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ISSUES OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND ENSURING THE INTERESTS OF THE PEOPLE

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Abstract. The quality of social services is one of the important factors determining the social well-being of the population and the sustainable development of society. Modern social policy increasingly focuses on ensuring people's interests, protecting vulnerable groups, improving accessibility, and increasing the efficiency of public services. This article examines the major issues related to improving the quality of social services and ensuring the interests of the people. Particular attention is paid to accessibility, quality, digitalization, individual approaches, professional development of social workers, social inclusion, and mechanisms for evaluating citizens' satisfaction. The article emphasizes that effective social services should be people-centered, transparent, accessible, and responsive to changing social needs. Improving cooperation between government institutions, local communities, civil society organizations, and service providers is also considered an important condition for achieving sustainable results.

Keywords: social services, quality of services, public interests, social protection, people-centered approach, social policy, accessibility, digitalization, social inclusion, public administration.

Introduction. Social services play an important role in protecting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. They provide assistance to people who face economic, social, health-related, or other difficulties and contribute to creating conditions for equal participation in society. The effectiveness of social services directly influences people's quality of life and their confidence in public institutions.

In contemporary society, the concept of social service provision is gradually changing. Traditional approaches, which mainly focused on providing standard forms of assistance, are increasingly being replaced by people-centered approaches. Under such an approach, the individual needs, rights, interests, and circumstances of each person should be taken into consideration.

Improving the quality of social services therefore requires not only increasing the amount of assistance provided but also improving the mechanisms through which services are planned, delivered, monitored, and evaluated. Particular importance should be attached to accessibility, timeliness, transparency, professionalism, and the ability of institutions to respond effectively to citizens' needs.

The importance of quality social services. Social services include a broad range of activities aimed at supporting individuals and families. These may include social assistance, psychological support, rehabilitation, services for persons with disabilities, assistance to elderly people, employment-related support, child protection, and other forms of social care.

The quality of social services can be assessed through several important criteria:

- accessibility of services;
- timeliness of assistance;
- professionalism of service providers;

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- effectiveness of support;
- transparency of procedures;
- respect for citizens' rights and dignity;
- individualization of services;
- responsiveness to people's needs.

High-quality social services should help people overcome difficult circumstances rather than create long-term dependence on assistance. Therefore, social policy should combine direct support with opportunities for education, employment, rehabilitation, and social integration.

Ensuring the interests of the people. Ensuring people's interests should be considered a central principle of modern social policy. A people-centered approach means that public institutions should identify the actual needs of citizens and develop services based on those needs.

One of the key principles is respect for human dignity. Individuals receiving social assistance should not be viewed merely as beneficiaries of state support. They should be treated as active participants who have rights, needs, opinions, and opportunities for development.

An effective social service system should therefore provide opportunities for citizens to:

1. receive information about available services;
2. access services without unnecessary administrative barriers;
3. express their opinions and complaints;
4. participate in decisions affecting their social well-being;
5. receive equal and non-discriminatory treatment;
6. obtain appropriate assistance according to their individual circumstances.

Such principles contribute to strengthening trust between citizens and public institutions.

Main problems affecting the quality of social services. Despite the development of social protection systems, several challenges may affect the quality of social services. Some groups may experience difficulties in accessing social services because of geographical, economic, physical, technological, or administrative barriers. People living in remote areas, persons with disabilities, elderly citizens, and socially vulnerable families may require additional support.

Improving accessibility requires the development of convenient service points, mobile services, digital platforms, accessible infrastructure, and simplified administrative procedures.

A standardized approach may not always correspond to the specific needs of an individual or family. People experiencing similar social problems may require completely different forms of assistance.

For example, financial support alone may not solve the problems of a family experiencing long-term unemployment. Such a family may also need professional training, employment assistance, psychological support, or childcare services.

Therefore, social services should increasingly use individual needs assessments and personalized support plans.

Professional development of social workers. The quality of social services largely depends on the competence of social workers. They need professional knowledge as well as communication, psychological, organizational, and analytical skills.

Continuous professional development should therefore be an important component of social service systems. Training programs should cover such areas as:

- communication with vulnerable groups;

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- conflict resolution;
- psychological support;
- case management;
- protection of human rights;
- digital technologies;
- ethical standards;
- assessment of social needs.

Professional and motivated social workers can significantly improve the effectiveness of services.

Digital technologies create new opportunities for improving the accessibility and efficiency of social services. Electronic applications, digital databases, online consultations, automated information systems, and integrated service platforms can reduce administrative barriers and save citizens' time.

Digitalization can contribute to:

- faster processing of applications;
- improved coordination between institutions;
- better management of social information;
- reduction of unnecessary paperwork;
- increased transparency;
- monitoring of service delivery;
- improved communication with citizens.

However, digitalization should not create new forms of inequality. People who lack digital skills, internet access, or appropriate technological devices may experience difficulties in using digital services.

For this reason, digital transformation should be accompanied by traditional service channels, digital literacy programs, accessible interfaces, and assistance for citizens who require support.

The role of citizen feedback. One of the most effective ways to improve social services is to systematically collect and analyze citizens' feedback.

Citizen satisfaction can provide important information about the strengths and weaknesses of existing services. Feedback mechanisms may include:

- surveys;
- interviews;
- online platforms;
- complaint and appeal systems;
- community meetings;
- focus groups;
- independent evaluations.

Importantly, collecting feedback alone is insufficient. Public institutions should analyze citizens' opinions and use the results to improve service delivery.

A feedback-based approach transforms citizens from passive recipients of services into active participants in the development of social policy. Improving social services should also focus on social inclusion. Certain groups may face additional barriers to education, employment, healthcare, public services, and participation in community life.

A socially inclusive system should create conditions in which vulnerable individuals can participate fully in society. This requires coordinated measures in different areas, including education,

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healthcare, employment, social protection, infrastructure, and community development. Particular attention should be given to persons with disabilities, elderly people, children in difficult circumstances, low-income families, unemployed citizens, and other groups requiring additional support.

Social inclusion is not limited to providing material assistance. It also involves creating opportunities for individuals to develop their abilities, participate in social life, and achieve greater independence.

Improving the management of social services. Effective management is essential for improving the quality of social services. Public institutions should clearly define responsibilities, establish measurable performance indicators, and regularly evaluate the results of their activities.

Several mechanisms can contribute to better management:

First, social services should be based on evidence and reliable information about social needs.

Second, institutions should strengthen coordination. Social problems are often interconnected, and their solution may require cooperation between social protection, healthcare, education, employment, and local government institutions.

Third, service providers should introduce quality standards and regularly assess whether these standards are being met.

Fourth, resources should be distributed according to actual social needs. This can help ensure that limited financial and human resources are directed toward areas where they can have the greatest social impact.

The government cannot address all social problems independently. Effective social protection requires cooperation between public institutions, civil society organizations, local communities, charitable organizations, private service providers, and citizens themselves. Civil society organizations can contribute through specialized services, social projects, volunteer activities, research, and advocacy. Local communities can help identify local social problems and participate in developing appropriate solutions.

Such cooperation can make social services more flexible and responsive to local needs.

Recommendations for improving the quality of social services. Based on the issues discussed above, several measures can contribute to improving social services:

1. Strengthen the people-centered approach by placing citizens' needs and dignity at the center of service delivery.
2. Improve accessibility by reducing administrative, geographical, physical, and technological barriers.
3. Develop personalized services through individual assessment of citizens' social needs.
4. Invest in professional development and establish continuous training for social workers.
5. Expand digital services while maintaining accessible non-digital alternatives.
6. Strengthen feedback mechanisms and ensure that citizens' opinions influence service improvement.
7. Introduce clear quality standards and measurable indicators for evaluating social services.
8. Improve interinstitutional cooperation between social protection, healthcare, education, employment, and local government organizations.
9. Promote social inclusion by creating equal opportunities for vulnerable groups.

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10. Increase transparency and accountability in the management and delivery of social services.

Conclusion. Improving the quality of social services is an important condition for ensuring social well-being and sustainable development. Modern social services should not be limited to providing material assistance. They should help individuals overcome social difficulties, develop their potential, participate in society, and achieve greater independence.

The interests of the people should remain at the center of social service development. Accessibility, personalization, professionalism, transparency, digitalization, citizen participation, and social inclusion are among the key factors that can improve the effectiveness of social services. A modern social service system requires cooperation between government institutions, communities, civil society, and citizens. At the same time, continuous assessment of people's needs and satisfaction is necessary to ensure that social services remain relevant and effective.

Ultimately, improving social services is not only an administrative or economic task. It is also an important component of building a society in which human dignity, equality, social responsibility, and people's legitimate interests are respected and protected.

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