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Support for social and community development

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The Hungarian National Action Plan has set a top priority on making extensive efforts to encourage social inclusion in all policy areas and on all levels of administration.

In order to develop the National Action Plan as well as to monitor the Joint Inclusion Memorandum, the Government established a Committee to Combat Social Exclusion, with the representation of all relevant ministries. The Committee will be responsible for the follow-up and evaluation of the NAP. As of the programmes detailed and targets set in this document all the relevant governmental bodies will report annually to both the Committee and to the Government.

During the preparation of the NAP, in the process of social dialogue the draft version was sent directly to many hundreds of civil and professional organisations. Many of the comments have been considered and incorporated into the final document. Our goal in coming years is to continue to expand and reinforce the involvement and participation of the regional and local actors, to initiate extensive professional dialogue to imbed the fight of social exclusion in Hungarian policy-making processes and public deliberations.

The state mainstreams the fight against social exclusion in all fields and levels of administration, therefore the goal of the Hungarian public policy is to employ a consistent and integrated approach of equal opportunity and equal treatment. To put this principle into practice, a Minister without Portfolio responsible for Equal Opportunities was appointed in 2003, and the Government Office of Equal Opportunities was established. The role of the Office was to mainstream equal opportunity and to reinforce coordination between the Government, NGOs and interest groups. The Office also developed and initiated programmes aiming to improve the life-chances of the Roma, of people living with disabilities, and of women. The change in the government structure in October 2004 allowed the social policy and equal opportunity functions to be concentrated in one ministry. The establishment of the Ministry of Youth, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities reinforced the position of this area within the Government.

To improve governmental coordination, Roma desk officers have been appointed in various ministries, as well as government level inter-ministerial Committees (Roma issues, demography, migration, drugs, etc.) are in operation. To promote social inclusion, a ministerial Commissioner for disadvantaged students



has been appointed in the Ministry of Education since 2002, and a ministerial Commissioner to advocate for the rights of children will soon begin working.

Special governmental attention needs to be devoted to the coordination of the NAP and the Structural Funds. Both in the Joint Inclusion Memorandum and the current NAP a priority attention was given to the ways Structural Funds can contribute to key goals, measures and actions undertaken in the fight against social exclusion and how the social inclusion agenda gets incorporated into national, regional and local development plans. Therefore, it is crucial to provide synergy between the NAP and Structural Funds both in terms of the implementation of first National Development Plan (NDP) between 2004-2006 and in the programming of the second NDP for 2007-2013.

A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the policy/measure to the peer country

The Portuguese program entitled “Social network for development” seems to be a well-thought-out solution in order to induce to participation the local actors into the struggle against exclusion and poverty.

It is especially significant that the program is operating since 5 years, since in many aspects a similar solution is drawn up for Hungary and the Portuguese experiences might be interesting for us. The bases of the Hungarian “Network” will be the so called Social Policy Round Tables that are organized right in these days in the local municipalities and on a district and regional and all-country level too.

The most comprehensive fora of dialogue between the government and the society in the area of social policy was the Social Council, which was founded in 1991. Members of the Council were representatives of governmental, non-governmental and clerical organisations. The Council is under reform nowadays. The new Social Policy Council will be organised at three – national, county and local – levels. Role of the county and local “Social Policy Roundtables” will be to ensure multi-sectorality (local authorities, civil organisations, institutions) in local social policy decision-making processes.



To improve local social service planning, as of 2003 all settlements with at least 2,000 population and all county governments have been mandated to design social service planning strategy. The strategy, which has to be developed with the participation of the NGOs and have to be debated in the Social Policy Roundtables, needs to be updated every two years. The county governments prepared their first strategy before the end of 2003, while local self-governments have to complete their plans by the end of 2004.

We cannot say much about their workings, but the Portuguese experiences are important, since the basic structure has so many common features.

The other program mentioned in the Portuguese document (social and community development 5.1.2.) is clearly based upon trainings and the development of individual capabilities. It can be compared in this respect to the HRDOP (Human Resources Development Operational Programme) measures that are in operation in Hungary since our accession to the EU. E.g. HRD OP measure 2.2., which aims the training of social professionals in order that professionals in the various sectors and institutions improve their cooperation, and thus improve the opportunities for rehabilitation and employment of their clients.

The Portuguese document reports that these two measures are attached to each other in some respects (in continuity and complementarity). This cannot be stated about the Hungarian measures. Since these very first HRDOP programs (that are co-financed by the Structural Funds) only start just in these days, we do not have concrete experiences and the same can be said about the above mentioned social policy Councils or Roundtables. So it is not possible as yet to analyse the attachment or joining of these systems.

The potential transferability of the policy/measure

As can be seen from the Portuguese documents, the basically centralized state social services are complemented by the NGO and Church initiatives. The Hungarian social service system is a special mixture of centralized and decentralized solutions. The state and the local authorities are co-operating in certain services, that is complemented by more than 40.000 civil organizations.

The different actors (civil-governmental-ecclesiastic) and the different levels (countrywide, regional, local) have a rather haphazard cooperation especially in



regard to the overall objectives. The Portuguese experiences can be especially useful for us, since we both stand before the same challenges, although they could start a few years (5-6 years) earlier to work on the same objectives of social inclusion.

Questions

The Portuguese programs clearly set several goals at once even in the cadre of one and the same program. At the same time they set the goals of supporting risk groups of social exclusion, training of participating experts and activists, mobilization of local actors and promotion of cooperation.

The Hungarian programs are very similar, and I have a continuous inner doubt: is it possible to respond to these goals at once? Sometimes I feel like I was a passenger on a train for which the rails are just put down right before it.

We did receive a relatively detailed report upon both the negative and positive sides of the programs. Among the positive ones I did not find very much reference to the question of whether all these programs did have some macro-level targets? I mean increasing employment, decreasing inactivity or any target that can be grasped by macro-level indicators.

Among the negative experiences I did find many instances that will certainly cause problems also in the Hungarian programs. Such are the limited management sources, the continuous payment delays, the extreme administrative burdens. As both the requirement of conscious monitoring and financial sustainability are present (if we want evidence-based services we need evidence at first), it seems to me, that in many times in EU programs the balance tips toward bureaucracy to the detriment of sustainability. Is this necessary and natural? – the question arises.