

Social Welfare Standards



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Organisation: Welfare Policy Division, Seoul Metropolitan Government

Country: Korea

Level of government: Local government

Sector: Education, General public services, Health, Housing and community amenities, Social protection

Type: Organisational Design, Public Service

Launched in: 2012

Overall development time: 7 months

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Description

The new city administration of Seoul has prepared new welfare directions for the city, named “Seoul Citizens’ Welfare Standards.” These standards are not only a new charter that defines welfare benefit as a basic right of citizens, but the guidelines for any future welfare policies of the city. The standards present the goals of Seoul’s welfare programmes in five major areas: income, housing, care, health, and education. In the future, the welfare policies will be aimed at achieving the welfare goals specified in the standards. Also, welfare policies will be evaluated based on the standards.

Why the innovation was developed

- Seoul is a global megacity with more than ten million inhabitants. In the 1950s, it was one of the poorest cities in the world. Having experienced rapid economic development, which is often referred to as ‘the miracle on the Han River,’ it has emerged as one of the biggest cities around the world in terms of economy. However, behind the amazing economic development were sacrifices of many citizens who had lost hope of leading decent lives. Seoul has long neglected the lives of its citizens while pursuing economic growth at full speed. As a consequence, the middle class has collapsed, more people have fallen below the poverty line, and the economic polarisation has become aggravated. 290 000 citizens who fall far below the poverty line are not eligible for any form of government assistance. More significantly, welfare policies have never been made with a social consensus. Thus, Seoul needed welfare standards that are equal to its economic status and has drawn public participation.
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Objectives

Improve access, Improve effectiveness, Improve service quality, Improve social equity

- Ensure citizens’ social rights.
 - Shift from an economic growth to people-oriented paradigm.
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Main beneficiaries

General population, Low-income groups

- Citizens of Seoul, particularly those who fall below the poverty line, but previously did not qualify for welfare. Currently, there are an estimated 500 000 people in Seoul whose income falls short of the city’s minimum cost of living (KRW 1 738 million per month for a family of four). However, only 200 603 are recipients of National Basic Livelihood Security (NBLS) scheme as of August 2012. Thus, around 290 000 may benefit from the new programme.
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Existing similar practices

The London Plan and Equal Life Chances for All

In other countries’ public administrations

London City Hall

The London Plan is a spatial development strategy for the Greater London area. It sets out a fully integrated social, economic and environmental framework for the development of the capital over 15 to 20 years. The 2011 London Plan is composed of eight areas and 121 policies with 24 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The eight areas include context and strategy, London’s places, London’s people, London’s economy, London’s response to climate change, London’s transport, London’s living places and spaces, and implementation, monitoring and review.

Results

Service quality

Accessibility:

Welfare services used to be selective, but due to the new standards, everyone gained access to the services.

Other:

A minimum level of living standard was set for income, housing, care, health, and education, which meant that citizens were to be provided with services that allowed them at least a minimum level of living standard.

Evaluation

Implemented in 2013, the Seoul Welfare Standard Initiative has been subject to internal and external evaluation. In terms of internal evaluation, experts from the Seoul Metropolitan Government gathered six times in March 2013 to exchange opinions on the progress of the initiative. As a result, projects with poor performance were either mended or abandoned. Also, online opinion polls and citizen evaluations were used as a way to accomplish external evaluation. Of the 650 public opinions collected, 117 were selected to help upgrade the project and the initiative as a whole.

Development

Design

Seoul Citizens' Welfare Standards did not come from a single person's idea. Civic society including grassroots organisations in the country had called for the standards for years. In 2010, the Seoul Metropolitan Council presented a policy proposal regarding standards for Seoul's welfare programmes.

The consensus was that the National Basic Livelihood Security Programme remains a form of public assistance; however, the government's passive interpretation of the citizens' social rights protected by the constitution needed to be redefined from the citizens' perspectives. They also agreed that the welfare programme for Seoul citizens must reflect the city's characteristics and that the national standard should not be applied to Seoul.

Design time: 3 months

Testing

Seoul held 1000-Person Roundtable, an open discussion forum for civic participation, to allow citizens to directly participate in deciding the Seoul Welfare Standards.

Testing time: 3 months

Implementation

Tools used:

- The Seoul Citizens' Welfare Standards Promotion Committee was formed with 65 members in five subcommittees. Its participants included officials, city councilors, academics, researchers and citizens from a variety of fields like gender equality activism, 'village' building campaigns and the protection of the disabled.
- A citizen monitoring group was launched with 220 citizens including some government officials from district offices.
- There were six 'Policy Listening Workshops' (intended to hear the opinions of the citizens on city policies) on the five areas of income, housing, care, health and education, with a total of 594 citizens participating in the workshops and 278 proposals being made.

Resources used:

- Seoul Citizens' Welfare Standards were completed with the input of a minimum level of fiscal resources and a maximum level of human and technical resources. Fiscally, research expenses and office operation costs were all that the city had to pay. The rest was done through the voluntary services of many citizens and experts.
- It was the online system that enabled active participation by the citizens. At the outset, an online café was set up at 'Daum', an online website. Citizens were able to post their opinions on the online café for the municipal government to review. A total of 354 opinions were posted. Officials collected and delivered them to researchers who used the ideas in drafting the project.
- Participants for the Seoul Welfare Meari (Echo) Group, policy workshops and the roundtable meeting were all recruited online.

Implementation time: 1 month

Challenges and solutions

- Difficulty in finding a compromise between the necessity to improve the welfare and to observe budget constraint. Solution: The gap was narrowed down through numerous meetings.
 - Cooperation with other agencies. Solution: The SMG had seven meetings with the central government (the Ministry of Strategy and Finance and the Ministry of Health and Welfare), two meetings with 25 district offices, six meetings with the offices of education and a number of contacts with the City Council.
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Partnerships

Volunteers

Civil Society

The standards were successfully prepared with the help of volunteers including 65 members of the standards promotion committee, 27 expert researchers, 47 city officials, 220 members of the Seoul Welfare Meari (Echo) Group, 1 075 participants in the 1 000-person round table, 594 attendees in Policy Listening Workshops and 354 citizens who shared their opinions online.

Ministries, district offices, City Council

Other Public Sector

As a successful implementation of the welfare standards required cooperation of different agencies, the SMG had had multiple contacts with all these parties concerned: It had seven meetings with the central government (the Ministry of Strategy and Finance and the Ministry of Health and Welfare), two meetings with 25 district offices, six meetings with the offices of education and a number of contacts with the City Council.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- The Seoul Welfare Standard initiative is a remarkable achievement not only because it is the first-ever welfare standards created by a local government in Korea but also because it is a good example of applying a proactive and universalistic rights-based approach in policy-making.
 - The initiative is believed to serve as a model for the central government as well as other local governments in developing a blue print for welfare from both procedural and substantial perspectives.
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Conditions for success

The SMG worked hard to draw as much social agreement on the standards as possible. Citizens, civic groups, experts and officials have all closely cooperated from start to finish. An important key to the approach was the participation of as many citizens as possible in all stages of the project.

Other information

The project was a 2013 winner of the United Nations Public Service Award.

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