

Response to the public consultation on the future “EU 2020” Strategy

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Page | 1

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Introduction

EASPD is the European Association of Service providers for People with Disabilities and promotes the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems in Europe. EASPD represents over 8,000 service provider organisations across Europe and across disability.

EASPD welcomes this consultation and the opportunity to contribute to the follow up strategy on growth and jobs. Since the world, the economy and society changed significantly over the last decade, and an economic, financial and social crisis hit all citizens of the EU, but most of all, vulnerable people, in the past year, the new strategy should consider these changes and respond to the challenges that the crisis brought about.

Quality employment and social inclusion for all

EASPD agrees with the EU 2020 Consultation Paper stating that **new policies must contribute towards social cohesion, tackling unemployment, fostering social inclusion and securing well performing labour markets**. It also states that transition between jobs and between training and jobs will have to be managed, and flexicurity deployed to the full, so that a real chance for everyone to enter the labour market is created. EASPD hopes that all population groups will be taken into account when developing appropriate measures, and **especially the most vulnerable in society**.

EASPD believes that all **people with disabilities have the right to equal work opportunities**, and to work in an inclusive and supportive environment. Only about 20% of people with disabilities are currently employed: disabled people still have fewer opportunities than non disabled people to enter the labour market and when they do, on average they earn less than their non disabled counterparts. In order to combat this situation, the public sector in general, and the European Commission in particular, should lead by example and **increase the number of places available to people with disabilities**, and employment in the private sector should be stimulated through active encouragement and incentives, and through support to make the workplace more accessible.

In order to facilitate an increase in the number of people with disabilities in employment, the problems of the **benefit trap** must actively be tackled – work should pay! This means that people with disabilities must be assured that their benefits will not significantly decrease once they have found employment. **These benefits are necessary regardless of their situation, in order to help them deal with their impairments**. Fear of losing out on benefits is a major factor preventing people with disabilities from seeking employment on the open labour market. This should be combated by guaranteeing their security, and taking positive measures to support them.

Such measures could include vocational and professional rehabilitation, guidance, lifelong learning, vocational training and return to work programmes, among other things. The European Commission and the individual Member States have an important role to play in this, by ensuring that the transition for people with disabilities from sheltered employment to the open labour market is smooth, and by guaranteeing the necessary level of **flexicurity** to effectively combat the benefit trap.

A successful **flexicurity** policy should facilitate the employment of people with disabilities by encompassing social protection, lifelong learning, activation policies and full worker's rights, and by helping to make the case for a more integrated approach to employment and social policies, for employees as well as employers. A successful flexicurity approach **must aim at specific target groups**. For example, for people with disabilities, periods of transition are very delicate and need higher degrees of security to ensure flexibility in the future. A successful flexicurity approach should focus not only on the current job of a person, but also on their future career. In order to succeed, EU policy-makers will need to involve **all stakeholders** in the debate on flexicurity.

A successful approach to designing effective employment strategies for people with disabilities is the "**STAR recommendations**" model, based on stakeholder co-operation, targeted actions, availability of support and research:

A/ Stakeholder cooperation: the multi-stakeholder approach represents a vital element in creating more and better jobs for people with disabilities on the open labour market as it is about shared responsibilities. It means that all relevant people should be involved in the discussion and work. The discussion is open and values the roles and perspectives of each person. It is possible to make a positive change and create real career opportunities for people with disabilities only by aiming at creating a partnership with all those involved. Two main elements need to be taken into account when developing this approach:

- a) The stakeholder cooperation should be structural, ongoing and based on cooperation agreements and protocols respecting the diversity in perspective and role;
- b) The stakeholder cooperation should be developed at all levels of governance: local, regional and national.

B/ Targeted actions: need to be undertaken at all levels in order to raise the profile of people with disabilities and create real employment opportunities for them. They represent the third *generation* of employment policies for people with disabilities, and try to incorporate the two previous approaches while producing employment legislation. Legal initiatives are built on already existing knowledge and recognising the fact that we need both perspectives: on the one hand, policies including disability in the mainstream, and on the other hand, specific measures targeting people with disabilities and their needs. This translates in an **individualised approach**.

Targeted actions should focus on:

- a) Individual employment and career plans to be developed for people with disabilities;
- b) Work should generate a salary: a specific focus on the benefit trap;
- c) Learning the language of the employers: the professionals of the social sector and civil servants should be able to speak the language of employers;
- d) Authorities must set the standard by employing people with disabilities in their structures.

C/ Availability of support: represents an essential step in moving forward to employment.

In order to create an inclusive work environment, both **employers and employees** should receive the necessary support. Employers need subsidies to cover for the additional costs such as loss in production, adaptation of the work environment, training and retraining of staff and employees arising from hiring a disabled worker. Employees obviously need premises to be adapted and also accessible transport, training, easy to read material on rights, obligations and any other documents they have to work with and understand, job coaching, support to fill in any necessary paperwork, and so on.

D/ Research - aiming at evidence based improvement: it is essential to involve researchers. Data should be collected in order to enable assessment of initiatives and approaches for the employment of people with disabilities on the open labour market. Benchmarking with other sectors and countries is only feasible when comparable data is available. Finally, there should be a particular focus on:

- a) Measures targeted to unemployed people: this might have an impact on the number of disabled persons employed (generating more jobs for them);
- b) Correct implementation of models of best practice in countries where there is need for this;
- c) International exchange of models of employment and data available.

Decent work and decent salaries must be ensured to everyone: there are increasing numbers of so-called 'working poor' in the EU: 8 million professional front line care staff employed in social services in Europe have become a disadvantaged group due to increasingly poor working conditions: the workforce is mostly female, with jobs often at risk, underpaid, and increasingly offered on a part-time basis. Many of these trends are negative consequences of public procurement exercises that are now becoming the norm in the field of social services, where providers are faced with the pressure of offering increasingly low prices for their services in order not to run out of business, with negative consequences both for the service users and the staff.

In addition to the Directive promoting equality in the work place, a strong, overarching legal instrument on **anti-discrimination** such as the proposed "article 13" Directive is required to ensure people with disabilities can enjoy their rights fully. We call on the Commission to include the development of such a framework in the new EU 2020 strategy.

Social services as a key sector for employment

The EU 2020 Consultation paper states that 'new sources of growth' need to be located, and that 'employment rates of both men and women will have to rise rapidly'.

EASPD believes that this new source of growth can be found in the **social and health care sectors**. The social sector is a vital economic sector capable of providing many jobs and **boosting economic growth**. Work in social services should be valued for what it is truly worth, and training and employment in this sector should be encouraged. Currently, the EU average of employment in the social, educational and health care sectors is of 11%, but the potential is to employ 15% of the working population **to satisfy current needs**. These **needs are bound to increase** given that the population of the Union is ageing and there will consequently be also increasing numbers of citizens with a disability who will need social care.

Higher standards of training in this sector would serve to improve the recognition of its work and to **increase its appeal** amongst younger workers. **Lifelong training** opportunities for **current care workers** would help them to take advantage of new scientific and technological developments.

Higher standards of training for **migrant workers** – who represent a high percentage of workers employed by the sector – need also to be ensured, for example through the implementation of schemes such as the European Care Certificate that facilitate mobility of workers since they provide an entry level qualification for social care staff recognized in all EU countries.

Investment in the infrastructure of health and social services would serve a double purpose in terms of boosting growth, too. It would **modernise** and better prepare countries for future needs, and **stimulate job creation** in several different industries, including industries outside health, like the construction industry.

Page | 4

EASPD also believes that the European Commission should promote working in health and social care services in order to ensure that **increasing demands** on these services will be adequately met across the EU.

With an increasingly **ageing population**, pressures on the health and social care sectors are set to increase in the future. There is a need to invest in health and social care services in a structural way, and to promote active recruitment strategies and strategies to train and retain staff in order **to deal with these challenges**.

Better governance and use of structural funds

EASPD agrees with the idea of **using structural funds to develop a sustainable health and social care workforce**. EASPD would also like to point out the necessity of ensuring that all EU public funds are used to promote work towards the **de-institutionalisation** of people with disabilities through the development of **community-based settings and person-centered services, as proposed by the Ad-Hoc Expert Group on the reform of institutionalized care**.

Furthermore, all EU-funded projects, including those on health and social care infrastructures should **be assessed in terms of their accessibility and inclusiveness**. No European money must be used for initiatives that will exclude disabled people.

Lifelong Learning and inclusive education

The EU 2020 Consultation Paper states that ‘rethinking education systems’ is required in order to contribute towards social cohesion. It also states that growth should from now on be based on knowledge, and that education is one of the most effective ways to combat inequality and poverty. Lifelong learning should become more accessible, so that ‘a real chance for everyone to enter the labour market’ is created.

EASPD believes that a **positive approach towards inclusive education** should be developed at European level. EASPD calls on the European Commission to promote educational policies and strategies that clearly state inclusive education as a goal. The main objective of inclusive education should be **to provide a school with good learning results** with the participation of all stakeholders and where all learners are treated equally. An action plan to reform existing education systems should be proposed, and education should become more individualized and needs based in general.

EASPD also recommends setting **clear standards and targets for lifelong learning** and promoting the participation of all groups of the population in LLL schemes. We recommend reinforcing the role of the European Commission as a coordinator in promoting the exchange of good practice.

Conclusions

Page | 5

The EU 2020 strategy should respond to the changes in society and in the economy. The strategic choices of the Commission should include:

1. Eradication of multi layered discrimination;
2. Actions tackling the high unemployment levels of people with disabilities;
3. Actions addressing the situation of the “working poor” and the need for more decent jobs, especially in the social sector;
4. Actions to unlock the job-creation potential of the social and health care sectors.

A real, positive impact on the quality of life of European citizens will be possible only if the EU 2020 strategy includes these strategic choices.

Annex:

- Report of the Ad Hoc Expert Group on the Transition from Institutional to Community-based Care;
- Thessaloniki Declaration on Employment;
- Dublin Manifesto on Inclusive Education.