



# Fact sheets on Britain

## Social Services

In Britain a wide range of human needs are provided for through either central or local government agencies. The State seeks to secure for every citizen adequate educational and other opportunities for self-development, housing, medical attention, and residential care or financial help in times of particular need, and to give special help to the disabled (mentally or physically) and to children deprived of normal home life. A variety of voluntary services supplement or assist the State services.

Expenditure on social services from public funds is about £9,360 million a year, or over £168 per head of the population.

### State Social Services

*Education and Youth Services:* Education is compulsory from the age of 5 to 15, and an increasing number stay in school after the minimum leaving age. Over 90 per cent of school children attend publicly provided or assisted schools (see Fact Sheet C/3). Local education authorities provide free primary and secondary education up to the age of 18 or 19. They also maintain technical colleges and colleges of further education (see Fact Sheet C/6). The universities are independent but they are grant-aided and over 90 per cent of students are assisted by awards from public or private funds (see Fact Sheet C/5). Many young people in Britain belong to youth organisations, which receive aid from public funds (see Fact Sheet C/4). The Young Volunteer Force Foundation has been set up to encourage and organise community service. The Youth Employment Service helps boys and girls to choose the right kind of work.

*Housing:* About half of the new housing built is provided by local authorities, which receive central government subsidies towards the cost (see Fact Sheet C/7). In selecting tenants for local authority housing, preference is given to families living in unsatisfactory conditions. Rents are usually low in comparison with current building costs. Over two-thirds of the councils in England and Wales and nearly half of those in Scotland operate rent-rebate schemes, which benefit tenants with low incomes or large families. In recent years about one-quarter of the dwellings built by local authorities have been for old people.

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*Health and Welfare:* The comprehensive National Health Service (see Fact Sheet C/2) is virtually free of charge and is available to everyone resident in Britain. It provides general practitioner services; hospital and specialist care; and local authority health and welfare services, many of which are available in the home.

The local authority services, often provided in co-operation with voluntary organisations, include maternity and child welfare centres, distribution of welfare foods, day nurseries, residential accommodation for the elderly and infirm as well as facilities for old people in their own homes, the care of the mentally disordered and physically handicapped, and domestic help in times of special need. The Disablement Resettlement Service (see Fact Sheet C/13) trains handicapped people and places them in employment.

*Social Security:* A comprehensive system of social security (see Fact Sheet C/9) is provided by national insurance, industrial injuries insurance, family allowances, war pensions, and supplementary benefits. These schemes are financed partly from contributions by employed people and partly from general taxation.

The national insurance scheme provides sickness benefit and unemployment benefit; maternity benefit including a maternity grant for all confinements and, for women paying contributions, a weekly maternity allowance for 18 weeks; widow's allowance and pension; a guardian's allowance; retirement pensions; and a death grant. The industrial injuries scheme provides special benefits at higher rates for injury, disablement or death due to employment. Under the family allowance scheme a weekly allowance is paid for each dependent child after the first.

War pensions and allowances are paid to people disabled or bereaved through forces' service.

Supplementary benefits are available to those whose resources are insufficient to meet their needs. They take the form of a supplementary pension for people over retirement age and a supplementary allowance for others.

*Child Care:* Local authorities are responsible for the care of children who have no parent or guardian, whose parents are unable to provide for them, or who are considered by a court of law to be in need of care, protection or control. When practicable, children are boarded out with foster parents; otherwise they may be placed in community homes provided by local authorities or by voluntary organisations. Family advice centres have been set up in many areas to help families in danger of breaking up.

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## Voluntary Social Services

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Voluntary organisations work in close partnership with the State services in many fields of activity. Although they derive at least part of their funds from voluntary sources, central and local government give them increasing financial aid.

The National Council of Social Service develops co-operation between voluntary societies and statutory authorities, provides information, carries out research, initiates experiments and undertakes promotional work in the United Kingdom and overseas.

*Advice and Family Casework:* The Citizens' Advice Bureaux movement was started in 1939. There are now some 500 bureaux at which members of the public may call for free advice on any problem. For those who also need personal help there are in many areas family casework agencies like the Family Welfare Association and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Marriage guidance is given by specialised grant-aided voluntary bodies. In several cities Family Service Units work with families with difficulties, giving them intensive practical help and personal support over long periods.

*Community Organisation:* In communities of all sizes, groups and individuals work together to meet specific needs and improve the quality of community life. In villages this may be by means of the parish council or village hall committee; in urban neighbourhoods through a community association; and in cities and counties by means of councils of social service and rural community councils. Work of this kind was pioneered in the late nineteenth century by the guilds of help and by settlements, many of which were established in poorer districts by universities.

*Youth Services:* Voluntary bodies and the Churches play a major part in providing a wide range of youth activities (see Fact Sheet C/4) and over three million young people belong to the principal youth movements. Among the largest are the Scouts Association, the Girl Guides Association, the National Association of Youth Clubs, the National Association of Boys' Clubs, clubs associated with the Church of England, the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, the Boys' Brigade and the Salvation Army youth organisations. There is also a growing field of activities in which young people give service to the community through such organisations as International Voluntary Service, Community Service Volunteers and Task Force. Voluntary youth

organisations receive grants from public funds but also raise substantial sums by their own efforts.

*Welfare Services:* Other services undertaken by voluntary workers include help for unmarried mothers, homes for children deprived of a normal home life, and services for the sick, handicapped and elderly, both in their own homes and in clubs, clinics and residential homes. Services to the sick, injured and handicapped are given by the British Red Cross Society, the St. John Ambulance Brigade and, in Scotland, by the St. Andrew's Ambulance Association. Many hospitals have their own Leagues of Friends or similar groups of voluntary workers who undertake a variety of services. The Women's Royal Voluntary Service helps in all kinds of difficulties, delivers 'meals on wheels' to housebound and elderly people, and undertakes relief work in emergencies. In many areas voluntary bodies concerned with the welfare of the elderly combine with public authorities to form old people's welfare committees which are aided by the National Old People's Welfare Council.

There is also a very large number of voluntary bodies concerned with some particular disability or need, for example, the Royal National Institute for the Blind, the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, the National Association for Mental Health and the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children.

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## Social Workers

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The social services depend more and more upon professional social workers who are full-time and salaried; in addition a large number of voluntary workers give part of their free time to some form of unpaid social work. Training for many types of social work consists of a basic university degree, diploma or certificate course in social science, followed by a university course in applied social studies or specialised training for a particular service. The Council for Training in Social Work promotes the training of workers in local authority health and welfare services and similar services run by voluntary bodies; two-year courses are available at colleges of further education.

For further information see COI reference pamphlet R.5595, *Social Services in Britain*.

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