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**THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS IN THE PROVISION OF EFFICIENT, QUALITY
SOCIAL SERVICES**

Czech Presidency conference on social services, 22-23 April

Panel II: Social Services – Creating New Job Opportunities

I very much appreciate the opportunity to present the position of BUSINESSEUROPE on social services of general interest and on the Feedback report made by the Social Protection Committee.

Let me first start by saying that high quality and cost-effective social services are of great importance to the people in Europe, to the individual member states and for the preservation of the European social model. It is also important for private enterprises and employers.

1. Better access to quality services

BUSINESSEUROPE fully supports access to affordable, quality services, in order to assist people in participating fully in the labour market and to provide a life in dignity for those who cannot work. Access to social services is a key complement to active inclusion in the labour market, as the social services sector can support considerably - through the scope, type and character of services offered - active inclusion of people excluded from the labour market. Services can act as direct support for integration into the workforce or indirectly, complementing this process, e.g. social security schemes and health services.

2. Role of providers of social services as employers

Both public and private employers have a role to play in provision of social services. The choice of how and by which bodies such services should be supplied is a matter for each member state to decide. Private employers have a key role as providers of quality social services, best achieved through cost-effective, efficient and modern services and delivery methods. In some cases modernisation of the services themselves as well as the methods of delivery is required to ensure this efficiency and quality. As well as employers, national authorities also have a role in terms of setting suitable framework conditions for provision of social services.

3. Role of the social economy

The social economy has a role to play in the provision of services, however employers emphasise that although the social economy may be able to assist in some particularly difficult cases, it should not lead to artificial jobs. Its use must therefore be restricted to those cases where it is a stepping stone to the normal economy and based on concrete labour market needs.

4. Member state prerogative

Social services and methods of delivery are a member-state prerogative and differ greatly across the EU. It is therefore up to governments, with the involvement of social partners, to decide how such services should be provided in their member state.

Nevertheless there are some common trends. Modernisation of Social Services is, generally speaking, a response to the ageing of our societies, the need for

active inclusion and labour market flexibility and the need for cost reduction or containment. Or with other words: it aims for making our welfare states more sustainable in the future.

We agree with the Commission's position that legislation at EU level in the field of social services is neither required nor desirable. The focus at EU level should be on encouraging modernisation of social services, which will ensure access, as well as cost-effectiveness, efficiency and quality. Therefore the work of the EU should continue within the framework of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion. This is a useful tool for member states to exchange experience and examples of good practice in this field.

5. Skills requirements for workers in social services sector

Firstly, a general comment: Enhancing workers' skills is a key part of increasing employment in the EU, to deal with the current economic crisis as well as the effects of demographic change. Demographic trends will require that employment rates increase sharply in the next 5 to 10 years beyond the current Lisbon targets as the working age population shrinks. In this respect it is important that new job opportunities are created.

On the question of skills in general, workers in the social services sector are not different to employees in any other field, in that they are affected by changes on the labour market. In this way, it is important that their skills are adaptable, in order to ensure their continuing employability and productivity in the sector. This requires that they extend and refresh their knowledge, skills and competences throughout their working lives.

Skills requirements for workers in the social services sector are of course important in ensuring the provision of high quality, efficient and cost-effective

services. In this context, productivity and adaptability is key, to ensure that the skills of workers in the social services sector adapt in line with the needs of the sector from both the employers' point of view, but also the users. Workers require not only skills specific to the sector, but also softer transversal skills and competences, for example teamwork, language and communication skills.