

## Services for persons with disabilities in a changing municipal and service structure - state steering in arranging housing services for persons with intellectual disabilities

Special services for persons with disabilities are arranged on the basis of the Act on Services and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities and the Act on Special Care for Mentally Handicapped Persons. In addition to this legislation, the way in which special services are arranged is influenced by different types of input provided in central government steering. For example, in arranging housing services for persons with intellectual disabilities, steering is aimed at shifting activities from institutional to non-institutional care. Service structures are also influenced by the Act on the Restructuring of Local Government and Services (169/2007), which is a temporary framework act.

The purpose of the audit was to examine how different actors in central administration have steered the arranging of special services for persons with disabilities and whether steering has been uniform in different administrative sectors and in line with the objectives of the restructuring of local government and services. The audit also examined what models central government steering has created with regard to the arranging and production of services for persons with disabilities in municipalities and regions. The main question in the audit was: How has central government steering influenced the coherence and functioning of services for persons with disabilities that are arranged by local authorities? The audit focused on services for persons with intellectual disabilities and particularly housing services.

According to audit findings, problems in the steering of services for persons with disabilities are linked primarily to inconsistencies in the legislative base, which in some respects is out of date, and to shortcomings in the information steering provided by central government.

Legislative steering is complicated by the existence of two separate acts covering services for persons with disabilities. A reform of the Act on Services and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities that entered into force in 2009 was intended to harmonize these acts and their application. Nevertheless, problems were observed in the application of legislation. The establishment of the priority of the Act on Services and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities has not changed the fact that services for persons with intellectual disabilities are still arranged largely on the basis of the Act on Special Care for Mentally Handicapped Persons. According to interviews at the local level, the reform has actually made it more difficult to coordinate the application of the two acts in some respects. From local authorities' viewpoint the reformed legislation does not give clear answers as to how individualized services can be provided for persons with serious intellectual disabilities. Problems also arise because the two acts contain similar services but draw different distinctions between groups of clients and criteria for charges. The outmoded legislative base in the Act on Special Care for Mentally Handicapped Persons is also visible in terms of technical quality and coordination with other legislation.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has emphasized the importance of shifting away from institutional care in its objectives since the late 1990s. Ministerial steering aimed at achieving this goal has been feeble, however, and financial support for this purpose has been meagre. Following a special housing programme for persons with intellectual disabilities that was prepared in 2009 under the direction of the Ministry of the Environment and a Government resolution on this matter, the shift away from institutional care has been given a clearer direction and considerably more financial support. Measures have been taken particularly to spur housing construction. On the basis of audit findings, steering has not paid sufficient attention to what services clients leaving institutions need and what resources and expertise are required to ensure services. Feeble steering in the past followed by rapid change presents risks that must be recognized. These concern actors' commitment, managing costs, service quality and supervision, and the functioning of structures.

Another shortcoming in information steering was that the objectives of the restructuring of local government and services have not

supported policies concerning the development of services for persons with disabilities very well. The weak synchronization of central government objectives has been reflected in a lack of coordination between the shift away from institutional care on the one hand and the development of services for a broader population base as required in section 6 of the Act on the Restructuring of Local Government and Services. The audit found that local authorities and special care districts do not see a connection between the objective of shifting towards non-institutional care and the consolidation of special care districts and hospital districts under the framework act. The current state of the development of services for a broader population base is unclear, nor has the latest reform of the framework act clarified matters.

The application of the framework act has presented challenges for local government. The general nature of the act together with its unclear concepts and objectives have resulted in motley cooperation practices. Problems of a technical and substantial nature have likewise reduced local authorities' commitment to the objectives that have been set.

Central government does not have a clear picture of what solutions regarding the arranging and production of services have stemmed from cooperation. Solutions are still being worked out in many respects. One objective of the reform has not been achieved, namely that cooperation areas should assume responsibility for social and health care tasks as a whole. In some cases the service structure has in fact become more fragmented, with new models for arranging services being introduced. Questions have also arisen concerning who is responsible for arranging services.

The audit pointed out that future solutions in legislation governing the arranging of services are still open and that the policies pursued by different ministries and administrative actors regarding models for arranging social and health services have varied in public discussion and information activities. Local authorities and special care districts have found it nearly impossible to make long-term plans in the current situation, in which two key ministries steering local services have taken different lines on future models.