

Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities must not be victims of the financial crisis!

The European Association for Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), which represents more than 8000 social and health service provider organisations across Europe, is highly concerned that disabled people, their families and the service providers will suffer from the consequences of the financial crisis, which they have not caused.

Already under normal circumstances social and health services for people with disabilities are underfinanced in a number of countries. EASPD calls for actions to avoid a further negative impact due to the current economic turmoil.

Franz Wolfmayr, President of EASPD, said: *“Today, more than ever before authorities at all levels need to invest in people. Today, more than ever before authorities need to invest in social, health and educational services supporting people to bounce back into society. Only by facilitating full participation of all citizens, including vulnerable groups we will overcome the crisis. A decrease in social and health sector budgets will have negative effects for the actual and the coming generation”*

Examples of how the crisis affects services

Social and health services for persons with disabilities are hit in several ways by the crisis:

- Cuts in the payments made to cover running costs, which means that many service providers are now struggling to keep their services running (i.e. in Ireland, Italy, Portugal)
- The non-implementation of already agreed action plans and programmes, which means a stand-still in the sector, especially in Eastern European countries (i.e. Lithuania, Romania)
- Sheltered workshops and employment agencies for persons with disabilities are losing their contracts with the industry and so have no work to offer their disabled workers (i.e. in France, Austria, Belgium)
- Due to the rising unemployment rate it is getting more and more difficult to find a job for a disabled person (i.e. in Italy, Belgium)

Urgent action is needed

In order to avoid that the situation gets worse, EASPD urges governments at all levels, including the European Union to invest in the infrastructure of health and social services. This type of investment would not only help to increase living conditions of people in need but would also stimulate the job creation in the construction sector which means that they would kill two birds with one stone.

Governments should also prioritise job creation and develop supported employment schemes to help disabled and otherwise disadvantaged people to enter the job market to avoid poverty and aiming full inclusion in society. More people moving into the workplace would result in an increase in net contributions to the treasury through income tax, and would likewise decrease the expenditure related to out of work benefits. The employment of people with disabilities will also contribute significantly to the sustainability of the social protection and security schemes.

Further information: Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General EASPD
Press contact: Ms Charlotte Boetticher, Tel. +32 2 282 46 10, Charlotte.Boetticher@easpd.eu
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