

PESSIS 3 Promoting employers' social services in social dialogue

Common Declaration on the Contribution of Social Services to Europe

21 March 2017

I. Introduction

The European Union has achieved a lot since its creation. This must be re-affirmed. However, there are several challenges which are affecting the EU's development; with perhaps the most significant being its (perceived or real) inability to demonstrate a positive impact on working and living conditions of many people in Europe. This has led to increased distrust in the European institutions.

To increase confidence in its institutions, the European Union must rebuild its political project with a stronger social dimension than in the past. The principles of equal opportunities and equal treatment, social cohesion and inclusion, quality jobs and social welfare models are at the very heart of European values. It must be ensured that they are also at the very heart of European policies.

Social Services play an important role in implementing these principles, as well as important automatic stabilisers in times of economic recession, as was again illustrated during the ongoing crisis. The European Union must therefore ensure that its policies aim at maximising the ability of social services to achieve their aims and objectives.

The values of human rights, solidarity, ecological sustainability, social justice, the priority given to social profit, and democratic participation are important aspects of the activities of most social services and are an important part of their success. Ensuring quality, equality and transparency in both the funding and provision of services is also essential. This must be recognised in policies directed towards social services.

The proposed European Pillar of Social Rights is an important first step in this regard and must provide an important European framework which recognises the essential contribution of social service providers in supporting people to access their social rights.

II. Social Services as an important contributor to Europe

Although different from country to country, social services –as defined by PESSIS- can be understood as care and support “services for older people, people with disabilities and children as well as services to reach excluded and disadvantaged groups”. The sector employs directly over 10 million staff in Europe,



with over 1.4 million jobs having been created between 2008 and 2015 making it one of the biggest job creating sectors in Europe. Together with health services, social services represent 7% of the total economic output in the EU-28¹. With changing demographics and family patterns, the social services sector is expected to grow significantly over the next few decades. Social Services must be recognised as an essential contributor to social cohesion, sustainable and inclusive economic growth and job creation in Europe. Indeed:

- Social Cohesion because social service providers play an important role in enabling a society which works towards strengthening access to social rights for all, the well-being of all, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility.
- Sustainable and inclusive economic growth because social cohesion is at the heart of enabling all people to be active in the community, in employment and in education. This in turn leads to heightened contribution to the economy and therefore towards growth.
- Job Creation in Europe because of the triple impact the social services have on jobs. Firstly, the sector already employs 10.106.800 people (EC, 2016)² in the sector and will continue to grow to guarantee the ability for all to access quality social services in the future; in particular in times of changing demographics. In between the second quarter of 2008 and second quarter of 2015, 1.477.000 new jobs were created in social services (EC, 2016) Secondly, social service providers contribute significantly to getting people excluded from the labour market- back into jobs; either directly or indirectly. Thirdly, the provision of quality social services allows higher labour market participation rates for some groups of people often excluded from it, in particularly women.

Social services are also intrinsically innovative, continuously finding new ways in which to improve the quality of care and support, whilst also delivering them more effectively, efficiently and sustainably. Innovation in social services stems from the very need to develop new strategies, services and partnerships. Further support should be given to social services in order for them to better respond to and take advantage of

- rapidly evolving societal changes and individual needs and wishes,
- the shift to quality social services which are community-based, are personalised and promote active participation in the community.
- demographic changes,
- constrained financial resources and evolving financial models,
- staff shortages and/or lack of qualified staff,
- limits to existing solutions due to cost, sustainability and infrastructure,
- cross-border nature of service provision,
- fast changing technological developments,
- gender imbalances and inequalities (in salaries, female participation in to the labour market...).

¹ European Commission – EU Employment and Social Situation – Quarterly Review – [Supplement December 2014](#)

² European Semester Thematic Fiche – [Health and Health Systems](#)



III. Developing Social Dialogue Structures in Social Services

Staff is the main asset in social services as it is them who actually enable the provision of care and support.

Policies must take these issues into account. All challenges mentioned above affect the day-to-day work of staff and enterprises in the sector. It is crucial to develop positive measures to enhance quality of life in work for staff working in social services. If social services are to adequately respond to, for instance, fast changing technological developments or the shift towards a human rights-based model of care and support, staff in the sector must be adequately trained, alongside improved professional development opportunities. It is also essential to be able to recruit and retain; a matter which has become a problem for many Employers despite increasing demand for social services and high levels of unemployment. This is in part related to the difficulties the sector has to convince young people, from both genders, with attractive jobs and career opportunities in social services. It is also important to ensure a smooth transition from the education system to the labour market for all, including for disadvantaged people.

The challenges in this area are clear with too many jobs being paid below national average wages, with rather difficult working conditions and with limited continuous professional development and training opportunities. It is also essential to improve the sector's attractiveness in society for creating quality jobs. Three important steps are needed to do so. Firstly, it is essential to increase the value of care and ensure its recognition by society, supported by sufficient funding streams. Secondly, efforts must be made to challenge the difficulties in recruiting men; which impacts not only the diversity of the workforce, but also gender stereotypes. Thirdly, equal chances in career paths between men and women, as well as equal pay for equal work, are important measures to ensure the sector is sufficiently staffed with well-trained professionals.

Failing to have a sufficiently numbered, well-paid and well-trained workforce in social services would have a significantly negative impact on the quality of life for all Europeans; those in need of such services as well as their families and friends. A reduced quality of life will also have a negative impact on the European economy.

The creation of recognised social dialogue structures and platforms for social services at European level is a particularly important step. This would allow employers and employee representatives in the sector to lay down on the table issues of concern and to provide a space for a collective assessment of the challenges faced.

This dialogue would also allow social partners to negotiate and agree on common solutions to these issues affecting the sector and its workforce, based on principles of non-discrimination.

Lastly, it would also help to provide the sector's social partners with an effective voice on European policy proposals and processes having an impact on its activities.

IV. Further recognition and support for social services at European level

The creation of social dialogue structures for social services employers and trade unions would not find solutions to all the aforementioned challenges and opportunities. It is therefore crucial that the European Union develops an EU-wide strategy to support quality jobs and unlock the job creation potential of the social services sector. Such a strategy would

- develop frameworks for the sustainable funding of the sector to ensure the quality of the services provided, job creation and decent work.



- provide guidance to Member States to find common solutions to the challenges aforementioned, including through the European Semester;
- allow for flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact when it comes to investing in social services;
- align EU funding tools (European Structural and Investment Fund, European Fund for Strategic Investments, etc) to job creation and training in social services;
- promote the development of social dialogue structures at national and EU level in all relevant EU policies and activities;
- facilitate the exchange of best practices in human resources, particularly in recruitment and retention, as well as health and safety, at national level and EU level
- facilitate mutual exchange on the development of social services in the context of digitalization;
- strengthen standards and structures of cross-border provision of social services and the corresponding job market;
- actively work towards and launch a campaign for decent work and quality jobs in the social services sector;

This Common Declaration was developed by recognised Employers in the field of social services in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany and Spain, as part of the European project: Promoting Employers in Social Services In Social dialogue III (PESSIS III)

