

# Declaration of the 25th Conference of Social Firms Europe

## Social Firms and Social Enterprises set all their hope on Europe

**Suceava, Romania 20th - 22nd September 2012**

The participants of the 25th Conference of European Social Firms CEFEC from Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom are formulating this declaration and appeal to the EU: Over the last 25 years national organizations and experts have been networking to define standards of Social Firms and Enterprise for people with mental health problems and other disadvantages in the labor market. They have supported projects to create sustainable jobs, not in sheltered employment, but in main stream business under normal competitive conditions. For disabled employees CEFEC asks for normal employer's rights, tariff regulated salaries and adequate representation in their firms and organizations. Our appeal specifies the following: (1) In most EU countries unemployment is rising to an actual level of 25 million people officially. The figures would be much higher, if counting those who have given up hope and no longer register. (2) There are an uneven number of people with mental health problems and other disabilities affected by unemployment. They are often the first to lose their jobs and they suffer more anxieties concerning their future. (3) Many countries have suffered severe cuts or even stopped their social and vocational programmes. This leads to increased crisis and despair. (4) Thanks to the EU, especially to programmes such as the EU Social Fund, there has been help and support provided for the successful implementing of Social Firms. CEFEC members have actively taken part and supported these programmes over many years by networking know-how across Europe. In this way a wealth of experience has been pooled and compiled within CEFEC. (5) This is the reason why the participants of the 25th CEFEC Conference appeal to the EU, to launch once again a specific programme to create new sustainable jobs and firms in order to counterpart the great unemployment misery. The programme should address foremost those countries with high unemployment rates. However they should qualify for this programme by implementing jobs and work conditions which sustain and last even after support schemes finish. This can be achieved by the following guidelines of the CEFEC Linz Appeal "Why there should be more Social Firms for disabled and disadvantaged in Europe": (6) On a national level support schemes should cater for

\*Investment subsidies and/or low credit lines when new jobs and social firms are created. \*Employers which employ a considerable number of disabled should receive compensation for reduced work performance. \*These employers are eligible for contract work from public bodies and agencies. \*Training and coaching programmes should be

included in the programme.

(7) To employ more disabled and disadvantaged is not only a demand of the UN Convention for the rights of these people, but also a device of economical reasoning, because this support leads to decreased public spending/costs and increased profits: \*Tax return grows by growing social security contributions. \*Contributions to unemployment, sickness and pensions decrease. \*Costs for psychosocial care programmes can be lowered if negative effects of unemployment, illness and social isolation are compensated. This adds up to a win-win situation from an economical and individual point of view. The EU has emphasized this repeatedly and extensive studies in Germany, where Social Firms have been implemented and supported by legal devices for many years, have confirmed this. Against all European skepticism in this actual crisis, we are expecting a strong signal of hope from the EU. • We explicitly refer to the Europe 2020 strategy, the political strategy of the European Union for the current decade, which strongly calls for reinforcing the social dimension of the EU. One of the five key objectives is to reduce the number of people living in poverty in EU member states and people with mental illness should be a priority target group in this context. • The European Commission may ask Member States therefore to take appropriate action in favor of people with mental illness, when developing their strategies to achieve the EU 2020 target in combating poverty. With reference to the new Regulation of the European Social Fund proving the legal basis for ESF funding in the period 2014-2020 (draft submitted by the European Commission on 14/03/2012) we ask to induce concrete support for social firms and vocational integration of people with mental illness into employment. In Article 3 of the draft Regulation it is stated that "social inclusion and combating poverty" could be achieved by the inclusion of marginalized groups, and in particular by "the promotion of the social economy and social enterprises". \* We ask therefore the European Commission to call on the Member States to make use of these options by including respective measures in their Operational Programmes. \* We invite the Member States to explicitly address the promotion of social firms for people with mental illness in their national plans for the use of ESF means and to give priority to social inclusion of this target group and their integration into employment. CEFEC therefore offers assistance in developing conceptual and practical steps when implementing the new programme. Our organization is represented in many European countries and our social firms are practical examples of the UN convention's philosophy of inclusion: disabled and non disabled employees work side by side in our projects.

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