

Ireland

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. Main challenges

Access to affordable, full-time and quality childcare remains difficult for families in Ireland. In terms of percentage of GDP, the Irish state invests the least amount in early years of any developed country.¹ The lack of public investment has led to prohibitive childcare costs and a lack of availability of places. In fact, with average fees of €186.12 per week for full-time childcare, parents in Ireland pay the highest childcare fees from take-home pay in the European Union. The lack of access and high childcare costs is hindering overall efforts to reduce child poverty and maintaining barriers to female labour market participation.

According to respondents, there has not been enough practical action to alleviate the challenges faced by young people or families in Ireland in trying to access childcare. The 2022 budget did not provide sufficient funding for families to offset the prohibitive childcare costs and the lack of places in childcare facilities.

1.2. Recommendations

Significant national investment is required to improve access to childcare for families. Creche and kindergarten facilities need to be subsidised by the national government to a level comparable with other European countries such as Denmark, where government subsidies cover 70% of childcare costs and for parents with a low income, pay zero to 25% of costs.

2. Long-term care

2.1. Key issues

Despite a positive reduction in the number of people waiting for home-care support in Ireland, from 9,000 at the start of 2020 to approximately 5,800 at the end of 2021, challenges remain in the provision of affordable and quality long-term care. While the government has provided an unprecedented level of funding for the provision of home-based and residential long-term care services, there are not enough workers to deliver these services – with recruitment and retention being the key issue. In addition, providers are faced with increased operational costs.

¹ https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/benefits-and-wages/Net%20childcare%20costs%20in%20EU%20countries_2019.pdf

Without urgent government intervention, nursing homes will reach a crisis point where the capacity to meet care needs is put under extreme pressure. Smaller providers in particular are under sustained threat, operating within a very difficult operational and cost environment.

to guide government housing policy and intervention design, currently lacking in Ireland.²

2.2. Key Recommendations

There is an urgent need for the Irish Government to recognise the unsustainable pressures present in home care and make available dedicated state funding to tackle the challenges in recruiting and retaining staff.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

Homeless figures remain high in Ireland. As of March 2022, there were 9,825 individuals reported as homeless by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. However, this figure does not reflect the true scale of homelessness as it only captures people who used local authority-managed homeless accommodation. The rising cost of living will likely have a huge negative impact on some of the most vulnerable households. Furthermore, the lack of housing stock remains a key issue in addressing the high level of housing needs. As a result, there is a continued reliance on the use of hotels to house families, and single people are remaining long-term in emergency accommodation.

3.2. Recommendations

A concerted effort needs to be made to match social housing expansion to need taking account of factors like house size and location. A Nordic approach to counting homelessness and how this data is used should be adopted



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2 NBO Housing Nordic (2020) 'Affordable Housing Models in the Nordic Countries 2020' [online] Available from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a99206bee17593d9ef5cceb/t/5f609207aed573278ae41bc4/1600164570274/NBO+%E2%80%93+Housing+Nordic_Housing+models+in+the+Nordic+Region.pdf