Peer Review in the Field of Social Inclusion Policies

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Portugal 2005

Programme for Socio-Community Development

Mobilising all relevant bodies and promoting the participation of people suffering social exclusion

Synthesis Report

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Executive summary

The context

The Peer Review meeting in the field of social inclusion in EU Members States took place in Lisbon, on 12-13 September, hosted by the Institute for Social Security (Instituto da Segurança Social) on behalf of the Portuguese government. The peer countries taking part were Cyprus, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta and Sweden, together with stakeholder representatives from ATD 4th world, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and REVES (The European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy).

The meeting set out to review the achievement and performance of two innovative measures for support to social development at local level, whose main objective is to mobilise all relevant stakeholders and promote the participation of people suffering social exclusion. These measures have been running since 2000 within the Programme for socio-community development, which is part of the Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Social Development (OPETDS).

This was the third Peer Review to focus on steps to mobilise local actors and involve the population and the potential beneficiaries, to address problems of poverty and social exclusion. The meeting provided opportunities for mutual learning and potential transfer to other EU Member States of policy measures that support area (or local community) based initiatives or projects addressing priority local social issues and promoted by public and private (non-profit) local actors operating within partnerships. To better understand what these projects entail in concrete terms and how they are implemented, a site visit to two projects supported by these measures located in the Alentejo region was included on the first day of the meeting.

The good practice

The two measures under review were the following:

1. Social Networks for Development provide support to local actors through technical assistance, developing methodology, human resource training, diagnosis and the design and implementation of local social action plans. A network

– a coalition of actors within a Local Social Committee – provides a framework for action, coordinating results with a view to making actions more efficient and selecting appropriate activities for specific populations. Support provided within this measure aims at activating and consolidating local partnership – in funding surveys, diagnosis, information, technical advice, etc – and at training social development workers or agents, local leaders and volunteers.

2. Social and Community Development aims to improve living conditions for people suffering social exclusion through the financing of local projects including several specific actions: to address an important social issue, improve and enhance personal and social skills and capacities, make people more active in the community and empower them. It also offers training facilities for development agents, young professionals, social workers, officials, volunteers, etc. who are directly involved in these projects.

Organisations eligible for submitting project applications are public (local authorities or local branch of social administration) and private not-for-profit social organisations, in cooperation with other local actors. Projects have a maximum duration of two years.

Results are encouraging. Between 2001 and 2004, social networks have been set up in 163 municipalities and more than 700 projects developed under the second measure, involving 157 000 people (almost 60% women). Beneficiaries include individuals, communities, professional workers and organisations. These numbers are expected to rise in the 2005-2007 period.

According to an evaluation of a sample of projects, they had positive impacts on beneficiaries as well as on communities and organisations. Among beneficiaries, 91% of actions have had visible impacts on (in order of rank):
– personal development and improvement of self image;
– better access to information;
– growing capacity for job search;
– development of professional skills.

The relevance for mutual learning and transferability

Participants were impressed by the strong commitment of local actors and enthusiastic staff – social workers and development agents – in the projects visited. They agreed that the projects promote integration within the commu-

nity and improve the quality of life of beneficiaries and that a decentralised and bottom-up approach of this kind has many positive aspects that could inspire forms of transfer. A general feeling was that local approaches are not a substitute for national social policies, but add value to them, which will be higher where national policies on social protection and housing are stronger. They will be more efficient if national administrations, and their officials at both central and territorial levels, create the conditions for horizontal coordination and bottom-up approaches.

Of course transferability is made difficult by the different models of governance and especially different degrees of decentralisation and autonomy of devolved local authorities in different countries. But many innovative aspects of the measures are very relevant and have been seen as sources for mutual learning:

- National policy measures such as the ones under review provide a vital framework for the bottom-up approach; in addressing social issues close to the people and in involving local stakeholders. They confirm that everybody has a role to play in fighting social exclusion and are a means to modernise the welfare state and pave the way towards a "local welfare society".
- The strong emphasis on local social development as a means to achieve extremely diversified forms of social inclusion, rather than merely focus on economic growth and job activation, was welcomed – especially by the new EU Members – as a way to address the problems of those who are distant from the labour force or are not in a position to access the labour market.
- Such a decentralised process helps to regenerate local communities, through new networks and capacity building and the setting up of a "basic local infrastructure" to address difficult problems.
- A local social development approach brings important changes in the way social services are delivered. In many countries, means of delivering services are criticised, or social workers even regarded with hostility. Here, they work more closely with and for the people.

Participants also expressed concerns about several issues raised in reviewing these measures and drew attention to some potential weaknesses, which seem to be common to policies promoting decentralised and locally based approaches:

- Sustainability and continuity of local projects and actions are hindered by the short two-year funding period. A longer-term basis is required if they are to win people's confidence and participation. However, in the Portuguese case, the continuity of certain projects is ensured by local authorities, other budget lines or government support.
- Mainstreaming such local initiatives remains an open question and a dilemma exists between focusing projects and resources on priorities, disadvantaged areas or groups, or multiplying them with the risk of dispersion and of decreasing impact and return.
- Coordination of bottom-up initiatives with EU and national strategies and policies and cooperation between different departments and administrations seems quite weak and would need to be improved;
- Principles of partnership need more precise definition. It is not clear in the social networks how local partners work together, have a coordination role or are actively involved in projects and in the implementation of local social plans.
- There is a need for better distinction between different levels of participation and a definition of ways in which beneficiaries are involved and empowered.
- A clear framework to enable the projects and lessons learned from this decentralised and bottom-up approach to feed back into the development of national measures and policy seems to be lacking in the measure under review.
- Although these measures are undergoing evaluation, data on measurable objectives and outcomes and on costs are lacking. Public agencies that are providing large amounts of funding to private (non-profit) bodies have to assess whether objectives are reached and use experience from monitoring and evaluation to improve future policies.

The programme conforms to the objectives of the EU strategy on social inclusion notably in supporting vulnerable groups and areas, increasing community awareness of problems and promoting tailored responses through partnerships between local authorities and NGOs, citizens and beneficiaries, which should be reinforced within the EU strategy and National Action Plans (NAPs) in the future.

1. The national context and the issue

Portuguese society contains internal contradictions that are difficult to resolve, with a mix of old and new patterns of poverty and social exclusion. The new patterns are characterised by poor qualifications and skills and connected to a range of problems including low abilities, illiteracy, exclusion of minority groups, domestic violence, bad housing and land use and lone parent and atypical families. Their effects accumulate and make it difficult to develop new responses. In 1998, 12% of workers in Portugal received less than two-thirds of the average salary, and 21% of the population is exposed to the risk of poverty with 15% on a persistent basis.

Improvements have been made in the Portuguese welfare system over the last decade. Portugal has introduced minimum income payments ('social insertion income') seven years ago. Most of the people who benefit are young or elderly and so would not have access to social inclusion through the labour market. For recipients capable of getting work, payments are made for short periods and are subject to regular assessment. Support can be withdrawn if recipients refuse to take part in training or to demonstrate they are actively seeking work. Such a safety net is a positive step forwards, but still inadequate to address a situation that remains worrying in the context of economic slowdown, increasing unemployment and high budget deficit.

Portugal is currently going through a period of uncertainty with regard to priorities in the fight against social exclusion, due to this unfavourable economic environment and high public budget deficit. But the struggle to combat poverty is still a priority, even if new initiatives are not always possible and additional investment in social policies is not substantial.

These social problems are highly concentrated in areas that need special attention.
They are affected by poor housing and populated by a high proportion of people living in poverty, with low pay and lack of qualifications, and by vulnerable groups such as children, older people and immigrants. In Portugal, poverty has a female face. Women make up 60% of the poor and bring their children with them.

The national context is extremely diversified and different types of territories can be identified, ranging from tourist and moderately inclusive zones (mainly found on the south and west coasts), to economically deprived urban areas with growing foreign migrants communities and desertified rural ones with an ageing population. The distribution offers little ground for complacency. Therefore there is good reason to invest in programmes that commit to specific groups or to specific areas, with an integrated approach to local development issues.

Such a context has led the authorities in Portugal to introduce changes in the governance and management of social development policies and promote a territorial approach, centred on tailored solutions at the grass roots or local community level, but contributing to a central strategy coordinated at high level. This approach is at the core of the measures on socio-community development that are the subject of this Peer Review.

2. The European context and perspective.

Portugal's NAPs for social inclusion (NAPs/Incl) of both 2001 and 2003 fall very much in line with the objectives of the EU Action Programme for combating social exclusion, even if they fall short of defining true priorities and identifying sources of funding. (Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, p. 85).

The measures under review are key measures and the flagship for good practices of the Portuguese NAPs/Incl. They are in line with several objectives and sub-objectives of the EU social integration strategy, such as helping the most vulnerable and developing comprehensive actions in favour of areas marked by exclusion, and mobilising all relevant bodies and promoting the participation, self expression and dialogue of people suffering exclusion.

They complement also some other EU policies, such as:
* fostering local employment development, based on local partnerships and local action plans within the European Employment Strategy;
* building partnerships, empowering beneficiaries and combating discrimination through area-based initiatives, which are key criteria of the Equal Community Initiative;
* promoting 'third system' or non-profit organisations, social enterprises and their cooperation with public institutions.

These two measures, which are funded through the European Social Funds, contribute directly to the objectives of Portugal's NAP/Incl, aimed at devolved actions for vulnerable groups and specific areas facing problems of exclusion, through mobilising all relevant partners. In emphasising the role of local public and private actors cooperating within networks or partnerships, these measures have developed appropriate coordination structures and adapted social services to the needs of people suffering exclusion and poverty. They support and implement the 'partnership approach' that the European Commission has promoted over the last 20 years within several Programmes of Community Initiative. The recognition of this approach reflects a new mode of tackling these problems as well as an understanding of the multidimensional causes of poverty and exclusion and their concentration within certain areas or communities.

These measures are innovative in the sense that they have been designed since 1997 (the local social networks) and implemented since 2000, before EU and

Member States policies on social exclusion stressed the need to coordinate efforts and improve the capacities of local and regional authorities in cooperation with local stakeholders and partners invited to mobilise and participate. This need to coordinate EU and national programmes with regional and local efforts, ensuring an integrated and multidimensional action at the territorial level to address social issues, has been more widely acknowledged in the NAP/Incl 2003-2005.

Ensuring this involvement is not an easy task. This Peer Review, focused on an area-based approach, on involvement and empowerment of beneficiaries and on participation of local actors and of local populations – including volunteers – provides a contribution to this dimension.
Little is known of the involvement of some other stakeholders such as the social partners. And the results of encouraging social responsibility and the engagement of all citizens in combating social exclusion are still fragile and volatile. The impact of such approaches on the quality and mode of delivery of social services and on the empowerment of people is largely unknown. In addition, if some evaluation of outcomes of each of these decentralised or bottom-up schemes and projects is available, the effects of actions and their cost-effectiveness are often ignored, and comparison across the EU Member States is lacking in the absence of a common technical language, indicators and benchmarking.

This review complements previous assessments of Local Development Agreements in Sweden and Citizens' Social Support Networks in Finland, which follow a similar approach. Beyond the potential transferability to other national contexts (see § 4), these reviews raise several issues of common interest and relevance for the next stage of the EU strategy on social inclusion.

The next steps on the EU agenda will bring, by the end of 2005, revised objectives from the Commission to the Member States and by March 2006 a decision by the European Council on common objectives on social inclusion and social protection – a streamlining approach. The next priority is to prepare a new generation of NAPs/Incl. The 2006-2009 period will be decisive in efforts to meet the Lisbon objective to reduce poverty by 2010.

The evolution of the Social Funds should also take into account the demand for greater flexibility to meet change inside countries, focusing not only on training but also on support for other forms of capacity building. One important facet is the capacity of all stakeholders at EU, national and territorial levels to be more flexible, to adopt a wider approach based on multi-partnership, and to develop a common multisectoral dimension, for example through coordination and interaction between different bodies, such as the Social Protection Committee, the Education Committee and the Health Committee at the EU level.

3. The good practice example

The measures under review come within the programme for Socio-Community Development, part of Portugal's Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Social Development (OPETDS), designed "to develop new intervention models to meet new challenges". They are also mentioned within the NAPs for social inclusion and for employment and within the regional development programme.

The OPETDS is structured around five axes, covering training and transition to work; lifelong learning; modernisation of public administration, employment and training policies, and fostering social development. Axis n° 5 of this Operational Programme aims specifically **to promote social development** through interventions designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups. It supports social and professional inclusion for disabled people and disadvantaged groups, and fosters the social employment market, social cooperatives and the development of social facilities.

This axis 5 incorporates six elements. The first one, the **Programme for Socio-Community Development** (5.1), sets out to improve living conditions, make people more active as citizens, eliminate social exclusion factors and revitalise the social fabric. (Other programmes refer to integration of disabled persons, integration into the 'secondary or social' labour market, support to cooperatives and funding of social facilities). Its purpose is to launch integrated interventions that allow people to access the social milieu, whether via the labour market, the social economy, self-employment, cooperatives or community activities. For some sectors of the population, circumstances are getting more difficult, and thus the programme often confronts situations of great social fragility, as well as territorial distinctions. It has to create dynamic processes that are strong enough to deal with situations on the ground. Such initiatives need financial support and complementarity in working towards the same objectives.

This programme works through a range of solutions, evolving in response to local problems and leading to the formation of a social network, capable of offering a diagnosis of the specific situation and activating partners at community level in areas such as education, training and promoting new skills. It covers two measures: the **Social Network for Development** (5.1.1) and **Social and Community Development** (5.1.2), planned with a bilateral intention of mutual incidence, which are the subject of this review.

First measure: Social Network for Development is a strategic approach giving support to local actors and partnerships through technical assistance, developing methodology, human resource training, diagnosis and support to the implementation of local action plans. A local social network is described as "a forum where actions are gathered and combined by all local actors who wish to participate in combating poverty and exclusion". Such networks operate at the community (more often municipal) level, and are labelled "local social council" (social commissions at the sub municipal level).

These local social councils are expected to provide a framework for action, coordinating results with a view to making actions more efficient and selecting appropriate activities for specific populations. In designing and implementing local social plans they bring an important contribution in promoting community awareness of social problems and cooperation of local stakeholders, in activating local solutions and in combining and optimising external and internal resources.

This measure is implemented by the Institute for Solidarity and Social Security under a contractual arrangement with the operational programme management unit.

Financial supports provided within this measure are related to:
- activation and consolidation of local networks – each network receiving a lump sum of €60 000 – and funding surveys, diagnosis, information, technical advice etc. required for the preparation of local plans;
- providing awareness raising and information for 3 000 local leaders and volunteers and training sessions for around 1 260 social development workers or agents.

Implementation and results: Since the year 2000, around 275 municipalities have succeeded in setting up such networks, according to the following programme:
- setting up of the network: information and awareness raising for all local actors involved by a 'core group for dynamisation', drafting of guidelines and internal constitution of the network, setting up of a local social council and commissions by the more committed partners.
- preparation of a local social action plan: shared diagnosis of social problems, information gathering and surveys, definition of objectives and priorities, drafting of priority actions and discussion of the plan before its endorsement and implementation.

But little is known of the outcome, in term of local plan or actions designed and implemented and the impact of these networks and commissions on local social service delivery, as well as on costs and on relationships between public and private actors and decision-making processes.

Second measure: Social and Community Development aims to improve living conditions for groups suffering social exclusion through the financing of local projects including specific actions that address important social issues, improve and enhance personal and social skills and capacities, make people more active in the community and empower them, offer training and strengthen capacities of development agents, young professionals, social workers, officials, etc. directly involved in community and social development (see Annex of the discussion paper for example of projects and actions).

The groups targeted by these projects are disadvantaged persons, families or groups living in depressed local communities. Organisations eligible for submitting project applications are public (local authorities, local branch of social administration) and private not-for-profit organisations, in cooperation with other local actors. The projects can have a maximum duration of two years.

Projects are selected on the basis of a set of criteria and scoring, relating to:
- the applicant organisation (involvement in previous projects and management capacity and experience);
- the project relevance in linking between objectives and baseline situation and local needs, between project content and methodology suggested.

Some other criteria are mentioned such as equal opportunities between men and women, information society and environmental awareness.

Results
Between 2001 and 2004, 157,659 people were involved in the programme, through a growing number of projects:
- 2001   95 projects   €886,000
- 2002   86 projects
- 2003   208 projects
- 2004   321 projects   €10.6 million

Priority is given to the four regions of Portugal with Objective 1 status.

Beneficiaries include individuals, communities, professional workers and organisations. Among individual participants, 57% are women, 40% have high school qualifications or less, 23% are under 35. Thus the majority target population is young women with low qualifications.

The 2005-2007 programme period will involve even more people, through 790 projects and an investment of €28.5 million.

Sample projects have been the subject of in-depth evaluation (see discussion paper), which shows, for example, that:

- The projects generally improve individuals' skills, confidence and employability, but have less impact on income and job mobility.
- Professionals are mainly young, qualified, and women. The programme helps to update their skills and develop specialised intervention methodologies in response to a combination of old and new problems at regional and local level. On the down side, they suffer from relatively low salaries and job insecurity.
- Many organisational structures in Portugal have long-established hierarchies. Work may be delegated to staff who do not have the power to take decisions, and this slows down implementation. It is easier to agree on goals than on specific action to achieve them. These characteristics are shared in some other southern European countries.
- In communities, results suggest that the project-based approach with short-term funding can create uncertainty and means that the duration of interventions does not coincide with the need. This can have the effect of stigmatising communities if problems are identified but results not delivered.

Characteristics and specificity of these measures of Socio-Community Development

The initiative is based on previous experience of social intervention gained through Integrar and the National Anti-Poverty Programme (NAPP). Small-scale activities in the field of training and employment yielded positive results and merited enhancement. However, it was clear that financing needed reorientation to reach the most disadvantaged groups and areas.

With the existence of some very difficult living conditions in Portugal, interventions must identify positive elements. Projects must be structured in a way that has a real impact on family life and individual perspectives, as well as having

upstream implications going beyond single communities. They are implemented through different modules with their own budgets. A 'top-down' approach has been transformed into 'bottom-up'.

The idea behind this programme and measures under review is to promote new intervention models to meet new challenges. The following principles are mentioned as references and foundations of the programme:
– integration – economic and social dimensions; individuals, groups and society;
– articulation – common aims;
– subsidiarity – close relation with local population and problems and local initiatives with collective, local, regional and national responsibility;
– innovation – through multidisciplinary, inter-institutional and de-bureaucratised approaches; and,
– participation – active involvement of all local actors, but mainly the most disadvantaged groups, on social interventions.

They work through a range of solutions, evolving in response to local problems and leading to the formation of a local partnership capable of offering a diagnosis of the specific situation and activating partners at community level in areas such as education, training and promoting new skills. They are structured around three complementary strands of action:
– Assistance to local actors with a social or political role, to maximise their intervention capacities, for example through the coordination of studies and diagnosis.
– Acting as a catalyst for community spirit, mobilising local people in bringing about change.
– Improving qualifications for a range of groups, through short-term pre-training and means for developing social and interpersonal skills. Providing training for those responsible for dealing with communities, through courses for mediators, improving skills for intervention in specific areas or particular groups of problems, or helping experts with high-level qualifications to be more efficient in implementing solutions.

Traditional forms of state welfare are not adequate to deal with problems of social exclusion, and therefore the measures focus on personal, social and professional education and training, encompassing a range of actions to make individuals more successful and if possible enable them to reach the labour market. Projects, financed under measure two, do not just occupy people for

the sake on it – they give them a sense of their own worth, and offer real opportunities. Their ultimate objective is social and professional integration. They are based on reflection and analysis, designed to affect change, and have been successful in altering people's perception of their reality and their ability to work in organisations, and maximising their potential.

The programme also strengthens the capacities of the agents involved, making it possible for experts to reinforce their academic skills. This is a key strategy, helping to promote employment for young professionals. Improving the qualifications of agents helps to maximise resources, change attitudes, and achieve better insight into how populations envisage their aims in life.

Partnerships offer greater potential for empowerment, and the programme seeks to encourage communities to work together to develop their own interventions. Personal development is seen in both a personal and social context, and strengthening individuals' desire to achieve something contributes to overall success.

Work, whether through the primary labour market, self-employment or social employment, changes individuals and their families, and breaks the cycle of social exclusion. The smallest intervention can help to alter people's perceptions, for example of the value of acquiring qualifications.

Most of the measures have been in force for four to five years, and so it is too soon to know precisely what they have achieved in these areas and to assess their full impact. However, the programme is contributing to the better targeting of funds, and countering the long tradition in Portugal of short-term rather than strategic action. Involvement of actors and civic surveillance is recognised as particularly important.

A few issues have been questioned:

Not all social intervention is automatically positive, and so it is crucial to continually rethink the strategy and identify its weaker aspects. Some of the difficulties already established focus on the inadequacy of specific interventions and problems in building partnerships. The following topics were subject to discussion:

Sustainability of projects: projects are co-funded by the EU and national government, but some of the initiatives will be taken over by mainstream services. The future of GAAF – a project visited – is assured, for example, as a result of the 'atypical agreement' with social security services. Although the scheme is not part of the standard provision, the high quality of the service it offers has earned the support of the local social security office, which will provide funding to maintain it after the project finishes, to the mutual benefit of all.

The inclusion process and its distance to employment: measures under review support low-level, grass-roots projects that draw participants, not directly to employment, but into other activities such as training. EU funding has made this pioneering initiative possible, and evaluation will lead to improvements in the future.

The scheme addresses people with low levels of qualifications. Some of them do not know how to go about finding a job, for example. It enables them to become more autonomous and to evolve at individual level. It does not always generate employment in the commercial market, but gives access alternatively to jobs in the social sector or more structured training programmes.

On partnership: very little evidence is available of how local social networks or partnerships operate and succeed in implementing their local action plans. There are more potential than active partnerships in Portugal, which are addressing many challenges including:
• How to share out responsibilities between the political system, organisations and individuals;
• How to find new ways of working;
• How to improve internal dialogue within organisations to promote change (since partnership prioritises external dialogue);
• Shortage of corresponding investment and other support from central administration.

One third of local networks are made up of NGOs. Some 10% of initiatives have ties with economic partners, and 46% of actors say they need the involvement of the economic sector in partnerships. There is a need to convince the economic sector to get involved, but the economic sector must also realise the importance of the social sector. The programme has been launched in critical neighbourhoods, and is very demanding. Portugal needs to build on what is

already known in order to apply it to reality on the ground. As mentioned by a participant: "The programme is complex because social reality is complex and it is not possible to reach everyone with a uniform strategy."

On assessing empowerment: close diagnosis in some small neighbourhoods has shown that participants become more independent and better able to exercise their rights. However, that assessment still needs improvement and there has been progress in training people in diagnosis and bringing better results.

4. Relevance and transferability to other national contexts

In order to review the **relevance** of these measures with regard to similar experiences in other Member States, some of the issues raised in the comment papers by peer countries and stakeholders (see annex) were discussed within three working groups, under the following general topics:

i) *Area-based policy measures within the EU/national strategy for social inclusion*

There are problems in defining a territory, an area or a local community, and definition varies from one Member State to another. Strategies must address regional and local concerns and not be imposed by the EU or national government. It could be facilitated by decentralisation of EU and national funding in cooperation with localities.

It is also hard to define and measure quality of life. How can the same quality of life be guaranteed to people living in very different regions? With regard to entry into the labour market, there is a difference of perception in northern and southern EU countries. In the north, there is a clearer view of who can and who cannot be employed, and how to go about getting people into work. Southern countries tend to ask why people cannot be employed. Different countries can learn from one another, and economic development must take on board the social dimension.

Accountability is important where funding is awarded, but how can social projects be measured? Compromise and flexibility is required between the EU and the different Member States to discover how funds can best be used, and policies created to really suit the various regions.

ii) *The components of a local community-based approach for social development: participation and empowerment*

Local participation means involving residents as well as organisations. Organisations need to be prepared to understand how best to attract participation, while individuals have to have a way to get their voices and opinions heard. There were concerns that local voluntary organisations may not always be truly representative of service users.

For example, Denmark has a platform for funding national NGOs with local branches, and this aids empowerment. Municipalities are obliged to set aside €20 per inhabitant per annum to finance voluntary organisations. In France, an EQUAL programme on anti-discrimination set up a 'peer group' of 'victims' to monitor projects. It made an exhibition to take to companies, employment offices etc.

There may also be problems of distrust between clients and social workers. The stakeholder group ATD Fourth World ran a successful project last year to develop a training module to sensitise social workers to families' points of view.

Two important barriers to communication and participation have been identified:

- use of language/jargon: all actors and stakeholders need to find a common language.
- activity venues: individuals need to feel at home and not intimidated. The setting is important. In Denmark, for example, meetings between social workers and users to discuss projects take place in the shelters where people live and feel at ease.

Local networks and partnerships run into problems if some partners are not active enough. For example, organisations have been known to join partnerships merely to keep an eye on 'rival' groups. There was agreement that building good networks takes time, and that every partner needs thoroughly to understand the benefits.

iii) Managing and monitoring community-based measures and local projects

Two questions were highlighted in relation to managing and implementing area based measures and projects:

- how to encourage local participation in order to enhance democracy and participatory governance. And how to ensure equity between different groups of stakeholders, and guarantee that the most marginalised people are represented.
- how to influence national policies.

The first step for project management must be to increase local and personal empowerment, and this should be recognised as a long-term process. Assess-

ment criteria should take account of improvements in quality of life, through access to education, for example.

The question of who should participate should be raised at each stage of projects' design and implementation. In defining stakeholders' roles there is likely to be some overlap, but this is less important at local than at national level. It is crucial to build capital for community involvement, but this cannot be done through short-term funding. The social partners' input tends to be weak, perhaps because their attention is focused more on the economic sphere. Community projects need to fit in with the goals and parameters of the NAP/ Incl, but local groups should have the autonomy to define precise objectives. Another question is who carries out evaluation. Beneficiaries must take part, and assessment must be linked to sustainability.

Poverty proofing is a planning tool designed to indicate whether all new policies are likely to have poverty implications. At present it only applies to the national framework. Equality proofing exists in Ireland and does involve consultation. For example, during the drawing up of the National Action Plan on employment (NAP/Empl), the consultation procedure allowed interested groups to identify potential discrimination risks.

Regarding transferability to other national contexts, peer country representatives and experts expressed the following views:

For **Cyprus**, the experience was very useful since it illustrated the importance of preparatory capacity and knowledge-building work, if a similar project were to be undertaken. It confirms that economic and social development should go hand in hand. Improving the social conditions of marginalised people is a prerequisite for return to the labour market, and for distressed communities it is a prerequisite for economic development.
Participants learned that in order to carry out such a programme, and in addition to a general reform aimed at decentralisation of social policy, substantive preparation and conditions are required such as:
• adequate capacity within municipalities, in terms of trained staff, financial resources and ability to manage projects and cooperate with private institutions;
• increasing the capacity of local NGOs to design, manage, monitor and assess projects;

- well-defined projects with measurable objectives for specific groups of people, setting priorities and measuring project outcomes;
- considering alternative options (could money be better used in a different way?) in order to minimise costs and maximise outcomes.

According to **Denmark**, the Portuguese programme confirmed that community work is here to stay, but a balance needs to be found between national policies and local communities which should have room to find their own framework. The importance of sustainability needs to be emphasised: projects should not be started if the services cannot be maintained. In Denmark, 20 years ago, some 2 000 projects were in operation, but most of them withered away within two years. Money may be better spent on creating fewer projects with longer duration.

The combination in the Portuguese programme of offering a service to the community and at the same time providing vocational training that can lead to employment is a very good one. However, it is obvious that many of these projects are examples of good social work but not necessarily community work. In the project visited that offers a schools' counselling service, this is something the authorities should provide anyway. Can everything that takes place in communities be defined as community work?

The question of the link between such a programme and employment needs to be raised. The Danish government has targeted measures to bring people into the labour market, but what can be done to create jobs in areas where little employment exists or when marginalised people are too far from the jobs market? Could local authorities, under special circumstances and in certain cases, guarantee a percentage of salary for people securing work?

Strong priority has to be given to users' involvement and participation, in so far as it adds value and users experience it as a boost to their capacities and living conditions. Involvement for the sake of involvement itself or just "because it is democratic" should be avoided. Finally, the Danish experience shows that empowerment requires an infrastructure. Support for voluntary organisations could benefit the Portuguese programme.

For **France**, the Portuguese programme highlights and confirms the importance of local development and a bottom-up approach. Several issues discussed in the review are relevant to France, such as:

- the articulation between European, national and local policies;
- the participation of beneficiaries, even if participation has different meanings which need to be clarified;
- the evaluation of outcomes.

France already has experience of involving beneficiaries, especially in assessing policies with a view to improving future action plans. But a somewhat different, global approach has been adopted, of offering universal access to rights designed to combat social exclusion. A national strategy has been in force since 1998 and social inclusion policies are decentralised to department level. Some departments and regions have carried out experiments, but they need close evaluation, and results need to be disseminated and acted upon.
The following issues require more investigation: coordination of regional and national strategy, improvement of cooperation between partners and in participation of stakeholders and NGOs.

For **Hungary**, the Portuguese measures are a well thought-out solution to encouraging the participation of local actors in the struggle against poverty and exclusion, and their example can be especially useful, since these measures have many common features with schemes recently implemented in Hungary. The innovative nature of the Portuguese programme was appreciated. A key question is to know if the Portuguese programme will be renewed after 2007.

At the EU level, employment and training measures are not adequate to meet the needs of people suffering severe poverty and European Structural Funds should extend their scope to support a greater range of issues. EU and Member States should expand intersectoral planning of strategies and finances and the EU Social Protection Committee could organise a joint meeting with the Education and Public Health Committees to enhance cooperation.

For **Ireland**, the problem of social exclusion is enormous and complex. Such a programme confirms that community development is very valuable, especially in rural areas, and that programmes of this type are especially useful for regenerating communities of older people. Ireland has come a long way in this context, and a government think-tank is about to report on ways to create more inclusive labour markets.
Earlier presentations claimed that the programme has already stimulated local economies, and yet admitted that it is too early to judge results, and this pointed to the difficulty of putting crucial indicators in place. In Ireland, it is

now no longer adequate to measure results by indicating, for example, how many people have completed a training course. Additional data must show how many went on to secure employment. As regards participation, this must be meaningful and effective, involving the right people who will be best able to have an input.

There is no question that activity has to be bottom-up, but this is easier said than done. People in national infrastructures also have to question how national policies can include the community aspect, and this is also not easy. There is a lot of learning to be done at all levels. Ireland now has a very elaborate community development process that has generated a new and expensive institutional structure of its own.

Italy finds the Portuguese programme inspiring. Strategy and project design from above and involvement of poor communities solving (some of) their own problems are innovative but the question remains of the true capacity of such communities to do so. Such an approach raises many questions such as the possibility of confrontation versus shared solutions between local actors and social partners; the role of the third sector and relations with local authorities and the whole question of capacities – including financial – of the latter.

But the Italian context of decreasing central state budget resources for social policy and transfer of competencies to regions and to municipalities with limited financial capacity hinder its relevance for Italy. In addition, it is hard to organise activities in small communities.

For **Malta**, more must be done to extend activities to all areas of the country. The bottom-up approach of the Portuguese measures is crucial to community development, with social workers located where people themselves are, rather than in a distant office. And several projects, such as the one visited in Beja, of professionals working directly in schools themselves, in the community, could be implemented in Malta and help the country to develop.

Another relevant element for Malta, where social workers' training is inadequate, is the priority given to training of social workers and development agents, as far as the process of community development depends on their ability to connect with the population, to facilitate the process of empowerment and to promote participation. The programme provides a common strategy and operational framework within which very fragmented local communities and social workers can operate.

Several concerns were expressed, such as the action to be taken when residents fail to participate, time required in getting to know residents' needs and potential, how to ensure sustainability and continuity of projects, the commitment required to turn a network into a partnership, and criteria for reaching and helping the more disadvantaged people in the selection and funding of project applications.

Local activities such as the ones fostered by the Portuguese programme are very relevant to **Sweden**. Social networks have similar points of departure as the ones created within the Local Development Agreements in Sweden such as a bottom-up perspective, cooperation, cross-sector activities etc., even if in Sweden deprived areas are mostly urban. However, the Swedish government is no longer funding projects in municipalities and the emphasis is on transferring local initiatives into mainstream services.

Among the common concerns and open questions put forward were:

- the necessary link between local level projects or activities and national policy, "since area-based welfare work has no prospect of being able to achieve the overall goal of enhancing social and community development", and the relationship between national and local objectives;
- understanding and defining how stakeholders can share their views on what should be done within the local social network, and how and for what purpose inhabitants participate and acquire real influence;
- the importance of adopting and implementing a long-term approach as a prerequisite for the success of social and community development;
- the need for different Ministries responsible for relevant policies to improve horizontal cooperation. This also applies to public agencies and stakeholder organisations.

For **ATD Fourth World** the measure has many positive aspects and "demonstrates a desire to involve and empower people experiencing poverty and exclusion to play an active role". The approach is based on the principle that social development is a prerequisite for economic development which is "thankfully in contradiction to the approach favoured by many EU Member States, which has seen the recent re-focusing of the Lisbon Strategy on jobs and growth to the detriment of social exclusion objectives". Among the weak points are:

- the maximum duration of two years for projects, which is insufficient if people experiencing poverty are to benefit from the services on offer and contribute their knowledge to the process;
- the need for a long-term commitment to ensure participation, empowerment and capacity building of people and increased trust;

- the need to see people experiencing exclusion as partners at all levels of decision-making, to enter into partnership with them and to redress the power imbalance that exist between different stakeholders;
- the need to reduce the administrative burden on applicant organisations and open the process to small grassroots groups.

For the **European Anti-Poverty Network** (EAPN), the operational programme and the measures under review are important and powerful tools in fighting poverty and social exclusion because their focus is on building actors' capacity, decentralisation and creation of local partnerships, facilitating promotion of local initiatives, job creation and qualifications.

Assuring their continuity is a priority, especially of the social networks, which are powerful tools in promoting and reinforcing people's participation.

Among suggestions were:

- to make the networks more flexible and less dependent on structural funds and bureaucracy, in order to facilitate access for NGOs and leave space for the necessary innovation and adaptation to some concrete needs;
- to decentralise implementation;
- not just to offer a global grant, or "at least experiment with direct deliverance of grants by NGOs or actors' coalitions".
- to guarantee the participation of civil society organisations.

EAPN Portugal judged that the social network programme could be a powerful tool, especially for involving individuals. The participation of excluded people is crucial and must be reinforced. The programme is an example of good practice that should be a priority for continuity and future development. According to the network representative, "democracy in Portugal is still young, but it will never be consolidated as long as poverty is allowed to exist". This programme is necessary to ensure a more cohesive, responsible and just society, but it might achieve better results if it had more flexible financing adapted to specific territories and if it was promoting the role of NGOs in developing projects.

For **REVES**, the measures recognise the importance of the local level and of a "solidarity by proximity" in that social capital and social infrastructures have to be created at the municipal level. But the underlying principles such as integration, transversality and a multisectoral approach, subsidiarity, partnership or participation have to be defined and put in practice. For example, little is known about the structure of the local networks, their mode of functioning, composition, the rights of members, decision-making mechanisms and the role of NGOs.

Recognition of the importance of training led to the remark that institutional training in this field is not always adequate and that mutual exchanges for the purpose of self learning are more relevant and efficient.

The REVES representative believed it was important to be reminded that social exclusion situations are different, and sometimes people do not even realise they are socially excluded. Therefore, flexible responses and local activities are crucial and we have to look at what already exists and try to transfer it to other areas. Linking actions at European, national and local level is important in avoiding a top-down approach, and learning must come from both the top and the bottom.

Attention must be paid to the need to support organisations already working to provide services in different European regions and to the importance of changing dominant institutional cultures to remove obstacles.

Lessons drawn from the exercise by the Portuguese hosts

The review confirmed that the Portuguese programme is worthwhile, while the exchange of views offered a new perspective.

Two attitudes among the peer group could be discerned: northern European countries have greater experience and more developed employment policies. In the southern ones, the situation is closer to that of Portugal, where developments are still at an early stage. Portugal is undertaking strict assessment, in order to find the best way to integrate local development into national and European policy, but this requires a lot of homework. The programme addresses populations that are "near the baseline", needing more than one form of intervention. But greater convergence between local stakeholder organisations and public policies is a worthwhile aim.

The Portuguese authorities are aware of the need for better impact assessment, but the programme sets out to reach people who cannot achieve inclusion in the labour market. They are convinced that the combination of enhancing awareness and promoting capacities is the best way to create a more productive society.

The Minister of Labour and Social Security **Mr José António Vieira da Silva** thanked all the participants for their work, describing the Peer Review Programme as one of the most successful initiatives in European policy. Member States have taken significant steps in coordinating social policies, and the Peer Review is an excellent model for reconciling common aims with the diversity of political situations in different countries.

The EU is facing considerable challenges, and the ambitions we nurture of fighting for cohesion and against poverty mean that the best policy instruments must be chosen with care, he noted.

Mr Vieira da Silva set out three fundamental principles:

1) Mainstreaming: the struggle for social inclusion must be reflected not just in cohesion and employment policies, but all other relevant areas including economic, housing, transport health and education policies. "In all these areas we have to make an effort to create cohesion and fight poverty, and we have not always done this."

2) Efficacy of social policies in redistributing income: we must combine the principle of universality of social protection with the need for selectivity in social policies. Next year, Portugal will put aside funds specifically to counter poverty among senior citizens, who are one of the groups most vulnerable to exclusion, isolation and poverty. Universality and selectivity can be combined through local actions.

3) National and European policies alone are not adequate. Resources must be concentrated where the problems are worst. There is a logic to local integrated programmes in urban and rural areas or among exposed social groups: e.g. disabled people, ethnic groups and immigrants. Combined with national policies, they make it easier to tackle problems and undo complex patterns of poverty and exclusion on a local plain, where action must be as close to people as possible.

It is not a question of choosing between local or national action, said the Minister. Experience has shown, for example, that local projects united with application of the guaranteed basic income bring a better cost/benefit performance.

Finally, in order to achieve efficiency and good value for money, projects should be self-sufficient and sustainable. But not all projects can become autonomous. Particularly severe problems exist in all countries (e.g. among disabled people and senior citizens) and need public support for interventions. "We need to guarantee levels of public support to make these projects lasting ones," he concluded.

5. Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

Participants largely shared views that projects developed within these measures promote integration within the community and improve the quality of life of beneficiaries. The decentralised and bottom-up approach has many positive aspects that could inspire forms of transfer.

Both measures have enriched local territories, through a range of adaptable and diverse projects that successfully stimulate small economies, create synergies, empower people in vulnerable urban and rural areas, and make them more active in decision-making.

The innovative nature of the programme has allowed for the development of interventions for combating social exclusion that did not exist before. Social development became a key component of local development. Such area-based and multidimensional or multi-problem approaches reflect a shift in social policies:

– From social policies targeted at disadvantaged individuals, families and groups to policy targeted at distressed areas – especially urban – where poverty and exclusion tend to be concentrated.
– From centralised and sector-based social policies to more decentralised and area-based responses to social problems, involving local authorities and private actors, often linked to central funding bodies by contracts, agreement or global grant arrangements;
– From a supply-oriented approach where the client has little to say and where quality of services is never questioned, towards a more client-based approach in which beneficiaries participate and services are accountable and evaluated and quality improved;
– From an approach based on traditional social action and social work, to social development.

Complexity, multi-dimensionality and interdependence of social issues imply new modes of governance, with which the programme has experimented, such as:
– confidence and cooperation between local actors within networks and partnerships;
– sharing of information, diagnosis and vision;
– strategic approach and definition of priorities;
– coordination of different actions and projects within a local social plan.

Although such local area or community-based approaches are not a substitute for national social policies, they do add value to them, which will be higher where national social protection and housing policies are stronger. They will be more efficient if national administrations, and their officials at both central and territorial levels, create the conditions for horizontal coordination and bottom-up approaches, succeed in integrating different (EU/national/local) levels of administration, top-down and bottom-up strategies, defining priorities at different levels and inspiring policy from the grass roots.

Such an approach also gives rise to several challenges. One is defining links between the social and economic dimensions of social exclusion. This is maybe a 'chicken and egg' question of social versus economic development, but it is a way to take account of people's actual situation and to improve the circumstances of those who are distant from the labour force or are not in a position to access the labour market. Another challenge is the tendency to multiply and 'mushroom' projects, and how to accommodate a diversity of services while at the same time focusing on priorities. One response is to give more support to the best projects in order to transform them into permanent services. Issues of sustainability and continuity of projects and of mainstreaming policies have already been mentioned. Developing new forms of local and community-based welfare in partnerships involving citizens and beneficiaries in stronger capacity building is a further challenge.

Finally, in such area-based programmes, there is a need for
− better distinction between different levels of participation and to define how beneficiaries are involved and empowered;
− a clear framework to enable the projects and lessons learned from this decentralised and bottom-up approach to feed back into the evolution of national measures and policy;
− data on measurable objectives, outcomes and costs;
− assessment by public agencies, which provide large amounts of funding to private (non-profit) bodies, of whether objectives are reached and how to use information from monitoring and evaluation to improve future policies.

As **Mr Feltesse** mentioned in his concluding remarks, the programme under review specifically addresses two of the EU's common social inclusion objectives: to promote community awareness of social problems and activate local solutions, and to promote dialogue and participation through local partnerships and citizens' involvement. The Portuguese case extends lessons drawn from Peer Reviews in Sweden and Finland, and participants learned more about how to mobilise all actors on a local level, how to tackle the need for better capacity, and adopt a tailor-made approach to certain complex social problems.

Annex:
Issues for discussion

The following issues were identified on the basis of the comment papers by peer countries and participating NGOs. They were gathered under three topics, discussed within three working groups.

1. *Area-based policy measures within the EU/national strategy*
   for social inclusion

- How should territories be defined, and what is the significance of this approach for EU policy? In the European Employment Strategy, for example, local action plans played an important role. Do similar schemes exist in other Member States?
- What is the link between local actions and national policies – for example the role of the minimum income? EU policy defines objectives, but local actions are diverse. This gives rise to questions about decentralisation and a 'top-down' versus 'bottom-up' approach.
- Economic versus social development: which takes precedence? EU strategy emphasises the key role of employment in social inclusion. But this is a 'chicken and egg' question. Some people are a long way from the labour market, and employment growth does not necessarily resolve the problems of socially marginalised groups.
- In some Member States, there is talk about moving from a centralised welfare state to a local welfare society, with the risk of central government withdrawing altogether from welfare provision.

2. *The component of a local community-based approach*
   for social development

- A new type of governance is developing defined through community initiatives. Yet the concept of partnership is scarcely understood in some countries, especially in southern Europe where development tends to remain the monopoly of the state.
- What kind of partnerships work best? What role for NGOs for example?
- Should initiatives demand management by objectives, as in the EU EQUAL Programme?

- Models of participation and empowerment: a word that does not even exist in many languages.
- What is the difference between social workers and development workers?
- How are partnerships formed? Who leads, and how are costs divided?

3. *Managing and monitoring community-based measures and local projects*

- Local projects place a large responsibility for managing public funds on private, non-profitmaking organisations. How should this be done?
- Central management: how to ensure policy objective is fulfilled; allocate responsibility for evaluation and capitalising on experience; promote benchmarking between local organisations; improve design of future policy; manage feedback in a top-down structure.
- Local management: how to improve capacity; what kind of technical support is required; what should central government's role be in supporting committed local workers.