



**Eurodiaconia**  *Connecting faith and social justice through action*

# STATE OF THE SOCIAL EUROPEAN UNION REPORT

**Eurodiaconia** is a European network of churches and Christian NGOs providing social and healthcare services and advocating social justice.

## 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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## INTRODUCTION

The state of our European Union is one of concern. Energy and food prices have been skyrocketing across Europe over the last months and weeks, pushing increasing numbers of households towards their financial limits. This cost of living crisis is reaching an unprecedented level of urgency and more than ever a swift and coordinated response is needed from the European Union.

Therefore, Eurodiaconia calls on the European Commission President not to turn a blind eye on the increasing social needs in her upcoming State of the European Union speech. It is urgent to acknowledge the need for a coordinated and ambitious approach to address key social issues: First and foremost coordinated emergency measures to cap prices and provide immediate support to low-income households are needed. In addition, structural measures are needed to reduce the number of persons living in or at risk of poverty. But there are also other key social issues that need to be addressed, such as developing high quality long-term care systems and improving the reception and integration of all migrants in EU member states.

Eurodiaconia is a network of 56 organisations in 32 European countries providing health and social services and working for social justice. Founded in the Christian tradition, we work to ensure that our societies provide opportunities for all people to live in dignity and to reach their full potential. Our members, representing more than 30,000

social and healthcare providers, have strong and long-standing expertise in providing services to the most vulnerable in Europe and advocating for social justice for all, leaving no-one behind.

## 2022 – a year marked by social concerns

This report is written at a moment in which social concerns are increasingly on the agenda in every EU Member State. European economies and societies have been weakened by more than two years of a pandemic, which has severely impacted the ways that we work and live. The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected certain groups, such as low-income households, migrants or persons from ethnic minorities, but also young people and women.

While we were hoping to begin recovering from this crisis, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has forced millions of people to flee their homes and their country. Economic sanctions imposed upon Russia are not only affecting people there but have also led to dramatic increases in energy and food prices in Europe and around the globe.

In every crisis, it is the most vulnerable people who are disproportionately affected. Our members have seen significant increases in the use of foodbanks and debt counselling services over the last two years, showing that current social protection systems are inadequate to meet peoples basic needs during this period of high and increasing inflation. Families, and in particular single-parents are often among those most affected and at highest risk of poverty.

Households that are struggling to afford their energy bills are at high risk of being evicted and becoming homeless. The promise of employment as being the answer to such difficulties is no longer being fulfilled with in-work poverty increasing along with the threat of unemployment. Our members are particularly concerned about young people who are unable to find work that pays enough and who are unable to enter the housing market independently, a situation that has been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.

The more immediate concerns related to the effects of the pandemic and the high inflation rates, are overshadowing issues that are of a more long-term concern, such as adequacy and sustainability of social protection systems and the effects of the green and digital transitions. Regarding the latter, many of our members wish to participate in the fight against climate change, by adapting their services and the ways they are operating. However, they are also greatly concerned by the effects of climate-change related economic measures, which are likely to affect low-income households disproportionately, again. Furthermore, significant transformations of the world of work related to deindustrialization and digitalisation are already affecting people, of whom some are facing great difficulties in adapting to the changes.

A growing acknowledgement of the role of intersectional vulnerabilities has been brought about by the COVID pandemic and the flow of refugees into the EU from Ukraine. The compounded vulnerabilities faced by, for example,

Roma children unable to access online education during the pandemic or Ukrainian women to access the labour market, can only be addressed with an understanding of the multiplicity of barriers faced by these specific groups. Because of their role filling in the gaps left by traditional social service providers, our members have unique insight into those who face the most complex forms of social exclusion and what is needed to address their needs in a holistic way that considers intersectional discrimination and structural forms of racism and discrimination.

## **Structure and aim of the report**

This report is based on our members experience working daily with people facing multiple social challenges, input from our members meeting in May 2022, and further quantitative and qualitative research carried out among members in July 2022.

It is structured in two main chapters. The first chapter highlights and explains the state of play of key social issues, as observed by our members across Europe. It also gives some concrete examples on how our members are supporting people across Europe, as well as policy recommendations for the European Commission. In the second chapter, we have identified key initiatives, which we consider to be solutions in addressing a wide range of social concerns. For each “solution” this chapter is providing concrete policy recommendations that should be enacted upon by the European Commission as soon as possible.

## Key messages for the SOTEU



Our network calls on the European Commission President to address the following social concerns in her State of the European Union Speech on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022, and for the relevant European Commission Directorates to include initiatives on the following points in their 2023 work programme: Coordinate with Member States to provide immediate emergency assistance to vulnerable households to support them in coping with rising energy and food prices;

- Step-up EU anti-poverty legislation, including the strengthening and crisis-proofing of social protection and adopting a Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes, which is urgently needed to adequately address the increasing risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union;
- Ensure full implementation of the Child Guarantee as a tool to improve equal opportunities and protection from poverty for children across the EU and encourage in particular the provision of quality social services along the lifespan with a priority on early childhood;
- Leverage the full potential of the recently created EU Platform on Combatting Homelessness and encourage Member States to adopt comprehensive national housing and homelessness strategies that include preventative, integrated, and housing-led approaches, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, including experts by experience;
- Ensure quick implementation of the European Care Strategy, by establishing a European Care Guarantee that guarantees everyone living in the EU access to quality care services and sets a framework for Member States to adequately fund and structure the delivery of high quality and person-centred services, leaving no one behind in access to LTC;
- Develop an EU Skills for Care Initiative to create a common reference tool for qualifications in the care sector, to define clear career paths, and to raise the professional status of care professions;
- Following the positive experience of the temporary protection directive (TPD) for refugees from Ukraine, propose a framework allowing all refugees entering the European Union to benefit from temporary protection, in particular the right to access the labour market;
- Following up on the Anti-Racism Action Plan, mainstream an intersectional approach in all relevant policy areas, including employment, education, and housing and urge Member States to do the same, so that all forms of discrimination are removed when accessing social services.
- Based on the work of the High Level Expert Group on the Future of the Welfare State, use the European Semester process and other tools of policy coordination to ensure that Member States improve and future-proof their social protection schemes to make them effective safety nets for everyone living in the EU;



- Call on Member States to ensure that social and care services are adequately funded and meet the rising needs. Social and care services should be a priority investment in Europe, as they are essential in supporting people in need and working towards a more cohesive and resilient society;
- Urge Member States to increase their commitment and efforts to implement all principles of the Social Pillar. Furthermore, Member States should ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders at national level in implementing the Pillar through a coordination mechanism, as suggested by the European Commission.

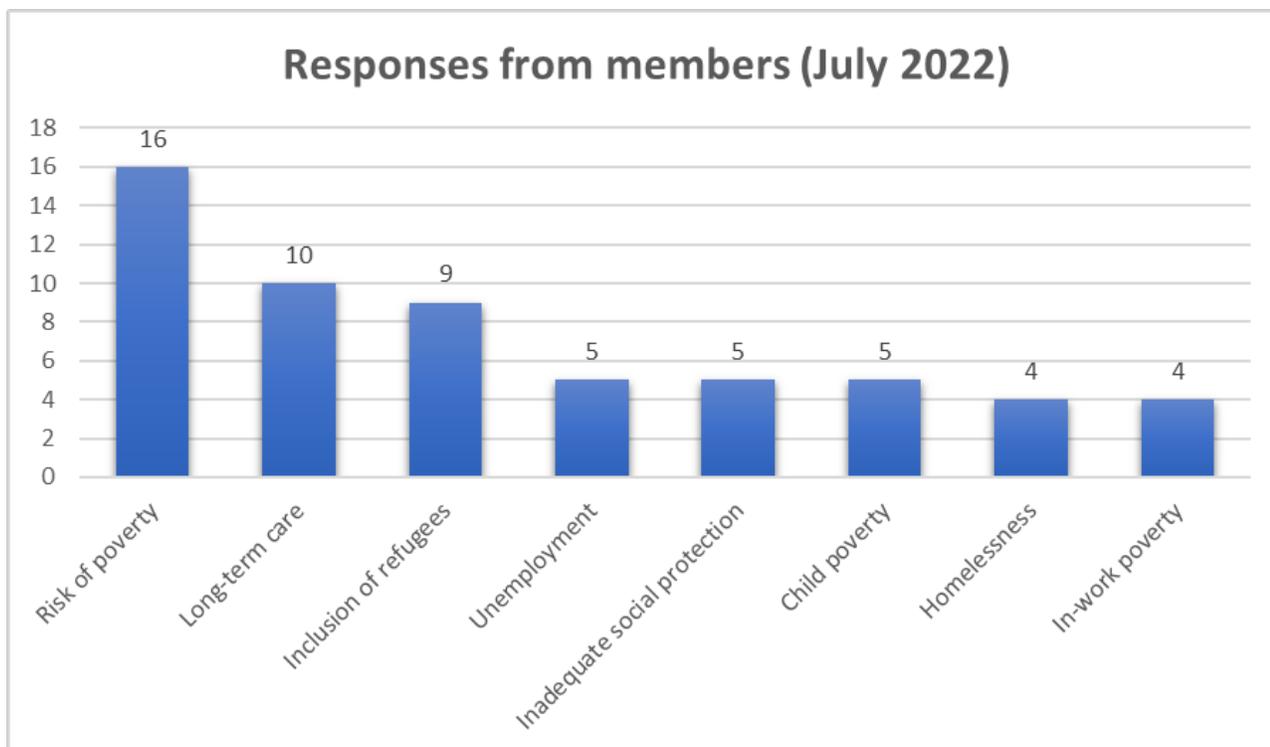
## SECTION 1 – KEY SOCIAL ISSUES AS IDENTIFIED BY OUR NETWORK

In July 2022, we asked our members to tell us which, according to them, are the three most pressing social concerns in their country. The response has been very clear across the continent and reflects the identity of our members as social and care service providers fighting for social justice.

Therefore, it is not a surprise that the biggest social concern our members identified, in the current context, is the increased risk of poverty, related to the rising cost of living. The second biggest concern is the increase in long-term care needs. Both issues have been identified, across Europe, as essential and reflect the key areas our members are active in.

The inclusion of refugees and migrants received the third highest score in our survey, reflecting current concerns related to the large influx of refugees from Ukraine. This is of particular concern for our members in countries bordering Ukraine, who are working hard to try to meet the needs of arriving refugees.

This Chapter takes a closer look at these three key topics, focusing on what our members are saying and which policy actions are now necessary. As the issue of poverty has many different facets, we will also address specific aspects of poverty, such as child poverty and homelessness.



## 1.1 POVERTY IS RISING AND AFFECTING NEW GROUPS

With inflation at a record high of 9.1% in August 2022, mainly due to high energy and food prices, it is not surprising that rising poverty has been identified by a vast majority of our members to be the most pressing social issues in their country or region at the moment. Following more than two years of a pandemic, which has heavily impacted the economy, followed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, forcing millions to flee but also leading to high inflation levels and a looming energy crisis, many are struggling to make ends meet.

According to a recent OECD report, those rising living costs impact lower-income households most, as basic goods such as food and energy are particularly affected by price increases and also represent a larger proportion of total spending for those households. Consequently, inequalities and polarisation are also on the rise.

This is confirmed by what our members are reporting. Already during the pandemic, our members were reporting an increased demand for material assistance (such as food aid), including from groups of people that had never sought assistance in the past. This trend has aggravated because of the cost-of-living crisis. For instance, Diakonie Deutschland states that in Germany poverty is expanding and affecting a rising number of people: single parents, whole families, but also full-time workers receiving minimum wages or low wages and people with low to middle-class wages. In-work poverty is also mentioned as a major issue

by our members in Romania, The Netherlands and Portugal.

### **Împreună pentru o comunitate mai bună (Together for a better community) -Fundatia Filantropia Timisoara, Romania**

This project takes place in Timișoara, Romania, and aims to help people at risk of poverty and social exclusion to solve their social and legal problems. The target groups include unemployed people, people without identity documents, the elderly, people with disabilities, Roma people, children in difficult situations (with disabilities, with special needs, from single-parent families, children who dropped out of school), people experiencing homelessness, or families at risk of domestic violence)

During this project, our member aims to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion from marginalized communities by providing information services, psychosocial counselling, legal counselling services and assistance in obtaining housing property documents. In addition, a social study will be carried out following the application of a questionnaire to users.

Link: <http://fft.ro/impreuna-pentru-o-comunitate-mai-buna/>

Increased housing exclusion and over-indebtedness are also problems reported by our members. In the Czech Republic, our member reports a big over-indebtedness problem with over 800.000 people currently in foreclosure. Many face the accumulation of several foreclosures at once.

Half of the indebted households are in foreclosure due to short-term and consumer loans (one third for repayment of housing, energy and telephone bills).

Although EU-wide unemployment is currently not a major concern, there are still 5 of our members who mentioned unemployment as a major concern in their country. Amongst them countries such as Italy, which continue having a high youth unemployment rate. Similarly, in-work poverty is a major concern for our members in Portugal, Romania, the Netherlands and Switzerland. Well-functioning and adequate social protection schemes, as well as adequate minimum wages would be ways to mitigate those forms of poverty across the EU.

Eurodiaconia welcomed the poverty headline target of lifting at least 15 million people out of poverty by 2030, established by the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

However, greater ambition is needed to respond to the devastating socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the consequent cost-of-living crisis. In view of this aim, our network calls on the European Commission to:

- Coordinate with Member States to provide immediate emergency assistance to vulnerable households to support them in coping with rising energy and food prices;
- Step-up EU anti-poverty legislation, including the strengthening and crisis-proofing of social protection and adopting a Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes, which is urgently needed to adequately address the increasing risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union.



## 1.2 CHILDREN ARE AT HIGH RISK OF POVERTY IN THE EU

Children have just returned to school after the summer holidays and in particular parents from low-income households are struggling with the costs that are related to school, often with increased lunch fees and many other school related expenses.

According to Eurostat, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, children were the age group at highest risk of poverty in the EU, with 24.2 % at risk of poverty or social exclusion (around 18 million children) in 2020. Equally, households composed of a single person with dependent children recorded the highest risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU (42.1 %)(Eurostat, 2021).

***“My children know that we cannot buy anything. Like yesterday, when I sold this old antique stool that I had, to be able to buy a pair of swimming trunks for my son. And they understand that if we want to buy something, we have to sell something. They know our life is like that. And somewhere they have accepted it.”***

***User of a local City Mission in Sweden***

The pandemic exacerbated the critical situation of those affected by severe material deprivation, including children. This is currently being severely aggravated by the war in Ukraine and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Some of our members already report increased numbers of children coming to school without having had

breakfast in the morning.<sup>1</sup> Over the coming months, a further increase in child poverty is to be expected.

Eurodiaconia members offer a wide range of child-related services such as family support centres, day care facilities, youth work services, after-school programmes, child protection, counselling and many other social services impacting on children and families. They are thus very aware of the reality of poverty and social exclusion among children in Europe.

For instance, our members have expressed that single parents and families with many children are facing particular difficulties due to decreased income and rising prices. In Sweden, families with children are not prioritised in the housing market, often experiencing trouble securing housing and being pushed into homelessness. In Austria, our member Diakonie Österreich highlights the growing need of ensuring good quality Early Childhood Care and Education, especially for children with disabilities and from other disadvantaged groups.

In the Czech Republic, our members state that unequal access to quality education reproduces and perpetuates the generational cycle of poverty, particularly for children from poor regions. In Romania, the EU country with the highest child poverty rate, our member notes that intergenerational poverty is a serious problem with

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<sup>1</sup> [Lernen mit leerem Bauch geht nicht › evang.at](#)

extensive ramifications. For example, they shed light on the exclusionary consequences of poverty for children: not being able to participate in recreational activities, not being able to go on a day trip with their schoolmates, or to a birthday party. In rural areas, the problem is acute, with lack of jobs, parents with little education, lack of access to medical services, and lack quality teachers and schools.

Moreover, Roma children, children from an ethnic minority, and children with a migrant background are groups that, according to our members, deserve special attention, as they are at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. For instance, according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) survey in nine EU Member States, Roma children are the most deprived group, with more than 90% of Roma children living at risk of poverty (EU-MIDIS II survey 2015-2016). Eurodiaconia members working with Roma children emphasize the need for early intervention in the lives of children living in poverty to break the generational cycle of poverty and social exclusion.

Eurodiaconia welcomed the ambitious advancements of the European Commission to tackle child poverty by including a headline target in the 2021 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan to reduce child poverty by at least 5 million and proposing the European Child Guarantee, which was adopted by Member States. However, further efforts are needed to effectively tackle child poverty.



### Family support work in Christianshavn - Kirkens Korshaer, Denmark

Our Danish member Kirkens Korshaer is doing family support work in the neighbourhood Christianshavn. The centre welcomes children and their parents to spend some time away from their daily worries. The children can play, parents can have a coffee and on certain days they are sharing a meal. The children are also offered to participate in some activities or excursions.

Increasingly, the staff of the parents house is also preparing packed lunches for the children so that they can have a healthy and nutritious lunch and therefore concentrate and learn better at school. Many parents are struggling to make ends meet and especially towards the end of the month they are struggling to provide their children with school lunch.

[Without food and drink, children will not | Church Cross Army \(kirkenskorshaer.dk\)](https://www.kirkenskorshaer.dk)

Therefore, our network calls on the European Commission to:

- Ensure full implementation of the Child Guarantee as a tool to improve equal opportunities and protection from poverty for children across the EU. Require Member States to submit, without further delay, ambitious, participatory and comprehensive Child Guarantee national action plans.<sup>2</sup> Member States need to capitalise on the Child Guarantee by mobilising national and EU resources and tackle and overcome the challenges children experience daily all over the Union;
- Ensure an intersectional approach to child poverty at EU and national level by addressing child poverty in other policy areas and include vulnerable children in gender, disability, as well as antiracism and discrimination legislation.
- Monitor and tackle multiple discrimination against migrant and Roma children and support Member States in addressing educational and spatial segregation, insufficient access to housing and social and health care, by providing guidelines and targeted recommendations;
- Make EU Funds available for the provision of quality social services along the lifespan with a priority on early childhood. Access to inclusive, high- quality ECEC and education must be guaranteed for all children to tackle social exclusion and break the generational cycle of poverty.



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<sup>2</sup> As of July 2022, only 11 out of 27 Member States have submitted their national action plans.

### 1.3 INCREASING RISK OF HOMELESSNESS

Many of our members are worried about an increase in homelessness and housing exclusion in the coming years. Indeed, throughout the pandemic, many people living in homelessness were offered temporary accommodation and many vulnerable households have been protected from eviction through legislation. As these measures come to an end now and at the same time the cost of living and in particular energy prices are soaring, vulnerable households will be confronted with the dilemma of paying for either food, energy or rent, putting them at high risk of eviction and homelessness.

Likewise, over the last years, our members have reported the increase of new target groups at risk of homelessness or living in homelessness, which was aggravated by the COVID-19 outbreak as it has intensified pre-existing issues. Whilst people in homelessness are still predominantly middle-aged, single men, our members report that there is a growing proportion of young persons, families, women, over-indebted people and migrants living in homelessness. This seems to be confirmed by the recently published first German national statistical survey on homelessness.

Moreover, the Russian invasion of Ukraine that provoked the displacement of millions of people, is putting some extra pressure on housing and homelessness services across Europe. Some of our members have implemented special emergency programmes to host Ukraine refugees,

but the continuity of those programmes is not guaranteed, as they lack funding and adequate support from local authorities or national governments.

When asked about the causes of homelessness, our members point to the high complexity and interweaving of different causes leading to homelessness. Structural issues and barriers preventing people from entering the housing market such as a lack of affordable housing, low or no income, over-indebtedness, legal status, and discrimination are among the main causes of homelessness. Addictions and mental health issues are also a common cause of homelessness but can as well appear because of it. Our members also observe a significant co-existence of homelessness and mental illnesses as well as psychosocial disabilities and a lack of necessary treatment. Additionally, in most countries, persons without legal residence, including EU mobile citizens, are excluded from housing programmes, public shelters or basic care and left without any support.

In the private rental market, discrimination, rent fraud and higher prices remain an obstacle to access affordable housing for many people. Several of our members report for instance, that Roma or persons with a migrant background face difficulties when trying to rent an apartment.

Based on our members' long-standing experience and on-the-ground observations, our network calls for decisive action at EU and Member State levels to put in place ambitious measures in order to reach the joint goal of eradicating homelessness in the European Union by 2030. In view of this aim, our network calls on the European Commission to:

- Leverage the full potential of the recently created EU Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH), by assigning adequate budget to it and involving all relevant stakeholders in the discussion, including service providers and people experiencing homelessness;
- Encourage Member States to adopt comprehensive national housing and homelessness strategies that include preventative, integrated, and housing-led approaches, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, including experts by experience, and develop an EU framework for monitoring and evaluating national homelessness strategies;
- Encourage Member States to prevent evictions, by reviewing existing legislation and putting in place targeted support measures for households at risk of eviction;

Establish together with Member States a common definition and coherent indicators on homelessness based on the ETHOS typology and enable the collection of comparable and reliable statistical data, with the involvement of local authorities and civil society organisations providing services for people living in homelessness;

- Provide adequate and sustainable funding to integrated, person-centred and sustainable housing solutions which combine homelessness prevention, holistic support interventions, and permanent solutions, reducing the administrative hurdles to accessing such funding;
- Tackle the structural issues of European housing markets through ambitious strategies and regulations and prioritise the social function of housing over the economic profit and speculative practices. Urge Member States to invest more in social and affordable housing to facilitate access to adequate housing also for low-income households and particularly vulnerable groups, such as young persons, migrants, women or people with mental illness



## 1.4 THE LONG-TERM CARE SECTOR IS UNDER PRESSURE

Eurodiaconia members have longstanding experience in the care sector, as many of them have been traditionally engaged in long-term care since their foundation, including care for the elderly as well as for persons with disabilities or other long-term care needs. Today this care takes various forms and is always oriented at the needs of the care receiver, whether this is in residential care facilities, community care, day care or mobile home care. The following analysis, concerns and recommendations are based on our members insights and observations.

The ongoing COVID 19 crisis has exacerbated existing challenges which the long-term care (LTC) sector was already facing due to chronic underfunding. It has made issues such as staff shortages and insufficient availability of LTC facilities even more prominent. Demographic change is, furthermore, expected to significantly increase the need for long-term care over the next years and decades, as the numbers of elderly people are continuously increasing and among them also the number of persons with high care needs, because of old-age, dementia and other memory disorders.

On the other hand, the number of family and informal carers is shrinking, due to changing societal and familial patterns, namely the increased participation of women in the labour

market coupled with low fertility rates in Europe. Our members observe a shift in care choices, as more elderly persons want to be cared for at home. However, their needs are not matched by sufficient investment in affordable homecare and community care services. Therefore, the high need for homecare workers is mainly covered by care workers from eastern and non-European countries, creating a care drain in those countries, which is also of concern to our members.

***"Loneliness hurts just like a poorly treated wound, a conversation about joy and sorrow is just as important as clean laundry"***

***Pastor Dr. Maria Katharina Moser,  
Director of Diakonie Austria***

Over decades, there has been insufficient investment in the care sector in most Member States, leading to a lack of availability of affordable services. In many EU Member States, our members report that high "out-of-pocket" payments are necessary to cover the costs of elderly care, which not everyone is able to afford. Furthermore, funding for social service providers, through public procurement or similar schemes, is often inadequate as it is awarded to the most financially competitive bidder and not necessarily to the one offering the best quality.

The sector is facing increasing commodification where quality can be compromised for price. As not for profit social service providers we see care in all forms as part of our common good and as services of general interest. Ensuring accessibility, affordability, availability and quality can run contrary to the commodification of care. The subsequent lack of funding makes it difficult for our members to both provide high-quality and innovative care services and pay attractive salaries to their workers due to pressure to focus on price rather than standards of care.

Severe staff shortages are of particular concern in a number of member states. The care sector is not seen as an attractive workplace, as work is low-paid, physically hard and lacks opportunities for professional development. Several members report that the set user/carer ratio is too low, leading to excessive workloads and, eventually, a vicious cycle in which care workers are increasingly overworked and drop out of the workforce.

Based on our members long-standing experience and on-the ground observations, our network calls for decisive action at EU and Member State level to ensure sufficient, affordable and accessible high-quality care services and make care work attractive.

**Austria: Diakonie Austria – SING Reform model** ('Seniorenarbeit Innovativ Gestalten', 'Innovative design of the work with elderly people' in English)

In this innovative care model for the future, the social service system of the future will not be based on standardized services that are planned years in advance. On the contrary, all relevant actors will work together with users, family members and volunteers to quickly implement innovative services and on a small scale, following a community-centred approach.

In SING, a professional caregiver supports people with care needs in deciding how they want to be cared for. After identifying the user's care needs as precisely as possible, the professional is then able to refer the user to the services available in the local area. If specific services lack in the region, the professional caregiver forwards the information to the local NGOs and authorities, which in turn can then develop offers to fill these gaps.

At the local level networks will be developed around the care receivers to support them and their families and using existing resources. The aim of this network will be to activate human resources, give professional support to family caregivers, involve volunteers, and provide expertise and tailored services from professionals.



In view of this aim, our network calls on the European Commission to follow-up on its recently published Long Term Care Strategy with the following concrete actions:

- Establish a European Care Guarantee that guarantees everyone living in the EU access to quality care services. These care services should be available, affordable, and of good quality to meet individual needs and fulfil the right to dignity and independent living. The European Care Guarantee should set a framework for Member States to adequately fund and structure the delivery of high quality and person-centred services, leaving no one behind in access to LTC, namely low-income people and people in vulnerable situations. This framework should include life-cycle care strategies, covering decent working conditions, training opportunities for carers, and support for informal and family carers;
- Develop an EU Skills for Care Initiative to develop a common reference for qualifications in the care sector, to define clear career paths, and to raise the professional status of care professions. This Initiative should also aim at improving up- and re-skilling opportunities for professionals in the care sector, identifying skill gaps and needs, as well as setting a framework to recognise skills acquired through experience, such as through informal care work to facilitate access to formal employment in the sector;
- Review the Voluntary European Quality Framework for social services and carry out a

comparative analysis of quality systems in the LTC sector across Member States. Organise peer reviews and mutual learning exchanges to enable the relevant public authorities to learn from each other;

- Improve the implementation of public procurement by awarding contracts on the basis of quality criteria instead of price only by setting an adequate duration of contracts (a minimum of three or four years) and including a mechanism to adjust the funding related to potentially faster rising costs due to external circumstances;
- Support and favour service providers, offering LTC services that put users at the centre of care, empower them to take decisions in the most possible autonomous way. Promote independent living as much as possible, including by providing users with personal budgets to pay for the type of care they choose;
- Irrespective of the financing system and source of funding, provide adequate and sustainable funding to ensure high quality and affordable LTC services to all people who need them.
- Continue the focus on care by the European Commission by developing strategies and actions to support all types of social and care services including those of a short term and emergency nature such as addiction services, youth services, housing and homeless support, debt counselling and others.

## 1.5 INVESTMENT NEEDED TO OFFER QUALITY RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION TO REFUGEES

Eurodiaconia members have always been active in welcoming and supporting foreigners. In some cases, the services have been strongly developed following the refugee wave from Syria and Iraq in 2015/2016 and they can benefit and build on that experience now to best support refugees from Ukraine. For others, this is now the moment to develop targeted services. As of September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, 7.1 million Ukrainian refugees had crossed into wider Europe<sup>3</sup> and Eurodiaconia members have been engaged since then in supporting and welcoming refugees at the borders and then also in settling in their cities, towns and communities.

First, our members reported that their work primarily involved safeguarding and preventing human trafficking, providing food and necessities, sourcing and providing accommodation, and helping people to navigate registration procedures. Eurodiaconia's network demonstrated its strength and diversity, constituting both non-governmental organisations working on a national level and small parish-based organisations. Our members were involved in coordinating across their own networks to source and allocate goods such as food, clothing and medicine, as well as coordinating with local and national authorities to ensure an effective and humane response.

Our network welcomed the activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD), which entitles people fleeing the invasion of Ukraine to a broad range of rights and services including residence permits; guaranteed access to asylum procedures; access to employment, housing, education and medical care; access to banking services, the rights to move to another EU country prior to the issuing of a residency permit, and the rights to move freely within the EU. However, reports from our members indicate that, thus far, the TPD is not being implemented consistently across the EU, leaving people unable to exercise their rights in full.

Sustainable funding is crucial for NGOs and service providers facilitating the reception and integration of refugees. Eurodiaconia welcomed that EU funding was quickly made available through unspent Cohesion Funds. However, our members reported that these funds were not easily accessible, and it was widely noted that this approach risked deprioritisation of other vulnerable groups.

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<sup>3</sup> [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situation-ukraine-refugee-situation)

***“Families with many children and single-parent families are facing difficulties related to the decrease in income. The refugee crisis affected several areas - care for young children, access to employment, and availability of housing. The provision of social services was limited for some Slovak citizens even before the refugee crisis, and the current situation and the need to also provide social services to help Ukrainian citizens increases tensions in society.”  
Lubica Szaboova Vysocka, Evangelical Diaconia in Slovakia***

In the long term, uncertainty around the situation in Ukraine makes it challenging to plan. However, Eurodiaconia calls upon the EU to heed the foresight and experience of people working on the ground, across Europe, to develop effective responses. Our members foresee that the primary long-term needs will be accommodation, access to the labour market, education, psychological support and services for those with specific needs, such as people with disabilities and other special needs.

Whilst the response to those fleeing Ukraine has been broadly praised for its compassion, the activation of the TPD has further entrenched perceptions and realities of a de facto two-tier system for people seeking asylum and refuge in Europe. While refugees from Ukraine are

welcomed with compassion, refugees from other parts of the world have to go through lengthy asylum applications, during which they are often not allowed to work and allocations do not always adequately cover costs for living, food and other necessities. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitative and irregular work situations. Once formally recognised as refugees, they are generally able to access social protection, but there remain variations in laws on the local and national level, and refugees may be limited in their ability to participate in certain programmes, for example, social housing or basic income. In some instances, receiving social assistance could hamper their ability to access family reunification or receiving permanent resident status.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, our members report that racism is one of the major factors at play when it comes to lower levels of employment for third-country nationals. Beyond this, low levels of education, mis-matched skills, and lack of recognition of certifications make it difficult for migrants and refugees to enter the labour market in the EU.

In order to facilitate the reception and integration of refugees and migrants from all over the world in the EU with the aim of building a cohesive society, our network calls on the European Commission:

- Ensure that all refugees have full access to the rights under the Temporary Protection Directive, independently of their nationality and the country they are fleeing, in order to

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<sup>4</sup> [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/situation-ukraine-refugee-situation)

prevent a two-tiered approach to refugee rights. This should include adequate social protection for all refugees and asylum seekers, covering daily payments adequate for accommodation, food, and other necessities. It should also include effective access to social protection and rights to access the labour market, housing, and through tailored and low-threshold support services and targeted information campaigns;

- Strongly encourage Member States to make all necessary efforts to accelerate asylum and other administrative procedures and make sure performance is monitored under the European Semester process;

- Provide adequate and easily accessible funding to organisations providing support for the integration of refugees and migrants, especially not-for profit social service providers and migrant-led organisations;
- Ensure the Temporary Protection Directive is independently monitored, through EU institutions and the FRA, and include regular consultation with civil society and grassroots organisations helping refugees.



## SECTION 2 – SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE SOCIAL COHESION AND LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

In the first section we have thrown light on the key social problems which our members have identified across Europe. Although the identified issues of increasing poverty, insufficient long-term care and much needed efforts for the inclusion of migrants are distinct from each other and each require a separate set of measures at the local, national and European level, we have also identified a few overarching measures that should be taken. This second section is therefore developing those overarching measures, which can contribute to addressing and mitigating several of the identified social concerns.

### 2.1 AMBITIOUS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

Adopted in 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights, has the potential to address most social concerns in the European Union and be a tool to ensure social justice for all persons living in the EU. With its 20 principles, the Social Pillar covers most social aspects and the Action Plan launched in 2021 with its three Headline targets and the revised scoreboard, has been a very welcome step towards better and more ambitious implementation.

Eurodiaconia welcomed the Action Plan, as it includes several promising measures, covering most of its principles. We regret nevertheless, that

the opportunity to systematically present initiatives on each principle, has been missed. Similarly, we feel that the implementation at national level is not monitored systematically, principle by principle.

In order to be an effective tool to improve social cohesion and leave no one behind in the EU, the implementation of the Social Pillar needs to be a common effort. **The European Commission should urge Member States to step up their commitment and efforts to implement all principles of the Social Pillar. Furthermore, Member States should ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders at national level in implementing the Pillar through a coordination mechanism, as suggested by the European Commission.**

### 2.2 ADEQUATE SOCIAL PROTECTION SCHEMES

In the current cost-of-living crisis, social protection schemes are failing to adequately protect people from poverty. Many fear having to choose between eating and heating this winter. Hence, several of our members have cited the inadequacy of social protection schemes as being one of the three most important challenges in their country.

Well-functioning social protection schemes create a security net to protect individuals in times of personal crisis, by supporting them to maintain a

dignified life and regaining their independence. They are essential to reduce poverty, improve social cohesion and make sure no one is left behind in our changing world. Well-designed social protection systems intervene early and with adequate financial and social support to provide targeted help to the individual to overcome a personal crisis situation. The current cost-of-living crisis shows that in order to be adequate, social protection schemes also need to be quickly adaptable. Ideally, automatic mechanisms should be included to adapt and increase payments in crisis situations to help vulnerable households cope.

Eurodiaconia firmly believes that everyone living in the EU should be covered by adequate social protection as it is a matter of human dignity. This includes persons which are often excluded from the general social protection schemes, such as asylum seekers, refugees and migrants, but also EU mobile citizens. As of now, EU mobile citizens are not eligible to access social protection schemes unless they have been employed or living in the host Member State for five years. This gap in social protection schemes is meant to discourage “welfare tourism,” but can result in situations of extreme destitution, particularly for low-skilled workers, EU mobile Roma and other groups fleeing discrimination and cycles of poverty in their home country. Targeted assistance for EU mobile citizens, such as accommodation and assistance to access the labour market, would improve the lives of many EU mobile citizens living in extreme destitution across the EU and enable them to work towards participation in economic activity.

Other migrant workers, from migrant domestic workers to seasonal agricultural workers, to migrant workers in irregular situations, experience different vulnerabilities, as well as rights and de facto access to social protection. Therefore, it is crucial that legislation considers these specific needs and vulnerabilities with targeted solutions that ensures the well-being of all workers and puts specific protection in place for those who are most vulnerable.

Adequate social protection should include everybody, not only people active in the job market. Thus, adequate minimum income schemes must be part of it, as they act as the last resort for individuals facing poverty by ensuring a minimum standard of living. Adequate minimum income is at the heart of any realistic, impactful approach to addressing poverty and social exclusion in the European Union. To be adequate, minimum income should not fall below 60% of the equivalised median income. Additional factors such as reference budgets and statistical analyses should also be considered and adjusted regularly to quickly respond to inflation and rising costs of living, as we are currently experiencing.

Minimum income schemes also need to be rights-based, inclusive and accessible to everyone in need of this support throughout the life cycle. Targeted information and active outreach measures towards marginalised groups, such as the long-term unemployed or Roma people, should be prioritised to prevent the same people to keep falling behind. Discriminatory and biased approaches are structural challenges acting as a deterrent to take-up and should be further tackled.

Transparent and non-discriminatory eligibility criteria are also key to improving accessibility and coverage. Moreover, punitive conditionalities are a direct contradiction to a rights-based approach and must be avoided. Instead, the focus should be on tailor-made labour market activation measures to support beneficiaries to (re)integrate in the labour market.

However, adequate social protection should not be limited to labour market support and basic subsistence, it also needs to enable everyone living in the EU to access quality health and social care services. This is of particular importance in view of an ageing population and a more active younger generation, in which women are working and are therefore not able anymore to care for elderly family members. Therefore, also persons with little or no income have to be entitled to receiving the professional care they need.

In all areas of social protection, one important concern is the non-take-up of benefits. The UN Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights has recently published a report on the non-take up of rights to social security. The report confirms that in the European Union “non-take-up rates are above 40% for most benefits considered”<sup>5</sup> and that the most marginalized and most in need are also those who are most often not taking up the benefits they are entitled to. He finds that “non-take-up can result from a lack of awareness of the benefit itself, a lack of understanding of the eligibility criteria” or difficulties with the application

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<sup>5</sup> [G2232217.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

procedure.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, simplification of procedures, timely and easily understandable information about benefits and well-functioning low-threshold support services to access them are crucial in order to make sure that social protection schemes reach those who need them most.

**Based on the work of the High Level Expert Group on the Future of the Welfare State, the European Commission should use the European Semester process and other tools of policy coordination to ensure that Member States improve and future-proof their social protection schemes to make them effective safety nets for everyone living in the EU.**

## 2.3 STRONG SOCIAL AND CARE SERVICES

Exploding energy prices are putting social and care services under serious pressure, some of them warning that they will have to close down without additional support.<sup>7</sup> This comes at a time where social services have been suffering from underinvestment for many years and have already been facing additional pressure over the last years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the beginning of the pandemic and until now, our members providing social services have responded to steep increases of beneficiaries in all areas, due to higher levels of unemployment, a rise in poverty, then also inflation and, therefore, increasing inequality. However, in most cases funding for social services providers has not

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> [CSD - Diaconia valdese](#)

increased, making it difficult to provide the targeted and person-centred support that people, especially the most vulnerable, need.

Social and care services are at the heart of our ambition for a social Europe and are essential in supporting people in need and working towards a more cohesive and resilient society. Furthermore, they play a crucial role in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the achievement of its 2030 Headline Targets. Also the successful social inclusion of vulnerable groups such as the long-term unemployed, the homeless, persons with disabilities, migrants and Roma, cannot be achieved without social services that provide targeted support to address individual needs. To be effective, social and care services must be accessible, affordable, available and of good quality.

The recruitment and retention of qualified staff is a key challenge for most social services providers. A

cross section of Eurodiaconia members are unable to get the sufficient amount of staff they need to continue providing services. There is a crucial need for the EU and Member States to create an enabling environment to ensure the sustainability of social service provision. Therefore, particular attention needs to be paid to the social care and social services sector in all the EU initiatives related to working conditions, including the proposal for an EU directive on minimum wages. Ensuring good working conditions in the social workforce in all Member States is an essential precondition to ensure quality services. Furthermore, the Commission should encourage Member States to launch campaigns aimed at increasing the societal recognition of careers in the care and social services sector.



## **Diakonie Düsseldorf, Germany**

### Window Counselling - Stadtteilladen Flinders

The 'Stadtteilladen' is a low threshold social centre for families in the neighbourhood Flinders in Düsseldorf, run by Diakonie Düsseldorf. During the COVID pandemic, they were quickly aware that their users and other people in the neighbourhood were suddenly not able to reach public administration services anymore, because they closed to the public and often were not even reachable by phone. Also, the centre reports, that for many elderly persons or persons with a migrant background digital access or having phone calls with public administrations turned out to be difficult, if not impossible.

Therefore, they started doing social counselling at the windows of their social centre, to respect social distancing and safety measures. This service is mainly run by volunteers, although complex cases can also be referred to a social worker. It is very successful as a low-threshold entry point for many in the neighbourhood who are struggling with accessing their social rights. As of July 2022, this service is still running and widely used, as some public services have still not re-opened to the public.

Moreover, social services occupy a front-line role in ensuring people's well-being and supporting them to be equal participants in society. This has been demonstrated during the pandemic; while other sectors shut down, social service providers continued providing services. As such, social services should be structured in a way that benefits everyone, especially the most vulnerable groups. Social services are at their most efficient when they offer targeted and person-centred approaches. Where necessary this needs to include active outreach activities. Furthermore, staff need to be trained in order to address unconscious biases and discriminatory attitudes towards certain groups. While digitalisation of

social services can bring great benefits, it must be ensured that everyone has access to those services, including persons with no or low digital literacy or access to digital tools. Otherwise, the elderly, but also disadvantaged groups such as the Roma, migrants or the homeless, risk being further excluded.

**Therefore, the European Commission should call on Member States to ensure that social services receive adequate and sustainable funding to meet the rising needs. They should be a priority investment in Europe, not an afterthought.** Furthermore, the EU should develop a coherent stream of funding to ensure the scaling-up of successful social experimentation and social innovation projects. Maximising the efficient use of EU funds should include pulling together resources from different funding programmes. The EU should equally consider establishing cooperation with other financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank, national promotional banks, ethical banks, foundations, philanthropic organisations, and social impact investors to top-up funding in a coordinated manner. To facilitate access and uptake of funds by not-for-profit social service providers, application and reporting procedures need to be further simplified.

## **2.4 EFFECTIVE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION MEASURES**

Discrimination is an overarching concern, leading to additional barriers to access the labour market and putting persons at higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. It can be discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, migration background

and/or status, and also because of gender. There is intersectional discrimination, when a person is facing discrimination on several grounds, such as for example Roma women or a migrant with a disability. Discrimination can hinder persons to effectively access their social rights and participate on an equal footing in society.

To ensure effective social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, anti-poverty, housing, education, and labour inclusion measures must be underpinned by strong anti-discrimination measures. This includes affirmative action and policies that target racist structures and practices and go beyond tackling individual acts of hate speech and racist behaviour. Eurodiaconia has therefore strongly welcomed the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020 – 2025.

In order to gain a better understanding of the problem and develop adequate and targeted responses, data collection should also be disaggregated by ethnicity and other forms of intersectional data in line with GDPR and human rights principles on data collection (participation,

data disaggregation, self-identification, transparency, privacy and accountability), as recommended in the Common Guiding Principles for National Action Plans Against Racism and Racial Discrimination<sup>8</sup> published by the European Commission.

**Following up on the Action Plan, EU Institutions and Member States should mainstream an intersectional approach in all relevant policy areas, including employment, education, and housing to make sure to address all forms of discrimination in those areas.** This should also be reflected in the work of public services, which should embed anti-discrimination and intersectional approaches in their work, provide tailored support to people facing complex barriers to access employment and utilise multi-disciplinary interventions to address individual cases of intersectional vulnerability and long-term unemployment.

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<sup>8</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/common\\_guiding\\_principles\\_for\\_national\\_action\\_plans\\_against\\_racism\\_and\\_racial\\_discrimination.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/common_guiding_principles_for_national_action_plans_against_racism_and_racial_discrimination.pdf)



# Overview of this report's recommendations

## Addressing rising poverty:

- Coordinate with Member States to provide immediate emergency assistance to vulnerable households to support them in coping with rising energy and food prices;
- Step-up EU anti-poverty legislation, including the strengthening and crisis-proofing of social protection and adopting a Framework Directive on Adequate Minimum Income Schemes, which is urgently needed to adequately address the increasing risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union.

## Protecting children from poverty:

- *Ensure full implementation of the Child Guarantee as a tool to improve equal opportunities and protection from poverty for children across the EU. Require Member States to submit, without further delay, ambitious, participatory and comprehensive Child Guarantee national action plans.*<sup>1</sup> Member States need to **capitalise on the Child Guarantee** by mobilising national and EU resources and tackle and overcome the challenges children experience daily all over the Union;
- Ensure an intersectional approach to child poverty at EU and national level by addressing child poverty in other policy areas and include vulnerable children in gender, disability, as well as antiracism and discrimination legislation;
- Monitor and tackle multiple discrimination against migrant and Roma children and support Member States in addressing educational and spatial segregation, insufficient access to housing and social and health care, by providing guidelines and targeted recommendations;
- Make EU Funds available for the provision of quality social services along the lifespan with a priority on early childhood. Access to inclusive, high-quality ECEC and education must be guaranteed for all children to tackle social exclusion and break the generational cycle of poverty.

### **Fighting homelessness:**

- Leverage the full potential of the recently created EU Platform on Combatting Homelessness (EPOCH), by assigning adequate budget to it and involving all relevant stakeholders in the discussion, including service providers and people experiencing homelessness;
- Encourage Member States to adopt comprehensive national housing and homelessness strategies that include preventative, integrated, and housing-led approaches, with the involvement of relevant stakeholders, including experts by experience, and develop an EU framework for monitoring and evaluating national homelessness strategies;
- Encourage Member States to prevent evictions, by reviewing existing legislation and putting in place targeted support measures for households at risk of eviction;
- Establish together with Member States a common definition and coherent indicators on homelessness based on the ETHOS typology and enable the collection of comparable and reliable statistical data, with the involvement of local authorities and civil society organisations providing services for people living in homelessness;
- Provide adequate and sustainable funding to integrated, person-centred and sustainable housing solutions which combine homelessness prevention, holistic support interventions, and permanent solutions, reducing the administrative hurdles to accessing such funding;
- Tackle the structural issues of European housing markets through ambitious strategies and regulations and prioritise the social function of housing over the economic profit and speculative practices. Urge Member States to invest more in social and affordable housing to facilitate access to adequate housing also for low-income households and particularly vulnerable groups, such as young persons, migrants, women or people with mental illness.

<sup>1</sup> *As of July 2022, only 11 out of 27 Member States have submitted their national action plans.*

### **Support the long-term care sector:**

- Establish a European Care Guarantee that guarantees everyone living in the EU access to quality care services. These care services should be available, affordable, and of good quality to meet individual needs and fulfil the right to dignity and independent living. The European Care Guarantee should set a framework for Member States to adequately fund and structure the delivery of high quality and person-centred services, leaving no one behind in access to LTC, namely low-income people and people in vulnerable situations. This framework should include life-cycle care strategies, covering decent working conditions, training opportunities for carers, and support for informal and family carers;
- Develop an EU Skills for Care Initiative to develop a common reference for qualifications in the care sector, to define clear career paths, and to raise the professional status of care professions. This Initiative should also aim at improving up- and re-skilling opportunities for professionals in the care sector, identifying skill gaps and needs, as well as setting a framework to recognise skills acquired through experience, such as through informal care work to facilitate access to formal employment in the sector;
- Review the Voluntary European Quality Framework for social services and carry out a comparative analysis of quality systems in the LTC sector across Member States. Organise peer reviews and mutual learning exchanges to enable the relevant public authorities to learn from each other;
- Improve the implementation of public procurement by awarding contracts on the basis of quality criteria instead of price only by setting an adequate duration of contracts (a minimum of three or four years) and including a mechanism to adjust the funding related to potentially faster rising costs due to external circumstances;
- Support and favour service providers, offering LTC services that put users at the centre of care, empower them to take decisions in the most possible autonomous way. Promote independent living as much as possible, including by providing users with personal budgets to pay for the type of care they choose;
- Irrespective of the financing system and source of funding, provide adequate and sustainable funding to ensure high quality and affordable LTC services to all people who need them.
- Continue the focus on care by the European Commission by developing strategies and actions to support all types of social and care services including those of a short term and emergency nature such as addiction services, youth services, housing and homeless support, debt counselling and others.

### **Provide support to refugees and migrants:**

- Ensure that all refugees have full access to the rights under the Temporary Protection Directive, independently of their nationality and the country they are fleeing, in order to prevent a two-tiered approach to refugee rights. This should include adequate social protection for all refugees and asylum seekers, covering daily payments adequate for accommodation, food, and other necessities. It should also include effective access to social protection and rights to access the labour market, housing, and through tailored and low-threshold support services and targeted information campaigns;
- Strongly encourage Member States to make all necessary efforts to accelerate asylum and other administrative procedures and make sure performance is monitored under the European Semester process;
- Provide adequate and easily accessible funding to organisations providing support for the integration of refugees and migrants, especially not-for profit social service providers and migrant-led organisations;
- Ensure the Temporary Protection Directive is independently monitored, through EU institutions and the FRA, and include regular consultation with civil society and grassroots organisations helping refugees.

### **Implement the European Pillar of Social Rights:**

- The European Commission should urge Member States to step up their commitment and efforts to implement all principles of the Social Pillar. Furthermore, Member States should ensure the engagement of all relevant stakeholders at national level in implementing the Pillar through a coordination mechanism, as suggested by the European Commission.

### **Develop adequate social protection schemes:**

- Based on the work of the High Level Expert Group on the Future of the Welfare State, the European Commission should use the European Semester process and other tools of policy coordination to ensure that Member States improve and future-proof their social protection schemes to make them effective safety nets for everyone living in the EU.

### **Support strong social services:**

- The European Commission should call on Member States to ensure that social services receive adequate and sustainable funding to meet the rising needs. They should be a priority investment in Europe, not an afterthought.
- The EU should develop a coherent stream of funding to ensure the scaling-up of successful social experimentation and social innovation projects. Maximising the efficient use of EU funds should include pulling together resources from different funding programmes.

- The EU should equally consider establishing cooperation with other financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank, national promotional banks, ethical banks, foundations, philanthropic organisations, and social impact investors to top-up funding in a coordinated manner.
- To facilitate access and uptake of funds by not-for-profit social service providers, application and reporting procedures need to be further simplified.

**Implement effective social inclusion and anti-discrimination measures:**

- Following up on the Action Plan, EU Institutions and Member States should mainstream an intersectional approach in all relevant policy areas, including employment, education, and housing to make sure to address all forms of discrimination in those areas.
- Public services should embed anti-discrimination and intersectional approaches in their work, provide tailored support to people facing complex barriers to access employment and utilise multi-disciplinary interventions to address individual cases of intersectional vulnerability and long-term unemployment.



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