European
Social
Network

Leading
Social Services

INVESTING IN SOCIAL SERVICES, INVESTING IN EUROPE

Social Services Essential for Europe's Recovery

About the European Social Network (ESN)

The European Social Network (ESN) is the independent network for local public social services in Europe. It brings together the organisations that plan, deliver, finance, manage, research, and regulate local public social services, including health, social welfare, employment, education and housing. We ensure the visibly of the perspective of public social services at the European level, while supporting the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

European Funding

About this report

This report brings together the analysis conducted by the members of ESN's Reference Group on the European Semester, which in 2020 represented 17 EU countries. The report illustrates the social situation according to public social services in the countries, with recommendations for the 2021 European Semester cycle.

Published: October 2020

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the members of the Reference Group for their invaluable contribution to this report in 2020:

- **Zorana Uzelac Bosnjak**, Zagreb City Council, Croatia
- **Pavel Čáslava**, Association of Social Care Providers (APSS ČR), Czech Republic
- **Lise Plougmann Willer**, Association of Directors of Social Services (FSD), Denmark
- **Merit Tatar**, The Institute of Baltic Studies, Estonia
- **Jukka Lindberg**, Association of Directors of Social Services, Finland
- **Johannes Schädler**, Centre for planning and Evaluation of Social Services (ZPE)
- **Dionyssis Balourdos** and **George Papadoudis**, National Centre for Social Research, Greece
- **Aideen McDonnell**, **Terry Madden** and **Mairead Finn**, Independent social services consultants, Ireland
- **Tobias Voltan**, National Council of Social Workers (CNOAS), Italy
- **Mārtinš Moors**, Riga City Council, Latvia
- **Sandra Abela**, Foundation for Social Welfare Services, Malta
- **Edwin van Staveren**, Association of Directors of Social Services (Divosa), The Netherlands
- **Ana Radulescu**, Centre for Training and Assessment in Social Work, Romania
- **Anja Osojnik**, Association of Centres for Social Work, Slovenia
- **Jimena Pascual Fernández, Begoña López González, Marta del Arco Fernández** Ministry of Social Rights and Welfare of the Principality of Asturias; **Carlos Santos Guerrero, Ledicia Suárez Rodríguez,** Regional Government of Galicia; **Emiliana Vicente González, Ana Belén Domínguez Milanés,** General Council of Social Work, Technical Office of the Department of Work, Social Affairs and Families, Regional Government of Catalonia; **Marta Ballester Santiago, Elisabet Herrera Cardenal, Cristina Salrach Arnau, Pilar Hilarión Madariaga,** Avedis Donabedian Research Institute (FAD) at Autonomous University of Barcelona, Spain
- **Graham Owen**, Association of Directors of Social Welfare Services (FSS), Sweden
- **Sue Wald**, Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), England, United Kingdom

Introduction

Reference Group on the European Semester

The European Social Network (ESN) is the leading network for public social services in Europe. Inclusion of public social services are responsible for the provision of support for vulnerable people to improve their wellbeing and help them to become as autonomous as possible. This includes supporting families, homeless people, adults with disabilities, children at risk of harm, migrants, and older people.

Public social services in Europe usually operate within local or regional authorities where they plan, regulate, manage, finance and provide a range of different services. Despite their key role in implementation, they are often far from policy and decision-making processes at European level. ESN tries to bridge this gap through its Reference Group on the European Semester (hereafter 'the Group').

The Group includes representatives from national associations of social services directors, social services in regional and local authorities, and national associations of social services professionals. (See full list for 2020 above in Acknowledgments). Set-up in 2014, the Group aims to share awareness of issues social services face at local level, provide policy recommendations to the European Commission on how these issues can be tackled, and raise the profile of social services in European policy-making.

Methodology

Each year, the Group follows the European Commission's cycle of policy coordination with the Member States known as the European Semester.

The Group members do this by completing a tailored questionnaire prepared by the ESN Secretariat. In 2020, the Group represented 17 countries:

- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- Germany
- Greece
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Malta
- The Netherlands
- Romania
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- United Kingdom (England)

In 2020, the questionnaires covered three important principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). The principles identified by members of the Reference Group as most relevant for social services were:

Principle 11 – Childcare and support to children

- Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality.
- Children have the right to protection from poverty. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds have the right to specific measures to enhance equal opportunities

Principle 18 – Long-term care

- Everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular homecare and community-based services.

Principle 19 – Housing and assistance for homelessness

- Access to social housing or housing assistance of good quality shall be provided for those in need.
- Vulnerable people have the right to appropriate assistance and protection against forced eviction.
- Adequate shelter and services shall be provided to the homeless in order to promote their social inclusion.

Annual Meeting of the Reference Group

Each year the Group meets with officials from the European Commission. In 2020 the Group met with European Commission officials on 22-23 September[1] after drafting their questionnaire contributions. Due to the current COVID-19 crisis the meeting was held online.

The meeting is an opportunity for Group members to come together and discuss some of the issues raised in their questionnaires and to exchange their views on the European Semester cycle with officials from the European Commission. It also provides Group members with the chance to engage in mutual learning by discussing common social issues in their countries.

The report

Outcomes of the meeting, along with the analysis provided by the Group in the questionnaires, is collected into a report put together by ESN. This annual report contains individual country profiles and policy recommendations based on the input of the Group, with 17 countries represented this year. The participation of ESN members in the EU Semester report has been impacted upon by the COVID-19 crisis, with some members having to withdraw participation due to prioritising the fallout of the crisis on public social services in their countries.

ESN also collaborates with the European Social Observatory (OSE) which provides a cross-country analysis of the issues described by the Group. This report is shared with the European Commission to inform the next cycle of policy analysis and recommendations of the European Semester as well as with member states representatives. The Group members are encouraged and supported to meet national government representatives in their countries to discuss the findings.

Country
Recommendations

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
CROATIA	Ensure ongoing support to civil society organisations in the provision of quality care. In order to ensure quality, promote the standardisation of care through developed and detailed quality standards for children's services.	Adopt clear and targeted strategies to continue the process of deinstitutionalisation for persons with disabilities, while establishing mechanisms to monitor existing institutions and accommodation services in general, with special focus on inspection of family homes for the elderly.	Develop a national homelessness framework and strategy accompanied by adequate resources. The strategy should clearly define homelessness, ensure sufficient capacity in homelessness shelters, develop programmes for the homeless aimed at independent living and inclusion in the labour market, and provide resources to support young people leaving care to remain in accommodation until the age of 26 when necessary.
CZECH REPUBLIC	Develop a support network of social services for families with social and educational needs and those at risk of having their children taken into care.	Accelerate the development of legislation for integrated social and health care services. Challenges related to population ageing including long-term care services capacities should be considered in these developments.	Accelerate the development of a basic legislative framework for social housing, including a clear division of responsibilities between the national and local levels, a definition of groups at risk of losing housing, and tools to prevent and address homelessness.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
DENMARK	Ensure a national focus on gathering knowledge and data on the lifecycle trajectory of children in care outside of the home, with a focus on educational achievement and employment.	Ensure a national focus on monitoring the provision of quality home care for older people. Monitoring should ensure that quality support is provided where needed so that older people can be cared for at home.	Make sure there is a stronger focus on education and labour market integration in efforts supporting homeless people. Moreover, ensure data is collected on the placement of homeless people and their ability to maintain the housing placement they receive through the Housing First approach.
ESTONIA	Implement a national alternative care regulation to address differences in implementation at municipal level.	Improve integration between the social welfare and healthcare sectors to create a shared long-term care system.	Introduce a system for monitoring the quality and impact of policies aimed at preventing homelessness. Complement this with financial support for municipalities to better equip them for service provision and social housing renovation.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
FINLAND	A national social and health care reform is needed for the restructuring of services aimed at children, young people and families at regional level. Municipalities should be granted additional national funding to finance universal services (school, day-care), as local demand keeps increasing.	Ensure greater flexibility in the development of housing policies, including more elderly-friendly housing services. Instead of legislation directed at single services, community care should be promoted.	Ensure the continuation of funding of "Housing First" programmes and NGO activities targeted at supporting homeless people with an extension of these programmes to smaller municipalities to address hidden homelessness.
GERMANY	Ensure the federal government eliminates the separation of administrative responsibilities between sectors according to article 35a SDG VIII and implement inclusive regulation for all children and young people within the Youth Welfare System.	Ensure local authorities should play a strong role in planning and coordination of long-term care services. To date, some federal states have a binding mandate to include long-term planning in their regional care laws. The German Federal Government could strengthen this obligation, e.g. by adding the responsibility for local social planning in article 17 SDB I (Social Code Book I).	Ensure, due to raising homelessness figures, every municipality establishes a special administrative unit for the prevention of housing evictions. This unit should bring different stakeholders working on housing support together to implement a local integrated approach based on social planning.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
GREECE	The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should introduce an Action Plan to increase the number of foster families and thus reduce children's institutional care. This should also ensure the development of local services and training of professionals to support families and prevent unnecessary institutionalisation of children. Quality standards based on internationally recognised child protection guidelines for alternative care should be introduced and used to monitor and evaluate placements, map residential and foster care and improve procedures.	Develop regulatory frameworks and quality standards for the provision of LTC including public, private organisations and NGOs. The framework should include the legal recognition of older person's carers, support for informal carers, a coordination mechanism to link the different long-term care structures and agents for better quality monitoring.	Develop a national database which will be systematically updated so that the homelessness situation can be better monitored and therefore help to develop adequate homelessness policies and services.
IRELAND	Address child poverty, childcare and children's support, ensuring a focus on staffing and waiting lists for placing children into care, and for children who do not have an allocated link to a social worker. In particular, those with disability and mental health needs.	Increase the availability of home care hours for those that require it. This would allow for greater choice for people requiring some level of care and reduce reliance on residential care. This should not push cost on to the care recipient as older people and those with disabilities are at a greater risk of poverty and pushing care costs may make the choice to receive care in their homes prohibitively expensive.	Ensure comprehensive data collection on homelessness. Currently the statistics on homelessness are underreporting the true scale of the problem, with the exclusion of a number of key groups (prisoners, women and children in domestic violence shelters, those in direct provision even after their refugee status has been confirmed, street sleepers etc).

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
ITALY	Establish a strategic plan which ensures both structural reinforcement of social services and integration between relevant public services and the third sector to support families and children.	Stop financing large residential centres for people with serious health problems and focus investment instead in apartments and small housing communities to promote autonomous life, incentivise personal relationships, favour the maintenance of cognitive functions and encourage links with the immediate community.	Adopt shared and uniform procedures to standardise and fulfil the right to housing and to reduce discrimination. This should also ensure the integration of public housing with other services (social, welfare, health and employment).
LATVIA	Clearly define national common standards of child welfare. These standards should also include housing, one of the biggest challenges for young people after out-of-home care.	Improve integrated social and health services and the distribution of responsibilities for long-term care, especially for dealing with people affected by dementia as it is not yet defined who should take care of planning their care process.	Formulate an official definition of homelessness and a national housing and homelessness strategy accompanied by funding to address the housing shortage.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
MALTA	Develop more outcome-related measures in child and family services to promote the accessibility of support services for parents of children in care and increase the possibility of children returning to their families. More generally, improve the evaluation of family support provided in their own homes.	Community care needs to be a priority investment. The budget allocated to these services might not be enough to ensure that they meet the specific needs of older adults to stay in their own homes.	Continue developing care plans that complement social housing allocations with support promoting labour and social mobility.
THE NETHERLANDS	Invest in nationally funded prevention programmes to prevent children from being taken into care. Increased investment should support municipalities in their task to both prevent the need for care, and where care is required ensure that it is of the highest quality.	Improve coordination and cooperation between professionals working within different legislative frameworks, ensuring access to care, support and information for people in need of long-term care, and training for local authority assessment officers to fulfil their duty.	Upscale the "The Young Homeless Action Programme 2019-2021", ensuring that it retains its integrated approach and partnership across all agencies involved.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
ROMANIA	Increase coverage and quality of children's social services and access of vulnerable young people to integrated community services that support their development of digital, social, and vocational skills to improve their access to the labour market.	Develop a comprehensive and inclusive long-term care strategy which provides, regulates and ensures quality care options in the community or specialist settings alongside a continuum of care. This includes enabling vulnerable individuals to continue living in their homes, healthy aging and quality end-of-life (palliative care) in care and nursing homes.	Develop integrated strategies to ensure access to permanent supported housing, social and healthcare support services. Identification of risk and protective factors to prevent episodes of homelessness for at-risk populations and support state and community partners to improve their response to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
SLOVENIA	Ensure the ongoing funding of preventative social programmes aimed at supporting families and children in care. These programmes should work in unison with existing services provided by public social services.	Develop specific legislation and dedicated policy frameworks which address the issues of long-term care, with such legislation seeking to meet the growing demand for quality long-term care options.	Ensure the collection of disaggregated data on the scale of homelessness. This data should inform a comprehensive housing policy which supports the regulation of housing at local level. Within this policy, special attention should be paid to addressing the long-term challenges of homelessness.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
SPAIN	Establish a state pact for children and update the strategic plan for childhood and adolescence to include the necessary resources including reinforcing family support services, the role of municipalities in detecting risks, improving child protection with a focus on prevention, and a law of protection addressing violence against children.	Address obstacles impacting the implementation of the personal autonomy and dependency law, including budget contribution, waiting lists, imbalanced co-payment, lack of emergency palliative care. Also, standardise the portfolio of home care services across the country.	Advance coordination of social and housing services in public administrations e.g. by integrating social workers in housing services.
SWEDEN	Based on the social services act review, future legislation for children and families should lead to changes that allow social services in municipalities to provide more proactive preventive interventions and support work without the need for bureaucratised demands and lengthy working methods.	Implement a programme of support for staff training and qualifications development to improve continuity of care in long-term care.	Develop a comprehensive housing reform that on the one hand provides clarity in areas of responsibility between municipalities and central government, and on the other, addresses the persistent problem of availability of affordable and adequate housing.

	Child poverty, childcare, children's support	Long-term care	Addressing homelessness
United Kingdom (England)	A renewed policy focus on, and investment, in children, families and local communities in order to address deep rooted inequalities, particularly those from the most deprived areas and from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups, and bring about meaningful and lasting change.	A long-term plan which allows the vision for adult social care to happen and enables the system to deliver the principles of the Care Act. This plan should be accompanied by a long-term settlement including funding, staff, housing, technology, and an informed and engaged public, together with immediate funding to enable local authorities to meet their statutory duties and the increased costs due to COVID-19.	Ensure 90,000 units of social housing to be built each year to reduce poverty amongst families and bring down homelessness.

Concluding remarks

Reference Group on the European Semester

Public social services play a key role in the implementation of European initiatives at local level, in particular the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), and their contribution to the European Semester is vital for monitoring progress on implementation.

ESN Reference Group on the European Semester supports the European Commission in addressing key issues for social services at national level and contributes to the development of policies tackling poverty, growing inequalities and support for vulnerable people in our societies.

In 2020, the Group's analysis focused on three main issues for social services: supporting disadvantaged children and families, investing in long-term care to support people with chronic conditions, and integrated support to fight homelessness. Each country profile provides an overview of these issues and highlights specific policy recommendations from the perspective of local social services.

I. Supporting disadvantaged children and families to advance EPSR's principle 11

Evidence collected throughout the report highlights the need to reinforcing community and family-based care. Several members pointed to the need to establish common national standards or children support pacts, including mapping every agency working with children and families, reinforcing family support services, supporting municipal services in identifying needs and risk, and improving child protection with a focus on prevention in the community.

II. Investing in Long-Term Care (LTC) to advance EPSR's principle 18

Evidence presented by members in this report highlights a fragmentation between health care and social services hindering the implementation of community-based care for people with chronic conditions. To address this fragmentation, members highlighted the need to build policy coherence between the various levels of government, health and social care authorities and providers. Evidence has also demonstrated the need for funding to invest in integrated community care models rebalancing care towards prevention and supporting older people to stay in their homes for as long as possible by investing in innovative forms of support.

III. Promoting integrated support to fight homelessness to advance EPSR's principle 19

Members presented evidence of an increase in homelessness highlighted by the persistent lack of affordable housing supply and social housing. To address this absence, members emphasised the need to increase affordable housing supply and emergency shelter availability on the one hand, and implementing integrated approaches in preventing evictions and the provision of support for the homeless.

Looking forward

Based on this year's analysis, the following points where made which look to promote and raise awareness on the role of social services in the implementation of EU social objectives at the local level. Specifically, ESN and its members would like the European Commission to take into account the following points as particularly relevant.

Promote investment in Social Services to support Europe's recovery and resilience

Strong social services act as an effective safety net to protect the most vulnerable against the worse impact of any crisis. As with the current COVID-19 crisis, previous crises have also shown that public social services play a vital role in the economic recovery, through supporting the employment, health, and social inclusion of the most vulnerable in local communities across Europe.

Public social services play a key role in the implementation of European initiatives at local level, such as those supporting the implementation of the principles contained in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). To make this a reality clear references to social services must be prominent in EU funding guidance, in particular in REACT-EU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and ESF+.

Support national authorities to set up a Care Guarantee for All

Support for vulnerable people comes mainly from cash transfers while there is little investment in the provision of individualised and integrated personal social services. A cross-cutting element across the 20 principles of the EPSR is the provision of support to different vulnerable populations. Promoting a guarantee to care for those who need it is the first step to ensure quality in social services and social care and personalised support for those in need.

A Care Guarantee would complement European initiatives like the Recommendation on Investing in Children and the proposal for a Child Guarantee, the Youth Guarantee, initiatives on long-term care and the European Disability Strategy.

Supporting the workforce to improve quality

Quality of social services and social care depends greatly on its workforce who play a vital role in supporting those in need as we have seen during the current pandemic. There is a lack of standardisation of skills and training for social services and social care professionals and differences in their status across countries. The sector is facing a tremendous recruitment gap and there are issues with poor working conditions and funding, which have become exacerbated by the current COVID-19 crisis.

In light of workforce mobility and economic development, these issues should be jointly tackled at national and European levels; for instance by exploring the possibility of establishing the mutual recognition of social work qualifications across the EU to enhance support for social workers to work in other Member States, improve ratios, promoting accreditation and enhancing the attractiveness of the sector.

EUROPEAN SOCIAL NETWORK
ASBL

Avenue des Arts 3-4-5
8th floor
1210 Brussels
Belgium

+32 (0) 2 511 10 93
info@esn-eu.org
www.esn-eu.org