The Impact of Service Standardization on Lithuanian Street-Level Bureaucracy

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Abstract. This paper analyses connections between the customer service standardization process and street-level bureaucracy behaviour, impact of customer service standards on the civil servants’ discretion in the perspective of the differences of weak and strong discretion. Analysis is based upon the interview data, collected at the State Tax Inspectorate, State Social Security Agency and State Employment Agency. Analysis of the empirical data revealed that in all three institutions written standards are interpreted by the civil servants rather freely. However, this does not mean that standards are useless, they serve as certain guidelines and behaviour reference points. Strict following of rules becomes relatively more important to the State Tax Inspectorate, while identification with the customers – for State Social Security Agency and the State Employment Agency. The customers of the latter agencies are often socially vulnerable people, therefore more individualized service provision is characteristic to these institutions.

Keywords. Street-level bureaucracy, standardization, customer service, customer service standard.