

EASPD opinion on the Draft European Pillar of Social Rights

EASPD is the European Association of Service Providers for persons with Disabilities. We are a European not-for-profit organisation and represent over 12,000 social service provider organisations across Europe and disability. The main objective of EASPD is to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems.

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Social Service providers play an important role in enabling people with disabilities to gain access to their social and human rights; including access to the labour market, education, housing, care etc. The following position paper has been written on this basis and tries to bring in the views and expertise of over 12,000 social service providers on the European Pillar of Social Rights, as proposed by the European Commission in the [preliminary draft](#).

The Position Paper includes

- Main Recommendations
- General Assessment
- Proposed Amendments
- Concluding Remarks

A. Main Recommendations

To ensure that the European Pillar of Social Rights leads to an actual improvement of the quality of life of people in Europe, including people with disabilities and their families, through high quality social support and care systems, the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities strongly recommends that the EPSR

- Is the first step in a trend which places social rights at the very heart of the European Union's policies, in particular its economic and budgetary policy ;
- Goes beyond a mere statement of rights and includes mechanisms to ensure that it makes a real difference to the life of people in Europe. These mechanisms should include:
 - Providing the EPSR with a strong legal format; in which to help create necessary legal certainty to make real progress in protecting and empowering quality social services at national and European level

- Ensuring the EPSR is backed-up by and integrated into the EU’s economic and budgetary policies; including the European Semester, the Stability and Growth Pact, the European Structural and Investment Funds and European Fund for Strategic Investment;
- Includes and mainstreams the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities throughout the EPSR; in particular when it comes to Art 9, 19, 24, 27 and 28;
- Promotes quality in social services as a key instrument in implementing social rights on the ground and re-affirms the importance of having sufficient adequately trained and paid professionals in social care and support as essential in achieve quality social services;
- Amends the current proposal for a EPSR to include the adaptations mentioned below aiming at 1. Mainstreaming the principles of the UN CRPD and 2. Recognising the value and importance of social services in implementing social rights.

B. General Assessment

Relevance of the European Pillar for Social Rights (EPSR)

The rise of poverty and social exclusion in recent years –alongside or even contributing to the rise of Europhobia- has demonstrated that the EU must be seen as taking active steps towards improving the quality of life for people in Europe; in part through more progressive social policies. It is also increasingly recognised by European and international institutions (European Commission, International Monetary Fund and the OECD) that tackling inequality is the most effective way in which to create economic growth. Developing effective social policies which tackle inequality at its heart are of course important factors in this regard.

Yet this context must also be understood through the prism of the European treaties –which place social protection and social welfare policies as primarily national competences- and an unwillingness of many governments to share more responsibilities in these areas.

This has led to difficulties for the European Commission to find effective ways in which to work, promote and develop a strong social policy agenda at European level. The European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) therefore welcomes the European Commission’s efforts to place social issues higher up on the European Union policy agenda through a proposed European Pillar of Social Rights.

The EPSR as an important opportunity

The EPSR is an important opportunity in which different stakeholders can work together on further developing the EU’s socio-economic agenda, in particular through deepening of the European Monetary Union, to ensure that Europe is a nicer place to live in for all people in Europe.

EASPD is particularly interested in guaranteeing that the EPSR contributes positively to guaranteeing that the social services sector recovers from austerity and provides progressive ideas as to how to improve the quality of services and the quality of workforce.

For this to be possible, the Pillar must go beyond the reiteration of EU Social Acquis and make a real contribution towards ensuring that the EU contributes more to social rights in Europe. The European Commission must ensure that the Pillar has sufficient teeth to make a real difference to the life of real people.

In its current format, there appears to be quite some distance to go in this area. The current vagueness as to the legal nature of the pillar does not create the necessary legal certainty to make real progress in protecting and empowering quality social services at national level. For the Pillar to actually have a real impact on the day to day lives of people in Europe, it must also be attached and integrated to the EU's economic policies (European Semester, Stability and Growth Pact) and budget (European Structural and Investment Funds and European Fund for Strategic Investment).

In terms of content, EASPD views the Pillar through two main lenses.

The EPSR and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Firstly, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) –ratified by the European Union- should be at the basis of the Social Rights Pillar. The CRPD presents several principles such as « individualised support, person centred planning and the empowerment of individuals and their families » as core factors to be included and considered in all areas of life and therefore in all 20 policy domains in the EPSR.

The focus on « enabling services » for persons with disabilities is a positive step, in particular as it will strengthen the transition to such services at national level. In this regard, the stronger the legal and financial framework behind the Pillar, the stronger the contribution the Pillar can be made towards the realisation of human rights for persons with disabilities at national level.

This concept of enabling services – if in line with the principles of the UN CRPD stated above- must also be mainstreamed throughout the entirety of the Pillar itself as barriers to inclusion are to be found in all areas and stages of life. The third section of this paper will present proposals as to how this could be done in terms of content in the Pillar.

The EPSR and Social Services

The second lens through which EASPD views this Pillar is from the perspective of job creation in social services. Quality social services can only be done through adequately qualified professionals. Whereas social services is one of the biggest job creating sectors in Europe with over 1.4 million new jobs in the sector created since 2008, the recruitment and retention of staff is a severe concern. The sector is increasingly finding it difficult to attract young well-trained professionals into the sector. This is in part as a result of the cuts to public expenditure towards social services since the onset of the crisis which has placed increasing pressure on services to produce the same quality service for less money. This has effectively had a negative impact on the salaries, working conditions and career paths of many professionals in the sector; thus reducing its attractiveness to young people, despite the increasing demand for care and support services. The Pillar must recognise the important role of social Services in helping people to achieve their social rights The Pillar must also understand that for social services to be effective, an adequately trained and suitably numbered workforce is a must.

Integrating the EPSR to EU Economic Policy

While the EPSR could be a useful tool for reform at national level if given the right legal framework, it must also be accompanied by relevant investment into social services in order to ensure that they are able to produce high quality and attract adequately trained professionals. To not do so would risk creating a Pillar which is positive on paper, yet bringing no real added value to the day to day quality of life of people in Europe. EASPD therefore calls on the European Commission to use the EPSR as an opportunity to re-consider its economic policy processes and to create closer links

between economic and social policy. In particular, EASPD recommends the European Commission to link the Pillar to the European Semester process by safeguarding investments in social services in any fiscal recommendation. EASPD also recommends the Pillar to be used as a cornerstone of Structural Funds and a tool in which to re-launch efforts for the European Fund for Strategic Investment to be used for investment in quality health and social services and decent jobs.

C. Proposed Amendments

Each of the following sections include the original text with adaptations in red, followed by explanations of the amendments, based on the experience of our members and research.

1. Skills, education and lifelong learning

Amended text: Basic skills in language, literacy, numeracy and ICT, which are the first building blocks for learning, remain a challenge for a significant share of the population, from children to adults. To increase quality and relevance of education outcomes, education and training systems need to become more **inclusive**, effective, equitable and responsive to labour market and societal needs. Equal access regardless of economic means **or abilities** to acquiring a foundation of basic skills and key competences in initial education needs to be complemented by quality opportunities for **all** adults to acquire basic skills and key competences throughout the life course. Population ageing, longer working lives and increased immigration of third country nationals require additional actions for up-skilling and life-long learning, to successfully adapt to technological transformations and fast-changing labour markets.

a. All persons shall have access to quality **inclusive** education and training throughout the life course to acquire an adequate level of basic skills and key competences for active participation in society and employment. Low skilled young people and working age adults shall be encouraged to up-grade their skills.

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes the right to inclusive education for all persons with disabilities in Article 24.

As highlighted by the [Paris Declaration](#) and the [Joint Report from the Commission and Member States](#), which both identified new priorities for European cooperation in education and training, and in line with Article 24 of the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), education should be inclusive and promote the values of tolerance, non-discrimination and equality. To become active citizens and active economic actors, young people should be effectively included at the earliest stage in society through education.

Young people with disabilities in particular suffer from widespread segregation from society, being often side-tracked into separate and segregating educational and vocational training paths, such as in special schools and sheltered working environments, often hindering their ability to participate on an equal basis in society with others and have access to mainstream services.

As recommended by the renewed Strategic Framework on Education & Training 2020, education should no longer only focus on economic skills and competences, but should also focus on abilities of individuals, social competences and the inclusion of all learners.

3. Secure professional transitions

Amended text: Working lives are becoming more diverse, including multiple jobs and forms of employment, career interruptions, increased mobility and professional changes within one's lifetime. Making the most of technological change and fast-changing labour markets requires faster and improved support for job and professional transitions, as well as support for regular up-skilling throughout the working life.

Up-skilling requires investment from individual workers, companies and society. Some social protection entitlements, such as occupational pensions, unemployment benefits, health insurance or training entitlements cannot always be easily transferred when changing jobs, nor can they be valorised or accrued when starting up self-employment. Conversely, some of the entitlements of jobseekers or inactive persons should not become disincentives to re-starting work or starting up own enterprises. **To avoid a benefit trap, entitlements for job seekers or inactive persons should not be immediately withdrawn when gaining employment, should be flexible enough so as to be restored with immediate effect in case of redundancy and should complement the salary wherever the job contract would not be on a full time basis.**

a. All working age persons shall have access to individualised job-search assistance *at the earliest stage possible* and be encouraged to take up training and up-skilling in order to improve their labour market or entrepreneurial prospects and faster job and professional transitions.

b. The preservation and portability of social and training entitlements accumulated during the career shall be ensured to facilitate job and professional transitions.

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes the right to lifelong learning and work for all persons with disabilities in Article 24 and 27.

Whereas it is important to ensure that welfare entitlements do not become disincentives to work, [experience](#) from our sector shows that it is also important to develop these welfare entitlements in a way which both continues to provide the adequate financial support for decent living conditions and ensure that work provides additional financial gains.

Withdrawing benefits or disability allowances immediately when entering into the labour market has also shown to lead people to be less willing to take up such jobs as they risk losing their benefits and ending up with less financial income and independence in employment that out. It is essential to ensure that gaining employment increases your opportunities, rather than further pushes you into poverty.

Experience from social service providers proves that the longer an individual is unemployed, in particular after 6 months, the harder it is to fight employment ; as is recommended in the Council Recommendation on Tackling Long-term Unemployment. This section should thus encourage assistance to the unemployed as early as possible.

4. Active support to employment

Amended text: Persistent, recurrent as well as long-term unemployment, in particular for young people and people with low skills, calls for adequate and targeted support for (re)entering work as well as measures to develop, skills, qualifications or work experience to enable entering into new occupations. **Measures to provide support (guidance, fiscal) to Employers can also help in tackling high levels of unemployment, in particular for those most excluded from the labour market.** Rapid and effective access to such measures can prevent labour market and social exclusion.

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a. All people under the age of 25 years shall receive a good-quality offer of employment, continued education, an apprenticeship or a traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

b. It shall be equally ensured that registered long term unemployed persons are offered in depth individual assessments and guidance and a job integration agreement comprising an individual service offer and the identification of a single point of contact at the very latest when they reach 18 months of unemployment. Adequate measures shall be taken to increase the engagement of employers in activation programmes, including through legal frameworks, fiscal advantages and adequate support and guidance.

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes the right to work for all persons with disabilities in Article 27.

The [Council Recommendation on tackling long-term unemployment](#) clearly indicates the relevance of better support and engagement of employers in developing activation programmes. The Social Rights Pillar should recognise this. This is backed up by the on-the-ground experience by EASPD's members, as included in our position paper on [« tackling long-term unemployment through support services »](#).

5. Gender equality and work life balance

Amended text: Women continue to be underrepresented in employment, overrepresented in part-time work and lower-paid sectors, and receive lower hourly wages even though they have surpassed men in educational attainment. Supporting their labour market participation is fundamental for ensuring equality of opportunities, and becomes an economic imperative in a context of ageing workforce.

Lack of adequate leave and care arrangements for children and other **dependent** family members **with support needs** can discourage people with caring responsibilities, mainly women, from continuing their jobs or re-entering employment. Barriers to female participation in the labour market include lack of adequate work-life balance policies, fiscal disincentives for second earners or excessive taxation of labour, **lack of access to quality and affordable care and support services** and stereotypes on fields of study and occupation.

Access of self-employed or workers who are not on full time and permanent contracts to paid family-related leave or insurance schemes remains uneven. Moreover, insufficient possibilities and encouragement for men to take leaves is reinforcing women's roles as primary carers, with negative effects on female employment.

There is also an enhanced opportunity for flexibility in the organisation of work partly derived from digital environments and combination of several occupations in the sharing and collaborative economy. Flexible working arrangements can also help facilitate work-life balance by allowing both people in employment and firms to adapt working schedules and patterns to their needs.

a. Gender equality in the labour market and education shall be fostered, ensuring equal treatment in all areas, including pay, and addressing barriers to women's participation and preventing occupational segregation.

b. All parents and people with caring responsibilities shall have access to adequate leave arrangements for children and other dependent relatives, and access to **quality and affordable care services. An equal use of leave arrangements between sexes shall be encouraged, through measures such as the provision of remunerated leave for parents, both men and women.**

c. In agreement between employers and workers, flexible working arrangements including in the area of working time shall be made available and encouraged, taking into account both workers and employers' needs.

JUSTIFICATION: The [increasing waiting lists for support and care](#) and the [diminished funding](#) for the sector is only increasing the pressure on disadvantaged people, their families and carers and domestic workers, often further pushing them into poverty and social exclusion. Providing affordable and high quality care and support services for persons with disabilities is therefore particularly relevant towards tackling gender inequalities due to the fact that a disproportionate percentage of carers (formal and informal) and support workers in the EU are women. This is re-stated by the European Commission in their background document for the [public consultation on work-life balance](#).

6. Equal opportunities

Amended text: Discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation is illegal throughout the Union. However certain groups face difficulties in accessing the world of work. **In particular,** Third country nationals and ethnic minorities are under-represented in employment and incur a greater risk of poverty and social exclusion. It is important to address the obstacles to their participation, which can include language barriers or gaps in recognition of skills and qualifications. As far as discrimination on the grounds of nationality or ethnic origin is concerned, the experience on the ground shows a lack of awareness both of employers of non-discriminatory hiring practices and of people subject of discriminations of their rights. **Persons with disabilities also suffer from significantly high levels of exclusion in education, employment and society, with stigma perhaps the biggest barrier. Too many persons with disabilities are forced to go into specialized schools and protected employment due to a lack of alternatives in all areas of life. Too often this significantly limits equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and their ability to take part in the open labour market.**

Supporting their labour market participation is fundamental for ensuring equality of opportunities, and becomes an economic imperative in a context of ageing workforce **and sustainable public expenditure.**

a. **Open** labour market participation of under-represented groups shall be enhanced, ensuring equal treatment in all areas, including by raising awareness, addressing discrimination **and creating inclusive environments at the earliest stage possible.**

JUSTIFICATION: According to [EUROSTAT](#), the employment rate of persons with disabilities in the EU-28 in 2011 was 47.3%, almost 20 percentage points below that of people without disabilities. This, however, appears to be a very optimistic estimation, as both the [European Disability Forum](#) and [EASPD](#) assess the employment rate of persons with disabilities as close to 20%. Although anti-discrimination policy for persons with disabilities is in place in all EU countries, its impact on employment levels is fairly limited. This can partly be explained by an inadequate level of support in employment and reasonable accommodation measures, as well as a lack of access to mainstream education which places barriers at the very early stages of life. EASPD's 2014 [Employment Declaration](#) and 2015 [Salzburg Education Declaration](#) explain this in further detail.

7. Conditions of Employment

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Amended text: New forms of flexible employment require additional care to specify the nature, volume or duration of work, to identify the employers as well as the associated level of social protection and to avoid abuses in periods of probation. Decentralised, self-organised forms of work can increase worker autonomy and boost business development, while leading to lower awareness of rights and unclear information requirements for employers. Existing EU legal provisions to inform employees on the conditions of employment do not apply from the start of employment and become more difficult to apply in increasingly transnational, mobile, digital and de-localised business organisation models. **Although not the only factor**, complex, costly and uncertain regulation governing the termination of open ended contracts **can make** firms reluctant to hire and also lead to uneven enforcement of the rules in place. A lack of information to Employers, in particular SMEs, regarding development in legislation and labour law in an easy to understand can also hinder the correct implementation of the law and consequently hinder the achievement of social rights.

a. Every worker shall be informed in written form prior to the start of employment on the rights and obligations derived from the employment relationship. Employers shall also be informed in non-jargon terms about changes in legislation regarding the rights and obligations of employers

b. If there is a probation period, the probation period shall be of a reasonable duration; prior to its start, workers shall receive information on its conditions.

c. Dismissal of a worker is to be motivated, preceded by a reasonable period of notice, and there shall be an adequate compensation attached to it as well as access to rapid and effective appeal to an impartial dispute resolution system.

JUSTIFICATION : According to [2015 data by the European Commission](#), Social services employ over 10 million professionals and is one of the biggest job creating sectors in Europe. For many smaller service providers it is particularly important to receive up-to-date and non-jargon based information on any change in legislation regarding labour rights. This will ensure that both Employers and Employees in the sector are aware of their working conditions and rights.

8. Wages

Amended text: Minimum wages with an adequate level ensure a decent standard of living for workers and their families and contribute to tackle the incidence of in-work poverty. A wide coverage avoids distortions leading to a two-tier labour market. A predictable evolution of wages is important for a stable business environment. Minimum wages need to be set at a level maintaining employment prospects for the low skilled and make work pay for the unemployed and inactive. Maintaining an evolution of wages in line with productivity has proven crucial for competitiveness, particularly within the euro zone. **When minimum wages are increased, public services, including public services provided by private services and non-governmental organisations, must receive commensurate increases in public financial support to ensure there is no negative impact on the quality of service provided.**

a. All employment shall be fairly remunerated, enabling a decent standard of living. Minimum wages shall be set through a transparent and predictable mechanism in a way that safeguards access to employment and the motivation to seek work . Wages shall evolve in line with productivity developments, in consultation with the social partners and in accordance with national practices. For organisations and enterprises providing public services reliant on public

financial support, changes in wage-levels must go hand-in-hand with commensurate adaptations in public financial support to avoid any negative impact on quality of the public service provided.

JUSTIFICATION : When changes are proposed to minimum wage levels in public services reliant upon public funding, the priority must be to protect the quality of the service provided, which must of necessity entail maintaining sufficient staffing to support those services. Whilst cutting wages undermines recruitment and increases staff turnover, increasing wages must require additional public funding, or services will inevitably be reduced.

This problematic can best be demonstrated with [recent developments in the United Kingdom](#) where increases to the minimum wage alongside reductions in financing in real terms have placed additional pressure on the provision of quality social services.

10. Social dialogue and involvement of workers

Amended text: Well-functioning social dialogue requires autonomous and representative social partners with the capacities to reach collective agreements. Given the decreases in terms of organisational density and representativeness, social partners need to further build their capacities to engage in a better functioning and effective social dialogue. The engagement of social partners at EU and national level is crucial for the success of design and implementation of economic and social policies, including in efforts to safeguard employment in periods of economic downturns. **The development of social dialogue structures at national and European level for sectors yet to be sufficiently organised must also be supported by Public Authorities.** Moreover, new forms of work organisation such as in the services sector and in the digital economy make the involvement of workers uneven, and their information and consultation more complex.

a. Social partners shall be consulted in the design and implementation of employment and social policies. They shall be encouraged to develop collective agreements in matters relevant to them, respecting national traditions, their autonomy and right to collective action.

b. Information and consultation shall be ensured for all workers, including those working digitally and/or operating across borders, or their representatives in good time, in particular in the case of collective redundancies, transfer, restructuring and merger of undertakings.

c. Support to the development of social dialogue structures in all sectors shall be ensured as a way to better respond to employer and employee relationships and challenges.

JUSTIFICATION: The promotion of social dialogue is recognised as a common objective of the EU and the Member States (Article 151 TFEU). The European Commission [argues](#) that « Successful and result-oriented social dialogue has a crucial role to play in terms of delivering sustainable growth and quality job creation ». Not all sectors are covered by social dialogue structures at both national and European level, including the social services sector. Additionally, in many countries, [social dialogue structures in social services](#) have been undermined since the onset of the crisis ; making it extremely difficult for social partners in this sector to discuss and negotiate on common responses to the main issues affecting it ; including difficulties in recruitment and retention, placing further pressure on their ability to produce quality care and support services.

11. Integrated social benefits and services

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Amended text: In some cases, the multiplicity of benefits and services, agencies, and application procedures make it difficult for people to access all the support that they need. Lack of integrated benefits and services also reduces their effectiveness in addressing poverty, as well as supporting social and labour market integration. **For persons with disabilities the lack of flexibility of benefits acts as a barrier in the promotion of active inclusion as it can require people to choose between the protection guaranteed by benefits and inclusion achievable by entry into a competitive labour market.** A three-fold alignment between social benefits, active support and social services is key to effective support. Such alignment should concern eligibility and coverage, coordinated offers of support and maintaining some entitlements when re-entering work or self-employment. Better integration of benefits and services can improve the cost-effectiveness of social protection.

a. Social protection benefits and services shall be integrated to the extent possible in order to strengthen the consistency and effectiveness of these measures and support social and labour market integration.

Justification: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection for all persons with disabilities in Article 28.

16. Disability

Amended text: People with disabilities are much higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population. They face the lack of adequate accessibility in the work-place, **individualised** support, discrimination and tax-benefit disincentives. The design of disability benefits can lead to benefit traps, for example when benefits are withdrawn entirely once (re-)entering employment. The availability of individualized **and enabling** support services can also affect the capacity to participate in employment and community life.

a. Persons with disabilities shall be ensured enabling individualised services, provided by adequately qualified professionals and basic income security that allows them a decent standard of living. The conditions of benefit receipt shall not create barriers to employment.

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes that all persons with disabilities have the right to quality care and support services to enable them to participate freely in employment, education and in the community. For services to effectively support persons with disabilities it is necessary that they respond to the varying needs. Only this way can services support the enjoyment of human rights, promoting inclusion and participation and at the same time be maximized according to the real needs of an individual.

The provision of individualised and enabling services can only be done through sufficient and well-trained professionals, fully aware of how support and care should be provided in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Furthermore, there are also [growing staff shortages in the area of care and social support](#), meaning that policy-makers must take pro-active steps to ensure there are sufficient amount of adequately qualified professionals able to provide individualised and enabling support or care services. This issue is also high-lighted in the section on long-term care and childcare.

17. Long-term care

Amended text: Population ageing, changing family structures and women's increased participation in the labour market all contribute to the increased demand for long-term care services. Family carers, usually women, often fill the gap left by unavailable or costly institutional **and/or segregating** care services. Formal home-based care **- including personal assistance -**, although preferred by many beneficiaries and family members remains under-developed, making informal care **is** often the only option for many families, putting a high financial burden on those affected and increasing the risk of poverty. Ensuring access to **quality** long-term care services, while guaranteeing the financial sustainability of long-term care systems, thus requires increased efforts in improving the provision and financing of long-term care.

a. Access to quality and affordable long-term care services, including home-based care, provided by adequately qualified professionals shall be ensured

b. The provision and financing of long-term care services shall be strengthened and improved in order to ensure access to adequate care in a financially sustainable way, **prevent institutionalisation and the risk of poverty of households.**

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes the right to live independently and be included in the community in Article 19. Long-term care services are essential to promote inclusion and active participation in the community. The availability of quality care and support services facilitates access to mainstream education and entry into the labour market, thus promoting active citizenship in the society and preventing individuals from being dependent on institutional and segregating settings where people are deprived of their human rights and live a life of poverty.

19. Housing

Amended text: Lack of adequate, **affordable and accessible housing** and housing insecurity continues to be a large concern across the EU, leading to increasing financial risk taking, evictions, arrears in rental and mortgage payments, and in some extreme cases, homelessness. **Often the lack of individualised support makes institutional and segregating settings the only housing option available for groups at risk of exclusion and/or with support needs, increasing thereby social exclusion and hampering the enjoyment of human rights.** Restrictions to supply in housing sector and rental market distortions are contributing to the lack of availability. Lack of adequate housing also remains a barrier for labour mobility, for the establishment of young people on the labour market and for fulfilment of life plans and independent living.

a. Access to social housing or housing assistance shall be provided for those in need. Protection against eviction of vulnerable people shall be ensured, and support for low and medium income households to access home property provided.

b. Shelter shall be provided to those that are homeless, and shall be linked up to other social services in order to promote social integration.

c. The integration of housing and support should become an option for persons with support needs in order to promote independent living and inclusion in the community.

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), to which the EU has ratified, clearly recognizes the right to live independently and be included in the community in Article 19. For persons with disabilities this right can be fully enjoyed only when adequate support tailored to individual needs is provided in order to overcome structural and functional barriers. The mismatch of support services and housing often prevents persons with disabilities to enjoy an independent life and to be fully part of society.

20. Access to essential services

Amended text: Essential services, such as electronic communications, transport, energy (such as electricity and heating) and financial services (such as a bank accounts), which ensure the full social inclusion of people in society, as well as to ensure equal opportunities to access employment, are not always available or accessible to everyone in need of them. Barriers to access include affordability, lack of infrastructure, or failure to meet accessibility requirements for people with disabilities.

a. Affordable access to essential services including electronic communications, energy, transport, and financial services, shall be ensured for all people. Measures to support access – including human support - to these services shall be available for those in need.

JUSTIFICATION: The [UN CRPD](#), ratified by the UN CRPD, clearly indicates in Article 9 that “states Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas ». This of course includes accessibility to essential services. While unlocking a wide array of new opportunities to users new services, tools, devices may also often become an obstacle to individuals with specific support needs, such as persons with intellectual disabilities. In order to overcome these barriers human support should always be an option for those who may not be able to access/use essential services due to their varying support needs.

D. Concluding Remarks

EASPD fully welcomes that the European Commission are proposing a tool to put social issues higher up on the European Union’s political agenda. Doing so is a political necessity in order to successfully tackle poverty and social exclusion, rising xenophobia and ensure that the economic recovery is based on the inclusion of all in society.

The current proposal is positive insofar as it covers a broad variety of social issues and concerns and includes (broadly speaking) rather adequate assessments of the current problematics in each field. This being said, the proposed European Pillar of Social Rights is in its current format rather too weak –in legal and political terms- to effectively have a significant impact on the lives of many in Europe; in particular given the current EU economic agenda focusing primarily on short-term budgetary stability than on the achievement of human and social rights.

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For many of the social rights proposed in the draft EPSR to be achieved, a renewed commitment to / protection of social investment in fiscal measures is a must. EASPD therefore calls on the European Commission to integrate the objectives of the EPSR into their work in the field of economic and budgetary policy, including the European Semester, the Stability and Growth Pact, European Structural and Investment Funds and the European Fund for Strategic Investment.

In terms of content, EASPD welcomes the overall coverage of the proposal insofar as it covers areas related to job creation, labour rights and social welfare systems. EASPD also generally welcomes the “enabling” approach in the section on disability, insofar as the role of support services is to empower the persons they are supporting. Nonetheless, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities –concluded by the EU in 2010- includes principles and rights to all areas of life. These principles and rights should therefore also be referenced throughout the EPSR and not only in the section on disability if the UN CRPD is to be truly mainstreamed within the EPSR.

EASPD also welcomes the references to the role social services play in implementing social rights, insofar as they can play an important role in empowering people to gain access to these rights. Nonetheless, the social services sector is increasingly challenged by more and more demand for services; yet often with decreasing financial support in real terms; thus placing pressure on the provision of quality services through well trained staff. A continued reduction of public finances towards high quality social services will only lead to a slow motion car crash for the care and support sector; and thus for the social rights of many in Europe. It is essential that the EPSR is used as an opportunity to re-evaluate this discussion and place social investment at the heart of any economic or budgetary policy proposed and implemented by the European Union.

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