

Meeting of SSE Delegation with Marian Jurečka, Czech Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Labour and Social Affairs

On Friday, 11 November 2022, a delegation of Social Services Europe (SSE) – consisting of Mathieu de Poorter, CEDAG and President of SSE, and Jiří Horecký, EAN and Board Member – met in Prague with Marian Jurečka, the Czech Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and Czech Deputy Prime Minister. In the context of the Czech Presidency of the European Union (EU), this meeting followed upon an online exchange between the Minister and the SSE Board organised early May 2022.



The meeting was organised around three main topics:

1. European Care Strategy & Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care
2. Energy poverty and impact of energy crisis on social service providers
3. Social service providers reacting to Ukraine crisis

At the end of the exchange, the SSE delegation raised concerns about the low level of involvement of civil society organisations in the preparation of the [EU Social Forum](#). The event held last 16 and 17 November 2022 in Brussels thematically focused on the social dimension of the green transition.

I. European Care Strategy & Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care

On 7 September 2022, the European Commission published a Communication on the European Care Strategy (ECS). It calls for sustainable and sufficient funding, good working conditions, gender equality

and work-life balance for social services workers, to make the sector more resilient and attractive. For SSE, the ECS represents a top priority. As highlighted in [SSE's contribution to the EC call for evidence on the ECS](#), there is a need to improve the quality of long-term care, strengthen the rights of users and support the improvement of the working conditions of the care workforce.

In exchanges with the Czech Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, SSE referred to the [webinar "Introducing the European Care Strategy: Stakeholders' Initial Reactions"](#) on 9 September 2022, co-organised by EASPD and SSE that brought together about 350 participants. SSE's President reiterated the call to the EU Member States (EU MS) for further ambition and to support enabling EU-level policy frameworks; such as a EU Care Guarantee, a European Care Platform, a EU Skills for Care Initiative and the availability of dedicated EU funding to support reforms in long-term care (LTC). SSE welcomed that the ECS recognises the positive link between safe and legal work migration channels and ethical recruitment practices to close gaps in the care sector in economically better off EU MS and recalled the various challenges linked to "brain drain" and "care drain" affecting in particular countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The SSE delegation supports the full access to social protection and to decent working and pay conditions for all migrant care workers, as well as sanctions against recruitment agencies and employers who rely on undeclared work ([contribution made by Jiří Horecký on behalf of SSE](#)). A related aspect addressed by the SSE delegation was the employment situation of Ukrainian care workers who had to flee since end of February 2022 to the EU.

Both Minister Jurečka and SSE recognised the strong potential of the forthcoming Council Recommendation on LTC, one of the priorities of the Czech EU Council Presidency in the social field, to help addressing key challenges for users and providers of long-term care services. Minister Jurečka highlighted the need for the Recommendation to rely on appropriate indicators for the quality and effectiveness of LTC services.

II. Energy poverty and impact of energy crisis on social service providers

Piling up with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, recent geopolitical instabilities stemming from the war on Ukraine and the related surge in prices for energy and food, have emerged as a major new variable impacting the social services resilience. SSE is closely following up the energy poverty issue as it is hitting in particular economically and socially most vulnerable people who often also benefit from social services. Energy poverty and impact of the energy crisis are strongly connected and mutually reinforcing issues. Social service providers across Europe already clearly perceive the impact of rising wages and increased energy, housing, transportation, construction and food costs. They heavily challenge their financial sustainability and resilience and undermine the continuity and quality of services provision.

For SSE, short-term measures are first needed to mitigate the impact of the high energy costs, such as through increased reimbursements to cover the additional costs of the delivery of social services but also more long-term/resilience-building solutions and investment in sustainable and energy-efficient services and infrastructures. The emergency measures are linked to the non-distribution constraint of non-profit social services organisations that enable them to provide services of general interest but limit their capacities to sufficiently build up financial reserves. This challenge has also been highlighted in [SSE's Contribution to the EC call for evidence on the Commission's proposal for a legislative initiative on cross-border activities of associations](#).

SSE President provided more detailed evidence from a the [report “Energy crisis: from emergency measures to more sustainable social services”](#) issued by the Federation of European Social Employers and EASPD’s [Initial Snapshot Report: The impact of the rising cost of living on service providers in the disability sector](#). He also introduced initial recommendations to governments. SSE has started to coordinate its policy and advocacy work and its members collect further evidence and plans to organise a webinar on the topic in January 2023.

Whereas a lot had already been done to mitigate the effects of the energy crisis for the citizens and those at the risk of energy poverty, the social impacts of the energy crisis in the different EU MS have been addressed by the national ministers at an informal meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council. Related to this crisis, opportunities lying in the establishment of a Social Climate Fund that includes Social Services (e.g., investment in energy efficient buildings, non-discrimination impact of care givers and providers, transportation, etc.) should be further explored.

III. Social service providers reacting to the situation in Ukraine

SSE issued an [Open Letter to EU Institutions on Situation in Ukraine](#), in early March 2022. Many SSE members have in the meantime provided support in form of humanitarian aid and a range of social services to those who had to flee from Ukraine and – given the huge challenges as to the provision of care services in Ukraine – continued their support for local social service providers, be it their members or partner organisations.

The SSE delegation referred to issues raised by some of its members that EU funds for Ukraine remain difficult to be accessed by social service providers on the ground or that new initiatives, e.g., “Safe Housing”, are not supported by additional budgets, i.e., that money is taken from other EU funds, including from those with ear-marked amounts for certain purposes and target groups, and linked to pre-existing EU policy frameworks.

SSE President highlighted the need to become more effective and to move towards a partnership approach between the EC and EU umbrella organisations of social service providers, as well as between national governments and the social service providers to guarantee a swift transfer of existing EU support to those providing supports.

[Social Services Europe](#) (SSE) is a network of eight European umbrella organisations – comprising [Caritas Europa](#), [CEDAG](#), [E.A.N.](#), [EASPD](#), [EPR](#), [Eurodiaconia](#), [FEANTSA](#) and the [Red Cross EU Office](#) – representing over 200,000 not-for-profit social and health care organisations. We are active in a sector employing over 11 million people, of which about half are employed by social economy organisations. This also means that more than a third of the (estimated) 13.8 million paid jobs in the social economy is in the sector of social services.