

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001926/19**  
**to the Commission**  
**Matt Carthy (GUE/NGL)**  
(17 April 2019)

*Subject:* Lack of accessible healthcare in Ireland

In the north-west region of Ireland, and in particular in Donegal, Irish citizens accessing cancer services must make a gruelling 4-5 hour car journey in order to access vital treatment.

The European Social Charter states that health systems must be accessible, and that Member States have an obligation to provide an adequate healthcare system which does not exclude parts of the population from receiving healthcare services.

Can the Commission clarify what the European Social Charter defines as 'accessible'? Moreover, can it give an indication as to what travel time and distance to healthcare is in breach of the European Social Charter?

**Answer given by Mr Andriukaitis on behalf of the European Commission**  
(24 June 2019)

The Honourable Member refers to the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe. At Union level, Principle 16 of the European Pillar of Social Rights states: 'Everyone has the right to timely access to affordable, preventive and curative healthcare of good quality' <sup>(1)</sup>.

Moreover, in accordance with Article 35 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union <sup>(2)</sup>, 'Everyone has the right of access to preventive healthcare and the right to benefit from medical treatment under the conditions established by national laws and practices'.

However, in accordance with Article 51 the Charter only applies to the Member States only when they are implementing Union law. Furthermore, in line with Article 168(7) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union <sup>(3)</sup>, Member States are responsible for the definition of their health policy and for the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care.

Therefore, the Commission does not have the competence to intervene as regards organisation of health services in particular Member States. Nevertheless, the Commission supports the efforts of Member States in building more accessible, effective and sustainable healthcare systems through the European Semester <sup>(4)</sup> and European Funds.

Furthermore, Member States can benefit from the knowledge building activities on healthcare systems, which are part of the State of Health in the EU <sup>(5)</sup> cycle and other activities carried out by the Commission.

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<sup>(1)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

<sup>(2)</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>

<sup>(3)</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12008E168&from=EN>

<sup>(4)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en)

<sup>(5)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/state/summary\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/state/summary_en)