



Portugal 2005

Panos Pashardes

Support for social and community development

Comment Paper, Cyprus



on behalf of



European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities





1. Introduction

The measure titled „Support to Social and Community Development“ introduced in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in Portugal is a response to the need to break away from a ‘tradition of centralism and bureaucracy’ and a ‘poor culture of participation’ by promoting: (i) local awareness of and solutions to social problems with emphasis on partnership, participation, integration, articulation and innovation; and (ii) local conditions for social and economic progress and social inclusion opportunities with emphasis on training, personal and social skills and the involvement of potential beneficiaries.

The measure consists of two sub measures, the *Social Network for Development* (SND) and the *Social and Community Development* (SCD).

- The SND sub measure is designed to start up territorial networks and consolidate local social work councils. Eligible actions under this sub measure include support to local actors and partnerships, local diagnosis/surveys, technical support for designing and implementing local action plans and the training to qualification of social development workers and agents. Its main targets are local communities and development agents and the project applications/criteria are local social plans/organisations.
- The SCD sub measure is geared towards participative and integrated local initiatives for vocational training and employment. Eligible actions are aimed at enhancing skills, mobilising local recourses and intervention from development agents/social workers, and include diagnosis/surveys, planning, monitoring, animation, project management support etc. The SCD main targets are area/local communities and disadvantaged persons/ families/ groups. The project applications/criteria are the development of partnership networks being an integrated project, promoting participation and creating conditions for sustainability.

Public and private not for profit organisations are eligible to submit project applications with a maximum project duration of two years. The two sub measures can interact, with the SND taking advantage of SCD initiatives promoting community action and participation, while contributing to the continuation of actions taken under the SCD by building a collaborative and participative social structure.



2. Analysis of the Portuguese measure

The Portuguese measure is an example of good practice emphasising the relationship between social inclusion and local/community development, and the need to combine economic development objectives and policies at local level with national objectives for combating social exclusion and poverty. The argument behind this approach is that improving social conditions is a prerequisite of economic development, as much economic development is a prerequisite for fighting poverty and social exclusion. It appears that the measure is well designed and implemented, with two separate institutions assuming responsibility for its implementation, with the support of the social security.

Most positive outcomes from the measure under review relate to decentralization and are of organisational/informational nature (improved local social diagnostics, more/stronger local partnerships, improved project management/implementation, increased inter-institutional contacts, streamlining of social work, definition of aims and priorities etc). Positive outcomes are also reported for beneficiaries, including personal development and improved self-image, more participation and improved citizenship and better access to information. Nevertheless, at this stage not enough information is available (other than the number of beneficiaries and participants) to assess the impact of the measure on quantitative social indicators. Of course, this impact will take time to show up¹ and even then one would not know whether the measure was worth pursuing without also knowing the corresponding impact of alternative measures that could be pursued at the same cost.

Is the Portuguese measure under review appropriate for other EU countries in their fight against poverty and social exclusion? My answer to this question is positive provided that:

- (i) social policy in these countries, as in Portugal, suffers from a 'tradition of centralism and bureaucracy' and a 'poor culture of participation',
- (ii) enough preparatory groundwork is accomplished to build the local infrastructure required for the effective and efficient implementation of the measure,

¹ Or, it may not show up at all in quantitative indicators not reflecting improvements in social inclusion happening in a diversified geographical and cultural context where each intervention becomes unique.



- (iii) the measure is part of a more general and long-term government strategy to ensure the continuity of policies/actions and, more importantly, the sustainability of results, and
- (iv) an adequate mechanism is set up to monitor the effectiveness of implementation and assess the economic efficiency of the results.

Next I focus on the applicability of the Portuguese measure in the case of Cyprus (government-controlled areas), starting with an overview of the social network structure on the island.

3. The social network structure in Cyprus

The three parts constituting the social network in Cyprus are the Social Welfare Services (Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance), the Pancyprian Welfare Council (PWC – a large umbrella organisation representing around 280 voluntary organisations) and the Local Authorities.

- The Social Welfare Services is responsible for mainstream social policy and the public sensitisation to social needs. It organises the actions to be taken and the procedures to be followed towards achieving the objectives in the NAP/incl. In doing so it supports activities by NGOs and Local Authorities by providing financial and technical assistance helping them to implement programmes. It also provides services that meet social policy objectives at the community level, encourages the establishment and maintenance of community welfare councils and NGOs, and undertakes social activities at local level. It does not, however, encourage initiatives at local level because the funds allocated to municipalities and local communities are earmarked for specific purposes.
- The PWC, as the institutionalised national coordinator of voluntary organisations, has a leading role in the activation and effective integration of the voluntary sector and NGOs to the total social effort in Cyprus. It is organised on a geographical basis with six District Welfare Councils and District Voluntary Organizations. It also operates at local level through the Welfare Community Councils and the Welfare Community Committees. All the constituent parts of the PWC at the district and community level adopt objectives and take actions decided centrally.
- Local Authorities in Cyprus have predetermined and limited responsibilities in the field of social policy, so the funds and human resources available to



them for fighting poverty and social exclusion are scarce. They are organised in the Union of Municipalities, constantly lobbying for more government funds to enable its members to assume a more substantial role in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. Some municipalities try to strengthen their financial basis by organising sponsored activities.

The main feature of the social network in Cyprus is that each of the three main actors described above is highly centralised and operating in an autonomous (if not isolated) manner. It is like having not just one but two (the Local Authorities and the PWC) social networks working in parallel, sometimes in cooperation and sometimes in conflict. The state appears unable to integrate them into a single social network and take advantage of the outcomes that may result from their activation in such an integrated network. The Open Method of Coordination contributes to improved dissemination of information, better understanding of the role of each relevant actor and mainstreaming of the major ideas of poverty, social exclusion and social inclusion.

Nevertheless, a substantial improvement is still needed for a proper social network to be created that can act as a catalyst against issues of social exclusion and poverty that refers to all vulnerable groups and their unique needs. At the moment it seems that conflicts of interest between the Local Authorities and the PWC are obstacles to the creation of an integrated functional social network structure. The PWC and Local Authorities are informed about social policy objectives and outcomes, provide information and feedback, participate in meetings where they can argue for their case and implement predetermined social policy measures but do not form, together with the Social Welfare Services, a fully integrated social network structure.²

Before discussing the relevance and transferability of the Portuguese measure it is worth pointing out that the 'general' risk of poverty in Cyprus is not as high as the 'specific' risk of poverty associated with small disadvantaged groups that are not homogeneous. For example, access to work can be difficult not by all one-parent families but only those not able to rely on their own parents/relatives to look after their young children. The same 'within group'

2 The NAP/incl refers to inadequacies of the social network such as the lack of cooperation and involvement of local authorities in the process of decision making and implementation and in general, the lack of adequate coordination of actions to combat social exclusion. Even though, it points out the importance of decentralization, the NAP/incl does not clarify how this can be achieved. Furthermore, it implies that for the time being responsibility for strategic policy decisions is best left with the central government, because local authorities, social partners and NGOs do not have the expertise and knowledge to undertake such responsibility.



heterogeneity is also observed among other groups at risk of social exclusion, such as the elderly, pensioners and chronically ill. The risk of poverty within these groups can also differ in severity between those who pay for their accommodation and those who are either owner-occupiers or live in rentfree/subsidised accommodation. It also differs between the elderly having close family ties with their descendants and those living on their own. Another difficulty in identifying the people in need in Cyprus arises from the fact that in recent years the risk of social exclusion is becoming less associated with low income and more associated with other causes such as family violence and drug abuse. The victims of this non-poverty related social exclusion may be in need of specialised services by adequately trained personnel and appropriately equipped premises for treatment and/or temporary accommodation.

This heterogeneity in the poverty risk calls for a more sophisticated strategic approach, with more refined objectives and more flexible procedures that can be better achieved through decentralisation, a point made in the NAP/incl report but not fully elaborated and, more importantly, not receiving enough attention in the section on strategic planning and policy measures. The heterogeneity in the risk of social exclusion in Cyprus strengthens the argument that social policy can be more effective at the local rather than the centralised level. At the moment there seems to exist a vicious circle in the sense that lack of resources limits social protection activity at local level, a result then used to justify low appropriations to local actions. It seems that an increase in the social protection capacity of municipalities is needed to break this vicious cycle.

4. Relevance and transferability of the Portuguese measure

It follows from the discussion in the previous section that it is premature to talk about the relevance and transferability of the Portuguese measure in the case of Cyprus, without first emphasising the importance of decentralization in implementing and monitoring this measure.

- Regarding *relevance*, recall that (the government–controlled part of) Cyprus is a small island without deep and territorially defined poverty and social exclusion problems. Furthermore, the local communities in Cyprus are very small consisting only of a few neighbourhoods and a small number of people. Therefore, application of the Portuguese measure under review to a particular area of Cyprus is out of question; unless the whole island is



considered as the 'local community' in the context of this measure, with the 'territories' defined as the existing Districts.

- As regards *transferability*, as said earlier, the Portuguese measure aims at integrating community/local development and national social inclusion policies and eliminating difficulties in reaching vulnerable and isolated groups by top-down social policy implementations. To achieve this, the municipalities and other local actors need to have adequate capacity, trained staff and financial resources. Taking into consideration this point and the current situation regarding the social network structure in Cyprus (described in the previous section), it is unlikely that the same measure is transferable to Cyprus without substantial preparation to create the conditions required for its efficient implementation and effective monitoring, the continuity of its actions and the sustainability of its results.

A possible starting point can be measures to increase the capacity/capability of Local Authorities to manage projects of this nature, including their ability to collaborate with private institutions. This exercise can be part of a more general reform aimed at the decentralisation of social policy, with the assignment of more responsibilities at the local authority level. For example, Local Authorities could be assigned the duty to identify the priorities for the NAP/incl, produce and propose community strategies and take specified actions to promote the social, economic and environmental well being of their communities. They could also be made responsible for the creation of proper tools and quantitative targets to measure and monitor the effectiveness of their actions. Eventually, Local Authorities can become community leaders, advocates of local regeneration and experts on social protection issues. Furthermore, they could be assigned the task of interpreting and implementing nationally framed measures (those included in the NAP/inc) to suit local needs, thereby becoming effective partners of the central government.

While a prerequisite for implementing the measure under review, decentralization cannot go far enough in the fight against social exclusion in Cyprus without bringing into the process the people in need, themselves. This calls for measures to increase the capacity/capability of local NGOs to design, manage, monitor and assess projects making the involvement of PWC an essential partner in this process. For this involvement to be productive, however, initiatives are required to create a framework within which the PWC and the Local Authorities can see each other as a partner (rather than as a competitor) in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.



As said earlier, the PWC organises its activities at local level, through its District Welfare Councils, Welfare Community Councils and Welfare Community Committees. Therefore, expanding the powers, responsibilities and resources of Local Authorities without a framework of cooperation and improved coordination with PWC can lead to a wasteful duplication, if not disruptive conflict, of social activity at the local level. One way to avoid such duplication is to strengthen the role of PWC as the institutionalized coordinator of voluntary organizations representing vulnerable groups by emphasising its responsibilities as the pillar of a thematic social network. Then, the Local Authorities will assume the role of the pillar for a territorial social network, with technical support from the Social Welfare Services. For instance, people with disabilities can be represented in the PWC by a committee covering the whole of Cyprus and promoting its activities at the district and municipality level not through separate PWC committees but through the Local Authority network.

Furthermore, before reaching conclusions about the suitability of the measure under review as a good practice for Cyprus one should consider how this measure relates to other in-situ good practices: the Self-employment Scheme for Older Persons and the PWC. For instance, the fact that the highest incidence of poverty is among older persons suggests that the Self-employment Scheme for Older Persons should be given priority. Also, like the measure under review, the PWC is considered as a good practice to get people in need actively involved in the fight against social exclusion. In short, the measure under review should be considered as a good practice (i) in addition to (not in place of) the Self-employment Scheme for Older Persons and (ii) in a manner strengthening the role of PWC, as described in the previous paragraph.

5. Conclusion

Major reforms are needed to provide the institutional basis for municipalities to become the territorially defined 'local community' for the creation of 'social and community development networks' in Cyprus, along the lines of the Portuguese measure under review. This, of course, is only the first step, and should be followed by measures/actions/initiatives ensuring that projects financed by the measure are appropriately selected and efficiently managed/implemented, and that adequate mechanisms exist to effectively monitor and assess their results. Furthermore, the measure under review should complement and strengthen, rather than replace or undermine insitu good practices.