SOCIAL SERVICES IN EU CROSS-INDUSTRY SOCIAL DIALOGUE
Towards a stronger and deeper involvement
CONTEXT

CEEP, working with the support of SALAR, SWO, UNISOC, UZS and HOSPEEM, conducted a project aimed at improving the involvement of social services employers in EU cross-industry social dialogue. The project intended to identify existing social services structures in 14 selected EU Member States and the conditions for their active involvement at the cross-industry level of social dialogue.

The project builds on important aspects of the previous CEEP project: “Mapping of the Public Services.” It was designed to provide additional and specific data on structural, procedural and statistical variables on social services. The data collected focused on social services, including both public and private not-for-profit service providers. While mapping social dialogue actors and structures, the project partners targeted employers’ organisations active in social dialogue.

This identification process was followed by a second phase, aimed at better involving the identified social services employers in the EU cross-industry social dialogue with a three-step approach:

1 ROUNDTABLE MEETINGS
   Organised in the four partner countries (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic and Sweden), bringing together the organisations identified as relevant social services structures with an important role in social dialogue. The purpose of these meetings was to provide a forum to learn from recognised social partners on representativeness and how to be involved in the discussions at all levels of social dialogue.

2 TECHNICAL TRAINING COURSES
   To explain how EU social dialogue presupposes the presence of the right partners around the negotiating table at every level. During this event, discussions on the path at national and EU level undertaken by the different project partners towards recognition as social partners took place. It was also an opportunity to reflect on different EU files considered for strategic interest for social services organisations.

3 FINAL DISSEMINATION EVENT
   Aimed at disseminating the final report. The targeted audience was the identified established or potential employers’ associations, providers of social services and of SSGI (Social services of general interest), from the 14 EU Member States targeted, interested in entering EU social dialogue. This conference identified ways to become representative, and to better grasp the difference between civil dialogue and social dialogue.

To that end, social services are defined as services with a distinct social objective. By delivering essential services, they are crucial for the well-being of citizens, and highly contribute to the social and territorial cohesion of the EU. Their main aim is to achieve wider social, environmental or community objectives.

To define social services, the project used the NACE 2007 classification, with a wide approach to what they encompass: hospitals and care; museums, libraries, arts; sports and amusement; and other social services.

The objective of the project was to strengthen the interest and participation of social services’ providers in the European cross-industry social dialogue.

It was of importance to identify the organisations active at national level, as well as their common challenges, in order to offer solutions through representation at EU level.

KEY FINDINGS

The public and private not-for-profit provision of social services is dominant across all studied countries, with few exceptions that are limited to specific types of public services (e.g. sports and amusement). Even if private-for-profit providers are increasingly present, they currently do not represent any major challenge to the strongly established not-for-profit provision of social services across the EU.

Reform efforts concentrate on improving the public and private not-for-profit provision of social services, especially concerning hospitals, rather than opting for their extensive commercialisation.

Social dialogue players and structures exist in all subfields of social services and in all countries.

This applies to countries that have, in general, highly developed organised corporatist systems of social dialogue (e.g. the Nordic countries), but also to countries with state-centred industrial relations systems (Spain, France, Portugal, Italy) or more decentralised and liberal industrial relations systems (UK, Latvia, Poland).

An organised structure of social dialogue vertically and horizontally coordinated is observable in most studied countries. Vertical coordination refers to coordination ranging from tripartite level, cross-sectoral and sectoral social dialogue, to establishment-level social dialogue. Horizontal coordination refers to coordinated social dialogue structures across various kinds of social services.

Perspectives for developing cross-sectoral social dialogue and perceived benefits from involvement in EU level social dialogue relate to access to networking and awareness of social service providers.

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1 | SOCIAL SERVICES PROVISION

Social services can be provided both by public and private not-for-profit providers.

The provision of social services in particular countries derives from historical developments and the formation of a welfare structure provision. In this context, the EU is a mosaic of diversity. To make sense of this diversity, similarities and differences across EU member states have been studied in order to identify country clusters.

Starting from a general perspective, the size of the public sector and the related provision of social services is often associated with developments in welfare states. The ILO defines public sector employment as the aggregate of employment in general government services and in publicly owned enterprises, many of which are likely to operate also in particular areas of social services.

Therefore, background evidence on the size of public sector helps evaluate the scope of not-for-profit provision of social services. In this sense, a general division between two groups can be done. The first one consists of central and Northern European countries in the Western part of the EU, with the exception of Austria and inclusion of Malta. These countries have relatively large public sectors in terms of employment share. The second group consists of all the Southern and Eastern European countries with smaller public sectors.

From the point of view of service provision structures, further characteristics of social services include those of workforce and of employment forms in social services.

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The shortage of skilled labour in social services puts workers under pressure and creates tensions between employers’ associations and trade unions: unions demand relief measures while employers hardly find a sufficient number of skilled workers.

Sectors with high female employment have traditionally been perceived as sectors with lower pay. This however is changing, particularly in social services with the emergence of new actors and public protests in the hospital and care sector, as witnessed in the last 3-4 years in some EU member states including post-socialist countries.

2 | CHALLENGES FACED BY SOCIAL SERVICES

The provision of social services is facing challenges and undergoing several changes. These challenges include, amongst others, the increasing role of private-for-profit service providers, various changes to the operation of public sectors and related changes to social dialogue structures, procedures and actors.

The understanding of social services structures and scope in Europe is still limited, despite their high social and economic impact. Moreover, a common definition of social services is still lacking: often this sector is associated with activities of charities or work integration of disadvantaged people. This lack of awareness negatively affects social services and its financing prospects.

In particular, social services face constraints in understanding the current legal and regulatory framework. For example, there is a general lack of awareness in relation to the new public procurement regulation as well as the rules for awarding public aid to social services.

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Social services are under strong pressure “to do more with less.” Major changes in this context relate to financing, social services provision, regulation, governance and access to services. For example, the public hospital and care sector in several EU countries experienced the emergence and rapid expansion of private-for-profit providers, establishment of primary care, and efficiency-driven reduction of the hospital sector size including employment.

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3 | SOCIAL DIALOGUE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

EU cross-industry social dialogue is fundamental to ensure the development of the social services structures.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Social dialogue, in line with the European Commission’s definition, refers to the discussions, consultations, negotiations and joint actions that take place between the social partners, namely employers and trade unions, on a wide range of social and work-related issues. At the European level, social dialogue takes the form of sectoral and cross-industry social dialogue. The EU-level cross-industry social dialogue occurs between organisations representing workers and employers in the private sector, the public sector and small and medium-sized enterprises, and professional and managerial staff.

Even though collective bargaining is essential to address sector related issues, at the EU-level a cross-sectoral social dialogue is preferable to ensure the development of the social services structures.

There are several differences in the definitions and forms of social dialogue among the 14 EU Member states analysed. However, common challenges have been identified for social services, especially in terms of representation. Indeed, representativeness has been highlighted as an issue for employers’ organisations in the field of social services.

In countries where a strong social dialogue in social services is assessed, there are several well-established social dialogue structures and organisations representing employers. However, in many countries there are still no formal social dialogue structures, even though some collective agreements exist at different levels.

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The perspectives for cross-sectoral social dialogue are closely related to the providers’ perceptions on the benefits from this level of social dialogue. Perceived benefits depend upon earlier experience, networking, information exchange, or a desire to engage in networking. An additional reason why social dialogue at the inter-sectoral level is perceived as beneficial is related to the principle of equality, both in terms of access to services and quality of working conditions in various fields of public services.

Through cross-sectoral social dialogue it is possible to influence EU-level decision-making. Social services are an integral part of the social economic reality: thus, they need to be taken into account in the design of cross-sectoral policy. Moreover, cross-sectoral social dialogue gives the opportunity to share experiences and to create an understanding within other sectors.

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CONCLUSION

The increased involvement of social services in cross-industry social dialogue is part of a long process, and this project is only the first step towards the identification of potential and existing strong social partners...