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**SOCIAL SERVICES: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES IN
THE ALBANIAN CONTEXT**

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Abstract

The system of social services in Albania was totally transformed compared to the system that functioned during the communist time. Besides State, various groups of civil society, strategic partners, donors and international organizations played an important role in providing social services.

The aim of this paper is a) to provide a general overview of the role of the actors that provide social services in Albania; b) to analyse the impact of decentralization and privatization of social services; c) to present evidence of achievements and challenges in the public and non public services.

The paper is not intended to be a comprehensive one on the overall subject of the system of social services in Albania, but rather a review of services related to social protection of vulnerable groups, children and women support, services for the people with special needs.

This paper is prepared based on documentation analysis (basic policy and strategic documents, legislation), interviewing and practical experience reflection.

The documentation analysis has involved reviewing all readily available materials, like domestic government policy documents, official statistics, national reports, publications of the NGO that offer social services and research publications on social services.

The method for analyzing the information was content analysis. Ten key actors in Albania were interviewed for the purpose of this research: five officials of the Ministry of Wellbeing and Youth and five representatives of NGO-s.

The purpose of interviews was to gather information that is not publicly available and to generate insights on the issue of social service provision.

It is a belief that the conclusions of this research will be a contribution to reshaping the role of all actors, increasing the role of the civil society and private providers of social services and improving the quality of social services in Albania.

Key words: social services, public and non public providers of social services.

1. Introductory background

In the early '90s, economic and social reforms were accompanied by the increasing number of people exposed to the risk of social exclusion. Economic and social inequality widened further and different layers of society approached schemes and social protection programs. These programs were mainly funded by State, which for the functioning social protection system has made available each year over 10.5 billion US Dollars or about 4% of the annual budget.

As a result of economic and social changes, empowerment of the State and increasing power of local government, amended European Social Charter, ratified conventions, and the Stabilisation and Association

Agreement, needs for new services closer to the community and individuals led to the demand for a reform of the social protection system and therefore the need to develop a new Strategy for Social Services.

The first step in that direction was the formulation and approval of the Social Services Strategy in May 2005, which outlined the decentralisation and deinstitutionalisation goals. The Social Protection Sector Strategy 2007-2013 set targets for the fulfilment of the other challenges. The objectives are defined in other crosscutting documents, such as: (i) The National Strategy for Children; (ii) The Strategy for People with Disabilities; (iii) The strategy for the Roma; (iv) The Strategy for Gender Equality and Against Domestic Violence that have also been re-assessed and coordinated in the social protection sector strategy.

The main objectives of the social services sector are grouped in three main aspects: decentralization, deinstitutionalization and quality guarantee (Social Protection Sector Strategy, 2007). They aim at:

- (i) decentralisation, transfer of all residential services to the administration of local government units;
- (ii) expansion of the variety of community-based services and coverage of all groups with basic services in all districts;
- (iii) expansion of community-based services also to those municipalities that do not currently offer these services;
- (iv) piloting of social care services in two municipalities and expansion of this service to other local government units according to the capacity of the budget;
- (v) deinstitutionalisation, consolidation of the “home-family” service model for children and people with disabilities, and extension of these services also to other social groups (young, elderly);
- (vi) implementation of social service standards and growth in the quality of services for children, people with disabilities, and the elderly;
- (vii) inspection twice a year of all residential and day care services offered by public and private operators;
- (viii) licensing of new providers and periodic re-licensing of all non-government organisations that offer care services.

The social transition was accompanied with some challenges in the field of social services that were related with decentralisation of services, de-institutionalisation of care, establishing of new social services in the community, institutionalization of the relationship with civil society and the development of quality standards in social services. These challenges require a proper policy based on sound evidence.

Besides the State, important roles in meeting the needs for social services in different groups played civil society organizations, international organizations, strategic partners, and donors. This paper aims at analysing the role of different actors in developing the social services in Albania, the effectiveness and problems of the public and private social services, the characteristics of the services provided by them.

The definition of social services

For the purposes of this paper the definition of “social services” is presented. There is no any common definition of “social services” in the world context, even in the European one. Berger (2007) has pointed the lack of an universal definition of social services in the European context.

Munday remarked: “It is difficult to agree on the meaning of the frequently used term ‘social services’ in a European context, particularly when including countries as diverse and numerous as those in membership of the EC. At times terms such as social services, social welfare, social protection, social assistance, social care and social work are used interchangeably as having almost the same meaning and as referring to the same services” (Munday, 2006).

The lack of clarity on terminology is mentioned during the debate (2007) of Council of Europe on services of the general interest.

The document of Commission of the European Communities on Social Services of General Interest in EU of April 2006 provides two main categories of social services:

- statutory and complementary social security schemes, organised in various ways (mutual or occupational organisations), covering the main risks of life, such as those linked to health, ageing, occupational accidents, unemployment, retirement and disability;
- other essential services provided directly to the person. These services that play a preventive and social cohesion role consist of customised assistance to facilitate social inclusion and safeguard fundamental rights. They comprise, first of all, assistance for persons faced by personal challenges or crises (such as debt, unemployment, drug addiction or family breakdown). Secondly, they include activities to ensure that the persons concerned are able to completely reintegrate into society (rehabilitation, language training for immigrants) and, in particular, the labour market (occupational training and reintegration). These services complement and support the role of families in caring for the youngest and oldest members of society in particular. Thirdly, these services include activities to integrate persons with long-term health or disability problems. Fourthly, they also include social housing, providing housing for disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups.

While “The Quality Framework for Services of General Interest in Europe” gives the following definition: “Social services of general interest (SSGI): these include social security schemes covering the main risks of life and a range of other essential services provided directly to the person, that play a preventive and socially cohesive/inclusive roles. While some social services (such as statutory social security schemes) are not considered by the European Court as being economic activities, the jurisprudence of the Court makes clear that the social nature of a service is not sufficient in itself to classify it as non-economic. The term social service of general interest consequently covers both economic and non-economic activities”.

The approach followed by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities in Albania was to adopt the concepts used by the European Union member states.

The Albanian legislation accepts the following definition on social services:

“Social services” are the whole range of services provided to individuals or groups in need who, with their own resources, are unable to meet their life needs in order to preserve, develop, and rehabilitate individual abilities for fulfilling emergency or chronic needs” (Law No. 9355, 2005).

The figures presented in the table 1 and table 2 present a picture of the

Table 1.		
N0.	Public services	Districts
1	Orphanage 0-3 years	Durrës, Korçë, Shkodër, Vlorë, Tiranë
2	Orphanage 3-6 years	Shkodër
3	Orphanage 6 -14 years	Sarandë, Tiranë, Shkodër
4	Disability rehabilitation centre	Durrës, Korçë, Shkodër, Vlorë, Berat, Tiranë
5	Day centres for people with disabilities	Korçë, Lezhë
6	Polyvalent canters	Sarandë, Tiranë, Elbasan
7	Homes for the elderly	Kavajë, Fier, Gjirokastrë, Tiranë, Shkodër
8	Crises centre for victims of trafficking	Tirana
9	National centre for the rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence	Tirana

Table 2: Services offered according to the social groups

N0.	Non- public services	Districts
1	Orphanage 0-3 years	Gjirokaštër
2	Orphanage 3-6 years	Elbasan
3	Orphanage 6-14 years	2 Tiranë, 2 Elbasan, Bubq-Fushë-Krujë, Erseke, Berat
4	Foster Care	Tirane, Korce, Durres
5	Disability rehabilitation centre	5 Tirane, Librazhd, Shkodë, Polican
6	Polyvalent centres	Sarande, Elbasan
7	Homes for the elderly	2 Durres, 2 Elbasan, 4 Tirane, 2 Shkoder, Korçë
8	Centre for victims of trafficking	Tiranë, Vlorë, Elbasan, Berat, Korçë,
9	Counselling and shelter services for women and girls, victims of domestic violence	Durres, Tiranë, Shkodër, Pogradec, Elbasan, Berat, Kukës, Gjirokaster
10	Legal advice and advocacy	Tiranë, Shkodër, Lushnje, Malësi e Madhe
11	Family planning	Tiranë, Vlorë, Lezhë, Durrës, Fier, Shkodër, Berat
12	Centre for drug treatment	3 Tiranë
13	Centre for persons deprived of their freedom	Tiranë

Source: Electronic map of the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth

State Social Service focuses at four following groups:

- Children orphaned and abandoned
- Lonely Elderly People
- Persons with disabilities
- Women and children, victims of trafficking.

Statistics show that majority of services are offered to meet children's needs, in the second place are listed the services offered to families and communities, in the third place are classified the services for

the persons with disabilities and in the fourth place are the services for elderly people.

2. Research methodology

The research methodology is based on quality research methods: documentation analyses and interviewing.

This paper is prepared based on documentation analysis (basic policy and strategic documents, legislation), interviewing and practical experience reflection. The documentation analysis has involved reviewing all readily available materials, like legislative and regulative framework, domestic government policy documents, strategies, official statistics, national reports, publications of the NGO-s that offer social services and articles. The method for analyzing the information was content analysis.

For the purposes of this research ten key persons in Albania were interviewed: five officials of the Ministry of l and Youth and five representatives of NGO-s. The purpose of interviews was to gather information that is not publicly available and to generate insights on the issue of social work services. Personal interviews with key persons were used as a way to get in-depth and comprehensive information. Knowing about their experiences was a very valuable way to understand their opinions in relation to the role of public and private social services in Albania.

The interview was semi structured and questions were prepared in advance. The type of the questions was selected according to the research objectives. They were face to face interviews.

Interviews were tape recorded because of the open ended questions. Tape recording allowed having people's explanations and opinions obtained in a shorter period of time. In some cases people provided more information than expected, which was very helpful for the research. Since the interviews were based on open ended questions, the

results were transcribed and codified in order to develop the data analysis. Answers were codified according to the most common responses provided by interviewees; therefore, the information was classified into answer categories.

3. A general overview of the role of the actors that provide the social services in Albania

The actors that provide social services in Albania can be grouped as following: central government institutions, local government institutions, domestic civil society organizations, international organizations, strategic partners, and donors.

Central government, local government and civil society have the main responsibility for setting up a system of social services which target the client. For a long period of time, the responsibility for the delivery of social services has been two-folded: on one side for central government and on the other side for local government. In the last decade, civil society has played an important role in the delivery of social services to the community.

It is important to mention that the NGO sector is quite new in Albania and very active. It is created in 90-s. During the communism period the state had a monopoly position both in the definition of people's needs and as the supplier of services. Three main sources of help for social care needs at that time were the state, the place of work, and the family.

The picture of the social services providers is quite different compared to the past. The legal framework and policy documents developed during the last 18 years determined the main actors involved in the social services sector and their responsibilities.

According to the "Law on Social Assistance and Services", "*Civil society* includes all the institutions and social organizations, which advocate and take action in the public interest in cooperation with the

state, business and family. It includes the non-profit and non-governmental organizations, trade unions, religious groups, social cultural and sports clubs, professional associations, academia, policy institutions, consumer and clients' organizations, media, civic groups and religious institutions".

The above mentioned law includes the following organizations on the group of *private legal entities that provide social services*:

- a. private legal entities that provide social services for a fee;
- b. NGOs (foundations, associations, centres) that provide non-profit social services;
- c. organizations and religious institutions.

Seen from another perspective, social services are provided by governmental institutions; non-governmental agencies – sometimes referred to as NGOs or not-for-profits; and by commercial for-profit organisations.

Central government is represented by the Ministry of Wellbeing and Youth, State Social Service and Inspectorate of Social Services as one of the main directorates of this agency.

Ministry of Wellbeing and Youth develops policies and national legislation; monitors the implementation of legislation; prepares the budget on social services; plans and delegates funds to local government units and monitors the use of budgetary funds according to their destination, licenses the providers of social services; develops standards and criteria related to social services, sets up the Social Fund to support the implementation of policies and the establishment of new services, as well as to sustain the development of social services in those municipalities/communes that have no financial resources.

The State Social Service is the executive institution of policies and legislation in the field of social protection system. It operates as an intermediary institution between the policy making level in the Ministry

and the implementing level in local government. SSS activity is summarized in: a) economic assistance - monthly payment benefit for families in need;

b) payment for physical, sensory disabilities, mental health; c) social care system –residential day and polyvalent institutions.

Inspectorate of Social Services (under State Social Service Agency) is the institution that monitors and inspects the use of funds and application of standards at all levels of public and non-public services; ensures that services of providers meet quality standards in order to obtain a license to provide the services.

The regional structures of the State Social Service operate as an intermediary; a cooperative and sustaining institution whose aim is to achieve coordination between central and local government; coordinate the activity across various sectors which are linked with social services at regional level; establish coordination and planning of needs at regional level, collect information and data at regional levels and monitoring and assessment of the impact of policy implementation; control the enforcement of legislation related to economic assistance, people with disabilities and service standards.

Local government reflects the objectives of the sector strategy of social protection in its programs and budgets related to socio-economic and regional or local development. It approves the establishment of social services structures and the local budget that covers the development and extension of social services; is responsible for the use of conditional funds from the state budget and implementation of national standards of social services; identifies families in need of economic assistance; the disabled and individuals who are in need of social care services; plans the needs of the groups in need and drafts requests for funds; sets up new types of social services in conformity with community needs; administers public residential institutions; follows up on services in day centres and community services that are under the jurisdiction of the local government units. Local government approves the activity of NGOs and other

providers which implement projects on social services in the territory of local government units; selects, according to public procurement rules, the providers of licensed social services to meet community needs; distributes payments related to economic assistance and disability entitlement; formulates and sends statistics to districts and other structures, coordinates inter-sectorial actions for protection from maltreatment including information on maltreatment, initial assessment; identification of potential maltreatment; possibilities and needs of the families; develops individual plans for each case by providing services or coordinating services with other professionals to support families and children; fulfils the functions for the management and administration of cases such as data collection and management, systematic review of plans for each case and preparation of court reports.

Civil society provides social services in the community according to needs; participates in the planning of services in conformity with community needs; assists through advocacy services in the review and implementation of policies; mobilises individuals and groups in need to take part in the discussions on social issues; acts to improve the well being of their members and of other groups in need; identifies and reports about cases where doubts exist on possible maltreatment; develops prevention programmes and improves co-ordination with local structures; provides community-based services in networks with a view to protecting, supporting and social inclusion of children and parents.

International organizations. World Bank, UNDP, UNESCKO, EU, Soros Foundation, Save the Children, World Vision are the international organizations with the great contribution in the field of social services in Albania. International assistance in finance and expertise has been and remains essential to the introduction and growth of social services in Albania. International assistance ranges from that of small foreign NGOs that provide homes for orphaned children to big programs. The World Bank Project on the delivery of Social Services in Albania included the cooperation and enhancement of the existing social work study program at the University of Tirana.

Individuals assume responsibilities on matters that relate to themselves; identify and report suspected maltreatment; assist other members of the family, organise in groups in order to help each other and to behave as good neighbours; contribute to the cost of services provided when they have sufficient resources to do so; work as volunteers. Individuals in need, families and the community as a whole are directly the most interested parties in the creation of an adequate system of social services.

Public social services are provided in residential and day centres, which are financed by the state budget.

In addition to residential social services, in recent years, community-based non-public social services have been delivered by NGOs or by religious organisations in day centres, with services provided to families and residential services as well. These community services are mainly financed by foreign donors.

The system of services is being reformed with the aim to better satisfy the needs through decentralisation and transfer of responsibilities to local government, establishment of a network of community services in collaboration with the local government structures and inclusion of civil society in their provision. Community services have been established with support from the Social Services Delivery Project of the World Bank.

Analyzing the last developments related to the actors of the social services sector, we can draw some conclusions.

The reform of social services system affected on reshaping the roles and responsibilities of central, regional and local institutions; supported the involvement of civil society and other community stakeholders as the service providers, promoted and strengthened the partnership between the public and non-public organizations in the delivery of social care services.

One of the main objectives of the reform is the institutionalization of the relationship with the civil society. Analysing the fulfilment of this objective we can point out these indicators: there is an evidencedence of the

active NGO-s that offer social services; ways of cooperation with civil society are defined; agreements of cooperation with NGO-s are signed; there are signed contracts of cooperation between public institutions and NGO-s and a considerable number of non-public activities is licensed.

Civil society is taking a special role in the process of putting into practice the new philosophy of social services.

Change was led by the principle of partnership. Despite the positive findings, current policy and practice in social services lack essential elements of partnership practice. There is a need to develop new methods of implementing the partnership. The interviewers mentioned that *'there is a need for an appropriate policy to lead to partnership practice'*. A set of partnership principles is required to be developed. Partnership should be seen in two directions: among the providers and among the providers and benefiteres. This principles must take into consideration the explicit consent of the potential user, user agreement, services must be based on negotiated agreement rather than on assumptions, users must have the greatest possible degree of choice in the services that they are offered.

The number of providers and stakeholders was increased. The typology of social services changed; the network of social care institutions expanded with new services.

The social services providers of the civil society in Albania are characterized by these attributes:

- a) Their mission is consistent with the goals of the strategy on social services, so they support and develop the institutionalized values.
- b) They use the services as the model of social development and change.
- c) Majority of them are cooperative by relationship to the state as they have contracts with the state or complement the services provided by the state; although some of them as lobby organizations, professional associations, and interest groups may show an opposition towards the state policies on social services.

- d) They support public discussion on social policies and services.
- e) The solidarity is the main value expressed and developed by them.
- f) They demonstrate civic skills as a mobilizing recourse.
- g) Ensuring the participation of citizens in the decision making process is another responsibility of civil society which is realised through the management of social debate and the transmission of the needs, priorities, ideas and opinions of the community into concretely formulated recommendations that have an impact in the life of certain groups and are fed into the decision making processes.

Despite the positive developments in the field of cooperation, there is a need for a continuing dialogue among policymakers, local authorities, academia, civil society and international organizations in order to strengthen the partnership, to make recommendations on improvements and further developments.

4. The analyses of the impact of decentralization and deinstitutionalization of service delivery

Decentralisation and deinstitutionalization are two new trends in Albania that have an impact on the creation of a new social market, on establishment of the new relations between public and non-public services, giving the latter a larger space.

Decentralization of the social services

In the framework of the first social reform, the government of Albania has launched processes of decentralization of social services as one of the main objectives of the reform. Decentralisation is viewed as a key democratic governance objective needed for the efficient delivery of services to people and to foster political integration, identification and involvement. It is seen as the antithesis of the centralism which was once imposed during the communist era.

The reform of decentralization aims at establishing a system of services, where individuals are helped and supported in their living

environment, while respecting their personalities, values, capabilities, particularities, preferences and sources.

The reform is focused on two main directions:

- a) A new distribution of tasks and responsibilities between central and local government.
- b) Transfer of the social services from the central government to the local government, especially transfer of residential service centres to local government units.

Ministry of Wellbeing and Youth develops policies, legislation, and standards related to the provision of services and the preparation of a system of control and evaluation of services.

According to the conception of the first reform, decisions related to planning, offering and delivering services to citizens will be taken at the local level (by the communes and municipalities) where the needs arise and where the beneficiaries live. The transfer of institutions to local government will be accompanied by the transfer of buildings, corresponding funds from the central budget, personnel, inventories etc. Criteria will be established to maintain these premises and services. Therefore the responsibilities, budgets and services will be exclusively the responsibility of the local government. The reform of the social service system will be supported by measures to build the capacity of participating institutions, at the central and local level, and civil society organisations as service providers. The decentralisation process will be realised in parallel with the establishment of an appropriate legal environment, organisational and structural improvements, new service standards for all categories of beneficiaries, licensing of service providers and inspection by corresponding structures. Human resources, who are involved on the provision of these services, will be trained to acquire new responsibilities within the framework of the decentralisation process. In order to satisfy special demands, some residential institutions will remain, which will be administered at the national level, such as centres for trafficking victims, for people with disabilities, children, elderly etc. In these centres urgent

cases will be treated, which come from regions where there are still no services for all groups in need.

Despite the policy background our analyses is based on the theoretical background as well.

According to Ugaz (1997) there are two important dimensions of decentralization: fiscal decentralization and administrative decentralization. *Fiscal* decentralization exists when sub national governments have the power (through the constitution or particular laws) to raise some taxes and carry out spending activities according to clearly established legal criteria. *Administrative* decentralization exists when much of the money is raised centrally, but part of it is allocated to decentralized entities which carry out their spending activities according to close guidelines or controls imposed by the central government.

Using the typology of decentralization sketched by Rondinelli (1990), one could associate administrative decentralization to the notion of *deconcentration*, or the transfer of power to the local administrative offices of the central government. In the same way, fiscal decentralization could be associated to the notion of *devolution*, or the transfer of power to sub national political entities that involves the creation or the strengthening of the sub national units of government, the activities of which are outside the direct control of the central government.

From the government data and from the interviews we found that the residential institutions are transferred to the local government except for the institutions that satisfy special demands related to trafficking and victims of violence.

Analysing the implementation process of the social services decentralization we present these conclusions.

The implementation of decentralization in the field indicates that some steps are achieved, but work has not yet been completed and what is promised on paper requires additional support and strong serious

commitment from all line ministries involved in the transfer of competences which they previously had.

Decentralisation as a principle requires all responsibilities to be transferred to local government.

Full and effective implementations of the powers of municipalities are facing difficulties. First, municipalities have limited capacity to cope with all the responsibilities conferred by law. Secondly, the sustainability of services is in question because of the lack of recourses. As a result, the provision of proper and efficient services is a challenge.

The decentralization is seen much more as an act than is understood as a process.

Decentralization relies on the participation of the community in order to achieve a better match of expenditures with local priorities and preferences. Decentralization is a costly process, because fostering participation at the local level generates costs.

Decentralisation implies a change in institutional culture, creating a socio-political context conducive to a transfer of authority. So, there is a need to empower local government, organisations and actors through more thorough training in the skills required of them in their new roles.

The lack of updated evidence is a weakness of the process of the decentralization. There is a need for systematic documentation of the process of the decentralization, sharing of lessons on good practices, networking that will help identify entry points for more effective public policy for services.

Deinstitutionalization of the social services

Public social services have been provided mostly in residential institutions for special needs groups, such as orphans, the disabled or the elderly. These services have shown that they are not the best alternatives for the beneficiaries. Detachment from the family and the community

denies beneficiaries their support and the right to receive services at the place where they live.

The provision of residential services in large environments for many beneficiaries obstructs the development of individuality and social skills, creating further difficulties for their re-integration after the exit from the institution.

Research has showed that the financial cost of residential centre services is higher in comparison with other community-based services, which are generally offered over a shorter time scale.

Foreign donors and institutions presented a concept of deinstitutionalisation of services.

The deinstitutionalisation of services is essentially a process of movement from social residential services to community services. This process is foreseen to be implemented following these ways.

- The gradual transformation of residential services into mobile services community-based.
- Establishing new social services in the community. Local Government Units will identify needs and in accordance with the identified needs will offer new kinds of social services. Services will be provided in day centers or community services by public and private legal persons.

The research found that there is an overlap of two concepts 'decentralization' and 'deinstitutionalization'. The transfer of the residential service centers under the local government units is accepted as the deinstitutionalization. So, there is a need for an expertise on a conceptualization framework of the deinstitutionalisation and training of the people that are involved in this process.

Based on the analyses of data and information collected for the purpose of this paper, the need for a new reform on social services system is evident.

5. Effectiveness and problems of the public and civil society social services

The system of social services in Albania, besides public residential services, is diversified and liberalized since the approval of services established by NGOs. Social services in Albania are provided either by public providers, or by not-for-profit and for-profit organisations.

The non-profit sector has some characteristics that distinguish it both from the public and from the for-profit sector. The provider is private, but service provision is value-based with the objective of developing the quality of services, responding to the needs of users and respecting their dignity and not to the needs of the market.

Public authorities have recognise and promote the added value of non-profit providers appreciating their contribution on developing the values of democratic solidarity and exchange, principle of reciprocity, the sense of benefit to the community rather than economic one, and their contribution in solving the financial, economic and social problems.

As the market of the social services is expanded, the main question is the guarantee of the effectiveness and quality of services.

In the country, the new regulatory framework is established and implemented which assesses and certifies according to the state standards the capacities, allowing the operators to provide services. All services that are being offered by various public and private operators, must guarantee a certain quality level in compliance with the standards. The quality of services depends on three main elements: a) definition of standards; b) monitoring of the achievement of the quality set by standards; c) evaluation and improvement of the quality of services

Standards

The standards developed in 2006 clearly define in a transparent and measurable way the criteria that a service or a service provider should fulfil. They constitute a public document, which assists service providers in meeting the obligations the latter undertake. The preparation of the standards is based on the principles of social inclusion, participation, capacity building, use of existing facilities etc. The standards cover services for the main groups in need. The package of the standards includes:

- (i) General Service Standards, which constitute of the basis for respecting the rights of clients for quality services in accordance with their needs;
- (ii) Standards for children in residential institutions;
- (iii) Standards for services to people with disabilities;
- (iv) Standards for the elderly in residential centres;
- (v) Standards for the elderly in day centres;
- (vi) Standards for services to victims of trafficking and at risk of trafficking, and
- (vii) Standards for services to victims of domestic violence.

Standards are important to ensure and to develop further the rights of its citizens enshrined in the legislation. The establishment of standards for social services can facilitate the process of monitoring, evaluation and improvement of the quality of social services.

Inspection

The process of inspecting services is based on Law No. 9355, dated 10.3.2005 “On social assistance and services” (changed), and the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 512, dated 31.5.2006 “On procedures for the introduction of controls on economic assistance, payments to people with disabilities and social services” and the Instruction of the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities for the inspection of social services. An Inspectorate of Services has been established at the central level and in the twelve regions

to inspect the providers of social services. To support inspectors and to turn inspection into a supporting, informative and monitoring instrument for public and private service providers, a methodology of social service inspection has been drafted. On the basis of this guidance, inspectors assess the service by comparison to the standards in force. The inspection serves as a system warning whether the services policy have not yielded the necessary results. Inspection can be requested also by providers themselves so that they are more aware of the quality of service they provide. Inspection is considered as a useful, constructive, and transparent process that encourages development.

Licensing

The aim of licensing social service providers is: to protect client interests from low quality service provision; to apply of social service standards and improve their quality; to list all providers and establish lines of cooperation at the central and local levels; to better know target groups and their needs and eliminate overlapping; to familiarise local government structures with service providers and support them in the process of offering new community services.

Licensing is not obligatory for all NGOs that operate in the social field but only for those that offer services that bear a direct relation with the welfare of the beneficiaries, demand specialised staff and have or manage day care centres, residential centres, home services etc.

Organisations that are, for example, engaged in awareness raising or simply information and lobbying activities can continue their activities in accordance with existing legal requirements without a need to obtain a license.

The procurement of a license for the provision of social services is an equal obligation for both domestic and foreign NGOs as well as for private legal persons.

Although the system of quality is framed, there is a lack of the sound evidence and the research on effectiveness of the services provided by the public and non-public organizations.

Implementation of the quality system is accompanied with lot problems that are related with the conceptualization of the evaluation process, knowing and the understanding the evaluation process, with preparing and using the measurement tools, with training of the inspectors, providers and users, with publication of the evaluation findings.

As the services are decentralized and deinstitutionalized, the measurement of the quality there is a need for the developing the local-based indicators and benchmarking schemes.

The establishment of an independent Agency of the Quality of Social Services would be a development that will guarantee the quality of the social services.

6. Conclusions

Social services system in Albania is transformed in last twenty years and in is the process of modernization.

The expand of the range of the providers, the involvement of the civil society, the decentralization and deinstitutionalization of the services, the community and client based approach, the establishment of the system of quality are the main developments.

There are still many challenges to cope.

The establishment of a data system and development of research in the field of social services would contribute to the further improvements and to the approximate to the European model.

A new reform in the system of social services that is expected to be undertaken by the new government in power and the new administrative

reform (dividing the territory in 65 municipalities) promise the improvement based on the achievements and challenges experienced in the last twenty five years.

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