

Proposals to the Informal EPSCO Council

Horsens, Denmark, April 23-25, 2012

Social services under pressure

Introduction:

Social Platform strives to guarantee access to quality services for social and occupational integration. The quality, accessibility and affordability of services of general interest (SGI) and related social services (SSGI) is essential in counteracting social exclusion and helping people find ways to improve their lives.

Many of our members are not for profit social service providers. The not for profit sector has some characteristics that distinguish it from the public and the for-profit sector. The provider is private, but service provision is values-based with the objective of developing the quality of services, responding to the needs of users and respecting their dignity and fundamental rights and not the needs of the market.

Social Platform has developed at EU level nine principles for quality social services (see annexe). We advocate for universal access to services and in particular for people facing social exclusion, and for their sustainability through the legal recognition and protection of their specific characteristics in the internal market.

Moreover, the role of social services is all the more crucial in times of economic recessions as they not only represent a source of job generation (it is estimated that the sector has an important potential with a possible increase of 5-7% employment in the EU 27) but are also a strategic tool for strengthening social cohesion and fighting poverty.

The need for social services is growing, not decreasing. The European population is ageing and, in the future, increasing numbers of people will need health care or social care for increasing amounts of time: this is a key driver of the growing demand for social services, which can be an opportunity for the creation of new jobs. The demand of formal care might also be increased by the reduction of availability of formal carers due to the changing family patterns (increase in single households, growing participation of women in the labour market, increased workforce mobility).

You will find here below the answers to the three questions asked by the Danish EU Presidency background paper on "social services under pressure".

1. Do you share the main thrust of this analysis that it will be necessary in the near future to rethink our social services with the aim of strengthening their efficiency?

We understand from the background paper that the proposed challenge is to make social services more efficient through social experimentation and new technologies in order to reduce the budget pressure on welfare state. We also perceive from the paper that social services are mainly conceived as services for the most in need.

Social Platform strongly advocates for a wide definition of quality social services, based on their universal access and character, and linked with the access to fundamental rights

for all, including access to services for the most vulnerable groups. Social services are addressed to all citizens who without them could not fully participate in society.

What does “re-thinking” of social services mean for Social Platform members?

- Rethinking means taking into account the new needs, the new challenges and the new economic context.
- **Social services are not only about “efficiency” but mainly about quality, the support and recognition of the absolute and specific value of each individual.** Effectiveness of social services means better meeting the needs of service users and improving their quality of life. Social services are ultimately a reflection of society’s values and objectives to care for the most vulnerable, whatever their possibilities to contribute to the economy.
- **The referred independent living policies are for the benefit of the users and should not be the consequence of the will to “reducing the cost of social services”.** More efficiency and effectiveness can be reached through initiatives that support people to live independently; there is however the need for a combined approach balancing preventative, rehabilitation and emergency measures, as well as universal services and targeted interventions tailored to the needs of the users.
- **“Technology” in social services has some potential, but should not be considered as the solution.** Social services are not only about the accomplishment of a task but encompass a much broader human dimension. The recent example of Quebec, where the Health Ministry suggested equipping elderly people with robotic baby seals to fight loneliness is symbolic of a deep misunderstanding of the human dimension of care.

What we propose:

- **Social and health services are not a cost but an investment for better cohesion in our society. The focus should shift from cutting costs to measuring social and financial return on investments.** For example, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities argues that it has been proved that 1€ spent in social services in the disability sector has a return on investment of 16€.
- **Do not cut budgets devoted to social and care services, especially in times of economic crisis when demands for support rise, and make full use of Structural Funds to achieve this goal.** Commit to the organisation and funding of social service delivery, even if the provision is delegated to third parties, to ensure that care services are available, accessible, affordable, and of high quality, taking into account the increased social care needs in society, as a result of the economic crisis, and with a long-term perspective.
- **The austerity measures should not undermine innovation in social service provision and should not invert positive trends in policy development** (such as de-institutionalisation, community-based services, personalised care services, preventive services, long-term strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion, etc.).
- **Use the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services as guidance for essential elements of a quality framework, especially in those countries where quality framework do not exist.** Ensure the importance of quality in service planning, funding and delivery, by developing and

testing quality standards, specific to the different sub-sectors and specific characteristics of groups of social services, with their active involvement.

2. Can you mention examples of how social services could be designed and targeted in a more efficient and effective way?

- **Promote a partnership approach among public authorities and all relevant stakeholders**, including not for profit social service providers, users themselves as well as organisations representing users, caregivers, excluded groups in the local community including those in poverty, **in the design, development, delivery and evaluation of social policies at national and EU level, to ensure a multidimensional approach in social services.**
- **Support the integration of services, accessible environment, adapted housing, tailor-made care and the development of inter-municipal cooperation** in the provision of services to maximise efficiency by developing economies of scale. Involve all relevant stakeholders in planning and policy development, implementation and review processes.
- **Make user participation and empowerment essential elements to improve the quality of services, through better tailoring them to individuals' needs and expectations.** Service user involvement and empowerment is essential in helping people towards independence and improving life quality, thus increasing effectiveness. Implementing user empowerment may be costly initially but will pay off in the long term in this regard¹.
- **While adopting the draft public procurement directive, ensure that a special regime for social services is kept and that quality in contracts for social services is taken into account in a mandatory way.** Develop methodologies and tools to apply also to social services the concept of the "life cycling cost", as foreseen by the draft public procurement directive in other fields. In some cases, also in the area of social services, it is worth promoting a life-cycle approach while assessing cost-effectiveness of different services, in order to better guarantee the sustainability of services. With some services, it's important to look at the life cycle instead of initial costs, because certain initiatives might be more expensive at the beginning but in the long run they make more savings to the community.
- **Develop a better common understanding of tools to measure social returns on investment and social value.** It is important to develop understanding and increase of the visibility of social services, social enterprises, the social economy and for both public authorities and private investors to be able to measure the social added value and evaluate the results if they want to invest in social infrastructures.

Example from a specific sector:

- **Housing First from the homeless sector.** *Housing First* 'separates' housing and support. Homeless people are immediately given secure housing without being

¹ "Service users' quality of life benefits as services increasingly take into account their wishes and as users gain ownership over the process of service delivery. Participation can thus be seen as a pre-condition of empowerment. User satisfaction increases as services focus more on this issue. Experience shows that empowerment is effective in the prevention of institutionalisation and service dependency through fostering autonomy and inspiring progress". From [Eurodiaconia, User participation and empowerment toolkit](#)

without there being any expectation that they for example comply with psychiatric treatment or stop drinking alcohol or using drugs. In the homelessness sector, for the funder, it is cheaper to finance homeless temporary hostels and emergency shelters in the short run, as opposed to building social housing, with independent units and floating support to house homeless people, which is initially more costly. However, research and evidence have shown that housing people in homelessness lower the costs to the community in the long term, because they quickly move on to independent living, whilst people living in temporary hostels and emergency shelters rarely do so, thus depend on community support for a longer period of their lives².

3. Have you any experience as to how the results of project-based social innovation can be implemented at a larger scale?

Member states are currently negotiating EU funds such as the European Social Fund (ESF) and the EU programme for social change and innovation (EUPSCI). In these two funds, social innovation and social experimentation are instruments promoted to implement funded programmes. Therefore we believe that the debate at the informal EPSCO Council should contribute to ensuring that social innovation and experimentation respond first to the needs of the people benefiting from these programmes.

- **Social Platform definition of social innovation:** "Social innovation means new interventions that are social both in their ends and their means and provide more effective, efficient, sustainable and/or just responses to social needs that are unmet or insufficiently met in terms of combating poverty and social exclusion, promoting a high level of quality employment and decent work, guaranteeing adequate and poverty preventing social protection, and improving working conditions, thereby contributing to social progress. Social innovation shall improve the quality of life and work. It shall not be judged primarily on the basis of economic criteria but, rather, on the basis of its added value for society as a whole".
- **Social Platform definition of social experimentation:** "Social policy experimentation means project-based field testing of social innovations in order to gather evidence on their effectiveness and feasibility, such projects being limited in time and including a variety of actors of all sizes. The results of the experiments shall help to determine whether and under which conditions social innovations can be implemented on a wider scale. Social policy experimentation shall aim at improving the life of beneficiaries by tailored services or products and should be developed with the direct involvement of stakeholders and beneficiaries. It should lead to the long-term and sustainable financing to ensure the scaling-up of effective approaches".

What we propose:

- **Not enough is done on financing engineering for social services.** The French "*Caisse des dépôts*" financing services of general interest is a good example. It is based on sharing the risk at the highest level (national) and lending the funds to the lowest level (local assessment of each project to get the best conditions).

² Nicholas Pleace, European Observatory on Homelessness, *Housing First*

- **Ensure that the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework provides sufficient funds for supporting quality social and health services and to promote innovation in the sector. Use in a more strategic way EU money to achieve the social targets of the Europe 2020 strategy.** Examples of key priorities: provide adequate training systems and lifelong learning opportunities to develop the required skills and qualifications in the sector; adapt training systems to the technological advancements in service provision; facilitate the anticipation, due to demographic and societal changes, of future needs in terms of employment and training of the social and care workforce.
- **Support the Commission’s proposal to allocate at least 25% of the Structural Funds to the ESF.**
- **Support the Commission’s proposal to earmark 20% of the ESF to “social inclusion and combating poverty” priority.** This is a good way to support social services in Europe.
- **Defend the Commission’s proposal to allocate 60% of the budget to the Progress axis in the EUPSCI.** Support activities aimed at ongoing processes that fight against poverty and social inclusion which are carried out through the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Social OMC and do not fall under social policy experimentation and social innovation.
- **Set a specific and separated priority for promoting social protection and inclusion and fighting poverty in the EUPSCI programme.** Specific objectives of the Progress axis of the EUPSCI are currently always in conjunction with employment. Yet certain groups may not immediately be ready to benefit from such interventions or they may not be able to maintain employment obtained as a result of such intervention. Instead, for the excluded and vulnerable groups, community-based interventions that increase their participation in the society and reduce exclusion are often a prerequisite for employment.

***Social Platform** is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 45 pan-European networks of NGOs, We campaign to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.*

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Annexe

Nine golden quality principles for social and health services of general interest

The EU and its Member States should ensure to all people living in Europe an equal access to available, affordable and quality social and health services in conformity with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the new provisions and protocol on Services of General Interest of the Lisbon Treaty.

The Social Platform stresses that quality services call for a holistic approach based on a supportive economic and legal environment and a bottom-up participatory approach to quality.

The Social Platform is committed to the following nine golden quality principles for social and health services of general interest. They must all be adhered to in service provision - regardless of the nature of the service providers.

- Quality services respect human dignity and fundamental rights by implementing fundamental rights of users and respecting their physical and mental integrity.
- Quality services achieve results by focussing on the benefits for the person served and their communities.
- Quality services are tailor-made to each individual aiming to improve the quality of life and equality of opportunities of the user concerned.
- Quality services ensure security to all users, including the most vulnerable by preventing physical, mental and financial abuse of users.
- Quality services are participative and empower users to take decisions on their own by encouraging users to be actively involved in defining their personal needs and capacities, in the provision of services and their evaluation.
- Quality services are holistic and continuous by achieving coherence between different services and avoiding the negative impact of disruption of services.
- Quality services are provided in partnership with communities and other actors ensuring the delivery of local proximity services which are responsive to local needs and which build social cohesion through the active engagement of local communities in service development and delivery.
- Quality services are provided by skilled professionals working under good employment and working conditions benefiting from life-long learning, skills development and specific measures to enhance non-discrimination and the gender equality of staff members.
- Quality services are managed in a transparent way and are accountable by providing independent complaint procedures and easily accessible and understandable information to users on the quality provided and on the financial performance of service providers.