

PERFORMANCE OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT, SPECIALISED ASSISTANCE CENTRES

30 November 2022

No. VAE-11

SUMMARY

Relevance of the Audit

Crisis situations arise when a person (family) cannot solve the social problems that have arisen due to the resulting social risk by himself or with the help of relatives, take care of personal (family) life independently, maintain relationships and participate in society.

We carried out the audit because the municipalities did not develop enough social services for people in crisis situations, e.g.: for those who have experienced homelessness, the consequences of natural disasters, loss of independence. In 2020, there were 61 crisis centres in municipalities, but there were still no such centres in 14 municipalities. 60 % of people in crisis situations are not identified and are excluded from assistance. Lack of individual services and lack of cooperation between institutions, e.g., between the Child Protection and Adoption Service and health and educational institutions.

Specialised integrated services do not provide effective assistance to victims of domestic violence, and there is a lack of support for those seeking to abandon violence behaviour. 20 % of Lithuania's population (24 % of women and 14 % of men) said they had experienced domestic violence, but 59 % did not apply for help¹. In 2021, only 21 % (20 % in 2020) of victims of domestic violence received specialised integrated assistance.

¹ Available on the Internet at: <https://www.lygus.lt/ka-mums-sako-viesosios-nuomones-tyrimai-apie-smurta-artimoje-aplinkoje/> (last accessed on 18 October 2022).

Objective and scope of the audit

The objective of the audit is to assess whether assistance to persons in a crisis situation is effective.

The main audit questions are:

- whether the existing system makes it possible to identify those in need in crisis situations;
- whether assistance to people in crisis situations meets their minimum needs;
- whether monitoring of assistance to persons in crisis situations makes it possible to measure the results.

The audited entity is the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, as it shapes social services policy, social integration policy of victims of violence, organises, coordinates and controls its implementation.

During the audit, we collected information and cooperated with the Social Services Supervision Department under the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, municipalities and institutions providing crisis management assistance in their territory (social service centres, crisis centres, shelter homes), the Lithuanian Women's Rights Enhancement Association and specialised integrated assistance centres, the Lithuanian Probation Service and institutions implementing violence behaviour change programmes in municipalities.

The audited period was 2019-2021. In order to assess the objectives set in the 2014-2020 National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Provision of Assistance to Victims and their achievement, we used data from previous years. We used the 2022 data to analyse trends in the financing of crisis management assistance to people in crisis situations, the number of agencies providing assistance, the number of professionals working there and the availability of services.

The audit was carried out in accordance with the international standards of supreme audit institutions. The scope of the audit and the methods used are described in more detail in Annex 2 "Scope and methods of audit" (page 46).

Key results of the audit

Social assistance for people in crisis situations would be more effective if they were more proactively identified, the information on the services provided was made public, the necessary legal and psychological support was provided, the physical accessibility and effectiveness of the services were ensured, and those at risk of violence participate in violence behaviour change programmes.

1. People in crisis situations should be identified more proactively

- 37 % (22 out of 60) of municipalities surveyed did not apply proactive measures between 2019 and 2021 in identifying people in crisis situations. In specialised integrated assistance centres, 20 % of all victims of domestic violence who received

assistance were identified by these means. Persons with disabilities accounted for only 3 % of the service recipients in these centres in 2021. Only 15 % (9 out of 60) of municipalities and 80 % (12 out of 15) of the specialised integrated assistance centres applied the practice of Outreach Services. Information from different institutions would help to identify individuals, but in 2021, reports of domestic violence from education and training, healthcare institutions, crisis and social services centres, etc. accounted for 0.15 % of all reports. In 2019-2020, all reports were received only from the police. The insufficient use of proactive measures and the lack of cooperation between institutions in the exchange of information do not help to identify as many people in crisis situations as possible in order to provide timely assistance to them (Chapter 1.1, p. 14).

- Five municipalities do not provide information on the institutions providing social services to people in crisis situations on their website. 16 municipalities do not provide information on all specialised integrated service centres operating on their territory, only 45 % (27) of the municipalities provide information on the assistance provided by target groups on the municipal website. All integrated service centres and 27 % of municipalities lack methodological support to promote information at the regional level in a targeted and consistent manner. The lack of information on the services provided to persons in crisis situations limits the ability to identify persons in need (section 1.2, page 18).

2. Social assistance to people in crisis situations does not sufficiently meet their minimum needs

- When determining the need for services, it is important to discuss the aims of the service recipient and the actions to implement them, but this was done in only 69 (out of 106) cases, although in all cases examined in municipalities and specialised assistance centres for those who have experienced crisis situations and domestic violence, the need for services has been determined individually. Specialised integrated service centres have logbooks of persons in need, but in 2021 the figures provided are inaccurate, as 18 (out of 373) children have been registered who are not provided assistance in these centres. 8.3 % (31 out of 373) were registered as newly experienced domestic violence, although these were repeated cases during the current year. Without data on repeated service recipients, the most effective services will not be selected (section 2.1, page 20).
- In order to restore autonomy, lost social connections and to support integration into society, it is necessary to provide assistance to those in crisis situations according to the identified needs, but:
 - In 11 % (12 out of 106) of cases in 10 selected municipalities persons were not provided services according to their needs: in 7 cases, psychological assistance was not provided. Psychological assistance was not provided in all the cases examined (51) in three out of 6 selected shelter homes because they do not have a psychologist. 48 % (30 out of 62) of persons received shelter home services for more than 1 year, of which 8 received it between 3 and 7 years. There is an increase in the number of older people and those with identified incapacity for work who would benefit more from sheltered accommodation services, but there is a lack of them;

- in all the cases examined (344) persons who have been subjected to domestic violence and who have agreed to receive assistance have received services according to their needs. However, there is no regulation on the types of violence and the form in which services are to be provided. In 2021, in 67 % (236 out of 344) of cases persons were provided with 3 or more types of services than it was identified. For the most part information (98 %) and counselling (64 %) services are provided, the least are provided psychological (14 %), legal (10 %), mediation (10 %) services and assistance in drafting documents (2 %). The main form of their provision is telephone conversations. In 2021, a small proportion of victims of domestic violence received legal and psychological services: psychological - 14 % (49 out of 344), legal - 10 % (35 out of 344);
- the network of municipal agencies providing assistance is distributed without assessing physical accessibility: 5 out of 6 municipalities surveyed reported that they had not assessed the accessibility of the agencies in 2019-2021. The Ministry did not assess the distribution of the network in 2019-2021 in municipal areas either, as it considers that the organisation and provision of social services is an autonomous function of the municipalities and they must ensure that services are not only available but also accessible. Service centres in some areas providing assistance to victims of domestic violence are more than 50 km away from them, but there is no provision of transportation services.

Insufficient provision of services to individual needs, in particular psychological and legal assistance, makes it more difficult for persons to cope with crisis situations (section 2.2, page 22).

- All specialists working in specialised integrated assistance centres develop their qualifications every year, but the need is not assessed on an annual basis and in 2019-2021 the Ministry did not analyse the need for their qualification development. All 15 centres reported that no plans for qualification development had been drawn up between 2019 and 2021. This does not ensure that qualification development is targeted according to the needs of specialists (section 2.2, page 22).
- Violence behaviour change programmes were implemented in 2019-2021 by the Probation Service territorial units, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour and the municipalities through financing these programmes carried out by non-governmental organisations. Ministry has not approved the programme, has not set the requirements for its content, and for education and qualifications of the specialists delivering the programme. Non-governmental organisations use different programmes. There is no mechanism for entry to the Ministry-funded programmes, which are implemented in 17 (out of 60) municipalities. This does not allow all those seeking to change violence behaviour to change it. The Ministry and its subsidiary Social Services Supervision Department did not assess the effectiveness of these programmes in 2019-2021, therefore there is no certainty whether they are suitable for changing the behaviour of the perpetrator (section 2.3, page 28).

3. Monitoring of assistance to people in crisis situations does not allow measurement of results

- There is no general information system on the assistance provided by the specialised integrated service centres. In all the cases (142) examined in the 10 municipalities, data on the services provided were entered into the Social Support for Family Information

System, but in 11 % (15) of cases municipalities indicated in the system other service than the one provided. The Ministry checks the correctness of the data only when the need arises and states that there is no need and resources for permanent control. 70 % (42 out of 60) of the municipalities surveyed indicated that there were no procedures in place for entering and the frequency of entering data into the system. The Ministry uses insufficiently reliable data in assessing the state of provided assistance in the country (Chapter 3, page 33).

- In the period between 2019-2021, 80 % (48 out of 60) of surveyed municipalities and 58 % (11 out of 19) of the agencies providing services for persons in crisis situations did not assess the effectiveness of the assistance provided. Only 15 % of municipalities analyse which part of the service recipients succeeds in achieving the objective of crisis management assistance — to restore independence. Eight (out of 60) municipalities assess the proportion of people receiving this assistance repeatedly over a period of 1 year. In 2019-2021, the Ministry did not assess on an annual basis the state of assistance provided by municipalities to persons in crisis situations. In 2019-2020, the Ministry, the Social Services Supervision Department and all specialised integrated service centres did not assess the effectiveness of the assistance provided to victims of domestic violence. Without such analysis, it is difficult to identify the directions for development to achieve the objective of the assistance (Chapter 3, page 33).
- The target of reducing domestic violence by 15 % by 2020 set in the 2014-2020 Programme for the prevention of domestic violence and the provision of assistance to victims of domestic violence has not been achieved as in 2021 the number of victims of domestic violence was 12 % higher than in 2014 (Chapter 3, page 33).
- In 2021, 2 out of 5 criteria values set by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour were not reached: the number of victims of violence to receive assistance in specialised integrated assistance centres was set at 14,000, and the actual number was by 17 % fewer (11,651); the share of service recipients to rate the quality of the received services positively was set at 98 % and the actual share was by 7.2 percentage points lower (90.8 %) (Chapter 3, 33 pages).

Changes during the audit

Following the entry into force of the amendment to the Law on Social Services on 1 July 2022² a new type of social services — preventive social services³ were introduced.

On 5 May 2022, Recommendations on the organisation of the Crisis Centres⁴ were approved.

Following the entry into force of the amendment to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence⁵ on 1 July 2023, other institutions will be obliged to inform a specialised

² Law amending Articles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 26, 29, 34, 38 of Law No X-493 on social services, supplementing Articles 61, 193, 201, 202 and 36 and 37, No XIV-877 of 23 December 2021.

³ Draft Order No 22-11812 of the Minister for Social Security and Labour of 23 August 2022 approving the Procedure for Organisation and Provision of Preventive Social Services, available on internet at: <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAP/ccb88f3022d111edb36fa1cf41a91fd9?jfwid=7jjinx2um>.

⁴ Order No A1-333 of the Minister for Social Security and Labour of 5 May 2022.

⁵ Law amending Law No XI-1425 on Protection against Domestic Violence, 15 March 2022, No XIV-934, Art. 13.

integrated assistance centre about a person at risk of domestic violence, and a new inter-institutional cooperation mechanism was introduced⁶.

From 1 July 2023, amendments to legal acts⁷ will enter into force concerning the right to provide accredited specialised integrated assistance. Information related to the staff qualification development need will be collected and analysed⁸.

Under the law, which will enter into force on 1 July 2023⁹, perpetrators may be subject to a protection order against violence for a period of 15 days. The procedure for receiving information from institutions and agencies and the requirement to publish information on the websites of the Ministry and municipalities about the agencies operating in their territory, which provide services to persons experiencing domestic violence and organise violence behaviour change programmes will be approved¹⁰.

Recommendations

To the Ministry of Social Security and Labour

1. In order to provide assistance to as many victims of domestic violence as possible, broaden information measures on the services provided, taking into account the results of the public opinion poll (key result 1).
2. in order to select the most effective services and to have relevant data on persons who have experienced domestic violence, ensure that institutions providing these services collect and provide accurate data (key audit result 2).
3. In order to increase the complexity and accessibility of assistance provided to a person who has suffered domestic violence, introduce the following requirements for the agencies providing these services:
 - 3.1. determine the basic package of services;
 - 3.2. set out requirements regarding the scope of contact services, counselling by a psychologist, legal advice, physical accessibility (key audit result 2).
4. For effective assistance in changing violent behaviour:
 - 4.1. adopt a programme of violence behaviour change to be followed by the agencies implementing these programmes;
 - 4.2. establish a mechanism (algorithm) for the involvement of perpetrators in the Ministry-funded violence behaviour change programmes;
 - 4.3. establish indicators to measure the effectiveness of ongoing programmes (key audit result 2).

⁶Ibid., Art. 6 and 7

⁷ Ibid., Art. 2.

⁸ Ibid., Art. 4(8)

⁹ Ibid., Art. 8.

¹⁰ Approved by Order No A1-653 of the Minister for Social Security and Labour of 30 September 2022.

5. In order for the policy-maker to have comparable data on municipalities and agencies providing specialised integrated assistance for decision-making on improvements, establish indicators for assessing the effectiveness of services (key audit result 3)

The measures and deadlines for implementing the recommendations, the expected impact of the audit and the indicators for assessing changes are set out in the section “Plan for the implementation of recommendations” (page 39). Relevant information on the status of the implementation of recommendations, results and developments is published in the open data section of the National Audit Office website at <https://www.valstybeskontrole.lt/LT/AtviriDuomenys>.