



**REPORT on the Progress on the Social Dimensions of
the Country-Specific Recommendations,**
and the complementary recommendations of our members.

Eurodiaconia is a European network of 54 organisations in 32 countries, founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconia. Representing over 30.000 local organisations, our members provide inclusive social and healthcare services and promote social justice.

This publication has been validated by our members and was approved by Eurodiaconia's board on 16 September 2021.

Mission

Eurodiaconia is a network of churches and Christian organizations that provide social and health care services and advocate for social justice. Together we work for just and transformative social change across Europe, leaving no-one behind.

Vision

Driven by our Christian faith, our vision is of a Europe where each person is valued for their inherent God-given worth and dignity and where our societies guarantee social justice for all people, including the most vulnerable and marginalized.

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The exceptional cycle of the European Semester in 2021

2020 was an exceptional year. Covid changed many of our approaches to work, home, and community life.

It has required policy responses that may have been unthinkable just one year earlier. Not only has it required adaptation it has also resulted in interruption with some policy initiatives put on hold until greater stability is seen.

This interruption has been seen in the European Semester, with 2021 and 2020 being 'exceptional' years where no new initiatives or recommendations were represented, and instead, the focus has been placed on national plans in line with the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

Along with adaptation and interruption, there has also been the emergence of more significant numbers affected by employment insecurity, low wages, or income, reduced educational opportunities, or the need for care services.

Eurodiaconia is a Europe-wide network that brings together over 30.000 providers of social and health care services and advocates for social justice. We have seen the impact of COVID-19 at all levels of society and our members have collected their experiences from the ground and have reported on [the emerging needs of the most disadvantaged](#) in the light of the pandemic. At the same time, with our members, we have continued to be involved in the European Semester as there is a need to ensure we do not lose sight of policy priorities that have already been identified.

This report continues our yearly practice of assessing progress on the country-specific recommendations (CSRs) prepared by the European Commission (Commission) and adopted by the European Council (Council). Our members give their view of the implementation of the 2019 CSR's. As noted by the European Commission and European Council, there have been no new structural country-specific recommendations produced, and the CSRs addressing medium- to long-term structural challenges, which were adopted by the Council on 9 July 2019, remain relevant and will be monitored by the Commission this year.

In this report, we will present our findings and members' analysis.

Four areas of general concern have been identified from across our membership that requires take up through the CSRs at the European and national level. We also examine how much progress our members can see relating to the fields and topics of the 2019 CSRs, and what further shortcomings they have experienced, which are missing from the official CSRs. We finish each country-specific summary with our country-specific recommendations complementing those of the Commission.

The method of preparing our report

The qualitative data at the core of this report was collected between March and June 2021, mainly in the form of interviews. Our member organisations from Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Greece, and Italy were interviewed, while one of our German members produced written input. All these member organisations are active nationwide, but most of the persons interviewed highlighted that their expertise refers rather to the regional context in which they personally operate.

Before the interviews, which we conducted in English, the representatives of our member organisations were provided with a summary of the 2019 CSRs relevant for the social area in their respective countries. In most cases, the persons interviewed could easily

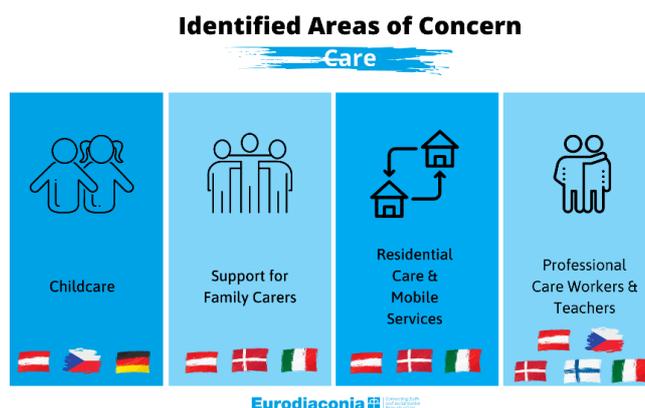


relate the CSRs to the main social challenges that they are facing in their countries and the services they provide.

Some of the persons interviewed were very familiar with the topics of the CSRs whilst others were familiar with only some specific aspects of them. Most of our member organisations do advocacy work at national level and regularly contribute to the design of social policies whilst others are doing it sporadically and/or only at regional level.

The overarching issues as communicated by our members

Based on the information gathered during the interviews, we have selected four main areas of general concern identified by our members, which are the following: the situation of the care sector, the challenges experienced by migrants, the experienced issues concerning the access to the labour market, and the state of inclusion of persons with disabilities. The following sub-chapters provide a comparative analysis of the shortcomings identified and reported by our members in the different countries.



Some of the beneficiaries living in our members' care facilities need assistance 24 hours a day. Some other persons in vulnerable situations live independently but need regular assistance (e.g., persons with reduced mobility needing help to take a bath in their homes; elderly people in need of nursing personnel to regularly check in at their homes and to provide medicines). Often, persons in vulnerable situations are compelled to move to a residential facility, even though they would be eager and autonomous enough to stay at their home and/or with their family members, if they had enough external support. Our Austrian, Danish and Italian members highlighted that a rigid differentiation between residential care and mobile services is not effective. Especially for those living in rural

areas, mobile services are still not an option. Our members are enhancing their offer of mobile services and/or are building up a more integrated system in which the residential facilities function as a base to coordinate services delivered to people's homes.

In many cases, the burden caused by a lack of flexible professional care services falls on the family members of the persons in a vulnerable situation, mostly on women. Family carers carry highly demanding tasks, for which they are not necessarily qualified, and which are not conciliable with other occupations outside their home. As a result, they often deal with health problems, including mental health issues. Our members from Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Germany, and Italy highlighted the need for better support of family carers, including the need of more places in affordable childcare. Releasing family carers from some of the responsibilities would not only preserve their psychosocial health, but it would also allow a better participation of women in the labour market.

Our members in Austria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, and Italy also emphasised the lack of professional care workers. In some cases, this is partially due to a shortage of training opportunities, but mostly it is because the work is very demanding and receives low remuneration.

Identified Areas of Concern



Our members from Denmark, Finland and Greece highlighted that a significant amount of health- and social services are inaccessible for non-residents and undocumented migrants. This had become even more problematic during the pandemic, when they were cut off from some essential services, including access to vaccinations.

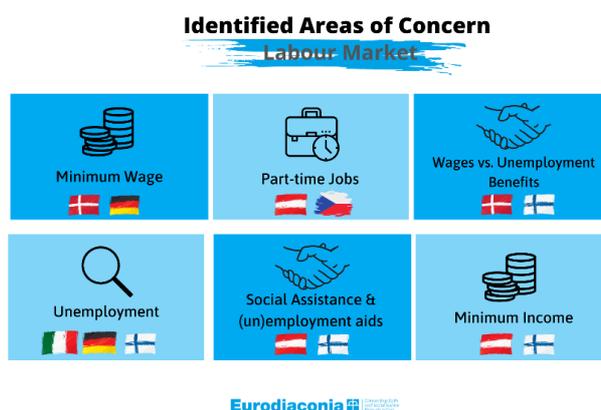
They also stressed that the lack of trust in state authorities is an additional barrier for migrants, both third-country nationals and EU-citizens, including Roma, to access social services. To be accessible, services need to be provided in a safe space for everyone to feel protected from bias and any forms of discrimination.

Our members provide language classes, school support programmes and have launched different initiatives; from cooking sessions with the locals to sports programmes, to introduce newcomers to the local habits and culture. Regarding asylum-seekers, our Greek and Italian members pointed out that their placement in residential apartments (instead of large refugee centres) is a crucial step for a successful integration process.

When it comes to accessing the labour market, our Danish and Finnish members highlighted that person with a migrant background, in particular women, are systematically oriented towards low-skilled jobs. This is also true for persons who have grown up in those countries. Our Finnish, Greek and Italian members spoke about the need for many migrants to get to know the rules of the labour market. In fact, cultural barriers are a main challenge for migrants not only to find an occupation, but also for employment retention. Our members provide trainings and advice on how to apply for

jobs, and raise awareness about the main rules and expectations of the labour market, e.g., how to behave with (female) colleagues and supervisors, what is the average required intensity and speed of work, the importance of respecting working hours, etc.

Finally, our members reported substantial barriers caused not only by systemic and/or indirect discrimination, but also by a general hostility of the society towards people belonging to an ethnic or religious minority or persons with foreign names.



Our German member highlighted the need for a higher minimum wage and its implementation in all sectors to combat in-work and old-age poverty. Similarly, our member from Denmark emphasised the need for a state minimum wage, which does not leave behind those workers who are now falling through the cracks of collective bargaining, such as the ones employed in the construction sector in Denmark.

When it comes to the participation of women in the labour market, our members in Austria and Czechia emphasised that part-time jobs are crucial. While our Czech member pointed out that the limited number of part-time job opportunities in Czechia has a negative impact on female participation in the labour market, our Austrian member reported that the number of part-time employed women in Austria is significantly higher than the number of part-time employed men, which is seen as a main barrier towards gender equality and inclusive growth.

Furthermore, our members from Denmark and Finland reported a delicate correlation between the incentives related to employment and the ones associated with social benefits. In some cases, the bureaucratic burden connected with occasional

employments can be complicated and difficult to conciliate with social benefits that some people would rather remain unemployed.

Our German and Italian members pointed out that unemployment is associated with several risk factors, i.e., health issues, age, and education. Long-term unemployment also leads to further challenges, such as mental health problems and social exclusion. The long-term unemployed and the persons who are the farthest from the labour market cannot benefit from the usual up- and re-skilling programmes but need tailor-made and comprehensive assistance. Therefore, some of our members address their needs with specific services, such as social labour market programmes and holistic coaching.

Our member in Finland reported that in many cases employment aids have not led to long-term employment. After receiving incentives to hire an unemployed person, some companies would rather employ new personnel to further profit from state funds than to continue employing the persons they had previously hired.

With regards to minimum income policies, our member in Austria highlighted that the shift from a dual system of a minimum income scheme and a social assistance scheme to the sole provision of a social assistance scheme has not proven to be adequate, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. An adequate minimum income scheme is preferable to a poor social welfare scheme that does not support people in existential hardship and emergency situations. In contrast, our member from Finland reported that the basic income experiment was interrupted after two years, because the provision of a basic income did not have the expected effect on the participants' employment status.

Identified Areas of Concern

Persons with Disabilities



As regards to inclusive education, our members in Austria and Czechia reported significant gaps from early childhood education to tertiary and adult education. Our members in Czechia and Denmark highlighted that, in some cases, inclusive education has resulted in less specialised and tailored care provided to the children with disabilities by the schools. They also insisted that inclusive education is a positive model as long as regular schools are provided with the necessary resources to make education truly inclusive towards students with disabilities. Another issue highlighted is the lack of flexible pedagogical concepts and curricula to meet the diverse needs of learners with disabilities.

Our members also reported that some students with disabilities have disproportionately suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example those who cannot make simple use of ordinary digital devices. Depending on the type of disability, though, some other students substantially benefitted from distance learning, such as those with strongly reduced mobility. Special attention needs to be paid to disadvantaged learners, who need safe and supportive learning environments during the pandemic and also afterwards.

When it comes to access to employment of persons with disabilities, our members reported a vacuum in the transition from education to employment. In Austria and Czechia, our members fill this gap by providing training and employment opportunities. Our Austrian and Finnish members also mentioned ongoing discriminatory practices, such as the so-called sheltered workshops, where very often, the work of persons with disabilities is not remunerated or it is compensated with a sort of pocket money, and it does not guarantee a full social insurance.

Furthermore, our members in Austria, Denmark and Italy reported major barriers for persons with disabilities trying to access social services and benefits. Some of the obstacles include complex bureaucratic procedures, the exclusion of persons with disabilities from social services, e.g., psychological treatments and social security such as pension, and little flexibility towards achieving reasonable accommodation.

The country-specific challenges as communicated by our members, and our complementary country-specific recommendations by countries'

Austria

Our member in Austria found that the CSRs are still relevant to the situation in the country. **Diakonie Austria** was ready to give a detailed account about the topics belonging to their area of expertise. Among those, the situation of persons with disabilities deserves meticulous attention.

The **long-term care (LTC)** system, whose sustainability got a red flag, is one of the areas which our member reported several shortcomings. One of these is its **rigidity**. LTC in the country is organised in a system of two rigid pillars based on residential care facilities and mobile services. However, the needs of people requiring care would often demand a mix of various services. The second shortcoming is caused by the fact that there are large **regional differences** in the provision of care services in Austria. In many parts of the country, care is determined by the supply, and not by the needs and preferences of the people who require care, therefore, many people do not get support at all. Thirdly, most people with care requirements wish to grow old in their own homes and within familiar surroundings. This is the reason why four out of five of the 455,000 care allowance recipients are cared for at home by their **family caregivers**, who only receive support from formal care providers in less than half of the cases. This presents a challenge for working-age family carers to reconcile their work and their care responsibilities. Furthermore, many family carers are retired or are at the end of their professional life¹. Since the provision of care is physically and emotionally demanding

¹ The average age of family carers is 60 (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2018).

for family carers, an expansion of support services for them would be crucial for preventing their health problems.

The Austrian government is aware of the shortcomings of the present LTC system, and a reform of the sector was started in 2020; however, it came to a halt due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our member is thus advocating for the continuation of the reform to ensure that LTC services are expanded, that there is flexibility in the combination of different services, and that the geographical coverage of the services is increased enough to allow people access to care in their own neighbourhood. All these changes are essential to enable the provision of needs-based care and the support of family carers.

In order to fulfil **the demand for care workers** now and in the future, apart from training young people to become carers, our member proposes to target career changers and migrants. As for **career changers**, our member considers securing a livelihood for the duration of the necessary training to be a key issue. Nevertheless, the law in force sets the age limit of 35 for the eligibility for a scholarship, which our member finds very problematic, since many potential employees in the care sector have already worked in other fields for years and are therefore older. The present practice of cooperation between the Public Employment Service, labour foundations and care provider organisations are effective in facilitating a second career in the care sector, however, sufficient subsidy should be paid to the participants of re-skilling programmes in order to attract the necessary number of people. When it comes to the employment of **migrants to work in the care sector**, our member detects two barriers, namely the lengthy process of recognising their qualifications obtained abroad and the mandatory language requirements. The new decree enabling professional nursing staff from third countries to obtain a Red-White-Red Card before the completion of the recognition procedure is going in the right direction, nonetheless, it would be important to speed up the process and to make it easier for the applicants. Based on the experience of our member, there are several asylum-seekers in Austria who are enrolled in re-skilling programmes to become carers. Our member finds it deeply saddening that, in case their asylum application is rejected, the asylum-seekers have to leave the country, despite their willingness to learn the profession and engage in it in Austria, and despite the severe lack of sufficient number of carers.

Moving onto the subject of **women's labour market participation**, we were reminded that the part-time work rate of women in Austria in 2019 was 48.5%, while that of men

was just under 10%. This high percentage of **female part-time work** is primarily caused by childcare obligations, which should be remedied by a comprehensive expansion of childcare services with a focus on lengthening the opening hours, reducing closing days and narrowing geographical gaps of coverage. Affordability of childcare is usually not a problem; however, it does present a challenge for single parents. **Female unemployment** is overwhelmingly present in the lives of women with a migrant background, who face language barriers and struggle with the recognition of their qualifications. Their career choice is often limited to the care sector and cleaning.

Another major challenge is **poverty** and the fact that more people are at the risk of it due to the 2019 legal changes introduced by the adoption of the Basic Social Assistance Act. Since the Act came into force, the formerly dual system of a minimum income scheme (for workers) and a social assistance scheme (for those who cannot work or who have been unemployed for a long time) has been turned into a system of social assistance only. This brought about negative changes for several groups of people: firstly, the basic amount decreased for people with a large family, which brings them to the brink of society; secondly, it also affects people in partially assisted living communities, in transitional housing as well as in psychosocial residential homes. Thirdly, persons with a humanitarian residence permit no longer receive any support. Therefore, our member insists that there is a strong need for a stable and adequate minimum income scheme, instead of a poor social welfare scheme which does not provide adequate support for people in existential hardship and in emergency situations.

When it comes to the **social inclusion of persons with disabilities**, our member identifies many significant gaps in several fields in Austria. There are major gaps in providing **inclusive education**, from early childhood education up to tertiary and adult education. Early childhood education concepts for children with disabilities from 0 to 3 are quasi non-existent. The compulsory last year in kindergarten excludes children with disabilities which often hinders families from accessing the institution of primary education which they have chosen for their child. The adult to child ratios in working with children with disabilities are far below the recommended standards, and there are not enough flexible pedagogic concepts and curricula for meeting the needs of learners with disabilities. Another hindrance for persons with disabilities is the fact that the right to inclusive education ends after compulsory education. Relating to the pandemic, while some learners with specific disabilities did benefit from distance learning, learners with

disabilities were more likely to be negatively impacted by distance learning due to the covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, special attention needs to be paid to disadvantaged learners by providing them with safe and supportive learning environments.

Persons with disabilities face major discrimination on the labour market, too. Approximately 20,000 persons are currently employed in different structures, where their activities are not considered as paid work, therefore, they do not receive wages (only pocket money) and do not have a social insurance (including unemployment and pension). The evaluation of one's capacity to work defines people's access to the job market and often leads to major discrimination in Austria. Furthermore, the different classification procedures and bodies are problematic on multiple levels.

There is also a lack of an Austria-wide legal right to **assistive technology**, which directly impacts 63.000 persons, 250.000 persons if including next of kin. Our member mentioned great bureaucratic obstacles in trying to receive access to assistive technology and to its financing. In addition to a secure funding, a centralized point of access and contact points regarding communication devices would be fundamental.

When asked about their **involvement in policy making**, our member informed us that there should be a more systematic and deeper involvement of NGOs active in-service provision. They often face difficulties when trying to be heard, and they feel that their input relating to policies concerning their field of expertise should be more welcome. As for the current long-term care reform, the government intends to set up a task force. Since the NGO sector is not planned to be included in it, a union of NGOs is now trying to put pressure on the government.

Our country-specific recommendations for Austria complementing the official CSRs:

-  Continue the reform of long-term care to enable the provision of needs-based care and the support of family carers. To fulfil the demand for care workers, facilitate the training and recruitment of career changers and migrants as carers.
-  Foster the full-time employment of women with young children, including by the comprehensive expansion of childcare services.
-  Review the Basic Social Assistance Act so that it does not leave any groups at risk of poverty and social exclusion behind and reinstate an adequate minimum income scheme.

- Ensure that persons with disabilities are included in the education system, that they have access to affordable assistive technologies and that discriminative labour market structures for persons with disabilities are dismantled.
- Safeguard the involvement of civil society organisations in policy making.

Czechia

Our discussions with our Czech member, **Diakonie ČCE**, revealed that most of the 2019 country-specific recommendations remain valid and there has not been substantial progress on them yet.

Experience from the ground confirms that **the pension system** has many flaws. One of the most concerning shortcomings is that changes to the pension system and the updated requirements and rights are not communicated towards the citizens properly; therefore, people do not have the necessary information about their pension entitlements and consequently they lose trust in the pension system. Furthermore, due to the existing inequalities in the society, including the gender pay gap, lower-skilled people and women are entitled to much lower pensions. With Czechia being an aging society, people also lack trust in the sustainability of the pension system and their potential pension rights in the more distant future, which many without savings find very concerning.

The employment situation of mothers with young children is also concerning for a lot of people. On the one hand, it is reassuring that women can stay at home with their young children for several years with a guaranteed maternity leave and their former position at work waiting for their return for 3 years. However, many women would find it more beneficial to be able to have a part-time job and part-time childcare available. Unfortunately, this poses a double challenge. First, part-time jobs are not popular, therefore, they are difficult to find. Second, the capacity of state kindergartens is not sufficient, thus, the families have to find alternatives, which are often too expensive.

When it comes to state **kindergartens**, another shortcoming is caused by discrimination as the admission criteria give priority to children whose parents are employed, thereby allowing the parents to go to work. This practice leaves the children of the unemployed, very often socially disadvantaged parents behind and widens the social gap.

There is also lack of systemic **inclusion of children with disabilities** in the field of education. In regular kindergartens and primary schools, there are not enough special education teachers and teaching assistants, and other necessary types of support are

also lacking, due to which many parents seek kindergartens specialised in providing care for children with specific disabilities. However, good-quality specialised schools are concentrated around bigger cities, therefore, parents face affordability challenges.

There are also significant regional differences when it comes to **the availability of qualified teachers**. In Prague and in bigger cities, there are many well-educated teachers; however, in regions where Roma people are concentrated, there is a severe lack of teachers. Our members mentioned that there is a general concern when it comes to the supply of teachers, especially at primary school level, due to a lack of investment into teacher training, low salaries, low prestige of and low interest in the teaching profession.

When asked about the frequent challenges as social service providers, our members admitted that they have no capacity to apply for EU funds, and although they are involved in policy-related consultations, these are often initiated by state institutions at a later stage when there are already problems arising concerning the specific policy making.

Our country-specific recommendations for Czechia complementing the official CSRs:

-  Improve communication towards the people about the changes of the pension system, the related requirements and entitlements.
-  Foster the employment of women with young children, including by creating part-time jobs and by safeguarding access to free childcare to people in vulnerable situations.
-  Ensure the inclusiveness of the education system, especially when it comes to children with disabilities and in vulnerable situations, by providing sufficient resources and training specialized teachers. Invest into the training, retaining and remuneration of teachers, and tackle regional disparities in the supply of good-quality teachers.
-  Safeguard the involvement of civil society organisations in policy making.

Denmark

Based on the experience of our Danish member, **Kirkens Korshær**, there are several challenges in the country which have not been featured in recent European Commission country reports and have not been followed by country-specific recommendations. Some of these challenges might be due to the COVID-19 pandemic, others have been longer present, either revealing a sporadic nature or showing signs of being systemic.

Concerning **poverty and social exclusion**, we received the following official Danish data from our member:

“According to the AE Council's² latest statement from 2020, 250,000 people are in economic poverty, of which approx. 60,000 children. Based on that definition, there are 190,000 adults who are socially disadvantaged.³ In addition, figures from the Folketing's employment committee in 2019 show that 56 per cent of the poor children in Denmark have an ethnic background other than Danish, corresponding to just over 36,000 children.⁴

Ethnic minorities are a group that is also overrepresented among people in vulnerable positions in other areas. For example, 7 per cent of the total number of citizens in homelessness in 2019 are descendants of immigrants. This is an over-representation in comparison with the Danish population, where only 3 per cent are descendants.⁵

Ethnicity and having a migrant background have been highlighted by our members as visible factors when it comes to poverty of families and child poverty, partly explained by the fact that more families with a migrant background are unemployed or experience exploitation. Experience from the ground shows that there is visible exploitation of migrants on the labour market, especially in the construction industry, who often do not speak Danish well or know the Danish labour laws. Exploitation results in lower wages and lower quality of health and safety at work for migrant workers, therefore, systemic protection of them would be necessary. Sporadic discrimination against young people with a migrant/ethnic background is present also in vocational education and training, where it is often challenging to find practical training places, but it is even more difficult in case someone has a foreign-sounding name and does not have good enough Danish knowledge.

When it comes to ***homelessness***, we have been informed that there are around 6.000 homeless people in Denmark, whose number has been increasing over the last years,

² The Economic Council of the Labour Movement (ECLM) is a Danish economic policy institute and think-tank working to promote social justice in Denmark.

³ The Economic Council of the Labour Movement (2020), Flere års stigning i fattigdom afløses af stagnation, <https://www.ae.dk/analyse/2020-01-flere-aars-stigning-i-fattigdom-afloeses-af-stagnation>.

⁴ The Danish Ministry of Economic and Internal Affairs (2019), <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20181/almdel/beu/spm/219/svar/1557070/2017182.pdf>.

⁵ The Danish Center for Social Science Research (2019), Hjemløshed i Danmark, <https://www.vive.dk/media/pure/14218/3352843>.

and is almost 30 percent higher than in 2009.⁶ The Danish state through its municipalities works actively on the provision of housing to people and of shelters and care to homeless people, however, shelters are primarily for homeless Danes or people with a legal residence in Denmark, which leaves homeless migrants from the EU and from third countries behind. Therefore, our members provide low threshold services to help those in need.

Loneliness and the need for corresponding social support have been identified as an increasingly present social phenomenon. Families experiencing poverty and deprivation suffer from loneliness and the lack of a supporting network, which our members and other NGOs try to help them with. **Poor mental health⁷, psychosocial illnesses and a lack of necessary treatment** is also a challenge for many people, leading to drug⁸ and alcohol abuse and ultimately homelessness and a lack of access to the necessary services to re-enter society. An ongoing policy discussion on a state reform of psychological treatments, including a 10-year-long plan, is expected to bring progress in this area.

When talking about the situation of **persons with disabilities** in the country, our member mentioned two challenges, i.e., regional differences and the traps of inclusion. As for the former, support is mostly provided by municipalities, and the quality of support differs significantly among them; therefore, families with children with disabilities often try to move to municipalities offering better services. As for the latter, although the inclusion of persons with disabilities is in the focus in all spheres of the society, when it comes to education, more resources should be invested to create real inclusion of students with different types and levels of disabilities in regular classes. Furthermore, the aim of

⁶ The Danish Center for Social Science Research (2019), Hjemløshed i Danmark, <https://www.vive.dk/media/pure/14218/3352843>.

⁷ The National Health Profile from 2017 shows that the proportion of young people aged 16-24 who assess that they have poor mental health has increased from 12 percent in 2010 to 18.3 percent in 2017. Danish Health Authority (2017), Danskernes Sundhed - Den Nationale Sundhedsprofil 2017, <https://www.sst.dk/da/udgivelser/2018/danskernes-sundhed-den-nationale-sundhedsprofil-2017>.

⁸ The number of registered drug-related deaths in recent years has been between 256 and 279 deaths per year. The Economic Council of the Labour Movement (2017), Flere fattige og udsigt til stor stigning, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwj_nLWBxoDyAhXJDuwKHUmRCNgQFjACegQIBRAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ae.dk%2Fsites%2Fwww.ae.dk%2Ffiles%2Fdokumenter%2Fanalyse%2Fae_flere-fattige-og-udsigt-til-stor-stigning.pdf&usq=AOvVaw2M_Uex8GUOdDM3bu4J96rs.

inclusion in regular classes should not hinder the provision of more specialised care to children in need of that.

Reacting to the 2019 CSR on the need for **sustainable transport** to tackle road congestion, our member highlighted the importance and the need of providing accessible and affordable public transportation to enable the most deprived to get to work.

Our country-specific recommendations for Denmark complementing the official CSRs:

- Step up efforts to ensure the labour market integration of migrants and third-country nationals, and to prevent and tackle their exploitation.
- Ensure that housing and homelessness services effectively help homeless people without discrimination on the basis of citizenship or residence.
- Focus investment into the provision of health- and social care for people suffering from psychosocial illnesses.

Finland

When talking about the country-specific recommendations for Finland, our member, **Deaconess Foundation**, informed us that there is no information available either on the recommendations or the progress on them on any ministerial or other relevant websites. Because of their experiences on the ground, the CSRs are relevant and still need to be acted upon to achieve the necessary progress. During our discussions, they have identified further challenges related to the situation of different minorities and the funding of health- and social care providers.

One of the CSRs draws attention to the phenomenon of **unequal access to social and healthcare services**, which has been confirmed by our members. The sector has been in the centre of attention of the different governments for 10 years, however, so far there has been no consensus on the direction that the proposed reforms should take. This means that inequality of access is still a daily challenge for the unemployed, due to very long waiting times, and for new groups having no residence in Finland, such as **undocumented migrants from third countries**, who have come to Finland mostly from Irak, Afghanistan and Somalia since 2017, and **homeless EU citizens without an EU health insurance card**. Relating to these new groups, there is no national-level policy, thus, individual municipalities have taken decisions about what services they want to offer. In certain, more progressive municipalities, some services provided to these groups are of the same level as those enjoyed by Finnish citizens or residents. However,

in other municipalities, a lack of services, a lack of access to services or inaccessible services presents a challenge. In one of the neighbourhoods of Helsinki called Kalasatama, a health- and social centre specialised in providing services to undocumented persons provides efficient care due to the fact the its employees have a clear understanding and training on how to serve undocumented persons, and they also employ interpreters. When asked about the most vulnerable among the vulnerable, our members identified undocumented migrants, Roma EU citizens without residency in Finland, homeless migrant women and girls who have major difficulties in finding employment and little hope for a better life, and homeless drug addicts.

Finland is well known for its 'Housing First' model, but Finnish **housing and homelessness services** also leave non-citizens and non-residents behind. For example, we have been told that in Helsinki the municipal shelter accepts only residents and has a scarce capacity even for the homeless who have residency. Since 2017, our Finnish member has set up an extra emergency night shelter financed by the City of Helsinki for Roma EU citizens and undocumented persons. Once the pandemic started, a second emergency shelter was opened to serve the residents, usually persons with addiction problems, who cannot be taken in the shelter run by the municipality. The decision about the shelter was made by the municipality and needs yearly re-negotiation, therefore, the offered service is only temporary. Another shortcoming of Finland's otherwise advanced housing policy is the difficulty to influence the practices on the **private rental housing market**, where significant discrimination is present. It is documented that Finnish Roma face difficulties when trying to rent an apartment and people with a foreign name share similar experience.

A partly housing-related challenge, which has been mentioned in one of the CSRs as well, is posed by the phenomenon of **personal indebtedness and a debt history**, which is very difficult to erase and creates a vicious cycle for those concerned. According to the present system in Finland, the accumulation of a debt history and a bad credit record have several severe consequences, among them the difficulty of acquiring a rental apartment. Due to a lack of sufficient municipal housing, families with children having a debt history have a priority, thereby leaving single people face additional difficulties.

Further effects of a debt history include:

- the cancellation of one's credit cards and a difficulty to get credit,
- one will not be able to enter contracts to pay in instalments,

- one will need to make advance payments for telephone and insurance contracts,
- it will be more difficult to get a job, particularly if the work involves financial responsibility,
- salary cuts will be applied not making it worth financially to take up a job.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased housing precariousness and indebtedness: there has been a 15-20% rise in the purchase prices of properties in the Helsinki area in one year, people have been taking enormous loans for a long period of time (normally for 25-35 years), and the level of household expenses has increased.

When it comes to **unemployment**, our member reveals the controversy between the need of skilled immigrants in Finland, where the population is aging, and the major challenges experienced by **migrants** to find a job due to existing discrimination. The Public Employment Services do not cover non-citizens and non-residents, thus it falls onto NGOs, among them our members, to inform migrants about the rules and laws of the Finnish labour market, the relevant procedures, and the available benefits, to provide trainings on basic work-related issues, such as health and safety at work, and on basic skills, and to help them throughout the process of finding a job or asking for a benefit. Due to the rigidity of several state services, NGOs are also indispensable to help migrants to open Finnish bank accounts and apply for residence cards without which they have no access to state and municipal services.

The situation of the **unemployed Finnish nationals** is also difficult due to the complexity and the rigidity of the benefit system. As reported, it is highly problematic due to bureaucracy to take up work only for a couple of days per month and receive unemployment benefit for the remaining days. The introduction of Employment Aid has not achieved the intended results either. The aid, which provides state funds to companies hiring a previously unemployed person, has not led to substantial long-term employment, as companies – instead of keeping the person employed after the state funds stop – rather give work to an unemployed person again. Public Employment Services provide services to the unemployed citizens and residents, however, due to a lack of resources, these are not tailored to the needs of the clients. Our members, therefore, try to fill the gap by supporting the unemployed to draw up their CVs, prepare a plan how to look for a job, etc.

Active inclusion for **persons with disabilities**, including for persons with psychosocial disabilities who suffer from a lot of stigmas, is also very problematic, as these do not lead to real employment with a fair salary.

Discrimination is also present in the lives of Finnish citizens, namely for **Finnish Roma**, who are often not even invited for job interviews because of their revealing names. Although the education level of Finnish Roma has improved, especially when it comes to vocational education and training, their labour market participation has not progressed due to discrimination.

Another minority facing discrimination and hate speech in all areas of life is **the Swedish-speaking minority**, which constitutes around 5% of the population. Young people of the community face bullying at school, even more so if they live in a less diverse municipality, if they come from a more disadvantaged socio-economic background or if they go to schools which do not have the financial means to launch preventive programmes or which lack skilled teachers. A 2016 study has shown that thousands of Swedish-speaking Finns are moving to Sweden to work, and such an intention is often heard from the young.

When discussing **the situation of women in Finland**, we have been made aware that there is still much work to be done in the country in order to achieve gender equality, particularly in the field of education and employment. Those farthest away from equality are women from a minority or migrant background, women with disabilities and those who are homeless or have a debt history. Our member highlighted a widening gap between those women whose wellbeing is good and those who face compounded forms of exclusions. During their education, girls in general are advised to study the fields which are not well paid, and it is even more so if the girls are from a migrant background, in which case it is assumed that the level of their Finnish language knowledge is not advanced enough. There are [efforts](#) to fight against gender pay gap, however, there is still a long way ahead. Women in the government are well represented, which functions as a good model, but gender balance in decision making is not reflected on the ground yet. An achievement has been identified concerning the draft proposal for the family leave reform, which has been recently circulated for comments and will be voted on by Parliament in the near future.

Our member considers it to be vital that much more attention is paid by the government to ***social groups facing multiple and intersectional discrimination and segregation***, that more efforts should be devoted to active inclusion in all policies, and that private companies and entities are targeted through trainings to help change stereotypes. To remedy discrimination in the field of education, for example, more investment should be made in ***teacher training***, to prepare the teachers to work in a multicultural environment, and it would be vital to transform the teaching profession into an attractive career.

As for the provision of health- and social services and related difficulties, our member has informed us about the Finnish system, in which [***the National Lottery***](#) has been providing funds for NGOs to deliver both project-related and more permanent types of health- and social services. This practice has raised criticism already since gambling can destroy people's lives, yet it is this gambling company whose financial assistance the service providers are dependent upon. Moreover, concerns have been raised because of COVID-19 too, since people have not been gambling so much during the lockdown, so, the income of National Lottery has decreased. This year the Finnish government is covering the loss of the National Lottery, but NGOs fear for their future income.

When asked about their ***involvement in policy-related consultations***, our member informed us that they are regularly invited both by the relevant municipality and by ministries to share their views.

Our country-specific recommendations for Finland complementing the official CSRs:

- Foster equal access to social and healthcare services to people in vulnerable situations, especially to undocumented third-country nationals and homeless EU citizens.
- Prevent and tackle discrimination towards members of ethnic minorities, linguistic minorities, migrants and persons experiencing intersectional discrimination in all areas, with special focus on education, employment and housing. Focus on raising awareness to the value of diversity.
- Ensure that housing and homelessness services effectively help homeless people without discrimination based on citizenship or residence.
- Ensure assistance to those with a personal debt history to prevent them from becoming victims of social exclusion.

Germany

Our largest German member, **Diakonie Germany**, has been producing a significant number of reports and recommendations on Germany's social and employment policy.

When it comes to tackling wealth inequalities, our German member asks specifically for a higher **minimum wage** and its implementation in all sectors to combat in-work and old-age poverty. When advocating for an increasing employment rate, our member puts emphasis on **the quality of employment**. In fact, as a significant number of the labour force in Germany works in precarious conditions, an increased employment rate would not necessarily lead to a decrease in poverty levels.

Our member also stresses the importance of reducing the levels of **long-term unemployment**, which is a main factor of poverty in Germany and a problem which was exacerbated during the pandemic. The longer the time of unemployment, the lower the chances for the person to re-enter the labour market. Diakonie Germany highlights that unemployment is associated with several risk factors, for example with mental or physical health issues, age, and education. It creates even more problems for people when they are unemployed for a long time: the loss of a daily structure, social exclusion, and the occurrence of more mental health problems. Long-term unemployed people are not people who do not want to work, but people who are far away from the labour market due to a multiplicity of challenges. Our member points out the need to address these personal issues in a tailor-made and comprehensive way; especially those who are the farthest from the labour market cannot be reached with usual upskilling or re-skilling programmes. Diakonie Germany criticises that the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan focuses on the transformation process of the EU economy without elaborating on the challenges of long-term unemployed people.

Diakonie Germany also highlights that the **labour market integration of migrants and refugees** needs to be fostered. This would require, among others, a better recognition of the value of informal and non-formal learning.

When it comes to **minimum income** policies, our member is of the opinion that the present German system is inadequate, and it is intimidating, controlling and sanctioning people. In this regard, the provision of minimum income security should be re-thought. The alternative concept presented by our member comprises three pillars: secure,

sufficient and unbureaucratic minimum income security, labour market incentives and an extensive social counselling⁹.

With regard to the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, Diakonie Germany stresses that it is not enough for Member States to re-establish the previous status quo; instead, social services should be made stronger than before the pandemic. Finally, our German member is overly concerned about the implications of the newly introduced Recovery and Resilience Facility in relation to the **participation of civil society**. It emphasises that it is important that the Commission continues producing country reports and recommendations on the economic and social development of the Member States, so that civil society can have a dialogue with the governments and the Commission on the most crucial social issues.

Our country-specific recommendations for Germany complementing the official CSRs:

- Increase minimum wages and assure their implementation in all branches in order to prevent in-work poverty and old-age poverty.
- Revise the present minimum income policy considering the recommendations of civil society organisations.
- Invest into the labour market integration of the long-term unemployed with active outreach and through the provision of comprehensive and tailored assistance. Foster the labour market integration of migrants and refugees to contribute to their overall integration.
- Safeguard the involvement of civil society organisations in policy making.

Greece

Our member from Greece, **the Evangelical Church of Greece** and its related NGO called **Perichoresis**, also shared their views on the CSRs and the situation in their region in the Northern part of Greece. They agree that substantial emphasis should be placed on equipping the Greek and migrant population living in Greece with **knowledge and skills** adapted to the constantly changing societal and economic needs. They consider it essential to provide key competencies, such as language, numeracy, and digital competence, to everyone. They also experience those transversal skills, such as critical thinking, tolerance and understanding, creativity and the ability to work as part of the society, are equally important to find a job, to build sustainable careers and become active citizens.

⁹ <https://www.diakonie.de/diakonie-zitate/hartz-iv-hat-keine-zukunft-existenzsicherung-neu-denken>

When asked about the most critical societal challenges, they talked at length about **the situation of third-country nationals**, including refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants mostly from Africa, the Middle East and the Western Balkans, and the ways of integration that have proven to be successful. Having understood the complex needs of refugees and asylum-seekers, they claim that the most important goal of all integration programmes should be to help people to lead an autonomous life. This, in practise, means the tailor-made provision of trainings of the most important skills to find a job in the country and to have a stable income, and the launch of community-oriented programmes which help them get to know the different aspects of socioeconomic life in Greece and become part of the local community. In line with this, our members provide training:

- of the Greek and the English language (in-person classes for those without digital competencies and enough mobile data, and e-learning for those who have the capacity to follow an online platform),
- on the workings of the Greek job market and what skills are necessary to find a job (e.g., preparing a CV),
- on how to set up one's own business and do the taxes,
- on cultural and social customs of Greece, e.g., on how one can become member of the local community – through sewing and cooking programmes involving the local population,
- on how local services work, etc.

Apart from shorter term trainings, our members also run a 5-year-long programme offering to a number of families a gradually decreasing financial coverage of their accommodation and utility cost, and providing them with social, legal, medical, translation and educational support. Throughout the five years, our members also give tailored support to the beneficiary families in a holistic and community-oriented way, which makes it easier for them to develop a sense of belonging.

Even through such a comprehensive set of trainings and life coaching of people, it takes several years to achieve that third-country nationals feel at home and integrated, and for some, it is a very difficult process. This is caused by diverse reasons, one of which is **illiteracy**, which is very common. It goes without saying that progress is easier to be

achieved for those migrants, who are more educated. A different reason for failed success with integration is that **many third-country nationals do not want to stay in Greece** but intend to join their family members or friends in another EU country, thus, they drop out of the training courses when their asylum is granted and leave. According to our members, less than 20% of the asylum-seekers intend to put down roots in Greece, therefore, there is a continuous movement of beneficiaries and a continuously changing set of needs to address.

Apart from third-country nationals, there is also a considerable need from **EU-migrants living in Greece and Greek citizens with an ethnic minority background**, especially the Roma, to get systemic assistance when it comes to access to education, employment, housing and social services.

When asked about their difficulties while running their operations, our members expressed that there is **no funding** coming from the state to cover the costs of their activities. Their occasional funding is provided by external partners, such as humanitarian organisations and church partners. In the absence of financial security and predictability, they run their services on a voluntary basis and hire only project-related staff for the duration of specific projects. They do not have their own resources; therefore, they have not been able to apply for EU funds either.

Our country-specific recommendations for Greece complementing the official CSRs:

-  Invest into the support of the most deprived and promote the social integration of third-country nationals.
-  Support NGOs effectively helping the integration of third-country nationals.

Italy

Having a detailed discussion with our Italian member, **Diaconia Valdese**, on the CSRs, which were guiding Italy on how to make the society more inclusive, create more jobs and maintain sound public finances, has revealed that progress on the targeted areas is still to be achieved.

Starting with the field of **education**, our member talked about **unintentional discrimination** present in the sector, which is due to the pre-existing economic differences between the families. Although teachers try to do their best to create inclusive education, the work of NGOs reaching out to the most disadvantaged, among them Roma and migrant children, is often necessary so that they can keep up with the

expectations at school. Secondary and tertiary education are more knowledge- than skills-based, which might be one of the reasons for the fact that there is a very high number of **young people not in jobs, nor in education or training** (NEETs). As a potential solution to this problem, based on their experience and ongoing projects, our member proposed more cooperation between universities and companies, and more focus to be placed on preparing the young for the actual demands of the labour market. Also, because of the current labour market prospects of young people, we have been informed about the challenge of **brain drain** taking the form of masses of young, educated people leaving Italy.

As for the **employment** sector, our member gave an account of the task of caring for the elderly family members and the little children falling overwhelmingly onto **women**, who, thereby, face difficulties in returning to work. As a potential partial solution to the issue, substantial investment should be made into **social care**. Bearing in mind that the Italian population is one of the oldest ones in Europe, our member advocates for the development of a more integrated and coordinated care system which includes residential facilities used as a base from which personalised services could be delivered to people's homes. This would be a more economical way to offer good services to elders, would be cheaper for the families, and women could more easily return to work. Naturally, for such a system to operate well, state investment into the training of care workers should be increased, their remuneration should be raised and their retaining should be helped by healthy and safe working conditions, and psychological support.

As one of the biggest challenges present in the labour market, our member identified the **inclusion of third-country nationals**, for which help from NGOs is indispensable in many directions and formats. One of the successful ways of inclusion is to work with local companies and employers and convince them to take on **third-country nationals as trainees**. This often requires that NGOs sponsor the first 6 months of the traineeship period. During this period, it is essential that migrants are helped to acquire necessary social and work-related skills and competences, such as

- language competences since most of the employers in Italy require the knowledge of Italian.

- the knowledge of the rules of the labour market, including the required intensity of work and working times, specific deadlines, the importance of following safety rules (using specific equipment and wearing protective clothing),
- the knowledge of the rights of workers,
- information about the basic workings of the labour market, such as the dynamics between the manager and the employees, and
- working with women and working as a woman.

Apart from the activation of traineeships, our member help third-country nationals by operating a **job placement service** with career counselling and matching of jobseekers with companies, and by monitoring available job vacancies. The sectors in which our member is more successful with the integration of third-country nationals are agriculture and the service sector, including shops and restaurants. These are the main sectors which are in constant need of workforce. To a lesser extent though, but there are also openings in the field of information technology and logistics. Some groups, such as refugees from Syria, seem to have better competences and thereby it is easier for them to find jobs in the latter fields, while jobseekers from African countries usually find non-qualified jobs. Our member emphasized the importance of providing help to each migrant to find a job, as investing in one person results in investing in a whole community. Experience from the ground shows that people having found a job will help other people from the same nationality to enter the labour market and start a life in Italy.

When asked to identify further challenges as regards the integration of third-country nationals, our member emphasised that it is especially challenging to include **migrant women with children**, both single and married ones, in the labour market. Although women often have better skills and competences and better career prospects due to the demand for workforce in the health- and social care sector, based on cultural differences and caring responsibilities, they cannot keep their jobs in the long term.

As for further difficulties, our member mentioned **discrimination** in the labour market, which can take different forms. Some of the asylum-seekers, who are legally allowed to work in Italy, do not hold a regular permit of stay, only a temporary document which is not recognised by all the companies, and some employers hesitate to hire asylum-seekers for this reason. Also, with such a temporary status, asylum-seekers cannot open

a bank account, because of which they cannot be paid their salaries. Lack of appropriate documentation thus pushes a lot of asylum-seekers to work in the black market.

Other groups of people experiencing specific difficulties of labour market integration are **persons with disabilities**, for whom it is also vital that NGOs help with trainings and provide tailor-made job counselling and job placement.

When discussing the **involvement** of our member **in policy making**, we got the news that Diaconia Valdese usually participates in consultations at the regional level. Regional authorities reach out to them specifically in connection with draft legislation concerning social care, and they also take part in consultations as members of thematic working alliances of organisations, through which they share their experiences and best practices.

Our country-specific recommendations for Italy complementing the official CSRs:

-  Improve the labour market relevance of education, invest into research and innovation, and ensure active labour market policies towards the young, persons with disabilities and third-country nationals.
-  Make substantial investment into the flexible provision of social care.



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