A Model for the Future

Innovative Social Policy in Lithuania
Social Protection is a collection of measures to improve or protect human capital, ranging from labor market interventions and publicly mandated unemployment or old-age insurance to targeted income support. Social Protection interventions assist individuals, households, and communities to better manage the income risks that leave people vulnerable.

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On the Cover

Top: A boy from a community-based day center for disabled children Lithuania is shouting “I am happy” in sign language. Middle: A girl from the same center playing outside with a ball on a spring day. This is a symbol of the changes since the Communist Era where disabled children and their families were typically left in complete isolation. Bottom: A training center for young adults with disabilities outside the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius is breaking new ground in giving these people skills to help them become independent.
Welcome to the first issue of SPectrum.

If you look up the word “spectrum” in the dictionary, you will see that it has varied meanings. A spectrum can be the series of colored bands that, like a rainbow, are dispersed and arranged in the order of their respective wavelengths by the passage of white light through a prism. Spectrum stands also for diversity, such as a continuous range or entire extent of ideas or opinions.

Both definitions reflect why you are now holding this new publication in your hand. We in the Social Protection (SP) Family of the World Bank want you to see all the “colors” that make up our work. We also want to let it become a global forum in which ideas, knowledge, and opinions covering the full spectrum can be exchanged.

It is my hope that this new publication will provide you with the hard facts and the newest thinking in SP, but most importantly tell you about the people involved. Here, World Bank staff and our partners will share their knowledge and experience person to person because we recognize that the best way to achieve our goals is through cooperation and building on each other’s strengths.

Social Protection is a young, but very dynamic portfolio in the World Bank. This is the result of events such as the restructuring of Eastern Europe and the global financial crisis that have brought the need for appropriate social safety nets, labor markets programs, and retirement income schemes into sharper focus. Social protection is also increasingly seen as a cornerstone of poverty reduction and sustainable development as witnessed by the high prominence given to the sector in the Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995. As an example of the increased importance, World Bank lending in the social protection area has increased nearly seven-fold since 1992 and accounted for over 12 percent of total Bank lending in fiscal year 1999.

Awareness of social protection issues has, however, not kept up with the sector’s dramatic growth in importance. My hope is that this new publication will help fill this gap and enrich and inspire our colleagues in the Bank as well as our partners in donor countries, client countries, international organizations, trade unions, NGOs and the media.

In this first issue we feature a Lithuanian project which is proving that community-based social services can provide a credible solution to the immense social challenges especially the Eastern European countries and former Soviet Union are facing. The project is a good example of the qualities we are seeking in the new Social Protection strategy of social risk management. We want social protection to be a safety net as well as a springboard for the poor and vulnerable, allowing those with some capacity to bounce back and set them on a positive development path. We see the need to move from largely centralized solutions, towards solutions designed and implemented by the people themselves. There are no easy solutions, no magic bullets to solve the problems of inadequate risk management, but this program does point out one possible scenario for how some of the problems can be tackled.

We in The World Bank’s Social Protection Unit will be delighted to hear your comments. In future issues there will be room for comments and letters to the editor.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Holzmann,
Director Social Protection

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Lithuania is breaking free from a harmful and costly legacy: institutionalization of its disabled, socially vulnerable and elderly citizens.

“Life is good. I am happy.”

The little boy is running towards us with his hands clasped above his head, sending this message to the world in sign language. His fingers are waving as the sun shines from a clear blue sky. Even people who never learned his silent tongue understand immediately: Life is indeed good.

We are in the village of Moletai. The little boy is one of 40 mentally handicapped children who live with their families in this corner of rural Lithuania, the former Soviet republic by the Baltic Sea. Only a year ago, the state authorities told his mother that she should give up her son and send him to an institution. She saw no other choice and braced herself for this heartbreaking decision. The boy could not speak, he could not walk, he could not even eat by himself.

But Now Everything Has Changed

In June of 1998 the little boy, together with 18 other disabled children, found a future. Since then, a minivan has come every weekday morning to collect him and the other boys and girls from their homes to bring them to the new day center in Moletai. Here they get an education, not only in school learning, but in how to build self confidence and live independent lives. At night the van returns them to their families. The center staff also works with the parents, both at their homes and at the center, to teach them how to improve their children’s care and reduce the strain on their families.

As the kids play in the playground sunshine, center director Aldona Kontrimanciene explains the transformation in these children’s prospects as she takes us on a guided tour from the center’s massage room to the classrooms to the basement workshop for the boys and finally into her office.

“Some of these children had never been outside before they came here,” says Kontrimanciene. During the Soviet era, she explains, disabled people had no place in society. By definition, society was a perfect world where everybody was perfect. Parents of children with disabilities were blamed for their misfortune—they were bad Communists—and were left in complete isolation. Often they were so ashamed that they waited until dark to take their children outside so that nobody would see them. “Now, when we take the kids for a walk, we meet people in the street who literally start to cry when they see how great our kids are doing,” Kontrimanciene says. “They tell us that they never thought there was any hope for them.”

A Model for the Future

The day center in Moletai is one of 14 pilot projects in the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project that is now being seen as a model for the future. Its main feature is social support provided by services rather than cash transfers.

The pilot projects are under way in six municipalities. They were launched after a competitive tendering process—the first tender offer ever conducted in social services in Lithuania. Each project is designed to be a feasible, cost-effective approach to social services delivery that is community based and responsive to local needs.

“The major object of the new social services, which include information and consultancy, assistance for disabled people at their homes, guardianship and nursing at special institutions, is to help people satisfy their needs and create decent living conditions,” explains one of the key persons in the project, Alfredas Nazarovas, director of the Project Coordinating Unit and secretary of the Social Services and Labor Ministry in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. “This project is the first prominent step in decentralizing social services and making them cheaper at the same time.”

Among the pilots is one of the first shelters for battered mothers and their children in Eastern Europe. The shelter is situated in a former nursery at a secret address in Vilnius. It provides abused young mothers a temporary residence and helps them find permanent and safe living conditions, including a job. Equally unique is the Training Center for Handicapped Young Adults. Here, 54 youths are being trained in carpentry, sewing and other job skills so they can lead financially and socially independent lives. There is also the day center for the elderly and handicapped in a suburb of Vilnius that offers a place for social contact, cultural activities and social services. This type of social support has been shown to be effective in preventing the deterioration and eventual institutionalization of the elderly.
“Some of these children had never been outside before they came here,” says Kontrimanciene. During the Soviet era, she explained, disabled people had no place in society.
In the poor rural area of Svencionys, where many vulnerable groups, especially pensioners, are concentrated, a Home Delivery of Services for the Elderly office has been established. Social workers visit the homes of 400–500 elderly, bringing and preparing meals, providing personal care and housekeeping services, and taking the elderly to medical and other appointments, allowing them to live safely in the community. Without this care, many of these pensioners would be placed in an institution.

One of its most innovative experiments was buying six new tractors this spring. Local authorities realized that many elderly pensioners own land, but were no longer able to do some of the more demanding tasks such as plowing. With help, however, they could still take care of the land, grow vegetables and remain self-sufficient. As improbable as it may seem, the tractor service helps these people stay in their own homes. The Home Delivery Service program is the first of its kind in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Svencionys is also the home of one of the first programs for former prisoners in Eastern Europe. After serving their prison sentences, Lithuanian ex-convicts are usually left to fend for themselves on the street with only a small amount of money—often after years behind bars. This program provides a short-term residence, and attempts to help them get established and find a job, avoiding the usual pattern of falling back into crime and returning to prison.

A Social Revolution
The idea of community-based social service marks nothing short of a revolution not only in Lithuania but throughout most of Eastern and Central Europe. In 1990 this Baltic country gained its independence after 50 years under Communist rule, and like the other former Soviet republics, it was left with a centrally planned social security system that had been regulated from Moscow. Centralization is still a chief characteristic of the Lithuanian social security system, leaving the country with one of the most harmful, financially costly and intractable legacies of the command economy: namely, the reliance on residential institutions as the only option for society’s most vulnerable groups—the disabled, the abused, the orphans and the elderly.

The harm caused by large residential institutions has been well-documented throughout the world by the World Health Organization. Still, roughly ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the number of children and disabled housed in these institutions in Eastern and Central Europe is rising. In Lithuania, the number of residents in infant and children’s homes increased 32 percent from 1990 to 1995. The overall quality of care for vulnerable populations in residential care is worse today than ten years ago, according to David Tobis, Ph.D., of the Center for the Study of Family Policy at Hunter College in New York and a specialist in institutionalization issues in Eastern Europe.

The Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project began in 1994. In the beginning it also included a computer project besides the social project aimed at introducing community-based services, and a parallel component to help develop the government’s capacity to design, implement and measure the impact of its social policy programs. The ministry’s outmoded Soviet-era techniques were more or less useless. These new tools have enabled the ministry to estimate the fiscal and social implications of proposed social policies, including the country’s new pension law—which is proving to be fiscally unsustainable.

As the project took shape, a partnership between the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Services and Labor, the University of Stockholm School of Social Work (supported by the Swedish government) and the World Bank emerged. Bank loan funds finance civil works and equipment, while Swedish government funds finance training in the community-based methods. Each municipality is required to provide the premises and pay the staff. The project costs more than $12 million. The World Bank loan was $3.7 million, while about $4.29 million was provided by the Swedish and Dutch governments as grants.

The Social Revolution
The projects have already demonstrated noteworthy achievements, and word is spreading fast. Policymakers from Lithuania and throughout Eastern Europe are coming to get a first-hand look. Delegations visit the various centers almost daily. The Training Center for Handicapped Young Adults, which opened last January, had by the end of March received more than 200 delegations.

The Day Center for the Elderly in Vilnius offers a place for social contact, cultural activities and social services. This helps to prevent the deterioration and eventual institutionalization of the elderly.
even travel alone to work—and they are so happy to realize these things. Their integration into society will be the main economic achievement to society. Otherwise they would have to have permanent care and end up in personally degrading residential institutions. Now it will probably be enough for them to have social workers visit them a few times a week. People may see this as an expensive institution and a waste of money. But that is because they are still stuck in the Communist era—when these problems officially did not exist.”

The numbers support his argument: an analysis in Lithuania shows the costs of community services to provide home visits, meals and other services to the elderly is just 25 percent of the cost of residential care. The study concludes that it is no more expensive to serve disabled children in an enriched day school program (including education, two meals a day, job training and a van to pick the children up and return them home at night), than to provide long-term residential care. The Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project is now halfway through its implementation. The results are already noteworthy. Of 1,655 clients served by the community-based centers, over two thirds are expected to be diverted from institutional placement, saving the Lithuanian government an estimated $2 million a year. Numerous disabled and vulnerable children, battered women and elderly—either at risk of being institutionalized or formerly in an institution—are receiving intensive care for the first time. The numbers still seem small, but they are growing. More importantly, this project is one of the few efforts in Central and Eastern Europe demonstrating that de-institutionalization is possible. The greatest testimony to the project’s success is that it is being copied throughout Lithuania, other countries are following suit, with the Lithuanian government now providing direct budgetary support to expand the community-based concept.

“The project embodies several principles increasingly central to World Bank assistance: partnership, participation, community-based development to ensure sustainability, institution-building, and learning,” says World Bank Principal Economist Louise Fox. “I believe this is an excellent example of how we can be effective in this field.”

As an economist, Fox knows that graphs and statistical tables showing cost-effectiveness are not the only measures of project success. The best proof can also come from a little boy from M ole tai shouting to the world in sign language that he is happy.
A shared vision and a clear working relationship between the government and the World Bank is often the secret behind a successful development project. In the Lithuanian Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project, the Lithuanian government was at the same time open about the problems it was facing and committed to decentralization. Finally it gave a strong mandate to one ministry, the Ministry of Social Security and Labor.

“Often when the World Bank is working on a project with a government, the mandate is spread to different ministries. Their internal differences often turn the projects into failures,” says Louise Fox from the World Bank team behind the Lithuania project.

Today Fox is the World Bank’s Lead Specialist on Pensions in the Social Protection Unit, part of the Human Development Network. But in 1994 she was the driving force behind the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project in Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (ECA).

Even though she has moved to a new position, she has kept her close connection to this special project where the daily responsibilities of managing it has been taken over by Social Protection Specialist Philip Goldman. He is now facing the challenge of taking the project into its next phase, bringing the good experiences from the pilot project to scale and making them the basis of a national social policy. Or as he more poetically puts it, to turn the “islands of excellence into a whole continent.”

**A Need For More Than Money**

When Fox was assigned to work on the Baltic countries in the fall of 1994, she had previously been dealing with institutionalization issues in Romania.

“Until that point in time, the Bank’s social protection efforts in Lithuania had been focusing primarily on how to insure a minimum income so that people would not starve. This cash benefit was important, but I believed the time had now come to start dealing with people’s other needs,” says Fox. “It was not just a question of people starving but the volume of change that was going on in their lives. I cannot imagine how I would have coped under such circumstances. Their whole world was turned upside down in three years. And many people, I knew, felt hopeless, useless and confused. The families were under all kinds of stress as people lost their jobs or their social culture changed dramatically. I knew this stress was not only about money for survival. Battered women are not a question about money, but it is a problem that needs to be addressed. It is a human capital issue.”

Louise Fox was also determined to take an approach that encouraged participation from the Lithuanians.
“The tender process really motivated the communities because they wanted what they asked for. And they became part of the project, if their proposals or their ideas were selected,” says Louise Fox.

“I did not want the team to be the traditional World Bank “experts” who come in and give advice and then leave. This was not a way to do this project. I felt it was important to start to transfer responsibility to the Lithuanians. I knew that otherwise the project would not work in the long run. So in a series of workshops we taught the Lithuanians project preparation and gave them the tools they needed to be able to participate on equal terms,” Fox says.

It worked. Louise Fox remembers an incident a year into the project, where she tried to change the way the Lithuanians were handling parts of the project.

“They reminded me that I could not do that, because after all it was their project. I loved it. I was of course a little frustrated in that particular moment, but I realized they were right. It was their project,” she says.

Tenders motivate communities

In 1995, the partnership with the Swedes was established and a tender process for the social services pilot was initiated.

“The tender process really motivated the communities because they wanted what they asked for. And they became part of the project, if their proposals or their ideas were selected,” says Louise Fox. The success of the tendering was, however, so overwhelming that it almost backfired by threatening to become unmanageable.

“I will never forget it. I had prepared deliver the ministry the message that this was not possible. But then the vice minister looked at me and said: Louise, this is the first time the municipalities have decided to do something for their people. We must help them. And I could not resist her,” says Louise Fox.

Now that the pilots have proven to be successful comes the next challenge: how to turn them into a sustainable national policy. “In five years we want it to be the exception when a municipality does not provide proper community-based social services for their vulnerable groups,” says Louise Fox.
The Challenge

World Bank Social Protection Specialist Philip Goldman is managing this second phase.

“The real issue for the first project is now to take a deep breath and look at all these initiatives because the whole concept is spreading like a wildfire in the country. We need to see what is really working here and what can be improved,” he says.

The second phase, which is still being developed, will focus on standards, training and services development, issues the Lithuanian government has asked for help on.

The Lithuanians are about to start developing a training system for present and future social workers and the Swedish government is very interested in continuing to work on this issue, according to Goldman. But instead of working directly with the pilots as they are doing now, the Swedish team will work much more with the trainers—train the trainers, so to speak—so the Lithuanians can begin to do all the training on the local level themselves based on their experience in the pilot projects.

The next step in the project will also establish stringent standards for admission into residential institutions in order to ensure that only those truly in need of permanent residential care are admitted to institutions. These standards must then be subject to accreditation and regular monitoring by the government. This part of the plan also calls for restructuring and downsizing of residential institutions, so that they can provide improved quality of service to a much smaller group of residents.

“During our last visit to Lithuania we talked to two of the heads of the traditional residential institutions. We walked in fully expecting them to be resistant to any notion of change whatsoever. We walked out, obviously very concerned with the state of the institutions, but very surprised of the willingness of the residential directors to consider change. I think, they had realized that the world is changing and that they cannot go on the way they are doing at the moment. In one institution they were actually thinking of setting up a day training program for the disabled that would be off site, but supported by the residential institution. This is an example of an initiative we believe can developed and expanded upon,” says Philip Goldman.

Finally, the second stage will modify the financing of social services so that over time “money will follow the client” and resources will be shifted from large institutions to the new community-based social services.

“There are two areas that needs to be addressed. One is financing and incentives, the other one is about training and knowledge. We need to find out whether or not the government can provide financial incentives at the community level, so the municipalities can develop pilots on their own, and if we can find a model where the government provides training and expertise,” says Philip Goldman.

He is thrilled about working on the project. Like Louise Fox, he considers it a model for the future.

“It is simple in concept. It is economically rational. The quality of the services is high. Politically the government is very supportive and it gets some benefits out of it. In short, everything neatly comes together,” says Philip Goldman.
I am a citizen of Lithuania.
I have a right to education.
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I have a right to education.
Parents of Disabled Children Turned Themselves into a Political Force

The demonstration outside the Prime Minister's office was peaceful, but very efficient. It only lasted about ten minutes, long enough to make one of the most vulnerable groups in the country, mentally disabled children and their families, realize that together they were a strong political force.

The parents were fighting for their children’s right to an education. It was September 1996. The place was Municipality Square in the center of Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital. A few hundred parents and their children were protesting the government’s reluctance to accept a loan from the World Bank. The loan was supposed to finance a series of community-based day centers for disabled children and young adults. This new type of institution was desperately needed as an alternative to the old Soviet-style residential institutions.

Dana Migaliova was one of the parents on Municipality Square. Her son is blind, autistic and epileptic. She remembers that day vividly and with excitement as she shows the photos from the demonstration in the small and crowded office of Viltis, the Lithuanian Welfare Society for Persons with Mental Disability, in Vilnius. Viltis is the Lithuanian word for “hope.” She has since become the director of Viltis, an organization that has spawned into a popular movement in Lithuania.

“We were just standing there, quietly and civilized. The children were carrying posters saying ‘I am a citizen of Lithuania’ and ‘I have a right to education,’” she recalls. “After five minutes the leaders of Viltis, who had organized the demonstration, were invited into the Ministry by the head of the Social Department of Vilnius. The meeting took less than an hour and all our demands were met. Luckily we had been well prepared for this meeting and had written our proposals down.”

The power of the demonstration was so strong that the Ministry asked the parents not to do it again. The image of the many families showing up with their disabled children was too embarrassing. “Since then we have succeeded in getting several amendments to the health care system. One victory we won after having called a press conference. Two days later the Social Ministry agreed to meet our demands on early rehabilitation of our children,” says Migaliova.

Learning the Art of Lobbying

Viltis was created on the initiative of child psychiatrist Dainius Puras, who in 1989 in the wake of Lithuanian independence, put an article in one of the country’s socialist newspapers inviting parents of mentally disabled children to a meeting where they could organize themselves. Two hundred people came, forming the core of Viltis. Puras is now the Head Child Psychiatrist in Lithuania.

“He made us realize that if we as parents wanted to legalize ourselves and our children’s needs, we had to take action. We realized that charity alone would not change the life of our children. We needed to work on all levels, including the political,” says Migaliova.

One of Viltis’ first victories happened in 1990, when the organization succeeded in having state facilities such as resorts for privileged pensioners converted for the benefit of persons with disabilities. A year later, an amendment to the education law gave all children up to 16 years of age—including the disabled children who had earlier been excluded—a right to education. Migaliova considers this Viltis’ main achievement so far.

“We found that the main resistance to change came from the social system itself, i.e., the schools claimed they could not provide classrooms and lacked both funds and expertise. That made the group of parents realize that we could not make things change unless we could prove that our ideas would work,” explains Migaliova.
And so the parents learned the art of organization, policy-making and lobbying. They raised funds from among Lithuanian emigrants abroad and through the diplomatic corps in Vilnius. They won support from the American and Canadian embassies, and Viltis finally managed to turn an empty kindergarten into a day center where the disabled children were trained. As mentioned, they also continued to organize demonstrations and “make noise” as Migaliova calls it. As the newly independent country began to shed the old Communist system, Viltis grew as a political force and began to recommend candidates for positions in the new political structures.

Their fight went beyond their children’s constitutional rights. Viltis also wanted to prove that the existing institutions were inefficient, inhuman and expensive. “To achieve this goal, we cooperated with the independent press. We raised awareness by making raids into institutions famous for inhuman conditions. We also showed that these institutions were inefficient. Our calculations proved that the maintenance of one child in a boarding school was 240 rubles a day. Families raising a handicapped child were, however, only allowed 20 rubles a day plus a few privileges to buy extra food and underpants—which were a rationed good at that time,” says Migaliova.

Today, Viltis is a non-governmental organization with 41 regional branches all over Lithuania and it’s still growing. The organization currently takes care of 4000 people with mental disabilities and unites more than 4800 caregivers and guardians. Ministry of Health Care statistics show that there are more than 23,000 mentally disabled people in Lithuania.

The membership of Viltis has not only grown dramatically but more families have realized that it’s not right to send their children to institutions. The campaign also changed the prevailing attitude that disabled children were only found in families where the parents were somehow to blame for their misfortune.

“It is not enough to go and cry if you have a disabled child. You must justify your claims and realize that the support you get is not for you personally.”

And the politicians were humiliated by our revelations and realized that the system had to change. Talking about it now, I can see it was a very exciting time. We had to take big responsibilities and work with all kinds of families and social problems. But we made it because we developed a very good coordination between parents, experts and the politicians. Sometimes the civil servants were not allowed to say everything, but then Viltis could speak up,” says Migaliova.

The Director of Viltis, Dana Migaliova is herself a mother to a son who is blind and autistic.

“To be able to change things you have to be able to rise above your personal problems,” she says.
Finding Inner Strength

Dana Migaliova’s own story is one of overcoming the personal tragedy of having a son with multiple disabilities and finding, in her own words, “inner strength” and “internal wisdom” after being left by her husband. “To be able to change things, you have to rise above your personal problems and learn to see them from a broader perspective. You also need the capability to assume political accountability and be part of national policymaking,” she says.

She explains that it has not been easy, as she, like many Lithuanians, was not used to taking initiatives and assuming responsibility. “Communism had for too long deprived us of our personal responsibility,” she says. Another thing that she has had to learn is management skills and the formulation of strong arguments and strategies. “It is not enough to go and cry if you have a handicapped child. You must justify your claims and realize that the support you get is not for you personally. It has to be managed properly,” she says.

She has learned from Viltis that leaders do not necessarily have to have degrees in higher education. She herself was originally an engineer. “What is important is that these people have internal wisdom and strength. Then we can provide management training. Often these persons also start to educate themselves in social science or other related areas. And they are good at turning to experts when they themselves cannot provide the answers,” she says.

Migaliova has been very pleased with Viltis’ cooperation with the World Bank. “I often go to conferences where I hear the World Bank being criticized for not providing sufficient support. The criticism often comes from NGOs in other Eastern European countries. And the conditions in many of these countries are terrible. But many of the complaints are based on misunderstandings of the rules of the World Bank. The NGOs do not realize that the World Bank works through the government and only funds projects that are approved by the government. The World Bank cannot be used as a political force to support their individual projects. The NGOs have to learn to work through their governments and to realize that the World Bank is lending money, not giving it away. The loans are investments and will eventually have to be repaid,” she says.

Dana Migaliova believes the community-based institutions in the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project are showing the way forward for how to treat disabled children and young adults in her country and the rest of Eastern Europe. Her own 20-year-old son with multiple disabilities is her best example. “He is attending education at one of the day-care centers and can communicate through sign language. He only wants to ride in the front seat in the car, and he can now eat with other people, even enjoy spending time with them,” she says proudly, showing that even these achievements, which may look minimal to many people, make all her struggles worthwhile.

A campaign changed the prevailing attitude that disabled children were only found in families where the parents were somehow to blame for their misfortune.

Facts on Viltis

- The Viltis Society is a non-governmental organization that represents mentally disabled persons and their families in Lithuania.

- The organization unites more than 3200 families in 41 branches.

- Viltis participates as member of the Council for Disability Affairs at the Government of Lithuania.

- To learn more about Viltis on the Internet: www.geocities.com/HotSprings/3002
Seeing is believing. The pilot projects in the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project in Lithuania are crucial in changing public opinion and the attitudes of policy makers, administrators and social workers from command-economy thinking towards community-based thinking. Such a transition presents enormous challenges.

Together with Principal Economist Louise Fox and the rest of the team on the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project, World Bank consultant David Tobis, Ph.D., at the Center for the Study of Family Policy at Hunter College, New York, developed a six-point strategy for carrying out social policy reforms in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

"Experience shows that a national reform in Eastern and Central Europe is unlikely to happen unless there is administrative support for the reform and new funding is made available. Those two conditions are rarely met without considerable education of policy makers, pilot testing of service models, formal and informal evaluation, and changes in public opinion," says Tobis.

Reform is Needed
Based on his research and the team’s work, Tobis makes a strong case for why social reform in this part of the world is needed.

"One of the more harmful, financially costly and intractable legacies of the command economy is the reliance on residential institutions. And the transition to a market economy has made the situation worse," he says.

His studies show that approximately 820,000 poor, vulnerable or disabled children in the 27 countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union live isolated during childhood and adolescence in approximately 5,500 large, regimented residential institutions that often stunt their physical, emotional and intellectual development. Children with disabilities, approximately 60 percent of the total number of children in residential institutions, are segregated from society in grim facilities from which most will never leave.

Roughly 365,000 elderly and disabled people live in social care homes in the former Soviet Union; no aggregate figure is available for the institutionalized elderly in the countries of Eastern Europe.

The harm caused by large residential institutions throughout the world has been well documented by the World Health Organization and others. Most of these studies indicate that the longer children stay in an institution, the greater the likelihood of emotional or behavioral disturbance and cognitive impairment.

The transition from a command economy to a market economy in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union caused the economic and social conditions of the region to deteriorate rapidly. At the same time, many of the financial and social supports that had been available to the population during the socialist period were eliminated or reduced. This has created a vicious circle, causing a major increase in the number of people at social risk. In response, residential institutions have become one of the few significant forms of help available to children, the elderly and the disabled to survive the transition.

"Now, roughly ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, more children and disabled people are housed in these institutions than before the transition, despite the decrease in the birth rate. And the quality of the care these children receive is getting worse," Tobis says.

In Lithuania, the number of residents in infant and children’s homes increased by 32 percent between 1990 and 1995. In the Kyrgyz Republic, there was a 69 percent increase in the number of young children’s homes between 1992 and 1995. Hungary is the only country in the region showing positive signs of numbers dropping.

"These people live their lives cloistered and bored in social care homes. Very few if any of these individuals need to live confined in total institutions," Tobis says.

Strong Economic Arguments
Change is desperately needed. Large residential institutions are not only inhuman, they are also very costly and inefficient. In Lithuania, for example, 1.75 percent of all national public expenditures in 1996 was for residential institutions.

The Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project gives young adults with disabilities their first chance to integrate into society in Lithuania.
Institutions in most cases are paid by the state. However, local governments have not involved decentralization of the responsibility for social services. However, local governments have not found good reasons to develop community-based institutions in most cases are paid by the state.

Another problem is the lack of a social-work infrastructure in these countries. Social-work training programs were dismantled throughout Eastern Europe in the decades after World War II and never developed in the Soviet Union. The responsibility for care for vulnerable children, the disabled and the elderly was placed in the hands of physicians and civil servants who had little time or training for this role.

In many countries, the political and economic transition has involved decentralization of the responsibility for social services. However, local governments have not found good reasons to develop community-based institutions for the disabled and elderly because the residential institutions in most cases are paid by the state.

The Ministry of Education and Science in Armenia reported that it is ten times more expensive to educate a disabled child in a residential boarding school than to educate a child in a regular school. In Romania, a study conducted by UNICEF and the National Committee for Child Protection demonstrated that the per child cost for foster family care in a program run by an NGO was no more expensive than the cost of institutional care, and was far superior for the children. In Lithuania, the costs of community services to provide home visits, meals, medical care and other assistance to the elderly was projected to be only 25 percent of the cost of residential care. The same analysis found that it is no more expensive to serve disabled children in an enriched day school program (including education, two meals per day, job training and a van to pick the children up and return them home at night), than the cost of long-term residential care.

“Other industrialized nations have gone through similar periods of economic and social upheaval and also relied on residential institutions to care for some of their vulnerable and marginalized populations. Virtually all of these nations have moved away from reliance on residential care except for the severely disabled, and instead rely primarily on community-based services,” Tobis says.

**Barriers to Be Overcome**

Tobis realizes it will take time, as many barriers must be overcome before community-based social services can become a credible alternative to large residential institutions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Among other things, there is organizational pressure to maintain such institutions because the reliance on residential institutions has created a large and influential constituency whose interests are tied to the preservation of these institutions. And the directors of residential institutions are struggling to keep their beds filled in order to preserve their budgets, which is determined by the number of people in their care.

“This is possible because the criteria to place an individual in a residential institution are often vague, inappropriate, outdated, and arbitrarily applied,” explains Tobis.

Another problem is the lack of a social-work infrastructure in these countries. Social-work training programs were dismantled throughout Eastern Europe in the decades after World War II and never developed in the Soviet Union. The responsibility for care for vulnerable children, the disabled and the elderly was placed in the hands of physicians and civil servants who had little time or training for this role.

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**A Strategy for the Future**

David Tobis and the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Team have developed a plan to reduce the region’s reliance on residential institutions. The team recommends a six-point strategy for carrying out a national social policy reform:

- **Change public opinion and mobilize community support:** The first step is to change the public opinion and attitudes of policy makers toward residential institutions. Tobis finds that in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union it is best to organize such a campaign from the ground up, relying on natural constituencies such as women’s organizations, organizations of parents of disabled children and NGOs involved in community development.

- **Strengthen the existing community-oriented social-welfare infrastructure:** The team wants to see the social-welfare infrastructure strengthened in social-work schools where staff in all levels of the social sector can get proper training, learning and understanding the advantages and techniques of community-based social services.

- **Create community-based social services as pilot projects:** The team recommends pilot projects as one of the most effective ways to develop these new services. As seen in Lithuania, pilots have many advantages: the flexibility to test a wide range of approaches, time and data to gain popular support to carry out the project on a larger scale; limited investment and risk by donors; and the opportunity to begin a dialogue on policy. “The main disadvantages are that pilot projects reach only a small portion of the population in need of assistance, and the policy environment is not changed,” says Tobis. One way of identifying the municipalities or regions in which the pilot projects should be located is a national tender offer as in Lithuania’s case. A government may also decide to...
focus on establishing pilot projects in regions in which residential care institutions are located. “This approach may increase the likelihood that a social service program will be targeted to serve individuals who are more at risk of institutionalization or who are already living in a residential facility,” says Tobis. After pilot projects have been tested, programs can be implemented nationwide and national legislation can be introduced in order to back up the new system.

- Create pilot projects to reduce inflow of individuals entering residential institutions and reintegrate selected individuals into the community: In order to reduce the inflow of individuals into residential institutions or even reintegrate selected persons into the community, appropriate criteria and methods should be developed to assess these individuals’ strengths and needs for additional assistance.

- Develop a facility management plan: Redesign, convert or close individual facilities. Staff and supervisors in residential institutions can be retrained, focusing on the value of family upbringing and the limitations of residential care. Residential institutions can be redesigned into smaller, semi-independent units, allowing the staff to focus on reintegrating children into the community. Finally, alternate uses for institutions can be found. A good example in Lithuania is a planned center for mothers and their children during a crisis.

- Create a national system of community-based social services with revised legislation, new funding streams, monitoring, evaluation and accountability: After pilot projects have been tested and redesigned, programs can be implemented nationwide and relevant legislation should be enacted.

“One key element that should be evaluated carefully is the cost-effectiveness of community-based social services. They are likely to be less expensive on a per-client basis than residential care. New services, however, generally expand the number of individuals who receive assistance. The expansion in the number of service recipients provides much needed help to people who have previously not been served, but will require additional resources beyond the money saved from closing residential institutions,” says Tobis.

He is happy to see that the government of Lithuania, in partnership with the World Bank and the Stockholm School of Social Work, are moving the country away from residential institutions toward a network of community-based social services.

“A formal evaluation of the pilot projects has just begun, but already anecdotal reports are very encouraging. The best news is that because of the success of these projects, the government of Lithuania has used its funds to triple the number of community-service projects for the poor, children and the elderly,” he says.
Swedes Are Turning Community-Based Social Services Into a Popular Movement

Before 1991 social work and education in this field did not exist in Lithuania. Therefore, employee training for the pilot projects of the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project is crucial. For this reason the Swedish government has set up a unique five-year program for the employees of the 14 pilot projects in the Social Policy and Community Social Services Development Project. The hope is that community-based thinking will become self-sustainable in Lithuanian society.

Ronald Penton, head of the International Projects Division of the Department of Social Work at Stockholm University, believes the program will become a model for the future. He has been working in Lithuania and other Eastern and Central European countries since the early 90s. But he has never seen a project take off like the one in Lithuania. “This training program has almost turned into a popular movement committed to developing the country’s community-based services,” he says.

Training and Supervision

The program is made up of three modules. Initially the Lithuanian employees spend three weeks in Stockholm. The first two weeks of training are focused on basic theory in social policy and community-based social work, which for most of the participants is an introduction to a completely new way of thinking. The third week is focused on practical training in a Swedish institution similar to the one they will start working in back home.

The second part of the training program is a ten-week training program divided into one-week modules, which the employees will attend over one year. These modules are not exclusively for the employees. Parents, administrative staff, staff from traditional social institutions, and other people related to the project can also participate. The week-long modules focus on how to apply the theory to the real world. Among the subjects are dialoguing techniques and education theory.

Finally, an intensive supervision program follows up the training until 2002. Each pilot project has a Swedish supervisor with expertise in its field. Every third week he or she flies to Lithuania to meet with the employees, monitor that work is progressing, and to help out if any new problems have showed up. And they do all the time. The supervision takes place with the help of an interpreter.

Janina Zileniene, the director for the social support and education center for the handicapped and children at social risk in Utena, two hours’ drive from Vilnius, gives an example of how the supervision has helped her in her work. One of the girls in this institution had some serious behavioral problems. When the Swedish supervisor heard about it, she realized that the girl was suffering from Asperger’s Syndrome.

“Our supervisor taught us a method to structure the girl’s everyday life, which was exactly what the girl needed. Suddenly she was behaving much better. We realized that she was a very intelligent girl, whose handicap was that she lacked social skills. Before we talked to our supervisor, we had never heard about such a social handicap,” says Zileniene.
“This training program has almost turned into a popular movement committed to developing the country’s community-based services.”

We Keep Moving Forward

“We are still in a phase where we keep running into problems we do not know how to deal with. But the supervisor helps us move forward every time; we otherwise would have been in danger of losing our way. Another positive result of the supervision is that the parents now start asking questions and we can help provide the answers,” says Janina Zileniene.

The training program is also a leadership program, and Ronald Penton hopes that the participants will be able to take over the supervision as new community-based social services develop in Lithuania.

For the Swedes, the training program has also been a learning experience. “I believe it has reminded us of what social work is really about. It has brought us back to the roots, something that we can sometimes forget in our developed system in Sweden. It has also taught us to be creative and to use our imagination because we do not have the same resources available in Lithuania as we do in Sweden. I have also found the enthusiasm of the employees in the pilot projects extremely inspiring,” says Penton.
The anonymous sanctuary maintains a secret address in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. The center is housed in a newly painted white building of four levels with sleeping space for 20 mothers and 30 children. It is a simple, but freshly renovated residence where the guests can participate in daily living inside a soothing environment. The community rooms are large and airy with new, but modest furniture, many of them in light wood. Each mother and her children have a big room with beds, a little furniture and a private bathroom.

The staff totals 19 including management, social workers and educators, a lawyer, a psychologist and attendants. The center has two main objectives: to provide temporary shelter and to give proper assistance and support to the residents according to their needs.

A Plan for the Future
When a woman arrives, a close investigation is undertaken in order to identify the woman’s needs and problems. Then the staff will help her to plan a future that includes education or work and a suitable solution of the housing problems. The atmosphere in the shelter is based on interaction and a spirit that enables the women to cope with their problems and strengthens their self-esteem.

The women are encouraged to talk to each other and organize cultural events and discussions with people from outside. Often they stay in close contact with the shelter after they move out. The women who have succeeded form good role models for the residents.

Nijole Dirsiene explains how domestic violence increased when privatization created high unemployment. “Suddenly the Communist Party was no longer there to think for us and provide everything for us. From one day to another we had to take care of ourselves, learn how to find a job, how to gain the skills for this job, and in the mean time get food and pay the rent. It went too quickly for us. The men especially had a hard time. The women continued to take care of the home, maybe they even became the breadwinners of the family. Many men, however, lost not only their jobs and their status, but also their self-respect and turned to alcohol. Most of the husbands to the women who come here are alcoholics,” says Dirsiene.

She completed a Master’s degree in social studies at the University of Vilnius and wrote her thesis on women’s problems and domestic violence. Through her studies and her experience, she has come to realize that it is not enough to look at the woman’s story. It is equally important to take the man’s story into account.

The Shelter for Battered Mothers and Their Children is anonymously located on a quiet street in Vilnius.

A Wave of Domestic Violence Hit Lithuania After 1989
In the years following independence after the end of the Cold War, Lithuania experienced a wave of domestic violence. Working for the Social Service Center in Vilnius, Nijole Dirsiene came into contact with an increasing number of battered women who asked for help. This encounter made her the driving force behind the establishment of the first Shelter for Battered Mothers and Their Children in Eastern Europe, an institution of which she is now the director.

The Shelter has room for 20 mothers and 30 children. Each mother has a big room with beds and a little furniture and a private bathroom.
Men Are Not Just the Bad Guys

“The problems are not just black and white. The men are not just the bad guys. We will never solve the problems if we only approach one side of the conflict. It is only in a few perverted cases there are not two sides,” Dirsiene says. She says the most important thing for these couples is to learn to listen to each other and to recognize that in a relationship and family the man and woman are equal partners.

An all-female staff in the shelter has made it more difficult to work with the men. “We would like to hire a man, but we have not found the right person yet. We also need a place outside the shelter to meet with the men, as they are not allowed in here. Right now we have to meet them in the parking lot, in cafes and train stations,” says Dirsiene. Inspired by Scandinavian models, she would like to create men’s groups, where they can talk about their problems with each other and with specialists.

Nijole Dirsiene and the shelter are also strongly involved in the creation of enlightened legislation in the social area that still needs to be developed in Lithuania, including a proper family code and legislation on domestic violence.

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In the Lithuanian municipality of Svencionys, a program transports the elderly to medical and other appointments in addition to providing them with meals, personal care, and housekeeping services. Had this service not been available, these elderly would have ended up in inhuman and much more expensive long term residential care as it happens in other parts of Lithuania and Eastern Europe.
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