Platform of European Social NGOs *Plate-forme des ONG européennes du secteur social*
Square de Meeûs 18, B-1050 Bruxelles, Belgique **T** +32-2-511 37 14 **F** +32-2-511 19 09 **E** platform@socialplatform.org **www.**socialplatform.org

socialplatform

Social Platform response to the consultation on personal and household services

Identification number in the Commission's register: 85083981189-35

GENERAL REMARKS

Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 45 pan-European networks of NGOs, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

a) Definition of personal and household services

We consider that the definition of "personal and household services" (PHS) given in the Commission staff working document on exploiting the employment potential of the personal and household services is not consistent with the definition of social services of general interest that has been in use since 2006[1]. The definition of PHS covers some activities provided at home to families or individuals such as childcare, long term care for the elderly and for persons with disabilities, which normally fall in the second category of SSGI ("other essential services provided directly to the person"). However, this category is much broader and includes: assistance for persons faced by personal challenges or crisis, social support to reintegrate people into society and in the labour market.

Furthermore, housework services such as cleaning, remedial classes, home repairs, gardening, ICT support etc. are put on the same level as care activities. Care activities are SSGI and require highly qualified staff, with very good interpersonal skills, different from housework services which require lower skills.

b) Scope of the paper

We understand that the aim of this paper is to create job opportunities in the area of domestic work and home care and to fight against undeclared work which is common in this sector.

[1] Communication (2006) 177

However, we recommend that the Commission adopts a broader and more comprehensive strategy, including an initiative to encourage member states to invest in the area of SSGI and the care sector as a whole (of which home care is just one part), in line with the Europe 2020 strategy and with the Integrated Employment Guideline no. 7.

Due to the increase of poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, homelessness, mental health problems and inequalities – as a consequence of the crisis - the demand for social services is higher than in the past. At the same time, we see a common trend to decrease the national budgets for social and health services.

In addition, the ageing of the population and societal changes (such as increase of single-person households, growing participation of women in the labour market, increased workforce mobility and ageing of informal carers) will increase the demand for care services.

These factors highlight the great potential of creation of new quality jobs in the area of SSGI and care services, as the supply already does not meet the demand.

c) Some general recommendations:

- The development of personal services at home does not have to replace by any means the obligation on member states to organise, provide and fund social services of general interest, to ensure universal access to quality, available and affordable services for all (art. 34, 35 and 36 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU; art. 14 TFEU; protocol 26 on Services of General Interest).

- The development of personal services provided at home in part reflects the cultural traditions of member states and how the welfare system is organised. However, at least in some member states, it is also a consequence of the lack of affordable quality care services, which also contributes to generating the flourishing of the black market.

- Receiving personal services at home is only one option of care and it is not accessible and affordable to everybody, even if it is provided with public support.

- As a consequence, it is necessary that personal care services are developed with public support and in a regulated manner, and they must not be left to a bilateral relationship between the user, his / her family and / or the care giver. Public authorities have a role to play as guarantor of this relationship, in cooperation with social partners and other relevant stakeholders, including non profit service providers and organisations representing users (e.g. need to ensure a match between the right skills of the carer and the user's needs, need to provide training and supervision to ensure the quality of the service, prevent risks of user's abuse and exploitation of the domestic carer etc.): see chapter 3 of Social Platform recommendations on care.

- Domestic work and the care sector are often characterized by poor working conditions; therefore, it is essential that the new jobs that are created are quality jobs, to ensure the rights of the care worker and the quality of the care service to the user (see chapter 4 of our recommendations).

- The consultation paper has a very strong employment perspective: even if in the EU women provide up to two thirds of informal and family care and a major reason for women's low employment rates is the challenge of work, family and private life reconciliation, care activities are not a responsibility only for women. We need reconciliation policies to promote a shared responsibility for care between women and men.

- We also consider that the rights-based approach should be better stressed in the paper: the development of quality personal and care services is also vital for the well-being of users (children, older people, dependent adults, persons with disabilities, etc.), their quality of life and better social cohesion (see chapter 1 of our recommendations). To this extent, it is important to develop services that promote and support self- directed care for those who wish to control all or part of the services they receive and to secure an appropriate balance between the regulation of home care and the protection of vulnerable service users and their right to self-determination.

- Finally, we consider that the development of personal services has to be accompanied by the promotion of policies to recognize and support informal and family carers, in case this kind of care option is freely chosen both by the user and the care giver (see chapter 2 of our recommendations).

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1) Ways to improve measurement and monitoring of the employment levels in PHS, taking into account the impact of the on-going crisis, loss of purchasing power, labour market exclusion issues and the potentially positive effect on the creation or growth of SMEs

The EC should acknowledge the significant potential of job creation in the no profit sector, social economy and social entrepreneurship, which is not mentioned in the paper. Personal social services have been traditionally mainly provided by not for profit organisations, which rests on values of democratic solidarity and is not driven by profit as driving principle. Household services are generally related to SMEs.

Existing EU processes and tools should be used to achieve this goal:
- Biennial report of the European Commission on SSGI
- Report on the social consequences of the crisis by the Social Protection Committee (one section is dedicated to the impact of the crisis and austerity measures on social services)
- Country Specific Recommendations, National Reform Programs, National Social Reports
- Initiatives linked with the Social Business Initiative (in order to acknowledge and exploit the significant potential of employment creation of social economy and social entrepreneurship)
- Studies and research projects

2) The utility of developing sharing of experiences, especially concerning the tools used or planned to support the PHS with a specific attention to the cost effectiveness and to the reduction of undeclared work

In personal services, cost-effectiveness should not be the primary aim – the primary aim should be implementing solidarity principles, ensuring human rights are

respected, making sure the most effective models work to achieve the aims of the service, and ensuring decent working conditions for staff in these services.

Developing sharing of experiences and mutual learning among member states is very useful. This can be done by the means of the social Open Method of Coordination[2] and through European projects. Therefore, it is necessary that the next multi-annual financial framework provides sufficient funds to promote innovation and quality in care policies, services and supports, to develop exchange of good practices and to carry out research in areas in which data lack.

European projects (for example in the frame of the Equal programme[3]) have proved to be a good tool to ensure the regularization of all care workers and discourage the grey market in the sector, by improving the match between demand (families) and supply (in particular migrant domestic workers) of care workers (through measures such as public registers of accredited care workers, vocational training, "window offices", counselling and information services and care vouchers)[4].

3) Ways of ensuring quality services and jobs (skill needs, working conditions), including possibility through development quality standards
4) Other ways to ensure greater professionalism of PHS jobs

- Encourage the use of the Voluntary European Quality Framework for Social Services as guidance for essential elements of a quality framework, in particular in those member states where quality frameworks do not exist.

- Make user participation and empowerment essential elements to improve the quality of services, as Care is better tailored to individuals' needs and expectations[5].

- Establish a common reference for qualifications and training in the care sector, to define clear quality career paths and to raise the professional status of professional carers.

- Ensure decent working conditions by guaranteeing migrant care workers equal treatment comparable to the rights of EU citizens including pay, working hours, leave, social security, access to education and training and rights at work, in addition to collective bargaining and unionisation. Ascertain the portability of their rights and benefits when moving to another country or to the country of origin.

- Take measures to recognise the qualifications of migrant care workers obtained in third countries also to reduce the extent to which many migrant workers are driven towards undeclared work. In addition, provide funding for

---

[2] The EPSCO Council has recently invited member states and the Commission to collect, analyse and exchange information on new efficient and effective methods to deliver social services, within the OMC (EPSCO Council Conclusions of June 21, 2012).

[3] An example run by a national member of one of our members is the project "Qualificare il lavoro privato di cura" (project run by Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale, Caritas Ambrosiana, Municipality of Brescia, Municipality of Sesto San Giovanni)

[4] SOLIDAR, *Private welfare: challenges to decent work for migrant care workers*, pp. 5-6

[5] See an example from one of our members: Eurodiaconia, *Toolkit "Service user participation and empowerment"*

them to be able to gain access to formal basic training and to avoid that they perform domiciliary care work without appropriate training.

- Develop mobility strategies and migration policies between the receiving countries and the countries of origin, by involving social partners and Civil Society Organisations, to avoid unnecessary brain-drain that can contribute to the increase of geographical imbalances. Promote the application of ethical recruitment practices, for instance by favouring family reunification.

FOR MEMBER STATES:

- Introduce regulations for minimum standards of employment in the care sector, including decent wages and the closing of the gender pay and pension gaps, decent working hours, access to social security, training and lifelong learning opportunities, non-atypical contracts, career development and adequate benefits to improve the working conditions in the sector and raise the profile of carers. This would make the sector attractive for the workforce, eliminate staff shortages, and alleviate the gender gap and the risk of being exposed to poverty.

- Ratify the ILO Convention 189 and Recommendation on "Decent work for domestic workers" and duly implement its provisions, in particular article 7 concerning migrant domestic workers.

- Promote collective agreements for decent working conditions for all care workers, irrespective of origin, in addition to adequate and coherent monitoring as well as enforcement mechanisms.

- Provide adequate training systems and lifelong learning opportunities which are person-centred rather than task-oriented, to develop the required skills and qualifications in the care sector and to alleviate stress and burn out while dealing with difficult situations.

Background information on the work carried out by Social Platform on care:

In December 2011, we released our recommendations on care: our starting point is that not only is care a human right but it also benefits our societies. These recommendations should be seen as a solid foundation for helping to change the paradigm so that care policies integrate all the necessary dimensions of care (equality, including gender equality, non-discrimination, rights' based approach, quality employment, social protection, social inclusion and fight against poverty, migration, legal framework for social services, financial perspectives etc.).

Contact person for this paper:

Valentina Caimi – Policy Adviser
Telephone +32 (0)2 5081636 – email: valentina.caimi@socialplatform.org