SOCIAL SERVICES AND THE PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION

SOCIÁLNE SLUŽBY A PROCES DECENTRALIZÁCIE

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Abstract

At present, the demand for social services which are part of social policy constantly increases. The social services can have diverse character in the terms of outputs, goals, methods and functions. The nature of social services depends on the desired outcome, which is determined by the demand of social policy objects, whether it is an individual, group, organization, institution or state. Providing a more efficient, effective and flexible implementation of social services allows the decentralization of social services.

Keywords: Social Policy. Social work. Social services. Social protection. Social services decentralization.

A significant part of the social policy are social services which are getting very demanded for several reasons. Social services may have a different character of their outcomes, different goals, methods, and functions, based on the desired outcome, set out by objects' demand of social policy, whether it is an individual, group, organization, institution, or a state. In order to entirely understand the importance of social services, it is necessary that we specify and define this term precisely (Krebs, 2010).

Matoušek (2001) draws attention to the different meaning of the term social services in the anglo-saxon perception compared to the importance of social services in our environment. He states: "In the anglo-saxon concept, everything that provides benefits to those who have the problem is referred as social services. Our (Czech and Slovak)

legislation indicates only the services, i.e. activities done by someone for someone, not the control and benefits."

The same author mentions in his other writing: "*Social services are provided to socially disadvantaged people in order to improve their quality of life, to integrate them into the society in the maximum extent possible, or to protect the society from the risks whose carriers are these people*" (Matoušek, 2007).

Definition of social services presented by Oláh and Roháč (2010), who define social services as follows:

- *professional activity*
- *service activity*
- *another activity*
- *complex of these activities aimed at:*
  - *the prevention of formation of unfavourable social situation,*
  - *the solution of unfavourable social situation or mitigation of unfavourable social situation,*
  - *the situation of the individual, family or the community, to maintainance of recovery, or the development of skills of individual to lead a self-determined life and to support its integration into the society, to ensure the necessary conditions for satisfying basic living needs of the individual,*
  - *the solution to the crisis of the social situation of individual and families and prevention of social exclusion of individuals and families*

Dávideková (2014) indicates, i.a, that social services as a focus of social assistance are subordinated to the system of social protection in the country. The objectives of the national priorities for the development of social services include in particular ensuring the right of citizens to social services, improving the quality and availability of social services with emphasis on the development of skills of social services, or the development of missing social services in the different autonomous communities and municipalities.

In the following dealing with the concept of social services we will stem from the above definitions. On the basis of these definitions we know that the social services represent a wide range of activities and processes with different focus and objectives.

With the concept of social services, there is a is close link to the concept of unfavourable social situation. The term is connected with the appearance and persisting various social events (risks) that cannot, whether individuals, families or whole communities overcome through their own options and abilities, or with the help of your close social surroundings. The term unfavourable social situation is also clarified in the Act no 448/2008 Coll., referring it as a threat of a natural person's exclusion or limitation of its ability to socially integrate and independently solve their problems, and this:

- *due to the fact that the individual does not have the secured necessary conditions for satisfying his basic living needs*
- *because of their living habits or way of life*
- *because of the severe disability or adverse health condition*
- *because of reaching the required age for entitlement to a retirement pension under a special regulation*
- *because of the performance of caring for physical persons with severe disabilities*
- *because of the threat by the behaviour of other natural persons or*
- *because of becoming a victim of human trafficking*

The negative impact of unfavourable social situations in which clients find themselves are removed and modified by social work, which Brnula et al. (2015) characterize as a part of the complex of the social sciences. Social work as a profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships, as well as the empowerment and liberation of people to improve their well-being. Using theories of human behaviour and social systems, interferes with social work where there are people interacting with the environment. The principles of human rights and social justice are the most fundamental. In practice, it focuses on the barriers, inequality and injustice. It responds to crises and uncommon occasions, as well as to everyday personal problems of clients and social problems (Mátel, Schavel, et al., 2014).

When working with clients we can make use of several methods and procedures mentioned by the authors Slovák and Vereš (2009): *information, distribution, clarification, ventilation, encouragement, interpretation, training, relaxation techniques, modeling, role-playing, confrontation, reflection, abreaction, persuasion, paradoxical intention and the role of the advisor.*

Social services are part of the state social policy, while the concept of social policy is defined as follows: *"Social policy as a science deals with the study of social policy as a practical activity, therefore there is ananalysis of processes of policies formation and implementation. It deals with inequalities and their distribution in society. At the same time it focuses on the political processes, institutions and activities affected by these inequalities"* (Duková, 2013).

When the concept of social protection, often mentioned in connection with the social sphere offers us the following definition by Tomeš (2010): *"The term social protection includes all of the system - the obligatory and facultative. It is a concept collectively referring to the system of social security and the system of social care and services."* He further adds that a distinction is made between three types of social protection:

- *preventive social protection*
- *the rapeutic and social protection*
- *rehabilitation and integration social protection* (Tomeš, 2010)

One of the levels at which the social services are implemented is the community along with the concept of a community work. According to Slovák and Vereš (2009) the term a community refers to:

- *the category of disadvantaged – unorganized group of people who need help*
- *the community of interests - organized association of interests, expressingits interests and works on them*
- *the service community–anorganized link of professionals (organizations dealing with the provision of aid) and members of the community who are able to participate in the implementation and supporting actions*
- *the village –understood as a social space where the relationships between service providers and disadvantaged, who are able to determine their requirements and assist in their implementation are created*

The concept of community work indicates a method of social work and a philosophical concept, which is based on other political and philosophical base than social work. Meanwhile the social and community work may be the part of (and often are) the same system of social services, the difference lies in the philosophical orientation and a practical concept. At the community level several social services are provided:

- *professional activities(may be performed separately*

- *social services to support families with children*
- *social services of crisis intervention*(Repková, 2016).

The concept of decentralization is understood as the transfer of competences from the central authority (e.g. central government) to the lower level of the vertical system structure. Most often it is a decentralization in the direction from the government and central bodies of public administration to the higher territorial units, which can be seen as a kind of intermediate level between the municipalities and the cities and the state or towards the cities and villages. By the process of decentralization, the individual competences are getting closer to the individual and groups, which allows a more efficient, and a more flexible implementation of the provision of social services (Cangár, Krupa, 2015).

At the same time, this process of social services more targeted at the local level, which can integrate closer to the area of the individual, or group, whose members are potential clients of a particular social service.

However, it has to be noted that the village and the town might not necessarily be the part of vertical structure, which is the lowest. The decentralization can also occur away from the towns and villages, e.g, towards the families and the communities. Such decentralization reinforces the importance of family, family ties, ties within a community, and also family-oriented, non-public providers of social services.

The decentralization of the public administration including social services also occurred in Slovakia. The process of decentralization of public administration was carried out in the years 2003 to 2006. The priority of this process was to strengthen the status of local self-government with a view to more effectively meet the needs and requirements of the population in the context of social services. The legislative framework for the government functioning in the area of social services in Slovakia, creates the Act no. 448/2008 Coll. Social services (Repková, 2016).

Cangár and Krupa (2015) believe that the aim in the transformation and deinstitutionalization of social services is to provide their recipients beneficiaries–the beneficiaries of social services, the quality of the portfolio of social services, contingent process of their inclusion into the natural environment of the community. The real subject of these processes focuses on the planned and professional process of changes in the field of institutionalized social service facilities, and that result should be the support of community social services. For the purposes of the provision of social services, the towns for the villages are also considered.

The municipalities play an important role in the provision of social services. They act as guarantors of providing the social services to dependent persons and they also act in the roles of founders and providers of the abovementioned services. In the scientific publication written by Dávideková (2014) we learn that the municipalities are key actors in the field of social services, who carry out the obligatory and facultative competences in the field of social services in the context of their original scope.

On the basis of the current legislation, the municipalities have the following competences: creation of social services ensuring the necessary conditions for satisfying basic living needs with equipment such as: low-threshold day centre for children and families, facilities for seniors, dormitory, day centre, homeless shelter, emergency housing facility, home at the halfway point, the rehabilitation centre, the integration centre, etc.

Higher territorial units provide services of the basic social counseling and interpreting services. Dávideková (2014) adds that municipalities and higher territorial units carry out a large number of significant tasks that are related to social services. Including:

- *conceptual and analytical activity*
- *decision-making activity*
- *assessment activity*
- *registration activity*
- *counseling activity*
- *evidence and control activities*
- *financial activity*
- *legal activity*
- *evidence and statistical activity*
- *street social work*
- *establishment and formation of new social service facilities*

In accordance with the stated piece of knowledge, it is necessary to point out the need of responsibility as sumption in villages and towns in Slovakia, as well as participation on community plans and field workers network creation in villages, towns and Non-governmental organizations with the aim to solve the unfavourable social situation in selected target groups (such as disabled seniors, homeless people, drug addicts, Roma people, etc.). A serious deficiency is represented by human resources.

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