

# Social Rights Monitor

2021



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# Contents

Foreword .....	3
Purpose .....	4
Introduction: European Trends .....	7
Bulgaria .....	17
Croatia .....	25
Czechia .....	36
Denmark .....	46
Estonia .....	53
France .....	64
Germany .....	74
Greece .....	83
Hungary .....	92
Italy .....	101
Luxembourg .....	110
North Macedonia .....	118
The Netherlands .....	127
Serbia .....	136
Spain .....	145
United Kingdom .....	156
Dedication .....	165



# Foreword

**MARIA JOAO RODRIGUES**

President,  
Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)



This Social Rights Monitor 2021 is a must-read report to understand the social impact across Europe of the unprecedented experience of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on comprehensive research in a large range of European countries, the monitor shows clearly how the Covid-related health, economic, and social crises have acted as powerful magnifiers of pre-existing social inequalities. They have also created new ones.

The worst scenario was avoided, thanks to some exceptional measures to counter a double-digit recession. These included the SURE safety net against layoffs, special bank lending schemes and the creation of a European recovery fund (comprising loans and grants), which was added to the EU Multiannual Financial Framework. All this was possible because governments had learned from the big past mistake of blind austerity. European solidarity emerged at a higher level and included efforts to coordinate access to vaccines and to urgent health services for all European citizens.

Nevertheless, the impact of these health, economic, and social crises is still developing. It will have lasting consequences for various forms of social inequality: in income, wages, jobs, working conditions, and living conditions – and for women and minorities.

This was the political context in which the Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted at the Porto Summit. The plan included measures to implement most of the Social Pillar principles on equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social protection, and social inclusion. These measures should be a

central priority for the Recovery Plans being launched now, as well as the three main targets adopted: to create jobs, provide access to life-long learning, and fight poverty. This priority is even more important given the two big transitions ahead of us: the green and the digital. These will only be viable if they are carried out with a deep sense of fairness. That is also why social and civic dialogue at all levels is so important when designing, implementing and monitoring the recovery plans.

It will be very difficult to make the Social Pillar a central priority if it is not underpinned by an in-depth reform of European economic governance. Europe's budgetary capacity must be kept strong, through common issuance of debt, as well a carbon tax, a digital tax, a corporate tax, and a financial tax – measures which should also bring more tax justice. The Stability and Growth Pact should be reformed to create a golden rule for future-oriented investment – including social investment – and to define updated targets for sustainable public debt. The assessment of macroeconomic imbalances should be complemented with one for macrosocial imbalances. The European semester process to coordinate economic, fiscal, and social policies should reflect these concerns and be adapted to ensure a more comprehensive follow-up of the Sustainable Development Goals.

These concerns should be reflected in the proposals from the ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe. It is now time to move towards a new phase of the European project, in which European citizens – with updated rights and responsibilities, stronger ownership, and active participation – become the central actors.

# Purpose

**MIKAEL LEYI**

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SOLIDAR's Social Rights Monitor got to its third edition this year. Since the first publication, the world and SOLIDAR have gone through many substantial changes. The COVID pandemic has left the world a changed place, influencing debate and policy in an unprecedented way. What is possible today was unthinkable before. SOLIDAR's new Strategy for 2021-2025 takes these changes as starting points. The present publication has been developed taking these developments into consideration, while maintaining its core structure and aim.

The Social Rights Monitor is designed in the framework of the Together for Social Europe programme, co-funded by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), with the objective of assessing the state of social rights in the European countries where the members of SOLIDAR network are active. The publication is composed of an introductory chapter that gives an overview of the trends in terms of social rights in Europe (the European Trends), followed by as many chapters as the number of countries analysed (the Country Monitors), amounting to 16 in this year's edition. Each of the chapters is divided into four sections: the first three mirror the three chapters of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) - equal opportunity and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion- while the fourth focuses on the state of civic space in the areas considered. The publication goes beyond the geographical scope of the European Union, as candidate countries in which some of our members are active are also included in the analysis. This is in line with SOLIDAR's strategic

commitment to give special attention to the European neighbourhood and Eastern Europe.

The Social Rights Monitor fulfils three main purposes:

- ♦ Firstly, the Social Rights Monitor aims at evaluating the implementation of the 20 Principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights at national level. The correspondence of the Country Monitors' sections with the Chapters of the EPSR has the aim of easing the monitoring exercise.

The Social Pillar, approved in 2017 in Gothenburg, is a valid tool to guide Member States in the protection and promotion of social rights at national level. Nevertheless, the actual implementation of this instrument is very often insufficient. The publication of the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights in March 2021, albeit not ambitious in important areas, is a much-needed step in this direction. What emerges from the Social Rights Monitor, in its latest editions as well as the previous ones, is that a lot of work still needs to be done in all the analysed countries. SOLIDAR firmly believes that a more meaningful coordination in the field of social policies at the EU level would enhance solidarity and social cohesion across the continent. The European progressive family, including civil society, must play a leading role in this process. The Social Rights Monitor - built from CSOs' expertise and their privileged position representing large number of important constituencies - is a clear reminder of this, for progressive actors, as well as for policymakers and other stakeholders.

- ◆ Secondly, the Social Rights Monitor offers complementary information to the European Semester cycle. SOLIDAR is a vocal advocate of strengthening the social dimension of the Semester.

The recently initiated EU economic governance review process is a precious window of opportunity to achieve change in the direction of fair and progressive taxation, sustainable, inclusive, and redistributive social policies and a sustainable recovery after the Covid 19 pandemic. As a matter of fact, so far, the EU has too often prioritised fiscal and economic objectives over social ones. This approach has led to detrimental effects on the living conditions of millions of people in Europe, notably in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. In the first two editions of the Social Rights Monitor, our publication assessed the Country Specific Recommendations produced by the European Commission in the framework of the Semester, focusing on the aspects linked with social policies that were lacking or that were not sufficiently explored. In this sense, the Monitor was used to complement the European Semester cycle. With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the European Semester was modified to accommodate the unprecedented situation and to integrate new instruments such as the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs). The Social Rights Monitor adapted accordingly and replaced the paragraph about the Country Specific Recommendations (that were eliminated from the exceptional European Semester cycles of 2020-2021) with a section concerning the involvement of CSOs in the definition of the NRRPs. Although the Recovery and Resilience Facility, stemming from the Next Generation EU strategy, derives from a substantially different, expansive approach to the Covid-19 crisis by the EU, far from austerity measures SOLIDAR regrets to observe that the involvement of CSOs in the design of the

NRRPs was insufficient in all countries analysed. This outcome demonstrates the necessity to keep advocating for a strengthened civil dialogue in Europe, as well as the importance of the role of European networks to join forces with this objective.

- ◆ Thirdly, as derives from the first two points, the Social Rights Monitor is an instrument for advocacy. Its content offers evidence base for policymakers both at national and European levels. The publication is conceived to be used by civil society all over Europe to support their advocacy claims, as well as by policy makers to have a clearer understanding of the state of social rights in their countries and in other parts of Europe.

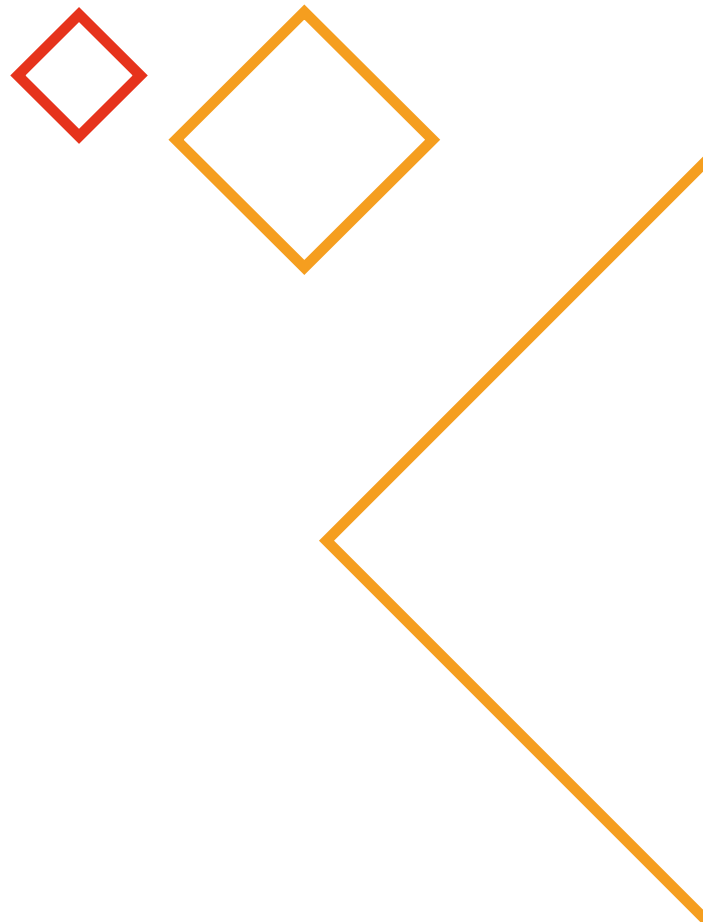
The Social Rights Monitor is developed based on the inputs provided by the National Strategy Groups (NSGs) set by SOLIDAR's members and partners active in the countries analysed and composed of actors encompassing trade unions, academia and civil society organisations. This composition of the NSGs ensures that the perspective of civil society is mirrored in the publication and that the experience of organisations active on the ground is reflected – complemented by scientific data gathered through desk research. This represents an enormous added value. Indeed, CSOs play a vital role in protecting and promoting social justice, as the Covid-19 crisis clearly showed. Therefore, their perspective and knowledge should have a more prominent role in the decision-making processes, both national and European. In this sense, the Social Rights Monitor is a resource to support civic dialogue. The realisation of events such as our European Conference, during which the European Trends of the Social Rights Monitor are presented, offers a perfect occasion to liaise with policymakers and push the NSGs' claims forward.

- ◆ Lastly, the National Strategy Groups created for the preparation of the Social Rights Monitor are hubs in which civil society actors can meet, exchange, network, strengthening their relationships and creating new partnerships. Through this exercise, this publication contributes to fostering civil society in Europe.

All in all, the Social Rights Monitor condenses SOLIDAR's mission: it increases the capacity of European progressive civil society, monitors policy developments that are relevant for the membership and amplifies our members' voice to advocate for social justice through a just transition. SOLIDAR's strategic is based on the realisation that social rights and environmental rights are inseparable and mutually

reinforcing. The Social Rights Monitor, especially in its section concerning the Just Transition, highlights this conjunction and calls for a more integrated and structural approach that combines the protection and advancement of both social and environmental rights.

We will do our best to make sure that this year's publication will reach a wide audience and support broader civil society in our shared endeavor to create a more just Europe. In the perspective of the digital and green transitions, the voice of civil society working to achieve social justice remain crucial to ensure that these systemic and defining changes truly leave no one behind.



# Introduction: European Trends

	EU-28 2018	EU-28 2019	EU-28 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	30.8	30.7	
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	6.8%	6.3%	7.1 %
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	66.2 (2017)	67.4	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	9.4%	9.2%	
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	15.5%	15.6%	

## Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

SOLIDAR is a European and worldwide network of more than 50 civil society organisations (CSOs), sharing the fundamental values of equality, solidarity, and participation. SOLIDAR promotes a just transition and social justice – in terms of an equal and fair distribution of wealth, knowledge, income, and power – through accessible and quality social services, social protection, lifelong learning, and fair working conditions.

SOLIDAR's Social Affairs Pillar, "Realising a Social Europe for All and with All", focuses on the social dimensions of the European Union. It analyses and monitors European labour markets and economic and fiscal governance, and it promotes increased access to sustainable, universal, and quality services for all, including marginalised groups, migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

To this end, SOLIDAR's Social Affairs Pillar set up the Social Rights Monitor, an annual publication investigating the impact of social and economic policies at European and national

level. The 2021 publication examines 13 EU countries – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain, and the Netherlands – as well as the United Kingdom and two European Union candidate countries, Serbia and North Macedonia. In each of the 16 countries, a SOLIDAR member or partner set up a "National Strategy Group", which provided fundamental statistical data and findings thanks to the expertise of civil society organisations, academics, trade unionists, and national experts.

Each chapter is dedicated to one country, and the structure of the country monitors mirrors that of the European Pillar of Social Rights.<sup>6</sup> There are three chapters: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. This enables SOLIDAR to more easily assess the implementation of the Social Pillar at the national level. Finally, the monitor assesses civic space, by evaluating freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly, as

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EU>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 European Commission (2017) The European Pillar of Social Rights: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

well as civil and social dialogue. This year, the chapters conclude with a section on the extent to which civil society has been involved in the preparation of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans financed by the European Recovery and Resilience Facility. This final analysis is carried out only in the chapters regarding members of the European Union.

Overall, the Social Rights Monitor 2021 identifies a general tendency to focus on certain impacts of Covid-19. It not only exacerbated existing inequalities across the countries, but also magnified the effects of public funds mismanagement, decreasing overall trust in politics and institutions and often generating social unrest and turmoil. The pandemic provided grounds for civil society and organised workers to push for new topics to be added to governments' agendas, as it violently forced public authorities to think about and deal with urgent issues that had not been prioritised before. For example, mental health and the digital divide became crucial topics for civil society and organisations, and governments across Europe and beyond had to address the public management of education and healthcare institutions. The pandemic provided a pretext for thinking outside the box and developing alternative methods of working, learning, commuting, and much more. Sometimes, more-inclusive methods were found that had not been deemed possible before. Almost every National Strategy group reports the introduction of teleworking as the most remarkable development in the world of work, potentially leading to a better work-life balance. This measure had a positive effect on some of the most vulnerable groups of workers, such as those with disabilities and single parents. However, remote and online activities had mostly negative implications, particularly among disadvantaged groups who encountered more obstacles than benefits. For example, some children could not exert their fundamental right to education, and where early childhood

care services were suspended, working from home became a huge challenge for parents. Moreover, digital illiteracy affects most elderly people, who often lacked support and could therefore not access some fundamental digital services. Therefore, these new developments need close monitoring and constant improvement if they are to foster fair and just societies for all.

The crisis hit hard, and it increased the income divide between the richest and the poorest people worldwide, generating huge waves of job losses across Europe and beyond. Unemployment rates reached worrying levels, with two million more unemployed workers in Europe at the beginning of 2021 compared to a year earlier. The unemployment rate increased (to 8.0%),<sup>7</sup> as did the share of people who live in poverty and cannot afford decent housing, quality food, education, or basic healthcare. Job and wage protection schemes were strongly demanded by civil society and its organisations, but they were not implemented universally, frequently at the expense of workers in the most precarious situations. Young people, migrants, and the self-employed were often left behind. Generally, social cohesion and inclusion were not prioritised.

While societies in Europe and around the world are trying to recover from the crisis, SOLIDAR believes **there is great momentum for making social justice a priority through a just transition and for pushing progressive ideas into policymaking at both the European and national levels.** The European Pillar of Social Rights and its recently adopted Action Plan are key instruments to this end. In this period, SOLIDAR and the progressive movement can be catalysts for fundamental change towards a fairer and greener Europe. Our goal is to build back better: it is time to change our approach and to develop the European Union of high social standards and fair living and working conditions that people deserve.

7 Eurostat (2021) Euroindicators – Unemployment: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11563203/3-30072021-CP-EN.pdf/35dbf525-da32-809f-0f9d-cd36a271a760?t=1627633423854>

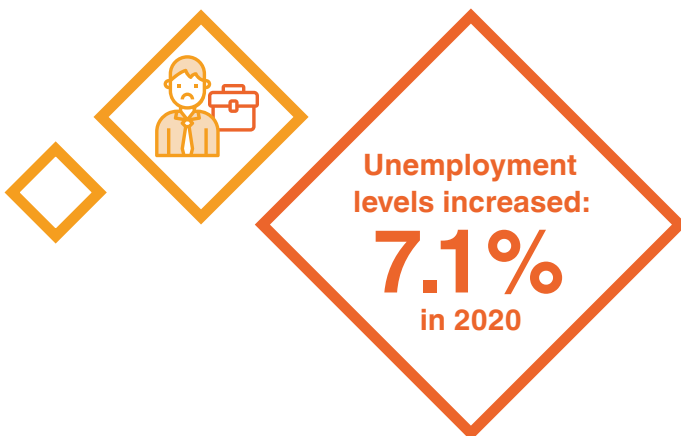


# Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

## EMPLOYMENT, PRECARIOUSNESS, AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The Social Rights Monitors published in 2019 and 2020 recorded slow but positive developments in social conditions, for example increased minimum wages in Spain, Czechia, and Hungary.<sup>8</sup> However, some countries had not yet fully recovered from the acute financial crisis that started in 2008. Therefore, the 2020 and 2021 pandemic plunged Europe into the worst recession since World War II, which will probably lead to intense and durable consequences, some of them not yet measurable. It is important to remark that, during the most severe phases of the pandemic, many countries relied on actions set out by civil society organisations, which provided services and delivered basic support in almost every country analysed. Common actions in different countries include providing meals and shelters for poor or homeless people, translating Covid-19 rules into foreign languages, crowdfunding for digital tools such as personal computers, and much more.

However, **unemployment levels increased, affecting 7.1% of EU nationals in 2020<sup>9</sup>** – an increase of more than one percentage point from 2019. Countries outside the EU were affected too. Despite the growth in the employment rate in North Macedonia during the past years, it lost 6 percentage points in 2020 and 2021.<sup>10</sup> The same goes for Serbia, where unemployment levels touched a historical low in the second quarter of 2020, before once again rising.<sup>11</sup> Member states have taken different actions to minimise the negative effects of the pandemic. The majority of measures aimed to prevent businesses from bankruptcy. The next most common measures protected incomes and employment levels. Among the analysed countries, Spain, Greece, and Hungary registered the highest rises in unemployment since the onset of the pandemic; while the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy recorded the smallest increases.<sup>12</sup> For Italy, this could be explained by the introduction in February 2020 of Europe's first temporary ban on layoffs, which saved thousands of jobs. However, the number of hours worked was drastically reduced in all the countries, causing reductions in many people's monthly income. Among the countries considered in this study, Italy registered the sharpest decrease in working hours (-9.7%), followed by Greece (-7.9%). Vulnerable categories, such as the young, the self-employed, and workers in precarious situations, saw their working hours decreased the most.



8 Hollewijn, J. (2020) European trends. Social Rights Monitor 2020: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/186/original/European\\_Trends\\_FINAL.pdf?1607694969](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/186/original/European_Trends_FINAL.pdf?1607694969)

9 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age - annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

10 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, (2021), Active Population: [https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooopstenie\\_en.aspx?rbrtxt=98](https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooopstenie_en.aspx?rbrtxt=98)

11 OPBC (2021) Labour Force Survey: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/PdfE/G20211239.pdf>

12 Eurofund (2021) Living, working, and COVID-19: [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef20059en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20059en.pdf)



Precariousness and unstable working conditions still affect too many people in Europe, and the situation did not improve over the last year, **as the number of flexible, platform, and self-employed workers increased.** Deteriorating working conditions are a constant reality for the youngest people, who were the most likely to lose their jobs. Indeed, across Europe, young women aged 18 to 34 were the most vulnerable group of workers. The lowest rate of job losses was among men aged 35 to 50.<sup>13</sup> Many National Strategy Groups that contributed to this publication further remark that young people entering the labour market were disadvantaged, as training opportunities have been drastically reduced due to remote working conditions.

It is worrying to notice that the results of this study suggest that gains achieved in social standards during the last decade could be lost. The employment levels of disadvantaged and groups in vulnerable situations (young people, people with disabilities, women, LGBTQI+, migrants) seem to be the most impacted. One reason is that physical distancing measures have had a substantial impact on sectors employing a high proportion of women, and women's employment fell more sharply than it did during the 2008 recession. In addition, the closure of schools and other care services greatly

increased childcare needs, with a likely disproportionate impact on working parents, notably women.

The pandemic led to an improvement in the status of some professions, notably in sectors that proved to be essential for the functioning of societies during the pandemic. Workers in these sectors included education and research personnel (teachers, assistants, professors, researchers, cultural facilitators, and educational institutions' staff) and healthcare personnel (nurses, social care workers, doctors, and non-medical staff). The most remarkable example was in Serbia, which hired all healthcare workers who volunteered during the state of emergency. In Germany, a pay rise for health and social care workers was successfully negotiated through a new collective agreement: trade unions obtained a 1.4% rise for all workers on 1 April 2021, with a further 1.8% increase from 2022.<sup>14</sup> French unions also obtained a pay rise for health workers in June 2020, after demonstrations and strikes.<sup>15</sup>

## EDUCATION

The education sector was highlighted like never before during the most critical phases of the pandemic. In order to reduce the spread of the coronavirus, most countries decided to temporarily close schools and education and training institutions, moving classes and courses online in March 2020.

Although online learning and digital platforms have proved essential to ensure the continuation of education, they have led to further inequalities and discrimination among teachers,

13 Eurofund (2021) Living, working, and COVID-19: [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef20059en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20059en.pdf)

14 EPSU (2021) Germany: Latest agreement to boost pay in health and care: <https://www.epsu.org/article/germany-latest-agreement-boost-pay-health-and-care>

15 BBC (2020) Coronavirus: France's health workers given pay rises worth €8bn: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53398208>



students, and learners. In all analysed countries, **more vulnerable students** – such as those sharing digital tools or internet access, those lacking an adequate learning environment, or those whose parents could not be of help because of language or digital barriers – **were often left behind**. More than 40% of Europeans lack digital literacy.<sup>16</sup> Children and students with disabilities or with special educational needs lost their support teachers during schools' closures. Moreover, students from disadvantaged backgrounds were also more likely to suffer from stressful home environments, which have a huge negative impact on mental health and development. On average, 5.7% of young Europeans aged 18 to 24 are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), with the highest rates in Spain at 9.7% and Bulgaria at 8.7%.<sup>17</sup>

The National Strategy Groups highlight how national education systems were not prepared to deal with such a sudden change. Many school systems in Europe and beyond therefore increasingly resorted to online learning platforms provided by private companies. In Greece, the government recommended that its schools and education institutions adopt Webex, an online platform provided by a private American company. Private-sector solutions

tend to undermine educational equality and academic freedom, and they raise concerns over the companies' data protection policies and goals to maximise profits.<sup>18</sup> SOLIDAR's National Strategy Groups therefore demand more open-source resources, as well as digital training for both teachers and learners, who have to be aware of their rights and the risks emerging from digital online educational tools. During the pandemic, some good practices were found in Serbia, where a charity foundation offered free primary school textbooks in PDF format.

## GENDER EQUALITY

The fragile gains in gender equality achieved during the past years may be rolled back by the pandemic's impact on gender violence, gendered roles such as housework and care work, and women's working and employment conditions. Indeed, women's employment levels fell faster than those of men, and the closure of schools and early childhood care services reinforced gendered stereotypes and had a disproportionate effect on working mothers. On average, the continuous increase in women's employment over the past years has always been countered by extreme gender segregation in the labour market, and some sectors have lower wages and less social protection than others. In all the countries analysed, women are overrepresented among temporary and part-time workers, and those in precarious situations. During the pandemic, being a migrant, single mother, or young women significantly increased the likelihood of being at risk of poverty. **In all the countries, it is evident that care and housework**

16 Frank, A. (2020) Citizenship and Lifelong Learning Monitor 2020: <https://www.solidar.org/en/publications/citizenship-and-life-long-learning-monitor-2020>

17 Eurostat (2021) Distribution of early leavers from education and training 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/7/7e/Distribution\\_of\\_early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_aged\\_18-24\\_by\\_labour\\_status%2C\\_2020\\_%28%25\\_of\\_population\\_aged\\_18-24%29.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/7/7e/Distribution_of_early_leavers_from_education_and_training_aged_18-24_by_labour_status%2C_2020_%28%25_of_population_aged_18-24%29.png)

18 For a more detailed analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the privatisation of education, see: SOLIDAR Foundation (2021) The Commodification of Education and the Prevalence of For-Profit Education Stakeholders: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/374/original/SOLIDAR\\_Foundation\\_Policy\\_Paper\\_on\\_the\\_Commodification\\_of\\_Education\\_October\\_2021.pdf?1633423601](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/374/original/SOLIDAR_Foundation_Policy_Paper_on_the_Commodification_of_Education_October_2021.pdf?1633423601)

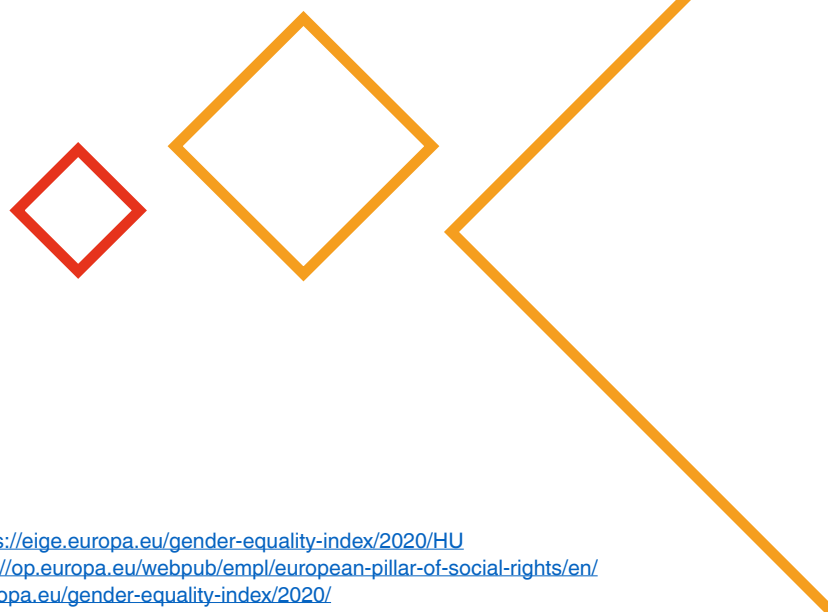
**responsibilities are unequally distributed. This often limited women's participation in the labour market, politics, and social life** – particularly during school closures. In Hungary, 95% of the country's ministers and 100% of the board members of research-funding organisations are men.<sup>19</sup> In France, 80% of the people responsible for daily housework activities are women.



The European Commission has committed to a more equal and just European society, particularly through the Presidency of Ursula von der Leyen, but much remains to be done in terms of gender equality. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan has set an objective of reaching an employment rate of 78% by 2030, while halving the gender

employment gap compared to 2019.<sup>20</sup> However, the European Gender Equality Index indicates that, at the current pace, it will take more than 60 years to reach complete gender equality,<sup>21</sup> demonstrating the urgent need to push for more-ambitious equality policies across Europe. Moreover, it is not encouraging to note that, although the Europe 2020 Strategy's employment target has almost been reached – it is only 3 percentage points away<sup>22</sup> – the gender gap remains high in all European countries.

In November 2020, the European Union adopted its first ever EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, for 2020-2025.<sup>23</sup> It pushed for the adoption of a non-discrimination directive and took some positive steps towards the achievement of equality, ensuring safety for LGBTIQ+ people, and building inclusive societies across European Union member states. The Netherlands recently took a small step forward, by removing all gender registrations ('X', 'F', 'M') from identity cards and documents from 2024. This will make it easier to promote equality and respect for all gender identities and characteristics, as well as the recognition of the LGBTIQ+ community.



19 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Hungary: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/HU>

20 European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (2021): <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

21 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/>

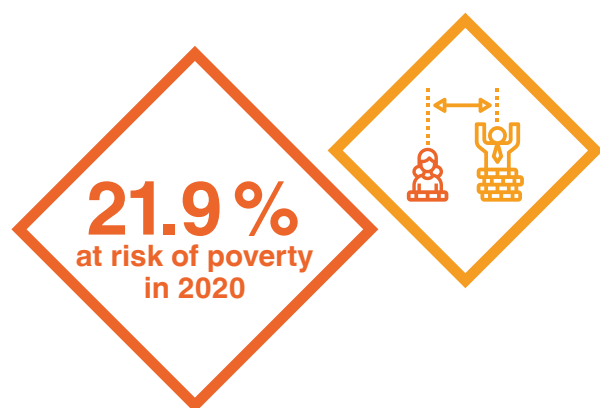
22 The Europe 2020 Strategy set the employment target for 2020 at 75% of the population, while the European employment rate was at 72% at the end of 2020. The Strategy is available online (p.3): <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

23 European Commission (2020) Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq\\_strategy\\_2020-2025\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/lgbtiq_strategy_2020-2025_en.pdf)

# Social protection and inclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic reminded us about many aspects of everyday life that often go unnoticed. It brought to the surface deep-rooted inequalities and reminded us how important it is to value and support spaces and services that are often taken for granted. These include education and training institutions, healthcare systems that provide for both physical and mental health, well-functioning welfare and social security systems to reduce poverty and social exclusion, and services that fight gender violence. Overall, the impact of the pandemic has been dramatic for most people, touching most aspects of daily socio-economic life across Europe and beyond. Many National Strategy Groups have demanded healthcare for all – including migrants and undocumented people – and the introduction of accessible mental health support.

## INCREASED POVERTY, INCREASED WEALTH GAP



**The wealth gap between rich and poor has widened dramatically in 2020 and 2021, and there was a worrying increase in**

both the number of people living in poverty and the number of billionaires. While 21.9% of the EU population lived at risk of poverty in 2020 – with more than 33% in Bulgaria, more than 25% in Greece and Spain, and more than 30% in Estonia and Germany<sup>24</sup> – the combined wealth of European billionaires rose to almost €3 trillion.<sup>25</sup> That meant the richest people were shielded from the economic impact of the pandemic, and its burden was carried by middle- and low-income people. Germany has Europe's greatest share of enriched billionaires, while France saw a rise in sales of luxury and fashion goods during the year. At the same time, other people in Europe were asking for mortgage and rent subsidies, as well as immediate responses to the shortage of affordable housing and to overcrowded housing, which were highlighted as major problems in most of the countries analysed. Overcrowding, which prevents people from living in mentally and physically safe spaces, affected 39.5% of the population in Bulgaria, 36.2% in Croatia, and 29.1% in Greece.<sup>26</sup> Even working Europeans could not afford a basic standard of living: more than 9% of employed people in Europe were at risk of poverty, with highs of 11.8% in Spain and Luxembourg, followed by 10.6% in Germany, and 10.5% in Estonia.<sup>27</sup>

## MIGRANTS, REFUGEES, AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Across the countries analysed, the situation for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (MRAs) deteriorated during 2020 and 2021. Already in a vulnerable position due to long bureaucratic procedures, language barriers,

24 Eurostat (2020) People at risk of poverty 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_2020\\_WEB1\\_FINAL.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:People_at_risk_of_poverty_2020_WEB1_FINAL.png)

25 Forbes (2021) 2021 List of the World Billionaires: <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>

26 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex, and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

27 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

and discrimination at work and in society, MRAs are one of the groups most exposed to the consequences of economic downturns. The pandemic negatively influenced international travel, decreasing migration to various European countries. At the same time, the deep recession caused by the pandemic put additional pressure on existing conflicts around the world and often aggravated them. Migration therefore continued, possibly within countries or towards neighbouring countries.<sup>28</sup> In addition, some countries tried to discourage migration as much as possible. Greece, for example, approved at the beginning of 2020 the controversial measure of closing its external border and suspending the procedures for asylum applicants. The situation for MRAs residing in European countries, however, has not been easier: they suffered inequalities in treatment and were often not granted access to fundamental services. This was particularly evident in the vaccination processes set up across Europe, which often did not include undocumented migrants or people waiting for their documents to be approved. This was the case in France, Denmark, and the Netherlands. This situation, coupled with social distancing and the suspension of activities by many CSOs working on MRA reception, hindered migrants' inclusion and worsened social cohesion across Europe.

At a European level, the European Commission presented its Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, a strategic plan for the period 2021 to 2027. It is built on the basis of the previous action plan (of 2016) and aims to address persisting challenges, particularly those that occur in the labour market, in education, and in access to public services. However, the plan's overarching concept is integration, understood

as a shared effort by both communities and newcomers, who should embody the so-called European way of life.<sup>29</sup>

## ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Throughout 2020 and 2021, European healthcare systems have been at the centre of political and organisational debates like never before. They became a common topic in Europe and beyond, as solid, inclusive, well-functioning public healthcare systems were fundamental to efforts to contain the spread of the coronavirus. The pandemic highlighted many weak points, particularly in countries lacking hospital beds and medical and non-medical personnel. This was the case for Italy, Spain, and the UK, where the rate of deaths due to Covid-19 was the highest. Across almost all analysed countries, geographical inequalities persist: overall, it is more difficult to access quality or specific care in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Lastly, SOLIDAR's National Strategy Groups highlight the deterioration of mental health due to an unprecedented situation that is stressful and uncertain and that resulted in loss, grief, poverty, fear, and a lack of social contact. Therefore, CSOs have been calling for the urgent development of public and accessible psychological support systems. In most countries, mental health services are currently a luxury that only a minority of the population can afford. Moreover, as highlighted by research conducted in Italy, depressive symptoms increased exponentially among the young, who are often overrepresented among people at risk of poverty.

28 [1] International Centre for Migration Policy Development ICMPD (2020) ICMPD Migration Outlook 2021: [https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/50542/file/ICMPD\\_Migration\\_Outlook\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.icmpd.org/file/download/50542/file/ICMPD_Migration_Outlook_2021_final.pdf)

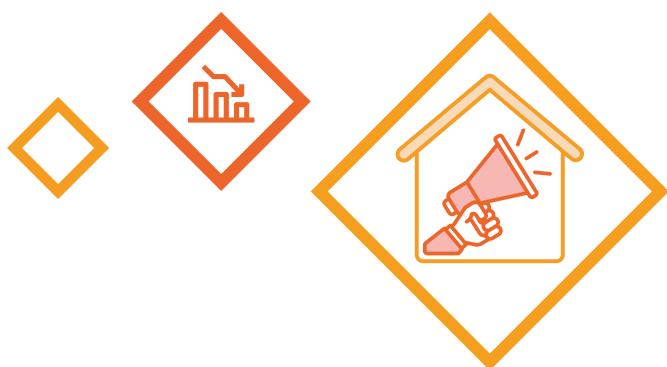
29 European Commission (2020) Press release – Inclusion for all: Commission presents action plan on integration and inclusion 2021-2027: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_2178](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2178)

# Civic space

According to the analysis carried out in this publication, **civic space has been shrinking due to unprecedented restrictions on civic space and basic freedoms adopted in 2020 and 2021.** The main concern shared by SOLIDAR's National Strategy Groups is that the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the coronavirus could have a long-term negative impact on fundamental rights. While it is acknowledged that restrictions were often necessary to curb the pandemic, it is nevertheless worrying that some of them were not been drafted or implemented with transparency. Some do not incorporate the principles of necessity and of proportionality. Overall, protests and public demonstrations often witnessed the use of force and unlawful detention by police forces. This has been the case in Greece, Germany, France, Serbia, the UK, Hungary, and the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> During the year, the biggest

demonstrations across Europe gathered people around the themes of the climate crisis, Covid-19 measures, and the “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) movement. The BLM movement followed the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis in May 2020 and had huge resonance in the US and beyond.

In addition, it can be concluded from the country monitors reported in this publication that some measures that limited civic spaces across Europe had asymmetric effects on different societal groups, often magnifying deeply rooted forms of discrimination. The enforcement of lockdown measures, such as restrictions on the freedom of movement, disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups and led to further marginalisation, stigmatisation, and even violence. In Italy, Spain, and the UK, homeless people have been fined for not complying with rules on self-isolation.<sup>31</sup> Police controls often disproportionately targeted certain ethnic groups. In the UK, for example, 7.2 out of every 1,000 Black people were stopped in March 2020, but 9.3 were stopped in April 2020, the first month of pandemic restrictions.<sup>32</sup> Similar data were reported in France, where in the Department of Saint-Denis – a working-class neighbourhood with a high percentage of foreigners – the number of fines was double the national average.<sup>33</sup>



30 This information, reported in the specific country monitors of this publication, is backed by the National Strategy Groups reports, as well as by Amnesty International (2020) analysis “Policing the Pandemic – Human rights violations in the enforcement of covid-19 measures in Europe” (accessible online at <https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Report-Policing-the-pandemic-FINAL-.pdf>)

31 Amnesty International (2020) “Policing the Pandemic – Human rights violations in the enforcement of covid-19 measures in Europe”: <https://www.amnesty.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Report-Policing-the-pandemic-FINAL-.pdf>

32 UK Metropolitan Police (2021) Disaggregated data September 2019 – September 2021: [https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/stop-and-search-dashboard/?\\_cf\\_chl\\_captcha\\_tk\\_\\_=pmd\\_ThVjFBuHOHGoqmqxX0bnryoYYG9Fs9PjQ4jPLs\\_vPw-1634643028-0-gqNtZGzNA1CjcnBszQh9](https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/stop-and-search-dashboard/?_cf_chl_captcha_tk__=pmd_ThVjFBuHOHGoqmqxX0bnryoYYG9Fs9PjQ4jPLs_vPw-1634643028-0-gqNtZGzNA1CjcnBszQh9)

33 Le Parisien (2020) Coronavirus en Seine-Saint-Denis : un nombre record d’amendes: <https://www.leparisien.fr/seine-saint-denis-93/coronavirus-en-seine-saint-denis-un-nombre-record-d-amendes-police-et-justice-durcissent-le-ton-19-03-2020-8284008.php>

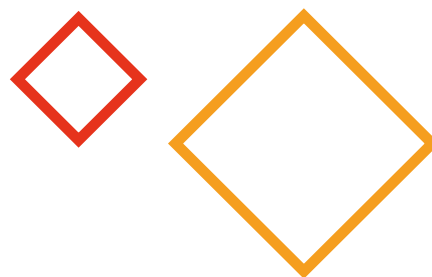


# The European recovery and resilience facility

In May 2020, the European Commission announced a plan to borrow €750 billion to support socio-economic recovery in the EU and some other parts of Europe, the so-called NextGenerationEU. The centrepiece of the plan was the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which will finance reforms in much of Europe until the end of 2026. It asks each EU member state to draft a national Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) for adoption at European level. Each NRRP had to include a description of how the country intended to spend the European grants and loans in order to recover from the crisis and achieve higher socio-economic standards. The plans needed to follow the principle of gender equality and six identified policy areas, including the green and digital transitions, social and territorial cohesion, socio-economic resilience, and education.

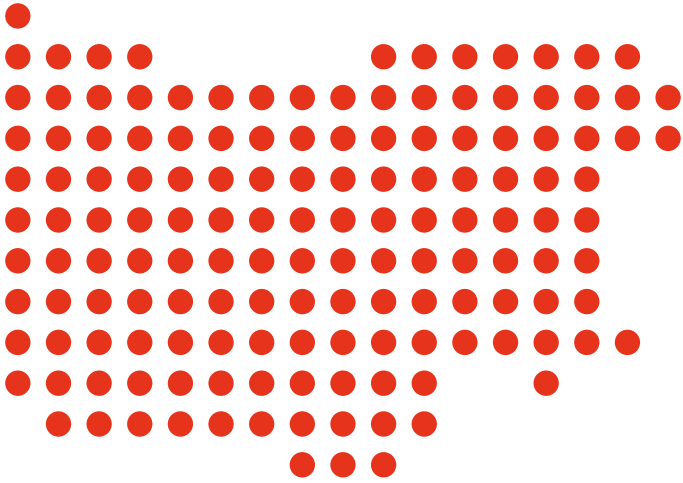
SOLIDAR Social Rights Monitor 2021 investigates the extent to which CSOs have been included in the drafting procedure of these national Recovery and Resilience Plans. In almost every country, the National Strategy Group reported that the impact of the Covid-19 crisis violently impacted social and civil dialogue. A state of emergency was declared in many of the countries analysed, resulting in less-transparent and less-inclusive policy-making processes due to the exceptional

situation and the necessity of adopting new measures quickly. This was not received positively by organised society and labour, particularly with regards to the preparation of the NRRPs. Indeed, Article 18(4) (q) of the Recovery and Resilience Facility Regulation requires governments to carry out open consultations with social partners, CSOs, and other relevant stakeholders, and to reflect their input in the plans. **This was not the case – at least not in a meaningful and structured way – in any of the countries analysed.** Overall, the results of this year's Social Rights Monitor with respect to the role of CSOs in the development of NRRPs are in line with the outcome of a recent survey carried out by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). This said that the consultation processes “are far from satisfactory in relation to the justified demands of civil society and even in relation to the terms set out in the RRF Regulation”. SOLIDAR regrets having to make such an assessment, especially in light of the crucial role played by civil society during the emergency and its untapped potential to promote innovative and socially just measures to help recover from the crisis. We call on national authorities to strengthen civil and social dialogue during the implementation phase of the NRRPs and urge EU authorities to closely monitor this process.





Country Monitor:  
**Bulgaria**



	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	39.6	40.8	40.0	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	5.2%	4.2%	5.2%	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	58.8 (2019)	59.6 (2020)	59.9 (2021)	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	10.1%	9.0%	9.7%	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	41.6%	41.1%	39.5%	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

The outbreak of the pandemic caused an economic downturn in Bulgaria, and the measures adopted to limit the spread of the virus had severe negative effects on different sectors and on employment. In 2019, the employment rate was 71.4%, but it decreased to 68.1% in the first quarter of 2020, reaching a low of 67.8% at the beginning of 2021.<sup>7</sup> The unemployment rate started increasing at the beginning of 2020 and reached more than 6% in the first quarter of 2021. It has not yet returned to its pre-pandemic level of 3.7%.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, unemployment disproportionately affects young

people, among whom the rate is almost 9%.<sup>9</sup> Employment levels of young people are lower than those for the older population, and the youth employment rate has lost 2 percentage points since 2019.

**Some major changes were adopted in 2020 to amend the national Кодекс на труда<sup>10</sup> – Kodyeks na trooda (Labour Code).** As in many other European countries, provisions for working from home were introduced, together with amendments for more-flexible working hours. Worryingly however, the threshold for

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2020). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/BG>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Bulgaria: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/bulgaria/>

7 National Statistical Institute NSI Bulgaria (2021) Employment rate for population aged 15-64: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/6481/en/node/18942>

8 National Statistical Institute NSI Bulgaria (2021) Unemployment rate for population aged 15-64: <https://www.nsi.bg/en/content/6481/en/node/en/node/18942>

9 Eurofund (2021) Living and working conditions in Bulgaria: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/bulgaria#key-figures>

10 КОДЕКС НА ТРУДА (Bulgarian labour code): <https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/1594373121>

overtime was also increased, and the annual limit on overtime was doubled, from 150 to 300 hours.<sup>11</sup> However, **a rise in the minimum wage was welcomed by trade unions and CSOs**, and it led to an increase in minimum monthly pay from BGN 560 in 2019 (€286,94), to BGN 650 in 2021 (€332).<sup>12</sup>

## GENDER EQUALITY

**Bulgaria still ranks among the worst countries for gender equality in the European Union.** According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, Bulgaria scored 8.3 points below the European average in 2020.<sup>13</sup> Since 2010, some positive developments have taken place, but at a slower pace than in other EU countries. Women's full-time equivalent (FTE) employment rate increased by 3 percentage points from 2010, to 45%. But it is still well below the FTE rate for men, which is 56%.<sup>14</sup> This is reflected in the time women dedicate to care and housework activities, which mainly remain tasks for women: **73% of women say they cook and do housework every day, compared to only 13% of men.**<sup>15</sup> There is therefore an urgent need to **increase women's representation at institutional level in order to develop policies and approaches to close this gap and ensure equal access and opportunity for all.** In 2020, only 27% of members of the Bulgarian Parliament were women, as were 26% of members of regional and local assemblies and municipal representatives.<sup>16</sup>

The gender gap in employment is sometimes wider when specific groups are considered.

Among couples with children, 76% of women participate in the labour market, versus 90% of men. Among young people, only 75% of women participate in the labour market compared to 83% of men. The risk of poverty therefore remains higher for women, and it has risen by 1 percentage point since 2010.<sup>17</sup>

In December 2020, Bulgaria's government adopted its National Strategy for Promoting the Equality between Women and Men.<sup>18</sup> Its main priorities are gender equality in the labour market, reducing the pay gap, combating violence and protecting and supporting victims, and overcoming sexism.<sup>19</sup> However, the National Strategy Group is pessimistic about the concrete effects of the strategy and will closely monitor its implementation.

## EDUCATION

2020 and 2021 have been difficult years for students, teachers, and education personnel, due to the pandemic and the measures adopted to limit its spread. These often led to the **temporary full closure of all education and training institutions.** Schools and kindergartens in Bulgaria closed in March 2020, with a huge effect on students and often on their parents as well. Parents had to provide the right learning environment, support, and digital tools. In Bulgaria, 40% of parents need support to care for their children, so that they can go to work.<sup>20</sup> Children from families living in poverty were most severely affected by school closures and a lack of support for their parents. Moreover, **only 63% of the support teachers for children with special needs worked**

11 Eurofund (2021) Living and working conditions in Bulgaria: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/bulgaria#background>

12 Ibid.

13 EIGE (2020) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Bulgaria: [file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/20203336\\_mhag20002enn\\_002.pdf](file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/20203336_mhag20002enn_002.pdf)

14 EIGE (2020) Gender Equality Index – Bulgaria: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/BG>

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ministry of Defence (2020) National Strategy for Promoting the Equality between Women and Men: [https://www.mod.bg/bg/doc/ravnopostavenost/20210119\\_National\\_strategy\\_2021-2030.pdf](https://www.mod.bg/bg/doc/ravnopostavenost/20210119_National_strategy_2021-2030.pdf)

19 Ministry of Labor and Social Policy MLSP – Government of Bulgaria: <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/politika-za-ravnopostavenost>

20 UNICEF (2021) Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 impact on education in Bulgaria: <https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/stories/rapid-assessment-covid-19-impact-education-bulgaria>

during the state of emergency,<sup>21</sup> therefore leaving behind some of the most vulnerable learners. Compared to the academic year 2016/17, the number of enrolled students decreased at every level. The biggest drop was in early childhood education, where 9,000 fewer children were enrolled in 2021.<sup>22</sup> There was also an increase in early leavers from education and training in 2020. The rate reached 12.8%,<sup>23</sup> giving Bulgaria the EU's fifth highest number of early school leavers. Most worrying were gender gap statistics, which show that Bulgaria's early school leaving rate is 3.5 percentage points higher among girls than boys.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, there are also geographical inequalities in education: the proportion of early school leavers is higher in rural areas than in cities.<sup>25</sup>

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Summer school for young children

The Bulgarian Foundation "Together in Class" organises a summer academy<sup>26</sup> to help young students (from the first to the twelfth grades) make progress in core subjects, such as the Bulgarian language, maths, history, and science. The annual summer academy is completely free and lasts three weeks. The National Strategy Group thinks the initiative is very useful during a year in which many students were left behind due to online remote learning without adequate support.

## INCLUSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

The outbreak of the pandemic had a huge impact on the reception of newcomers to Bulgaria. After the declaration of the state of emergency in March 2020, the country's borders were closed, reducing the flow of migrants to the country. The most controversial measure was **the government's suspension of the treatment of asylum requests**, which stopped national courts from proceeding with their activities.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, despite the state of emergency and the lifting of major restrictions in May 2020, the registration of asylum seekers only resumed again in June. This seems to confirm the National Strategy Group's view that the Bulgarian government is not interested in developing better inclusion policies. Instead, it is trying to depict the country as a transit country that allows people to pass through, but which is not willing to make efforts to receive, support, and include migrants. **Throughout 2020, Bulgaria was accused of violating the non-refoulement principle: its rejection rate of asylum seekers reached 100% for applicants from Afghanistan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, and was very high (96%) for those from Pakistan and Iran.**<sup>28</sup> Along with this policy, while Bulgaria had a National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection for the period 2014 to 2020,<sup>29</sup> no action plan has ever been adopted for its implementation, and no funding has ever been allocated to it.<sup>30</sup> There has been no discussion of such a national strategy in 2021,

21 UNICEF (2021) Rapid Assessment of COVID-19 impact on education in Bulgaria: <https://www.unicef.org/bulgaria/en/stories/rapid-assessment-covid-19-impact-education-bulgaria>

22 National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria (2021) Education in the Republic of Bulgaria 2021: <https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/publications/education2021.pdf>

23 Eurostat (2021) Early leavers from education and training: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training#Overview](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training#Overview)

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Together in class Summer Academy: [https://zaednovchas.bg/summer\\_academy/](https://zaednovchas.bg/summer_academy/)

27 Supreme Judicial Council (2020) Preventive measures against COVID-19, 15 March 2020: <https://bit.ly/3s1t0tk>

28 Asylum Information Database AIDA (2021) Country Report Bulgaria 2020: [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AIDA-BG\\_2020update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/AIDA-BG_2020update.pdf)

29 Национална стратегия за интеграцията на лицата, получили международна закрила в Република България (2014-2020) [National Strategy for the Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection in Bulgaria (2014-2020)] <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/national-strategy-for-the-integration-of-beneficiaries-of-international-protection-in-bulgaria-2014-2020>

30 European Commission (2019) Governance of Migrant Integration in Bulgaria: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/governance/bulgaria>

and Bulgaria currently lacks civic education, language classes, and vocational training opportunities – all of which are considered basic steps for migrant inclusion.<sup>31</sup> According

to the UNHCR office in Bulgaria, the national authorities are currently dedicating too low a budget to inclusion and reception policies, and it covers only 7% of actual needs.<sup>32</sup>

## Social protection and inclusion

**Bulgarian income inequality, as measured by the Gini coefficient, stands out as the highest in the European Union and is higher than that of almost all OECD countries.**<sup>33</sup>

Increasing inequality and high poverty rates are negatively impacting living conditions and leading young people to move permanently to other European countries. Inclusivity is also falling in Bulgarian society, as the GDP growth of recent years has most benefitted high-income people: the top 20% of incomes grew twice as fast as the rest.<sup>34</sup> To foster a more inclusive society, better education policies and an increased minimum wage are necessary.

**Urgent measures are also needed to fight the poverty rate**, which is rising as a result of the growing inequality and recently reached 16% of the population. Social segregation is particularly visible in the overrepresentation of the young and the elderly among people currently living in poverty. In addition, Roma, people with disabilities, and residents of rural areas have elevated risks of poverty.<sup>35</sup> Already in 2017, Eurofund reported that social mobility in

Bulgaria is extremely low.<sup>36</sup> The pandemic has probably worsened the situation.

**Bulgaria's housing market is characterised by low affordability, as well as overcrowding, which at 41.1% is more than 24 percentage points higher than the European average.**<sup>37</sup> Investment in infrastructure and housing would help the population live in decent conditions and let them focus on other aspects of their lives. Material deprivation is reflected in housing conditions, which are reported to be of poor quality and with very low energy efficiency.<sup>38</sup> More than 11% of residents live in a house with a leaking roof; more than 7% do not have a bathroom or shower facilities; and, most worryingly, more than 30% are unable to keep their home adequately warm, three times the European average.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, with house prices and rents rising, housing often represents a burden on households' incomes. The European indicator "housing cost overburden" measures the percentage of the population spending more than 40% of their net disposable income

31 European Commission (2019) Governance of Migrant Integration in Bulgaria: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/governance/bulgaria>

32 UNHCR Bulgaria (2021) Bulgaria Fact Sheet 2021: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Bi-annual%20fact%20sheet%202021%2002%20Bulgaria.pdf>

33 OECD (2021) Economic Assessment – Bulgaria: <https://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/bulgaria-2021-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Eurofund (2017) Social mobility in the EU: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/social-mobility-in-the-eu>

37 European Commission (2020) Quality of Housing: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-1c.html?lang=en>

38 OECD (2021) Economic Assessment – Bulgaria: <https://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/bulgaria-2021-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>

39 European Commission (2020) Quality of Housing: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-1c.html?lang=en>

on housing, and Bulgaria has one of the highest rates, reaching 18.5% in rural areas.<sup>40</sup> Housing is therefore neither affordable nor decent for a high percentage of the Bulgarian population. The National Strategy Group reports that a very decentralised system leaves housing under the competence of municipalities, which are very different in terms of means and disposable funds. This does not favour the adoption of an overarching approach to housing. According to the National Strategy Group, the only positive housing policy of 2021 has been the amendments to the Personal Income Tax Act, Article 17 of which allows a reduction in the interest paid on mortgage loans used for the purchase of housing. However, the conditions are incredibly strict, and only young (under 35) married people are entitled to benefit. This amendment can therefore be considered as discriminatory, as many Bulgarian couples – notably LGBTQI+ – are not allowed to marry or enter a similar kind of civil partnership.

Ensuring access to healthcare should be a priority for Bulgaria, not only because of the pandemic, but also because it is the European country in which patients have to pay the most for health insurance.<sup>41</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that, since citizens receive healthcare services only when they have paid social security and are insured, **about half of total healthcare costs are paid by the patients. In 2020, 15% of the population reported not being able to access healthcare, and 28% lacked necessary medicines.**<sup>42</sup> The National Strategy Group said that geographical discrepancies are still evident in 2021, as small towns and villages often lack the funding they need to develop hospital and medical-care facilities and infrastructure. One

reason is the high degree of decentralisation of the healthcare system, which means that different wages are paid for the same job in different parts of the country. As a result, medical professionals and staff often prefer working in big cities, causing a lack of doctors, nurses, and staff in rural and poorer areas of the country. In addition, the NSG fears that access to healthcare could be limited for LGBTQI+ people due to the constant discrimination they face in Bulgaria. However, the NSG reported that no official data on this topic have been collected by authorities.

### GOOD PRACTICE Open Doors

Two Bulgarian LGBTQI+ organisations – Bilitis<sup>43</sup> and GLAS<sup>44</sup> – together with other CSOs and universities from Hungary, Spain, Poland, and Italy, are implementing the Open Doors project.<sup>45</sup> This aims to carry out research activities and give training opportunities to healthcare professionals with the aim of providing inclusive and competent healthcare to LGBTQI+ people. Open Doors' national report for Bulgaria will soon be ready and will examine the healthcare settings for LGBTQI+ people. It will provide an overview of the legal and policy environment, as well as data on the attitudes of doctors and medical personnel. The project also prepared a Guide for Health Care Professionals, including an introduction to LGBTQI+ terminologies and practical recommendations to avoid discrimination and create inclusive medical spaces.<sup>46</sup>

40 European Commission (2020) Is housing affordable? : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-2b.htm-?lang=en>

41 OECD (2019) Bulgaria Country Health Profile 2019 : <https://www.oecd.org/publications/bulgaria-country-health-profile-2019-34781ac1-en.htm>

42 EAPN (2020) Bulgaria Poverty Watch 2020: [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-Bulgaria-Poverty-Watch-2020\\_ENG-4747.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-Bulgaria-Poverty-Watch-2020_ENG-4747.pdf)

43 Bilitis Bulgaria: <https://bilitis.org/2019/05/10/en-sofia-pride-sports/>

44 GLAS Foundation (Gays and Lesbians Accepted in Society): <https://glasfoundation.bg/en/>

45 OPEN DOORS Project: <https://opendoorshhealth.eu/en/who-we-are>

46 Open Doors (2020) An LGBTI guide for healthcare professionals – Open up the doors: [https://opendoorshhealth.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/opendoors\\_guide\\_en.pdf](https://opendoorshhealth.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/opendoors_guide_en.pdf)

## JUST TRANSITION TO A GREENER ECONOMY

A just transition remains a very controversial topic in Bulgaria. The country still depends on coal for around 40% of its electricity, and the coal industry provides jobs for around 15,000 people – 50,000 if we consider indirect jobs through activities related to coal and the energy it produces.<sup>47</sup> It is reported, and confirmed by the National Strategy Group, that uncertainty over just transition strategies makes workers and local populations reluctant to move away from

coal and towards more-sustainable forms of energy production. However, the perception of the population is slowly changing. In 2008, only 10% of people knew about climate change, but today nearly 50% are really concerned about it.<sup>48</sup> However, **the majority of respondents to the same survey said that poverty and low income were their main fears for the future, and that these impeded them from focusing on the climate emergency.** One of the main obstacles is a lack of expertise and strategies for reallocating workers and industries, the National Strategy Group reported.

## Civic space

The National Strategy Group reports narrowing opportunities for civic space, an observation confirmed by CIVICUS' monitoring activities.<sup>49</sup> Even though the right to peaceful assembly is protected by law, **hundreds of people were injured or arrested<sup>50</sup> in 2020 during months of demonstrations in Sofia against the government.** The NSG denounced the use of violence by police officers and reported the use of pepper spray, tear gas, and water cannon against protestors. The right to peaceful assembly was threatened even more when the government targeted individuals identified in the protests and took them to court under politically-motivated accusations.<sup>51</sup> In addition, **serious concerns were raised over amendments to the Legal Non-Profit Entities Act,** which would have imposed several restrictions on civil society organisations. The amendments introduced an obligation for CSOs to report all their forms

of income over €500 within seven days of receiving of them. Any violation would let the government terminate the CSO's activity or its ability to receive funds.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the regulation of civil society activities has become even stricter and less encouraging.

Freedom of expression is also deteriorating. In 2021, some journalists investigating corruption by authorities received threats and other forms of intimidation.<sup>53</sup> The National Strategy Group also reports serious concerns over the **lack of transparency of ownership of the media,** which are subject to systematic political control. Reporters Without Borders denounced the government's allocation of national and European funding to media outlets without transparent procedures or budgets.<sup>54</sup> Media are therefore encouraged to publish or share government-friendly material, the National Strategy Group reported.

47 WWF (2021) Bulgaria at coal crossroads as mayors prepare to seize 'just transition' opportunity: <https://www.wwf.eu/?4750941/Bulgaria-at-coal-crossroads-as-mayors-prepare-to-seize-just-transition-opportunity>

48 WWF (2021) WWF survey: <https://www.wwf.bg/?4161466/wwf-prouchvane-blizo-polovinata-bulgari-znyat-za-klimatich-nite-promeni>

49 CIVICUS (2021) Bulgaria Country Monitor: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/08/26/protests-resume-ahead-snap-elections/>

50 Amnesty International (2021) Bulgaria country report: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/bulgaria/report-bulgaria/>

51 Ibid.

52 BCNL (2020) News – November 2020: <http://bcnl.org/en/news/when-will-the-controversial-proposal-to-amend-the-non-profit-legal-entities-act-be-withdrawn.html>

53 Ibid.

54 Reporters Without Borders (2021) Bulgaria – Press freedom trapped: <https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria>

# Civil and social dialogue on the national recovery and resilience plans

Last year's European Commission Country Recommendations for Bulgaria<sup>55</sup> (in the framework of the European Semester), acknowledged the extent of geographical and social inequalities in the country and the need to strengthen the welfare state to overcome the socio-economic crisis caused by the pandemic. This should have been done through open and inclusive processes with input from representatives of civil society and organised labour. However, the Bulgarian National Strategy Group reports that during 2020 and 2021, the Covid-19 crisis was too often seen as a pretext for avoiding open and transparent decision-making procedures. **Neither local nor national authorities consulted with either**

**social partners or civil society on the measures taken during the pandemic. In addition, civil society organisations had no official involvement in the development of Bulgaria's national Recovery and Resilience Plan (nRRP).** Moreover, the government did not take into consideration suggestions made through online open consultations: it is reported not to have given feedback on these, including those contributed by national experts.<sup>56</sup> The nRRP was nevertheless submitted to the European Commission in October 2021,<sup>57</sup> and was structured in four sections: Innovative Bulgaria, Green Bulgaria, Connected Bulgaria, and Fair Bulgaria.<sup>58</sup>

55 European Commission (2020) Country Specific Recommendation for Bulgaria: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TX-/?qid=1591720629495&uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0502>

56 CEE Bankwatch Network (2021): Assessment of Bulgaria's recovery and resilience plan: <https://euagenda.eu/publications/assessment-of-bulgaria-s-recovery-and-resilience-plan>

57 European Commission (2021) NextGenerationEU: Bulgaria submits official recovery and resilience plan: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_5264](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5264)

58 Bulgarian Government (2021) Bulgaria Recovery and Resilience Plan: [https://www.nextgeneration.bg/upload/36/Bulgaria\\_Recovery\\_and\\_Resilience\\_Plan\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.nextgeneration.bg/upload/36/Bulgaria_Recovery_and_Resilience_Plan_ENG.pdf)



# Country Monitor: Croatia



Although Croatia's socio-economic indicators have strongly improved since its accession to the European Union,<sup>1</sup> the Covid-19 pandemic and several earthquakes hit the country dramatically and brought challenges and inequalities to the surface. For the first time, the government decided to employ a comprehensive tool for the recovery and development of the country. In February 2021, it adopted the 2030 Nacionalnu Razvojni Strategiju (National Development Strategy to 2030).<sup>2</sup> Aimed at encouraging Croatia's recovery, the strategy established four development directions: a sustainable economy and society, strengthening resilience to crises, green and digital transitions, and balanced regional development. Each of these directions aims to contribute to strategic goals, as well as to the objectives set out in the European Green Deal and the European Territorial Agenda 2030.

The National Strategy Group (NSG) identifies the most pressing issues for Croatia as combating poverty and social exclusion, housing policy, and recovering from the earthquakes throughout the year in the counties of Zagreb and Sisak-Moslavina.<sup>3</sup>

1 Hernandez Littlewood, M. (2020) Social Rights Monitor 2020 – Croatia: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/195/original/02\\_SRM2020\\_Croatia\\_R0\\_online\\_-\\_english.pdf?1608118518](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/195/original/02_SRM2020_Croatia_R0_online_-_english.pdf?1608118518)

2 The Republic of Croatia (2021), Croatian Parliament, National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030, 11 February 2021. URL: <https://hrvatska2030.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Nacionalna-razvojni-strategija-RH-do-2030-godine.pdf>, [https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021\\_02\\_13\\_230.html](https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2021_02_13_230.html)

3 UNICEF Croatia (2021) Earthquake Situation Report: [UNICEF Croatia Situation Report No.3 \(Earthquake\) - 13 January 2021.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/croatia/sites/default/files/2021-02/UNICEF_Croatia_Situation_Report_No.3_(Earthquake)_-13_January_2021.pdf) (reliefweb.int)

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>4</sup></b>	29.6	29.2	28.3	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>5</sup></b>	8.5%	6.6%	7.5%	7.0%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>6</sup></b>	53.1 (2018)	55.6	57.9	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>7</sup></b>	5.2%	5.0%	5.1%	9.2% (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>8</sup></b>	39.3%	38.5%	36.2%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>9</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

Even though there were no major changes to the provision of welfare in Croatia in 2020, major changes are expected in coming months. The government issued a National Development Strategy setting out policy objectives to be implemented throughout 2021, and a Legislative Action Plan for 2021<sup>10</sup> was adopted to translate objectives into clear and concrete reform projects. The plan already contains 12 legislative proposals<sup>11</sup> and mandates public authorities to draft further regulations to reach its strategic objectives. In addition, the government is drafting a new Social Welfare Act<sup>12</sup> which – according to the NSG – is expected to

introduce significant structural changes. Croatia's 82 Social Welfare Centres will be merged into a single institution, and centres for families will be set up within counties' Social Welfare Centres. Most interestingly, an academy for the continuous training and education of workers will be put in place to ensure continuous adult training.

These reforms should ease the socio-economic pressure on living conditions and help to achieve equal opportunities and access to services. Indeed, **19.4% of the population is still at risk of poverty and social exclusion.**<sup>13</sup>

4 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

5 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

6 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EU>

7 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

8 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

9 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Croatia: [CIVICUS - Tracking conditions for citizen action](https://www.civikus.org/croatia/)

10 The Republic of Croatia, Government of the Republic of Croatia (2021), Legislative Action Plan for 2021, 23 December 2020. URL: <https://zakonodavstvo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/201223%20VRH%20Zakljucak%20i%20PZA%202021.pdf>

11 The Republic of Croatia (2021) <https://zakonodavstvo.gov.hr/>

12 Parliament of Croatia (2021) <https://www.sabor.hr/radna-tijela/odbori-i-povjerenstva/izvjesce-odbora-za-zdravstvo-i-socijal-nu-politiku-o-204>

13 Eurostat (2021) <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/visualisations>

**Unemployed people are easily prone to poverty, therefore long-term measures are needed to increase Croatia's employment rate and working conditions and to mitigate the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.**

However, the NSG reports that legislative amendments introduced at the beginning of 2021 to reduce income tax will benefit only Croats with the highest salaries. In addition, the NSG fears that the tax reduction, together with a welcome initiative to increase minimum wages, will cut public revenues and ultimately weaken the welfare system. This concern echoes a report published by the Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity (CROSOL), which stated that the income tax reduction would be relevant only to people who already have high incomes, further disadvantaging those earning below the median wage.<sup>14</sup>

## WORKING CONDITIONS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

After the economic downturn caused by the 2008 financial crisis and following Croatia's accession to the European Union, the economy has been on a recovery path since 2015. Yet, fair access to the labour market and satisfactory working conditions are far from a reality. A study requested by the European Parliament's EMPL Committee on the employment and social situation in Croatia<sup>15</sup> found that growth in

the employment rate was attributable to a rise in temporary contracts. Indeed, the employment rate rose slightly, from 66.7% in 2019 to 66.9%<sup>16</sup> in 2020, but Croatia remains among the EU countries with the highest rates of precariousness. This has been the case for a long period: **in 2015, more than 95% of all new employment contracts in the country were fixed term.**<sup>17</sup> **Moreover, such contracts were more common for women, migrants, people with disabilities, and workers with low educational attainment.**

The NSG highlights that Croatian working conditions remain inadequate, mainly due to extremely low salaries: 17% of Croatian workers earn less than two-thirds of the median gross hourly earnings.<sup>18</sup> The share of low-wage earners is therefore high. Moreover, as highlighted by a Eurofund study, 29% of people feel they do not receive the recognition they deserve for their work.<sup>19</sup> The Croatian Bureau of Statistics (CBS) found that in-work poverty is a reality for 5.1% of workers overall and 12.6% of the self-employed.<sup>20</sup> Poor working conditions combined with a high level of precariousness have adverse effects on mental health and mean that workers have fewer learning opportunities.

In addition, despite a decrease in recent years, youth unemployment still represents a major challenge for Croatia. The rate is now 16.7%, four percentage points above the EU-27 average of 12.5%.<sup>21</sup> This data is alarming, as the NSG points out that young workers have been most prone to lose their jobs during the

14 CROSOL, (2021), The Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Croatia. A Civil Society Perspective: [https://crosol.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Provedba-ciljeva-odrzivog-razvoja-u-Hrvatskoj\\_Perspektiva-civilnog-drustva-1.pdf](https://crosol.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Provedba-ciljeva-odrzivog-razvoja-u-Hrvatskoj_Perspektiva-civilnog-drustva-1.pdf), p.78

15 Tomic, I., Rubil, I., Nestic, D., Stubbs, P., (2019) The employment and social situation in Croatia [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/642345/IPOL\\_STU\(2019\)642345\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2019/642345/IPOL_STU(2019)642345_EN.pdf)

16 Eurostat (2021) Employment – annual statistics: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment\\_-\\_annual\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_-_annual_statistics)

17 WHO (2019) Croatia: Health and employment: [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/397214/20190311-h1245-croatia-report-no-isbn.pdf#:~:text=Temporary%20and%20precarious%20work%20Croatia%20was%20heavily%20impacted,the%20Institute%20for%20Development%20and%20International%20Relations%2C%2010](https://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/397214/20190311-h1245-croatia-report-no-isbn.pdf#:~:text=Temporary%20and%20precarious%20work%20Croatia%20was%20heavily%20impacted,the%20Institute%20for%20Development%20and%20International%20Relations%2C%2010)

18 Eurostat (2021) Low-wage earners: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/4/46/Low-wage\\_earn-ers\\_%E2%80%94\\_employees\\_%28excluding\\_apprentices%29\\_earning\\_two\\_thirds\\_or\\_less\\_of\\_the\\_median\\_gross\\_hourly\\_earnings%2C\\_2018\\_%28%25\\_of\\_employees%29.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/4/46/Low-wage_earn-ers_%E2%80%94_employees_%28excluding_apprentices%29_earning_two_thirds_or_less_of_the_median_gross_hourly_earnings%2C_2018_%28%25_of_employees%29.png)

19 Eurofund (2021) Living and Working in Croatia <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/croatia#quality-of-life>

20 CBS (2020) Indicators of poverty and social exclusion 2020: [https://www.dzs.hr/default\\_e.htm](https://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm)

21 Eurostat (2021) Youth unemployment rate: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth\\_empl\\_100&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth_empl_100&lang=en)

pandemic. Some job preservation measures have been implemented, but these are too narrow – they cover only certain sectors – and short-term. The organisation of young workers is also very low in Croatian trade unions, so they are underrepresented in trade unions’ demands and priorities.

Though a change in trajectory is needed, the NSG reports that only sectoral amendments were made in 2020 and 2021, and they will not apply to the whole labour force. Nevertheless, public consultations with the social partners on a new Labour Act started in September 2020, and a document is now being negotiated. The new Labour Act is planned for enforcement from August 2022, and it will mainly touch upon topics related to the pandemic: work-life balance, teleworking, and flexible working hours. It is reported that 80% of workers would support a prohibition of work on Sundays.<sup>22</sup>

## GOOD PRACTICE

### The Arise Roma Project<sup>23</sup>

The organisation “Centre for Peace Studies – CMS”,<sup>24</sup> a member of the SOLIDAR network, is committed to fighting racism, xenophobia, and ethnic exclusivism through intercultural projects, education, and training. In 2019, it launched the “Arise Roma” project, together with the Roma Youth Organisation ARTERARIJ and co-financed by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union.<sup>25</sup> The project implemented a six-month job-shadowing and mentoring programme, designed to empower Roma people aged 18 to 28. First, an internship gave them the opportunity to observe and follow the work of their mentors in the host civil-society organisation. This involved work on various socially relevant topics, such as environmental protection, human and minority rights, media, culture, and social services. Then, they elaborated and implemented project proposals in their local communities with the support of their mentors. The main objective was to contribute to the achievement of real equality for young members of the Roma community, which continues to be a highly marginalised social group.

22 UTAC (2019) Research on working hours: [http://www.sssh.hr/upload\\_data/site\\_files/istrazivanje-sssh-o-radnom-vre-menu-2019.pdf](http://www.sssh.hr/upload_data/site_files/istrazivanje-sssh-o-radnom-vre-menu-2019.pdf)

23 Arise Roma Project: <https://romhr.hr/projekt/arise-roma>

24 Centre for Peace Studies, website: <https://www.cms.hr/hr>

25 Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/programmes/rec>

## EDUCATION

Croatia's education system did not undergo any major change in 2021. Nevertheless, it was one of the sectors most hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and by a 6.4-magnitude earthquake, which severely damaged school buildings and facilities. While studying conditions have deteriorated for every learner and student, the NSG points out that Roma people have been particularly disadvantaged. They are more likely not to receive support from family members, as these have normally attained relatively low educational levels and often struggle with a language barrier. Lacking physical space, technology tools, social contact, and support from fellow students, more Roma learners are expected to drop out if no measures are adopted to mitigate these conditions. In addition, online schooling exacerbated educational inequalities: rural areas often have no internet connection, and these areas are mostly populated by the national minority groups. The NSG strongly calls for more personal assistants for students with disabilities. The lack of infrastructure and social support is the most pressing issue for the education sector.

The National Development Strategy 2030 sets ambitious targets both for young students and adult learners. By 2030, 97% of children over four years old should receive early childhood education, while the adult participation rate in lifelong education – which was 3.5% in 2020 – should reach the EU average of 10.8%.<sup>26</sup> If these targets are reached, the number of highly educated people will rise from 66.7% to 75%, while overall employment rates will rise.

## GENDER EQUALITY

The NSG reports that no major steps have been taken to close the gender gap in Croatia. The NSG calls for European policies to be quickly developed and adapted to the country's needs, such as the European Directive on Pay Transparency. They should then be included in the upcoming reforms under the new Croatian Labour Act. Trade unions at both national and European levels are demanding that the right to bargain for equal pay be included in the upcoming reforms.<sup>27</sup>

Tackling gender equality should be of crucial importance for Croatia, but the issue is not included in the National Development Strategy for 2030. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, Croatia ranks 20th out of the 27 EU countries, with a score of 57.9 points out of 100, exactly 10 points below the European average of 67.9 points. Alarming, no significant improvements have been made since 2017. Moreover, the share of women members of parliament has decreased in the last decade, from 29% in 2010 to 19.5% in 2020.<sup>28</sup>

Only 9% of women are undergoing training to improve their digital skills, half the European average, and working conditions for women have particularly deteriorated over the last year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. **The number of women taking care of children, elderly people, or people with disabilities is almost double that of men, and women take care of household activities six times more than men. Indeed, the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment in Croatia is**

26 National Development Strategy, Objective 2: Educated and Employed people: <https://hrvatska2030.hr/rs1/sc2/>

27 ETUC (2019) ETUC Resolution on Gender Pay Transparency Directive: [https://www.etuc.org/system/files/document/file2019-11/ETUC%20Resolution%20on%20Gender%20Pay%20Transparency%20Directive%20Adopted\\_1.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/system/files/document/file2019-11/ETUC%20Resolution%20on%20Gender%20Pay%20Transparency%20Directive%20Adopted_1.pdf)

28 EIGE, (2020) Gender Equality Index, Croatia: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/country/HR>

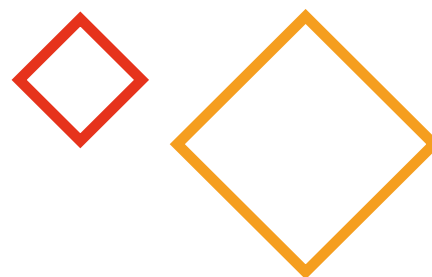
**39.9% for women, compared to 52% for men.**<sup>29</sup> The NSG calls on the national government to tackle this systematic discrimination against women with children. They mostly have short-term contracts, but parental leave benefits are accessible only to parents with at least 18 months of insurance without interruption in the two years preceding the birth.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the level of benefit is based on healthcare contributions, which are based on a person's average earnings. Low wages and fixed-term contracts therefore put women, families, and children at a disadvantage.

### IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic strongly hit the Croatian economy, and GDP fell by 15.1% at the beginning of 2020, compared to the previous year.<sup>31</sup> Unemployment peaked at 7.7%, with youth unemployment rates touching 18.2% in the first quarter of 2020.<sup>32</sup> The epidemiological situation worsened throughout the year. In addition, central Croatia was struck by a magnitude-6.4 earthquake at the end of December 2020, worsening the country's already-difficult situation.

The school year has been terribly affected in 2020 and 2021. Education soon had to be moved online, affecting students and learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and those living in rural areas with little access to the internet. Moreover, the beginning of the second semester was postponed due to the earthquake.

To mitigate the economic downturn caused by the pandemic and the 21.3%<sup>33</sup> increase in the number of unemployed people from December 2019 to December 2020, the Ministry of Labour and Pension System of Croatia extended its employment subsidy programme. This then covered full-time and part-time workers' salaries for companies that experienced major decreases in revenues.<sup>34</sup> In June 2020, making use of the allocations available from the European SURE programme,<sup>35</sup> the government introduced a support facility for short-time employment. Generally speaking, the country's political forces and social partners welcomed the measures adopted by the government during the emergency period. But they also called for long-term measures and a better monitoring system to combat employers' misuse of job protection support.<sup>36</sup>



29 EIGE, (2020) Gender Equality Index, Croatia: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/domain/work/HR>

30 EIGE (2021) Who is eligible for parental leave in Croatia? [file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/20210527\\_mh0421047enn.pdf](file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/20210527_mh0421047enn.pdf)

31 Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2021) Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on socioeconomic indicators: [https://www.dzs.hr/Eng/Covid-19/gdp\\_2\\_q.html](https://www.dzs.hr/Eng/Covid-19/gdp_2_q.html)

32 Eurostat (2021) <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/covid-19/society-work>

33 OECD (2020) Tackling coronavirus, Contributing to a global effort – Croatia: <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-Croatia.pdf>

34 Croatian employment service (2021): <https://mjera-orm.hzz.hr/potpورا-za-ocuvanje-radnih-mjesta-sijecanj-veljaca/>

35 SURE Programme: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/funding-mechanisms-and-facilities/sure\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/economic-and-fiscal-policy-coordination/financial-assistance-eu/funding-mechanisms-and-facilities/sure_en)

36 Novosti (2020) Profiterima nikad dosta / Profiteers never get enough, <https://www.portalnovosti.com/profiterima-nikad-dosta>

# Social protection and inclusion

**The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Croatia is 23.3%, and 7.3% of the population live in materially deprived conditions.**<sup>37</sup> The risk of poverty before the transfer of social benefits and financial aid is 24.3%, showing that social protection measures have a very limited concrete effect on living conditions. The NSG denounces the lack of a follow-up strategy to the Strategy for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2014-2020, which has now expired. Significant improvement is needed, as the State Audit Office of Croatia highlighted that no reform was implemented during the 2014-2020 period. The office therefore asked for the creation of a monitoring and assessment body.<sup>38</sup> In the same report, the office found that the implementation plan for the strategy was adopted by the government only nine months after the strategy's adoption, meaning a huge delay for the programmes envisaged. Moreover, out of 10 measures proposed, two were not implemented, and eight were either not aligned with the overall aims and deadlines or referred to too wide a target group. In conclusion, the measures and initiatives undertaken by the government on social protection and inclusion are often inadequate and require significant improvements.

A good positive step identified by the NSG was the introduction in 2021 of a monthly allowance of 800 HRK (€106,26)<sup>39</sup> for people aged over 65. The act introducing the allowance, the National Allowance for the Elderly Act, entered into force in January 2021, so its impact will be soon measurable.

## GOOD PRACTICE Ray of Sun – Light of Hope

Zelena akcija (Green Action), FOE Croatia, and the People for People Initiative organised the humanitarian campaign “Ray of Sun – Light of Hope”<sup>40</sup> with the aim of mitigating energy poverty in poor communities in Sisak-Moslavina County, one of the poorest areas of the country. Raising awareness of energy poverty in Croatia, they trained local communities in the benefits of renewable solar energy. Using a crowdfunding platform, they collected enough money to bring electricity to six households, which had electricity for the first time and became energy independent.

37 Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2020), indicators of poverty and social exclusion: [https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv\\_Eng/publication/2019/14-01-01\\_01\\_2019.htm](https://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2019/14-01-01_01_2019.htm)

38 State Audit office of the Republic of Croatia, (2020), Performance audit of measures and activities undertaken on poverty alleviation: [https://www.revizija.hr/UserDocsImages/ENG/Reports/2019/PERFORMANCE\\_AUDIT\\_OF\\_MEASURES\\_AND\\_ACTIVITIES\\_UNDERTAKEN\\_ON\\_POVERTY\\_ALLEVIATION\\_IN\\_THE\\_REPUBLIC\\_OF\\_CROATIA.pdf](https://www.revizija.hr/UserDocsImages/ENG/Reports/2019/PERFORMANCE_AUDIT_OF_MEASURES_AND_ACTIVITIES_UNDERTAKEN_ON_POVERTY_ALLEVIATION_IN_THE_REPUBLIC_OF_CROATIA.pdf)

39 Consulted on 22.10.2021

40 CAN Europe, Ray of Sun – Light of Hope <https://caneurope.org/achievements/ray-of-sun-light-of-hope/>

## ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Croatia has a housing model that promotes home ownership and has resulted in an ownership rate of 89.7%.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, as the NSG highlights, this is not encouraging data. Croatian households are overcrowded and on average host more people than in the rest of Europe. According to Eurostat, **38.5% of the population live in overcrowded homes, which had an impact on people's living conditions during the pandemic lockdowns.** Moreover, 6.6% of the population cannot keep their house warm during the winter:<sup>42</sup> energy poverty is still a reality, particularly in the country's poorest regions.

The NSG denounces that the government's lack of plans for a comprehensive housing policy that answers the needs of the population. Since 2017, a housing loan subsidy has been available to new buyers, but this measure does not seem to be making housing more accessible or affordable. According to recently published research, which is supported by the NSG's observations, there is evidence that the subsidy has been contributing to an overall increase in housing prices.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the measure is ineffective for the subsidy's recipients and makes housing less affordable for those who are not applying for it.

The earthquakes that hit the country in 2020 had serious consequences for the quality, accessibility, and safety of buildings – especially

older ones but also new ones. Reconstruction took several months to start, leaving people leaving in poor conditions. Often, citizens did not know how to apply for reconstruction grants, and the Human Rights House Zagreb found that information about the procedures was neither accessible nor transparent.<sup>44</sup>

### GOOD PRACTICE

#### Right to the City: A Handbook<sup>45</sup>

The organisation Pravo na Grad (Right to the City) held a series of workshops with a large number of tenants, analysing their rental contracts and the relevant regulations. It then prepared and published a handbook for tenants describing common elements of rental contracts, showing practical examples, introducing the legal framework for renting, and recommending how to conduct contract negotiations. The handbook also contains contacts of civil society organisations that provide free legal advice.

## HEALTHCARE

**Aside from the direct effects of the pandemic, the NSG reports that insufficient investment in both human capacity and infrastructure has had a negative impact on the quality of and access to healthcare in Croatia.** Although there is no publicly available

41 Eurostat (2020) Housing in Europe: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/index.html?lang=en>

42 Ibid.

43 Kunovac, D., Žilić, I., (2020) Home sweet home: The effects of housing loan subsidies on the housing market in Croatia. Hrvatska Narodna Banka : <https://www.hnb.hr/documents/20182/3596318/w-060.pdf/955d2e9e-76d7-8b3e-3c1a-8a8732ff326e>

44 Human Rights House Zagreb (2021): Human Rights in Croatia: Overview of 2020: [https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/KLJP\\_GI2020\\_PRIP\\_web\\_26.4..pdf](https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/KLJP_GI2020_PRIP_web_26.4..pdf)

45 Right to the City: Handbook for Tenants: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/11ZWjwV6co2\\_vE2r8fZ6K7njC0OWchVEF/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11ZWjwV6co2_vE2r8fZ6K7njC0OWchVEF/view)



data on the quality of healthcare in the country,<sup>46</sup> there is a clear and measurable lack of general practitioners, paediatricians, dental care teams, and gynaecologists.<sup>47</sup> The problem was exacerbated by the pandemic, and access to health services was further limited.

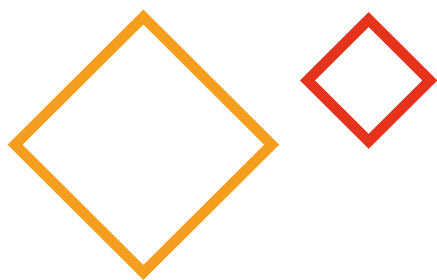
Many changes were introduced to cope with the Covid-19 emergency, but Human Rights House Zagreb denounces<sup>48</sup> human rights violations such as denying parents' permission to visit children being treated in hospital. It criticises an overall lack of clear regulations for visits and stays. This resulted in unequal hospital treatment during the pandemic. In addition, the earthquakes had impacts on medical treatment and healthcare buildings and facilities, further increasing delays to treatment.

Limitations on the right to move freely during the pandemic had negative impacts on access to healthcare in rural areas, where there is a shortage of medical teams and facilities in many areas. Groups living in these areas were therefore disadvantaged.

## JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

In contrast to 2020, some policy directions were published in 2021 on the just transition to tackle the climate crises. In the National Development Strategy 2030, the third strategic objective, "green and digital transition", aims to turn Croatia into a European leader in the green transition, by carrying out a just and inclusive shift towards climate neutrality by 2030.<sup>49</sup> Talk of turning environmental challenges into opportunities fits with a Croatian economy oriented to the service sector.<sup>50</sup> However, the NSG demands an impact assessment and clear regulation on the transition to a green labour market.

Two Croatian regions – Istria and the Sisak-Moslavina County – together with the Ministry of Regional Development prepared territorial plans, identifying areas in need of major support and ways to address social and economic consequences. Finally, 30% of the grants from the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2021 to 2027) and 37% of the funds received for the national Resilience and Recovery Plan are scheduled to be invested in green-transition projects.<sup>51</sup>



46 Human Rights House Zagreb (2021): Human Rights in Croatia: Overview of 2020: [https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/KLJP\\_GI2020\\_PRIIP\\_web\\_26.4..pdf](https://www.kucaljudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/KLJP_GI2020_PRIIP_web_26.4..pdf)

47 Republic of Croatia, Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia (2020), Annual Ombudsman Report for 2020: <https://www.ombudsman.hr/hr/download/izvjesce-pucke-pravobraniteljice-za-2020-godinu/?wpdmdl=10845&refresh=60c0ea27d3aa51623255591>

48 Human Rights House (2021) Statemets: <https://humanrightshouse.org/category/statements/>

49 National Development Strategy (2021), Strategic objective 3: <https://hrvatska2030.hr/rs3/>

50 UN (2019) World economic situation and prospects report: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2019\\_BOOK-web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESP2019_BOOK-web.pdf)

51 The Croatian Ministry of Regional Development and EU Funds (2021), "Minister Tramišak at the conference "The Green Plan – A Chance for the Energetic Development of Croatia": <https://razvoj.gov.hr/vijesti/ministrice-tramisak-na-konferenciji-zeleni-plan-pri-lika-za-energetski-razvoj-hrvatske/4544>.

# Civic Space

The NSG reports that freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and speech are formally respected and protected, but that the procedures are often not clear and sometimes hinder organisations' enjoyment of these rights. Funds and finances are the most pressing issue for ensuring freedom of association, but bureaucratic and administrative barriers often prevent organisations from applying for and receiving the necessary funds. Moreover, the NSG finds that local communities' priorities, which have been identified by CSOs through surveys and on-field action, are inconsistent and not recognised by national donors. As a result, they are often not included in the funding priorities. The NSG calls for longer financing periods, as short-term programmes adversely affect advocacy work and forward planning.

Most importantly, and echoing the findings of the Croatian civil society organisation "Gong" in a report published in June 2020, the government still has not developed a strategy for the Council for Civil Society Development. This is an advisory body to the government tasked with monitoring and cooperating with

civil society, as well as participating in the planning and programming of projects to help civil society develop. This is therefore unlikely to become a usefully functioning body.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, both the report and the NSG denounce the Ministry of Labour's failure to comply with the calendar deadlines for tender announcements, as well as delays in or suspensions of existing calls and the ministry's lack of flexibility and transparency.<sup>53</sup>

Regarding the freedom of peaceful assembly, the NSG reports that it is often difficult to receive information on guidelines for notifying public authorities about public assemblies and activities. This hinders the process of obtaining the necessary permits. Moreover, Covid-19 measures, despite their legitimate aims, caused concerns over their unfair and unequal implementation. The NSG denounced the lack of clear, published guidelines on the requirements for public gatherings, even though some events were still allowed.

52 Gong (2020), Government Attacks on Civil Society in Croatia: [https://www.gong.hr/media/uploads/government\\_attacks\\_on\\_civil\\_society\\_in\\_croatia\\_eng.pdf](https://www.gong.hr/media/uploads/government_attacks_on_civil_society_in_croatia_eng.pdf)

53 Ibid.

# Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

The NSG denounces an historic low level of involvement of civil society and its organisations in the decision-making processes. Despite the existence of the Council for Civil Society Development,<sup>54</sup> delegates from civil society organisations make up just a minority of its members. The NSG reports that the Council did not have regular meetings in recent months, despite the pandemic and the devastating earthquake. Most importantly, the government has not appointed new representatives to the Council since May 2020.<sup>55</sup> This has hindered the participation of CSOs in all working groups of the Council for Civil Society Development, including the one charged with providing opinions on the national Resilience and Recovery Plan (NRRP). Therefore, civil-society representatives sent an open letter to the government, calling for the appointment of new representatives from public authorities to the Council. The

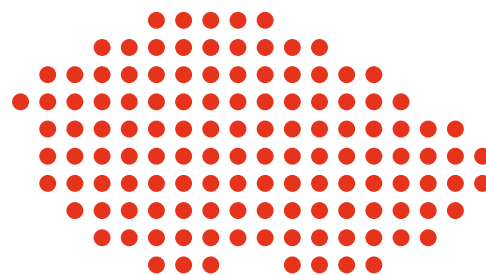
letter also denounced the Council's dysfunction and inability to vote and take decisions. The biggest consequence was that civil society was unable to select CSO representatives for government working groups for the preparation of the financial period 2021-2027.

Moreover, the NSG concludes that CSOs have not been adequately included in the development of the NRRP. The government only presented them with an executive summary of the draft plan, making it impossible for CSO representatives to comment on the full content, for which detailed descriptions were not provided. When the government published its NRRP on 13 April 2021, CSOs organised a public demonstration and held a press conference to denounce once again the unfair procedure and complete lack of public consultation and participation.

54 Republic of Croatia, Council for Civil Society Development. Website: <https://udruga.gov.hr/highlights/the-council-for-the-civil-society-development/163>

55 Open letter to public authorities: <https://www.gong.hr/hr/aktivni-gradani/civilno-drustvo/imenujte-predstavnika-tijela-javne-vlasti-u-savjet/>

# Country Monitor: Czechia



Living and working conditions in Czechia have improved a lot during recent years, according to SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group (NSG) – led by Multikulturní Centrum Praha – and national statistics, such as those published by the Czech Statistical Office CZSO.<sup>1</sup> Czechia is a high performer in the domains of, education, and social connections, but it ranks below average in housing, income, civic engagement, and environmental quality.<sup>2</sup> The gap between the richest and poorest quintiles of the population is increasing: the top 20% earns four times as much as the bottom 20%. And the gender pay gap is still among the highest in Europe. One of the main challenges for the country will be to improve housing conditions, by making housing more accessible and affordable, as too large a share of households' budgets is dedicated to housing expenses. Lastly, the National Strategy Group is concerned by the extremely low salaries for low-skilled jobs and calls for further training, as well as the recognition of more courses and nonformal education certificates.

1 CZSO: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/home>

2 OECD (2021) Better Life Index – Czech Republic. <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/czech-republic/>

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>3</sup></b>	24.0	24.0	24.2	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>4</sup></b>	2.2%	2.0%	2.6%	7.1%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>5</sup></b>	55.7	55.2	56.7 (2021)	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>6</sup></b>	3.5%	3.5%	3.7%	9.2% (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>7</sup></b>	15.7%	15.4%	15.2%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>8</sup></b>	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

As throughout Europe and beyond, the pandemic had particularly negative consequences on the Czech economy, and real GDP fell 5.8% in 2020.<sup>9</sup> This posed difficult challenges for the welfare system, which nevertheless provided increased support to social services and healthcare – for example, increasing the number of healthcare workers.<sup>10</sup> Other measures were undertaken to support society and the economy during the Covid-19 pandemic, with the main objective being to support and maintain employment rates by contributing some of the cost of wages and supporting

entrepreneurs in the worst-hit sectors.<sup>11</sup> One year later, **labour taxation remains among the highest of European<sup>12</sup> and OECD countries,<sup>13</sup> and no exemption is foreseen for people on low incomes.** Against the overall trend in the EU, the tax wedge has increased since 2009, reaching 41.6% in 2020, and it puts single parents and one-earner households at a particular disadvantage.

Nevertheless, the employment rate is among the highest in the EU, and unemployment among the lowest. Therefore, Czechia

3 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

4 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

5 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/CZ>

6 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

7 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

8 CIVICUS (2021). Civic Space Monitor - Czechia: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/czech-republic/>

9 Eurostat (2021). Real GDP growth – volume <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00115/default/table?lang=en>

10 Ministry of Labour and social affairs (2020) Social benefits and allowances. <https://www.mpsv.cz/web/cz/davky-a-prispevky>

11 Government of the Czech Republic, (2021), Measures to support the economy. <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/epidemie-koronaviru/dulezite-informace/podpora-a-ulevy-pro-podnikatele-a-zamestnance-180601/>

12 Eurostat (2021) Tax rate on low wage earners: Tax wedge on labour costs [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/EARN\\_NT\\_TAXWEDGE](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-datasets/-/EARN_NT_TAXWEDGE)

13 OECD (2021) Taxing Wages – The Czech Republic <https://www.oecd.org/ctp/tax-policy/taxing-wages-czech-republic.pdf>

continues to perform well on the Social Scoreboard that supports the European Pillar of Social Rights and its recent Action Plan for implementation. But the labour market needs to become more accessible for groups in vulnerable situations, LGBTQI+ people, and women; the gender pay gap remains one of the highest in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the teaching profession's limited attractiveness and low social status, combined with low investment and wide socio-economic inequalities in education, mean that educational outcomes are decreasing, as is access to higher education.<sup>15</sup>

Geographical challenges also affect living conditions in the country. While housing prices keep increasing in the richer regions, the poorest areas suffer from social exclusion: they need significant investment in transport, the energy transition, and digitalisation.<sup>16</sup>

## GENDER EQUALITY

The National Strategy Group denounces the lack of improvement in gender equality over the past few years. Since 2010, the country's ranking in the European Gender Equality Institute's index has increased only 0.6 points. The European Index for Gender Equality (EIGE) classifies Czechia as the country with the third highest gender gap, behind only Hungary and Greece, so policies and structural reforms are

needed to promote equality in and accessibility to the labour market. Women earn 18.9% less than men,<sup>17</sup> and the gender pay gap is the highest among women aged 35 to 44, when women are often busy as mothers.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the National Strategy Groups welcomes the recent introduction of the LOGIB tool by the Czech government. This analytical tool allows public and private companies and employers to conduct research and assessments into the equality and fairness of salaries.<sup>19</sup>

In Czechia, parental leave is called *Rodicovská dovolená*. It lasts for up to 36 months and carries a benefit not higher than CZK 220,000 (€8,368)<sup>20</sup> for the entire leave period. Both employees and self-employed workers are eligible for parental leave.<sup>21</sup> Gender equality is far from a reality, as women make up more than 67% of the people taking care of elderly and disabled people and children.<sup>22</sup> This data reflects the fact the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment is higher among men (66.7%) and that there are relatively few women in positions of power: more than 80% of government ministers are men, as are 79.1% of members of the Czech parliament and 79.2% of members of the regional assemblies.<sup>23</sup> There are also few women on the boards of the largest quoted companies, and there are no women on the board of the Czech Central Bank.<sup>24</sup>

There is widespread discrimination against Roma people, and women are often the target of mistreatment. Some positive developments took place during the year, as the government

14 European Commission (2020) Country Report Czechia 2020 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2020-european\\_semiester\\_country-report-czech-republic\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2020-european_semiester_country-report-czech-republic_en.pdf)

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Eurostat (2021) Gender Pay Gap: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:GPG\\_2019\\_data.PNG](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:GPG_2019_data.PNG)

18 Eurostat (2021) Gender Pay Gap Statistics: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender\\_pay\\_gap\\_statistics#Part-time\\_versus\\_full-time\\_employment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_pay_gap_statistics#Part-time_versus_full-time_employment)

19 LOGIB Software: <https://www.rovnaodmena.cz/rovne-odmenovani/logib>

20 Consulted in August 2021.

21 EIGE (2021). Who is eligible for parental leave in Czechia? <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/who-eligible-parental-leave-czechia>

22 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/CZ>

23 EIGE (2021) Gender Statistics Database: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/domain/power/CZ>

24 Ibid.

said it was willing to implement a mechanism to provide compensation to Roma women who were victims of forced sterilisation.<sup>25</sup>

**The Czech NGO “Coalition Against Violence” reports that more than 160,000 women are victims of gender violence every year, but the parliament has still not ratified the Istanbul Convention on violence against women.** This number is likely to have increased during the pandemic due to the restrictions put in place. Therefore, the Czech government should take immediate action to develop an ad-hoc strategy.

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

Czechia is a destination country with an increasing number of migrants every year. They represent slightly more than 3% of the population, and around half hold a permanent residence permit, while the other half has some kind of short- or medium-term residence permit.<sup>26</sup> The highest number of migrants are those with permits to stay in the country for educational purposes. They are followed by those who have come for family reasons and those in the country for work.<sup>27</sup> Since the country joined the European Union in 2004, over 41,000 people with a migration background have acquired Czech citizenship.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the country has developed integration programmes for the beneficiaries of international protection. These now include support for finding accommodation, education, and healthcare, as well as guidance to apply for social benefits and language and civic education courses.

### GOOD PRACTICE CSOs’ representatives on the Committee on the Rights of Foreigners

Civil society organisations play an important role in the inclusion of migrant people. They manage three out of 13 Regional Integration Centres, and their representative are members of the Czech Committee on the Rights of Foreigners,<sup>29</sup> which is part of the Government Council for Human Rights. This role is primarily meant to provide policy advice and to monitor the implementation of current strategies for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX),<sup>30</sup> Czechia is increasingly developing policies to address its main weaknesses regarding the inclusion of migrant people. These include political participation and access to nationality, followed by access to healthcare and to permanent residence permits. In the last five years, the country has improved its education policies, allowing newcomers and locals to build stronger networks and interact together. In particular, the introduction of ad-hoc language courses and teacher training to reflect diversity has helped Czechia to support immigrant children and their teachers, resulting in a better learning environment.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the National Strategy Group agrees with the findings of the MIPEX report that Czech integration policies create as many opportunities as obstacles. The NSG believes that the country should

25 Amnesty International, (2021), Annual Report 2020 – Czech Republic: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/czech-republic/report-czech-republic/>

26 Czech Statistical Office (2021) Foreigners statistics. <https://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci/cizinci-pocet-cizincu>

27 European Commission (2020) Governance of Migrant Integration in the Czech Republic. <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/governance/czech-republic>

28 Ibid.

29 Government of the Czech Republic, Committee on the Rights of Foreigners. <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rlp/vybory/pro-prava-cizincu/uvod-55935/>

30 MIPEX (2020) Migrant integration policy index – Czechia. <https://mipex.eu/czech-republic>

31 Ibid.

make it easier for newcomers to access civic and political rights, as well as to obtain long-term residency permits. **Despite scoring average among European countries on integration policies, Czechia is a leader in Eastern Europe, with more advanced policies than most of its neighbouring countries.**

## WORKING CONDITIONS

As in the rest of Europe and beyond, working conditions in Czechia have been altered by the introduction of new regulations to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Some changes are probably here to stay and will become a common part of working life in Czechia. It will likely continue in the long term to be possible to work from home and abroad and to work more-flexible hours. The digitalisation of everyday activities, too, is expected to remain.<sup>32</sup>

The amendment act to the Czech Labour Code passed on 10 June 2020<sup>33</sup> contains a regulatory framework for the introduction of a new form of “shared workplace”. This will allow employees to work from home or in the office according to their needs and without the intervention of their employer. This is considered a positive step forward in work-life balance and will be useful in coming years for regulating telework and making life easier for people with caring duties, a large majority of whom are women.

Despite the unfavourable situation created by the pandemic, average wages increased slightly in 2020 from 2019. **The minimum wage rose by 4%, and bigger increases came in education, health, and social care.**<sup>34</sup> **Nevertheless, the growth is expected to cease eventually as a consequence of the long-term impact of the pandemic.**<sup>35</sup> Therefore, in order to maintain the living conditions and purchasing power of the population, the government should introduce measures such as care allowances to mitigate future losses of income.

The National Strategy Group expresses its concern over the government tax package that was approved in December 2020. This will reduce the tax rate on gross wages from 20.1% to 15%,<sup>36</sup> increasing employees’ net salaries. However, neither employers’ organisations nor trade unions are positive about the package. Employers are afraid that the lost public revenues will increase the tax burden on companies,<sup>37</sup> while trade unions believe that it will slow down the growth in nominal wages, as well as increasing households’ expenses, if the state provides fewer public services.<sup>38</sup>

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

During the last few years, the country has registered progress in reducing early school leaving, lowering the rate below the European average. The majority of pupils – 71.3% of students – in upper secondary education are

32 Lehmann, S., Veverková, S., (2021). Czechia: Working life in the Covid-19 pandemic 2020, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA)

33 Amendment act No. 262/2006 to the Czech Labour Code, June 2020: <https://aplikace.mvcr.cz/sbirka-zakonu/ViewFile.aspx?-type=c&id=38891>

34 Lehmann, S., Veverková, S., (2021). Czechia: Working life in the Covid-19 pandemic 2020, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA)

35 Aktuálně.cz (2020). Krize nekrize, mzdy v Česku dál rostou. Polovina lidí však bere méně než 31 tisíc. 4.12. 2020.

36 Lehmann, S., Veverková, S., (2021). Czechia: Working life in the Covid-19 pandemic 2020, Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA)

37 Čížek, B., Štípek, V. (2020). Daňový balíček schválen. SP ČR

38 ČMKOS (2020). Předpoklady pro ekonomický vývoj v roce 2021



enrolled in vocational training rather than other kinds of schools.<sup>39</sup> As vocational education and training is very popular in Czechia, the National Strategy Group believes that it requires additional attention and strengthened recognition in order to ensure the employability of its graduates.

The National Strategy Group reports that there are still important differences between education systems across the country, as education administration is decentralised to municipalities. This makes it fragmented and, often, unequal. The NSG denounces some municipalities' lack of experience or resources to develop high-quality public education, especially in the poorest areas of the country. This results in differences in the performances of students and learners. The NSG believes that immediate targeted support is needed to provide assistance to disadvantaged students, and this should continue beyond the pandemic.

**In 2020, the Czech government adopted a new Strategy for Education Policy for 2030 and beyond,<sup>40</sup> which sets the main priorities for education and training over the next 10 years.** The primary issue highlighted in the strategy is the need to modernise non-formal education and lifelong learning through two main objectives: adapting learning to long-term trends such as climate change and digitalisation; and reducing inequalities, through individual teaching and teaching methods aimed at diverse groups. The objectives set out in the strategy are supposed to be achieved through stable, increased funding for education, aimed particularly at reducing the number of students per teacher.

In response to the pandemic, an amendment to the Education Act adopted in August 2020 made distance education an equivalent form of education. Nevertheless, according to the Czech School Inspectorate, more than 12% of primary school pupils did not have access to online learning during the first phase of the pandemic.<sup>41</sup>

39 Eurydice (2020) Czech Republic Overview, [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/czech-republic\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/czech-republic_en)

40 MŠMT - Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy, (2020) Strategie vzdělávací politiky ČR do roku 2030+ / Strategy for Education Policy of the Czech Republic until 2030+. <https://www.msmt.cz/file/54104/>

41 Amnesty International, (2021), Annual Report 2020 – Czech Republic: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/czech-republic/report-czech-republic/>

# Social protection and inclusion

The National Strategy Group reports its concerns over poverty in the country: **10% of the population lives in poverty, and the share is 19% among children up to 17 years old. Homelessness is increasing at a steady pace, and about 33% of households with one parent are at risk of poverty.<sup>42</sup> In general, 17.6% of Czech households find it difficult to make ends meet.** The problem is mainly encountered by women and single mothers, highlighting the gender pay gap and the gap in employment rates.<sup>43</sup>

The category of people most at permanent risk of poverty is those with low-income jobs and no assets, and they make up 20% of the Czech population. Poverty has particularly heavy consequences for the personal and career development of vulnerable groups such as women, minorities, migrants, and people with disabilities or chronic illness. For these people, unexpected expenses or illness could land them in extreme poverty. They are at high risk of falling into devastating debt if they need healthcare, with migrants particularly vulnerable. Indeed, Czechia is the only European country that restricts access to public healthcare for children of employed third-country nationals<sup>44</sup> whose healthcare is covered by an employment contract in their home country. Therefore, third-country nationals who are pregnant, who have premature babies, or who are living with disabilities are in a dangerous situation.

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Open letter to the Czech government

A group of migrant workers in Czechia launched a petition<sup>45</sup> calling on the government to grant access to healthcare and insurance for children with employed migrant parents. The letter strongly demands that the prime minister end discrimination against migrant children. The main argument is that these families pay the same level of taxes in Czechia as other households, so they should receive the same treatment.

## ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The NSG is concerned over rapidly growing housing costs, as a result of which many Czech households struggle to access affordable housing, especially in the main cities. House prices have increased faster than household incomes, making it harder for newcomers and young people to find decent and affordable housing.<sup>46</sup> **Nearly 10% of the population spends more than 40% of their net income on housing,<sup>47</sup> but homes are often located in old, unsafe buildings that need improvements in energy, heating, and insulation.**

42 EAPN (2021) Poverty Watch Report 2020 – Czech Republic: <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-PW-2020-Czech-Republic-ENG-4746.pdf>

43 Ibid.

44 European Website on Integration (2020) Czech Republic: <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/czech-republic-new-initiative-demands-access-to-public-health-insurance-for-children-of-employed-migrants>

45 The petition is available online at the following website: [https://www.petice.com/petice\\_za\\_vstup\\_dti\\_vech\\_pracujicich\\_v\\_r\\_do\\_systemu\\_zdravotniho\\_pojitni](https://www.petice.com/petice_za_vstup_dti_vech_pracujicich_v_r_do_systemu_zdravotniho_pojitni)

46 OECD (2021) Housing Affordability in Cities in the Czech Republic: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/bcddcf4a-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/bcddcf4a-en>

47 EAPN (2021) Poverty Watch Report 2020 – Czech Republic: <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-PW-2020-Czech-Republic-ENG-4746.pdf>

The National Strategy Group denounces the lack of adaptation of social housing to the needs of low-income and vulnerable groups and underlines that there is not enough supply to meet the demand from all the low-income households that apply.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Czech households in need of social housing are often obliged to turn to private housing with bad living conditions such as dormitories.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the number of both young and elderly homeless people is growing. The majority – around 11,600 people – sleep outside or in occasional night shelters.<sup>50</sup>

The NSG therefore calls for the fast adoption of a comprehensive national regulation on affordable housing to tackle this emergency. This should clearly define the duties and responsibilities of municipalities, regions, and the government in addressing and tackling homelessness and social inclusion.

## TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

According to the European Commission, Czechia generates 3.5% of EU greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). The country has acted slowly on GHG reduction for more than 15 years, and the National Strategy Groups denounces its lack of effective measures for a just and radical climate transition. The country has an energy-intensive industrial

economy, which accounts for 60% of its total emissions.<sup>51</sup> Currently, Czechia's plans for reducing GHG emissions mainly focus on eliminating coal and lignite from energy production by 2038,<sup>52</sup> but the National Strategy Group finds this choice highly concerning. The regions producing energy through coal are indeed those with the country's highest rates of unemployment, poverty, and early school leaving. To ensure social justice, the NSG therefore suggests introducing a support mechanism for local communities and the more than 21,000 employees who are currently dependent on coal mining at the same time as GHG reduction strategies. The steepest increase in emissions in recent years has come in the transport sector.

Although the country doubled its share of renewable energies from 9.9% in 2009 to 16.2% in 2019, its aim of increasing this share to 22% by 2030<sup>53</sup> was described as unambitious by a European Parliament report on Czechia's climate action. **The National Strategy Group, together with various journalists,<sup>54</sup> denounces a lack of prioritisation for sustainability in the investment of available national sources of funding, as well as a lack of penalisation for projects using fossil fuels.** Indeed, it is likely that a large part of what Czechia receives from the EU Just Transition Fund will go to chemical plants, and that research funds will continue to prioritise activities related to fossil fuels.

48 EAPN (2021) Poverty Watch Report 2020 – Czech Republic: <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-PW-2020-Czech-Republic-ENG-4746.pdf>

49 Ibid

50 FEANTSA (2021) Country Profile Czech Republic - 2020: [https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/country\\_profiles/CZ\\_Country\\_Profile\\_2020.pdf](https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/country_profiles/CZ_Country_Profile_2020.pdf)

51 European Parliament (2020), Report: Climate Action in Czechia: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689329/EPFS\\_BRI\(2021\)689329\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/689329/EPFS_BRI(2021)689329_EN.pdf)

52 Czech Government, Coal Commission (2019): <https://www.mpo.cz/cz/energetika/uhelna-komise/uhelna-komise--248771/>

53 Czech Republic (2019) National Energy and Climate Plan of the Czech Republic: [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/cs\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/cs_final_necp_main_en.pdf) (p.29)

54 See: Plevák, O., (2020) Babi's conflict of interest debacle, a never-ending story: [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/babis-conflict-of-interest-debacle-a-never-ending-story/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/babis-conflict-of-interest-debacle-a-never-ending-story/), or: Zachová, A., (2020) Green EU funds to Czechia's big players: [https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short\\_news/green-eu-funds-to-czechias-big-players/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/green-eu-funds-to-czechias-big-players/)

# Civic space

Civic space in Czechia remains open, as indicated by CIVICUS's Civic Space Monitor.<sup>55</sup> Overall, the National Strategy Group (NSG) considers that freedom of civic space is sufficiently respected and protected. The only legal modifications during the year aimed to minimise the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, most of the provisions remained in force even after the state of emergency was lifted on 12 April 2021. Restrictions still in place include a limit on public gatherings, which defines a maximum number of participants depending on the epidemiological situation. However, freedom of peaceful assembly remains protected: organisers are obliged to declare upcoming events to the public authorities, but no formal authorisation is required.

The National Strategy Group reports some concerns in the domain of freedom of speech because of the private influence in Czech television and radio, which represent a big portion of the country's media coverage. According to the International Press Institute, there have been various attempts to remove specific people from the councils that govern both Czech radio and television, because the people were considered responsible for broadcasting news critical of the government. Interference in the independence of public media is therefore increasing. Moreover, as Reporters Without Borders reports,<sup>56</sup> Czech journalists are facing increasing threats and unrestrained verbal attacks from government officials, which are spreading a climate of mistrust in journalists and the press.

55 CIVICUS (2021) Czech Republic: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/czech-republic/>

56 RSF (2021) Czech Republic report: <https://rsf.org/en/czech-republic>

# Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

The NSG reports that social dialogue in Czechia, known also as the Tripartita (Tripartite),<sup>57</sup> is carried out by three main types of entity: employers' organisations, the government, and trade unions. CSOs do not generally take part in social dialogue procedures, particularly at high levels. Rather, they play a consultative role on different advisory bodies for specific issues – such as the environment, gender issues, housing, Roma rights, and employment – where most cooperation takes place at the regional level. However, they need more time to review policy, legislation and programme proposals, and their lack of stable funding often limits CSOs' capacity to have a real influence at national level.

In addition, **the National Strategy Group denounces the way the drafting of the Czech**

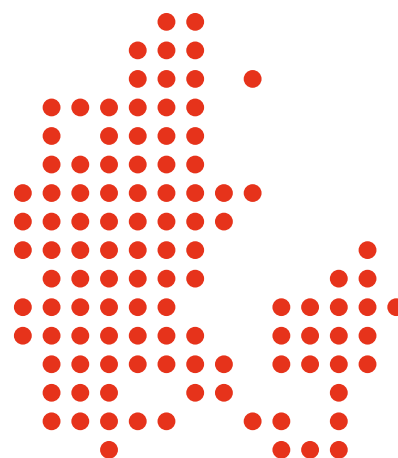
**Recovery and Resilience Plan has largely been going on behind closed doors.** Civil society organisations were not invited to participate in the process, and there has not been any attempt to inform the public about the most current version of the plan, which includes changes up to the end of March 2021.

Despite this lack of respect for the partnership principle, the NSG reports that the final version of the Czech Recovery and Resilience Plan has undergone several major positive modifications since the first draft was published in October 2020 due to pressure from CSOs and the European Commission. Harmful projects erased from the plan include investment in highways, re-financialisation of newly legislated tax reforms, and investments in liquefied or natural gas (LNG/CNG) vehicles.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Czechia -Tripartita: <https://www.tripartita.cz/social-dialogue/>

<sup>58</sup> Bankwatch, (2021) Report on the Czech Recovery Plan: <https://bankwatch.org/blog/czech-recovery-plan-a-few-steps-away-from-being-on-the-right-path>

# Country Monitor: Denmark



Just like other EU member states, Denmark is experiencing increasing social inequalities, which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. To ensure a smooth recovery from the significant economic and social hardships hitting the entire social fabric, the National Strategy Group (NSG) recommends prioritising the protection of employment and the creation of new jobs. This should be done through closer cooperation between the branches of the Danish government, civil society, and the trade unions. In light of the newly demonstrated acute need for accessible healthcare for everyone, the National Strategy Group recommends readdressing healthcare provision. It should be changed so that migrants, undocumented people, and refugees can access professional healthcare facilities without fearing expulsion or deportation.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	27.8	27.5	27.3	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	5.1%	5.0%	5.6%	7.1%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	/	77.4	77.8 (2021)	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	6.1%	6.3%	6.1%	9.2% (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	9.2%	10.0%	9.5%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

Fair working conditions and access to the labour market have for a long time been closely monitored by the daily presence of trade union representatives in most workplaces. **Despite the pandemic, Danish trade unions remained on the frontline, thanks to their high membership and role in collective bargaining.** They had successful consultations with the Danish government and employers' organisations on equal opportunities and working conditions, and they concluded 14 tripartite agreements – between government, trade unions, and employers organisations – which was the highest number of agreements signed in such a short period since this form of social dialogue was established in 1987. The agreements quickly responded to the

disruptions caused by the health and economic crisis: 12 had direct effects on Denmark's welfare system.<sup>7</sup> The National Strategy Group highlights one on temporary wage compensation for furloughed workers, which entered into force on 14 March 2020 and gives employees compensation equivalent to 75% of their salary.

Despite the positive support from social partners to mitigate the unemployment crisis during the pandemic, unemployment benefits in Denmark are far from universal. **To be entitled to unemployment benefits, people must meet several strict requirements that often hinder access to social assistance.** Requirements include continuous membership of the unemployment insurance fund for

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/DK>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Denmark: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/denmark/>

7 Fagbevægelsens Hovedorganisation (2020) One year – 14 tripartite agreements: <https://fho.dk/blog/2020/11/22/et-aar-ti-trepartsaftaler/>

at least one of the previous three years and a gross income of at least DKK 243,996 for full-time insured employee or DKK 162,660 for a part-time insured employee. In addition, beneficiaries must be registered at a job centre (physical or online), where they must update their CV and other documents and be actively looking for employment.<sup>8</sup>

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Despite several programmes developed throughout the year to assist newcomers to Denmark, many obstacles still hinder the inclusion of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. As reported by the National Strategy Group, foreign workers residing in Denmark have to be in a full-time employment for at least three-and-a-half years to obtain permanent residence. Moreover, it is problematic that eligibility requirements cannot be fulfilled when any kind public social assistance has been received over the five previous years. For this reason, many immigrant workers in Denmark do not dare register as unemployed, even if they have lost their jobs due to the Covid-19 crisis.

Nevertheless, the National Strategy Group reports that some positive steps have been made in the context of the expansion of “integration basic education” (IGU).<sup>9</sup> It is a programme for 2021-2024, which aims to help refugees entering the labour market through specific training and courses in collaboration with both job centres and educational institutions.

However, Denmark has undertaken a hazardous action against migrant people without legal residence, the National Strategy Group reports. **Migrants without legal residence who reached out to the Danish national health-care system for Covid treatment were isolated in asylum centres** (either Center Brovst in North Jutland or Center Gribskov in North Zealand). **After recovering, they were sent back to their countries of origin.** This decision was criticised strongly by several NGOs. Among others, Rådet for Socialt Udsatte, the Council for the Socially Vulnerable, and Gadejuristen, the Street Lawyers, said that such measures would have negative consequences for the whole population, as it would likely lead people not to get any medical treatment for fear of being repatriated. They would therefore avoid testing and isolation.<sup>10</sup>

## GENDER EQUALITY

Despite the generally high employment rate among women in Denmark (73.2%, in comparison to 77% among men in 2019),<sup>11</sup> Danmarks Statistik – the Danish statistics agency – reports that both **wage and pension gaps persist**.<sup>12</sup> The wage gap between men and women in 2019 was 12.8%, a figure that has been decreasing since 2005, when the gap was 16.2%. The inequality is believed to result from several factors, in particular the traditional understanding of “male” and “female” jobs, the greater extent of part-time employment among women, and maternity leave being significantly longer than parental leave.<sup>13</sup>

8 FOA (2021) Unemployment benefits eligibility: <https://www.foa.dk/a-kasse/ledig/dagpenge-abc/dagpenge-feriedagpenge-dagpengeplus>

9 KL (2020) New agreement on strengthening the integration basic education: <https://www.kl.dk/forsidenyheder/2020/december/regeringen-og-arbejdsmarkedets-parter-enige-om-styrkelse-af-integrationsgrunduddannelsen/>

10 See the press article with the declaration of different NGOs on the topic of repatriation of migrants after treatment: <https://arbejder.dk/indland/fagfolk-kritiserer-regeringens-coronaindsats-overfor-hjeml%C3%B8se-migranter>

11 Statista (2020) Employment rate by gender, Denmark: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1166044/employment-rate-in-denmark-by-gender/>

12 Danmarks Statistik (2020) [https://www.djoef-forlag.dk/openaccess/samf/samfdocs/2020/2020\\_1/Samf\\_2\\_1\\_2020.pdf](https://www.djoef-forlag.dk/openaccess/samf/samfdocs/2020/2020_1/Samf_2_1_2020.pdf)

13 Aarhus University (2020) Gender equality in Denmark is a myth: <https://bss.au.dk/insights/business-2/2020/ligestilling-i-danmark-er-en-myte/>



According to the European Gender Equality Index 2020, Denmark remains the second highest performer – after Sweden – in gender equality. **The National Strategy Group finds that the biggest challenges to gender equality in Denmark are an unequal participation of fathers in parental leave; a low number of women in leadership positions; and so-called gender-segregated jobs, which are closely related to the wage gap, as jobs typically considered to be women's are paid significantly less than those traditionally considered to be men's.**<sup>14</sup> To address the lack of women in leadership and decision-making positions, the Danish Ministry of Transport and Housing introduced several practices. Firstly, half of all participants in training as potential leaders have to be women, and managers must openly discuss the barriers faced by women when applying for managerial positions. Secondly, since 2020, the department requires an equal distribution between women and men of tasks that provide management experience, and it encourages male employees to take parental leave. The success of the initiative is currently being monitored in the department's annual wellbeing survey.<sup>15</sup>

To favour higher participation of fathers in parental leave, the length of paternity leave has been increased slightly. The most recent tripartite agreement, OK2020,<sup>16</sup> introduces longer parental leave for fathers and co-parents, who can now claim up to eight weeks instead of the previous five. The leave is fully paid and cannot be transferred to the pregnant parent. The National Strategy Group recommends monitoring whether the extension in paternity leave mitigates the pay gap between men and women in the future.

## ADULT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

2020 can be considered a successful year for reforms to improve vocational education and training. **The reforms have been focusing on preparing the Danish labour force for new demands in various specialisations after the corona crisis.** According to the agreement,<sup>17</sup> unemployed people over the age of 30 are entitled to enrol in and attend a vocational education training course. If this is in an area where there is a labour shortage, they will receive unemployment benefit raised to 110% of the normal level. The choice of training is therefore strictly related to demand in the labour market, but it is still possible to train in other domains. If an unemployed person wishes to start vocational education in an area that is not recommended, they will still receive 80% of their unemployment benefit. These initiatives aim to prepare the Danish labour force for new demands for different specialisations after the Covid pandemic, **as well as for the green and digital twin transitions.**

All unemployed people have also been given the right to a short vocational course from the first day of unemployment, so that they can receive updates and training. Nevertheless, the National Strategy Group reports that the scheme's main limitation is its requirement of being over 30 years of age and a member of an unemployment insurance fund.

14 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index – Denmark: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/DK>

15 Ministry of Labour (2020), Ligestilling i Stat, Kommune og Region / Gender Equality in the State, Municipality, and Region <http://www.ligestillingidanmark.dk/files/rapporter/7239-Inspirationskatalog.pdf>

16 KVINFO (2020) OK2020: <https://kvinfo.dk/ok2020-giver-mere-ligestilling-med-faedreorlov/>

17 The Danish Agency for Labor Market and Recruitment (2020): <https://bm.dk/arbejdsomraader/aktuelle-fokusomraader/ledige-loefte-i-krisen/>, <https://virk.dk/myndigheder/stat/STAR/selvbetjening/Voksenlaerling/#tab1>

# Social protection and inclusion

## SOCIAL HOUSING

Public housing is an important element of the Danish welfare system. According to the Danish Ministry of Transport and Housing, there are about 540,000 public housing units, and around 1 million Danes today live in public housing.<sup>18</sup> In 2021, housing benefit is a maximum of DKK 4,230 per month, a 2.3% increase from 2020, which is only a slight improvement considering the economic hardship that the pandemic caused households and families. In 2021, loans can be granted for both apartments and single rooms. As a general rule, the municipality must grant a loan if the household's income is below certain designated thresholds.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the National Strategy Group considers these changes mildly positive, as they can benefit many people. However, they are predominantly linked to annual inflation rates, so they do not adequately reflect the extent of economic insecurities experienced by many Danes in 2020.

In addition, **the Danish Parliament reached an agreement in May 2020 to allocate DKK 30.2 billion up to 2026 for the green renovation of public homes.**<sup>20</sup> The agreement aims to encourage healthy and up-to-date public housing. Though it is too early to provide an assessment of the initiative, the National Strategy Group expects it to generate positive effects for the environment and for residents' housing expenses.

## HEALTHCARE

The Danish healthcare system is publicly funded, which means that all citizens or registered foreigners have the right to be examined, treated by a doctor (including both a general practitioner and specialists), and be hospitalised free of charge. **The Danish public healthcare system ensures there is little inequality in access to medical care between the lowest- and highest-income residents.** A 2020 OECD report found that in 2017, only 1% of the population felt they had unmet medical needs due to payments, waiting times, or distance.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the country's health spending has been increasing over the last decade and is now higher than the European average. Danish healthcare planning and delivery is assigned to regional and local authorities, so the system is rather decentralised.

**The National Strategy Group reports that undocumented migrants are Denmark's most vulnerable group when it comes to access to healthcare.** Under ordinary circumstances, a patient must provide proof of identity and present a health insurance "yellow card" before seeing a doctor. Therefore, although hospitals are obliged to provide adequate medical assistance in acute situations to everyone regardless of their status, undocumented patients still face numerous issues. These include a lack of medical records, language barriers, and the fear of expulsion if reported to the authorities by public officials working in healthcare.

18 Danish Ministry of Transport and Housing (2020) <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2020/bred-politisk-aftale-om-groen-renovering-af-almene-boliger/>

19 Kerteminde Kommune (2020) Loans for residents: <https://kerteminde.dk/borger/borgerservice/laan-til-beboerindskud>

20 Ministry of Transport and Housing Ministry of Climate, Energy and Supply (2020), political agreement on green renovation of public housing: <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2020/bred-politisk-aftale-om-groen-renovering-af-almene-boliger/>

21 OECD (2020) State of Health in the EU – Country Health Profile 2019: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/5eede1c6-en.pdf?expires=1629627663&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=F5BD6469C860C063899EF7C461574A66>

## POVERTY

According to a recently published OECD report, **Denmark has the third lowest proportion of citizens with a disposable income less than half of the median.**<sup>22</sup> However, the pandemic and its measures reversed the positive trend. In January 2020, the Labour Movement's Business Council reported<sup>23</sup> that the number of Danish residents living in poverty was stagnant, if not increasing. Over the rest of the year, 15,000 families applied for Danish People's Aid seasonal help packages, the highest number in the last 14 years.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Employment jointly announced that in 2021 the government would introduce a new poverty-line calculation<sup>24</sup> to monitor poverty more closely and help it to pursue active labour market and social policies.

### Good Practice – Ellengården

A positive example of cooperation between NGO services and governmental institutions is Bostedet Ellengården in Aarhus, a self-governing institution that operates under an agreement with the Aarhus municipality.<sup>25</sup> Approximately 50 families per year are offered temporary accommodation and professional support. The organisation, a network of 18 nationwide organizations, supports such placements with support from the government. The programme offers 13 emergency apartments and 11 longer-term “eviction homes”, where support is offered for up to two years to people who have been evicted. The main beneficiaries are women and families with children under the age of 18 who do not have – or cannot stay in – their own home.

## Civic space

Civic space in Denmark is considered to be open by CIVICUS, which carries out frequent monitoring activities.<sup>26</sup> **Although Denmark has a long tradition of safeguarding individual rights and personal freedom, the Covid-19 pandemic imposed severe restrictions on citizens and civic liberties, as happened across Europe and beyond.**

During 2020, no changes were reported in the area of freedom of association, which is guaranteed by Article 78 of the Danish Constitution.<sup>27</sup>

This grants the freedom to establish an organisation, provided that its purpose is in accordance with the law.

In Denmark, as in other European countries, the boundaries for imposing restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly are blurry. Indeed, the National Strategy Group reports that the current interpretation of the constitution assumes that a general restriction, such as a ban on assembly, must be “necessary and proportionate”. During the pandemic, according to the

22 CEPOS (2021) Danmark har den 7. laveste ulighed blandt OECD-landene: <https://www.cepos.dk/abcepos-artikler/0004-danmark-har-den-7-laveste-ulighed-blandt-oecd-landene/>

23 Andersen, L. (2019) Combating poverty requires social policy action: <https://www.ae.dk/debatindlaeg/2019-11-bekaempelse-af-fattigdom-kraever-socialpolitisk-indsats>

24 Joint statement by the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Employment (2021): <https://sm.dk/nyheder/nyhedsarkiv/2021/maj/vi-vil-bekaempe-boerndefattigdom-i-danmark>

25 Ellengården - home for homeless families: <https://www.aarhus.dk/borger/personlig-hjaelp-og-stoette/kriseramte-familier/ellengarden/>

26 CIVICUS (2021) Denmark: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/denmark/>

27 Danish Constitutional Act: <https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/en/democracy/the-constitutional-act-of-denmark>

initial precautionary measures from 17 March 2020, the restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly were not sanctionable: they served only as guidelines, advising against the gathering of large crowds. Initially, this referred to groups of more than 1,000 people, but the restrictions were later tightened to apply to groups of more than 10.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the regulations did not apply to private homes or assemblies for political or other causes, such as demonstrations.<sup>29</sup>

Discussion of freedom of speech in 2020 has generally been positive in Denmark. Human rights organisations monitored and reported on precautionary measures imposed by the Danish government and their potential effects on freedom of speech. In April 2020, the Freedom of Expression Commission published a monitor that highlighted the Danish public's continued support for free media and their consequent high degree of trust in free journalism.<sup>30</sup>

## The national recovery and resilience plan

Denmark has a longstanding tradition of civil organisation, voluntary work, and collective bargaining. This reflects a culture of mutual cooperation between the public, private, and third sectors. As reported throughout this chapter, social partners played a crucial role during the year, concluding 14 tripartite agreements. These mainly addressed unemployment, working conditions, and social security schemes. **However, the National Strategy Group reported that the situation has unfortunately not been the same for civil society organisations. These pointed to a lack of consultation and involvement, both in Covid-19 measures and in drafting the national Recovery and Resilience Plan.**

### Good Practice – The Civil Society Strategy: A Handbook

The Danish Civil Society task force recently released a handbook containing a list of recommendations for the government's civil society strategy.<sup>31</sup> These were translated into 12 concrete initiatives under three headings: participation and community for all; an infrastructure that supports people and helps them develop; and knowledge. The handbook says that a strong civil society fosters social cohesion and generates voluntary commitment to take personal responsibility on common issues. In the end, such action will benefit the whole community.

28 Danish Government (2021) Covid-19 Emergency Laws in Denmark: <https://svjt.se/svjt/2020/1098>

29 Institute for Human Rights (2020) Seven Recommendations for the next health crisis: <https://menneskeret.dk/nyheder/syv-anbefalinger-naeste-sundhedskrise>

30 Danish Freedom of Expression Commission (2020), Ytringsfrihed i Danmark / Freedom of Expression in Denmark: <https://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Pressemeddelelser/pdf/2020/ytringsfrihedsundersogelse.pdf>

31 The Civil Society Strategy: <https://sm.dk/media/8127/strategi-for-et-staerkere-civilsamfund.pdf>

Country Monitor:  
**Estonia**



	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	30.6	30.5	30.5	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	5.4%	4.4%	6.8%	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	59.8 (2019)	60.7 (2020)	61.6 (2021)	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	9.5%	10.3%	10.5%	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	12.6%	13.9%	12.7%	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

Estonia has an aging and decreasing population, but over the last 20 years, its people's healthy life expectancy has increased. Considering the ratio of people aged between five and 14 to those aged between 55 and 64, it is estimated that more people will leave the Estonian labour market than enter in the next decade. **A recent analysis indicates that by 2024 there will be almost 50,000 fewer people of working age in Estonia. This trend is putting increasing pressure on the labour market and its growing needs, as well as on the country's system of social**

**protection.** More attention needs to be paid to the financial sustainability of the systems of social and health protection.<sup>7</sup>

However, the National Strategy Group reports that the State Budget Strategy 2022-2025 and Stability Programme 2021<sup>8</sup> did not put forward any decisive changes in welfare and taxation. The NSG recalls that wealth is not appropriately taxed – corporate income tax accounts for 5% of total tax revenue; and that real estate tax is almost non-existent – land tax accounts for 0.1% of total tax revenue.<sup>9</sup>

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2020). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/EE>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Estonia: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/estonia/>

7 Eesti Statistika (2021) Population Pyramid of Estonia 2021: <https://www.stat.ee/rahvastikupyramiid/?lang=en>

8 Rahandus Ministerium (2021) State Budget Strategies and Draft Budgetary Plans: <https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/state-budget-and-economy>

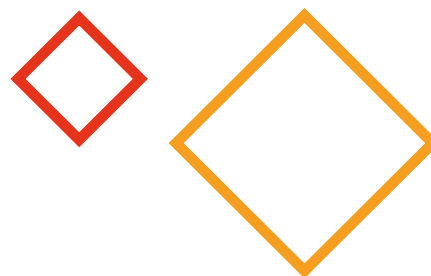
9 Ibid.

After the outbreak of the pandemic, additional measures were undertaken to protect employment and access to the labour market. A temporary subsidy was paid to employees of those employers whose activities were significantly disrupted by the restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund paid compensation of 60% of the employee's average monthly salary, up to a maximum of €1,000 per month.<sup>10</sup> This subsidy is estimated to have saved around 65,000 jobs,<sup>11</sup> reducing the number of people falling into extreme poverty – defined as those living on less than €220 per month.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the National Strategy Group reports that a state study allowance was provided to students from low-income families in order to cover the costs of education. The allowance, based on the revenues of students and their families, ranged from €75 to €220 per month.<sup>13</sup>

The pension system was changed in 2021 by the government that finished its mandate in January 2021. The change allows workers to withdraw money they have allocated to their pension fund,<sup>14</sup> therefore reducing pensions to the “first pillar” – that is, money added by the state. The National Strategy Group reports the introduction of this possibility as a negative development. People who make withdrawals from their pension funds will only receive very low pensions, which might result in a significant deterioration of their quality of life during retirement and old age.

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

As mentioned in last year's Social Rights Monitor, not many changes in Estonia's approach to migration have taken place in 2020 and 2021. The conservative government adopted strategies to limit migration in all its forms. Due to the pandemic, the number of newcomers to the country in 2020 fell around 11%.<sup>15</sup> Most of these came from Syria, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation.<sup>16</sup> **The National Strategy Group reports that borders were closed and that the government did not issue any working visas during the state of emergency.** However, when it again became possible to issue working visas in the second half of 2021, the demand for labour was lowered by the economic impact of the pandemic,<sup>17</sup> and there were 31% fewer registrations for short-term work than there had been before the pandemic. The decline was particularly sharp in the manufacturing and construction sectors, which are normally large employers of migrants.<sup>18</sup>



10 Eesti Töötukassa (2021) Temporary Subsidy Programme: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/eng/content/subsidies-and-benefits/temporary-subsidy-program-0>

11 Ibid.

12 Eesti Statistika (2021) Estimated subsistence minimum: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/well-being/social-exclusion-and-poverty/estimated-subsistence>

13 Ministry of Education and Research (2021) Study allowances and grants: <https://www.hm.ee/en/activities/higher-education/study-allowances-and-state-grants>

14 Rahandus Ministeerium (2021) Lisa pressiteatele - Teisest sambast raha väljavõtmise statistika: [https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/news-related-files/lisa-ii\\_sambast\\_lahkujate\\_statistika\\_1.4.2021.pdf](https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/news-related-files/lisa-ii_sambast_lahkujate_statistika_1.4.2021.pdf)

15 Eesti Statistika (2021) Migration: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/population/migration>

16 UNHCR (2021) Estonia Fact Sheet: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/Bi-annual%20fact%20sheet%202021%2002%20Estonia.pdf>

17 Eesti Pank (2021) Labour Market Review 2021: <https://www.eestipank.ee/en/publications/labour-market-review/2021/labour-market-review-12021>

18 Ibid.

## GOOD PRACTICE

### The International House of Estonia (IHE)

The International House of Estonia (IHE)<sup>19</sup> is based in Tallinn and provides newcomers with a wide range of services that help them settle in the country. Most importantly, it provides free consultation over essential documents, bureaucracy, housing possibilities, language courses, and family reunification. The IHE also wants to provide Estonian employers with useful information and training on how to hire and retain an international workforce.

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Estonian education and training institutions had to close their doors in March 2020 to reduce the spread of the coronavirus.<sup>20</sup> Learning and education activities were moved entirely online, and educational institutions cooperated with private companies to make use of online learning platforms.<sup>21</sup> As final school exams were cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, the government arranged additional state exams in 2021 for upper secondary school students<sup>22</sup> who had already graduated in 2020 but needed a graduation certificate in order to enrol in higher education institutions. This allowed students to pursue their academic careers in Estonia and abroad. However, the basic final examination and upper secondary state exams

were not cancelled or postponed<sup>23</sup> in 2021. The Estonian government needs concrete data on the impact of the pandemic and online teaching on students' skills and learning. Such data will help the government take adequate measures while planning next year's education strategy and mitigate gaps in learning that emerged during the pandemic. The Estonian Ministry of Education and Research has prepared a strategy to support the students who are most in need. It will provide additional courses to prepare for exams, compensatory courses before the beginning of the next academic year, and enhanced support for students' and teachers' mental health.<sup>24</sup>

The dropout rate was low in the early stages of education, but around 25% of young people left their studies in the first year of secondary education, according to figures from 2017. At universities, the dropout rate was even higher, at over 30% for bachelor's degree students.<sup>25</sup> More recent data confirm this trend. In 2021, the number of young people not in education increased by 1.3% compared to 2020.<sup>26</sup> **In 2020, 9.7% of people aged between 15 and 24 were not in employment, education or training, almost 3 percentage points higher than in 2019.**<sup>27</sup> However, as reported by the National Strategy Group, no accurate comparative data are yet ready to enable an assessment of the impact of the pandemic and of distance learning on Estonian education.

Overall, vocational and adult education in Estonia is functioning well, as 74.1% of adult Estonians currently have professional or vocational education certificates.<sup>28</sup> However, the target set by the Estonia 2035 Strategy is 80%.<sup>29</sup>

19 The International House of Estonia – IHE: <https://workinestonia.com/internationalhouse/>

20 ETUCE (2020) Estonia shares digital education tools for distance teaching and learning: <https://www.csee-etuice.org/en/policy-issues/covid-19/latest-updates/3646-estonia-shares-digital-education-tools-for-distance-teaching-and-learning>

21 Ibid.

22 EACEA (2021) Estonia: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-20\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-20_en)

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Parliament of Estonia Riigikogu (2017) Soolised lõhed hariduses: <https://rito.riigikogu.ee/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Valk.pdf>

26 Eesti Statistika (2021) Education: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/education>

27 Eesti Statistika (2021) The Tree of Truth – Education: <https://tamm.stat.ee/tulemusvaldkonnad/haridus/indikaatorid/79?lang=en>

28 Ibid.

29 Vabariigi Valitsus (2021) Eesti 2035: <https://valitsus.ee/strateegia-eesti-2035-arengukavad-ja-planeering/strateegia>



# Fair working conditions

The 2019 Guidelines and Recommendations for employers and employees on health and safety in telework<sup>30</sup> adopted by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs became particularly relevant for employees' working conditions after the outbreak of the pandemic. Teleworking became the norm for sectors in which it is possible. In 2020, 40,400 more people than in 2019 teleworked, reaching almost 200,000 people at the end of 2020.<sup>31</sup> The increase in women who teleworked was bigger than the increase in men.<sup>32</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that some of the positive aspects of teleworking were a better balance between work and personal life. However, employees working from home generally felt disconnected from their workplace.<sup>33</sup> During school closures, women were often left alone while working, taking care of children and young people, and doing most of the housework.<sup>34</sup>

**The unemployment rate reached 6.9% in the second quarter of 2021,<sup>35</sup> a dramatic increase from the recent annual minimum of 4.4% in 2019.** Until then, Estonia had been on a trend of decreasing unemployment, from a peak of 12.3% in 2011.<sup>36</sup> The pandemic and the measures to cope with it increased the

number of unemployed, exacerbating geographical inequalities. Northeastern Estonia registered double the unemployment rate of the northern region, where the capital Tallinn is located.<sup>37</sup> However, average monthly wages kept increasing from 2010 despite the pandemic. In June 2021, the average gross monthly salary was €1,448, a 6.7% increase from the previous year.<sup>38</sup>

In last year's chapter on Estonia, the increasing inappropriate use of contracts was mentioned, as more flexibility often coincided with reduced social protection for workers.<sup>39</sup> In 2020 and 2021, a new form of contract is being developed by a tripartite committee composed of the social partners – employees and employers – and the Ministry of Social Affairs. The new employment contract has been developed in order to increase flexibility, and it allows a variable number of working hours every week.<sup>40</sup> In April 2021, the Ministry of Social Affairs signed a goodwill agreement with the Estonian Trade Union of Commercial and Servicing Employees, the Estonian Traders' Association, the Estonian Trade Union Confederation, and the Estonian Employers' Confederation.<sup>41</sup> The new variable-hours contract<sup>42</sup> is now being tested

30 Eurofound (2020) Living and working in Estonia <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/estonia#working-life>

31 Eesti Statistika (2021) Aastaga lisandus üle 40 000 kaugtöö tegija: <https://www.stat.ee/et/uudised/aastaga-lisandus-ule-40-000-kaugtöö-tegija>

32 Ibid.

33 Ministry of Social Affairs (2017) Tulemusi tööelu-uuringust: Kui levinud on Eestis kaugtöö vormis töötamine: <https://somblogi.wordpress.com/2017/03/29/tulemusi-toöelu-uuringust-kui-levinud-on-eestis-kaugtöö-vormis-tootamine/>

34 EIGE (2021) Estonia Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/EE>

35 Eesti Statistika (2021) Unemployment rate: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/work-life/labour-market/unemployment-rate>

36 Ibid.

37 Eesti Statistika (2021) Labour status of population by region, county, and age group: [https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/sotsiaalelu\\_tooturg\\_tooturu-uldandmed\\_aastastatistika/TT4645](https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/sotsiaalelu_tooturg_tooturu-uldandmed_aastastatistika/TT4645)

38 Eesti Statistika (2021) Average monthly gross wages and salaries: <https://www.stat.ee/en/find-statistics/statistics-theme/work-life/wages-and-salaries-and-labour-costs/average-monthly-gross-wages-and-salaries>

39 Corti, M. (2020) Social Rights Monitor 2020 –Estonia Country Monitor: [https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/198/original/02\\_SRM2020\\_Estonia\\_RO\\_online\\_-\\_english.pdf?1608118623](https://www.solidar.org/system/downloads/attachments/000/001/198/original/02_SRM2020_Estonia_RO_online_-_english.pdf?1608118623)

40 Estonian Trade Union Confederation (2021) Hea tahte kokkuleppega tehakse ettepanek piloteerida jaekaubandussektoris paindlikumaid töölepinguid: <https://www.eakl.ee/hea-tahte-kokkuleppega-tehakse-etepanek-piloteerida-jaekaubandussektoris-paindlikumaid-toolepinguid>

41 Parliament of Estonia (2021) The Riigikogu extended the circle of people who are exempt from the restrictions on the acquisition of immovables: <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/sitting-reviews/the-riigikogu-extended-the-circle-of-people-who-are-exempt-from-the-restrictions-on-the-acquisition-of-immovables/>

42 Bill on Amendments to the Employment Contracts Act and the Taxation Act (403 SE): <https://www.riigikogu.ee/tegevus/eel-noud/eelnou/e95c54e0-c3bf-47e7-aea4-fc0875d7e85e/T%C3%B6C3%B6lepingu%20seaduse%20ja%20maksukorralduse%20seaduse%20muutmise%20seadus>

through a piloting experiment in the retail sector, in which employees can work an additional eight hours per week.<sup>43</sup> The National Strategy Group thinks that this new type of contract could potentially result in more people working shorter working weeks, while maintaining the employment protection granted by traditional employment contracts. The additional weekly working hours must be agreed by both employer and employee, but employees may come under pressure or obligation to accept the additional working time.

## GENDER EQUALITY

Progress in gender equality has slowed over the last couple of years.<sup>44</sup> Men and women are still not granted equal access to work or good working conditions. Part-time employment is more common among women than men, as the rate of full time equivalent (FTE) employment among women is 15.6 percentage points lower than that of men.<sup>45</sup> The gender pay gap decreased by 1.5 percentage points over the year. In 2020, women's average gross hourly pay was €7.70 and men's was €9.13. The largest gaps between men's and women's wages were in finance and insurance (29.4%), mining and quarrying (26.1%), and information and

communication (24.1%).<sup>46</sup> Gender inequality can also be seen in women's average monthly earnings, which are 23% below those of men. Women are therefore most at risk of living in poverty.<sup>47</sup>

On the plus side, parental leave in Estonia lasts for 36 months and can be transferred between the newborn's parents. However, self-employed workers are not eligible for parental leave.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, the allocation of time – one of the main indicators of the Gender Equality Index – reflects gender inequalities that are still present in the country: 76% of women say they are the person in charge of doing daily housework, while only 47% of men say the same.<sup>49</sup> This leaves women with less time to work and develop personal interests. In Estonia, as in the majority of the countries analysed, **gender inequalities are not adequately addressed by policies and laws to give equal opportunities to all. Decision-making and political power is mainly held by men in Estonia:** they represent 74% of members of the Estonian Parliament and 71% of members of regional and local assemblies.<sup>50</sup> The disproportion is even worse on the boards of large, quoted Estonian companies, where women represent just 9% of members.<sup>51</sup>

43 Ibid.

44 EIGE (2021) Estonia Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/EE>

45 Eesti Statistika (2021) Sooline palgalõhe vähenes aastaga taas: <https://www.stat.ee/et/uudised/sooline-palgalohe-2020>

46 Ibid.

47 EIGE (2021) Estonia Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/EE>

48 EIGE (2021) Who is eligible for parental leave in Estonia: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/who-eligible-parental-leave-estonia>

49 EIGE (2021) Estonia Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/EE>

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

# Social protection and inclusion

The Estonian constitution<sup>52</sup> is the main source of social protection rights, particularly through its second chapter, which recognizes the universal right to public assistance. It pays special attention to support for households living with children and people with disabilities. The constitution also says that social protection should be guaranteed to migrants. But the National Strategy Group reports that people without Estonian nationality need to be either in possession of a work contract or attending an educational institution in the country if they are to receive social-security and healthcare benefits. Others have to bear the costs themselves. This puts migrants who do not speak the Estonian language at a particular disadvantage, especially in healthcare.

## HEALTHCARE

Estonia has a unified national healthcare insurance system, which ensures access to all people with no distinction based on income or place of residence.<sup>53</sup> **Only 6.7% of national GDP is spent on healthcare,<sup>54</sup> and the system is mainly funded through workforce taxation, which contributes to the Haigekassa, the Estonian Health Insurance Fund (EHIF).<sup>55</sup>** In order to receive healthcare services in Estonia, someone must be a permanent resident of the country or be living there on a temporary

residence permit.<sup>56</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that, overall, Estonia has an efficient healthcare system with satisfied patients. However, they often have to wait on incredibly long waiting lists, especially in rural areas. A recently published analysis by the European office of the World Health Organization,<sup>57</sup> reports that Estonia significantly cut public health expenditure after the 2008 crisis. This led to an increase in patients' out-of-pocket payments, a trend that was not later reversed.

An analysis in 2021 by the Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs makes it clear that it is becoming less sustainable to finance healthcare from social contributions. It cited increasingly flexible forms of work as one particular cause. While people's expectations of healthcare are rising, the proportion of people contributing to health insurance is sharply decreasing, putting future generations at risk of not being adequately covered.<sup>58</sup>

**In 2021, remote healthcare services were introduced.<sup>59</sup>** Importantly, an online register<sup>60</sup> was created, a move particularly welcomed by the National Strategy Group. The NSG reports that communications between doctors and patients have been facilitated thanks to the digitization of medical records. Telehealth became more widespread in Estonia after March 2020, in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak. In 2021, healthcare professionals have provided

52 Estonian Constitution: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/530102013003/consolide>

53 European Union Social Fund (2021) Healthcare in Estonia 2021: [https://issuu.com/settleinestonia/docs/tervishoid\\_2021\\_eng](https://issuu.com/settleinestonia/docs/tervishoid_2021_eng)

54 Eurostat (2020) Healthcare expenditure statistics

55 Eesti Haigekassa – the Estonian Health Insurance Fund EHIF: <https://haigekassa.ee/en>

56 Ibid.

57 WHO Europe (2021) Spending on health in Europe: entering a new era: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/340910/9789289055079-eng.pdf>

58 Sotsiaalministeerium (2021) ANALÜÜS TERVISHOIUSÜSTEEMI RAHASTAMISE JÄTKUSUUTLIKKUSE NING AVIKINDLUSTAMATA ISIKUTELE TERVISHOIUTEENUSTE KÄTTESAADAVUSE TAGAMISEKS: [https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Tervishoid/tervishoiu\\_rahastamise\\_analuus.pdf](https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/content-editors/Tervishoid/tervishoiu_rahastamise_analuus.pdf)

59 European Union Social Fund (2021) Healthcare in Estonia 2021: [https://issuu.com/settleinestonia/docs/tervishoid\\_2021\\_eng](https://issuu.com/settleinestonia/docs/tervishoid_2021_eng)

60 Patsiendiportaal (Patient portal): <https://www.digilugu.ee/login>

specialised care services remotely. According to the National Strategy Group, the Estonian Health Insurance Fund now finances both remote visits and remote therapies, which can take place via phone or video chat. The National Strategy Group reports that the remote service provided most often at the beginning of 2021 was psychological help. Next most common were services in gynaecology, endocrinology, and neurology. The National Strategy Group thinks that remote services are a major innovation in Estonian healthcare.

## HOUSING

The housing and rental market in Estonia is not regulated by the state, and local authorities have limited possibilities to intervene. According to the National Strategy Group, municipalities can influence housing policy by planning and selling residential plots and granting building rights. During 2021, no major changes in housing policy were made. However, the country has already undertaken a process for developing the housing sector, as part of the Estonian National Development Plan of the Energy Sector Until 2030.<sup>61</sup> According to the National Strategy Group, it mainly provides support to renovate apartment buildings and small houses to improve their energy efficiency or to help low-income households with three or more children. In addition, the Plan grants allowances to adapt houses and apartments for people with physical disabilities, the National Strategy Group reports.

On average, Estonian households live in homes that are less overcrowded than the European average.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Estonia experiences lower percentages of people living in a house with

a leaking roof than the European average, and the majority of the people are able to keep their homes adequately warm.<sup>63</sup> However, Estonia registered the largest increase in house prices among European countries between 2010 and 2020: prices rose 96%, making it almost impossible for the majority of the population to buy a house. Most worryingly, rents in Estonia increased 156% over the same period (2010 to 2020), the biggest increase in the EU. This has had a dramatic impact, particularly on young people, who make up many lower-income households.<sup>64</sup>

## JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

The National Strategy Group reports that Estonians' perspective on the climate emergency and the necessity of adopting a just-transition approach is slowly changing. There is a clear recognition of the relationship between human activities and climate change, according to research published by the Ministry of the Environment in 2020.<sup>65</sup> However, the environmental situation in Estonia is considered to be generally good, so global problems such as climate change are considered distant and almost irrelevant for Estonia. Even when environmental disasters happen, such as more-frequent heat waves and an increase in storm surges, it is difficult for the majority of Estonians to link daily changes in the country's environment to the global situation.<sup>66</sup> However, Estonians perceive individual activities to be the main drivers of climate change and propose solutions such as reductions in consumption and car trips.<sup>67</sup> Compared to 2016, the number of people who consider that Estonia has not prepared adequately to deal with the climate

61 Eesti energiamaajanduse arengukava 2030: [https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/enmak\\_2030\\_koos\\_elamumajanduse\\_lisa-ga.pdf](https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/enmak_2030_koos_elamumajanduse_lisa-ga.pdf)

62 European Commission (2020) Quality of housing: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-1c.html?lang=en>

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Keskkonnaministeerium (2020) Eesti elanike keskkonnateadlikkuse uuring: <file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/Eesti%20elanike%20keskkonnateadlikkuse%20uuring%202020.pdf>

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

emergency had increased. Now, 43% of survey respondents are concerned about their ecological footprints and for the future of the next generations.

The contribution of the Estonian Recovery and Resilience Plan to just transition to a greener economy amounts to 42% of its total funding.<sup>68</sup> The Plan is structured in three main pillars: green transition in enterprises, sustainable transport, and energy efficiency. Decarbonising the economy is one of the main challenges for Estonia, according to the National Strategy Group, especially because of its widespread use of oil shale. The envisaged National Development Plan for the Energy Sector plans to develop a strategy to phase out oil shale,<sup>69</sup> which

will create new incentives for renewable energies and facilitate investment in energy-storage solutions.<sup>70</sup>

Creating new jobs while implementing the carbon neutrality targets will provide a longer-term opportunity to restructure and improve the competitiveness of the economy and better prepare for the future. Strategic investments over the next decade will support innovation and the creation of new, high-value-added jobs in low-carbon and sustainable sectors.<sup>71</sup> Investment in human capital development can also help to prevent the emergence of bottlenecks in technical skills – that is, shortages of skills that are in demand – through education and vocational training.

## Civic space

Freedom of association is protected in Estonia. Everyone has the right to belong to a trade union, religious community, or other non-governmental organisation. During the last year, no major obstacles to freedom of association were registered in Estonia. Indeed, the CIVICUS monitor ranks Estonian civic space as open.<sup>72</sup> **The National Strategy Group reports concerns over hate speech directed at LGBTQI+ organisations.** But a recent public opinion survey demonstrated increasing support for LGBTQI+ rights: 64% of Estonians were in favour of the Registered Partnership Act,<sup>73</sup> the legal basis for the recognition of same-sex unions. However, in July 2020, the

Minister of Trade proposed not to grant further funding to three human rights organisations working on gender and equality issues.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the situation needs close monitoring.

Freedom of assembly has also been protected, according to the National Strategy Group. However, throughout 2020 and 2021 restrictions have been adopted by national and local authorities in order to limit the spread of Covid-19. The National Strategy Group says the adopted measures have been proportional and justified, as a ban on public gatherings was removed as soon as other major restrictions were lifted.

68 Estonia Resilience and Recovery Plan: <https://rrf.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/RRP-Taastekava-170621-VIISI.pdf>

69 Eesti energiamajanduse arengukava 2030+: [https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/enmak\\_2030\\_koos\\_elamumajanduse\\_lisaga.pdf](https://www.mkm.ee/sites/default/files/enmak_2030_koos_elamumajanduse_lisaga.pdf)

70 European Commission (2021) European Commission endorses Estonia's €969.3 million recovery and resilience plan: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_21\\_5022](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_21_5022)

71 Stockholm Environment Institute - SEI (2019) Analysis of Estonia's climate ambition options: <https://www.sei.org/publications/eesti-kliimaambitsiooni-tostmise-voimaluste-analuus/>

72 CIVICUS (2021) Estonia – Country Monitor: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/estonia/>

73 CIVICUS (2021) Support for LGBTI Rights grows: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/estonia/>

74 Amnesty International (2021) Country Report – Estonia: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/estonia/report-estonia/>

# Civil society involvement and the national recovery and resilience plans

The Estonian National Strategy Group reports positive developments in the involvement of civil society organisations and trade unions in civil and social dialogue in the country. **In July 2020, the Ministry of Population approved its Kodanikuühiskonna Programmi 2021-2024 (Civil Society Programme),<sup>75</sup> which provides a strategy for the development and involvement of civil society.** The programme is part of the Sidusa Eesti arengukava 2021-2030 (Cohesive Society development plan).<sup>76</sup> The overall goal is to strengthen civil society by increasing the share of the population participating in voluntary activities in order to support community initiatives, increase the capacity of non-governmental organisations, and improve the general viability of Estonian civil society. Interestingly, a joint committee composed of members of the government and civil society representatives was created and tasked with monitoring the development of the programmes and their approval. The National Strategy Group reports these processes favourably as inclusive and transparent.<sup>77</sup>

The process that led to the adoption of the country's strategy Eesti 2035 (Estonia 2035)<sup>78</sup> has also been open and inclusive. The strategy was created through an open process, a joint work of Estonians, associations and unions, communities, social partners, experts, entrepreneurs, and local governments and officials. A nationwide brainstorming – featuring

seminars, workshops, meetings, and debates at festivals – was carried out in 2020 to develop the strategy. The initiatives were meant to map out Estonia's needs and identify key challenges, in order to find agreement on the main reforms and changes that need to be implemented.

The preparation of the Estonian Recovery and Resilience Plan<sup>79</sup> was carried out in a similar way. Key social partners and civil society organisations were consulted through meetings and virtual roundtables from autumn 2020 onwards, the National Strategy Group reported. They discussed the key elements, priorities, processes and steps of how to make use of funds made available by the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Further in-depth dialogue took place at the end of March 2021, with more than 30 different umbrella organisations and around 1,000 participants. Five thematic workshops and 46 roundtables took place to discuss the key elements of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan to be published – the reforms, investments, activities, and actions. They also discussed actions planned under the structural instruments. Participants during the week of seminars provided valuable input for the preparation of the Recovery and Resilience Plan. The government approved the plan on 17 June 2021. It set out the use of nearly a billion euros of funds from the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. The plan was then

75 Estonian Ministry of Population (2020) Civil Society Program 2021-2024: <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/et/tegevusvaldkonnad/kodanikuuhiskond/kodar>

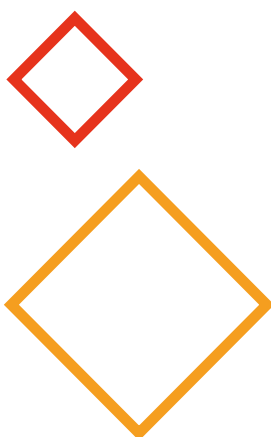
76 Estonian Ministry of Population (2020) Cohesive society development plan 2021-2030: [https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/dokumentid/Arengukavad/sidEST/sidusa\\_eesti\\_arengukava\\_eelnou.pdf](https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/dokumentid/Arengukavad/sidEST/sidusa_eesti_arengukava_eelnou.pdf)

77 For example, the summaries of all the meetings of the joint committee are available online at: <https://www.siseministeerium.ee/et/tegevusvaldkonnad/kodanikuuhiskond/kodar>

78 Vabariigi Valitsus (2021) Eesti 2035: <https://valitsus.ee/strateegia-eesti-2035-arengukavad-ja-planeering/strateegia>

79 Estonian Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021): [https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/estonias-recovery-and-resilience-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/estonias-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en)

submitted to the European Commission, which endorsed it in October.<sup>80</sup> The plan allocated 42% of its funds to support measures towards the green transition, in particular the development of new skills, improvements in energy efficiency, and support for the transport sector. Another 22% was allocated to the digital transition, including measures aimed at enterprises, public administration, and the strengthening of internet capacity in rural areas.<sup>81</sup>



### **GOOD PRACTICE** **Municipalities' Participative Budgets<sup>82</sup>**

Out of the 79 Estonian municipalities, 49 have made participative budgets a common practice. In these cities, citizens are invited to participate in initiating public projects through an inclusive budget. In this way, communities can partially decide on the use of municipal money by submitting proposals for actions that they deem necessary for their hometowns. This means that all residents of a particular municipality can submit ideas and vote on them. The winning ideas are then implemented by the municipality – for example a new swimming pool, a public library, or a theatre. Implementing the inclusive budget increases the participation of residents in planning to use and distribute public funds. The National Strategy Group warmly welcomes the initiative, as it provides an opportunity to narrow the gap between politics and citizens

80 European Commission (2021) NextGenerationEU: European Commission endorses Estonia's €969.3 million recovery and resilience plan: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_5021](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5021)

81 Ibid.

82 Rahandus Ministeerium (2021) This year, 49 municipalities are implementing an inclusive budget: <https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/et/uudised/tanavu-rakendab-kaasavat-eelarvet-49-omavalitsust>

# Country Monitor: France



The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic increased inequalities in France, fragmented its society, and led to social unrest. To tackle these crises, the government decided to use all necessary means to deal with the unprecedented situation – “whatever it costs”, as the president said in a March 2020 speech. The country had to deal with several lockdowns, and many measures were adopted by ordinance, thereby reducing social and civil involvement and debate to a minimum. The country’s GDP fell by 8.3% in 2020; the number of jobseekers increased; and the massive use of short-term, precarious working contracts reduced the negative impact on employment rates.<sup>1</sup> The French National Strategy Group reports that one of the main concerns throughout the year was a huge increase in poverty and inequality. This was followed by social fragmentation and a sharp reduction in public civic space.

<sup>1</sup> Frédéric Turlan (2021), France: working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/wpef21015.pdf>



	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>2</sup></b>	28.5	29.2	29.3	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>3</sup></b>	8.7% (mainland) 9.0% (incl. overseas territories)	8.2% (mainland) 8.5% (incl. overseas territories)	8.0%	7.0%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>4</sup></b>	74.6 (2019)	75.1 (2020)	75.5	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>5</sup></b>	7.1%	7.4%	7.4%	9.2% (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>6</sup></b>	8.2%	7.7%	7.7%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>7</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

# Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

The Covid-19 pandemic led to the introduction of a series of measures that strongly impacted the world of work and working conditions. **Social partners, despite not being initially involved in the development of the emergency measures, managed to enter the political debate and be active players in the preparation of policies to deal with the pandemic's consequences.** In July 2020, the newly appointed prime minister organised a consultation with social partners, in which he delivered a plan for all the consultations foreseen in 2020 and 2021. Since then, French social partners have been extremely active and productive, concluding three cross-industry agreements – on working conditions in public hospitals, telework, and occupational health

and safety (OSH).

**The employment rate in France declined by 0.4 percentage points from 2020 to 2021, and among young people it declined 0.7%.** They have found it particularly difficult to find ways to support themselves financially due to a lack of student jobs and an increase in contracts that lead to precarious work situations. In 2021, precariousness remains a reality for many French workers, as 15.4% are employed with temporary contracts, among the highest percentages in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of working conditions, the pandemic imposed new rhythms and profoundly disrupted the organisation of work. Some of the

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

<sup>4</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/FR>

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>7</sup> CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - France: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/france/>

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2021) OECD Employment Outlook 2021 – Temporary employment: <https://data.oecd.org/emp/temporary-employment.htm#indicator-chart>

changes will last beyond the crisis and will foster alternative ways of organising work. In particular, widespread telework will lead to more co-working spaces. These are likely to reduce companies' fixed costs, while they will prevent employees suffering from solitude through working at home full-time.

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Although no major reform took place during the year, the world of education had to deal with many challenges caused by the pandemic and the measures adopted to contain its spread. **In France, two major lockdowns had huge consequences on formal and nonformal education, as people were allowed to leave their homes only for necessary work or medical reasons.** There was a high percentage of early leavers from education and training in 2020: 8% of the population aged between 18 and 24 years old dropped out of education and 5.2% are neither in education nor in active search of employment.<sup>9</sup> The plan 1 Jeune, 1 Solution (One Young Person, One Solution) aims to identify young people who dropped out of education and therefore find themselves in a particularly vulnerable situation, and to provide them with individual support.<sup>10</sup> It aims to provide training, aid in finding work, and even financial support. Nevertheless, the NSG expresses some concerns on important limitations of the measures for the youth, particularly **a failure to take into account some of the collateral needs of young people** in education, training, or employment. These include a lack of decent and affordable housing, which is essential for career and personal development and for independence.

**The NSG also denounces the lack of institutional attention given to nonformal**

**popular education, which was heavily impacted by the health provisions.** Access to education, culture, and sports suffered particularly during 2020, accentuating the psychological malaise of young people. The National Strategy Group furthermore reports that people's withdrawal from these essential socialisation spaces sometimes seems irreversible.

## GOOD PRACTICE Les Ateliers relais

The Ateliers relais (bridging workshops) represent a co-educational project between formal and nonformal educational institutions. They aim to reduce the number of school dropouts and to work with young people at risk of social exclusion. The objective is to reintegrate young people through (formal) classes and (nonformal) workshops. Currently, the majority of the students assigned to this programme are reported to remain successfully enrolled in education establishments.<sup>11</sup>

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

According to the report issued by the Migrant Integration Policy Index in 2020, France has recently been improving its national reforms on the inclusion of migrants, allowing non-EU citizens to benefit from greater opportunities for inclusion.<sup>12</sup> The creation in 2018 of the inter-ministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees was a positive development,<sup>13</sup> the first aim of which is to support refugees for one year after their arrival in the country. **In 2020, 300,000 people were recognised as refugees in France and could therefore benefit from the support of the**

9 Eurydice (2021) Distribution of early leavers from education and training aged 18-24 by labour status: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Distribution\\_of\\_early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_aged\\_18-24\\_by\\_labour\\_status\\_2020\\_\(%25\\_of\\_population\\_aged\\_18-24\).png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Distribution_of_early_leavers_from_education_and_training_aged_18-24_by_labour_status_2020_(%25_of_population_aged_18-24).png)

10 1 Jeune, 1 Solution: <https://www.1jeune1solution.gouv.fr/>

11 Ministère de l'éducation nationale, de la jeunesse, et des sports: <https://eduscol.education.fr/1872/les-classes-et-ateliers-relais>

12 MIPEX (2021) Migrant Integration Policy Index 2020 – France: <https://www.mipex.eu/france>

13 Délégation interministérielle à l'accueil et à l'intégration des réfugiés: <https://accueil-integration-refugies.fr/>

**delegation. In particular, French language courses are provided, as well as assistance in dealing with health and social care and housing.** For the latter, the inter-ministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing<sup>14</sup> plays a coordination role. Both delegations are in charge of the implementation of the 2018 National Strategy for Integration of Refugees.

**Despite these positive developments, the NSG reports that French law is disproportionately restrictive towards asylum seekers.** A 2020 National Assembly Report on the professional inclusion of third-country nationals describes a very different situation affecting asylum seekers.<sup>15</sup> The report focused on the labour market, for which access is described as restrictive and with little incentive for asylum seekers, who are subject to strict administrative procedures. People therefore tend to avoid subscribing to an employment centre and consequently are not granted social benefits.<sup>16</sup> The waiting period for being able to apply for a work permit has recently been reduced to six months, but it still represents an obstacle to people willing to work.

## GENDER EQUALITY

France's performance on gender equality has been improving in recent years. It ranks third in the European Gender Equality Index,<sup>17</sup> scoring higher than average. **In the last decade, France has made some progress in closing the gender pay gap.** However, gender

equality is still far from being a reality, and the Covid-19 pandemic did not help reduce inequalities. Women's participation in the labour market is still 10 percentage points lower than that of men. The pandemic has also exposed and exacerbated the unequal share of care activities, 45% of which are carried out by women. Housework, too, is carried out by women in almost 80% of households.<sup>18</sup>

Parental leave is granted in France to parents in order to allow them to take care of children under three years old without losing their jobs. The leave is paid and can last up to 36 months, but it is not transferrable between parents. Third-country nationals are also eligible for parental leave, but not refugees or asylum seekers.<sup>19</sup> In addition, workers who have not worked for long are not granted parental leave, a particular difficulty for young workers. **Some positive developments were recently introduced through the Social Security Financing Law, which doubled the duration of leave for the second parent, most often the one not giving birth, from 14 to 28 days, starting from July 2021.**<sup>20</sup> This change is to be welcomed, as it should help rebalance some domestic and parental tasks. Moreover, the NSG welcomes a proposed bill to accelerate economic and professional equality, which was tabled in parliament in March 2021 and is intended to encourage women to participate in the labour market. It provides for measures such as the establishment of quotas in companies, the introduction of an index for gender equalities in higher education institutions, and reserved places in nurseries for single-parent households.

14 Délégation interministérielle à l'hébergement et à l'accès au logement: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/delegation-interministerielle-a-l-hebergement-et-a-l-acces-au-logement>

15 Assemblée Nationale (2020) Rapport d'Information relatif à l'intégration professionnelle des demandeurs d'asile et des réfugiés / Report on the professional integration of asylum seekers and refugees: <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/opendata/RINFANR5L15B3357.html>

16 Ibid.

17 EIGE (2021), Gender Equality Index – France: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/country/FR>

18 Ibid.

19 EIGE (2021) Who is eligible for parental leave in France?: [file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/20210526\\_mh0421046enn\\_.pdf.pdf](file:///C:/Users/socialaffair/Downloads/20210526_mh0421046enn_.pdf.pdf)

20 French Government (2021): 28 jours de congé paternité pour plus de temps auprès de mon nouveau-né / 28 days of paternity leave for more time with my newborn: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/les-actions-du-gouvernement/sante-famille-handicap/28-jours-de-conge-paternite-pour-plus-de-temps>

# Social protection and inclusion

Aside from the impact of Covid-19, the NSG reports a sharp rise in poverty and social exclusion, which are increasingly a reality for single women with children, the elderly, and young people. In France, the main social assistance tool for income support is the *Révenu de solidarité active* (RSA – active solidarity income), which is intended to guarantee a minimum income for the unemployed and workers with low revenues.

## POVERTY AND LIVING CONDITIONS

Despite the huge economic downturn produced by the health crisis, France is one of the European countries with the lowest poverty rates.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, **over the last year, the number of people living below the poverty line increased sharply, reaching more than 14% of the population.**<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it should be mentioned that the reported data is an underestimate, as it does not include all the homeless and undocumented people living in poverty throughout the country. Poverty hinders social inclusion and most often occurs among young people in neither employment nor education (more than 2 million); single-parents (around one-third of the poor), among whom women are overrepresented; and other unemployed people.<sup>23</sup>

**In September 2018, the French government presented its National Strategy for Poverty Reduction,**<sup>24</sup> which proposed policy measures to enhance equal opportunities. Indeed, the strategy presents different actions, many of which are focused on early childhood and young people, such as providing breakfasts to young children before school and introducing a training obligation up to the age of 18. Other themes covered by the strategy include proposals on health and support for employment and housing. Nevertheless, the committee in charge of evaluating the strategy reports that only four out of 35 proposed measures have been implemented: the revalorization of the activity bonus, the implementation of complementary health insurance for RSA recipients, the renewal of these recipients' complementary health insurance, and the deployment of 400 budget advice centres.<sup>25</sup>

Income inequality grew at a steady pace during 2020. **While 1 million people fell into poverty, the richest quickly recovered from the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 crisis.**<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the rate of demands for social assistance remained very low: it is estimated that just one in three people in need of assistance reached out to local authorities for social benefits.<sup>27</sup> The NSG denounces scarce access to information coupled with long, complex, and cumbersome

21 EAPN (2020) National Poverty Watch Report 2020 – France: [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-France-Poverty-Watch-2020\\_EN\\_final-4706.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-France-Poverty-Watch-2020_EN_final-4706.pdf)

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 French Government (2021) Stratégie Nationale de prévention et d'action contre la pauvreté / National Strategy against poverty: <https://www.gouvernement.fr/action/strategie-contre-la-pauvrete>

25 Comité d'évaluation de la stratégie nationale de prévention et de lutte contre la pauvreté (2021), 2021 Report: <https://www.strategie.gouv.fr/sites/strategie.gouv.fr/files/atoms/files/fs-2021-rapport-pauvrete-rapport2021-avril.pdf>

26 Oxfam (2021), Le virus de l'inégalité / The inequality virus: [https://www.oxfamfrance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rapport\\_Oxfam\\_Davos\\_Zoom\\_France\\_2021.pdf](https://www.oxfamfrance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Rapport_Oxfam_Davos_Zoom_France_2021.pdf)

27 Ibid.

administrative procedures. The groups of people targeted by the measures should be provided with information that is more accessible and higher quality.

## UNEMPLOYMENT REFORMS

2020 saw the unfolding of the second phase of a reform of unemployment insurance – a delicate topic in a year in which job losses and social security needs increased across the whole country and beyond. The reform partially entered into force in November 2019 but was then suspended due to the pandemic. Some major concerns were therefore further discussed, particularly the new methodology for assessing the daily wage –  *salaire journalier de référence*, SJR – that serves as a basis for the calculation of the unemployment benefit. Two years later, **in March 2021, a decree on the unemployment insurance scheme was published**,<sup>28</sup> explaining that the SJR would be based on the average salary received in the last two years, taking into account both days worked and those not. **This led to a reduction of the SJR – and, therefore, of unemployment benefit** – for many workers who did not have a full-time contract during the analysed period. For just the first year, the new method of calculation means 1.15 million beneficiaries will receive lower allowances. The new regulation entered into force in October 2021. According to the National Strategy Group, the increase in part-time and fixed-term contracts, coupled with the aforementioned new method of SJR calculation, will inevitably lead to an increase in precarious employment and living conditions.

## HEALTHCARE

Access to healthcare in the country is generally good, but geographical inequalities often persist. Access to doctors is limited in some rural and disadvantaged areas, according to organisations that are part of the National Strategy Group. The phenomenon is known as “medical deserts” – under-equipped areas, where access to a general practitioner is very limited, resulting in long waiting and travel times. **Approximately 18% of people live in areas either where it is difficult to find a general practitioner, or where some medical equipment is lacking, or where it takes more than 30 minutes to get to the closest hospital for emergencies.**<sup>29</sup> The NSG therefore recommends simplifying the incentive mechanisms to encourage the opening of more medical practices in rural areas, as well as higher investment in public healthcare for all.

However, healthcare inequalities in France extend well beyond geographical distances, the NSG notes, and access to care is not the same for social minority groups. In particular, the state of health of migrants and asylum seekers deteriorated on average:<sup>30</sup> they often live in inadequate conditions with insufficient shelter or access to water. Therefore, awareness-raising campaigns are needed to encourage newcomers to subscribe to health coverage programmes. France, like many other European countries, did not include a strategy to enable the Covid-19 vaccination of undocumented migrants, so they encountered the most obstacles to access vaccination.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the

28 Décret 2021-346 portant diverses mesures relatives au régime d'assurance chômage: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000043306112?r=WfhpPRa3Vt>

29 European Commission (2020), Rapport 2020 pour la France: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/FR/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0509&from=FR>

30 Médecins du Monde (2019) Accès aux soins des migrants / Migrants' access to healthcare: <https://www.medecinsdumonde.org/fr/pays/france/migrants>

31 UN International Organisation for Migration (2021), Covid-19: IOM warns of difficulties in accessing vaccines for migrants: <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2021/05/1096182>

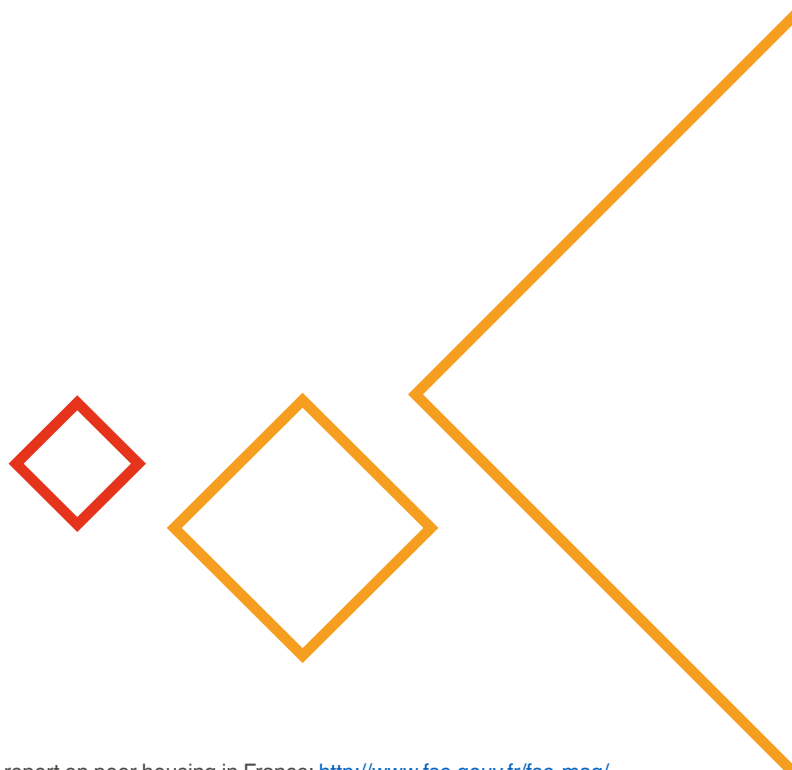
lack of resources allocated to psychological and psychiatric care became clear, according to the French NSG, as it was magnified by the consequences of the pandemic on people's mental health and wellbeing.

## HOUSING

No major policy developments took place in the domain of housing in 2020. However, the NSG considers this to be negative, as **rents are increasing steadily, the construction of social housing has been declining, and housing subsidies have been reduced.** Moreover, the economic effects of Covid-19 put many French households at a higher risk of poverty, which can result in homelessness if immediate measures are not taken. Indeed, 4 million people are currently living in poor housing conditions or homelessness, according to

the French Ministry of Work, Employment, and Inclusion.<sup>32</sup> This constitutes a violation of the right to housing and emergency accommodation, which particularly affects people in the most vulnerable situations. Indeed, people on low incomes are the least able to find decent and affordable housing. More than 143,000 are homeless, and more than 640,000 are currently forced to live with third parties.<sup>33</sup> The current situation was fostered by a 5.5% increase in the house price index in the second half of 2020 from the second half of 2019.

In addition, following the Loi relative à la solidarité et au renouvellement urbains (SRU – Solidarity and Urban Renewal Law) of December 2000,<sup>34</sup> municipalities are required to provide a number of social housing units in proportion to their residential stock (Article 55): between 20% and 25% has to be social housing. In 2020, 550 municipalities did not meet their obligations under the law and will be fined.<sup>35</sup>



32 Ministère du Travail, de l'emploi, et de l'Insertion (2021), 2020 report on poor housing in France: <http://www.fse.gouv.fr/fse-mag/rapport-2020-sur-le-mal-logement-en-france>

33 Fondation Abbé-Pierre (2021), L'état du mal-logement en France 2020 / The state of poor housing in France 2020: [https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/reml\\_2020\\_cahier\\_4\\_les\\_chiffres\\_du\\_mal-logement-sfp.pdf](https://www.fondation-abbe-pierre.fr/documents/pdf/reml_2020_cahier_4_les_chiffres_du_mal-logement-sfp.pdf)

34 Loi 2000-1208 relative à la solidarité et au renouvellement urbains: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/LEGIT-EXT000005630252/>

35 France Info (2020): Des sanctions alourdies pour 550 communes qui n'offrent pas assez de logements sociaux / Heavier penalties for 550 municipalities that do not offer enough social housing: [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/immobilier/immobilier-indigne/des-sanctions-alourdies-pour-550-communes-qui-n-offrent-pas-assez-de-logements-sociaux\\_4211857.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/economie/immobilier/immobilier-indigne/des-sanctions-alourdies-pour-550-communes-qui-n-offrent-pas-assez-de-logements-sociaux_4211857.html)

# Civic space

Civic space in France is reported to be adequately supported and protected. Nevertheless, major concerns were raised throughout the year, particularly over the methods and measures used to contain Covid-19. **The CIVICUS Monitor currently rates France’s civic space as “narrowed”**,<sup>36</sup> and the organisations that constitute the French National Strategy Group strongly support this evaluation.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

While freedom of association is normally respected in France, the 2021 law “Reinforcing respect for the principles of the Republic”<sup>37</sup> worried civil society organisations because of its possible side effects. In particular, concerns were raised over the law’s means: it says that organisations must commit to certain principles in order to receive public subsidies, and its stipulations on security could negatively affect freedom of association. Moreover, the law was adopted after the murder of history professor Samuel Pathy by a radicalised person in October 2020 and could be seen as providing new means to foster generalised suspicion of faith-based organisations. The NSG also denounced the accelerated parliamentary procedure chosen for the law, in spite of requests from organisations for a transparent and inclusive legislative process<sup>38</sup> and demands for dialogue and debate.

## FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Although freedom of peaceful assembly is generally respected in France, the pandemic and the measures taken to cope with it posed difficult challenges for normal public assembly. An ad-hoc legal framework – the Decree of May 31, 2021 – was adopted, banning public gatherings, restricting freedom of assembly to a limited number of people, and therefore dramatically reducing public space throughout the country. The judges of the Conseil d’État (State Council) advised against the ban on assemblies and demonstrations, saying that it was not justified by the health situation, so long as social distancing was respected.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, hundreds of protestors were fined for participating in rallies on public roads. In addition, as reported by Amnesty International in its annual country report, demonstrators were arrested and prosecuted for vaguely defined offenses,<sup>40</sup> such as contempt of a police officer, failure to comply with the obligation of prior declaration, or participation in a group preparing to carry out violent acts.

## FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Freedom of expression is generally well protected in France. However, recent legislative developments –in particular, the proposed law on Sécurité Globale (Global Security) enacted

36 CIVICUS (2021) Civicus Monitor 2020 – France: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/france/>

37 Law 2021-1109 Confortant le respect des principes de la République: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORF-TEXT000043964778>

38 See for example the open letter published by different French organisations on the Bill (April 2021): <http://www.cnajep.asso.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Lettre-aux-se%CC%81natrices-et-se%CC%81nateurs-Projet-de-loi-confortant-les-principes-re%CC%81publicains-Avril-2021.pdf>

39 Conseil d’État (2020), Ordonnance de jugement: <https://www.conseil-etat.fr/fr/arianeweb/CE/decision/2020-06-13/440846>

40 Amnesty International (2021) Human rights in France in 2020: <https://www.amnesty.fr/pays/france>

in May 2021<sup>41</sup> – are believed to threaten freedom of the press. The law aims to provide for better regulation of the main surveillance entities: the police and gendarmerie, municipal police forces, and private security companies and surveillance tools, such as pedestrian cameras and video protection. In particular, the bill proposed to prohibit the dissemination

of images of police officers, which would make it harder to hold them accountable for their actions.<sup>42</sup> The European Commission stepped into the discussion, highlighting the law's worrying lack of consideration for respecting the balance between security and civil liberties such as freedom of the media and journalists.<sup>43</sup>

## Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

### SOCIAL AND CIVIL DIALOGUE AND INVOLVEMENT

All the organisations that constitute the French National Strategy Group agree that the activities of both civil society organisations and trade unions declined in 2020 and denounced how little French society was involved in governmental decisions. Nevertheless, citizens were called on to participate in public life through some initiatives, such as the Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (Citizens Convention for the Climate),<sup>44</sup> which aims to get 150 randomly selected citizens to help write a climate law. Another initiative was the Partenariat pour un Gouvernement Ouvert (Open Government Partnership), a forum that involves different actors and stakeholders (as civil society

organisations) in activities aimed at strengthening citizens' participation in public activities. Under this, civil society organisations are invited to provide opinions on public policies and to share their demands and priorities.<sup>45</sup>

In order to increase civil society organisations' **capacity to contribute more actively to discussions of and consultations on public policies, French CSOs are calling for a strengthening of the Fonds de Développement de la Vie Associative (FDVA, the national Fund for the Development of Associative Life)**. Created in December 2011 and later amended by Decree law 2018-460 of June 2018,<sup>46</sup> the fund's remit is to support CSOs in their activities and projects, as well as by training volunteers.

41 République Française (2021) Loi du 25 mai 2021 pour une sécurité globale préservant les libertés: <https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/277157-loi-pour-une-securite-globale-preservant-les-libertes>

42 Ibid.

43 European Commission (2020), Midday press briefing from 23.11.2020: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-199315?lg=INT>

44 Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat: <https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/>

45 Partenariat pour un Gouvernement Ouvert: <https://gouvernement-ouvert.transformation.gouv.fr/>

46 Decree-law 2018-460 on the Fund for the Development of Associative Life: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORF-TEXT000037038642>



### Good Practice The platform Je veux aider

The pandemic made increasingly clear that civil society organisations are crucial for spreading social inclusion and improving people's wellbeing. At the beginning of 2020, the French government launched a useful online platform called Je veux aider. It has a centralised database that collects calls for action from national civil society organisations and public structures, which makes it easier for people to get to know different organisations, decide which ones to engage with, and carry out a mission for a CSO.<sup>47</sup>

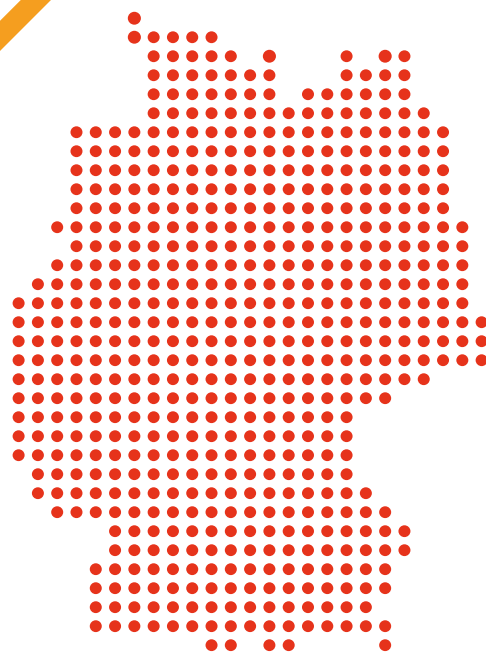
### INVOLVEMENT IN THE NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN

The NSG reports that the majority of French CSOs did not have a direct voice in the process of drafting the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. Indeed, only the Mouvement Associatif (Associative Movement), which brings together more than 700,000 organisations, was consulted by the Prime Minister to discuss the plan. In the end, the Mouvement Associatif welcomed the recognition of the added value of civil society organisations in the NRRP but criticised the overall lack of support for them and of measures for community development. Moreover, the organisation regrets the absence of significant transversal and structural measures to develop and strengthen activities and associative life. This absence shows a disregard for CSOs' transformative capabilities as a force for social and territorial cohesion.<sup>48</sup>

47 Je veux aider: <https://www.jeveuxaider.gouv.fr/>

48 Le Mouvement Associatif (2021) Plan de Relance – Communiqué de presse / Recovery Plan – Press release : <https://lemouvementassociatif.org/plan-de-relance-copie-a-completer-pour-la-vie-associative/>

# Country Monitor: **Germany**



The National Strategy Group in Germany identifies inequalities as the major social issue that needs to be addressed. In particular, it sees the current education system as responsible for spreading inequalities and discriminating against people from a very young age. The pandemic exacerbated these issues in all aspects of daily life and highlighted the need to increase civil and social dialogue at all levels, with the objective of providing expertise and input aimed at education reform.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	31.1	29.7	34.4	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	3.4%	3.1%	3.8%	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	66.9 (2019)	67.5 (2020)	68.6 (2021)	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	9%	7.9%	10.6%	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	7.4%	7.8%	10.3%	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

Germany's state welfare system significantly mitigated employees' loss of income due to the Covid-19 crisis. However, the pandemic cut gross income by about 3% on average and 4.3% among the poorest 10% of the population.<sup>7</sup> **The Kurzarbeitergeld (short-time allowance),<sup>8</sup> in particular, acted as an important income stabilizer.** The unemployment rate is slowly declining, to 3.3% in August 2021 compared to 4% in September 2020.<sup>9</sup> However, young workers and those in precarious situations have not been adequately

protected, and the unemployment rate among people up to 24 years old increased, reaching 6.7% in August 2021.<sup>10</sup>

Social partners played an important role in negotiating policies and measures to deal with the Covid-19 emergency in the country, whilst collective wage bargaining was postponed in favour of a rapid response to the pandemic and the definition of the Kurzarbeit schemes. In 2020, a major public sector agreement was concluded, providing public workers with a

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2020). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/DE>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Germany: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/germany/>

7 IAB, ifo (2020) Welfare State Eases the Blow of Income Lost to Coronavirus in Germany: <https://www.ifo.de/en/node/60456>

8 Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (2020) Fragen und Antworten zu Kurzarbeit und Qualifizierung: [https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/2020-03-18-kurzarbeitergeldfaq.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/2020-03-18-kurzarbeitergeldfaq.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1)

9 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2021) Arbeitslosigkeit: <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Labour/Labour-Market/Unemployment/Tables/press-month2.html;jsessionid=7274A4686306AE3F19B96AB1733655E2.live732>

10 Ibid.

one-off payment of between €300 and €600 as compensation for their increased workload during the pandemic and for sometimes having to telework. **Telework increased pressure especially on working single parents, notably women and parents of children with disabilities who no longer received the learning support they needed.**<sup>11</sup>

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

According to the National Strategy Group, Germany has various policies in place aimed at the inclusion of newcomers to the country. The most popular are German language courses and cultural and social inclusion courses. However, the National Strategy Group reports that the courses offered by the state are often of low quality and privilege frontal learning, which discourages newcomers and often leads them to leave a course before reaching an adequate level of German. This is why, according to the NSG, courses and exchange spaces offered by local civil society organisations are vital to foster the inclusion and wellbeing of migrants and refugees throughout the country.

The National Action Plan for Integration (NAP-I) was developed in 2018 through joint efforts and proposals by the federal government, the federal states, local authorities, and civil society, including more than 75 migrant organizations.<sup>12</sup> It was revisited in March 2021<sup>13</sup> during an integration summit. It foresees five integration phases, starting from “before immigration” and progressing to inclusion, growth, and cohesion. Germany has not fundamentally changed

its approach to the inclusion of migrants, and the country’s policies do not provide long-term support.<sup>14</sup> For example, migrants face difficulties with family reunification, and cannot keep dual citizenship: instead, they have to renounce their previous nationality when they obtain German nationality. Anti-discrimination policies should also be improved, as victims often do not get justice.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the National Strategy Group recommends that the programmes funded by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) go hand in hand with the work of civil society organisations. It recommends that such programmes be developed in concertation and constant cooperation with organisations that work with migrants and refugee seekers on a daily basis.

### GOOD PRACTICE LAGFA Bayern

LAGFA Bayern<sup>16</sup> is the amalgamation of around 120 volunteer agencies, volunteer centres, and coordination centres for civic engagement in Bavaria. It is committed at the state level to improving the framework for civic engagement and provides funding to the programme “Language Creates Opportunities”,<sup>17</sup> which supports initiatives and projects for people with a refugee and migration background to learn German. In addition, LAGFA Bayern particularly encourages job-related language training, to ease newly arrived people’s entry to the labour market.

11 Eurofound (2021) Living and working conditions in Germany: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/germany#highlights-working-life-in-2020>

12 Bundesregierung (2021) NAP-I: federal government, the federal states, local authorities and civil society, including more than 75 migrant organizations

13 Euractiv (2021) Germany revisits integration policy as critics demand ‘paradigm shift’: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/non-discrimination/news/german-integration-policy-needs-a-paradigm-shift-opposition-migrant-organisations-say/>

14 MIPEX (2020) Germany country report: <https://www.mipex.eu/germany>

15 Ibid.

16 LAGFA Bayern: <https://lagfa-bayern.de/>

17 Language Creates Opportunities: <https://lagfa-bayern.de/projekte/sprache-schafft-chancen/>

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Germany's public expenditure on all levels of education is above the OECD average.<sup>18</sup> The teaching profession is considered very attractive, as the country's teachers have the highest average salaries among OECD countries.<sup>19</sup> However, this is apparently not enough to ensure educational fairness and equal opportunities for students and learners, the National Strategy Group reports. In 2020, the share of early leavers in Germany was 10%, higher than the European average.<sup>20</sup> This is a worrying statistic, considering that the risks of poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion are higher among the people who left school at a young age or that have no educational qualifications.<sup>21</sup> **The National Strategy Group says that Germany's education system in its current form is not suited to giving equal opportunities** to all children and young people. The socio-economic status of young students significantly affects their participation in education from a very early age, producing an effect that is intensified from one educational level to the next.

Although tuition fees in Germany are among the lowest among European countries,<sup>22</sup> this does not translate into an open and inclusive education system. Compulsory education in the country starts at the age of six, when pupils enter primary school, or Grundschule, but inequalities start at a very early stage. After primary school, education splits into different paths that lead to different outcomes and

preclude choice later on. Only pupils who have attended a Gymnasium can enter higher education.<sup>23</sup> Once students complete compulsory education at around the age of 15, the next move has already been determined by the path taken after primary school. According to the National Strategy Group, children's socio-economic situation is a major determinant of educational opportunities. This is confirmed by a 2021 OECD study,<sup>24</sup> which says that **in Germany, economic status influences learning outcomes more on average than in other OECD countries**. This results in greater disadvantages for students from an immigrant background and those with special educational needs.

The pandemic exacerbated these inequalities. Students from higher-income families are more likely to attend a Gymnasium, so they also had a better chance than other students of being provided with a digital device, a safe learning environment, and parental support. The pandemic also raised concerns over the career prospects of young people. The unemployment level for the people aged 25 to 34 with secondary education stood at 12.1% in 2020, an increase of 0.2 percentage point from the previous year.<sup>25</sup> The Covid-19 crisis also lowered the employment levels of young people,<sup>26</sup> with particular lows in the final quarters of both 2020 and 2021.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the German Research Institute for the Economics of Education and Social Affairs, FiBS, expects youth unemployment to dramatically increase in the coming years, particularly among people with a migration background.<sup>28</sup>

18 OECD (2021) Education at a glance 2021: Germany: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e4292276-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e4292276-en>

19 Ibid.

20 Eurostat (2021) Early leavers from education and training: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)

21 Eurostat (2021) Key figures on Europe 2021: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/13394938/KS-EI-21-001-EN-N.pdf/ad9053c2-debd-68c0-2167-f2646efeaec1?t=1632300620367>

22 OECD (2021) Education at a glance 2021: Germany: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e4292276-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e4292276-en>

23 Eurydice (2021) Germany overview: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/germany\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/germany_en)

24 OECD (2021) Education at a glance 2021: Germany: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/e4292276-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/e4292276-en>

25 Ibid.

26 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2021) Arbeitslose in Deutschland insgesamt: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Konjunkturindikatoren/Arbeitsmarkt/arb110.html>

27 Ibid.

28 FiBS (2020) Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in Deutschland in Krisenzeiten: [https://jugendsozialarbeit.news/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FiBS\\_Forum\\_075\\_Jugendarbeitslosigkeit\\_in\\_Deutschland\\_final\\_erg.pdf](https://jugendsozialarbeit.news/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FiBS_Forum_075_Jugendarbeitslosigkeit_in_Deutschland_final_erg.pdf)

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Street College

The Street College project,<sup>29</sup> organised by the organisation Gangway in Berlin, provides a free space for individual and self-determined learning. It pursues a radically needs-based, strength-oriented, and self-reliant approach to learning. The students determine the course programme and can design the content according to their interests. It is particularly aimed at students who experienced discrimination and exclusion, feel confronted with psychological problems, live in difficult social circumstances, or are dealing with traumatic experiences. Therefore, in addition to the acquisition of professional competences, importance is attached to reflection on personal strengths.

## GENDER EQUALITY

Despite some improvements from last year in the representation of women in politics and economic decision-making, women face particular disadvantages in the labour market and at home. **In Germany, the jobs in which women are over-represented – i.e. low-qualified, fixed-term, and domestic work – were the first jobs to be cut in March 2020 due to the outbreak of the pandemic.**<sup>30</sup> When measures to limit the spread of the virus were

enacted, the cultural, education, and personal care sectors were deeply affected – areas where women make up the majority of the workforce. As an example, 32% of women in Germany are employed in education and social work activities, compared to only 9% of men.<sup>31</sup> An important measure adopted by the government to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis has been the Kurzarbeitergeld (short-time allowance),<sup>32</sup> but women benefited the least from it. As the allowance was calculated based on hours worked, people with part-time jobs received lower allowances. **In Germany, 24% of women are part-time workers, compared to 4% of men, so women are six times more likely to be in part-time work than men.**<sup>33</sup> The higher rate of part-time work among women is connected with their roles as caregivers and housekeepers. While 72% of women living in Germany say they are the person responsible for daily cooking and household activities, only 29% of men say this. Women in Germany are also more likely to be in charge of care activities for the elderly, disabled, and children.<sup>34</sup> As a result, 23% of women in Germany earn a gross salary of €1,999 or less, 10 percentage points more than the 13% figure for men.<sup>35</sup>

Parental leave in Germany is regulated through the Elterngeldgesetz<sup>36</sup> (act on parental allowance). The amount corresponds to 65% or 100% of the monthly salary of the parent taking leave based on the length of the leave, which can be up to 12 months. If both parents take at least two months' paid leave, one can receive a two-month leave bonus, potentially allowing one parent up to 14 months' leave.<sup>37</sup> The German National Strategy Group welcomes

29 Street College project: <https://streetcollege.de/>

30 European Parliament (2020) Precarious work from a gender and intersectionality perspective: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL\\_STU\(2020\)662491\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2020/662491/IPOL_STU(2020)662491_EN.pdf)

31 EIGE (2021) Segregation and quality of work – Germany: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/work/DE>

32 Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales (2020) Fragen und Antworten zu Kurzarbeit und Qualifizierung: [https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/2020-03-18-kurzarbeitergeldfaq.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](https://www.bundesfinanzministerium.de/Content/DE/Downloads/2020-03-18-kurzarbeitergeldfaq.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1).

33 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2020) Kernerwerbstätige in unterschiedlichen Erwerbsformen nach soziodemografischen Merkmalen und Wirtschaftsabschnitten: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsmarkt/Erwerbstaetigkeit/Tabellen/atyp-ische-beschaefigung.html>

34 EIGE (2021) Care activities – Germany: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/time/DE>

35 D. Hobler, S. Pfahl, A. Zucco (2020) 30 Jahre Deutsche Einheit, Gleichstellung von Frauen und Männern auf den Arbeitsmärkten in West- und Ostdeutschland? - WSI Report Nr. 60: <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/225423>

36 Gesetz zum Elterngeld und zur Elternzeit: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/gesetze/gesetz-zum-elterngeld-und-zur-elternzeit-73806>

37 EIGE (2021) Who is eligible for parental leave in Germany: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/who-eligible-parental-leave-germany>

this measure, which should encourage fathers to take parental leave. However, the NSG denounces workplaces that discourage men from taking parental leave, something that happens often. The main problem, as identified by the National Strategy Group, is the scarcity of early

childhood nurseries. Finding a day-care spot is getting harder, the German Economic Institute (IW) reports in a study,<sup>38</sup> which says that one in seven children will not find a place in public day care.

## Social protection and inclusion

### HOUSING

**Housing prices and rents are reported to be one of the main causes of the increasing inequalities in living conditions**, according to the National Strategy Group. The average rent increased steadily over the past seven years. One square metre of a newly constructed dwelling cost around €8 to rent in 2013, but this increased to more than €10 in 2021.<sup>39</sup> Low- and middle-income households often cannot afford decent housing, as demonstrated by the inability of around 2 million people to keep their homes warm during the 2020 winter<sup>40</sup> and the increasing number of Germans living in overcrowded houses, particularly in the largest cities.<sup>41</sup>

To address these issues, the Berlin region adopted a rent-cap measure called Mietendeckel,<sup>42</sup> which essentially consists of three sets of rules for the apartments covered by its scope: a rent freeze that prohibits rent exceeding the rent effectively agreed in June 2019, an upper limit on rents, and a legal prohibition of excessive rents. The measure had already been tested in 2015 in Berlin, when it proved effective: in just one month, rents declined on average by 3%.<sup>43</sup>

However, the Mietendeckel has triggered much debate, and in March 2021, the Second Senate of the Federal Constitutional Court ruled against it,<sup>44</sup> saying it was incompatible with the German constitution, the Grundgesetz. Tenants therefore had to repay the difference

38 DW (2021) Germany with massive shortage in day care spots, study finds: <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-with-massive-shortage-in-day-care-spots-study-finds/a-55232526>

39 Statista (2021) Average rent price of residential property in Germany: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/801537/average-rent-price-of-residential-property-in-germany/>

40 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2021) 2 million people in Germany did not have a sufficiently heated home in 2019 due to a lack of money: [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2021/02/PE21\\_066\\_639.html;jsessionid=D4289104E24C8346CCBA7CAF316B93D7.live731](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2021/02/PE21_066_639.html;jsessionid=D4289104E24C8346CCBA7CAF316B93D7.live731)

41 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2020) Presse release #N 079 from 26 November 2020: [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2020/11/PE20\\_N079\\_634.html;jsessionid=D4289104E24C8346CCBA7CAF316B93D7.live731](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2020/11/PE20_N079_634.html;jsessionid=D4289104E24C8346CCBA7CAF316B93D7.live731)

42 Berliner Mieterverein (2021) So funktionierte das Mietendeckelgesetz: <https://www.berliner-mieterverein.de/mietendeckel/die-regeln-des-mietendeckel-gesetzes-und-tipps-zur-anwendung.htm> Mietendeckel: <https://www.berlin.de/sen/justiz/service/gesetze-und-verordnungen/2020/ausgabe-nr-6-vom-22-2-2020-s-49-56.pdf>

43 BBC (2015) Will Berlin's brake on rents be good for Germany? : <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34066100>

44 Bundesverfassungsgericht (2021) Beschluss vom 25. März 2021: <https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2021/bvg21-028.html>

between the upper limit defined by the Mietendeckel and the contractually agreed rent.<sup>45</sup>

which led to adverse psychosocial effects. This was especially true for self-employed, lone parents – notably women – and people from a migration background.<sup>51</sup>

## POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Poverty has been worsening at a steady pace in Germany in recent years. In addition, there is a registered **increase in the wealth gap**, and the pandemic hit the poorest people harder than others. **In 2021, 15% of the German population live at risk of poverty, while 17% face social exclusion.**<sup>46</sup> These figures are particularly negative, as the number of people living at risk of poverty had been increasing for a decade already, and then the pandemic made it grow further.<sup>47</sup> Most worryingly, people who have fallen below the poverty line in Germany are now more likely to remain poor for a longer time, according to the German Federal Statistics Office. Indeed, 44% of the poor are considered to be at risk of permanent poverty, double the number of 1998.<sup>48</sup>

The pandemic had disproportionate effects on low-income people all around the world, but this was particularly the case in Germany. Together with France, **it is the European country where billionaires have increased their wealth the most.**<sup>49</sup> At the same time, in-work poverty is becoming increasingly common. In 2021, 10.6% of workers in Germany were at risk of living in poverty despite having a job,<sup>50</sup>

## HEALTHCARE

Comprehensive data on the impact of Covid-19 on the public expenditure in 2021 is not yet available, but German public spending on healthcare increased by around 3% in 2020 compared to the previous year.<sup>52</sup> **In the years before the pandemic, Germany continuously increased its proportion of GDP allocated to healthcare.**<sup>53</sup> **This reduced patients' out-of-pocket expenditure<sup>54</sup> and meant the healthcare system was better prepared to deal with the pandemic.** During the most critical period of patients' hospitalisation, some federal states of Germany – including Bavaria – adopted measures to oblige hospitals to cooperate in the management of the emergency.<sup>55</sup> Hospitals not treating Covid-19 were requested to provide personnel and to relieve the pressure on other hospitals by receiving in-patients who were not infected with the virus. In addition, all non-essential treatments and operations were postponed.

Aside from the Covid-19 pandemic, the National Strategy Group reports that the access to healthcare is normally granted to everyone,

45 Berlin Stadtportal (2021) Berliner Mietendeckel – questions and answers: <https://mietendeckel.berlin.de/>

46 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2021) Living conditions: [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Income-Consumption-Living-Conditions/Living-Conditions-Risk-Poverty/\\_node.html](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Income-Consumption-Living-Conditions/Living-Conditions-Risk-Poverty/_node.html)

47 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2020) At-risk-of-poverty threshold and risk of poverty: <https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Society-Environment/Income-Consumption-Living-Conditions/Living-Conditions-Risk-Poverty/Tables/eu-poverty-threshold-risk-silc.html?sessionId=D4289104E24C8346CCBA7CAF316B93D7.live731>

48 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2021) Presse release #113 from 10 March 2021: [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2021/03/PE21\\_113\\_p001.html](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2021/03/PE21_113_p001.html)

49 Forbes (2021) 2021 List of the World Billionaires: <https://www.forbes.com/billionaires/>

50 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

51 Destatis Statistisches Bundesamt (2021) Presse release #113 from 10 March 2021: [https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2021/03/PE21\\_113\\_p001.html](https://www.destatis.de/EN/Press/2021/03/PE21_113_p001.html)

52 WHO (2020) Global spending on health 2020: weathering the storm (p.56) : <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/337859/9789240017788-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

53 World Bank (2018) Current health expenditure (% of GDP): <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.GD.ZS?locations=DE>

54 WHO (2018) Global Expenditure Database – Germany: [https://apps.who.int/nha/database/country\\_profile/Index/en](https://apps.who.int/nha/database/country_profile/Index/en)

55 European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies (2021) Policy responses for Germany: <https://www.covid19healthsystem.org/countries/germany/livinghit.aspx?Section=3.1%20Planning%20services&Type=Section>



with the health insurance rate close to 100%. However, inequalities still persist between people who are insured through the public system (GKV) and those with private insurance (PKV). The duality allows privately-insured patients – around 11% of the population<sup>56</sup> – to skip lines by bearing limited direct costs. Moreover, there are differences between the German Länder, such as the density of doctors: in Hamburg, for

example, the density is almost double that in Brandenburg.<sup>57</sup>

Discrimination still affects the healthcare of migrants and refugees. Residence status is essential for having access to healthcare, and language barriers often prevent people from receiving adequate treatment without the assistance of other people.<sup>58</sup>

## Civic space

The pandemic has posed many challenges to freedom of association across Europe, but the National Strategy Group reports that in Germany it has generally been protected and sufficiently respected during 2021. However, many organisations have dramatically lost members and volunteers, who are often difficult to reach and involve again, which has in turn reduced the organisations' presence. In addition, different CSOs are still scared to carry out actions and planned activities due to sanitary restrictions or data protection rules connected to the EU Digital COVID Certificate. The National Strategy Group fears that if parts of civil society no longer provide their usual services and opportunities to meet, the cement holding society together will begin to crumble, making solidarity more difficult to achieve.

The CIVICUS indicator, which monitors civic space across Europe, indicates that

Germany's civic space is open.<sup>59</sup> However, **press freedom has come under increasing pressure, and attacks on journalists have become more frequent.**<sup>60</sup> The latest report on Germany by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) confirms that violent attacks on journalists spiked in 2020, with 69 verified attacks.<sup>61</sup> In comparison, 14 cases were registered in 2019.

The National Strategy Group reports that the Infektionsschutzgesetz<sup>62</sup> (Infection Protection Act), which aims to reduce the spread of the virus, put some pressure on freedom of assembly as mentioned in the Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland<sup>63</sup> (the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany – the country's constitution). Limiting freedom of assembly is perceived by German people as very controversial, but the NSG says that peaceful assemblies remained possible.

56 OECD (2020) Das Deutsche Gesundheitssystem im internationalen Vergleich: <https://blog.oecd-berlin.de/das-deutsche-gesundheitssystem-im-internationalen-vergleich>

57 Ibid.

58 NaDiRa (2021) Geflüchtete im Gesundheitssystem: <https://www.rassismusmonitor.de/netzwerk-rassismusforschung/kurzstudien/solidaritaet-in-der-pandemie/gefluechtete-im-gesundheitssystem/>

59 CIVICUS (2021) Germany Monitor: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/germany/>

60 CIVICUS (2021) Decline in rsf world press freedom index amid increasing attacks on journalists: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2021/06/17/decline-rsf-world-press-freedom-index-amid-increasing-attacks-journalists/>

61 ECPMF (2021) Fact finding mission - Germany: <https://www.ecpmf.eu/monitor/fact-finding-mission/>

62 RKI (2021) Infektionsschutzgesetz: [https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Infekt/IfSG/ifsg\\_node.html](https://www.rki.de/DE/Content/Infekt/IfSG/ifsg_node.html)

63 Deutscher Bundestag, Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: <https://www.bundestag.de/gg>

# National recovery and resilience plans

The German National Strategy Group reports that civil society organisations are normally involved in government consultations, and this happened in 2020 and 2021 as well. Nevertheless, the main consultations are with umbrella organisations, so the government rarely has contact with smaller CSOs, which do a lot of groundwork and have very close, direct relations with people. **The NSG calls for the vast variety of small NGOs and volunteer-led initiatives to be heard better and given more space and platforms for engagement, so that civil and social dialogue is not only carried out with big welfare organisations.** In Germany, as in many other countries analysed, even though volunteer activities were very important in times of lockdown, the government did not really focus on these organisations and activities, the NSG

reports. Many activities could not be carried out because of the Covid-19 rules and lockdowns. Nevertheless, local volunteers organised direct neighbourly support for vulnerable people in many regions. This means that volunteering was system-relevant, as were public services. Unfortunately, however, volunteering did not get the same public attention and recognition.

Smaller organisations did not hear of any possibility of involvement in the debates over the preparation of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan, according to the National Strategy Group. However, other organisations reported the same. In February 2021, the German Trade Union Organisation (DGB – Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes)<sup>64</sup> denounced a complete lack of consultation with the government.<sup>65</sup>

64 Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes: <https://www.dgb.de/>

65 Deutschen Gewerkschaftsbundes (2021): Stellungnahme: <https://www.dgb.de/++co++e7c8b2bc-714f-11eb-a1a2-001a4a160123/DGB-Stellungnahme-zum-Entwurf-des-Deutschen-Aufbau-und-Resilienzplans.pdf>

# Country Monitor: Greece



Hard hit by the 2008 financial crisis, Greece slowly began to recover in 2018, after a 10-year economic crisis that turned the country in a difficult place to live, study, and work. Many Greek workers were left without a job; the country came to have Europe's greatest income inequalities; and regional and gender gaps led many people to leave the country. The pandemic created a new multi-level crisis, the effects of which, although not yet fully measurable, have already left their marks on economic and social life. Unemployment rates remain around 10 percentage points higher than the European average, and the Gini coefficient indicates ever-growing income inequalities. Moreover, SOLIDAR's Greek National Strategy Group (NSG) reports strong negative consequences on the country's education systems, particularly due to the increasing public funds that are allocated to private education providers. High rates of youth unemployment led to a "brain drain", which the government is trying to counter through salary incentives to encourage Greek people to return from abroad.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	32.3	31.0	31.1	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	19.3%	17.3%	16.3%	7.0%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	50.0 (2017)	51.2	52.2 (2021)	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	10.9%	10.1%	9.8%	9.2% (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	29.2%	28.7%	29.1%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

# Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

## WORKING CONDITIONS AND PRECARIOUSNESS

Although Greece has recently been on a slight recovery trend from the 2012 economic crisis, its gross domestic product fell 7.9% in 2020 from the previous year.<sup>7</sup> The pandemic worsened participation in the already-fragile Greek labour market, and the unemployment rate – which reached 16.3% in 2020 – remains the highest in Europe.<sup>8</sup> **Inequalities persist in**

**the labour market, since unemployment continues mainly to affect vulnerable social groups. It is higher among women, among young people aged 15 to 24, and in some geographical areas – mainly in the Western Greece region.<sup>9</sup>** Confirming a trend experienced by other European countries throughout 2020, Greece registered a significant drop in the number of employees, while the number of self-employed workers grew. In addition, a large proportion of workers

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EL>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Greece: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

7 EURES (2021) Labour Market Information – Greece: <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=2589&countryId=GR&acro=Imi&lang=en>

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

faced a suspension of their contracts for more than three months, which caused their monthly salaries to fall by an average of half.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, an unprecedented conversion from full-time to part-time contracts took place. In general terms, the average monthly salary was reduced by 10% compared with the previous year, leading to financial difficulties for many people. The pandemic did not only affect salaries and incomes, but it also forced many workers to transition to online and other solutions in order to work from home. Many employees in Greece work in the service sector (23%), so this resulted in increased working hours and a heavier workload, and around 60% of workers said they worked more than 40 hours per week. Nevertheless, precarious contracts, increased workload, and growing unemployment rates do not seem to affect the Greek population equally. The number of low-income households (with an income below 60% of the median) increased by 1.5% from 2019, while the number of households with an annual income of more than €30,000 also increased – from 5.8% in 2019, to 6.7% in 2020.<sup>11</sup> SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group is therefore particularly worried by widening income inequalities, which disrupt cohesion and foster social injustice.

In June 2021, under great criticism from unions and workers, the government passed the new Labour Law 4808/2021.<sup>12</sup> While members of the Greek parliament were adopting this reform, strikes and demonstrations unfolded against it in the streets. The reform covers working conditions and mainly concerns the introduction of more flexible working hours and

ways of working. The most contested measure makes it possible for employees to work longer days without receiving more pay in exchange for time off in the same week. The main criticism from the Greek trade unions confederation GSEE is that the law would introduce the logic of “more work, less pay, no protection”,<sup>13</sup> as it would let employers force employees to work overtime with a day off instead of proper compensation.

## GENDER EQUALITY

Inequalities between women and men are still a very pertinent factor in Greece. They affect people's everyday lives and hinder equal opportunities and fair access to the labour market, employment contracts, and equitable salaries. The annual report of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) ranks Greece last among European countries in gender equality. Moreover, it has ranked last for a decade now, meaning that not much effort has been made since 2010 to develop effective policies. **In the labour market, women are overrepresented among holders of part-time contracts: the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment is 31.4% for women.**<sup>14</sup> **This data is mirrored in monthly earnings that are an average of 200 points lower for women in terms of purchasing power standard (PPS).**<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that women are the ones taking care of young children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. They also do 85.3% of housework, indicating huge gender

10 Kousta, E., (2021) Greece: Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/other/2021/working-life-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-2020#wp-103877>

11 Kousta, E., (2021) Greece: Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2020: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/other/2021/working-life-in-the-covid-19-pandemic-2020#wp-103877>

12 Law 4808/2021: [https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/54940/o-neos-nomos-48082021-gia-ta-ergasiaka-dhmosieyohke-sto-fek?fbclid=IwAR24C3E08IBZ56v70Y8DKq02jWyrYq1jaACydZq\\_olJeiN-hRuhpcP2yhI](https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/54940/o-neos-nomos-48082021-gia-ta-ergasiaka-dhmosieyohke-sto-fek?fbclid=IwAR24C3E08IBZ56v70Y8DKq02jWyrYq1jaACydZq_olJeiN-hRuhpcP2yhI)

13 The Guardian (2021) Controversial new labour laws set to shake up working life in Greece: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/17/greece-controversial-new-labour-law-reform-shake-up-working-life>

14 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Greece: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EL>

15 Expressing income in PPS (Purchasing Power Standard) allows to account for differences in currency among European Member states.

inequalities in the time spent on care and domestic activities.<sup>16</sup> Parental leave in Greece is unpaid, presenting households with a difficult choice. The parent with the highest salary – usually a man – continues to work.<sup>17</sup> Gender balance is not a reality across the political and economic spheres either: women are under-represented as government ministers (82.4% are men), members of parliament (81.1% are men), and members of regional assemblies (78.8% are men). The gap gets even wider on large companies' boards, where 90% of members are men.<sup>18</sup> Similar numbers are found in public institutions, such as research-funding and broadcasting organisations, where 84% are men.

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

After 2015, when migratory flows towards Europe increased, Greece made some small steps forward to ensure equal rights and opportunities in society for migrants and refugees. Possibly due to the pandemic, land and sea arrivals declined sharply in 2020 to 15,669 from 74,613 in 2019.<sup>19</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that several emergency projects have been adopted over the last five years, aimed at protecting migrant people and providing inclusion for children and other vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, the Migrant Integration Policy Index for 2020 finds that the Greek system of reception and protection still generates more

obstacles than benefits for inclusion. The main obstacles are in education, access to citizenship, and political participation.<sup>20</sup> The National Strategy Group confirms the data. It also reports that **migrants and refugees face notable delays in obtaining a social security number, which not only hinders their full access to healthcare, but also prevents them from accessing the labour market, leading to illegal labour and employment relations.**

Moreover, SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group identifies a worrying, radical change in Greece's approach towards migrant and refugee inclusion. This approach tries to represent Greece as unsafe and unwelcoming for migrants, with the aim of discouraging them from coming to the country. Greece recently added Turkey to its list of countries to which it is safe to send back migrants,<sup>21</sup> and it has started increasingly to reject migrants and apply push-back measures at its borders. Greek border forces were reported to use tear gas, water cannons, and even plastic bullets against people attempting to cross.<sup>22</sup> Other abuses have included excessive use of force and beatings, as well as systematic unnecessary detention. Breaching the principle of non-refoulement, Greece even temporarily suspended asylum requests on 2 March 2020.<sup>23</sup> A joint declaration published in February 2021 and signed by six national CSOs operating in the fields of inclusion and migration<sup>24</sup> called for an immediate ban on pushbacks at the Turkish border. It said that these violate human rights, as well as Greek and international law.<sup>25</sup>

16 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Greece: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/EL>

17 EIGE (2021) Who is eligible for parental leave in Greece? <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/who-eligible-parental-leave-greece>

18 Ibid.

19 Amnesty International (2021) Greece 2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/greece/report-greece/>

20 MIPEX (2021) MIPEX 2020 – Greece: <https://www.mipex.eu/greece>

21 MacGregor, M (2021) Greece: More asylum seekers could be sent back to Turkey under government plan. (InfoMigrants): <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/32805/greece-more-asylum-seekers-could-be-sent-back-to-turkey-under-government-plan>

22 Amnesty International (2021) Greece 2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/greece/report-greece/>

23 Act on the "Suspension of the submission of asylum applications": <http://www.immigration.gr/2020/03/pnp-anastolh-ths-ypovolis-aithseon-asylou.html?m=1>

24 Joint Statement on push backs practices in Greece (2021): [https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/JOINT\\_STATEMENT\\_GR\\_NGOS.pdf](https://www.gcr.gr/media/k2/attachments/JOINT_STATEMENT_GR_NGOS.pdf)

25 Ibid.

On the other hand, some successful programmes have been developed or prolonged to provide support to newcomers in Greece. In particular, the ESTIA programme<sup>26</sup> provides accommodation, psychological support, and inclusion activities. Launched and operated by the United Nations Refugee Agency UNHCR, the programme has now been taken over by the Greek government as ESTIA II.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the programme Stegasi kai Ergasia – shelter and work – has been transformed by Law 4756/2020<sup>28</sup> into a stable programme for vulnerable groups facing homelessness. Civil society organisations working with the homeless welcomed this with enthusiasm, as a good example of the transformation of a proven good practice into a long-term, sustainable programme.

## THE BRAIN DRAIN

The brain-drain phenomenon, when highly trained or qualified people leave a country, has been widespread in Greece over the last

decade. Since 2010, around 400,000 people have left the country, of whom 69% held a master's or a PhD diploma and 26% another kind of university degree.<sup>29</sup> They mainly move to other European countries, looking for a better employment match for their education. The brain drain also constitutes an accelerating demographic threat for Greek society. As young people leave, the population is aging at high speed.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the restrictions imposed by European governments to contain the spread of coronavirus had a strong impact on migratory flows, which decreased dramatically. In these circumstances, **the Greek government adopted some new measures to try to keep highly skilled workers in the country and welcome back some people who had previously emigrated.** The Greek authorities recently launched a “Rebrain Greece” programme – a wage subsidy scheme offering high and competitive salaries to scientists, experts, and researchers willing to return to Greece to work.<sup>30</sup>

26 UNHCR, Estia Programme: <http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home/>

27 UNHCR (2020) Towards ESTIA II. UNHCR welcomes Greece's commitment to ensure the continuation of flagship reception programme for asylum-seekers: <https://www.unhcr.org/gr/en/15985-towards-estia-ii-unhcr-welcomes-greeces-commitment-to-ensure-the-continuation-of-flagship-reception-programme-for-asylum-seekers.html>

28 Law 4756/2020 - Government Gazette 235 / A / 26-11-2020 (Codified): Measures to support workers and vulnerable social groups, social security regulations and provisions to help the unemployed: <https://www.e-nomothesia.gr/kat-ergasia-koinonike-asphalise/nomos-4756-2020-phek-235a-26-11-2020.html>

29 Papakonstantinou, K., (2021) Discussing the Brain Drain, London School of Economics: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/greeceatlse/2021/03/10/discussing-the-brain-drain/>

30 Rebrain Greece: <https://platform.rebraingreece.gr/en/>

# Social protection and inclusion

The Greek National Strategy Group reports that no data is yet available on the impact that the 2020 measures had on poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Nevertheless, the government adopted some measures to ease the economic and financial pressures on households and citizens. Social assistance support was mainly provided through one-off payments to specific target groups. While this has certainly helped some people in need, the call for more long-term support was not heard. Directed at self-employed workers,<sup>31</sup> Law 4756/2020 provided a support payment of €600 in April 2020. Long-term unemployed workers could also benefit from a one-off payment of €400. To be eligible for this latter payment, people had to be unemployed and ineligible for any other unemployment benefit. However, the government has provided relatively little support.

Other categories of workers have been slightly more protected in 2021, and an ad-hoc measure was adopted in May 2020<sup>32</sup> to help seasonal workers in the tourism and food industries who were not rehired in 2021 due to the pandemic lockdowns and closures. They were given an extraordinary two months' worth

of compensation – corresponding to the unemployment benefit – for January and February 2021. Moreover, beneficiaries of the “GMI” guaranteed minimum income saw their monthly benefit increased by €100 for each child, with a ceiling of €300. But this lasted for just two months.<sup>33</sup> **All these measures were welcomed by their beneficiaries, but they did not provide long-term, sustainable support.**

## HOUSING MEASURES

**The Greek government introduced a mandatory reduction in rent for some target groups, pioneering this measure in Europe. The reduction corresponded to 40% of monthly rent** and was applicable from March to October 2020, with some extensions. People were entitled to the reduction if they were paying rent on a place of work, primary residence, or student accommodation.<sup>34</sup> According to the European Social Policy Network, this measure had a strong impact on renters throughout the country: in March 2020, 971,482 people benefited from this reduction.<sup>35</sup>

31 The beneficiaries of this measure included self-employed economists, accountants, engineers, lawyers, doctors, teachers and researchers.

32 Έκτακτη αποζημίωση εποχικά εργαζόμενων του τουριστικού και επισιτιστικού κλάδου χωρίς δικαίωμα υποχρεωτικής επαναπρόσληψης / Extraordinary monthly compensation for seasonal workers : <https://www.gov.gr/ipiresies/ergasia-kai-asphalise/nergia/ektakte-meniaia-apozemiose-epokhika-ergazomenon>

33 Εφάπαξ έκτακτη εισοδηματική ενίσχυση / One-time special income support: <https://covid19.gov.gr/efapax-ektakti-isodimati-ki-enischysi-apo-100-eos-300-evro-se-dikeouchous-tou-elachistou-engyimenou-isodimatos-pou-ine-gonis-anilikon-teknon/>

34 Μείωση μισθώματος επαγγελματικών μισθώσεων, μισθώσεων κύριας κατοικίας και εξαρτημένων μελών φοιτητών: <https://covid19.gov.gr/proeretiki-miosi-misthomatos-epangelmatikon-misthoseon-misthoseon-kyrias-katikias-misthoseon-exartime-non-melon-fititon-ke-misthoseon-naftikon/>

35 ESPN (2021) Thematic report on social protection and inclusion policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis – Greece: [https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=10&advSearchKey=%20ESPN\\_covid2021&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?pager.offset=10&advSearchKey=%20ESPN_covid2021&mode=advancedSubmit&catId=22&policyArea=0&policyAreaSub=0&country=0&year=0)



Moreover, through the Γέφυρα – Yéphira, bridge – programme,<sup>36</sup> the government contributed to the payment of mortgages on the primary residences of vulnerable borrowers who have been affected financially by the pandemic. The amount varied according to income and assets but ranged up to 90% of the monthly instalment for a maximum of nine months.

## EDUCATION

As in the rest of Europe and beyond, 2020 and 2021 were very difficult and peculiar years for both formal and nonformal education in Greece. Because of the pandemic, the majority of students and learners had to continue their education through online platforms and classes. **In Greece, as no public platforms were ready to meet the needs of online primary and secondary education, the government adopted Webex as the main platform.**<sup>37</sup> This is provided by a private American company that develops videoconferencing systems. In addition, several Greek education trade unions denounced an amendment adopted by the Greek Parliament without proper social dialogue consultations on the compulsory web streaming of classes and courses.<sup>38</sup> Despite their efforts, many students did not manage to follow online education, mainly due to gaps in digital skills or the lack of the necessary material and space.

Peculiar to Greece was the situation of migrant and refugee learners in refugee camps during the schools closure. Often lacking Internet access, they were provided with weekly homework assignments.

### GOOD PRACTICE

#### “Larissa learning city”: teachers networking to support learning and inclusion for vulnerable migrants<sup>39</sup>

The municipality of Larissa has been closely working with local civil society organisations to provide basic support for refugees living in the city and in the Koutsochero refugee camp. There, teachers provided extended support to students encountering significant challenges to access education on a daily basis. Mainly, the teachers translated information and adopted measures that had been written only in Greek. They helped children and students access online learning platforms, so that they could participate in distance education.

The National Strategy Group expresses its concerns over the Greek government’s choice to increasingly pay for private providers of vocational education. This promotes the growth of these providers,<sup>40</sup> while the country’s

36 Government Gazette 256 / AD / 23-12-2020 (Art. 82)

37 Ministry of Education, Circular Circular 15/9/202 121802 / DG4 - Instructions to Principals and Teachers of Primary and Secondary Education for modern distance education during the school year 2020-21: [https://webex.sch.gr/docs/odigies\\_gia\\_tin\\_syghroni\\_ex\\_apostaseos\\_ekpsi.pdf](https://webex.sch.gr/docs/odigies_gia_tin_syghroni_ex_apostaseos_ekpsi.pdf)

38 ETUCE (2020) Greece: Greek Government bypass social dialogue mechanisms and adopts regulation on live streaming delivery of lessons: <https://www.csee-etuce.org/en/news/member-organisations/3851-greece-greek-government-bypass-social-dialogue-mechanisms-and-adopts-regulation-on-live-streaming-delivery-of-lessons>

39 Deligiannis, D. Measures developed by cities for migrants and refugees during the COVID-19. The case of Larissa: <https://uil.unesco.org/system/files/larissa.pdf>

40 Ministry of Education (2020) Εκσυγχρονισμός της ιδιωτικής εκπαίδευσης και άλλες επείγουσες διατάξεις αρμοδιότητας / Modernisation of private education and other urgent provisions of competence: [https://www.esos.gr/sites/default/files/articles-legacy/\\_nomos\\_47132020.pdf](https://www.esos.gr/sites/default/files/articles-legacy/_nomos_47132020.pdf)

investment in public education in among the lowest in Europe as a proportion of GDP. Most worryingly, with the support of the right-wing Greek Solution Party, the Greek ruling party passed a law on 11 February 2021 that established a dedicated police section for public universities. The National Strategy Group denounces this law as a dramatic infringement of academic freedom and freedom of expression.

**On the other hand, the National Strategy Group reports that nonformal education is widely managed by CSOs.** These are mainly supporting migrant and refugee children through education activities and courses to promote child protection, empowerment, and employability. However, nonformal education also stopped during Greece's two lockdown periods.

## Civic space

Civic space and liberties were much debated in 2020, due to the various restrictions imposed by the government to contain the spread of Covid-19. The National Strategy Group reports that freedom of association was generally respected and protected in Greece. However, **major concerns were raised over Ministerial Decision 3063/2020,<sup>41</sup> which introduced strict requirements for the registration and certification of CSOs and NGOs working in migration and asylum.** The decision provides that, in order to continue their activities and operations, the organisations must apply for a certificate from the Greek Ministry of Citizen Protection. The certificate is issued after an examination process, which analyses documents submitted by the organisations. According to the European Expert Council on NGO Law, the proposed requirements can be discriminatory.<sup>42</sup> Organisations with longer activity track records will be at an advantage, as will those that can demonstrate their sustainability. But these provisions will put newer and smaller service providers at a disadvantage.

The National Strategy Group echoes these remarks and opposes the potential criminalisation of organisations carrying out humanitarian activities.

Moreover, such an important governmental decision should only have been adopted following an inclusive and participatory procedure, which did not take place. While some NGOs had the opportunity to submit an opinion, the timeline was extremely short for elaborate and relevant feedback<sup>43</sup> and no public consultation took place. This is particularly negative, as any regulation dealing with freedom of association should be adopted through a democratic and participatory procedure.

From mid-2020 to mid-2021, various public demonstrations took place in Greece, including some against any austerity measures that might be introduced. In Greece, as in other European countries, authorities often found the pandemic a reason to impose limitations on public gatherings and the right to demonstrate.

41 Ministerial Decision 3063/2020 / Καθορισμός λειτουργίας του «Μητρώου Ελληνικών και Ξένων Μη Κυβερνητικών Οργανώσεων (ΜΚΟ)» και του «Μητρώου Μελών Μη Κυβερνητικών Οργανώσεων (ΜΚΟ)», που δραστηριοποιούνται σε θέματα διεθνούς προστασίας, μετανάστευσης και κοινωνικής ένταξης εντός της Ελληνικής Επικράτειας: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12yuxqKCKFp5W9zz06wSjEJgYIM3aV5P9/view>

42 Expert Council on NGO Law (2020) Opinion on the compatibility with European standards of recent and planned amendments to the Greek legislation on NGO registration: <https://rm.coe.int/expert-council-conf-exp-2020-4-opinion-ngo-registration-greece/16809ee91d>

43 Ibid.

Legislative reforms regulating the right to demonstrate were carried out in July and September 2020.<sup>44</sup> While it is recognised that restrictions can be acceptable to curb the pandemic, it is nevertheless necessary to implement them with transparency, through clear criteria which meet the principles of necessity and proportionality. Amnesty International reported that these requirements were not met in Greece. One example is the use of force and subsequent detention by the police to stop demonstrations, which led people to incur a higher risk of contagion by gathering in small spaces.<sup>45</sup> There were also reports of the use of force and the dispersion of peaceful protests, with the police using water cannon and

chemical irritants against protesters.

**In addition, the Greek government passed a controversial new law creating a dedicated police force for university campuses.** The government presented it as a necessary measure to reduce crime on campuses, but the National Strategy Group – as well as students and academics – fear that this will hinder freedom of speech and academic freedom. The NSG stands against the introduction of police officers into universities, which should be places that foster freedom and critical thinking. CIVICUS Monitor therefore rates Greek civic space as “narrowed”.<sup>46</sup>

## Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

Following the emergency situation due to the coronavirus, the Greek government adopted measures without consulting social partners or other political forces. The National Strategy Group reports that the EU has requested that CSOs be involved in formal social dialogue procedures.<sup>47</sup> These are normally carried out through open public consultations and meetings, or by writing open letters to authorities. Nevertheless, throughout 2020 and in particular during the drafting of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan, the impression was that, although CSOs should be invited to contribute to national planning and the design of policies, their input rarely had an impact.

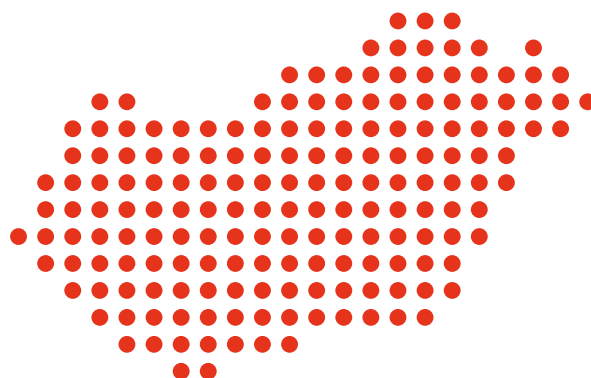
44 Amnesty International (2021) Greece: Authorities abusing power to trample on right to protest: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/greece-authorities-abusing-power-to-trample-on-right-to-protest/>

45 Ibid.

46 CIVICUS (2021) Civicus Monitor – Greece: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/greece/>

47 European Commission (2020) Commission Staff Working Document, Guidance to Member States - Recovery and Resilience Plans, (part 1, p. 33) : [https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/recovery-and-resilience-task-force\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/recovery-and-resilience-task-force_en)

# Country Monitor: **Hungary**



SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group (NSG) in Hungary reported deteriorations in both working and living conditions, and it is particularly concerned about the reduction of income and high unemployment that followed the Covid-19 pandemic. The health crisis also exposed the difficult situation of the healthcare sector, in particular a shortage of workers and a consequent increased workload for healthcare professionals. Moreover, civic space – the protection of democratic spaces and rights, as well as media and academic freedom – is increasingly under pressure from the government, which often used the pandemic as a pretext to limit civic freedoms. Measures to tackle the health crisis were often delivered without previous notice, and consultation with social partners and civil society was generally overlooked.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	28.7	25.1	28.3	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	3.7%	5.4%	4.1%	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	51.9 (2019)	52.9 (2020)	53.4 (2021)	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	8.5%	8.5%	7.8%	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	20.1%	20.3%	19.0%	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	N/A

### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

# Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

## WORKING CONDITIONS

At the beginning of 2021, the participation rate in the Hungarian labour market stood at 63.2%.<sup>7</sup>

**Although the number of unemployed people had been decreasing since 2015, the pandemic reversed this trend and the unemployment rate hit 4.5% in April 2021.**<sup>8</sup> In the same month, youth unemployment peaked at 14%.<sup>9</sup> Due to the restrictions imposed by the

government to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the Hungarian economy suffered a particular impact in the second quarter of 2020, when GDP declined 13.6% compared to the same quarter in 2019.<sup>10</sup> The hours of around 22% of workers were reduced due to the pandemic, while 8% were furloughed without a salary and 3% were dismissed.<sup>11</sup>

Following its policy of a “work-based society”,

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/HU>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Hungary: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/hungary/>

7 EURES (2021) Labour market information – Hungary: <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=2768&countryId=HU&acro=Imi&lang=en&regionId=HU0&nuts2Code=%20&nuts3Code=&regionName=National%20Level>

8 Eurostat (2021) Euro area unemployment at 7.7%: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11563203/3-30072021-CP-EN.pdf/35dbf525-da32-809f-0f9d-cd36a271a760?t=1627633423854>

9 Ibid.

10 Eurofound (2021) Living and Working conditions in Hungary: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/hungary>

11 Ibid.

which grants social assistance in return for work,<sup>12</sup> the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán did not design any specific measure to support workers without jobs.<sup>13</sup> A short-time allowance was introduced from July to August 2021, but its short duration meant it did not have a measurable impact on Hungarians' incomes and quality of life.<sup>14</sup>

Social partners were little involved throughout the year, and their demands were not heard. There were also strikes. Several companies – mainly large multinationals – are reported to have terminated collective agreements with workers<sup>15</sup> under the pretext of the pandemic. In addition, some temporary measures adopted by the government allowed employers to arbitrarily decide on their employees' schedules, as well as to impose home-office solutions.<sup>16</sup>

**Despite the negotiation of a 4% increase in minimum wages, which was agreed on at the beginning of 2021,<sup>17</sup> Eurofound reported that no increase in real terms was perceived by workers,** due to inflation and the increase in daily expenses.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the hourly minimum wage in Hungary remains the second lowest in the EU, above only that of Bulgaria.<sup>19</sup>

The pandemic exposed some of the existing inequalities affecting the labour market, such as the gender gap in pay and income distribution, the shortage of workers in healthcare and education, and the population's lack of digital competence and awareness.<sup>20</sup>

## GENDER EQUALITY

Women in Hungary do not have the same access as men to the labour market. The employment gap is still very wide between men (more than 80%) and women (65.3%), and women's monthly earnings are still lower than those of men.<sup>21</sup> The full-time equivalent (FTE) employment rate of women is around 20 percentage points lower than that of men.<sup>22</sup> This also helps to explain the lower participation of women in the labour market, together with the fact that women are still mainly responsible for household care activities. While 56% of women carry out cooking and household tasks every day, only 14% of men do this.<sup>23</sup>

Women in Hungary are underrepresented in both the political and economic worlds and therefore have low decision-making power and influence. Men make up 80% of government ministers, well above the European average of 66%, and 87% of parliamentarians are men, above the European average of 67%.<sup>24</sup> In addition, women are even less present on the boards of the country's largest companies: only 10% of board members are women. Worryingly, no woman is on the boards or decision-making bodies of research-funding organisations – these are 100% male. And women occupy only 29% of the seats on the boards of public broadcasters.<sup>25</sup> The NSG thinks this is a serious situation.

Despite a doubling of incidents of gender violence since the beginning of the pandemic,<sup>26</sup>

12 FES Budapest (2018) Welfare for the Wealthy - The Social Policy of the Orbán-regime, 2010-2017: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/14209.pdf>

13 Eurofound (2021) Living and Working conditions in Hungary: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/hungary>

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

17 Eurofund (2021) Minimum wages in 2021: Most countries settle for cautious increase: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sv/publications/article/2021/minimum-wages-in-2021-most-countries-settle-for-cautious-increase>

18 Eurofund (2021) Minimum wages in 2021: annual review: [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef21015en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef21015en.pdf)

19 Ibid.

20 Eurofound (2021) Living and Working conditions in Hungary: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/hungary>

21 Ibid.

22 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2021 – Hungary: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/work/HU>

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 European Parliament (2020) Question for written answer E-002981/2020/rev.1 to the Council: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-002981\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-002981_EN.html)

the country refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention<sup>27</sup> on violence against women and gender-based violence in May 2020. The excuse was that Hungarian law already contained legal protection for women.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the Hungarian Parliament did not ratify the convention, as it was deemed to promote illegal immigration to the country, as well as a supposed “gender ideology”.<sup>29</sup> However, this is nothing new for Hungarians, as the government has not ratified the ILO’s Violence and Harassment Convention<sup>30</sup> either.<sup>31</sup>

## EDUCATION

Schools and education and training institutions were closed in March 2020, following a rapid increase of coronavirus cases in the country and across Europe.<sup>32</sup> Education switched completely to online classes and methods, which were initially very difficult to access and adapt to. Hungary, like most other EU countries, had not made preparations to offer online teaching and learning, so teachers and students quickly had to find online platforms and tools. Civil society organisations provided huge support for online education, by coordinating teachers and providing assistance for disadvantaged students.<sup>33</sup>

**Inequalities have been exacerbated both at school level and at the level of individual students. Some schools appear to**

**have been better prepared than others to deal with and adapt to online scenarios.** Schools with a lower capacity to adapt were those where the majority of children came from poor backgrounds, notably Roma.<sup>34</sup> Often, the poorest parents lacked the time to prioritize their children’s education. In other cases, they were digitally illiterate and thus unable to provide support. In households with more than three children of school age, parents often could not cope with their own work, as well as education and other daily tasks. In some schools, up to 57% of students did not hand in the weekly assignments prepared by their teachers.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, students with special learning needs or disabilities were also disadvantaged during online learning. The lack of personal contact and reduction of time spent with support teachers disproportionately affected these students.<sup>36</sup>

Other than some measures to test teachers and staff members for Covid-19, no major change was implemented that affected education in 2021.<sup>37</sup>

The NSG reports that a new regulation on vocational education and training was implemented. From the 2020/21 academic year, training has been gradually transformed. However, successful graduation from high school is still one of the criteria for entering higher education.

27 Council of Europe (2011) Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

28 European Parliament (2020) Question for written answer E-002981/2020/rev.1 to the Council: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-002981\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-002981_EN.html)

29 Ibid.

30 ILO (2019) C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:3999810:NO](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:3999810:NO)

31 ILO (2021) Up-to-date Conventions and Protocols not ratified by Hungary: [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:11210:0::NO::P11210\\_COUNTRY\\_ID:102679](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:11210:0::NO::P11210_COUNTRY_ID:102679)

32 JRC (2021) The school year 2020-2021 in Hungary during the pandemic: [https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bit-stream/JRC125455/jrc125455\\_edu\\_covid\\_hungary\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bit-stream/JRC125455/jrc125455_edu_covid_hungary_report_2021.pdf)

33 Prohász, Á. (2020) A tantermi és az on-line oktatás (tanítás és tanulás) összehasonlító elemzése: <http://opuseteducatio.hu/index.php/opusHU/article/view/390/672>

34 JRC (2021) The school year 2020-2021 in Hungary during the pandemic: [https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bit-stream/JRC125455/jrc125455\\_edu\\_covid\\_hungary\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bit-stream/JRC125455/jrc125455_edu_covid_hungary_report_2021.pdf)

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Eurydice (2021) National Education Reforms in Hungary: [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-29\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/national-reforms-school-education-29_en)

## GOOD PRACTICE The Safe Start<sup>38</sup>

The Biztos Kezdet Gyerekház, or Safe Start Programme, is aimed at laying the foundations for children's successful integration into society. It originated in an NGO project founded in 2020 by the Hungarian Directorate-General for Social Opportunities.<sup>39</sup> It comprises different projects that aim to provide help for young children living in disadvantaged

households, in order to give them with a "safe start" along with their peers, so that they do not lag behind in development and social skills. In addition, events for parents are organised to enhance group activities and community building. The Safe Start centres give adults support and the opportunity to use computers, the internet, and the telephone.<sup>40</sup> This programme plays an important role in communities and fosters social cohesion.

# Social protection and inclusion

**Income distribution is not fair in Hungary, and there is a growing distance between the poor and the rich: the Gini-coefficient increased to 28.2% in 2020.**<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic's consequences mainly affected low-income workers and those in precarious work situations.<sup>42</sup> This led to a 58% increase in in-work poverty over the last decade, the biggest increase among EU countries, which left more than 8% of workers living in poverty.<sup>43</sup>

In 2020, 17.8% of Hungarian population were living at risk of poverty or social exclusion.<sup>44</sup>

Children and young adults are the most affected group in society, and 15.2% live in material deprivation, compared to the EU average of 6.4%.<sup>45</sup> Among Roma children, 43.7% live in severe deprivation.<sup>46</sup>

According to the NSG, no specific measures have been adopted in 2021 to reduce poverty in Hungary. Moreover, social allowances have been frozen, as has been the case over the past few years, the NSG reports. This choice is connected to what Viktor Orbán started to call a "work-based society" and the government's reform of the welfare system.<sup>47</sup> Based on this

38 Biztos Kezdet Gyerekház: <https://tef.gov.hu/projektek/>

39 Hungarian Directorate-General for Social Opportunities: <https://tef.gov.hu/>

40 Safe Start - Devecser: <https://maltai.hu/bkgydevecser>

41 EAPN (2021) Hungary Poverty Watch 2020: [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EAPN-EAPN-Hungary-Poverty-Watch-2020\\_ENG-4680.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EAPN-EAPN-Hungary-Poverty-Watch-2020_ENG-4680.pdf)

42 Ibid.

43 ETUC (2020) Pay rises needed as in-work poverty rises by 12% in EU: <https://www.etuc.org/en/pressrelease/pay-rises-needed-work-poverty-rises-12-eu>

44 Statista (2021) Share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the total population of Hungary from 2007 to 2020: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1012809/hungary-share-of-people-at-risk-of-poverty/>

45 EAPN (2021) Hungary Poverty Watch 2020: [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EAPN-EAPN-Hungary-Poverty-Watch-2020\\_ENG-4680.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/EAPN-EAPN-Hungary-Poverty-Watch-2020_ENG-4680.pdf)

46 Ibid.

47 FES Budapest (2018) Welfare for the Wealthy - The Social Policy of the Orbán-regime, 2010-2017: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/14209.pdf>



policy, most resources and allowances are now allocated to the “hard working” part of society, which basically means those who already benefit from a stable position in the labour market. Workers living in poverty and the unemployed are overlooked.<sup>48</sup> The NSG denounces the choice of the country to offer social protection only in exchange for work. Moreover, consultations with relevant stakeholders have also stopped, and the ruling party overlooks parliamentary procedures and open consultations.<sup>49</sup>

## HEALTHCARE

The accessibility and affordability of healthcare in Hungary differs by region and health insurance coverage. The NSG reports that, during the pandemic, access to healthcare services was restricted to people without social insurance, which primarily affects poor workers and those in precarious situations.

The NSG reports that a lack of adequate professional personnel was a problem throughout the pandemic. This was especially problematic in the spring of 2021, during the third wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the number of infected patients needing hospital care and ventilators grew rapidly, increasing the ratio of doctors to patients.<sup>50</sup> Most importantly, healthcare personnel in Hungarian hospitals denounced a lack of basic items such as soap

and sanitizer,<sup>51</sup> leading a large number of people to contract the coronavirus inside hospitals.

**In March 2020, the government adopted changes to the healthcare system,<sup>52</sup> and the public employee status of medical workers was removed.** The government claimed a new system was needed to make healthcare workers more efficient and flexible.<sup>53</sup> But the reform has made it easier to fire nurses and healthcare assistants, or to relocate them anywhere in the country. Despite substantial increases in doctors’ pay during the pandemic,<sup>54</sup> the legislation included no pay rise for nurses or other medical workers. Medical personnel therefore had to face a difficult choice during an already uncertain and unstable period: accept the new conditions or resign. The workers denounced the lack of discussion with their representatives before the law was passed,<sup>55</sup> so healthcare workers had to accept a new contract without fair prior consultation.

## ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE AND ADEQUATE HOUSING

The NSG reports that the government’s housing policy in recent years mainly focused on incentives for families, as part of a long-term demographic strategy.<sup>56</sup> This has been, according to the NSG, the main tool as well as the main objective guiding the government’s decisions

48 FES Budapest (2018) Welfare for the Wealthy - The Social Policy of the Orbán-regime, 2010-2017: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/budapest/14209.pdf>

49 Ibid.

50 IHME (2021) Covid-19 Projections in Hungary: <https://covid19.healthdata.org/hungary?view=cumulative-deaths&tab=trend>

51 Human Rights Watch (2021) World report 2021 – Hungary: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/hungary>

52 Kihirdetve (2020) 2020. évi C. Törvény az egészségügyi szolgálati jogviszonyról: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2000100.tv>

53 DW (2021) Hungary: Health care workers speak out: <https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-health-care-workers-speak-out/av-58254675>

54 Reuters (2020) Hungary PM agrees on big wage hike for doctors as COVID-19 cases rise: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-hungary-healthcare/hungary-pm-agrees-on-big-wage-hike-for-doctors-as-covid-19-cases-rise-idINKB-N26Q0P5?edition-redirect=in>

55 DW (2021) Hungary: Health care workers speak out: <https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-health-care-workers-speak-out/av-58254675>

56 European Social Policy Network ESPN (2019) Measures to fight demographic decline in Hungary: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=19642&langId=en>

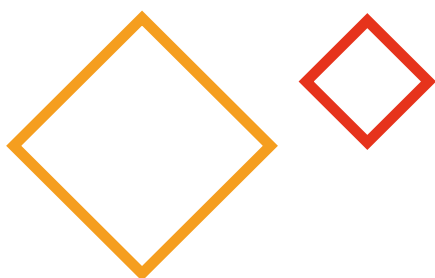
on housing. The Family Housing Support Programme (CSOK)<sup>57</sup> aims to increase home ownership and provides significant support and low-interest loans for households with children to buy houses. Incentives increase in proportion to the number of children present in the household.

However, the NSG calls for broader policies on housing, which is often unsafe. The percentage of overcrowded dwellings in Hungary is 3.2 points above the EU27 average,<sup>58</sup> and poverty prevents many residents from renovating. This highlights the need for public support for the maintenance of houses throughout the country. **Hungary has one of the highest percentages (22.3%) in the EU of houses with a leaking roof and of houses without a toilet or bath (2.7%).** In addition, 5.4% of households are still unable to keep their homes warm.<sup>59</sup> Because of the importance of adequate housing during a health crisis, the NSG calls on the government to take immediate action. It is particularly urgent, given that housing prices grew at a steady pace, rising by 6.8% compared to 2020, according to the country's central bank.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, almost 7% of the population suffer from a housing cost overburden,<sup>61</sup> meaning that housing costs represent more than 40% of household disposable income. Inequalities are evident: low-income households on average spend more than 27% of their income on house-related expenses, compared to 11% for high-income households.<sup>62</sup>

### GOOD PRACTICE Welkám Májgrencsz!

The Asylum Association Menedék<sup>63</sup> looks for people throughout the country who are willing to rent a room or a flat for the project "Welcome migrants!"<sup>64</sup> This aims to provide support to migrants and refugees who are having a hard time finding accommodation. People can register their rooms, and the organisation will match owners and tenants.



57 Hungarian Government: Családi Otthonteremtési Kedvezmény (CSOK): <https://kormany.hu/penzugyminiszterium/csaladi-otthonteremtési-kedvezmény>

58 Eurostat (2020) Quality of Housing: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-1c.html?lang=en>

59 Ibid.

60 Magyar Nemzeti Bank (2021) House Price Index: <https://www.mnb.hu/letoltes/mnb-lakasarindex-en.xlsx>

61 Eurostat (2020) Quality of Housing: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/digpub/housing/bloc-1c.html?lang=en>

62 Ibid.

63 Asylum Association Menedék: <https://menedek.hu/>

64 Project "Welkám Májgrencsz!": <https://menedek.hu/vm>

# Civic space

The NSG describes a rather negative image of civic space in Hungary. After the first cases of Covid-19 in March 2021, the government of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used the pandemic and health emergency as a pretext for passing laws granting him the power to rule by decree without parliamentary oversight. This power was granted for a period that was not explicitly defined.<sup>65</sup> Among other powers, the government could arbitrarily restrict freedom, movement, and the right to peaceful assembly.<sup>66</sup> In particular, the NSG reports that NGOs dealing with refugee rights, corruption, human and LGBTQI+ rights face discrimination from the state. They have no chance to receive public funds, so they often operate with scarce financial and human resources. Particularly on LGBTQI+ rights, the government is promoting discriminatory measures. For example, despite a 2020 rebuke by the European Court of Human Rights over Hungary's violations of transgender rights,<sup>67</sup> in May 2020 the government officially prohibited the gender recognition of transgender people, instead confirming that gender registration needs to be based on the sex assigned at birth.<sup>68</sup> In November 2020, the constitution was amended to redefine the concept of family,<sup>69</sup> declaring that children's parents have to be a man and a woman and restricting same-sex couples' right to adopt children.

The NSG reports that the right to peaceful assembly was only partially respected in 2020 and 2021, as it was restricted due to Covid-19 containment regulations. Assembly therefore mainly moved online. Moreover, **in April 2020, the government passed an amendment to the criminal code that broadened the offence of diffusing false or distorted information and made it punishable with a sentence of five years in prison.**<sup>70</sup> However, the NSG reports that media platforms in Hungary are increasingly controlled by the government or by pro-government businesses, which are politically biased and threaten media independence. Hungary's media regulation authority did not renew the licence of the opposition media outlet Klubrádió, which expired at the beginning of 2021.<sup>71</sup>

In conclusion, civic space and freedoms have been constantly under attack in Hungary over the past decade, in which time they have eroded. The CIVICUS Monitor declared that Hungarian civic space is obstructed, based on the increased restrictions on the right of association, the systematic targeting of initiatives by LGBTQI+ and refugee organisations, and the decreasing independence of the media.<sup>72</sup>

65 Freedom House (2021) Freedom in the world 2021 - Hungary Overview: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2021>

66 Amnesty International (2021) Report on Hungary: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/europe-and-central-asia/hungary/report-hungary/>

67 ECHR (2020) Case of Rana V. Hungary – Judgment: [https://www.stradalex.com/nl/sl\\_src\\_publ\\_jur\\_int/document/echr\\_40888-17](https://www.stradalex.com/nl/sl_src_publ_jur_int/document/echr_40888-17)

68 The Guardian (2021) Hungary votes to end legal recognition of trans people: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/19/hungary-votes-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people>

69 Reuters (2020) Hungary amends constitution to redefine family, limits gay adoption: <https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-lgbt-idUKKBN28P1N8>

70 Freedom House (2021) Freedom in the world 2021 - Hungary Overview: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2021>

71 European Parliament (2021) Media freedom under attack in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia

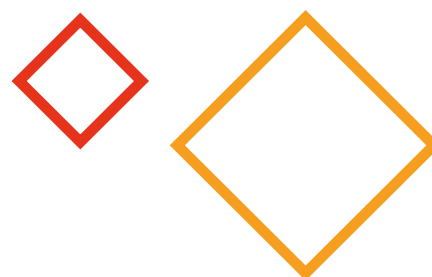
72 CIVICUS (2021) Hungary country report: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/hungary/>

# Civil dialogue and the national recovery and resilience plan

The National Strategy Group reports that, throughout 2020 and 2021, trade unions have been particularly active with negotiations and tripartite consultations with the employers' representative and the government. Following their discussions, an agreement was reached in January 2021 to increase the Hungarian minimum wage.<sup>73</sup> Dialogue with local authorities was initiated at the beginning of 2021 on the topic of animal welfare, when civil society and organisations were called on to give their opinions over animal cruelty in the context of circus.<sup>74</sup> The dialogue aimed to improve animal wellbeing and, eventually, an amendment to the Hungarian Animal Protection Law.<sup>75</sup>

Consultations with civil society over the national Recovery and Resilience Plan were carried out only from November 2020 to the first months of 2021. The National Strategy Group condemns the methodology adopted to allow civil society organisations to express their

concerns over and demands for the plan. **The NSG reports that CSOs were not included in the drafting of the plan** and that, for the online consultation, they were only provided with a general summary of what the government had prepared. In April 2021, according to the National Strategy Group, the government finally published the comprehensive and complete plan.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, civil society was not able to provide reasoned feedback and could not hold proper internal meetings to discuss the complete version. However, following the EU's concerns over the lack of measures to prevent corruption,<sup>77</sup> the Hungarian government had to rewrite the plan. This also happened behind closed doors and so lacked transparency. Throughout the year, citizens and organised civil society lost confidence in Hungarian institutions, and half of Hungarians were dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in the country.<sup>78</sup>



73 Eurofund (2021) Minimum wages in 2021: Most countries settle for cautious increase: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sv/publications/article/2021/minimum-wages-in-2021-most-countries-settle-for-cautious-increase>

74 NAK (2021) Állatvédelmi társadalmi párbeszéd indult: <https://www.nak.hu/kamara/kamarai-hirek/orszagos-hirek/103067-allatvedelmi-tarsadalmi-parbeszed-indult>

75 Hungary Today (2021) Hungary to Establish New Animal Protection Law: <https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-new-animal-protection-law-legislation-rights-shelter-cruelty-abuse-punishment/>

76 Hungarian Government (2021) Recovery and Resilience Plan: <https://www.palyazat.gov.hu/helyreallitasi-es-ellenallokepessegi-eszkoz-rrf>

77 Politico (2021) Brussels holds up Hungary's recovery plan: <https://www.politico.eu/article/brussels-holds-up-hungarys-recovery-plan-but-for-how-long/>

78 Euronews (2021) Eurobarometer: a magyarok jobban bíznak az Európai Parlamentben, mint a magyarban: <https://hu.euronews.com/2021/05/06/eurobarometer-a-magyarok-fele-elegedett-a-demokracia-mukodesével>

# Country Monitor: **Italy**



The National Strategy Group reports that the most pressing social issues are increasing poverty, high social exclusion, and growing inequalities. Education and lifelong learning are in desperate need of more funds and are key to the social and economic recovery of the country. Labour rights and the protection of employment must be adapted to the twin transitions, digital and green.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	33.4	32.8	/	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	10.6%	10%	9.2%	7.1%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	63.0	63.5(2020)	63.8 (2021)	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	12.3%	11.8%	/	9.2 % (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	27.8%	28.3%	/	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OPEN (until November)	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

Equal opportunities and access to services and the labour market have been hindered by the pandemic, which strongly hit the Italian peninsula both on a social and an economic level. Existing inequalities were magnified by the pandemic, which is disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable groups of society. **Women, young people, migrants, and LGBT people have been the most affected by job losses. They also suffer more from poor working and living conditions and often from financial insecurity or poverty.**<sup>7</sup> To mitigate social hardship, the Italian government has introduced some legislative changes and other measures, such as the extension of the solidarity fund for mortgages for

the purchase of a first home, the suspension of evictions, and the introduction of funds to support people who are not self-sufficient.

Most importantly, **Decree Law No. 34 of 19 May 2020 introduced an unprecedented tool to allow the regularisation of irregular employment.** This measure was adopted mainly to ensure adequate levels of health and safety at work, but it will have greater effects on social cohesion and inclusion. The majority of people with irregular contracts are from a disadvantaged background or vulnerable group. The measure has been demanded most often to regularise domestic workers.<sup>8</sup>

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/IT>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Italy: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/italy/>

7 Eurofund (2021) Living, working, and Covid-19 Dataset – Italy [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/covid-19/quality-of-life?-var=C001\\_01&chart\\_type=Bar&country\\_filter=Italy](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/covid-19/quality-of-life?-var=C001_01&chart_type=Bar&country_filter=Italy)

8 Gazzetta Ufficiale, Decreto Legge 19.05.2020, No.34: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/05/19/20G00052/sg>

## EDUCATION

Despite improvements over the last decade, it is still not possible to offer all young people the same opportunities for an adequate education. **The level of education and skills that young people can achieve across the country still depends to a large extent on their social background, socio-economic environment, and the area in which they live.** Education lags behind the European average in all indicators, including lifelong learning and skills levels.<sup>9</sup> The 2020 pandemic exacerbated those difficulties through the closure of schools and universities and the shift towards distance or integrated learning.

Italy continues to be critically below both the European and OECD averages in educational

attainment. Only 61% of adults have completed upper secondary education, around 17 percentage points below the OECD and European averages.<sup>10</sup>

**Moreover, the share of 15-to-29-year-olds not in education or employment (NEETs) remains high. After several years of decrease, it is increasing again and reached 23.9% in the second quarter of 2020.** The proportion of young people who leave education and training prematurely is also worryingly high. In 2020, the share of early school-leavers reached 13.5% of people aged between 18 and 24 years. It was found that parents' educational qualifications have a strong influence on pupils' success at school and on their ability to remain in education and training.

# Fair working conditions and Labour rights

The pandemic significantly affected working conditions in Italy throughout 2020. The strict lockdowns imposed at the beginning of the pandemic and other restrictive measures that are still in place in 2021 had overall impacts on employment levels and incomes. Like other European countries, Italy introduced a short-time scheme to preserve employment, combined with a ban on dismissals that was in place until the end of March 2021.<sup>11</sup> The socioeconomic effects of the pandemic were mitigated by income support measures for the self-employed and domestic workers, as well as benefits for households with young children. Flexible working hours and extra provisions for leave and time off also helped people

tackle the unprecedented physical and mental consequences of the pandemic.

**Social partners played a crucial role in ensuring occupational health and safety,** despite the challenges posed to collective bargaining from the state of emergency and reduced consultations with the government. The National Strategy Group particularly welcomes the New Skills Fund<sup>12</sup> established through the Decree Law No. 34 (2020). This allows companies to reshape employees' working hours to allow and encourage them to take part in training activities on the basis of specific collective agreements with trade unions.

9 ISTAT (2020) Rapporto Bes 2020: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/254761>

10 OECD (2021) Better Life Index – Italy: <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/italy/>

11 Pedersini, R., (2021) Italy: Working life in the Covid-19 pandemic 2020: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/wpef21020.pdf>

12 Gazzetta Ufficiale, Decree Law 19.05.2020: [https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/static/20200519\\_128\\_SO\\_021.pdf](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/static/20200519_128_SO_021.pdf)

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

Strong inequalities still affect the economic situation of migrants in Italy. While the share of Italian citizens living in absolute poverty is 7.5%, the percentage jumps to more than 29% for foreigners,<sup>13</sup> highlighting migrants' vulnerable conditions compared to Italian citizens. Despite the continuing negative effects of the Decreti Sicurezza Decrees approved in 2018,<sup>14</sup> some positive steps for the inclusion of migrants have been undertaken since these decrees were modified in December 2020. The 2018 decrees dismantled the SPRAR reception system for asylum seekers and suspended humanitarian protection, resulting in 80% of asylum requests being rejected in 2019.<sup>15</sup> **In December 2020, humanitarian protection for asylum seekers was reinstated, and some of the judicial charges and fines imposed on NGOs saving migrants in the Mediterranean were lifted.**

In addition, Law No.173 of 18 December 2020 introduced an important step forward for the inclusion of migrants, allowing residence permits to be converted into working permits. This adjustment will allow thousands of people who entered Italy for various reasons – such as study, medical treatment, or special cases – to obtain a work permit if they meet the requirements. The same law also reintroduced the public reception system, which can once again accept and start processing asylum seekers and people holding other permits related to conditions of fragility and vulnerability.

## GOOD PRACTICE

### The Juma Map

The health emergency dramatically affected vulnerable sections of the population, among them thousands of migrants and refugees. The Juma Map project tackles the problem of access to information that migrants encountered during the pandemic, mainly due to language barriers and complex terminology. Juma Map is an online platform created through the collaboration of a network of mediators and refugees, which conveys official information on the measures (restrictions and opportunities) in 15 languages. For two of the languages, podcasts were created. The service has been very useful, as it answered a real need for access to information by a very large part of the Italian population. Juma Map and its COVID-19 information pages had more than 133,000 visits during 2020.<sup>16</sup>

## GENDER EQUALITY

The pandemic has highlighted existing inequalities in societies, and this was certainly the case for the gender gap in Italy, which is still higher than the European average. **First of all, working women have more short-term contracts than men. This makes them more prone to lose their jobs, a phenomenon**

13 ISTAT (2021) Absolute poverty report 2020: [https://www.istat.it/files/2021/06/REPORT\\_POVERTA\\_2020.pdf](https://www.istat.it/files/2021/06/REPORT_POVERTA_2020.pdf)

14 Gazzetta Ufficiale, Decreto Sicurezza e Immigrazione, 1.12.2018: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/showNewsDetail?id=1478&backTo=archivio&anno=2018&provenienza=archivio>

15 ISPI (2020) Migrazioni in Italia: tutti i numeri <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/migrazioni-italia-tutti-i-numeri-24893>

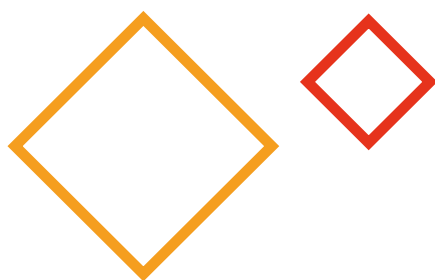
16 Juma Map – Services for Refugees: <https://www.jumamap.it/en/>



which peaked during the pandemic. The rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment in Italy is 31.1% of women compared to 51.4% of men, making men's career prospects much better than those of women in terms of continuity, job security, and career advancement.<sup>17</sup>

Most worrying for the National Strategy Group is the approach adopted and fostered by the Italian government on teleworking and care activities. **As working from home has become the norm for many workers, there is a need for policies promoting co-responsibility at home and in looking after children.** In Italy, 81% of housework continues to be carried out by women, well above the European average.<sup>18</sup> The National Strategy Group therefore denounces the rhetoric promoted by the Italian government through the Family Act, in which work-life balance policies are considered to be only for women, or even just for mothers. Work-life reconciliation policies continue to be mainly calibrated to deeply rooted cultural assumptions.

**The National Strategy Group also calls for more women to be included in political decision-making bodies and structures, in order to ensure a real change of vision.** In 2020, Italian politics was still predominantly "male": government ministers are mostly men (75.6%), as are members of the assemblies governing the Italian regions (80.3%).<sup>19</sup>



## LIVING CONDITIONS AND HOUSING

Living conditions deteriorated for many people in Italy in 2020. **Housing prices rose sharply, by 3.4%, and they continue to rise, putting extraordinary pressure on already impoverished households. In the first trimester of 2021, prices rose 1.7%.<sup>20</sup>** Moreover, overcrowded housing continues to have negative effects on both physical and mental health: the average household has just 1.4 rooms per person, which is less than the OECD average.<sup>21</sup> According to a statement recently published by the Italian social housing organisation, Federcasa, the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic mean that one in four people find it difficult to pay the rent, **while more than 40% expect not to be able to pay their rent in 2021.**<sup>22</sup> The same applies to households with mortgages, which in 2020 have made use of loans to an unprecedented extent (a total of €15.6 billion).<sup>23</sup> Therefore, an important and significant housing policy promoted by the Italian government was the introduction in 2020 of a temporary ban on evictions. This allowed tenants to cope with the pandemic's impact on their household income. First introduced as a temporary measure until August 2020, it was extended several times, lastly with the Sostegni Decree Law adopted in March 2021.<sup>24</sup> This extended the ban to the last quarter of 2021. The National Strategy Group identifies this measure as fundamental during a crucial period, when living in satisfactory housing conditions is fundamental for mental health and personal development.

In addition, there are clear differences between the north and south of the country. **A housing shortage affects 8.6% of southern households and 5.2% in central and**

17 EIGE (2020) Gender Equality Index 2020 – Italy: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/domain/work/IT>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 ISTAT (2021) Prezzi delle abitazioni / Housing prices <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio>

21 OECD (2021) Better Life Index – Italy: <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/italy/>

22 Federcasa (2020) Dimensions of housing deprivation pre- and post-Covid-19: <http://cms.federcasa.it/download.aspx-?id=9fe957dd-f413-476f-ba81-4c05cf30149e>

23 Ibid.

24 Gazzetta Ufficiale (2021) Decree Law 22 March 2021 "Decreto Sostegni": <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/03/22/21G00049/sg>

**northern Italy.**<sup>25</sup> SOLIDAR's Italian National Strategy Group calls for a significant increase in the number of social housing units in order to cope with the severe housing shortage.

However, the National Strategy Group welcomes the Italian government's "Superbonus 110%" initiative, which provides for a 110% deduction on expenses incurred when carrying out specific interventions. These can be for energy efficiency, anti-seismic renovations, installation of photovoltaic systems, or infrastructure for charging electric vehicles. This measure is expected to produce significant results in numerous other ways. It aims to decrease energy poverty, remove architectural barriers, and increase seismic safety. In other words, it contributes to environmental objectives, while ensuring a positive social impact.

### **GOOD PRACTICE** **Abitare Solidale**

The organisation Auser Abitare Solidale provides a service to tackle housing issues through an innovative approach. It creates positive connections between the needs of elderly people – often living alone and at greater risk of social exclusion – and young people, who are looking for decent housing at reduced costs. Usually, guests are people at risk of poverty, young workers and students looking for independent and decent living conditions, or women recovering from gender or other kinds of violence. To match these needs, Abitare Solidale promotes different forms of cohabitation based on the principles of mutual solidarity and mutual help.<sup>26</sup>

## **POLICIES TO TACKLE POVERTY**

**In 2020, the poverty rate in Italy reached its highest level since 2005.** According to data released in March 2021 by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat), the incidence of households in absolute poverty jumped from 6.4% in 2019 to 7.7% in 2020, representing over 2 million households and more than 5.6 million people.<sup>27</sup> This increase can mainly be explained by the pandemic, but it is worrying as it reversed a pattern of decreasing poverty rates up to 2019. That year, the share of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion fell 2 percentage points from 2018.<sup>28</sup>

The National Strategy Group reports that the Reddito di Cittadinanza Citizenship Income, introduced in 2019, played a crucial role in supporting millions of people. This structural measure was accompanied in 2020 by the Reddito d'Emergenza Emergency Income introduced by Decree Law No. 34 (2020), which contained economic measures to support the population. Emergency income was initially envisaged as an intervention limited to a few months, but it was repeatedly extended, most recently in May 2021.<sup>29</sup> This demonstrated the limitations of the Citizenship Income – above all the access criteria for foreigners – as well as the difficulties incurred by a wide part of the population for a prolonged period of time.

**Particularly worrying is the poverty gap between Italians and foreign citizens. More than 1.5 million foreigners live in absolute poverty, a rate of 29.3%, compared with 7.5% of Italians.**<sup>30</sup> The measures slightly reduced the poverty rate from 20.2% to 18.6%,<sup>31</sup> which led them to be considered sufficient, so that no structural intervention in the welfare

25 Federcasa (2020) Dimensions of housing deprivation pre- and post-Covid-19: <http://cms.federcasa.it/download.aspx?id=9fe957dd-f413-476f-ba81-4c05cf30149e>

26 Auser Italia, Abitare Solidale: <https://www.auser.it/cosa-facciamo/abitare-dalla-parte-degli-anziani/abitare-solidale/>

27 ISTAT (2021) Poverty in Italy: <https://www.istat.it/en/archivio/259103>

28 ISTAT (2020) Income, living conditions, and fiscal burden: <https://www.istat.it/en/archivio/255479>

29 INPS (2021) Reddito di Emergenza: indicazioni per la domanda / Emergency Income: application guide <https://www.inps.it/news/reddito-di-emergenza-indicazioni-per-presentare-la-domanda>

30 ISTAT (2021) Absolute poverty report 2020: [https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/06/REPORT\\_POVERTA\\_2020.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files/2021/06/REPORT_POVERTA_2020.pdf)

31 Ibid.

system was thought to be necessary. But a structural intervention might strengthen public services at local level, enabling them to provide necessary services, respond to the population's multidimensional needs, and accompany people along paths to social inclusion.

## HEALTHCARE

Healthcare in Italy remains accessible and of good quality. It ranks above the OECD average and has achieved an annual increase in average quality since 2005.<sup>32</sup> **Access to healthcare is a universal right in Italy:<sup>33</sup> it is provided free of charge based on the condition of someone's health and their care needs, regardless of income. But equality is far from being achieved.** Over the last decade, different Italian governments have opted for cuts in public spending on healthcare,<sup>34</sup> which not only failed to help the system recover from the 2008 financial crisis, but also fostered even stronger inequalities between regions, enlarging Italy's historical north-south divide. **Per capita spending on healthcare is much higher in northern regions than in southern, resulting in huge gaps in service capacity and care delivered.**<sup>35</sup>

The governance of healthcare has changed considerably over the past few years. A new management structure made the regions the main actors in healthcare policy and, as the National Strategy Group confirms, resulted in differences among regions, with a clear

north-south gradient. **In addition, cuts in public spending are resulting in individuals having to pay greater amounts of money, which will likely lead larger shares of the population to avoid medical treatment and assistance.**

Furthermore, the challenges posed by the pandemic highlighted many weak points in the Italian health system, which was at risk of collapsing due to a lack of hospital beds, doctors, and nurses.<sup>36</sup> Increased public spending therefore remains essential to hire more staff, widen services and infrastructure, and create a more accessible, egalitarian healthcare system.

Despite the significant increase in mental illness during the pandemic, particularly during the 2020 lockdown, almost no measure was adopted to guarantee equal access to psychological services. According to recently published research,<sup>37</sup> 27.1% of the Italian population suffers from a mental illness, and the percentage is 40.2% among young people. The same research revealed that 34.1% of young people show depressive symptoms and that the suicide rate among young people increased 20% during the pandemic. In addition, according to the Italian Psychiatric Society, **4.5 million people need mental health services but are unable to meet the incredibly high cost of treatment and support. Most services are not public, making mental health more a luxury than a right.**

32 OECD (2021) Better Life Index – Index: <https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/italy/>

33 See the DPCM dated 17.01.2017, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2017/03/18/17A02015/sg>

34 Pavolini, E. (2020) The Italian healthcare system facing the Coronavirus crisis: [https://osservatoriocoesionesociale.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Nota1\\_Pavolini\\_2020.pdf](https://osservatoriocoesionesociale.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Nota1_Pavolini_2020.pdf)

35 Italian Senate (2018), Documento conclusivo dell'indagine conoscitiva sulla sostenibilità del servizio sanitario nazionale / Final Report on the Sustainability of the Italian NHS: <http://www.senato.it/leg17/3381?comunicato=54392>

36 Pavolini, E. (2020) The Italian Healthcare system on the eve of the pandemic

37 Fondazione Italia In Salute (2021) Gli italiani e il Covid 19 / Italians and Covid-19 [https://www.sociometrica.it/sites/default/files/Gli\\_italiani\\_e\\_il\\_Covid\\_19.pdf](https://www.sociometrica.it/sites/default/files/Gli_italiani_e_il_Covid_19.pdf)

# Civic space

The latest monitoring activities carried out by CIVICUS find that **civic space in Italy has narrowed**.<sup>38</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that the measures to counter the pandemic had a negative impact on civic space and certainly limited the activities of civil society organisations. The National Strategy Group mentions in particular the circoli clubs (community-based organisations) that are part of larger national networks, which were forced to close and cease their cultural and social activities. The closures contrasted with continued activity at commercial and religious organisations, which continued with their activities. The unequal treatment led to cultural and social damage for communities, as well as economic damage for the clubs, many of which closed for good. In October 2020, ARCI released a statement<sup>39</sup> denouncing the lack of consideration in the government's measures for the crucial role that cultural and recreational organisations have in social cohesion and their contribution to alleviating loneliness and depression.

The health crisis put exceptional pressure on the freedom of peaceful assembly, as it often became difficult to maintain both the constitutional right to health and that to publicly demonstrate. Articles 17 and 21 of the Italian constitution protect the right of assembly and provide that the right to meet in a public place may be only limited “for proven reasons of public safety or security”.<sup>40</sup> Such limitations must be ad hoc and temporary, and they must meet the requirements of proportionality and reasonableness. Finding the balance was not always easy in 2020, and social tension intensified.

The Italian National Strategy Group identifies an important difference between the first and second periods of the pandemic. During the first lockdowns, uncertainty over the nature of the pandemic led to obedience to the imposed measures. In the following period, protest demonstrations took place in many Italian cities.<sup>41</sup> The NSG reports that these demonstrations were highly heterogeneous in terms of the political affiliation of their participants. **For the National Strategy Group, the most important message of these demonstrations is that the Italian government has to involve people in decision-making in order to function well. That means listening to them and understanding the difficulties they are experiencing. As the pandemic increases pressure on social cohesion and public spaces, democracy is in real danger if the institutions of political decision-making become closed.**

However, freedom of speech and of the press have been maintained and supported. Nonetheless, as reported by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ),<sup>42</sup> three NGOs operating in Italy were charged in March 2021 with helping illegal immigration. The EFJ joined its Italian affiliate FNSI in demanding an explanation of the investigation procedures. It emerged that the investigators seeking to establish links between migrant rescue operations at sea and traffickers apparently engaged in a violation of the secrecy of journalistic sources by monitoring the communications of journalists working on the case.<sup>43</sup>

38 CIVICUS (2021) Italian country report: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/italy/>

39 ARCI (2020) Statement to the Italian government: <https://www.arci.it/nuovo-dpcm-il-governo-non-ignori-lassociazionismo-culturale-e-di-promozione-sociale/>

40 Constitution of the Italian Republic: [https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/documenti/download/pdf/Costituzione\\_della\\_Repubblica\\_italiana.pdf](https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/documenti/download/pdf/Costituzione_della_Repubblica_italiana.pdf)

41 As an example, see La Repubblica [https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/10/27/news/proteste\\_contro\\_le\\_misure\\_anti\\_covid\\_milano\\_chi\\_sono\\_i\\_manifestanti-272010811/](https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/10/27/news/proteste_contro_le_misure_anti_covid_milano_chi_sono_i_manifestanti-272010811/). Many other protests took place throughout 2020 from Milan to Naples, against the measures adopted by the government.

42 EFJ (2021) Italy: Massive violation of the confidentiality of journalists' sources: <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2021/04/02/italy-massive-violation-of-the-confidentiality-of-journalists-sources/>

43 Articolo 21 (2021) Decline di giornalisti e un avvocato intercettati illecitamente. Il lato oscuro dell'inchiesta sulle Ong: <https://www.articolo21.org/2021/04/decline-di-giornalisti-e-un-avvocato-intercettati-illecitamente-il-lato-oscuro-dellinchiesta-sulle-ong/>

## SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Italy has a long tradition of social dialogue, and its 1946 constitution set up an auxiliary body of government. But many people point to its fundamental lack of mandate and consequent difficulty in producing policy proposals and inputs.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, the NSG reports that social dialogue in Italy continues to be rich in good

practices and articulated at national, regional, and local level. Despite the pandemic and the general trend of diminishing social dialogue across Europe and beyond, the National Strategy Group reports that relations between social partners and the government have become more frequent and meaningful because of the pandemic. Nevertheless, social dialogue slowed with Mario Draghi's technocratic government.

# The national recovery and resilience plan

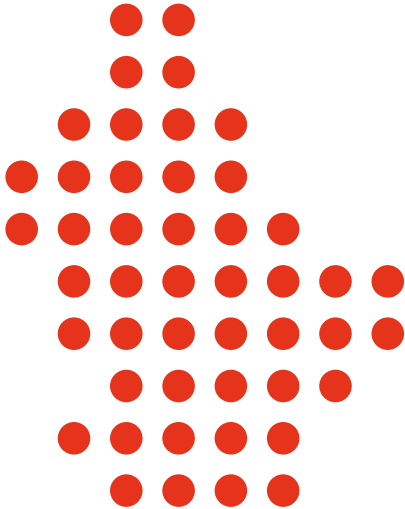
Despite the long tradition of social dialogue and civil society organisations' greater involvement in the government's decision-making procedures, **both CSOs and the main Italian trade unions denounced a lack of participation in the preparation of the national Recovery and Resilience Plan.** The National Strategy Group also says that their lack of involvement in the process was a "sore point". **It reported that neither of the Italian governments that helped to draft the National Recovery and Resilience Plan opened any consultation with civil society.** (In February 2021, a new government had to be formed following the fall of the previous one.) Beyond the national plan, decreased social and civil dialogue is partly due to the state of emergency declared because of the pandemic. All the measures adopted were approved by direct decree of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM).

Many people – even members of the Italian parliament – said that this form of action made discussion scarce.<sup>45</sup>

The intermediate social bodies rightly called for thorough coordination with the social, productive, and political forces of the country over the European Recovery Plan and the national plan. But this did not happen. The Italian National Strategy Group reports that only some political parties tried to influence the decisions taken by small groups of super-specialized experts directly in contact with the prime minister. But their role was severely reduced because of the lack of discussion during the pandemic. Therefore, the space for participation has been limited, despite the great efforts that third-sector organizations have put into collaboration with public institutions to maintain decent welfare during the pandemic.

44 Guardiancich, I., Molina, O. (2020) The Effectiveness of National Social Dialogue Institutions: From Theory to Evidence, ILO Working Paper 16: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---dialogue/documents/publication/wcms\\_762099.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---dialogue/documents/publication/wcms_762099.pdf)  
45 La Repubblica (2020) "Basta DPCM, torniamo in parlamento." [https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2020/04/29/news/basta\\_dpcm\\_torniamo\\_in\\_parlamento\\_il\\_pressing\\_del\\_pd\\_trova\\_alleanza-255166680/](https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2020/04/29/news/basta_dpcm_torniamo_in_parlamento_il_pressing_del_pd_trova_alleanza-255166680/)

Country Monitor:  
**Luxembourg**



	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	31.3	32.3	31.2	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	5.6%	5.6%	6.8%	7.0%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	69 (2017)	69.2	72.4 (2021)	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	11.5%	12.0%	11.8%	9.2 % (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	8.4%	7.1%	8.5%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

# Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

On average, many indicators in the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) are higher in Luxembourg than in other European Countries. Nevertheless, 66% of respondents reported being too physically or mentally tired from work to enjoy other activities. **A negative trend has therefore been registered in the work-life balance of the country's workers and employees,<sup>7</sup> which was eventually magnified by the pandemic.** The National Strategy Group (NSG) reports that many of the changes in Luxembourgers' professional lives and working conditions have been provoked by the

health crisis. This had a strong impact on working conditions throughout 2020 and will probably continue to do so in the future. Therefore, this chapter has to be read and understood through the lens of the emergency situation caused by the pandemic.

As noted by the country's Chambre des Salariés (Chamber of Employees) – one of the five chambers in Luxembourg defending the interests of professional categories – **the oldest employees were least affected in their working lives by the pandemic. Workers**

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/LU>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

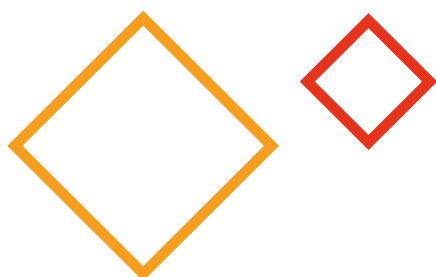
6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Luxembourg: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/luxembourg/>

7 Eurofund (2021) European Quality of Life Survey – Luxembourg: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/luxembourg#work-life-balance>

**under 44 years of age were impacted the most.** Pandemic measures also exacerbated inter-generational and gender inequalities. Women declared more than men that they have experienced unwanted changes in their professional lives, particularly those with children and single mothers.<sup>8</sup>

The most evident consequence of the adaptation of work to the pandemic has been the introduction of teleworking and home-office solutions. Nearly half the workers in Luxembourg say they have worked or are working remotely,<sup>9</sup> which led to an adjustment in the length and structure of working time. Flexible working hours have increasingly been adopted, and they are now part of the daily working life of a growing share of Luxembourgers.

However, the pandemic and the economic crisis disrupted work in different ways. More people are working part-time (53% at manufacturers and 40% at constructors),<sup>10</sup> and there has been an increase in non-standard ways of working. There has also been unprecedented growth of in-work poverty. In addition, the National Strategy Group highlights that threats to mental health posed by the pandemic have often been underestimated. Emotional distress increased the likelihood of psychosocial risks at work, leading to decreases in wellbeing, satisfaction, and motivation.



## PRECARIOUSNESS

Precariousness endures as a widespread issue across the country. The unemployment rate increased by 1.2 percentage points in 2020 from 2019. While full-time employment remains the norm among residents, temporary employment has increased by 30% in the last decade. Young people, aged 15 to 24, are most affected by these changes. They represent 36.7% of temporary employment contracts.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Luxembourg stands out from its partners in the eurozone due to the high presence of women among part-time workers. They represent 82% of part-time workers in the country.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, precariousness is becoming the norm for an increasing share of people. **In-work poverty has risen, and 18.9% of part-time workers and 10.0% of full-time workers are at risk of poverty.** This data shows Luxembourg to be the eurozone country with the highest risk of in-work poverty.<sup>13</sup> On average, the self-employed are experiencing in-work poverty more than other employees.

In 2020, the Chamber of Commerce developed the JobSwitch platform<sup>14</sup> to meet the needs of both businesses and workers. It helps employees move from one company to another for a defined period of time or for a project. The platform helped workers earn extra pay, and it provided a response to the pressing demand for workers in certain sectors during the pandemic, such as food and transport. Nevertheless, to reverse the negative trends of the last years, long-term solutions to fight in-work poverty have to be developed and urgently adopted.

8 Chambre des Salariés (2021) Rapport – Quality of work Luxembourg 2020: <https://www.csl.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/in-fas-rapport-quality-of-work-index-luxembourg-2020-francais.pdf>

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Albanese, A., Gallo, G. (2020). Buy flexible, pay more: The role of temporary contracts on wage inequality. Labour Economics, 64. ; SJR: 1,368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2020.101814>

12 Ibid.

13 CSL (2021) Panorama Social 2021 – Conditions et qualité d'emploi: [https://www.csl.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/panorama\\_social\\_2021\\_version\\_web.pdf](https://www.csl.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/panorama_social_2021_version_web.pdf)

14 [www.jobswitch.lu](http://www.jobswitch.lu)



## GENDER EQUALITY

Luxembourg is a high performer in terms of gender equality. On an index developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality, it scores 2.4 points above the European average, showing that the country is progressing towards gender equality faster than other European countries.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, gender equality is far from being a reality in the labour market, as there remains an uneven concentration of women and men in the workforce. **Especially when positions of power and decision-making are considered – both in the political and in the economic spheres – men and women are not fairly represented.** Women represent only 24.6% of government ministers, 24% of members of regional assemblies, and 27% of members of parliament. The gaps are even wider for the boards of large companies, where almost 90% of directors are men.<sup>16</sup>

The government has recently taken some measures to narrow the gender gap. In July 2020, the National Action Plan for Equality was updated and amended by the Ministry for Gender Equality.<sup>17</sup> Seven priorities were identified for fighting inequalities in society, the labour market, and at home. The Action Plan has been complemented with the Positive Action programme,<sup>18</sup> which supports dialogue between the government and social partners towards an inclusive economy and a more egalitarian society. The National Strategy Group of Luxembourg particularly welcomes this initiative, which is a key instrument to help the country advance the cause of equality at work. The programme supports companies on a voluntary basis in developing and certifying good practices. Following recent developments in working conditions, the programme is focused on teleworking, career development following parental leave, and the development of tools and indicators to monitor equality in pay and training.

15 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index 2021 – Luxembourg: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/country/LU>

16 Ibid.

17 Government of Luxembourg (2020) National Action Plan for Equality: <https://mega.public.lu/content/dam/mega/fr/publications/publications-ministere/2020/MEGA-plan-action-nation-egalite-WEB.pdf>

18 Government of Luxembourg (2020) Programme des Actions Positives: <https://mega.public.lu/fr/travail/programme-actions-positives.html>

# Social protection and inclusion

Throughout 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic induced several quick adaptations to the social protection system. The National Strategy Group welcomes the measures undertaken by the government, which are reported to have provided support for the population. **In particular, family support leave was introduced to allow a member of the household to stay with young children during the closure of schools and nurseries,** and home-office solutions were developed and recognized as a new way of working. Moreover, since the social security payment for an employee unable to work is limited to 78 weeks in a reference period of 104 weeks,<sup>19</sup> lockdown and quarantine periods were not added to employees' totals for 2020.

## HEALTHCARE

Despite the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the healthcare sector in Luxembourg was able to provide the necessary emergency care while continuing with other regular treatments and hospitalisations. In general, access to healthcare is open to all residents, who are provided with the necessary services without any discrimination by the National Health Fund (CNS), which insures people against health risks. Indeed, reimbursements cover a high percentage of healthcare costs, and the population reports being satisfied with healthcare and its accessibility when needed.<sup>20</sup> **Nevertheless, as a residency permit is needed to**

**register for healthcare insurance, a share of the population – albeit small – remains excluded from the system.** In particular, specific groups of people in illegal situations – for example, minors who have left their parents' home and have no domicile – remain outside of the system.

## HOUSING

The Luxembourg National Strategy Group reports a dramatic situation for the housing sector, with many implications for poverty and inequality. For decades, the increase in Luxembourg's population has not been matched by housing construction.<sup>21</sup> That has led recently to **a housing deficit, which is growing over time. The shortage has pushed up real-estate prices,<sup>22</sup> and the weight of housing costs on incomes has become a major source of poverty and inequality.** The National Strategy Group reports that the housing issue is not new to Luxembourg. Already in 2019, more than one in three households (35.2%) faced heavy financial burdens related to housing. The Covid-19 pandemic dramatically increased Luxembourg households' economic and financial difficulties, putting even more pressure on the high number of people living around the threshold for poverty. According to the country's statistics agency, STATEC, prices of apartments and houses increased by almost 17% in just one year. That was the fastest increase in recent years: in 2018, prices

19 European Commission (2021) Your social security rights in Luxembourg: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=13752&langId=en>

20 Chamber of Employees (2021), Panorama Social 2021: [https://www.csl.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/panorama\\_social\\_2021\\_version\\_web.pdf](https://www.csl.lu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/panorama_social_2021_version_web.pdf)

21 Marco Hoffmann, (2012), Sortir de l'échec. La politique du logement au Luxembourg : [https://www.caritas.lu/sites/default/files/sortir\\_de\\_lechec\\_la\\_politique\\_du\\_logement\\_au\\_luxembourg.pdf](https://www.caritas.lu/sites/default/files/sortir_de_lechec_la_politique_du_logement_au_luxembourg.pdf)

22 Luxembourg Wort (2020) Si Google parvient vite à acquérir 33 hectares / If Google can easily get 33 hectares: <https://www.wort.lu/fr/luxembourg/si-google-parvient-vite-a-acquerir-33-hectares-5ef4c2b8da2cc1784e3605a4>

rose 7.1%; in 2017 they rose 5.6%; and in 2016 they rose 6%.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the supply of affordable housing built by public bodies is reported by the NSG to be inadequate and insufficient, particularly in relation to the needs of young people, young households, and households in the poorest three income deciles. Although several large-scale projects are emerging to tackle the housing shortage, the deadlines for completion are very long (around two decades) and will therefore not provide a response in the immediate future.

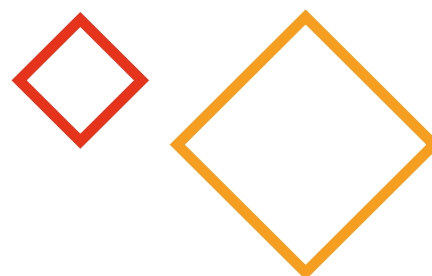
**The housing shortage has consequences for social exclusion, one of the biggest challenges faced by people living in poverty and the homeless.** The National Strategy Group recalls that the homeless population is difficult to quantify, since it is by nature excluded from official statistics. But the NSG reports that the number of overnight stays at shelters per person is continuously rising, and that the average occupancy rate never falls below 90%. The situation has been worsened by the pandemic and recommendations to stay at home.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE** **Wanteraktioun**

The non-profit organisation Inter-Actions carries out a so-called Wanteraktioun (Winter Action). Running from December to the end of March every year, the organisation welcomes homeless people during the coldest winter months, providing them with beds and three hot meals per day. The project also aims to generate statistics and reports on homelessness. During the pandemic, it accommodated people who were in quarantine and ensured that those in need of emergency treatment received it.

## **EDUCATION**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, formal and non-formal education providers and institutions temporarily closed classes and courses or had to move them online. The National Strategy Group reports that, during the lockdown period, non-formal education was penalised the most due to the impossibility of continuing practical training that requires physical presence or tools not normally available at home. The National Strategy Group echoes the findings of the CSO Youth&Work, which analysed the pandemic's impact on young people's education, regarding the dramatic effects of schools' closures. These resulted in the dissolution of important structures at a time when young people were developing, which generated feelings of abandonment and helplessness.<sup>24</sup> **The fear of the future generated by the pandemic was combined with boredom, grief, anxiety, and a lack of physical contact. Together, these feelings are reported to have fostered the belief among young people that there is no way to change their personal situation, leading to low self-esteem and depression.** The pressures on and frustrations of young people and learners increased considerably, often leading them to feel isolated. The National Strategy Group reports that it has been very difficult to reach out to young people, particularly the most vulnerable, and persuade them to come back to courses and non-formal training.



23 STATEC (2021) Housing in figures in the fourth quarter of 2020: <https://statistiques.public.lu/catalogue-publications/logement-en-chiffres/2021/logement-en-chiffres-final.pdf>

24 Youth&Work (2021) <https://www.youth-and-work.lu/fr/>

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Words4Work

Luxembourg's Agency for the Development of Employment (ADEM) developed the training programme Words4Work<sup>25</sup> to increase equal opportunities by improving the linguistic knowledge of applicants for jobs in various sectors which require specific French vocabulary. The training consists of four weeks of general French language lessons and two weeks of specific professional vocabulary. The National Strategy Group welcomes the initiative, recognising the importance of being fluent in the country's main language in order to be truly integrated in the labour market.

## JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

Luxembourg has always been forward looking when it comes to the green transition. The country is a signatory to various international climate conventions and has a progressive role at the European level. The National Strategy Group reports that the current government coalition has put forward some ambitious decarbonization plans and goals, making contributions to the European debate on minimum targets for emission reductions. **In December 2020, the parliament adopted the Climate Protection Law, which aims to cut 55% of the country's CO2 emissions by 2030 (compared to 2005) and to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.**<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the European Commission's approval of Luxembourg's National Recovery and Resilience

Plan came with a positive note of appreciation on the support provided to the green transition. **Luxembourg allocated 61% of its total of €93 million to the green transition, exceeding the unambitious minimum level of 37% required by the Recovery and Resilience Facility framework.** For the plans to be achievable and sustainable, Luxembourg established additional investment and financial support in the form of the new Climate and Energy Fund, which will be partially financed through a CO2 tax introduced in January 2021. Other measures will provide financial support for electric vehicles and charging stations, and there will be a fuel tax on petrol and diesel.

However, the National Strategy Group highlights that, too often, these measures do not foster social justice, as they do not take into account income inequalities. Measures are applied without considering that, for example, incentives to buy electric vehicles are not helpful for everybody, as these vehicles are too expensive for low-income households. Such households would instead benefit more from help to adapt their houses and renovate buildings that lack isolation, heating equipment, or renewable energy sources. This means that the transition towards a greener society is accessible only to better-off people.

**Nevertheless, Luxembourg in March 2020 became the first country in the world to offer nationwide free public transport for everyone.** This is a very inclusive measure, as it allows people to move around the country using a system that is both sustainable and public. It applies to all kinds of public transport: trains, buses, and trams. The National Strategy Group welcomes this measure and highlights it as an example of good practice for a just and fair transition.

<sup>25</sup> Words4Work: <https://adem.public.lu/fr/actualites/adem/2020/01/words4work-remise-certificats.html>

<sup>26</sup> Government of Luxembourg (2020) Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030: [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/lu\\_final\\_necp\\_main\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/lu_final_necp_main_en.pdf)

# Civic space

Freedom of association is guaranteed in Luxembourg by Article 26 of the national constitution, and it is reported to be both respected and protected. The CIVICUS report monitoring the state of civic space throughout the world rates Luxembourg as “open”.<sup>27</sup> **The NSG reports that the associative fabric is particularly lively and well developed in many sectors of society, such as sport, culture, the environment, youth, personal assistance, development aid, and charity. Generally, civil society organisations can operate freely, and the majority of the workforce is unionised.**<sup>28</sup>

Freedom of peaceful assembly is ensured by Article 25 of the constitution, which states that political public gatherings are subject to prior authorization. Therefore, the National Strategy Group reports that large gatherings and public demonstrations are not the preferred means

of protest in the country. It reports that these events are rare and exceptional. During 2020, two major demonstrations took place as part of the movements Fridays For Future and Black Lives Matter.

A detailed analysis was issued by the Committee for Human Rights in Luxembourg (CCDH), which recently published its 2020 report.<sup>29</sup> This considered the health crisis and its effects, while analysing the extent to which it was legitimate to restrict individual freedoms to advance the general interest. The publication recognizes that the exceptional circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic may have justified the implementation of measures limiting human rights, such as freedom of movement and public assembly and gatherings. Nevertheless, it denounces a lack of clear rules, transparency, and access to information.

# Social dialogue

Luxembourg is known for having a well-established tradition of social dialogue. The “Luxembourg model of social dialogue” is indeed often referred to as a culture of social dialogue that is capable of successfully settling disagreements, concluding negotiations, and reaching consensus. Consultations take place through the Economic and Social Council, the Tripartite Coordination Committee, the Economic Environment Committee, and the Permanent Committee of Labour and Employment. Social partners also meet to negotiate bipartite agreements in the framework of collective bargaining.

**The NSG reports that the Tripartite Coordination Committee – which brings together the government, employers, and trade unions – met in July 2020 to discuss the labour market in the light of the Covid-19 crisis.** They exchanged views on measures to be envisaged to protect work and employment. Nevertheless, despite the country’s highly institutionalised social dialogue, the NSG denounces the lack of consultation for developing the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, which did not involve civil society organisations.

<sup>27</sup> CIVICUS (2021) Civicus Monitor – Luxembourg: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/2017/01/01/luxembourg-overview/>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Commission consultative des Droits de l’Homme (2021) Rapport d’activités 2020 / 2020 Activities report : <https://ccdh.public.lu/fr/actualites/20201/rapport-activites.html>

# Country Monitor: North Macedonia



Throughout 2020, North Macedonia continued its efforts to deliver concrete and sustainable improvements in the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and public administration. However, the Covid-19 pandemic did not spare the Western Balkans region in general or North Macedonia in particular. Therefore, some of the advances made in the last decade were reversed due to the difficult socio-economic period resulting from the pandemic. **The crisis has left its mark on both the economic and social fabrics of the country, and positive trends in employment and income were reversed.** Despite the adoption of the 2019-2021 Transparency Strategy, corruption is still prevalent in many areas of public administration, and a more active approach is needed from public authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Since its application in 2004, North Macedonia has been on a path towards European Union membership. Negotiations with the EU are among the Macedonian government's priorities and feature<sup>2</sup> in "Action Plan 18: Building a State according to European Rules".<sup>3</sup> The country is aiming to build independent institutions and to combat organised crime, corruption, and the violation of human rights and freedoms.<sup>4</sup>

1 European Commission (2020) North Macedonia 2020 Report: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north\\_macedonia\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf)

2 Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Government Strategic Priorities: <https://vlada.mk/node/18029?ln=en-gb>

3 Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Action Plan 18: <https://vlada.mk/plan18>

4 Government of the Republic of Macedonia, Government Strategic Priority 6: <https://vlada.mk/node/18059>

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>5</sup></b>	31.9	30.7	/	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>6</sup></b>	20.8%	17.3%	16.4%	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>7</sup></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>8</sup></b>	8.7%	8.4%	/	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>9</sup></b>	46.4%	43.5%	/	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>10</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

The government of North Macedonia recently adopted three packages of policy measures to cope with the negative consequences of Covid-19, which are likely to have a long-term impact on the country. The measures mainly aim to address four identified risks: the spread of infection; economic consequences such as income loss and deterioration in quality of life for the most vulnerable citizens; the risk of unfair access to services; and the deterioration of the learning process.<sup>11</sup>

SOLIDAR's National Strategy Group (NSG) for North Macedonia reports that the government

devised two types of policy interventions to prevent income loss and maintain citizens' quality of life. The first aimed to protect jobs and liquidity at the most affected companies and included subsidizing private-sector wages and social contributions, the deferral of profit-tax prepayments, loans on favourable terms, loan guarantees, and some sector-specific support. The second aimed to maintain social stability for the most vulnerable citizens by increasing their access to services and relaxing their eligibility criteria for guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA) and for unemployment benefit. The relaxation of criteria for obtaining unemployment

5 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

6 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=unert\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=unert_a&lang=en)

7 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020>

8 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

9 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

10 CIVICUS (2021). Civic Space Monitor: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/macedonia/>

11 UNICEF (2020) North Macedonia Rapid Analysis and Policy Proposals: <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/media/6816/file/Study:%20Social%20and%20Economic%20Effects%20of%20COVID-19.pdf>

benefit is seen positively by the NSG, because it expanded eligibility to all individuals who lost their jobs for any cause in March and April 2020, and it provided them with at least some sort of income.

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

In 2018, the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science introduced a Strategy for Education 2018-2025 and an Action Plan, aimed at improving different areas of education, training, and research in order to strengthen Macedonia's economy and society.<sup>12</sup> Despite its adoption, concrete results are not yet visible: the country continues to lag behind both the European and Western Balkans averages.<sup>13</sup>

**Overall, the most pressing issue remains the large gap between students from different socio-economic backgrounds.** This is evident from PISA indicators,<sup>14</sup> which show that educational performance in North Macedonia is inequitable. Moreover, gender and socio-economic divides result in a decline in performance between educational and vocational programmes: male students are 1.4 times more likely to attend vocational education and training programmes than female, and students from a disadvantaged household are 2.3 times more likely to attend vocational education. The pandemic added pressure and stress to the whole education community, but young people were particularly affected by increasing insecurity and unclear protocols for completing their degrees. This resulted in

difficult transitions between educational levels<sup>15</sup> and intensified psychosocial risks.

A report published by Eurofund confirms the downward trends in the education system in North Macedonia, reporting that its 5.3 quality rating for education is the lowest among all surveyed countries.<sup>16</sup> Most worryingly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that workers with a secondary education degree in North Macedonia are disproportionately represented among the unemployed, particularly the long-term unemployed.<sup>17</sup> It points out important challenges lying ahead for the country's education system. The National Strategy Group therefore calls for the government to improve the quality of public secondary and vocational education and to address skills mismatches.

The Covid-19 pandemic steadily increased the vulnerability of young people. As the National Strategy Group reports, young people are normally employed under employment contracts that offer only weak protection and make them particularly vulnerable to precarious employment situations. Young people in education and training have to maintain their motivation for learning by overcoming the inequalities in the education system.

**Youth employment has increased 30% since 2013,<sup>18</sup> but this gain is mainly the result of the decreasing demographic trend in the young population, and of the high level of emigration of young workers to EU countries.<sup>19</sup>** One out of four people who lost their jobs during the pandemic is below 29 years old, according to official statistics. But the

12 Ministry of Education and Science (2018) Education Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2025: <https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/macedonia-education-strategy-for-2018-2025-and-action-plan-strategija-za-obrazovanie-eng-web-1.pdf> / in Macedonian: [https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/macedonia-strategija-za-obrazovanie-2018-2025-mak-web\\_0.pdf](https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/macedonia-strategija-za-obrazovanie-2018-2025-mak-web_0.pdf) / In Albanian: [https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/strategija-za-obrazovanie-alb-web\\_0.pdf](https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/strategija-za-obrazovanie-alb-web_0.pdf)

13 Considering OECD PISA indicators.

14 OECD (2021) Education in North Macedonia: [https://pisa.oecd.org/north\\_macedonia/#section-02](https://pisa.oecd.org/north_macedonia/#section-02)

15 EAPN (2020), North Macedonia Poverty Watch 2020: <https://www.eapn.eu/poverty-watch-north-macedonia-poverty-watches-overview-2020/>

16 Eurofund, (2019) Living and Working in North Macedonia

17 ILO (2020), Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_746124.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_746124.pdf)

18 Ibid.

19 Majhosev, A., (2019) Working Life in North Macedonia, University of Goce Delchev, Štip, North Macedonia



proportion is likely higher, since illegal workers were not counted, and the majority of them are very young. The pandemic increased the country's already-high youth unemployment rate to 35%, which is now one of the highest in Europe. According to the government, some of the funds received by the European Union to mitigate the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis will be used to tackle youth unemployment.

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

The majority of third-country nationals who apply for international protection in the EU arrive through the Western Balkan region, particularly from Turkey to Greece, from where many then go to North Macedonia. The southern border, particularly the area of Bogorodica, is a notable zone for arrivals,<sup>20</sup> due to its geostrategic position. North Macedonia is therefore both a transit and a destination country for migrant people, and its government needs to develop good policies and procedures to deal with the high influx and to ensure social inclusion for migrants and asylum seekers. Without adequate knowledge, skills, and practical tools for recognising the rights and needs of migrants and refugees, North Macedonia may not be able to ensure adequate social standards for its wider society.

Despite the importance of the topic for North Macedonia, **the Migrant Integration Policy Index's<sup>21</sup> latest analysis reports that no legal changes or major improvements have occurred in North Macedonia's integration policy since 2015.** This stands in contrast to

the regional trend, in which integration policies have become more effective in neighbouring countries Albania, Croatia, and Serbia.<sup>22</sup> There are still major obstacles in the labour market and to educational opportunities, access to healthcare and nationality, and political participation. Foreign citizens are not informed, consulted, or allowed to vote or join political parties. Immigrants therefore have basic rights but do not enjoy full and equal opportunities.<sup>23</sup>

The inclusion of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers is not currently one of the Macedonian government's priorities,<sup>24</sup> nor is it expected to be soon. The National Strategy Group calls for a national ad-hoc strategy to be developed soon, in order to tackle and mitigate the negative consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable groups in society, such as migrants. According to the 2020 ILO assessment of the pandemic's impact on employment in the country, migrant workers are particularly exposed to job losses and income reductions. Without policies directly addressing migrants, the group is not only highly vulnerable, but also less visible.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

In North Macedonia, the average net monthly salary corresponds to MKD 22,142 (€357.28 as of May 2019).<sup>25</sup> Among the candidate countries to join the EU, North Macedonia has a national minimum wage, of €343.28.<sup>26</sup> The minimum wage was introduced in 2017, with the object of reducing in-work poverty and inequality. A 2019 ILO assessment of the consequences of

20 European Commission (2020), Action Document (North Macedonia) on the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance II, 2014-2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/annexes/2020\\_ad2\\_eu\\_for\\_improved\\_border\\_and\\_migration\\_management.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/default/files/annexes/2020_ad2_eu_for_improved_border_and_migration_management.pdf)

21 MIPEX measures integration policies across all the European Member States and other countries, such as North Macedonia. Policy indicators have been chosen to create a picture of migrants' opportunities to participate in society. See MIPEX Website: <https://www.mipex.eu/>

22 MIPEX (2020), North Macedonia: <https://www.mipex.eu/macedonia-fyrom>

23 Ibid.

24 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (2019) Strategic priorities 2019-2021: <https://vlada.mk/node/18029?ln=en-gb>

25 Eurofund (2020) Living and Working in North Macedonia: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/nb/country/north-macedonia#pay>

26 Eurostat (2021) Monthly minimum wages – Bi-annual data: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn\\_mw\\_cur/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn_mw_cur/default/table?lang=en)

the minimum wage found overall positive effects on living standards. It mostly benefitted low-wage workers, therefore contributing to an “equalisation” of wages. Thanks to this reform, North Macedonia has lower wage inequality than the European average.<sup>27</sup>

During the last decade, the Macedonian labour market has performed well, with growing participation rates, increasing employment, and decreasing unemployment. Nevertheless, **the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically hit the labour market, and the employment rate – which rose from 44% in 2011 to 54.7% in 2019 – fell by 6 percentage points to 47.1% in the first quarter of 2021.**<sup>28</sup>

## GENDER EQUALITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In North Macedonia, the protection of gender equality lies within the mandate of the government’s Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. In the parliament, the Commission on the Rights of Women and Men discusses and approves any proposal on gender equality. Gender equality was mentioned in the 1991 constitution as a fundamental value, and discrimination has been a criminal offence since 1996.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the main legislation covering gender equality issues, which was adopted in 2012, is considered too weak.

In 2019, the European Institute for Gender Equality published its latest report on North Macedonia, which said that gender inequality is still significant. This is particularly the case regarding equal pay and time dedicated to the care of young, elderly, and disabled people and to housekeeping activities. The report highlighted women’s weak position, in particular when it comes to accessing financial resources.<sup>30</sup>

The biggest improvement was achieved through the Macedonian Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018-2020,<sup>31</sup> which introduced training to include gender-sensitive indicators in all the programmes developed by the government. This training was compulsory for all civil servants responsible for strategic planning in ministries. However, **the European Commission’s 2021 report on non-discrimination in North Macedonia said the country’s main legislation<sup>32</sup> on gender equality was too weak<sup>33</sup> in its enforcement procedures. Moreover, one of the main concerns in the report was that the terms “gender” and “sex” are not used in an inclusive way in the law.** This de facto diminished transgender people’s visibility and excluded transgender women from protection against discrimination, especially at work.

A new law on gender-based violence was adopted on 29 January 2021,<sup>34</sup> entering into force in May 2021. The law is a positive step in the

27 ILO (2019), Assessment of the economic impacts of the 2017 increase in the minimum wage in North Macedonia: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_714892.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_714892.pdf)

28 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, (2021), Active Population: [https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie\\_en.aspx?rbrtxt=98](https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie_en.aspx?rbrtxt=98)

29 Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia / Устав на Република Северна Македонија [www.sobranie.mk/the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-macedonia.nsp](http://www.sobranie.mk/the-constitution-of-the-republic-of-macedonia.nsp)

30 EIGE (2019) North Macedonia country report: <https://eige.europa.eu/north-macedonia>

31 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (2018) Periodic Report on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/MKD/INT\\_CEDAW\\_STA\\_MKD\\_32920\\_E.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/MKD/INT_CEDAW_STA_MKD_32920_E.pdf)

32 Gender Equality Law, (2012), Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, 6/2012, 30/2013, 166/2014, 150/2015.

33 European Commission, DG JUST D.2 Gender Equality (2021) Country report on gender equality – North Macedonia 2021: [https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021-MK-GE-country-report\\_final-for-web.pdf](https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021-MK-GE-country-report_final-for-web.pdf)

34 Law on prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence / Закон за спречување и заштита од насилство врз жените и семејното насилство. Official Gazette, No. 24/2021. <https://ldbis.pravda.gov.mk/PregledNaZakon.aspx?id=54941>

implementation of the Istanbul Convention, particularly for its introduction of free legal aid (Article 97), reparations, and support for mediation in court proceedings and for female victims of gender-based violence. Nevertheless, while the law takes some good steps forward, it also strictly defines sex as the “physical characteristics of an individual, according to which

sex is therefore assigned at birth, due to physical reproductive organs.” This definition de facto excludes transgender women from protection and support. It is the main point that the country report on gender equality – which was issued by the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination – advises should be changed.<sup>35</sup>

## Social protection and inclusion

Due to the pandemic, the North Macedonian unemployment rate and public debt are likely to increase for the months to come. This is likely to have a strong impact on long-term social protection and security schemes of the country. During the most difficult months of 2020, the government tried to put in place public policies to protect key and vulnerable groups that were severely hit by the pandemic and its containment measures.

The government introduced price controls for basic and necessary goods during the pandemic: the maximum prices of food, medicines, and sanitising products were fixed by public authorities.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, in April 2020, a new<sup>37</sup> unemployment insurance system was introduced to cover workers who lost their jobs due to the pandemic. The monthly allowance provided was not always enough to cover basic needs, as it corresponded to half of the average monthly wage over the last two years. But a significant improvement came with the

adoption of the Decree Implementing the Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance during a State of Emergency.<sup>38</sup> It extended the eligibility criteria for the insurance to all workers who had lost their jobs due to Covid-19 between March to May 2020, regardless of their length of service. On the other hand, and despite a growing unemployment rate, the measure was not prolonged, leaving many unemployed people in a difficult socio-economic situation.<sup>39</sup> The number of beneficiaries of unemployment compensation increased by 76% in May 2020, but they decreased at the end of June 2020, due to<sup>40</sup> the reintroduction of rigid criteria. A research group led by the University of Skopje and the European Social Policy Network has identified rigid criteria as the most explicit gap in North Macedonia’s social protection system. Self-employed people are excluded from the unemployment allowance, as are workers whose contract was terminated as a result of a mutual agreement with the employer.

35 European Commission, DG JUST D.2 Gender Equality (2021) Country report on gender equality – North Macedonia 2021: [https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021-MK-GE-country-report\\_final-for-web.pdf](https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021-MK-GE-country-report_final-for-web.pdf)

36 OECD (2020) The Covid-19 Crisis in North Macedonia: <https://www.oecd.org/south-east-europe/COVID-19-Crisis-in-North-Macedonia-archive.pdf>

37 ILO (2020), Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_746124.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_746124.pdf)

38 Official Gazette No. 136 from 27.05.2020

39 Gerovska Mitev, M. R. (2021). North Macedonia: Unemployment insurance in response to COVID-19, ESPN Flash Report 2021/20, European Social Policy Network (ESPN), Brussels: European Commission: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=23904&langId=en>

40 Petreski, M., Petreski, B., TomovskaMisoška, A., Gerovska Mitev, M., Parnardzieva-Zmejškova, M., Dimkovski, V. and Morgan, N. (2020). COVID-19’s effects on children in North Macedonia: Rapid analysis and policy proposals, Skopje: UNICEF

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Local Heroes

The Community Development Institute (CDI) and the Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund (ASB) have organised volunteers called “local heroes” to provide fundamental services to people in need. First, a collection of food and hygiene items was organised. This was soon followed by the distribution of electrical devices, face masks, and visors during the most difficult phases of the pandemic.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, volunteers helped to support people with disabilities and to disinfect the public areas of residential neighbourhoods. They also donated meals for hospitalised patients. The organisations gathered workers and volunteers in North Macedonia that could help with the collection and distribution of emergency materials to families in need. In particular, they helped people who were unemployed due to the pandemic or could not go outside because of Covid-19 restrictions and quarantines.

## JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

To achieve a just transition, the country has been focusing on harmonisation with European standards, but in the last decade improvements in environmental policy consisted only of amendments to existing Macedonian legislation. North Macedonia holds reserves of coal, and in February 2021 the European Commission launched a new initiative to support the green transition in the Western Balkans,<sup>42</sup>

which will support North Macedonia’s decision to reduce and progressively abandon coal-based energy production by 2028. As identified in the Social Rights Monitor 2020, one of the main challenges remains the design of implementation strategies. The Commission’s initiative will rely on the exchange of practices and a region-wide dialogue. Moreover, through a so-called “coal academy”, it will provide training in implementation strategies and governance.

According to the National Strategy Group, a lot remains yet to be done, and there is still a lack of concrete action towards a just transition.

## HEALTHCARE

Aside from the challenges posed by the pandemic, North Macedonia faced other major issues related to access to healthcare in 2020, and these will likely continue. **According to the World Health Organisation, every fourth person in the country will be over 65 in 20 years’ time.**<sup>43</sup> That means the government needs to quickly organise integrated services for older people and to prepare social- and health-related policies to avoid pressure on the country’s social protection system and on the younger generation. Another major issue faced by North Macedonia is the severe lack of healthcare personnel: just one out of three physicians are primary-care practitioners, and many are leaving the country every day, especially for other European countries.

Moreover, health literacy and preventive public services are reported to be under resourced, while tobacco consumption, obesity, and air pollution are prevailing risks for diseases including cancer.<sup>44</sup>

41 CDI, ASB (2020) Local Hero initiative: Food [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfH4\\_1RDo2w&list=PLWxlixz7euws9WteF0LWlcMkcpxFVYZsA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UfH4_1RDo2w&list=PLWxlixz7euws9WteF0LWlcMkcpxFVYZsA), Computers: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqZno9i2PgY&list=PLWxlixz7euws9WteF0LWlcMkcpxFVYZsA&index=2>

42 European Commission (2021) Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/coal-regions-in-the-western-balkans-and-ukraine/initiative-coal-regions-transition-western-balkans-and-ukraine\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/coal-regions-in-the-western-balkans-and-ukraine/initiative-coal-regions-transition-western-balkans-and-ukraine_en)

43 WHO (2021) Older people and access to health care in North Macedonia. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/339644/9789289055420-eng.pdf>

44 Ibid.

# Civic space

According to the CIVICUS monitor, civic space in North Macedonia has not improved and remains “narrowed”. Nevertheless, positive steps for the active involvement of civil society organisations were introduced by the 2018-2020 Action Plan for the Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society. The National Strategy Group welcomes the initiatives but points out that civil society and its representatives demand consultations that are more meaningful and timely.

## FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The Macedonian National Strategy Group reports that the legal framework for the freedom of association is defined by the Law on Citizen Associations and Foundations, passed in 1998. According to this, an association of citizens can be established by five adult citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. A foundation can be established by one or more founders. Recently, the registration procedure was simplified after the law was harmonized with the European Law on One-Stop-Shop System.<sup>45</sup> The procedure for registering a CSO was transferred from the courts to the Central Register Office, making it simpler and quicker: it can now be done within five days of completion of the required documentation.<sup>46</sup>

**The NSG reports that the constitutional guarantees of freedom of assembly are generally well protected and respected. However, protests are typically monitored by riot police.** In June 2018, a protest in Skopje against the Prespa Agreement turned violent

when police fired tear gas and flash grenades into a crowd to disperse a demonstration. However, the situation can be encouraging, as in June 2019, when North Macedonia hosted its first Pride parade in the capital Skopje. While conservative religious and nationalist groups opposed the event, it took place peacefully and exceeded attendance expectations. Some representatives of parliament and the government joined the Pride parade, raising hopes for the public agenda of LGBTQI+ demands and priorities.

## FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

The country’s constitution protects the freedom of expression for all citizens. **The government has made progress in respecting media freedom and freedom of expression, but problems remain, including weak media independence and violence against and intimidation of journalists.** CIVICUS Monitor reported violence and physical attacks on an LGBTQI+ activist in 2020, as well as rape and death threats against a female activist on social media. Moreover, the National Network against Hate Speech in Media was launched in January 2021, led by the Media Ethics Council and supported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The network comprises 17 entities, including media and journalistic associations, civil society organisations, government representatives, and other relevant stakeholders. The network will undertake awareness-raising activities and events to increase knowledge of the topic and its visibility.

<sup>45</sup> The “one-stop-shop” principle, together with the consistency mechanism, is one of the central pillars of the proposed General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

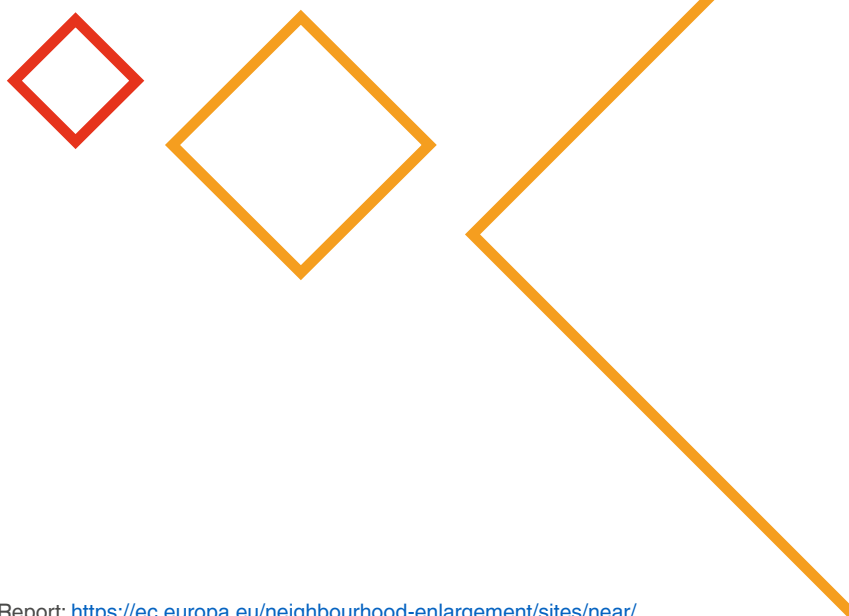
<sup>46</sup> Balkans Civil Society Development Network – Legal framework law on freedom of association: <https://www.balkanscd.net/civil-dialogue/macedonia/legal-framework-law-on-freedom-of-association-incl-foundations-and-its-regulation/>

## SOCIAL AND CIVIL DIALOGUE

Social dialogue in North Macedonia remains weak, and limited progress was made in 2020. Despite tripartite consultation structures established in 12 Municipalities,<sup>47</sup> raising awareness of social dialogue, the utilisation of the Local Economic and Social Councils (ESC) is not yet effective<sup>48</sup> and requires further support. Indeed, the Macedonian social dialogue bodies were established in 1996 (and confirmed in 2010)<sup>49</sup> and can therefore be considered as young compared to those in some EU member states. The exchange of experiences and good practices with social partners from other countries would therefore benefit their effectiveness and Macedonian society more broadly. At the

same time, trade unions need to enhance and promote their visibility, membership, relevance, and capacity to act at local and national level.

**In one of its latest publications on social dialogue in North Macedonia, the ILO expresses its concerns that out of the six working bodies of the national ESC, only one is working regularly – the Tripartite Commission for Licensing of Conciliators and Arbitrators.**<sup>50</sup> The other working groups – on labour relations and wages, on social protection, on occupational health and safety, and on employment policies – are not meeting or delivering concrete results. However, these groups are needed for the country to achieve better employment and working conditions.



47 European Commission, (2020) North Macedonia 2020 Report: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north\\_macedonia\\_report\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/north_macedonia_report_2020.pdf)

48 ILO (2021) Strengthening social dialogue in North Macedonia, description of the project: [https://www.ilo.org/budapest/what-we-do/projects/WCMS\\_679543/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/budapest/what-we-do/projects/WCMS_679543/lang--en/index.htm)

49 The first tripartite agreement of 1996 was signed by trade unions, the government, and the economic chambers. It was only in 2010 that the Organisation of Employers of Macedonia ORM entered the agreement, together with the two trade unions federations SSM and KSS, and established the Economic and Social Councils as they are known today.

50 ILO (2020) Towards effective and functional social dialogue in North Macedonia: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_744279.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_744279.pdf)

# Country Monitor: **The Netherlands**



The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and magnified the effects of the mismanagement of public funds. In the Netherlands, trust in politics and government has declined over the past year, particularly due to the toeslagenaffaire childcare allowance scandal. Some policy and legal initiatives to counter inequalities and mitigate the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 are currently being prepared, but they are still in their initial stages, and their effects cannot yet be felt or measured. Precariousness still affects too many people in the country, and there was a sharp increase in the number of flexible and self-employed workers over the last year. A deterioration of working conditions is noticeable in higher unemployment rates, especially among the young. Gender equality is far from being a reality, but some measures are being prepared to reduce gender identity discrimination. Decentralisation is increasing inequalities in areas such as access to healthcare, housing, and social protection. The shortage of affordable housing remains a major problem. Civic space in the country is open, and freedom of assembly and speech have been sufficiently promoted and protected. Nevertheless, freedom of the press is sometimes at risk and needs to be dealt with by the competent authorities.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	27.4	26.8	27.5	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	3.8%	3.4%	3.8%	7.1%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	72.9 (2017)	72.1	74.1	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	6.1%	5.4%	5.7%	9.2% (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	4.1%	4.8%	4.8%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	OPEN	OPEN	OPEN	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

In the Netherlands, according to the National Strategy Group (NSG), the perspective of the majority of population on the Dutch welfare system has dramatically changed over the last year.<sup>7</sup> The trigger was the allowance affair toeslagenaffaire, in which the government wrongly accused of fraud tens of thousands of people who had received allowances legitimately but then had to return them. The NSG denounces the government's efforts to fight intentional fraud, as this eventually led to systemic ethnic profiling, the violation of fundamental principles of law, and obstruction by many governmental bodies. These included the cabinet, as stated in the Ongekend Onrecht

– Unprecedented Injustice – parliamentary report published in April 2021. Ultimately, the allowance affair exposed years of systemic injustice and mismanagement of funds, leading to a strong decline in approval of the government and reduced trust in politics in general. The NSG believes that the new cabinet's priority should be to establish credibility and trustworthiness.

Another cornerstone of the Dutch welfare system – the 2015 Participatiewet (Participation Act) – has also recently fuelled further dissatisfaction with the country's welfare system. The law – which sets the eligibility requirements

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/NL>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - The Netherlands: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/netherlands/>

7 Tweede Kamer (2020) Ongekend Onrecht / Unprecedented Injustice: [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20201217\\_eindverslag\\_parlementaire\\_ondervragingscommissie\\_kinderopvangtoeslag.pdf](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20201217_eindverslag_parlementaire_ondervragingscommissie_kinderopvangtoeslag.pdf)



for receiving social unemployment benefits – instructs beneficiaries to communicate any circumstances that may affect their income. Therefore, any material support received on top of social benefits may alter beneficiaries' eligibility, and a failure to communicate such support could even be considered fraud. In some cases, this rule has been interpreted strictly by public authorities, hurting many people who were found guilty of receiving just small amounts of support from family and friends. Although no formal changes have yet been approved, the Dutch parliament has already proposed an amendment to the law, which would allow beneficiaries to receive additional kinds of grants. These episodes, too, were not beneficial for trust in politics during 2020. To counter these trends, Dutch municipalities are increasingly preparing to act autonomously. Nevertheless, the NSG expresses its concerns, as further decentralisation of the Dutch welfare system often reinforces inequalities across the country.

## PRECARIOUSNESS

Precariousness endures as a widespread issue across the Netherlands. As reported already in the Social Rights Monitor 2019 and 2020, **vulnerable and minority groups remain overrepresented in sectors where precarious work is more common.** Youth, migrants, LGBTQI+ people, and women are frequently on flexible work contracts or self-employed, meaning they have less social protection and security. Recently published research<sup>8</sup> investigating the main labour market obstacles for transgender people finds different bottlenecks in medical leave schemes. It therefore

proposes the introduction of 'transition leave' to reduce disadvantages and take the first step towards broader action needed to strengthen transgender people's roles in the labour market. Moreover, migrant seasonal workers have repeatedly been reported to be working in appalling conditions and suffering maltreatment and intimidating behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

Precariousness affects both workers on flexible contracts and the lone self-employed (ZZPers), which reached a combined peak of 1.166 million (more than one-eighth of the working population) in the final quarter of 2020.<sup>10</sup> In January 2020, the Wet Arbeidsmarkt in Balans (WAB – Balanced Labour Market Act) entered into force, with the primary objective of reducing the differences in costs and risks between permanent and flexible employment contracts. The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment was charged with assessing the act,<sup>11</sup> but it could not properly measure the effects on the labour market due to the consequences of the pandemic. However, the gap between the two types of employment contracts was confirmed by the government's response to pandemic: workers on flexible contracts, and ZZPers were not prioritised for receiving financial support. Consequently, the NSG reports that the WAB had limited effects, as major gaps persist between the contracts.

## GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality remains a major challenge for the labour market in the Netherlands. The gender gap – measured in terms such as salary, employment conditions, and working time in

8 SEOR (2021) The labour market position of transgender persons <https://www.seor.nl/de-arbeidsmarktpositie-van-transgender-personen/>

9 NOS (2021) Migranten in 'mensonterende situatie' aangetroffen op boerderij in Limburg: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2383190-migranten-in-mensonterende-situatie-aangetroffen-op-boerderij-in-limburg>

10 CBS (2021). Arbeidsdeelname; kerncijfers: <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/82309NED/table?ts=1596637624918>

11 (2020) Kamerbrief met quickscan naar effecten Wet arbeidsmarkt in balans / Assessment of the Balanced Labour Market Act <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/06/05/kamerbrief-met-quickscan-naar-effecten-wet-arbeidsmarkt-in-balans>

recent years, but at 74.1 it still remains higher than the European average of 67.9.<sup>12</sup> **The participation rate of women is particularly worrying: the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment corresponds to 38% for women, and this figure is expected to decrease as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.** In addition, women's participation remains extremely low in high-level and decision-making positions.<sup>13</sup> The NSG finds that, although gender inequalities are covered by media and researchers, a silent acceptance is spreading across the country. This feeling may be fuelled by ineffective and inadequate legislation. A 30% target for the participation of women on private businesses' boards was introduced in 2013, but without proper binding targets the increase in such participation is slowing down or even coming to a standstill.<sup>14</sup> As reported in 2020 research on the topic,<sup>15</sup> too few companies feel the need adapt to a more inclusive approach: 90% fail to meet the target, while in 43% no woman is part of the supervisory board. This data may also reflect the fact that women in the Netherlands continue to have the main responsibility for family care, from daily housework to assistance for the elderly, people with disabilities, and children.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, in 2020 some positive steps were taken in the context of work-life balance. Paid parental leave is still one week, but additional leave has been extended to five weeks. The parent on additional leave will not receive a full salary but instead a benefit not higher than 70% of their daily wage.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, more-flexible working times and the possibility

of working from home are being implemented in national legislation and collective agreements, meaning that an increasing number of people will soon be able to benefit. Finally, the Netherlands will from 2024 pioneer the removal of gender registration ('X', 'F', 'M') from identity cards. This will help to promote equality and respect for all gender identities.

## SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to dramatically affect the Dutch economy, which experienced a contraction due to declining household and public consumption.<sup>18</sup> **The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities in the labour market and beyond, highlighting the need to strengthen the social security system.** Indeed, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS),<sup>19</sup> the pandemic provoked exceptional consequences for labour and income: during 2020, unemployment increased, reaching 309,000 people in May 2021, or 3.3% of the labour force. In 2020, labour participation declined, touching 67.7% in the first quarter of the year, when 250,000 job losses were recorded. Research shows that the number of people living with social assistance benefits is increasing each year, particularly among the young: there has been a 9% increase among people aged less than 27. This is also true for municipal social benefits (bijstand), for which the majority of recipients are less than 30 years old.<sup>20</sup>

12 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/NL>

13 EIGE 2021 Gender Equality Index finds that the share of women in regional assemblies is 33%, in boards of large companies 31%, in the central bank 15.4%, and in research funding organisations 27.8%.

14 NOS (2021) Wet voor meer vrouwen in de bedrijfstop had beperkt effect / The law for more women at high-level positions had limited effect: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2366429-wet-voor-meer-vrouwen-in-de-bedrijfstop-had-beperkt-effect>

15 Powels, B., van den Brink, M. (2020) Bedrijvenmonitor Topvrouwen 2020 <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2021/01/29/rapport-bedrijvenmonitor-topvrouwen-2020-zonder-wet-geen-voortgang>

16 EIGE (2021) Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/NL>

17 Rijksoverheid (2021) <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/geboorteverlof-en-partnerverlof/geboorteverlof-voor-partners>

18 CBS (2021) <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/dossier/coronavirus-crisis-cbs-figures/economic-impact-of-covid-19>

19 CBS (2021) <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/dossier/coronavirus-crisis-cbs-figures/covid-19-impact-on-labour-and-income>

20 CBS (2020) Vooral toename jongeren in de bijstand: <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2021/22/vooral-toename-jongeren-in-de-bijstand>

This figure reflects the decline in labour market participation of this age group. However, the NSG reports that the government did not undertake any specific measure to prevent or tackle growing **youth unemployment (aged 15 to 29), which increased more than 1 percentage point from 2019 to 6.6% in 2020.**<sup>21</sup> This data is alarming, as youth unemployment had been decreasing over the previous seven years. As a consequence, the NSG expects an increase in demand for youth care, and therefore calls for the development of new patterns of participation and work in the years to come. Long-term support will likely be needed for the young generation, even after they enter the labour market.

According to the NSG, some of the changes imposed by the pandemic on working conditions are here to stay. Despite initial hesitation, the possibility of creating a hybrid way of working – some days at the office, others from home – is gaining support among both employees and employers.<sup>22</sup> It will allow people to

move further away from cities into rural areas where housing prices are more sustainable, while reducing office sizes. The NSG moreover reports that another consequence of the pandemic has been a change in the perceived societal status of some professions. Sectors that proved essential during the lockdowns to hold societies together – for instance education personnel and healthcare employees – have experienced growing public recognition and salary increases. On the other hand, workers in other sectors have faced decreases in income: 10% of workers may not receive their vakantiegeld (holiday pay) benefit in 2021,<sup>23</sup> twice as many as in 2020.

In 2021, the Dutch government has extended some support measures that were planned to end in 2020, by amending them for the longer term. New support packages are being prepared by the government, with an eye on the socio-economic situation over the coming year, which is still unclear.



21 Eurostat (2021) Youth unemployment rate: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth\\_empl\\_100&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth_empl_100&lang=en)

22 TNO (2021) Bijna een kwart van de thuiswerkers wil ook na corona grotendeels thuis blijven werken / One out of four people working from home wish to continue to telework <https://www.tno.nl/nl/over-tno/nieuws/2021/2/kwart-thuiswerkers-na-corona-deels-thuis-blijven-werken/>

23 AD (2021) Miljoenen werknemers ontvangen dit jaar geen vakantiegeld / Millions of workers will not receive their holiday pay this year <https://www.ad.nl/geld/miljoenen-werknemers-ontvangen-dit-jaar-geen-vakantiegeld-a3687f72/>

# Social protection and inclusion

Aside from the impact of Covid-19, the NSG reports unequal access to healthcare and social protection across the country. Constraints are partially geographical, as general practitioners tend to work in the most populated areas. But they are also financial, as people living on social benefits often cannot afford to pay for necessary medical care and treatment. This is more common among migrant workers, who usually depend on their employer and work contract for housing support and healthcare. Losing a job therefore means losing access to social protection. This is also the case with the Covid-19 vaccination scheme, for which only registered inhabitants of the Netherlands are considered eligible.<sup>24</sup>

## GOOD PRACTICE Diversity Day

In October 2020, more than 300 organisations, governmental institutions, and companies took part in 'Diversity Day', which aims to create a public space to share good practices for inclusion at work and beyond. The starting point was the question, "Are you yourself at work?" The main message was that talent development only happens if people have a free and safe space in which to express themselves. The initiative will be repeated in October 2021 as well.

## HOUSING

Despite the economic downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, housing prices continued to rise at a steady pace. Growth of 11.5% was registered from April 2020 to April 2021,<sup>25</sup> the sharpest increase in the last two decades. The NSG reports that in the Netherlands, housing is often not accessible or affordable, pointing out that it takes twice the average household income to afford average housing prices. Thus, young people and vulnerable groups – who normally have the lowest incomes – are often not able to buy. **In the rental market, inequalities and an unfair taxation system put tenants at a huge disadvantage compared to owners.** Put simply, house owners benefit from tax reductions – in the form of mortgage interest deductions, or hypotheekrente aftrek<sup>26</sup> – that tenants cannot profit from.<sup>27</sup> This causes an unfair and growing gap between owners and tenants, as tenants deal with living costs that increase every year. Social housing is available through a system of waiting lists, but it is reported<sup>28</sup> that it takes an average of seven years to reach the top of a list and be eligible for social housing. The municipality of Landsmeer has the record of a 22-year waiting list.

24 Trouw (2021) Ze lopen extra risico, maar arbeidsmigranten krijgen voorlopig niet allemaal een vaccin / They are at extra risk, but migrant workers will not receive a vaccine for the time being: <https://www.trouw.nl/binnenland/ze-lopen-extra-risico-maar-arbeidsmigranten-krijgen-voorlopig-niet-allemaal-een-vaccin~bd592a9f/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F>

25 CBS (2021) <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/economy/construction-and-housing> , <https://www.cbs.nl/en-gb/news/2021/20/sharpest-house-price-increase-in-almost-two-decades>

26 Since 2013, in the Netherlands the interests paid on annuity or linear mortgages are deductible from people's income, when the mortgage is fully repaid within 30 years.

27 Rijksoverheid (2021) <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/huis-kopen/vraag-en-antwoord/recht-op-hypotheekrenteaftrek>

28 NOS (2021) Sociale huurwoning? In zeker een kwart van de gemeenten wacht je meer dan 7 jaar / Social housing? in one quarter of the municipalities you will wait more than 7 years: <https://nos.nl/op3/artikel/2377995-sociale-huurwoning-in-zeker-een-kwart-van-de-gemeenten-wacht-je-meer-dan-7-jaar>

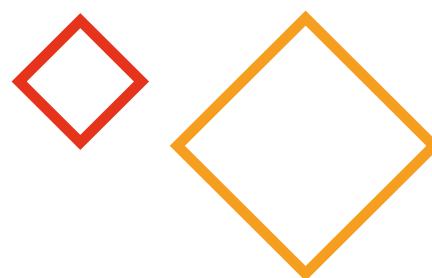
## EDUCATION

Schools, universities, and providers of non-formal education were temporarily closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and classes and study activities were held online. Studying from home is possible when students have access to a computer and an adequate physical space. In the Netherlands, according to an OECD country note published in 2020,<sup>29</sup> these two conditions were met by a high percentage of students: 95% reported having a computer, while 97% had access to an appropriate study space at home. Therefore, the NSG reports, the number of early school leavers has dropped over the last year. Nevertheless, these conditions may have deteriorated over the course of the year, as cases were registered where both space and tools had to be shared with other members of a household. **For those students without access to adequate tools, online learning exacerbated existing inequalities. This was particularly true for people in disadvantaged socio-economic situations and for migrants in need of learning and practicing the Dutch language.** Indeed, 10% of the surveyed students declared that the language spoken at home was different from the one used for education, resulting in less support from other members of the household. Learners whose educational efforts could be assisted by parents and other household members speaking the same language as the one used in education were at an advantage. Though the long-term effects are not yet visible, increasing inequalities among students will likely have a strong impact on both personal growth and career development.

## DECENTRALISATION

The NSG reports that the decentralisation of the Dutch public sector has been a catalyst for inequalities across the country. Public and social policies are managed by 12 provinces and almost 400 municipalities. Local government is responsible for youth and long-term care, mental healthcare, income support, and social assistance. **The NSG denounces the way in which decentralisation creates fragmentation and an imbalance in the treatment<sup>30</sup> of people in different areas of the country:** municipal services are better in areas where demand for support is lower and where municipalities are simply better organised.

As of January 2022, a new law on the integration of newcomers (inburgering<sup>31</sup>) will come into effect, changing the integration system. While newcomers have been personally responsible for the fulfilment of 'integration obligations' (mainly concerning language learning) since 2013, Dutch municipalities will now play a greater role in guiding newcomers through the integration process. They will help them to find schools, with the aim of faster integration and participation in society. This move towards a more decentralised system is likely to give newcomers better opportunities and ad-hoc solutions, but the NSG says this will lead to different treatment and chances for different newcomers.



29 OECD (2020) School education during Covid-19: were teachers and students ready? <https://www.oecd.org/education/Netherlands-coronavirus-education-country-note.pdf>

30 Trouw (2021) <https://www.trouw.nl/economie/steeds-meer-gemeenten-versoepelen-bijstand-maar-er-is-grote-willekeur-b110138e/>

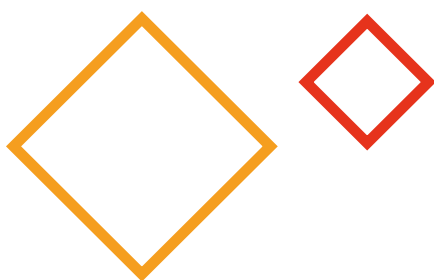
31 Rijksoverheid (2021) <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/inburgeren-in-nederland/nieuwe-wet-inburgering>

# Civic space

In the Netherlands, freedom of assembly and speech are constitutionally guaranteed, and the NSG reports that despite Covid-19 measures, they have generally been respected and protected by local authorities. During 2020, the government supported the right to peacefully assemble so long as Covid-19 measures were respected. It was difficult and controversial, sometimes resulting in police violence against demonstrators, as happened in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague during the large demonstrations for the Black Lives Matter movement. Other tensions developed at demonstrations against Covid-19 measures and at farmers' demonstrations against new nitrogen rules. The Dutch Council on Human Rights (College voor de Rechten van de Mens) therefore intervened and clarified the boundaries for demonstrations during the pandemic.<sup>32</sup> It stated that the government must guarantee and even facilitate demonstrations, so that they are visible and audible to the targets of their protest. But the

Council also said that demonstrations that use violence or promote hatred and discriminatory messages do not fall under the freedom of demonstration and should therefore be stopped by authorities. Moreover, it made clear that Article 9 of the Dutch Constitution allows the restriction of demonstrations if this is necessary to protect public health – for example, when participants would not be able to maintain sufficient distance between each other.

On freedom of the press, the NSG expresses its concern over the frequent violence against journalists and press workers. As indicated in the 2021 World Press Index,<sup>33</sup> press freedom in the country has deteriorated from 2020: physical attacks on journalists increased, and the government has not improved the media's access to state-held information. (The allowances affair is one example.) In addition, mass data collection often violates journalists' privacy.



32 College voor de Rechten van de Mens (2021) an blokkades tot online demonstreren: wat mag wel en niet tijdens een demonstratie? / From blockades to online demonstrations: what is allowed and not allowed during a demonstration? <https://mensenrecht.nl/nl/toegelicht/van-blokkades-tot-online-demonstreren-wat-mag-wel-en-niet-tijdens-een-demonstratie>

33 World Press Freedom Index (2021), The Netherlands: <https://rsf.org/en/netherlands>

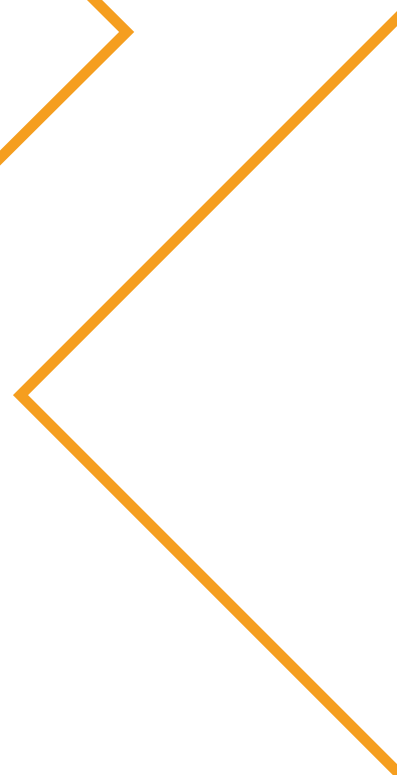
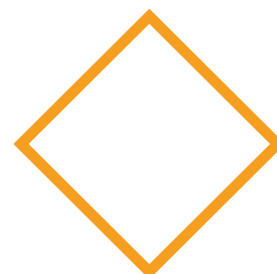


# Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

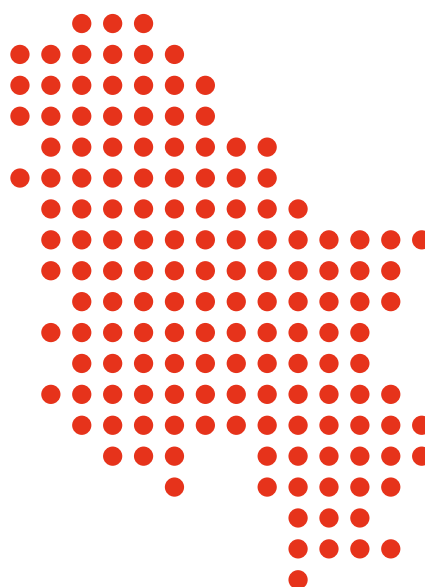
The European Commission's 2020 Country Specific Recommendations touched upon two vital issues for the NSG. They recommended that the country strengthen social protection for self-employed workers and increase public investment in housing. One year later, SOLIDAR and the NSG recognise that there is still a long way to go, and that further legislative support is needed to make improvements in these areas.

After the pandemic disrupted the usual European Semester cycle, European countries were asked this year to prepare national Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs), in order to benefit from the financial support of the

European Recovery and Resilience Facility. To develop fair and effective plans, the support of civil society and social partners is necessary at all stages. Member states must therefore plan consultations with stakeholders to ensure that their national plans reflect society's diverse demands and priorities. However, **the NSG judged the involvement of civil society in the development of the NRRP to be extremely limited, if not non-existent.** As the Netherlands has decided to wait until 2022 to present its NRRP, the NSG and SOLIDAR strongly call for a change of trajectory, in order immediately to include civil society in the plan's development.



# Country Monitor: **Serbia**



Though Serbia's GDP had been growing, the pandemic caused it to shrink 1% in 2020,<sup>1</sup> mainly due to declining activity in the services sector. Following elections in June 2020, a new government was formed in October, tasked with aligning the country to the EU acquis and dealing with Serbia's structural weaknesses. These include income inequalities, the inefficiency of the public sector, a shrinking population, and labour shortages. Importantly, as highlighted by the Serbian National Strategy Group, the country must introduce an approach to the green transition into its policies and strategies, while carrying out reforms that will support Serbia's accession to the EU.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2021) Serbia – overview: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/serbia/overview#1>



	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>2</sup></b>	35.6	33.3	33.3	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>3</sup></b>	12.8%	10.5%	9.1%	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>4</sup></b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>5</sup></b>	9.9%	9.1%	7.7%	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>6</sup></b>	53.3%	53.3%	52.5%	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>7</sup></b>	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	OBSTRUCTED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

Two peaks of Covid-19 infections had significant impacts on the Serbian labour market in 2020, as well as on people's work and lives. The government provided some stimulus measures to companies and enterprises, mainly intended to reduce layoffs and bankruptcies. The Serbian economy was hit hard, but nevertheless was able to keep negative effects to a minimum: in the second quarter of 2020, Serbian GDP declined 9.2% from the previous quarter, less of a fall than the European average of 14.4%.<sup>8</sup> This is believed to be due

to Serbia's steady growth over the past few years,<sup>9</sup> together with the country's relatively high dependence on sectors that have been less impacted by the pandemic's consequences, such as agriculture and food-processing.<sup>10</sup> However, the pandemic had huge impacts on employment levels, which had also been growing in the period prior to the pandemic. **Official statistics report that, just in the first half of 2020, more than 94,000 people lost their jobs.**<sup>11</sup> The National Strategy Group calls on the government to address the Serbian labour

2 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

3 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

4 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/>

5 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

6 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

7 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - Serbia: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/serbia/>

8 UN Serbia (2021) Covid-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment: [https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia\\_report%20%281%29.pdf](https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia_report%20%281%29.pdf)

9 SOLIDAR (2020) Social Rights Monitor 2020 – Serbia:

10 UN Serbia (2021) Covid-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment: [https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia\\_report%20%281%29.pdf](https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia_report%20%281%29.pdf)

11 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2020) Labour Force Survey I quarter 2020: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2020/PdfE/G20201135.pdf>

market's main vulnerabilities, which were identified in a recently published International Labour Organization (ILO) study as the high rate of workers employed by the nonformal economy, the large proportion of self-employed workers, high levels of precariousness, and low wages.<sup>12</sup>

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

In line with global trends, migration in and out of the Republic of Serbia has been severely impacted by Covid-19 and the limitations imposed on the freedom of movement in the country as well as in its neighbours. In 2020, the registration of migrants dropped significantly, from around 12,900 certificates issued in 2019, to less than 3,000 in 2020.<sup>13</sup> **The registration of asylum seekers was suspended from March to May, and inhumane and degrading treatment was denounced in many reception centres.**<sup>14</sup> In particular, various CSOs criticised health and hygiene conditions, as well as unlawful detention that authorities tried to justify by the health crisis.<sup>15</sup>

The Migrant Integration Policy Index reports that newcomers to Serbia encounter many obstacles to inclusion. Once they obtain permission to enter Serbia, migrants enjoy basic rights but not equal opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Among the Western Balkan countries, Serbia could be defined as a pioneer in inclusion policies,<sup>17</sup> but their implementation still lies in the hands of civil

society organisations<sup>18</sup> and is therefore largely dependent on CSOs' capacity and means. The country's legal framework pays particular attention to national minorities' right to self-governance in culture and education. It provides for elections to National Councils,<sup>19</sup> which debate on the protection and full equality of minorities. These are mainly composed of Hungarians, Roma, and Bosniaks.<sup>20</sup> **During 2020, the Serbian Commissioner for the Protection of Equality received twice as many complaints as in previous years.**<sup>21</sup> **These complaints indicated that the Roma population are the most frequent victims of discrimination** – in access to the labour market and also to education, healthcare, decent and affordable housing, clean water, and electricity.

The pandemic triggered numerous mental health risks and challenges due to the vulnerability and traumatic experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. Fears over their safety were compounded by uncertainty, language barriers, and lack of information. Moreover, there was a complete lockdown<sup>22</sup> and limitation of movement, which was controlled by armed officers who guard state-run facilities. The National Strategy Group reports that, during the state of emergency, refugees and migrants were allowed to leave asylum and reception centres only if they were referred for specialist medical examination.

However, in April 2021, Serbia included refugees and asylum seekers in the third phase of its vaccination programme – after health

12 ILO Serbia (2020) Covid-19 and the World of Work - Serbia - Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_754624.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_754624.pdf)

13 AIDA (2020) Country Report - Serbia: [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIDA-SR\\_2020update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIDA-SR_2020update.pdf)

14 Ibid.

15 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (2020) Initiative Filed with the Constitutional Court to review the Constitutionality and Legality of the Order Restricting Movement on Roads Leading to Asylum and Reception Centre Facilities and Grounds <http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/eng-lat/initiative-filed-with-the-constitutional-court-to-review-the-constitutionality-and-legality-of-the-order-restricting-movement-on-roads-leading-to-asylum-and-reception-centre-facilities-and-grounds/>

16 MIPEX (2020) Serbia Country Report: <https://www.mipex.eu/serbia>

17 Ibid.

18 AIDA (2020) Country Report - Serbia: [https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIDA-SR\\_2020update.pdf](https://asylumineurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIDA-SR_2020update.pdf)

19 Commissioner for Protection of Equality (2021) Annual Report: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Regular-Annual-Report-of-the-CPE-for-2020-za-sajt.pdf>

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Reuters (2021) Covid-19 Tracker – Serbia

workers, vulnerable patients, and the elderly – showing commitment to equality of treatment and inclusion. The National Strategy Group wholeheartedly welcomes this initiative. It was deployed with the support of the UN refugee agency UNHCR, which provided interpreters and other personnel.<sup>23</sup>

## EDUCATION

The education system in Serbia is undergoing important changes aimed at improving the quality of education and retention levels of teachers. **Over a decade, there was a continuous decrease in the number of pupils and learners enrolled in education in Serbia, and the student population was around 4% lower in 2020 than it was in 2013.**<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the National Strategy Group denounces the absence of a clear strategy to tackle early school leaving and increase the country's enrolment levels. However, compared to the European average, Serbian people aged 20 to 24 are more likely to have attended upper secondary levels of education – around 90%, 10 percentage points above the EU average.<sup>25</sup> Serbia registered a slight increase in the last decade – of 0.6% – in the number of students attending tertiary education, which may be explained by the ageing population. The proportion of students who actually complete tertiary education remains lower than the average in EU member states.<sup>26</sup>

The National Strategy Group reports that the Serbian government has acknowledged the crucial role of a quality education system in addressing the country's social and economic challenges. It has initiated a partnership with the European Union to bring about important reforms in the system. The EU therefore supports the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development through the REDiS 2030 project.<sup>27</sup> This focuses on building capacity for key actors in the education system, encourages more-systematic policy monitoring, and develops quality-assurance mechanisms. The project will last until March 2022, when the EU contribution should reach €2.7 million.

Throughout the year, the Serbian Ministry of Education undertook two main policy changes. Firstly, it adopted the Bylaw on the Implementation of practical teaching and professional practice,<sup>28</sup> regulating the organisation of vocational education and training (VET). This defined agreements between schools and the employers for when trainees gain experience in a workplace. Secondly, and mainly as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, a Bylaw on Special Educational Programmes<sup>29</sup> was adopted. It describes the procedures for teaching and learning during emergency situations, in particular for remote, online learning. Some of the main changes are shorter school lessons (a reduction from 45 to 30 minutes) and different evaluation methods based on learning outcomes.

23 UNHCR (2021) Serbia vaccinates refugees against COVID-19: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2021/3/60632be44/serbia-vaccinates-refugees-against-covid-19.html>

24 Eurostat (2020) Number of pupils and students, Serbia: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Enlargement\\_countries\\_-\\_education\\_statistics&oldid=515694#Early\\_leavers\\_from\\_education\\_and\\_training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Enlargement_countries_-_education_statistics&oldid=515694#Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 REDiS 2030, EU support to Reform of Education in Serbia: <https://capacity-building-education-reform.euzatebe.rs/en/about-project>

28 Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development (2020) Bylaw on the Implementation of practical teaching and professional practice: <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/ministarstva/pravilnik/2020/112/1/reg>

29 Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development (2020) Bylaw on Special Educational Programmes: <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/pravilnik-o-posebnom-programu-obrazovanja-i-vaspitanja.html>

## GOOD PRACTICE Besplatna Biblioteka

The charity foundation Alek Kavčić began its campaign for free, quality primary education by offering free primary school textbooks in PDF format. Textbooks and complementary material could be downloaded free of charge from an online platform.<sup>30</sup> The service has been particularly welcomed by households, and more than 9,000 copies were downloaded on just the first day.<sup>31</sup> It saved the cost of buying schoolbooks, which cost around 800 Serbian dinars (€6.80) each, enabling families to save around €100 per child.

## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The youth unemployment rate in Serbia remained high during 2020, reaching 22.2% in the second quarter of 2021.<sup>32</sup> Youth has been hit hard by the Covid-19 crisis, not only in terms of job loss but also through deterioration in mental health and increased anxiety over working conditions in the future: 62% of young people think they will encounter bigger obstacles to find decent jobs. Indeed, **20% of young people reported that their work had been strongly impacted by the pandemic: 12%**

**had suffered a reduction in salary, and 5% were laid off.**<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the National Strategy Group calls on the government to develop long-term support strategies, as the prolonged economic downturn is likely to reduce employment levels and further transform the labour market and working conditions.

In June 2020, the Serbian government announced strategies and measures to stimulate youth employment and access to the labour market.<sup>34</sup> The government intended to implement a service to assist high school graduates in finding a job, while at the same time encouraging employers to develop training and hiring programmes through public subsidies and incentives. Moreover, the National Employment Strategy for the period from 2021 to 2026<sup>35</sup> envisages the introduction of the Youth Guarantee Support System in Serbia, particularly to encourage the formalisation of internships and traineeships.

**The Serbian Labour Force Survey shows that young people in the country do not only have to deal with bad working conditions. But they are exposed to other significant risks, such as poverty and material deprivation, which affect 33% of Serbs aged 16 to 29.**<sup>36</sup> Worse, in Serbia it normally took young people two years to find their first stable employment after the end of their studies, compared with an EU average of 6.5 months.<sup>37</sup> The pandemic means this will likely take longer, as training for new employees has often been suspended or postponed due to remote working conditions.

30 Besplatna Biblioteka: <https://www.besplatnabiblioteka.com/>

31 Emerging Europe (2021) In Serbia, free school books disrupt a foreign-dominated market: <https://emerging-europe.com/news/in-serbia-free-school-books-disrupt-a-foreign-dominated-market/>

32 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2021) Labour Force Survey: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/oblasti/trziste-rada/anketa-o-radnoj-snazi/>

33 UN Serbia (2021) UN Serbia (2021) Covid-19 Socio-Economic Impact Assessment: [https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia\\_report%20%281%29.pdf](https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia_report%20%281%29.pdf)

34 ILO Serbia (2020) Covid-19 and the World of Work - Serbia - Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_754624.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_754624.pdf)

35 Government of the Republic of Serbia (2021) New Employment Strategy for more efficient labour market: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vesti/en/168387/new-employment-strategy-for-more-efficient-labour-market.php>

36 ETF (2021) Youth Situation in Serbia – Employment, skills and social inclusion: [https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-06/youth\\_in\\_serbia\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-06/youth_in_serbia_executive_summary.pdf)

37 Ibid.

# Fair working conditions

According to the Serbian Statistical Office, OPBC, the employment rate remained more or less stable throughout the year, but the unemployment level rose. While unemployment reached an historic low of 7.9% at the beginning of 2020, it increased to 12.8% in the first quarter of 2021,<sup>38</sup> and an increasing percentage of the Serbian population has been without work since the pandemic's outbreak. A growing number of people could not look for work or were unable to start working because of the lockdown and other measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus; because they were out of the labour force, they did not count as unemployed. According to the National Strategy Group, the resumption of immigration at the beginning of 2021 could also explain part of the increase in the employment rate between the first two quarters of the year, from 46.3% to 48.3%.<sup>39</sup>

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

**The Covid-19 pandemic hit Serbia after an unprecedented period of growth in jobs and the employment rate. It had disruptive effects on the labour market and the economy, and 9% of the companies had to dismiss some of their employees,** mainly due to insufficient revenues to maintain their levels of activity, or due to lower demand from customers and consumers.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, a recently

published ILO report<sup>41</sup> confirms that vulnerable categories of workers – informal and self-employed workers, low-wage earners, people on non-permanent contracts, women, and young people – are the most likely to suffer from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. This will further exacerbate in-work poverty and existing inequalities.

During the state of emergency, two sets of laws applied to workers in Serbia. In addition to the regular Labour Code, other rules were applied, such as the Law on Protection from Infectious Diseases and some preventive measures to maintain healthy and safe workplaces. Employers had to develop plans of preventive measures by mid-August 2020<sup>42</sup> to limit the spread of the virus.

The Serbian government's policy response came in June 2020, when it adopted a set of policies to limit and mitigate the negative consequences of the health and economic crises. To protect employment, the government guaranteed all public-sector workers that they would not be laid off during the pandemic and that they would maintain their full salaries. Moreover, laid-off private-sector employees received half their monthly pay during the state of emergency. Furthermore, medical personnel who volunteered for the health sector during the state of emergency were eventually hired as full-time employees.<sup>43</sup>

38 OPBC (2021) Labour Force Survey: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2021/PdfE/G20211239.pdf>

39 Ibid.

40 ILO Serbia (2020) Covid-19 and the World of Work - Serbia - Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_754624.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_754624.pdf)

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

## PRECARIOUSNESS

Precarious employment in Serbia increased from 2.4% in 2011 to 7.3% in 2020,<sup>44</sup> triple the European average rate. In addition, 23% of Serbian workers are employed on temporary or short-term contracts, double the number of 2011. Most worryingly, **informal employment remains a major challenge: it represents for 18.2% of total employment, a very high share.**<sup>45</sup> Precarious working conditions, worsened by the pandemic and the containment measures, led to an increase in already-high levels of inequality – the Gini coefficient was 33.3 in 2019.<sup>46</sup> In 2020, the Labour Force Survey by the Serbian Bureau of Statistics identified 114,000 employees without pension insurance and 115,900 workers without health insurance.<sup>47</sup> The National Strategy Group expresses its growing concern, as increased precariousness will inevitably make people more likely to accept poorer working conditions and occasional jobs in order to have at least some income.

Furthermore, the National Strategy Group denounces the insufficient definition of non-standard ways of employment and workers in the Law on Simplified Work Engagement on Seasonal Jobs 50/2018.<sup>48</sup> This leaves workers without adequate protection and encourages additional flexibility of work, opening the doors to new forms of exploitation and abuse and particularly damaging female workers, who are overrepresented in domestic, auxiliary, and nursing work.

## GENDER EQUALITY

Serbia was the first non-EU country to use the Gender Equality Index to evaluate gender equality policies and achievements and compare them over time and with other countries. The latest report was published in 2018<sup>49</sup> and described a high gender pay gap, as well as low labour market participation by women. The National Strategy Group confirms a growing number of issues related to work-life balance during the pandemic while remote working was encouraged. **Teleworking had a strong negative impact on women, who are mostly responsible for housework and daily care activities.** In 2020 and 2021, workers in the health and care sectors have been in the frontline of the crisis, often with little protection against infection and inadequate equipment. Women account for 76% of the sector's employees and are also overrepresented in the services sector. Of the employment contracts held by women, 53.9% are considered highly vulnerable by the ILO.<sup>50</sup>

One aspect of Serbia's path towards accession to the European Union has been to develop and implement a new Law on Gender Equality to strengthen women's participation in the labour market and in politics and society. Gender equality in Serbia is already protected by the Serbian constitution, which mandates equal opportunities and prohibits discrimination based on sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or marital status. The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020<sup>51</sup> recently

44 Eurostat (2021), Precarious employment by sex, age, and NACE [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lf\\_sa\\_goe\\_4ax1r2&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lf_sa_goe_4ax1r2&lang=en)

45 ILO Serbia (2020) Covid-19 and the World of Work - Serbia - Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_754624.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_754624.pdf)

46 Eurostat (2021) Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

47 SORS (2021) Labour Force Survey: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/oblasti/trziste-rada/>

48 Zakon o pojednostavljenom random angazovanju na sezonskim poslovima u određenim delatnostima / Act of 28 June 2018 on simplified employment in specific categories of seasonal work (Official Gazette No. 50/18): <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natllex/docs/ELECTRONIC/109262/135504/F-1023568000/SRB-2018-L-109262.pdf>

49 Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit Government of the Republic of Serbia (2018) Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia [http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Indeks\\_rodne\\_ravnopravnosti\\_u\\_Republici\\_Srbiji\\_2018\\_eng.pdf](http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Indeks_rodne_ravnopravnosti_u_Republici_Srbiji_2018_eng.pdf)

50 ILO Serbia (2020) Covid-19 and the World of Work - Serbia - Rapid Assessment of the Employment Impacts and Policy Responses: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms\\_754624.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-budapest/documents/publication/wcms_754624.pdf)

51 Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit Government of the Republic of Serbia (2018) Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Serbia: [http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Indeks\\_rodne\\_ravnopravnosti\\_u\\_Republici\\_Srbiji\\_2018\\_eng.pdf](http://socijalnoukljucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Indeks_rodne_ravnopravnosti_u_Republici_Srbiji_2018_eng.pdf)

expired, and the Serbian government adopted a new strategy to fight gender-based and domestic violence for 2021 to 2025. The main objective is to develop a national support system for domestic violence against women and girls, which was particularly frequent during the pandemic and lockdown periods.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, a new bill on gender equality was endorsed by the government. It included sanctions for discrimination at the workplace and encouraging employers to adopt anti-discrimination plans.

Since 2017, when the Serbian Law on Financial Support for Families with Children was adopted, Serbian civil society organisations have come together to denounce the many

restrictions that the law imposed on maternity, paternity, and parental rights to cash benefits.<sup>53</sup> Following the CSOs' pressure and campaigns, the Constitutional Court ruled against those provisions in December 2020, claiming they went against constitutional principles. The Serbian government therefore prepared a new proposal based on the Court's decision, and in June 2021 the Serbian Parliament adopted a new law defining the criteria for financial support to households with children. Some positive steps were taken to secure the legal rights of working parents of children with disabilities and to penalise employers who did not follow the rules on parental leave and benefits.<sup>54</sup>

## Social protection and inclusion

Public spending allocated to social protection in Serbia has for a long time been lower than the European average. The economic and financial crises of 2008 slowed Serbia's fiscal consolidation, and austerity measures resulted in lower expenditure on social protection.<sup>55</sup> In Serbia, taxation is the main source of funds for social protection. In 2019, the biggest decrease in funds was registered in the healthcare sector, mainly due to a fall in the healthcare contribution rate but also because of a falling employment rate and tax evasion.<sup>56</sup> This meant Serbia was not prepared for the pandemic.

In 2021, half a million people in Serbia are living in absolute poverty, and more than two million are at risk of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>57</sup> The National Strategy Group reports that the majority of these people do not have access to social security and that the measures adopted by the Serbian parliament are not enough to help people get out of poverty. Moreover, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and health crisis, the number of people living in poverty increased across the country, but the government did not increase the adequacy, or the coverage of programmes aimed at the poorest groups in society. The most relevant measure adopted during

52 The Government of the Republic of Serbia (2021) Government adopts Bill on gender equality: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/171564/government-adopts-bill-on-gender-equality.php>

53 European Commission (2021) Press Release of 15.09.2021: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1135&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10069>

54 Masina (2021) What will the amendments to the Law on financial support for families with children bring: <https://www.masina.rs/en/what-will-the-amendments-to-the-law-on-financial-support-for-families-with-children-bring-it-could-have-been-better/>

55 Pejin, L., and Bajec, J. (2019) ESPN Thematic Report on Financing social protection – Serbia, European Social Policy Network (ESPN): <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21843&langId=en>

56 Ibid.

57 Center for Democracy Foundation (2021) Half a million Serbians living in absolute poverty: <http://www.centaronline.org/en/event/12272/half-a-million-serbians-living-in-absolute-poverty-researcher-says>

the year was the provision of emergency cash payments of €100 per adult. However, due to the long period between the policy proposal and its implementation, the government only made the payments one week after the end of the lockdown, and it failed to reach everyone in need.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, as the measure was directed at adults, it was not of great help to households at the greatest risk of poverty – that is, those composed of two adults and with three or more dependent children.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, **children up to 18 years old are the most exposed to poverty, representing 24.2% of the people at risk, followed by young adults aged 18 to 24, at 23.6%.**<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the payments did not reach the Roma population or people without official documents. These include internally displaced people, who are often left behind and prone to social exclusion. In addition, the needs of people with disabilities were not addressed through benefits.

## HOUSING

The housing situation in Serbia still faces several challenges. **It is particularly worrying that 20% of settlements in the country with at least 22,000 people do not have access to safe, potable water, while 63% of those with more than 60,000 inhabitants lack access to proper sanitation and sewage systems.**<sup>61</sup> According to the National Strategy Group, since the collapse of the socialist system, no real long-term housing strategy has been developed, letting a deregulated, privatised market shift from a welfare model

towards a liberal, market-oriented approach. The NSG reports that illegal construction practices became normalised, often leaving the most vulnerable, poorest parts of society to live in obsolete, unfinished, and unsafe homes. In September 2020, the government therefore adopted a Law on Housing and Maintenance of Apartment Buildings,<sup>62</sup> aimed at defining the relationships, rights, and duties of apartment owners and renters and introducing for the first time the concept of sustainable housing and energy efficiency. It stipulates that sustainable housing encompasses improving the living conditions of citizens and increasing the value of the housing stock through the development of energy-efficient facilities that reduce negative environmental impacts. To encourage the renovation of buildings and houses, the Serbian Ministry of Mining and Energy formed the Directorate for Financing and Facilitating Energy Efficiency, which will be responsible for the distribution of subsidies and benefits. The government also decided to form the first National Coalition for the Reduction of Energy Poverty.<sup>63</sup>

## HEALTHCARE

**Public expenditure on social protection declined after the 2008 financial crisis, and the service cut the most was healthcare protection.**<sup>64</sup> **The pandemic worsened the situation and made healthcare an even less accessible service.** The National Strategy Group reports that the often-low salaries of nurses and doctors, coupled with cumbersome bureaucracy and long waiting periods,

58 Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) (2020). Social Protection in The Western Balkans – Responding to the Covid-19 crisis: <http://csp.org.rs/en/regional-initiative/news/regional-study-social-protection-in-the-western-balkans-responding-to-the-covid-19-crisis-published.html>

59 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) (2018) Statistical Release Survey on Income and Living Conditions: <https://publikacije.stat.gov.rs/G2019/PdfE/G20191281.pdf>

60 Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) (2021) Poverty and Social Inequality, 2020: <https://www.stat.gov.rs/en-us/vesti/20211015-siromastvo-i-socijalna-nejednakost-2020/?s=0102>

61 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU) (2020), Analysis of Socioeconomic Impact of Covid-19 on Groups at Risk in the Republic of Serbia: [https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia\\_report%20%281%29.pdf](https://serbia.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/seia_report%20%281%29.pdf)

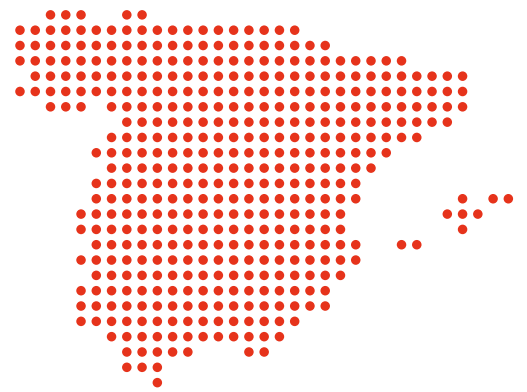
62 Government of the Republic of Serbia (2020) Planning and Building Act (in English): <https://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/planning-and-building-act-serbia.html>

63 Government of the Republic of Serbia (2021) Press Release of 22.04.2021: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/171564/government-adopts-bill-on-gender-equality.php>

64 Pejin, L., and Bajec, J. (2019) ESPN Thematic Report on Financing social protection – Serbia, European Social Policy Network (ESPN): <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=21843&langId=en>



# Country Monitor: **Spain**



SOLIDAR's Spanish National Strategy Group (NSG) remains concerned over persistent social exclusion; poverty, unemployment, and high gender inequalities in employment contexts and beyond; and the lack of accessible healthcare and decent housing. The social fabric had not fully recovered from the 2008 financial crisis, but it is now being further damaged by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. The NSG says there is a strong need to strengthen trade union membership and collective bargaining power in order to improve working conditions, which are a priority for making Spain a more equal country where public services are widely accessible.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	33.2	33	32.1	30.2 (2019)
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	15.3%	14.1%	15.5%	7.1%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	70.1	72.0	72.0	67.9
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	13.0%	12.8%	11.8%	9.2 % (2019)
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	4.7%	5.9%	7.6%	17.1% (2019)
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

# Equal opportunities and fair working conditions

The Spanish National Strategic Group reports that legislative changes over working conditions and labour rights were undertaken because of the pandemic. In particular, emphasis was put on the prevention of occupational risks and the protection of health and safety at work. According to the Spanish trade union Confederacion Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.), the Temporary Redundancy Programmes (“ERTE – Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo”<sup>7</sup>) have proved useful. **Around 4 million workers temporarily dismissed during the hardest phase of the pandemic had been at risk of losing their**

**jobs.** Nevertheless, structural problems were magnified, especially exposing the increased precariousness of temporary contracts, poor work-life balance, the gender pay gap, and the absence of a monitoring body to oversee the working conditions of the self-employed. One of the main priorities identified by the National Strategy Group to tackle these issues and ensure fair working conditions and equal access to the labour market is to strengthen trade union membership and unions’ collective bargaining power. Moreover, greater value needs to be placed on female participation, particularly in sectors that were seen to be crucial

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&-dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/ES>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic Space Monitor - Spain: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/spain/>

7 ERTE, Expediente de Regulación Temporal de Empleo, is regulated in the Spanish Workers’ Statute – Estatuto de los Trabajadores.

during the year, such as national healthcare and public education. The National Strategy Group also calls for the development of better policies to fight the increasing discriminatory and fascist discourse that is developing across the country. This often prevents vulnerable people from receiving equal treatment in a fair labour market.

Among the measures adopted by the government, the National Strategy Group highlights the positive impact of two specific measures: the regularisation of migrant workers<sup>8</sup> and the subsidy introduced for domestic workers.<sup>9</sup>

## PRECARIOUSNESS AND ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

The National Strategy Group points out that the recovery measures adopted in 2019 to tackle increasing labour precariousness<sup>10</sup> did not prove efficient in coping with the social and economic effects of the Covid-19 crisis. Indeed, research published by the NGO Oxfam Intermón on the occasion of the 2021 Davos Forum found that working conditions are deteriorating and acting as catalysts for inequality.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the economic sectors with the lowest salaries are those being more affected by the pandemic measures. In the third trimester of 2020, the unemployment rate increased by 2.4 percentage points,<sup>12</sup> but this was mitigated by the positive impact of ERTE. Migrant workers found themselves in a particularly precarious

situation because of their vulnerable administrative status: administrative irregularities and short-term residency permits and contracts influence the stability of their situation in Spain. Generally speaking, **the pandemic disproportionately hit young, low-skilled, and temporary workers.**<sup>13</sup> Data collected by the Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration<sup>14</sup> demonstrates that temporary employment helped workers and companies in the short term. But it also highlighted the need to strengthen permanent contracts to reverse the trend of increasing unemployment.<sup>15</sup>

According to the annual labour force survey issued by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE – National Institute of Statistics), the number of employed people continues to decrease. More than 137,000 people lost their jobs between the last quarter of 2019 and the beginning of 2020.<sup>16</sup> Despite countermeasures, young workers were hit worse than other groups: unemployment among people up to 20 years old increased 55% from 2019. According to Eurostat, **Spain has the largest share of unemployed youth in the EU-27, at 41.7% compared to an EU average of 17%.** The Plan de Choque por el Empleo Joven 2019-2021 (Shock Plan for Youth Employment) aimed to improve competitiveness by increasing the participation of young people in the labour market.<sup>17</sup> It consisted of around 50 structural measures, which aimed to increase the quality of employment, close the gender gap, and reduce youth unemployment. The National Strategy Group reports that the most effective

8 INE (2020) Encuesta de Población Activa – EPA <https://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/daco4211/epa0220.pdf>

9 Eurofund (2020) Extension of the extraordinary subsidy for lack of activity to domestic workers: [https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/ES-2020-14\\_617.html](https://static.eurofound.europa.eu/covid19db/cases/ES-2020-14_617.html)

10 Eurofound (2019) Labourmarket segmentation: Piloting new empirical and policy analyses [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef19033en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef19033en.pdf)

11 Oxfam Intermón (2021). Superar la pandemia y reducir la desigualdad [Overcoming the pandemics and reducing inequalities]: <https://oxfam.app.box.com/s/2izodgd8e3eeqg51cl20qx8pf3xyf78q>

12 Ibid.

13 Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1787/888934232162>

14 Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration: <https://www.inclusion.gob.es/en/index.htm>

15 OECD (2021), Economic Survey: Spain 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Spain-2021-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>

16 Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2021) Encuesta de Población Activa: <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=4028>

17 SEPE (2018) Shock Plan for Youth Employment 2019-2021: <https://www.sepe.es/HomeSepe/en/Personas/encontrar-trabajo/plan-de-choque-empleo-joven-2019-2021>

measures of the plan include those that ensure a long-term commitment to the young people and university students who will soon enter the labour market.

The National Strategy Group highlights how the concept of precariousness can also be applied to the social sphere, where the confinement had a strong negative impact. Physical and mental health were more at risk for precarious and vulnerable groups, who did not have sufficient means and tools to find alternative ways of living, working, and studying. Moreover, gender-based violence dramatically increased during the lockdowns. There was a 48% increase in calls to specialised telephone helplines and a 733% increase in online consultations with experts, the Spanish National Strategy Group reported.

### GOOD PRACTICE

The Instituto de la Juventud de España InJuve<sup>18</sup> (Spanish Youth Institute), an initiative of the Ministry of Social Rights, covered themes of crucial importance for the young generation. The institute created a booklet containing a collection of the best policy responses from governments worldwide, selected for their responses to the challenges that affect youth and for programmes that represent real alternatives for youth. The compilation of 20 Good Practices in Public Youth Policies,<sup>19</sup> carried out jointly by OIJ, UNDP, UNFPA, ECLAC, and UNESCO, was presented during the XXII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in November in Cadiz.

## GENDER EQUALITY

A 2020 constitutional provision makes the principle of gender equality compulsory in all public policies and legal frameworks,<sup>20</sup> and the Spanish Royal Decree Law 6/2019<sup>21</sup> on gender equality was approved in 2019. The National Strategy Group reports that these led to important improvements in the domain of equal treatment and opportunities, as well as a reduction in discrimination – both direct and indirect – against women in the field of employment and occupation.

The Royal Decrees 901/2020 and 902/2020 provided for concrete actions, such as the creation and implementation of an “Equality Plan” for all companies with more than 150 employees. The decrees also described the scope of these plans and the procedure for their negotiation and implementation. In addition, the decrees oblige companies to be transparent over equal pay from April 2021: they have to publish sufficient and meaningful information on their levels of remuneration. This allows authorities, trade unions, and other organisations to more easily detect discrepancies and the presence of discrimination. These measures apply to all companies with more than 150 employees and are binding requirements. Companies have to keep a pay register and set up a remuneration audit. The National Strategy Group welcomes these initiatives and supports the presence of workers’ representatives in companies as an effective way of advancing gender equality at work.

However, the National Strategy Group points out that the measures undertaken by the government are welcome but not sufficient. **There**

18 Injuve, Ministerio de derechos sociales y Agenda 2030: [Injuve, Instituto de la Juventud](#).

19 Injuve (2020). 20 Buenas prácticas en políticas públicas de juventud / 20 Good practices in youth public policies. [www.injuve.es/sites/default/files/20buenaspracticasyjuventud.pdf](http://www.injuve.es/sites/default/files/20buenaspracticasyjuventud.pdf)

20 State Official Newsletter (2020) Spanish Constitution <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1978-31229>

21 Spanish Government, <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2019/03/01/6/con>

is a lack of policies aimed at reconciling work and families, supporting domestic workers, and reducing persistent gender segregation. Improvements in this area would contribute to a more equal society in Spain and Europe. Despite the government measures, there are dramatic inequalities: the rate of full-time equivalent (FTE) employment is 37.7% for women compared to 52% for men, according to a 2021 report issued by the European Institute of Gender Equality.<sup>22</sup> Worryingly, the allocation of time dedicated to care and domestic work presents serious challenges for gender equality: 84.5% of women report doing housework every day, compared to 42% of men.<sup>23</sup> The European Institute of Gender Equality finds that women are also strongly underrepresented as members of political bodies: only 41% of Spanish ministers and 39% of members of parliament are women. The share is even lower for women board members, at only 23.6% in the largest quoted companies.<sup>24</sup>

The National Strategy Group reports that more measures encouraging co-responsibilities are therefore needed. It welcomes the introduction – from 1 January 2021 – of equal parental leave of 36 months. Nevertheless, parental leave in Spain is unpaid, and self-employed workers are not eligible for it.<sup>25</sup> Due to the pandemic and consequences such as teleworking and lockdowns, many people experienced overload and burnouts due to an increased amount of work. As women are mainly responsible for housework in Spain, they benefitted from the introduction of Royal Decree 8/2020, which allows more-flexible working hours, including a reduction for people caring for family members.

## SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19

The pandemic exposed some of the structural weaknesses of the country, after the State of Emergency introduced limitations on mobility and social and economic activities. Although it is still too early to measure the medium- and long-term effects on welfare and the labour market, some trends are identifiable. One major problem is that, before the pandemic's outbreak, employment levels and the economic conditions in Spain had still not fully recovered from the 2008 financial crisis.<sup>26</sup> The pandemic and the containment measures therefore halted the recovery and even put further pressure on vulnerable groups – in particular women, migrants, and young workers.

Despite measures to mitigate the negative impacts of Covid-19 on employment and the economy, new measures for working life and conditions have been implemented, such as the introduction of a minimum living income and a regulation on telework. However, the National Strategy Group thinks it dangerous that telework has not been precisely regulated, and it calls for a more detailed framework: during the past months, telework led to an increase in overtime, which was often unpaid and not recognised by employers. On the other hand, the introduction of the Ingreso Mínimo Vital (Minimum Vital Income) – aimed at preventing the risk of poverty and social exclusion – was approved by Royal Decree Law 20/2020. Though this is a positive development fuelled by the Covid-19 crisis, the National Strategy Group points out that its complexity is delaying effective deployment and hindering concrete results in improving equal opportunities for recipients.

22 EIGE (2021). Gender Equality Index – Spain. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/domain/work/ES>

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Spanish Government, Excedencia por cuidado de hijos: [https://www.mites.gob.es/es/Guia/texto/guia\\_7/contenidos/guia\\_7\\_16\\_2.htm](https://www.mites.gob.es/es/Guia/texto/guia_7/contenidos/guia_7_16_2.htm)

26 Molina, O., (2021). Working Life in Spain in 2020. Centre d'Estudis Sociològics sobre la Vida Quotidiana i el Treball – QUIT, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona – UAB <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/spain#working-life>

**The National Strategy Group recognizes that ERTE, the temporary redundancy programme to avoid layoffs, was the main success in government employment policies.**

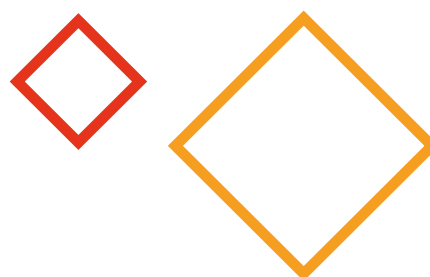
It covered and protected a significant number of workers from unemployment (498,000 in just the last quarter of 2020).<sup>27</sup> At the end of 2020, a slight increase in employment levels was recorded by the Spanish statistics institute INE, particularly in the private sector. Nevertheless, 80% of the new contracts are temporary, indicating a precarious situation in the Spanish labour market.

In Spain, as all across Europe and beyond, the pandemic completely changed education and learning. This had a huge impact on younger children, as they are at high risk of poverty in Spain: one out of three depend on school meals for nutrition.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, online learning endangered personal growth and development, particularly for children from a disadvantaged socio-economic background. Children living in crowded households often lacked the necessary tools and equipment for learning, or else they had to share tools, and they rapidly fell behind at school.

**Migrants and newcomers were also particularly disadvantaged throughout the year. They often suffered more than others from the pandemic, due to precarious and overcrowded housing conditions, which favour contagion and make lockdowns harder.**

The closure of social spaces that organised inclusion activities and training made it even more difficult, if not impossible, for newcomers to build trusted networks and safe spaces to live, share, and recover from a difficult situation. Moreover, the digital divide is evident among young migrant students and learners, worsening their learning environment and outcomes.

Nevertheless, the NSG points out that the Spanish government has adopted other measures to protect migrants during the year. These include the extension of residency for asylum seekers, by simplifying family reunification procedures, and the introduction of telematic application forms for victims of gender violence to request provisional permits.



27 INE (2021) EPA – Encuesta de Población Activa [https://www.ine.es/prensa/epa\\_tabla.htm](https://www.ine.es/prensa/epa_tabla.htm)

28 EAPN Spain (2021), Poverty Watch 2020: [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-SPAIN-POVERTY-WATCH-2020\\_ENG\\_FINAL-4708.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-SPAIN-POVERTY-WATCH-2020_ENG_FINAL-4708.pdf)

# Social protection and inclusion

According to the National Strategy Group, the pandemic hit Spain very hard, with severe consequences for both the economy and society. According to a report on the Spanish economy by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),<sup>29</sup> a durable and sustainable recovery will be achieved only by addressing pre-existing structural challenges, including the labour market, and by correctly supporting and protecting employment. Inequalities remain very high, and the most affected groups remain women, young people, foreigners, single parents, and the unemployed. In order to tackle inequalities and foster social protection and inclusion, the National Strategy Group identifies three priority areas: addressing poverty, increasing access to healthcare, and improving housing policy.

In February 2020, the European Commission Country Report<sup>30</sup> warned Spain to tackle precarious employment and structural unemployment, which have led to high rates of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. In 2020, 21% of the population was affected by these problems,<sup>31</sup> while 5.4% of households cannot afford a meal with meat at least every other day.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the year, Spanish policies failed to meet the goals they were set, and the consequences of the pandemic aggravated

socio-economic conditions. At the end of 2020, the increase in child poverty stood out, affecting 27.4% of children – 35% higher than the rate for people older than 18.<sup>33</sup> In addition, inequality increased, and the net income of the poorest 20% of the population is one-sixth that of the richest 20%.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the country needs to tackle geographical disparities in the distribution of people at risk of poverty and exclusion, who are concentrated in the south of the country, where this rate is four times that in the north.

**Severe material deprivation – indicating severe vulnerability and a lack of basic tools considered essential for participation in the community – increased sharply from 2008 and was worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences.** Material deprivation is higher among single-parent households, many of which are headed by women, according to the INE's Encuesta de condiciones de vida 2020 (Living Conditions Survey).

Despite a decrease in inequality of disposable income, Spain remains among the most unequal EU countries,<sup>35</sup> most likely due to the common use of temporary contracts that do not qualify for unemployment benefit and thus generate precariousness and low incomes. Moreover, 13% of the work force suffers from

29 OECD (2021), Economic Survey: Spain 2021. <https://www.oecd.org/economy/surveys/Spain-2021-OECD-economic-survey-overview.pdf>

30 European Commission (2020) 2020 European Semester: Country Report – Spain: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1584543810241&uri=CELEX%3A52020SC0508>

31 INE (2021) Life Conditions Survey 2020: <https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=9958>

32 Ibid.

33 EAPN Spain (2021), Poverty Watch 2020: [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-SPAIN-POVERTY-WATCH-2020\\_ENG\\_FINAL-4708.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/EAPN-EAPN-SPAIN-POVERTY-WATCH-2020_ENG_FINAL-4708.pdf)

34 Ibid.

35 EU Commission, Country Report Spain, 2020: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2020-european-semester-country-report-spain\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/2020-european-semester-country-report-spain_en.pdf)

in-work poverty, particularly young workers.<sup>36</sup> In this regard, the National Strategy Group points to the introduction of the new Minimum Vital Income, which was established in May 2020 by the Spanish Royal Decree Law 20/2020. The Minimum Vital Income is a non-contributory social security benefit aimed at providing economic coverage to people living in conditions of severe material deprivation. It is part of a policy framework called the Escudo social (social shield), which aims to lift more than 1 million people out of poverty.

**Poor and vulnerable people also suffer from scarce access to health treatment, medication, and medical teams. Based on data collected by the European Health Survey 2020, there is a huge gender gap in access to healthcare.** According to the survey, 12.94% of women report excessive delay or being unable to access medical care over the last year. In addition, 2.19% report being unable for financial reasons to access medical care, 10.04% unable to access dental care, 1.34% unable to access prescription drugs, and 1.02% unable to access mental health care. Among men, financial reasons prevent 1.49% from accessing medical care, 8.82% from accessing dental care, 0.76% from accessing drugs, and 0.48% from accessing mental health care)<sup>37</sup>

According to the National Strategy Group, significant concerns remain over housing affordability. The pandemic exacerbated existing problems connected to housing policy in Spain, including construction deficiencies, severely overcrowded households, and limited access to basic utilities. The Plan Estatal de Vivienda 2018-2021 (Housing State Plan)<sup>38</sup> aimed to bring about structural improvements, such as

improving the quality of buildings – their physical conditions, energy efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability – and facilitating young people’s access to decent and adequate housing. Nevertheless, young people – whose access to housing is closely related to their presence in the labour market with permanent contracts – are still paying incredibly high amounts to have a place to live. The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) 2020 report on housing Informe de posición sobre Vivienda 2020 (Position Paper on Housing), finds that young people spend 91.2% of their net salaries on rent.<sup>39</sup> The National Strategy Group also highlights that buildings are often not accessible to people with physical disabilities. Only 22.9% of buildings provide safe spaces for people with disabilities, leading more than 4 million people to live in a house that does not respond to individual needs.<sup>40</sup>

## JUST TRANSITION TO A GREEN ECONOMY

The transition towards a green economy in Spain features many aspects, plans, and actors. Nevertheless, the National Strategy Group finds that the overarching framework for the development of just transition policies in the country is the European Green Deal and related policies. Spain is trying to invest in environmentally friendly technologies to support industrial innovation, decarbonise the energy sector through energy efficiency, and deploy cleaner and cheaper public transport systems. These points were largely included in the Spanish Recovery and Resilience Plan, approved in April 2021, which will provide Spain with €140 billion by 2026 with which to boost

36 INE, (2021). Encuesta de condiciones de vida 2020 / Living Conditions Survey: [https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica\\_C&cid=1254736176807&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735976608](https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176807&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735976608)

37 INE (2021). European Health Survey 2020: <https://www.ine.es/dynt3/inebase/es/index.htm?type=pcaxis&path=/t15/p420/a2019/p05/&file=pcaxis>

38 Royal Decree 106/2018 of 9 March regulating the State Housing Plan 2018-2021: <https://goo.gl/NdeEtZ>

39 EAPN (2021), El derecho a una Vivienda adecuada y Digna, Informe de posición sobre Vivienda 2020. [The right to adequate and decent housing] [https://www.eapn.es/ARCHIVO/documentos/documentos/1588750014\\_informe-vivienda.pdf](https://www.eapn.es/ARCHIVO/documentos/documentos/1588750014_informe-vivienda.pdf)

40 Ibid.



investments and make reforms. Spain's plan includes an important and ambitious agenda of investments and structural reforms with the objective of a greener, more digital, and more socially cohesive country.<sup>41</sup>

The Spanish Recovery Plan states that all measures proposed through it shall adhere to the principle of not causing significant harm to the environment.<sup>42</sup> The National Strategy Group believes that the plan represents a positive step forward and wants local-level plans to be developed to protect people and help companies, industries, and territories shift towards sustainable development and production. The NSG believes that sustainable mobility and digital connectivity will be two key areas for Spain in coming years.

At the same time, the European Commission's proposal for the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)<sup>43</sup> introduces changes aimed at concrete results in the areas of food security, the socio-economic development of rural areas, and the environment. According to the National Strategy Group, rural areas undoubtedly play a key role in the transition towards a greener economy, although they face multiple challenges. On the one hand, Spanish agriculture is vulnerable because of high volatility in some sectors, high fragmentation in terms of economic size and concentration of supply, and the concentration of exports in certain markets. This affects its long-term resilience, particularly in some sectors and territories. Productivity growth is low, and there is a low

level of investment, research and innovation, as well as low uptake of new technologies. There are also problems such as water availability, a high risk of soil erosion, and a high risk of desertification, especially in certain regions. As a result, the European Commission considers that Spanish agriculture needs to improve its ecological and climate transition in line with the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy<sup>44</sup> and the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.<sup>45</sup>

To conclude, **the National Strategy Group is concerned that, together with great opportunities, the transition to a greener economy could generate new inequalities in the Spanish society.** The NSG calls for in-depth consultations with social partners and civil society organisations, in order to develop a comprehensive and inclusive strategy that will leave no one behind.

### GOOD PRACTICE Community Composting

In Pontevedra, the provincial council and civil society are promoting a waste model based on community composting and zero-kilometre treatment of municipal biowaste. Not only private citizens joined the initiative, but also university campuses, the Pontevedra university campus, the local vocational training centre, the geriatric centre, and several local restaurants. These structures do not leave any organic waste for external treatment.<sup>46</sup>

41 Spain – Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021): [https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/spains-recovery-and-resilience-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/spains-recovery-and-resilience-plan_en)

42 Spanish Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021), Impulso a la Transición verde / chapter on the Green Transition: <https://www.miteco.gob.es/es/ministerio/recuperacion-transformacion-resiliencia/transicion-verde/default.aspx>

43 European Commission (2018) The common agricultural policy at a glance: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cap-glance\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cap-glance_en)

44 The Farm to Fork Strategy, published by the European Commission in 2020, calls for action for a fair, healthy, and a sustainable food production. It aims at building an European food chain which keeps into consideration producers, consumers, but also the climate and the environment. [https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2020-05/f2f\\_action-plan\\_2020\\_strategy-info\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf)

45 The strategy for 2030 calls for the establishment of an European network of protected areas of land and sea, for the development of an European nature restoration plan, and to introduce measures to enable a better implementation and monitoring of transformative policies tackling the biodiversity challenge. [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030\\_nl](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/biodiversity-strategy-2030_nl)

46 Deputación Pontevedra, Revitaliza Plan: <https://revitaliza.depo.gal/compostaxe-comunitaria>

# Civic space

Freedom of association was not altered during 2020. Article 2 of Organic Law 1/2002 of 22 March 2002 regulating the right of association affirms the right of all persons to associate freely for lawful purposes. According to the law, the right of association includes the freedom to associate or create associations without the need for prior authorisation. Nevertheless, 2020 was marked by the pandemic at all levels. Administrative deadlines were paralysed, and the administration modified its working practices, particularly through telematic procedures. Certain fundamental rights were restricted. But in the case of the right of association, insofar as it is exercised in a less-physical manner, the NSG affirms that it has not been negatively affected.

However, the NSG reports that some organisations denounced the infringement of the right of assembly in 2020 for reasons of public health. Greenpeace and the Civil Liberties Union for Europe denounced an insufficient respect for this right and the disparity of criteria in similar situations.<sup>47</sup> It has also been pointed out that, when the denial of this right has been taken to court, courts have expressed themselves in different ways.

The Platform for the Defence of Freedom of Information (PDLI) also issued an annual report,<sup>48</sup> in which it refers to limitations on the right to freedom of expression. The Platform refers in its balance sheet to aggression against journalists and reporters by security forces when covering demonstrations. It also refers to a lack of transparency on the part of the

government in the information management of COVID. However, it also refers to mediation having taken place, indicating an improvement in the situation.

Journalists and related organisations, including the Madrid Press Association and the PDLI, asked the government for transparency and greater balance in the management of media questions in the telematic press conferences held daily after the beginning of the state of emergency.

**The CIVICUS Monitor classified civic space in Spain as “narrowed” both in 2019 and 2020,<sup>49</sup> especially due to some concerning rulings issued by the Constitutional Court, which took a restrictive interpretation of the right to freedom of expression.** A Spanish Court condemned Revista Contexto (CTXT) – an online media outlet – for breaching the “right to honour” of a famous actor in a news article published in 2016. The court went further by preventing the outlet from publishing any further information relating to the news that led to the lawsuit, a ruling that raised concerns over freedom of information.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, Eurofound finds that throughout the last year, some organisations have emerged with the aim of building and developing strategic networks between the government, social partners, and civil society. They conduct awareness-raising activities, organise training and workshops, and join research projects.<sup>51</sup>

47 Civil Liberties Union for Europe, Greenpeace (2020) Locking down critical voices: <http://www.rightsinternationalspain.org/uploads/publicacion/648dc0722c17b64486dcada16b3570eed60eae62.pdf>

48 PDLI (2020) Plataforma por la Libertad de Información: <https://libertadinformacion.cc/informes/>

49 CIVICUS (2021) Spain country report: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/spain/>

50 CIVICUS (2021) Constitutional court rulings threaten to limit freedom of expression: <https://monitor.civicus.org/updates/?country=142>

51 Eurofound (2021) New forms of employment. [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef20027en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20027en.pdf)

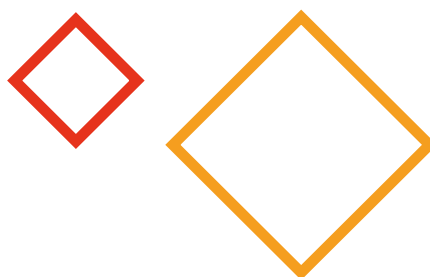


# Civil dialogue on national recovery and resilience plans

**The National Strategy Group denounces a lack of transparency during the elaboration of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, as well as a reduction in access to information, public control, and good governance.** Citizen participation has been scarce. In some autonomous communities, such as Galicia, even the choice of the strategic lines of action to which funds will be allocated has been privatised. The public-private partnership formula has been given absolute prominence, to the advantage of large companies and consultancy firms over public-community models. This is clearly visible in the creation of a new form of cooperation between government and companies, the so-called Strategic Projects for Economic

Recovery and Transformation (PERTE), which were set up by the Royal Decree Law 36/2020.<sup>52</sup>

The orientation of the process has led to an evident asymmetry in opportunities to present projects. This favours companies and corporations, while SMEs, social and solidarity organisations, self-employed people, feminist projects, and even small municipalities did not have the tools or knowledge to present their projects. The NSG denounces a monopolisation of European funds by large companies to finance mega-projects, at the expense of local projects that could be truly transformative and resilient and have social, gender, and ecological impacts.



<sup>52</sup> Royal Decree Law 36/2020 <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2020/12/31/pdfs/BOE-A-2020-17339.pdf>

# Country Monitor: **United Kingdom**



The National Strategy Group for the United Kingdom identifies different issues having an impact on the cohesion of society. First of all, poverty – growing due to the retrenchment of welfare and the decline in the economy – is affecting an increasing share of the population and also creating a hostile environment for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Brexit had a strong impact on the 6 million EU citizens living in the UK, resulting in emigration to other EU countries. The impacts included shortages of social-care and medical staff, recorded throughout 2020 and 2021.

	2018	2019	2020	EU-27 2020
<b>GINI index<sup>1</sup></b>	33.5	N/A	N/A	30.1
<b>Unemployment<sup>2</sup></b>	4.0%	3.8%	N/A	6.3%
<b>Gender Equality Index<sup>3</sup></b>	72.2 (2019)	72.7 (2020)	N/A	67.9 (2020)
<b>In-work poverty<sup>4</sup></b>	10.4%	N/A	N/A	9.2%
<b>Housing Overcrowding<sup>5</sup></b>	4.8%	N/A	N/A	15.6%
<b>CIVICUS Civic Space Monitor<sup>6</sup></b>	NARROWED	NARROWED	NARROWED	N/A

#### Selected indicators on the state of social rights in Europe

Missing data for 2020 are not available at the time of publication of the Social Rights Monitor 2021.

## Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

Significant changes to the welfare system in the UK were undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic. **The introduction of enhanced Universal Credit payments<sup>7</sup> was particularly welcomed as it benefited people with scarce resources.** It consisted of a payment made once a month, the amount of which varied according to factors such as disabilities, health conditions, housing situation, and the number of children to take care of. For a limited time, the allowance was extended to individuals on precarious contracts, but this measure was rescinded in October 2021.

**In March 2020, the government introduced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS),<sup>8</sup> which provided a legal basis for the so-called “flexible furlough”.** This allowed employers to modify and reduce the working hours of their employees, while getting a CJRS grant to cover the hours not worked.

According to the National Strategy Group, the UK is experiencing increasing inequalities, and the welfare system is not providing the necessary safety net for all. There seems to

1 Eurostat (2021). Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income: [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc\\_di12](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?lang=en&dataset=ilc_di12)

2 Eurostat (2021). Unemployment by sex and age: annual data: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (2021). Gender Equality Index: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/>

4 Eurostat (2021). In-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate : <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tespm070/default/table?lang=en>

5 Eurostat (2021). Overcrowding rate by age, sex and poverty status – total population: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_lvho05a/default/table?lang=en)

6 CIVICUS (2021). Civic space monitor - UK: <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/united-kingdom/>

7 UK Government (2021) Universal Credit: <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/what-youll-get>

8 UK Parliament (2021) FAQs: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8880/>

be an overreliance on food banks and charities to alleviate hardship, which has become even more pressing due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the rising cost of fuel, food, and energy related to the Brexit agreements.

## INCLUSION OF MIGRANTS

The National Strategy Group finds the inclusion environment increasingly hostile, as newcomers arriving by boat are often denied access to the country before arrival and immediately detained in dedicated centres. **These fast procedures are an increasing concern, as they do not allow for proper processing of asylum applications.**<sup>9</sup> In addition, refugee organisations fear the government's use of false narratives around migratory flows. For example, the Home Secretary declared that the vast majority of individuals arriving to the UK by boat are not asylum seekers but economic migrants.<sup>10</sup>

## EDUCATION AND YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

All students and learners missed considerable learning hours and schooling opportunities in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Studying and learning from home has exacerbated inequalities and made discrimination more visible. There were wide differences

between the prosperity of different societal groups, including between different ethnicities and different regions. In addition, educational performance varied significantly according to socioeconomic background.<sup>11</sup> These inequalities are likely to worsen some of the UK's structural problems, such as low intergenerational income mobility.<sup>12</sup> While a quarter of students had no formal schooling or tutoring during the lockdown in Spring 2020,<sup>13</sup> children from high-income households were provided with online learning facilities and had adequate learning environments and devices, as well as parental support during the school day. This was particularly true for primary school pupils, who have a greater need for supervision to provide guidance and motivation. A study carried out by the Department for Education, finds that **primary school students were an average of three months behind their learning schedules, while secondary school students were around two months behind.**<sup>14</sup> The existing education inequalities related to students' socio-economic backgrounds were confirmed by the finding that those eligible for free school meals lagged behind more than average and recovered more slowly once schools reopened.<sup>15</sup>

As school absence related to Covid-19 continues to be high in the 2021-2022 academic year<sup>16</sup> – with more than 100,000 children staying at home in just one week in September 2021 – educational support methods have to be revised in order to ensure education recovery for all.

9 The Guardian (2021) Home Office 'acting unlawfully' in rush to deport asylum seekers: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/jul/11/home-office-acting-unlawfully-in-rush-to-deport-asylum-seekers>

10 The Guardian (2021) Priti Patel urged to justify claim that most boat migrants are not real refugees: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/nov/02/priti-patel-urged-to-justify-claim-most-boat-migrants-not-real-refugees>

11 IFS (2021) Inequalities in education, skills, and incomes in the UK: The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic: <https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BN-Inequalities-in-education-skills-and-incomes-in-the-UK-the-implications-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Department for Education (2021) Pupils' progress in the 2020 to 2021 academic year: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1029842/Understanding\\_progress\\_in\\_the\\_2020-21\\_academic\\_year\\_Report\\_3\\_October2021\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1029842/Understanding_progress_in_the_2020-21_academic_year_Report_3_October2021_.pdf)

15 Ibid.

16 The Guardian (2021) Record Covid absences cause concern in England's schools: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/22/its-scary-record-covid-absences-cause-concern-in-englands-schools>

## GOOD PRACTICE Family Supporters

Run by Volunteering Matters, the programme dedicates one volunteer to each applicant household, and they hold weekly meetings to build up a customized action plan. The main areas

of help throughout 2020 and at the beginning of 2021 have been improved school life and selfcare. The volunteers provided people joining the programme with practical and emotional support, as well as guidance in finding necessary information related to the Covid-19 measures.<sup>17</sup>

# Fair working conditions

The pandemic led to numerous and unexpected changes in working conditions, and the situation has often become unstable and unclear, the National Strategy Group reports. In occupational health and safety, even when government regulations did not legally require workers and customers to wear face masks, some employers – such as Transport for London – still asked them to. Another recent example identified by the National Strategy Group is the use of the so-called Covid Pass. There is no clear regulation for it, and its implementation is therefore not uniform across the country.

For some jobs, **the use of teleworking solutions increased steadily throughout 2021. These arrangements are likely to become a permanent feature of work, often in a hybrid form**, in which staff divide their working weeks into office and telework days.

Some changes in workers' rights were introduced after the UK ceased to be a member of the European Union on 31 January 2020. Since then, the country has no longer been

bound to adhere to EU employment law, and parliament has the last word in adjusting and eventually overturning legislation derived from EU law. One of the largest effects, according to the National Strategy Group, is that the UK is no longer able to refer cases to the Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ),<sup>18</sup> which used to be able to provide guidance to UK courts and tribunals.

## PRECARIOUSNESS

It has been proven that people working under low-paid and part-time contracts – hence in less-secure forms of work – are more likely to lose their jobs, have their hours reduced, or be furloughed.<sup>19</sup> Among people laid off or temporarily dismissed at the beginning of 2020, six out of 10 were able to return to work by the end of 2020. But, of the people who lost their jobs in 2021, half remained unemployed.<sup>20</sup> The situation of these people is the most worrying, as many of the most vulnerable people have

17 Volunteering Matters (2021) Family Supporters in Edinburgh: <https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/app/uploads/2021/10/FSE-Year-1-Impact-Report-5.pdf>

18 Court of Justice of the European Union: [https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/j\\_6/en/](https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/j_6/en/)

19 JRF (2021) People in low-paid, insecure work faced a rising tide of employment uncertainty in 2020: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/58715/download?token=ADc1QW2b&filetype=briefing>

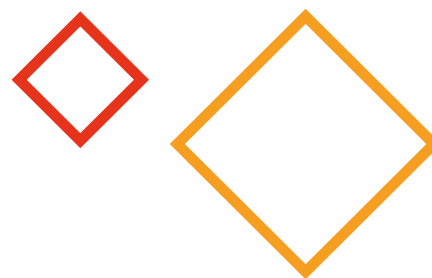
20 Ibid.

experienced multiple shocks, and their risk of long-term unemployment is growing. Data from the Labour Force Survey makes it clear that **the employment conditions of younger workers – normally in the early stages of their careers and in more precarious situations – were particularly affected by the pandemic, and these workers suffered unemployment or pay reductions more often than others.**<sup>21</sup>

Workers on so-called zero-hours contracts and those employed by an agency on fixed-term or casual contracts were the most likely to lose their jobs in 2020. Of people employed on permanent contracts, 9% suffered from job losses or reductions, but the figure for workers on zero-hours contracts was 25%.<sup>22</sup> Self-employed workers were also three times more likely to stop working during 2020 and 2021 than people with permanent contracts.<sup>23</sup> This indicates that a country in which a large number of the jobs are precarious can easily suffer from unemployment in a crisis or economic downturn. That means it should be a priority to develop long-term support measures in order not to leave people behind. The National Strategy Group reiterates that an insecure job is often the starting point for accepting poorer living conditions, renouncing social life and continuous education, and fostering poverty and inequality among adults and children.

## GENDER EQUALITY

As in the rest of the world, women in the UK are most likely to work in the economic sectors that have been most affected by the Covid-19 crisis. In particular, women with children and women from a migration background were more likely to be furloughed in 2020 and 2021.<sup>24</sup> **In general, women's employment has sharply fallen since the outbreak of the pandemic, and 232,000 fewer were employed at the end of 2020 compared to the beginning of that year.**<sup>25</sup> **The drop in women's employment can be explained by the 212% increase in redundancies for women from the beginning of 2020 to the end:** they rose from 46,000 to 143,000.<sup>26</sup> In a trend common throughout Europe, more women than men held jobs that were eligible for furlough through the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.<sup>27</sup> According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, women were one third more likely to work in a sector that was severely affected by the pandemic, such as hospitality, retail, or tourism.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, women have left or lost their jobs more than men since the beginning of the pandemic, which can be explained by the lack of childcare support while schools were closed.<sup>29</sup>



21 JRF (2021) People in low-paid, insecure work faced a rising tide of employment uncertainty in 2020: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/58715/download?token=ADc1QW2b&filetype=briefing>

22 Ibid.

23 JRF (2021) What the first COVID-19 lockdown meant for people in insecure, poor-quality work: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/58016/download?token=aPUf22aK&filetype=briefing>

24 UK Parliament (2021) How has the coronavirus pandemic affected women in work: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/how-has-the-coronavirus-pandemic-affected-women-in-work/>

25 ONS (2021) Labour market overview - Table A02: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/previousReleases>

26 ONS (2021) Redundancies levels and rates: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/redundancies/datasets/redundancieslevelsandratesseasonallyadjustedred01sa>

27 UK Parliament (2021) FAQs: Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8880/>

28 IFS (2020) Sector shutdowns during the coronavirus crisis: which workers are most exposed? <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

29 Ibid.



# Social protection and inclusion

## HOUSING

The housing situation put increasing pressure on UK households, as they experienced the acute economic downturn due to the pandemic. Decent and affordable housing has been a pressing concern during the most intense phases of the Covid-19 crisis, and it should be prioritised by the government. However, the average price of houses in the UK increased by 10.6% from 2020 to 2021,<sup>30</sup> and it has continued to increase on a month-to-month basis. Housing and mortgage starts felt dramatically in the second quarter of 2020, touching an historic low.<sup>31</sup> **Poor housing conditions are a longstanding issue, especially in the private rented sector.<sup>32</sup> In England, 23% of homes – a total of around 1.1 million – do not meet decent standards.<sup>33</sup>** Poor housing conditions are affecting residents' physical and mental health, and they have a strong impact on people's work and learning outcomes. This was particularly the case during the pandemic and the isolation policies imposed.

In the UK, local authorities are responsible for housing conditions and management.<sup>34</sup> However, the National Strategy Group reports that low levels of enforcement of decent housing standards are a widespread problem throughout the country. The UK parliament has

suggested that local authorities be supported by a national system of benchmarking and indicators to raise awareness of the issue and increase the political will to address it.<sup>35</sup>

## JUST AND GREEN TRANSITION

There has been increasing, ever-wider support from civil society for decarbonising the UK economy. Moreover, the government is legally bound to reduce the country's overall carbon dioxide emissions by 80% from 1990 levels by 2050. According to the European Commission's 2020 Country Report, the United Kingdom is expected to make good progress in decarbonising its economy, but additional measures are needed to reach the target for 2030. In 2021, the London School of Economics and the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment found that the transition to a net-zero, green economy could affect approximately 6.3 million jobs around the country, either positively or negatively.<sup>36</sup> However, **data suggests that moving to a green economy has the potential to increase the number of UK jobs overall,<sup>37</sup> if people whose jobs are at risk can be upskilled appropriately.**

30 UK Government (2021) UK House Price Index: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn02820/>

31 Ibid.

32 House of Commons (2021) Housing conditions in the private rented sector (England): <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7328/CBP-7328.pdf>

33 MHCLG (2020) English Housing Survey 2019 to 2020: headline report, Annex Table 2.2: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2019-to-2020-headline-report>

34 House of Commons (2021) Housing conditions in the private rented sector (England): <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7328/CBP-7328.pdf>

35 House of Commons (2019) Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Private rented sector: Fourth report of Session 2017-19, <https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry1/>

36 LSE (2021) Green economy: how the transition to net-zero could affect UK jobs across the country: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/news/green-economy-how-the-transition-to-net-zero-could-affect-uk-jobs-across-the-country/>

37 PCAN (2021) Just transition jobs tracker: [https://pcancities.org.uk/sites/default/files/Just Transition Jobs Tracker 05.03.21\\_0.xlsx](https://pcancities.org.uk/sites/default/files/Just%20Transition%20Jobs%20Tracker%2005.03.21_0.xlsx)

## GOOD PRACTICE

### Just Transition Job Tracker<sup>38</sup>

The Place-Based Climate Action Network (PCAN), developed a tool to help policymakers develop targeted employment and educational policies for a just transition. Thanks to the cooperation of researchers and policymakers, the Just Transition Job Tracker estimates how jobs and employment levels will be affected by the transition to a green economy. In particular, it focuses on identifying which jobs will need upskilling and the significant changes needed to adapt professions to a net-zero economy. It also highlights which jobs will soon be in higher demand due to their crucial role in a net-zero economy.

## FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

In 2020, 11.7 million people – 19% of the population – were living in households with an income 60% or lower than the median income in the UK.<sup>39</sup> Though average levels of poverty have been stable in recent years, the proportion of children and elderly people living in poverty is higher than five years ago.<sup>40</sup> Other signs of inequality are that **poverty hits relatively more Pakistani and Bangladeshi households**,<sup>41</sup> as well as beneficiaries of social allowances.

The situation has pushed an increasing number of people to claim the Universal Credit, and 4.6 million households were receiving the

allowance in August 2020, an increase of 90% from January 2020.<sup>42</sup> Households with children are overrepresented among the claimants, meaning that an increasing number of young people are exposed to the risk of poverty. Moreover, **employed people asking for social benefits have drastically increased too, and they represent eight out of 10 people asking for the benefit.**<sup>43</sup>

## HEALTHCARE

**Access to healthcare in the UK in terms of availability, affordability, accessibility, and quality is positively evaluated by the National Strategy Group.** However, it is difficult not to take into consideration the impact and direct effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has increasingly restricted access to healthcare. There is also evidence that some people did not seek treatment as a result of the pandemic:<sup>44</sup> **in July 2021, a record-high 5.6 million patients were waiting to be hospitalised for treatment for conditions other than Covid-19.**<sup>45</sup> Many of these people were left unable to work or carry out daily tasks. In addition, around 75,000 people with disabilities were waiting for assessments<sup>46</sup> to qualify to receive care and support, often while their families and close friends struggled to combine support with daily activities. However, the rapid expansion of remote consultations in some cases helped limit the disruption caused by the pandemic, the National Strategy Group reported.

In the UK, as across Europe and beyond, the demand for mental-health care has significantly increased due to the pandemic. **The Centre**

38 PCAN (2021) Tracking local employment in the green economy: <https://pcancities.org.uk/tracking-local-employment-green-economy-pcan-just-transition-jobs-tracker>

39 UK Parliament (2021) Poverty in the UK: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn07096/>

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 JRF (2021) Uk Poverty report: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/file/57306/download?token=iru3hBZ0&filetype=full-report>

43 Ibid.

44 Care Quality Commission (2021) State of Care 2020/21: [https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-reports/soc202021\\_01a\\_pandemic-impact](https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-reports/soc202021_01a_pandemic-impact)

45 NHS (2021) Consultant-led Referral to Treatment Waiting Times Data 2021-22: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/rtt-waiting-times/rtt-data-2021-22/>

46 Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (2021) Sprin Survey 2021: <https://www.adass.org.uk/adass-spring-survey-21>

**for Mental Health expects up to 10 million people (around 20% of the population) including 1.5 million children to be in need of additional mental health support for stress caused by the health crisis.**<sup>47</sup> In particular, the National Strategy Group says services directed at transgender people are appalling. In April 2021, it emerged that thousands of

patients at the NHS Specialist Gender Identity Clinic (GIC) have been on a waiting list that is now over five years long.<sup>48</sup> Only seven GICs in England and Wales are able to offer a health-care specialist, while the estimated population of transgender people is half a million.<sup>49</sup> The situation has been worsened by the pandemic.

## Civic space

In the last year, civic space has narrowed dramatically,<sup>50</sup> and the UK has been put on the CIVICUS Watch List for countries experiencing a serious and rapid decline in civic freedoms.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the National Strategy Group reports that, due to lockdowns and restrictions on people's movement and public gatherings, there were not that many peaceful assemblies in 2021. However, **the Judicial Review and Courts Bill**<sup>52</sup> raised many concerns over the increased powers given to police to crack down on protests. In particular, protestors experienced police brutality during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations following the murder of George Floyd in the US by a police officer and during the demonstrations that followed the murder of Sarah Everard by an officer of the London Metropolitan Police. BLM.<sup>53</sup> **This police brutality was denounced but not prosecuted.**<sup>54</sup> The National Strategy

Group believes that different standards are applied to demonstrations than to other situations. Football matches, for example, are characterised by little police presence, and there are no reports of police brutality.<sup>55</sup>

One concern related to freedom of speech is the **2021 Draft Online Safety Bill**,<sup>56</sup> a proposed act of parliament intended to improve internet safety. It follows the 2019 Online Harms White Paper<sup>57</sup> and, if passed, would give the relevant secretary of state the power to designate and address a wide range of potentially harmful content. This might include online discrimination, illegal pornography, and some forms of internet fraud. The bill would create a new duty of care for online platforms towards their users, requiring them to take action against harmful content. Platforms failing in this duty would be liable to fines of up to €21 million or 10%

47 Centre for Mental Health (2020) Covid-19 and the nation's mental health: October 2020: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/publications/covid-19-and-nations-mental-health-october-2020>

48 Pink News (2021) NHS gender clinic apologises to trans patients for shameful five-year waiting time: <https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/04/20/nhs-gender-clinic-the-laurels-waiting-list-time/>

49 Ibid.

50 CIVICUS (2021) Civicus Monitor – UK: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/news/5413-a-decline-in-civic-freedom-is-anything-but-silly>

51 Ibid.

52 Government UK (2021) Judicial Review and Courts Bill: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/judicial-review-and-courts-bill>

53 BBC (2021) Boris Johnson 'deeply concerned' by footage: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-56396960>

54 The Guardian (2021) Sarah Everard vigil report strongly defends police's use of force: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/30/police-handling-of-sarah-everard-vigil-appropriate-says-watchdog>

55 BBC (2021) Rangers' title celebrations: Police condemn club's lack of support: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-56321426>

56 Government UK (2021) Online Safety Bill: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-online-safety-bill>

57 Government UK (2020) Online Harms White Paper: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper>

of their annual turnover, whichever is higher. It would also empower Ofcom (the UK communications services regulator)<sup>58</sup> to block access to particular websites. In addition, the bill would oblige large social media platforms not to remove – and to preserve access to – journalistic or "democratically important" content, such as user comments on political parties and issues.

However, the draft bill has come under strong criticism for including proposals to restrain the publication of "lawful but harmful" speech. This effectively creates a new form of censorship of otherwise legal speech and thus curbs the right of freedom of speech. The draft is currently going through pre-legislative scrutiny in the parliament by a joint committee, made up of members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The committee will report back by 10 December 2021, after which the government will look at the report and see if any changes are needed. The bill will then be formally introduced to the parliament, so that it can become law.

## CIVIL DIALOGUE

The UK has a strong culture of cooperation between civil society organisations, according to the National Strategy Group. Despite the ongoing pandemic restrictions and lockdowns of 2021, **the CSO sector in the UK, just like its counterparts in the EU, has proven to be a flexible, resilient, and cooperative stakeholder.** It has been able to adapt and continue to provide services to those in the most vulnerable situations. Across the UK, there are sectoral umbrella bodies that help to coordinate activities between civil society organisations,

especially around joint advocacy, visibility, and voice. In England, it is the NCVO<sup>59</sup> that is responsible; in Wales, it is the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA);<sup>60</sup> in Scotland, it is the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO);<sup>61</sup> and across the Irish Sea, it is the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA).<sup>62</sup> All the councils are very helpful channels of communication between the voluntary sector and the government. They advocate for better involvement of civil society in the development of policies and programmes, so that the direct experiences and reach of civil society can be drawn upon earlier and more widely.

As in other parts of Europe, **volunteering charities pulled together in the UK and delivered many vital services to vulnerable communities and people who would not otherwise have been able to access fundamental services during the pandemic and lockdowns.** Therefore, the National Strategy Group strongly emphasises that civil society organisations need a robust system of financial support and should be valued as relevant partners at all levels of the negotiation and implementation of policies and programmes.

A positive practice for CSOs' involvement in civil dialogue was developed in London as part of the London Recovery Programme.<sup>63</sup> The partners involved agreed on the main priorities to be addressed by the city and came up with nine missions to "build back better" its economy and society. The consultations also gave rise to a report, "After the Storm", proposing priorities<sup>64</sup> for funders to act on. This report, by London Funders, says that funders need to plan flexibly, change their ways of working, and support more capacity building.

58 Ofcom: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/what-is-ofcom>

59 NCVO: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/>

60 WCVA: <https://wcva.cymru/>

61 SCVO: <https://scvo.scot/>

62 NICVA: <https://www.nicva.org/>

63 London Councils (2020) London recovery programme: [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/recovery\\_programme\\_overview.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/recovery_programme_overview.pdf)

64 London Funders (2020) After the storm: <https://londonfunders.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/After%20The%20Storm.pdf>

# Dedication

We would like to thank all the people who have participated in the realisation of this publication. Without you, the third edition of our Social Rights Monitor would not have been possible. In particular, we acknowledge all SOLIDAR's members and partners from the 16 National Strategy Groups that have contributed with their input and observations to this document. Thank you very much for bringing us closer to

the reality of your respective countries and allowing us to know first-hand the state of social Europe in terms of equality of opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection, inclusion and civic space. We take this occasion to thank also the European Commission that, through the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI), co-funded this publication.





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SOLIDAR is a European and worldwide network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. With over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries (19 of which are EU countries), member organisations are national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working in one or more of our fields of activity.

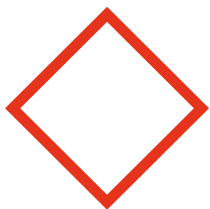
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The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is the think tank of the social democratic political family at EU level. Its mission is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training and debates to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. FEPS operates as a hub for thinking to facilitate the emergence of progressive answers to the challenges that Europe faces today. Today FEPS benefits from a solid network of 68 member organisations. Among these, 43 are full members, 20 have observer status and 5 are ex-officio members. In addition to this network of organisations that are active in the promotion of progressive values, FEPS also has an extensive network of partners, including renowned universities, scholars, policymakers and activists.

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**SOLIDAR's Social Rights Monitor 2021 has been developed in the framework of the Together for Social Europe programme co-funded by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). It provides an insight into the state of social rights in 16 European countries. The Monitor assesses the state of social Europe in terms of equality of opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection, inclusion and civic space based on the observations of Civil Society Organisations working on the ground in combination with statistical data and scientific findings. This information is provided by National Strategy Groups that are set up in each of the 16 countries by a SOLIDAR member or partner. The 2021 Monitor also analyses to which extent civil society and social partners have been involved in the design of the national Recovery and Resilience Plans, integrated in the 2021 European Semester cycle.**

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