

Belgium

Each year, the ESN European Semester Group follows the European Commission's cycle of policy coordination with EU Member States known as the European Semester and produces a report based on a questionnaire completed by public social services authorities on the social situation in European countries with a particular focus on social services. This country profile identifies the most important common challenges facing social services as reported by ESN members in Austria, related to three principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and makes recommendations for the 2023 European Semester. The full report, with cross-country analysis of all the participating countries is available [here](#).

1. Children's services

1.1. Key issues

Answers to the children-related questions in Belgium's questionnaire focused on the national plan for the implementation of the EU Child Guarantee. The institutional complexity of Belgium poses a particular challenge as the document covers different policy areas at different levels of government. Instead, the action plan is an account of all existing or planned measures that can be placed under the heading of the EU Child Guarantee. Respondents regret that the drafting of the action plan did not lead to an overall, shared strategic vision or any new policy initiatives. Moreover, respondents highlighted that stakeholders and children in need were not involved in drafting the document, and there were issues with data collection. There is a lack of data to provide an in-depth analysis about the needs of vulnerable groups of children and their access to services covered by the EU Child Guarantee such as early childhood education and care, education and extracurricular activities, health care, nutrition, and housing.

1.2. Recommendations

An integrated and coordinated approach, involving all relevant stakeholders at all levels and areas of competence should be put in place to address child poverty and inequality, with special attention to children in need. Improving data management, especially administrative data of children in need, is essential for better children's care and protection. Data collection and management should be unified at national level.

2. Long-term care

2.1. Key issues

Belgium has multiple challenges and opportunities to improve homecare and community-based services. A main challenge is the lack of research on community-based end of life care. Research¹ has also shown that citizens from a lower-socioeconomic background make less use of available care and of palliative support. Another challenge is to shift the focus from providing specialist care to providing care in the community

¹ Lewis, J, DiGiacomo, M, Currow, D C, Davidson, P M., 'Dying in the margins: understanding palliative care and socioeconomic deprivation in the developed world,' Journal of Pain and Symptom Management, 42(1): 105-118 (2011)

and social support so that older people can maintain their independence. Finally, a third key challenge is the shortage of experienced and qualified staff in this sector.

2.2. Key Recommendations

The Belgian long-term care system needs reform and increased investment to address the challenges it is currently facing. Investment should focus on smart and innovative technologies while ensuring care providers and end users are included in the development and implementation processes. More experimental participatory research projects that explore both social innovation that bridges the gap of formal and informal care and enhances collaboration with elderly retired care experts.

More qualitative and quantitative data and knowledge exchange are also needed to improve the Belgian integrated long-term care system.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

There is a lack of affordable housing. The Federal Government is now developing a coordination unit with regional governments to take stock of the situation and the challenges to fulfil the housing objectives as formulated in the [Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#) ahead of the 2024 EU Belgian Presidency .

3.2. Recommendations

Develop a national inclusive policy framework and an action plan fulfil the objectives of the [Lisbon Declaration on the European Platform on Combatting Homelessness](#). In addition, data collection and management covering all elements of housing and support needs for homeless people should be improved and harmonised at national level.

A new coordination unit between federal and regional governments should be put in place, with a mandate to propose strategic changes to improve the situation of homeless people. This should be accompanied by funding to achieve those goals.



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