



News letter

2/2008

Observatory for the Development of Social
Services in Europe

The Commission strategy for supporting the quality of social services of general interest across the European Union

In its Communication on "services of general interest, including social services of general interest: a new European commitment"¹, the Commission announced a strategy for supporting the quality of social services of general interest (SSGI) across the European Union.

Such a strategy is an answer to the increasing interest among public authorities and stakeholders in enhancing SSGI quality. Their interest is directly related to the process of reforms in which Member States have engaged in this field in the last two decades, in order to face changing needs and societal challenges.

In particular, the increased decentralisation of the organisation of these services to the local and regional levels and the increased

outsourcing of their provision, which are two important features of the process of reforms, call for a better definition of the services at stake. Both developments lead to a diversification of SSGI providers and therefore, when dealing with a variety of providers, public authorities need to clearly define the services they are delegating and thus, the quality they expect.

Moreover, societal challenges and changing needs have also a direct impact on the demand for SSGI, which has increased and has become more sophisticated. Users expect to be offered a larger choice of both services and service providers. Enhancing SSGI quality and efficiency is therefore essential in order to address this increasingly more sophisticated and evolving demand for SSGI and to foster the

ability of users to make informed choices.

Thirdly, a consistent part of SSGI addresses the (multiple) needs of vulnerable users who, due to their precarious situation, are much less able than "standard" consumers to make informed choices. Protecting the most vulnerable users also means that the actions undertaken to promote quality and efficiency should take into account the integrated dimension of their needs and enhance, as far as possible, their ability to make informed choices, thereby strengthening equitable access to SSGI.

Fourthly, this expanding and more complex demand for SSGI raises the need for sufficient and well-trained human resources. Added to the difficult working conditions in the sector², this tendency may create a risk of upcoming shortages of well-trained human resources. The question of adequate and well trained human resources is directly linked to the debate on quality and efficiency. Actually, the definition and measurement of the quality of the service provided is closely related to the definition and measurement of the quality of service providers and of the skills of social workers.

Finally, in the EU context, the debate on SSGI quality and efficiency acquires a special value also because of the cross-border dimension of SSGI provision, an issue that was particularly highlighted in the field of cross-border care. Even though cross-border provision of SSGI is still limited, it will call more and more for a greater level of service comparability.

It is therefore the increasing introduction of market elements and cross-border services provision as

Editorial

DEAR READER,
THIS NEWSLETTER WILL BE LOOKING MORE CLOSELY AT THE ISSUE OF THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST. THE NEWSLETTER OPENS WITH CONCETTA CULTRERA'S AND MICHELE CALANDRINO'S PRESENTATION ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE QUALITY DISCUSSION IN EUROPE AND THE POSITION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON THIS ISSUE. IN THE GUEST COLUMN, LAURA JONES OF EURODIACONIA EXPRESSES HER GENERALLY POSITIVE VIEW OF THE DEBATE, WHILE STRESSING THAT THE SPECIAL CHARACTER OF SOCIAL SERVICES SHOULD NEVERTHELESS NOT BE FORGOTTEN. ROLAND SIMON OF THE GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR FAMILY AFFAIRS, SENIOR CITIZENS, WOMEN AND YOUTH STRESSES IN HIS CONTRIBUTION THE COMPETENCE OF MEMBER STATES FOR ISSUES INVOLVING THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL SERVICES.

SHORTLY BEFORE THE CZECH REPUBLIC IS DUE TO TAKE OVER PRESIDENCY OF THE EU COUNCIL IN JANUARY 2009, OUR COUNTRY REPORT PRESENTS THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC. MARTIN BEDNÁŘ DESCRIBES THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE PERIOD FOLLOWING THE DISSOLUTION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE SPECIAL CHALLENGES INVOLVED IN ESTABLISHING A WELFARE STATE AND DESIGNING SUITABLE SOCIAL SERVICES.

EUROPEAN SOCIETIES ALSO NEED TO FACE THE CHALLENGE OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE. A VERY IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE DISCUSSION ON DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE, ACCORDING TO ANNETTE ANGERMANN AND KATHRIN LINZ IN THEIR ARTICLE, IS THAT BETTER ADVANTAGE SHOULD BE TAKEN OF THE POTENTIAL STRENGTHS OF OLDER PEOPLE. THEY ARE EXPERIENCED EMPLOYEES, AFFLUENT CONSUMERS AND IN ANY CASE NOT AT ALL A HOMOGENEOUS GROUP.

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THE EDITORIAL TEAM



well as an expanding and more complex demand of social services which trigger the need for a better understanding of what SSGI quality means. In this context, further developing of a policy dialogue on quality at Community level is all the more appropriate, as confirmed by the consultation process on SSGI conducted by the Commission since 2005.

For these reasons, the strategy announced in the Communication of November 2007 is centred on three complementary actions.

First, the Commission will finance via the PROGRESS programme bottom-up initiatives aimed at developing mechanisms for the definition, measurement, assessment and improvement of SSGI quality. For this purpose, the Commission has launched a call for proposal which has led to the selection of various cross-European initiatives. These initiatives, which will start by the end of 2008, cover a variety of SSGI, such as long-term care services for elderly people, services for the integration of migrants, services to people with disabilities, services to homeless people and childcare services.

Secondly, the Commission will also finance public authorities training programmes, which will notably focus on how to guarantee the delivery of quality services when applying public procurement rules and state aid rules for the selection and the financing of SSGI providers. This initiative aims at addressing a concern, often expressed by the stakeholders, that the application of public procurement rules may lead to the selection of the provider which proposes the lowest price, at the detriment of the quality of the service. The training will more generally allow for a better understanding of Community rules and the possibilities they already offer for the organisation and financing of quality social services.

Finally the Commission will support the development, within the Social Protection Committee, of a quality framework for SSGI. This will provide a tool that public authorities and other relevant stakeholders can refer to in order to define, measure and assess SSGI quality and therefore to promote high-quality SSGI.

The framework will be voluntary and will lay down the basis for a consensus on the meaning of SSGI quality at EU level.

It is mirrored by similar on-going initiatives concerning long-term care in the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) context and by another recent Commission initiative on quality of care and health-care standards.

The SSGI framework could focus not only on quality but also on accessibility, which includes both availability and affordability, as this is recognized as a prerequisite for service quality. It could identify some common quality and accessibility principles and, to do so, it could build on the Active Inclusion initiative, which has already identified common principles on access to quality services³.

Moreover, the quality framework could cover methodological aspects concerning the definition, monitoring and evaluation of SSGI quality and accessibility. It could refer e.g. to peer reviews, user's participation mechanisms, certification procedures, procedures for the development of indicators and standards.

The development of the framework should build on the results of the above-mentioned bottom-up initiative financed via the PROGRESS programme, which will identify mechanisms for the definition, measurement, assessment and improvement of SSGI quality. It may also benefit from the output of the Network of Local Authorities' Observatories that is about to be launched with the support of the PROGRESS programme, to monitor and promote best practices on active inclusion policies especially in relation to quality services.

Developing such a quality framework within the Social Protection Committee will ensure a consensual approach, guaranteeing that the diversity of situations within each Member State will be respected, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

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¹ COM(2007) 725 final, 20 November 2007.
² See chapter 2, section 2.1.3., of the Biennial report on social services of general interest, SEC(2008) 2179, 02 July 2008.

³ In this context, in order to promote the active social and economic inclusion of people excluded from the labour market, the Commission has put forward an integrated and comprehensive strategy based on three pillars, namely: adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services. After a two stage public consultation that started in 2006, the Commission has recently adopted a Recommendation on common principles and guidelines in the three strands and for the integrated strategy as a whole. The Council is due to adopt conclusions on the common principles in December. See Communication COM(2006) 44 "concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market"; Communications COM(2007) 620 Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion. Taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market and the Commission Recommendation "on the active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market", C(2008) 5737, 03 October 2008.

Guest Column

Quality in social services – the EU's activities from an NGO perspective

Eurodiaconia has been actively engaged in the EU debate on the quality of social services since the 2005 European Commission green paper on services of general interest. In 2006 we welcomed the Commission's recognition of the special characteristics of social services of general interest (SSGI) and their importance in promoting social inclusion and cohesion. Furthermore, we applauded efforts to safeguard quality and accessibility of these services through the clarification of European community law's impact on their provision. In addition, we supported the Commission's 2007 integrated approach to inclusion which links access to quality services with adequate income support and labour market access (active inclusion).



We also welcomed the use of a Recommendation of the Commission and Council as an instrument to lay down principles for active inclusion. Although non-binding, the political weight of the agreement shows a commitment to promoting social inclusion and quality social services. However, the Commission's September 2008 Recommendation has not taken on many issues raised by social

NGOs regarding access to quality services. We particularly highlight the absence of the recognition of the importance of preventative measures, that services are delivered in a timely manner and the need for follow up of the user. We also have concerns as to how the principles will be implemented given that they lack detail.

Quality and accessibility

Eurodiaconia has stressed that the quest for increased quality should lead to improvements in the lives of those who use the services. In some instances, such as with homelessness, integrating people into society is more important than quality services per se. Above all, a focus on high quality should not lead to services becoming inaccessible or unaffordable to users. Improving the quality of services will usually lead to an increase in cost. Therefore, we emphasize that financial commitment is necessary at all levels of government to ensure access to quality services for all and sufficient operating revenue for service providers. We wish to avoid a two-tier care system whereby only low-quality care is accessible in some areas because quality services are simply not affordable. We therefore regret that the Active Inclusion Recommendation merely states "Consideration should be given to...the availability of financial resources" for the implementation of the principles.

In addition, in the most recent Social Protection Committee (SPC) – Commission consultation on SSGI the recognition that social services have special characteristics, and therefore that their quality is key to achieving their goals, was absent. In a joint letter, Eurodiaconia and seven other European NGO networks of service providers questioned this absence. Not having the explicit recognition of such special characteristics of SSGI and their users in Commission documents and policies makes it more difficult to take this into account when considering adapting relevant European policies or Community rules.

A coherent approach by the Commission is necessary

The Commission launched three different initiatives related to the quality of social services: a framework providing guidelines on the methodology to set, monitor and evaluate SSGI, a call for proposals on developing mechanisms for the definition, measurement, assessment and improvement of quality of SSGI,



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and the *principles on access to quality services*. However, it has been unclear how these three processes are connected. In particular, their timing makes it impossible for some processes to positively influence others.

We have also been disappointed that some policy areas affecting SSGI have seemingly not taken their specificities into account. Such a lack of recognition risks weakening the impact of efforts to support their quality. For example, the ways state aid and public procurement may negatively impact the quality of social services have been raised by NGOs in responses to three consultations yet seemingly not taken into consideration. Public procurement rules currently allow funding authorities to award tenders for social services, *as with all services*, on the basis of the “lowest price”. Yet, for social services, quality is essential in order for the service to achieve its goal. Competitive tendering has been used to drive down costs in social care provision. Many providers who take on services at these lower costs then find it difficult to provide high-quality care and support working with minimum resources. In addition, some soon go out of business, leading to a disruption in care.

We are still hopeful, however, that the outcome of the EU’s actions will be positive. In any case we will continue to work for the EU to support quality social services.

Laura Jones
Eurodiaconia Acting Secretary General

Eurodiaconia is a federation of organisations, institutions and churches providing

social and health services and education on a Christian value base in over 20 European countries. Eurodiaconia receives support under the European Community PROGRESS programme. www.eurodiaconia.org.

Social services of general interest at European level in the year 2008: the German point of view

Efforts to improve legal certainty and clarity with regard to European law in the field of social services of general interest were intensified in 2008. One important event was the appointment of the Social Protection Committee working group at the beginning of the year, accompanied by the launch of the European Commission’s interactive information service. In this context, a new questionnaire of the Social Protection Committee – the third after 2004 and 2006 – was sent to Member States and relevant organisations in July 2008 in an effort to clarify open issues.

In Germany the questionnaire was sent out to a great number of recipients, with central stakeholders of civil society and particularly non-statutory welfare organisations included among those surveyed. Responses have shown that the efforts of the European Commission and of the Social Protection Committee have already achieved a great deal. In addition to the Green and White Papers on this subject, other important documents include above all the Communication of the Commission on

services of general interest including social services of general interest, COM(2007) 725 final, which was published together with two working papers by Commission services dealing with frequently asked questions on State aid and public procurement legislation.

German respondents believe that the Commission’s interactive information service has proved to be a useful instrument to help elucidate issues and problems involving EU law in a direct manner. It has already been actively used by both German service providers and government authorities. In the few months of its existence, the service has been a valuable contribution towards making EU laws more comprehensible, coherent and visible, so that services of general interest are better able to fulfil their mission. It has also allowed the European Commission to provide more specific details in connection with the information published in its 2007 Communication, although many of the individual explanations given, in particular those concerning the distinction between services of general economic interest and services of general non-economic interest, have not always been found helpful to allow legally certain conclusions to be drawn, and have therefore given rise to further queries.

German institutions therefore believe that any work that was necessary in this area and at this point in time has now been done. No further measures are considered necessary. Now the new instrument needs to be kept up to date, its visibility needs to be increased, and the result of its activities needs

to be evaluated after a suitably long period of use. If necessary, certain aspects of its operation can then be reviewed or improved. From a German point of view, the success of the information service will depend to a crucial extent on whether its operation is accompanied by a learning process on the part of the European Commission and not just based on a purely top-down approach.

Three suggestions for changes to this information service can be made at this point. One immediate change is that answers should include the name of a direct contact so that any directly related queries do not need to be submitted via the mail form. Another change that would be very helpful for all stakeholders in this area would be that the Commission makes both questions and answers accessible – of course anonymously. And finally, for the new medium to be even more successful it is above all necessary for questions and answers to be exchanged in any of the EU official languages.

The proposals presented in the Communication also include a strategy to guarantee the quality of social services across the EU. Germany has already gone a long way towards developing principles in this area, for instance with the charter of rights of persons in need of help or care and with the quality objectives of the German Federation of Non-Statutory Welfare Services. German institutions emphasise that a quality framework of this nature, which includes methodical guidelines to define, monitor and evaluate quality standards, must remain voluntary and should not lead to additional monitoring measures and reporting obligations. Besides, defining and monitoring quality standards for health services as well as for solidarity-based long-term care services is the sole responsibility of the EU Member States.

Both processes are viewed constructively by the German federal government and will be supported to the largest possible extent.

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Main Report

Demographic change as an opportunity for older people to lead active and self-determined lives

Demographic change and the new age structure of our populations have far-reaching consequences, many of which have so far been seen and discussed only in terms of the challenges they present. Now, and particularly with the 2006 publication of the Commission Communication on Europe's demographic future, a new wind has begun to blow, as can be seen clearly from the subtitle of the Communication: "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity"¹. Demographic change continued to be an important topic of discussion during the German EU Presidency in 2007. In its resolution², the Council also calls on both the Commission and the Member States to remain committed to the relevance of a "silver economy" and of "age as an economic factor". These concepts show clearly that, in a European context, older people are increasingly viewed as economic factors from two contrasting points of view. On the one hand they are members of the workforce, people whose employability and ability to work should be preserved and promoted on the labour market. This is a particularly important aspect when seen within the scope of the Lisbon strategy – in connection with the prolongation of our working lives³ – but of course it is true that the term of "active ageing" is often equated only with this rather narrow context of longer active working lives. On the other hand, older people are consumers of social services. Results of market research

show that the 50-plus group accounts for nearly half the sales for many categories of consumer goods.⁴ This means that products and services can be adapted to the age of their consumers, and this will help them maintain both their quality of life and their ability to work. These two facets of the economic potential of older people – employment potential and consumption potential – may sound very functional at first, but indeed they open up opportunities for older people to make their lives more active and more self-determined. For this to become reality, however, the relevant infrastructure needs to be improved. With regard to employment potential, the framework conditions for active ageing could be improved if companies adopted more sustainable human resource management policies, for instance by offering more flexible working hours and facilitating compatibility of professional and private life. Initiatives and policy approaches aiming at improving infrastructure, for instance measures such as housing projects, local contact offices and help in every-day life, could also be helpful. In the area of consumption potential, a better tailored provision of products and services for the elderly means that care services would be improved. If framework conditions were better in both areas, in other words in terms of both employment and consumption, older people might be perceived in a more holistic manner: not only as an economic factor but also as integrated members of society.

The needs of this population group must therefore be examined more closely. This will open up new development opportunities for providers of social services. With less government control in the social sector, the Europeanisation and the free market, new

markets for social services are evolving. At the same time, demographic change means that the need for social services for the elderly is also growing. Above-average growth rates are expected in this area, particularly with regard to health and nursing care.

However, how successfully individual social services will be able to position themselves in this promising market will depend to a large extent on what they have to offer. An important prerequisite for the development of new concepts is orientation to the changing needs and desires of the target group. But this is exactly where we encounter a great deal of complexity. As a target group, "the elderly" are not homogeneous. There are youthful seniors, gainfully employed seniors, healthy seniors, and those who are ill. There are those who need a lot of support, while others need little or no help at all⁵. This means that providers of social services are called on to understand the life situations of a variety of special target groups within the overall target group of the elderly and to develop a diversified range of services to meet diversified needs.

Furthermore, dialogue between customers, social service providers and local and regional authorities – in particular at local level – can contribute to guaranteeing the participation of older people in the development of an appropriate range of services and at the same time to create transparency about existing services.

New concepts in the area of household-related services are also of utmost importance in this context. Expanding the range of support services at home helps the elderly to maintain their quality of life and their independence. By combining person-related services and new living concepts and by using modern information and communication technology (ICT) or Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) systems tailored to individual needs, structures can be created that foster active and self-determined living in every phase of life. And in the area of out-patient and in-patient long-term care, too, the aim of providers should be to meet the various needs of their users, to develop diversified ranges of products and to co-ordinate the two. In terms of a more efficient organisation of health and social services, ICT also has advantages for both users and suppliers.⁶

With its action plan on "Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing"⁷ the European Union is supporting research in the field of ICT as it impacts social services for the elderly.

Within the scope of the renewed social agenda, the Commission has announced the publication of further Communications that will discuss concepts and measures for the health and well-being of older people in the EU. The Commission Communication announced for late 2008 on "actions to meet the needs of an ageing population" will also deal with the importance of communication and information technology.⁸ Moreover, a Commission Communication on infrastructure needs in an ageing society is also expected.

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Kathrin Linz, ISS e.V. ■■■

- 1 COM(2006) 571 final, 12 October 2006 (DOC 14114/06).
- 2 Resolution of the Council of the European Union: "Opportunities and challenges of demographic change in Europe: Contribution of older people to economic and social development" (6216/4/07 REV 4), 29 May 2007.
- 3 The objective of the Lisbon strategy for the EU – in terms of employment rates for people 50 and older – is 50%. With its current figure of 51.50%, Germany is just above the mark, and although the overall European rate rose to 44.70% in 2007, the 50% goal is still unlikely to be achieved by the year 2010. (EUREPORT Social, 7-8/2008, 16th year, p. 31).
- 4 Quoted from: German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (12/2007), study on "Wirtschaftsmotor Alter" – Kurzfassung, [Ageing as an economic motor – Summary] p. 11.
- 5 There are various other groups with diverse needs, for example the growing population of elderly migrants.
- 6 European Commission (Ed.) (2008): "Final report of Seniorwatch 2 study – Assessment of the Senior Market for ICT Progress and Developments". URL: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/ct/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=4286.
- 7 EU Commission (2007): "Ageing well in the Information Society – An i2010 Initiative – Action Plan on Information and Communication Technologies and Ageing". COM(2007) 332 final.
- 8 EU Commission (2007): "Renewed social agenda: Opportunities, access and solidarity in 21st-century Europe". COM(2008) 412 final, p. 12f.



Social Services in Europe

Social Services in the Czech Republic

Social services have long and rich tradition in the Czech Republic. Unfortunately, this tradition was radically interrupted in the era of real socialism, a system that also devastated other fields of public life. In the late 1980's, the then Czechoslovakian social welfare system was centralised and characterised by a privileged position of the state as lawmaker, operator, inspector and financial source of the welfare system. The space for independent operation of all non-governmental entities was significantly limited and/or eliminated, and social problems were concealed.

The role of citizens and families was suppressed and charitable and church-based activities were excluded completely. Citizens were forced into the position of passive receivers of social benefits, allowances and services without being allowed to co-decide on the scope and quality of the same.

In the early 1990's, the following initial principles were defined to be implemented and gradually adhered to in the entire system, including the social services:

- de-monopolisation of social assistance and pluralisation of sources,
- de-centralisation and democratisation of the state social administration,
- pluralisation of assistance sources adequate for the social need,
- changed target and humanisation of social assistance devices,
- personification and professionalization of social assistance

In spite of these principles defined at the beginning of the 1990's, social services failed to become a major focus of reforming efforts. The priorities at the time were to ensure the political feasibility of economic transformation, to compensate any negative social consequences of individual transformation stages, and to avoid exceeding the social load threshold. For this reason, the so-called "social safety network" became the most urgent priority. The concept of such a network was based on three-stage protection: 1. an active employment policy, 2. adaption of wages and social allowances to the development of living costs with

a view to ensure that the decrease in actual levels of income is economically and socially bearable, 3. provision of tools to ensure that no person accidentally falls into poverty. This stage of protection comprises the field of minimal guarantees – minimum wage, minimum social security benefits, subsistence minimum, and it also declared the protection of housing and residential care.

The state monopoly was removed as early as 1990, giving rise to new non-governmental entities. Citizens' social activities were liberalised, along with those pursued by voluntary associations and organisations.

No other regulatory amendments were made with the exception of the partial legislative changes concerning the system being opened to other than state-operated providers of social services. This state of affairs was quite unsatisfactory. Although there was an effort to reform the system of social assistance, which also included social services, all changes predominantly dealt with the system of benefits. In addition, actual implementation of these changes was constantly postponed despite several drafts of the social assistance act. Negotiations on special legislative regulation which would govern the social services commenced as late as 1998. Although the situation before the special regulation was predominantly negative, there had nevertheless been some positive developments: the network of social services being under construction, the existing system of benefits and allowances,

growing self-confidence among social services users, and development of professional social work, both at university and college (higher education) level. The most important factor was the sector of non-governmental non-profit organisations, which emerged quite rapidly in the early 1990's and strove to provide social services at state-of-the-art level.

In 2002, the system of public authorities was reformed, district authority offices were disbanded along with state administration bodies, and new regional self-government authorities were established. Social services were transferred to the competence of the self-governing cities, communities and regions. These changes had far-reaching consequences which manifested themselves in an overall concept of the social legislation.

In the year 2006, the Social Services Act was introduced, coming into force on 1 January 2007. The strengths of this act are generally seen in its consistency and in the separate legislative provisions governing social services, including their wider spectrum, in the effort made to change values (stress on social inclusion and individual needs, choice and wishes of the users), in the abandonment of the formerly predominating medical approach to social services and in the act's commitment to provide for an adequate quality of services.

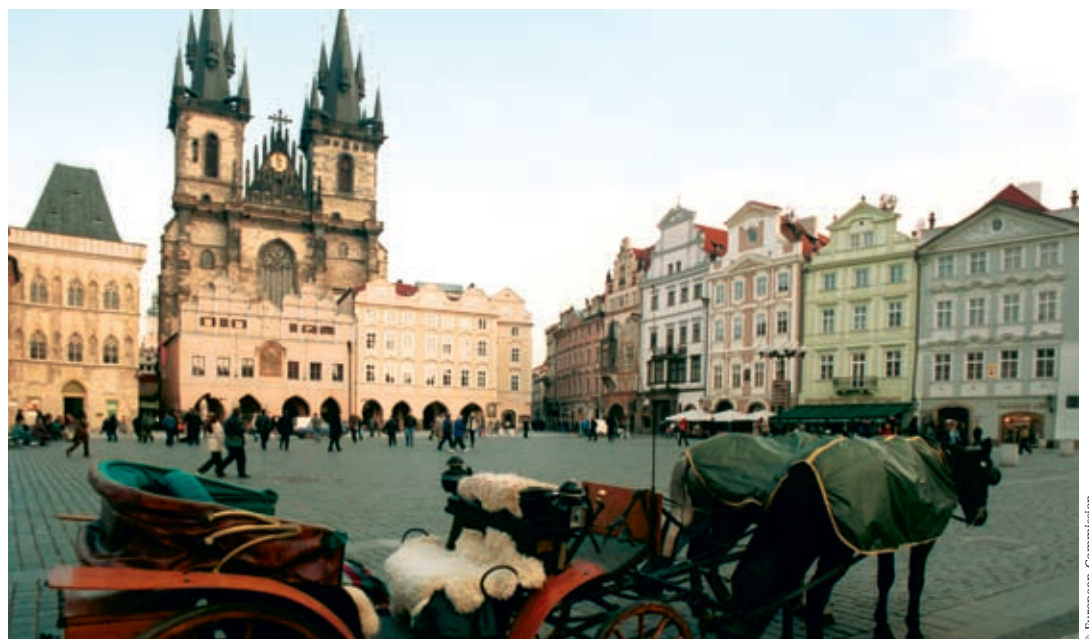
However, the act and its implementation bring forth some new pressing problems. A completely new element is the social care al-

lowance, which was planned to be a tool for allocating public resources to where social care/service is really needed. Nevertheless, this original intention failed, as the majority of the allowance receivers do not use the social services at all. Criteria for assigning the allowance are problematic. The process of assignment runs at four levels, based on the degree of dependence on the assistance of another physical entity. The assessment takes into account a summary of activities which the particular receiver is unable to undertake, but not the current social situation of the user. Criteria are uniform for all the types of disabilities; in practice, however, no objectification of demands is performed. The amount of allowance is not sufficient to cover the cost of social services and/or to ensure adequate care provided by the relatives or family members.

Accessibility of social services for those in need should be ensured through an arrangement of local and regional service networks. However, community planning is still at a very early stage. Moreover, financing and community planning systems have not been interconnected yet.

The mode of financing itself poses a complicated problem. The system of unclaimed subsidies has been preserved though it means existence uncertainty for providers and is a root of unequal access to financial resources.

Implementation of social services quality standards is another difficult task ahead. Many times a



The Old Town Square in downtown Prague



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General view of Charles Bridge and Prague Castle

social service worker does not understand the content of the standards, and/or has a different view of what the quality of a service should be like. Practical fulfilment of these standards is extremely difficult for many providers due to inadequate material and technical conditions or a lack of qualified personnel or financial resources. This situation is also related to the fact that the inspection system is still in its early days: there is a lack of qualified inspectors, and methodology is not applied uniformly. Therefore, inspection is still seen as an act of terror rather than as a tool for quality improvement.

Although social work has been resurrected as an academic subject, the number of qualified personnel is still insufficient. An accreditation system has been established to evaluate various educators and individual programmes in the field of further education, but there is still no system for lifelong education and training in social services.

The most topical task is to put the new system into operation, to reflect the entire philosophy of the changes not only in legislation but – above all – in everyday practice.

The years to come should see increased responsibility of towns/communities in providing the social services, a strengthened role of social services recipients, and the establishment of a stable financial environment which would allow for further development of the sector, modification of the social services network structure and continuing deinstitutionalisation and individualisation of care.

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News from the Observatory

The Observatory serves as the national contact point for the web portal of the “European Alliance for Families”

Family-friendly policies and family-friendly measures are more and more discussed at EU level. The web portal of the “European Alliance for Families” is a platform created to stimulate the exchange of extensive information on family-relevant topics among the Member States and to make the results of these exchanges available to the general public.

Since September 2008, the Observatory, as the “national contact point” for Germany, has assumed the task of collecting topical information on German family policies, to process this information and to pass it on to the operators of the web portal. This means that the Observatory is now the official contact for federal and state government authorities as well as for other relevant stakeholders. In this position it will facilitate the transfer of up-to-date information about German developments in the area of family policy measures and policy approaches as well as about recent research and events.

Information involving the “European Alliance for Families” can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/families.

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SOLIDAR conference “Together for a social Europe”

On 25 June 2008, one day before the start of the French EU Council Presidency, a conference entitled “Together for a social Europe” was held in Paris, hosted by SOLIDAR – the European network and interest group for providers of social services at European level. Participants examined various issues of the European social agenda and discussed them at greater depth.

The objective of the event was not only to continue discussion of the European social agenda but above all – in the form of conclusions drawn up in the course of the conference – to send a powerful message to the French EU Council Presidency and its Czech and Swedish successors as well as to EU institutions and European governments. Participants called for more clarity in European legislation, a better co-ordination of policies in the social area and greater respect for the dignity of persons in their working and living circumstances.

The conference took place in three broad discussion blocks. The first set of topics dealt with services of general interest and non-profit social and health services. Among the issues that came up for discussion was the idea that a new and comprehensive social agenda was necessary, that creating a social Europe needed an integration policy based on human dignity and human rights and that the conditions for non-profit services of general interest (particularly social and health services) should be legally and politically suited to their missions. The second part of the conference discussed two related topics: decent working and living conditions and the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Here, participants looked at aspects such as comprehensive social protection and decent working and living conditions in the EU Member States (and before the backdrop of increasing globalisation).

The gist of the conference was that a social Europe can be successful only if Europeans are clearly committed to it – by developing coherent and co-ordinated policies, programmes and actions supportive of this overarching goal.

Annette Angermann, DV e.V. ■■■

A look at our neighbours: German-Dutch conference on the civic engagement of senior citizens

In awareness of current demographic trends, discussion on the strengthening of civic engagement has recently been focusing particularly on the commitment of older citizens. "Civic commitment among older people – strategies for the future", a German-Dutch conference on this subject, took place in Berlin in July 2008. It was hosted jointly by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and by the Dutch Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport in co-operation with the Institute for Gerontology of the University of Dortmund.

Discussions in the working groups and in the plenum made it particularly clear that although there may be differences between the two countries, there are also large areas of common positions with regard to framework conditions impacting on the commitment of senior citizens. Particular importance was placed on the need to give volunteers recognition and praise for their involvement and on the importance of using their services on the basis of their abilities. Personal contact was also found to be essential for the success of efforts to attract new volunteers: people want to be asked whether they could imagine doing volunteer work.

An extensive report on the results of the conference is available in both German and Dutch at <http://www.engagement-conference.info>.

Information on the many real-life examples presented at the conference is also available. An extensive comparative report entitled "Strategien zur Stärkung des bürgerschaftlichen Engagements älterer Menschen in Deutschland und den Niederlanden" (Strategies to strengthen civic commitment

among older people in Germany and the Netherlands), which served as the foundation of the conference, can be downloaded from:

<http://www.engagement-conference.info/resources/D-NL-Expertise.pdf>.

Birgit Sittermann, ISS e.V. ■■■

Support services for migrant families in Europe – challenges, policy approaches and examples

On 2 July 2008, on the occasion of the annual conference of European Social Networks (ESN), the Observatory held a workshop on "Supporting migrant families in Europe". It was attended by some sixty participants from fourteen European countries, among them representatives of local and regional authorities, NGOs and welfare federations. The workshop was based on the results of a project on "Equality of opportunities for families – integrated policy approaches to provide early support for children and young people at EU level and in the Member States". The guest speaker at the event was Sascha Wenzel of the Berlin-based Regional Centre for Education, Integration and Democracy (RAA). He presented "One square kilometre of education", a field project carried out in the Berlin district of Neukölln. The objective of the project is to give migrant children and young people more equal opportunities by encouraging the creation of networks among the various stakeholders at the interface between social affairs and education, even beyond the boundaries of their departments and areas of responsibility.

Europe is facing a number of common challenges surrounding the issues of (in)equality, poverty and social exclusion of children and young people from migrant families. As a result, more and more EU initiatives are being developed to meet these challenges. So far, however, focus has been restricted to problem definition and to a few agreements regarding intended objectives. As this issue is becoming more and more topical in most EU Member States, we can expect EU-level co-operation structures in this area to increase. The various EU Member States offer a number of support

services for children and young people from migrant families organised on the basis of the welfare state principles of each individual state. To provide successful support services – services that are consistently oriented towards the principle of equal opportunities for children and young people from migrant families as well as reduction of poverty and social exclusion in this population group – the following factors should be taken into account. The central prerequisite is early support for children and young people from migrant families as well as for all children and young people. Here the various EU Member States have used different approaches. While Scandinavian countries provide universal services – i.e. services that are accessible to all children and young people without special access criteria – other countries tend to offer services aimed at special target groups. Depending on how the individual welfare states are organised, these services may be offered within the scope of the educational system or as part of the social system. What is important is that specific, high-quality support is provided for children of pre-school age. The Scandinavian countries could be used as examples, as they have developed curricula for children as young as pre-school age based on the principle that children of this age must have access to high-quality care and education. This way, something can be done to counteract any possible social disadvantages of children from migrant families by giving these children early access to key competencies that will be essential for them to lead a self-determined adult life. Other factors of success are an exact determination of needs, local networks, and management and organisation of these services by new, decentralised governance structures.

For further information please visit our website:

http://www.soziale-dienste-in-europa.de/frame/dokumente/Aktuelles/ix6574_920791b96.htm?script=0.
http://www.soziale-dienste-in-europa.de/Anlage/Abschlussbericht_P6_16072008.pdf.

Hanna Steidle, DV e.V. ■■■

D a t e s

2009

22–23 January/ Loughborough, Great Britain

Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards a More Equal Society?
Organisation: Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University
E-mail: crspconference@lboro.ac.uk
http://www.crsp.ac.uk/conference/conference_2009/index.htm

5–7 March/ Dornbirn, Austria

Exhibition for nursing care and rehabilitation „Inter-Cura“ 2009
<http://www.dornbirnermesse.at/start.php4?m lid=11&sch=1024>

6–7 March/ Luxembourg, Luxembourg

The European Social Model in a Global Perspective
Organisation: IMPALLA-ESPAnet
E-mail: impalla2009@soc.kuleuven.be
<http://soc.kuleuven.be/ceso/impalla/ESPANET/description/description.html>

26–29 April/ Dubrovnik, Croatia

IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) and Partners European Conference
Social Action in Europe: Different Legacies & Common Challenges?
Organisation: ENSACT (European Network for Social Action)
<http://www.rathanea.hr/ensact/index.html>

4–6 May/ Berlin, Germany

Soziale und berufliche Integration benachteiligter Jugendlicher – Nationale Ansätze im europäischen Vergleich
Organisation: Deutscher Verein e.V., Berlin
<http://www.deutscher-verein.de/03-events/2009/gruppe2/f-203-09/>

22–24 June/Prague, Czech Republic

17th European Social Services Conference
Organisation: European Social Network
<http://www.esn-eu.org/european-social-services-conference/index.htm>

2–3 July/ Berlin, Germany

Employment Uncertainty and Family Dynamics
Joint workshop of the French National Institute for Demographic Studies, the German Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research and Stockholm University
http://www.soziologie.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Pressebereich/Call4Papers.pdf

5–9 July/Paris, France

IAGG World Congress of Gerontology and Geriatrics
Organisation: IAGG
E-mail: info@gerontologyparis2009.com
Website: <http://www.gerontologyparis2009.com/site/view8.php>

Personalia

Hanna Steidle has left the Observatory. On 1 September 2008,



Sabrina Stula joined the Observatory's Berlin project team as a new research officer. Ms. Stula studied sociology with a focus

on European sciences at Otto-Friedrich University in Bamberg and at Université Marne-la-Vallée in Paris. Her main areas of interest were European integration, social policy, migration and integration. Within the scope of a study project she participated in a publication on low birthrates among academic women and was involved in an investigation of the various framework conditions for reconciling family and career in selected countries in Europe. Her diploma dissertation was on the Europeanisation of family policy. Before coming to the Observatory, she was a research officer in the team running the "Binsfeld multi-generational house" project.

News Update

The "Family Monitor": what do Germans want for a better compatibility of family and career?

In September 2008, the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth published the 2008 "Family Monitor", a representative survey on the current situation of families in Germany. Most Germans feel that careers and family life should be easier to reconcile: 63% of the population aged 16 or older list this as one of their top priorities. The expectations of survey participants as to how these objectives can best be achieved are directed at state authorities, at the workplace and at child-care facilities. While one of the respondents' special priorities is the adequate provision of child-care facilities by municipal authorities, parents are also particularly interested in more whole-day schools and kindergartens. The survey shows that participants would also like employers to offer child care and flexible working hours for parents.

Further information and the results of the survey (in German) can be found online at: <http://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/generator/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Abteilung2/Pdf-Anlagen/allensbach-familienmonitor,property=pdf,bereich=sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf>.

Birgit Sittermann, ISS e.V.

Two reports on social services of general interest

The current situation of social services of general interest (SSGIs) in the EU is the topic of two reports published in June and July 2008. In one of them, authors Manfred Huber, Mathias Maucher and Barbara Sak examine the situation of SSGIs in eight EU Member States (including Germany, Great Britain and the Czech Republic) on behalf of the European Commission. The study concentrates on long-term care, social integration with special focus on migrants and illegal drug users, labour market services for disadvantaged persons, child care, and social housing. Starting from these areas, the study examines the application of EU legislation and judgments of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to SSGIs. The authors come to the conclusion that, particularly in view of the various national traditions in the field of social services, there is still a great deal of uncertainty and lack of clarity regarding the application of EU competition rules to social services, and that there is a need for clarification in this area.

A second report on social services of general interest has been published within the scope of the European Commission's social package: the first biennial report of the European Commission on social services of general interest, offering an overview of the situation of social services in the Member States of the EU. Following an introductory presentation of the history of the debate on SSGIs at EU level, the report focuses on the areas of child care, long-term care, and labour market services for disadvantaged people. In spite of the differences between the three selected areas and the range of approaches taken by the various EU Member States, the report finds that there are nonetheless similarities between them. All Member States have to react to the same challenges: for instance, demo-

graphic change and increasing labour market flexibility. These new requirements for social services are, according to the report, a decisive factor for their modernisation. The next report, which will be published in 2010, will focus on the quality of social services.

The study by M. Huber, M. Maucher and B. Sak, "Study on Social and Health Services of General Interest in the European Union", can be downloaded from: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsi/docs/social_protection/2008/study_social_health_services_en.pdf.

The Commission's "Biennial report on social services of general interest" (SEC(2008) 2179 final) can be found online at:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/publications/2008/keat08001_en.pdf.

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