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4th European Quality of Life Survey 2016 (EQLS)

Brussels, European Economic and Social Committee (EECS), 8th March 2018

Access to and quality of public services in the EU: a debate on improving quality of life



The first edition of the European quality of life survey, which is an initiative of the EU Agency Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Working and Living Conditions, was realised in 2003. Afterwards, every four years, a new report is established and the latest, based on interviewing 37,000 people in the 28 member states and the 5 candidate countries in 2016, led to the publication of the fourth EQLS in January 2018. (The report is restricted to findings related to the EU member states. Information on the candidate countries will still be made available.)

The aim of the EQLS is to look at what the trends in the quality of life are, against a background of changing European societies at economic and social level.

The fourth report has three major thematic parts: quality of life, quality of public services and quality of society.

Overall, the report noted that there has been progress in the quality of life in the EU from 2011 to 2016, but, in 11 countries, more than half of the population still report difficulties in making ends meet. The differences between countries remain extensive.

The quality of and access to public services has been a key topic on which the survey has collected information. People were interviewed on their views as regards the provision of seven public services: health services, education system, public transport, childcare services, long-term care services, social housing and state pension system. Once again, great differences exist between countries. For example, 15 countries (mainly from Eastern Europe) give a score under 5 for their pension system. The average rating for the quality of public services was 6.3.

Accessible and good quality public services can be regarded as an essential element of the quality of life in Europe and as a key element of the European social model. As the quality of public services varies extensively between countries, there is considerable potential for policy learning across member states. Although many countries have already taken measures in the field of work-life balance, citizens evaluate the provisions in this respect as still largely unsatisfactory. Work-life balance is also a subject dealt with by the European Pillar of Social Rights. EQLS can be considered a tool to complement the implementation of the Pillar.

Access to quality health services is a key consideration in the policy and public debate at both EU level and in member states. Some of the questions in the 2016 EQLS were designed to evaluate differences between primary care and hospital services. On average, people in the EU give a higher rating to primary care (GP, family doctor or health centre services) than to hospital and specialist services. The high satisfaction levels associated with primary healthcare may be considered a standard to be reached for other categories of health services.



Another set of questions in 2016 concerned the way in which the respondents evaluated the professionalism of care providers, the personal attention given, the attitude of staff, the information and consultation of patients. Again, there are large differences between member states. Nevertheless, the scores for these aspects of services are fairly high, ranging (on average) from 7.6 to 8.0.

Another area of study was the way in which the respondents evaluated their trust in institutions (parliament, government, legal system, police, local (municipal) authorities, ...). A general pattern can be observed across countries, with trust in parliament and government scoring the worst (on average below 5) in the majority of countries. The trust in the legal system (5.2) and municipal authorities (5.6) scores better, while the police are seen as the most trustworthy of all the institutions mentioned (average rating of 6.4).

The quality of public services is one of the main concerns of Eurofedop as trade union organisation. Apart from the need for appropriate salary and working conditions, the delivery of quality services is one of the factors with a determining influence on the well-being of staff of public services. It has therefore been a subject of discussion of many meetings (congresses, seminars and trade councils) organised by Eurofedop.

The debate on the European Quality of Life Survey 2016 was followed by Bert Van Caelenberg, Secretary General of Eurofedop. The event was a joint organisation of Eurofound, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.