

Brussels, June 19th, 2008

Dear Member of the SPC,

In preparing the SPC's opinion on Active Inclusion to the European Commission we would like to forward to you some key messages from our membership for inspiration, input and consideration. We believe that drawing up principles for the different strands of active inclusion should be based on the values and aims of the European Union¹. When translating the principles into actions and frameworks at the national level, we believe it is essential to involve the expertise of all stakeholders who work with people affected directly by, for example, quality standards, minimum income levels and supportive social services.

Eurodiaconia is a European network and partner with the European commission under the PROGRESS programme. Our members are NGOs and churches across Europe involved in the provision of social and health services and labour market integration programmes, who work every day with and for people in need in society. Please find below our main messages on active inclusion.

Active Inclusion as part of a wider social inclusion strategy

We welcome the integrated policy mix of Active Inclusion Communication as a cross-cutting approach is necessary for effective inclusion policies but point out that **active inclusion is a means and not an aim. The aim should be social inclusion**, not only be for those furthest from the labour market, but for all. We stress the **need for policies that assist and support the social inclusion of those who will not be able to enter the labour market.**

For the EU to reach their overall Lisbon employment targets people excluded from the labour market must be included. This would also not only mean that the EU would take significant steps towards avoiding anyone being left behind but it would also counterbalance the effects of an ageing population, as emphasised by EMCO in their opinion on active inclusion.

Eurodiaconia strongly supports that labour market policies, and thereby the Lisbon Strategy, are combined with a strong inclusion strategy in order to combat poverty. We do this because we see social inclusion strategies not as added costs but as an integrated part of a sustainable society and promoters of growth and jobs.

Investment in labour market “outsiders” is necessary for a fully inclusive labour market

Individually-tailored measures for people on the margins are needed and important for building bridges to the labour market. High participation in lifelong learning is positively associated with high employment and low unemployment². Unfortunately, those with most need for learning such as low-skilled workers suffer most from underinvestment in training and they are also those who are increasingly becoming permanently excluded from the labour market. **Lifelong learning should be a right independent of one's status.**

In addition to the labour market policies directed at the individual one should also **endeavour to make the labour market itself more inclusive** for people who are furthest from the labour market. Alternative job opportunities and positive treatment for the disadvantaged could be steps in this direction. Active inclusion

¹ Articles 2 and 3 of the consolidated versions of the Treaty of the European Union and the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union

² Employment in Europe 2006: p. 108

policies aiming at open up doors for excluded people must go hand in hand with not only more jobs but more quality jobs and jobs that pay.

Access to social services is a fundamental right³ and public financing should reflect this

Financial commitment is necessary at all levels of government to ensure access to quality services for all – that service providers are able to provide such services. It must be recognized that improving the quality of services will usually lead to an increase in cost. Everyone should have the right of access to quality services. Therefore the scenario in which a two-tier care system develops, whereby in some areas only low-quality care is accessible because quality services are not affordable should be avoided by sufficient funding.

We welcome the emphasis on quality services, but stress that **quality should lead to improvements in the lives of those who use the services. In some instances integration policies are more important than quality**, such as in the area of homelessness.

As well as monitoring the principles to be drawn up, **policies and rules that affect or regulate the functioning of social services should also be carefully assessed and action taken to address negative impacts if necessary.**

Minimum income as part of an integrated support programme for participation in society

Combining minimum income schemes with effective tailored training measures, without being conditioned, for people on the margin to participate in the society would mean a more inclusive society. **Minimum income strategies as part of Active Inclusion policies must be coordinated with flexicurity policies so that the design of these does not increase insecurity for more vulnerable groups** in relation to the labour market, including the working poor. **Member States must also commit to funding such schemes as a priority to ensure that they achieve their aim and allow people to live in dignity.**

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Kind Regards,



Heidi Martinussen
Secretary General.

Eurodiaconia

Rue Joseph II, 166
B-1000 Bruxelles
(+32) 2234 38 60
www.eurodiaconia.org
martinussen@eurodiaconia.org

Eurodiaconia creates a platform for 34 diaconal actors in 19 European countries. Members' activities facilitate social cohesion and inclusion through diaconal education and the provision of curative and preventative social and health services on a Christian value basis to young and old, people with disabilities, people experiencing marginalization, poverty and abusive situations, drug and alcohol addicts and other people in need.



Eurodiaconia is supported by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013). Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission

³ Part 1 article 14 of the European Social Charter and Article 34 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.