



Social Service Provision

An International Review

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Abstract

Background

Since the 1980s, social services in many countries worldwide have been undergoing an intensive transition from direct provision by the state to outsourced provision by external suppliers. This has led to the development of various ways of providing social services to citizens: some are provided by nongovernment organizations, whether for profit (private sector) or not (third sector), whereas some are still provided directly by either state or federal governments or regional or local authorities. When the government outsources its social services, it remains responsible for policymaking and regulation.

The Social Service Procurement Division at the Prime Minister's Office, in charge of implementing the concept of social services purchasing as a means of improving social services, together with JDC-Elka, commissioned the Quality Assurance Team at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to conduct an international comparative review of social service provision in other countries.

Objectives

Examine the policy of providing social services in select countries worldwide: the state's role in promoting social services, the main players providing the services, the mechanisms used by the state to provide social services, and its policy of regulating them.

Method

To compare the social service provision policies of other countries with those of Israel, five Western democracies were selected, differing in their traditional welfare policies: Australia and England, both liberal welfare states; Sweden, a social-democrat welfare state; Germany, a conservative welfare state; and the Netherlands, a hybrid welfare state, combining characteristics of the different types.

The review was based on data collected from a variety of sources from September 2023 to January 2024. These included (1) academic articles from the Israeli and international literature; (2) gray literature, including research reports, official documents of governments and state authorities, and official documents of private and third-sector organizations; (3) public information from websites of ministries, regulatory bodies, and private and third-sector organizations; (4) laws and regulations; and (5) in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve experts on social service provision from the countries reviewed (conducted from November 2023 to January 2024).

Key Findings

The review indicates that most of the countries examined have procurement laws for social services that distinguish between general public procurement and social services procurement. In most countries, a significant decentralization trend was identified, according to which local authorities are increasingly responsible for providing social services, whereas the central government is responsible for funding them and for general policymaking.

Regarding service-provision purchasing mechanisms, it was found that most services required no competitive tender in purchasing. Moreover, the interviews conducted with academics and experts from the countries reviewed indicated that competitive tender was not the main mechanism for service purchasing; rather, the main mechanism was demand-side motivated outsourcing. Finally, in most countries, independent, nongovernment organizations acting on behalf of the government's social ministries are responsible for licensing and regulating social services.