

Social Services: A Viable Opportunity for Growth

European Parliamentarians and experts discuss how social services contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth

Brussels, 9 October 2012. Social services are a key component of the European social model and important stabilisers in times of economic recession. How social services contribute to smart, sustainable and economic growth, as laid out in the Europe 2020 strategy, was discussed at a round table in the European Parliament. The event was organised by Social Services Europe, bringing together nine Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit providers of social and health care services, and the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

Stephen Hughes, Member of the European Parliament (MEP), emphasised the importance of social services in reaching the goals of Europe 2020: *“We are struggling with the economic crisis. The extent of the impact of austerity has been underestimated and there is evidence to suggest that austerity measures are counterproductive. I hope this brings about a radical re-think in the way the crisis is being handled. We have to take care of the most vulnerable and social services are doing exactly that.”* He thereby opened the event in the European Parliament and three round table discussions on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

During the round table debate on smart growth, MEP Jean Lambert, Henriette van Eijl of DG Enterprise and Industry and Josef Hochgerner from the Centre of Social Innovation (ZSI) in Vienna discussed the important role social services play in finding innovative solutions to meet social needs by maximising the impact of innovation policy, and by building knowledge and sharing experience. Hochgerner affirmed: *“Social services should work together with civil society organisations, scientific bodies and even government to do a mapping exercise of social innovation in Europe and to build up a suitable repository. ... Social service providers can do a lot to identify social innovation and carry it into the policy arena.”*

In the view of Carola Fischbach-Pyttel of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU): *“We can no longer sustain this degree of social disintegration as it creates problems now and in the long term for the survival of the EU. One way to address this is to strengthen the social partners and social dialogue.”* Fischbach-Pyttel and the other members of the panel on sustainable growth, Ana-Cristina Costea of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and Raymond Maes, Member of the Cabinet of European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Lázló Andor, affirmed the view of Social Services Europe, that non-profit social service providers have a big role to play in the provision of social and health services and also in the future of job creation. These jobs can only be sustained, if employees in this sector have access to quality employment, including social dialogue, better working conditions and training opportunities.

On the panel on inclusive growth were Gabi Zimmer (MEP), Concetta Cultrera, Head of the Social Protection and Social Services Unit of the European Commission, and Bernd Schlüter from the EESC. Schlüter explained the essential elements of an inclusive economy: *“It has two basic principles: a strong and available social service system and an inclusive economic structure with fair market opportunities for small enterprises.”* Social services not only provide value-driven services for the most vulnerable in our societies, they also provide employment for marginalised groups and others at the risk of poverty.

Social Services Europe brings together nine Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit providers of social and health services who each have a track record in providing value-driven services for those at risk of poverty and exclusion in our societies. The network has an important contribution to bring to the overall success of the Europe 2020 strategy and in addressing the social impacts of the present crisis. Social Services Europe works on the impact of EU legislation on social services of general interest, social dialogue, social innovation and the European Structural Funds.

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NOTES FOR THE EDITOR

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 services.

Social Services Europe brings together nine 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.

Members of the network are: Caritas Europa, CEDAG, EASPD, epr, Eurodiaconia, FEANTSA, Red Cross, solidar and Workability Europe.

For more information, please visit:
www.socialserviceseurope.eu