

## Personal contribution to the public consultation on active inclusion

Bilbao, Spain, 10 January 2008

I am grateful for your invitation to contribute to the discussion on active inclusion.

On the whole, what you are considering seems very encouraging. My only concern regards the process of clarification and promotion of social services as one of the pillars of welfare systems in the European Union. Therefore, adopting, as you suggest, a holistic approach, I wish to make the following contribution.

In my opinion, within the field of social protection, there are a series of *vertical* policies or systems, each one concerned with a particular need or good to be protected. For example:

- health services deal with health
- employment services are in charge of work
- housing policy is concerned with accommodation needs
- the education system promotes learning
- social services are responsible for human interaction, meaning the adjustment between personal autonomy and relational (informal) support.

Lastly, among the vertical policies or systems there would be a *wildcard*, a final policy or system which would guarantee income, providing money for those needs or services not covered by any of the other vertical systems.

Taking this outline as a starting point, it must be understood that pro social inclusion policy is *transversal*, meaning, as its name suggests, that it overlaps

with all the vertical policies or systems. At any given time or circumstance (and for any given person), one or other of the vertical policies will be more important: in some cases the priority will be housing, in others employment, in others income, etc. I agree with the document's approach, with its focus on income, employment and social services, without forgetting the other issues: housing, health care, education, etc.

The problem as I see it is that, historically, social services have taken on many tasks, measures, activities or programmes that are not their concern and have carried them out only for vulnerable groups, without respecting the necessary universality. This is not good for anyone, especially for people who are vulnerable or excluded, as it often contributes to stigmatising and segregating them even more. Furthermore, this has made the specific added value of the social services invisible, which is basically the role they play as a catalyst in maintaining relationships and the value they bring to the community.

For this reason, I believe that we must insist on the transversal nature of the pro social inclusion policy and, at the same time, better define and identify social services, distinguishing them from the other systems (education, health care, employment, housing, guaranteed income, etc.) The important added value they bring to everyone should also be highlighted, as everyone, at different points during our lives, may experience an imbalance between our individual ability to cope and the support that our family or community network gives us.

I am at your disposal to continue sharing thoughts and ideas.

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