

Latvia

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

The current main challenge facing Latvia today is to ensure that all children have equal access to social services and care facilities. This is particularly important for children with disabilities. Although relevant legislation has been adopted to guarantee non-discrimination for children with special needs to access social welfare services and schools, this legislation is not properly implemented. Several policy documents have also recently been developed in this area, including the draft of Children, Youth and Family Policy Guidelines 2021-2027. However, this has not been followed up with funding, making it impossible to implement it. The situation is particularly difficult for children with disabilities in alternative care, among whom the school dropout rate is the highest of all children.

1.2. Recommendations

The implementation of laws and policies regarding children's equal access to education and social services should be closely monitored. In particular, the introduction of any new

legislation in this area should be accompanied by the channelling of appropriate funding to adapt services as well as childcare and school facilities to the requirements of children with special needs.

2. Long-term care

2.1. Key issues

Better coordination between social services and health care remains the most serious challenge for long-term care in Latvia. Fragmentation of long-term care services means separate funding sources, facilities and staff. There is a lack of vision and political will to overcome these divisions, and people with long-term needs continue to be negatively affected. At present, there are plans to set up health service points in social services' long-term care facilities, which would protect against hospital placements of people for whom on-site medical support would suffice. But this is an ad hoc solution, not followed either by allocating adequate funds for the medical staff who would operate these points or considering how they could be integrated with other services.

2.2. Recommendations

Investment in human resources, including the development of training programmes for staff to work at the intersection of the two sectors is required to improve coordination between social services and health care. This should be followed by adequate funding to recruit and retain suitable professionals.

3. Support for homeless people

3.1. Key issues

There is a lack of affordable social housing in Latvia, resulting in a constant level of homeless people in Riga. This is to be countered by the introduction of the operational programme Housing First to identify the needs of homeless people and design an individual support path for them. The pilot period is expected to last up to 15 months and involve about 60 individuals. However, it should be noted that this is a piecemeal solution. The country lacks a comprehensive strategy against homelessness, including documents providing an official definition of homelessness and analysing it as a wider social problem.

3.2. Recommendations

The development of a national housing strategy that aims at reducing homelessness with clear indicators, targets and deadlines is a necessary foundation for the permanent eradication of homelessness in Latvia.



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