



INNOVATION IN INTEGRATED MINIMUM INCOME AND SOCIAL SERVICES



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 support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

For further information about ESN, visit www.esn-eu.org.

About this briefing

The Recovery and Resilience Funds and the future ESF + offer the opportunity to make a robust investment in public social services, and aspire to transform the care, social support and welfare models of our societies. The European Commission's recommendations to national governments have been focusing on well-functioning minimum income schemes to help support the most vulnerable in our societies. But with the evidence gathered over the years we are very much aware that minimum income needs to be combined in an integrated manner with access to quality social services to ensure the social inclusion of beneficiaries.

This briefing aims to address and explore the challenges outlined in an online European Social Services Conference session on minimum income and social services held in June 2021 to contribute to the debate on improving integrated income and social services programmes, a key aspect of our work at the European Social Network.

About the European Social Services Conference

The European Social Services Conference (ESSC) is the largest international forum for managers and senior professionals working in social services in Europe and beyond. Launched in 1992, the conference welcomes more than 600 participants every year that meet to discuss key issues related to the transformation of community-based social services and welfare in countries and communities across Europe.

For further information about the ESSC, visit www.essc-eu.org.

Published: January 2022

Copyright © The European Social Network 2022

The overall copyright of this publication is held by the European Social Network (ESN). The European Social Network retains editorial responsibility for any inaccuracy or inconsistency the report may contain.

ISBN:

Royal Library of Belgium | Legal Depot:

Innovation in Integrated Minimum Income and Social Services

Introduction

Beyond its health impact, the Covid-19 crisis has been an unprecedented turning point for social services systems across Europe. It truncated the positive path towards social innovation and quality improvement, which had been initiated to counteract the years of austerity that followed the financial crisis. The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated the need to transition towards more strengthened social services models, but also more dynamic and with greater capacity for adaptation. Likewise, it has led to the need for social protection measures, like the minimum income schemes, to be properly resourced and implemented.

Minimum income has been acknowledged as a social measure that supports the eradication of poverty and social exclusion. Indeed, Principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that “everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services.” Likewise, much of the debate on minimum income revolves around the implementation of the benefit linked to incentives that promote the participation of beneficiaries in the labour market.



“

“Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services”

Principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights

”

There is also a governance question, as minimum income is usually financed nationally while implemented regionally or locally. For instance, the implementation of the Vital Minimum Income (VMI) in Spain has required the adaptation of existing regional minimum income schemes as well as city-led minimum income programmes. The adaptation and coexistence of both measures brings an additional layer of complexity when it comes to coordination of benefits, services, and administrations, as well as the inter-operability of much needed IT tools and systems to manage the process.

This complex picture was the focus of conversation at a thematic panel held at an online European Social Services Conference session in June 2021. This briefing gathers the main thoughts and proposals for further work for a future community of practice on this matter.

Integrated Minimum Income and Social Services for Social Inclusion

A lesson learnt not just from the pandemic but after years of working on fighting poverty and social exclusion is that vulnerability is not an isolated factor. It is the consequence of multiple factors interacting with each other, hence social inclusion programmes should be multidimensional. Social inclusion strategies should ensure the right of beneficiaries to a minimum income that guarantees their life in dignity and is part of a system, which is flexible enough to adapt to multiple situations of vulnerability.



“We need to reinforce the diagnosis of situations of social vulnerability, improve the ways in which we identify people's needs, and put in place integrated responses to support every individual.”

Sara Buesa, Director of Social inclusion and Benefits, Employment Service, Basque Country, Spain



A second lesson learnt not only from the Covid-19 crisis but also the 2008 financial crisis is that vulnerability not only affects people in severe poverty or the populations with whom social services usually work. Instead, due to their multidimensional nature, people who have never been in situations of poverty and social exclusion have also become increasingly affected. This is a fundamental question that policy makers should consider when designing future social inclusion policies. “We need to reinforce the diagnosis of situations of social vulnerability, improve the ways in which we identify people's needs, and put in place integrated responses to support every individual,” says Sara Buesa, Director of Social Inclusion and Benefits, Employment Service, Basque Country, Spain

Labour market integration is key to breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion, hence promoting access to the labour market needs to be part of every social inclusion policy. This involves having a holistic and personalised social inclusion plan, which includes all services and benefits for the person or family. For this, inter-operability between systems is crucial. Inter-operability is very much linked to accessibility and process simplification, benefiting from the advantages of digitisation, but also offering the option of face-to-face services, simplifying language, and improving the usefulness of tools and systems for the professionals and end-beneficiaries.



“We need interoperability, but for this we should speak the same language. A common challenge across regions that must be addressed both at national and European levels.”

Javier Fernandez Presa, Head of Information Systems and Services, Regional Ministry of Equality, Conciliation and Social Policies, Andalucía, Spain



Innovation in Integrated Minimum Income and Social Services Programmes

As our societies move towards recovery in the aftermath of Covid-19, several national governments have underlined the role of social innovation in the transformation of social policies within the resilience and recovery plans that were submitted to the European Commission.

These innovations should be framed within the role of public social services as guarantors of rights, with the necessary participation of all actors involved, and the strengthening of social services systems at legal, financial and professional levels. The comprehensiveness of social inclusion policies and services are essential to ensure an integrated and community-based approach, which places the person at the centre of the support programme. Finally, a priority for these innovations should be to come up with the evidence to reinforce social protection systems.

The implementation of pilot projects should provide a framework for experimentation and the generation of evidence which will guide social innovation. These projects should allow for the testing of methodologies so that regular evaluation of the results points in turn to the design of social inclusion policies.

“It is important to implement pilot projects that allow to test a series of methodologies and interventions so that the results can be assessed and guide the further design of social inclusion policies,” says Esther Pérez Quintana, Deputy Director General for Inclusion, Spain.

Finally, innovating in different forms of collaboration and alliances is very much needed as well as difficult in the implementation of minimum income schemes. This process should involve all public administration levels, the third and private sectors, and the professionals who will be responsible for implementing these new processes in their daily work.

“

“It is important to implement pilot projects that allow to test a series of methodologies and interventions so that the results can be assessed and guide the further design of social inclusion policies.”

Esther Pérez Quintana, Deputy Director General for Inclusion, Spain.

”



Future Discussion

An interdependent and interdisciplinary approach from a holistic perspective is one of the main challenges in building social inclusion policies in such a way that they truly address the root causes of social vulnerability. Providing comprehensive and integrated social inclusion policies accompanied by an ongoing monitoring and evaluation of results should be a guiding principle for policy-makers to break the cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

Coordination between sectors and collaboration between professionals require a shared vision that should translate into shared tools, like an electronic social history, which should be driven by the development of the necessary regulatory frameworks to back them up. This includes knowledge management tools that help to collect and manage information and contribute effectively to the further design of social inclusion policies. Coordination is also about the implementation of participatory co-design methodologies based on which the different groups involved – policy-makers, professionals and people using services- collaborate in defining the characteristics of the services, their model of interaction and communication, and the way in which the information is presented and accessed.

Integrated minimum income and social services programmes should be approached from the perspective of social inclusion: as a universal right that provides integrated support through adequate financial provision, a guarantee of access to social services, and a strong component of social and labour market support.

Integrated minimum income and social services programmes should lead to the modernisation of existing social benefits regarding the simplification of the application process and easing access, the compatibility of the financial support with work, and ongoing evaluation of the measures to assess their effectiveness.

Simplification refers to the need to standardise and simplify language and to automatise the way in which the requested information to beneficiaries is input and assessed. Digitisation should support the accessibility of beneficiaries, for which it is crucial to integrate their views in the process.

Likewise, the compatibility of minimum income schemes with work is crucial to encourage beneficiaries to access the labour market. The debate here focuses on how minimum income may compare with wages and its gradual adaptation not to disincentivise labour market integration.

Innovation is very much related to the implementation of pilots and testing new forms of collaboration that allow generation of evidence, which being regularly assessed should help to further define the development of integrated minimum income and social services programmes.





info@esn-eu.org



[european-social-network](https://www.linkedin.com/company/european-social-network)



[@ESN_Social](https://twitter.com/ESN_Social)

EUROPEAN SOCIAL NETWORK ASLB
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