

Estonia

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

Although Estonia scores relatively well on children's social inclusion indicators, a closer look reveals disturbing inequities in children's access to care. In particular, ensuring long-term care for children with disabilities or life-threatening and life-shortening conditions. One of the main reasons is the lack of integration of different services (education, social support, health care), which for these children, who require complex and multi-sectoral support, is particularly important. Although in the past there have been plans to reform social services to prevent their fragmentation, this work has been suspended due to successive crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.2 Recommendations

The collection of relevant data on children's needs and the implementation of effective tools to analyse this data is essential to improving the care and protection of children. This will require a reform of data protection legislation, but also the enhancement of the

competences of all professionals working with children, especially in social services.

2. Long-term care

2.1 Key issues

The provision of long-term care services is still lagging behind the needs of the population. Increasingly, people requiring support expect to receive home-based care. However, there is a shortage of community-based service providers and the private sector is often too expensive, while the situation is even more difficult in rural areas. Therefore, larger metropolitan areas are attracting increasing numbers of people in need, as it is easier to access well-designed services there. This phenomenon places a larger burden in larger cities, as financial resources do not grow in proportion to the number of people requiring support. In addition, the respondents' answers reveal that there is no generally accepted definition of community-based services, which results in difficulties in establishing appropriate standards for these services. It is also unclear within the public debate to what extent volunteers and NGOs should

replace the state in providing care services. Answering these questions requires a systemic rethinking of long-term care at national and local levels. Finally, a major challenge is the limited exchange of data between health and social services, leading to duplication of data collection and subsequent inefficient data processing, further straining limited human resources. Inefficient data management also means that data-driven decision making is not always possible.

2.2. Recommendations

Ensuring that all Estonian residents have access to good quality long-term care services requires prioritising home and community-based services over institutional placement for people in need. To this end, it is necessary to clearly define community-based services at national level and set appropriate standards for their operation. Particular attention should be paid to the provision of such services in smaller towns and rural areas.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

Both the European Commission's analysis and data provided by the respondents show that Estonia does not face a significant homelessness problem. Homeless shelters and social housing are available to all those in need. Lunch distribution points and food banks operate efficiently. Food sharing programmes are also developing. However, this positive picture may be misleading, as there is a lack of comprehensive data on housing problems, especially in smaller towns and rural areas. Another problem raised by respondents is the lack of cooperation in designing support between larger and smaller municipalities. The latter often lack adequate services and competences, which result in constant migration of homeless people to larger cities.

3.2. Recommendation

Collecting and effectively managing data on homelessness would facilitate evidence-based services design for homeless people.



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