

**Open letter to:**

Herman Achille Van Rompuy, President of the European Council

José Manuel Durão Barroso, President of the European Commission

Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament

Brussels, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2012

**Re: Invest in social services to rebuild Social Europe**

Dear Presidents,

The financial and economic crisis, which started in 2008, has now also become a very serious social crisis. The political responses lack a clear and committed social and employment policy dimension. The 2012 Annual Growth Survey and the Joint Employment Report show that fiscal consolidation is still the priority while the social and employment targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy are not sufficiently addressed.

Studies carried out and statistics collected over the past four years have shown that vulnerable people and the services supporting them have suffered in a disproportionate manner because of this. In particular, social services for persons with disabilities across the EU have been hit in a number of ways:

- Direct cuts in budgets devoted to social services;
- Closure or inappropriate merging of services;
- Staff reductions, worsening pay and working conditions;
- Reduced long-term sustainability;
- Cuts in independent living support and postponements of developments and innovation programmes;
- Negative consequences on inclusive education;
- Reduction of employment supports and services;
- Tougher eligibility criteria.

This has a negative impact on the availability, affordability and accessibility of the services supporting persons with disabilities across Europe and on their quality and sustainability, with many reported cases of complete or partial closure of social services as EASPD's<sup>1</sup> and EFC's<sup>2</sup> surveys clearly show.

The working conditions of staff employed in the sector, in many cases already critical, are getting worse due to job cuts and salary decreases. This is a clear consequence of the curtailed funding to services, since around 80% of the costs of running a service are devoted to human resources. This has not only a direct, negative impact on the quality of services, but is also a

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<sup>1</sup> The service providers' role as human rights enablers in times of crisis... and the need for their recognition in the European Disability Strategy, EASPD, September 2012 [http://www.easpd.eu/Portals/easpd/Press%20Releases/booklet%2010-09\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.easpd.eu/Portals/easpd/Press%20Releases/booklet%2010-09_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Harald Hauben and others, Assessing the impact of European governments' austerity plans on the rights of people with disabilities, EUROPEAN REPORT, October 2012, p.[http://www.efc.be/programmes\\_services/resources/Documents/Austerity%20European%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.efc.be/programmes_services/resources/Documents/Austerity%20European%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

missed opportunity in terms of ensuring a way out of the crisis. The growing demand for social services – linked to increasing numbers of people in need - could create economic growth and employment, but this needs investment rather than cuts.

The reduction in public support pushes people with disabilities and their carers in many EU countries to pay a greater proportion of the costs of services out of their own pockets, and to make up for the lack of services by relying on informal and family carers, which raises serious equity questions.

Service providers are increasingly forced into providing more standardised and impersonal services as a consequence of the crisis, competition for limited funds is on the increase, tendering requirements have been tightened and more service outputs are unrealistically expected for less money. This reduces person-centred services and planning and leads to a reduction in innovative and community-based services, often the first to be cut, despite the obligations under article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which are reconfirmed in the European Disability Strategy.

**We ask you to urgently reconsider the political and financing choices that have been made so far and promote investment in social inclusion and cohesion** to ensure that the EU2020 targets for poverty reduction, employment and education can be met.

**Investing in social services doesn't only make social sense, it also makes economic sense:** social services as an economic sector have grown much faster than other sectors of the economy in the period 2000 – 2009, and have generated about 5% of the total economic output of the Union.<sup>3</sup> They have the potential, in meeting growing need, to also play a significant role in economic recovery.

The concept of **Social Return on Investment**, developed in the US in the 1990s, has been used also in European countries to measure the economic output of social services and enterprises. They **show that non-profit organisations supporting persons with disabilities can, through their activities, create cost savings and profits for the public purse**. This also has positive outcomes for future decision makers as positive changes to the situation of service users, organisational structures and processes will have positive and lasting outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

At times of shrinking resources when public money has to be spent particularly carefully, **it is more important than ever to ensure that every Euro counts and that it is used to serve the community in the best possible way**. Innovative social services help make this possible. Research shows that funding for services supporting people in the community go further than funding used to keep people in big, institutionalised settings. Intervening directly within communities even before there is a need for institutional care (as is the case for children), is a much more rights-based, proactive, beneficial and economic viable approach to the social crisis that confronts us.

**The EU is not only an economic project but also a social one that puts people at the heart of its concerns -as outlined in article 3 of the TEU and in the EU2020 strategy.** Heads of State and Government and European Institutions are committed to achieve clear objectives in terms of poverty reduction, higher employment and educational levels and greater inclusion. EASPD, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities and ENIL, the European Network on Independent Living, now call on the EU to promote policies that will have a clear impact on meeting these objectives.

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Second Biennial Report on Social Services of General Interest, p. 10

<sup>4</sup> For some examples and case studies, see Dr. Rainer Loidl-Keil, Wolfgang Lakowski and Evelyne Schneider, Social Return on Investment experiences in Austria, and Con.Solida, Dare lavoro agli Svantaggiati è economicamente vantaggioso.

**Help the social care sector to help society:** we call on the European Institutions to promote availability, accessibility and affordability of services by investing in the sector and ensuring its attractiveness as a viable career option by fostering an appropriate lifelong learning framework, good working conditions and excellence in social dialogue mechanisms.

We further call on the European institutions to **put quality at the heart of Social Services of General Interest. A sector seeking social benefit should not be operating under the same rules as enterprises seeking financial profit.** This specificity should be recognised and respected. Services support and empower persons with disabilities. They accompany service users through education and learning, towards employment; they pave the way towards inclusion in society and concretely contribute to reducing the pressure on social protection schemes and thereby participate in reinforcing social cohesion.

**These economic arguments we outlined must serve everyone’s right to enjoy their human rights and equal opportunities on an equal basis with others.** EASPD and ENIL want to reaffirm the fundamental role played by social services in making it possible for people with disabilities and especially those with high support needs, to enjoy their fundamental rights. Austerity measures in the social policy sphere threaten disabled people’s rights and have negative implications on their quality of life. They, furthermore, contradict the commitment taken by the European Union and by most of its member states with the ratification of the CRPD and with the issuing of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

In light of this, **it is crucial that the forthcoming Cohesion Policy, Structural Funds regulations and Common Strategic Framework for the period 2014-2020 include the obligation to protect and promote social policy and the fundamental rights of the most powerless.** The ‘Social Investment Package’, foreseen for early 2013, must be human rights based and have a long-term perspective recognising that investment in services is needed in order to achieve a more equal and flourishing society.

**It is not too late to change direction and to make sure that the most powerless don’t pay for this crisis!**


Yours sincerely,




Franz Wolfmayr  
EASPD President



Jamie Bolling  
ENIL Executive Director



**The European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) promotes the equalisation of opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high quality service systems in Europe. EASPD represents 10,000 service provider organisations across Europe and across disability.**



**The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is a Europe-wide network of people with disabilities. ENIL is a forum for disabled people, Independent Living organisations and their non-disabled allies on Independent Living. ENIL represents the disability movement for human rights and social inclusion based on solidarity, deinstitutionalisation, democracy, self-representation, cross disability and self-determination.**