

OCTOBER 2010

EASPD Conference in Skopje: austerity measures endanger social services all over Europe



The EASPD Conference held in Skopje on the 7 and 8 November was a great success: Over 220 participants joined the event, including representatives from all major European Institutions.

Several delegates from Macedonia and all over Europe brought up worrying testimonies of the situation of the social sector in their countries in the context of the crisis. However, all participants showed their commitment to implement the UN Con-

vention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, with the aim of ensuring better social conditions for person with disabilities. Thanks to high quality inputs from experienced speakers, debates focused on bridging the gap between principles and practices. Moreover, delegates from different backgrounds and origins explored concrete cooperation opportunities.

Members of the Macedonian Parliament representing all major parties in the country promised that the Convention would be ratified by the beginning of December 2010. This is a positive signal for the region, which will encourage the disability sector to closely follow up any related development. Nevertheless, building and strengthening links across borders is today more needed than never, as austerity measures greatly endanger social cohesion.

EASPD publishes paper on the current employment situation in the social care sector in Europe

The document describes the current situation on employment in care services in Europe and the implications on the possibility of providing high quality services. It also puts forward suggestions and recommendations

on how to address the highlighted issues, notably through the ESF. The full report is available on the policy and the news section of the EASPD website www.easpd.eu.



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EASPD NEWSFLASH OCTOBER 2010

EASPD publishes report on the effects of the financial crisis on social services for people with disabilities in Europe



At the end of October 2010, EASPD published a report outlining the effects of the financial crisis on social services in several countries around Europe. The results are rather disappointing: the condition of people with disabilities across Europe were either poor or under threat because of heavy cuts to social budgets put forward in austerity plans. This is especially true in countries where austerity measures are at their most severe, such as Ireland, Romania and Bulgaria.

In some countries people working in sheltered workshops are employed to

similar levels as before the crisis while in other countries unemployment has soared in the sector. On the open labour market unemployment levels have reached record highs across Europe and people with disabilities are having great difficulty in finding or keeping employment.

Many countries have reported that people with disabilities' unemployment rates are much higher than those of people without disabilities.

Another big effect of the financial crisis is that Governments have stopped funding for pro-

jects aimed at bringing people with disabilities to work, in addition to other cuts affecting support services.

Finally, social projects which could boost employment, are in general suffering from cutbacks. While some countries such as France haven't cut their social spending others such as Ireland, Bulgaria, Austria and Romania have already suffered major cuts which might further negatively impact on service delivery for people with disabilities.

EASPD recommends at High Level Group on Disability meeting to better use European structural funds to minimize the impact of the crisis



The main topics of the High Level Group on Disability meeting of the European Commission which took place in early October was the state of play of the new Disability Strategy. According to the Disability Unit of DG Employment, the Communication will be launched by 10 November 2010. It was reported that its policy framework will be built on 8 areas (accessibility, participation, equality and non discrimination, employment, education and training, social protection, health, External actions). EASPD thanked the Euro-

pean Commission for the open and proactive way in which the strategy was developed. Nevertheless, EASPD stressed that the strategy should include in all policies and actions the very specific position of persons with severe and high support needs and the need for an empowered High Level Group including all stakeholders. Finally, EASPD underlined again that the strategy should look at how to handle the negative impact of the crisis. EASPD repeated that we cannot accept that the social infrastructure is

demolished by austerity plans: innovation should not stop, re-institutionalisation is not acceptable. Therefore EASPD proposed to better look at the Structural Funds and how to use these funding streams to fight the impact of the crisis. EASPD therefore calls on the Member States to develop plans, in close cooperation with all stakeholders, to minimize the negative effects and to prepare for the recovery.

EASPD writes open letter to Commissioners to call for recognition of social services as key actors to reach the poverty reduction targets of the EU 2020

In October 2010 EASPD wrote an open letter to EU Commissioners and their cabinets to call for the recognition of social services as key actors to reach the poverty reduction targets of the EU 2020 Strategy.

In its letter, EASPD stated that it is important to bear in mind that poverty has many facets and there is not one single solution to today's problems. This is why it is imperative that the European Platform against Poverty includes the right policy mix and strategies to meet these multiple needs so that European society is adequately prepared to achieve the agreed poverty eradication targets. Social services are a vital part of this policy mix as they play a very important role in supporting vulnerable citizens.

It may be highlighted that social services operate in different areas (e.g. education, employment, healthcare, antidiscrimination, etc.) and help improving the quality of life of citizens. Social services address poverty and social exclusion at two levels: firstly, they play a preventative role by help-

ing people at risk; secondly they provide remedy, i.e. offer vital support to those people who already experience poverty and exclusion.

The EU has the primary responsibility to protect these services within Europe. A strong EU framework is needed to effectively contribute to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion, and consequently to the strengthening of social cohesion. We need to face the fact that there are increasing numbers of people in the EU who live in poverty, often even despite being employed. The financial, economic and social crisis has hit hardest on the most vulnerable groups in society. This situation was exacerbated as a result of more or less drastic cuts of social expenditures throughout Europe. The European Platform against Poverty represents a unique opportunity to redress this situation.

Thus, EASPD deems it essential to improve the conditions within which social services throughout Europe operate. It is vital that this Flagship initiative contains a concrete formu-

lation that highlights the importance of social services.

For the users of social services, it must be ensured that services can continue to provide adequate and universal assistance to the citizens of Europe. A strategy that recognizes the role of social services would contribute positively to the fight against poverty both by creating job opportunities and by delivering vital care to EU citizens. The right to receive support services is recognized in article 34 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and it is time to create the conditions for people to be able to enjoy it.

The European Council has recognized that a successful implementation of the EU 2020 is only possible if done in partnership with all national, regional and local authorities, social partners and representatives of civil society. This is why EASPD, a key representative of the social sector, reiterated its availability to work with European Institutions to turn this vision into a reality for all citizens of Europe!



Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights calls for end of institutionalisation of persons with disabilities



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Thomas Hammarberg, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights made a formal comment mid October 2010 calling for an end to institutionalisation and inhuman treatment of people with disabilities.

Drawing from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Hammarberg emphasised the right to independent living. Article 19 of the UNCRPD, entitled Living in the Community, guarantees that people with disabilities have the right to

live independently in the community with the support they need provided. He called for the end to deaths and abuses of persons within psychiatric and social care institutions and highlighted the failure of States to develop good community based services.

“In Europe today, thousands of people with disabilities are still kept in large, segregated and often remote institutions. In a number of cases they live in substandard conditions, suffering abject ne-

glect and severe human rights abuses. In too many cases, premature deaths are not investigated or even reported,” said Hammarberg.

“Since several European countries still lack a system for community-based services, it will take time before large psychiatric and social care institutions are phased out. Thus it is all the more important that those remaining be under regular scrutiny.”

European Commission launched public consultations on the next generation of EU programmes

More information on:

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=LifelongLearning&lang=en>

The European Commission launched public consultations on the next generation of EU programmes to replace three existing ones from the beginning of 2014.

Anyone can take part in the consultations – individuals, associations, organisations and stakeholders. The first programme proposed is EU Education and Training, to replace the current Lifelong Learning programme. The second is Youth Programme to replace the current Youth in Action programme. Finally, there is the international higher education programme to

replace the current Erasmus Mundus programme. In the consultation questionnaires, the Commission asks for stakeholders' views on the development and design of the programmes and how they can contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy.

The Europe 2020 strategy plans for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The consultations will be open until 30 November. In line with Europe 2020, the programmes should help Europeans adapt to a labour market where a great majority of jobs require a high or medium level of skills, and there

are fewer and fewer jobs for people without solid professional training.

You will find more information on the following link:

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=LifelongLearning&lang=en>

The results will be published on the Directorate General for Education and Culture's website. EASPD will regularly inform its members on the latest developments.

Upcoming events

- The seminar “Assistive technology. How can we make the most of it?” will take place on 19 November 2010 in Paris. Organised in the framework of the ImPaCT in Europe project, it will focus on the role of PCT in the field of education. More information is available on the websites: www.impact-in-europe.eu and www.easpd.eu
- The EASPD Policy Seminar 2010: “Poverty and disability– how can we break the link?” will take place in the morning of 02 December 2010. More information will soon be available on the EASPD website.



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