



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**NOTE**

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from: Working Party on Social Questions  
to: Permanent Representatives Committee (Part 1) / Council (EPSCO)

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Subject: **Social Services as a tool for active inclusion, strengthening social cohesion  
and an area for job opportunities.  
- Adoption of Council conclusions**

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Delegations will find attached draft Council conclusions as finalised by the Working Party on Social Questions at its meeting on 19 May 2009.

All delegations entered linguistic scrutiny reservations pending availability of the text in their own language versions.

**Draft**  
**Council Conclusions**  
**on**  
**Social services**  
**as a tool for active inclusion, strengthening social cohesion**  
**and an area for job opportunities**

**THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,**

RECALLING

1. that social services of general interest play a major role in ensuring social, economic and territorial cohesion throughout the EU by providing for higher levels of employment, social protection and social inclusion;
2. that social services based upon the principles of solidarity play a specific role in social cohesion and fulfil social policy goals to the benefit of all or to society as a whole;
3. that the organisation and financing of social services are a national competence, to be performed in conformity with the applicable Community rules;
4. that Article 137(1)(h) and (j) of the Treaty underlines that the Community should support and complement the activities of the Member States to promote the integration of persons excluded from the labour market, as well as the fight against social exclusion;

5. the role of the Open Method of Coordination as a framework for the exchange of good practices of social policies in line with common objectives aiming notably at ensuring the social inclusion of all and an access for all to high quality and sustainable health and long-term care;
6. the Commission's Communication of November 2007 on "Services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment"<sup>1</sup> and the Commission's Communication of April 2006 "Social services of general interest in the European Union: implementing the Community Lisbon programme"<sup>2</sup>;
7. the Council conclusions of 17 December 2008 endorsing the aim of designing and implementing comprehensive and integrated strategies to promote the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, on the basis of the common principles on active inclusion identified in the European Commission Recommendation of 3 October 2008<sup>3</sup>, and, in particular, the common principles regarding the third pillar of the active inclusion strategy: "access to quality services";
8. the operational conclusions of the Social Protection Committee's report on the application of Community rules to social services of general interest, as approved by the Council on 17 December 2008;

#### TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

9. the work carried out by the Social Protection Committee on the active inclusion strategy as well as the significant progress that has been achieved as regards social services of general interest in recent years in the context of the European Commission's and the Social Protection Committee's activities;

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2007)725 of 20 November 2007.

<sup>2</sup> COM(2006)177 of 26 April 2006.

<sup>3</sup> 2008/867/EC of 3 October 2008.

10. the proceedings of the 7th Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion devoted to active inclusion, held in Marseille on 15 and 16 October 2008;
11. the outcome of the of 1st and 2nd Fora on Social Services of General Interest held in Lisbon on 17 September 2007 and in Paris on 28 and 29 October 2008;
12. the proceedings of the conference on Social Services held in Prague on 22 and 23 April 2009.

## STRESSING

13. that social services play a vital preventive and socially cohesive role and enhance the capacity of individuals to fully participate in society, to use their economic and social potential and to enjoy their fundamental rights;
14. the fact that, as social services are often rooted in local and cultural traditions, their delivery mostly rests at local and/or regional level, in accordance with national circumstances;
15. that the demand for social services will increase due to challenges in the European economies and societies, such as ageing of the population, changes in gender roles and in the households' composition, a need for increased participation in the labour market, for a better reconciliation of work and family life, and for more inclusive labour markets as well as technological changes and globalisation;
16. the increased need for social services in the current economic crisis, as these services may help to mitigate the social impact of the crisis and could act both as a safety net and an additional support for active inclusion and employment for people affected by the crisis;

17. it is important that workers in social services have access to skills upgrading, including the most disadvantaged. Those persons in informal care and volunteering activities should be enabled to use their experience when seeking employment by fostering the acknowledgement of the skills they have acquired.

#### EMPHASISES THAT

18. social services are generally driven by the principle of solidarity and are significantly dependent on public financing. In order to support the sustainable development of social services, comprehensive strategies developed at the local, regional or national level may help to tackle the tension between universal access, quality and financial sustainability;
19. in order to tackle multiple disadvantages, social services should be comprehensive and adapted to users' needs, as well as conceived and delivered in an integrated manner;
20. legal certainty is of importance for these services and that the Social Protection Committee plays an active role in analysing the impact of Community rules on social services of general interest; the European Commission's interactive information service has proved to be a useful tool in providing information and guidance to citizens, public authorities, service providers and other stakeholders on questions concerning the application of Community rules, so that social services of general interest are better able to fulfil their mission and goals;
21. universal access to high quality social services strengthens social cohesion and forms a basic precondition for socially excluded people to participate actively in society and in the labour market. Preventive and support services enable people, through personalised support, to overcome their adverse social situations, to ensure inclusion into society and to enhance their employability;

22. the voluntary Quality Framework for social services which aims at providing guidance on a methodology to set up, monitor and evaluate quality standards for social services, which is to be developed within the Social Protection Committee with the support of the Commission, may subsequently support the development of high quality standards for social services determined at the appropriate level;
23. life-long learning and capacity building for social services may help to ensure the high quality of social services, including informal care. It is necessary, however, to strike a balance between high-quality services, skill requirements and the level of service supply;
24. when assessing the quality of social services, it is necessary to take into account the special needs of social services users and to protect their rights, interests and dignity;
25. a significant part of social care is provided within informal settings. The conditions for quality informal care could therefore be supported through adequate training, guidance and support to informal carers, if needed;
26. a combination of both formal and informal care (so-called „shared care“), could give carers the possibility of reconciling their working and family lives and offer new job opportunities;
27. work undertaken by professional caregivers plays a significant role and it is important to promote equality among women and men in sharing care responsibilities;
28. the social services sector represents a large field of employment opportunities in the European Union. The sector will become increasingly important in providing new job opportunities and thus offering possibilities for employment and social inclusion;

29. promoting social services during the present economic crisis, while taking into account national realities and policies, can help the sector to better respond to an increasing demand for services due to the changes in the European economies and societies, and new needs caused by the economic crisis. It may also improve the quality of the services delivered, thus allowing them better to play their preventive and socially cohesive role. The involvement of the persons concerned is an useful tool in improving the quality and efficiency of social services.

#### **INVITES THE MEMBER STATES**

30. to ensure that measures combating social exclusion and promoting the active inclusion of those furthest from the labour market and society, through a better access to social services, are high on the political agenda;
31. to ensure that social protection and active inclusion policies facilitate the integration into sustainable, quality employment of those who can work and provide resources, which are sufficient to live in dignity, for those who cannot;
32. to recognise the role of social services, in particular during the present economic crisis, in the national recovery plans, where appropriate, so as to reinforce the recovery of our economies and strengthen their potential in terms of growth and job opportunities as well as economic and social cohesion;
33. to encourage the use of the European Commission's interactive information service which provides useful information and guidance on questions concerning the application of Community rules in the field of social services of general interest.

## **INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

34. to continue to support the exchange of good practices among the Member States as regards access to sustainable and high quality social services;
35. to continue to contribute to legal certainty and clarity by regularly updating its “Frequently Asked Questions” documents<sup>4</sup> on state aid and public procurement rules in the light of the questions put to the interactive information service; to take the appropriate steps required to address the issues identified by the Social Protection Committee's sub-group on social services of general interest and to present a report on social services of general interest on a biennial basis.

## **INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

36. to continue the work within the Social Protection Committee on the application of Community rules to social services of general interest and on a voluntary Quality Framework for social services which aims at providing guidance on the methodology to set up, monitor and evaluate quality standards for social services, in line with the subsidiarity principle.

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<sup>4</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/services\\_general\\_interest/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/services_general_interest/index_en.htm)