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Province of Limburg
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Introductory Speech

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you at the start of this meeting

Today you are gathered in the main conference room of the Provincial Government. It was here that in 1992 the Maastricht Treaty was signed – the treaty that lay the foundations for today's Europe. It therefore is a very suitable location for opening this annual meeting of the European Platform for Worldwide Social Work.

I was asked to provide a brief outline of the challenges and opportunities being presented in Limburg with regard to social work and the steps the provincial government is taking in this respect. Within the current provincial administration, I am responsible for the 'Investing in People' programme.

The 'Investing in People' programme has a number of prominent themes. I would like to explain three of these prominent themes which I believe will be of interest to you as a result of their relationships with social work.

Today, I would like to inform you about

- education and employability,
- youth care, and
- at last an integrated approach to urban districts.

My first theme is Education and employability

In the coming decades, the Province of Limburg will be faced by a decrease in the magnitude of the working population. This will have huge consequences for the labour market. The number of young people is decreasing, so the number of people entering the labour market is also decreasing. In addition, the number of people leaving the labour market is growing as a result of the ageing population.

Consequently, between now and 2040, the working population in Limburg will decrease by about 35%!

This presents Limburg with an enormous challenge:

- how do we ensure that as many young people as possible leave the education system with satisfactory qualifications – which will mean little or no dropouts – and
- how do we ensure that working people continue to receive in-service training so that they will always meet the continually changing quality requirements

A satisfactory link between education and the labour market therefore is vital for the economic and social development of our province. In order to meet the personnel requirements of present and future businesses in Limburg and in view of the fall in the working population, we will have to use all talents of current and potential employees.

In the policy document 'Limburg – a Region Full of Talent', from July 2008, we drew up a regional agenda focusing on the relationship between education and the labour market, which establishes a framework for developing effective actions.

The regional education-labour market agenda is characterised by four themes:

- Coordinating supply and demand in the growth sectors, which in Limburg include High Tech Materials, HealthCare and Cure and Agrofood and Nutrition
- Preparing pupils and students for the regional and euroregional labour market
- Equipping the working population
- Encouraging highly-educated workers to settle in Limburg

From the point of view of social work, I would like to briefly explain the themes 'preparing pupils and students for the labour market' and 'equipping the working population'.

As I said earlier, the number of young people in Limburg will decrease in the coming decades. We will have to exploit the talents of every young person in order to use them in social and economic functions. That will require high-quality and attractive training. Together with educational institutions and the business community, we are going to invest in that training. We will do so by strengthening early childhood education in order to prevent – but also to reduce – development delay in children when they start school at the age of four.

In the case of a shrinking working population, it is vital that every employee continues his development in order to satisfy the needs of the labour market.

Regular in-service training and retraining will be required. Lifelong learning is the way forward, but not everyone is aware of that. For this reason, the provincial government, together with educational institutions and the business community, wish to bring about a change in behaviour. We wish to make employers and employees aware that investment in training is of major importance.

Practical training is particularly important for the lower end of the labour market. However, apprenticeships will have to be available for this purpose. We as a province have decided to focus on social return, in other words: creating space on the labour market for disadvantaged groups. We focus on the following steps.

- In the case of provincial assignments for construction and other projects above € 250,000, we will impose the granting criterion that 5% of the contract sum will be used for work experience placements or apprenticeships.
- We will establish a social return knowledge network in Limburg in which social return activities will be coordinated or dealt with jointly. Twelve parties, including government authorities, educational institutions and the business community, have already registered for this network.

Limburg is taking the initiative in applying social return, and as such we are one of few practising this principle in the Netherlands.

Youth care

Youth care is the second important prominent feature in the 'Investing in People' programme. On the basis of the Dutch Youth Care Act, the province has an important task as regards youth care. That task involves the planning and financing of youth care. In carrying out that task, we wish to be more than just an intermediary of the national government. Our aim is to achieve added value.

This will be included in a youth care policy framework. The Youth Care Policy Framework for the period 2009 to 2012 is currently being prepared.

One of our aims is to ensure that youth care in Limburg will have sufficient and well-qualified staff.

In order to gain a better understanding, we asked Hogeschool Zuyd to investigate labour market entrance and the associated labour market problems being faced by Limburg youth care institutions. The three most important themes that emerged from this report were:

- youth care institutions are being faced by a marked increase in the ageing of staff;
- the integration of the lifelong learning concept, in order to create a permanent learning environment; and
- the poor link between the skills of graduates and practical requirements.

The investigation findings have been reviewed by institutions and professionals involved in youth care and educational institutions. These parties have drawn up a joint 'Limburg youth care and labour market action plan'. In the youth care policy framework, we wish to introduce four projects – with the title 'perspectives for the professional' – to improve the labour market entrance and quality of professionals in the youth care sector.

These four projects are:

1. *traineeships and labour market entrance*

We aim to ensure that there is a clear structure for traineeships and trainee monitoring and for the supervision of starting professionals. Graduate skills and professional competences must be in line. This must result in an increased social studies outflow of 7% with respect to 2008.

2. *lifelong learning as a guarantee for quality*

We aim to ensure that every provincial youth care institution has a lifelong learning plan, in which knowledge and skills in youth care can be supported.

3. *professional pride*

We believe that this project must result in Limburg youth care presenting itself as a self-assured youth care sector which is keen to demonstrate what it has to offer children, young people and their parents and foster parents.

4. *diversity*

Our aim is that provincial youth care institutions should have their own diversity policy. This should involve a focus on access to and familiarity with youth care, promoting skills of staff and increasing the diversity of professionals. The number of immigrant staff should increase from the current rate of 2% to 4% in 2012.

Integrated approach to urban districts

The final prominent feature that I wish to explain is the integrated approach to urban districts. The Province of Limburg believes that the inhabitants of Limburg must be able to rely on a sustainable living environment providing satisfactory conditions for living, working and relaxing. For this reason, we are working on a further strengthening and improvement of the quality of life in urban districts, and rural neighbourhoods.

In addition to demographic developments, there are a number of social trends that influence the quality of life. In this respect, I am thinking particularly of traditional social connections that are becoming increasingly less cohesive and social networks that are continuing to extend beyond the boundaries of the inhabitant's own neighbourhood, village or town. This means that a great deal of attention must be focused on the need for quality of life in Limburg. In cases where the quality of life is under pressure, the province – together with the municipalities and other parties – wishes to improve the situation based on a demand-driven approach. In this context, we will as far as possible base our approach on what has already been developed by the municipalities and the inhabitants themselves.

The integrated approach to urban districts focuses on the following five core aspects; what we refer to as the High five.

1. Residing: including housing and the quality of the housing supply
2. Facilities: including welfare and care, working and learning, counselling and advice
3. Participation: including social cohesion, education and work, diversity
4. Safety: including physical and social safety
5. Identity: including cultural and historical values

These core aspects are being dealt with cohesively. Consequently, the approach to urban districts is a very comprehensive and unique prominent feature, involving both social and physical aspects.

What are we going to do?

1. At present, municipalities, housing corporations and other partners in a region are selecting twelve Limburg urban districts that are most in need of a boost to the quality of life. The province will conclude a tailor-made district arrangement with these selected urban districts. In these arrangements, the province – together with the municipalities in question – will lay down agreements relating to objectives, approach, tasks and financing.
2. In addition to these twelve urban districts, we are investing in a wide range of projects relating to the quality of life. For this purpose, the province is developing instruments and incentive schemes. The area of welfare and care involves such aspects as active participation and healthy living, and more specifically empowerment, community care, prevention, sport and facilities.
3. Finally, we are keen to export knowledge and skills relating to district-oriented working. With this objective in mind, we are developing a practical training school where, in addition to general information, information may be obtained relating to the district arrangements, individual projects and best practices.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can conclude from my speech, the province is making various efforts to improve social participation and the welfare of people in Limburg. What I have told you represents only part of the aims that we have regarding this subject. After all, the province is not the only party involved in the wide-ranging area of social work. In addition to government authorities and implementing parties, training and research institutes play an important role where knowledge and skills are concerned. In the past few years, the province has benefited from what they have to offer on many occasions.

I thank you for your attention and wish the members of the European Platform for Worldwide Social Work a pleasant stay in our province.