

Activities of the state in organising state welfare services for individuals with special psychological needs

Is the state capable of providing the services necessary for individuals with special psychological needs?

Report of the National Audit Office to the Riigikogu; Tallinn, 5 February 2008

A summary of audit results

The National Audit Office carried out an audit of state welfare services for people with special psychological needs in order to assess their efficiency and to determine whether all of those in need receive the appropriate services. Individuals with special psychological needs are classed as those with psychological and/or psychiatric disturbances whose conditions significantly affect their everyday lives.

The National Audit Office based its assessment on the premise that the welfare system could be said to be operating effectively when all individuals with special psychological needs are able to obtain the necessary welfare services within a reasonable period of time, without their rights being infringed in the process. In addition, the state is able to guarantee that all service providers are providing services of the required quality and to finance the services in accordance with the actual cost incurred in their provision.

In its activities the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe pursues, inter alia, the protection of people's rights and improvement of the quality of life of the disabled. Also the Government of the Republic has declared in the State Budget Strategy: "To improve the opportunities of the young and people of working age with severe and long-term special psychological needs to participate in economic and social life, it is essential to create a better living and working environment for them, to contribute to the creation of studying opportunities for them and to ensure better access to education and to health and labour market services."

According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, there are around 7000 people with special psychological needs who require welfare services. Less than 4000 of them are being granted such support.

171.1 million kroons were allocated to the welfare services for individuals with special psychological needs in the 2007 state budget. In 2001 new services were designed for individuals with special psychological needs. It is now time to assess the provision of these services.

Based on its audit, the National Audit Office arrived at the following conclusions:

- **Not all individuals with special psychological needs receive the welfare services when they require them.** The Ministry of Social Affairs admits that the number of individuals who need welfare services remarkably exceeds the number of those who actually receive the services, but the Ministry is unable to guarantee state assistance to all of them. This has led to a situation where these individuals or their caregivers – who, in the event of adequate services being available, would be able to make themselves useful to society in some other way – are being forced to join long queues in order to obtain the services. Due to the unavailability of necessary services some of the individuals with special psychological needs are being supported with the services that happen to be available, but which need not be suitable for them.
- **The state is not capable of providing even the services that have been ordered by a court ruling.** Even in the case of individuals for whom welfare services have been prescribed by a court due to them representing a danger to themselves or others, the state is unable to ensure that they will obtain the services immediately. The National Audit Office's analysis revealed that on average these services are only granted six months after a court ruling is made.
- **The state is not capable of ensuring high-quality provision of welfare services.** As there are no standards for the provision of such services and the applicable quality requirements are minimal, there is no guarantee that individuals will receive services of the same standard in all areas. Nor is there assurance that supervision over the activity of service providers will lead to improvements in the quality of services, as the audited county governments exercise either minimal supervision or no supervision whatsoever.
- **The main reason for the poor availability of welfare services is insufficient funding of the services.** Prices charged for the provision of welfare services do not accord with the actual costs of providing them. Over the years the prices have only risen by the same amount as labour costs, but this has not managed to secure qualified staff or reduce staff turnover. Underfunding

is also the reason for the lack of a significant increase in recent years in the volume of services being offered.

- **No solution has yet been found to the problem of special welfare services for the elderly.** Although the provision of welfare services to the elderly is the task of local governments, to date it has mostly been the state that has provided financing for elderly people with special psychological needs. While it is the position of the National Audit Office that the organisation of welfare services for people with special needs must not be based on age, it will allow that one of the reasons for the unsatisfactory availability of the services is the unresolved problem of care for elderly with special needs.
- **Individuals receiving 24-hour welfare services must cover their accommodation and food costs as their circumstances allow, but almost a third are unable to do so on their income.** As a result, the service providers are forced to make up the difference from the already small amount they receive for the services.

Response of the Minister of Social Affairs: The Minister for Social Affairs thanked the National Audit Office for the observations and suggestions, and admitted that there is still room for improvement in the system of state welfare services for people with special psychological needs. The Minister confirmed that the ministry is working to provide the highest quality specialist welfare services possible at reasonable prices to all of those who need them. The Minister stated that many of the observations and suggestions set out in the audit report have already been taken on board.

Response of the Minister of Regional Affairs: The Minister for Regional Affairs agreed with the National Audit Office's suggestions and added that reinforcing and improving the efficiency of the state supervision carried out by county governors has become a priority and that county governments have increased the amount of planned supervision in their policy papers for 2008.

Jüri Kõrge
Director of Audit
II Audit Department