

LONG-TERM CARE FOR PERSONS IN CARE NEEDS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC INTEREST

*DLHODOBÁ STAROSTLIVOSŤ O OSOBY V OPATROVACÍCH POTREBÁCH Z
POHLADU VEREJNÉHO ZÁUJMU*

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ABSTRAKT

Autorka zameriava svoju pozornosť na inštitucionálny rámec dlhodobej starostlivosti o osoby v núdzi na Slovensku. Inštitucionálny rámec obsiahnutý okrem iného v oficiálnych dokumentoch (stratégie, programy, akčné plány) je prezentovaný ako referenčný rámec pre prax sociálnej práce. Vychádza z *Healyho dynamického prístupu* a dokumentom pripisuje sprostredkovateľskú pozíciu, keďže sú výstupmi interakcií a rokovaní medzi relevantnými aktérmi na jednej strane a slúžia ako referenčný rámec (vstupy) pre prax sociálnej práce, ktorý overuje relevantnosť dokumentov na druhej strane. Analyzované sú najnovšie národné dokumenty schválené v rokoch 2020-2021, ktoré sa explicitne venujú oblasti dlhodobej starostlivosti, s cieľom identifikovať hlavné ideologické perspektívy prístupu k dlhodobej starostlivosti. Okrem toho je uvedená štruktúra súvisiacich politických záväzkov v tejto oblasti na veľmi blízku budúcnosť. Na záver sú uvedené krátke poznámky o možných kolíziách medzi inštitucionálnym rámcom a praxou sociálnej práce v tejto oblasti z pohľadu kritickej sociálnej práce.

Kľúčové slová: Dlhodobá starostlivosť. Verejný záujem. Inštitucionálny rámec. Dokumenty. Sociálna práca.

ABSTRACT

The author focuses her attention on the institutional framework of long-term care for persons in care needs in Slovakia. The institutional framework being contained, besides of others, in official documents (strategies, programs, action plans) is presented as the term of reference for practice of social work. She draws on *Healy's dynamic approach* and to the documents attributes a mediating position as they are the outputs of interactions and negotiations between relevant actors, on one hand, and serve as the reference framework (inputs) for social work practice, which verifies relevance of documents, on another hand. The latest national documents approved in years 2020-2021, which explicitly address the area of long-term care, are analysed in order to identify the main ideological perspectives how the long-term care is approached. Moreover, the structure of related political commitments in this field for a very near future is presented. Finally, brief remarks are made on the potential collisions between the institutional framework and social work practice in this field from a view of critical social work.

Key words: Long-term care. Public interest. Institutional framework. Documents. Social work.

Introduction

Long-term care is defined „... as a range of services needed for persons who are dependent on help with basic ADL. This central personal care component is frequently provided in combination with help with basic medical services such as help with wound dressing, pain management,

medication, health monitoring, prevention, rehabilitation or services of palliative care“ (OECD 2005 p. 17). According the Principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, „... everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home-care and community-based services“ (EC 2017). Leichsenring, Billings,

Nies (2013) highlighted systemic perspective in approaching long-term care (hereinafter only „LTC“) when they integrated into the LTC system such interrelated issues as the LTC identity, policy and governance, pathways and processes, management and leadership, organisation structures, as well as means and resources in and for this interventional field. Symposium reflects on the systemic approach when the LTC for persons in care needs is considered to be a public interest which is determined (constructed) by a wider contextual framework, namely by political, economical, societal, ethical, ethnographic and geographical factors. Such conceptualization inspires to pay an attention to the institutional national context, in which the perception of LTC as a public interest is embodied. We will pay particular attention to the latest national documents approved in years 2020-2021 in which the LTC is recognised as a priority of public policy with multiplier goals, e.g. to create conditions for the protection of human rights of the LTC actors (those who are in LTC needs as well as those who provide care on a formal and informal basis); to promote their social inclusion and quality of their lives; at the same time, to address challenges of the demographic developments, all within the framework of sustainable goals (UN 2015). The thematic focus also reflects that just before launching the symposium the Slovak Government approved a unique document entitled *Strategy of Long-term Care in the Slovak Republic. Integrated Social and Health care* (MPSVR SR 2021). The examination of LTC institutional framework is relevant to the professional interests of social work because it conditions the constructing social work at the systemic level, with direct or indirect impacts on practical organisation and performance of social work.

2. Theoretical backgrounds

Taken into account a relevance for social work the paper builds upon selected theoretical pillars. First of them is a public interest which can be defined as a fundamental criterion for establishing the legitimation of power (Méthot 2003). To act in the public interest means to act legally (on the basis of entrusted power), but also

legitimately, meant on the basis of moral legitimacy (Stachoň 2017). Public interest depends on a successful social and political debate with an aim to reach some consensus on values and actions (Méthot 2003) and bring benefit to all or most of those concerned. Related theoretical pillar lies in a recognition of LTC as public interest. The main reasons why the LTC is considered to be an important public interest remain the same in the long run. According Triantafillou, Naiditch, Repkova et al. (2011) it is mainly a changing perception of care which is impacted by many contributory factors, as follows:

- demographic changes and the rising need for care (e. g. *Europe's ageing society; ageing of informal carers; gender differences in life expectancy*);
- changes in social structures (e. g. ageing viewed mainly as a negative phenomenon; informal care as a gender issue; caring as a family matter);
- users empowerment and privatisation (e. g. creation of service 'demand' from older persons and their families' side; request for quality of formal services);
- economic changes (e. g. growing income inequalities and their consequences for meeting care needs; needs for complementary policy to harmonise paid employment and caring tasks).

Méthot (2003) highlights application of the participatory culture with a special reference to the LTC field as it enables adopting agreement on sustainable values, goals and strategies for the implementation of programs and actions leading to fulfilling of the LTC goals and interests of target groups. The results of such agreement are contained in the adopted official documents and corresponding legislation. This constructivist approach to LTC as a public interest shifts the theoretical framework of the paper towards another theoretical pillar that deals with the professional interests of social work, in general (Repkova 2016), and in the field of LTC, in particular. It is a socio-constructivist interpretation of social work. It draws e.g. from Payne's approach (2014) of three arenas how social work is constructed in the area of social services. On the system level, it is the political-social-

ideological arena, in which social and political debate forms policy that guides social service providers and/or other organisations in their purposes and actions. According Healy (2014) it is an institutional context of social work that provides the term of reference for social work practice. The institutional context refers to laws and documents, including the laws governing the regulation of professional social work, public and organisational policies. It arises on a basis of debates and negotiations among actors with an aim to reach consistency between the institutional context, formal professional base and individual framework for social work practice. The paper theoretically responds also to the integrated concept of social work in LTC area, which we dealt intensively and comprehensively in the previous works (Repková 2011). We assumed that the application of integrated perspective of social work in the LTC field is crucial due to the integrated recognition of LTC as a socio-political priority on both international and national scene. As integrated were considered also the LTC target groups and all actors engaged in this interventional field (persons in care needs, informal carers, caring professionals, LTC service providers, LTC funders, civic society initiatives, etc.). The integrated concept corresponds with what Leichsenring, Billings, Nies (2013) titled as systemic perspective in approaching LTC.

Healy (2014) developed an approach how to capture links between all theoretical factors that determine designing the purpose of social work in any interventional area, including LTC. The author presented dynamic approach/model in which are the institutional context, formal professional base of social work, needs and expectations of service users and their communities as well as an individual framework for practice (cf. of Payne's constructivist interpretation of social work) in permanent interactions and negotiations. Based on Healy's dynamic model, we can assign to relevant legislation, official documents and regulations a position where they are considered as outputs of interactions between all factors and actors operating in the LTC system, from one side, and serve as inputs (initial reference framework) for practical

interventions, from another side. Helping practice verifies the relevance of the documents and, if necessary, provides incentives for their improvements and change.

3. Methodology

For the purposes of the paper, we used a qualitative methodology, namely the study of relevant documents focused on LTC in Slovakia. Applying the abovementioned theoretical pillars this research question was addressed: Which current documents form the basic institutional framework of LTC in Slovakia and from what perspectives (optics) is the LTC approached in the documents? The identification of perspectives is important for current and future purposing of social work interventions in LTC area. And, vice versa, it is important to make possible that practical social work interventions influence existing institutional context (framework) of LTC and bring incentives for its improvements.

4. Documents, perspectives and political commitments in ltc field

The LTC agenda is addressed explicitly in couple of the latest national documents, namely:

- Vision and Strategy of Slovakia Development up to 2030 – *Long-term Strategy for Sustainable Development – Slovakia 2030* (December 2020);
- *Memorandum of the Slovak Government 2021-2024* (April 2021);
- *National Strategy on Deinstitutionalisation of the System of Social Services and Foster Care* (March 2021);
- *National Program on Development of Living Conditions of Persons with Disabilities 2021- 2030* (March 2021);
- *National Priorities on Development of Social Services 2021-2030* (March 2021);
- *Recovery and Resilience Plan of Slovakia* (Component 13; April 2021);
- *Strategy on Long-term Care in the Slovak Republic. Integrated Social and Health Care* (September 2021).
- *National Program on Active Ageing 2021-2030* (work in progress).

From an ideological point of view, in the documents two core (superior) pe-

rspectives how LTC is approached are identifiable.

First of them is an individual perspective from which LTC is approached as a human-rights issue, needs of care dependent persons are addressed mainly from the human-rights perspective. According to the LTC Strategy, LTC is defined as „... all activities that are delivered with an aim to ensure, that all persons with serious or permanent loss of abilities, or persons in such risk can maintain such level of their functional abilities that corresponds with their basic rights, freedoms and dignity“ (MPSVR SR 2021, p. 6). The LTC vision, goals and all planned measures and actions are interlinked with this human-rights perspective. Efforts will be focused on strengthening the human dignity of persons in care needs and their carers; delivering social and health care of an adequate level; elimination of insecurity in situations of helplessness and disease, promotion of people's safety; timely and comprehensive needs-assessment of persons in care needs in order to satisfy their needs; empowerment of persons in care needs and their families; increasing readiness of social and health care providers to provide care at an adequate level; guaranteeing quality of the LTC services including setting-up conditions for systematic quality evaluation.

Another is the societal perspective derived from sustainable goals and challenges related to demographic changes. In the document Slovakia 2030 the LTC is centrally conceptualised as a sustainability issue. Protection of human and environmental resources as well as their further development are recognised as a superior public interest in which strengthening the resilience of the state and society is possible through, beside others, „... better management of long-term ill people and applying of appropriate forms of long-term, follow-up and palliative health care and community-based rehabilitation“ (MF SR, 2020, p. 19).

How is this twin-track approach (cf. UNECE 2021) in which are interlinked both individual and societal interests, respectively human-rights and sustainability perspectives, displayed in the detailed political commitments? What needs to be done to transform the general political ideology in LTC field into a real institutional

framework for actions? Based on the analysis we identified certain prominent aspects (commitments) addressed to build-up the LTC system that have been emerging across all analysed documents, namely:

Integration (to establish system of integrated social and health care; combination of long-term, follow-up and palliative care, and community-based rehabilitation; increasing accessibility of LTC for persons in care needs; adoption of respective LTC legislation).

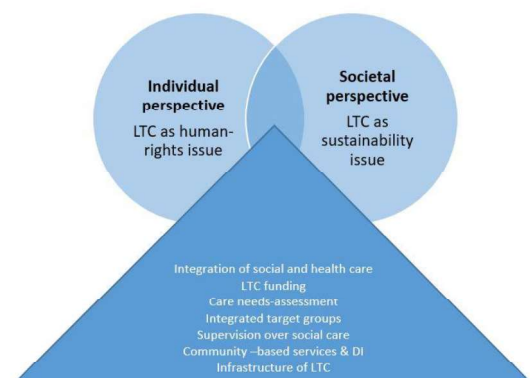
Reform on funding LTC (new conception and system of the LTC funding; individual budget to cover costs related to a person's care needs). Reform of care needs-assessment (setting-up a unified system of care needs-assessment for both, services-in-cash and services-in-kind; interlinks between care-needs assessment outputs with other interventions focused on social inclusion of persons with disabilities – e.g. early intervention, work rehabilitation, personal assistance, education, etc.). Integrated target groups (enhancing quality of life for persons in care needs; provision of methodical support to informal carers; better working conditions for social workers performing care needs-assessment; better working conditions for professional staff of the LTC service providers).

Reform on supervision over social care (the LTC services recognised as a mean to enhance quality of life for both persons in care needs and those caring for them; setting-up an independent authority to ensure supervision over provision and quality of formal social services; supervision over informal care; supervision over health care provided in social services). Community-based services and deinstitutionalisation (preference for home and community care; psycho-social centres as a new type of community-based social service; continued deinstitutionalisation of the large-sized service providers).

Infrastructure of LTC (digitalisation of care needs-assessment system; new Informational system of social services). Based on our analysis we drafted scheme on institutional framework for the LTC area in which the ideological pillars are combined with more specified political commitments addressed to a very close future (up to

2025, respectively 2030). Framework is illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Institutional Framework of the LTC



Source: author

5. Discussion and conclusions

Based on analysis of the relevant national documents approved in years 2020-2021 we drafted the institutional framework for the LTC area. The institutional framework was considered to be an ideological and thematic "picture" of how national authorities approach LTC as public interest. Due to the limited scope of the paper, we presented the documents in short rather than in detail. Our main aim was to identify core ideological lines on which the LTC is built (twin-track approach), and subsequently, to focus on the structure of political commitments through which the identified ideological lines should be fulfilled in the near future.

The adopted documents indicate comprehensive and ambitious intentions of the national authorities to establish an effective system of LTC, from which all stakeholders could be prospering, namely: persons in care needs, formal and informal caregivers, LTC service providers and their staff, communities, society as a whole (cf. Repková 2011), all in terms of requirements for sustainable development. The documents outline not only the ideological foundations of the future LTC system (human-rights and sustainability), but also the effort for its systemic complexity (integrated social, health and palliative care), including the complexity of aspects that will need to be addressed (target groups, financing, competencies, working

conditions, supervision and quality of LTC services, information system).

With regards to the professional interests of social work, the analysis pointed out the new opportunities for professional involvement of social workers. They should be engaged in performing of the reconceptualised social assessment (care needs-assessment) for the purposes to provide persons in care needs with the LTC interventions; delivering of a wide range of the LTC community services, including new types of social services (e.g. psychosocial centre). Promising are also new intentions for more effective supervision over delivering LTC services, support for LTC organisations in provision of services of a high quality, as well as the organisational and methodological support for quality evaluators. Particular attention will be paid to support for informal carers, including assessment of the quality of their care provided at home, which has not yet been the subject of a more systematic interest.

However, at present no detailed information is available on how these policy intentions and commitments will be implemented in helping practice, how the content-based and organizational rules will be set-up for performing social work in the LTC system. Also information on an extent and a way how the representatives of social work or other helping disciplines have been involved to influence the formation and final texts of the determining documents, is not publicly available. Therefore, we cannot responsibly conclude whether the latest LTC institutional framework has been formulated on the basis of a participatory political culture, whether documents have been subject of a wider social and professional dialogue and negotiation (cf. Healy 2021) what is considered as a condition for successful defining of any public interest, particularly in reference to LTC field (cf. Méthot 2003). Due to all mentioned reasons, the privileged focus of the paper "only" on institutional issues may lead to some conflicting perception as a knowledge of the institutional and legal LTC framework is not sufficient to know more how it will be enforced to address needs of the LTC actors, especially needs of care-dependent persons (cf. Janebová 2019). Representatives of critical social work even

emphasize that institutional frameworks (laws, other regulations, official documents) can be counterproductive and adversarial for helping practice (cf. Healy 2001) especially in neoliberal conditions; that they can contribute to the end of the professional autonomy of social workers (cf. Janebová 2021) or can weaken the professional identity of social work as such (cf. Levická, 2015).

We believe, that human rights and sustainability perspectives, which were identified as leading ideological foundations of the latest LTC institutional framework in Slovakia, are solid basis for dealing with possible collisions between this general framework, on one side, and the specified professional interests and opportunities for social work in this field, on another side.

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