

1. The situation of older persons in Slovakia

Combating poverty and social exclusion is one of the main challenges facing individual EU states in the development of social security policy. This has been confirmed by the new Europe 2020 Strategy, in which the issue of effective social protection provides one of the headline targets. Specifically, as regards combating poverty and social exclusion, the Europe 2020 Strategy has laid down the ambitious target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty by the end of the decade.

With reference to the objectives of the above strategy, in its National strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion the Slovak Republic has set itself the following national objective with regard to the elimination of poverty and social exclusion: “Lift at least 170 000 people out of the risk of poverty and exclusion by 2020”. Key measures developed to achieve this objective are included in the National reform programme of the Slovak Republic 2011–2014.

Older people in general are one of the groups most at risk of poverty and social exclusion (in particular older people living alone). Advanced age is a major factor contributing to a high risk of poverty and social exclusion. Although the measures proposed in the above reform programme are not aimed exclusively at resolving the problems of older people, their implementation will have a large effect on them too and they are an important target group for the proposed measures.

The International plan of action on aging and the commitments resulting from it constitute another major document supporting the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy as regards social protection.

The issue of the protection of older people through their own activities and initiatives was highlighted by the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion 2010.

2. Method for the presentation of information

The information presented in this document was prepared by the specialist units of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (MLSAF SR – Section of Social and Family Policy, Section of Labour, Section of Social Insurance and Pension Savings, Analytical Centre, Department of Foreign Relations and Protocol), the Combined Secretariat for the Committees and the Committee for Seniors of the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for human rights, national minorities and gender equality.

Selected information, as noted in the text below, was taken from documents submitted by other central state administration bodies in Slovakia.

Relevant legislation of the Slovak Republic is also cited for each commitment under the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

3. Commitments under the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

Commitment No 1

The issue of ageing is mainstreamed in, amongst other places, the new long-term objectives for state family policy because in current socio-economic conditions it is necessary

to deal with the demographic changes resulting from the ageing of the population and their consequences. Society must be prepared for an increase in the proportion of older people and must also find ways to reach out to young people to motivate them to start a family and bring up children. The problem of ageing is also an integral part of policies for combating poverty and social exclusion.

In Slovakia the main source of legislation on social assistance for individuals with a severe disability (including older people with a severe disability) is Act No 447/2008 Z.z. on cash benefits to compensate severe disability and on the amendment of certain acts, as amended. The rights established by the Act on cash benefits to compensate severe disability are guaranteed for all in accordance with the rules for equal treatment laid down by Act No 365/2004 Z.z. on equal treatment in certain areas and on protection against discrimination and on the amendment of certain acts (the Anti-discrimination Act).

At the level of the ministry there is the Combined Secretariat for the Committees, within which has been established a Committee for people with disabilities, which is a permanent specialist body for the rights of persons with disabilities reporting to the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for human rights, national minorities and gender equality. Part of the Committee for persons with disabilities is a chamber made up of members of the committee representing non-governmental organisations working for the rights of persons with disabilities. Through this committee natural persons can express their opinions and their needs resulting from their disabilities and can submit any responses to the act on cash benefits to compensate severe disability.

The problem of ageing is also addressed, indirectly, in Act No 448/2008 Z.z. on social services and on the amendment of Act No 455/1991 Zb on trade licensing (the Trade Licensing Act), as amended, as amended by Act No 317/2009 Z.z., which came into effect on 01.01.2009 introducing a new method for the provision of social services.

The objective of the social services act is to support the social inclusion of citizens and to satisfy the social needs of persons in unfavourable social situations. Social services focus mainly on preventing the occurrence of unfavourable social situations, resolving unfavourable social situations or mitigating unfavourable social situations for natural persons, families or communities, preserving, restoring or developing the ability of natural persons to lead an autonomous life and supporting their integration into society, preventing social exclusion and resolving crises in the social situation of natural persons and their families.

The act divides social services into several groups according to the character of the unfavourable social situation or the target group that they are intended for. The groups are social services intended to provide for essential living conditions, social services supporting families with children, social services for natural persons with a severe disability or unfavourable health conditions or for natural persons who have reached retirement age, social services making use of telecommunications technologies and auxiliary services.

Under the act, social services are provided through specialist, care giving and other activities that a provider is obliged to provide or arrange if such activities are listed for the relevant services. A provider may also carry out other activities than those defined in the act if they increase the quality of social services. In general terms social services can be described as services in the public interest and are provided on a non-profit basis, although the act permits the provision of social services under a trade licence or as a business activity.

The social services act regulates a broad spectrum of social services intended for persons with disabilities or older people whose objective is to support independent living and integration into society. The basic duties of a social services provider laid down in Section 7 also include cooperating with families, municipalities and communities in creating conditions permitting the recipients of institutionally-provided social services in permanent residential facilities to return to a natural family or community environment, giving priority to services provided in the community, in day centres or on a weekly residential basis.

Commitment No 2

The aim of the Act on cash benefit to compensate severe disability is to maintain, restore and develop the ability of natural persons and their families to lead an independent life, to create conditions supporting the integration of natural persons and their families into society with their active participation in this process and to eliminate or mitigate the social consequences of severe disability. The cash benefits that significantly assist an autonomous and independent life for natural persons with a severe disability (including older persons with a severe disability) include:

Cash allowance for personal assistance – intended to support independence, decision-making and participation in work, education and leisure activities and to provide relief for family members. It cannot be provided to an applicant over 65 years of age unless the cash benefit was granted to the applicant in the period before he or she reached 65 years of age.

Cash allowance for the purchase of aids, cash allowance for training in the use of aids, cash allowance for the adjustment of aids – intended for the acquisition of compensatory aids (including guide dogs) and for training that may be necessary in the use of aids and for the adjustment of aids according to meet the individual needs of a natural person with a severe disability.

Cash allowance for the repair of aids – provided for the repair of non-functional aids and surgical operations or major veterinary treatment for guide dogs.

Cash allowance for the purchase of lifting equipment – used to purchase lifting equipment including any necessary accessories, for installation and for the performance of any necessary building work relating to the installation of the equipment.

Cash allowance for the purchase of a car – the purpose of this benefit is to provide for the regular transport of a person with a severe disability who is in employment or education or who attends a social services facility. This cash benefit is not provided to persons aged 65 years or over.

Cash allowance for the modification of a car – intended to cover costs related to the modification of a car for the individual needs of a natural person with a severe disability, i.e. modifications allowing the person to drive or use the car, e.g. without using pedals.

Cash allowance for transport – this benefit is intended to compensate for the cost of transport provided by a taxi service, municipality or a registered subject under the Social Services Act.

Cash allowance for the modification of an apartment, cash benefit for the modification of a house and cash benefit for the modification of a garage - provided in order to ensure access and to increase the ability of natural person with a severe disability to move freely, to orientate themselves, to communicate and to provide for their own needs.

Cash allowance to compensate increased expenditures – these cash benefits can be used to compensate the costs of special diets, costs associated with hygiene or wear and tear

to clothes, bedding, footwear and furniture, costs relating to car use and costs relating to care for a guide dog.

Cash allowance for care giving – the purpose of this benefit is to provide assistance to a natural person with a severe disability who is dependent on a care giver for self-care, care for the household and engagement in social activities, and to provide income for the care giver. The cash benefit for caring is the only benefit that is not paid to a natural person with a severe disability but to the care giver. This instrument is often used to provide assistance to older natural persons with a severe disability, who usually receive care from family members. No upper age limit is set for care givers under this measure. If there are doubts about the claimant's ability to give care due to the disadvantages resulting from advanced age or unfavourable health condition, a competent authority has the right to assess the care giver's mental and physical ability to give care in order to ensure that the natural person with a severe disability receives assistance of the necessary extent and quality.

Under Act No 448/2008 Z.z. on social services and on the amendment of Act No 455/1991 Zb on trade licensing (the Trade Licensing Act), as amended, recipients of social services in institutions have the right to participate in determining living conditions in such facilities through the elected representatives of recipients. The right to participate in determining living conditions includes the participation of elected representatives in determining rules for residents, in resolving issues relating to the conditions and the quality of the provision of social services and the selection of leisure activities. In the case of recipients who are children, they have the right to participate in the determination of living conditions in social services facilities in person or through their legal representatives.

One of the forms in which social services are provided under the Social Services Act is through day centres. Those eligible to receive services in such facilities include, amongst others, people who have reached retirement age or grandparents with grandchildren. These facilities also provide opportunities for people to pursue their interests through various lectures, education activities, courses and recreational activities.

Commitment No 3

In the Slovak Republic the system of social protection (for individuals, families and their members) operates mainly through **instruments for assistance in material need** (Act No 599/2003 Z.z. on assistance in material need and on the amendment of certain acts). Under Article 39(2) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, everyone who is in material need is entitled to provision of basic requirements of life – the above act therefore implements the relevant constitutional guarantee for every citizen. Under the act on assistance in material need the basic requirements of life are defined as one warm meal per day, necessary clothing and shelter.

The system of assistance in material need supplements citizens' incomes to enable them to provide for the basic requirements of life. Material need is defined as a situation in which the income of a citizen and the persons assessed together with him or her is less than the subsistence minimum and the citizen and persons jointly assessed with them cannot obtain or increase their income for themselves. The system of assistance in material need provides not only basic assistance in material need but also specific allowances for health care, housing, an allowance to promote the activation of citizens in material need and protective benefit. A positive feature of the above system is that assistance in material need provided under it also provides for life situations in which citizens in material need cannot secure

income through their own work due to their age, incapacity for work or the need to provide twenty-four hour care for a citizen or child deemed to have a severe disability.

Development of the number of recipients of assistance in material need and supplementary benefit allowances with jointly assessed person, by age and gender

Age	2007			2008			2009			2010		
	Female	Male	TOTAL	Female	Male	TOTAL	Female	Male	TOTAL	Female	Male	TOTAL
0 – 4	10 140	10 809	20 949	7 622	8 061	15 683	11 401	11 906	23 307	12 796	13 249	26 045
5 – 9	15 342	16 038	31 380	12 291	13 046	25 337	16 093	16 973	33 066	17 300	18 136	35 436
10 – 14	15 343	15 935	31 278	12 830	13 310	26 140	16 488	17 150	33 638	17 844	18 686	36 530
15 – 19	13 469	14 206	27 675	10 834	11 707	22 541	13 722	15 044	28 766	14 391	15 638	30 029
20 – 24	9 322	8 644	17 966	6 818	6 244	13 062	9 427	9 142	18 569	10 449	10 387	20 836
25 – 29	12 485	11 284	23 769	10 246	8 914	19 160	14 470	14 989	29 459	15 752	16 344	32 096
30 – 34	12 733	11 760	24 493	10 379	9 512	19 891	13 816	14 403	28 219	14 615	15 628	30 243
35 – 39	11 047	10 788	21 835	9 334	9 086	18 420	12 549	13 098	25 647	13 722	14 577	28 299
40 – 44	11 100	12 111	23 211	9 223	9 966	19 189	11 528	13 070	24 598	12 204	13 732	25 936
45 – 49	11 002	13 257	24 259	9 372	10 964	20 336	11 544	14 184	25 728	12 310	14 976	27 286
50 – 54	11 159	13 317	24 476	9 445	11 536	20 981	11 223	14 504	25 727	11 937	15 274	27 211
55 – 59	7 398	10 050	17 448	6 805	9 088	15 893	7 974	11 962	19 936	9 017	13 192	22 209
60 and over	43 257	15 537	58 794	36 699	12 943	49 642	26 766	8 739	35 505	24 994	8 689	33 683
TOTAL	183 797	163 736	347 533	151 898	134 377	286 275	177 001	175 164	352 165	187 331	188 508	375 839

Commitment No 4

The rights established by the **Social Services Act**, including the right to the provision of social services are guaranteed for all in accordance with the rules for equal treatment laid down by Act No 365/2004 Z.z. on equal treatment in certain areas and on protection against discrimination and on the amendment of certain acts (the Anti-discrimination Act).

With regard to legislative protection of citizens in the provision of social services, since the decentralisation of social services decisions on whether a citizen is dependent on social services are made by municipalities and self-governing regions according to the competences defined in the Social Services Act. Supervision of compliance with legislation and other generally applicable regulations by public administration authorities is performed by the prosecution service in accordance with Act No 153/2001 Z.z. on the prosecution service, as amended. If a citizen believes that the law has been violated in certain proceedings or by a particular decision, they have the possibility to file a complaint with the prosecution service under Section 31 and following of Act No 153/2001 Z.z. on the prosecution service, as amended, for the investigation of the lawfulness of a decision relating to the provision of care in an old people's home.

If a citizen is found to be dependent on social services by decision of a municipality or self-governing region, the municipality or self-governing region is obliged to provide social services or arrange for them to be provided by a public or non-public provider of social services.

The Social Services Act also provides legislative protection for a citizen's income and property in relation to payments for the provision of social services. Citizens are obliged to

pay a fee for the provision of social services according to their income and assets and rules determine what can be deemed income and assets for the purposes of determining the fee for social services and what cannot. A public provider of social services and non-public provider of social services that provides social services on a non-profit basis can set a fee for social services at most at the level of the economically justified costs incurred in providing the social services.

In the case of social services in the public interest provided by a public provider or a non-public provider which are arranged by a municipality or self-governing region, the affordability of services for recipients is guaranteed by the law, which establishes legal protection of citizens against paying fees for social services that are out of proportion to their income or assets. This takes the form of a guarantee of a minimum level of income after the payment of social service fees, which is linked to the subsistence minimum and is adjusted every year. This guaranteed minimum level of income after the payment of social service fees is determined according to the type of service provided and its extent. This means that if a client's income is not enough to pay the full fee, they will pay nothing or only a part of the fee so that after payment of fees they retain a set percentage or multiple of the subsistence minimum. In the case of a community care service, the amount retained is 1.3 times the subsistence minimum, in the case of day care in a facility it is 70% of the subsistence minimum, in the case of weekly residence in a facility it is 50% of the subsistence minimum and in the case of year-round residence in a facility it is at least 20% of the subsistence minimum.

Commitment No 5

Older people who are employees have the same status in relations under labour law as other employees. In Slovak law, the equality of citizens and the prohibition of any form of discrimination is declared in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and implemented through Act No 311/2001 Z.z. the Labour Code, as amended, and Act No 365/2004 Z.z. on equal treatment in certain areas and on protection against discrimination and on the amendment of certain acts (the Anti-discrimination Act).

In accordance with the principle of equal treatment, Section 6(1) of the Anti-discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, religious or other belief, racial, national or ethnic origin, disability, **age** or sexual orientation in relations under labour law, equivalent work relationships and related legal relations.

Access to work and the performance of work is made easier by various flexible forms of employment established by the Labour Code and which are available to older employees:

1. employment with a shorter working time,
2. employment performed at home (home work)
3. a work relationship under an agreement on the performance of work or an agreement on work activities,
4. teleworking,
5. flexitime,
6. job sharing, which means that two employees divide between themselves the working time and content of a specific job. This flexible form of employment was

established by the last amendment of the Labour Code, which came into effect on 1 September 2011.

Older people who are jobseekers have the same **right of access to employment as other jobseekers**.

Active labour market measures include for example:

Employment mediation – Employment is mediated by the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (the central office), an office of labour, social affairs and family (an office) and workplaces established by an office and by legal entities and natural persons who provide employment mediation services for a fee, mediation of temporary employment, mediation of supported employment or **integration of disadvantaged jobseekers** in the labour market in accordance with this act, or other legal entities and natural persons who can mediate employment in accordance with conditions laid down in a written agreement with an office. The central office and offices provide employment mediation services free of charge.

Information and advice services – Under Section 42 of the Act on Employment Services (Act No 5/2004 Z.z. on employment services and on the amendment of certain acts, as amended), an office provides information and advice services for citizens, jobseekers, persons interested in employment and employers. Information and advice services for the purposes of this act include services for the **selection** of employment including **changing employment free of charge**.

Specialised advice services – An office may develop, in cooperation with a disadvantaged jobseeker (this category includes citizens over 50 years of age), an individual action plan to improve the jobseeker's prospects in the labour market (an individual action plan). An individual action plan is prepared at the invitation of the office or at the written request of a disadvantaged jobseeker.

An allowance to provide work training for a disadvantaged jobseeker – Under Section 49a of the act on employment services an employer may provide work training in the performance of required work activities for a disadvantaged jobseeker (this category includes **citizens over 50 years of age**) before the start of employment. Work training for a disadvantaged jobseeker for the purposes of this act is the acquisition of practical experience and working habits necessary to perform work activities for the provider of work training.

Allowance to support the employment of a disadvantaged jobseeker – Under Section 50 the act on employment services, an allowance to support the employment of a disadvantaged jobseeker (this category includes **citizens over 50 years of age**) is provided to an employer who employs a disadvantaged jobseeker who has been a registered jobseeker for at least three months in a newly created job.

Support for the employment of a disadvantaged jobseeker in a social enterprise – To help and assist employees in finding work in the open labour market, a social enterprise cooperates with an office, legal entities and natural persons who support or carry out the integration of disadvantaged jobseekers in the labour market. The central office grants social enterprise status in response to a written application from a legal entity or natural person if the applicant satisfies the criteria laid down by the act on employment services.

Allowance to support regional and local employment – Under Section 50i of the act on employment services an allowance to support regional and local employment is provided to an employer who employs for a set period a disadvantaged jobseeker as specified in Section 8(1)(a) to (e), (h), (i) or (k) (**this category includes citizens over 50 years of age**) if employment for a fixed term is agreed for at least nine months and for at least half of the employer's set weekly working time.

Support for the integration of disadvantaged jobseekers in the labour market – Support for the integration of disadvantaged job seekers (**including citizens over 50 years of age**) is provided in accordance with Section 53c of the act on employment services and is intended to improve their prospects for finding and retaining a job for a period of at least six months.

Commitment No 6

Access to education is **the same for older employees** as for other employees. Employers must ensure that employees can reinforce their qualifications or raise their level.

An employer provides for the training or tuition of any employee who enters employment without qualification. After training or tuition, the employee receives certification of this from the employer (Section 154(1) of the Labour Code).

The employer is obliged to provide for the retraining of an employee who transfers to a new workplace or a new type or method of work if this is necessary due to changes in the organisation of work or other rationalisation methods (Section 154(2) of the Labour Code).

Employees are obliged to systematically reinforce their qualification to perform the work agreed in an employment contract. The reinforcement of qualifications includes their maintenance and renewal. Employers are entitled to require employees to take part in continuing education to reinforce their qualifications. Participation in education is deemed to be the performance of work for which employees are entitled to pay (Section 154(3) of the Labour Code).

In the area of employment services, **citizens over 50 years of age** who are jobseekers, persons interested in employment or employees have the same access to education and training for the labour market as other jobseekers, persons interested in employment and employees.

Under Section 44 of the Act on Employment Services, education and preparation for the labour market is understood for the purposes of the act as theoretical or practical training offering new vocational skills and practical experience to enable a jobseeker or person interested in employment to obtain suitable employment, or to enable an employee to remain in employment. The content and extent of education and preparation for the labour market must be based on the current knowledge and vocational skills of the jobseeker, person interested in employment or employee in order to be useful for the acquisition of new knowledge and vocational skills. Education and preparation for the labour market for the purposes of this act does not include an increase in the level of education pursuant to relevant legislation or preparation for the performance of special vocational activities requiring a special qualification under applicable regulations.

Commitment No 7

Improvements in the provision of long-term care services for older people will be addressed in the new Social Services Act being prepared by MLSAF SR, which will also deal with the creation of conditions in the new long-term care (LTC) system, which is intended in particular for older clients and people with a disability who are dependent on the assistance of another person, but which requires the introduction of a new mechanism for the financing of social services able to ensure both that clients receive social services to which they are

entitled and that such a system is financially sustainable. In view of the growing needs of clients of advanced age, such a system imposes great financial requirements and it is necessary to seek a national consensus and the necessary resources. At present we are considering financing such services from multiple sources because social services have been decentralised and are financed entirely from local government budgets (municipality, higher-tier territorial unit), which do not have adequate funds, partly due to the effects of the economic and financial crisis. It is proposed that social services should also be financed by the state, which would guarantee clients' rights to social services established by law. Further resources would be provided from local government budgets and payments from clients and their families (the aim is to increase their participation). The preparation of the new system will include public discussion with interested parties and in the near future there will be intensive consultation on the specific form of the new system. This is a very difficult process on both the national and regional levels.

In an effort to ensure continuity and efficiency in the provision of social services and also in an effort to encourage people who require assistance to remain as long as possible in their natural family environment, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic is currently in the process of planning for the start of the de-institutionalisation of social services in Slovakia. Because the success of such a process depends, amongst other things, on the creation of adequate community social services, including support for clients remaining at home making use of information technology, support for community and day centre social services is one of the national priorities for the development of social services in Slovakia. The ministry has drawn up a draft strategy for de-institutionalisation of the social services system and the provision of alternative care in Slovakia. In this document the Slovak Republic joins the global trend towards the systematic elimination of the effects of the long-established but now obsolete model of institutional isolation and segregation of people in need of long-term assistance and care in specialised facilities.

Vocational training for social service providers is regulated by Social Services Act, which includes provisions on specialised employees and their training to meet the qualification requirements necessary for the performance of work in social services, special qualification requirements, and also the systematic vocational training of employees. It covers mainly care givers and instructors in social rehabilitation and work therapy. The Social Services Act regulates training for these specialist employees and for the purpose of raising their qualifications it grants accreditation to legal entities and natural persons for training programmes for training leading to satisfaction of special qualification requirements and systematic vocational training for the performance of work in the area of social services.

Commitment No 8

At present, the legislative framework for the prevention of discrimination in employment is laid down by Act No 5/2004 Z.z. on employment services and on the amendment of certain acts, as amended, the Labour Code (Act No 311/2001 Z.z., as amended) and Act No 365/2004 Z.z. on equal treatment in certain areas and on protection against discrimination and on the amendment of certain acts (the Anti-discrimination Act).

Article 6 of the fundamental principles of the Labour Code states that women and men have the right to equal treatment with regard to access to employment, remuneration and promotion, vocational training and working conditions. Women must be provided with

working conditions that allow them participate in work while respecting their physiological characteristics and their social function in motherhood, and women and men must have conditions that respect their family duties with regard to bringing up and caring for children.

Offices of labour, social affairs and family abide by the principle of gender equality in providing employment services for jobseekers and persons interested in employment. The active labour market policy measures currently in use are targeted mainly at disadvantaged jobseekers, including both men and women, whose family duties can make it harder for them to find appropriate work in the open labour market.

Improvements in the standing of persons with family responsibilities in the labour market are promoted by measures to increase the participation of jobseekers in training and preparation for the labour market and to increase the use of specialised counselling services through the provision of allowances for services for families with children.

Under Section 46(10) of Act No 5/2004 Z.z., if a jobseeker takes part in training and preparation for the labour market or who participates in activities for specialised counselling services and is a parent caring for a child below the age of compulsory school attendance or person who cares for a child below the age of compulsory school attendance, the office of labour, social affairs and family may award the jobseeker an allowance to compensate a part of the demonstrable costs for the child to attend pre-school facilities or to compensate demonstrable costs for childcare provided by a natural person with a licence to perform such an activity.

The Labour Code incorporates protection for pregnant women and women and men who care for children against the termination of employment. Under Section 64(1)(c) of the Labour Code, an employee cannot give notice with a protective period, i.e. the period during which an employee is pregnant, when an employee is on maternity leave, when an employee is on parental leave or when a single parent takes care of a child under the age of three years. Under Section 64(3) of the Labour Code, the prohibition of notice does not apply to notice given to an employee if the employer or a part thereof is wound up or relocated (Section 63(1)(a) of the Labour Code) or in cases where an employer is entitled to terminate employment with immediate effect under Section 68 of the Labour Code unless the employee is on maternity leave or parental leave (Section 166(1) of the Labour Code).

Commitment No 9

Natural persons with a severe disability (including older people with a severe disability) who are dependent on the assistance of another person can receive **a cash allowance for care giving** under Act No 447/2008 on cash allowances to compensate severe disability and on the amendment of certain acts, as amended. The cash allowance for care giving is intended to provide assistance to a natural person with a severe disability who is dependent on a care giver for self-care, care for the household and engagement in social activities, and to provide income for the care giver. It is provided to a natural person who gives care to a natural person with a severe disability aged six years or over where the care giver has one of the following relationships to the cared-for person: wife, husband, parent, foster parent or court-appointed guardian, child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, niece, nephew, widowed daughter-in-law, widowed son-in-law. The cash allowance for care giving can also be provided to a person who is not closely related if they live together with the person with a severe disability to whom they give care.

The basic level of the cash allowance is currently EUR 211.32 per month (like all repeated compensatory cash allowances, this allowance increases automatically when the subsistence minimum increases) and is adjusted according to the income of the natural person with a severe disability or the care giver and also in the event that the natural person with a severe disability attends various facilities, e.g. a social services day centre or a school.

A progressive instrument providing support for families with a disabled member is **personal assistance**, the aim of which is not only to support the independence of the natural person with a severe disability but also to relieve the burden of difficult care borne by family members. By this means, natural persons with a severe disability receive effective assistance in the area of mobility, communication and self-care.

Under the act on cash allowances to compensate severe disability, an allowance for personal assistance can be provided to a natural person with a severe disability from the age of six years to the age of sixty-five years. After sixty-five years of age, the allowance for personal assistance can be provided only to a person with a severe disability who began to receive the benefit before reaching this age limit. A condition for the provision of this cash allowance is that personal assistance for the natural person with a severe disability is not provided by a husband, wife, parent or natural person who has taken a child into care in place of a parent under a decision of a competent authority or a natural person that a court has appointed as guardian of a natural person with a severe disability, a child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, daughter-in-law, son-in-law, father-in-law or mother-in-law. Family members may perform only limited activities of intimate nature and interpretation, for a maximum of 1 460 hours per year.

The extent of personal assistance is determined by the activities that the natural person with a severe disability cannot perform alone and the number of hours needed to perform such activities. The number of hours of personal assistance is determined for the period of a calendar year. The rate for one hour of personal assistance for the purposes of calculating the cash allowance for personal assistance is 1.39% of the subsistence minimum for one adult person, which is currently EUR 2.64.

Since 2008 the state social support system, one of the instruments for the implementation of state family policy, has implemented special measures for the parents of minors who receive an old-age pension, an early old-age pension, a disability pension due to a reduction in the ability to perform gainful activity greater than 70% and a service pension after reaching the age of entitlement to an old-age pension and who have no income from gainful activity and are therefore unable to claim a tax bonus for their children who are minors. Due to their age such parents were at a disadvantage compared to younger parents because they could not increase their family income through gainful activity. In these cases the state therefore pays such parents a supplement to the child allowance for each child who is a minor.

Act No 448/2008 Z.z. on social services and on the amendment of Act No 455/1991 on trade licensing (the Trade Licensing Act), as amended, as amended, establishes conditions for the provision of support services. These support services include a respite service, which is provided to a natural person who gives care to a natural person with a severe disability during a period in which the person who gives care cannot give care. The purpose of the

respite service is to provide a care giver with necessary rest in order to maintain his or her physical and mental health and to prevent it from worsening.

According to the results of monitoring of the implementation of the Social Services Act, respite services were provided 91 times in 2010 at a total cost of EUR 21 927.

Commitment No 10

Resolution of the government of the Slovak Republic No 681 of 11 August 1999 approved the national programme for older people (the National Programme). The objective of the National Programme was to present in concentrated form, in the context of social policy towards older citizens, the need to promote the self-sufficiency, social participation and integration of this age group and to formulate implementation mechanisms for achieving the objective within the areas of responsibility of the departments concerned.

Resolution of the government of the Slovak Republic No 488 of 9 July 2008 established the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for seniors, including 18 members representing seniors' organisations. Other members of the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for seniors came from non-governmental organisations with an interest in issues affecting the lives of seniors.

The performance of tasks that the National Programme sets for individual departments, other central state administration bodies, public institutions, local government and civil society is evaluated at regular intervals. At the same time as evaluation, new measures are formulated for the subsequent period to take account of the continuously changing legislative and economic situation in society, in particular the practical problems that seniors – and indirectly also their families – have to deal with in everyday life. For the above reasons the National Programme gradually became less transparent, many measures were difficult to evaluate and the existing structure ceased to reflect adequately the changing priorities in support for the living conditions of seniors and the possibilities for their implementation. In response to this development, the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for seniors began work on a new National programme for the protection of older people in 2009.

In the course of a general reform of the advisory bodies of the government of the Slovak Republic, Resolution of the government of the Slovak Republic No 158 of 2 March 2011 cancelled the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for seniors and transferred its responsibilities to the Committee for seniors of the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for human rights, national minorities and gender equality (the Committee for seniors), which continued activities for the development of the new National programme for the protection of older people.

In addition the Committee for seniors makes proposals to the Council of the government of the Slovak Republic for human rights, national minorities and gender equality relating to the support, protection and upholding of the rights of seniors; proposes individual and systematic measures for the promotion of seniors' interests and the better upholding of seniors' rights; it prepares draft standpoints and resolutions for the Council on proposed laws, generally applicable regulations and internal regulations and also governmental, departmental and other measures of a non-legislative character that could affect the protection or upholding of seniors' rights. The Committee also participates in the drafting and review of other

materials that directly affect the standing of seniors and the issue of the ageing of the population; it also suggests directions for research into the living conditions of seniors and the ageing population and seeks to create and extend sources of statistical information important for conceptual work in this area; particular attention is given to the development of an analysis of social and medical care for seniors. The Committee for seniors also participates in the drafting of reports for the control mechanisms of international treaties on human rights, monitors documents of the European Union and other international organisations dealing with issues that affect seniors and population ageing and makes proposals to the government council for their elaboration and provision for their implementation.

The members of the committee include, as in the past, sixteen elected representatives of seniors' organisations and other representatives of non-governmental organisations promoting seniors' interests, and such representatives are equal in number to the representatives of the civil service.

4. Plans for the future

As regards the future direction of social services in Slovakia, the MLSAF SR is aware that a systematic solution of the financing issue is needed. The availability and, on the other hand, the sustainability of social services is a challenge for Slovakia as for many other countries in Europe, especially taking into consideration the demographic changes and the increasing number of older people dependent on the assistance of another person, globalisation and the resulting change in family structure and the smaller contribution of families through informal care giving.

One of the measures planned is the preparation of new legislation on social services based on the commitments made in the manifesto of the government of the Slovak Republic for the years 2010 to 2013, in which the government committed itself to reforming the system for financing social service providers so that all legal forms of provider have equal status, and to introduce a right for clients to choose a social service provider.

As regards on-going initiatives relating to the social protection of older people through the system of assistance in material need, a new act on assistance in material need is currently in preparation and is intended to come into effect from January 2012. Because this act will also address the unfavourable social situation of older people, it is stressed that under the new act, as under the current legislative framework, the provision of assistance in material need will take note of situations in which citizens in material need cannot achieve an income through their own work due to, for example, their age, disability and the like. This means that older people, who are objectively incapable of participating in activation or finding a job and thereby obtaining or increasing their income for themselves will also receive a so-called solidarity benefit in the planned legislative framework for assistance in addition to the basic benefit in material need.

In its national strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion based on the Europe 2020 Strategy, the Slovak Republic has set itself the objective of lifting 170 000 people out of the risk of poverty or exclusion by 2020." The target group at the national level is citizens living at risk of poverty and exclusion, i.e. people with low incomes and/or those who cannot afford some of the necessary requirements of life and/or those living in families where no one works or where there is only occasionally work.

Poverty and social exclusion are multi-dimensional problems that relate above all to factors such as income and standard of living, opportunities for education and decent work, social protection, housing, access to social services, healthcare and so on.

The Slovak Republic aims to reduce poverty and social exclusion by, for example, introducing new instruments for assistance in material need, adopting measures aimed at ensuring an adequate income, improving the quality of social services and ensuring access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality social services, adopting measures for social and legal protection and through support for families, especially as regards the balancing of work and family life. Achieving the set objectives requires the gradual continuation of modernisation and stabilisation in the social protection and social inclusion systems and also the implementation of measures to ensure their financial sustainability.