Caritas CARES!
country report 2019

Portugal

Access to services by vulnerable groups: barriers, obstacles and good practices
Authors: Chiara Crepaldi, Francesca Pepé and Gaia Sartori, Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale
Contributions to this report by: Filipa Abecasis, Caritas Portugal
Coordination: Peter Verhaeghe and Shannon Pfohman, Caritas Europa

Published by Caritas Europa, September 2019.

This study has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” (2014-2020).
For further information please consult: http://ec.europa.eu/social/easi

The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.

Caritas Europa reserves the right to not be held responsible for the accuracy and completeness of the information provided in this publication. Liability claims regarding damage caused by the use of any information provided, including any information which is incomplete or incorrect, will therefore be rejected.
## Contents

- What this report is about .................................................. 5
- About Caritas in Portugal ................................................. 6
- Recent publications ....................................................... 6
- Contacts ............................................................................. 7
- Executive summary .......................................................... 8
- 1. The evolution of the socio-economic context ................. 9
- 2. Characteristics of the welfare system ............................ 10
- 3. Access to key social rights and to services by people experiencing poverty or social exclusion 10
- 4. An assessment of the availability, accessibility, affordability and adequacy of key services and benefits in Portugal
  - a. Public employment services are still ineffective at tackling long-term unemployment ........................................ 13
  - b. Vulnerable families have difficulty buying or renting a house due to price rises ................................................. 14
  - c. The coverage of childcare (for 0–3 years) is high, but a mismatch between supply and demand occurs in some areas 15
  - d. Migrants and asylum seekers share difficulties and challenges in accessing social inclusion services 15
  - e. Counselling services are mainly provided by NGOs but there is no financial or structural support from the Government to develop these activities 16
- 5. Use of the minimum income as a measure of inclusion and activation in Portugal .............................................. 16
- 6. Progress made towards achieving EU social targets ......................... 17
- 7. The use of EU Funds 2014–2020 ........................................ 20
- 8. Caritas Portugal promising practices .................................. 20
- Conclusions ....................................................................... 23
- Recommendations ............................................................. 23
What this report is about

Caritas Organisations are essential actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and the fight for social justice. They do so by assisting and providing services to people in need, as well as by presenting alternatives to address unfair structures, policies and measures.

The Caritas CARES report is an important instrument in this endeavour. Caritas informs local, regional, national and European authorities and formulates recommendations, based on its daily work with people experiencing poverty.

This report has been compiled on the basis of a questionnaire, designed in consultation with the participating member organisations. It will ensure that the voice of the weakest members of our societies is heard and will support the advocacy efforts of Caritas at national and at European levels.

This report is focused on an analysis of the availability, accessibility, affordability and adequacy of services addressing poverty and on the promotion of social inclusion and activation in European countries. It also attempts to identify the concrete causes of non-access to services by the most vulnerable members of our society.
About Caritas in Portugal

Cáritas Portuguesa is an official service of the Portuguese Bishops Conference and the national union of 20 Diocesan Cáritas and several local grassroots groups that work in parishes and communities. We are a member of Caritas Internationalis, Caritas Europa, the Portuguese Platform of NGOs for Development, the Non-Governmental Forum for Social Inclusion, the Portuguese Volunteer Confederation, the Dignitude Association, Ethical and Solidarity Finances for the Common Good, the Refugee Support Platform and the Forum for Catholic Organisations for Immigration. Our Vision is to be a testimony of fraternity of the Christian community among the most vulnerable through the social pastoral activity of the Church. Our mission is to promote integral human development and the Common Good through pastoral activities, acting as agents of change, fostering the sharing of goods and providing aid in emergencies.

Cáritas Portuguesa is monitoring poverty in the country through its Social Observation Centre (NOS), a group of volunteers and members of Cáritas, who analyse data from the social care attendance in the Diocesan Cáritas and parishes, as well as developing thematic analyses whenever relevant and implementing consultations in order to call on the expertise of the NOS members and other Cáritas Portuguesa stakeholders.

In 2018 the number of beneficiary members was 121,031; this number includes family contacts with the Diocesan Cáritas or with the parish group (face-to-face, home visits, via telephone or via email contact, etc.), and each contact that was made in order to provide assistance (e.g. food support). All beneficiaries of social services provided by the Diocesan Cáritas are also included, as well as beneficiaries from training and capacity building programmes, either in the parishes and/or the dioceses. In comparison to the previous year, the number of people helped decreased by 12.7% (as opposed to 138,635 in 2017). This figure is in line with the downward trend observed since 2015 (161,379), and was most pronounced in 2016 (139,337), allowing one to conclude that, in general, the level of demand has been steadily decreasing over the past few years. This decrease could have been greater in 2017 and 2018, but due to the population affected by the forest fires, and support offered by Caritas and other Church organisations, it maintained a steady decline.

Every three months each Diocesan Cáritas sends to the NOS their information on the total number of contacts with beneficiaries. The Social Observation Centre is currently implementing a new online system of collecting data (SGASP) from the Diocesan Cáritas, which will help systematise and better monitor the services provided by the network. The specific projects on training and capacity building also provide their own list of participants.

Recent publications

Recent publications of reports and articles by Cáritas Portuguesa can be downloaded at the following links:

Reports:


• Young people in Europe need a future! CARES Report Portugal (2017): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gMROuM902NpLoq1VbO6Q0BvE0k48YSnj/view


Articles:


Contacts

Contact person: Filipa Abecasis
Email: filipaabecasis@caritas.pt
Tel: +351 911 597 326

Communication/press contact: Márcia Carvalho
Email: marciacarvalho@caritas.pt
Tel: +351 911 597 497
Executive summary

Portugal is a rapidly ageing country: between 2009 and 2018 the population decreased by -2.6%, the number of children decreased by -12.7% and the over 85s increased by 51.4%. Migration is not a key issue affecting population change and the number of asylum seekers is one of the lowest rates of the resident population in Europe. The employment rate of the 20–64 year-olds has steadily increased and the unemployment rate is declining.

Concerning poverty, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate in 2017 was 23.3%, just above the EU average, but poverty and social exclusion indicators continue to improve.

In spite of this favourable context, people’s social rights have been assessed as not fully accessible, particularly by the most vulnerable groups of the population, and this is especially the case of access to housing (ranked as only 1 out of 5). All the others have been rated as 2, apart from healthcare, which was rated as 3.

Caritas Portugal notes that some groups of vulnerable people face considerable barriers in accessing services. They are mostly the elderly, people of working age, children, young people, the homeless, persons with physical and intellectual disabilities, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees, and people and families with low(er) incomes.

The main problems evidenced in the 5 services selected for this analysis are accessibility and availability. The policy/service having the biggest problems is housing policy, given the lowest rating (1 out of 5) followed by early childhood education and care (ECEC). In general, the quality of services has been assessed as rather low: the average score does not exceed 2.75:

- Public employment services are still ineffective at tackling long-term unemployment;
- Vulnerable families have difficulty buying or renting a home due to price rises;
- The coverage of childcare (0–3 years) is high, but a mismatch between supply and demand occurs in some areas;
- Migrants and asylum seekers share difficulties and challenges in accessing social inclusion services;
- Counselling services are mainly provided by NGOs but there is no financial or structural support from the Government to develop these activities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Promote reasonable wage levels, including in the measures for creating employment, and expand social protection coverage in case of unemployment.

Recommendation 2: Build and promote social housing and control selling/purchasing and rental prices for the most vulnerable.

Recommendation 3: Promote affordable and accessible day-care services, to ensure that parents and families have access to this service.

Recommendation 4: Support decentralisation and enhance the engagement of local actors in the integration of migrants and asylum seekers.

Recommendation 5: Concerning counselling services, promote the decentralisation of the social services provided and improve the financial support and capacity building of the social organisations in the field.
1. The evolution of the socio-economic context

Between 2009 and 2018 the population in Portugal diminished by -2.6% with a decrease of 271,987 people. It is a rapidly ageing country, and the data show that while children decreased by -12.7%, the working age population has diminished by 5.4%, the elderly (>65) increased by 16.6% (+314,971) and the over 85s by 51.4%.

Immigration flow is not a key issue affecting population change: in 2018 284,793 third country nationals were living in the country, about 2.8% of the population, well below the EU average of 4.1%. The number of asylum seekers has rapidly increased in the last three years, but it still remains one of the lowest rates per capita in Europe. In 2018 about 1,285 asylum applicants registered in Portugal, a decline since the peak registered the year before with 1,750. The low levels of salaries is certainly a good reason to explain it (immigrants and foreigners look for richer countries).

Portugal’s labour market continued to improve during 2018, though at a decelerating pace. The employment rate of 20–64 year-olds has progressively increased over the years and reached 75.4% in 2018: 3.5 percentage points more in comparison to 2008.1 The unemployment rate continued to decline gradually after the 2012 peak of 15.8%, falling to 7% in 2018; these results being very close to the EU 28 average (6.8 %).2

Concerning poverty, the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate (AROPE) was 23.3% in Portugal in 2017, versus an EU average of 22.5%.3 Poverty and social exclusion indicators continued to improve thanks to the employment recovery, the social protection policies and the actions of civil society. The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate decreased from 25.1% in 2016 to 23.3% in 2017, more than 4 percentage points below the peak reached in 2014 and also below the pre-crisis levels. This is related to a drop in the number of severely materially deprived people and in the percentage of people living in low-work-intensity households.4 At the same time income inequality in Portugal remains high and the effectiveness of social transfers (other than pensions) in reducing poverty remains limited.

Foreigners, and particularly citizens from third countries, are a group for whom the incidence of poverty and social exclusion is very high. More than 44% of these foreigners are at risk of poverty or social exclusion and almost 34% are at risk of monetary poverty. Those experiencing very low work intensity reaches almost 12% of this population and 13% are in severe material deprivation.

The expenditure for social protection benefits in Portugal hasn’t increased very much over the years, and it is well below the EU average: it increased from €3,779 per inhabitant (at constant prices) in 2008 to €4,125 in 2016 (the latest available data), in comparison to €7,377 at EU level. In relation to the impact of social transfers (excluding pensions) on poverty reduction,5 social expenditure reduces poverty by only 22.46% while the EU average is 34.1%, one of the lowest impacts across Europe. However, while the country’s welfare spending on social protection and healthcare remained below the EU average in 2016, Portugal deployed more resources on other spending, targeting public services in general.6

---

1 Eurostat, 2019, Employment – annual data.
2 Eurostat, 2019, Unemployment – annual average.
3 Eurostat, 2019, People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex.
5 Reduction in the percentage of the at-risk-of-poverty rate, due to social transfers (calculated comparing at-risk-of-poverty rates before social transfers with those after transfers; pensions are not considered as social transfers in these calculations). The indicator is based on the EU-SILC (statistics on income, social inclusion and living conditions).
2. Characteristics of the welfare system

The Portuguese social protection system is composed mainly of a mixture of provision of services and policy measures.

The welfare system includes most employees and also self-employed people, and it provides financial support to workers in times of sickness, maternity, paternity and adoption, occupational diseases, unemployment, disability, old age and death. The solidarity system guarantees citizenship rights, and is aimed at eradicating poverty and exclusion and providing support in situations of personal or family need, through a non-contributory scheme, a special social security scheme for agricultural workers and a social integration income. The social action system is provided specifically by local authorities and by private non-profit institutions, with the aim of providing special protection for more vulnerable groups, as well as in other situations of financial or social need that are not covered by the solidarity system. The supplementary system, which is optional, comprises supplementary group-initiative schemes, individual initiative schemes, and a public capitalisation scheme that is the responsibility of the State, which will complement the benefits provided by the welfare system and of which membership by workers is voluntary.

By 2018, 2,223,000 people were at risk of poverty or social exclusion, resulting from the combination of people at risk of poverty in the previous year (1,777,000 or 17.3%), and those living in households with a very low per capita income in the previous year (532,000), and those who experienced severe material deprivation in 2018 (815,000). Of these groups, 109,000 people were simultaneously in all three adverse conditions: poverty, deprivation and low labour intensity. As a result, the poverty or social exclusion rate was 21.6% in 2018, down 1.7 percentage points below the previous year’s level, and 5.9 percentage points lower than in 2013 (data from EU-SILC 2018, INE).

3. Access to key social rights and to services by people experiencing poverty or social exclusion

The main goal of this Caritas CARES country report is to analyse if and how living in poverty or in conditions of social exclusion hinders access to social rights and to services.

Several EU initiatives have been promoted in recent years to tackle inequality, poverty and social exclusion, both in general terms and for specific targets groups. The European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission have proposed several policy initiatives to strengthen the social dimension of the European Union, and the most relevant one adopted recently is The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). Another relevant one is the European Social Charter (ESC) (Council of Europe). They both state the right of all persons (independent of their socio-economic conditions) to access some specific rights related to equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and access to social protection and social inclusion. However, Caritas Portugal believes that the EU decision-makers focus mainly on their own statistics and on the people and organizations that develop applications and co-funded projects. The downside is that these organisations tend to focus more on the funding agencies than on the most vulnerable people and families.

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.
They are fully described here: [LINK]. Several of the rights cited by the European Pillar of Social Rights specifically relate to the conditions of people in poverty and social exclusion. This is particularly the case of PRINCIPLE 4 – Active support to employment; PRINCIPLE 11 – Childcare and support to children; PRINCIPLE 14 – Minimum income; PRINCIPLE 16 – Health care; PRINCIPLE 19 – Housing and assistance for the homeless; and PRINCIPLE 20 – Access to essential services.

Another highly relevant instrument is the (revised) European Social Charter (ESC) of the Council of Europe. The most relevant articles of the European Social Charter relating to access to services are listed below (Box 1).

---

**Box 1 – Ratification and implementation of the Revised European Social Charter (1996) relating to access to services and minimum income**

Portugal has ratified the 1996 Revised European Social Charter. The following Articles could have an impact on access to services and minimum income:

- The right to vocational guidance (Article 9)
- The right to vocational training (Article 10)
- The right to protection of health (Article 11)
- The right to social and medical assistance (Article 13)
- The right to benefit from social welfare services (Article 14)
- The right of the family to social, legal and economic protection (Article 16)
- The right of elderly persons to social protection (Article 23)
- The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 30)
- The right to housing (Article 31)

Portugal has accepted the Additional Protocol providing for a System of Collective Complaints. More information on the provisions accepted by Portugal can be found in the Country Factsheet.

---

All these rights have been assessed as not fully accessible, in particular by the vulnerable sections of the population, and this is especially the case with access to housing (ranked 1 out of 5). All the others have been rated as 2, apart from healthcare, which was ranked 3. Based on the Caritas Portugal survey, access to some of these rights remains extremely difficult in this country. In the following section we can see the difficulties in accessing some of the services available.
Caritas Portugal notes that some groups of vulnerable people face considerable barriers and obstacles in accessing services, namely the elderly, people of working age, children, young people, the homeless, persons with physical and intellectual disabilities, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees.

In this section the main strengths and weaknesses of accessing five important services are described. Three services selected for analysis are common to all European countries – public employment services, housing policies and early childhood education services – and two have specifically been chosen by the national Caritas, identified as being particularly relevant in Portugal: services for migrants and asylum seekers and counselling services.

Concerning the first additional service chosen, Cáritas Portuguesa and Caritas Portugal network, together with Caritas Europa and Caritas Internationalis, have been ever more active in the response and service provision to migrants and asylum seekers, through advocacy campaigns, social services, and other projects that focus on this challenge at a national level.

Access to quality counselling services is more and more restricted due to budget cuts in all fields of public services, especially health, education and social services. Together with the low levels of innovation and the decrease in the public services’ sense of mission, these factors together have contributed to the crisis in the public services sector. The access to services is particularly limited for people living in the rural inland parts of Portugal.

The main criteria for the evaluation of services are adequacy, accessibility, availability and affordability:

- **ADEQUACY**: the service is of good quality and is satisfactory; it is able to respond to the needs of the user;
- **ACCESSIBILITY**: the service can be reached or obtained easily, and it is easy to understand and to use;
- **AVAILABILITY**: the service exists and it is available for those who need it;
- **AFFORDABILITY**: the service is cheap enough for people who need it to be able to afford it.

The survey responses have been ranked on a scale ranging from 1 (the lowest score, meaning that the service is completely inadequate, inaccessible, or unavailable or unaffordable) to 5 which means that it is totally positive.

The main problems, in general, for the 5 services are accessibility and availability. The policy/service having the most significant problems is the housing policy, ranked with the lowest rating (1 out of 5) followed by early childhood education and care (ECEC). In general, the quality of services has been assessed as very low. In fact, the average result of the rankings does not exceed 2.75, as the following table shows:
a. Public employment services are still ineffective at tackling long-term unemployment

Portugal continues to have high poverty and social exclusion, and in-work poverty. According to 2016 incomes, Portugal has an in-work poverty rate of 10.8%. In 2017, 13.3% of workers were at risk of poverty or social exclusion and 4% were in severe material deprivation. Even though there have been many new measures implemented, there are several barriers for the most vulnerable in accessing the labour market. Portugal is implementing measures to tackle long-term unemployment, but effectiveness remains a challenge. Monitoring data of the Council Recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed reveals a very high level of implementation on all segments (around 98% and well above the EU average of 83%). However, effectiveness remains low with only 16.8% transiting to employment in 2017 and around half of the 2016 users still unemployed 12 months after receiving a job integration agreement.9

It is in this context that Public employment services have been assessed as barely adequate, accessible and available, all ranked 2 out of 5, although, at the same time, regarded as completely affordable (rated 5).

Young people, people over 45 years old with low skill or qualifications, and specifically the long term unemployed, are those facing the most relevant barriers and obstacles in accessing them.

In the last few years the service has worsened, mainly because the acceptance rate of service users by the employment services and programmes increased considerably after the crisis, especially from 2013 onwards. The number of participants in the Active Labour Market Policy measures increased by almost 60% between 2012 and 2015 – although it declined again in 2016, largely as a result of declining unemployment. This resulted in an increase in the coverage rate – the number of unemployed participants registered in programmes rose from 19.1% in 2012 to 29.4% in 2016. In addition, it is important to note that not all unemployed people are enrolled in the Institute for Employment and Professional Training (IEFP), thus, not eligible to participate in the programmes. In the case of Portugal, around 83% of the unemployed in 2016 were enrolled in the IEFP, a figure which is in line with the EU average. However, Portugal has a relatively high number of people who are officially registered as inactive but who are, in fact, available to work, although they are not looking for a job. It is also crucial to understand how and to what extent expenditure on different types of programmes has evolved over time and how effective this has proved.

---

A testimony can help to better illustrate the access to these services:

António, aged 54, divorced and living with his retired sister, has no access to the Social Integration Income (RSI) due to his sister’s pension. Antonio is a long-term unemployed person, with a long history of working for employers. As a result of a car accident, a lower limb was amputated, which led to unemployment, without any kind of support. Although the services of the Job Centre have guided him to the possibility of being integrated into protected work, he has not been summoned to accept a job offer. With the intervention of Caritas Viseu, he has participated in training programmes, in order to obtain the RSI. In this region, according to the IEFP, companies are not very aware of the offers of protected jobs, thus not offering the opportunity to people with physical limitations.

Caritas Viseu

b. Vulnerable families have difficulty buying or renting a house due to price rises

According to the INE\(^\text{10}\) and Público newspaper, the sale of houses has grown for four consecutive years and the number of transactions verified in 2016 is close to that of 2010. These figures also show that prices rose by 7.1% at national level.

Housing prices in Portugal, compared to medium income values, are absolutely out of proportion. Recently the Social Observation Centre of Caritas Portugal focused attention on the housing situation in Portugal. Despite having some measures in place, the situation of housing has become uncontrolled. A study, undertaken by the Social Observation Centre, reveals that ‘old’ houses have again registered an increase in prices (9.2%), higher than the price of ‘new’ houses (3.5%). The price of housing rose on average 7.1% in 2016, and 7% in only the three first months of 2017, and in the urban areas of the country, mostly in Lisbon, the price of houses is very high compared to the average income per family.\(^\text{8}\)

Most social housing needs to be renovated, and the costs are estimated at more than €50 million.

Therefore, presently, there are various policy makers and pressure groups who are asking the government to create policy measures to help those who are on the verge of AROPE. The Government and some municipalities have committed themselves to providing aid through housing units or subsidised rents in order to help those families and individuals who are unable to pay their rent and live adequately. Laws and policies in this regard are being discussed in order to create a higher level of adequacy.

The vulnerable groups identified as most affected by these barriers or obstacles are young people, people of working age and the elderly.

According to the Caritas survey, housing services are currently regarded as completely inaccessible, unaffordable, inadequate and unavailable (all criteria have been ranked 1 out of 5). In relation to these findings, Cáritas Portuguesa is seriously concerned about the lack of housing in Portugal. The conversion of residential homes into local tourist accommodation, and the consequent departure of the local inhabitants, is a serious problem. Caritas is also concerned about the increasing indebtedness of many poor families.

In the last few years the access to housing has worsened. Because housing prices are increasing and the measures in place are not adequate,
consequently, the problems related to housing are worsening for the most vulnerable groups. The supply of affordable housing for this specific population has virtually disappeared.

c. The coverage of childcare (0–3 years) is high, but a mismatch between supply and demand occurs in some areas

Public childcare services support all parents in caring for their children. These services are of good quality and they are important for early childhood education and the development of children. These services also help parents during the day to attend to their jobs or to find job opportunities.

The coverage of childcare (0–3 years) in Portugal is high: it ranks among the highest in the EU for participation in formal childcare for children under 3 years of age. 47.6% compared to an EU average of 34% in 2017, albeit with a slight decrease from 49.9% in 2016. However, the indicator for children aged 4–6 is below target. A mismatch between supply and demand occurs in some areas: the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto suffer from insufficient provision of childcare, whereas the supply exceeds the demand in small inland towns. The National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination – Portugal + Igual – contains proposals for investment in childcare services, including an increase of coverage, especially in urban centres. A measure to ensure that all children aged 4 and 5 have access to pre-school education is currently being implemented, although there are difficulties in accomplishing this target in the main metropolitan areas, especially in Lisbon. Some new facilities have been built in recent years, co-financed by the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund. Work-life balance depends significantly on the availability of childcare: while legislation provides that both mothers and fathers are entitled to flexible working hours until children are 12 years old, access to this scheme is often difficult.

Users of this service, regardless of their financial situation, must pay an amount that is calculated according to their annual income. But even if families with a low income pay a low amount, it is still a challenge for these families to keep their children in these facilities, because a significant proportion of these people are unemployed or have low wages. There is insufficient coverage of public day care centres, which forces many parents to choose either private services, which are very expensive, or to leave their children with nannies, often not certified and without adequate conditions.

For these reasons the ECEC services have been evaluated as completely unavailable and unaffordable (both ranked as 1 out of 5), only marginally accessible (ranked 2) albeit quite adequate (rated 3).

In the last few years the service has worsened.

d. Migrants and asylum seekers face difficulties and challenges in accessing social inclusion services

Regarding the main obstacles to the inclusion of immigrants in Portugal, it is important to distinguish between two factors: integration policies and inclusion practices. It is also important to distinguish between the policies and practices for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, and the inclusion policies and practices concerning immigrants. These two groups face unique inclusion challenges although they sometimes share common difficulties in inclusion and, above all, difficulties in accessing existing social inclusion systems. Barriers to inclusion are challenges that need to be overcome in Portuguese society in order to enhance the capacity of migrants to contribute to their country’s development. There is a need for an assessment of these barriers in order to offer new evidence on ways in which migrants can positively contribute to and enhance sustainable development. One of the main problems is related to the low level of training and knowledge of the service providers. Access to regularisation, employment, housing, healthcare, amongst other rights, is difficult for migrants, as the information varies from service to service, and there is limited coordination between public services, especially when it comes to migrant integration.
The most affected vulnerable groups are people of working age, asylum seekers and refugees, undocumented persons, migrants and ethnic minorities.

The service does not respond appropriately to all the needs; in fact, it has been evaluated as neither adequately accessible and available (ranked 2), nor entirely adequate (ranked 3), but quite affordable (rated 4 out of 5).

In the last few years the service has improved.

E. Counselling services are mainly provided by NGOs but there is no financial or structural support from the Government to develop these activities

In 2017 almost half of the users of social services were children and young people, while the elderly represented 41.5%, which indicates that the needs of these two age groups are much higher than those of the age group in between. The distribution of social services and the access by these target groups is quite homogeneous throughout the country, although with a concentration of services in the most populous districts of the coastal strip, especially in Lisbon and around the metropolitan area of Porto. More than 70% of the social responses were developed by non-profit entities, particularly the solidarity network, which reveals the dynamism of the entities that make up the social economy. However, most of the time there is not sufficient financial or structural support from the Government to develop these activities, and lack of training is also identified as a need from these organisations.

According to the Caritas Portugal survey, these services do not respond appropriately to people’s needs: in fact, these services have been evaluated as completely inaccessible (ranked 1), hardly available (ranked 2) and not fully adequate and affordable (both rated 3).

Although this is a rising problem in Portugal, the authorities are trying their best to help the people who are experiencing this unfortunate challenge.

In the last few years the service has worsened. The lack of responses in the interior and rural areas of the country leads to more isolation of the elderly and people with disabilities in these areas.

5. Use of the minimum income as a measure of inclusion and activation in Portugal

Principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that:

"Everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits should be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market."

According to the approach put forward by the EU initiatives (in particular, the Recommendation on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, promoted in 2008 by the European Commission), minimum income schemes have to be viewed through the perspective of the active inclusion approach: they are expected to be

---

universal and to provide integrated support in the form of adequate cash benefits, effective access to enabling goods and services, and to include an activation component for beneficiaries.

Minimum income is implemented in Portugal and is called **Rendimento Social de Inserção/Social Integration Income**.

In Portugal the minimum income is an active inclusion measure but it seems able to make only a very marginal contribution and is not able to lift people from poverty, but only to make it less severe for those affected by it. It is also a support designed to protect people living in extreme poverty, consisting of:

- a **cash benefit** to ensure satisfaction of their minimum needs, and;
- an **insertion programme** that includes a

  contract (a set of actions established according to the characteristics and conditions of the household of the applicant for this benefit, aimed at progressive social, labour and community integration of its members). Access to the provision depends on the value of the applicant’s movable assets (bank deposits, shares, bonds, savings certificates, participation certificates and units in collective investment institutions or other financial assets) which must not exceed €26,145.60 (60 times the value of the index of social support).

The activation approach has, as its main negative aspect, the risk of fraud, consisting of false work opportunities or wage conditions. It should be noted here that the low income from work activities constrains full autonomy, and precarious work does not, for the most part, present a reliable, stable and adequate source of income.

### 6. Progress made towards achieving EU social targets

**The Europe 2020 strategy** sets out the EU’s agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade, having as its main objective the promotion of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as a way of overcoming the structural weaknesses in Europe’s economy and tackling the main European inequalities. The Strategy sets out **EU TARGETS** to give an overall view of where the EU should be by 2020, based on key socio-economic parameters. The EU targets are then translated into national targets so that each EU Member State can check its own progress towards each goal. The ones particularly relevant for this study are those referring to employment, and poverty and social exclusion.

In relation to **EMPLOYMENT**, the target set at EU level is that, by 2020, 75% of people aged 20–64 are expected to be in work. In Portugal this indicator has also been set at 75%. Eurostat data show that in 2009 it was about 71.9%, and in 2018 it was at 75.4%. As the data indicate, the target has been reached successfully and exceeded.

In Portugal, an improvement is also visible in relation to **POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION**. In the EU target set the aim is to achieve a reduction of at least 20 million people in or at risk of poverty/social exclusion. Portugal set a target to reduce, by 2020, the number of individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion by 200,000 persons. Eurostat data show an improvement of the indicators thanks to the employment recovery. The at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate decreased from 24.9% in 2009 to 23.3% in 2017, and is more than 4 percentage points below the peak reached in 2014. In absolute terms the reduction has been 359,000 people, so in this case, too, the target has been reached and surpassed.

To achieve the employment and poverty targets, the Portuguese Government has promoted, over the years, programmes and reforms in line with the **EUROPE 2020 Strategy**.
• Within this framework the evolution of the socio-economic context in Member States is described each year within the Commission Staff Working Document European Semester COUNTRY REPORT. In 2019, in the area of poverty and social exclusion, the report identified a positive trend in terms of the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, but some challenges remain to be tackled, in particular in terms of access to services:

• In May each year the European Commission assesses the progress made and issues COUNTRY SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS to propose new actions. The recommendations provide policy

---

- Portugal has seen a substantial decrease in its poverty indicators. The improvement is related, in particular, to the increase in work intensity of households. Still, child poverty remains high in households with three or more dependent children and in single-parent households. While improving, the situation of elderly people (65+) shows some vulnerabilities.

- In spite of the overall progress, success in reducing the poverty of people in employment is less evident.

- The labour market situation of people with disabilities is improving, with a slight increase in their placements in the open labour market compared to the previous years, and a decrease in the number of registered unemployed.

- The risk of poverty remains high in rural areas.

- Recent increases in house prices (see Section 4.2.2) can put housing affordability at risk in urban areas, namely in Lisbon and Porto.

- Income inequality has declined but remains above the EU average.

- The impact of social transfers (other than pensions) on poverty reduction remains limited.

- Recent changes in eligibility rules for unemployment benefit may increase their coverage.

- The coverage of childcare (0-3 years) is high, but a mismatch between supply and demand occurs in some areas.

- A measure to ensure all children aged 4 and 5 have access to pre-school education is currently being implemented.

- Depopulation linked to ageing puts pressure on the efficiency and quality of the public services.

- The health status of Portuguese citizens is good in many areas, but inequalities in access to healthcare remain.

---

guidance tailored to each EU country on how to boost jobs and growth, while maintaining sound public finances. The recommendations focus on what can realistically be achieved over the next 12-18 months. In 2018 there were no Recommendations issued for Portugal referring to social inclusion, but only one concerning the strengthening of qualification programmes:

In 2019 the CSRs proposed by the European Commission directed specific attention to social inclusion, as in Recommendation 2 where it suggests

2. (…) Increase the skills level of the adult population, including digital literacy, by strengthening and broadening the coverage of the training component in adult qualification programmes. Improve higher education uptake, namely in science and technology fields.

the following: “Adopt measures to address labour market segmentation. Improve the skills level of the population, particularly their digital literacy, by making adult learning more relevant to the needs of the labour market. Increase the number of higher education graduates, particularly in science and information technology. Improve the effectiveness and adequacy of the social safety net.”

- Combating poverty and social exclusion, giving priority to the most vulnerable groups, including women, the elderly, people with disabilities, and in particular children and young people, taking into account not only the high incidence of child poverty, but also the increased vulnerability of households with children;

- Increasing the disposable income of families and greater fiscal fairness and equity;

- Promoting the access of all citizens to essential public goods and services, articulating actions in the areas of health, education, transportation, and housing, among others, thus providing a fundamental aspect in the fight against impoverishment and in guaranteeing human dignity;

- Achieving this goal involves a sustained improvement in the conditions and levels of social protection, especially for situations of extreme poverty, families with children, the elderly and low-income workers, along with strategies for greater social inclusion and the fight against inequalities; plus a rise of families’ available income also through the reform of the minimum wage.

According to Caritas Portugal the situation and problems described in the COUNTRY REPORTS do indeed adequately reflect the reality of poverty and social exclusion in Portugal. The reforms identified in the National Reform Programmes are considered largely adequate (ranked 4 out of 5), but barely implementable (rated 2).

The most relevant policy reform implemented
in Portugal in the last 2 years, that is considered as having had a mostly positive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion and in promoting access to social rights is called the Social transport pass. It is addressing the public transportation policy, and the institutions responsible are the Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Environment. However, it is important to note that this benefits people and families with low, medium and high incomes, and the measure has not been accompanied by any other type of support for those most vulnerable in situations of extreme poverty, such as a lack of housing, insufficient income, health problems with high impact on the family budget, insufficient day-care services, elderly centres, and other services.

On the contrary, the most relevant policy reform implemented in Portugal that is considered as having had a mostly negative impact is the tax policy. In this case the reform is addressing the income support/minimum income policy and the institution responsible is the Ministry of Finance.

7. The use of EU Funds 2014–2020

According to EAPN Portugal, the use of EU Funds in Portugal, could be improved by guaranteeing 30% EU financing to the programme of fighting poverty and social exclusion and to the active inclusion of the most vulnerable. Model actions should be set up to experiment new organisational forms of fighting poverty, engaging multiple stakeholders and developing innovative initiatives or micro-projects at local level to develop responses to the problems of poverty and social exclusion of specific groups, prioritising child and youth poverty. For example, a more inclusive school that adapts programmes and learning methodologies for the most vulnerable children and youth (e.g. study support, tutoring). It is recommended that Government moves away from the traditional top-down governance model to a participatory, horizontal governance model based on trust, dialogue and involvement of different actors.

8. Caritas Portugal promising practices

Two positive and innovative practices, that have proved to be particularly successful, have recently been implemented by Caritas Portugal with the aim of helping access to employment services:

- The first service is called Our Farms. The “As Nossas Quintas” brand aims to make a contribution to the sustainable development of innovative actions that allow for the integration of young people and beneficiaries, and that fit the perspective of local intervention. The result is a better balance between social intervention, the promotion of personal and social skills, and the employability of people who are in situations of greater social vulnerability.

  The service tries to fight poverty and social exclusion through integration and/or socio-professional reintegration, the acquisition and development of personal and professional skills appropriate to the exercise of an activity and creating new jobs.

  Since 2012, this service has presented applications to private entities to finance activities in training, for the employability of young people between the ages of 18 and 30, with the objective of promoting skills for employability. First with
In August 2016, they received a positive response to an application for the creation of an insertion company, known as “Our Farms”. This social insertion company will be managed by Caritas of Ilha Terceira and will allow, at the initial stage, the hiring of 3 staff members to develop practical activities in the area of organic farming, packaging, marketing and also the possibility of providing services in the area of agriculture for individuals. Besides the focus on agriculture, and the production of fruit processing (preserves and jams), pastries and small traditional sweets will also be an integral aspect of this new project.

Further information is available via the following link: https://acores.caritas.pt/asnossasquintas-quem-somos/.

- The second service is called MAKEBRAGA-CLDS 3G: Local Social Development Contract of Braga; a result of the partnership between the Archdiocesan Caritas of Braga (Local Coordinating Entity of the Partnership), the Cultural and Social Centre of Santo Adrião (Local...
Entity Executing the Action) and Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Braga (Local Action Enforcement Agency), and is based on a concerted strategy between different educational, social and economic agents in the territory.

The aim is to promote employment, qualifications and inclusion, as well as stimulating entrepreneurial skills in the population; activate personal and social development experiences with families and the community, enhancing their autonomy and inclusive social participation; empowering local actors, such as through development leverage and territorial cohesion.

A “Community of Practice” in the Disability sector was created within the framework of MakeBraga CLDS 3G, in partnership with the Municipality of Braga and the Working Group for the Disability Sector. The sessions of the Community of Practice have included the following institutions: ACAPO, AIA, APCB, APD, APPACDM, Inclusive Encounter, Centro Novais and Sousa, CERCi Braga, Iris and País emRede. With the aim of fostering processes of entrepreneurship and social innovation, the Project hopes to contribute to the intelligent, inclusive and sustainable development of the municipality. More information is available at the following link: https://makebraga.pt/.
Conclusions

In Portugal all social rights have been assessed as not fully accessible, particularly by the vulnerable groups of the population, and this is the case, for instance, with access to housing (ranked 1 out of 5). All the other services have been ranked 2, apart from healthcare which is rated 3.

Caritas Portugal evidences that some groups of vulnerable people face considerable barriers and obstacles in accessing them. They are, especially, the elderly, people of working age, children, young people, the homeless, persons with physical and intellectual disabilities, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and refugees.

The main problems, in general, for the 5 services are accessibility and availability. The policy/service having the most significant problems is the housing policy, ranked with the lowest score (1 out of 5) followed by early childhood education and care (ECEC). In general, the quality of services has been ranked very low. In fact, the average ranking does not exceed 2.75. This indicates that:

- Public employment services are still ineffective at tackling long-term unemployment;
- Vulnerable families have difficulty buying or renting a home due to the rise in prices;
- The coverage of childcare (0-3 years) is high, but a mismatch between supply and demand occurs in some areas;
- Migrants and asylum seekers share difficulties and challenges in accessing social inclusion services;
- Counselling services are mainly provided by NGOs but there is no sufficient financial or structural support from the Government to develop these activities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Promote decent wage levels, including in the measures for creating employment, and expand social protection coverage in case of unemployment.

Recommendation 2: Build and promote social housing and control buying/selling and rental prices for the most vulnerable.

Recommendation 3: Promote affordable and accessible day-care services, to ensure that parents and families have access to this service.

Recommendation 4: Support decentralisation and enhance the engagement of local actors in the integration of migrants and asylum seekers.

Recommendation 5: Concerning counselling services, promote the decentralisation of the social services provided, and improve the financial support and capacity building of the social organisations in the field.