

**PRESS RELEASE**

**Brussels, 23 February 2017**

## **EU Semester is now a relevant tool for breaking down barriers to inclusion**

Yesterday, the European Commission launched its [country reports](#), analysing the economic and social challenges in the European Union Member States. Since 2013, the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) has been calling on the European Commission to act more on developing high quality support services through these Country Reports and more broadly the European Semester. EASPD is pleased to see far more messages in the Country Reports aiming to break down barriers for persons with disabilities through high quality support services.

The [European Semester](#) is a mechanism aiming to help Member States coordinate their economic and social policies. Published each year, the Country Reports provide the European Commission's assessment of national reforms and policies made. The Reports then serve as a basis for a series of Country-Specific Recommendations provided to each Member State.

Since [2013](#), EASPD has worked significantly with its members to provide the European institutions with up-to-date messages on the major challenges at national level towards the development of high quality care and support services for persons with disabilities, in line with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2016, EASPD produced [proposals](#) on the reforms and policy changes needed to break down barriers to employment for persons with disabilities.

**EASPD fully welcomes that many of our proposals have been brought up in this year's [Country Reports](#).**

The Country Report for Bulgaria for instance is critical of the "limited provision of social services to support the long-term unemployed", which reflects our proposal that legislative and administrative limitations hinder the ability for social services to provide additional services for activating unemployed people. The Country Report for the Slovak Republic discusses the need for the "planned hiring of new specialised staff, outsourcing of job search support and enhanced cooperation with private agencies and NGOs" to enhance the provision of individualised support services. This is in line with EASPD's proposal for this country to further involve the strong and professionalised non-profit sector which has a long-standing experience in the labour market and supported employment of persons with disabilities. The Country Report for Finland highlights the problems linked to the "administrative complexity (bureaucratic traps) related to the reinstating of benefits for those moving in and out of the labour market", highlighting EASPD's similar message in this regard.

**Mr Jim Crowe**, President of EASPD, believes that *"the Country Reports show a growing understanding that a more Social Europe is key to breaking down exclusionary barriers at national level"*; adding that *"to ensure that social inclusion becomes a reality for real people, investment into successful and effective policy interventions should be a priority. The time has come for the European Union to reconsider its tight fiscal rules and allow Member States additional flexibility for quality social investment"*.

EASPD also welcomes the European Commission's [Communication on the main findings and results of the Country Reports](#) which argues that “**social investment is a prerequisite for a successful and lasting recovery**”.

**Investment into successful and effective policy interventions in the field of social inclusion of persons with disabilities is a priority for EASPD in 2017.** Later this year, EASPD will provide up-to-date data on the key trends and policies regarding the funding of social services at national level. The report will also highlight EASPD's view that **adequate public funding is the main ingredient for quality social investment, a perspective which the European Commission should further promote and protect.**

EASPD will also continue to work significantly towards ensuring that **the EU Investment Plan for Europe supports investment into quality community-based social infrastructure.** In this regard, EASPD welcomes the Commission's view that “[additional efforts have to be deployed to design instruments adapted to this \(social\) sector and to ensure that social and financial actors cooperate more closely](#)”; **both arguments being fully in line with EASPD's [proposals](#).**

Mr Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General of EASPD, welcomes that “*the European Commission and the European Union proved to be open to dialogue with civil society organisations. These frank and constructive discussions are necessary to ensure that Europe has a future which works for all people. We look forward to working with the EU institutions to make progress towards a more Social Europe*”.

## Related documents

- [European Commission Communication on the main findings and results of the Country Reports \(2017\)](#)
- [European Commission Country Reports \(2017\)](#)
- [EASPD European Semester Reports & Studies \(2013-2017\)](#)
- [EASPD EU Investment Plan Reports & Studies \(2015-2017\)](#)

## Note to editors

The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities is a non-profit European umbrella organization, established in 1996, and currently representing over 12,000 social and health services for persons with disabilities. EASPD advocates for effective and high-quality disability-related services in the field of education, employment and individualised support, in line with the UN CRPD principles, which could bring benefits not only to persons with disabilities, but to society as a whole.

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*This publication has been produced with the financial support of the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation “EaSI” (2014-2020). The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.*