



Portugal 2005

Support for social and community development



Summary



on behalf of



European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities





Peer Review of the Programme for Socio-Community Development– Mobilising all relevant bodies and promoting the participation of people suffering social exclusion, Portugal, September 2005.

The 13th Peer Review in the field of social inclusion policies took place in Lisbon, Portugal, on 12-13 September, hosted by the Instituto da Segurança Social (ISS) on behalf of the Portuguese government. Under review was 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).

This was the third Peer Review to focus on steps to mobilise local actors to address problems of poverty and social exclusion. The peer countries taking part were Cyprus, Denmark, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, and Sweden, together with stakeholder representatives from REVES (the European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy), ATD Fourth World, and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) Portugal. Mr José António Vieira da Silva, Minister of Labour and Social Solidarity, addressed the meeting on behalf of the Portuguese government, and Mr Hugues Feltesse represented the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

The Programme for Socio-Community Development comes under axis 5 of OPETDS, with co-funding from the European Social Funds, 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** (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 ISS is responsible for financial management, selecting projects, giving technical support and monitoring.

Social and community development (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 rise in the 2005-2007 period.



The opening session of the meeting took place at the Orada Convent in Monsaraz in Alentejo, near the Spanish border. In the afternoon, participants divided into two groups to visit some projects supported by the programme:

- In the town of Beja, the Cal3 project runs a Student and Family Support Office (Gabinete de Apoio ao Aluno e à Família – GAAF) as a resource for deprived families and children at risk of truancy, school drop-out, deviant behaviour and pre-delinquency, with workers based in two schools.
- In Arraiolo, the Casa Solidarity Network (Rede de Solidariedades) has launched an initiative combining care for elderly people with vocational training for young women.

Transferability

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.

Underlining the mutual learning experience offered by the peer reviews, the group identified a number of innovative aspects that could be adopted elsewhere, even if it would not be possible to transfer the programme in its entirety. These included 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 welcomed what they perceived to be the programme’s emphasis on social development as a means to achieving social inclusion, rather than merely focusing on economic growth and job activation, pointing 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.

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.

However, the Peer Review also drew attention to some potential weaknesses or questions for the Portuguese authorities to address in the future:

- Schemes must be developed and services offered on a long-term basis if they are to win people's confidence. Since projects are currently funded for two years, how can this continuity be guaranteed?
However, it was pointed out that local authorities have taken over many of these projects at the end of the funding cycle, and the Minister of Labour and Social Solidarity acknowledged the need for public support to ensure their sustainability.
- Although the programme is currently undergoing evaluation, some members of the peer group regretted the shortage of data on measurable objectives and outcomes, together with precise figures on the cost of activities.
- 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 seems to be lacking.
- The principles of partnership need clearer definition. How do local partners work together in concrete terms? Great care is needed to ensure that marginalised individuals and groups have an opportunity to make their voices heard.