

Putting Social Services at the Heart of European Solidarity

Yesterday, 12 December 2011, a new European network, Social Services Europe, was launched to strengthen the profile and position of social services, and to promote the role of not-for-profit social service providers throughout Europe.

Social Services Europe¹ brings together seven Europe-wide networks of not-for-profit providers of social and health care services² who each have a track record in providing value-driven services for the most vulnerable in our societies. Recognising the increasing pressures on social and health care service providers around Europe, Social Services Europe aims to ensure that the specificity of not-for-profit social and health care service providers is recognised³ and that economic, social and legal conditions exist for quality social and health care services.

“Member organisations of the network have expertise as large scale providers of social and health services on a not-for-profit basis. With the increase in demand for our input both in consultations and in public fora, such as the 2010 forum on social services of general interest organised under the Belgian Presidency, we decided to make ourselves a formal grouping” explained Jarmo Kökkö, Social Services Europe President and Eurodiaconia Chairperson.

He continued: “Social Services Europe has an important contribution to bring to the overall success of the EU 2020 strategy and in addressing the social impacts of the present crisis⁴. The current debates around Europe 2020, quality in Social Services of General Interest (SSGI), state aid, public procurement and social innovation show that there is an importance being attached to SSGI and there is a space for a formal, strong network that can promote the not-for-profit agenda.”

Notes

¹ 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. The Network is made up of the following European organisations: SOLIDAR, Eurodiaconia, the European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR), Workability Europe, European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) and the European Platform for National Non-Profit Umbrella Organizations and for National Associations of General Interest (CEDAG).

² What are Social Services of General Interest? Social services of general interest (SSGI) can be considered as services improving quality of life and providing social protection, such as for example social security and social assistance services, employment and training services, social housing, child care and long-term care services.

³ What are the specificities of this sector? Social services and their users have a number of special characteristics as compared to other services of general interest. That is to say that as services they aim to bring about the realization of social policy objectives and social rights of individuals and groups and are an integral part of social protection systems. Their users are also often dependant – needing guidance and support – ill, handicapped or living under economically precarious conditions.

⁴ Why are SSGI important? Social services of general interest are a key component of the European social model. They are also important automatic stabilizers in times of economic recession, as was again illustrated during the ongoing financial and economic crisis. Although they have no legal recognition, they are referenced by a series of official documents from the European Institutions.