

Social Services Europe

Commissioner-designate Hearings:

Two Questions the European Parliament must ask

INTRODUCTION

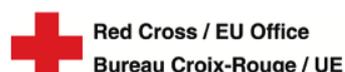
Between the 22th and 30th September 2014, the European Parliament will hold the hearings for the Commissioners-designate. Indeed, ever since the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament has to approve the proposed candidates for becoming Commissioners. During this process, Members of the European Parliament can question the Commissioners-designate on their suitability for the role they are candidate for and potentially refuse the proposed Commissioners.

Social Services Europe, bringing together 9 Europe-wide networks of social and health service providers, fully welcomes this process which brings added democratic legitimacy and transparency to the decision of whom should be our next European Commissioners. Indeed, each European Commissioners will be in charge of developing key policies and actions over the next few years, having an impact on nearly every aspect of our lives and it is only normal that our elected Members of the European Parliament can have a say in the decision to appoint them or not.

In the hearings, each parliamentary committee will be given the chance to ask the relevant Commissioner-designate a series of questions focusing both on their aptness for the position, as well as on their plans for their mandate.

Social Services Europe, representing over 100, 000 social service providers supporting those most excluded in Europe, calls for Members of the European Parliament to ask the following two questions to the relevant Commissioners-designate:

1. To the Commissioner-designate for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. How do you plan to unleash the job creation potential in the social services sector? Do you think a dedicated Communication in which a proposal for an EU action plan is presented would be useful?
2. To the Commissioner-designate for Trade. How is the European Commission planning to safeguard quality public services in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations and will the social and health services sectors be completely excluded?



Written Questions to Commissioner-delegates – September 2014

1. Unleashing the job creation potential in the Social Services Sector

To the Commissioner-designate for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion,

As a result of demographic and societal trends, it is clear that the demand for social services is growing and will continue to do so over the next few years and decades. This implies that the supply will need to meet the demand, consequently meaning that the health and social services sector will need to employ more and high(er) qualified staff. Over 10% of EU workforce already works in the social and health services sector and the European Commission already acknowledges that this trend will increase with the evolving demographics.

In addition to reducing unemployment, securing the supply for the demand for social services is also key to counteracting the increasing social exclusion and poverty in Europe and finding ways to improve the lives of many Europeans. Moreover, social investment leads to positive economic outcomes as changes to the situation of service users usually has positive and lasting economic outcomes; such as being in employment, training or education.

However, many barriers continue to stop the sector from achieving its potential. These include problems such as the lack of public finance which could be used to improve the quality of services provided as well as to offer better working conditions and training opportunities to the staff employed, the imbalanced regional distribution of workforce, the low attractiveness of the sector, difficult working patterns, a lack of opportunities for training, as well as the movement of social workers across Europe that often leads to illegal posting, social dumping and exploitation. It is clear that the European Commission can and should support member states overcome these barriers and develop concrete actions based on policy and financial instruments it has at its disposal. An EU employment strategy should be developed that seeks to seize the potentials of the sector, dedicates European funds to back this up and ensures the appropriate legal, political and financial environment so that social services can fulfill their mission.

How do you plan to unleash the job creation potential in the social services sector? Do you think a dedicated Communication in which a proposal for an EU action plan is presented would be useful?

Withdrawing Public Services from the Trans-atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

To the Commissioner-designate for Trade,

The European Commission currently claims that Public Services are excluded from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations, yet refuses to confirm if this includes –or not- certain commercialised Public Services such as social and health services. The social and health services sector represents an important part of the EU economy accounting for between 5 and 13% of EU GDP and over 10% of the EU workforce. The sector also plays a key role in counteracting the increasing social exclusion and poverty and helping to improve the lives of many Europeans.

Opening up access to public procurement transnationally, beyond the EU's borders, as is proposed by TTIP, could be hugely damaging to the quality of social and health services. The public procurement directives of 2014 that include many social and environmental safeguards could be considered as non-tariff barriers to trade and therefore challenged, with the risk of them being struck down. Furthermore, in the case that future governments may wish to further re-enforce social and environmental safeguards at a higher level than they are currently, investors could –through the Investor-to-State Dispute Settlement system- ask for compensation from national authorities for the changes made; even if these changes are in the interest of the general public. This could strongly limit any government's willingness to carry out such reform as it could well lead them to have to pay compensation to corporate investors; as has been the case in countries where the ISDS already exists.

How is the European Commission planning to safeguard quality public services in the TTIP negotiations and will the social and health services sectors be completely excluded?