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First main findings of the PESSIS project:
Promoting employers' social services organisations in social dialogue

Aims of the PESSIS project:

- **Gathering and exchanging information and experience on employers in the social services sector both at national and European level**
- **Increasing knowledge and awareness about the social dialogue processes in 11 European Union member states***
- **Policy recommendations for decision makers and stakeholders at European level and within member states**
- **Enhanced cooperation within the sector, promoting a culture of inclusive social dialogue at national and European level**
- **Dissemination of the project results through reports and newsletters and at the final conference.**

For more information please contact :

info@easpd.eu

*** Pessis covers the following countries :**

Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Finland, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, UK

The Pessis project is a first step by providers of non-profit social services providers to better promote their values and objectives in terms of employment and socio-economic development. The final aim is to establish or improve participatory fora for exchange between employees and employers in the sector, both at the national level and ultimately at the EU level too. **Pessis is beginning with coordinated research** on the state of play in 11 countries*.

The research is now well underway and findings and recommendations will be presented at an open conference in Brussels on 22 June. On the 17 April, project partners met to give each other an advance preview of the most salient findings to date.

Naturally the situation varies enormously from country to country, with some such as Netherlands and Belgium having reasonably developed dialogue structures. In the Austrian social services sector a number of collective agreements have already been negotiated, mainly covering issues such as working hours, part time employment, vocational training, night work, overtime, mandatory rest periods and holiday provisions.

Overall, the picture of the non-profit social services in the EU is one of **an expanding sector** experiencing both significant growth potential but also important challenges. Some of the more common challenges lie in the fragmentation of the sector and the existence of an institutional framework which does not always recognise sectoral specificities. In addition, the budgetary cuts and the increasingly common use of tendering procedures for public contracts are having a worrying effect on quality of services and sometimes creating unconstructive competition with other actors.

Partners struck a positive note during the meeting, underlining the possibility that the difficult prevailing economic circumstances currently forcing actors in most economic sectors to make adapt, may open up new prospects for the non-profit social services. Some of the opportunities include organisations collaborating or establishing new structures as well as developing new models for the delivery of services and for sustainable funding.

The research to date points to a widespread desire for employers in the sector to be more involved in social dialogue. In Slovenia for example, the stakeholders interviewed expressed a unanimous desire to be recognised in the highest level social dialogue institution in that country, the tripartite Economic and Social Council. The Greek research has shown that effective inclusion of the sector would be taken as a sign of the central government giving social service providers the consideration which their significant social and economic contribution would deserve.

It was underlined that the social services sector should find ways to better structure itself and internally promote a culture of social dialogue. Only by being adequately organised at national level is it possible for the sector to carry a certain weight in social dialogue.

The information and best practices gathered during the mapping exercise will feed into national reports which will then be compiled into one concise analytical European report. These documents will all shortly be available on the dedicated Pessis webpages. **The data and the recommendations of the European report will be discussed and assessed during the final Conference planned for 22nd June 2012.**

