



Poverty and Social Exclusion Watch Report Slovenia

ENDING POVERTY IS A POLITICAL CHOICE!

September, October 2022

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EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK (EAPN) AND EAPN SLOVENIA

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), established in 1991, is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks and European organisations active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It currently unites 31 national networks and 13 European organisations whose main activities involve the fight against poverty and social exclusion. EAPN acts for and cooperates with persons who experience poverty, and jointly designs policies on the national and EU levels with them as key stakeholders. It promotes measures to eliminate poverty and social exclusion, raises awareness of the issue of poverty among experts and the general public, and offers people living in poverty empowerment and advocacy. EAPN has consultative status with the Council of Europe and is a founding member of the Social Platform, which is the largest network of European social NGOs.

In May 2019, 13 organisations established the network EAPN Slovenia. On the European level, Slovenian membership was officially confirmed at the EAPN General Assembly in Helsinki in September 2019.

EAPN Slovenia, which is coordinated by CNVOS, is currently composed of 19 organisations:

- Association Counselling for Workers
- Association Forum for Equitable Development
- Movement for Decent Work and Welfare Society
- Association Cultural, Informational and Counselling Centre Legebitra
- Association for Help and Self-Help of the Homeless Kings of the Street
- Association of Volunteers of St. Vincent de Paul
- Association ŠKUC
- Association Women's Lobby of Slovenia
- Peace Institute
- Mozaik, Association for Social Inclusion
- OPRO, Institute for Applicative Studies
- Slovenian Red Cross, Regional Association Ljubljana
- Slovenian Third Age University, National Association for Education and Social Inclusion
- Transfeminist Initiative TransAkcija Institute
- Institute Three, Institute for Sustainable Community Practices
- Slovenian Federation of Pensioners' Associations
- Association of Friends of Youth Domžale
- Association of Friends of Youth Ljubljana Moste-Polje
- Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth

EAPN Slovenia's key endeavours are focused on the elimination of poverty and social exclusion of all marginalised groups and individuals, based on their needs and experiences. EAPN Slovenia's key areas of work include long-term care, housing policy, precariousness, access to healthcare services, intersectionalities etc. The areas of focus are supplemented and added in accordance with the interests and capacities of the members.

1. KEY FINDINGS OF THIS YEAR'S REPORT

- NGOs, which deal with people in vulnerable situations daily, are noticing **combined poverty as a consequence of several factors**, which are not being properly addressed by the state.
- Even though the state came to the assistance by one-time pay-outs for the alleviation of the effects of the (energy) crisis, the **greater systemic shortcomings, through which these patterns of combined poverty are leaking out, are increasingly more chronic**.
- With the **transfer of income support** from the social security scheme to the social assistance system, the state has drastically decreased the number of recipients of income support. Even today the potential beneficiaries are afraid to apply for income support, believing that they may lose their house or land. Besides, **the calculation of the minimum living expenses** (the last was just published in 2022 (based on the costs in 2022 and the structure of expenses in 2018) is subjected to the pressures of the political debate about the »traps of poverty«, which results in the difference between the calculation and the amount approved by policy (on which a whole range of social transfers depends).
- In addition, **the wages are not keeping up with the increasing monthly living expenses**, which is primarily reflected in the increasing prices of market rents, which are outside of all public regulations. The increase in living expenses along with an epidemic of low wages is producing higher numbers of users of NGO services, who are patching up their family budgets with undeclared work.
- At the same time, **a too strong emphasis on the supervisory and administrative function of social protection on the one side and uncontrollable markets on the other** (labour market, housing market) cause a great amount of distress to individuals, who are almost automatically stigmatised in vulnerable situations. Besides, it also brutally reveals all the **shortcomings of the public system of assistance to victims of domestic violence**. NGOs are reporting that **the number of these victims is rising**. Thus, they not only find themselves in the circle of violence but also in the circle of poverty.
- The associations and institutes that are working directly with the vulnerable groups and that we talked to are reporting that there are more and more **poor persons in employment**, who receive a regular income from work, but it is too low. In many instances these individuals attempt to resolve the situation by additional undeclared work; **there are many debts on the account of paying the basic monthly living expenses**. There are still too many disconnections of electricity supply; a very difficult situation for those who are **receiving (very low) disability allowance**; an increase in divorce **caused mainly by domestic violence**. These are mostly women seeking to remove themselves from violence and more than 90% are mothers with children. A victim of intimate partner violence often has no adequate conditions: she has nowhere to go and she is unable to find a suitable housing solution immediately, all the while the rents are visibly rising; there are more and more **single-parent families living in bad economic circumstances**. The poverty of these families is not always a result of violence. It has been established that in many poor families illness is present, both with parents and children; open **discrimination in access to (rental) housing**; increasing **numbers of homeless women**; they are anticipating **an increase in mental health issues**. Telephone TOM[®] – the only anonymous telephone for children and youth in Slovenia – has recorded a significant deterioration of the mental health of children and youth at the time; there are also more and more **older users from (female) single households** with a very weak social network; there are still many individuals who are **under-informed regarding the possibilities of assistance**. Individuals often don't know that they are eligible for some type of aid even when they are employed. They also often don't know about the humanitarian organisations that can aid them also in financial terms; when individuals find themselves in vulnerable situations many aspects depend on their **social network, which many of these individuals lack**.
- Big NGOs, which were included in the conversation, are also emphasising that in the past year humanitarian organisations received **fewer material and financial donations, while the needs remain the same and are expected to increase in the following winter**.

2. POVERTY AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

In 2021 the at-risk-of-poverty threshold amounted to 771 EUR per month in Slovenia. 11,7% of residents were living below it, while 13,2% were exposed to the risk of social exclusion. At-risk-of-poverty rate was 11,7%, which represents a decrease of 0,7 of a percentage point compared to the previous year. Approximately 243.000 people were living with an income lower than the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. For a single-person household, this threshold is at 771 EUR per month or 32 EUR more than in the previous year. For a four-person household (two adults and two children younger than 14 years) it amounted to 1.619 EUR and for a two-person household without children, it came to 1.156 EUR per month.

Among the 243.000 people living with income beneath the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, there were 85.000 pensioners, 46.000 persons in employment, 40.000 underage children, 38.000 unemployed persons, and 34.000 others (unable to work, housewives, students, other inactive or uncategorized persons).

If social transfers (family or social benefits) are not counted as income, the at-risk-of-poverty rate amounted to 21,2%. If pensions are deducted also, the percentage rises to 40,3%.

The income distribution among households was somewhat more even since the value of the Gini coefficient has decreased by half of a percentage point and the value of the ratio of quantile ranks for 0,1%.

The rate of the risk of social exclusion was 13,2% and has decreased by 1,1% compared to the previous year. 275.000 people were exposed to the risk of social exclusion.

This decrease can be attributed to the decrease in all three indicators of social exclusion: at-risk-of-poverty rate (0,7% decrease), serious material and social exclusion rate (0,8% decrease), and very low work intensity rate (0,3% decrease).

The share of people who were simultaneously exposed to all three forms of social exclusion remained the same. There were 0,3% of these most vulnerable people.

(Statistical office of the Republic of Slovenia – SURS, 16th June 2022)

3. SOCIAL TRANSFERS

CALCULATION OF THE MINIMUM COST OF LIVING

Following the Social Assistance Payments Act (ZSvarPre) the state is obliged to calculate the minimum cost of living every six years. This calculation affects the base amount of the minimum income (BAMI), and in accordance with the 2021 policy changes regarding the minimum wage, it also affects the calculation of the minimum wage. In accordance with Article 8 of ZSVarPre the level of the minimum cost of living is determined at least every six years, but in practice (also because of late calculations depending on the promptitude of the Research of the consumption of households (APG)) the implementation of new thresholds of BAMI has regularly been very late (or has not been fully applied because of the austerity measures). The minimum cost of living calculated in the year 2017 (based on the costs in 2016 and the structure of expenses in 2015) and valid until the next calculation is 613,41 EUR. The minimum cost of living calculated in the year 2022 (based on the costs in 2022 and the structure of expenses in 2018) is 6669,83 EUR. The minimum cost of living is thus under the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, but also much above the threshold of BAMI. The lagging of the BAMI threshold (adjusted to inflation within the period of six years) behind the actual cost of living has been increasing from year to year (until the new calculation of BAMI), which results in declining numbers of individuals eligible for social transfers. Since the beneficiaries of the latter are also dependent on the hierarchy of social transfers, it is especially the share of the beneficiaries of financial social assistance which is rising (FSA). Considering that after the changes in minimum wage policy in 2021 the minimum wage also depends on the calculation of the minimum cost of living (the minimum wage has to exceed the minimum cost of living by at least 20%, but not by more than 40%), the adequate and on-time calculations of the minimum cost of living is all the more important. Namely, since 2019 we can again see the lagging of minimum wage behind the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. The gap between BAMI and the minimum cost of living has also been widening, meaning that poverty is rising among the beneficiaries of BAMI. Households in the first quintile, which spend the largest part (91,6%) of their income on basic necessities, are the most affected. The expenses for food and nonalcoholic beverages combined with housing expenses represented 45% of all expenses in the case of the lowest income households, while it represented only 22% for the highest income households (UMAR, The European Pillar of Social Rights 2000 – 2020, 2021, Institute for economic research, 2022).

SOCIAL TRANSFERS: 2021 AND 2022

Source: Social transfers, December 2021, September 2022, Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities - MDDSZEM)

The data for the year 2020 shows that the highest expenses were the following transfers: parental benefit, financial social assistance, child benefit, unemployment allowance and state scholarships. The available data reveals that the total amount of payments for transfers in 2020 added up to 1 billion and 456 million EUR. This includes 82 million paid out by municipalities (on the account of the rights to the exemption from paying social security services, domestic assistance, and rent subsidy). **The most numerous rightful recipients are those who receive transfers: child benefit (number of children), financial social assistance, kindergarten subsidy and the right to full coverage of health insurance** (Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MDDSZEM), Social transfers, December 2021). **For the year 2021,** the available data reveals that the total amount of payments for transfers added up to 1 billion and 478 million EUR, which includes 81 million EUR paid out by municipalities. Compared to 2020 and disregarding the payments for ZRSZ transfers, the sum of paid transfers in 2021 has increased by 67,3 million EUR. **The biggest part of expenditure in 2021 was dedicated to the following transfers: parental benefit, financial social assistance, child benefit, unemployment allowance, and personal assistance. The highest numbers of beneficiaries in 2021 were in the following order: child benefit (number of children), financial social assistance, kindergarten subsidy, right to full coverage of health insurance and state scholarships** (MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2022).

The highest relative parts of beneficiaries of financial assistance (FA), emergency financial assistance (EFA), and income support (IS) are to be found in the following statistical regions: Mura, Drava, Central Sava, Savinja and Southeast Slovenia. The lowest relative parts of beneficiaries belong to Gorizia and Upper Carniola. Most rightful beneficiaries of EFA per 100.000 inhabitants live in the Mura statistical region. In the case of IS, the highest number of beneficiaries per 100.000 inhabitants can be attributed to the Mura and Drava regions.

Additional insight into social transfers, which provide temporary income assistance to individuals who have no income or very low income (FA, EFA and IS), is provided by subdivisions of family types, age and gender. **The prevailing family type of beneficiaries in all three cases (FA, EFA and IS) is distinctly in favour of single persons.** In the cases of FA and EFA, they are followed by two-parent households with two children and two-parent households with one child, but their numbers are significantly lower than that of single persons in both cases. In the case of IS, single persons are followed by married couples or partners without children. Among those eligible for FA, EFA and IS the number of single persons has increased the most in the previous years.

The majority of the beneficiaries of FA and EFA are less than 18 years old and between 35 and 44 years old. In the case of FA, the age group of 55–64 years is prevalent among single persons. **Most beneficiaries of IS are between the ages of 65 and 74**, while among these most are single, followed by married and/or unmarried couples.

As for gender, in 2021 there were 3000 more male than female beneficiaries of FA on average per month. There were more women than men only in the age groups above 75 and between 18–25 years. In the case of EFA and IS, there were more female than male beneficiaries in the group between 55–64 years old, but especially among those older than 75.

The average amount paid out per beneficiary of FA and EFA was highest for single persons and single-parent households with one child, while the amount paid out per beneficiary of IS was highest for single-parent households with children (but the number of these is very low).

Among the beneficiaries of FSA in 2021 more than a third were officially unemployed (the monthly average was 34.000). The age structure of the officially unemployed who are also eligible for financial social assistance (FSA) has not changed in the past three years. Most are 35–44 years old, followed by those 45–55 and 26–34 years old.

Even though FSA, IS and EFA are awarded only for a short period, some beneficiaries receive these transfers for a longer period. Long-term beneficiaries are defined as those who have been receiving FSA (IS, EFA) for at least 24 months in the past 36 months. The data regarding the number of beneficiaries in the past 36 months shows that in the cases of FSA and IS most beneficiaries are long-term. This is not the case with EFA, where most were eligible for assistance six times in the past 36 months. Considering the age structure of those who receive FSA, most long-term beneficiaries belong to the age groups of younger than 18, 25–44 years and 55–64 years. In the case of IS, most long-term beneficiaries are 65–74 years old. In the case of EFA, the majority of those who received assistance six times at most are below 18 or 55–64 years old.

The monthly average of registered unemployment in 2021 was 74.300 people or 10.600 less than a year earlier. Among them, there were on average 34.000 of those who have been receiving financial social assistance, which is 900 less than in 2020. Among these the majority were 35–44 years old, followed by 26–34 and 45–54 years old. (MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2022).

Some of the transfers which support family welfare (child benefit (CB), state scholarship (SS) and kindergarten subsidy (KS)), are paid out or awarded in relation to income and are determined by considering income brackets. Income from CB is also taken into account in calculating the average monthly income for SS. The bulk of CB is paid out to families from the 1st and 2nd income brackets, while most children eligible for CB belong to the 5th, 6th and 7th brackets. The largest part of SS is paid out to beneficiaries from the 1st and 4th income brackets, while most individuals eligible for SS are from the 4th bracket. In the case of SV, most eligible children belong to the 5th, 6th and 7th income brackets. (MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2022).

Amount of CB in EUR in relation to the income bracket for a child in primary school or until their 18 years of age

Income bracket	Average monthly income per person (EUR)	1st child	2nd child	3rd and the next child
1	up to 200,78	122,79	135,06	147,35
2	from 200,79 to 334,64	104,98	116,05	127,05
3	from 334,65 to 401,58	80,01	89,43	98,81
4	from 401,59 to 468,50	63,11	72	81,07
5	from 468,51 to 591,22	51,6	60,22	68,78
6	from 591,23 to 713,91	32,7	40,92	49,1
7	from 713,92 to 914,71	24,53	32,7	40,92
8	from 914,72 to 1.104,33	21,36	29,54	37,71

Census for awarding the state scholarship

Income bracket	Average monthly income per person (euro)	Base amount in EUR for a eligible recipients up to 18 years of age	Base amount in EUR for an eligible recipient above 18 years of age
1	up to 334,64	112,25	224,51
2	from 334,65 to 401,58	94,53	189,05
3	from 401,59 to 468,50	76,81	153,61
4	from 468,51 to 591,22	59,08	118,16
5	from 591,23 to 713,91	41,35	82,71
6	from 713,92 to 914,71	31,16	62,31
7	from 914,72 to 1.104,33	27,12	54,23

Source: MDDSZEM, 2022

In 2021 the transfers with the most individuals eligible were the following: child benefit (number of children), financial social assistance, kindergarten subsidy, right to full coverage of health insurance and state scholarships. Compared to 2020, the average monthly figure of eligible residents in 2021 has increased in the cases of child benefit (for 1500), personal assistance (for 1100) and full coverage of health insurance (for 1100). It has decreased most in emergency financial assistance, state scholarship (both for 1100) and reduced working hours (for 800).

The average monthly amount which the beneficiaries received in 2021 differs between different types of transfers and amounts to 3.631 EUR at its highest for personal assistance and to 63 EUR at its lowest for child benefit. For unemployment allowance the average monthly transfer per beneficiary was 797 EUR (gross amount); for financial social assistance it was 226 EUR; for emergency financial assistance 200 EUR and for income support amounted to 152 EUR. The highest year-on-year growth of the amount per beneficiary in 2021 was recorded with child benefit (29%), reduced working hours (28%), childbirth allowance (21%) and compensatory aid for loss of income (20%). (MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2022).

IN FOCUS: INCOME SUPPORT

In 2012 income support (IS) changed its status from a right of all pensioners with »low« pensions to a social welfare income with restrictive conditions, which is why the number of beneficiaries has drastically dropped and remains at low levels also according to the recent data. Up until 2012 IS was a part of the retirement provision and had been granted to each pensioner whose pension was considered

low. The basic purpose of IS was to function as a corrective and to improve the material security of beneficiaries with the lowest pensions. With ZSVarPre (2010) coming into effect, IS became a social welfare income targeting individuals who are unable to procure material and social safety for reasons they are unable to affect. The income is meant to cover living expenses accumulated over a longer period of time. According to the new policy in Slovenia, individuals eligible for IS are those who are permanently unemployable, permanently incapable of work or unemployed (women older than 63 and men older than 65), but are not subject to institutional care and do not reside in a residential care institution. With ZSVarPre coming into effect in the period 2012–2017 two important policies were enacted: notice against immovable property and recovery of social assistance in case of beneficiary's death, if the individual or their family owned an apartment in the value of 120.000 EUR or more (Article 54.a of TSVVarPre). For all of these reasons, the number of IS beneficiaries declined by 78%, from 46.752 to 10.217, in the period from December 2011 to December 2012. From the 1st of September 2019, the maximum pay-out was 189,2 EUR, while the average pay-out in 2019 for all beneficiaries was 172,8 EUR (MDDSZEM, 2021a). After the massive decrease in 2012, the number of IS beneficiaries only slightly increased in 2016 and slightly more so after the annulment of the notice against immovable property in 2017. Even though the need for IS has not decreased on the account of a big relative part of low pensions in the past decade, numerous individuals eligible for IS do not exercise their rights for fear of the notice against property (even though it has been annulled) and the risk they believe it would pose for their families (MDDSZEM, 2021C; 2021D). A complicated procedure of invoking these rights only contributes to this lack. Recent data shows that the current number of IS beneficiaries fails to reach even half of beneficiaries in 2011 (MDDSZEM, 2021c) (UMAR, European Pillar of Social Rights 2020–2022, 2021).

IN FOCUS: THE ELDERLY

In August 2022 the average net retirement pension was 777,44 EUR (768,90 EUR for men and 786,17 EUR for women). At the same time, the average net disability pension was 604,19 EUR (591,81 EUR for men and 621,42 for women). This means that the average net retirement pension is only a couple of euros above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold for single-person households in 2021, which was 771 EUR per month. However, the average net disability pension is not only significantly below this threshold but also below the minimum cost of living calculated in 2017 (based on the assessment of costs in 2016 and the structure of expenses in 2015), which was 613,41 EUR (the latest calculation, based on the assessment of costs in 2022 and the structure of expenses in 2018 is 669,83 EUR). The guaranteed retirement pension amounts to 653,75 EUR, which is again significantly under the at-risk-of-poverty threshold from 2021. Meanwhile, the guaranteed disability pension is 409,70, which is even below the base sum of minimal income, which serves as the basis for the calculation of financial social assistance (421,09 EUR). The average disability allowance (this notion is discussed in the second part of the report) was 231,55 EUR at the time. Among 210.497 retired women (not counting those who receive pro rata pensions or partial pensions) there is 95.962 (45,6%) of those who receive pensions lower than 700 EUR. Among 182.919 retired men (not counting those who receive pro rata pensions or partial pensions) there is 60.649 (33,2%) of those who receive pensions lower than 700 EUR. (Pension and Disability Insurance Institute, ZPIZ, 2022).

The data of The Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development (UMAR) suggests that the lowest pensions are mainly a consequence of a shorter pension qualifying period, while in other brackets the level of pensions (at corresponding pensions qualifying period) depends on other parameters. Pensioners with the lowest pensions (up to 500 EUR) also have the shortest pension qualifying period (on average 26,8 years). In the following brackets pensions (at corresponding pensions qualifying period) rather depend on wage level during working years. Thus the difference between the pension qualifying period of those who receive a pension between 500 and 1.000 EUR, and of those who receive a pension between 1.500 and 2.000 EUR, is very small. In the case of the highest retirement pensions (above 2.000 EUR), the pension qualifying period is significantly longer, which likely includes pensioners of those occupations, which enable one to remain in the workforce for longer, also concerning one's health. The municipalities where pensioners received low pensions were mostly

concentrated in the cohesion region of East Slovenia. This is an effect of lower levels of activity in the past, lower wages and long-time high levels of unemployment.

The pension qualifying period of insured persons under 50 years of age is getting shorter, which will result in individuals having a shorter pension qualifying period at the time when their age condition will be fulfilled. Consequently, they will receive a lower pension, if they retire at that time. In 2005 a man aged 30–34 years had 10,1 years of pension qualifying period on average, while a woman had 10,2 years. In 2020 the period of insurance for this age group was 2,6 and 3,5 shorter respectively. (ZPIZ, 2006; ZPIZ, 2021a) This means that these individuals will need to work longer to fulfil the 40 years of the pension qualifying period, or, they will retire with shorter periods and lower pensions. Insured persons today spend more time in the educational system than in the past resulting in a delayed entrance into the labour market and a shorter insurance period. In addition, today's insurance holders are frequently employed in non-standard forms of employment, which affects the length of the pension qualifying period and the pension itself. This presents a challenge to the pension system and the provision of decent pensions since usually these individuals have a shorter pension qualifying period (UMAR, 2021). Taking into account the trends in the labour market, which increasingly offer only non-standard forms of labour to (highly) educated young people, this means that without properly addressing this problem we may end up with more and more generations, which will receive the lowest pensions as a result of the short pension qualifying period. In other words, these will be generations of the poor elderly.

MONTHLY DYNAMICS UP UNTIL NOVEMBER 2021

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, December 2021

The dynamic of the transfers in the recent period is a result of the fundamental trends before the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of the pandemic and the political response to it, including changes in some of the rights in question. In this context we should differentiate between: 1) the basic trend of movement of social transfers that reflects past policies; 2) the influence of the pandemic upon the trends through the social nature of the transfers (i.e. the unemployment allowance); 3) the political responses to the pandemic as in the twofold increase of transfers aimed at alleviating the effect on vulnerable lower income groups, where these responses do not affect the number of beneficiaries, but only the level of their income; 4) the political responses in the form of one-time transfers; 5) the changes regarding certain rights, which are not connected to the pandemic. These distinctions are to be followed.

Considering the function of individual transfers, we can conceptually classify them according to the standard statistical classification by function (EUROSTAT) or partition them by other criteria (ESSPROS). MDDSZEM monthly report on social transfers separates them into three groups: 1) **Transfers which ensure or expand welfare and are primarily tied to family matters and child-rearing:** child benefit, parental benefits, foster care payment, birth grant, large family benefit, social contribution payment (4 or more children), reduced working hours, state and fund scholarships; 2) **transfers with the aim of solidarity:** income support, personal assistance, communication benefit, funeral expenses and bereavement payment, exemption of payment of social service, home care assistant, child care allowance, compensatory aid for income loss; 3) **transfers for mitigating the immediate consequences of loss of employment or income:** unemployment allowance, rent subsidy, financial social assistance and emergency state social assistance.

The transfers related to welfare have in most cases followed former average trends of growth (except for yearly adjustments or policy changes). Measured with a 12-month moving average, a trend of rising expenditure can be seen in most social rights. Namely, the following rights: reduced working hours, large family benefit and social contribution payment, birth grant, parental allowance, parental leave and benefit. A trend of decreasing expenditure can be seen with state scholarship, child benefit, foster care payments and fund scholarships. **The changes in the number of beneficiaries are more heterogeneous. A falling trend can be observed** in the cases of state scholarship, reduced working hours, social contribution payment (4 or more children), parental leave and benefit, and kindergarten subsidy. In the cases of parental allowance, fund scholarships, large family benefit and birth grant, the number of rightful beneficiaries has risen.

Compared to the same period of the previous year, the first eleven months of 2021 saw an increase in expenditure for social contribution payment (4 or more children), birth grant, parental allowance, large family benefit, reduced working hours, parental leave and parental benefit. In the cases of birth grant, parental allowance and reduced working hours the increase was substantial. The expenditure has fallen year-on-year for all other rights.¹ Considering the *number of beneficiaries* in comparison to the same period in the past year, the first nine months of 2021 have seen a rise in the following rights: parental allowance, fund scholarships, large family benefit and birth grant. The numbers of rightful beneficiaries for other transfers have fallen or remained the same.²

The transfers related to solidarity have been reaching higher growth rates, especially with the number of beneficiaries. This is especially true for personal assistance, compensatory aid for income loss,³ health insurance contribution, the right to full coverage of health insurance, child care allowance, income support, and communication benefit (January – November 2021). The observed trends of high growth of expenditure for transfers related to solidarity are a consequence of the political decisions before the pandemic. The two exceptions are the rights to: a) health insurance contribution to which an unemployed person receiving financial social assistance is eligible, and b) to have the difference to the full value of healthcare services covered, to which all adult beneficiaries of financial social assistance are eligible regardless of their labour status. Because of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the growth of financial social assistance beneficiaries, high growth of both rights was recorded. With the recovery of the labour market in the past 6 months, the year-on-year drop in the number of beneficiaries was recorded. In November the year-on-year growth of beneficiaries of these rights (considering the same month of the previous year) was -15,9 or -13,8%. In 2021 (January – November) there were on average 65.000 beneficiaries of the right to full coverage of health insurance and 52.000 beneficiaries of health insurance contribution. While the expenditure and the number of beneficiaries for personal assistance are growing, the number of beneficiaries of the right to home care assistance is falling and consequently so is the expenditure for this right. The number of beneficiaries of the right to exemption from payment of social service is also dropping. This is a consequence of falling numbers of those included in institutional care, home help and alternative forms of housing and care. Despite the pandemic, the expenditure and the number of beneficiaries of funeral expenses and bereavement payment is falling, which is to a certain extent a consequence of the data not being final, since these two rights can be claimed up until a year after a person's death.

The dynamic of expenditure of those **transfers that aim to alleviate the consequences of income loss** was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, since the growth of this expenditure from April 2020 until March 2021 was high, but then the number of beneficiaries began falling. In May 2020 the number of beneficiaries of financial social assistance has grown year-on-year by 11,6%, growth remained high and stable until October 2020, when it became even higher. Since March 2021 the growth of financial social assistance is falling. In November 2021 it amounted to -14,5% year-on-year. In November there were 87.000 people eligible for it, among them 29.200 of those who are registered as unemployed. The number of beneficiaries of financial social assistance in November was at a similar level as it was before the pandemic (in January 2020). In the case of extraordinary financial social assistance, the year-on-year growth of the number of beneficiaries has stabilised after an uptrend in the second half of 2020, while it has been negative since March 2021. In accordance with the cyclical movement of the number of beneficiaries, the number increases in the winter. The effect of the pandemic can also be observed in the movement of expenditure and the number of beneficiaries of rent subsidy, which depends on the income situation of beneficiaries. After the growth rate of the number of beneficiaries of rent subsidy and the expenditure for the subsidy were on the increase until the first quarter of 2021, they have been dropping since, even reaching negative year-on-year monthly growth in November.

¹ Large family benefits are paid out once per year. The data from the last month is a reflection of the applications concerning the changes in the number of children during the year and is thus highly variable.

² The data is not final and may be subject to change.

³ The Act Amending the Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act, which came into effect on 1. 7. 2021, specified that the compensatory aid for income loss is raised to the level of the gross minimum monthly wage to 751,77 EUR.

The dynamic of the number of beneficiaries for the unemployment allowance has fundamentally changed as a consequence of the pandemic. A downward trend (seasonally adjusted) stopped in March 2020, when the year-on-year growth rate rose to 25%. Since then the year-on-year growth of the number of beneficiaries has been falling, while it has been negative since March 2021. The average monthly number of beneficiaries was higher by 34,4% in 2020 than in 2019. In comparison to the same period of the previous year, the average growth rate of the number of beneficiaries of the unemployed allowance in 2021 (the period of January – November) was negative (-26,1%) – in November it was 31,3%. In October 15.900 persons were eligible for the unemployment allowance.

MONTHLY DYNAMICS UNTIL AUGUST 2022

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2021

Regarding transfers related to welfare, important policy changes were introduced in 2021 and in the first half of 2022, which are reflected in the monthly movement of expenditure. The changes in 2021 were concerning parental allowance, reduced working hours, childbirth allowance, parental leave and benefit, and kindergarten subsidy. In May 2022 changes to the right of state scholarship were introduced. As a consequence of policy changes and general trends, the **expenditure for seven out of eleven rights increased on a year-on-year basis. This is the case with the following rights: foster care payment, childbirth allowance, parental allowance, reduced working hours, state scholarship, child benefit, parental leave and benefit.** The number of payments decreased in the case of the following: **fund scholarships, social contribution payment (4 or more children) and large family benefit** (once per year payment). **The number of beneficiaries has risen in four out of twelve rights and fallen in the case of six.** It has risen on a year-on-year basis in the cases of fund scholarships, childbirth allowance, reduced working hours and kindergarten subsidy. The number of beneficiaries has fallen on a year-on-year basis in the cases: of foster care payment, parental allowance, social contribution payment (4 or more children), large family benefit and state scholarship. The figure has remained constant in the case of child benefit.

Transfers related to solidarity have reached higher levels of growth of expenditure, while in terms of the number of beneficiaries higher levels were reached in personal assistance and compensatory aid for income loss. In 2021 two important policy changes were introduced concerning these two rights. These changes are reflected in the number of beneficiaries and the expenditure.

In the cases of seven out of ten rights in this set, the expenditure has risen year-on-year in August. These are the following: assistance and attendance allowance, personal assistance/communication benefit, home care assistance, compensatory aid for income loss, child care allowance, income support, exemption from payment of social service and personal assistance. Expenditure has decreased for two rights: funeral expenses and bereavement payment. With these, the year-on-year decrease is mostly a consequence of the fact that the data is not yet final, since this right can be claimed up until a year after a person's death.

The number of beneficiaries of rights related to solidarity has increased in four out of twelve rights on a year-on-year basis in August: compensatory aid for income loss, personal assistance/communication benefit, personal assistance, child care allowance and income support. The rights which saw a decrease in beneficiaries are the following: funeral expenses, bereavement payment, home care assistance, health insurance contribution and full coverage of health insurance. The highest numbers of beneficiaries were recorded in cases of the right to health insurance contribution (39.500) and of the full coverage of health insurance (51.000). The beneficiaries of the former are unemployed persons receiving financial social assistance, while the beneficiaries of the latter are all adult beneficiaries of financial social assistance regardless of their labour status. The high growth of beneficiaries of the health insurance contribution and the full coverage of health insurance was recorded in 2020 because of the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and the growth of the number of beneficiaries of financial social assistance. With the improvements in the labour market in the second half of 2021, the number of beneficiaries of both of these rights fell significantly. It also fell in the case of the right to home care assistance, which is related to the rising number of beneficiaries of personal assistance. Decreases were also seen in the number of beneficiaries of funeral expenses and bereavement

payment (but this data is not final) and in the number of beneficiaries of the exemption from payment of social service (the reasons being falling numbers of those included in institutional care, home help and alternative forms of housing and care, but also the Covid-19 pandemic). Since the second half of 2021, the number of beneficiaries of the exemption of payment of three social services has been on an increase, but the numbers in the case of institutional care, alternative forms of housing and care were still beneath the pre-pandemic levels. In the case of home help, the numbers have been falling or stagnating again in the past months.

The dynamics of the transfers that aim to alleviate the effects of income loss have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and the strong recovery of the labour market later. The expenditure for four rights dedicated to alleviating the effects of income loss (financial social assistance, extraordinary financial social assistance, rent subsidy and unemployment allowance) increased substantially in 2020 but has been decreasing since the second quarter of 2021. Among them, the expenditure for rent subsidy and extraordinary financial social assistance recorded positive year-on-year growth in August 2022. This expenditure follows the dynamics of the number of beneficiaries, which has been decreasing in all four cases. After a substantial rise in 2020, the number of beneficiaries of financial social assistance (FSA) has been falling since March 2021. In August 2021 it was negative on a year-on-year basis (-8,6%). At the same time, there were 78.700 people eligible for it, which is less than the average for the whole of 2021 (99.700) and at a lower level than before the pandemic (i.e. in January 2019 and at the same level as in 2018, before the basic amount of minimum income was raised for 30%). In August there were 24.000 registered unemployed persons among the beneficiaries of financial social assistance. Most of the registered unemployed that received FSA in July were 35–44 years old, while the highest share of registered unemployed among those eligible for FSA was in the age category of 26–34 (56%). The number of beneficiaries to FSA in August 2022 was at a lower level than before the pandemic (i.e. in January 2019). The year-on-year growth of beneficiaries for extraordinary financial social assistance has been negative since March 2021 and amounted to -8,6% in August. The elevated prices of energy and food have not (yet) been reflected in higher numbers of beneficiaries. The effect of the pandemic can also be noticed in the movement of expenditure and the number of beneficiaries of rent subsidy, which depends on the income situation of beneficiaries. After the growth rate of the number of beneficiaries for rent subsidy was rising until the first quarter of 2021, it has been slowing down since. In August 2021 the year-on-year monthly growth of beneficiaries was negative.

The dynamic of the number of beneficiaries for the unemployment allowance has fundamentally changed as a consequence of the pandemic. A downward trend (seasonally adjusted) stopped in March 2020, when the year-on-year growth rate of the number of beneficiaries increased to 61,7%, while in May (i.e. when it reached its peak) it even rose to 76,6%, but then fell to 25% in December. Since then it has been falling and has been negative since March 2021. In July the year-on-year growth rate was negative, -14,5%. There were 14.600 beneficiaries of unemployment allowance in July, which is less than before the pandemic.

Yearly adjustment of transfers

An adjustment of transfers is executed once per year in the first quarter. Consequently, the payments of social transfers increase. In 2022 the adjustment was 4,9%. Until the end of February 2023, we may expect a higher monthly year-on-year growth of payments for individual social transfers.

ADDENDUM

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2021

Policy changes in 2021 and 2022

In comparison with 2020 when policies were focused on the response to the pandemic in the form of one-time transfers, relevant changes to the rights from the welfare and solidarity strand have been implemented in 2021. In the same year some one-time transfers have also been paid out, but to a smaller extent than in the previous year.

In 2021 changes have been implemented concerning seven rights. Except for personal assistance, the amount to which the beneficiaries were entitled has risen.

The policy response to the pandemic in the form of one-time transfers

As previously mentioned, the pandemic is reflected in the trend of some transfers (as an automatic response of the system) but the transfers also reflect the response of policy or discretionary measures for the mitigation of the impact of the crisis. Most measures related to transfers affected a one-time increase in transfers. Thus, their effect for the years 2020 and 2021 is represented separately in the table below (Table A2), which encompasses all one-time transfers including the income of pensioners and disabled persons. The package of measures also contained the provision of unemployment allowance to those who in the middle of March 2020 lost their employment on account of the pandemic but did not meet the demands for the right to unemployment allowance. These individuals were also included in the report about the movement of the unemployment allowance in the MDDSZEM report.

In January 2022 the solidarity allowance was paid out for the third time to pensioners. In the same month, the extraordinary readjustment of pensions and other benefits was executed.

Responses of policy to the energy crisis with one-time transfers

One-time energy solidarity allowance for alleviation of social distress as a result of the high prices of energy products was paid out in April 2022 (and partly in July 2022). It was paid out to pensioners, the recipients of financial social assistance and income support, the beneficiaries of child benefit and the large family benefit, not excluding foster parents. The total financial effect was estimated to be 107 million EUR.⁴

In August 2022 the recipients of financial social allowance or income support were approved to receive a one-time energy allowance, which is going to be paid out in November 2022 at the latest. A single person or a family, which is not a recipient of financial social allowance or income support, is also going to be entitled to the allowance. It is estimated that approximately 71.000 individuals and families are going to receive it. The financial effects are estimated to be about 18,4 million EUR. The amounts are going to be the following:

- 200 EUR for single persons;
- 200 EUR for single-parent families, increased by 118 EUR for each child or by 59 EUR, if the child is in joint custody and upbringing;
- 314 EUR for double-parent families, increased by 118 EUR for each child or by 59 EUR, if the child is in joint custody and upbringing;
- 314 EUR for couples without children.

Table A1 Policy changes in 2021 and 2022

	Date of entry into force	Amount per beneficiary	Expenditure	Number of beneficiaries
		Year-on-year growth, %	Year-on-year growth, %	Year-on-year growth, %
Welfare				
Free kindergarten for the second and third child	1st September			-0,1
Childbirth allowance increase from 286,72 EUR to 350 EUR	1st January	21,2	53,2	26,7
Parental allowance increase from 258,09 EUR to the level of the basic amount of minimum income (402,18 EUR)	1st January	28,5	37,2	6,8
Increase of the lowest disbursement of maternal, paternal and parental benefit from 331 EUR to 543,29 EUR (gross)	1st January	6,7	5,9	-0,8

⁴ https://www.fs-rs.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/JMG_202202.pdf;
<https://twitter.com/FiskalnivetRS/status/1567029640182599680?s=20&t=sAd23VpRTxjCCAOsGz3OIA>

Reduced working hours: up to full workload the payment of social contribution is ensured from the proportionate part of the average of the last 12 wages, but not less than the proportionate part of the minimum wage	1st January	27,5	20,2	-5,9
Changes regarding the state scholarship. Two new income brackets were introduced (the 6th and the 7th bracket), and the limits of income brackets and the amount of the scholarship were changed.	5th May 2022			
Solidarity				
Compensatory aid for loss of income increase from 751,77 EUR to 1024,24 EUR (gross)	1st July	19,8	31,2	9
Act Amending the Personal Assistance Act, which improves the functioning of the service and eliminates the anomalies in this field	3rd November	-3,8	56,2	61,8

Table A2 Disbursement of one-time allowances for the alleviation of the effects of crisis

	Measure	Period	Recipients	Financial effect (in Mio. EUR)	Average per recipient (EUR)
2020	One-time solidarity allowance for pensioners	April	287.380	62,2	216,3
	Disability allowance	April	14.844	4,3	289,2
	One-time solidarity allowance for vulnerable groups FSA/IS	April	49.728	7,5	150,0
	Increased amount of the large family benefit	April	29.150	3,4	118,0
	One-time solidarity allowance for students	April	52.180	7,8	150,0
	Bonus to child benefit	June	191.272	5,7	30,0
	Income support for the self-employed	Mar – Dec	40.463*		
2021	One-time solidarity allowance for pensioners	January	299.895	68,0	226,7
	One-time solidarity allowance for students	January	54.249	8,1	150,0
	Allowance to child benefit (number of children)	January	329.168	16,5	50,0
	Increased amount of the large family benefit	January	31.587	3,7	118,2
	Increased child care allowance	January	8.000	2,4	300,0
	Income support for the self-employed	Jan – Apr	34.600*		
	One-time solidarity allowance for the unemployed	2021	9.484	1,4	150,0

* Monthly average in the observed period.

Source: ZPIZ, MDDSZEM and Fiscal council (FS)

Table A3 Disbursement of one-time allowances for the alleviation of the effects of the energy crisis

Target group	Period	Recipients	Financial effect (in Mio. EUR)	Average per recipient (EUR)
Beneficiaries of FA and IS	April, July	45.677	6,85	150
Beneficiaries of CB and RE		125.521	18,83	150
Beneficiaries of DVD		11.478	1,21	105

STATISTICAL APPENDIX

Table 1 Basic indicators of income, poverty and social exclusion, Slovenia

	2020	2021
Median value of yearly equivalised disposable income (EUR)	14.774	15.415
Yearly at-risk-of-poverty threshold for a one-person household (EUR)	8.864	9.249
Monthly at-risk-of-poverty threshold for a one-person household (EUR)	739	771
Risk of social exclusion rate (% of population)	14,3	13,2
Risk of poverty rate (% of population)	12,4	11,7
Serious material and social deprivation rate – for 7 out of 13 elements (% of population)	2,6	1,8
Very low work activity rate, age 0–64 (% of population)	3,9	3,6
Risk of poverty rate before social transfers, except pensions (% of population)	22,4	21,2
Risk of poverty rate before social transfers, including pensions (% of population)	39,4	40,3
Income inequality – proportion of quintile ranks (80/20)	3,3	3,2
Income inequality – Gini coefficient (%)	23,5	23,0

Table 2 Population with the lowest rate of poverty risk, Slovenia

	2020	2021
	% persons below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold	
Active working population (aged 18+)	5,0	5,0
Population with at least a higher education degree (aged 18+)	4,9	5,3
Households where all adults are in employment	3,4	3,1

Table 3 Population with the highest rate of poverty risk, Slovenia

	2020	2021
	% persons below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold	
According to work activity of the household		
households without employed members	40,4	41,7
According to the most frequent status of activity in the year before the interview (aged 18+)		
unemployed persons	43,4	39,7
retired women	22,6	19,6
other inactive persons (housewives, students, incapable of work ...)	18,9	19,4
According to age and gender		
women older than 59 years	22,4	19,5
According to tenure status of household		
tenants	28,1	26,7
According to completed level of education (aged 18+)		
persons with only primary education	29,5	29,0

Source: SURS, 2022

Table 4 Amounts of social transfers by individual rights, 2021, in EUR

Function	Right	Type of right	Total sum I-XI	Year-on-year growth (%) I-XI 21/I-XI 20	Amount in the month XI	Year-on-year growth (%) XI 21/XI 20
Welfare	Vignettes	income	66.550	-0,3	-	-
Welfare	Social contribution payment (4 or more children)	right arising from insurance	3.134.703	1,7	272.101	2,1
Welfare	Foster care payment	service	5.066.432	-5,2	436.580	-7,2
Welfare	Birth allowance	income	6.895.601	45,5	557.137	371,6
Welfare	Parental allowance	income	9.488.834	34,3	993.094	47,8
Welfare	Large family allowance**	income	13.430.420	1,7	29.906	-64,1
Welfare	Fund scholarships	income	15.788.179	-11,1	1.955.954	39,0
Welfare	Reduced working hours	right arising from insurance	21.746.566	19,4	1.967.806	27,3
Welfare	State scholarship	income	78.026.753	-1,8	5.720.682	-3,5
Welfare	Child benefit	income	225.227.498	-2,2	19.874.019	-3,8
Welfare	Parental leave and benefit	right arising from insurance	282.124.850	5,3	26.263.353	9,7
Solidarity	Assistance and attendance allowance*	income	1.030.104	2,9	92.861	-0,3
Solidarity	Bereavement payment	income	1.202.116	-25,0	65.555	-68,3
Solidarity	Personal assistance/communication benefit	service	2.507.100	5,8	232.950	4,7
Solidarity	Funeral expenses	income	2.732.160	-23,8	135.937	-70,5
Solidarity	Home care assistance	service	3.298.560	-17,7	279.487	-14,6
Solidarity	Compensatory aid for loss of income	right arising from insurance	8.570.743	29,3	955.240	54,7
Solidarity	Child care allowance	income	11.315.824	6,5	1.045.568	6,7
Solidarity	Income support	income	39.030.603	0,6	3.489.266	-2,6
Solidarity	Exemption from payment of social service	subsidy	51.677.410	-2,7	4.804.266	-0,0
Solidarity	Personal assistance	service	114.248.159	57,5	12.255.511	48,0
Mitigation of impacts	Rent subsidy	subsidy	19.202.616	7,9	1.730.829	1,9
Mitigation of impacts	Extraordinary financial social assistance	income	21.722.419	-4,9	2.162.767	-8,8
Mitigation of impacts	Financial social assistance	income	250.328.620	2,9	20.001.723	-13,5

*Assistance and attendance allowance is not independent, it is granted along with income support or financial social assistance.

** Large family allowance is paid out once per year. The data for the last month is a reflection of the applications resulting from the changed number of children during the year, and can thus be very variable.

Right	I-X	Year-on-year growth (%) I-X 21/I-X 20	X	Year-on-year growth (%) X 21/X 20
FB Financial benefit	154.078.019	-25,8	12.733.320	-28,0
PU Contributions until retirement	393.957	-2,6	36.272	-2,2

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, December 2021

Table 5 Number of beneficiaries for social transfers by individual rights, 2021

Function	Right	Type of right	Average number I-XI	Year-on-year growth (%) I-XI 21/I-XI 20	Number in the month XI	Year-on-year growth (%) XI 21/XI 20
Welfare	Vignettes*	income	605	-0,3	-	-
Welfare	Foster care payment	service	811	-4,3	777	-6,3
Welfare	Social contribution payment (4 or more children)	right arising from insurance	928	-5,9	880	-7,7
Welfare	Parental allowance	income	2.888	6,5	2.727	-2,2
Welfare	Fund scholarships	income	7.594	1,7	6.935	-6,2
Welfare	Reduced working hours	right arising from insurance	13.272	-6,3	12.933	-3,4
Welfare	Birth allowance*	income	19.562	20,2	1.577	285,6
Welfare	Parental leave and benefit	right arising from insurance	21.317	-1,2	20.960	2,3
Welfare	Large family allowance*	income	32.269	1,5	79	-65,7
Welfare	State scholarship	income	54.074	-1,7	52.403	-3,3
Welfare	Kindergarten subsidy	subsidy	74.390	-0,2	74.729	-0,0
Welfare	Child benefit**	income	326.380	0,4	324.452	-0,4
Solidarity	Assistance and attendance allowance	income	463	4,2	457	-0,2
Solidarity	Home care assistance	service	575	-19,6	536	-15,6
Solidarity	Compensatory aid for loss of income	right arising from insurance	979	8,7	1.031	11,8
Solidarity	Personal assistance/communication benefit	service	1.519	5,8	1.553	4,7
Solidarity	Personal assistance	service	2.870	63,8	3.368	44,4
Solidarity	Bereavement payment*	income	2.989	-25,0	163	-68,3
Solidarity	Funeral expenses*	income	3.405	-23,9	169	-70,6
Solidarity	Exemption from payment of social service	subsidy	8.034	-5,3	8.100	-3,7
Solidarity	Child care allowance	income	8.401	5,9	8.519	6,1
Solidarity	Income support	income	23.361	4,3	23.075	0,1
Solidarity	Health insurance contribution	subsidy	51.886	3,3	44.667	-15,9
Solidarity	The right to have the difference to the full value of healthcare services covered	subsidy	64.639	3,5	56.845	-13,8
Mitigation of impacts	Extraordinary financial social assistance	income	9.826	-8,4	10.533	-12,7
Mitigation of impacts	Rent subsidy	subsidy	13.007	4,9	12.623	-1,7
Mitigation of impacts	Financial social assistance	income	100.853	2,2	87.360	-14,5

* The number of beneficiaries is calculated as a sum by months.
** The number of children is shown.

Right	Average monthly number of beneficiaries I-X	Year-on-year growth (%) I-XI 20/I-XI 19	Number of beneficiaries in month X	Year-on-year growth XI 20/XI 19 (%)
FB Financial benefit	19.412	-26,1	15.894	-31,3
PU Contributions until retirement	291	-1,7	283	2,5

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, December 2021

Table 6 The amounts of social transfers by rights, 2022, in EUR

Function	Right	Type of right	Total sum I-VIII	Year-on-year growth (%) I-VIII 22/I-VIII 21	Amount in the month VIII	Year-on-year growth (%) VIII 22/VIII 21
Welfare	Vignettes	income	54.560	0,6	-	-
Welfare	Social contribution payment (4 or more children)	right arising from insurance	2.279.984	-1,6	286.425	-0,5
Welfare	Foster care payment	service	3.998.650	6,4	495.395	5,4
Welfare	Birth allowance	income	4.415.326	-15,5	672.538	18,7
Welfare	Parental allowance	income	9.314.513	43,0	1.106.984	17,1
Welfare	Fund scholarships	income	11.482.454	-1,2	1.010.943	-7,7
Welfare	Large family allowance*	income	13.319.928	0,9	47.317	-50,0
Welfare	Reduced working hours	right arising from insurance	17.020.564	6,6	2.221.368	6,4
Welfare	State scholarship	income	52.009.437	4,2	7.077.881	11,5
Welfare	Child benefit	income	166.268.306	0,6	20.973.187	2,0
Welfare	Parental leave and benefit	right arising from insurance	220.055.720	8,5	29.119.753	5,7
Solidarity	Bereavement payment	income	722.725	-25,8	54.002	-36,4***
Solidarity	Assistance and attendance allowance**	income	775.102	2,1	98.219	2,9
Solidarity	Funeral expenses	income	1.492.690	-33,4	107.607	-41,1***
Solidarity	Personal assistance/communication benefit	service	1.976.173	9,0	252.547	9,5
Solidarity	Home care assistance	service	3.569.638	59,0	419.614	59,6
Solidarity	Compensatory aid for loss of income	right arising from insurance	8.478.796	48,0	1.081.768	18,8
Solidarity	Child care allowance	income	9.009.949	10,2	1.142.618	8,7
Solidarity	Income support	income	29.356.986	2,8	3.715.741	6,8
Solidarity	Exemption from payment of social service	subsidy	39.286.451	5,9	4.985.853	6,0
Solidarity	Personal assistance	service	98.537.316	45,0	-	-
Mitigation of impacts	Extraordinary financial social assistance	income	13.848.441	-11,8	1.290.833	1,9
Mitigation of impacts	Rent subsidy	subsidy	14.926.438	6,2	1.883.639	8,9
Mitigation of impacts	Financial social assistance	income	160.180.215	-15,6	19.060.696	-8,9

* Large family allowance is paid out once per year. The data for the last month is a reflection of the applications resulting from the changed number of children during the year, and can thus be very variable.

** Assistance and attendance allowance is not independent, it is granted along with income support or financial social assistance.

*** The data is not yet final, since this right can be claimed up until a year after a person's death.

Right	I-VII	Year-on-year growth (%) I-VII 22/I-VII 21	VII	Year-on-year growth (%) VII 22/VII 21
FB Financial benefit	94.333.555	-17,6	12.499.170	-9,2
PU Contributions until retirement	418.960	51,8	64.577	57,4

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2022

Table 7 Number of beneficiaries for social benefits, 2022

Function	Right	Type of right	Average number I-VIII	Year-on-year growth (%) I-VIII 22/I-VIII 21	Number in the month VIII	Year-on-year growth (%) VIII 22/VIII 21
Welfare	Vignettes*	income	496	0,6	-	-
Welfare	Foster care payment	service	796	-2,9	798	-2,0
Welfare	Social contribution payment (4 or more children)	right arising from insurance	884	-6,5	895	-5,2
Welfare	Parental allowance	income	3.005	3,7	2.776	-7,7
Welfare	Fund scholarships	income	8.482	1,3	7.040	0,5
Welfare	Birth allowance*	income	12.005	-19,2	1.811	14,0
Welfare	Reduced working hours	right arising from insurance	13.849	2,9	14.216	3,5
Welfare	Parental leave and benefit	right arising from insurance	21.337	0,3	23.451	0,0
Welfare	Large family allowance*	income	31.801	0,5	121	-54,2
Welfare	State scholarship	income	53.434	-2,6	54.499	-1,0
Welfare	Kindergarten subsidy	subsidy	74.754	0,5	72.671	0,4
Welfare	Child benefit**	income	326.986	0,0	326.703	-0,2
Solidarity	Assistance and attendance allowance	income	468	-0,0	470	-0,6
Solidarity	Home care assistance	service	477	-11,6	426	-15,3
Solidarity	Compensatory aid for loss of income	right arising from insurance	1.076	11,6	1.094	11,2
Solidarity	Personal assistance/communication benefit	service	1.588	5,2	1.605	4,4
Solidarity	Bereavement payment	income	1.753	-27,6	128	-39,3
Solidarity	Funeral expenses*	income	1.820	-34,9	128	-43,9
Solidarity	Personal assistance	service	3.751	39,9	-	-
Solidarity	Exemption from payment of social service	subsidy	7.966	0,6	7.894	-0,7
Solidarity	Child care allowance*	income	8.851	6,0	8.865	3,3
Solidarity	Income support	income	22.888	-2,5	22.993	0,4
Solidarity	Health insurance contribution	subsidy	42.293	-22,4	39.354	-15,5
Solidarity	The right to have the difference to the full value of healthcare services covered	subsidy	54.048	-19,9	51.073	-12,5
Mitigation of impacts	Extraordinary financial social assistance	income	8.271	-16,4	6.261	-8,6
Mitigation of impacts	Rent subsidy	subsidy	12.806	-2,6	12.547	-2,0
Mitigation of impacts	Financial social assistance	income	83.922	-20,6	78.777	-14,3
* The number of beneficiaries is calculated as a sum by months.						
** The number of children is shown.						
Right	I-VII	Year-on-year growth (%) I-VII 22/I-VII 21	VII	Year-on-year growth (%) VII 22/VII 21		
FB Financial benefit	15.816	-23,8	14.619	-14,5		
PU Contributions until retirement	406	40,4	421	37,6		

Source: MDDSZEM, Social transfers, September 2022

4. WHAT IS GOING ON BEHIND THE NUMBERS?

What do non-governmental organisations see when they deal with vulnerable people daily? Our attempt to sum up the main observations following the conversations with them can be found below.⁵ We need to stress that the main observations are interlinked, meaning that we have to speak about **combined poverty, which is a consequence of several factors**. This poverty is not adequately addressed by the state. Even though the state came to the assistance by one-time pay-outs for the alleviation of the effects of the (energy) crisis, the greater systemic shortcomings, through which these patterns of combined poverty are leaking out, are increasingly more chronic.

To give an example, with the transfer of income support from the social security scheme to the social assistance system the state drastically decreased the number of recipients of income support. Even today the potential beneficiaries are afraid to apply for income support, believing that they may lose their house or land. Besides, the calculation of the minimum living expenses (the last was published in 2022 (based on the costs in 2022 and the structure of expenses in 2018) is subjected to the pressures of the political debate about the »traps of poverty«, which results in the difference between the calculation and the amount approved by policy. In addition, the wages are not keeping up with the increasing monthly living expenses, which is primarily reflected in the increasing prices of market rents, which are outside of all public regulations. The increase in living expenses along with an epidemic of low wages is producing higher numbers of users of NGO services, who are patching up their family budgets with undeclared work.

At the same time, a too strong emphasis on the supervisory and administrative function of social protection on the one side and uncontrollable markets on the other (labour market, housing market) cause a great amount of distress to individuals, who are almost automatically stigmatised in vulnerable situations. Besides, it also brutally reveals all the shortcomings of the public system of assistance to victims of domestic violence. NGOs are reporting that the number of these victims is rising. Thus, they not only find themselves in the circle of violence but also in the circle of poverty.

The associations and the institutes working directly with vulnerable groups that we talked to are reporting the following:

- Among their user base there are more and more **poor persons in employment**, who receive a regular income from work, but it is too low. This can be especially observed in the recent hikes in living expenses such as housing expenses, rent, heating and food. In many instances, these individuals attempt to resolve the situation through additional undeclared work (Association of Friends of Youth Moste-Polje (AFY Moste-Polje), Slovenian Red Cross – Regional association Ljubljana (SRC RALJ), Association of Friends of Youth Slovenia (AFYS)).
- A very difficult situation for those who are **receiving a disability allowance**, which is very low (around 400 EUR) and does not enable a decent living (Mosaic, SRC RALJ).
- There have been many divorces in the past year, mainly because of the **consequences of domestic violence**. For example, among the weekly applications for help received by AFY Moste-Polje, half is the result of domestic violence. These are mostly women seeking to remove themselves from violence and more than 90% are mothers with children. A victim of intimate partner violence often has no adequate conditions: she has nowhere to go and she is unable to find a suitable housing solution immediately, all the while the rents are visibly rising. With removing themselves they encounter additional administrative problems since the income of women frequently drops as a result, which affects the chances of acquiring certain housing permits. There are also many mothers who were left alone with children, which belong to the first three years of primary education, meaning that the mothers are unable to accept employment other than in the morning shift. There are very few employment options only with a morning shift, especially when we are considering those fields of work, which only demand middle school education. Along with the initial poor financial and personal situations of women who are victims of domestic violence, SRC RALJ reports that they are regularly contacted by women's shelters seeking help for mothers who are victims of domestic violence.

⁵ The entire conclusions of individual NGOs are in the final part of the report.

- There are more and more **single-parent families living in bad economic circumstances**. The poverty of these families is not always a result of violence. It has been established that in many families in poverty illness is present, in both parents and children. These families spend a significant part of their income on additional therapies or medical costs, which are not covered by insurance since more and more medication is being white-listed. Their financial means are not enough to cover all of the expenses (reported by AFYS).
- Open **discrimination in access to (rental) housing**. Landlords are explicitly avoiding families (AFY Moste-Polje), foreigners (Institute Three and SRC RALJ), as well as individuals with social assistance benefits (Mosaic).
- **The number of homeless women** has been noticeably growing in the past year – 30% of all program visitors (Kings of the Street Association), which is very worrying.
- The period of the Covid epidemic has considerably **affected the mental health of individuals**. Mosaic is noting that the already poor condition of users has degraded further during this time. Basing their assessment on this fact combined with the accompanying fear of the future they, together with AFY Moste-Polje, are anticipating a rise in mental health issues.
- At Telephone TOM®, an anonymous telephone for children and youth, they have been witnessing significant **mental distress also in the case of children and youth**. The interruption of kindergarten and school life has for many resulted in a loss of contact with peers, loss of the possibility to acquire quality learning help, and loss of the possibility to remove themselves from families with dysfunctional patterns. The effect of the pandemic has also been recorded in questions received by Telephone TOM® from their users. The topic that prevailed in the period of the pandemic involved family, mental health and suicidal thoughts. Thus, the most common topics were »relationship with parents«, »violence in the family«, »relationships with peers«, »depression« and »suicidal thoughts« (AFYS)
- There are also more and more **older female users from (female) single households** with a very weak social network (SRC RALJ). In the case they live outside of city centres, one of the issues is also the access to daily services such as grocery stores (Mosaic). Material distress specific to smaller and rather remote places was heightened by the closing down of post offices, banks and cash machines, making the path to these services longer and more costly (Slovenian Federation of Pensioners' Organisations (SFPO)).
- **There are many debts on the account of paying the basic monthly living expenses**. Disconnections of electricity supply are getting more common (AFY Moste-Polje and AFYS). SRC RALJ and AFYS have also been noticing that many people approach them because of the rising prices, especially since the past winter when there were hikes in the prices of heating, gas and electricity. Individuals have already been sending applications for assistance in paying for firewood and heating oil.
- There are still many individuals who are **under-informed regarding the possibilities of assistance**. Individuals often don't know that they are eligible for some type of aid even when they are employed. They also often don't know about the humanitarian organisations that can aid them also in financial terms (AFY Moste-Polje and AFYS), or, they don't even know they are entitled to income support (Mosaic).
- When individuals find themselves in vulnerable situations many aspects depend on their **social network, which many of these individuals lack**. The Mosaic is emphasising the older persons who live alone in farmer's households in Goričko, Institute Three is reporting poor social networks of their users, while SRC RALJ is stressing the wider issue of a very impoverished informal network of aid in Ljubljana. AFY Moste-Polje and AFYS are also emphasising that most at risk regarding debts stemming from unpaid living expenses are those individuals who lack a sufficient social network or their primary family, from where they could borrow funds to avoid the worst outcomes. Or, they come from families with generational poverty.
- In the past year, humanitarian organisations have received fewer material and financial donations, while the needs remain the same and are expected to increase in the following winter (AFYS, SRC RALJ and AFY Moste-Polje)

KINGS OF THE STREET

- The number of people seeking aid from the NGO Kings of the Street is growing every year. Among them are also those who are not the primary targets of the program, i.e. refugees, the erased, foreign workers, individuals with mental health problems, Roma people, etc. The Association still witnesses a (generational) persistence of poverty; even in the case of individuals that may have been employed in the past year, but receive a minimum wage, still living beneath the at-risk-of-poverty threshold. Within their program of prevention of evictions, they are noticing that many families are in a worse social-economic situation than they were before the Covid-19 pandemic, even though many of them had improved their situation just before it.
- Since the prices of real estate have been steeply increasing in recent years, there is a serious shortage of accessible housing, leading to more people sleeping in the streets. In the past year, the Association has been recording an increasing trend of homeless women – 30% of all program visitors. Also in the context of their housing support program, they are noticing that the current situation concerning financially accessible housing has been the worst in the history of the Kings of the Street. The options for renting financially accessible accommodation in the housing market for a person whose only income is financial social assistance are alarmingly small. The available options for acquiring suitable accommodation from the state or municipal housing funds are far from satisfying the actual needs of the most vulnerable part of the population since their limited capacities result in a multi-year waiting period.
- They also encounters the Roma community in their work, observing that this is one of the most excluded and deprived groups of the population, which lives in poverty and has no chance to exit its circle. The young Roma have almost no chance of reaching independence – lack of education, limited employment options, financial dependence, the influence of tradition, etc.
- They are also noticing that vulnerable groups' diet is monotonous and unhealthy and that the food aid packages offered by humanitarian organisations are ungainly, simple and very inappropriate for making a healthy meal. The ingredients are mostly simple sugars and carbohydrates, which can contribute to different diseases, which the users face as a result of their lifestyle (diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, cholesterol, etc.)
- They also stresses that the life circumstances of individuals are getting more complex. As the most vulnerable persons, they recognize those with a combined set of problems intertwining addiction, (chronic) mental health issues and usually long-term social exclusion and homelessness. A big problem is also exclusion from primary health care since many of the users are battling chronic health issues. In the case of long-time drug users, the prominent issues are related to chronic and acute wounds or abscesses and to the need for regular changes of bandages – a service which is not very accessible for them in public health institutions. The long-term homeless individuals (and users of drugs) that deal with severe health issues and require health care and treatment, remain without proper assistance and mainly circle between health institutions and homelessness shelters not receiving decent and suitable care. But the most excluded are the individuals with mental health issues who also have addiction problems since they are left out of almost all rehabilitation (and social security) programs.
- The Kings of The Street emphasises that to systemically curb the growth of homelessness in Slovenia a change in housing policy is needed, i.e. a provision of suitable accommodation for the most vulnerable people by following the principle of *Housing first*. It is also necessary to reorganise primary health care to secure a sufficient number of general practitioners and to transfer services to the streets, where the users need them most. The necessity of interrelating health care and social services is an urgent debate. Changes in the field of employment are also necessary for Slovenia. Forms of employment need to be adjusted in a way that enables inclusion and employment maintenance to vulnerable groups, by which a decent living can be guaranteed. These groups need continuous and integral support with social inclusion and the stabilisation of life – specialised housing programs. The lack of these is especially noticeable in the context of housing the most vulnerable groups, where these programs would at least partially compensate for the unsuitable housing policy and prevent the growing poverty and exclusion.
- The Kings of The Street thus deems it necessary that the professional services start orienting themselves more towards fieldwork and community work, and that they develop support

programs which are aimed at an integrated treatment of the user and cooperation and interrelation of sectors. At the same time, these services should be more flexible, accessible and less limiting. There is room for improvement also in connecting housing policy with business, economy and social security since this is the only way to successfully tackle poverty.

INSTITUTE THREE, ŠKOFJA LOKA

- Institute Three (hereinafter 'the Institute') engages women who move to Škofja Loka and who have been living there for less than five years. The Institute provides them with classes in the Slovenian language, but also works in the direction of prevention of discrimination and breaking down stereotypes within the community in Škofja Loka.
- In the past year, they have been working on intercultural mediation. They have two intercultural mediators, one for the Albanian language and one for the Macedonian language. There is a great need for mediation in the Albanian language, which they also offer in the valleys (Selška and Poljanska valleys). The needs are immense. The problems do not exist only in the context of employment or PTA meetings, but also in acquiring an apartment, changing the paediatrician and simultaneous interpretation at the administrative unit. The Institute was able to obtain municipal funding for the two mediators through a contract of services. The mediators turn in regular reports, the contract is signed with the kindergarten and they are paid by the hour. Even though the funds are very small, there is a danger that this setting is cancelled at any time. They would like for the mediators to be employed or that there would be more of them. They are also facing a lack of systematically organised training for intercultural mediators. The mediators have undergone the National Vocational Qualifications (which does not need renewal once it is passed). Here, ethics is a major problem: the mediator is prohibited to let other people know she is a mediator; she has to interpret without including her own opinion. There is also a need for Ukrainian and Macedonian languages.
- Regarding access to employment, it seems that those women who speak Slovenian at a proficient level of communication can find employment immediately – even regular employment under contract in bigger companies such as Mecator or Spar. However, those who do not speak Slovenian or are illiterate, are involved in undeclared work. This is very bad, the Institute constantly reminds them that this is not okay. For example, there was a case of a bakery using undeclared work and the Financial Administration (FURS) closed it down; they also didn't pay rent. Concerning the knowledge of the Slovenian language, the Institute is emphasising that the People's University Škofja Loka announced they are not going to offer any courses in 2023. Courses are offered in Kranj, probably also in Jesenice.
- At the Institute they are also noticing a rise in living expenses and rents, people are worried about the winter. In the past, it was possible to live off the husband's wage who, for example, drove a truck, but now it seems that it will be impossible to pay the bills with only one paycheck. Higher living expenses will probably also cause more undeclared work.
- They are also noticing that the women don't have an adequate social network which could, for example, take care of the children in the afternoon. As a consequence women are limited to morning work, i.e. first shift. In the past year, women were able to find a job faster.
- Some Ukrainians also came to Škofja Loka in the past year. They also came with families. The schools were ready, there were no serious problems and the children were immediately accepted into the school.
- The Institute is also stressing the administrative complications for foreigners at the Administrative Unit. The Unit sometimes extends only the residence permit of the parents, while declining the children's saying that not enough funds are available. When the Institute inquired about it for the first time, the adviser told them that the problem was the census, but in three months the census was not a problem anymore.
- They are also noticing discrimination when women attempt to rent apartments. The landlords are not even hiding their reasons, but are explicit about wanting to rent it to Slovenians. There was a case where they were helping two Ukrainians to find an apartment. Now they will maybe get accommodation at some lady's place, but before that, they had to make several calls. People had different responses, such as: »where will they get the money, will they receive support, is a contract necessary, are we sure that they will not return home, what do they do, what is their

job.« In short, very uncomfortable questions. Regarding the Ukrainians, a general response is that »we will not help them«, even when they are offering a half-year advance payment. The owners say that they'll rather wait for »locals«.

MOSAIC

- NGO Mosaic runs a social assistance program in the Mura region. It receives most of its financial means by a contract with the Ministry of Labour, but at least 20% of these means have to be from other sources. Starting with this year the contract is for seven years. They mostly deal with potentially homeless persons. Different situations are in question such as restraining orders, violence, time after imprisonment, debt and the subsequent threat of eviction. Involved in the program are also individuals with very low monthly income, those who do not receive income support and potentially do not even know they could claim it, but also individuals who live in poor housing conditions.
- Among the clients of the society, there are a couple of young families regarding which they highlight »generational poverty«. Or it could be a disability, or the Roma population, where employment is hard to find. They also mention individuals who receive disability allowance, which is very low (about 400 EUR). These individuals also receive compensation for the difference to financial social assistance (421 EUR).
- Most clients of the Society live outside of city centres, around Goričko, in smaller villages that are far away and lack good transport links, while also lacking post offices, banks, general stores and department stores, where they could do their monthly shopping for less.
- The clients are 55 years old on average, but most are under 57 years old. Many of them are retired (with disability) and many receive income support because they are not employable anymore. Many clients have been living in poverty for years, most are part of the rural population, and when they are met with disease, old age and when the young leave, poverty only grows. Plenty of clients are severely ill. Long-term clients of the program are mostly single, without a social network and often in debt because of their low income. They frequently do not have any expenses with rent, since they live on their own property, and they also often grow a part of their own food. Some are also eligible for one inexpensive hot meal through EHO support or a free meal with Diocesan Karitas.
- In operational terms, the Society is strongly connected with local communities, for example, with the directors of communal administrations. They closely collaborate with social work centres, where they frequently cooperate with professionals (psychiatrists, social and health workers) in establishing an aid plan for individuals. The social network of clients is also often contacted in order to establish possible support options. They help clients with filing documentation, as well as with shopping for groceries and provide them with adequate information.
- The Society especially emphasises that the time of the epidemic severely affected the mental health of people. They observe that the already bad health condition of their clients has gotten even worse. Basing their assessment on this fact combined with the accompanying fear of the future they are anticipating a rise in mental health issues. Furthermore, they call attention to the fact that indebtedness will rise since the chances of regularly paying debts will decrease with the rise of living expenses.
- The Society notes that clients need to be supported comprehensively and consistently, notwithstanding the collaboration between NGOs and public institutions. An example they offer was when Karitas provided a client with a bathroom, but then he had to be taught how to use it and how to take care of his hygiene and cleanliness at home.

ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF YOUTH MOSTE-POLJE

- The Association of Friends of Youth Moste-Polje (hereinafter AFY Moste-Polje) runs the program Good People Chain. It is a humanitarian program intended to support families with underaged dependent children. The suggestion for including a family in the program is co-written by several different professional institutions such as social work centres, school specialist services, safe houses and women's shelters.

- An interview with the family is carried out before inclusion. Together with the family, the professional caseworkers of AFY Moste-Polje go over the issues and the reasons why the family is seeking assistance. Goals and timelines for reaching solutions are then set.
- Since 2019 AFY Moste-Polje has been registering more families with one or both parents employed joining the program. Thus from all the participants in the Good People Chain program, more than 70% of families are those with working parents. They have been noticing that these families turn to them mostly only when it is already too late and they are already in debt that they are unable to pay by themselves, which leads to admonitions and debt enforcement. Many say that they are searching for extra work besides their regular jobs such as cleaning or waiting. Families with employed members especially feel deeply responsible for the situation and practically »incompetent«. There are also several of those who in such situations decline therapeutic support offered by AFY Moste-Polje, because of stigma.
- Recently most debts result from paying basic monthly living expenses. There are still too many disconnections of the electricity supply. At AFY Moste-Polje they have been noticing for a while already that people tend to become »paralysed« when they are faced with distress, not being able to find an adequate solution. At the biggest risk are those who do not have a sufficient social network or their primary family, where they could borrow funds to avoid the worst outcomes. In many instances, people do not even know that they can claim benefits from public funds even when they are employed, or they are unaware of the humanitarian organisations which can also support them financially. It is also important to note that all of these families feel embarrassed finding themselves in such positions and needing this type of assistance.
- AFY Moste-Polje is also noting that divorce has been very frequent in the past year, mostly as a result of domestic violence. This trend is steadily increasing. Among the applications for help AFY Moste-Polje receives weekly, half is a result of domestic violence. These are mostly women seeking to remove themselves from violence and more than 90% are mothers with children. These are also very diverse family profiles – immigrants, locals, highly educated, without primary education, etc. On average these are people older than 30 years. A growing number of cases are women who cannot leave a violent relationship because of their economic instability, while they are also scared of being blackmailed by their partners in order to take their children based on their economic instability.
- AFY Moste-Polje is also stressing the problem that safe houses and women's shelters do not welcome boys older than 13 years. In many cases, this means that the child remains with the violent parent. Sometimes mothers say that their partner has not been violent against the child, but »only« against them. In the words of an AFY Moste-Polje representative, the victims of violence practically have no conditions to move away from the violent partner. Despite this, there were a lot of victim removals in the past year. But instead of removing the one who is causing the violence, it is the victim that moves, even though she often lacks all conditions and has nowhere to go, unable to find suitable accommodation overnight. With removing themselves they encounter additional administrative problems since the income of women frequently drops as a result, which affects the chances of acquiring certain housing permits.
- The AFY Moste-Polje representative also notes that landlords are strongly avoiding families. For example, a mother told them that after a breakup with her partner, she stayed with her child in their rented apartment, but then during the same month, the owner told her that he is selling it. The woman moved out, which resulted in additional costs. But later she found out that there are new tenants in the apartment she moved out from. AFY Moste-Polje has been generally seeing many people moving out of rented apartments because the owners tell them they are selling the properties. It is not clear how many of these arguments of »selling« are fictitious.
- Among the unemployed who are included in the program Good People Chain, there are many people with health issues. There are also many mothers who were left alone with their children, who are in the first three years of primary education, meaning that the mothers are unable to accept any employment but one in the morning shift. There are very few employment options with only a morning shift, especially when we are considering those fields of work, which only require middle school education. Many women work as shopkeepers, also in manufacturing, but this is mostly shift work.

- With rising living costs we can anticipate that the number of applicants for social support will rise. We need to keep in mind that the general social pressure and stigmatisation of the beneficiaries of support are putting them in additional distress and pushing them toward attempting to solve their situations in problematic ways, for example, by taking on usurious credits. The representative predicts that this could become a much more common thing.
- If we think of the deterioration of mental health during Covid-19, AFY Moste-Polje expects that this deterioration will only continue with the current trends. At the same time, the waiting time for psychiatrists and clinical psychologists is very long and there is trouble with personal physicians. These issues are chronic. Also, donations in the recent year have significantly decreased, while the needs are increasing.

SLOVENIAN RED CROSS – REGIONAL ASSOCIATION LJUBLJANA

- Among those who apply for assistance with bill payment at the Slovenian Red Cross, Regional Association Ljubljana (hereinafter: SRC RALJ), there are still many older people, especially female single households, followed by poor persons in employment and the employed. There are also a lot of disability pensioners with very low pensions. Among these, there are also some young individuals and several people with mental health issues, which is, in the words of the SRC RALJ representative, a consequence of their living conditions. Among the applicants, there are also many long-term unemployed as a consequence of health issues. SRC RALJ is also pointing out those who have to pay rent besides everything else, and those who receive rent subsidies, but have a hard time financially surviving the month. They especially emphasise single-parent households with a lower educational level. Frequently these are mothers who can hardly land a single-shift job, which causes severe problems regarding childcare. Furthermore, there are foreigners, for example (bigger) families from the Balkan countries, but also Ukraine, that lack a good social network and consequently have nowhere to turn; problems in dealing with the public administration are also an issue. When registering with the police, Ukrainian families receive information on where to find support (in food, clothes, and value card for groceries).
- SRC RALJ also receives requests for aid to users who are sent their way from other NGOs and social work centres. For example, the users of Kings of the Street turn to them for aid regarding the effects of evictions; and then there are the users from women's shelters, where mothers with children find refuge after running from domestic violence.
- Regarding the recent trends, SRC RALJ notices that many individuals are seeking help because of the price rises, especially since last winter when the costs of heating, gas and electricity went up. People are already sending requests for payment of firewood and heating oil. These people are first offered material aid, while financial aid is limited by the received donations since the number of requests greatly outweighs the means available. In many cases, this results in a combination of aid. People receive financial social assistance and a part of aid at SRC RALJ or also at the Municipality of Ljubljana. Individuals have to practically combine the benefits to get through the winter.
- At SRC RALJ they also run a program for keeping track of individuals. Those with a poor social network are supported by a network of volunteers. There were several cases in the past year where it was established that »the erased« live in trailers or sheds. Supposedly there are more instances of this. When in autumn the owners of gardens put their tools back into their sheds, they let people spend the winter there. Among these individuals, some have no valid identity documents or health insurance.
- In the latter case, SRC RALJ sends them to the Free healthcare clinic. This clinic is also visited by people from Ukraine. There was a case of an oncological patient whose treatment was not covered by his insurance because it supposedly wasn't a case of »urgent medical assistance«. They also tend to several users from Balkan countries, who are on long-term sick leave and accordingly have very low income but remain in Slovenia for medical care.
- In the SRC RALJ humanitarian centre, they have noticed an increase in the number of retired persons. Regarding the »type« of families: if there are between 160 and 170 daily visitors, 100 are one-person, or at most two-person families. There are about 10.000 registered users of SRC RALJ, the circle of aid turns around in about six weeks. It has been noticed that many of their

users are unable to find employment after Covid-19, employers rather seek out students. The women who previously worked in bar and restaurant service and are over 40 years old say that nobody wants to employ them. There are also instances of female workers who were included in the program of community work for a year, but the employer didn't hire them afterwards. The employer then applied for community work again and the workers again ended up in the same job. There are also more families among users in which one of the parents lost their job or where both parents receive only a minimum income.

- SRC RALJ is especially emphasising the situation of those who are eligible for an apartment from the state housing fund but need to pay a deposit of six monthly rents, which can add up to several thousand euros. Besides, these apartments are empty and need to be furnished, resulting in people borrowing money to cover the expenses. Ukrainians have told them they have huge problems with accessing apartments for rent, which SRC RALJ has already seen in the case of refugees from Syria and neighbouring countries.
- The knowledge of the Slovenian language can also be a limiting element. There was a case of a boy from Syria who was working at the Slovenian Post, also working 12-hour shifts, but then a condition of knowledge of the Slovenian language was introduced for his job. The boy couldn't afford a language course and lost his job. SRC RALJ has employed two intercultural mediators on one of the projects.
- SRC RALJ is also visited by women who are victims of domestic violence, which is often accompanied by economic dependence. There was a case of a woman with a violent partner who had no income of her own, while in another case a woman even had no bank account.
- Located on the outskirts of Ljubljana there is still a broader informal social network of people who inform SRC RALJ about individuals living in severe poverty. Meanwhile, in Ljubljana itself, there is much less of it. Last year there was a case of an elderly woman, where a volunteer in one of the neighbourhoods realised that the woman had not been seen for some days. The police were then called and they established that the woman had died two days ago.
- SRC RALJ was running a program of study help and psychosocial support for families, a one-year project as a response to the Covid-19 epidemic. They mention a mother who was relieved from a part of her work as a consequence.
- SRC RALJ expects very soon a rise in the number of requests for financial aid as an effect of rising costs of heating. This will be followed by a »spring wave« (reconciliation bill). They note that the quantity of food will decrease in the humanitarian centre at the same time. The reason is the price rises of food, while they have the same amount available from the EU mechanism. The aid amount thus remains the same, while the prices go up, resulting in less food available. They are also noticing a lesser inflow of donations.

ASSOCIATION OF FRIENDS OF YOUTH SLOVENIA

- The number of families seeking help from the Association of Friends of Youth Slovenia (AFYS) is growing by the year. Their services are being used by refugee families, families of foreign workers, families of children with special needs, etc.
- AFYS runs various humanitarian programs (among them Family assistance, Full school bag, and Sapra mouse fund) collected under the name One heart. The program supports families with underaged dependent children or with children with special needs. The application for inclusion into the program is written by parents or guardians. With the application, they have to enclose an opinion of a certain professional institution such as social work centres, school specialist services, safe houses, or women's shelters.
- AFYS notices that the structure of families in need of financial and material support changed in recent years. They are being contacted by families where both parents are employed, but still unable to cover all the expenses with their minimum wages. Most of the requests come from single-parent families and families with sick children. The vicious circle of poverty is very common in families, where long-term sickness of parents or children is present. This situation is related to unemployment, medical expenses, purchases of special accessories or equipment, child care, covering the expenses of medicine not covered by insurance. They are noticing that more and more medicine for children is being whitelisted.

- AFYS is noticing that families are contacting them too late. The array of debts is usually a consequence of the inability to pay basic living expenses (electricity, rent, school activities, etc.). In many cases help is needed when, for example, washing machines are broken, they don't have heating. Schooling of children is becoming more expensive, problems include expensive workbooks, very specific (more costly) school requisites (like notebooks, calculators, and pencils of a certain brand), but also rising food prices (if the government does not succeed with the intervention law, which would keep the cost of school meals at the level of the previous year). The costs of middle school are even greater (purchasing the special requisites). They are emphasising that we should not forget the parents (usually mothers), who were left alone with all the expenses, not only because of violence but also because of consensual separations. They are pleased with the change of the Public Guarantee, Maintenance and Disability Fund of the Republic of Slovenia Act, which will make the procedure of claiming alimony for single-parent families less complicated in autumn.
- In the recent period, they are also receiving more requests from families with the status of foreigners in Slovenia, but this is in most cases a large family with an employed father and an unemployed mother. Including these families in everyday life is very hard.
- They are afraid that the rising prices of food, energy and rents will cause an increase in requests from families in distress.
- AFYS draws attention to the decline of the mental health of children and youth in Slovenia during the period of the pandemic and after. Telephone TOM[®] – the only anonymous telephone for children and youth in Slovenia – has recorded a significant deterioration of the mental health of children and youth at the time. The interruption of kindergarten and school life has for many resulted in a loss of contact with peers, which is their developmental need. It also meant the loss of the possibility to acquire quality learning help, the loss of the possibility to remove themselves from families with dysfunctional patterns. School and after-school activities are also a definitive protective factor for the mental and physical health of children, which was interrupted. The effect of the pandemic has also been recorded in questions received by Telephone TOM[®] from their users. The topics that prevailed in the years before the epidemic were relationships with peers, love, sexuality, body development and school. These have stepped into the background and the centre was taken by themes that involve family, mental health and suicidal thoughts. Thus, the most common topics were »relationship with parents«, »violence in the family«, »relationships with peers«, »depression« and »suicidal thoughts«. Fortunately, with the normalisation of social life the previous themes, common for children and youth, are slowly returning. However, there are still many contacts related to psychic distress. All the while people are dealing with very long waiting lines in the health system. The lack of pedopsychiatrists, clinical psychologists and paediatricians is unbearable.
- AFYS is also emphasising that we need to take into account that future inconvenient conditions in Slovenia can cause great problems in collecting donations and consequently provide fewer possibilities to help all the families who turn to them. In the past year, humanitarian organisations got fewer material and financial donations, while needs are the same and we can expect them to rise in the coming winter. Hence, these organisations are also in distress in terms of being unsure if they'll be able to help or if will they need to reduce their work. Everything is getting more expensive, while the available means remain the same.

SLOVENIAN FEDERATION OF PENSIONERS' ORGANISATIONS

- Slovenian Federation of Pensioners' Associations (SFPA) runs a public social security program Elders for Elders. Since 2004 the program has offered volunteer support all over Slovenia. The bulk of its financial means is guaranteed by a 7-year contract with MDDSZEM, while a smaller part comes from the Foundation of disability and humanitarian organisations (FDHO), Municipality Ljubljana (MOL), donors and sponsors.
- The program's users are those individuals over 69 years old, who benefit from volunteer aid, which enables them to stay in their local environment even when they are unable to attend to daily chores and take care of themselves. Even though most elder people want to remain independent as long as possible, there are also those who for different reasons want to live in a

social care institution, but remain at home, because they do not want to financially burden their family, but their income prevents them from going into a care home.

- At the end of 2021 around 200.000 elder people were included in the program, among which 145.000 received visits from volunteers. The volunteers gave support to 14.888 individuals, which received 50.637 different forms of support through the pensioners' organisations, while a little more than 2.200 were organised with the help of other organisations such as the institutes for home help, humanitarian organisations (Karitas, EHO support, SRC, Civil Protection Service, social work centres, community nursing service, local community).
- The data from SFPA indicate that the material situation of the elderly is worsening. Some numbers for illustration: 19% of all the included elder people report that their income does not guarantee their survival, more than 40% do not want to even speak about their material distress; if they would need payable assistance, 45% of users could not afford it or they could only pay it in part; SFPA volunteers on the ground stumble upon cases where users don't have hot water, toilets or bathrooms in their apartments (there is 9–12% of such cases, depending on the region); there is slight growth in the percentage of those who can hardly cover their monthly expenses or cannot at all, but don't seek any help and don't receive any from their families; 7% of interviewed elder people only enjoy two meals per day; 18% said that nobody helps them when they find themselves in distress and only 5% said that they are helped by public service and NGOs.
- Material deprivation, based on the low income of the elder, also causes digital poverty, which further impoverishes them because of limited access to services. Only about 20% regularly use IT, and about 13% use it occasionally. 52% of the elder don't have the conditions to use technology, because they don't know it, can't afford or don't want to buy electronic devices, they don't trust it or are unable to use it, and it is inaccessible to them because they live in areas with bad mobile network coverage. This is also a reason they are materially deprived, since they, for example, have limited access to less expensive purchases (special offers, discounts, coupons), they are unable to use applications that measure the status of the counter of gas and electricity, they are paying a flat rate the reconciliation bills for energy at the beginning of the year push them into financial distress that they may not be able to handle.
- Considerable material inequality exists among the elderly who live in urban centres and those who live in the countryside. But especially there is a great disproportion between regions – Mura, Drava, Lower and Central Sava regions have much bigger shares of those elderly who cannot secure their financial security.
- Material distress specific to smaller and rather remote places is heightened by the closing down of post offices, banks and cash machines, making the path to these services longer and more costly (for example, since there is no free public transport for the elder, they need to rely on their neighbours, but they feel obliged to pay for gas and offer a reward for the help).