



european network of service providers in employment and rehabilitation

Social Services and the Services Directive: Declaration from the European Network of Service Providers in Employment & Rehabilitation (ENSPER)

The **E**uropean **N**etwork of **S**ervice **P**roviders in **E**mployment and **R**ehabilitation (ENSPER) is an independent, overall structure, grouping together three separate organisations – the *European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)*; *Workability Europe (WE)* and *Rehabilitation International (RI)*.

ENSPER's purpose is to give providers of work, employment and all kinds of rehabilitation services a single voice so they can have greater influence in the international decision-making process. The scope of ENSPER covers all actions and initiatives in the public affairs arena relating to people with disabilities and others who are experiencing disadvantage. In this way, the *European Platform for Rehabilitation*, *Workability Europe* and *Rehabilitation International Work & Employment Commission* are now working together in Europe:

- **to** promote Equality of Opportunity in work, training, employment, health, social care, and access to all kinds of rehabilitation services for people with disabilities;
- **to** specifically increase the range of employment opportunities and choices through individual employment;
- **to** raise the profile of disabled people as active and inclusive contributors to the economy and labour market;
- **to** promote quality and best practice in all areas relating to work, employment and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities.

In this context, ENSPER welcomes the revised European Commission proposal for the Services Directive, which excludes social and health services - as the Services Directive in its original format would make it difficult for public authorities to guarantee high quality standards in our sector. EPR now calls on the Council to respect the Commission's amended proposal.

At the same time, ENSPER reaffirms its support for some key principles embedded in the Services Directive, and asks these principles are taken into consideration in all future EU legislative and policy-making processes affecting the provision of social and health services.



Consequently, what we continue to strive for is:

1. Strengthening user rights and involvement

ENSPER stresses that the specific situation of the user in social and health services requires special measures to strengthen user rights and to guarantee that users will indeed benefit from competition. Such measures could comprise:

- Ensuring that users receive all the information/assistance to understand their own need and have a clear view on the various services and service providers available
- Ensuring that users have a real choice and can decide themselves on which service and service provider they want
- Ensuring that users are involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of the services they receive
- The evaluation of all services is an indispensable tool. Evaluation criteria must be carefully formulated to correspond to the goals of social services

2. Application of the business model to social services

ENSPER is keen to ensure that the 'rehabilitation business' is a 'good' business combining a business approach with essentials of the Social Model. Therefore it advocates

- Putting in place of systems and structures to ensure transparency and accountability
- Setting guarantees in the contractual relationship between the public authority and the service provider
- Instituting monitoring systems and complaint procedures (rewards & sanctions)
- Continued evaluation and target-setting
- Understanding by public authorities and funders that the most economical solutions are not necessarily the best and emphasis on the development of sustainable services

3. More market and competition

ENSPER holds the view that the achievement of more flexible and competitive markets - a key objective of the Services Directive - in the rehabilitation sector offers better opportunities to the 'best' service providers in terms of expertise, reputation and quality. In a more competitive and flexible environment, it is easier for high-level service providers to distinguish them from the others and to obtain a greater market share. The ENSPER believes that elements to compete will comprise a high degree of specialisation, quality and proximity to the costumers - finally to the advantage of the users.

However, ENSPER underlines that competition in the social and health services sector must be designed to suit the specificities of the sector in a way which does not undermine the European Social Model. Many personal social and health services differ to other Services of General (Economic) Interest by the fact of the vulnerability and often dependency of their users. The 'client' in social services is often in a weak position, which means that he/she cannot make a real and informed choice for a provider or service. In this respect, orientation towards more competitive services should also include the provision of highly specialised rehabilitation services to people with complex dependency who require more personalised and costly solutions.

Finally, ENSPER wants in this context to underline that in practice, competition in social and health services mainly relates to the selection and contracting of service providers by the public authorities, rather than offering a real choice to the service-users.

4. Less bureaucracy and regulation

ENSPER strongly believes that service providers are able to offer more and better outputs with less financial resources if they are given more freedom to be creative and to manage with more efficiency. This requires less bureaucracy, the simplification of laws and regulations or even deregulation in both the *setting up* of new services and in *operating services*

ENSPER supports the principle of deregulation with regard to cross-border service provision, as envisaged in the Service Directive, but also emphasises that a more general application of this approach at national level could allow service providers to offer 'more with less resources', and would as such create a 'win-win' situation for public authorities, service providers and, above all, people with disabilities.

5. Quality of services

ENSPER strongly supports the aim of the Services Directive to promote the quality of services, and emphasises that services in the social sector should be:

- *Multifaceted* (ie providers should provide a wide range of services to cater to individuals in a holistic way);
- *Human-needs centred* (personalised and non-standardised services are needed, which take time, understanding and respect to respond to each person's needs);
- *User-empowering* (Enabling people to get involved in defining their personal needs and capacities helps guarantee that their needs will be served adequately and contributes to their independence);
- *Protective* (mechanisms need to be in place to prevent abuse of vulnerable people: physical, mental and also financial)

However, ENSPER holds the view that voluntary standards and codes of conduct are *not* sufficient to guarantee quality in social and health services, and that a European Quality Framework or Quality System is indispensable for two main reasons

- Greater competition and liberalisation of the market of service-provision to people with disabilities involves the establishment of many new service providers that often lack experience and specific expertise.
- Increased trans-national service provision or the “Europeanisation” of the rehabilitation market calls for a Quality Framework at European level. It would not only provide guarantees to users and purchasers of services but would at the same time allow “good” service providers to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

- THE END -

Ray Fletcher
President ENSPER

Jan Spooren
General Secretary EPR

Hans Vrind
President Workability Europe

Contact

European Network of Service Providers in Employment and Rehabilitation (ENSPER) composed of:

- European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR)
- Workability Europe (WE)
- Rehabilitation International Work & Employment Commission (RI)

Rue de Spa 15, B-1000, Brussels, Belgium
Tel +32 2 235 66 64; Fax: +32 2 736 86 22
Email: martin.ohridski@epr.be
Website: www.ensper.org

