

Better Partnerships for achieving the United Nations Agenda 2030

Brief resume of the International Workshop “SDGs Priorities & Challenges of Social Policy in the Eastern Partnership Countries” 14-15 October 2019, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna, Austria

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries face significant challenges regarding their social policy systems. These challenges include, among others, the ageing workforce, ongoing migration and the transformation of the informal care sector. Moreover, EaP countries strive to **transform their social policy systems** with the general aim of increasing their efficiency, sustainability and accessibility for all in need. To support the reforms and smooth the transitions in adapting national policies towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international workshop “SDGs Priorities & Challenges of Social Policy in the Eastern Partnership Countries” was held on 14 and 15 October 2019, in Vienna, Austria. The Workshop was organized and conducted by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (in short, European Centre), an UN-affiliated institution based in Vienna.

The **social** domain is an important social **pillar** of the 2030 Agenda, along with the economic and environmental pillars. Many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address social issues such as ‘End of poverty in all its forms everywhere’ (Goal 1) or to ‘Adopt ... social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality’ (Goal 10/Target 10.4). The international workshop gathered the EaP countries’ National Liaison Officials (NLOs) of the European Centre, i.e. nominated personnel of relevant Ministries in the UNECE countries, as well as interested NLOs and partners from other countries of the UNECE region, such as Georg Reibmayr from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection, Board Member of the European Centre; Ian McFarlane, Deputy Director, UNFPA Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office (EECARO); and Michael Herrmann, Advisor on Economics and Demography, Population and development Branch, Technical Division, UNFPA.

The Workshop was intended to **build bridges** by identifying and discussing common challenges and proposing meaningful initiatives to help implementing the social pillar of the 2030 Agenda. Findings of the Workshop comprise policy gaps and solutions related to build the social infrastructure and ensuring the necessary resources and sustainable delivery of public services (see box 1).

Box 1: Main findings of the Workshop “SDGs Priorities & Challenges of Social Policy in the Eastern Partnership Countries”

- **Common challenges** of the region comprise *building strong institutions; ensuring cooperation between agencies of different public and private sectors and administrative levels; developing legal frameworks and regulatory impact assessment mechanisms in service provision, especially in long-term care (LTC); strengthening the capacity of the social protection systems to provide good coverage (care service, health insurance); and improving the quality of social services and benefits.*

- The possibility to benefit from lessons learned and the exchange of good practices and scaling up methods/approaches from other regions and countries was identified as the main **opportunity** for the EaP countries.
- **Four priority areas for further cooperation** were formulated by the participants: *LTC* (protection mechanisms for vulnerable older persons; deinstitutionalization of care provision and development of the alternative care services); *labor market* (measures and incentives for the inclusion of vulnerable groups); *social protection systems* (developing services, improving efficiency of cash benefit schemes); and *active (and healthy) ageing*.
- Participants highlighted the need for a better understanding of the **Active (and healthy) Ageing (AHA)** concept in the EaP context for defining the needs and formulating policy initiatives. It was suggested that the countries should mainstream AHA in the strategic policy documents and, most importantly, ensure implementation mechanisms. At the same time, the countries should provide adequate social welfare for older population as the first step of policy on ageing (e.g. more progress on the pension reform processes).

Next networking steps comprise the exploration of the two foremost areas of social policy in the EaP countries: **long-term-care** and **social security systems**. In order to do so two international Workshops will be held in the first half of 2020 in the EaP countries. Moreover, the European Centre offers support through **internally funded projects to our EaP partner countries**. An example of such support is the consultancy offered by the European Centre to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia on “Social protection of older population, de-institutionalization and alternative care support” (see box 2).

Box 2: Consultancy offer for the Republic of Armenia on “Social Protection of older population, de-institutionalization and alternative care support”

In 2017, the Government of Armenia adopted the *Strategy for Overcoming the Consequences of Ageing and for Social Protection of the Elderly 2017-2021*. One of the priorities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia (MLSA) towards efficient implementation of the above-mentioned Strategy is the **deinstitutionalization** of the care for older people and the development of an alternative care services system in the country to promote independent living and social inclusion of elderly people.

The European Centre offers consultancy service to the MLSA aiming at assisting the MLSA in the **transformation process of existing systems** from institutional to **community-based care** for the older population in Armenia, including the development of alternative support services.

By setting up activities in the EaP countries together with the NLO’s of the respective countries, the European Centre will build on **long-lasting cooperation between public authorities** in the field of social welfare. Since 2015, the European Centre intensified its **Bridge Building activities** by focussing on assisting the EaP countries, especially the **Western Balkan countries**, in establishing integrated social policies. The corresponding know-how is now being used for assisting the **EaP countries** in transforming their social policy systems.



The EESPN (Eastern European Social Policy Network) has been initiated and coordinated by the European Centre. It links research, policy and practice in the area of social welfare (see box 3).

Box 3: Eastern European Social Policy Network

The Eastern European Social Policy Network (EESPN) is an initiative of the [European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research \(European Centre\)](#). EESPN is a **network of researchers, policy advisers and representatives of public authorities** working in the field of social welfare policy. We represent diverse professional, geographical, and academic backgrounds and interests but are united in a common vision for more efficient and equitable social policies in the countries of the EU, [Eastern Partnership \(EaP\)](#) and [EU \(potential\) candidate countries](#).

The work of the EESPN has **three main pillars**:

- Knowledge exchange and transfer;
- Development of joint research projects and policy advice; and
- Networking and generating public fora.

Interested in **becoming a member**? Please register at: <https://eespn.euro.centre.org/>

