



MEETING REPORT

High Level Expert Group on Social Services

23-24 May 2018

On the 23rd and 24th of May, experts on social services from Eurodiaconia member organizations and key stakeholders met in Brussels to discuss key challenges for the provision of social services. During this two-day meeting, experts had the opportunity to discuss a wide range of issues and proposals to bring forward a positive agenda for quality social services in Europe.



Wednesday, 23rd of May

Social Services in the aftermath of the crisis.

During the 1st session Eurodiaconia's Secretary General, **Heather Roy**, welcomed participants and explained the motivation behind the creation of the Group, its context and goals. She first drew on the European political





context in which social services operate today, with the rise of populism and anti-European parties as a potential threat for social services and social justice. The way social services are delivered is also changing towards a community-based and more inclusive approach. Concerning the financial context, social services providers are facing tighter public budgets as well as a changing legal framework, for instance in the field of public procurement. Finally, regarding the social context Heather Roy recalled the rise of inequalities and how our members are witnessing this phenomenon on a daily basis. Therefore, she stressed the need to listen to vulnerable people's stories to build our advocacy strategies.

Eurodiaconia has an expertise on social services thanks to its members and is already acknowledged as a reliable partner in its dialogue with EU institutions on social services issues. The aim of the Expert Group is to strengthen Eurodiaconia's advocacy work with key partners at EU level through a more precise identification of the key messages we want to advocate for. The Group also aims to establish stronger links between the EU level and national and local ones and, therefore, makes the work of Eurodiaconia even more relevant for its members.

According to **Heather Roy**, the abovementioned issues and new trends make relevant the creation of the Group as a new space for discussion. Europe is in a post-crisis context and social services should have a role in this context to promote cohesion and inclusive societies. Technological change, however, will likely change the way in which such services are delivered. Furthermore, the EU is now in the process of defining the post 2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and this will present challenges but also opportunities for social services. Finally, the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) has put social issues back at the centre of the European project. Ten out of the twenty principles enshrined in the EPSR cannot be achieved without the involvement of social service providers. The EPSR provides us with a positive framework we can refer to, but the implementation will have to be closely monitored.

To conclude, **Heather Roy** said that this group is set-up for the 3 next years and that the aim was to produce a high-level report on social services based on members' expertise to be used as an advocacy tool. Heather closed this session by putting forward three main questions to be discussed throughout the meeting: What is the core business of NPO (Non-Profit Organisations) in our current contexts? Who are our users and what is our function in the new scenario? What are the future trends?

Getting the right people for quality social services

The session was introduced by **Klaus Heeger** Secretary General of the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI). Klaus invited participants to reflect on three main issues which, according to him, lie at the heart of staffing challenges and the sustainability of service provision. Such challenges are interrelated and regard how to promote better working conditions among staff, how to improve funding for social services and how to improve the image of the sector.

Klaus Heeger then gave the floor to the speaker **Thomas Bignal**, Policy Advisor at the European Association of Services Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD). EASPD has an important external and internal advocacy work aimed at service provision that promotes and guarantees equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Before having a participatory discussion with the experts in the room, **Thomas Bignal** made a presentation on the need to get skilled people for the provision of quality social services and difficulties to achieve this. First, he stressed that the move from an institutional care system (with a block approach, coming from outside the community) to a community-based system (based on greater inclusion in the community, greater control of the clients over their own lives) has several impacts on social service providers. It impacts the workforce (need of reorganisation, training, e-training), the legal framework (need of gatekeeping mechanisms), and the approach of service provision (now it is more and more important to have a mainstream approach, to support families as well etc). This also has impacts on the staff and on the skills needed to provide the services (e.g. provision of legal advice, provide support to the family, use of the technology etc). Against



this background, **Thomas Bignal** acknowledged the difficulty to attract the right profile for the provision of social services, especially given the lack of recognition of this sector. He gave some ideas to overcome this challenge: promotion of innovation, giving more autonomy and responsibilities to the carers, offering continuous professional development, improving the working conditions and addressing gender imbalances. Finally, **Thomas Bignal** gave examples of projects for developing the right skills for quality services such as the [European Mentoring in Social Care](#) or the [European Care Certificate](#).



Discussion:

Yvan Grimaldi from the Salvation Army France commented on the French situation, where quality in social services has been left in the hands of for-profit providers due to insufficient state support for public and non-profit actors. Then **Hanns-Stephan Haas** from Diakonie Alsterdorf Hamburg said that if the people have changed (young people are different), the needs have changed as well. For him, in order to attract new people with the right skills the organisations should be less hierarchic which is a challenge for diaconal organisations. **Olli Holmstrom**, from the Helsinki Deaconess Institute (HDI), shared that in Finland HDI is paying its employees (2 000 employees) more than the for-profit providers under the same agreement, which is positive. However, they continue to face issues with finding people with the right competences. For **Anna Johansson**, Stockholm City Mission, non-for-profit providers of social services in Sweden face a real problem of retention: they invest in people, train them but then people leave because they can find better paid jobs in the for-profit sector.

After the first round of comments and questions, **Thomas Bignal** said that an excessive stress on quality can be challenging because quality is not always measurable. Regarding pay levels, he gave the example of the organisation [Enable Scotland](#) that managed to raise the salaries of its staff by reducing the number of jobs in its hierarchy.

Then, **Yvan Grimaldi** shared his concerned about the move from institutional care to community-based care because the French legislation is not yet adapted to this transition and the definition of the term 'community' in France may differ. Continuing on this issue of the move toward community-based services, Hanns-Stephan



Haas mentioned that it was raising regulatory issues. For example, the working time directive is difficult to apply in community-based services because they cannot afford it.

Finally, **Heather Roy** asked the experts to share information on the profile of staff in their organisations (tenure, gender balance etc). **Olli Holmstrom** explained that in HDI has regular data of the employees and people are staying 8.8 years on average, while only 18% of the staff is male. In France, **Yvan Grimaldi** said that the Salvation Army has data and that the younger the beneficiaries are, the higher the share of male staff is. For Diakonie Alsterdorf Hamburg **Hanns-Stephan Haas** stated that on average people are staying 12 years and that in education the balance was 50-50 but in working with people with disabilities the balance was 60-40. Finally, Anna Johansson shared that in the Stockholm City Mission the average of staying in the organisation was over 2 years and that the gender balance was 75-35.

Klaus Heeger concluded by emphasising the overall objective to boost the quality of service provisions and the working environment. The incentives to attract people are not necessarily material only; providers should also focus on the meaningfulness of the sector.

Promoting access to markets by not-for-profit providers

Heather Roy introduced and gave the floor to **Anna Lupi**, Legal and Policy Officer at DG GROW in the European Commission. Eurodiaconia has been active on the topic throughout the legislative process of the last Directive 2014/24 and its transposition at national level. However, Eurodiaconia is witnessing that the implementation of the Directive is not making full use of its social potential. As a result, Eurodiaconia aims to make contracting authorities, providers and relevant stakeholders aware of this potential as given by the new procurement rules.

To begin with, **Anna Lupi** explained that the Directive has four main objectives: ensure compliance with existing legislation; supporting the use of socially sustainable criteria and quality considerations; encourage social inclusion and create a special light regime for social services. The social criteria introduced by the Directive, can be used at different steps: through the technical procedures; by contract performance clauses and through award criteria. While the Directive does not spell out the term not-for-profit as a criterion reserved contracts and the “light regime” should be especially applied with these operators.

Anna Lupi next addressed the implementation of the Directive. The European Commission is fully engaged with making new public procurement rules work. At this point, the EC is aware that issues in national legislation exist but needs to know precisely where such issues lie. The implementation of the Directive is not easy because it makes the selection of contracts more complex and this calls for increased professionalisation of public authorities. Today, 55% of all public procurement decisions are based on price only and this should change.

After the deadline of the transposition of the Directive, the European Commission released the Public Procurement package in October 2017 including a Communication on Public Procurement stressing 6 priority areas (the most important one is to boost strategic public procurement) and a Recommendation on the Professionalisation of Public Procurement to Member States¹.

To conclude with her presentation, **Anna Lupi** described the further steps for the Commission: one-day seminars will be launched in different Member States in 2019 (SE, DK, NL, EL, FR, DE, PL, LV, SK, CZ, HU, RO, HR, IE). The seminars will target mainly contracting authorities and social enterprises. The aim is to focus on the national level and to explain how the legislation works. In 2019 the Commission will release a guidance on socially responsible public procurement with key recommendations on procurement both in terms of legal

¹ Eurodiaconia briefing on the Public Procurement package can be found [here](#).



compliance and efficiency of the process². Communication tools will also be produced to be used for dissemination and further awareness-raising.

Discussion:

Participants stressed the fact that the public procurement logic creates difficulties to pay workers adequately. According to **Anna Johansson**, the bodies in charge of public procurement often do not want to apply the social criteria unless they have the legal advice and security that this is according to the law. The guide will be of help if it reaches public authorities. For Olli Holmstrom, tenders are often more looking at the number of transactions than at the real effect of the service provision. Finally, **Hanns-Stephan Haas** raised the issue that reserved contracts are not a guarantee of quality per se and public procurement is often used to intervene in the market. For him, the usefulness of public procurement is different from one country to another: for example, in Romania it would be great to have more procurement because the current offers are unrealistic. But in Germany, it is different because public procurement is not the only way to provide services (triangular system in Germany).

Thursday, 24th of May

A spotlight on long-term care services

Alexander Elu introduced the day by recalling the importance of the focus on long-term care (LTC) for Eurodiaconia and its members and how this topic is key at EU level, especially after its definition as a principle of the EPSR. Then, he welcomed and gave the floor to **Ana-Carla Pereira** Head of Unit, Modernisation of Social protection Systems, at the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Ana-Carla Pereira began her presentation saying that the European Commission recognizes several challenges when it comes to LTC: sustainability, adequacy, employment and quality. On sustainability she explained that LTC expenditure is one of the fastest growing in the social budget considering European ageing population. For some countries (ex: NL, FI, DK), the expected increase is very significant, and for others (PT, EL) the current level is quite low. However, such projections do not take into account the informal care. With this observation, it can be stated that LTC will become an area of political attention, and the question is how to achieve adequate levels of quality and equity while ensuring that public expenditure does not soar. On adequacy **Ana-Carla Pereira** stated that the European Commission is looking at how the LTC services can be provided to those in most need. As a matter of fact, a significant share of people at risk of poverty are above 65, and older women are particularly at risk of poverty. LTC represents also an employment challenge because this area is very much driven by temporary work. Furthermore, the tendency for professionalisation in the sector requires training efforts. Finally, the Commission also recognized that there is an increased need of quality in LTC. The respect of human rights and dignity must be ensured. However, quality is hard to measure, and no common definition exists at the EU level.

Considering those challenges, **Ana-Carla Pereira** explained that at EU level the aim is to have a clear overview of which areas should be prioritised.

Despite these difficulties, an EU policy framework has been developed. In 2013, a staff working document³ on LTC in ageing societies was released and in 2014 a Joint Report of SPC/EC on adequate social protection for LTC needs in an ageing society was published⁴.

² Eurodiaconia response to the targeted Consultation on the scope and structure of a Commission guide on socially responsible public procurement can be found [here](#).

³ European Commission, SWD (2013) 41 final, Long-term care in ageing societies. Challenges and policy options.

⁴ Social Protection Committee and European Commission (2014): *Adequate social protection for long-term care needs in an ageing society*.



Now, the EPSR gives the European Commission a new mandate to relaunch its work on LTC 9 (work-life balance) and principle 18 (long-term care). Also, the European Semester continues to be a space for social protection reforms and the 2018 country specific recommendations have raised LTC issues in four-member states (AT, BE, FI, SL).

It is now key to reinforce the monitoring and data collection on LTC to have a baseline. To do this, work with Eurostat should be reinforced. In addition, the EC aims to establish an informal group of experts with the mandate to help identifying the areas where EU action could have the highest value added. DG EMPL will also launch an EaSI call to support LTC projects at national level. The call will be launched in October 2018 for actions to take place in 2019.

Discussion:

After the presentation, **Alexander Elu** stressed the need to include access to LTC as another of the key challenges to be addressed. He also recalled that quality standards at EU level exist and the voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services is a useful reference. Furthermore, he expressed his concern about the institutional balance of power between the different dimensions on long-term care. In this regard, experience (pensions) tells us that sustainability arguments -as emphasised by DG ECFIN- are often privileged over adequacy ones (DG EMPL).

Anna Johansson, in turn, stressed that in Sweden the government tries to push for more informal care and that structures are built to support informal care.

Ana-Carla Pereira answered that LTC is not yet a big concern but will become a concern. For her, the risk is to repeat the debate on pensions, which has been deeply driven by financial sustainability. According to **Ana-Carla Pereira**, comparing to other policy areas, LTC presents two shortcomings compared to other policy areas: on the one hand, the lack of data makes it difficult for the EC to have any initiative; on the other hand, the difficulty to mainstream and operationalize human rights' arguments in economic debates.

The legal status of not-for-profit operators.

Alexander Elu introduced the next speaker of the day, **Victor Meseguer** from Social Economy Europe (SEE). SEE works to promote the social economy model at EU level. **Victor Meseguer** explained that the social economy and social enterprises gather a wide range of actors (cooperatives, mutualities, foundations, institutions) united around common values: primacy of the individual; democratic governance and reinvestment of most of the benefits for sustainable development objectives, or for general interest. As social enterprises are diverse, a wide diversity of legal frameworks exist as well.

However, at European level progress has been made to develop a common framework through the Social Business Initiative (2011), which has succeeded in putting social economy at the centre of the EU conversation on growth, jobs and social issues. SEE is calling for a relaunched initiative where the European Commission can support directly social enterprises and supports Member States in creating a positive ecosystem for them. Still at European level, in 2015 the Council conclusions on Social Economy defines social enterprises such as "economic actors whose main purpose is to create a positive social impact". The Council Conclusions also set actions to be implemented for 2017-2018 around 5 pillars: access to markets; improving framework conditions; social innovation, technologies and new business models; and boosting international dimension. According to **Victor Meseguer**, an obstacle for such developments is still the lack of awareness from the general public. Therefore, he sees a need for stronger political commitment and a dedicated budget for such initiatives

Discussion:

After the presentation, **Alexander Elu** recalled that it was important to build a narrative on the added-value of not-for-profit social service providers as these organisations are often challenged on that by politicians,



contracting authorities and the European Commission. **Yvan Grimaldi** explained that in France, the terminology refers to Social Economy and Solidarity Economy and for him it is important to distinguish both. Solidarity economy are social services based on the national social contract and are financed through taxes. Solidarity is based on a national definition of the common good, whereas social economy is more about democracy and empowerment. Furthermore, it is worth noting that big capitalist organisations invest in social economy. **Victor Meseguer** agreed on such a distinction but saw common objective in both. For him, solidarity economy can be seen as the more activist and political part, but social economy can also meet solidarity aim. The problem is that in France the spirit has changed because the government is taking the opportunity of using social economy to lower solidarity at national level. Then, **Heather Roy** shared that sometimes Eurodiaconia feels that social services structured as social enterprises are not well represented by EU initiatives and discussion around the social economy.

Katharina Wegner (Diakonie Germany) said that for her there is so much diversity in social economy that sometimes it is hard to see the common points which is a problem. However, non-profits are keen on using the SBI to show that they are economic actors and therefore have a valued voice at EU level. **Hanns Stephan Haas** followed on the idea saying that from a German perspective, being a social enterprise is advantageous (ie: tax advantages) and provides recognition. Yet, there is a need for greater clarity to build meaningful coalitions.

Enabling quality as a guiding principle of service

Alexander Elu gave the floor to **Anna Johansson** (Head of social services at the Stockholm City Mission). She introduced the topic by sharing a story depicting how quality can have different meanings for people. A few years ago, one of the services of the City Mission underwent two types of inspection: a standard one and a user-led one. Both were looking at the quality of the service but in different ways. The first one checked the compliance with rules, the procedures, the health and safety reports. Instead, the user-led inspection proceeded in a different way and engaged in a dialogue with users asking about the activities and so on. The recommendations of the inspection were different and complementary. For **Anna Johansson** this example shows that the definition of quality is important, and its perception can change from one actor to another. So, it is worth wondering if we can have a common definition of quality. At the EU level there is a voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services. However, knowing the complexity and diversity of social service provision, what does quality mean today? What new dimension of quality do we need to explore

Discussion:

Anna Johansson opened the floor to the discussion and all the experts had the chance to exchange their views. **Heather Roy** mentioned that in the past, focus tended to be on inputs and targets (eg: the number of beds; the number of people moved into accommodation), but now we are talking about the quality of the interventions and how these are experienced by users. But how to measure quality? For her, there is a need to rethink the social approaches to move from the target perspective to a focus of what quality means and for who. According to **Idar Magne Holme** it would be important to have a common Eurodiaconia definition of our understanding of quality. Then **Hanns-Stephan Haas** stated that talking about quality leads to the question of who give the definition; for him it should be the consumer. In his organisation, they have a new process which is peer monitoring, they try to look at the outcomes of the services and these are discussed with users. According to **Heather Roy** we have not found the right way to measure quality yet. Indeed, many methods to measure our social impact focus on numbers. Furthermore, the understanding of quality at political and EU level need to be changed. **Anna Ludwinek** said that Eurofund is working on a new module on public services to measure access and quality. The report will be published soon. She shared that a new dimension of quality was hard to develop because there is a strong push from the EU to look at the economic perspective of quality. For **Jan Soběslavský** from DECCB, quality can be defined once we try to imagine ourselves in the services provided. **Anna Johansson** added that service provision is becoming more complex because there is an



increased demand to share control and responsibility over the resources and to have new governance structures. Therefore, who is responsible for quality?

Anna Johansson concluded by saying that at this stage, a lot of questions remain: how to rethink the approach of quality through a right-based approach? As Diaconia, do we frame the argument of quality enough? How do we look at quality results, impacts and outcomes? How do we look at user participation when we want to tackle inequalities? And how to respect data protection from an integrity point of view?

Advocating for quality services:

The last session was organized as a workshop to discuss the outcomes of the meeting, the content of the report to be published in 2019 and the future of the group. The experts summarized the main take-aways of the meeting grouping their ideas around different dimensions and identifying the issues that merited further discussion.



Conclusion:

To conclude the meeting Alexander Elu stressed that European societies will continue to need social services and increasingly so in the coming decades. Therefore it is essential to translate this into consistent legal and political frameworks in the long term. Services need to be stable but also flexible because we don't know exactly which challenges are coming ahead. Furthermore, there is an increasing gap between the rights stress on the paper and the concrete fulfilment of those rights. The EPSR is a positive framework available to make those rights effective and social services should be acknowledged as key instruments to fulfil such a promise



Annex: List of participants

Experts	Name	Position and organisation
	Grimaldi Yvan	Director of the Social Inclusion programmes, Salvation Army France
	Haas Hanns-Stephan	CEO of Diakonie Alsterdorf Hamburg
	Heeger Klaus	Secretary General of CESI
	Holme Idar Magne	CEO of Diakonhjemmet
	Holmstrom Olli	CEO of Helsinki Deaconess Institute
	Johansson Anna	Head of Social Services of the Stockholm City Mission
	Ludwinek Anna	Research Manager at Eurofound





	Roy Heather	Secretary General of Eurodiaconia
	Sobeslavsky Jan	CEO of Diaconia Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren
Participants		
	Wegner Katharina	Head of the EU-Office of Diakonie Germany
	Bignal Thomas	Policy Advisor, EASPD
	Lupi Anna	Legal and Policy Officer, GD GROW, European Commission
	Meseguer Victor	Director of Social Economy Europe
	Pereira Ana-Carla	Head of Unit, DG Empl, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission