

EASPD Provider Forum

NATIONAL FORUM / EXHIBITION “SOCIAL SERVICES, EMPLOYMENT AND DEVELOPMENT”

HOTEL “MELIA GRAND HERMITAGE”

“GOLDEN SANDS” - VARNA

JUNE 8th-10th, 2016

Summary

From June 8th until June 10th, 2016, in Golden Sands Resort, Varna, a National Forum / Exhibition “Social Services, Employment and Development” organised by National Alliance for Social Responsibility (NASO) in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Municipality of Varna took place. The event was joined by social service representatives, local, regional and national authorities, NGOs, employers, persons with disabilities.

During the first day, June 8th, 2016, a National Advisory Meeting “Social Services” of NASO and the Agency for Social Assistance was held. Within the meeting, various questions regarding the provision of social services and the work with service users were raised. The discussion was led by Georgi Georgiev, President of NASO, Kosta Bazitov, Deputy Mayor of Varna, Dr. Lidiya Marinova, Deputy Chairperson of the Municipality Council of Varna, as well as by Nikolina Ivanova, Head of Social Services for Adults Department at the Agency for Social Assistance, and Reneta Manolova, Head of Social Services for Children Department at the Agency for Social Assistance. One of the leading characteristics of the Municipality of Varna is that it does not predominantly rely on the state budget but it funds social services mostly on its own. Additionally, it is one of the main municipalities appointing NGOs as social service providers.

Representatives of Social Departments at the Municipality of Varna and the Social Assistance Directorates in the city and region of Varna were also among the official guests at the Advisory Meeting. They answered questions related to separating teenagers from children as a target group using social services, increasing the budget for the Family-type Accommodation Centres by 15 % as well as for persons with mental disorders from 2017 onwards, improving the residential services and the services provided at home.

On June 9th, 2016, an exhibition of social services was presented, in which 22 social services took part together with their users. All forum participants had the chance to go around the exhibition stands, ask questions about the products exhibited as well as learn techniques about their making.

The forum itself was opened by Mr. Georgiev who pointed out that NASO was already uniting approximately 2000 structures throughout the whole country, 1400 out of which were social service providers giving support to more than 33 000 persons daily. Additionally, the members of NASO were



providing nearly 13 000 job places. In the context of the broad scope of work of NASO and the partnerships which it managed to establish, Mr. Georgiev encouraged even more the work between social service providers, NGOs and local, regional and state authorities and institutions in order to improve the effectiveness of social services and provide a better quality of life for persons with disabilities in Bulgaria.

Ivaylo Ivanov, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Policy, initiated the first ever held in Bulgaria National Advisory Meeting of NASO and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Mr. Ivanov pointed out that previous forums provided a great platform for the introduction of normative changes, and hence, the Advisory Meeting was also to be seen as an opportunity for legislative changes in view of the employment of persons with disabilities on the open labour market. During the Advisory Meeting, recommendations were made and questions were raised which were noted down by the Deputy Minister who promised to further discuss them with his colleagues and take them into consideration when adopting the Law on Social Services, the Law on Social Entrepreneurship and when introducing changes to the system of occupational expertise. All in all, around 20 participants took part in the discussion and more than 50 questions were asked related to the provision of social services and the qualifications of their staff, the employment of persons with disabilities, the education system, the transition to the open labour market, etc.

The next panel of the forum was led by Ivaylo Naydenov, State Expert at the Labour Market Policy and Labour Mobility Directorate at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. In his speech, he presented the normative documents which provide the legislative measures for the integration of persons with disabilities in the society, including in view of their employment, the taxes to be paid on their income and the currently existing system of medical expertise. The National Strategic Framework includes the Long-term Strategy for Employment of Persons with Disabilities 2011 – 2020 and the corresponding Action Plans for its implementation. Mr. Naydenov further mentioned the new National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities 2016 – 2020 focused on topics such as employment, accessibility and education aiming at the full integration of persons with disabilities in the society. The changes in the Law on Employment Promotion made with regard to supported employment and under NASO's initiative were also pointed out.

The new Deputy Executive Director of the Employment Agency, Tatyana Pashinova, presented the measures taken by the Labour Offices throughout the country with regard to the employment of person with disabilities. She stressed that the number of persons with disabilities registered as unemployed was 17 083, which represented 5,6% of the total number of unemployed persons registered at the Labour Offices in Bulgaria.

Valentin Damyanov, Regional Representative of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, presented the activities of the Agency as well as the funding opportunities for self-employment of persons with disabilities, for specialised enterprises and cooperatives, for rehabilitation and integration of people in need through the provision of an accessible environment.

Luk Zelderloo, Secretary General of EASPD, began his speech by pointing out that the persons with disabilities in Europe were more than 80 Million and they were provided two to three times less employment opportunities than persons without disabilities. Additionally, Mr. Zelderloo underlined that it was important to provide employment to persons with disabilities due to several reasons, and namely, economic, social and personal. Furthermore, the Secretary General made recommendations



regarding the employment of persons with disabilities, such as provision of equal opportunities, legal frameworks, intersectoral partnerships, accessibility and implementation of the universal design, support to employers and development of ICT.

In conclusion, it was pointed out that, unfortunately, in the last 25 years very little was achieved with regard to the employment of persons with disabilities in Bulgaria. The experts' presentations made it clear that around 5% of the persons with disabilities were employed, whereby 1673 of them were employed at specialised enterprises / cooperatives. In addition, the following recommendations were made: practical implementation of supported employment in Bulgaria, normative regulation of sheltered employment as well as its partial introduction, setting up of regulations regarding the functioning of the specialised enterprises as a form of employment for persons with disabilities existing in Bulgaria only, introduction of normative documents regulating social enterprises, provision of support to employers hiring persons with disabilities on the open labour market.

During the last day of the 3-day forum, Snezhana Angelova, Chief Expert at the Regional Monitoring and Control Department at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, presented the funding opportunities for employment and social inclusion under Human Resources Development Operational Programme.

Finally, Mr. Zelderloo and Stefana Cankova, Membership & Events Officer at EASPD, shared with the forum participants their work on the European Semester as a mechanism for influencing national and European policies. In this respect, it is important to mention that NASO and its members are also involved in the process of the European Semester and the 2015 report prepared by the national social service umbrella organisation contained specific recommendations on the need of integrated intersectoral approaches for increasing the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The recommendations made to Bulgaria by the European Commission in 2016 clearly pointed out that integrated social services and active policies for employment, specifically in view of long-term unemployed persons and young people who are neither in employment nor in education or training, should be implemented. The EASPD report within the European Semester that is to be prepared in 2016 will be focused on employment, whereby NASO will contribute with information on the situation in Bulgaria.

At the end of the forum, Mr. Georgiev thanked all participants and guests for the extremely fruitful discussions and debates, the presentations and the important topics included in them by suggesting rapid measures aiming at achieving higher effectiveness of social services and creating greater opportunities for employment of persons with disabilities in Bulgaria.