

Social Services Europe

**RESPONSE TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION PUBLIC CONSULTATION:
“Exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services”**



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Social Services Europe brings together seven Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit providers of social and health care services who each have a track record in providing value-driven services for the most vulnerable in our societies. The network aims to strengthen the profile and position of social services, and promote the role of not-for-profit social service providers in Europe. For more info: www.socialserviceseurope.eu

INTRODUCTION

Social Services Europe represents 100,000 social and health services active across Europe promoting social inclusion and social cohesion. The sector, employing 10% of the EU workforce, has a long-term commitment to vulnerable people and is constantly searching for innovative and cost effective solutions to providing quality services.

The network aims to strengthen the profile and position of social services, and promote the role of not-for-profit social service providers in Europe. It seeks to ensure that the specificity of not-for-profit social and healthcare service providers be recognised and that economic, social and legal conditions exist for quality social and healthcare services.

What type of service do our members provide?

Our members cover a large range of services at the regional or local level. Some provide stationary or ambulatory social and health care services by qualified staff and funded by social security schemes. Other member organisations supply personal services exclusively through volunteers on a private basis. Activities include those associated with Activities of Daily Living and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living, for example, nursing of older people, meals on wheels, daily shopping, and assistance with administrative tasks.

1. Definition and scope of personal and household services and specificities of social services

The European Commission (EC) staff working document defines personal and household services (PHS) as *“a broad range of activities that contribute to well being at home of families and individuals: child care (CC), long term care (LTC) for the elderly and for persons with disabilities, cleaning, remedial classes, home repairs, gardening, ICT support, etc.”*

Firstly, this definition covers only some of the categories mentioned in the EC communication on social services of general interest (SSGI) from 2006¹, which includes services to the person, such as social support services for people furthest away from the labour market and suffering social exclusion, and crisis and emergency social and health services. This narrow definition found in the staff working paper is problematic because it no longer has the holistic approach to the definition of social services that the Commission took in 2006 and which Social Services Europe members support. A holistic and comprehensive strategy is essential. Social services face many of the same challenges, whether provided at home, in community or institutional settings. These challenges are often interlinked and cannot be addressed individually, such as addressing only personal social services delivered at home. Therefore we call for an EU strategy that tackles the full range of challenges to the sector and proposes actions to support the whole social services sector, and not just the services addressed in the Commission’s consultation.

Secondly, although there is an interpersonal dimension also in household services, this interpersonal dimension plays a much more important role in social services, such as child care/long-term care. The quality of social services closely depends on the interaction established between user and provider, enabling user empowerment and co-construction of the service. Neither does the service users’ health, nor their wellbeing depend on such services in the same way, as the target group of social services is often vulnerable, or in a difficult situation (and not mere “consumers”).

Addressing personal and household services in the same way is also problematic because care services require highly qualified staff; whereas housework services can be carried out by a less qualified workforce. Social and health services must be of high quality to achieve their goal of meeting the need of their target group.

¹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Social services of general interest in the European Union, Brussels, 26.4.2006 COM(2006) 177 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_protection/docs/com_2006_177_en.pdf

Thirdly, the SSGI EC Communication clearly states: *These services that play a preventive and social cohesion role consist of customised assistance to facilitate social inclusion and safeguard fundamental rights.*² Not taking into account the human rights and social inclusion dimension plays down the responsibility of public authorities to guarantee availability, accessibility and affordability of high quality integrated social and health services for all.

2. Employment in the context of emerging social needs

As a result of demographic change, changing social patterns, increasing inequalities and the economic and financial crisis there is a growing demand for social services, not only housework, long-term care for elderly people, and child care. Quality employment should be promoted where it responds to all emerging needs in the personal social services sector.

Given this context, although stimulating employment in social and health services is important, this should not be the only focus and objective of the strategy. Therefore, the Commission must work to promote investment in the full range of social and health services, showing that it pays off in the long term through better health, social inclusion, access to the labour market and empowerment of people to live independent lives.

Using the full potential of the sector requires improving the working conditions by generating sustainable quality employment that would attract people to enter the sector. Quality employment and decent work are crucial to ensuring the quality of social services.

Austerity measures that lead to cuts in social and health services will only exacerbate a vicious circle of long-term social exclusion. If not addressed through social and health care services, poverty and social exclusion bear a human cost in terms of lost potential and well-being. This in turn negatively impacts social cohesion.

² *Ibidem*, p. 4

SOCIAL SERVICES EUROPE RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. What are your views on ways to improve measurement and monitoring of the employment levels in personal and household services, taking into account the impact of the on-going crisis, loss of purchasing power, labour market exclusion issues and the potentially positive effect on the creation or growth of SMEs?

As stated by the EC Staff Working Document, personal and household services are characterised by a predominance of undeclared work. Public authorities have to act in order to facilitate the provision of these services in the formal economy, as a precondition for an effective measurement of the employment levels in the sector.

Some actions can be suggested, in order to improve the measurement of the employment levels as well as the working conditions in the sector.

1) The social accounting system can represent an effective method to monitor the evolutions in employment levels, as well as other social issues. This system is a practical means of describing what is taking place in an economic system insofar as this can be expressed in terms of transactions between a set of accounts³. It is used in Belgium, for example, and keeps track of all transactions for the registered employers. Information on the evolution of the workforce is thus easily accessible and also the share of non-profit service providers in the whole can be identified.

2) In addition to this, a better representation of employees in household and personal services could be a means to gather more information and to improve the working conditions and the attractiveness of the sector. The high number of domestic workers (mainly in household services) without proper representation in industrial relations has negative consequences on their working conditions and on the information available. The European Commission could facilitate this process by encouraging Member States to promote negotiations between such workers and employers.

3) The biennial report of the European Commission on SSGIs could also provide a useful framework for monitoring and measuring employment.

4) As a measure to better use and monitor the employment potential in the sector better information should be available to households who might be in search of a care worker as well as for the providers and employees in the sector. Specialised job centres could act as intermediary between households and providers, help in assessing needs of the users, guaranteeing the skills of the staff and informing about the rights and obligations of all.

There is a clear link between the crisis and the provision of social and health care services in general. A loss of purchase power of service users, such as through cuts in their benefits, negatively affects employment potential, employment conditions and the quality of services as they may be unable to ensure decent working conditions, be no longer able to employ someone with sufficient qualifications or unable to employ someone at all.

The EC should also acknowledge the significant potential of employment creation in the not-for-profit sector. Indeed, while household services are related to SMEs, personal social and health services are often provided by not-for-profit organisations. To fully benefit from its potential in job creation, additional investment should be given to the not-for-profit sector.

³ *Functions and criteria of a system of social accounting*, Richard Stone, <http://www.roiw.org/1/2.pdf>

2. What are your views on the utility of developing sharing of experiences, especially concerning the tools used or planned to support the personal and household services with a specific attention to the cost effectiveness and to the reduction of undeclared work?

The primary aim when talking about the sharing of experiences in social services should be improving the well-being of the persons using the services, implementing solidarity principles, ensuring human rights are respected, making sure the most effective models work to achieve the aims of the service, and ensuring decent working conditions for staff in these services – and not only cost-effectiveness. Due to the societal trends noted above, the need for social services is increasing and will increase. Sharing experiences on effective and innovative practices that best meet users' needs and improve their quality of life and work is therefore increasingly important.

In addition, on 21 June 2012 the EPSCO council invited *"MS and the EC to, within the Open Method of Coordination, collect, analyse and exchange information on new efficient and effective methods to deliver social services."*⁴ In fact, social and health services are not a short-term cost but a long-term investment in a cohesive society that supports and recognises the absolute and specific value of each individual and its dignity, whatever her/his possibility to contribute to the economy. The focus should shift from cutting costs to measuring social and financial return on investments. The European Commission and Member States should promote methods in the evaluation and assessment of the social and economic impact of social services and carry out research to prove cost effectiveness of social services, including preventive care. Better policies and better services in some areas can also be cost-effective in the short term.

Exchanges on how to meet user's needs more effectively should include initiatives that address preventative, rehabilitation and emergency measures, as well as universal services and targeted interventions tailored to these needs. Further, experiences should be shared on how to optimise partnerships between public authorities and all relevant stakeholders in the design, development, delivery and evaluation of social services and social policies at national and EU level. Service users' involvement and empowerment is essential in supporting people towards independence and improving life quality, thus increasing effectiveness. EU level cooperation should also be developed to examine working standards and conditions in the social service sector, sharing best practice and drawing up common commitments and proposals.

However, before promoting the transfer of effective practices and policies to another level, critical examination should consider the different modalities and legal requirements for the implementation of such practices and policies within different Member States. Social policy experimentation provides a means to test (innovative) solutions before mainstreaming them. As the actors actually delivering social services, social service providers can act as advisors and promoters in the scaling-up of effective practices and policies⁵.

Voucher schemes in the social service sector should not be used as a means to cut costs or for public authorities to renege on their responsibility and impact assessments should be made to ensure that reduced access to essential social services is not a consequence of such schemes. Sufficient information and support to service users in using any voucher scheme is essential to take into account the information asymmetry between the providers and the users and the vulnerability of certain users. Moreover, schemes such as the Belgian voucher scheme, which relates mainly to housework tasks, should be assessed according to decent work criteria.

⁴ http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/131109.pdf

⁵ <http://socialserviceseurope.eu/publications/item/34-briefing-on-social-innovation-in-social-services>

3. What are your views on ways of ensuring quality services and jobs (skill needs, working conditions), including possibly through development quality standards?

To ensure the quality of services their organisation, funding and delivery needs to be supported, particularly in times of crisis. A coherent policy and financial framework can also be hugely important for the quality of service provision. Governments must ensure a financial framework in which social service providers can pay decent wages.

Furthermore, the involvement of users, providers and other relevant stakeholders in the design, delivery and evaluation of the service is key to their continuous quality development.

Making profit as the driving force of service provision can easily hamper their quality and availability, since the focus is more on short-term interests of shareholders than on long-term interests of stakeholders and users' needs. Therefore, the use of reserved markets for not-for-profit organisations in public procurement should be promoted where it is in compliance with EU law.

In addition, Member States should be supported in implementing the Voluntary Quality Framework for Social Services, adopted by the Social Protection Committee in 2010. Furthermore, sector specific quality frameworks should be developed, as announced in the EPAP flagship initiative.

Quality staff is essential for effective, quality social services and service providers will need even more personnel in the future due to the increasing demand. The growing demand for care and health care staff 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 qualification. Others are not qualified but still providing health services. Jobs in the care sector are often not valued by society which means that the sector does not attract the workers needed. 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. Improving working conditions in the sector would prevent some of the black and "grey" market work and prevent abuses of migrant workers.

Quality services provision through quality staff requires decent work and quality employment. It is not only a question of creating more jobs, but also quality jobs which can ensure high quality and sustainable service provision. Staff should be remunerated according to their skills and the value they provide in the service.,

Wage negotiation mechanisms and collective bargaining are an effective means to secure a competition based on the quality of the service and not on the lowest price. This relates, inter alia, to improving remuneration and tackling the gender pay gap to ensure decent living wages and guaranteeing health and safety at work. We therefore recommend the development and strengthening of a sectoral social dialogue and call upon Member States to ratify the ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers.

4. What are your other ways to ensure greater professionalisation of personal and household services jobs?

In addition to the promotion of collective representations, quality vocational training and tailor-made lifelong learning opportunities are key to the greater professionalisation of personal and household services.

Personal and household services, in turn, can only unfold their full potential if Member States adopt the proper frameworks aiming to recognise the qualifications of workers, especially those obtained by migrant workers in third countries. This includes guaranteeing them access to funding for formal basic training. This could help reduce undeclared work and prevent domestic workers carrying out personal and household services without proper qualifications. We also recommend an intensified exchange about vocational training as well as about competence development and recognition between Member States.

Confident and motivated individuals working in social services who are aware of their own abilities as well as learning workplaces enabling the use and development of skills, competences and knowledge are necessary for the provision of quality services. To that end, existing skills, competences and knowledge have to be better used and new skills and competences have to be developed through high quality vocational education and training, retraining and lifelong learning opportunities. In addition, providers should develop care workers' roles, giving them more responsibility and widening their skills and knowledge base.

In terms of content of vocational training, due to the specific characteristics of the workforce in this sector, it should include gender-specific elements. Training for treating medical conditions and addictions should include the specificities of working with groups such as older people and people with a migrant background.

The announced set up of a Sector Skills Alliance, Sector Skills Councils, Skills Panorama and the European Skills, Competences and Occupations Taxonomy (ESCO) must map skills, competences and knowledge, to anticipate future needs and to support the setup of individual learning pathways. They should develop tools that recognise skills, competences and knowledge acquired through non-formal and informal learning since they are vital in personal and household services, although they are not recognised in EQF or ECVET. CEDEFOP could be a partner to develop transnational training modules with social and health providers, as well as providers of vocational and professional trainings to meet skills needs.