



SOCIAL SERVICES EUROPE

PRIORITY THEMES

INTRODUCTION

For a number of years, the Informal Network of Not for Profit Social and Health Service Providers¹ (INSSP) has met together on a regular basis to share information and develop common advocacy strategies concerning Social Services of General Interest and related Health Services.

The network has also developed into taking a more active advocacy role over the past two years and the principles of mutual interest, respect and consensus have guided this advocacy work. During this period there have also been increasing external developments in Social Services of General Interest that have required increased advocacy work and specific, fact based input on issues such as quality, public procurement, tendering, social responsibility, state aid and other SSGI related mechanisms and initiatives. Due to the expertise of members of the INSSP as large scale providers of social and health services on a not for profit basis there had been an increased demand for our input both in consultations and in public fora, such as the 2010 3d forum on social services of general interest organised under Belgian Presidency.

This changing situation has led to greater co-operation among the participants and has brought us to the point today where we consider how to develop the next stage of our co-operation. The overall objective is to strengthen the profile and position of social services, and to promote the role of not-for-profit social service providers throughout Europe. To this aim, Social Services Europe intends to reinforce the activities of its member organisations mainly (but not only) in the following domains:

1. IMPACT OF EU LEGISLATION ON SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST

Social services of general interest are a key component of the European social model. They are also important automatic stabilizers in times of economic recession, as was again illustrated during the on-going financial and economic crisis.

Although they have no legal recognition, they are referenced by a series of official documents from the European Institutions.

Recently, the European Commission published a new communication on the “Reform of State aid rules on Services of General Economic Interest”², where the issue of social services of general interest has been addressed again. European rules have indeed an important influence on issues such as State aid, public procurement and on establishment rules. Also quality of social services is on the agenda at European level. All development in this respect should be continuously monitored as well in the Social Platform, through the double angle of service users and service providers, and within our network, where this last specificity can be further considered.

2. STAFF AND HR ISSUES

Social dialogue is also a key component of the European social model ; however, in spite of the growing importance of social and health services, which may account for more than

¹ The current participants in the INSSP consist of Solidar, Eurodiaconia, Caritas Europa, the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), Workability Europe, European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) and the European Platform for National Non-Profit Umbrella Organizations and for National Associations of General Interest (CEDAG).

² COM (2011) 146 final

10 % of total employment in some Member States, there coverage by the traditional social partners is still quite poor.

Yet, social dialogue is likely to have far-reaching consequences on a series of issues such as working conditions, skills management and quality of services. It may also help addressing bottlenecks such as staff shortage.

Several attempts have already been made to have our sectors involved in projects aiming at improving this situation. New perspectives are emerging again and should be encouraged.

Next to social dialogue, Social Services Europe will focus on various other staff and HR issues such as qualifications and competencies of staff, working conditions and professional development.

3. SOCIAL INNOVATION

According to the European Commission, “**Social innovation** is an important new field which should be nurtured. **It is about tapping into the ingenuity of charities, associations and social entrepreneurs to find new ways of meeting social needs which are not adequately met by the market or the public sector.** . As well as meeting social needs and tackling societal challenges, social innovations empower people and create new social relationships and models of collaboration. They are thus innovative in themselves and good for society’s capacity to innovate.”³

Social innovation belongs to the DNA of social services, which are constantly challenged by changing social conditions and the emergence of new social risks.

The members of Social Services Europe are indeed key players in this respect. They should contribute to building knowledge and sharing experiences, while also monitoring and contributing to the most relevant policy developments regarding this theme. In particular, they could also channel information on funding programmes which might be accessible to its member organisations.

4. STRUCTURAL FUNDS

Structural funds are an important tool for achieving social cohesion and social inclusion. Non-profit service providers are heavily involved in the delivery process, but to a lesser extent in their governance process. Yet, they might bring an important contribution by complementing social partners in helping define the main orientations because of their knowledge of the social needs at grassroots level.

There is therefore room for improvement as well at EU as at national level.

Here again, Social Services Europe could play a leveraging role by bringing together the experience and expertise from its members.

5. THE CONTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL SERVICES TO OVERALL EU POLICY

Finally, Social Services Europe has an important contribution to bring to the overall success of the EU 2020 strategy and in addressing the social impacts of the present crisis. Social services are an integral part of the active inclusion agenda, which is itself in line with the headlines targets recently adopted by the European Union.

³ Communication from the Commission : "EUROPE 2020 FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE - INNOVATION UNION" [COM(2010) 546 FINAL]