



## POLICY PAPER

# SOCIAL SERVICES

Social services provide essential assistance to many, whether for a long or short term need, covering the main risks of life, such as ageing, as well as for specific circumstances, such as disability. They often address not only physical and mental needs but also the spiritual aspect of care for each human being. They enable people to integrate or reintegrate into society. They enable people to access and retain employment, offer a route out of poverty and exclusion, enabling them to fulfill their potential. The belief that all humans are created in the image of God with equal worth and dignity forms the basis for all Eurodiaconia's work. Given the role of social services outlined above, Eurodiaconia believes that access to social services is necessary to uphold human dignity and is a fundamental right. This is supported by Part 1 article 14 of the European Social Charter<sup>1</sup> and Article 34 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>2</sup>. The European Commission also recognised the importance of social services in promoting social inclusion and cohesion<sup>3</sup>.

However, Eurodiaconia believes that social services are often not given the recognition or financial support that they deserve and need. Despite an increase in demand for services, Eurodiaconia's member organisations experience falling income and therefore increased difficulties in providing their services. More and more authorities funding social services are using tendering to procure services rather than providing them in house or providing direct subsidies to providers. Unfortunately our members report negative impacts on the quality of social services following this trend. There are discussions as to how to protect social services' special nature and role in society, on how to ensure access to quality social services for all, This document presents Eurodiaconia's recommendations to do so and we believe that institutional actors at all levels and stakeholders must work together to carry them out.

## Public Responsibility and Solidarity: Preconditions

Public responsibility and therefore public financial commitment is necessary at all levels of government to ensure access for all to social services and that service providers are able to provide quality services. A free market would not guarantee access to services for all; often those with the least financial means have the most needs and life risks such as unemployment are often structural rather than individual.

Everyone should have the right of access to *quality* services. 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. The Lisbon Treaty states with reference to "services of general interest", which include social services, that "*The Union and Member States...shall take care that such services operate on the basis of principles and conditions, in particular economic and financial conditions, which enable them to fulfil their missions*".

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<sup>1</sup> Everyone has the right to benefit from social welfare services. [European Social Charter](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Union recognises and respects the entitlement to social security benefits and social services providing protection in cases such as maternity, illness, industrial accidents, dependency or old age, and in the case of loss of employment [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#)

<sup>3</sup> See also the European Commission's communication COM(2006) 177 final for a comprehensive description of social services. Please note however that Eurodiaconia believes that social security schemes are not services in themselves.



## Our recommendations

- Ensure social and health services are provided on the basis of solidarity; that they are publicly funded
- The relevant funding, supervising, and legislating authorities and institutions at all levels must ensure that the financial, social and regulatory environments are such that social service providers are able to fulfil their missions
- Where services are provided for remuneration they must be affordable to all
- That services are available to the user as locally as possible to ensure no-one is unable to access the services because of location and that services are physically accessible to all

## The Special Nature of Social Services; Why Quality Matters

In 2006 the European Commission recognised the special characteristics of Social Services of General Interest. As opposed to other “network” services of general, or public interest such as water provision they are not provided within a “normal” supplier/consumer relationship, rather an “asymmetric” one due to the position of the service user in relation to the service provider and the personal nature of the service. It must be ensured that EU internal market and competition rules and their implementation by member states does not negatively impact on the provision of or access to quality social and health services and that the specificities of social and health services are protected.

EU public procurement rules currently allow funding authorities to award tenders for social services, as with all services, on the basis of the “lowest price”. Yet, for social services, quality is essential in order for the service to achieve its goal of meeting a need. Many providers who take on services at these lower costs then find it difficult to provide high quality care and support as they are working with minimum resources.

Eurodiaconia has drawn up a comprehensive position paper on quality in social services which includes principles outlining what Eurodiaconia and its member organisations believe to be quality in diaconal social care and services and what they commit to strive for in the services they provide. This covers the characteristics of the service provided, the relationship between the provider/staff and user, the relationship between the provider and those working for it as well as principles that funding, supervising and legislating authorities should strive for<sup>4</sup>.

## Our recommendations

- The European Commission should monitor the impact of EU rules on social services and non-profit providers and take action to amend rules or improve understanding where necessary
- Public tendering for social service provision must include consideration of independently verified quality criteria
- Member States must implement the Active Inclusion principles on access to quality social services<sup>5</sup> and the European Commission must monitor their implementation
- In EU processes designed to provide guidelines on the methodology to set, monitor and evaluate quality all relevant stakeholders must be involved

<sup>4</sup> Eurodiaconia Principles of Quality Social Services in Diaconia

<sup>5</sup> COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market C(2008) 5737



## The Special Situation of Non-Profit Organisations

Eurodiaconia is concerned about the impact of state aid regulations on not-for profit organisations. Tax breaks or other similar benefits given to non-profit service providers can be contested if part of the organisation's work is profit-making. However, this fails to note the specific nature of not for profit social and health service providers. Although a surplus may be made it would be reinvested in the services provided. Under state aid regulations this may be questioned and seen as unfair even though the income is reinvested. The disadvantages of having to re-invest profit are not taken into account whereas the tax advantages themselves are. This could lead to reduced funding to organisations that have a person's well-being and not profit as their goal.

### *Our recommendation*

- The European Commission must amend State Aid rules that adversely affect the development and provision of social services provided by non-governmental, non-profit actors

## More in Need – More Needed and the Economic Contribution of Social Services

As society faces economic crises and given demographic trends more of the population will need the care and support that social services provide so such services must be developed and supported to meet this increasing demand. Additionally, this increasing demand means that jobs created in the sector will be long-term. Therefore, just as social and health care services have contributed strongly to job creation, even while other sectors were shrinking, they will continue to provide jobs. If new services are supported and developed there is the potential to provide new jobs and sustainable employment. Investing in and improving the quality of services, particularly in preventive services, reduces need in the long-term and therefore expenditure.

### *Our recommendations*

- National and EU investment to promote growth should include investment in social and health services and infrastructure
- A part of EU structural funds should be earmarked for investment in social and health services and infrastructure
- Improved monitoring at national and EU level of member states' use of EU funds to ensure that projects benefit those they are meant to target

## Working Conditions in the Social Sector

Studies show that despite above average educational levels of workers in the social and health care sector, working conditions are demanding, wage levels are below average and have declined relative to other sectors and turnover is high because of this<sup>6</sup>. Jobs in the sector are also not highly valued.

The growing demand for care and healthcare personnel has led to a growing "grey market" of unqualified and/or unregistered carers; many of whom are migrants in an irregular situation. People registered as a carer may in fact be providing health services. Some are qualified medical professionals, but employed below their

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<sup>6</sup> See European Commission *Background Information* EMPL/E-4 D(2009)



qualification<sup>7</sup>. Others are not qualified but still providing health services. There is also evidence of the exploitation of migrant workers, such as when employers overcharge for workers' accommodation.

### *Our recommendations*

- Governments must ensure a financial framework in which social service providers can pay decent, competitive wages
- Where necessary governments must address the issue of grey or black market work in the social sector and close legal loopholes that allow exploitation of migrant workers.
- EU level cooperation should be developed to examine working standards in the care sector, sharing best practice and drawing up common commitments and proposals

## Stakeholder Involvement and Added Value

Stakeholders, including non-profit service providers, have much valuable experience and expertise on the ground which they can bring to policy discussions, as well as to planning and evaluating social service provision. Eurodiaconia also believes that users should be involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of their care.

### *Our recommendations*

- All responsible authorities must involve all stakeholders, including providers, in social planning and the formulation of services including the assessment of a community's needs, in the evaluation of services and in dialogue about policy affecting services
- Services should enable the user to recognise his or her own resources and to use those resources to fulfil their potential. The aim of a service should be independence and self-determination for the user as far as possible or feasible<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.eurodiaconia.org/files/Eurodiaconia-CSC%20response%20to%20Health%20Services%20Consultation%2031-01-07.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> For a more comprehensive elaboration of this issue please see the document *Eurodiaconia Principles of Quality Social Services in Diaconia*