

New Caritas CARES! report: Fostering access to services to support people to move out of poverty

Caritas Europa is launching its new report on poverty and inequalities in Europe on 19 February at the European Policy Centre in Brussels. The report highlights the legal barriers, administrative hurdles and other difficulties vulnerable people face when trying to access basic services, such as employment, housing and early childhood education and care.

“ Adequate income support, access to high-quality health and social services, long-term care as well as early childhood education and care, to affordable housing and support for labour market integration and reintegration are essential to prevent and to address poverty and exclusion while ensuring equal opportunities for all.¹

Council Conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing, adopted in December 2019

The new Caritas Europa CARES! report indicates that access to (public) employment services, housing and early childhood education and care seems to be a bigger challenge for the most deprived people than for the ‘average’ citizen. Vulnerable people are less likely to know of the existence of a service and where to find it, and to have physical or digital access to it. Often, basic services are also not affordable to them, nor is service delivery usually personalised to their needs and capacities. The report presents 12 policy recommendations for action at both EU and national level in order to improve access to and adequacy of services for the most deprived members of our societies, in line with the principles enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR).

The EPSR is an important compass for an EU strategy to reduce poverty and social exclusion. And access to affordable and adequate services is an essential element of such a strategy. It is primordial that the EPSR is now translated into a coherent set of concrete policies and measures by all governance levels, from the EU to local level authorities. Caritas is committed to contributing to the implementation of the EPSR.

Article 30 of the Revised European Social Charter (RESC) also refers to the right to protection against poverty. The Council of Europe’s Committee of Social Rights, which monitors the implementation of the RESC, states that Member States must have in place a comprehensive plan to successfully address poverty and social exclusion. This interpretation of Article 30 by the Committee supports the recommendations in the Caritas report.

The European Commission presented in January 2020 the Communication ‘A strong social Europe for just transitions’², announcing promising initiatives to fight poverty and social exclusion. Some of these respond to the recommendations presented in the Caritas report:

¹ EPSCO Council conclusions, 24.10.19: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13171-2019-INIT/en/pdf>.

² Communication COM(2020) 14 final, 14.1.2020: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:e8c76c67-37a0-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1.0003.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

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an action plan for the social economy, improved childcare and long-term care services, a European Accessibility Act and the long-term vision for rural areas. The Communication also refers to access to adequate (minimum) income as complementary to access to services in order to ensure a life in dignity. The EU 'Child Guarantee' could possibly play an important role in improving access to services, in particular for the most deprived as highlighted in the Caritas report.

With its findings and recommendations, Caritas will feed into the development of the various initiatives mentioned in the Commission Communication in order to ensure that they effectively contribute to reducing poverty and social exclusion in Europe.

Notes to editor

- The Caritas CARES! European report on 'Fostering access to services to support people to move out of poverty' is launched on 19 February at 10:00 at the European Policy Centre in Brussels. Register online: <http://www.epc.eu/en/events/100096-2e804c>.
- The European report presents 12 policy recommendations for the EU Institutions to address to facilitate access to services for the most vulnerable. They relate in particular to the:
 - creation of quality jobs;
 - investment in younger and older workers;
 - affordability and adequacy of long-term care and the conditions allowing family members to provide support;
 - access to social rights by those most in need;
 - ending of discrimination;
 - implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights;
 - proposal on a framework directive on minimum income;
 - strengthening of social and economic policy coordination;
 - setting of further poverty targets and sub-targets;
 - ratification of the Revised European Social Charter;
 - role of EU funds;
 - promotion of participation of people experiencing poverty in policy making.
- The European report is based on findings by 16 Caritas Europa member organisations in Europe. These 16 country reports are available online: <https://www.caritas.eu/access-to-services-country-reports/>.
- To receive your embargoed copy of the European report, please contact: Sonia De Voght sdevoght@caritas.eu.