

SSE Reaction to the State of the Union Speech 2023

Social Services Europe regrets that social and health care services are not part of the State of the European Union

Despite the recognition of the essential role of social and health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine international armed conflict the 2023 State of the European Union speech fails to address the specific needs of the social services sector with regards to employment, funding, and investment all of which are crucial to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged communities in the EU.

Social Service Europe recognises that quite some progress has been made with the European Care Strategy¹ and the Social Economy Action Plan and the forthcoming Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions². SSE also has welcomed other recent initiatives, e.g., the Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income schemes, the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages, the Social Climate Fund, and the European Year of Skills 2023. But this is not enough.

Social and health care services enable millions of people in Europe to be empowered to live decent, dignified lives and be able to enjoy their human and social rights. But with shortages in staff and increasing waiting lists we need urgent action to avoid ethical, economic, and social consequences for Europe. Social Services Europe therefore regrets the absence of social and health care services in the policy initiatives announced by President von der Leyen. The initiatives presented in the last four years cannot respond adequately to the numerous interrelated challenges for the EU citizens. They don't live up to the needs of (not-for-profit) social services providers to effectively offer care, support, guidance, and training for all those in need and for their digital and green investments.

More needs to be invested by the EU and Member States if millions of European citizens are to have accessible, affordable, and quality social services, health care, housing, and employment support. We urge the EC to present in the months and years to come a stronger and more comprehensive social response. This concerns three fields of key importance for our members and for the users of the social services: 1) social protection, 2) social services and 3) barriers to social inclusion.

SSE's President Heather Roy stated: *"Social and Health Care services need more support at European level, and we are disappointed that the #soteu this year does not provide that. Their role as proven in the crises of the last one and a half decades, need to be better recognised and supported. This is what the users of social services deserve and what the providers expect. We hope that the next EC will give social services and the major issues limiting people's access to them, thus their social rights, the attention they deserve."*

SSE would like to see for the new mandate of the EC and EP as of 2024, with EU policy, financial and legislative initiatives to strengthen 1) sustainable and adequate social protection systems accessible to all, 2) accessible, available, affordable quality social services which are adequately staffed and sufficiently financed, and 3) increased efforts to reduce and overcome barriers to social inclusion in the fields of employment, education and vocational training, housing and (mental) health. SSE is committed to work in partnership with governments and local and regional authorities to make this happen.

¹ Cf. [SSE contribution to EC Consultation/Evidence Collection on a Roadmap for a European Care Strategy](#) (18 February 2022)

² Cf. [SSE Statement on the EC proposal for a Council Recommendation on developing social economy framework conditions](#) (6 July 2023) & [SSE Proposals for the Implementation of the Social Economy Action Plan - From Ambition to Implementation](#) (28 April 2022)