

WP4: TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Deliverable n.5 – “Study Visit n.1 Report”

Brussels, 16-17 May 2022

DAY 1

Belgian Federal Public Planning Service For Social Integration (PPS)

The study visit started with a general presentation of the [Reticulate Project](#) by Andrea De Conno from the National Association of Italian Municipalities – Tuscan Department ([ANCI Toscana](#)) and Chiara Crepaldi from Italian Institute for Social Research ([IRS](#)).



Francesco Capuani, from the [European Social Network \(ESN\)](#) concluded the first session with an introduction of the main objectives and action points of the work package number 4 “Transnational Cooperation” including the study visits concept and format.

After the welcome session, each project partner had the chance to make a short introduction and ask questions to the three first speakers.

Alexandre Lesiw, Director at the Belgian [Federal public planning service \(PPS\) for social integration](#) introduced the PPS’s work and its collaboration with the [Public Centers for Social Welfare \(PCSW\)](#). Mr Lesiw first gave an overview of the Belgium federal system and its consequences on social, health and employment services with a specific focus on the functioning of the integrated minimum income.

Municipalities decide and then implement autonomously the activities related the minimum income based on their territory priorities while it is financed and politically managed principally at federal level.

PPS is a federal public service created in 2003, which strives to guarantee that all persons living in poverty can live with dignity: " PPS prepares, implements, evaluates, and monitors an inclusive federal policy for social integration that guarantees long-term, fundamental social rights to all". PPS works on the ground to enable the most socio-economically disadvantaged people to participate in civic life, via the minimum income, employment measures, urgent medical assistance, the settlement bonus for the homeless, the rental guarantee, heating allowance, etc.

The Belgian Minimum Income

Belgium has been the first country in Europe to have introduced a minimum income scheme to guarantee all citizens or families an income sufficient to live on. The primary goal of a guaranteed minimum income is reduction of poverty; however, it nowadays includes a wide range of personalised services and paths to labour inclusion. The Minimum Income scheme is centrally controlled by the Ministry which has developed strict indicators and control systems to guarantee the quality of the services at local levels.

The last part of the presentation regarded the ways to access the scheme, the types and roles/responsibilities of social service professionals involved and the monitoring activities to assure that the beneficiary will leave the situation of need.

How to measure poverty

In 2020 there were 151.664 persons entitled to the minimum income scheme. This is 13,16 % of the Belgian population. However, Mr Lesiw underlined that "we cannot express this as a percentage of the people experiencing poverty because this figure is based on administrative data". To measure poverty, Belgium uses the EU-SILC and more exactly the At-Risk-of Poverty or Social Exclusion (AROPE) as is used for defining the European target of the reduction with at least 15 million in the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2030 in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

Mr Lesiw presentation and PPS facts and figures are available on [Reticulate Website](#).

Martin Lichte, ESN Policy Officer gave a presentation on the ESN work on **integrated social inclusion programmes for minimum income beneficiaries**. He started by providing an overview at EU level on the latest policies related to minimum income and then presented the 2022 ESN Recommendations on EU Minimum Income policies.

ESN launched in April a survey among its members on integrated minimum income; the results will be included in the project deliverable n.6 and presented in one Seminar which will be organised in Bordeaux in September.

Eventually, Martin presented best practices of one-stop-shop in Europe and among ESN members.

The ESN Recommendations on EU Minimum Income Policies and the description of each best practices are available on the [Reticulate Website](#).

Frédéric Lemaire, PPS Social Integration Head of Unit presented the role of the “**experts by experience**”, that are former users of social service, employed by the state to help and guide people facing similar issues. It is a new professional role which over the years have demonstrated to successfully integrate the work of other social service professionals. These experts proved to be able to better engage and open dialogues with server users.

Mr Lemaire described later the recruitment procedures and which type of education trainings they attend before working on the ground.

Mr Lemaire presentation with the specific forms of interventions for the experts by experience are available in the [Reticulate website](#).

Christian Fillet, ESN Board Chair, participated to the study visit to give a presentation on “**Integrated approach in tackling homelessness**” based on his experience as a social welfare director in Bruges. The presentation focused on facts and figures on the homelessness in Belgium, reasons and strategies to prevent homelessness, the integrated approach to offer personalised services and the needed skills and qualifications of professionals dealing with this societal issue.

DAY 2

Public Centers for Social Welfare and Bruss’Help

The 2nd day the Reticulate Consortium visited the [Public Centers for Social Welfare](#) and [Bruss’Help](#).



The Public Centers for Social Welfare (PCSWs) are the most important partner of the Ministry of Social Affairs for the implementation of the integrated minimum income. Organised at communal level, the 581 PCSWs are the first point of contact for most people living in poverty.

PCSW are responsible for providing individuals and families with the social assistance due from the community. This help can be material, social, medical, medico-social or psychological. Together with the applicants, the PCSWs look for a tailor-made solution: a minimum income, training and employment trajectories, intervention in medical costs, rental guarantees, specific support for the homeless. This support is granted under specific regulations: before granting the aid, the PCSW must verify that the conditions for awarding the support are met by the applicant in terms of the specific rules. For each specific aid the PCSW receives a state grant from the federal government. This state subsidy is paid by the PPS for Social Integration and is monitored by the Ministry inspection service.

The Brussels PCSW decided to decentralise their social services in 11 local antenna's, based in different neighborhoods, to be better attuned to the social reality, to be closer to the real life situations of the citizens and to receive people in an appropriate setting.

PCSWs provides users with:

- information about their rights and appropriate services.
- psychosocial, moral or educational guidance
- contacts of potential employments
- financial guidelines
- housing support
- guardianship over minors or at the very least the custody, maintenance and education of minor children assigned to him.
- urgent medical aid.

Homeless accesses the service not always on their own, the Bruss'help mobile units on the ground look for people in need and escort them to the centre if needed and find for them a shelter.

It is important to note also that there are 501 municipalities in Belgium, which means 501 PCSWs. Given their local autonomy, they are very diverse in the way they organise the local social services, and guarantee the right to social services depending on their local needs.

In generally the general services, reception, information and orientation are guaranteed in the antennas. Often, more specialised services as debt mediation, housing, training, psychosocial counselling... are organised centrally or organised in collaboration with specialised third parties.

During the second part of the morning, the delegates visited **Bruss'help** welcomed by managers and social workers.



Bruss'help is responsible for coordinating emergency aid and integration schemes for homeless people in the Brussels-Capital Region. The organization provides a service to health and social actors working with homeless and poorly housed people.

Bruss'help brings together two main cells working in multidisciplinary teams:

- An Operational unit which ensures the permanent monitoring of the places available in the emergency reception structures and which develops sustainable solutions for the rehousing of homeless and poorly housed people.
- A unit of Advisers specializing in the study of homelessness, as well as the coordination of projects and global intervention systems.

The missions of Bruss'help are in three points:

- "Analyze": Collect and study data & produce sustainable solutions oriented assessments.
- "Coordinate" appropriate measures, concerted with the actors in the field and the public authorities.
- "Direct" people who are homeless or in need of guidance to competent aid/organizations.