

4th Stakeholder Dialogue on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion
Brussels, 3 May 2012

DYNAMO INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE EC QUESTIONS ON SOCIAL SERVICES

In consultation with BAPN - Belgian Anti-Poverty Network
and RWLP - Walloon Anti-Poverty Network

Dynamo International Street Workers Network, in consultation with the Belgian Anti-Poverty Network and the Walloon Anti-Poverty Network put forward a response on the below issues.

Key questions by the Commission on the challenges currently facing social services:

- In your opinion, what are the types of social services that would be most essential for social inclusion? Could you please provide evidence of gaps in the provision of social services that would need to be filled for the EU to meet the EU 2020 poverty reduction target?
- What scope is there for better targeting public support for social services and / or for efficiency gains in the provision of social services (for example, gains related to innovative ways of providing the services), allowing for social services either to become more effective for the same level of spending or for spending cuts without negative effects?
- Based on evidence that you have of cuts in public spending for social services (as a result of the financial and economic crisis and on-going austerity measures), what would allow us to make a strong case for social services as investment?
- In the context of using social policy experimentation to facilitate reforms, in particular in the delivery of social services, how to better involve stakeholders' organisations in the EU action and how to go further in capacity building?

As key stakeholders' active in the social field, we are pleased to be part of the Commission's dialogue process on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion. We believe that in order to meet the EU 2020 objectives, cross-cutting efforts are needed. The European Commission can benefit from the expertise and the on-the-ground knowledge from social and street workers. Indeed, these actors are often front-line witnesses of a situation which is constantly deteriorating, particularly following the austerity measures implemented by European governments.

BUT...

As networks of organisations that fight against poverty, we do not feel comfortable with the questions posed in this paper. In particular, there is a lack of transparency concerning the final goal that the Commission aims to achieve through this stakeholders consultation. We fear that NGOs and grassroots organisations are being consulted with the purpose to validate a potential

overall reduction of social services' resources, as well as to identify the most useful or important services. These two elements clash massively with the actual social services' realities on the one hand and the real conditions of people living in poverty and in street situations on the other.

Since many years, public and private social services are under increasing pressure. In fact, funding measures did not - or very rarely - follow the trend of an **increasing number of people excluded from society or living in poverty and in street situations**. In practice, this is represented by frequent situations of saturation of professionals and structures. It is not unusual for social workers to handle more than 80 individual records each in the social services. Lack of funding and hence staff can no longer guarantee the time required for the provision of quality services. Besides, it is more and more usual to hear professionals from different sectors to talk about files instead of families or individuals. Such a lessening of services is recurrent in all types of social services and contributes actively to keep people away from services and consequently to bring to social exclusion.

In terms of social support, if it is true that segmentation exists as a result of the different sectors peculiarities, there is however a **lack of consistency**. While it is sometimes desirable to build more bridges and crossings, the provision of a broad range of services is crucial. The exclusion experienced by people living in poverty is often reduced to few main themes: employment, housing and health. These are obviously essential to a dignified life and it is therefore urgent to support social services who work and access to the exercise of rights in this matter. However, this trio can be meaningful only if mobility is not problematic, if the link with the social services was built in accordance with proximity, and if children receive adequate education and training in a school system that fight against inequality. People shall be provided the opportunity to plan and to be creative in their lives through places of exchange and reflection, creativity and entertainment. For instance, so many people get back to social life through cultural and artistic activities.

According to the EU, social services play a crucial role in improving **quality of life** and providing **social protection**. These include social security, employment and training services, social housing, child care, long-term care and social assistance services¹. Social protection being a recognised human right², it is imperative to first make a **social impact assessment** and a **human rights impact assessment** for any action taken on social services. All governments must provide a formal social security system which is accessible to all³. Implementation and monitoring systems must be put in place in order to get the target populations constantly connected with the social services that providing daily care and support⁴.

Social services are fundamental to meet the key EU 2020 objectives such as social, economic and territorial cohesion, high employment, social inclusion and economic growth. Still, it must be pointed out that the **Commission cannot just target a limited number of settings** that are often restricted to ordinary survival interventions. The access to welfare and quality services cannot be limited to mere material daily needs. On one side, it is unbearable to consider the excluded people only from the standpoint of the basic physical needs at the bottom of the pyramid, and on the other side all the other dimensions are required to build up society in a

¹ European Commission website : <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=794&langId=en>

² Right to social security - Articles 22 and 25 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

³ Recommendation n.3 from the 2nd International Forum of Street Workers, October 2010

⁴ In this context, **street workers** do play a key role in taking to task the general public and politicians, over violations of rights that all human beings are entitled to, whatever their economic, social or cultural situation. Being in regular and even daily contact with particularly vulnerable populations who are often **victims of human rights violations**, street workers become a valuable partner for social service providers and relevant Institutions.

participatory manner. The roles of the different types of services are complementary and constitute a system. Without this complementarity, it does not work.

It appears as totally illusory the notion that it is possible to do more with less. **Uncertainty of social services and lack of social protection contribute to enduring poverty.** This is unfortunately the result of policy developments that are far from strongly fight poverty and are limited to organisational management. In this context, the social assistance field is in dire need of refinancing. Similarly, it is essential for the diverse auxiliary benefits are at least above the poverty line. These are two key conditions for the fight against poverty.

However, it also appears that the **financial position of the member states represents a barrier.** Thus, it is essential that the public financial investment into social policy have a real impact. In this sense, it is astonishing to realise the increasing amounts that are allocated more and more for the establishment of social control policies. These policy strategies, far from contributing to a drop of public expenditure, justify the daily implementation of exclusion acts against the most vulnerable populations.

These suspicions are detrimental to relationships between people and services, break the image that people have of themselves, produce a dramatic competitive public and convey the most populist stereotypes in our society. It is urgent to make the choice to trust in each other so that social policies are indeed cradles of empowerment and inclusion, not suspicion and rejection. **We find it important that the money allocated to social control shall finally be invested in equities which are meaningful, useful aid in relevant services.**

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