



Portugal 2005

## Support for social and community development

Comment Paper, EAPN /  
European Anti-Poverty  
Network – Portugal



on behalf of



**European Commission**  
**DG Employment, Social Affairs**  
**and Equal Opportunities**





## Introduction

The European Anti-Poverty Network in Portugal is a network of groups or individuals (more than 500 members) whose main purpose is to fight poverty and social exclusion. EAPN Portugal has been established in 1991 as a non-governmental organization, and its strategic principal axes of intervention are information, training and research as key areas of action.

### *Objectives*

- Establish / encourage an interaction (network) between grassroots organizations, groups or individuals who work to poverty and social exclusion eradication;
- Contribute to the definition and implementation of social action programs and policies;
- Promote and enhance the effectiveness of policies to combat poverty and social exclusion;
- Promote and encourage innovative actions in order to fight poverty and social exclusion;
- Lobby for and with the most vulnerable groups or individuals;
- Promote social integration and cultural, economic, moral and physical development for those who experience poverty and social exclusion;

### *Key Principles*

- Partnership and Participation
- Cooperation
- Innovative and good practices attitudes/ initiatives
- Training and continuous broaden information dissemination
- Exchange of services, knowledge and experiences
- Understand the fight against poverty and social exclusion as a mainstreaming strategy present in all policy areas
- Participation in social policy (through protocols and alliances with the State public services and different departments)

Since 1994 EAPN Portugal, driven by principles such as subsidiarity and partnership, started a process of decentralization through the creation of Regional Networks (18 regional networks at the moment covering the 18 District Areas in the country).



### *Regional Networks*

They integrate a number of regional development centres that can be called as anti-poverty nucleus which work to poverty eradication in a local and regional basis. This was the best practice found to fight the different causes of poverty and social exclusion at local and regional levels.

### *Strategic Objectives*

- Promote and enhance the effectiveness of actions against poverty and social exclusion
- Raise awareness about poverty and social exclusion, deepening the knowledge on these problems
- Empower people facing poverty and social exclusion to access their rights
- Lobby in favour and with the disadvantaged groups and encourage them to participate in policy decision processes

### **A brief assessment of the possible relevance of the strategy / policy / measure to the peer country (e.g. what social exclusion problems in the peer country it could potentially solve, the extent to which it fits the policy and legislative system in the peer country, etc)**

In general the overall POEFDS programme can be considered as an important and powerful tool in the field of fighting poverty and social exclusion. The need for a specific programme within the framework of the structural funds, specially targeted for employment and social development, **was one of EAPN Portugal demands in terms of building up a strategic view of intervention.**

The focus of this programme on the capacity building of the overall actors, the potential for mainstreaming and decentralisation and to create local strong partnerships able to promote concrete actions with a quite strong potential impact on fighting inequalities and promoting employment seemed to be - also according to different diagnostics (including some particular researches run by EAPN Portugal) - exactly what the fight against poverty and social exclusion needed.

**This programme also offered the possibility for a continuity line** between a previous initiative (Integrar) and complementarities with the National Anti-



Poverty Programme which, at least theoretically, could be a good principle in terms of policy making and cross-cutting articulation of different programmes and measures.

The possibility offered by this programme to, on one hand reinforce the capabilities of all the local actors and human resources and, on the other hand, to facilitate the promotion of different initiatives of job creation and qualification of different publics to better access these jobs was very much in line with the most clear and detected necessities.

**A brief assessment of the potential transferability of the policy / measure (as a whole or in part) to the peer country and of the likely conditions for its application**

POEFDS is an operational programme with a framework defined for a specific time and with a specific budget. At the moment **more important than to guarantee its transferability is to assure** its continuity, particularly on which concerns the Social Network for Development (5.1.1).

**This programme, even if we recognise all its difficulties, tried to introduce a bottom-up approach.**

The “short story” of democracy in Portugal is still giving its first steps towards a more open society where the citizens (no matter their social condition) can and effectively participate and influence the decisions which then will affect their lives and well-being. **Even the participation of great organizations of the civil society (NGOs) is not yet guaranteed** and it’s always quite difficult to get access to a clear, structured, respected and meaningful participation.

**The “Social Network for Development” programme can be a very interesting and powerful tool to promote and reinforce the participation of people experiencing poverty** and we believe that this good practice should be used as main tool to develop this strategy.

EAPN Portugal has underlined, in different moments, **the need of the necessary conditions for the mobilization and the participation of the vulnerable groups in its process of inclusion**. Since 2001 we continuously point out that its very important prioritizing and to have as transversal orientation in



all activities and projects, **the need to create adequate mechanisms of consultation and participation of the persons** that will be, in last instance, the main protagonists (while final beneficiary) of the social policies. **It's essential to consolidate the idea that participation and commitment of all citizens is crucial for the reinforcement and support of democracy and that democracy will never be deeply consolidated when poverty continues to be one of the main problems.** The quality of democracy depends in great dimension on the way and engagement of the citizens into it. So, it's fundamental to launch and promote a critical conscience, active, participative, dynamic and responsible. The continuity of such a programme - taking also in consideration the know-how gained until now - and its dissemination on the overall territory seems to be quite relevant for the concretization of this democracy development.

For the future continuation of this programme **we have although two main suggestions:** firstly it could be easier to manage a programme such as the **"Social Network for Development" if it wasn't so dependent on structural funds and its bureaucracy.** If the financing of this measure was more flexible we believe that in some cases it would be possible to achieve better results leaving more space for creative actions more adapted to the territories where they were being developed. One of the main obstacles for NGOs to access this programme (particular to develop projects under the "Social and Community Development" action) **was that it was too rigid and in some way too formatted not leaving space for the necessary innovation and adaptation to some more concrete needs (particularly with some specific targets).** Thinking about a future continuation of this programme, we would like to see an even more decentralized implementation of this programme and for instance that it could be implemented as a "global grant" delivered in an independent way by local actors and partnerships (like it happens for instance in the UK and Spain). **At least a small experience of direct deliverance of grants by NGOs or different actor's coalitions would be quite welcome.**

**A note of any important questions about the policy / measure that are being raised and debated in the peer country**

**Some of the questions raised by the experts in their report are very much in line with the major worries and concerns of EAPN Portugal** about this programme and in our opinion should be carefully taken in consideration in the further development of this kind of programme / strategy. **We would like to underline the following ones:**



*“The strategic importance of partnership for future social development requires knowing if these **local partners** have widened their views, changed their attitudes, enriched their experience with target groups, strengthened their links between them, established lasting relations with disadvantaged people or groups, increased their experience and their contacts and changed their perspective regarding social issues in their community”*

(Page 26 of the Report)

*“**Local authorities** are playing an increasing role in the social policy field. The „social network“ sub measure under review has succeeded in setting up permanent social infrastructures at the municipal level: Local Council for Social Development (CLASD) and Social Commissions (CSF) at the sub municipal (freguesia) level. A few questions could be raised in order to better understand these new functions:*

- Have these local social units been involved as applicants and implementers of projects under sub measure 5.2?*
- Do municipalities have the capacities, staff and financial resources to properly manage projects and make such initiatives sustainable?*
- Do they have the will and abilities to cooperate with private actors and local branches of public social services such as social security, health and social care”.*

(Page 25 of the Report)

**Attention should be paid in particular to the potential contribution of such a policy / measure to the objectives and strategy of the peer country’s NAP / Inclusion**

For Portugal, programmes such as this one **are strategic measures for the implementation and serious consolidation of a National Action Plan for Inclusion**. Actually and in the opinion of EAPN Portugal, we consider that this programme (particularly the Social Network for Development) constitute **an important tool to create the necessary conditions for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Inclusion**. The territorial dimension of social inclusion, promoting co-operation between public and NGOs, mobilisation of all actors, are important “flags” that this programme was in some way able to disseminate. **However we are particularly concerned if these principles, policy tools and instruments are in practice really being putted in place in a more concrete way.**



Since in the context of the National Action Plan **there isn't a clear system of decentralisation of its actions**, the relation between the strategic approach of this programme and the concretization of the National Action Plan measures is not clear enough. It's not always evident if there is a **clear connection between the central initiatives and the local resources and actions**. At the local level even the existence of a National Action Plan was not always well-known and therefore local actors didn't really knew they were taking part in a larger plan with a national (and even European) context. On the other hand, and as consequence of an existence of a difficult co-ordination it was clear that there is some contradictions between the existing different programmes and measures, which in the limit were acting over the same problem / population provoking confusions and difficulties of orientation and strategic planning by the different actors. **The danger of all this is losing some coherency in particular programmes and policies.**

Nevertheless we would like to reaffirm that this particular measure in the programme **created at the local / regional level very positive conditions for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Inclusion and it should continue to be in the future a strong tool for its concrete development and implementation.**

### **Key issues and main questions proposed for debate at the review meeting**

**The experts report raised already the most relevant questions for debate. In the opinion of EAPN Portugal we are particularly concerned with the following issues:**

- **How to reinforce** the community capacities, **particularly the capacities of people experiencing poverty**? Could it be interesting to **design and implement in a future programme a specific sub measure** to promote these kinds of actions?
- How to **better adapt the training and developing opportunities to the concrete needs** of disadvantaged people and families?
- **How to prioritize tackling the most severe situations of poverty** and exclusion and to provide projects and actions for **groups who are not usually the common publics or in the limit are "outside" of all the measures** and actions provided by these more "regular programmes"?



- **How to pass from a “project logic” to a “service providing logic?**
- How to avoid that **only the most involved and empowered actors access these programmes and impose their views and powers?** How to promote the access and the involvement of grass-roots organisations to these kinds of actions?
- **How to raise more awareness about the necessity of more open minded partnerships?** What kind of training could be organised in order to assure these necessary changes?
- **How to put in place local observatories** able to monitorize and evaluate the overall impact of these programmes guaranteeing the **necessary mainstreaming?**
- Would it be possible **to put in place at the local level mechanisms of “poverty proofing”?**