



Legal Regulation of Non-State Participation in Municipal Social Services in Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of non-state actors in Lithuania's social service sector, a field shaped by demographic change, growing demand, and governance reforms. While national legislation provides opportunities for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to participate in service delivery, planning, and oversight, the practical implementation of these provisions varies across municipalities. Using document analysis and secondary statistical data, the paper compares two municipalities Marijampolė and Alytus to examine how the legal framework is applied locally. The findings show that national regulation has expanded the formal space for NGO involvement through accreditation, diversified funding, and defined provider requirements. However, municipal differences in infrastructure, administrative capacity, and policy priorities produce distinct cooperation models: Marijampolė demonstrates more established NGO engagement, while Alytus shows a gradual, incremental approach. Overall, the study reveals persistent fragmentation and uneven implementation, highlighting the need for coherent mechanisms to strengthen multi actor collaboration in social service provision.



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1. Introduction

Scholars have long explored the organisation of public service delivery in response to dynamic societal demands and ongoing economic, social, and institutional transformations that influence systems of public governance.¹ Nevertheless, the role of non governmental organisations (NGOs) in providing public and social services, their interaction with governmental institutions, and their involvement in policy formulation continue to represent significant areas of scholarly concern.² In many national contexts, governments are increasingly required not only to delegate certain service delivery functions to non-state actors but also to strategically leverage these partnerships to foster citizen participation,

¹ Charles W. Kaye-Essien, 'The Co-Governance of Basic Education: Assessing the Complementary Effects of Intergovernmental Support, Municipal Capacity, Non-Governmental Organization Presence and International Development Assistance', *Governance*, 38.1 (2025), e12879 <https://doi.org/10.1111/GOVE.12879>;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION

² Chengzhi Yi, Xinyi Qiu, and Huafang Li, 'Exploring the Roles of Non-Profit Organizations in Co-Production: A Systematic Literature Review', *Public Management Review*, 2025 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2025.2484661>;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION

enhance the effectiveness and quality of public services, and build greater adaptive capacity in the face of sustained uncertainty.³

Developments in cross sectoral collaboration and public service provision can be examined through various public management theoretical perspectives.⁴ Since the 1970s, public governance has progressively shifted away from rigid hierarchical and bureaucratic arrangements toward governance models that emphasise networks, markets, and community engagement. This transition has substantially redefined both the mechanisms of service delivery and the institutional role of the state.⁵ Consequently, public service provision has evolved from a predominantly state driven model to forms of shared or collaborative delivery, the nature of which varies according to the level of stakeholder participation and the scope of authority transferred to non-state actors.⁶

Co-production refers to a form of joint service implementation that emphasises the active involvement of citizens or citizen groups in public service delivery through the partial transfer of service responsibilities from the state to the civil sector,⁷ while co-creation encompasses the processes of co-initiation and co-design that focus on stakeholder participation in developing services and generating new ideas and innovations. In contrast,⁸ co-governance is characterised by the equal involvement of public, private, and civil society actors in decision-making and planning processes, and is commonly understood as a collaborative governance model based on negotiation and the pursuit of mutual benefits.⁹

The academic literature conceptualises these interactions as serving multiple interconnected objectives, including the expansion of service provision, the improvement of service quality, and increased responsiveness to citizens' needs by enabling the public to

³ Stefanie Gesierich, Anne Jørgensen Nordli, and Anthony Arundel, 'NGO Engagement in the Creation of Public Service Innovations: A Configurational, Explorative Approach', *Public Money and Management*, 45.5 (2025), 424–34

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2024.2410806;REQUESTEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:RPM20;ISSUE:ISSUE:DOI>

⁴ Ali Al Mokdad, 'Role of Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations in Addressing Developmental Disparities in the Middle East: Empowering Communities for Sustainable Development', *Http://Services.Igi-Global.Com/Resolvedoi/Resolve.aspx?Doi=10.4018/979-8-3693-7377-4.Ch004*, 1AD, 93–140 <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-7377-4.CH004>

⁵ Nada Jabbour Al Maalouf, Chadia Sawaya, and Jean Elia, 'Evaluating the Influence of Organizational Capability on Fundraising Success in Lebanese Non-Governmental Organizations', *Heliyon*, 11.2 (2025), e41891 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2025.e41891>

⁶ Leila Doshmangir and others, 'The Involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations in Achieving Health System Goals Based on the WHO Six Building Blocks: A Scoping Review on Global Evidence', *PLOS ONE*, 20.1 (2025), e0315592 <https://doi.org/10.1371/JOURNAL.PONE.0315592>

⁷ Denita Cepiku and others, 'A Comprehensive Framework for the Activation, Management, and Evaluation of Co-Production in the Public Sector', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 380 (2022), 135056 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.JCLEPRO.2022.135056>

⁸ Joris van der Voet and Petra van den Bekerom, 'Performance Information, Expectations and Satisfaction with Public Service Delivery in the Context of Co-Production Initiatives', *Public Management Review*, 27.4 (2025), 1157–78 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2392131;WEBSITE:WEBSITE:TFOPB;PAGEGROUP:STRING:PUBLICATON>

⁹ W. H. Voorberg, V. J.J.M. Bekkers, and L. G. Tummers, 'A Systematic Review of Co-Creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the Social Innovation Journey', *Public Management Review*, 17.9 (2015), 1333–57 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.930505>

directly influence what services are delivered, to whom, and through which mechanisms.¹⁰ These dynamics further highlight the relationship between citizen participation and enhanced institutional legitimacy, public trust, democratic quality, equity, and social inclusion.¹¹ Moreover, cross sectoral collaboration between public and non-governmental actors not only mobilises and coordinates non-state resources, such as knowledge and human capital, but also stimulates innovative approaches to service delivery.¹² Comparative analyses indicate that multi-actor governance arrangements broaden the resource base and generate adaptive and innovative service models that rarely emerge from isolated actors, while, in conditions of uncertainty, such collaboration helps mitigate risks, prevent crises, and ensure organisational stability and the continuity of public service delivery.¹³

However, analysing NGO involvement in service delivery entails a structure agency dilemma, which arises from the dynamic interplay between institutional structures and individual actors.¹⁴ On the one hand, institutional arrangements such as regulatory frameworks, funding mechanisms, and bureaucratic hierarchies both facilitate and constrain the scope of action available to actors. On the other hand, agencies, including service providers and service users, actively pursue their own interests within these structural conditions, resulting in ongoing negotiations as each side seeks to maximise its respective benefits.¹⁵ Accordingly, within the field of public governance, this dilemma has been examined through the lenses of rational choice theory, decision making theory, and public choice theory. These approaches underscore that, in the context of public service delivery, the structure agency problem reflects an inherent tension between institutional arrangements that shape and constrain service provision and the autonomous behaviour of service providers and service users.¹⁶ Depending on their capacity to “make a difference,” these actors may either reinforce existing institutional frameworks or act as agents of change. Consequently, notwithstanding the recognised benefits of such arrangements, several critical aspects of this process warrant closer consideration.

Service oriented non governmental organisations may enhance their financial independence by diversifying funding sources and stimulating cross-sectoral competition,

¹⁰ van der Voet and van den Bekerom.

¹¹ Leila Cornips and others, ‘Co-Production as a Strategy for Enhanced Equal Representation in Public Service Delivery: The Case of Rotterdam’, *Cities*, 141 (2023), 104480 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CITIES.2023.104480>

¹² Daniel Masterson and others, ‘Mapping Definitions of Co-Production and Co-Design in Health and Social Care: A Systematic Scoping Review Providing Lessons for the Future’, *Health Expectations: An International Journal of Public Participation in Health Care and Health Policy*, 25.3 (2022), 902–13 <https://doi.org/10.1111/HEX.13470>

¹³ Karen J. Baehler, ‘The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Public Management for Social Policy’, *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Public Management for Social Policy*, 2023, 1–1044 <https://doi.org/10.1093/OXFORDHB/9780190916329.001.0001>

¹⁴ Ariful Islam and others, ‘Paradox of Sustainable Growth: The Interplay Between Small and Medium Enterprises and Non-Governmental Organizations and Government Helix’, *Business Strategy and Development*, 8.1 (2025), e70054 <https://doi.org/10.1002/BSD2.70054>;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION

¹⁵ Tanja Klenk, ‘Social Services as Critical Infrastructure – Conceptualising and Studying the Operational Core of the Social Investment State’, *European Journal of Social Security*, 25.2 (2023), 115–38 <https://doi.org/10.1177/13882627231175566>;REQUESTEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:EJSA;WGROU:STRIN G:PUBLICATION

¹⁶ Virginija Poškutė, Rūta Kazlauskaitė, and Irminda Matonytė, ‘Stakeholder Collaboration in Long-Term Care of Older People in Lithuania’, *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30.1 (2022), 193–202 <https://doi.org/10.1111/HSC.13389>

which can improve the quality and efficiency of public service delivery,¹⁷ However, an excessive focus on financial sustainability risks diverting these organisations from their core missions and aligning their practices more closely with those of private sector actors.¹⁸ Concurrently, public governance institutions face challenges such as diminished autonomy, increased dependence on interest groups,¹⁹ the distortion of organisational mandates, and the risk of over representation, while publicly funded service providers may prioritise competition and compliance with formal programme requirements over cooperation and the broader public interest.²⁰ Moreover, the configuration of service delivery systems, the conditions governing service provision, and the requirements imposed on providers are exposed to institutional risks arising from decision making constraints, collective and social risks affecting societal members, and systemic risks threatening the stability of the political administrative system; although these risks are shaped by the participation of diverse stakeholder groups, the active involvement of citizens can strengthen public sector resilience.²¹

Given the complexity of the factors shaping collaborative arrangements, the diversity of services poses significant challenges to defining what constitutes a public service. The concept of a service encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings, ranging from personalised activities to services embedded within products, and any definitional attempt is necessarily limited in scope.²² Consequently, certain activities widely recognised as services may not conform to specific definitions, rendering such definitions inherently open to critique and contingent upon contextual and national practices. Furthermore, service delivery involves multiple interconnected stages, which requires an analytical perspective that accounts for stakeholder participation throughout the entire service process. Accordingly, co-production should be understood as occurring across all phases of service provision, taking forms such as joint service delivery, individual or collective contributions, active user engagement, and voluntary participation.²³

¹⁷ Tzu Ying Chiu and others, 'From Fragmentation toward Integration: A Preliminary Study of a New Long-Term Care Policy in a Fast-Aging Country', *BMC Geriatrics*, 19.1 (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-019-1172-5>

¹⁸ Jeonghwa You and others, 'Public Engagement in Health Policy-Making for Older Adults: A Systematic Search and Scoping Review', *Health Expectations*, 27.4 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.70008>

¹⁹ Rūta Kazlauskaitė and others, 'Inter-Organizational Knowledge and Information Transfer in Long-Term Care for Older Persons: Do Sector and Resource Availability Matter?', *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 39.9 (2025), 247–65 <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHOM-11-2024-0453>

²⁰ Mindaugas Butkus and others, 'The Impact of Organizational Resilience on the Quality of Public Services: Application of Structural Equation Modeling', *Equilibrium. Quarterly Journal of Economics and Economic Policy*, 18.2 (2023), 461–89 <https://doi.org/10.24136/EQ.2023.014>

²¹ Violeta Gevorgianienė and others, 'Ribų Valdymas Asmeninių Socialinių Paslaugų Erdvėje: Samprata, Iššūkiai Ir Galimybės', *Socialinė Teorija, Empirija, Politika Ir Praktika*, 29 (2024), 56–71 <https://doi.org/10.15388/STEPP.2024.29.4>

²² Zhouyan Hu, Nur Hairani Abd Rahman, and Hanira Hanafi, 'Non-Governmental Organizations' Role in Promoting Life Satisfaction Among the Elderly Within the Active Aging Strategy', *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 2025 36:3, 36.3 (2025), 337–51 <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11266-025-00728-0>

²³ Thomas Elston and Germà Bel, 'Does Inter-Municipal Collaboration Improve Public Service Resilience? Evidence from Local Authorities in England', *Public Management Review*, 25.4 (2023), 734–61 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.2012377;WEBSITE:WEBSITE:TFOPB;PAGEGROUP:STRING:PUBLICLICATION>

From a legal standpoint, the absence of a clear definition, or the divergent conceptualisation of identical services, may complicate both regulatory frameworks and the formation of public service or consumer contracts, as differences in actors characteristics, prior experiences, and contextual constraints can generate varying interpretations of the same legal concepts.²⁴ Consequently, public service provision across countries may differ in terms of regulatory approaches, accessibility for the population, and the institutional organisation of service delivery systems, not solely as a result of distinct public governance traditions but also due to these interpretative and structural variations.

Another key consideration concerns the diversity of public services delivered by the state, which traditionally encompass areas such as defence, environmental protection, education, and culture.²⁵ Among these sectors, social protection represents the largest component of public expenditure and is therefore selected as the primary focus of this study. Budgetary data indicate that social protection accounts for approximately 31% of total public spending in OECD countries and about 39% in EU member states that are also part of the OECD. Lithuania, which constitutes the case examined in this article, follows a similar pattern. In 2023, general government expenditure by function amounted to 37.5% of GDP,²⁶ although the proportion of public sector expenditure relative to GDP remains among the lowest within the European Union.²⁷ This situation suggests that while social protection is clearly prioritised, there is a concurrent need to enhance the efficiency of service delivery due to the relatively limited level of fiscal redistribution through the state budget. The growing demand for social protection services is further intensified by demographic developments, including increased life expectancy, population ageing, widening income inequality, the expansion of available services, and governmental commitments to deliver a broader range of services at higher standards of quality.

Previous research has consistently identified social services as a fundamental pillar of the welfare state since its early development.²⁸ However, scholarly attention has traditionally prioritised social cash benefits over the organisation and delivery of social services. In recent years, increased recognition of the role of social investment, together with successive crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic and challenges related to migration management, has prompted both the European Union and its Member States to reassess the function of social services within contemporary welfare state arrangements. As a result, there is broad consensus that effective and well coordinated social services constitute a core element of the emerging social investment paradigm. Nevertheless, in parallel with shifts in public governance toward more decentralised models of service provision, many countries experience increasing fragmentation of social services and the development of

²⁴ Muhammad Zaurez Afshar, Mutahir Hussain Shah, and Corresponding Author, 'Resilience Through Adaptation: Examining the Interplay Between Adaptive Capacity and Organizational Resilience in Public Sector Organizations', *ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences*, 4.2 (2025), 1770–89 <https://doi.org/10.63056/ACAD.004.02.0289>

²⁵ Haris Alibašić, 'Advancing Disaster Resilience: The Ethical Dimensions of Adaptability and Adaptive Leadership in Public Service Organizations', *Public Integrity*, 27.3 (2025), 209–21 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2024.2388285>; WEBSITE:WEBSITE:TFOPB;PAGEGROUP:STRING:PUBLIC

²⁶ OECD, *Government at a Glance 2025*, (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1787/0efd0bcd-en>.

²⁷ Jean Louis Denis, Ewan Ferlie, and Nicolette Van Gestel, 'Understanding Hybridity in Public Organizations', *Public Administration*, 93.2 (2015), 273–89 <https://doi.org/10.1111/PADM.12175>

²⁸ Pwint Kay Khine, Jianing Mi, and Raza Shahid, 'A Comparative Analysis of Co-Production in Public Services', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13.12 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU13126730>

uneven provider networks, which ultimately contribute to disparities in service accessibility.²⁹

From an operational perspective, although the composition of social service packages differs substantially across national contexts, such services generally concentrate on preventive interventions as well as general or specialised forms of assistance directed at specific population groups, varying in scope and intensity from one off counselling to continuous long term care provided in residential settings.³⁰ Accordingly, the core functions of social services may be summarised as delivering assistance and support to socially vulnerable or disadvantaged individuals, promoting problem solving and capacity development, and safeguarding social security at the societal level by ensuring protection for the most vulnerable groups.³¹

This service classification facilitates the identification of key stakeholder groups in the analysis of specific social service provision and, as noted by Pestoff, supports a nuanced assessment of the diversity of interests among municipal authorities, professional service providers, and service recipients or citizens, as well as their differing motivations for engagement in social service delivery.³² Consistent with the structure agency dilemma discussed earlier, institutional actors are likely to be driven by economic, political, and professional considerations, such as cost reduction or enhanced legitimacy, whereas citizens motivations tend to be grounded in personal benefits, including economic and social gains, which may be fragmented or even conflicting.³³ Moreover, social services are typically characterised by sustained interpersonal interaction, as their effective delivery requires regular and often daily contact between professionals and service users. Such interaction necessarily depends on continuous dialogue, which enables both groups to align their expectations regarding service provision and outcomes in a manner that is mutually beneficial.³⁴

Following the restoration of independence in 1990, Lithuania inherited a highly centralised and inflexible social service system, which has since undergone substantial

²⁹ Tanja Klenk, 'Social Services as Critical Infrastructure – Conceptualising and Studying the Operational Core of the Social Investment State', *European Journal of Social Security*, 25.2 (2023), 115–38 <https://doi.org/10.1177/13882627231175566;REQUESTEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:EJSA;WGROUPE:STRING:PUBLICATION>

³⁰ Elizabeth Eppel and Barbara Allen, 'Social Services Fragmentation', *The Oxford Handbook of Governance and Public Management for Social Policy*, 2023, 401–14 <https://doi.org/10.1093/OXFORDHB/9780190916329.013.5>

³¹ Muhammed Muazzam Hussain, 'Social Work Practice in the Public Social Service Sector of Bangladesh: Service Users' Perspective', *Social Work in Asia*, 2026, 217–38 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-11089-3_15

³² Giorgia Trasciani and others, 'Collaborative Networks for Migrant Support: A Case Study on the Role of Civil Society Organization in Marginalized Urban Contexts', *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 2026, 1–17 <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-03-2025-0137>

³³ Keita Inoue, Yoshitaka Shirinashihama, and Masafumi Fujino, 'Community Initiatives and Legitimacy: The Case of an Older Adult Transportation Support Project', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 2026, 1–24 <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-05-2022-5785>

³⁴ Gertrud Alirani and others, 'Adaptive Capacity in a Crisis: Turbulence Managers in Street-Level Organizations', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 33.1 (2025), e70017 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.70017>

modernisation to incorporate non state actors.³⁵ Existing studies have examined the participation of non-state actors in Lithuanian public service delivery, highlighting the relevance of this issue and exploring opportunities for co delivery, participatory arrangements, and service co creation, as well as the particularities of service provision during periods of crisis. Nevertheless, this body of literature has predominantly addressed these models at a general level, offering limited insight into the specific characteristics of individual public services.³⁶ Against this backdrop, a more in depth examination of non state actor involvement and the applicable legal framework is required to clarify the steps necessary to advance the implementation of objectives set out in long term strategic policies.³⁷

Several Indonesian studies have examined collaborative arrangements in public service delivery, demonstrating a shift from traditional bureaucratic models toward cross sectoral governance. Tando³⁸ provide a systematic mapping of collaborative governance practices in public services in Indonesia, highlighting the prevalence of multi-actor engagement in sectors such as health and social services. Andriastuti,³⁹ emphasise community based transformations in public service delivery, where citizen participation reshapes government community relations. Research on specific social service areas, such as mental health policy implementation in Yogyakarta⁴⁰ and collaborative governance in elderly social services during the COVID-19 pandemic,⁴¹ further illustrates the operationalisation of cross-sector collaboration in practice. Additionally, studies of innovative governance such as in smart city public services reveal that structured collaboration among government, civil society, and private actors enhances service effectiveness.⁴² These findings collectively underscore both the theoretical significance and the practical complexity of involving non state actors in public service delivery in Indonesia.

Previous studies in Indonesia have examined *collaborative governance* and the involvement of non state actors in public service delivery; however, these studies remain largely general and sector oriented, with a predominant focus on managerial aspects. Existing research has not sufficiently analysed the provision of specific types of social

³⁵ Agyemang G., O'Dwyer B., and Unerman J., 'NGO Accountability: Retrospective and Prospective Academic Contributions', *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 32.8, 2353–66.

³⁶ Agyemang G. and others, 'NGO Accountability and Aid Delivery' (The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, London).

³⁷ Gehad El-Sheikh, Ahmed O. El-Kholei, and Almoataz Bellah El-Buhairi, 'Good Governance Drives Human-Centric Smart Cities toward Resilience and Equity', *Discover Cities* 2026 3:1, 3.1 (2026), 7-
<https://doi.org/10.1007/S44327-026-00190-7>

³⁸ Cahyoko Edi Tando, Sudarmo Sudarmo, and Rina Herlina Haryanti, 'Collaborative Governance In Public Service In Indonesia: A Systematic Mapping Study', *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial*, 18.2 (2020), 144–63
<https://doi.org/10.14710/JIS.18.2.2019.144-163>

³⁹ Komang Tri Putri Andriastuti, Fatmawati Fatmawati, and Alifia Ainun Rizky, 'Community-Based Public Service Transformation: A Qualitative Perspective from the Field', *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Administrasi Publik*, 15.2 (2025), 193–200 <https://doi.org/10.26858/JIAP.V15I2.77469>

⁴⁰ Alan Sulistyo and Amy Yayuk Sri Rahayu, 'Collaborative Governance Dalam Pelaksanaan Kebijakan Penyelenggaraan Kesehatan Jiwa Di Provinsi Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta', *Sosio Konsepsia: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Kesejahteraan Sosial*, 13.3 (2024) <https://doi.org/10.33007/SKA.V13I3.3417>

⁴¹ Kurnia Nur Fitriana, 'Collaborative Governance in Handling Covid-19 for Elderly Social Services', *Journal of Social Studies (JSS)*, 18.1 (2022), 119–46 <https://doi.org/10.21831/JSS.V18I1.49569>

⁴² Muhammad Habib Ainun Najib and Nur Faidati SIP, 'Analysis Of Public Service Quality Using The Servqual Model At The Dukun Community Health Center In Magelang Regency: Society Perspective', *Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan Suara Khatulistiwa*, 10.2 (2025), 119–26
<https://doi.org/10.33701/JIPSK.V10I2.5577>

services nor the implementation of legal frameworks at the local level, and it has rarely integrated the structure agency dilemma to explain the interaction between institutional arrangements and actor behaviour in practice. Consequently, a gap persists in understanding how social service regulations are operationalised and how they affect service accessibility and quality at the local level.

This article aims to examine the involvement of non state actors in the provision of social services within Lithuanian municipalities by considering the existing legal framework. To this end, the study analyses the inclusion of non state actors in social service delivery at both national and municipal levels and investigates selected municipal case studies to assess how the legal framework is implemented in practice. These case studies enable a comparative analysis of municipal approaches and provide empirical insight into the practical functioning of the legal framework.

2. Research Method

This article analyses the involvement of non-governmental actors in the delivery of social services at the municipal level and the legal framework governing such participation in Lithuania. The study seeks to contextualise national practices by comparing two municipalities Marijampolė and Alytus that exhibit differing approaches to the inclusion of non-state actors in social service provision.⁴³ To achieve this objective, the research employs document analysis and secondary statistical data analysis, allowing for a comprehensive assessment of both regulatory arrangements and practical implementation. Although the analysis focuses on two cases, methodological triangulation enhances the validity and reliability of the findings and facilitates the identification of gaps between legal regulation and practice.

Consistent with qualitative case study methodology, the study prioritises the systematic selection and interpretation of relevant legal and policy documents to generate empirical insights. The analysis is conducted in two stages: first, national level legislation and policy documents are examined to identify the core principles, regulatory scope, financing mechanisms, types of social services, and forms of non-state actor participation in service delivery; second, a comparative case study of Marijampolė and Alytus is undertaken, based on their comparable population size but contrasting patterns of service provision. While both municipalities operate under the same national legal framework, Marijampolė relies predominantly on non-state service providers, whereas Alytus primarily delivers services through municipal institutions. The findings enable the identification of key trends and general principles shaping non-state actor participation in social service delivery in.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Participation of Non-State Actors in the Provision of Social Services: National Regulation

The social services sector in Lithuania is characterised by continuous transformation and is shaped by a range of social, economic, political, demographic, and structural

⁴³ Bart Slob and Francis Weyzig, 'Corporate Lobbying and Corporate Social Responsibility: Aligning Contradictory Agendas', *Business, Politics and Public Policy*, 2010, 160–83 https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230277243_7

challenges. Following the restoration of independence in 1990, Lithuania inherited a highly centralised Soviet era system, primarily centred on state operated residential care institutions. Over time, this hierarchical model has gradually given way to governance arrangements incorporating market based and network oriented elements, which prioritise inter-organisational cooperation, expand the diversity of social services and service providers, and promote the development of community-based and non-institutional alternatives to traditional forms of care.⁴⁴ The increasing demand for social services, shifting expectations of the population and rising quality standards have created a need for innovative approaches to service provision. As the state alone cannot meet these expectations, there has been growing debate regarding the involvement of non-governmental and private sector in the social service system.⁴⁵ Uneven development of social services infrastructure across municipalities and regions, combined with the dominance of residential care and the state sector in the provision of services, has led to specific objectives for reform: reducing territorial disparities; engaging as many communities and NGOs as possible in service provision; developing non residential service infrastructure.⁴⁶ Project funding through competitive tendering was the only mechanism available for financing NGOs to implement the measures. However, this method did not ensure an even distribution of funds across regions, instead leading to time limited implementation, passive participation by organisations and highlighting the need to explore alternative approaches to organising service provision.

The development of the social service system in Lithuania is characterised by a gradual shift from state dominance to market relations, from a monopoly of institutional care to the expansion of community based services and from a person-centered approach to one driven by cost analysis.⁴⁷ The stages of development of the social service delivery system and the changing roles of the non-governmental sector are presented in Table 1. It should be noted, however, that in the first decade after Lithuania regained independence, the focus was on the development of community based social services and the professionalization of social work.⁴⁸ Social work as a profession did not exist during the Soviet era. Consequently, the new system, built from the ground up, initially relied on the experience and knowledge of professionals from various fields, while professional competences were developing alongside the growth of the social security system.⁴⁹ The first years after independence

⁴⁴ Jawad Abu Younis, Anna Uster, and Itai Beer, 'Safety, Trust, and the Role of Co-Production in Combating Violence: Local Government-Community Relations in the Arab Minority in Israel', *Local Government Studies*, 2026, 1–26 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2025.2612033>

⁴⁵ Hardeep Kaur and others, 'Collaborative Approaches to Navigating Complex Challenges and Adapting to a Dynamically Changing World', *Https://Services.Igi-Global.Com/Resolvedoi/Resolve.aspx?Doi=10.4018/979-8-3693-7076-6.Ch010*, 1AD, 209–34 <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-7076-6.CH010>

⁴⁶ Xu'e Zhang, Fenghua Wen, and Lapo Hou, 'Co-Production Dilemma and Governance Optimization for Sustainable Management of National Wetland Parks in China : Evidence from Shandong, Province', 2026 <https://doi.org/10.21203/RS.3.RS-6792169/V1>

⁴⁷ Connor Clark, Gyan P. Nyaupane, and Xiao Xiao, 'Building Community Resilience and Adaptive Capacity Through Investments in Tourism and Conservation', *Journal of Travel Research*, 2024 <https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875241304482;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION>

⁴⁸ Rhys Andrews and Gene A. Brewer, 'Social Capital, Management Capacity and Public Service Performance: Evidence from the US States', *Public Management Review*, 15.1 (2013), 19–42 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2012.662445>

⁴⁹ Joydeb Garai and Hok Bun Ku, 'An Ethnographic Study on the Impacts of Covid-19 Pandemic on Indigenous People and Their Coping Strategies in Bangladesh', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 86 (2023), 103553 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.IJDRR.2023.103553>

were characterized by a monopoly of institutional social care, financed by the state and municipal budgets, along with assistance provided through monetary social benefit payments.⁵⁰ The first legislation in this area was based on the inherited experience of the Soviet social security system and did not recognize social services as a distinct form of assistance.⁵¹ It was not until 1994 that the concept of social assistance was formally adopted, establishing social services as an independent sub system of social assistance.⁵² From 1996 onwards, an active period of legislative development began, which involved defining the concept of social services, classifying services,⁵³ establishing principles for service payment and identifying the population's needs for social services,⁵⁴ Although the legislation introduced decentralization principles and increased the number of service providers, the social service system remained dominated by the public sector.⁵⁵ The non governmental sector was considered a complementary support rather than an equal partner. Opportunities for the non-governmental and private sectors to operate in social services were therefore very limited, due to the constraints of the legal framework as well as historical and practical experience.

Since 2006, changes in legal regulation in Lithuania have promoted more active decentralization, allowing social services to be purchased from a variety of providers regardless of their legal status. These changes have expanded the diversity of community based social services and facilitated the entry of the non-governmental sector into the social service system.⁵⁶ The adoption of the Law on Social Services⁵⁷ of the Republic of Lithuania introduced market based mechanisms into the social service system and formally created conditions for the non-governmental sector to become an equal provider of social services. The regulations established by the Law have necessitated a review of the methodology for financing social services, the procedures for service allocation and the mechanisms enabling recipients of the assistance to participate in the decision making

⁵⁰ Albert Jacob Meijer, 'Networked Coproduction of Public Services in Virtual Communities: From a Government-Centric to a Community Approach to Public Service Support', *Public Administration Review*, 71.4 (2011), 598–607 <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1540-6210.2011.02391.X>

⁵¹ Iswantoro Iswantoro and Tajudeen Sanni, 'Injustice in Indonesia's Legal Protection Framework for Outsourced Workers', *Contrarius*, 1.2 (2025), 109–29 <<https://doi.org/10.53955/CONTRARIUS.V1I2.210>>.

⁵² Hessel Bos, Pieter Zwaan, and Taco Brandsen, 'After the Initial Start of Co-Production: A Narrative Review of the Development of Co-Production and Changes in Orientation', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 17.3 (2025) <https://doi.org/10.3390/SU17030971>

⁵³ Flora Begum and others, 'Development Pathways for Co-Management in the Sundarban Mangrove Forest: A Multiple Stakeholder Perspective', *Forest Policy and Economics*, 148 (2023) <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.FORPOL.2023.102918>

⁵⁴ Noorseha Ayob, Simon Teasdale, and Kylie Fagan, 'How Social Innovation "Came to Be": Tracing the Evolution of a Contested Concept', *Journal of Social Policy*, 45.4 (2016), 635–53 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004727941600009X>

⁵⁵ Ahmad Dwi Nuryanto and Turdialiev Mukhammad Ali Polatjon Ogli, 'Achieving National Health Insurance in Indonesia: Policies and Challenges', *Contrarius*, 1.2 (2024), 67–87 <https://doi.org/10.53955/CONTRARIUS.V1I2.208>

⁵⁶ Anis Mashdurohatun and Abdul Hanis Embong, 'Legal Protection of Coastal Community Land Tenure Rights', *Contrarius*, 1.2 (2025), 89–108 <https://doi.org/10.53955/CONTRARIUS.V1I2.209>

⁵⁷ Nurul Nurhidayati and others, 'Co-Production in Innovation Development: A Case Study of the Republik Melon in Wates District, Blitar Regency: Co-Production Dalam Pengembangan Inovasi: Studi Kasus Republik Melon Di Kecamatan Wates Kabupaten Blitar', *Jurnal Pemerintahan Dan Politik*, 11.1 (2026), 62–85 <https://doi.org/10.36982/JPP.V11I1.5857>

process.⁵⁸ The contractual relationship between service providers and local authorities primarily affected social care. It changed the traditional financing models, shifting from a system where local authorities allocated funding based on criteria they set, to one in which providers are reimbursed for the services actually delivered and the costs actually incurred.⁵⁹ These mechanisms were further consolidated under the 2020 adoption of the Description of Procedures for the Accreditation of Social Care and Short Term Respite Services.⁶⁰ This document standardises the criteria for social service providers, establishes the right for various entities to provide social services and expands the diversity of providers to not only include the public sector but also the non-governmental and private sectors, as well as individuals. Additionally, it liberalises the conditions under which social services can be provided.

Due to changes in national level legal regulation, the catalogue of social services⁶¹ which specifies the content, delivery methods, locations and potential providers of services is now fully applicable to all service providers, regardless of their legal status. Changes in the legal framework, funding models and the liberalisation of conditions for service provision have contributed to greater involvement of the non-governmental sector in the social service system. This is well illustrated by data on municipal payments to NGOs for public services in 2020–2022, which show that social services experienced the highest increase in expenditure, reaching 94% (compared to education, culture and sports).⁶²

The increasing role of NGOs in social services is changing traditional models of cooperation with the public sector, the implementation of functions and the distribution of responsibilities.⁶³ This shift has created a need to revise the principles of cooperation, planning and decision-making, and to regulate them through legal acts. The principles of management, allocation and provision of social services, established under the Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania,⁶⁴ define the role of NGOs as partners and active participants in the system, involved not only in service provision but also in planning and management processes.⁶⁵ The principles of cooperation, active participation and partnership imply that the allocation, provision and effective management of social services can be achieved through joint decision making involving recipients, service

⁵⁸ Pujiyono Suwadi and others, 'Judges' Role in Suspect Determination and Evolving Legal Concepts', *Journal of Justice Dialectical*, 3.2 (2025), 176–97 <https://doi.org/10.70720/JJD.V3I2.98>

⁵⁹ Ali Mukartono and others, 'Reconstruction of Collusion and Nepotism in Corruption Policy', *Journal of Justice Dialectical*, 3.2 (2025), 111–35 <https://doi.org/10.70720/JJD.V3I2.95>

⁶⁰ Taco Brandsen and Victor Pestoff, 'Co-Production, the Third Sector and the Delivery of Public Services. An Introduction', *Public Management Review*, 8.4 (2006), 493–501 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030601022874>

⁶¹ Denita Cepiku and others, 'The Co-Production of Public Services', *The Co-Production of Public Services*, 2020 <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60710-4>

⁶² Mujahiddin, Yurisna Tanjung, and Sahran Saputra, 'Sinergitas Pemerintah Dan Komunitas Desa Dalam Pengelolaan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Berbasis Kearifan Lokal Di Kabupaten Deli Serdang', *Sospol*, 9.2 (2023), 261–72 <https://doi.org/10.22219/JURNALSOSPOL.V9I2.28286>

⁶³ Adi Akbar and others, 'Proliferation of Policies on Notarial Supervisory Institutions Based on Justice', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 5.3 (2025), 833–64 <https://doi.org/10.53955/JHCLS.V5I3.789>

⁶⁴ Erik Eriksson, 'Coproduction and Inclusion: A Public Administrator Perspective', *International Public Management Journal*, 25.2 (2022), 217–40 <https://doi.org/10.1080/10967494.2021.1969486>

⁶⁵ Agusmidah Agusmidah and others, 'ASEAN's Migrant Rights Policy Dilemma and Deadlock on Migrant Worker Protection', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 5.3 (2025), 714–48 <https://doi.org/10.53955/JHCLS.V5I3.581>

providers and organisations advocating for the interests and rights of social groups.⁶⁶ Based on national legislation and other sources, the development of Lithuania's regulatory framework for the social service system, divided into three periods (1990–1995, 1996–2005, and 2006–2025), is presented below:

Table 1. Development of Lithuania's regulatory framework for the social service system

Criteria of analysis	Social service system 1990–1995	Social service system 1996–2005	Social service system 2006–2025
Main objects of legal regulation	Regulated provision of institutional social care, payment of benefits	Definition of the concept, types and content of social services; classification of services; establishment of the principles of payment for social services and principles of assessing the need for services	Standardisation of requirements for service providers; definition of criteria for payment by the recipient and for the assessment of service quality
Social service providers	The state	The state dominates, NGOs get involved	Partnership of NGOs and the public sector
Principles for financing social services	State and municipal budgets	State and municipal budgets	State and municipal budgets, payment by the recipient of the service, EU funds
Types of dominant social services	Institutional social care	Social care services are dominant; community-based services start to develop	Community services as a priority
Participation of non-state actors in the provision of public services	Cooperation with non-state actors is not mentioned	Non-state actors mentioned as participants in service provision	Non-state actors are active providers of social services, involved in planning and monitoring, shifting from cooperation to co-creation

Source : Processed by the Author

An examination of the legal regulation of the Lithuanian social service system and its recent developments reveals several key trends. First, the regulatory framework increasingly promotes the decentralisation of social services by reducing the predominance of public sector provision and encouraging the participation of multiple actors in service delivery.⁶⁷ Second, legislation has introduced standardised requirements for social service providers, alongside criteria for the assessment and assurance of service quality. Third, legal provisions establish contractual relationships between public authorities and non-

⁶⁶ Bambang Manumayoso and others, 'Sustainable Tourism in Indonesia's Ring of Fire: Toward Ecological Justice and Green Energy', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues*, 3.3 (2025), 590–615 <https://doi.org/10.53955/JSDERI.V3I3.105>

⁶⁷ Anis Mashdurohatun and others, 'Combating Digital Defamation: Regulations, Challenges and Protecting Reputation', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues*, 3.3 (2025), 486–514 <https://doi.org/10.53955/JSDERI.V3I3.147>

governmental organisations, reflecting the growing incorporation of market-oriented elements into the social service system.

At the same time, all actors involved in social service provision operate within a highly regulated environment, requiring organisations to respond rapidly and adapt flexibly to ongoing legislative changes. Finally, recent legal reforms have significantly influenced patterns of cooperation between public and non-governmental sectors.⁶⁸ Although the principles of partnership, participation, and cooperation are formally embedded in the legal framework, their practical implementation remains fragmented, particularly at the level of subordinate legislation, which only partially specifies how these principles should be applied in service delivery, administration, and planning.

Lithuania's social service system is moving towards decentralisation, involving local authorities, communities and the non-governmental sector in its management. When the need arises, access to social services must be ensured for all residents by the municipalities, which are administrative units within the territory of the state and which have the right to self-government guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, exercised through the municipal council and the mayor elected by the residents.⁶⁹ According to Article 54 of the Law on Local Self-Government of the Republic of Lithuania, "the municipality is responsible for the provision of public services to the population".⁷⁰ The delivery, planning, organisation, and quality assessment of social services – an area of public services – are autonomous functions of the municipality, which is obliged to develop a social services infrastructure that meets the needs of the population, creates a network of service providers and assesses the quality of the services they provide. Quality evaluation, service effectiveness and the criteria for assessing the efficiency of the social service system are included in the Methodological Guidelines for the Social Service Planning as areas requiring attention.⁷¹ It should be noted that this legislation establishes that these processes must involve the stakeholders. The development and implementation of a national quality standard for social services remains an important issue in the management of the social service system. Such a standard would clearly define the criteria for assessing service quality for all providers, irrespective of the scope of their activities, the types of services they deliver, or the organisational resources available to them. In this way, the legally established opportunity for various entities to provide social services would oblige providers to ensure service quality based on the same criteria, to carry out monitoring and to analyse areas for improving service provision.

The legal framework regulating the social service system is constantly evolving, focusing on expanding the diversity of social services, defining new types and forms of services, revising payment methods and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of service providers. Changes in the legal framework have favoured the involvement of the non-

⁶⁸ Bambang Ali Kusumo and others, 'Corporate Crime Prevention Through Sustainable Governance and Regulatory Reform', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues*, 3.3 (2025), 616–40 <https://doi.org/10.53955/JSDERI.V3I3.168>

⁶⁹ Jixiang Li, Shui Yan Tang, and Bo Wen, 'Unpacking Resilience in Public Administration: Insights From a Meta-Narrative Review', *Public Administration Review*, 0 (2026), 1–20 <https://doi.org/10.1111/PUAR.70083;JOURNAL:JOURNAL:15406210;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATIO>

⁷⁰ Arūnas Poviliūnas and Arunas Juska, 'Disciplining the Poor: The Politics of Responsibilising the Underclass in Lithuania', 2025, 135–58 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-05538-5_7

⁷¹ Andrius Puksas, 'Lithuania', *Governance and Public Management*, Part F1290 (2026), 129–48 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-95674-4_7/TABLES/4

governmental sector in the social service system, with a marked trend towards standardising requirements for service providers and decentralising service delivery.

3.2. Comparative Study of Social Service Provision in Marijampolė and Alytus

Municipalities, in exercising their autonomous function to ensure the provision of social services to their populations, are obliged to define the procedure for the allocation, delivery, financing and quality assessment of social services, establishing objective indicators and implementation stages for all actors in the system. Municipal legislation defines the conditions and procedures for accrediting social services, the procedures for payment and the processes for assessing the need for social services. The regulation of individual elements of the social service system clearly defines the roles, functions and responsibilities of participants (recipients and providers of social services, municipal administration, etc.), as well as the processes for planning, providing and administering social services.⁷²

The Marijampolė region stands out as having the highest need for social services and assistance, with 40.2% of its population experiencing poverty or social exclusion.⁷³ Marijampolė is one of the 10 largest municipalities in Lithuania in terms of population. The municipality is characterised by a well developed social services infrastructure and the active participation of non-governmental organisations in the delivery of social services.⁷⁴ Social services aimed at strengthening independence of an individual seek to enhance the social inclusion of vulnerable groups and to prevent the emergence of social challenges or risks. Marijampolė municipality, like many others in Lithuania, faces various social challenges, such as an ageing population, an increasing number of families and children at social risk and a rising number of children with disabilities.⁷⁵ The analysis of the municipality's demographic indicators as presented in the Plan for Social Services in Marijampolė Municipality for 2019–2023 (Figure 1) shows that the population has remained generally stable, with a slight upwards trend. However, nearly one-fifth of the municipality's population has used social services and the elderly make up around 20% of the population.⁷⁶

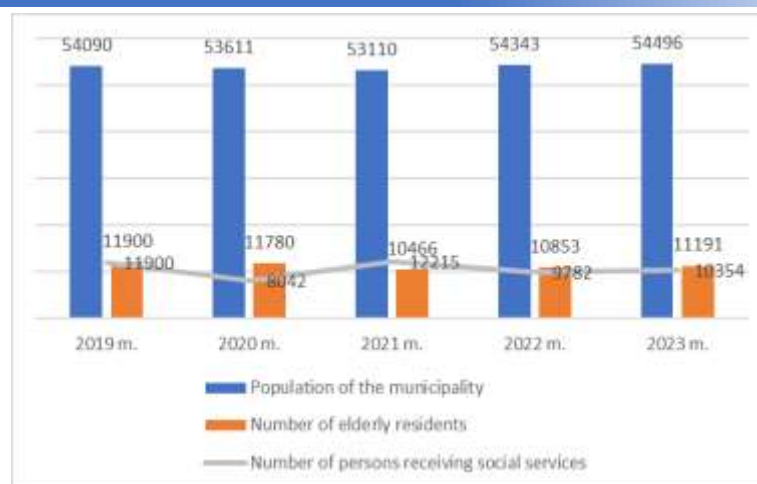
⁷² Marcos Paulo de Oliveira Corrêa, Karine Lustosa Panerai, and Luisa Souza Lima Macedo, 'Performance Management Program as a Disruption in Public Management: The Case of the Administrative Council for Economic Defense (CADE)', *Https://Services.Igi-Global.Com/Resolvedoi/Resolve.aspx?Doi=10.4018/979-8-3693-4030-1.Ch008*, 1AD, 173–90 <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-4030-1.Ch008>

⁷³ Chesney Callens and others, 'Internal and External Exploration for Public Service Innovation–Measuring the Impact of a Climate for Creativity and Collaborative Diversity on Innovation', *Public Policy and Administration*, 2026 <https://doi.org/10.1177/09520767221135686>

⁷⁴ Irene Liarte, J. Ignacio Criado, and Laura Alcaide-Muñoz, 'Determinants of Public Sector Innovation: A Comparative Study of Spanish Local Governments', *International Journal of Public Administration*, 2025 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2025.2451390;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION>

⁷⁵ Ayu Evita Sari and others, 'Mapping Research Trends Digital Communication on Public Policy: A Systematic Literature Review', *Https://Services.Igi-Global.Com/Resolvedoi/Resolve.aspx?Doi=10.4018/979-8-3373-5576-4.Ch010*, 1AD, 229–52 <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3373-5576-4.Ch010>

⁷⁶ Sarah L. Young, Kimberly K. Wiley, and Denita Cepiku, 'Intersecting Public Management and Social Equity Introduction to the Special Issue of Public Management Review', *Public Management Review*, 27.2 (2025), 385–94 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2023.2288261>



Source : Processed by the Author

Figure 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the population of Marijampolė municipality and the number of people who received social services

Demographic changes drive the development of social services infrastructure in the municipality, the expansion of service provision and higher municipal budget expenditures for social services. Municipal budget expenditure on social services increased from €46.09 to €68.47 per inhabitant between 2021 and 2024.⁷⁷ Measures to address the social challenges identified in the municipality's strategic planning documents include developing community based social services, increasing the involvement of the non-governmental sector in service provision and boosting funding for social services.

In Marijampolė municipality, social services are provided by various entities, including municipal institutions, non-governmental organisations, private-sector providers and individuals.⁷⁸ The public sector is characterised by a high concentration of social services: although the number of institutions is small, they offer a wide range of services. The obligation of municipalities to provide social services to their inhabitants has led to the establishment of various social service centres, which offer a range of services and are responsible for carrying out the autonomous functions entrusted to municipalities.⁷⁹ The largest provider of social services in Marijampolė municipality is a municipal social services institution, offering preventive, general and specialised social services. The growing demand for social services, longer waiting times, the development of new services and rising municipal expenditures have highlighted the need to assess infrastructure efficiency and the balance of development, as well as increasing the involvement of the not for profit sector in service provision.⁸⁰ According to the municipality's social service planning documents, the number of NGOs operating in the social sector has been growing

⁷⁷ Branka Zolak Poljašević, Ana Marija Gričnik, and Simona Šarotar Žižek, 'Human Resource Management in Public Administration: The Ongoing Tension Between Reform Requirements and Resistance to Change', *Administrative Sciences* 2025, Vol. 15, Page 94, 15.3 (2025), 94 <https://doi.org/10.3390/ADMSCI15030094>

⁷⁸ Francesco Colona and Rivke Jaffe, 'Hybrid Governance Arrangements', *European Journal of Development Research*, 28.2 (2016), 175–83 <https://doi.org/10.1057/EJDR.2016.5>

⁷⁹ Eleonora Perobelli, Giulia Cappellaro, and Raffaella Saporito, 'Public–Private Hybrid Organisations in the Public Sector: Evidence and Future Directions from a Systematic Literature Review', *Public Management Review*, 27.11 (2025), 2615–42 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2024.2365244>

⁸⁰ Muhammad Irfan and others, 'Strategi LSM Jemari Sakato Dalam Mendorong Partisipasi Masyarakat Terhadap Pembangunan Di Kota Padang', *Jurnal Ilmiah Pengabdian Pada Masyarakat*, 2.4 (2025), 1099–1107 <https://doi.org/10.47233/jipm.v2i4>

each year. This has been influenced not only by the growing demand for social services and service providers, but also by changes in the legal framework.⁸¹ Accreditation processes have streamlined the administration of social care services and enabled more organisations to participate in service provision. This has expanded the coverage and diversity of social services, reduced waiting times and enabled service recipients to choose their providers.⁸²

Alytus has a population similar to that of Marijampolė municipality, but both the scope of social service provision and development trends differ. At the beginning of 2024, Alytus had a population of 51,351, of which 26.5% were the elderly.⁸³ The population in this municipality is ageing even more rapidly than in Marijampolė, but this is not well reflected in social services planning. The number of institutions providing services remains stable, the volume of service provision is unchanged and only a few new non-governmental organisations have become involved. This is despite the municipality's planning documents expressing the goal of broadening the diversity of social services by involving non-governmental and community based organisations.⁸⁴

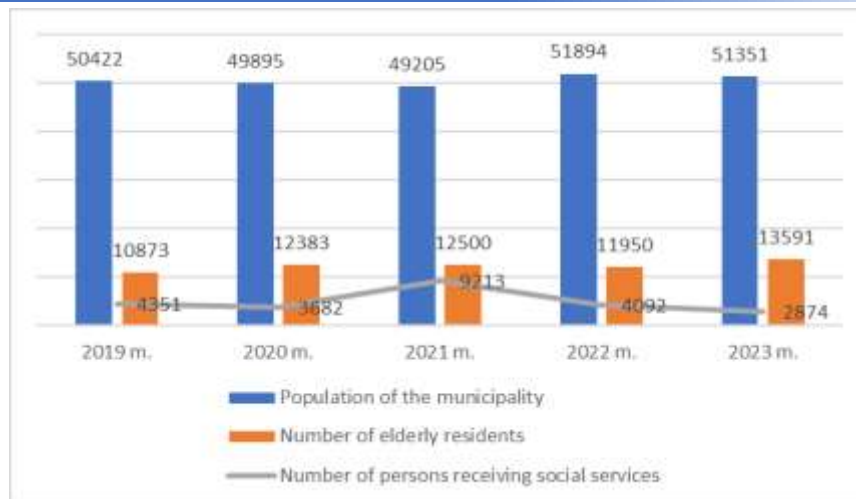
Data from the 2019–2023 social service plans indicate that the population of Alytus city municipality is changing only slightly, but there is a clear trend of population ageing and imbalances in the provision of social services (see Figure 2). The number and capacity of social service providers, the number of ongoing projects and the extent to which social service needs have been identified may determine the volume of services provided in the municipality.

⁸¹ Kismartini and Muh Yusuf, 'Stakeholders Analysis: Managing Coastal Policy Implementation in Rembang District', *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, 23 (2015), 338–45
<https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PROENV.2015.01.049>

⁸² Maria Therese Gustafsson and Martin Scurrah, 'Strengthening Subnational Institutions for Sustainable Development in Resource-Rich States: Decentralized Land-Use Planning in Peru', *World Development*, 119 (2019), 133–44 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.WORLDDEV.2019.03.002>

⁸³ Noora Kassab, 'Power to Communities: What Gets in the Way? From Service-Based to Community-Led', 2025 <https://doi.org/10.20381/RUOR-31491>

⁸⁴ Keratilo Sishoma Mogotsi and Nicole Baron, 'Local Solutions for Local Problems: The Contributions of Social Enterprises to Resilient Urban Communities in South Africa', *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11.1 (2025), 2474187
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2025.2474187;REQUESTEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:OASS20;PAGE:STRUNG:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>



Source : Processed by the Author

Figure 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the population of Alytus city municipality and the number of people who received social services

Alytus city municipality was one of the first municipalities in Lithuania to participate in the pilot project “Transfer of Social Services to NGOs, Social or Private Business”. The project was followed by an impact purchase aimed at creating an efficient, user-friendly service system for children with developmental disabilities on the autism spectrum and their families.⁸⁵ Unlike Marijampolė municipality, Alytus city municipality, in addition to project funding and payments for services actually provided, also uses public procurement to involve non-governmental organisations.⁸⁶ According to the Plan for Social Services (2024), 18 non-governmental organisations and 6 budgetary institutions provide social services in Alytus municipality. The budgetary sector dominates in terms of the volume of services provided, except for certain individual services (social rehabilitation in the community for people with disabilities and social day care for children, where NGOs play the leading role).⁸⁷ The number of social service recipients in Alytus varies depending on the projects implemented, the number of applicants and the capacity of service providers to meet demand.⁸⁸ Given the increasing share of elderly people in the municipality’s population as viewed alongside stable numbers of families at risk and persons with disabilities, it is possible to predict a growing demand for social services and the need to develop social service infrastructure in the future. Unemployment is one of the main

⁸⁵ Hao Yao and others, ‘Non-Governmental Organizations’ Perceptions of Challenges and Opportunities for Participating in the Provision of Government-Purchased Community-Based Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services in Shanghai, China: A Qualitative Study’, *BMC Health Services Research* 2024 25:1, 25.1 (2025), 3- <https://doi.org/10.1186/S12913-024-12125-2>

⁸⁶ L. L.B. Lazaro and others, ‘Corporate Lobbying, Agribusiness, and Climate Change Politics in Brazil’s Bioenergy Transition’, *Energy Research & Social Science*, 129 (2025), 104353 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.ERSS.2025.104353>

⁸⁷ Martha Cristina Linares-Rodríguez, Nicolás Gambetta, and María Antonia García-Benau, ‘Climate Action Information Disclosure in Colombian Companies: A Regional and Sectorial Analysis’, *Urban Climate*, 51 (2023), 101626 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.UCLIM.2023.101626>

⁸⁸ Winny Astuti and Daniel Adi Prasetyo, ‘Model of Community-Based Housing Development (CBHD) of Bedah Kampung Program in Surakarta Indonesia’, *Procedia Environmental Sciences*, 20 (2014), 593–601 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PROENV.2014.03.072>

problems in the municipality.⁸⁹ The employment support programme, financed by the state and municipal budgets, includes measures to promote the inclusion or reintegration of vulnerable groups into the labour market. NGOs, however, are not identified as potential employers.⁹⁰ Support for NGOs is provided through a programme to strengthen community-based organisations, funded by state budget grants.⁹¹ The social services planning documents do not provide information on the municipality's independent initiatives to fund NGO activities and project proposals.⁹² Based on the analysed documents of strategic planning and social services planning of the municipalities, the municipalities of Marijampolė and Alytus can be compared in the context of cooperation with NGOs in terms of funding models, diversity and scope of social service providers, as well as legal regulations (see Table 2).

Table 2. Comparison of NGOs participation in the provision of social services in the municipalities of Marijampolė and Alytus

Criteria	Marijampolė Municipality	Alytus City Municipality
Social service providers in the municipalities	Services provided by 28 NGOs and 2 municipal institutions	Services provided by 18 NGOs and 6 municipal institutions
Percentage of social service recipients in the total population	19.4%	12%
Funding models of social services provided by NGOs	Project funding Contract-based payment for services actually provided	Project funding; Contract-based payment for services actually provided; Public procurement
Role of NGOs in the provision of social services	Prioritised as social service providers	The goal is set to develop cooperation, but no concrete measures are foreseen
Legal framework for cooperation with NGOs	There is no approved cooperation strategy; the principles are defined in the social service plans and in the regulations of the NGO Council. NGO project ideas are funded from the municipal budget (independent municipal initiative).	There is no approved cooperation strategy; the principles are defined in the social service plans and in the regulations of the NGO Council. The municipal budget does not allocate funds for the implementation of NGO ideas (no independent municipal initiatives).

Source : Processed by the Author

Even though Marijampolė engages a greater number of external service providers, certain patterns in the operation of the non-governmental sector are evident in both

⁸⁹ Danieli Marinho Nobre and others, 'Governance of the Cassurubá Extractive Reserve, Bahia State, Brazil: An Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses to Inform Policy', *Marine Policy*, 77 (2017), 44–55
<https://doi.org/10.1016/J.MARPOL.2016.12.008>

⁹⁰ Nora Germundsson, 'Configuring Social Assistance: Conceptualizations and Implications of the Adoption of Robotic Process Automation in the Swedish Personal Social Services', *European Journal of Social Work*, 28.3 (2025), 512–24
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2024.2421879;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>

⁹¹ Kjellaug K. Myklebust and others, 'Collaboration with Clients to Create Journal Notes: A Mixed Methods Evaluation of a Pilot Intervention Study in a Municipality Mental Health Services Team', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 25.1 (2025), e12829
<https://doi.org/10.1002/CAPR.12829;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>

⁹² Manpreet Rajpal and others, 'Public Sector Development and Entrepreneurial Initiatives for Improving Circular Economy Performance: Government Policy and Digital Transformation Initiatives as Moderators', *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 221 (2025), 124333
<https://doi.org/10.1016/J.TECHFORE.2025.124333>

municipalities.⁹³ First, NGOs can be categorised into those representing the interests of specific groups, such as people with disabilities, and those that operate as social service providers for sale⁹⁴. Second, non governmental organisations are most active in service areas where the public sector is unable to fully meet community needs. This is particularly apparent in the provision of social services for the elderly in rapidly ageing communities.⁹⁵ Although Alytus has a higher proportion of elderly residents than Marijampolė, the latter serves 7.4% more beneficiaries, suggesting that increasing service demand may stimulate the expansion of the provider network. Third, the financing of social services in both municipalities follows multiple models, including public procurement of services, programme and project based funding, and contracts covering individual service costs.⁹⁶ Both Marijampolė and Alytus employ a combination of these approaches, integrating contractual arrangements with project-based financing. Finally, both municipalities prioritise written contracts for funding services provided to individuals, ensuring consistent funding, reimbursement of expenses, and continuity of organisational operations.

There is a difference, however, in the the way in which projects are financed: Marijampolė municipality finances around 20 NGO projects,⁹⁷ while Alytus city municipality finances 2–4 projects. These, however, are larger in scope, introduce innovations in social services and increase the employment of persons with disabilities.⁹⁸ A distinctive feature of Marijampolė municipality is the provision of project based funding for NGOs from the municipal budget with clearly defined funding priorities, criteria, and directions.⁹⁹ In developing the network of social services, Marijampolė municipality identifies the non-governmental sector as a priority service provider, giving it an advantage over other providers.¹⁰⁰ Both municipalities aim to involve a wider range of non-governmental organisations in providing social services; however, no strategies or measures for achieving this are defined in their strategic planning documents.¹⁰¹ The strategic development plan of Alytus city municipality until 2030 aims to transfer 30% of

⁹³ Michael Bratton, 'The Politics of Government-NGO Relations in Africa', *World Development*, 17.4 (1989), 569–87 [https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X\(89\)90263-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0305-750X(89)90263-5)

⁹⁴ Corinthias Pamatang Morgana Sianipar and Kitri Widaretna, 'NGO as Triple-Helix Axis: Some Lessons from Nias Community Empowerment on Cocoa Production', *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 52 (2012), 197–206 <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.SBSPRO.2012.09.456>

⁹⁵ Nicola Banks, David Hulme, and Michael Edwards, 'NGOs, States, and Donors Revisited: Still Too Close for Comfort?', *World Development*, 66 (2015), 707–18 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.09.028>

⁹⁶ Claire Mercer, 'NGOs, Civil Society and Democratization: A Critical Review of the Literature', *Progress in Development Studies*, 2.1 (2002), 5–22 <https://doi.org/10.1191/1464993402PS027RA>

⁹⁷ Funeka Makhholwa and Emmison Muleya, 'Examining the Challenges Faced by School Social Workers in Selected Township Schools in City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality: An NPO Perspective', *TWIST*, 20.2 (2025), 213–24 <https://doi.org/10.5281/twist.10049652#422>

⁹⁸ John Gal and Idit Weiss-Gal, 'The Policy Role of Social Workers as Heads of Local Government Social Services', *European Journal of Social Work*, 2025 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2025.2493318;JOURNAL:JOURNAL:CESW20;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>

⁹⁹ William F. Fisher, 'Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), 439–64 <https://doi.org/10.1146/ANNUREV.ANTHRO.26.1.439>

¹⁰⁰ Slob and Weyzig.

¹⁰¹ Jenna Peiponen and others, 'Navigating Social Services from the Perspective of Finnish Older Adults with Complex Needs: An Examination of Different Dimensions of Access', *Journal of Social Service Research*, 51.1 (2025), 144–61 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2024.2388627;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER>

public sector services to the non-governmental sector,¹⁰² whereas Marijampolė municipality has not set this as a priority.¹⁰³ The planning process is based on quantitative indicators such as the number and type of social services provided, the number of applicants and the number of people on waiting lists. Strategic plans also identify planned social projects aimed at modernising and developing infrastructure.¹⁰⁴ Municipal planning documents do not reflect the ideas or plans of the non-governmental sector, nor the directions for the development of its activities. This may be due to an inappropriate choice of planning methods, limited maturity of cooperation between NGOs and municipalities and weak NGO competences that restrict the implementation of social innovation within the municipality. There is no record of public consultations or discussions with the non-governmental sector on these issues, except for isolated instances related to service planning and social needs assessments.¹⁰⁵ They may be regarded as isolated initiatives rather than an established practice.

The expanding network of NGOs in the social field, along with the growing volume of social services, is strengthening the position of NGOs as service providers.¹⁰⁶ The limited number and narrow focus of initiatives Marijampolė municipality finances about 20 NGO projects annually, but they primarily target a single social service (socio-cultural service) while Alytus city does not have a municipal programme to support NGO activities along with funding priorities determined solely by the public sector, provides a basis for discussing the gradual involvement of NGOs in developing social services infrastructure and expanding opportunities for action.¹⁰⁷ Municipal administrations do follow the guidelines of social policy makers and implement strategic objectives, but municipality-specific initiatives remain fragmented.¹⁰⁸

After analysing the legal acts regulating social services in the municipalities of Marijampolė and Alytus, the following can be stated:¹⁰⁹ (i) the legal regulation of

¹⁰² Nestor Soler del Toro, 'Bridging Sectors: Applying Crowdfunding Insights from NGOs to Private Ventures', *World Sustainability Series*, Part F85 (2025), 149–62 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-80969-9_11

¹⁰³ Giuseppe Crapa, Paolo Roma, and Manfredi Bruccoleri, 'The Influence of NGO-Corporate Relationship on Environmental Disclosure: Evidence from the Fashion Industry', *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 32.2 (2025), 2104–27 <https://doi.org/10.1002/CSR.3056;SUBPAGE:STRING:FULL>

¹⁰⁴ Michael D. Lord, 'Research Note: Corporate Political Strategy and Legislative Decision Making: The Impact of Corporate Legislative Influence Activities', *Business & Society*, 39.1 (2000), 76–93 <https://doi.org/10.1177/000765030003900106>

¹⁰⁵ Rich Thornton, 'Dilemmas of Vulnerability in Indian Education NGOs: Neoliberal Subjectivity, Emotions, and Class-Based Employment Hierarchies in Delhi', *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 56.1 (2025), e12520 <https://doi.org/10.1111/AEQ.12520;PAGEGROUP:STRING:PUBLICATION>

¹⁰⁶ Arran Magee, 'Non-Governmental Organisations' Role in Shaping Refugee Youth Education: A Case Study of NGOs Working with Syrian Refugee Youth in Jordan, 2019-2020', *Doctoral Thesis, UCL (University College London)*, 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Quoc Dung Ngo, Quynh Hoa Nguyen, and Pham Ngoc Toan, 'Assessing the Impact of the European Union-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement on Labor Market and Employment in Vietnam', *International Journal of Social Economics*, 52.7 (2025), 1068–83 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-03-2024-0236>>

¹⁰⁸ Ina Šuklje Erjavec and Tatiana Ruchinskaya, 'A Spotlight of Co-Creation and Inclusiveness of Public Open Spaces', *Lecture Notes in Computer Science (Including Subseries Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence and Lecture Notes in Bioinformatics)*, 11380 LNCS (2019), 209–23 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13417-4_17

¹⁰⁹ Cornips and others.

municipal social services is based on the general provisions of laws and subordinate legislation, while the exercise of the municipality's autonomous function in providing social services allows it to shape the relevant social services infrastructure according to local needs and specificities; (ii) the directions, scope and variety of social services to be provided in cooperation with the non-governmental sector are defined in the municipality's strategic planning documents; (iii) to purposefully implement the stated ambition of expanding the network of NGO service providers, municipalities not only finance social services but also implement complementary programmes for participants in these networks.

4. Conclusion

An analysis of the evolution of legal regulation regarding the participation of non-state actors in the provision of social services at the national level shows that since 1990, social service regulation has been continuously improved. The role of non-state actors has evolved from complete non-participation (when services were provided exclusively by state entities) to recognition of their active involvement as providers of social services, participating in service delivery, planning and monitoring. Accordingly, changes in the national legal framework for social service provision have significantly enhanced the participation of non-state actors by standardising unified quality requirements for all service providers (state and non-state) and establishing clear procedures for the accreditation, financing and quality evaluation of service providers. The national legal framework allows municipalities to select the model of social service provision that best meets their needs, taking into account factors such as demographic characteristics and existing service delivery infrastructure. The municipality analysed in the study, which has chosen a model where non-state actors dominate the provision of social services in terms of the volume of services provided, is characterised by additional funding opportunities that go beyond the contractual obligations to finance non-state actors for the provision of social services. Simultaneously, independent municipal programmes and initiatives are implemented to finance a wider range of activities of the same non-state actors. Although this article primarily addresses the processes and tools involved in non-state actors' participation in social service provision, rather than managerial aspects, the current context of Lithuanian public administration and the consistently increasing demand for social services indicates an emerging need to develop systems that can evaluate and manage stakeholder relations in service provision. This would enable more effective collaboration and greater accessibility of public goods. However, this issue should be analysed more broadly, taking into account other aspects of cooperation maturity. Such cooperation and legal regulations should be based on shared objectives and mutual benefit, with a strong focus on processes and decisions, as well as on assessing risks to the parties involved and the impact of their actions on creating the greatest possible value, while maintaining a focus on public interest.

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