be similar to the experience of children who leave their parents' home to study and/or rent their first home, but who can return home if necessary. Young people leaving care also need such a buffer where they can feel supported by significant adults.

Municipality representatives in Kaunas region shared a success story where part of an "independent living" house was separated off and had a separate entrance. Three girls, aged 16, who were continuing their vocational training in Kaunas and wanting to live on their own, moved in. The social workers of the "independent living" home helped them to plan their finances and with shopping, to deal with shortages, and maintain their home. Both the staff and the three girls acknowledged that the experience was very positive.

> *We helped them settle in. We bought some non-perishable food – oil, flour, something else. We sat down together and planned how they would distribute their EUR 300 a month. How much per week, how much to put in. Their tickets to go to Kaunas on Monday and come back on Friday have been bought, so they do not have to worry. They live in a dormitory there. If they want to go back earlier, they have to pay for it. One day I got a call from a girl saying: "I do not have money for the week, what to do?" So, I say: "Wait for Friday, you have to survive those two days somehow". We will of course lend her money, but she has to understand and ask for it. It is not for us to offer her. If you need help, ask. Sometimes they even do not know how to do that. Everything is very much done for them, thought out, planned. Now they are saying: "I had no idea how many things you have to think about when you live alone." And they do not live alone, we pay the utility bills and so on. There needs to be a transitional period so that they learn those lessons safely so that there are adults around who want to help, not take advantage. (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

> *We set up a separate housing next to the shared independent living house, just by separating part of the house. There are three girls living almost independently, learning a profession, and planning a budget. We visit them, they turn to us if they need us – we are all there. But that is the way it worked out for us, however, there is not always a possibility for that. But it is really effective. (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

Municipality representatives also observed that where possible, if a minor owns a property when they enter care, that property should be preserved for them, either by renting it out or otherwise refinancing the costs. The possibility of returning to their home when the child reaches adulthood, or selling it to buy another one, can be a significant and positive step towards independent living.

> *We had a boy of 14 years of age, his mother died suddenly and then his grandmother, and he was left alone. But there was an apartment. We rented it while he was with us, and when he was about to leave, we all renovated it together, he bought furniture with the money he had from his move-in, and now he lives there nicely. He has a home and some kind of connection with his family, they need those memories, their roots. (Municipal representative, Kaunas region)*

> *We had a case where the father killed the mother in the flat, leaving twins, a girl and a boy, who came to us. That flat was still there. Nobody wanted to live there, you know, such a tragedy. In small towns, people are superstitious. But when it was time for them to leave, we consulted them and they did not mind – they fixed it up, and the sister is living there now with her husband and child. I do not know how she and her brother split up, but the house stayed for them to start a life. (Municipal representative, Švenčionys)*

Publication of good practices

Municipality representatives believe that publicising good practices of young people successfully transitioning from care to independence not only reduces stigma in society, makes employers and

landlords more vigilant and less likely to exploit young people, but also instils in the young people themselves self-confidence and the courage to pursue their own goals.

Municipalities currently manage publicity campaigns themselves, but municipality representatives believe that campaigns should be centralised, and creative work done by professionals in Vilnius (by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, or a creative agency hired by the ministry). They agree that while information is known locally, they lack both the expertise and the time to write quality articles and, in the end, the desired impact is not being achieved i.e. public engagement, reduction of stigma and increased patronage. The *Karas Keliuose* (War on Roads) campaign which aimed to reduce the consequences of unsafe driving was provided as an example of a campaign that was carried out centrally, using both national and local media channels, achieving good results.

5.5. Conclusion

The objective of this chapter has been to describe how people with disabilities, people leaving prison and care leavers experience the delivery of public services in Lithuania based on their feedback. The views of service users themselves have been complemented with those of people who work with them – NGOs, social workers, and municipality representatives. This section draws together the focus group discussions about the challenges, the successes, the good ideas and the aspirations into a small number of key conclusions.

5.5.1. The challenges

A surprising number of challenges were common across all three groups. A lack of appropriately qualified staff was raised time and time again in the workshops. This ranged from a shortage of professionals such as psychologists to simply a need for more staff and volunteers with the right experience and qualities. All three service user groups talked about how important it is that the people who work with them have the right characteristics, for example, a positive attitude. They want people to encourage and empower them, not merely do everything for them. People with disabilities said that service providers with the right communication skills were more likely to be highly valued; people leaving prison said they sensed a lack of empathy and positive attitude from both the individuals and institutions that work with them; and care leavers in talking about teachers commented that the characteristics they want in a teacher (e.g. a sense of ambition for them) are often found to be the exception rather than the norm.

Stigma is a major issue for service users, particularly for people leaving prison and care leavers. People leaving prison believe they are often seen as dangerous and unworthy of help, even by the people whose job it is to help them. As well as citing examples of discrimination such as being denied housing or paid less for unskilled work, care leavers said that often less is expected of them i.e. they are not encouraged to continue their education or to have professional ambitions. Only one service user in the disabilities workshop said they had experienced negative attention from others, with most participants saying the situation has changed for the better in the last ten years. Now, people around them are willing to help if needed and they do not often feel any negativity. When discrimination was talked about, it was in terms of a lack of access to the same opportunities as able-bodied people, for example, fewer jobs being available because employers lack an understanding of what people with disabilities can do and what it would cost to modify the workplace for them if required.

Finally, a lack of co-operation and co-ordination between institutions is a common problem which workshop participants believe leads to issues such as institutions not always knowing what services they or other providers are offering to a particular service user, overlapping or duplication of services and service users not being aware of what other services they might be entitled to. Poor or inadequate information can exacerbate the problem. Despite a view that many services are available, participants observed that the

information about those services can be difficult to find and/or overly bureaucratic and complicated. Service providers observed that better co-operation between institutions would allow them to better target their efforts.

Several challenges relating to the specific target groups are worth highlighting. People with disabilities noted that their needs are often perceived in a very physiological way which can result in receiving services that focus them on their disability when what they want is a more holistic approach to the support they receive i.e. supports and services that help them to overcome exclusion and participate more fully in society. The lack of appropriate services for families of service users was raised in both people with disabilities and the people leaving prison workshops.

For people leaving prison, lack of (safe) accommodation options, particularly for male prisoners immediately upon release, is a pressing issue. Some service users reported not having anywhere to go while service providers reported that the use of night shelters, which are not viewed as suitable, is common in some municipalities. Service users said they would value an intermediate environment between prison and full independence where they have the time and space to adjust to living outside prison and where they can learn or re-learn basic living skills. A much earlier start to the reintegration process (i.e. well before people leave prison) would also be valuable.

Greater preparation and planning for living independently was also discussed in the care leavers' workshop. Care leavers talked about feeling quite unprepared for "suddenly" having to look after themselves. Care leavers need access to both tangible and intangible supports such as having a significant adult involved in their lives to transition successfully to independent living. Municipality representatives believe supporting independent living could take one of two forms: either the young person lives independently and is in regular contact with an appropriate support person, or they could live next to a shared home and run their own household, supported by a social worker.

5.5.2. The successes and opportunities for improvements

Across the board, workshop participants struggled to identify and articulate successful experiences and things that are working well. While participants provided a small number of concrete "success stories" they focused more on potential solutions to specific problems and what they believe is required to better support service users. This does not mean there have not been positive improvements to the services delivered or how they are delivered, but the stakeholders all agreed there is a lot more that can be done for all three groups.

Each stakeholder group focused on different aspects of service provision, based on their specific roles in the system. One solution (in response to the issues of stigma and discrimination) that was raised by all four stakeholder groups across the three workshops was the potential value of publicising good news stories. There was a strong view that a joint and systematic approach to disseminating successful experiences and practices within and across different institutions and municipalities to improve public awareness and education would be highly valuable. For example, service providers suggested that disseminating stories of people with disabilities successfully engaging in the labour market may encourage more employers to hire people with a disability.

Increased co-operation and collaboration between institutions was described as critically important for improving service provision for all service users. NGO representatives went as far as saying better co-operation is what will help to solve many of the other problems. Several examples of successful co-operation were provided, for example NGO representatives and social workers stressed how valuable they have found the support of municipalities in creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Some service providers believe that co-operation is currently based more on personal relationships and informal communication and while this may be working initiatives can fall over for example if staff change.

Formal systems and practices would help to prevent this, so that if employees do change, communication channels remain in place. Social workers believe that more frequent roundtables would be valuable, so that respective responsibilities are better understood, and people can share their experiences, including practices that are proving to work.

Promoting autonomy was a consistent theme, and while it may have been expressed differently for each group, the idea was the same – service users being supported and encouraged to progressively make more decisions and choices for themselves. The value of living arrangements that help service users increase personal responsibility such as shared housing with associated programmes and services that support independent living were discussed in all three workshops. In the care leavers workshop for example, service providers talked about young people living in an environment where they can gain independence gradually, within a support system of a professional support person(s), parents, other family members, and friends.

Finally, stakeholders raised representation and advocacy as important factors in improving service provision, for example, service users and their representatives having the opportunity to participate directly in service design and decision-making processes ("client voice") so their needs are fully understood and accommodated. Municipality representatives noted that while they often encounter organisations representing children with disabilities or care leavers for example, they are not as familiar with organisations representing people leaving prison and that there are lessons that could be learned from groups who have established organisations to represent their interests.

Note-worthy solutions specific to each of the three groups included, starting with people with disabilities, the importance of understanding the unique challenges people with disabilities face so their needs are not only met through targeted services but are also taken account when designing universal services. Remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic enabled more participation in the learning process, particularly for those with mobility issues, and service users would like to see more educational programmes and cultural activities offered online.

Accessibility is a major issue and participants want more effort put into addressing the challenges associated with limited mobility, including private as well as public institutions being required to adapt their environment for people with mobility issues and making lists of places that are accessible to people with disabilities readily available or creating an award for easily accessible places. Access to workplaces and/or training institutions, services such as health services, as well as cultural events was also raised as a challenge. Service users would like better access to cultural and other social events that would help them to get out of the home, where they could socialise with other people and not be so isolated.

The issue of institutional discrimination is particularly acute for people leaving prison, with most service users reporting they have experienced it, not only from private institutions such as banks but also from service providers and other professionals involved in their reintegration process. The success of an ex-prisoner's re-integration into society depends in large part on the quality of the contact they have with institutions and individuals. People leaving prison believe support is most effective when it is delivered in a community-based setting, for example in a rehabilitation centre or through organisations like Caritas. Many of these rehabilitation centres are run by people who have been in prison themselves, and so not only can people leave prison learn or re-learn basic skills in a safe environment, but they can do so without feeling "looked down upon".

Care leavers talked about the value of supports, for example, workshop participants said they are sincerely grateful for the financial support provided to them for independent living. It relieves fears about the immediate future. Care leavers also talked about wanting a confidant they could talk to as an "adult", this could be the person organising their transition process or another significant adult who is involved in their lives; someone who has the time to help them with the challenges they face. Trusted relationships are built over time and so whoever the support person(s) is, they should be a constant in the young person's life, while they are building their own adult life.

There is no doubt from the information workshop participants shared that people with disabilities, people leaving prison and care leavers face significant challenges, some unique, many the same, in receiving the supports and services they need to help them live the lives they want to live, the lives most people take for granted. While concrete examples of "success stories" were limited they do exist and were provided in the workshops. Furthermore, workshop participants spoke enthusiastically about potential solutions and improvements that could be made to improve social services for all three groups of service users.

Suggestions for improving service delivery

The suggestions in this box build on the experiences of users and key stakeholders involved in the delivery of public services and complement the recommendations provided in the other chapters of this report.

To identify and address the gaps, overlaps and complexity in service provision, Lithuania could consider:

- Consolidating some existing services and tailoring them more to the service user to simplify service promotion, to reduce duplication and to make service provision more transparent and effective.

- Ensuring consistent coverage of service provision across all municipalities and improving resources for smaller communities where necessary.

- Shifting the service focus from assisting service users to empowering them, promoting autonomy among service users, and encouraging them to progressively make more decisions and choices for themselves.

- Introducing case management for people with disabilities to help them identify the right mix of services (building on the experience with the recently introduced preparation and planning support for people leaving prison and care leavers).

- Providing more opportunities for service users and their representatives (including NGOs) to participate directly in service design and decision-making processes ("client voice"), so their needs are fully understood and accommodated in the design and delivery of services.

- Reviewing and where necessary improving the supports available to the families of service users.

To ensure service users are sufficiently prepared and supported to live independently, Lithuania could consider:

- Offering a range of services to inmates while they are still in prison to prepare them for their return to society (e.g. education, training, psychological support, etc.).

- Ensuring consistent implementation of the preparation and planning process for independent living for care leavers and people leaving prison across municipalities.

- Guaranteeing the development of an individual action plan for each care leaver and inmate to guide their transition process, so their individual reintegration needs are understood, and relevant service providers are identified to ensure that services are available upon release.

- Involving service users in the development of their individual action plan.

- Ensuring all inmates are met by a service provider on their release date at the prison gate to be accompanied to their accommodation.

- Increasing the availability of safe housing options, either through "independent living" homes where care leavers/ people leaving prison /people with disabilities can receive support for

independent living, social housing, or through collaboration with private housing market (e.g. state housing insurance).

- Supporting target groups to build an adequate social network, e.g. through volunteers, who can help them in the transition to independent living.

To ensure adequate human resources and skills to deliver for these service user groups, Lithuania could consider:

- Undertaking a workforce planning exercise for social service provision, with the aim of developing future-focused workforce strategies and plans.
- Exploring how to attract more volunteers, e.g. through campaigns aimed at attracting volunteers such as retired people to help run activities for and with young people.
- Making the personal attributes and characteristics necessary to work effectively with service users a core competency required of employees and considering how to build this into the recruitment process.
- Reviewing the training provided for staff working with service users (social workers in particular).
- In the case of people leaving prison, considering more community-based services provided by staff who were once prisoners themselves.

To increase and improve co-operation and co-ordination between institutions, Lithuania could consider:

- Reviewing and strengthening institutional co-ordination mechanisms within and between all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders through stronger public governance arrangements.
- Improving greater sharing of information between institutions by identifying and addressing the barriers to information sharing.
- Introducing more regular meetings and networking forums, e.g. between municipalities, NGOs, service users and their representatives, to better understand the needs of service users, as well as "roundtables" for officials where information about respective responsibilities, changes to policy or legislation, best practices and successful innovations can be shared.

To improve the quality and flow of information to service users and service providers and between and within institutions and municipalities, Lithuania could consider:

- Rationalising the information available to service users and making it more "user-friendly", including making more information available on-line.
- Introducing a directory of services and partners that can be accessed by service users as well as those work with them and support them (e.g. family members).
- Making more information available about the effectiveness of services, e.g. a research "clearinghouse".
- Asking service users what information they would find useful and how they would like to receive it, e.g. lists of places that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Reducing the bureaucracy and documentation required to access services, including through digitalising documentation.

To eliminate or at least significantly reduce the stigma and discrimination experienced by service users, Lithuania could consider:

- Establishing a joint and systematic approach to disseminating "good news" stories, i.e. stories of successful experiences and good practices, within and across different institutions and municipalities as well as for the general public to improve public awareness and education.

- Assigning service users with a "trusted adviser", someone who can provide advice and represent or advocate for them (e.g. in the case of care leavers this role was described as a significant adult who has the time to help them with challenges).
- Introducing education campaign(s) within institutions who work with vulnerable groups to combat (public) institutional discrimination.
- Increasing/improving integration into the labour market through close collaboration between the public employment service and employers.
- Encouraging/supporting better organisation of advocacy groups for some service user groups who can help represent their interests.
- Providing opportunities for peer-to-peer networking.

Annex 5.A. Focus Group Discussions guide

IMPORTANT: At the beginning of the meeting, the researchers:

- Distribute at each table a sheet where the participants can note their full name, municipality and institution. This information will help the researchers to note "who says what" for the report.
- Name a representative per the table who will present the conclusions to the rest of the group after the table discussions.

1st discussion: Main issues and challenges around public service delivery (45 minutes)

- In your own opinion, what are the main issues/challenges surrounding public service delivery in your municipality?
- Could you please provide some concrete examples of those issues/challenges?

- What do you think are the main reasons/factors that trigger these challenges?
- *[Only for Users]* Have you faced any difficulties in trying to access the following services due to (your disability/your condition of young care leaver/ex-prisoner)?
  - o Employment services
  - o Education services
  - o Healthcare services *[Please probe for mental health care services]*
  - o Social services *[See below the complete list of social services for your reference]*

General services	Special services	
	Social assistance services	*Care services*
Information	Home assistance	Day social care
Counselling	Support to develop or restore social skills	Short-term social care
Mediation and representation	Support for independent living	Long-term social care
Provision of food	Accommodation in night shelters	Temporary respite (care)
Provision of clothing and footwear	Accommodation in hostels	
Transport	Accommodation in other forms of temporary accommodation	
Socio-cultural activities	Intensive-crisis resolution assistance	
Personal hygiene	Psychosocial assistance	
Open youth work	Temporary respite (assistance)	
Youth work on the street	Support for carers, adoptive parents and guardians	
Mobile youth work	Day-care services for children	

- *[For all groups except for Users]* In your opinion, do people with disabilities/young care leavers/ex-prisoners face any difficulties in trying to access the following services due to (your disability/your condition of young care leaver/ex-prisoner)?
  - o Employment services
  - o Education services
  - o Accessing healthcare services *[Please probe for mental health care services]*

    o   Accessing social services *[See below the complete list of social services for your reference]*

General services	Special services	
	Social assistance services	*Care services*
Information	Home assistance	Day social care
Counselling	Support to develop or restore social skills	Short-term social care
Mediation and representation	Support for independent living	Long-term social care
Provision of food	Accommodation in night shelters	Temporary respite (care)
Provision of clothing and footwear	Accommodation in hostels	
Transport	Accommodation in other forms of temporary accommodation	
Socio-cultural activities	Intensive-crisis resolution assistance	
Personal hygiene	Psychosocial assistance	
Open youth work	Temporary respite (assistance)	
Youth work on the street	Support for carers, adoptive parents and guardians	
Mobile youth work	Day-care services for children	

- Which of those were the most problematic/difficult to access?

- In your opinion which of the following challenges are most urgent to tackle regarding the provision of public services in your municipality? *[Ask the participants to rank the challenges in terms or urgency. Please add other challenges to the list if they have been mentioned during the first part of the discussion. Ask participants to explain their decisions if the challenge has not yet been discussed in one of the previous questions.]*
  - Limited resources
  - Lack of co-operation between services
  - Unawareness of existing services among users
  - Limited availability of services
  - Low quality of services
  - Services are not easily accessible (possible reasons: distance, price, stringent conditions…)
  - Stigma
  - Other (please, specify)

2nd discussion: What is needed to improve service delivery (45 minutes)

1. *[Only for Users and Family/friends]* Could you please share a pleasant/successful experience you had with public service providers in your municipality?
   [Probe:
   - What type of service were you trying to access?
   - Who provided the service?)

2. *[Only for Social Workers/NGO representatives]* Could you please share a pleasant/successful experience you had when providing public service to people with disabilities/ex-prisoners/ young care leavers?
   [Probe:
   - What type of service were you providing?
   - What was the profile of the person trying to access the service?]

3. What elements in particular made that experience a pleasant/successful one?

4. What do you think we can learn from each of those examples?

5. Based on those examples, or other experiences/knowledge, what would be your recommendations to improve public service delivery in your municipality?

6. In your opinion, which of the following solutions would be most welcome to improve public service delivery in your municipality? *[Ask participants to rank options. Please add other recommendations to the list if they have been mentioned during the first part of the discussion. Ask participants to explain their decisions if the topic has not yet been discussed in one of the previous questions.]*

    o   Increase resources

    o   Improve co-operation/co-ordination between services

    o   Locate services in one place

    o   Raise awareness among users of existing services

    o   Introduce new services

    o   Improve the quality of services

    o   Improve the accessibility of services (distance, price, conditions…)

    o   Address stigma

    o   Other (please, specify)

3rd discussion: Common challenges and recommendations (50 minutes)

Table debrief (10 minutes).

Each group should identify the three main issues/challenges surrounding public service delivery in Lithuania and the three main recommendations to improve such delivery. The representative of the table will present their conclusions to the rest of the group.

Open debrief (40 minutes).

1. What are the three main challenges surrounding public service delivery for vulnerable groups in your municipality? Each table has selected three challenges and explains to the whole group why they chose them.

2. Any reactions from the other tables? How does this list compare to their own list? Are there any issues that surprise them? What can you learn from the other lists?

3. What are the key recommendations to improve public service delivery for vulnerable groups in your municipality? Each table has selected three recommendations and explains to the whole group why they chose them.

4. Any reactions from the other tables? How does this list compare to their own list? Are there any issues that surprise them? What can you learn from the other lists?

Note

[1] In 2020, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Security and Labour (MSSL) enacted an order on the social reintegration of people released from correctional institutions ("ex-prisoners"). The order entered into force on 1 January 2021 and serves as a co-operation instrument among municipalities, NGOs, correctional institutions and probation offices for the provision of integrated and personalised services to people leaving prison.

Personalised Public Services for People in Vulnerable Situations in Lithuania

TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATED APPROACH

Despite strong economic performance and significant governance reforms over the past few decades, Lithuania has a higher share of its population at-risk-of poverty than other EU countries (21.4% in 2020 compared to an EU average of 16.3%), with some people more at risk than others, particularly people with multiple and complex needs in vulnerable situations who tend to rely more on public services.

The provision of personalised services is fundamental to addressing the needs of people in vulnerable situations and to improving their well-being. This report is part of a joint project between the OECD and the European Commission to develop a more integrated approach to personalised services for people with disabilities, young people leaving care, and people leaving prison in Lithuania and to increase the involvement of non-governmental organisations in the design and delivery of those services.

The report provides an analysis and assessment of the governance arrangements and NGO involvement in Lithuanian public service provision, the associated operating models and information technology (IT) infrastructure of employment and social services; and service design and delivery methods for the three groups. Finally, the report proposes recommendations to deliver effective, well-integrated public services to people in vulnerable situations in Lithuania.