

Croatia

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

In Croatia, 20% of children live at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹. Although this figure is just below the EU average, data shows that these children are present in all parts of society including minimum income beneficiaries, national minorities, children in alternative care, children in families without employed adults or low-income families, single-parent families, families with many children and children with disabilities. Different profiles of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion indicate that there is a need for a more effective system of support for children in poverty throughout the country. The current support mechanisms focused on financial support for families in poverty are not sufficient to end the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage for vulnerable children.

1.2 Recommendations

A national legal framework should be developed with a wider definition of a child at risk of poverty or social exclusion focused on a preventative approach that guides local

authorities in the implementation of services for children. Steps should include identifying the needs of these children, drafting a plan of financial and non-financial support to create equal opportunities for growth and development, and monitoring and evaluating the results of the support provided.

2. Long-term care

2.1 Key issue

Respondents identified several challenges for social services in Croatia in providing residential-based as well as home- and community-based care for people with long-term care needs. Regarding residential services for older people, insufficient capacity and an uneven distribution of facilities across the country means that there are only long-term care accommodation facilities for 3.68% of older people, which is far beneath the EU average (5%). The development of community-based services has also been indicated as a pressing issue. Ensuring non-institutional support to allow older people to lead independent lives in their own homes is a challenge in sparsely populated rural areas that have a higher

¹ Report on the Work of the Ombudsperson for Children for 2021

share of the country's older population. Long-term care workforce shortages, in particular, nurses and caregivers, caused by internal EU migration due to higher levels of pay have only aggravated these challenges.

2.2. Recommendations

The government should implement the National Plan for the Development of Social Services 2021-2027 through legislative reforms that address the issues of insufficient capacity of residential services nationally and the lack of community-based services in rural areas, and improve the attractiveness of working in the long-term care sector with better salaries. This should also be accompanied by monitoring the implementation of the social protection objectives of the Croatian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), such as the development of services in local communities to prevent institutionalisation, improving the capacity of professionals to provide these services, and defining standards for monitoring quality in residential services.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

In 2021 there were 525 homeless people registered in Croatia. However, there are more than an estimated 2,000 homeless people who are not registered nationally. Of those registered, 418 were men and 107 women. Up to 35% have addiction problems and about 27% have mental health problems highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to combatting homelessness. Among the issues leading to homelessness, almost 69% state lack of funds to cover the cost of housing. Although the new Social Welfare Act, as part of the Croatian NRRP, includes new support for homeless people, such as guaranteed minimum income, many homeless people remain in temporary accommodation for over a year as local authorities are unable to provide them with social housing.

3.2. Recommendations

A social housing plan should be developed to determine and improve the available capacities of local authorities for planning and maintaining social housing, and improved funding for local authorities to increase their social housing stock including dedicated housing for homeless people.



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