

Prot. 1565

Roma, 22/02/2007

“The planning capacity of a society oriented towards the common good and looking to the future is measured also and above all on the basis of the employment prospects that it is able to offer..”

(Compendium of the social doctrine of the Church n. 289)

ANSWER TO THE CONSULTATION ON
“Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market”
(COM(2007)620 final)

- 1) Caritas Italiana, together with the 220 Italian Diocesan Caritas, welcomes with pleasure the consultation which represents an important step forward on how social policies are conceived with regard to the employment sector.
- 2) The overcoming of a traditional approach, based upon active but sectorial policies, and a more holistic orientation of this proposal, seems to us corresponding more properly to the fundamental principles of centrality of the human person and instrumentality of the market, also the labour market, in his respect.
- 3) Our daily practices and expertise in social tutorship of disadvantaged people, allows us to recognize in the employment a fundamental key place for social inclusion, but not the only one, nor the self resolute in multidimensional and multiple situations of poverty.
- 4) Caritas Italiana considers the “virtuous cycle” proposed regarding access to a quality employment, access to quality social services and access to minimum income, as an idea that is fully in accordance with the best practices carried out among our services.
Experience teach us that good results are an outcome of a truly integrated approach to the people, even those furthest from the labour market, through a warm and meaningful relationship and serious proposals.
Mediation, counselling, personalized vocational and professional training, material long-term support for basic needs, tutorship in accessing labour market, are all crucial instruments in a strategic approach to this issue.
- 5) Caritas Italiana believes that all of it has to be a responsibility of the public institutions, as representatives of the civil society as a whole, not delegable to private actors, both profit or not profit ones.
Nevertheless those actors, according to the subsidiary principle, have to be involved by the public institutions within an integrated public directed service system, to enhance personalised labour inclusion processes, to unleash and employ on this goal all the resources provided by the community, with a shared responsibility.
- 6) The common goal is to create employment and meaningful occupations for all, also for those that, according to the common market and competition criteria, are not productive enough or unemployed.
- 7) Caritas Italiana believes that the well-being cannot be thought as a mere power of spending. Well-being is not ensured through income availability alone, although it represents one of the main pillars for it.

8) Caritas Italiana strongly support a vision where the individual well being is considered within a more general frame of communitarian well-being, in which meaningful relationships, reciprocity and gratuitousness for “a good life”, are available and provided also in the professional life.

9) Caritas Italiana believes that a virtuous logic in economics is the one which simultaneously pursue the well-being for all, also through public recognition and pursuing of social activities like volunteerism, self-help, non monetary cooperation.

10) Hence, Caritas Italiana considers that the active inclusion strategy alone it's not enough. That's surely an important first step towards a more general active participation strategy, capable of exploiting each person as a resource, within a strategy that pursue the common well-being inspired by social utility and the principle of common good.

Full participation and involvement in the society, with or without an employment in the economic market, is a subsidiary goal as important as full employment is, that can underpin the promotion of a proper environment, so to cope with the controversial challenges like the up-raise of retirement thresholds and of work-life balancing.

11) Considering the Active Inclusion Strategy under a technical profile, Caritas Italiana's expertise in the field of tutorship for disadvantaged people towards employment, allows us to stress the strategic importance of the following points:

- There's a strong need for Tutorship:

A tutor acting as a third part between the person and the employer, could be decisive to:

- promote integration among services;
- facilitate the interaction between disadvantaged clients and institutions;
- support the managing process of those micro-conflicts, that often are the root causes of disadvantaged people exclusion from the labour market.

That's an investment in social skills and abilities rooted in the community; it only apparently increase the strategy costs, as in our experience these additional expenditures are compensated by the raising rate of successful inclusion processes and the following decrease in drop-out rates.

Hence, the focus will be not only on the disadvantaged person, but also on the entrepreneur-person and on the tutor-one, prompting wider networks and stronger relationships, a more cohesive community, compared to possible achievements of a mere bureaucratic approach.

- A minimum income should be adopted, but within a frame of relationship and reciprocity.

Minimum Income shouldn't be an automatic and anonymous benefit, maybe linked to the acceptance of any job proposal offered by the service provider. It should be a conditioned benefit, where the conditionality should be related to a wider commitment of the beneficiary to follow counselling and other social activities, and to cope with responsibility with his distress situation.

In our experience, this approach can minimize the risks of disempowerment for the person and of poverty traps, especially for the weakest. Moreover, it acts as incentive for the beneficiaries to cope with their disadvantages not alone, but within a specific local community. This community, if supported by social workers acting as animators and facilitators (linking agents), could become a powerful resource for the person and the most appropriate (informal and formal) service provider for its needs.

In our vision this pedagogical approach empowers all the actors and helps to overcome the difficulties that a mere contractual scheme, as the incentive/sanction system could be, can upsurge for the poorest and weakest.

- Beside a minimum income scheme, “Micro credit” should be adopted as a tool to promote and empower specific targets of beneficiaries; micro credit, in a community environment, could be a key instrument for self organization and entrepreneurship of a disadvantaged person within a community that offers a comprehensive approach to its members.

- Social economy and Social Enterprises are the probably the best context where develop and test good practises of transition to employment. Moreover, this field of the economy, with an adequate financial support from the public institutions, is probably the best one to provide a good quality job and/or meaningful occupation for those that for several reasons never could reach the productivity levels asked by the present competitive market or are unemployable. A strong empowerment of social enterprises is requested.
- A strong and full acknowledgement of the political and strategic value of social work should be promoted at all levels in the society. This means a more prompt and willing attitude to invest in it, to mainstream quality into the processes “social work” is called to manage, avoiding the paradox of an insecure and fragmented sector that is asked to give security and cohesion to the weakest part of the society.

11) More generally, according to its experience, Caritas Italiana strongly recommend a public support not only to the social enterprises itself, but also, within a wider approach, to the social function of the enterprise.

12) Caritas believes then that if an enterprise accepts the permanent inclusion in its labour force of weak and disadvantaged people, it's deeply wrong to think the possible public compensation of this function as a State aid. It's rather a preventive investment of public funds in the social potential of a part of the community (the enterprise), to avoid later higher spending, needed to repair the damages caused by the exclusion of a relevant part of the population from the labour force. It's a question of efficient allocation of public spending, responding to the principle of general interest, and not to be thought as an interference in the single market rules!

13) At the same time, public policies for social inclusion and cohesion, following an integrated approach, should adopt structural frameworks of incentives to be offered to the enterprises so that, in the local communities in which they are located, they can endow, through their market behaviour, social capital and healthy environment.

14) A behaviour of this kind, in a civil economy frame and in a context of reciprocity, should be evaluated, defining a structural set of severe and innovative indicators of social responsibility. A meaningful pay off for those enterprises who comply with them should be strong fiscal incentives and the gain of most of the social costs society would have otherwise to face through taxation, as a contribution to endow social capital and environmental safeguard.

15) Without this political attitude, our political and socio-economic system will replicate also in the future predatory schemes in which social policies are asked to repair damages without any real possibility to achieve it, because of a permanent lack of resources and political will that a system of this kind entails.

16) In this context too, Caritas Italiana believes that social economy in Europe could be an excellent training place, where to experiment and spread good practices to build up strong and more human socio-economical infrastructures in the local community, especially the poorest ones, without abdicating to the single market and to a competitive system.

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