Integrated social services for more efficient service delivery

**SUMMARY**

For the past four decades, and even more so since the crisis of 2008, integrated social services have been considered an efficient tool for helping all people, but particularly vulnerable ones, to participate successfully in society.

What are these services, what can they really achieve and what are their limitations? Due to their complex nature, resulting from combining several services from employment, through health, social protection and education, they have only partly been mapped systematically across Europe.

Several European policies provide support for social innovation and within this context also for integrated social services. The policy dilemmas surrounding the implementation of these services go to the heart of the concept shaping traditional welfare state models.

Integrated social services and the policies related to them can contribute to the realisation of ‘Social Triple A’ for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), which is a major objective of the Juncker Commission.

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Glossary

**Vulnerable groups**: refers to people or households living in poverty or confronted with life situations that increase the likelihood of poverty. These groups often face multiple risks and can require a range of services, such as education, health and housing (adapted from OECD, *Integrated service and housing consultation 2012*).

**Social innovation**: means developing new ideas, services and models to better address social issues. It invites input from public and private actors, including civil society, to improve social services. (adapted from European Commission sources).

### Integrated social services in Europe

**What is integration or alignment of services?**

A consistent theme of policy-making over the past 40 years has been a concern that welfare services could be improved if agencies worked together more efficiently. With the socio-economic consequences of the crisis of 2008, the issue has come even more to the fore, integration being seen as a way to respond efficiently to austerity measures and to offer support to vulnerable groups in particular.

Integration can be vertical, implying more systematic, closer cooperation between several levels of government, or horizontal, linking services provided by separate entities. Integration across agencies can happen to different degrees: co-location (having all related agencies in one location); collaboration through information-sharing, training and the creation of joint networks; and cooperation through working together on issues of common concern. There is a distinction between the integration of existing services and the establishment of integrated services from scratch, which happens often in countries that have a history of targeted social services (for example, the UK), and an ongoing dialogue about these services mainly in relation to vulnerable groups.

There are several types of integrated services: integrated children's services, integrated employment and social services, integrated health and social services, and so forth.

The main drivers behind designing integrated social services are: simplifying the complexity of governance; increasing economic efficiency by at least avoiding additional costs; improving the efficiency around shared priorities and thus being able to meet local, regional or national needs (that is, prevention and intervention); having better outcomes; contributing to service quality and thus helping individuals and families through active support and protection.

The family centres in Germany often include a childcare centre, combined with other services for parents and children, including early education, adult education and parent support. It is a cluster of services supported by several other institutions, such as schools, cultural, counselling and health services.

In 2000, pilot programmes of Joint Service Centres kicked off in 18 Finnish municipalities to promote inter-agency cooperation among the labour administration, the social affairs administration and the social insurance institutions. These new services were targeted at the long-term unemployed. The success of the pilot phase served as grounds for the establishment in 2004 of the Labour Force Service Centres (LAFOS Centres) – permanent structures for integrated service delivery.

There is no comprehensive study on the current state of play regarding integrated services across the EU Member States. Some existing practices have been described and categorised, with the conclusion that the main challenges remain planning, including
identifying the target groups without losing out or stigmatising their members; financing, including competition among different services and sectors; multilevel governance; third party, that is, social enterprise involvement; and the lack of evidence on effective integrated services-related implementation strategies and outcomes. In addition, the **broader policy context** is also very important, that is, the tradition of the welfare state, the quality of public administration, including the trust, credibility and mediation of the relevant institutions, which in turn influences policy responsiveness.

**Are integrated social services efficient tools for social innovation?**

While all studies talk about the efficiency of integrated social services, there are in fact very few reliable ones that analyse in detail their implementation and impact. **Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness studies** lack robustness. There are some studies on short-term outcomes. **Long-term outcome measurement** is scarce and mainly in the early intervention field; evidence on the **benefits of prevention over intervention** is also limited.

Integrated social services can be seen as tokens of social innovation, as they are created bottom-up, do not follow a one-size-fits-all model and respond to local and individual needs. They are collaborative and outcome-oriented. Institutional frameworks that allow for innovation are an indispensable requirement for their existence.

Measuring the impact and benefits of social innovation, and within that of integrated social services (including process and outcome indicators), is problematic. However, there are **some new encouraging elements**, for example, social experimentation around the effectiveness of social innovation and social impact measurement.

**European policies on integrated social services**

The idea of integrated social services appears within the European agenda mainly in relation to **social protection and social investment** policies. In these areas, the European Commission provides policy guidance within the European Semester and the **social Open Method of Coordination**. The main activities are aimed at developing and supporting policies and strategies that help to bring about the framework conditions for successful social policies and services, including monitoring, governance and funding at Member State level.

The idea of a socially robust and resilient Europe features in several policies that focus on **active inclusion** (including **unemployment**), **working conditions**, **work-life balance** and **social protection**. More recently, the 2013 **Social Investment Package** and the 2016 consultation on the **European Social Pillar** call for more comprehensive approaches to these issues. These two initiatives are aimed at creating a framework for more comprehensive or integrated policies in the employment and social sector, and thus encourage the formation of integrated public services.

In a broader context, building on the Commission's **Social Business Initiative**, the Council's draft conclusions on the **social economy** and the Luxemburg Presidency's roadmap on **social enterprises** call for a better funding and regulatory environment. In 2015, the Council adopted Conclusions on **social governance**, the starting point of which was the **Five Presidents’ Report**, which emphasised the need for strengthening the social aspects of the EMU and for aiming to achieve '**Social Triple A**'.

Several financial instruments support Member States in their efforts to reform their public services, in order to promote social innovation and social inclusion. Since 2014, a minimum of 20% of the European Social Fund (ESF) has been earmarked for social
inclusion and for combatting poverty. In these fields, ESF can be complemented by the European Regional and Development Fund (ERDF). In addition, the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) is also aimed at supporting high-level employment, securing social protection, fighting against social exclusion and poverty, and improving working conditions. Horizon 2020, the EU's research and innovation programme, also has a social innovation component, including the development of indicators for social innovation, and of techniques for social impact measurement. Finally, the new European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) gives the possibility to invest in public-private partnerships in the field of innovation, including in the social domain. The yearly social innovation competition and the Social Innovation Europe Platform make good practices visible.

Main stakeholder views

While European policies can mainly influence and contribute to the regulatory, financing and monitoring environment of integrated social services, major stakeholders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society have valuable input with regard to the practical implementation of these services. At the end of March 2016, the Commission held a first Annual Convention for Inclusive Growth, at which it launched a dialogue with civil society organisations on the European Pillar of Social Rights. Among other things, the forum emphasised the importance of comprehensive policies and integrated services.

As part of a bigger project for analysing the implementation of the Social Investment Package, the European Social Network published a concise study on integrated social services in early 2016, demonstrating their importance not only for an individualised approach to social protection, but also for establishing a productive society.

To facilitate the cooperation of public institutions and social enterprises, the Strasbourg Declaration – with 2 000 social entrepreneurs, the Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on board – called for new, innovative funding sources, business support, networking, and clearer EU-wide regulations. The Rome Strategy, drawn up with the broad participation of national and European policymakers, practitioners and researchers, promoted strong and wide cooperation for the improvement of the social economy among public institutions, private investors and research centres, and offered a unifying framework and approach. The multi-stakeholder Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship (GECES) aims to ensure this broad participation. Its subgroup on social impact measurement was set up to agree upon a European methodology.

Role of the European Parliament

Parliament has been active in pressing for the strengthening of EMU's social governance. In a 2013 resolution on social investment, it stressed that to ensure longer-term thinking about social investment, EMU should also be monitored on the basis of social and employment indicators and progress towards structural reforms. It called for 25% of ESF to be invested in social inclusion; for a broad interpretation of active inclusion, including integrated policies and services; for a better financing mechanism, including social impact bonds, public-private partnerships, microfinance, a social investment passport and policy-based guarantees; and for the involvement of social enterprises. In a 2015 resolution focusing on child poverty, it called for the development
of multidimensional indicators in order to inform evidence-based policy and have more data on the quality and outcomes of the services.

Parliament has also recognised social economy as a key player in Europe's economy and social entrepreneurship and social innovation as important means for combatting unemployment.

A recent study for Parliament's Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) on social and employment indicators within the macroeconomic surveillance procedure claimed that Parliament can play a major role in balancing the economic and social aspects of the European Semester and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs), as well as support the development of social indicators in the headline scoreboards.

Main references

Integrating social services for vulnerable groups, OECD, 2015.


Endnote

1 See main references.

2 The social economy, which unites a large and rich variety of organisational forms shaped by diverse national and welfare contexts but with shared values, characteristics and goals, combines sustainable economic activities with positive social impact, while matching goods and services to needs. It plays an important role in the transformation and evolution of contemporary societies, welfare systems and economies thus substantially contributing to economic, social and human development across and beyond Europe and is supplementary to existing welfare regimes in many member states. Council conclusions on the social economy, December 2015.

3 Social enterprise as interpreted in Article 2, point 1 of the EASI Regulation.

4 According to recent estimates, Member States are spending up to 25.6% of the ESF for these purposes.

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