



Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility  
Joost Korte, Director General, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility

Brussels, 26 June 2019

**Re: Building EU social dialogue for the social services sector: time to move to the next level!**

With this letter, we would first like to **update you on the ongoing and fruitful cooperation** between the Federation of European Social Employers (short: Social Employers) and the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) **and on progress made in view of the strengthening of effective industrial relations at EU-level in the field of social services.**

The social services sector employs directly over 10 million workers in Europe, with over 1.4 million jobs having been created between 2008 and 2015, making it the biggest job creating sectors in Europe. Together with health services, social services represent 7% of the total economic output in the EU-28 and about 10% of the EU 28 workforce. It comprises care and support services for older people, people with disabilities and children as well as services to reach excluded and disadvantaged groups. The European Pillar of Social Rights recognises it as an essential sector to ensure social cohesion, sustainable and inclusive economic growth and job creation in Europe.

A series of four projects since 2012, co-funded from the DG EMPL social dialogue budgets, were instrumental to identify and bring together employer organisations from across Europe in order to discuss and structure their action at the European level and also to exchange and work with trade unions organising the workforce in social services. It provided a space for a collective assessment of the challenges faced: a precondition to negotiate and agree on common solutions on a number of joint priorities and to give the national and EU-level sectoral social partners a voice on European legislative initiatives and policy proposals.

In 2017 the Federation of European Social Employers has been officially launched as the EU-level employers organisation for social services. In the last two year membership could be expanded considerably to currently cover 25 members from 17 EU MS. Efforts to strengthen the Social Employers' regional coverage and representativeness recently have been successfully made in particular in Central and Eastern Europe. EPSU organises trade unions i.a. in the health and social services sector from about 40 countries and currently covers 25 of the 28 EU MS with affiliates organising workers in the field of social care.

The still ongoing **PESSIS+ Project** allowed both EPSU and the Social Employers to strengthen their cooperation on a selected number of topics and joint priorities which have been jointly agreed in the context of the preceding project. **Three thematic seminars were organised.** One first and major outcome is the elaboration, discussion and adoption in June 2019 of the Joint Position Paper "Digitalisation in the Social Services Sector - Assessment of Challenges and Opportunities". Another position paper to cover selected aspects in relation to the recruitment and retention of social care workers is being elaborated.

It is the interest of both the Social Employers and EPSU to **work towards a coverage of the whole sector of social services by structures of EU-level social dialogue**. The social dialogue sector is the biggest economic sector in terms of employment which is still outside the scope EU-level sectoral social dialogue. Both organisations are aware of the fact that there are some EU Member States where additional work will need to be done to identify and build employers' capacity and representation and to foster closer partnership working.

**EPSU and the Social Employers are actively involved in the ongoing representativeness studies done by Eurofound, including for the social services sector**, for which results are expected for the spring/early summer 2020.

The work in the context of the PESSIS 3 (2016-2017) and the PESSIS+ (2018-2019) Projects allowed for the **identification of joint fields of interests and common priorities**. Capitalising on the work done in the last years and in particular in the outcomes of the three technical seminars organised in the context of the PESSIS+ Project **we ask you to support a move in the next months into a test phase**. Based on the outcomes of joint work in the last years, in particular on the outcomes of the technical seminars and the position paper mentioned above, we are working on a joint work programme – on which we could work in the context of EU level sectoral social dialogue structures – that once agreed we would like to present to you.

This letter has been presented at the final conference of the PESSIS+ Project (2018-2019) on 27 June 2019 in Brussels. The Social Employers and EPSU reaffirm their willingness to further engage and promote an effective EU-level social dialogue for the social services sector. They stand ready to engage in an exchange with you and your services. We also would like to organise a meeting to exchange on the related political, strategic and practical questions in the months to come.

We are looking forward to receiving your reply and to our future cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

Gregor Tomschizek  
President Social Employers

Jan Willem Goudriaan  
EPSU General Secretary