



# Towards a European Pillar of Social Rights

## INTEGRATED SOCIAL BENEFITS AND SERVICES

Integrating social services and cash benefits enhances the consistency and effectiveness of these measures. The integration of benefits and services also makes it easier for people to access the support that they need, and it can also reduce administrative burdens and improve the cost-effectiveness of social protection.

### Challenges

The multiplicity of social services and cash benefits and numerous application procedures can make it difficult for people to access all the support that they need. In many Member States different functions and responsibilities are divided between public authorities at national, regional and local level. This creates considerable administrative barriers to an integrated approach. In other Member States, numerous social protection schemes co-exist and sometimes overlap. Other challenges relate to a lack of common databases or data transfer practices and the absence of incentives for cooperation among stakeholders involved in the provision of social services and cash benefits. This can lead to gaps in support and the reduced effectiveness of social services and cash benefits in combatting poverty and supporting social and labour market integration.

Individualised service approaches, one-stop-shops or single points of contact<sup>1</sup> to provide benefits or services can improve cost efficiency, effectiveness of delivery and the capacity to tackle complex situations. They can also help to reduce bureaucratic hurdles, administrative costs, and unnecessary overlaps, and at the same time it can ensure better take-up by those in need of support by making it easier for them to receive the different supports they need by accessing it them all in one place. Integrated, comprehensive social support also supports the transition from institutional to community-based care, thereby supporting greater social inclusion.

### Situation at EU level

Articles 151 and 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) cover social security and social protection for workers as well as combating social exclusion. Furthermore, access to social services and benefits is covered, in accordance with the rules laid down by Union law and national law and practices, by Article 34 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Moreover, Articles 13 and 14 of the European Social Charter and point 10 of the Community Charter on the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers, albeit not instruments of EU law, are also relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> A single point of contact refers to coordination of front-line services and client intake through a system of cross-organisational referrals and data sharing. In the framework of the EU Services Directive, Member States are not legally obliged to make available tax and social security procedures through the Point of Single Contact.

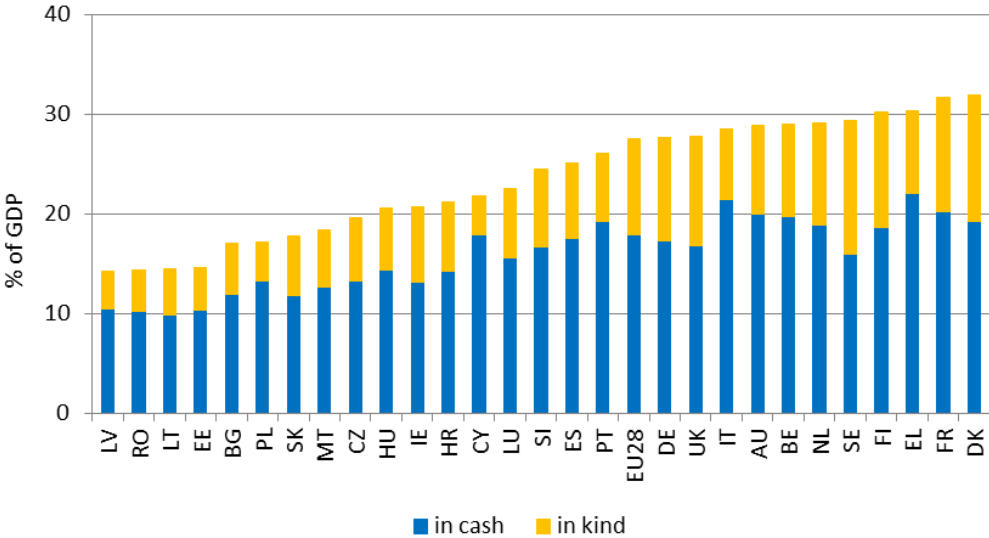
The Employment Guidelines emphasise the complementary use of activation, quality services and income support, targeted at individual needs.<sup>2</sup> The 2008 Commission Recommendation on Active Inclusion calls on Member States to combine adequate income support with access to quality services and measures promoting inclusive labour markets.<sup>3</sup> Social services benefit from special treatment in the implementation of EU internal market, public procurement and State Aid rules<sup>4</sup> partially because these services are “Services of General Economic Interest” within the meaning of Article 106 TFEU.

The Council Recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed<sup>5</sup> also foresees the establishment of a single point of personal contact to ensure continuity and consistency of the support offered by different agencies such as public employment services, social services and municipalities.

### Situation in the Member States

Most Member States (21) link social assistance benefits for people who are unemployed/long-term unemployed with registration with the Public Employment Services and nearly all (26) link them with mandatory participation in activation measures. However, given the low coverage of activation offers, existing conditionality is rarely enforced. Several Member States are moving towards the more integrated delivery of cash benefits and services, which address the multiple drivers of labour market and social exclusion and are targeted to individual needs. Some Member States are reforming their benefits systems to provide smoother transitions and re-entry into work and provide greater incentives to take up employment, e.g. Rechargeable Unemployment Benefits in France. For the unemployed, only a limited number of Member States (9) promote an institutionally coordinated offer of service delivery in the form of a single point of contact or a one-stop-shop.

**Figure: Social protection expenditure on benefits in-cash and benefits in-kind (services) in the EU (2013)**



Source: Eurostat ESSPROS (EL, PL and EU28 data from 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Council Decision 2015/1848 of on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States for 2015.  
<sup>3</sup> Commission Recommendation 2008/867/EC of 3 October 2008 on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, OJ L 307, 18.11.2008.  
<sup>4</sup> See notably the Directive 2014/24/EU of 26 February 2014 on public procurement and the Commission Decision 2012/21/EU of 20 December 2011 on the application of Article 106(2) TFEU to State aid in the form of public service compensation granted to certain undertakings entrusted with the operation of services of general economic interest.  
<sup>5</sup> Council Recommendation of 15 February 2016 (2016/C 67/01).

## International dimension

Access to social services is reflected in paragraphs 4 and 10(a) of the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) which provides for basic social security guarantees and calls for combined services and benefits. The UN Sustainable Development Goal N°1 "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" provides for appropriate Social protection systems and measures for all, as well as access to basic services.

Note: shall include a reference to de-institutionalization, since COM is adopted actions and ESIF is also available?