

Employers in the social services sector must get organised to increase their voice in Europe

For the first time ever, social partners in the social services field came together to discuss the added value of European social dialogue for Employers in the sector, as well as to discuss what topics they would be interested in discussing at European level. **The conference, held on 23rd September, brought to an end the second phase of the [PESSIS](#) project which aims at promoting employers in the social services sector in social dialogue.**

The objectives of the conference were: to give an overview of the state of social dialogue in the social services sector throughout 17 European countries, to present the interest of employers in five different countries in participating in EU Social Dialogue, as well as to analyse what would be the main goals to be achieved by participating in such a process. The outcome was clear. As stated by **Luk Zelderloo**, EASPD Secretary General and President of Social Services Europe, in his concluding remarks *"it is key to organise ourselves as employers if we wish to further our impact on European and national policy-making processes"*. Indeed, being considered as social partners by the EU institutions obliges the latter to formally consult Social partners on any EU policy in the field of employment and social affairs.

Another clear outcome was **the strong willingness of national Employers –alongside the relevant trade union representatives- to start discussing concrete topics at European level**. This step forward could help the social services sector be considered as a key area of growth by the European Institutions in the years to come. In this sense, all participants agreed that the social services sector has a huge job creation potential and can play a key role –both economically and socially- in the future of Europe. However, if we want to make the most of this job-creation potential, many barriers still need to be dissolved.

Many of these problems were brought up by the national employers present, who mentioned the current lack of attractiveness of the sector, recruitment and retention, the increasing cross-border mobility of workers, the lack of professional qualification and training, the ageing of the workforce as key issues for most if not all social service providers in Europe.

All of these problems can be tackled at the negotiation table, between Employers and Employee representations. However, the PESSIS project has demonstrated that strong differences remain between the level of structures of social dialogue in our sector throughout Europe. **It should be a priority for the European institutions to help develop the capacity of social partners in the social sector to negotiate on these issues if we are to unleash the job creation potential in our sector.**

Moreover, the social and health services sector represents around **10% of EU workforce, yet our sector had no say in the development of key EU strategies or policy initiatives**; such as the Europe 2020 strategy or the review of the structural funds. Is this acceptable? No!

It is clear that a sector of this importance should be at the table in such discussions. It was therefore agreed that **it is key for our sector to take part in the two strands of European Social Dialogue**. On the one hand, our sector needs to become involved in cross-sectoral European Social Dialogue for our voice to be heard and viewed as a key part of the European economy. On the other hand, it is also key to create a social dialogue committee for the social services sector, in order to ensure that we discuss characteristics and issues which are specific to our sector. A sector specific committee would also contribute to positioning the social services field as a grown-up sector willing to further contribute to the debate at European level, from the perspective of Employers and Employees in the social services sector.

Please visit our [website](#) for additional information on the PESSIS project.

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