**Provision of the support to persons with disabilities in the Republic of Lithuania**

**1**. There have been implemented a number of programmes or measures aiming at social integration of persons with disabilities and improvement of quality of their life in the society. They include provisions with technical assistance measures, provisions of social services, adaptation of accommodation to meet the needs of people with disabilities, payment of target compensations, supporting of disabled students, promotion of engagement and employment, and implementation of the professional rehabilitation programmes.

One of the key programmes which measures have a direct impact as regards the improvement of the quality of life of persons with disabilities is **the National Program for the Social Integration of Persons with Disabilities 2013–2019** approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

The National Programme covers many areas of public life: public education, health care, medical rehabilitation, training of autonomous life skills, vocational rehabilitation, psychosocial rehabilitation, social services, education, social security, employment, culture, sport, recreation and family life. The aims of the National Programme are achieved through better legislation, central and regional programmes and measures, staff training and raising their competence, collaboration and consultation with associations of the disabled, collecting and analysing statistical and other information about persons with disabilities, their problems, and solutions to these problems, initiating and supporting social and economic research programmes.

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| **Recipients of social services (disabled and elderly people)\*** | **Number** | **Percent (%)** |
| Residential care  | 11159 | 17,5 %  |
| Social services at home  | 17826 | 82,5% |
| In day care centres  | 34500 |
| In independence-livingcentres  | 436 |

*\*According to data of Statistics Lithuania, 2015*

According to **the Law on Social Services** (dated February 20, 2006, No X-493) local municipalities ensure provision of social services to residents of its territory by planning and organising social services and controls the quality of social services of common interest and social attendance.

Social care services include services which are provided by a team of specialists (social workers, social workers assistants, health care, assistance and other depends on need) at a persons’ home.

Elderly and disabled people can receive help at home (till 10 hours per week), day care services at home (from 2 hours till 8 hours per day up to 7 times per week), short - term care (respite care) (up to 8 hours per day till one month) at person‘s home.

In some cases, when it is impossible to organise social services in monetary form, services may be changed into a cash allowance. This target benefit is paid for foster families, persons with disability, elderly and their families in order to ensure social assistance. Cash allowance financed from the municipal budgets.

In 2013, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour has started the implementation of **the Integrated Assistance Development Program**. The aim is to create and develop high quality integrated assistance (nursing and social care) at home for disabled and elderly persons, consultancy aid for family members who take care of disabled and elderly persons.

From the middle of 2013 pilot projects started in 21 municipalities. In 2016, the implementation of projects was extended and new 39 municipalities were involved into process of providing social care services. During pilot projects, municipalities provide integrated assistance – nursing and social care for the disabled or elderly people at home.

Integrated Assistance Development Program is implemented by resources of the European Structural funds.

Elderly and disabled people can receive day care services in day care centres from 3 hours per day up to 5 days per week in institution.

Short–term social care (respite care) for elderly and disabled people covers not less than 12 hours per day till 6 months per year or 5 days per week.

 Long term care in residential care institutions is termless.

In order to ensure persons with mental disabilities right to community-based services according to their individual needs the care system reform with focus on de-institutionalization is carried out in Lithuania. **The Action Plan of the Transition from Institutional Care to the Provision of Services in a Family and Community for the Disabled and Children Deprived of Parental Care 2014–2020** was adopted in 2014. During the period of 2014–2020, the Action Plan aims to envisage consistent and coordinated actions that promote the creation of the system for transition from institutional social care to community-based services for disabled persons (including children and youth), with mental and/or psychical disability, children deprived of parental care, including babies, as well as families, and assistance to the family, guardians (foster parents).

The Action Plan envisages the following aims:

- to ensure harmonious environment and conditions for all children to be raised in their families, and to children deprived of parental care to be raised in the families of foster or adoptive parents or in social families and to receive assistance in the community;

- to create the conditions for disabled adults and their families (guardians, foster parents) to be provided with individual community services that meet their needs;

- to promote the change of value attitudes in society, forming a positive society’s attitude towards reorganisation of the system and to ensure publicity of ongoing processes.

According to The Action Plan, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour approved the group of experts who monitor and evaluate the implementation of de-institutionalisation process. Delegated experts of different organisations of persons with disability, state and municipal institutions are involved into process.

In order to support people with disabilities to continue living in the community, appropriations are made from state budget and municipal budgets to support community based social rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities under the projects run by nongovernmental organisations. Social rehabilitation services for disabled persons are activities and services of permanent nature and include the following: people with disabilities and independent living skills training, support and recovery, through practical training (disabled people, their family members) and activities (services) for the care of people with disabilities in the family, at home, in public life, knowledge and management of disease and disability, learning to look after (the disabled) and yourself (himself a disabled person), learning to move around and in the environment, and technical assistance measures to deal with disability arising due to psychological problems and teaching healthy living. Self-support groups of the disabled, their family members and relatives, care support and skills training, and learning to look after themselves at home everyday skills, training technical assistance measures, psychological assistance, etc. A personal assistant helping people to stay in employment, education, rehabilitation, health care, law enforcement and other public-service authorities and providing information to persons with hearing and visual impairments in accessible formats and technologies.

**2.** The rights of persons with disabilities are protected by the **associations of persons with disabilities** which are representing them. When decisions are taken, efforts are made to consider the opinion and experience of the disabled. The laws and other legislation relevant to the disabled are drafted by the responsible public institutions in co-ordination with associations of persons with disabilities. One of the key institutions representing the persons with disabilities and their organizations is the **Council for the Affairs of the Disabled** which includes, as participants, the representatives of the organizations of the disabled.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Department for the Affairs of the Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Disability and Working Capacity the Assessment Office under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, the Technical Assistance Center for the Disabled under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour consult the people with disabilities on issues affecting them. Information concerning the disability issues is available at the above-mentioned institutions official websites.

People can apply for a help to local municipality and municipalities’ counties (*seniūnija*). All information about providing of social services is available in municipalities’ and delegated authorities’ websites. Municipalities evaluate the need of social care level of needs of physical and social independence for social services and social care according to The Persons (Family) Social Care Needs Evaluation and Assessment of Social Services for Elderly, Disabled Persons with Severe Disability (dated 5 of April, 2006, No A1-94). The need of social services could be assessed at persons’ home.

**3**. Individual needs of persons with disabilities are assessed and should be provided in a timely, fair and appropriate manner according to the very specific needs of the person.

Social services are provided to all residents in need by ensuring a safe and healthy environment, assistance respecting human dignity, and integrated assistance, education to help compensate for the lost independency as well as ability to maintain social relationships with the family and society. The need for such services is assessed according to a combination of principles of co-operation, participation, complexity, accessibility, social justice, relevance, efficiency, comprehensiveness.

The provision of support is tailored to the individual’s stage of dependency and capacities to compensate for this loss of independence. It assumes and ensures services in the transition periods between life cycle stages.

Social integration of disabled people throughout their life cycle is organised by applying the principles of equal rights, equal opportunities, discrimination prevention, of guaranteeing self-sufficiency and freedom of choice, accessibility, compensation for disability, decentralisation and destigmatisation.

**Associations of disabled persons** carry out programmes of social integration of the disabled and provide assistance to children with disabilities as well as their family members, e.g., they provide services themselves or assist in the provision of services as partners to municipalities and help them organise social services to children with disabilities and their family members in a community; they initiate the establishment of social services, day care services and centres in municipalities, and contribute to their development; they organise the non-formal education of the disabled, carry out other educational programmes for the disabled; they provide psychological assistance to families, organise recreational activities for children with disabilities and their families; they represent the disabled and protect their rights, encourage civil initiatives at the community level with the use of various measures, i.e. they defend the interests of persons with disabilities, collect information about persons with disabilities and their special needs, the necessary services, employment and education; moreover, they represent the disabled to make sure that their special needs are satisfied, the services are provided and conditions, necessary for the implementation of educational and employment measures, are created at the community level.

**Social Care Standards** approved by the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania stipulate the duty to provide a child with an opportunity to express his/her opinion a form acceptable to him/her on the choice of the social care institution, prior to starting providing social care, as well as with an opportunity to visit social care institutions and express his/her opinion about the suitability of the social care institution. When preparing and reassessing child's individual social care plan, in addition to all specialists and child's relatives, the child concerned is also involved, provided he/she can express his/her opinion because of his/her age and maturity. Considering child's age and maturity, child must be provided with a possibility to freely express his/her opinion, views or requests on the matters concerning his/her, as a full-fledged personality, development, he/she also takes part in the processes related with satisfaction of his/her needs, i.e. in acquisition of goods, necessities, planning visits to doctors, etc.

When implementing the measure “Providing financial aids to disabled students”, financial support is provided to disabled student. Following the Description of the Procedure for the Provision of Financial Aids to the Disabled Studying in Higher Schools, the funds are allocated for meeting special needs of the disabled studying in higher schools (a monthly benefit) and partially reimbursing for studies (a benefit once in a semester).

Specific active labour market policy measures for disabled are being organized by Public employment services: subsidized employment, subsidy for job creation or workplace adaptation, support for self-employment. For disabled as for any other additionally supported in the labour market person also could be organized other active labour market policies: vocational training, job rotation, acquisition of professional skills, public works, unemployed territorial mobility.

In Lithuania, a number of types of rehabilitation is used, namely, medical rehabilitation, social rehabilitation, and vocational rehabilitation; they are aimed at increasing people’s abilities and reducing limitations in various areas so that the disabled, availing of the services of rehabilitation, could participate in public life in a comprehensive manner. The aim of vocational rehabilitation is to develop or restore capacity for work of the disabled and increase opportunities for their employment. This is achieved in several stages. First of all, the need for vocational rehabilitation services is determined. The Service for the Establishment of Disability and Capacity for Work, which performs this function, assesses medical, functional, vocational, and other criteria, which have an impact on the possibilities of an individual’s vocational rehabilitation and employment, with regard to every individual who is approaching the Service concerning the establishment of the level of capacity for work.

**4.** The Minister of Social Security and Labour approved **the Plan for the Use of the Lithuanian Sign Language and Interpretation Services for 2013−2017**, which aims at the integration of the deaf to the society as well as the reduction of their social cohesion. The sign language is the main method of communication as well as receipt and transmission of information in the deaf community, as a language minority. Implementation of the measures under the said plan involves the improvement of the vocabulary of the Lithuanian sign language and development of sign language research, training of sign language researchers, preparation and publishing of specialised dictionaries for the Lithuanian sign language, enhancement of the methodological resources of the schools for the deaf, preparation of Lithuanian sign language instruction programmes for the specialists providing public services and sign language interpreters, organisation of Lithuanian sign language courses for Lithuanian sign language translators, pedagogues and etc.

Lithuania has five sign language interpretation centres (in Vilnius (27 sign language interpreters), Kaunas (27 sign language interpreters), Klaipėda (15 sign language interpreters), Panevėžys (14 sign language interpreters), and Šiauliai (13 sign language interpreters)). Each centre for sign language interpretation provides interpretation services for two country territories and the deaf people residing therein. Sign language interpretation services in Lithuania are provided to deaf people individually. With the help of EU Structural Funds’ assistance, the provisions of video interpretation services are provided, this increases the accessibility of sign language interpretation services.

**5.** According to the Law on Social Services, the management, granting and providing social services shall be based on co-operation and mutual assistance between a person, family, community, the organisations defending the interests and rights of social groups of people, social services establishments, municipal and state institutions. Social services can be provided by public or private providers. Persons have free choice to choose services provider.

For example, the National Institute for Social Integration implements and operates a project *Social-Taxi*. *Social-Taxi* is a service which allows the people with disabilities to become more mobile and independent in planning their daily activities. The purpose of this service is the free-and-easy mobility in their work, studies, everyday interactions and involvement into the active social and cultural life. This service ensures effective transportation to various destinations, like work, public, medical and other kinds of institutions and organizations, shops, cinema, theatre and etc. The vehicles are properly applied for safe and comfortable transportation. Personal assistants not only drive the customers to the assigned location but also provide full assistance required for people with disabilities. Personal assistants are trained in first aid, communication and other skills. For now the service is available for the citizens of Vilnius and Kaunas, but in the process of project development, it is planned to implement the services in other locations as well. From the very start of *Social-Taxi,* people with disabilities are involved into the process of creation, planning and implementation of the service. This cooperation gives opportunity to improve and to reach the best quality of the service.

Rather successful in the area of public education on the issues of persons with disabilities is the initiative to publish articles in a separate rubric on the portal of one of the most popular newspapers – www.lrytas.lt. Here is another example of cooperation between the state and non-governmental organisations of persons with disabilities because articles of the rubric are prepared by a public institution that was selected in a tendering procedure and whose founder is the Lithuanian Association of People with Disabilities. The expenses of supporting the rubric on the website and preparation of articles are covered from funds of the state budget. The editors of this portal acknowledged the rubric as exclusive, interesting, professionally prepared, encouraging respect for the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

**6**. According to **the Law on Public Administration** public administration entities regarding administrative decisions related to general legitimate public interest, have the obligation to consult the representative organisations especially in the field of public interest (associations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations), and in cases provided by the law – with the residents or their groups. The above-mentioned legal act provides for consultation methods (such as: stakeholders' conference, interviews, meetings, public invitations to representatives of other opinions, detection techniques), unless otherwise established by the law, to be selected by public administration bodies. Information on consultation mode, participants and the results must be published in the administrative decision of the promoting entity of public administration website.

Entities when submitting draft legal acts to the Government must include information on public consultation method (techniques) and to the public offer, the following assessment of the proposals, provided that the draft act has consulted with the public and that the public assessment of the proposals is not described in harmonization certificate.

People with disabilities as well as organisations representing them can be included into the process of the social integration of persons with disabilities through the Council for the Affairs of the Disabled; representatives of organisations of the persons with disabilities are actively involved in the activities of this council.

It must be repeatedly noted that all draft legal acts prepared by the ministries which concern rights of persons with disabilities, to receive comments and suggestions from all interested organisations, society and organisations uniting persons with disabilities are published on the legislation information system.

**7.** More information about the social integration system for the persons with disabilities can be found at:

<http://www.socmin.lt/en/social-integration/social-integration-of-z7sn/social-integration-system-ag75.html>

<http://www.ndt.lt/en/>

<http://www.ndnt.lt/index.php?1438832216>

<http://www.tpnc.lt/en/>

<http://www.lygybe.lt/en/>