



Connecting
Social
Services
to Europe

European Semester 2019

Recommendations
European Analysis



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“The Pillar – and Europe’s social dimension as a whole – will only be as strong as we allow it to be. This is a joint responsibility and it starts at national, regional and local level, with a key role for social partners and civil society. Therefore, while fully respecting and embracing the different approaches which exist across Europe, we all now need to turn commitments into action. Europeans deserve nothing less.”

Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, Proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, November 2017

The European Social Network (ESN) is the independent network for local public social services in Europe. It brings together the organisations that plan, finance, research, manage, regulate and deliver local public social services, including health, social welfare, employment, education and housing. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

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About this report

This report brings together the analysis conducted by the members of ESN's Reference Group on the European Semester, which represents 24 EU Member States. The report illustrates the social situation according to social services in these Member States and across Europe, with recommendations for the 2019 European Semester cycle.

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Reference Group on the European Semester

The European Social Network (ESN) is the leading network for public social services in Europe. Social services are responsible for the provision of support for vulnerable people to promote their independence and well-being. This includes supporting families, homeless people, adults with disabilities, children at risk of harm, and older people.

Public social services in Europe usually operate within local or regional authorities where they manage, plan and provide services to users. They are often far removed from the policy-making process at European level, but ESN bridges this gap through its Reference Group on the European Semester (hereafter 'the Group').

The Group includes one representative, from national associations of social services directors, social services in regional and local authorities, and national associations of social services professionals. (See full list in acknowledgments)

Set-up in 2014, the Group aims to share awareness of issues social services face at local level, provide policy recommendations to the European Commission on how these issues can be tackled, and raise the profile of social services in European policy-making.

Methodology

Each year, the Group follows the European Commission's cycle of policy coordination with the Member States known as the European Semester.

The Group members do this by completing one tailored questionnaire per country prepared by the ESN Secretariat. In 2018, the Group represented 24 countries:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- the Netherlands
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- UK (There is one representative from England and one from Scotland. Their analysis is brought together into one UK profile)

The questionnaires focus on the country reports of the European Commission, the phase of the European Semester where the social and economic conditions in each member state are analysed. The questionnaires also cover important social policy areas for social services which may have been missed in the European Commission's analysis

The questions vary per country to take into account key issues highlighted by the European Commission, or relevant reforms taking place, but follow the same structure of themes:

- Social services quality and governance
- The employment of vulnerable people and coordination between social and employment services
- Housing and homelessness
- The role of EU funding in promoting social services
- Young people: early school leaving and youth (un)employment
- Children's services: poverty and social inclusion, child protection and community care, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
- Older people: long-term care
- People with disabilities and people with mental health problems: social inclusion, development of community care services
- Other vulnerable groups: migrants, Roma and other minorities.

Annual Meeting of the Reference Group

Each year the Group meets with officials from the European Commission. In 2018 the Group met with European Commission officials on 28-29 June¹ after drafting their questionnaire contributions.

The meeting gives the opportunity for the group members to discuss in person some of the issues raised in their questionnaires and their views on the European Semester cycle with officials from the European Commission. It also provides Group members with the chance to engage in mutual learning with each other, by discussing common social issues in their countries.

The report

Outcomes of the meeting and the analysis provided by the Group in the questionnaires is collected into a report put together by ESN. This annual report contains individual country profiles and policy recommendations based on the input of the Group, with 24 countries represented this year.

ESN also collaborates with the European Social Observatory (OSE) who provides cross-country analysis of the issues described by the Group.

This report is shared with the European Commission to feed into the next cycle of policy analysis and recommendations of the European Semester.

Introduced in 2010, the European Semester is the cycle through which the European Commission coordinates the macro-economic and social policies of the Member States.

It follows an annual cycle:

- The Annual Growth Survey² issued in Autumn sets out general economic and social priorities for the EU.
- Individual Country Reports³ are issued in Winter for each Member State (except Greece) to provide in-depth analysis of the social and economic state-of-play.
- National Reform Programmes and Stability/Convergence Programmes⁴ are presented by the Member States in Spring to outline specific policies each country will implement to address economic and social priorities.
- The Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs)⁵ are issued in Summer by the European Commission to provide tailored policy guidance to each Member State.

The economic goal of the European Semester is to monitor macro-economic imbalances to avoid excessive government debt and promote economic growth. For the social aspects of the European Semester, the aim is to promote social inclusion, according to the objectives outlined by the European Commission's social policy initiatives, especially the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

The European Pillar of Social Rights

The EPSR aims to deliver new and more effective rights for citizens through 20 key principles.⁶ Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, announced the EPSR in his 2015 State of the Union speech⁷ and it was jointly signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017.⁸

Over half of the principles directly relate to the work of social services including support to children, inclusion of people with disabilities, long-term care and housing. However, the principles are not legally binding and are more aspirational in nature.

Mainstreaming the EPSR principles into the European Semester policy analysis and guidance is one key method for its implementation.

This has been achieved in the 2018 country reports by benchmarking the Member States against 12 separate indicators taken from the European Commission's social scoreboard, as outlined in Tabel 1.

For each indicator, each country is given a ranking from 'critical situation' to 'best performers' based on their performance relative to the other Member States, and weighted for recent changes in performance.

The Group's analysis of the European Semester in 2018

During the 2018 meeting the Group made the point that the social scoreboard incorporated into the European Semester country reports omit several EPSR principles important for social services, especially:

- Principle 11. Child poverty, including children in child protection.
- Principle 17. The social inclusion of people with disabilities
- Principle 18. The provision of long-term care and community-based services
- Principle 19. Support to homeless people and access to social housing

This creates a risk that these issues will be overlooked by national governments when they come to act on the European Commission's policy analysis. As illustrated in the country profiles of this report and the cross-country analysis, these are issues that are having significant impact on people's quality of life and deserve greater attention from policy-makers at European and national level.

The Group also found that too often the policy analysis and recommendations from the European Commission take a narrow view of social inclusion.

Firstly, employment is a key feature in the social aspects of the European Semester analysis and recommendations. With unemployment rates now at 8.1% in the EU,¹⁰ initiatives to promote employment must focus on more vulnerable people who face multiple long-lasting barriers to the labour market such as a lack of adequate education and training, housing, health issues, indebtedness, providing care for family members and children, and substance abuse. In cases like these, activation measures are not enough, with greater coordination required between employment, health, education and social services for more holistic strategies that can help them find and retain employment.

Secondly, many important factors for social inclusion beyond employment are not given adequate attention in the European Semester. For people with disabilities, migrants, Roma, and other vulnerable people, their social inclusion is primarily measured by their employment rate. However, access to education, healthcare, housing, and adequate benefit levels are crucial factors for their social inclusion.

Thirdly, the Group have found that the Country-Specific Recommendations often focus too much on economic and financial issues, with limited attention on the social dimension, this was particularly the case in 2018 for Denmark and the Netherlands. The Country-Specific Recommendations are a call for the Member States to prioritise an issue and act on it. Where social priorities such as those in the EPSR are not included, the importance placed on them by the Member States will be jeopardised.

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market	Early leavers from education and training
	Gender employment gap
	Income quintile ratio
	At risk of poverty or social exclusion rate
	Youth NEET rate
Dynamic labour markets and fair working conditions	Employment rate
	Unemployment rate
	GDHI per capita growth
Social protection and inclusion	Impact of social transfers on poverty reduction
	Children aged less than 3 years in formal child care
	Self-reported unmet need for medical care
	Individuals' level of digital skills

Colour Coding						
Best performance	Better than average	On average	Good but to monitor	Weak but improving	To watch	Critical situations

This cross-country analysis has been drafted based on input from 25 questionnaires filled out by the members of the Group from 24 EU countries and identifies eight broad policy areas:

1. Quality of services (Early Childhood Education and Care in particular)
2. Long-term care and the development of community Care
3. Poverty and social exclusion
4. Homelessness and housing exclusion
5. The social inclusion of people with disabilities
6. The social inclusion of migrants
7. Labour market integration
8. The role and usage of EU funds

Drawing on the main developments in the above policy areas, clusters of countries have been identified with similar trends: overall positive developments, mixed developments and finally, overall negative/static developments. The primary challenges facing social services in each policy area have been identified with the key findings summarised. More in-depth information on the issues within each country are available in the country profiles.

In addition to the questionnaire, the Group members were asked to assess whether their countries are close or far from achieving the key principles and rights contained in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

Quality of services

Ensuring the quality of social services (for example capacities and coverage within a country) is a key issue stressed by all the national Group members.

Positive developments
Italy
Poland

In Italy, the last Budget Law earmarked a significant amount of funding to improve social services infrastructure, a prerequisite for effective implementation of anti-poverty measures such as the financial benefit Reddito di Inclusione (REI). In Poland, a bill has been proposed on establishing Social Services Centres. In accordance with the new law, new social service facilities will be created in all Polish municipalities and, hopefully, these services will be better coordinated.

Mixed developments
Belgium
Croatia
Germany
Estonia
Portugal
UK (England and Scotland)

In these countries, new potentially positive measures have been introduced but it is unclear to what extent they will be effective. For instance, in Belgium, a recent decree on local government foresees the merging of the local Public Centres for Social Welfare in Flanders with local authorities, with a view to improving the efficiency and accessibility of service provision. However, with the centres under the municipalities there is a risk that the decision-making process may become more politically complex and slow. Moreover, the decree only applies to Flanders thus potentially increasing further territorial differences in the provision of services.

Negative or static developments
Austria
Czech Republic
Finland
Lithuania
Romania

Negative or static developments are due to several factors, including budget cuts or the inadequacy of funds (e.g. in Austria, Lithuania and Romania) and regional disparities in the availability and quality of services

(e.g. in Croatia and Lithuania). Other factors include the lack of coordination between social, employment and healthcare services or an unclear distribution of competences (e.g. in Finland, Germany and UK (England)) and the lack of an adequate and skilled social services workforce, also due to low wages (e.g. in Lithuania).

Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

Many Group members highlighted the importance of ECEC in their reports. What emerges is a number of key factors limiting the effectiveness of ECEC, including: financial constraints (e.g. in the Czech Republic, Germany and Ireland); the lack of a skilled workforce or staff shortages (e.g. in Germany and Ireland); the limited quality of the services (e.g. in Ireland); and limited access to and availability of childcare facilities, also due to high fees (e.g. in Poland, Slovakia and UK (Scotland)).

Positive developments
Bulgaria

Bulgaria is the only country where positive developments are clear. Following new legislation passed in 2017, the enrolment of children over four years in kindergartens in Bulgaria was made mandatory.

Mixed developments
Czech Republic
Germany
Poland
Portugal
UK (Scotland and England)

Mixed developments are apparent in a number of countries. For instance, in Scotland, the expansion of free early learning provision from 600 hours to 1,140 hours per year by 2020 is among the priorities

of the Scottish government. The measure concerns all three and four-year-olds plus eligible two year-olds. However, doubts have been expressed as to the effectiveness of the reform. According to Audit Scotland, it should have been planned better since the provision of 600 free hours was already challenging given current capacities.

Negative or static developments
Ireland
Slovakia

In Ireland, staff shortages and a lack of state funding are forcing childcare facilities and creches to reduce their intake of babies and toddlers under two years of age, obliging parents to turn to unqualified and unregulated childcare options. Furthermore, the implementation of an affordable childcare scheme is currently blocked.

Long-term care and the development of community care

The provision of long-term care to people with chronic issues is a key responsibility of social services, and they face increasing pressure on long-term care systems due to an ageing population. Furthermore, the transition from institutional to community-based care is a challenging and long-term process for improving the social inclusion of older people, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, and children at risk of harm.

Positive developments
Bulgaria
Lithuania
The Netherlands
Portugal
UK (Scotland)

In some cases, new legislation or new strategies are being introduced and implemented to promote health and social care integration (e.g. in Bulgaria, Portugal and UK (Scotland)), including joint needs assessments (e.g. in Bulgaria and Lithuania), and integrated funding systems. In Bulgaria, the deinstitutionalisation process is progressing, assisted by the creation of support networks and home-like residential services for children. A National Long-term Care strategy was adopted in January 2018, envisaging an integrated approach to long-term care, including funding. The reform is based on a thorough assessment of the needs of adults with disabilities and older people, identifying gaps in services (including day centres) across the country.

In Portugal, important progress has been made in the deinstitutionalisation of people with mental health issues. Initiatives undertaken include a reduction of beds in psychiatric hospitals (and the closure of some of them), the inclusion of mental health care in the National Network of Integrated Continuous Care, and an increase of social facilities for psycho-social rehabilitation. In Scotland the integration of health and social care is two years into implementation, and initial evaluations indicate that improved outcomes are being achieved. Actions to increase the responsibilities of municipalities in the provision of quality long-term care services have been implemented in countries such as Lithuania and the Netherlands. In Lithuania, particular progress has been made with regard to children's services, through the creation of a centralised information system, the provision of training for foster parents and for regional and local officials responsible for the development of community services. In this country, the key role in the process of deinstitutionalisation is played by the municipal departments for children's rights and social services.

Mixed developments

Croatia
Hungary
Estonia

In Croatia, although efforts have been made, progress in deinstitutionalisation is not as fast as expected. That said, the number of community-based services is increasing supported by EU funds. In Estonia, there has been a plan to create 240 day-care and weekly-care places by 2018, yet the progress to date has been poor. However, considerable attention is being paid to the issue of deinstitutionalisation. A taskforce created by the government will propose a long-term care strategy at the end of 2018, with implementation expected to take place in 2021.

Two major factors have been limiting progress in the three countries:

1. Lack of consideration of the costs of care for people with severe disabilities (notably Hungary)
2. Misuse of funding to build facilities for people with mental health issues and disabilities (notably Estonia).

Negative or static developments

Austria
Belgium
Czech Republic
Slovakia

In Austria, the government has proposed adjusting existing family allowances to foreign nationals on the basis of their country of origin, who form an important part of the care workforce. This reduces the attractiveness of such jobs, potentially affecting the availability of care services. In the Czech Republic no progress has been made on social and health care integration with different funding systems and quality standards. In Slovakia, the latest Amendment to the Social Services Act included changes to the financing of social services and has maintained institutional care, rather than promoting more community-based services. In Belgium there is a lack of support for informal carers and community networks who could potentially provide more community-based services for people requiring long-term care. As a result, these vulnerable people become more isolated and require additional

support from social services.

Three main challenges can be detected in these countries, which limit progress in deinstitutionalisation and long-term care:

1. Lack of adequate funding - Slovakia
2. Lack of support for carers - Belgium, Austria
3. Lack of coordination between healthcare and social services - Czech Republic

Poverty and social exclusion

A number of measures aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion have been implemented in the countries analysed.

Positive developments

Italy
Latvia
Portugal
Slovenia

In Italy, as of January 2018 the coverage of the financial benefit *Reddito di Inclusione (REI)* has been extended and the amount of funding for large families has increased. Similarly, in Latvia, the Ministry of Welfare drafted a plan in May 2018 to improve minimum income support for people in need as well as the minimum state pension.

Mixed developments

Bulgaria
Spain

In Spain, the adoption of a National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion 2018-2020 is a positive step. However, the complex division of competences and responsibilities among different levels of government could limit its effectiveness. In order to avoid this, the Spanish Group member recommends giving more responsibilities to local administrations (the closest to people in need) and strengthening coordination between the various levels of governance involved in this policy area.

Negative or static developments

Austria
Estonia
Hungary
Lithuania
Romania

There seem to be two main problems likely to limit the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies in the Member States:

1. The low level of benefits or cuts to minimum income benefits (e.g. in Austria, Estonia, Lithuania),
2. The limited effectiveness of measures targeted at ethnic minorities, in particular Roma minority (e.g. in Hungary).

Homelessness and housing exclusion

The increasing severity and impact of homelessness and housing exclusion is prevalent in many countries across Europe.

Positive developments

Denmark
Latvia
Portugal
UK (Scotland)

Positive developments typically take the form of new investments in the housing sector, and the introduction of new legislation (e.g. in Portugal). For instance, in Scotland all local authorities are now required to draft a Strategic Housing Investment Plan, as part of the wider Scottish government Affordable Housing Supply Programme. The latter includes support for the building of 50,000 new homes to be delivered by 2020, of which 35,000 should be for social rent. In Portugal, according to the national Group member, the right to quality and accessible housing is on the political agenda and a 'new generation' of policies is in the pipeline. Among them, in April 2018, the First Right programme was approved by the Council of Ministers.

including intervention in several housing issues such as support to access to housing, affordable rental property, housing mobility for territorial cohesion, and a tax system encouraging long-term rental agreements.

Mixed developments

UK (England)

In England, the Homeless Act came into force in April 2018. The law gives new duties to local authorities to prevent homelessness of all families and single people, regardless of priority need. However, financial support from the central government to local authorities seems inadequate for implementation.

Negative or static developments

Belgium
Czech Republic
Germany
France
Hungary
Ireland
Romania
Slovakia
Sweden

A number of factors explain the negative or static trend in these countries, including insufficient social housing or low levels of investment in the sector (e.g. in Belgium, the Czech Republic, and Sweden), the rise in housing prices (e.g. in Belgium, Czech Republic and France), and the lack of cooperation between social services and the housing industry (e.g. in Germany). For instance, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia the notion of social housing is not sufficiently defined in any legal act; and consequently neither are the target group, the criteria for assessing entitlements, nor a policy strategy. In Hungary, the number of recipients of housing benefits has decreased following the decentralisation of this policy.

The social inclusion of people with disabilities

When it comes to the social inclusion of people with disabilities, there is notable variation between countries.

Positive developments

Denmark
Germany
Italy
Lithuania
Portugal
UK (Scotland)

Most progress is related to the improved inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market and to the provision of new benefits and services increasing their autonomy (especially by speeding up the deinstitutionalisation process). For instance in Scotland a voluntary employment support service - Fair Start Scotland - became operational in April 2018, with the aim to support 38,000 people with disabilities to find and retain employment. In the Scottish system, as well as in the UK in general, an important role is played by third sector organisations.

In Germany, the 2016 Federal Law on Participation (BTHG) - aiming at aligning services with the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - has reformed the benefits system and introduced a person-centred and rights-based approach to disability. This approach is comprehensive, aiming to increase the inclusion of people with disabilities in political, economic, social and cultural life and emphasises also the development of community-based services. Similarly in Lithuania, new guidelines for the organisation and provision of personal assistance services were approved in March 2018. The aim is to provide people with disabilities with personalised assistance thereby promoting their independence. In Portugal, a new benefit - Social Benefit for Inclusion - has been introduced, with a view to increasing the independence of people with disabilities and to accelerate the deinstitutionalisation process.

Mixed developments

Bulgaria
Czech Republic
Sweden
UK (England)

In England a new strategy aims to place one million more people with disabilities in the labour market within 10 years. However, the Group member from England claims this strategy is too narrow, insofar as fundamental aspects related to social care are not properly addressed. In particular, references to social care in the strategy are extremely limited. Consequently, policies and financial support to include people with disabilities in society (beyond the labour market) appear inadequate.

Negative or static developments

Belgium
Estonia
Ireland
Romania
Slovakia

A number of obstacles to the inclusion of people with disabilities in the labour market were highlighted by the Group members. First, there is a lack of adequate targeted measures such as personalised services to guide career pathways (e.g. in Romania). Second, there are difficulties in adequately linking employment with social benefits (e.g. in Bulgaria) and the inadequacy of benefits (e.g. in Estonia where benefits are too low and a complicated system makes access difficult). Third, in some cases there is a lack of adequate infrastructure to facilitate mobility (e.g. in Ireland and Romania). Fourth, in some member states the Group members have identified difficulties in offering adequate educational services to people with disabilities (e.g. in Belgium) and inadequate inclusion services for people with mental health issues (e.g. in Belgium). Finally, there is a lack of coordination between social and healthcare services (e.g. in Estonia).

The social inclusion of migrants

The integration of migrants and refugees into society is a complex and multi-dimensional issue, ranging from inclusion in the labour market and in the educational system to, more broadly, integration in society. A particularly urgent challenge confronting EU countries is the establishment of adequate services devoted to unaccompanied children. However most of the Group members have focused on the labour market integration of people with a migrant background, as they based their analysis on the information included in the European Commission's country reports where the focus is on employment.

Positive developments

Denmark
France
Finland
Germany
Sweden

Positive developments are apparent in most countries partly due to the reduction in the number of new arrivals, which has relieved some of the pressure on social services. Measures undertaken in these countries include the strengthening of integration policies and services or the creation of new services (Belgium, Denmark and Sweden), the introduction of innovative policy tools (e.g. in Finland), and increased coordination between stakeholders (e.g. in Germany and Sweden). In Denmark, the policy of having migrants first learn the language and afterwards access employment has been revised. In fact, this policy proved to be an obstacle to the labour market integration of migrants. Now, the two objectives are pursued simultaneously. Furthermore, Danish municipalities are now carrying out regular assessments of their integration strategies for bringing migrants and refugees into the labour market, and job centres are incentivised through bonuses to promote this.

In Finland, the national Group member welcomes the potential of Social Impact Bonds (SIB) to increase the employment rate of immigrants. This tool – whose advantages and disadvantages are being discussed at EU level – is an innovative method of contracting private sector organisations to improve social outcomes. The latter are rewarded on the basis of their capacity to achieve well-defined objectives. In Finland, there is an SIB project which aims to train 2,500 to 3,700 immigrants to prepare them for the labour market. In France, the decision of the government to halve the number of children per class in primary schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods could help improve the performance of pupils with a migrant background.

Mixed developments
Belgium
Italy

In Belgium, the funds provided to local authorities for the integration of migrants have been reduced, and the Flemish regional Integration Agency may be restructured due to a reduction in demand as a result of fewer migrants arriving. On the other hand, in the Walloon and Brussels regions an obligatory integration pathway for refugees has led to the strengthening of integration services. In Italy, the Law no. 47/2017 sets the ratio between guardians and unaccompanied children at 1:1. This said, while about 4,000 volunteer guardians have now been trained to take care of unaccompanied children, this number is not sufficient to achieve the target established by the law. Furthermore, foster care structures need to be reinforced.

Negative or static developments
Austria

In Austria migrants now receive reduced financial support while the budget for language courses, a fundamental pre-requisite for social and labour market integration of immigrants and refugees, has been cut by €105 million euros. In Ireland, attitudes towards migrants have recently worsened, making their inclusion in society more difficult.

Summing up, despite some progress, there are still a number of obstacles to the integration of refugees and migrants. These include language barriers, inadequate skills, lack of coordination among the stakeholders involved, difficulties in providing adequate support for education, and lower access to healthcare services than for nationals.

Labour market integration

Measures to enhance integration into the labour market, especially of the most vulnerable groups in society, have been the focus of recent actions undertaken in the Member States though trends vary from country to country

Positive developments
Bulgaria
France

In Bulgaria Centres for Employment and Social Assistance are having some success in the provision of services to the unemployed, and the unemployment rate in the country has been falling. These centres have a particular focus on young people, especially NEETs.

Mixed developments
Croatia
Denmark
Germany
Italy
Portugal
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia
Spain

Mixed developments have been reported in most countries. For instance in Croatia there are very few programmes targeted at the unemployed, and the focus is on financial support rather than on activation measures. However, the newly established 'Life-long Career Guidance Centres' have the potential to strengthen the link between the unemployed

(especially young people) and the labour market.

Negative or static developments
Belgium
Finland
Hungary
Latvia

Negative or static developments are clear in another group of countries, due to a number of factors. The most common limitations are first of all that the quality and quantity of employment services available (especially in relation to activation measures) are uneven (e.g. in Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy and Slovenia). Second, in many cases, employment and social services are not sufficiently integrated, or the creation of multi-disciplinary teams – fundamental when dealing with groups such as the long-term unemployed, young people, people with disabilities or people with addiction problems – is lagging behind (e.g. in Finland and Romania). Third, in some countries, employment services are significantly understaffed (notably, in Italy). Finally, in some cases budget cuts have affected active inclusion policies or the level of unemployment benefits and a 'punitive approach' (i.e. strong conditionality) has been adopted (e.g. in Finland and in Spain).

The role and use of EU funds

The importance of EU funds, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF), for social services has been stressed by almost all Group members. In particular, three positive aspects have been highlighted. First, this support makes it possible to implement innovative programmes and services (e.g. in Croatia, Denmark, France and Italy). Second, it makes it possible to create new services that increase accessibility or reach new users (e.g. in Belgium, Germany, and Latvia). Third, EU funds have been fundamental for the implementation of nation-wide reforms (e.g. in Bulgaria and Hungary).

Nevertheless, members have also pointed to four important limitations.

1. The complexity of the administrative procedures.
2. The lack of adequate assessment of the impact of the projects funded, and their sustainability over time.
3. There is little awareness within local social services of funding opportunities.
4. There needs to be further transparency in project management to limit the possibility of corruption.

Key messages from the cross-country analysis

This analysis has allowed us to identify the broader trends in each policy area. Some trends emerge in three policy areas. To start with, important progress has been made in most countries in the social inclusion of migrants and refugees. However, there has been a less positive trend in the quality of services, and in addressing homelessness and housing exclusion in most of the countries.

As far as the areas covered in this report are concerned, there are positive trends in Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia, whilst negative trends have been observed in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Romania and Austria. In Austria and Romania, the analysis shows that the situation is worsening in most policy areas considered: the social inclusion of people with disabilities, poverty and social exclusion, services quality. In the Czech Republic, areas of particular concern include the quality of services offered, homelessness and housing exclusion and long-term care and deinstitutionalisation. In Hungary, a particularly difficult situation emerges in the areas of labour market integration, poverty and social exclusion and homelessness and housing exclusion.

In general, policy developments are mixed for most countries. This demonstrates that whilst progress is being made in some areas, there remains a number of social policy areas where progress is lacking according to social services.

Progress by policy area			
Policy area/ progress	Overall positive	Mixed	Overall negative /no developments
Quality of services	2	6	5
ECEC	1	5	2
Long-term care and deinstitutionalisation	5	3	4
Poverty and social exclusion	4	2	5
Homelessness and housing exclusion	4	1	9
The Social inclusion of people with disabilities	6	4	5
The Social inclusion of migrants	5	2	1
Labour market integration	2	9	4

This table was created from the input provided by the Group members

The European Pillar of Social Rights: Achieving the principles

The Group members were asked to indicate the situation in their countries in relation to some of the key principles and rights contained in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) most relevant for social services. The table below provides an overview of their answers.

As the table shows, most countries for which information is available are closer to achieving the principles

related to childcare and support to children and unemployment benefits. In particular, most countries have strengthened the links between unemployment benefits and activation measures, except for Romania, where the design of unemployment benefits is still under-developed.

Conversely, most countries are further from achieving the principles on long-term care (notably, Central and Eastern European Countries) and, especially, the principle related to housing and assistance for the homeless.



Gaging progress against a selection of the EPSR principles		
Principle/ situation	Close	Far
11. Childcare and support to children	FI; FR; HU; PT; SE	AT; DE
13. Unemployment benefits	BG; EE; LV ; PL; SI	/
14. Minimum income	BE; DK;	BG
16. Healthcare	AT; CZ; DE; SK; UK	HR; FR; DE; IT
17. Inclusion of people with disabilities	ES	DK; NL
18. Long-term care	/	CZ; EE; PL; SI;
19. Housing and assistance for the homeless	HR	BE; FI; HU; IE; PT; RO; SK; SE; UK

This table was created from the input provided by the Group members

Note:

- in green, principles and rights that a significant number of countries are closer to achieving;
- in blue, principles and rights where achievement is mixed;
- in red, principles and rights that a significant number of countries are further from achieving.-(overall negative developments or lack of developments).

Country Abbreviations

- Austria - AT
- Belgium - BE
- Bulgaria - BG
- Croatia - HR
- Czech Republic - CZ
- Denmark - DK
- Estonia - EE
- Finland - FI
- France - FR
- Germany - DE
- Hungary - HU
- Ireland - IE
- Italy - IT
- Latvia - LV
- Lithuania - LT
- the Netherlands - NL
- Poland - PL
- Portugal - PT
- Romania - RO
- Slovakia - SK
- Slovenia - SI
- Spain - ES
- Sweden - SE
- United Kingdom - UK



Country Profiles

Budget cuts to social services are leading to the cancellation of social inclusion programmes. The initiative 'Aktion 20.000' for supporting 20,000 long-term unemployed people older than 50 has been cancelled.¹¹ In April 2018 a decision to cut funding for family counselling centres which have been in existence since 1974 may lead to half having to close. Furthermore, financial support to young people aged 16-18 in vocational education has been reduced by 50%, which may lead to a higher risk of drop-out. Many of these decisions are being challenged through legal appeals, with some of the decisions being repealed where they have been found in violation of the Austrian constitution.

Social services are under pressure to adapt to these budgetary cuts. According to OBDS social services must develop more community-based services and improve coordination with NGOs who can step-in where social services programmes have been cancelled.

Social services must develop more community-based services and improve coordination with NGOs

There is an inadequate redistribution of funds to manage new responsibilities at regional (Länder) level. The nursing rally (Pflegerereg) is the requirement for the costs of long-term care to be borne by the user and their family. It is being abolished with

the costs transferred to the regional states. The initial €100 million offered by the Federal Government to cover this is far below the envisaged €650 million cost for the regional states.¹² A new proposition totalling €444.7 million is being discussed.

The long-term care system faces an extra challenge in the recruitment of the workforce due to changes in family benefits. Many citizens from Eastern Europe are employed in the Austrian care system. In Austria child benefits are provided to residents even if their child is living in another country, and often forms an important source of income for these Eastern Europeans working in the Austrian care system. However, these benefits will now be linked to the cost of living in the child's country, which will lead to significant reductions in benefits for Eastern Europeans living in Austria.¹³ For example a child living in Poland would be eligible for only €78 compared to the current €150 per month whilst a child living in the UK would be eligible for €192 instead of €150.

The quality and affordability of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has been decreasing, especially in Upper Austria. At national level budget cuts have been leading to increased class sizes and fewer integration classes for children with disabilities. Furthermore, in Upper Austria a fee was introduced in February 2018 for the afternoon care of children two years below school age. The impact has led to 3,450 children being unsubscribed from afternoon care, with many kindergarten groups facing closure from a lack of children.¹⁴ The regional government's justification is that the fee is covered by a tax relief, but this is not the case for all families as those on low-incomes are not supported. For those earning less than €1,500 per month the saving is zero as they do not

earn enough to qualify for the tax relief.¹⁵

Proposed restrictions to minimum income schemes increase the risk of poverty for migrant families.

A new Federal Law makes German language proficiency at B1 level, or English language proficiency at C1 level, or proof of completion of Austrian compulsory education necessary to receive full support.¹⁶ If these criteria are not met, applicants may receive only €563 out of a possible total amount of €863 per month. Benefits will also be reduced significantly for the second child, with €216 per month for the first child, €130 for the second and €43 for additional

children.¹⁷ The tightened eligibility criteria to access minimum income may be in violation of EU laws on providing social assistance to asylum seekers.¹⁸

The social inclusion of migrants and refugees has been made even more difficult as the new Integration Act has been undermined by funding cuts. The law was to be primarily implemented through language courses for refugees and asylum-seekers. However, the budget has been cut by €105 million with an expected 30% reduction in the number of staff involved in training, and a reduced number of courses.¹⁹



Levels of housing deprivation continue to rise. The number of tenants experiencing severe housing deprivation reached 9% in 2017 compared to 5.5% in 2016.²⁰ In cities, rising housing prices and increasing demand is resulting in growing numbers of homeless people. For example, Brussels saw a 30% rise in the number of homeless people between 2014 and 2016.²¹ The actions of the national government on housing policy focus on renovation and developing renewable energy, but this provides insufficient support for those at risk of housing exclusion.

Greater investment in benefits and social housing is crucial to alleviate poverty. In its coalition agreement the Federal Government had pledged to raise benefit levels to the poverty threshold. However, the Federal Government has since abandoned this objective. VVOS and PPS SI state that massive investment in social housing and raising the benefit level to the poverty threshold are essential for combating poverty and reducing pressure on social services.

The centres for social welfare in Flanders will be integrated in the local authorities (communes) from 2019. As a result of a 2017 decree,²² the political and management administration of the Public Centres for Social Welfare (PCSW) will be integrated with local authorities from the beginning of 2019.

The re-organisation has the potential to improve efficiency, promote stronger social policy, and more accessible social services to citizens. However, according to VVOS there is a missed opportunity here as the decree does not require the PCSWs and local authorities to reorganise core tasks between them. Also, the organisations will remain two separate legal entities with separate governing bodies, which may result in some complexity when it comes to decision-making. The decree only applies to Flanders - not Wallonia, leading to further differences in how social services are organised within Belgium.

People with disabilities in Belgium face multiple barriers to inclusion. This starts from an early age, with insufficient arrangements made by mainstream education to support children and young people in schools. For example, teachers lack necessary training to support children with disabilities.²³

There is also a culture of seeing institutionalisation as the sole option for people with disabilities, leading to criticism that there has not been sufficient action to promote deinstitutionalisation.²⁴ There is currently no data collected on the number of people with disabilities in institutions nor is there a national plan for promoting deinstitutionalisation and the development of community care. Implementation of these measures is needed to promote more community-based services which can improve the social inclusion of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities face further barriers when it comes to labour market inclusion. The Belgian government fails to meet its own 3% quota for employing people with disabilities,²⁵ and private companies are not required to meet any legal quota. Furthermore, initiatives to accommodate people with disabilities into the labour market are mostly focussed on those with physical disabilities. There is insufficient flexibility for people with sensory impairments or learning disabilities.²⁶

Research carried out at local level demonstrates other obstacles to social inclusion faced by people with disabilities. A study in Ghent²⁷ found out that whilst most people with disabilities in the city were satisfied with their lives, an average of 20 to 25% were not (Table 1).

There is a lack of coordination between local, regional and national stakeholders for supporting the integration of migrants. The integration of migrants is a regional competence. In Flanders, this is managed by the Agency for Integration. Decisions made

at regional level by the Agency and others made at national level by the Federal Government have a strong influence on services provided locally.

For example, local social services send applications for right of residence on behalf of migrants to the Federal Government. This can be a time-consuming process and local social services must also pay a fee for this procedure that is difficult to have reimbursed later.

In the Walloon and Brussels regions, an integration trajectory service was made obligatory for all new migrants, leading to an increase in the integration services provided.

In contrast, in Flanders the Flemish and Federal Government have reduced support to local authorities for the integration of migrants leading to the cancellation of some local projects. Furthermore, the Flemish Government plans to restructure and reduce the work of the Agency of Integration, with the rationale that there are currently fewer asylum-seekers in need of integration services. This is leading to fears within local authorities' social services that there will be greater pressure on them to provide services for migrants.

There are promising examples of service coordination to integrate migrants locally. In the City of Ghent, the project 'refugee taskforce'²⁹ brings together the PCSW, civil society and other partner organisations to provide more coordinated support to refugees, demonstrating positive results:

- In 2017, out of 59 individuals and families, 53 found housing thanks to the support of 'buddies' who provided assistance during property searches.
- From October 2016 to December 2017, a total of 2,450 local people and refugees received the 'starters help' package which provides guidance for newly arrived migrants/refugees.

The City of Ghent was given the URBACT Good Practice "Refugee Solidarity" award for this project.

A reduction in projects offering routes into employment combined with negative incentives makes the integration of vulnerable people into the labour market challenging. The social services programme for supporting the employment of vulnerable people, 'Activa' contracts, which included reductions in social security contributions for employers and additional employee benefits, has been discontinued. This decision was made by the Flemish Government when it was granted competence for employment services.

The new temporary work experience programme 'Tijdelijke werk ervaring', which allows unemployed people to learn skills in the workplace, has a focus on achieving employment through a package of workplace learning tools which is less suitable for vulnerable people with whom social services work. The changes to these projects reduce the opportunities for social services to support vulnerable people in accessing the labour market and finding long-term employment. This situation is compounded by negative incentives in the form of restrictions on eligibility to unemployment benefits which penalise vulnerable people who require additional support.

There are shortcomings in the implementation of community-based services. There is a lack of support for informal carers and community networks to provide more community-based services for people requiring long-term care.³⁰ As a result, these vulnerable people become more isolated and require additional support from social services.

Table 1. Results of survey of people with disabilities in Ghent ²⁸
25% felt they lacked access to information
20% were very dissatisfied with the state of their home and living situation
23% felt strongly or very strongly that they were lonely

Despite increases in the minimum wage, minimum income and benefits, poverty is still high among vulnerable groups. Children at risk, older people, people with disabilities and Roma people still experience high levels of poverty. From 2016 to 2018, the minimum wage increased from 420 BGN (€215) to 510 BGN (€261),³¹ minimum income raised from 65 BGN (€33) to 75 BGN (€38),³² and minimum pensions increased to 200 BGN (€103), but they are still below the basic minimum income established by the national government which stands at 322 BGN (€165). Currently, 1.2 million retired Bulgarians receive a pension that is below the basic minimum income threshold.³³ Finally, monthly allowances for families with children have been raised (see table 1).

Roma children still experience high levels of poverty and lack of opportunities. The central government is currently focussing on promoting early childcare and addressing early school leaving. In 2017, new legislation established compulsory early childcare for all children from the age of four. The legislation has a three-year transitional period in which to undertake the assessment of needs for new infrastructure building and staff training. As a result of this new legislation, experts expect a positive impact on integration of Roma children and better opportunities for them in school. By the end of 2018, a specific sub-committee will start to analyse how to improve the use of EU funds to tackle the main issues faced by the Roma. This sub-committee will primarily focus on education and childcare, healthcare, housing and employment.

The deinstitutionalisation (DI) process is progressing and quality of social services for children is improving. At the end of 2017, only 14 institutions remained in Bulgaria³⁴ and all were for children aged 0 to 6.

Still, 400 children were accommodated in such institutions, mainly new-born babies with severe disabilities and from families at risk. Thanks to the integrated work of social and health services, these children spend short periods in such institutions before they are placed in foster families or adopted. In the meantime, 1,500 new foster families have been trained while 149 family-type accommodation centres, 36 protected homes and 9 day centres for social rehabilitation have been constructed.³⁵ Despite the positive evolution of the DI process, staff training and retention is still problematic, due to social services staff's low salaries. This issue is addressed in the draft of the new social services law due in October 2018.

Building on the successful DI process for children, the provision of quality long-term care is improving. The National Long-Term Care Strategy (2018-2022) envisages integrated measures for the provision of quality services for the long-term care of vulnerable people. An initial assessment of needs and the mapping of services have been conducted. Results show that there is a lack of support for people with dementia and older people with disabilities, therefore 74 new day centres should be built.³⁶ The EU Operational Programme 'Regions in Growth' has allocated €21.2 million to municipalities in need of the construction of six day care centres for people with disabilities and older people. Once construction has finished, new teams of professionals will be trained with the support of the European Social Fund (ESF). New services are expected to be operational by the end of 2022.

The disability reform did not deliver the expected results. The government published the draft of the new regulations³⁷ but the reforms were faced with protests from organisations representing people with

disabilities. Their main point of concern was the possibility of losing part of their benefits as a result of individual employability assessments. After the protests, the government started consultations with them to seek consensus on the reform. There is no significant progress on the reform to this date.

The Centres for Employment and Social Assistance have produced successful results, although there are still high numbers of early school leavers and people with low levels of education. Thirteen centres are currently operational and according to the National Statistical Institute (NSI) the number of unemployed people decreased by 16.3% in 2017. Unemployment has reached its lowest level so far: 6.2%.³⁸ Despite these positive results, 55% of unemployed people are long-term unemployed and 41.8% have low or no education.³⁹ In 2017, the Incentives of the Employability Act⁴⁰ focused on higher mobility of the workforce. Incentives are addressed to the long-term unemployed so that they can move to another city where jobs are available. They receive financial support for the move and accommodation. Families re-

ceive financial support for a period of time calculated on the basis of the type of employment and family income.

Mobile teams organised by the Ministry of Education successfully traced and reintegrated early school leavers.

The teams started in the 2017-2018 school year and traced and reintegrated into school 24,000 early school leavers. 4,000 of them left school again after two or three months but the rest continued at school⁴¹ Mobile teams operate at regional level and include social and educational experts, as well as experts from the municipalities. Further measures, such as an electronic system for registration of early school leavers are also foreseen to allow mobile teams to intervene as quickly as possible. This measure is expected to become operational at the beginning of the next school year.

Table 1. Monthly allowances for raising a child until graduation from high school, but not after the age of 20

See footnote ³²

	Year 2017	Year 2018
1 child	37 BGN (€19)	40 BGN (€20)
2 children	85 BGN (€43)	90 BGN (€46)
3 children	130 BGN (€)	135 BGN (€69)
4 children	140 BGN (€66)	145 BGN (€74)
4+ for every subsequent child	20 BGN (€10)	20 BGN (€10)



Croatia

Larger municipalities spend much more on social services per capita than others. The city of Zagreb spends almost €80 per resident, whilst the counties of Virovitica-Podravina, Medimurje, Varaždin and Krapina-Zagorje spend four to five times less per resident.⁴² Therefore social services available to residents vary significantly within Croatia as per table 1.

Inequality in social services is also reflected in the workforce. In smaller municipalities, 21% of staff who manage social policies are educated only to secondary education level, and lack opportunities for training.⁴³ Improving the quality of social services across Croatia requires better cooperation with NGOs, more skilled staff for securing EU funds,⁴⁴ and a more equitable distribution of funds to municipalities to enable smaller and more rural municipalities to provide higher quality and a wider coverage of social services.

Research reveals that many children experience severe material deprivation. This is especially true for Roma children⁴⁵ and poverty persists for 28.8% of young people after they enter adulthood.⁴⁶ To combat this it is essential that a network of local children's and family services is developed to tackle the complex needs of families (including health, social, education, financial assistance).

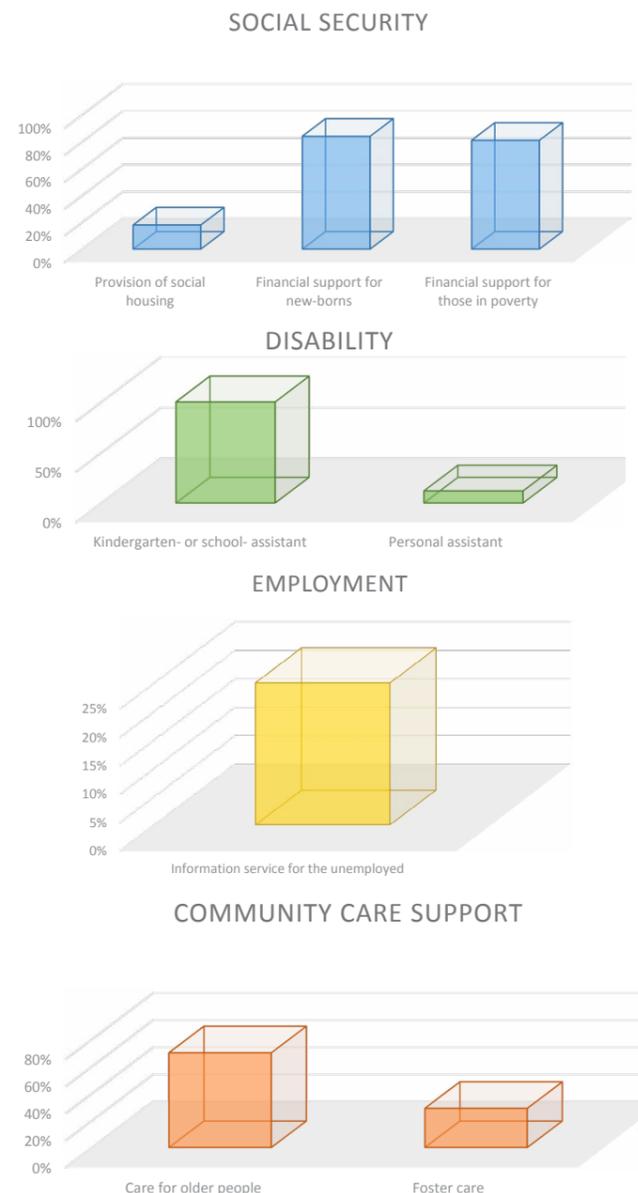
Vulnerable young people require greater support. Social services do not sufficiently provide support to young NEETs, and there is a lack of accurate data on the rate of school drop-outs. The Youth Guarantee scheme has had some success, but often benefits privileged young people. More vulnerable youth, such as those leaving care, often lack a social network, struggle finding adequate housing, and are unable to cover their costs of living with the low wages provided by entry-level jobs. This means they require greater support to benefit from the Youth Guarantee.

People with disabilities are at greater risk of poverty. Of 472,795 adults with disabilities in Croatia, only 4% are in employment and 63% have only primary school education or no education at all.⁴⁷ Whilst primary level education is making progress in including children with disabilities (90% of primary school age chil-

dren with disabilities are enrolled in schools)⁴⁸ this trend is not replicated further on. Only 53% of children with disabilities of secondary school age are enrolled in education. There is a lack of legislative frameworks supporting the inclusion of young people in higher education, and insufficient guidance on professional pathways.⁴⁹

People with disabilities receive tax relief set at national level, but policy-makers should place more importance on in-

Table 1. The proportion of Municipalities providing selected social services⁵⁵



creasing the participation of people with disabilities in the labour market to decrease their reliance on state support. They should also enable affordable access to health care, a significant expense for people with disabilities and their families.

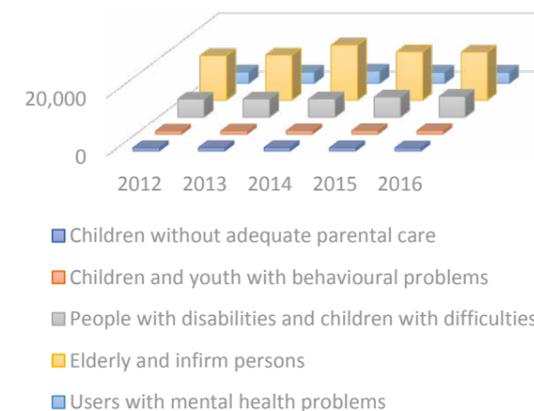
Older people are at significant risk of poverty. Pensions are often insufficient to cover living costs,⁵⁰ whilst health and social care represents a large proportion of older people's expenditure. This is especially important for those in more rural, less developed counties where there is a lack of available and affordable care options.

There has been limited progress on deinstitutionalisation in recent years. The number of people in institutions has changed little (see table 2) although more recent decisions favouring placements in the community indicate that it may be gaining momentum (see table 3).

There are also regional disparities. As indicated by table 1 only 29% of municipalities have foster care families, and just 12% have personal assistants for people with disabilities.

New policy initiatives demonstrate a growing emphasis on deinstitutionalisation. Specifically, a new set of quality standards for social services in 2014 and eight new 'Centres for providing community services'. A new act on social care is also in preparation and it is hoped that it will contribute to the development of community-based services. In addition, EU funded projects are playing an important role in delivering new community-based services.

Table 2. The number of users in institutional care⁵⁶



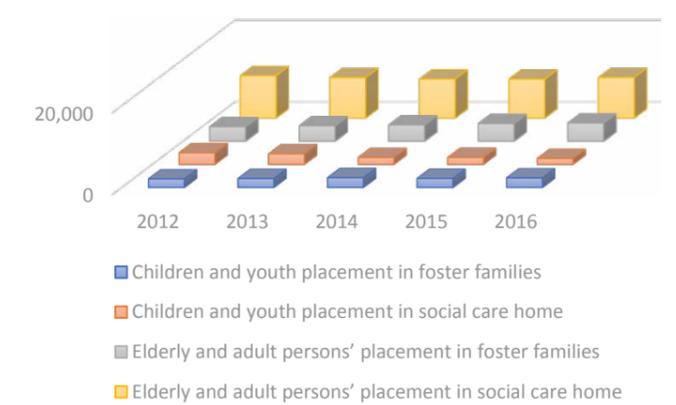
Employment services are severely underdeveloped. Support programmes from social services to help people find employment are almost non-existent⁵¹ Table 1 shows that only 25% of social services in municipalities provide services to unemployed people. Users' satisfaction with the quality of the service is low. For example, 50% were dissatisfied with employment services in the county of Slavonia.⁵²

There are some promising initiatives for promoting employment. Lifelong Career Guidance Centres have been developed using EU funds to support unemployed people and young people in education to build work skills. However there remains room for improvement for the centres to create links between their service users and the labour market.

The Ministry of Education and Science introduced regional centres of competitiveness using the European Social Fund (ESF) in 2017. This will help build bridges between education and employment for young people with the potential to support vulnerable students in particular, and to boost opportunities in vocational education.

Protective mechanisms are required for people who are at risk of poverty but not eligible for minimum income. People are eligible for minimum income once they have no assets left meaning many who are simply at risk due to low or irregular incomes go unsupported. For example 9,791 employees do not receive regular wages from their employer.⁵³ On top of this 325,254 citizens have blocked bank accounts due to high levels of personal debt.⁵⁴

Table 3. New social care placements⁵⁷



A more integrated long-term care system is needed to improve quality and efficiency but differences at government level make it difficult. How services are funded (health insurance or combination of public and user expenditure) and differences in services provided in healthcare and social care settings make integration difficult. Additionally, there are significant differences in quality standards. In social services, standards are monitored by the State Quality Inspectorate, with a focus on the rights and dignity of service users, but this is not aligned with quality standards in healthcare where a medical model is followed. There are also differences in approaches to palliative care between the two sectors, and competencies assigned to nurses in social care and in healthcare facilities.

A strategic framework on an integrated long-term care system is needed.

This would include:

- standardised assessments of service users' needs,
- the organisation of community teams to provide adequate care, and the coordination of formal and informal care,
- the coordination of formal and informal care to provide personalised support.

Delays to the Social Services Act mean that there continues to be unequal quality and coverage of social services.

A new amendment to the Social Services Act was not approved before the end of the Parliament's term in October 2017 and must be re-submitted. The amendment pro-

posed by the government would introduce a more effective system of quality monitoring, introduce better mechanisms for protecting the rights of service users, and create clear financing procedures by fixing a share of the state budget for social services each year.

High levels of employment in the Czech Republic are not shared by people with disabilities, as their employment rate lies at 43%. The use of active labour market policies to encourage the employment of people with disabilities is growing, but few of them find work in the labour market, with many working in sheltered employment. One clear barrier for people with disabilities is fear that they will lose benefits during capacity assessments if they are considered fit to work.

Incentives from the state to employers for hiring people with disabilities have grown from 1.4bn CZK (€54m) to 4bn CZK (€155m). Despite the positive outlook, this strategy seems ineffective as the employment rate for people with disabilities has not seen a corresponding increase.

The implementation of the 2016 reform to improve the inclusiveness of education is making good progress in its second year. The vast majority of schools now provide students with the recommended support measures, with 98% of kindergartens, 97% of primary schools, and 97.7% of secondary schools educating students in mainstream classes.⁵⁸

A survey of school professionals⁵⁹ found that 49% of school principals believe they can now provide better support to children with special education needs. However, the recruitment of teaching assistants to support children with special education needs is a challenge with 21% of principals failing to find qualified candidates.

The early childhood education and care system (ECEC) is developing. The 2016 Amendment to the Education Act⁶⁰

will extend the obligation of kindergartens to accept two-year olds by 2020, through incremental steps between 2017-2020. The increase in kindergarten capacity will require EU funds, which have been so far used by kindergartens for employing childminders. The Ministry of Education also announced in March 2018 the launch of further funds for expanding the capacity of kindergartens.

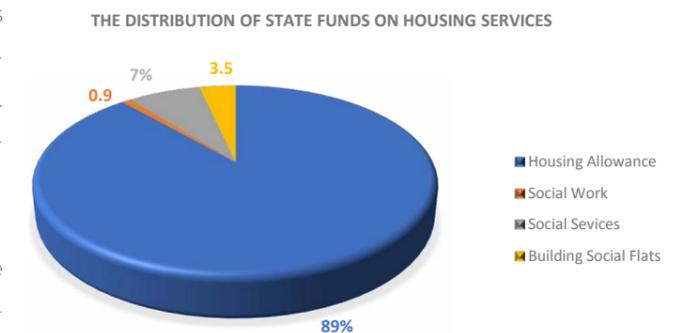
The 'Restart' programme aims to reduce inequalities between Czech regions but has made little progress yet on social issues. It will bring significant investment into the economic, environmental and social sectors of the regions Karlovarský, Moravskoslezský and Ústecký to reduce inequalities between these regions and the rest of the country. In the social sphere, the following initiatives are in the process of being undertaken:⁶¹

- **Indebtedness:** education programmes to improve people's personal finance management to be introduced in schools, and workplaces. However, the programme for schools is yet to be announced and the workplace one has not been included in current plans.
- **Public employment services:** Staff salaries have increased, but the establishment of cooperation systems with regional partners and the collection of statistics on housing rents and standards is yet to be achieved.
- **Social inclusion of children and families:** Support for children in more deprived areas will be evaluated and a plan proposed. Preparations are ongoing.
- **Social housing:** A pilot strategy for the provision of housing and family support is to be planned in 2018. The programme is yet to be launched.

Overall whilst the 'Restart' strategy has significant potential

for supporting deprived regions, there has not been significant progress on social issues, and there is also a lack of clear evaluation and reporting documentation made publicly available.

The current system of housing support does not address housing exclusion sufficiently. Social housing is not enshrined in Czech legislation and its organisation is under-developed. The primary form of housing support is through benefits, as indicated by the figure below:⁶²



APSS CR states that the role of social work in providing support to vulnerable people and the construction of social housing are undervalued approaches for solving the root causes of housing exclusion, which cannot be achieved by housing benefits. A monitoring system to evaluate the effectiveness of different measures is required to improve the impact of housing policies,⁶³ and could provide evidence of the need for more investment in social work and social housing.

Getting youth into education and employment is still a significant focus of the government. In the age group 18-21, the number of vulnerable young people having started or completed education is declining. In 2014-2015, the number of 18-21-year olds, who started or completed education dropped from 51% to 48%. Among non-vulnerable young people of the same age, the number dropped from 85% to 83%.⁶⁴

FSD highlights the differences between municipalities, in some, more than 50% of vulnerable young people have started or completed education while in others the figure is lower than 40%. According to FSD, each municipality's strategy and organisation plays a role in the effectiveness of support for vulnerable young people.

To attempt to address the issues, FSD welcomes targeted funding from the national government to fund projects such as 'Job-bro til Uddannelse' (Bridging education and jobs). In total, 70,000,000 DKK (€9,410,000) have been allocated to the project⁶⁵, which aims to support vulnerable young people to start and finish education. Each young person in the programme is provided with a mentor to support them through the process and to provide them with follow up support once the course has been completed. The course also helps young people gain practical work experience. This project follows the successful implementation of the project 'Building Bridge to Education' where 80% of the participants in this project said it helped them finish their education.⁶⁶

Proposed legislative changes may damage migrant integration into Danish society. The previous trend in Denmark was language first then employment, however now language training and employment occur simultaneously. Legislative changes mean that as of 1st July 2017, new language students are required to pay a

deposit of 1,250 DKK (€168) when registering for Danish language courses. Payment of a deposit does not apply to au pairs, refugees or family reunited individuals but can still affect the number of people taking the course. In the fourth quarter of 2017, 5,602 people receiving Integration syddelse (integration benefit) were registered for a Danish language course.⁶⁷

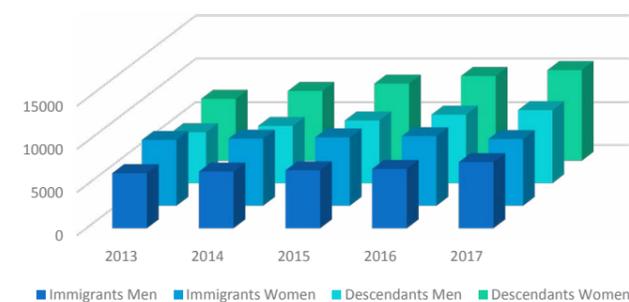
FSD is currently very concerned about a proposed bill requiring payment of a fee of 2,000 DKK (€268) per module. As knowledge of the Danish language is often essential for obtaining a job, FSD worries that this bill could lead to an increase in long-term unemployment for those who cannot afford to pay, language being key to integration into society.

The increasing cost of accommodation in cities poses a major problem for those on low income. Municipalities finance 10% of the costs for new house building projects, which FSD says ensures that there is continuous growth in housing supply. The focus of current housing projects is on smaller housing which are more affordable. FSD adds that the government has allocated additional targeted funding to address homelessness. Many municipalities are focusing on trying to get young people out of homelessness. 'Housing First' has been launched with the participation of social services to specifically tackle youth homelessness.

The implementation of the 2-year youth employment plan has now been delayed until August 2019. FSD supports the planned initiative, which will pass the responsibility for young people under 25 to the municipalities so that they support young people to access education or employment. As part of this initiative, integrated support will be provided by the public sector through cooperation between the departments of education, social services and employment. Despite the delay in imple-

menting this legislation, positive progress is being made through current programmes as the number of young immigrants and descendants of immigrants completing a youth education programme is growing. See table 1.⁶⁸

Table 1 Completed youth education programmes



There are plans to try and address the performance gap between native and migrant children. The government has presented its plan: 'One Denmark without parallel societies. No ghettos in 2030' to the Parliament. The plan, which has not been passed yet, consists of 22 initiatives to break down and prevent parallel societies, including:

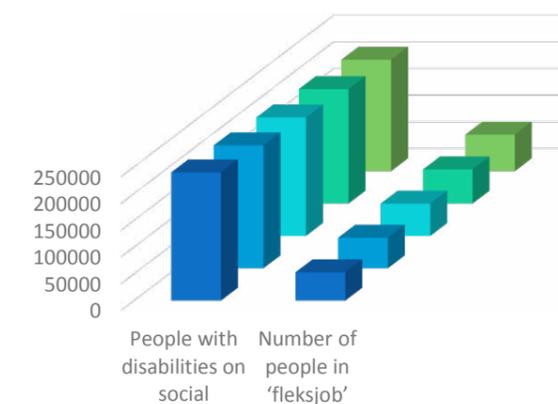
- Obligatory 30 hours of kindergarten per week for children in vulnerable neighbourhoods.
- Maximum 30% of children in each kindergarten from vulnerable residential areas.
- Danish language tests in 0. Grade (children at the age of 6 to 7).
- Better allocation of children from a migrant background in upper secondary schools.

FSD welcomes that the government is taking responsibility for tackling integration. However, they highlight that the plan's implementation will be expensive which may be an obstacle to implementation. FSD also points out that the bill has not yet been passed so it is too early to assess the proposed reforms impact.

The employment situation of people with disabilities

continues to improve and the number of benefits recipients continues to decrease. More people with disabilities are entering the labour market each year with assistance from the 'fleksjob' initiative. The legislation gives people with disabilities an opportunity to have support such as special equipment or personal assistance to do the parts of their job they cannot perform due to their disability. The number of people assisted through this scheme can be seen in table 2.⁶⁹

Table 2 People in 'fleksjobs'



FSD observes that workplaces are becoming better at accommodating people with disabilities. According to a study conducted in Denmark between 2012 and 2015, the employment of people with disabilities increased at a rate faster than that of people without disabilities.⁷⁰ However, FSD states that employers and staff are more open to employing people with physical disabilities and remain cautious about hiring people with mental health issues.⁷¹

Social protection is insufficient for preventing high levels of poverty Poverty levels are high in Estonia with 21.1% (almost 276,000 people) living in relative poverty in 2016.⁷² Between 2015 and 2016 the relative poverty rate decreased for children, young people and adults, but has increased for older people, from 40.2% in 2015 to 41.8% in 2016.⁷³

Research underlines the importance of addressing this critical issue in Estonia.⁷⁴ Poverty can hinder the potential of children in the education system and into adulthood when they have fewer employment opportunities. It also reduces the ability of people to pay for health care and increases stress which can lead to substance abuse and limit the network of support around a person. These factors can contribute to a poverty trap for people and lead to their social exclusion.

Long-term care services must be better financed by public authorities and provide more integrated support. The costs of long-term care for older people is very high compared to the pensions they receive, adding extra financial pressure to people using it and their families. In 2015 a Taskforce was set up to address how to reduce the burden of care.⁷⁵

Assessing the current situation, this Taskforce found that due to the high costs of care family members need to contribute to costs or provide the care themselves. This can have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of the family members.⁷⁶ Therefore the Taskforce recommends that a greater share of care costs should be shouldered by local or national governments. The Taskforce will propose their long-term care strategy to the national government at the end of 2018, with implementation expected to take place in 2021.

Health and social care services remain separate, with different assessment methods and funding sources. This makes the user experience more difficult especially if they must

transfer from one service to another.^{77 78 79}

There have been set-backs in the deinstitutionalisation process. Plans were made for the creation of 240 day-care and week-care places for people with mental health problems and people with severe disabilities. However as of April 2018 the construction of these facilities had been delayed by the Estonian Ministry of Finance due to the alleged misuse of EU funds allocated to their construction.⁸⁰

It is hoped that the local government reform will contribute to required improvements in the capacity of local authorities and the quality of social services. The local government reform adopted in 2016 intends to address differences between financing and the devolved responsibilities of local authorities, thereby improving their capacity to provide quality services. The reform came into force in autumn 2017, so is still at an early stage.

The reform is unlikely to solve all obstacles faced by local authorities, as the quality of social services and the financial capacity of local authorities is an issue which will require significant attention.^{81 82} Many local authorities have expressed concern over lack of clarity regarding their capacity to plan and provide social services in the future, particularly who will be responsible for service provision and for which target groups.

The 2016-2023 Welfare Development Plan sets out important strategic objectives for the labour market, social protection, and equality policies⁸³ One of the objectives is to improve the accessibility and quality of social services and to promote people's opportunities to live independently, in the community, and participate in society. A number of policy instruments are planned to implement this:

- Major reforms for reducing the burden of care on informal carers and the re-organisation of rehabilitation services.
- New information and communications technologies, and social enterprises will be encouraged to promote innovation.
- Uniform quality standards for social services will be developed.
- Better collaboration between social, employment and health services for needs assessments.
- Increased availability of community-based services.

The results of the Welfare Development Plan are gathered annually, while a mid-term evaluation is due to take place in 2019.

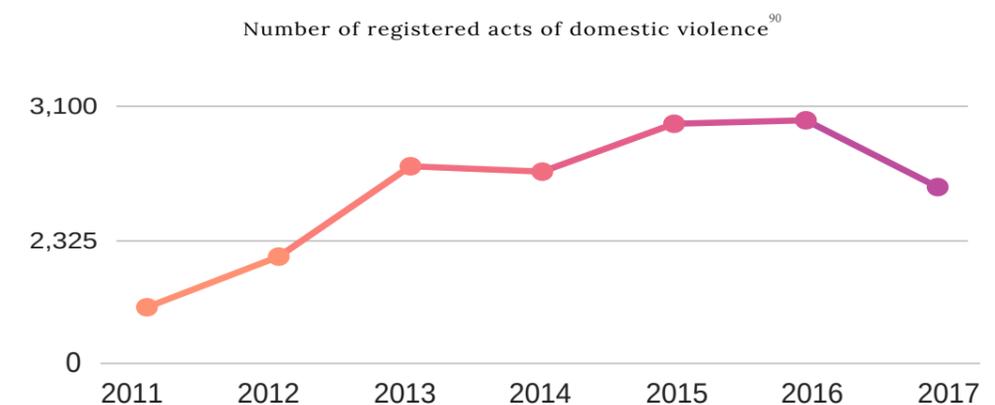
People with disabilities should be better included in education and be supported with income that covers their living costs. According to the Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023 "Disabled people must be guaranteed equal access to the physical environment (including transport), as well as information and means of communication".⁸⁴ Estonia has made progress towards this through improving access to public services and information. Despite this, much more needs to be done to achieve the aims of the UNCRPD in Estonia according to the Estonian Chamber of Disabled People.⁸⁵

For example, the drop-out rate from education for people with disabilities is very high. For 18-24 year olds with a disability (assessed to have a 40-100% incapacity for work) 35.1% of them have not completed basic education⁸⁶

The state provides compensation for some costs, but this is insufficient to cover the cost of the service, and is not suitable enough for the requirements of people with disabilities.⁸⁷

Attitudes need to change to combat domestic violence. Levels of domestic violence are high as demonstrated in the figure below and have a significant impact on families given that in at least 33% of cases a child was a victim or witness.⁸⁸ Overcoming cultural attitudes is crucial, since 54% of people still agreed in a 2014 survey that domestic violence was the fault of the victim⁸⁹

There have been flaws in the implementation of an additional allowance for older people living alone. An additional annual allowance of €115 had been approved for retired people living alone. Nevertheless, there have been administrative difficulties in implementation given that many older people who live alone are not officially registered as such. Greater accuracy is needed to ensure that the benefit reaches the target population.



Finland is in the process of implementing a long-awaited reform of health and social care services. The reform proposes the creation of 18 new administrations (counties), which will be responsible for services previously run by the municipalities. The counties will be responsible for managing all public social welfare and healthcare services, and the decisions will be made by elected county councils.⁹¹ The first county elections are foreseen in May 2019 and the government is hoping to pass the legislation beforehand. The objective is that the counties would start organising public health and social services at the start of 2021. The final vote in Parliament should take place at the beginning of December 2018.

As part of the reform, the Finnish government submitted a legislative proposal to the Parliament on freedom of choice. The aim is to increase choice for clients in health and social services.

Freedom of choice means that clients have the right to choose where to get primary health services, home care, housing services and services funded by personal budgets.

The purpose is to increase the possibility for clients to influence and improve the availability, quality and cost-effectiveness of services.

The Parliament's Constitutional Law Committee warned that the schedule for increasing people's freedom of choice was too ambitious. In addition, it mentioned that it could create uncontrollable risks to patients' safety.⁹²

The provision of long-term care will change completely under the social and health care reform. Access to long-term care services in Finland is based on residency in a municipality and there is a wide range of in-kind benefits as well as cash benefits available. Due to the ageing of the population, Finland is facing a challenge when it comes to the financial sustainability of long-term care provision. Taking into account that social spending already represents 30% of GDP, there are limited possibilities for increasing spending in long-term care. In this sense, there may be a trade-off between services and income transfers. The health and social care reform will introduce personal budgets in order to rationalise spending.

Unemployment rates (including long-term unemployment) are decreasing. A total of 284,100 unemployed jobseekers were registered at the Employment and Economic Development Offices at the end of July 2018. This is 45,000 less than a year before.⁹³ At the end of July 2017, the number of long-term unemployed who had been out of work without interruption for more than a year amounted to 77,000, which represents a decrease of 29,200 compared to the previous year.

High inactivity traps constitute an obstacle to a more extensive use of the labour force. Activation measures could have a more positive impact if they were coupled with good, many-sided and sufficient services focused on increasing job-seekers' work ability, competences and qualifications in the labour market.

In 2017, Finland launched a national basic income pilot to help design a possible future reform of the social security system.

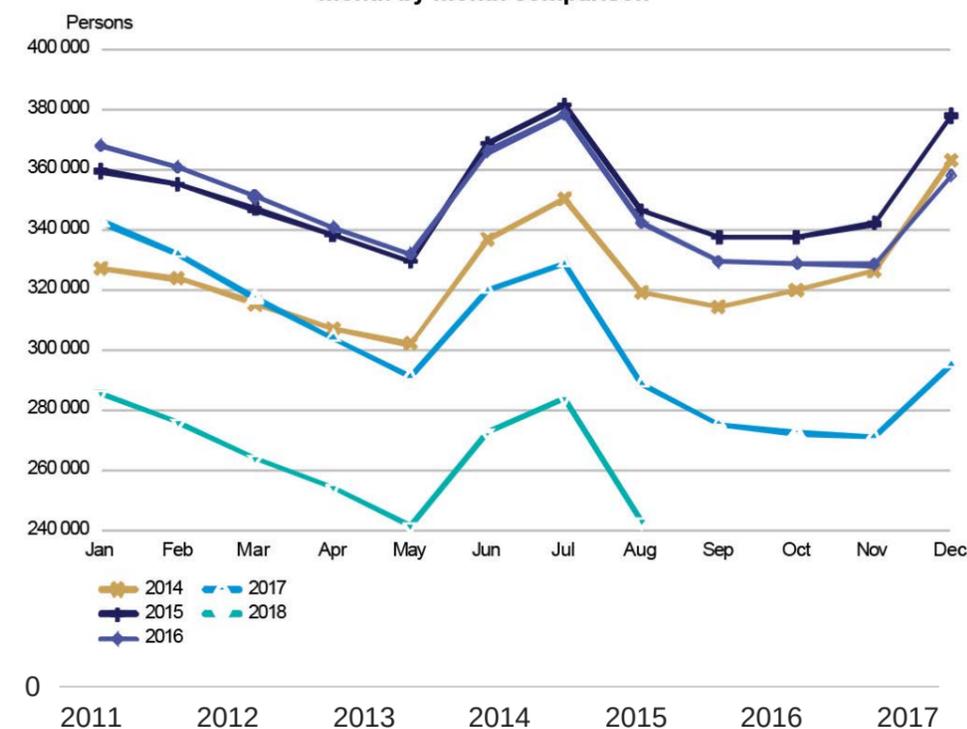
The National Social Security Institution (KELA) pays €560 per month to 2,000 randomly selected unemployed persons in the age group 25-58, regardless of other income and with no requirement to seek or accept employment. This pilot is aimed primarily at seeing whether a guaranteed income might incentivise people to take up paid work by smoothing out gaps in the welfare system. In addition, the trial would help assess if an unconditional payment might reduce anxiety among recipients. The aim is to simplify a complex social security system that is struggling to cope with a fast-moving and insecure labour market.⁹⁴

The initial plan was for the experiment to be expanded in early 2018 to include workers as well as

non-workers, but this didn't happen. In addition, the government decided in April 2018 that the trial wouldn't continue in 2019. The pilot's full results will not be released until late 2019, once its impact on participants has been assessed.

Finland is also experimenting with Social Impact Bonds (SIB) as an innovative approach to achieving better outcomes for service users. An SIB is a new method of contracting services, where payments are made on the condition of achieving certain results. The European Investment Fund (EIF), and the Finnish Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment will use SIBs to provide job-matching and training for 2,500 to 3,700 migrants and refugees in Finland, with €10 million invested in this scheme.⁹⁵

UNEMPLOYED JOBSEEKERS
month by month comparison



See footnote ⁹³

The French educational system struggles to ensure equal opportunities for new generations as students with a migrant background face more difficulties.

To reverse this situation and ensure equal opportunities for everyone, the government has decided to divide by half the number of children per class in primary schools in all disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Since September 2017, 2,500 classrooms in priority education zones can only have up to 12 students. This measure was first applied to the students in the first year of primary school. The long-term objective is to establish this threshold in 12,000 classrooms in the first and second years of primary education.⁹⁶

The percentage of Young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) (11.9%) remains stable, even though the EU rate is declining.

The high level of NEETs is a combination of several factors, mostly growth of the working age population, slow economic growth and high rates of early school leaving. The economy is picking up and the rate of the working age population growth is now slowing down (due to baby boomers' retirement). Therefore, the main leverage to reduce the NEET's rate is to fight school drop-out. Improvements on early education, such as dividing by two the number of children per class in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, is likely to have an effect in the long run. The government has also taken measures to increase the number of apprenticeships and has increased the apprenticeships' wages. It has also extended the age limit to take it to 30 years old instead of the current 26.⁹⁷

The ability of public employment services to swiftly find employment for young NEETs remains a challenge. A high proportion of young NEETs are registered with the Youth Guarantee Scheme, but almost

80% of those registered did not receive any offer for more than 4 months.

Although overall poverty rates are declining, specific groups face increased difficulties.

In order to reduce poverty, the main minimum income scheme (Revenu de solidarité active -RSA) was increased by 10 % in real terms. Increasing the minimum income is the easiest and most direct way to reduce poverty in the short term. However, additional measures could be implemented. As France is facing both high levels of unemployment and manpower shortages in both industrial and service companies, it is vital to make work more attractive by reducing labour taxes. In addition, other measures such as aiding people's geographical mobility, increasing self-confidence, designing flexible forms of employment etc. are being worked out by counties ("Départements") as part of their responsibilities in the field of social inclusion.

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For example, several counties collaborate with the platform Wimoov, which is an association that advocates for inclusive mobility. Vulnerable people with mobility issues are usually sent to Wimoov by social workers and a mobility consultant performs a 'mobility skills assessment' to propose solutions adapted to their needs: training, support or material solutions (bicycles, electric scooters, car sharing, carpooling...).

Access to housing remains a matter of concern.

Housing affordability has worsened: the proportion of disposable income spent on housing increased from 20.2% in 2005 to 20.9% in 2015.⁹⁸ The severe housing deprivation rate has been increasing since 2013 and stood at 2.7% in 2016. As a consequence, the number of people requesting emergency housing is increasing and France is not able to provide sufficient housing. In June 2017, 20,845 people called the emergency number 115, which represents an increase of 17% from 2016. However, 48% of the people who called the number were not provided with a solution.

France is moving towards more person-centred services through the programme "Réponse accompagnée pour tous" which aims to provide better care and support for all people with disabilities.

In 2015, 24 local authorities volunteered to implement the programme and in 2017, 66 more localities decided to do so. The 'local houses of people with disabilities' (Maisons départementales des personnes handicapées - MDPH), distributed across the French territory, are in charge of developing this programme.

Since January 2018, according to the article 89 of the legislation on the modernisation of the health system,⁹⁹ the MDPHs are able to establish a global caring

plan (plan d'accompagnement global - PAG) to determine all caring needs together with the service user. The request to establish a global caring plan can also come from the service user or their representative. The objectives of the PAG are:¹⁰⁰

- To identify precisely the institutions, services or devices corresponding to the needs of the disabled person.
- To specify the nature and frequency of all interventions required for inclusion. These include education and schooling, therapeutic, occupational or social integration and assistance to caregivers.
- To identify the necessary commitments of the actors responsible for its implementation from an operational point of view.
- To designate a coordinator who will follow and support the disabled person.



Germany has, with 6.8%, one of the lowest youth unemployment rates in Europe.¹⁰¹

In order to improve the integration of disadvantaged young people in education and employment, the coalition partners agreed at the federal level in the 2013 Coalition Agreement the introduction of youth employment agencies. Youth employment agencies are a form of cooperation between youth welfare services at local authorities and employment services.

The aim of these youth employment agencies is to establish better coordination between the different actors involved in the provision of social services: the employment agency, the job center and the youth welfare office in local authorities. The creation of youth employment agencies is voluntary. Out of the 563 youth welfare offices throughout Germany, 289 have signed a cooperation agreement to create

a youth employment agency.

However, this cooperation is not always easy as a result of the different organisation of the authorities involved. The employment agencies and job centers, as branches of a central federal authority, set uniform standards throughout Germany, while the local youth welfare offices focus more on individual local conditions.

While the number of newly-arrived asylum seekers has fallen, integrating the large number of asylum seekers into education and work represents a long-term challenge.

The coordination and meaningful interaction of the various measures (integration course, language course, social counseling, housing, mobility support, etc.) has been identified as the main barrier to achieve integration.¹⁰²

To improve coordination, the German Association of Counties called in mid-2017 to abandon the sole responsibility of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) for the organisation of language and integration courses and to allow the counties to voluntarily take over the coordination function. The regionalisation of the responsibility for co-ordination is expected to facilitate cooperation between the different agencies involved locally.

Increasing rates of people at-risk of poverty and inequality since the financial crisis have slightly reversed, but the improvement has been modest.

This constant growth of poverty leads, despite the good economic conditions, to an increasing burden in social services, particularly in supporting those in the most vulnerable situations. The income layers are more permeable to the bottom than to the top. This is reinforced by the social filter of the education system, which penalises students from lower social strata.¹⁰³

The government has recently decided to significantly expand projects to help people at risk of poverty such as the CURA project in Bavaria¹⁰⁴ and to implement new methods of working such as taking the entire family ecosystem into account when delivering social support.

The risk of poverty for people with disabilities in Germany is higher than the EU average (15.6 pps. vs the EU average of 10.1 pps).¹⁰⁵ The law on strengthening the participation and self-determination of persons with disabilities (Federal Law on Participation - BTHG), which was approved in 2016, fundamentally reforms social benefits in this area. The aim is to align the services provided for rehabilitation and participation with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities in a person-centred manner.

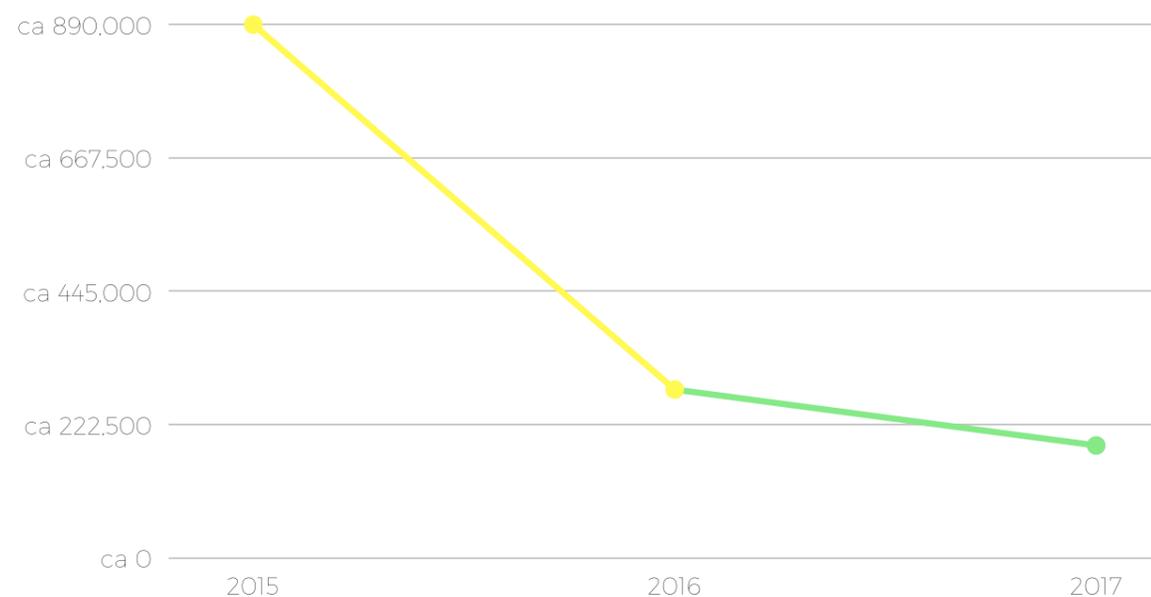
The reform on integration assistance promotes moving away from facility care to person-centred care, highlighting that the necessary support should be based exclusively on individual needs from a holistic perspective. Therefore, care and support measures should be chosen together with the person.

Housing policy remains a challenge as house prices and rents increase.

During the past four years, prices for owner-occupied homes have risen by 30% and rents by 15% across Germany.¹⁰⁶ This trend was caused by a shortage of more than one million residential units, mainly in large cities. The rising cost of housing has a considerable impact on the poor. In North Rhine-Westphalia alone, one of the few Länder (regions) that consistently records homelessness figures, the number of registered homeless persons increased by 36% between 2011 and 2016.¹⁰⁷

Social services for the prevention of homelessness, housing and advice for older people and people with disabilities have become increasingly important in recent years due to developments in the housing market. Nevertheless, there is a lack of structured cooperation between social services and the housing industry. The majority of people who have become homeless are (in the absence of appropriate housing provision) housed in most cases in local homeless shelters. It should be noted that social housing is, since 2006, entirely a competence of the Länder (regions), which have implemented different programmes and funding schemes.

Number of registered asylum seekers in Germany



Source: German Interior Ministry

Despite the total number of children under-18 falling, the number of children in care measures has been increasing, reaching 21,000 in 2017.¹⁰⁸ Research suggests that poverty is a significant factor in decisions to take children into care, especially in rural areas, despite laws prohibiting children being taken into care because of poverty.¹⁰⁹ This could be linked to child and housing benefits that are insufficient for supporting adequate standards of living.

Child protection services also struggle to provide quality support to children and families due to high workloads for professionals¹¹⁰

There are flaws in the implementation of deinstitutionalisation measures. Care in large institutions is being replaced by smaller units, however these units are unprepared and unable to care for people with severe disabilities, with little consideration made for the greater costs of caring for people in these settings. The new units are being constructed in isolated rural areas limiting opportunities for finding employment.

It is recommended that more attention is placed on the management of the deinstitutionalisation process to identify how services will be provided and financed for service users who require different levels of support.

Different cultural attitudes in Hungary mean that people are less inclined to refer to themselves as having a disability.¹¹¹ This may be due to the stigma attached to it and contributes to the fact that the social inclusion of people with disabilities is not as strong in Hungary compared to the rest of the EU as statistics tend to feature those with more severe disabilities.

Housing deprivation is a severe issue with insufficient policy mechanisms to tackle it.

The poor quality and availability of housing is particularly pronounced in rural areas.

National government housing benefits were set at 5,000 HUF per month (€15). In 2015 the responsibility for housing benefits was decentralised to local authorities but many do not provide it in practice, with the total amount of housing benefits distributed falling by 15%.¹¹² Greater investment in housing benefits is required to enable people to cover the costs of housing, although care must be taken to prevent this from causing inflationary pressure on the rental market.

The social inclusion of Roma does not show signs of improving. There are particular concerns in the field of education where research indicates that in 900 schools Roma children are segregated into Roma-only classes despite this practice being illegal.¹¹³

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However, a National Social Inclusion Strategy targeted at Roma people is in place. It aims to improve child welfare, education, employment, health care, housing, and tackle discrimination.¹¹⁴

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality standards are high but levels of enrolment are low.

Low rates of ECEC enrolment correlate with extended maternity leave until children reach the age of three.

A family support policy is in place to help mothers find work and improve ECEC enrolment for children, through benefits, mortgage support, deductions to income tax, and childcare leave with the option to work.¹¹⁵

Furthermore ECEC capacity has improved through the use of European and national funds, with six eligible children under three years old per place in 2017, compared to ten per place in 2010.¹¹⁶

Quality standards in ECEC are extremely high in Hungary. This is positive but these standards should be better linked with resources available. Some less developed counties lack the resources to run services that meet the high quality standards established by law.

Public Work Schemes (PWS) remain the prevailing approach to employment policy.

The PWS are concentrated in certain regions. In the northern and eastern counties PWS participants represent 20% of those in employment, whereas in the capital and western counties the proportion of PWS participants in the total employment figure is less than 2%.¹¹⁷

There are no active labour market policies in place,

nor institutions and resources to implement these. Hungary should implement active labour market policies to improve employment opportunities for people through pathways that include training, social security, public transport subsidies and other support measures.

Unemployment benefits do not provide adequate support.

Those in unemployment are eligible to receive 60% of their previous monthly wage, up to the minimum wage, 138,000 HUF (€420). However, unemployment benefits last for a maximum duration of three months, putting many unemployed people at greater risk of poverty if they become long-term unemployed.





Ireland

Homelessness increased to 6,052 adults with 3,755 dependents in February 2018 from 4,875 adults with 2,546 dependents in 2017. ¹¹⁸ This corresponds with rising rents, up by 10.4% in 2017. ¹¹⁹ The Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness is the government's key housing strategy. However, its effectiveness is in doubt. Research indicates only a fraction of the reported 19,000 houses have actually been constructed in 2017, as the government's figure is based on misleading data. ¹²⁰

The Action Plan also relies on the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). It is an improvement on the former system of rent supplements, by allowing recipients to earn an income through work without losing eligibility to support. However, recipients can only utilise the HAP on properties below a maximum rent level, a level determined by household size and location. Research demonstrates this level is far below market rates, with many areas lacking a single eligible property on the market. ¹²¹

The support social services provide to homeless people and people at risk of homelessness is under pressure because of growing numbers of homeless people, rising rents, and a lack of housing supply. The government should increase the rate of housing construction, including social housing provided by local authorities. A rent register should also be implemented to improve transparency and clarity on rent levels, thereby encouraging landlords to comply with rent controls. This would relieve tenants of the responsibility of reporting when landlords do not comply and make it easier to match the HAP to market rates.

Childcare facilities are reducing their intake of children under two years old as a direct

result of staff shortages and insufficient funding. ¹²²

As many as 58% of providers fear they are at risk of not meeting regulatory requirements on staff ratios. ¹²³ The absence of sufficient state support, in a context of rising staff, overhead and rent costs makes it unsustainable for providers to offer childcare for children under two years old. ¹²⁴

This lack of availability is compounded by very high fees for families which range from €900 to €1,200 per month. ¹²⁵ The More Affordable Childcare Scheme aims to address this issue, however full implementation has been delayed beyond September 2018 due to issues relating to its ICT system. ¹²⁶

High fees and a lack of childcare places means more parents are turning to unregulated childcare options. ¹²⁷ Childminding Ireland, the national representative body for childminders, recommends the regu-

Ireland and EU: Employment rate, 2006-2016 - % aged 15 -64 ¹²⁹				
Year	Ireland		EU	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
2006	77.7	59.1	71.5	57.2
2007	77.5	60.6	72.4	58.1
2008	75.4	60.4	72.6	58.9
2009	66.8	57.6	70.6	58.4
2010	63.9	56.0	70.1	58.2
2011	62.8	55.6	70.0	58.4
2012	62.4	55.2	69.6	58.6
2013	64.6	55.9	69.4	58.8
2014	66.3	56.4	70.1	59.5
2015	68.7	57.6	70.8	60.4
2016	69.9	59.5	71.8	61.4

Source: CSO QNHS, Eurostat LFS

ation of childminding on a mandatory basis, with a system that supports and promotes quality. ¹²⁸

Addressing these issues is key for improving the employment rate of women. The lack of childcare places and affordability has a strong impact on their employment rate, which remains below the EU average in 2016, at 59.5%.

Ireland's healthcare system faces significant challenges. In 2017, Ireland's health system was ranked overall 24th of 35 European countries in the Euro Health Consumer Index. ¹³⁰ Demographic changes are projected to affect the country in the coming years, with expenditure on healthcare and long-term care expected to increase by 2.9 pp of GDP (1.0 due to health care and 1.9 due to long-term care) from 2016 to 2070. ¹³¹

Under the Project Ireland 2040 plan, ¹³² the government aims to address future health needs largely through capital investment, including new hospital buildings, diagnostic facilities, long-stay beds for elderly care, and improving access to digital health records. These measures are welcome, but it is unclear when they will be implemented and they do not address the current lack of in-home care options for people who need support to live at home, a service that needs strengthening given demographic changes.

Age Action estimates that there are 4,600 people waiting on at least one element of their Home Care Package which provides minor caring tasks such as light house work, shopping, some personal care, etc. ¹³³ The issue of a lack of funding for carers is compounded by the very limited hours of care provided once

funding is put in place, as little as four hours of care per week. ¹³⁴ Greater investment is needed in home care services to reduce the burden on informal carers and to prepare the system for an aging population.

Caring responsibilities are directly linked to women's lack of access to the labour market. Women aged between 55 and 64 years are disproportionately inactive in the labour force. This rate is suspected to be linked to the caring responsibilities carried by women. According to the 2017 census, the number of people self-reporting as informal carers increased by over 8,000 since 2011 to almost 200,000 people in 2016 (4.1% of the population). The number of female carers exceeds the number of male carers 118,151 to 77,112. ¹³⁵

People with disabilities are one of the social groups with the highest degree of social risk in Ireland. ¹³⁶ This is partly because they are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to the general population. ¹³⁷ People with disabilities would like to take up work but are afraid of losing benefits such as a medical card for access to healthcare, or transport support. ¹³⁸ Beyond employment, people with disabilities in Ireland face barriers using public transport. Daily occurrences in Dublin include a lack of staff available to provide support at transport stations, broken lifts, and passengers with disabilities left stranded on rail services. ¹³⁹ These are serious issues given that accessible public transport is key for employment and participation in the community. ¹⁴⁰

A new financial measure to fight poverty shows positive results. As of January 2018, families and individuals can receive a financial benefit (Reddito di Inclusione – REI) as part of a personalised activation plan established together with social services.¹⁴¹ By March, 50% of potential beneficiaries had been reached (about 300,000 families and 900,000 individuals). Seven out of 10 families live in the south, mostly in areas with the highest unemployment rates (Campania, Sicily, Calabria), and most families that can benefit from this measure are large ones.

Multi-disciplinary teams made up of social and employment services established by the law have been formally constituted. However, challenges have been reported regarding a lack of adequate number of social services staff.

Reinforcing and adapting the organisation of services to address the tasks foreseen by the law is currently a

challenge due to budgetary constraints. Funding for anti-poverty measures available to local authorities is low (7% of total social services expenditure) and extremely heterogeneous as shown by table 1.

More actions are needed to improve the integration of unaccompanied migrant children. Law 47/2017 established that each unaccompanied child should be assigned a guardian on a 1:1 ratio.¹⁴³ About 4,000 voluntary guardians have been trained thanks to the work of the Ombudsperson for Children¹⁴⁴ which is currently working to provide reimbursement of expenses incurred by voluntary guardians and insurance coverage. The Ombudsperson also recommends reinforcing foster care as a measure to provide care for unaccompanied children younger than 12.

Moreover, new measures addressing the transition to adulthood of unaccompanied migrant children turning 18 are needed urgently. When turning 18,

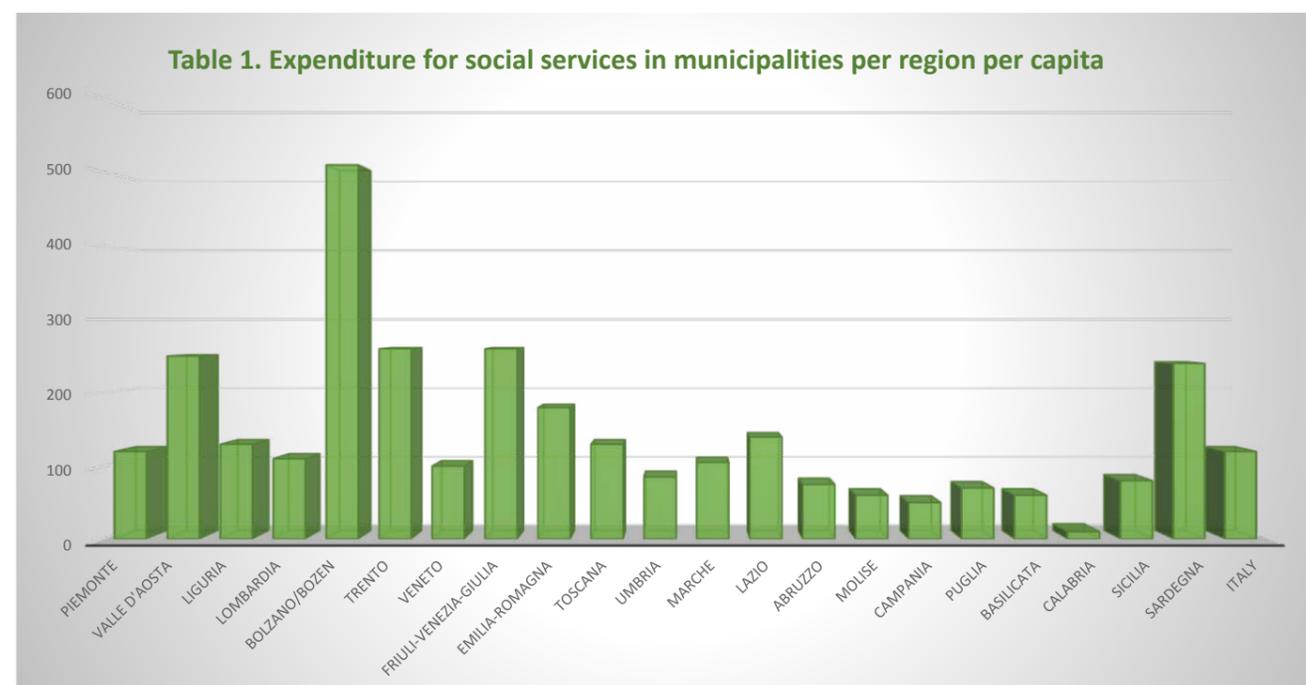
unaccompanied migrant children are transferred to services for adults and lose access to their personalised plans. Given the high number of migrant children arriving at the age of 15 to 17 (see table 2), there is a need for measures to be implemented in the short term. Finally, not all regions ensure that they register with the health insurance, despite this being a prerequisite to access training or internships.

Families where there are people with disabilities should be supported and a stronger and more homogeneous market for care services should be developed. According to data from ISTAT, in Italy there are 3 million people with disabilities but only 2 million receive some form of support. The responsibility for disability support has been decentralised to the regions and provision is patchy across the country. Families cope with the lack of services by hiring carers who are often not qualified. The lack of day centres and community-based services also has a negative impact on family members who are often obliged to leave employment to provide care for their relatives. There are currently 15,182,000 people who regularly take care of family members; this represents 38% of the population aged 15-64. Out of all family carers, 55% are women.¹⁴⁶

More services for families are needed to tackle child poverty and support young people with mental health problems. Currently, there is no structured intervention plan to support work/life balance and parenting for families who are at risk of poverty. REI is expected to have a positive impact on this issue, however more services should be planned. For instance, there is a lack of youth centres where young people can access social workers and health services. Young people with mental health issues are often cared for only from a health perspective and in facilities for adults. No structural intervention is currently planned to support young people relapsing into challenging behaviour and substance abuse.

Substance abuse needs to be tackled in the short term as this is an increasing phenomenon. According to the government, more than 40% of people aged 15-34 have consumed drugs at least once.¹⁴⁷ Consumption of illegal drugs is becoming a significant problem. Moreover, there is an increase in the number of people with mental illness who are also substance abusers. The national health system does not have a structured care plan for this target group.

Cuts in public expenditure on health are affecting accessibility to services and negatively impacting rural areas. The reduction in the number of operating hospitals in mountainous and rural areas forces people to travel long distances to access healthcare. Older people and the most vulnerable are often obliged to move to urban areas. At the same time, there is greater competition between the private and public sectors. Public hospitals are suffering a high staff turnover and lack resources. Long waiting lists for public health services make people turn towards private specialists and hospitals.



* Data provided by the National Statistical Institute (ISTAT)¹⁴²

Table 2. DISTRIBUTION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN ARRIVING BY AGE

AGE GROUPS	PRESENT AND SURVEYED	%
17 years	8.511	59.4
16 years	3.522	24.6
15 years	1.291	9.0
7-14 years	901	6.3
0-6 years	113	0.8
Total	14.338	100

* Data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, February 2018¹⁴⁵



People with disabilities and older people still experience high levels of poverty despite a new plan to introduce a guaranteed minimum income.

Last May, the Ministry of Welfare announced a draft plan to improve the minimum income support system for 2019-2020.¹⁴⁸ The plan sets out the minimum income at €188 monthly and increases the minimum amount for state pension to €94 monthly. The plan also includes a higher level of benefits to reach a guaranteed minimum income (GMI). In 2018, the GMI was set at €53 per month and on average 13,000 people per month receive it. It is planned that from 2020, the GMI will be raised to €94 per month for the first person in the household and to €65.80 for other members. Riga City Council recommends that pensions for people with disabilities and older people should be above the poverty threshold.

Despite improvements in overall levels of employment, more programmes supporting the long-term unemployed need to be implemented.

The youth unemployment rate for people aged 15 to 24 has decreased to 13.6% since last year. The State Employment Agency (SEA) reports that the proportion of young people who are unemployed has decreased from 9.5% to 6.8% since 2013. The Central Statistical Bureau conducted a labour force survey in 2017 and reported that the number of unemployed people aged 15 to 74 is 10.4% less than the previous year. However, the situation has not improved for social services users, who are in need of employment and social services support. SEA does not provide specific psychosocial support for unemployed people with complex needs. The Welfare Department of Riga City Council has registered 226 people who are long-term social assistance beneficiaries.¹⁴⁹ They do not participate in active inclusion programmes organised by the SEA

and municipal social agencies do not have adequate resources to support them.

Last year, the project 'To know and to do', targeting young people showed some weaknesses in terms of outreach to unemployed young people who receive social assistance. However, changes in EU grant regulations addressed this issue and now young people who receive social assistance and are unemployed and registered with the SEA can participate in the programme. On another note, child protection issues received increased media and public attention and the government approved new regulations delegating to the municipalities the responsibility of establishing teams of professionals who need to coordinate with each other in the field of child protection.¹⁵⁰

Child protection issues received increased media and public attention and the government approved new regulations delegating to the municipalities the responsibility of establishing teams of professionals who need to coordinate with each other in the field of child protection.

These teams may be integrated by representatives from the municipalities, social services agencies, education departments, children's courts and the police.

No new integration programmes for young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) are developed at national level therefore municipalities are planning some specific services. Riga's Welfare Department in cooperation with the Education Department and the Social Services Office has started to develop mobile street work teams to reach young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the meantime, a new model of social work for young people is currently being developed.

Childcare remains a challenge, with great disparities between municipalities. Riga City Council implemented vouchers allowing parents to have financial support for childcare for children from 1.5 years. These vouchers allow parents to have financial support for baby-sitting services. Currently 1,058 children in Riga use these vouchers. Pre-school counts 26,432 places but 900 children are on the waiting list. There are also long waiting lists in other major cities. The private sector is developing fast to face the lack of places in public kindergartens. Municipalities are the only public body responsible for childcare, therefore there are great disparities between municipalities with different levels of income.

Foster families will receive more financial support and counselling. In 2018, foster families and adoptive parents will have received €2.96 million more than in 2017. In January 2018, the minimum amount for child support for a foster family more than doubled, reaching €215 monthly for children until 6 years of age, and €258 for children aged 7 onwards. In addition, to the amount for child support, foster families will receive €171 for one child per month, €222 for two children and €274 for three or more children. Currently, there is a discussion around the possibility of

creating specialised foster families able to care for children who have suffered severe violence. In Latvia, a new service for foster families will be implemented during the second half of 2018 providing counselling, information and support in difficult situations. These centres will be financed by national funds.

Support for children with disabilities is still a challenge due to a lack of integrated social and health services. Social services struggle to cooperate with health services because under current legislation on medical treatment and patients' rights protection there is no obligation to cooperate with other services. Therefore, it is very challenging to organise integrated teams of social services, police, education and health practitioners. As a result, social and health support is fragmented and lacks continuity. Moreover, there is a lack of specialists, such as psychiatrists.¹⁵¹ In order to improve accessibility to services, children with disabilities or social services users should benefit from a fast track line to rehabilitation services.

An EU project is helping municipalities develop social work. Different projects are financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) for the implementation period 2015-2022. Various training sessions and supervision of social work specialists are taking place. Moreover, quality management systems of municipal social services are being developed, as well as methodological support. This includes access to a collection of periodical articles, development of a dictionary of social work terminology, development and piloting of community social work.

The provision of social assistance was decentralised to municipalities in 2015,¹⁵² but implementation can be improved. Whilst this represented a good step to bring support closer to users so that it can be more effective, a number of issues have become apparent:¹⁵³

- Municipalities can make more use of their flexibility to combine social assistance with active labour market policies. A more integrated approach between social and employment services is needed, especially for complex cases.
- Funds allocated for social assistance are being transferred to other priorities by some municipalities at the expense of potential beneficiaries.
- Eligibility conditions are too strict, with new sources of income from employment being grounds for ineligibility, creating a disincentive to work.
- The levels of social assistance remain too low, even below the poverty threshold.

More focus on quality social services is required to respond to growing urban and rural divides. Household incomes in rural areas on average are just 65% of the level in urban areas,¹⁵⁴ leading to greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. The establishment of

...national quality standards and monitoring systems are required for social services so that those in rural areas have the capacity to empower local residents and lift them out of poverty and social exclusion.

A wide range of community-based services are being launched supporting the deinstitutionalisation process for children and people with disabilities.

For children in care, one important initiative is the development of a centralised information system.¹⁵⁵ Municipalities will be able to add and view information on children in care, guardians, and foster carers. Being a centralised service it will enable coordination between the municipalities, and allow for statistical analysis of the child care system.

Also, leaders in public authorities have been taking part in training on community-based services, whilst care centres for providing guidance to adopted children, guardians, relatives and foster parents are being introduced.¹⁵⁶

High levels of institutionalisation remain for people with disabilities with almost 7,000 residing in 52 institutional centres.¹⁵⁷ However there are now 150 day-care centres set-up with 37,000 people with disabilities involved, plus the establishment of 56 independent and group housing facilities in the community.

There are plans for the re-organisation of 26 institutional facilities for people with disabilities, with the aim of transitioning to more community-based services. Other community-based services are currently in the pilot phase, with personal assistants being trialled in two regions following the approval of guidelines on personal assistants¹⁵⁸

One issue to overcome in the deinstitutionalisation process is resistance from institutions, as the employees feel that they have uncertain futures and lack information.¹⁵⁹

A package of services for families available in every municipality is being planned.¹⁶⁰ This includes social skills development, early childhood education and care (ECEC), health, education and cultural services.

In the field of ECEC, the main objectives is to improve and establish external quality standards and monitoring. Currently, there are significant differences between urban and rural ECEC services, including the level of funding for the service, the quality of the facilities, and quality of the care and education. Another issue in Lithuania is the poor pay and status of ECEC staff, leading to difficulties in staff retention and recruitment. Furthermore, greater investment will be needed to provide adequate coverage of ECEC services, with an estimated 120 new child day centres required.¹⁶¹

Policies are now encouraging autonomy and integration in the community for people with disabilities but benefit levels and cultural attitudes are areas for serious concern. Following a flawed strategy to

promote the employment of people with disabilities through social enterprises¹⁶² a new model will focus on person-centred approaches which focus on the capacities of the individual. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour is also considering providing subsidies and tax relief to employers hiring people with disabilities and a 5% quota for public sector organisations with more than 50 employees.

The monthly €130 benefit paid to 42,000 people with intellectual disabilities has been criticised for being far too low, at half of the poverty threshold level. Whilst statistics on the employment rate of people with intellectual disabilities are not available, estimates put it at a maximum of 5%¹⁶³

Changing stereotypes and attitudes towards people with disabilities is one of the next most important steps for their social inclusion, especially for people with intellectual disabilities. Research indicates that over half of all media articles in Lithuania portray people with disabilities in a negative way.¹⁶⁴



The part-time employment rate is particularly high among women with caring responsibilities. As stated in the European Commission's report, many more women are working part-time and few men use paternity leave. Though the government is intending to improve paternity leave in order to improve the share of caring responsibilities between men and women, this step is still considered very modest. The issue of paternity leave should not be considered only from an economic perspective, but also as an issue of major importance when it comes to the early development of the child. Moreover, with increasingly diverse household and family compositions, increasing paternity leave should also take account of this diversity.

The caring responsibilities expected from the family and wider social networks with regards to older generations need to be addressed from a work-life balance perspective. These responsibilities are mainly taken up by women, and as populations age and further policies are designed for people to stay at home for as long as possible, women take a bigger share of caregiving responsibilities. Therefore, the government should invest further in respite care so that family caregivers can take a break from their daily routine, challenges and stress of caring for an aging adult.

In 2016, the government decided to invest an additional €100 million annually to tackle child poverty. However, recent reports show that this has not had the expected impact. The Children's Ombudsman published a report¹⁶⁵ in December 2017 which stated that 1 out of 9 children in The Netherlands grow up in poverty, a total of 378,000 children. The report concludes that although the municipalities, given their new legal responsibilities, could implement programmes that strengthen children's development

and upbringing, there are many shortcomings in current child municipal policies. Some of these include the limited possibilities of municipalities to improve the financial situation of parents, overestimating the self-reliance level of the parents, lack of cooperation with education, and difficulties experienced in providing tailor-made solutions.

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The Commission's report does not mention the extra budget to fight child poverty for the municipalities that in the end received only 87 million Euro instead of the 100 initially announced. No other additional reports have been conducted since. It is also important to emphasise that beyond child poverty, implementation of the right of all children to grow up in a safe, healthy and supportive environment is the major goal behind the youth care act that took effect on the 1st of January 2015.

A major reform has been introduced to decentralise long-term care and a new framework to improve the quality of long-term care is due to be implemented. The decentralisation reform of long-term care was part of a wider set of policies introduced on 1st January 2015 that shifted the responsibilities for youth care, social support and labour participation to the municipalities. While the financing of care for the most fragile and vulnerable older citizens is provided by the national government, the municipalities are responsible for organising and providing care services, supporting informal caregivers and providing house-

hold care. The aim of the reform is to provide care at home that is of an equivalent quality to the care provided in nursing and care homes.¹⁶⁶

The pace of reforms has not met expectations. This led to a public initiative promoted by people with caring responsibilities and the adoption in Parliament of a new framework for improving the quality of long-term care with a total cost of €2.1 billion. After the new government was formed, an intergovernmental programme with the participation of representatives from different layers of government was set up in the field of social services to speed up the implementation of the reform in long-term care and the wider aspects of social inclusion.

People with a migrant background have problems integrating fully in society. To start with, it is important to distinguish differences between groups of migrants. For second and third generations, their problem is less related to language but rather to the difficulties they face navigating the social services system and the discrimination they experience when trying to access the labour market.

Recently arrived migrants and asylum-seekers face the well-known difficulties of language, lack of familiarity with the social services system, and lack of tools to be able to understand it. Many local authorities would like to support their integration ensuring that their status is granted earlier on. Having responsibility for integration of migrants passed onto the municipalities would imply that they would be able to tailor support to their needs. The integration of newly arrived migrants and asylum-seekers is one of the issues addressed in the framework of the intergovernmental programme mentioned above.

In this context, Minister Wouter Koolmees of Social Affairs decided in July 2018 to put an end to the Netherlands' current integration system in which immigrants and refugees have to buy their own civic integration course. Instead, municipalities will set up a personal integration plan for all newcomers, which includes language courses, rent and costs for insurance. In addition, municipal officials will establish a 'learning route' for each newcomer in their personal integration plan. This new system is expected to be implemented in 2020.

The Commission's report does not refer to staff shortages in the care sector, which need addressing. The care sector is looking to recruit 190,000 extra people by 2022. Homes for older people had a staff shortage of 7,000 carers in 2018. Even though there are staff shortages in youth care and long-term care, the general appreciation of this type of work and its remuneration is limited, hence the care sector is not seen as presenting attractive career prospects. Despite the lack of qualified people in the sector, this is not being addressed at national level.



Insufficient access to early childcare is particularly detrimental to women's participation in the labour market. In Poland, only 10% of children under three years-old are enrolled in childcare. The programme 500+, implemented in 2016, is a universal monthly cash transfer of PLN 500 (equivalent to around €117) paid to families for the second and any consecutive children until they reach the age of 18.¹⁶⁷

This programme was put in place to improve families' disposable income and therefore reduce the number of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In total, PLN 42.6 billion (€10 billion) have been allocated to this programme.

Fifty-three per cent of children up to 18 years old are being covered.¹⁶⁸ However, this programme is also acting as a disincentive for women to access employment. It is estimated that about 100,000 women resigned from work in the eighteen months following the introduction of this benefit.¹⁶⁹

In order to respond to this challenge, the Polish government allocated in 2018 PLN 450 million to the *Maluch Plus Programme* (baby plus programme), which represents an investment three times bigger than the investment made in 2017.¹⁷⁰

The Maluch Plus Programme is dedicated to developing childcare services for children under the age of 3. In addition, since 2017, counties and districts that do not have childcare facilities are also eligible for funding from this programme. One hundred and two municipalities have received governmental co-financing to build childcare services for children up to 3 years-old.¹⁷¹

However, the question is whether an increased budget and an extended range of facilities for support will be enough to encourage municipalities to create and develop childcare facilities especially if they are not obliged to do so.

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Long-term care faces multiple challenges. Most long-term care is provided by informal carers, often family members who have almost no government support.¹⁷² Relying on informal carers to meet the needs of an ageing population has negative implications for social inclusion and labour market participation. Even though the government is aware of this shortage of available support for people requiring long-term care, there is still a lack of public financing.

Poland is working towards better integration of social services. The government has proposed legislation to establish a new centre in local authorities that will integrate social services. This new social services centre will coordinate services planning and delivery.

The World Bank and the government are working together to pilot enhanced service-delivery integration across different levels of care and providers. These new measures aim to ensure that diagnosis, therapeutic, and rehabilitation care are focused on people's needs. The pilots will serve as an element of a wider, primary health care reform.¹⁷³

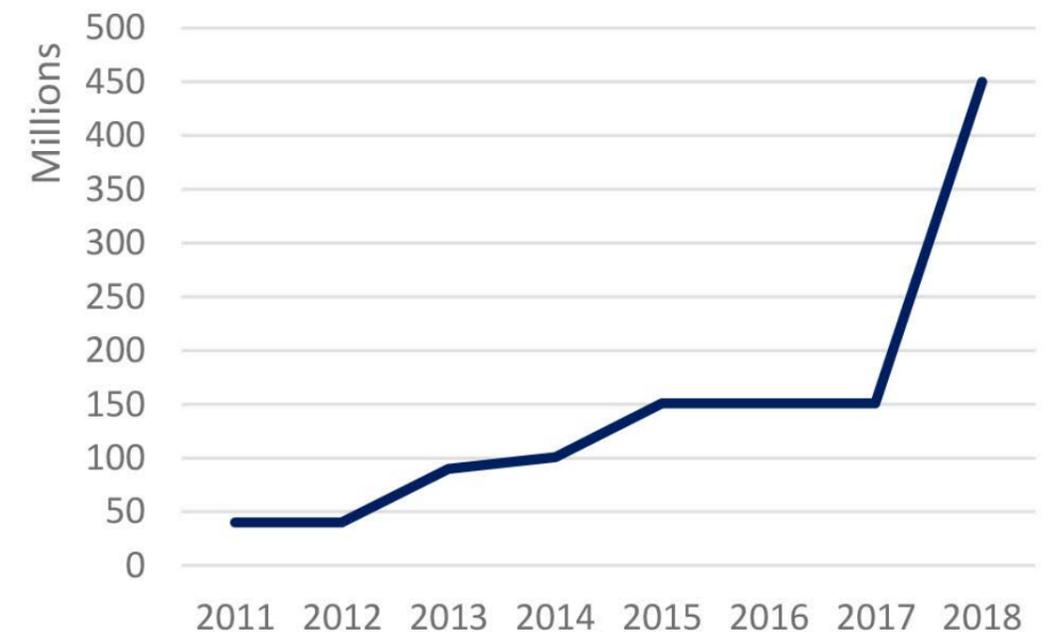
The unemployment rate of people with disabilities decreased in 2016. The unemployment rate of people with disabilities of working age group in 2016 was 11.6% and decreased by 1.4 percentage points compared to 2015 and by 4.5 percentage points compared to 2014. During 2016, employers reported to the labour offices the creation of 61,400 job offers for people with disabilities, of which 10.2% (6,200) were subsidised job offers. It is important to highlight that people with disabilities in Poland do not receive any additional benefits for participation in employment activation programmes. This limits incentives to participate in these programmes

The receipt of a disability pension can be combined with paid work but only to a certain income threshold.

The system of professional activation of persons with disabilities in Poland remains to some extent centralised because it is organised by the State Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (PFRON). Money from this state fund is transferred to local authorities. The current situation, where both national and local authorities are responsible for activation programmes, creates a complicated system with overlapping and duplicating tasks.¹⁷⁴

Figure 1. Millions of euros assigned to 'Maluch' program

See footnote ¹⁵⁹



The measures implemented under the Youth Guarantee programme have helped lower youth unemployment. The programme *Garantia Jovem* (Youth Guarantee) was created in 2014 to reach two different kinds of young people: unemployed (registered/in contact with employment services) and those not in contact with public services. Regarding the first group, the results are very encouraging as the youth guarantee programme was able to significantly reduce their unemployment rate, from 42% to 21%.¹⁷⁵

Each Employment Centre has a coordinator and a set of focal points throughout the country. In addition, local partnerships consisting of various groups and entities have been established in order to identify and support unemployed young people. Until now, the experience showed the difficulties of reaching people further away from the regular services and organisations. In the first quarter of 2017 there were 175,800 NEETs up to 29 years old.¹⁷⁶ This shows that more progress is needed. In order to improve results, it would be important to better integrate all services aiming to reach those NEETs and to provide the adequate resources, both financial and professional, to reach those young people who are not on the public services' radar.

Poverty indicators improved since the beginning of the recovery from the financial crisis but in-work poverty and poverty risk levels need to be further reduced. In-work poverty remains high, only reduced from 10.9% to 10.8% between 2016 and 2017. In-work-poverty is much higher among those working part time (30.2%) than those in full time employment (9.5%).

In addition, The Survey on Income and Living Condi-

tions shows that 23.3% of the population was at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion in 2017, declining from the previous year (25.1%).¹⁷⁷ Women continue to be most affected: 18.7% compared to 17.8% for men.¹⁷⁸ The presence of children in a household continues to be associated with a higher risk of poverty (19.7% for households with dependent children and 16.9% for households without dependent children).¹⁷⁹ In this sense, more needs to be done to support households with children.

The Minimum Income Scheme (*Rendimento Social de Inserção*) combines income support with additional social and active inclusion opportunities. However, this income is only provided to the most vulnerable and is not significant enough. In 2017, the maximum amount per person was €186.68. The adequacy of the minimum income scheme to fight poverty and inequalities is limited. Despite an increase of 1.8% in the number of recipients over the previous year, the level of coverage in Portugal ranks among the lowest. This is at odds with European recommendations such as the European Pillar of Social Rights which emphasises that ensuring access to minimum income is essential for groups lacking sufficient resources.

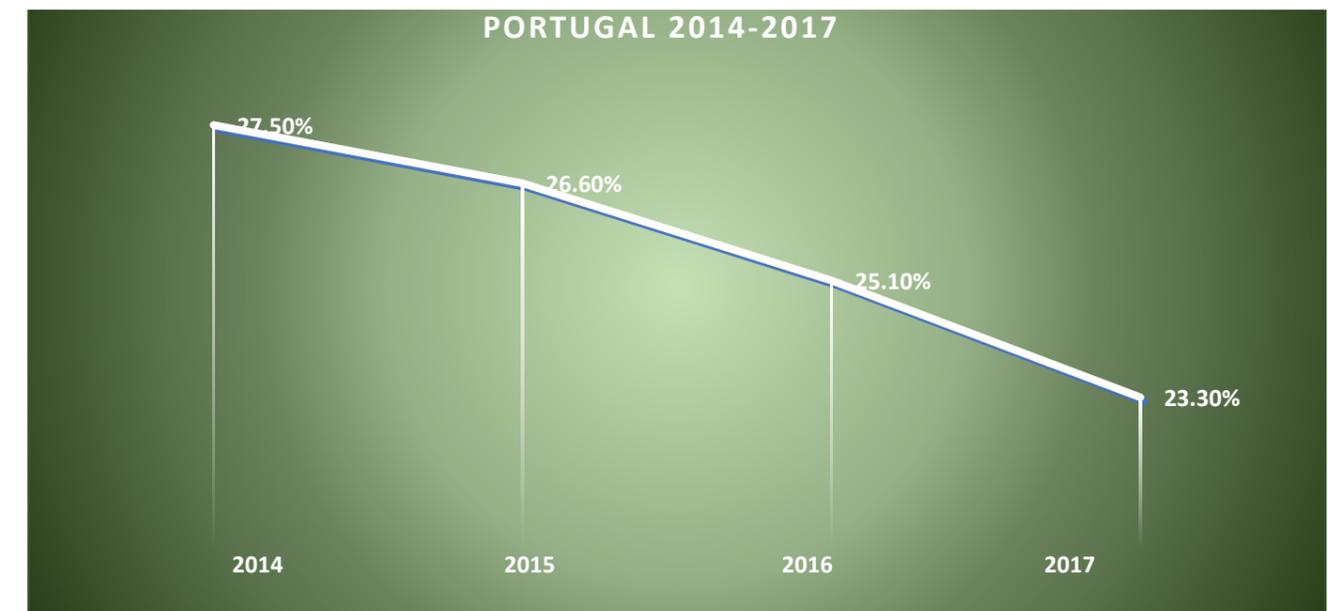
Significant improvement has been made to support people with disabilities have an independent life. Two key initiatives were approved in 2017: the Social Benefit for Inclusion (*Prestação Social para a Inclusão*)¹⁸⁰ and the Programme for Independent Life (*Modelo para a Vida Independente*).¹⁸¹ The Social Benefit for Inclusion is a financial benefit (maximum €264.32) addressed to national and foreign citizens aged over 18 with a level of disability of 60%. This benefit is expected to be received by 26,000 citizens in 2018.

The Programme for Independent Life is organised at the local level in Support Centres for Independent Life and aims to provide personal assistance for people with disabilities to support them in their daily activities and allowing them to remain independent. Therefore, both initiatives reinforce the capacity of people with disabilities to get support at home in their communities and, thus avoid their institutionalisation. These initiatives will be implemented as of October 2018.

Since the beginning of the financial crisis, housing costs as a share of disposable income have increased significantly, especially for the poor. Indeed, housing affordability worsened significantly over the past 10 years, with the share of disposable income spent on housing costs increasing from 16% in 2005 to 21% in 2015.¹⁸² This is mainly due to a decrease in household income as a result of growing unem-

ployment and the introduction of austerity policies. Similarly, the number of households in arrears with their rents or mortgage credit payments has also increased. The recent rise in housing prices in Portugal is likely to worsen access to housing for people who have low incomes and are socially deprived. Prices are still below pre-crisis levels but they are increasing, especially in urban areas which are increasingly attracting interest from investors.¹⁸³

The awareness of these difficulties and the need to facilitate housing access to families led to the elaboration of a new National Housing Strategy for the period 2015-2031. This strategy has three key objectives¹⁸⁴: 1) to encourage urban rehabilitation; 2) to boost the rental market; 3) to improve housing regeneration. However, it is still too early to evaluate the results of this strategy.



See footnote ¹⁷⁷

A project targeting young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) was launched, but there are delays in the creation of multidisciplinary teams of professionals. In August 2017, the National Agency for Employment in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice, the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research, and the Agency for Payments and Social Inspection launched the project INTESPO, focussing on NEETs.¹⁸⁵ The aim of the project is to register at least 160,000 NEETs with the Public Employment Service where they will be provided information and professional advice.¹⁸⁶ After an initial assessment, they will receive an activation plan based on their needs.

The project foresees the creation of 42 multidisciplinary teams of social workers, education and employment services professionals to support NEETs. It also foresees the development of specific methodologies to provide adequate support to NEETs and training for the multidisciplinary teams of professionals. However, though protocols for the implementation of the project have been signed at county level, there have not been developments in the creation of these multidisciplinary teams.¹⁸⁷

Despite the approval of financial support, housing deprivation remains a challenge especially for young people leaving care. The Government cancelled the programme 'First room' for children leaving care. Currently, there are no proposals on new programmes to support young people leaving care at the age of 18 or 26 (when young people continue their studies at university).

A new programme, 'First House Lease', was designed to provide financial support to unemployed people

registered with employment agencies and who move more than 50 kilometres from their place of residence. However, according to data reported by the media, only 15 people applied in the first two months and just 110 unemployed people received financial support four months after the initial implementation of the programme. This is mostly due to the fact that financial support can be requested only after resettlement, which means that the deposit and the first two months of rent need to be paid in advance and not everyone may be able to afford to do so.

No concrete anti-poverty measures have been adopted despite the approval of a national plan.

The plan¹⁸⁸ adopted in 2017 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice has not been implemented. The plan includes different measures such as developing a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the measures included in the National Strategy on Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction for the period 2015-2020. Moreover, it aims to assess poverty profiles for future policy developments, such as improving living conditions for poor families, reducing poverty and social exclusion in rural areas and developing monitoring and evaluation systems for poverty intervention.

In March 2017, the Ministry of Labour and Social Justice also approved a Collaboration Protocol¹⁸⁹ for the implementation of integrated community services to prevent social exclusion and fight poverty. These services should be provided by social and health services together with mediators, health and school counselors. However, no further actions were implemented at national or local levels after the release of the above-mentioned collaboration protocol.

Hiring social services staff is still a challenge for local authorities. In November 2017, the Government approved a measure making it compulsory for each community centre to have at least one social worker in public social services (SPAS).¹⁹⁰ However, no specific budget has been set aside for the implementation of this measure. Despite having financial difficulties/not receiving sufficient funds from the national level, local authorities are responsible for paying salaries for social workers. According to the contributor, salaries for social workers should be covered by national instead of local budgets.

People with disabilities still face a higher risk of poverty. A lack of targeted employment services, inadequate transport infrastructure and insufficient comu-

nity based services for their rehabilitation hinder the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Moreover, there has been no increase in the number of day care non-residential centres.¹⁹¹ Statistics from the National Authority for People with Disabilities (NAPD) show that 97.74% of people with disabilities live in family care or independently, and 2.26% in residential facilities. The number of residential services increased in 2017 from 388 to 417. Approximately two-thirds are care and assistance centres (6,535 beneficiaries) and one third are supported homes (907 beneficiaries). In July, the Government also increased social benefits (see Table 22). The monthly allowance, regardless of income, is calculated at 70% of the social reference value 500 RON (€108.13) for adults with severe disabilities and 53% for adults with partial disabilities.

Table 1. Increase of social benefits for people with disabilities as of 1 July 2018

	Monthly pension regardless of income	Additional monthly allowance regardless of income
Adult with severe disability	350 RON - €75 (232 RON - €50 previously)	150 RON - €32 (106 RON - €23 previously)
Adult with partial disability	265 RON - €57 (193 RON - €42 previously)	110 RON - €24 (79 RON - €17 previously)
Adult with minimal disability		60 RON - €13 (39 RON - €8 previously)
Child with severe disability	300 RON - €64	
Child with partial disability	175 RON - €38	
Child with minimal disability	60 RON - €13	

* Government decision no. 60/2017¹⁹²

Legislation is in place for deinstitutionalisation, but better implementation is required. The 2017 report on the deinstitutionalisation strategy from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Families¹⁹³ refers largely to past work in 2014-2015 and provides very general information on the work done by social services in this field. This indicates a lack of ambition to implement deinstitutionalisation according to SOCIA.

Furthermore the National Project on Deinstitutionalisation: Support for Transition Teams has been delayed by two years. These transition teams include directors and staff members from institutions, and regional representatives to develop practical transformation plans for the institutions.

The Deinstitutionalisation Expert Council brings together different government ministries, regional and local authorities, service providers and organisations representing service users. Its role is to coordinate the process of deinstitutionalisation. However according to SOCIA the Council has little impact in practice, demonstrated by the fact that the Council meets only once per year.¹⁹⁴

The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Families must improve its implementation of deinstitutionalisation policies, and promote coordination of all relevant stakeholders including users and their families, local communities and regional authorities.

The Social Services Act should be amended to promote more community-based services, and more public funds should be harnessed to supplement EU funds on deinstitutionalisation.

The Social Services Act should be amended to promote more community-based services.

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) capacity is limited. Discussions are ongoing over the introduction of compulsory ECEC for children age five. However current capacities are limited and this move would result in 23% of three to four year olds being unable to access ECEC places.¹⁹⁵ A more appropriate first step would be the establishment of the legal entitlement to claim an ECEC place for five-year olds. This would avoid adding significant pressure to the system and provide time for municipalities to tackle capacity shortages. Also, disparities in regional availability must be addressed, with some regions performing better than others, for example in the Košice region where only 60% of children aged three to five are enrolled in ECEC.¹⁹⁶ There are also plans to improve ECEC access for children of unemployed parents from 2018. But given capacity shortages this will be difficult to implement in practice.

One measure that is being introduced and could improve access to ECEC for vulnerable families is the partial reimbursement of ECEC costs for families who can demonstrate their lack of financial means.

Slow progress is being made in promoting the social inclusion of Roma people. This is particularly the case in access to housing, health and employment, whilst the National Roma Integration Strategy has been successful in scaling up successful local and NGO projects.¹⁹⁷

However discrimination remains an important barrier. Particularly segregation in education and housing, and the discriminatory behaviour of police towards Roma people.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, in the National Roma

Integration Strategy there is a lack of attention on the most vulnerable in the Roma community such as women and children.¹⁹⁹ Children could be better supported through improving their access to ECEC. In 2016 only 34% of Roma children attended ECEC.²⁰⁰

Policies on social housing must be introduced to guide future developments. To begin with, a new law is required so that the concept of social housing is clearly defined, with emphasis on long-term solutions rather than overnight support. A national strategy should be put in place to outline the development of accessible social housing, including a range of support services to improve people's wider social inclusion. Social housing provided by municipalities is currently difficult for vulnerable people to access due to very strict eligibility conditions.²⁰¹

On top of this, the current housing allowance (€55-59 per month) is too low to cover the real costs of housing so it should be increased to improve support. In addition, policies should be put in place to support the development of more affordable housing provided by the private sector.

People with disabilities are underrepresented in the labour market and in education. Of the 240,000 people with a disability in Slovakia in 2014 only 30% were employed,²⁰² indicating that a significant proportion face a high risk of poverty and social exclusion. Their lack of participation in education is also indicated by the fact that 40% of children with disa-

bilities do not attend ECEC,²⁰³ which seems to suggest that parents often take responsibility for providing care themselves. This trend carries through to adulthood with only 5% of people with disabilities in employment educated at university level.²⁰⁴

One promising initiative has been introduced by the National Institute for Education. It is a programme for children with disabilities to access specialised ECEC facilities, and to support mainstreaming in schools.

Greater coordination and a focus on personalisation is required to support the inclusion of vulnerable people in the labour market. There is insufficient coordination between education, employment and social services for promoting employment, with a focus on regional differences also required.²⁰⁵

Specific target groups have their own dedicated national projects for promoting their employment, such as young people, people with disabilities, older people and the long-term unemployed.

However employment policies take a narrow approach, with the vast majority of funding going to subsidised job placements. Public employment services receive little funding and there is almost no skills training available for unemployed people. On average employment officers manage 202 users each and expert employment consultants 2,280 users each.²⁰⁶

More attention should be placed on personalised services to guide unemployed people to find suitable pathways into the labour market. These services currently receive only a small amount of funding but show better outcomes for users.²⁰⁷



Slovenia

Minimum income has been increased. A study set monthly minimum costs of living at €441.67.²⁰⁸ The proposed minimum income amount was calculated at 75% of this amount (€331.26). However, in April 2018, the government passed a law that increased minimum income to €385.05, which came into force on the 1st of June 2018. New additional benefits for older people and people unable to work will increase from €484.97 to €566.02.²⁰⁹

Child poverty is expected to be reduced thanks to the minimum income increase. In April 2018, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs and the Social Protection Institute organised a consultation on the situation of children in Slovenia. The consultation acknowledged that despite the economic crisis and the higher rate of risk-of-poverty due to austerity measures in transfers, the situation has improved to reach the pre-crisis level.²¹⁰ As stated in ESN's report last year, the Law on Personal Assistance will enter into force on 1st January 2019.

The recent family law transfers a significant part of the decision-making on measures concerning children and families from the Centres for Social Work (CSW) to family courts.²¹¹ In this context, CSWs need to recruit lawyers because social workers have no training on how to write legal applications for child protection trials. This means that social workers should be trained in legal proceedings to make the most effective use of funding in child protection.

Poverty levels among older people are increasing and the financial burden on families should be relieved. The at-risk-of-poverty rate of older people was on average 17.2% in 2015.²¹² Women are more at risk of falling into poverty in their old age compared to men. The Active Ageing Strategy was adopted in 2017, although there are no improvements in long-term care. According to the Family Act, children are responsible for financially supporting their parents when they

live in residential care and if they do not have enough income to cover for the expenses. Family members can apply for financial support from public social security. However, in the process of calculating the allowance for accommodation, the income of partners/spouses is taken into account. Moreover, older people do not receive any social security benefits if their house is worth €120,000 and they received social financial assistance for more than 18 months in the last 24 months.²¹³

There are not enough places in residential care. Although some emergency beds in care homes for older people should always be available, there are no free places. This creates difficulties for social services trying to place older people in care.

A project targeting long-term unemployed was launched, but regional disparities still exist in the provision of services. In September 2017, a project on social activation co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF) for the period 2017-2022²¹⁴ started. The project proposes long-term programmes lasting one year, intermediate programmes lasting six months and short-term programmes lasting three months. The CSW are involved in the project by providing support to long-term unemployed. Regional disparities in terms of provision of services were high due to lack of applications from organisations working in the sector (see the map). Initial results show that only 25 out of 40 projected applications were received for long-term programmes, and 13 out of 21 applications were received for intermediate programmes. In some areas, the programme was not implemented at all.²¹⁵ Moreover, the effectiveness of the programme also varied from region to region, depending on the different levels of performance of organisations providing services. Despite regional disparities, the national overall goal of 25% of long-term unemployed people reintegrating in the labour market is most likely to be achieved. The in-

tegration of social and employment services in the framework of this programme was also positive.

New reforms are addressing the modernisation of social benefits and social services delivery. The National Programme for Social Assistance and Care established new rules to simplify administrative procedures. An automatic benefits calculation was adopted in December 2017 and will be operational in autumn 2019. According to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, social benefits' beneficiaries will receive an automatic calculation of their annual benefits. The obligation to apply for additional benefits such as child support or kindergarten contributions will remain

only for those who apply for the first time. The Ministry aims to provide a modern social security system featuring an efficient user-oriented way of deciding what types of public social benefits beneficiaries are entitled to.

The modernisation of social services will continue with the upcoming reform of the CSWs, which will be operational from October 2018. CSW will be reorganised into regional centres, thus reducing the number of centres from 62 to 16. Together with the reform of the social security system, the administrative burden for social workers is expected to be reduced, and the social inclusion of vulnerable groups improved.

Social Activation Project: Implementation by Region

See footnote ²¹⁴



Youth unemployment and long-term unemployment rates in Spain continue to be among the highest in the EU (37.5% and 7.1% respectively in 2017).

The 2017-2020 Employment Activation Strategy sets the objectives for the national employment system in terms of planning, delivery, evaluation, and financing of active labour market policies²¹⁶ The strategy aims to modernise public employment services to support vulnerable groups such as NEETs and the long-term unemployed. In order to implement the Employment Activation Strategy, each year Spain approves the Annual Plan of Employment Policy (Plan Anual de Política de Empleo-PAPE), which is the key coordination instrument for employment policies. The 2018 plan includes a total of 620 services and programmes, which represents an increase of 15.24% since 2017.

For 2018, the allocated budget is €5.5 billion, of which 2 billion will be managed by the regions. The Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families of the Catalan Government has allocated EUR 7.1 million to the UbiCAT programme, which aims to support long-term unemployed as well as workers in precarious employment situations. This would be achieved through the provision of personalised information programmes, professional counselling and motivation programmes.²¹⁷ In addition, the Enfeina't programme, which receives EUR 14.9 million, allows long-term unemployed people to be hired for a period of 6 to 12 months, meaning they can improve their future employability.

A number of initiatives are being implemented in Spain to enhance labour activation and inclusion of young people, but some implementation challenges remain. At national level, the number of newly registered young people in the Youth

Guarantee continues to increase, particularly for those 25-30 year-old. In Catalonia, the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families of the Catalan Government has maintained the development of the Youth Guarantee programme and 34,234 young people registered in 2017. During that year, 65% managed to get a work contract. Overall, the programme had over 106,000 people enrolled, of which 57,716 participated in training programmes or job placements. Most participants (59%) only had compulsory education.²¹⁸

In order to design and implement appropriate social intervention itineraries to meet the needs of unemployed people, it is vital to improve the coordination of employment and social services.

For NEETs, this coordination between professionals should lead to the establishment of specific protocols that would determine how to support young people with particular difficulties into employment.

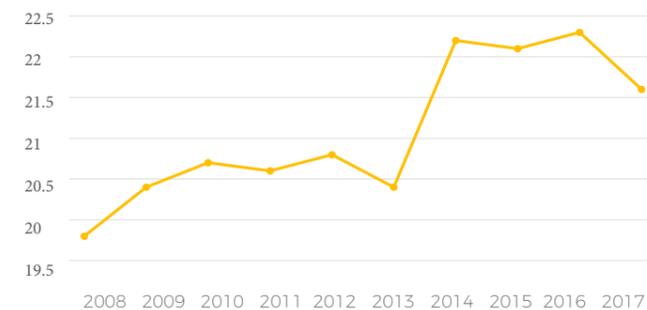
The region of Asturias approved in March 2017 a programme aimed at providing social and employment services in an integrated manner to ensure that minimum income recipients receive personalised support covering all their needs.²¹⁹ This programme is specifically targeted at recipients of the minimum income (basic social income as it is called in this region).

Asturias approved in March 2017 a programme aimed at providing social and employment services in an integrated manner to ensure that minimum income recipients receive personalised support.

Even though Spain is slowly benefiting from the economic recovery, the challenge is to ensure that the positive impact reaches all groups. As shown in the table below, the at-risk of poverty rate has remained quite stable since 2014 and reached 21.6% in 2017.²²⁰

The at-risk-of poverty rate 2008-2017

See footnote ²⁰⁹



According to the National Institute of Statistics, the regions with the highest rate of at-risk of poverty or social exclusion are Extremadura (44%), Canarias (40.2%) and Andalucía (37.3%). The regions with the lowest values are Navarra (13.5%), La Rioja (14.4%) and Basque Country (14.5%). Against this reality, it is necessary to adopt a national strategy for the prevention and fight against poverty and exclusion which should focus on specific vulnerable groups such as children, the unemployed and people with disabilities.

The poverty rate among children continues to be particularly high. In 2017, an estimated 31% of children under 16 (31.7% in 2016) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.²²¹ These levels clearly show that the measures put in place previously to reduce poverty levels have been highly ineffective.

Gender inequality is a persistent issue in Spain. According to the Active Population Survey, the unemployment rate among women is 18.54%, compared to 15.18% in men. In addition, women earn 23% less colleagues and 6.7% of women are not in employment due to caring responsibilities against only 0.7% of men. These differences result in high inequalities at pension age: only 37% of women receive a retirement pension, compared to 63% of men. Therefore, efforts should be intensified to achieve equality between men and women and to combat traditional gender roles, both within the family and in society.

As a consequence of the economic and financial crisis, there has been a rapid increase in the number of people in inadequate and insecure housing.

Growing unemployment and income falls have increased vulnerability to homelessness as more people are unable to meet housing costs. In the last three months of 2017, Spain's housing prices jumped more than 7%.²²² Homeless shelters in Spain received an average of 16,437 people daily during 2016. This figure is 20.5% higher than the number registered in the previous homelessness services survey carried out in 2014.²²³

In the last few years Spain has made progress in the integration of people with disabilities, offering financial assistance and support to integrate into the labour market according to their needs.

For example, in 2017, the regional Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families of the Catalan government increased the dedicated budget to support people with disabilities from € 68 to 80 million. The regional Ministry also signed framework agreements with the representatives of federations employing 70% of workers with disabilities.

There is not enough affordable housing available in Sweden and the groups most affected are young people and newly arrived migrants. FSS points out that the main consequence of the housing shortage is homelessness. A study conducted in April 2017 found there were 5,900 people in Sweden who were deemed acutely homeless.²²⁴

Social services are becoming increasingly involved in housing issues and are often forced to use expensive solutions, such as hotels, to provide accommodation for homeless families. Authorities are often forced into becoming 'social landlords' which is when social services rent housing and then sub-let to people who are unable to have their own rental contracts. At the beginning of 2014 there were 16,000 of these sub-lets, which are both expensive and time-consuming for social services to administrate.²²⁵

FSS states that the Swedish construction industry is working near its maximum capacity. The government has a plan currently to build 250,000 homes by 2020 but expansion of construction is needed to achieve this. Many construction companies indicate that the biggest obstacle to increasing housing construction is the difficulty to recruit skilled labour. FSS highlights that in 2017 the construction industry was awarded €34,900,000 from the European Social Fund to help train construction workers in Stockholm.²²⁶ The project will run until 2021 to attempt to address this labour shortage. FSS recommends increasing financial support and subsidies from the government to encourage the increased construction of affordable housing.

Integration of migrants to society and the workplace remains a key issue in Sweden. Upon arrival, migrants are put into 24-month introduction programmes. There are currently around 70,000 people participating in these introduction programmes due to the scale of migration to Sweden since 2015. The role of social services in these

two-year introduction periods varies between municipalities as they decide how services at the municipal level are organised.

Our contributor highlights that due to service integration issues, there are difficulties ensuring consistent payment of benefits to migrants once they are placed in a municipality. The intention is for the newly-arrived migrants to participate in the introduction programme and to qualify for benefits via payments administered by the Social Insurance Office. However, due to coordinating errors, there is a considerable gap between the initial immigration benefit ending and Social Insurance Office benefit starting. This means that migrants often become short-term recipients of benefit payments from social services, which puts an unnecessary financial and administrative burden on already stretched social services administrations.

The Delegation for the Employment of Young People and Newly Arrived Migrants (Dua) has been responsible for helping migrants find employment since 2017. Their main tool for achieving this is to encourage municipalities and the Swedish Public Employment Service to enter into collaborative agreements at local level. Dua is then responsible for allocating government grants linked to these local agreements. It is expected that agreements should be tailored to the employment situation at the local level. For example, the local authority of Trosa has just received a grant of 2,100,000 SEK (€197,000) to work together with its neighbouring municipality and local employers to find better matches between employer's needs and the skills/potential skills of newly-arrived migrants.

Youth unemployment is still relatively high but there has been a successive reduction since 2012. In 2012 it stood at around 23.6% but in the first quarter of 2018 it was reported to be 16.5%. See graph on the youth unemployment

rate.²²⁷

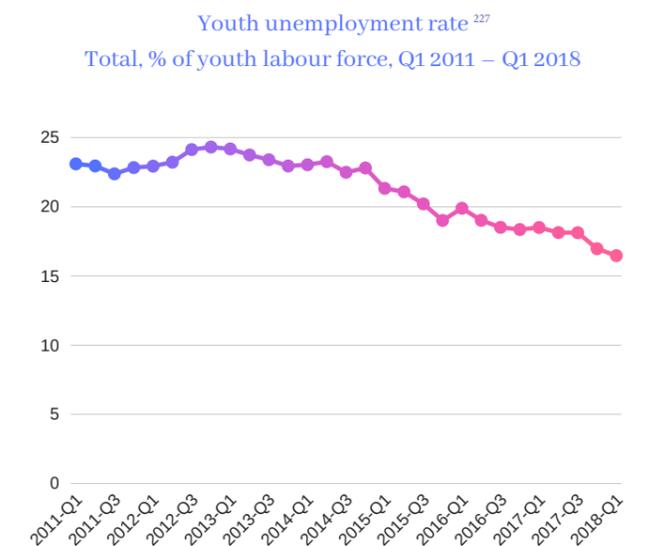
Dua's approach to tackling youth unemployment is the same as that of tackling migrant unemployment. Since autumn 2015, 287 of Sweden's 290 municipalities have entered into local agreements with the Swedish Public Employment Services to reduce youth unemployment. The agreements cover joint initiatives targeting young people aged 16 to 24 who are not in education, employment or training.

The project 'Ung Komp' is an example of one of these collaborative arrangements. This project takes place in 19 different locations in Sweden. Municipalities and the employment service form multidisciplinary teams who share a workplace and meet young people who need coordinated support to gain employment. The teams consist of different professionals such as social workers, employment officers, psychologists and occupational therapists. Results have been promising with 7 of 10 project participants entering employment or further education after completing the project.²²⁸

The situation of people with disabilities has become more precarious in Sweden over the last 12 months. The Social Insurance Office has become more restrictive in its interpretation of legislation and assessment of the need for personal assistance for people with disabilities. There is an ongoing review of the legislation which is due to produce a report in December 2018. One of the objectives of the review was initially to suggest proposals to reduce and slow down rising costs for services. After pressure from service recipients and user organisations the government has removed its pledge to reduce costs. FSS is waiting for the new legislative changes to be announced before they voice their opinion on the topic.

Some demographic groups within Sweden are moving towards the poverty line, especially those receiving assistance benefits. The percentage of Swedes who work and who have an income below the EU's at-risk-of-poverty threshold is 7%, which is around 3% below the EU average.²²⁹ At the same time during the period 2008-2016 the proportion of Sweden's total population with a low disposable income increased from just over 13% to just over 16%.²³⁰

There are still certain groups who are vulnerable and where the risk of falling below the poverty threshold is critical. Of those who are employed, young people, single parents and foreign-born persons are most at risk of falling into poverty. For benefit recipients such as those who are retired, the unemployed and people with disabilities 'real-income' has not kept pace with wages from employment. Annual increases to social assistance benefits grow at a smaller rate than the increase in wages producing a widening gap between those who are employed and those who receive social assistance payments.





United Kingdom

The UK social care workforce has major issues with recruitment and retention of staff. ADASS says that low pay for social care workers contributes to a severe lack of available homecare in many parts of England. This means that it can be hard to avoid hospital admissions and to discharge patients from hospital back into the community which results in costly extended hospital stays.

Local councils have been forced to make cuts to their social care budgets despite additional local taxation and the demand for social care increasing.

This has major impacts on older and disabled people and their families, on the stability and sustainability of the care market and the National Health Service. In the UK it is reported that 16% of care homes are at risk of closure due to financial pressures²³¹

Housing remains an important issue in the UK.

Homelessness in Scotland has been on a steady decline from a high of 43,595 in 2005/06 to 28,247 in 2016/17.²³² Social Work Scotland attributes the reduction in homelessness to taking a more preventative approach. 'Housing Options' is an information and advice service funded by the Scottish Government to support local authorities in reducing homelessness. As well as supporting someone with a housing issue, the service also signposts service users to other services which can address underlying issues which can lead to homelessness, such as financial difficulties or mental health issues.

In April 2018, English local authorities gained a new duty to prevent homelessness of all people, regardless of priority need. ADASS points out that the act has been generally welcomed, but that financial support to local authorities from central government has been criticised as inadequate. Croydon, for example, will receive an extra £1,300,000 (€1,483,933) but expects a 20-25% rise in the number of people presenting as homeless.²³³ ADASS believes that the real cause of homelessness is the lack of affordable housing supply and that this needs addressing for significant progress to be made.

Health and Social Care integration in England is progressing slower than in Scotland.

Alongside the re-naming of the Department of Health to include Social Care, the focus in England has been on the development of Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships. These have been charged with the responsibility to develop integrated care systems at the local level. These partnerships aim to provide a way for funding to be moved around the system to incentivise more preventative care services.

ADASS believes integration efforts in England are being hampered by the 'payment by results' approach mechanisms. This is where a hospital generates a large share of its income from activity and as a result becomes dependent on this income, making it difficult to transfer funding from hospitals to be used on preventative care. ADASS believes this approach will need to be addressed nationally if real progress is to be made.

In Scotland, Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) and Joint Boards have now been fully operational for two years. Two HSCP inspections have been carried out by the Care Inspectorate in 2018 regarding the delivery of integrated services. Both HSCPs inspected were graded four on a six-point grading scale for quality outcomes.²³⁴ ²³⁵ Audit Scotland is undertaking a review of integration progress and expects to report more comprehensively on the topic in

November 2018. Both UK contributors agree that an added difficulty to integration of services is doing it at a time when services are most stretched due to reduced budgets and increasing demand due to population change.

Governments across the UK are pushing for more accessible childcare for all, but there are still considerable issues to overcome.

In England, the government has increased the state funded childcare allowance for 3-4-year olds from 15 hours to 30 hours per week. Under the new legislation, all 30 hours are paid for by the state, so childcare groups are expected to provide the whole 30 hours of care at the state funded rate. ADASS highlights that some childcare groups are struggling to adapt to this and that this issue is compounded by increases in minimum wage for staff.

The expansion of free early learning and childcare provision in Scotland from 600 hours per year to 1,140 hours per year is a requirement for all Scottish local authorities to have in place by 2020.²³⁶ However, our contributor states that funding allocated to increasing provision is currently insufficient. Furthermore, this rollout is reliant on an expansion of childcare and on more people moving into the profession. Audit Scotland assesses that plans should have started earlier in trying to achieve this by 2020, and that other options should have been considered.²³⁷

The UK government launched its Disability Employment Strategy this year. The aim of the Disability Employment Strategy is to get 1,000,000 people with disabilities into employment in the next 10 years.

ADASS states that there is very little mention in the strategy of the role that social services can play in its implementation. They say this is a missed opportunity, especially regarding adults with learning disabilities where Adult Social Care has a clear role to play. With clear policy and financial support social services could be able to offer more pro-active support. However, despite the strategy, ADASS highlights that disabled people are currently more likely to be experiencing benefit reductions than increased support.²³⁸

Although most of the aims of this strategy are the responsibility of the decentralised authorities, the UK legislation is aligned with Scotland's on many issues. Key themes of UK strategy in line with Scottish strategy are personalised employment support, work coaching and working with employers to create inclusive workplaces. A March 2018 progress report from the Scottish project "A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People" showed that 8,400 people with a disability or long-term health condition were being supported to find work.²³⁹

The situation regarding NEETs is improving in Scotland, but ADASS recommends a change of approach in England.

Scotland outperforms the rest of the UK in terms of youth unemployment with the current figures at 10.3% in Scotland compared with 12.1% for the UK. The Scottish contributor awards this success to the Youth Employment Strategy which has a 7-year plan to reduce unemployment by 40% by 2021 and is progressing ahead of schedule.²⁴⁰ The plan helps promote integration between employers and education institutions, so that skills can be matched better to the needs of the market. Mentors are also available to help those who face additional barriers such as disability.

In England, ADASS states that there continues to be a reliance on school based careers education which risks failing to reach those young people who are disadvantaged and who may need additional assistance, either because of lack of engagement with the school or due to them becoming NEET between 16-19 years.²⁴¹ ADASS recommends a targeted youth strategy to help NEETs get into work or education based on early identification of vulnerable youth and personalised support packages.

Austria

Social policies must place greater emphasis on the development of community-based services and coordination with stakeholders in different sectors with the aim of improving service quality and efficiency in the face of budget cuts to public social services.

Belgium

Investment in social housing and raising the benefits level to the poverty threshold is vital to combat poverty and reduce the pressure on social services. This is because housing deprivation levels are rising fast and high poverty levels continue to be a significant issue for social services to address.

Bulgaria

It is necessary to improve the whole continuum of education services for disadvantaged children. This should start with early childcare access for all children, at least from the age of four, followed by incentives for better quality secondary education and effective measures to prevent early school leaving. These measures are key to tackle the high number of early school leavers and poor outcomes for young people in education.

Croatia

Croatia must define the statutory obligations of public social services, specifically making it clear that services which are critical for service users' wellbeing should be guaranteed through the national or local budget and made available across the country. It is vital to add preventive services to the catalogue of basic services needed to guarantee a certain level of quality of life and these should be provided in partnership with NGOs and other organisations.

Czech Republic

Accelerating the preparation of the law on long-term care, basing it on the provision of personalised and integrated services is necessary. Part of this should be promoting coordination between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Services to overcome current barriers in the provision of care, which will become more pronounced with demographic ageing.

Denmark

There should be a continuous focus on young people who are marginalised or at risk of marginalisation. This is because there is significant difficulty in resolving the complex issues facing these young people, despite awareness and attention to this topic. Therefore a continuous focus on young people is needed by social services and policy-makers.

Estonia

Benefit levels must be increased as they currently do not provide sufficient income support and there is an increasing proportion of the population who are at risk of poverty. Older people, people with disabilities, NEETs, and families are those at particular risk.

Finland

Finland should further develop tools to measure and evaluate the impact of the free choice model in social services. A thorough impact assessment is central in order to know in advance which impacts a new legislation significantly affecting the provision of social services is likely to have.

France

Redistribute income by increasing property taxes paid by property owners and decrease taxes paid by those on low incomes. This would ease access to housing for lower income populations.

Germany

Social services for children and older people should be further developed in order to avoid relying on informal caregivers. This would allow more women to take part in the labour market.

Hungary

To make better use of the European Social Fund, more rigorous implementation procedures are needed, including the direct involvement of EU authorities and agencies and civic organisations. This would be more in line with the operation of the Norwegian Fund, and help prevent misuse, improve transparency and the effectiveness of EU funds in Hungary.

Ireland

Housing should be seen as a right with all housing policies designed with that perspective. The conceptualisation of this right should be accompanied by the delivery of a housing programme that ensures good practice. This would reduce the levels of homelessness in Ireland.



Italy

Improving the definition of essential levels of social assistance at national level and investing in social services staff training and development to improve quality of services and outcomes for service users is needed. Regional governments have extensive autonomy in the field of social policies but the lack of a clear definition of minimum national levels of social assistance contributes to high regional disparities.



Latvia

It is important that standards of quality of living for families with children are developed. Standards should include quality housing, education, care for children, and leisure activities. These services should be provided via vouchers and funded by the central government for families who do not have adequate income. Social services recently noted an increase of social issues originated by inappropriate living conditions of families, such as lack of adequate living space, insecure housing, lack of amenities in the surrounding areas, and living for long periods in emergency housing facilities.



Lithuania

Benefit levels must be raised to at least the poverty threshold to support the social inclusion of the most vulnerable as current benefit levels put people at significant risk of social exclusion.



Netherlands

Further support should be provided for those with lower qualifications to be able to enter the labour market. In 2017, out of 438,000 people who were unemployed, 161,000 had a low level of education.



Poland

The social welfare system should be thoroughly reconstructed towards social services and social work that support people's needs, and not just financial transfers. Financial transfers can only be efficient if accompanied by a whole range of services to support people's needs in a holistic manner.



Portugal

An anti-poverty strategy at national level is required to reduce high levels of poverty in Portugal. This strategy should bring together a plurality of measures needed to tackle poverty in a holistic manner, covering income support, access to education and healthcare. This holistic approach from social services is needed because people in poverty face difficulties in a plurality of dimensions.



Romania

Enhancing the professionalisation of social services would help to improve the overall performance of the social protection system in Romania. A shortage of social workers, low salary levels and a lack of appropriate training is hindering the capacity of social workers to adequately respond to the needs of service users and the most vulnerable people in society.



Slovakia

A reform of the social services system is required as the current 2008 law is outdated. Social services require better funding to be prepared for new challenges such as demographic ageing. A re-orientation is also required to facilitate a greater focus on preventative measures.



Slovenia

Improving the recruitment of staff for social work and the social sector in public administration by increasing the budget at national level directed towards this purpose would be beneficial. The social sector lacks a significant amount of staff. The budget for social services and social work is established at national level and currently does not allow the recruitment of more staff.



Spain

The government and the local and regional authorities must take urgent, effective and specific measures to protect children and reduce the high levels of child poverty and safeguard their rights, particularly in the case of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.



Sweden

Following significant attention given to the influx of refugees arriving in Sweden since 2015, the focus should now be shifted to strategies for their integration in society. To effectively tackle the current integration issues caused by the scale of migration in recent years, sufficient economic resources and support need to be allocated.



United Kingdom

Focus on improving the recruitment and retention rate of the social care workforce through improving the status of those who work in it is crucial. This is needed in the context of increasing demand for social services and social care in the UK at a time of budget reductions.

The Group's analysis included in the country profiles highlights the perspective of social services on the social situation in their countries. They illustrate achievements, progress and challenges across a number of areas, highlighting positive examples and making policy recommendations.

This input from social services is vital given the role they play. They are recognised as pillars of European society and economics because of their contribution to employment, social protection, health, equality, and cohesion.²⁴² They provide support locally to people across Europe, and represent important employers. Over 20 million people are employed in health and social work in the EU.²⁴³

Their consultation is key as it is important that the European level recognises that the national level does not always adequately address issues at local level. The dialogue we create through our Reference Group on the Semester with the European Commission is crucial to ensure a two-fold objective.

- First, that European social policies are well informed by the issues affecting those on the ground
- Second, to engage with local citizens to secure implementation of European policies.

The messages from senior leaders in social services will be of significant use to policy-makers at European and national level, by providing insights from the local level. Here we present some of the key messages to feed into the 2019 European Semester cycle.

There are a number of recurring themes for social services across the countries presented in this report, regardless of their social welfare systems:

- Despite a more positive economic outlook, the impact of the financial crisis is still significant on how

social services are being managed and how social policy is being implemented

- There has been some progress on the development of community-based services across the life cycle, bringing new ways of working in social services and emphasising the need for enhanced coordination across services and sectors
- The promotion of inclusive policies for those people most in need, such as the long-term unemployed, refugees, and people with disabilities or people with mental health problems
- Administrative reforms across Europe, whether decentralising service management and provision or addressing overlaps and recentralising certain services

A broader view of social inclusion

This year the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) has helped to strengthen the social dimension of the European Semester. However, most of the data and analysis focusses on employment as the sole driver of social inclusion whilst we've realised that this is not always the case. There are a significant number of social protection principles for which data is not being collected at European level. These principles relate directly to the key duties of social services whose work on this can provide important insights and data.

Access to quality services, including housing, community-based services for children, young people, people with disabilities and people with long-term conditions, have been identified by the Group members as key priorities for implementing the social protection principles included in the third chapter of the EPSR. These should be given more attention in the framework of the European Semester.

Where there is a lack of data for monitoring one of

the principles, the European Commission could encourage cooperation with Member States and networks of local stakeholders to gather this data. This would support the implementation of these EPSR principles.

In the country reports and country-specific recommendations employment is a dominant theme in the social dimension. However, a broader view of social inclusion is needed. For example, the European Commission's analysis of the social inclusion of people with disabilities focuses on their rates of employment, but does not take into account whether they live in the community, their access to housing, education, healthcare, transport, or cultural attitudes, all vital factors for promoting their social inclusion.

Social services quality

Despite a positive economic outlook in the EU with unemployment rates at their lowest level in ten years,²⁴⁴ our members tell us that the recovery has not

yet reached everyone. Social services continue to face high demand from people with complex needs while facing budgetary constraints in many Member States.

There is an important case to be made for greater social investment, especially into social services. Whilst the impact of their work is difficult to quantify and put in economic terms, they undoubtedly provide a significant return on investment by improving people's quality of life and empowering vulnerable people to become more independent. This can not only improve wellbeing, but also encourage people to find employment and reduce their reliance on state support.

To ensure successful implementation of the EPSR principles, the policy analysis and recommendations from the European Commission must connect to the priorities felt locally by social services. Their work on promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable people is critical for making the EPSR principles a reality.



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35. See [Operational Programme Human Resources Development](#)
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38. See [National Statistical Institute](#)
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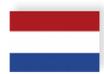
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239. Scottish Government (2018) - [A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People](#)
240. Scottish Government (2014) - [Developing the Young Workforce - Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy](#)
241. Department for Education (2017) - [Careers strategy: making the most of everyone's skills and talents](#)

Conclusion

242. European Commission (2006) [Communication on Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Social services of general interest in the European Union](#)
243. European Commission (2015) [Sectoral social dialogue](#)
244. Eurostat (2018) [Euro area unemployment at 8.1%](#)

The European Social Network (ESN) is the independent network for local public social services in Europe. It brings together the organisations that plan, finance, research, manage, regulate and deliver local public social services, including health, social welfare, employment, education and housing. We support the development of effective social policy and social care practice through the exchange of knowledge and expertise.

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