

Briefing Note

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Social Employers Observatory Report: The Social Services Workforce in Europe: State of Play and main Challenges

Context

The social services sector is one of the biggest job creators in Europe today, is contributing significantly to the European economy and also plays a crucial role in implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. Nevertheless, there is a lack of information and data on the social services sector, its workforce and current challenges. The need for reliable information and data led to the creation of the Social Employers Observatory, whose first major output is a report on employment, industrial relations, qualification and training, working conditions and main challenges social services face across Europe. It is based on Eurofound and Eurostat data and on a questionnaire and interviews with the Social Employers' national members.

This briefing note provides the main outcomes of the report prepared by Frédéric Turlan head of [IR Share](#). The report was produced in the framework of the PESSIS+ project, with financial support from the European Union.

Main findings

Employment

- **Important workforce:** the social services sector employed more than **10.9 million** people in 2018 in the EU representing **4.7%** of the total EU labour force (230.4 million persons in 2018).
- **Strong employment dynamic:** the EU social services workforce **increased by 24 %** between 2009 and 2018, despite the economic crisis, while the entire EU workforce increased by about 5 %.
- The social services workforce is **overwhelmingly female (82 %)**.

Industrial relations

- **Social dialogue:** collective bargaining is strong in the private social services (not-for-profit and for-profit); almost all the enquired countries have collective agreements at different levels (from national to company level). There is a gap though, primarily in Central and Eastern Europe.

Qualification and training

- Almost a quarter of the workforce declare needing further training to cope well with their duty.

- According to all national correspondents, the budget dedicated to vocational training is too low.

Working conditions

- On average, workers in the social services sector work about **31,37 hours per week** in their main paid job, due to the **importance of part-time work** in the sector. Large differences between countries have been reported, depending on public policies promoting part time work (NL) or on the contrary promoting full time work (FI).
- the workforce in the social services is largely exposed to **psychological risks**.
- Compared to the broader EU economy, less social services workers reported feeling that they have enough time to complete their work. 94 % of the social services workforce have the feeling of doing always or most of the time **useful work**, compared to 85% in the general economy.
- Nearly 1/3 of the social services workforce reports experiencing **stress at work** always or most of the time (compared to 27 % in the general economy).
- 56 % of the workforce have to handle angry clients more than ¼ of their working time.
- 65% of the workers are involved in situations that are emotionally troubling for them more than ¼ of their working time.

Human resources challenges

- Several countries that participated in the Social Employers' survey highlight the **disinvestment of public authorities** in financing social services.
- According to the survey the number of employees in the sector is expected to increase further in the next two years.
- **The 50-64** age group represents **more than a third** of total employment in the social services sector (**34.6%**).
- The survey shows difficulties related to **recruitment, qualification, skills** and **workforce retention**, mainly due to low salaries; difficult working conditions and a poor reputation of the sector in the general public.
- **Work life balance**: 48% of workers in the Social Services feel that their working hours fit “well” with their family or social commitments outside work, which is 7 points less than the EU average.

The full research report will be available online.

