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## Field social work programmes in neighbourhoods threatened by social exclusion in the Czech Republic

Peer review meeting in Prague, 20-21 May 2005

A specific and severe situation of social exclusion occurs when socially excluded people are spatially concentrated in communities such as city districts, villages and the like. Many European cities are confronted with this problem, particularly concerning people with a minority ethnic background. Such spatial concentration intensifies the absence of social competence of the residents, limits their access to different forms of governmental and non-governmental institutional assistance and leads to numerous types of deprivation among individuals, families and entire communities. More specifically, in socially excluded localities the chances of finding a job are limited, access to education of good quality is impeded, housing is of low quality and the infrastructure is in poor condition.

Several countries, particularly Central and Eastern European countries, experience this situation especially with regard to Roma people, who very often live together in localities which are spatially separated from their environments. This is the case in the Czech Republic for instance. But what is new in these countries is that the formation of Roma localities has intensified considerably. In addition to the above mentioned risks related to spatial social exclusion, the Roma living in such localities are usually subject to discrimination as well.

The participants at the peer review meeting in Prague on 20-21 May 2005 applauded the courage of the Czech Republic in hosting a peer review on such a complex issue. The peer countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the UK) and the representatives from the European Anti-Poverty Network and the European Roma Information Office learnt about the work done

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on behalf of





by the NGO People in Need in combating the social exclusion of Roma people. The peer review participants also visited three locations where the programme is being developed, in Prague, Kladno and Ústí nad Labem. The gravity and size of problems leading to social exclusion differs among these cities.

The programme that People in Need has developed since 1999 has as its main goal to increase people's social competences, help them orient themselves in the system, and work out practical and long-term solutions that will lead towards social inclusion. It targets clients who have been both socially and spatially isolated for a long period, and are often unaware of the services and benefits they are entitled to. The programme adopts an individual approach, offering a range of services, negotiating with the client on the basis of his or her wishes and needs, and agreeing in partnership on a plan of action that is constantly reassessed and revised. On this basis workers of People in Need carried out a total of 11,893 consultations involving 2,871 families in 2003.

The peer review gave rise to a number of highly interesting discussions. One of the debates concentrated on whether the social exclusion of Roma people should be approached primarily from a social or an ethnic standpoint. One side argued that not all Roma in the Czech Republic are poor, and that therefore the clients of People in Need should be assessed primarily on their social status, to avoid stigmatisation. On the other side, it was argued that experiences and policies elsewhere were much more successful once they identified the issue as an ethnic one, with discrimination as a major influencing factor.

Another issue that gave rise to discussion was how municipal authorities, which in the Czech Republic have funds available to run their own so-

cial inclusion schemes, can really be motivated to undertake actions. Support for Roma communities is often unpopular among the general Czech population, and is therefore regarded as politically disadvantageous.

Overall, the peer group found many positive elements in the Czech programme. They praised its design and objectives, and agreed that it was carrying out invaluable work in helping some of the most vulnerable people in Czech society. However, most felt that since it could be said to provide a minimum level of harm reduction it could only be usefully transferred as a whole into contexts where no provision already exists.

<http://pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en1.html>

## Peer review meeting on the provision of basic social services in rural areas

Miskolc, Hungary, 27-28 June 2005

Rural areas in Europe are facing a diverse set of challenges, which impact on their economic viability and put their population's integration in society at risk. Many rural areas are suffering a loss of population, since young people in particular tend to leave them. One important reason for this is the lack of adequate and sufficient jobs, which is partly the result of agricultural restructuring. Consequently, the quantity and quality of educational facilities and social services are decreasing in many rural and remote areas. The Joint Inclusion Report for 2005 therefore identifies guaranteeing equal access to quality services such as transport and social care, and the recognition of areas of multiple deprivation, as a very important issue to be faced.



With respect to these issues, the peer review meeting held in Miskolc, Hungary dealt specifically with an example of how to counteract the risk of exclusion by the provision of basic social services in rural and remote areas. More precisely, it reviewed the Hungarian village caretaker ("falugondnok") scheme, which was started in 1989 as an initiative by individuals in the context of cultural and regional development. Since then it has become a nationally funded scheme that has the goal of overcoming the disadvantage that rural populations face as a result of the lack of institutions, transport and other infrastructure. The budget for the programme is at present HUF 1.8 billion (€ 7.2m) and more than 800 caretakers in as many local communities are employed by local authorities.

The caretakers provide a wide range of services, and the key to providing them is a minibus. Caretakers deliver meals to people and institutions, take children to school or kindergarten, collect prescriptions from the chemist, take old people to the doctor, provide information on a variety of issues and even take workers to the nearest bus stop. The concept of "social services" in this case is approached broadly and pragmatically and includes educational support, transport, health support and even cultural development.

The peer review participants from Finland, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia – all countries with quite extensive rural areas – and the representatives of the European Social Insurance Platform (ESIP) and Caritas visited several villages and settlements in the Miskolc area and met with the caretakers of six villages, who explained their work and tasks.

It was interesting to see that the everyday routine of most village caretakers is rather similar. The number of additional activities, such as cultural projects, that are developed varies substantially

and depends on the caretaker's personal engagement and his or her relationship with the mayor of the community.

An issue that caught the interest of the participants and was discussed extensively was thus the relationship between the mayor and the caretaker, in view of the fact that the local authority is the employer. A possible weakness of this position might be that the caretaker is seen as the mayor's assistant and therefore politically dependent. Therefore, a clear administrative framework, defining different roles and tasks, is very important.

Another important topic of discussion was the question of who decides which services are offered to the local population and how. A strength of the present service delivery is that it can respond quickly and unbureaucratically to expressed needs. However, at the same time, the peer country participants remarked on the absence of systematic processes of needs assessment and evaluation systems to determine whether those who need services are receiving adequate provision. A major challenge is to combine a general, systematic public service approach with flexible, tailor-made solutions, which are firmly rooted in local life.

In the course of the meeting it became clear that contributing to the social inclusion of people in rural and remote areas should take an important place on the European and national social agenda. Although countries are dealing with the provision of basic social services in different ways, it is very helpful to exchange practices like the village caretaker scheme in Hungary to improve provision for those people who are confronted with the absence of institutionalised social services.

<http://pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en2.html>



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## Programme for socio-community development – Mobilising all relevant bodies and promoting the participation of people suffering social exclusion

Peer review Portugal, 12-13 September 2005

The mobilisation of local actors to address problems of poverty and social exclusion has been a recurring theme in the peer reviews since 2004. In Portugal, the focus was on support for community development through an innovative measure for support to social and community development that has been running since 2000, within the Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Social Development (OPETDS).

The Programme for Socio-Community Development comes under priority 5 of OPETDS, with co-funding from the European Social Fund, and aims to improve people's living conditions, make them more active as citizens, counter social exclusion and revitalise the social fabric. The social network for development (Measure 5.1.1) encourages local actors to work in partnership to develop their own solutions to specific problems including low income and bad housing, poor qualifications and illiteracy, domestic violence, and drug abuse. The Institute for Solidarity and Social Security (ISSS) is responsible for financial management, selecting projects, giving technical support and monitoring. Social and community development (Measure 5.1.2) is a complementary measure focused on training and skills development, managed by a unit of the Employment and Professional Training Institute.

Between 2001 and 2004, 157,000 people were involved in the programme (almost 60% of them women), and this number is expected to be ex-

ceeded in the 2005-2007 period. The programme conforms with the objectives of the EU's social inclusion strategy, notably in supporting vulnerable groups and areas, increasing community awareness of problems and promoting tailored responses through partnerships between local authorities and organisations, citizens and beneficiaries. The peer review participants were impressed by many aspects of the programme, including the strong community spirit and enthusiastic staff. They agreed that the projects promote integration within the community, and improve the quality of life for those involved.

Innovative aspects of the measure under review include the 'bottom-up' strategy for empowering local people to meet local needs. Peers praised the "flexible, adaptable and transferable" nature of the approach, and pointed out that projects also address specific demographic challenges such as ageing populations and falling birth rates, and promote interaction between generations. Participants also welcomed what they saw as the programme's emphasis on social development as a means to achieving social inclusion, rather than merely focusing on economic growth and job activation. They pointed out that not all disadvantaged people are in a position to access the commercial labour market – particularly those who are older or have certain psychological problems. Participants from the new EU Member States were especially interested in this broader approach.



The presence of independent social workers and psychologists in schools, to counsel and support young people on a confidential basis, was highlighted as one specific measure that could be introduced in other countries with beneficial results.

Some questions for the Portuguese authorities remain to be addressed, especially with regard to the long-term sustainability of the projects after

the initial funding period of two years, ways to collect data on measurable objectives and outcomes related to cost-effectiveness, a clear framework to enable the experiences and lessons learned from local projects to feed back into the evolution of Portugal's national policy to counter social exclusion, and a clearer definition of the principles of partnership which include marginalised individuals and groups.

<http://pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en3.html>

## Remaining Peer Review Programme of 2005

The table below provides basic information on the remaining two peer reviews for 2005. Clicking on a specific topic will take you to the abstract of the review in question.

Topic	Host Country	Date
Pathways to social integration for people with mental health problems – the establishment of social co-operatives <a href="http://www.pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en5.html">http://www.pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en5.html</a>	Greece	6-7 October
Minimum income and social integration – Institutional arrangements <a href="http://www.pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en6.html">http://www.pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en6.html</a>	Belgium	7-8 November

The papers and reports prepared for all peer reviews can be found on the website [www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net](http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net).



## Taking the EU social inclusion process forward

EU Luxembourg Presidency Conference, 13-14 June 2005

On 13 and 14 June, the EU's Luxembourg Presidency organised a conference on „Taking Forward the EU Social Inclusion Process“. The principal subject of discussion was the development of common social inclusion indicators. An independent report was written by the authors who had also written the academic background study „Social Indicators: the EU and Social Inclusion“ on behalf of the EU Belgian Presidency as an input to the Laeken European Council, which took place at the end of 2001.

The final report „Taking Forward the EU Social Inclusion Process“ can be downloaded from:  
<http://pr-soc-incl.net/nl/052en4.html>

## Round table on social inclusion in the framework of the United Kingdom's EU Presidency 2005

Glasgow, 17-18 October 2005

The annual Round Table Conference plays a key role in involving civil society organisations in the social sector in the EU strategy on social inclusion. It is one of the main occasions where politicians, representatives from NGOs, national, regional and local governments and European institutions can exchange their views on this process and learn from each other's approaches. This year's Round Table will take place in Glasgow on 17 and 18 October, coinciding with the International Day against Poverty.

Since we are half way between the Lisbon Council and 2010, one of the goals of the Round Table is to take stock of progress made towards reaching the Lisbon objectives and to highlight the areas which are crucial in achieving them.

The conference programme includes plenary presentations, workshops and site visits, which reflect the seven key priorities set out in the Joint Report on social protection and social inclusion.

For more information on the programme, click:  
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/eupresidency2005/events/events/5.asp>

## Social emergency and crisis intervention in large cities

Conference: Paris, 27-28 October 2005

The European federation of organisations working with the homeless, FEANTSA, is organising, in partnership with FNARS Ile-de-France, a conference on social emergency („urgence sociale“) and crisis intervention in large cities on 27-28 October 2005 in the City Hall of Paris, in the presence of Mr. Bertrand Delanoë, Mayor of Paris.

The conference invites all actors involved in social emergency at local, regional, national and European levels to share their experiences and practices in dealing with social emergency and to identify common solutions. It will be a unique opportunity to promote mutual learning between actors in the EU social inclusion strategy working and dealing with social emergency.

The conference debates will build on good practices examined in recent peer review meetings, such as the English Rough Sleepers Strategy and the Danish freak fouses approach, and on trans-



national exchanges carried out within FEANTSA meetings. Through an in-depth analysis of the situation of social emergency and crisis intervention across the EU, of the population concerned by such forms of social exclusion, and of the existing strategies and policy measures across the EU, the conference will try to determine the relevant challenges for policy-makers and actors in this area. The central question will be whether social emergency services and interventions aim to move people out of their emergency situation, or primarily aim to meet their immediate needs.

For more information on registration please visit FEANTSA's website

<http://www.feantsa.org/code/en/theme.asp?ID=31>

or contact Mr Philippe Tzou tel: +32 2 534 0523

## The position of socially excluded children in the EU policy process

Eurochild conference, Brussels,  
14 November 2005

Eurochild will organise its second annual conference to coincide with the publication of the first draft of the communication on the Rights of the Child by the European Commission. The conference aims to examine whether children, particularly the most excluded ones, are taken into account in the EU policy process, in what context they are mentioned, and whether they are included in the decision-making process on issues concerning them.

For more information on this conference, please visit Eurochild's website:

<http://www.eurochild.org/>

## Launch of LOCIN, the website on local initiatives to combat social exclusion

All actors in the struggle against poverty and social exclusion in Europe recognise that the local level is crucial to achieving results in this field. Giving access to a wide range of good practices on the ground is the aim of LOCIN, the European website on local initiatives to combat social exclusion. At present the site contains more than 170 local initiatives, information on national contexts, an annotated bibliography and the details of research centres in six EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Italy and the UK). The site also provides useful links to NGO, research and policy websites.

The website project has been co-ordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN).

<http://www.locin.info/>

## New head of the Social Inclusion and Social Protection Policies unit

Mr Adam Tyson has been appointed as head of the Social Inclusion and Social Protection Policies unit of the Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG. In this function, he succeeds Mr Armindo Silva. The unit delivers policy and analytical support to the modernisation of the European social model, in the framework of the Lisbon strategy, by promoting an open method of co-ordination involving Member State governments and other stakeholders through the exchange of good practice, the development of common indicators and policy monitoring and analysis. The peer review programme on social inclusion policies is one of the activities that fall under the responsibility of Mr Tyson's unit.



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## Comments and feed-back

We would greatly appreciate receiving your comments and reactions to this Newsletter as well as to the programme's website. Messages can be sent via email:

[forum@pr-soc-incl.net](mailto:forum@pr-soc-incl.net)

## Contributions

We also invite you to send us peer review-related articles and information on events and publications, which could eventually be included in forthcoming Newsletters of the Peer Review Programme. Publication of contributions will be considered in liaison with the responsible staff of the European Commission's Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion. Please send proposed contributions to:

[newsletter@pr-soc-incl.net](mailto:newsletter@pr-soc-incl.net)

## Subscription to the Newsletter

Wide dissemination of the activities and results of the Peer Review Programme in the Field of Social Inclusion is among its major objectives. Please do not hesitate to forward this Newsletter to people and organisations to whom the programme might be of interest.

If you want to receive the Newsletter directly and you are not yet on the mailing list, please send an email to:

[newsletter@pr-soc-incl.net](mailto:newsletter@pr-soc-incl.net)

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