

ACCESS: Cottonera Community Resource Centre

Discussion Paper

Fred Deven

The Discussion paper mainly aims to provide

- “a balanced view of the good practice under consideration incl. the aspects of transferability to other Member States and its possible contribution to European policy development”
- “an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the policy as well as of its impact from an independent point of view”

In its National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006-2008, the Maltese Government refers to ACCESS as a project which expanded from the setting up of a community development team. *“The Centre provides a plethora of welfare services to the local community while also acting as a pivotal point for facilitating and empowering community development initiatives anchored on the involvement of community organisations and public consultation”*¹

At present, the policy and services to be reviewed apply to the Cottonera region, including the three localities **Cospicua, Senglea, Vittoriosa** (as well as **Kalkara**).

Part A THE POLICY DEBATE AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

A.1 The policy framework at European level

The fight against poverty and social exclusion remains a major challenge for the European Commission and for all EU Member States. Among the seven key policy priorities adopted several are reflected in the aims of ACCESS especially

- Increasing labour market participation
- Tackling disadvantages in education and training
- Eliminating child poverty
- Improving access to quality services

Eradicating child poverty remains among the key policy priorities identified in the 2005 Joint Report on social Protection and Social Inclusion. It is said that *“Particular focus is given to early intervention and early education in support of disadvantaged children; and enhancing income support and assistance to families and single parents. Several countries also put increasing emphasis on promoting the rights of the child as a basis for policy development”*.

The 2007 Joint Report on Social Protection and Inclusion highlights that Member States are stepping up their efforts to tackle child poverty, promote ‘active inclusion’ of the most disadvantaged

in society and ensure equal access to health and long-term care. The Commission welcomes the progress made but underlines that big challenges remain.

A more thorough examination of the process of poverty and social exclusion among children is a key priority for the EU streamlined Social Protection and Social Inclusion process in 2007. Many EU Member States responded already to the European Council's appeal (March 2006) for action to counter child poverty.

A.2 A summary of the related policy debate at European level

Various tools and procedures such as the recently established *Task-Force on Child Poverty and Child Well-Being* aim to provide the EU and its Member States a much firmer basis for developing effective policies on the social inclusion and well-being of children. All this work will contribute to the establishment of a baseline on the extent and nature of child poverty and social exclusion in the EU Member States. Indicators and other types of measures can improve the monitoring and assessment of progress made. This can in turn enhance the exchange of learning and good practice between all actors and stakeholders involved.

The 2007 Report also emphasizes that Member States need to back their commitments to reduce child poverty by taking a *multi-dimensional approach*, including improving access to quality education and adequate housing, facilitating parents' labour market participation, and protecting children's rights. For example, 16% of EU citizens remain at risk of poverty and 10% live in jobless households.

Since November 2002, the Maltese government demonstrates a strong commitment to give the early childhood years the attention and efforts they deserve in the best interest of children and of society as well (e.g. return of investments).

In their *National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion* (2006-2008) Maltese authorities refer to the following number of strengths over the past few years:

- an increased computer literate population with high Internet and mobile telephony penetration. To further foster such growth, a national ICT Strategy 2004-2006 was drawn up and is being implemented;
- an efficient and integrated financial services sector;
- *effective social inclusion policies*; and
- a relative low and stable unemployment rate in the labour market.

The Government also expresses its commitment to *continue to nurture a caring society* where everybody is secured an adequate standard of living and full participation in the social and economic mainstream.

A.3 European (and possibly international) comparative aspects

ACCESS, the subject of this Peer Review, can now draw on a full four years experience. It was inspired by a European policy debate which developed within the Council of Europe. Under the auspices of the new European Committee on Social Cohesion (CDCS) experts and senior civil servants from the Members States thoroughly discussed "Access to social rights in Europe". It resulted in a report² adopted by the CDCS (May 2002) and inspiring the Council of Europe Recommendation R (2003) 19 on improving access to social rights.

The work of ACCESS, launched as a pilot project in November 2002 represents innovative work to tackle real challenges in Maltese society. It can now be looked at as a valuable good practice to inspire in its turn the European policy debate.

For EU Member States operating under the logics of different types of welfare states (including different models of care and education) every practice is relevant to consider. There are indeed various ways to develop policies on services for children, parents and families. The choice largely depends on what type of Early Childhood Education and Care system (ECEC) is wanted and what type of rationale is followed. For example, are such services seen as private commodities or public goods? Do public authorities want markets and competition or networks and collaboration? Does a government want to provide for some children (target populations) or provide for all children?

The OECD Thematic Review "*Starting Strong*" provides a very rich source of information and inspiration (Country Notes + Concluding policy observations). The majority of the seven peer countries were involved in the 1st (Portugal, Sweden, UK) or the 2nd wave (Hungary, Ireland) of that comprehensive review work³.

At this stage, the Maltese government may be at a cross-road to decide under what type of services it wishes to develop for young children and their families.

If Malta wants to develop a universal, integrated 0-6 system, in which services are available to all children as a right and providers are either local communities or non-profit organisations, than they can learn most from the politics and practices developed by Sweden or Denmark as examples of a social-democratic welfare state type.

On the other hand, if Malta wants to focus on service provision targeted on the most deprived children then it can certainly learn from the politics and practices developed by the UK government in the previous ten years. It has developed a very extensive planning system to develop such services, but it is based on services for very young children (under 3) being provided mainly by 'for profit' providers, within an explicitly market system of a liberal welfare state. Local authorities have responsibilities to ensure there are sufficient childcare 'places' through developing an effective market. But places clearly continue to lack in those areas which are non-profitable for private providers.

France provides another model, as it has followed a split system (under 3 in welfare, 3-6 in education). It has used its very extensive family allowance fund (cf. CNAF) as a change driver through a system of contracts with local authorities to stimulate provision. It focuses on services

for very young children as it already developed a historical record of the pre-primary school system with almost all children attending it. Belgium shares the latter characteristic with France. As a federal state structure, the linguistic communities are responsible for services for children under 3. These communities contracted this responsibility to an agency that is accountable to, but separate from, government and who stimulates, sets standards and monitors the (universal) spread and the quality of service provision. This led to a considerable expansion of good quality childcare services in the country.

Till now, the EU till recently hardly operated in the domain of ECEC. It has set the Barcelona targets for childcare only in the context of reaching its objectives for employment and raising the rates of employability. Such targets do encourage a crude and fragmented quantitative approach to service provision for (very) young children. They are all about places to help working parents (e.g. mothers) to enter and to stay on the labour market. But they have still little to say about the overall concept of early childhood service provisions. At present, however, there is work coming from *DG Education and Culture* especially focused on pre-primary education (e.g. the EC Communication and Staff Working Paper on "Efficiency and Equity")⁴

A.4 An assessment of the contribution of the good practice to the European policy debate

ACCESS started operating and was opened to the public in November 2002. It coincided with a large Council of Europe Conference "Improving access to Social Rights" where the report⁵ was presented. Joe Gerada - member of the European Committee Social Cohesion (Council of Europe) as well as CEO of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services- was very instrumental in this initial process.

By now, it is highlighted as an example of good practice in the NAP/Inclusion 2004-2006 report. ACCESS is the link between the policy and the practical level of combating poverty. The Smart Kids centre within the ACCESS complex in Cottonera is hailed by the Council of Europe as a success story. It can now inspire similar initiatives around Europe.

A.5 An assessment of its transferability to and learning value for other Member States

Transferability is thought to be more easy or feasible if policies and programmes have single goals, simple problems, few side-effects, actors with high levels of information and/or outcomes which are easily to predict. As these conditions hardly apply to ACCESS it is consequently considered more difficult to discuss policy transfer.

However, as the Maltese government mainly holds a centralised model this represents an interesting experiment of social engineering (i.e. developing appropriate infrastructure, efforts to join up services, the management of various actors and stakeholders) providing worthwhile *processes and mechanisms* valuable to learn from as well.

For EU Member States operating under the logics of a different type of welfare state (including different models of care and education) it provides an interesting 'test case' to monitor how an approach which is familiar to them (e.g. to deliver universal and good quality early childhood

services) works out in a macro social setting which differs (strongly) from their own. It may reveal that such service provision does not need all conditions (e.g. infrastructure, staff capacity, qualifications) they consider essential to succeed.

The Thematic expert also considers some practices reviewed in previous years relevant for the Maltese ACCESS project. To start with the work in **Finland** on citizens' social support network models - HYVE⁶. It represents a model for partnership among all actors. It builds on local partnerships providing new forms of support and social services in partnership between NGOs and authorities at regional and local level. Within the broad national development objectives, local targets are specified through dialogue between all relevant actors. The mix of funds and pooled budgeting may also be relevant to the Maltese context. That review concluded that it is perfectly in line with EU pronouncements on governance and horizontal and vertical subsidiary.

In **Sweden**, Local Development Agreements (LDA) were launched with the aim of promoting long-term economic growth and breaking down ethnic and social segregation⁷. It's truly multidimensional approach requires the strong integration of employment, housing, social and lifelong learning, and economic policies. It targets the measures to the most vulnerable citizens and makes efforts to mobilize all relevant bodies. There is a strong focus on evaluation, development indicators and other monitoring mechanisms.

Also the project work in **Ireland** on money advice and budgeting⁸ seems relevant for the work of APPOGG. Independent, locally based companies limited by guarantee mainly help people to cope with debt and take control of their own finances. Clients receive one-to-one counselling from a trained money adviser, confidentially and free of charge. The management is made up of representatives from local bodies and NGOs, health boards and credit unions.

Another Peer Review discussed work and activities on "Support for Social and Community Development"⁹ in **Portugal**. As one of the peer countries, the Comments from the Maltese participant stressed the relevance of community based services in Malta and felt it is gradually becoming a more acceptable form of intervention. It minimises duplication of resources and makes maximum benefit of existing services¹⁰. Identifying partnership as a basic principle in community development, it is stressed it depends on the ability of local service providers or community leaders to see the relevance of networking and commit oneself in it.

In the **United Kingdom** the large Sure Start programme¹¹ focuses also on the importance of ensuring children the best possible start. The overall design aims to support parents in both parenting skills and employment, to improve young children's health and emotional development and by increasing the availability of good quality childcare for all. It is felt very important to support parents to ensure that they can enter or stay in the labour market to provide well for their families.

Local Sure Start programmes were initially launched in the most deprived areas of England. By mid 2006, about 850 children's centres covering almost 700,000 children were in operation. The British government is committed to create a children's centre for every community - 3,500 by 2010. Between 2004 and 2008 the Government is planning to spend a total of approx. € 5.1 billion on Sure Start programmes. The ultimate aim is to provide universal services to every community in the country.

Taken from the UK context, the innovative work of the UK Sure Start lies in its joined-up approach. The idea indeed is that local authorities, job centres, health services, childcare centres, local communities, public agencies, NGOs and private sector organisations all work together to provide services that benefit children and their families in a holistic way¹². ACCESS could also benefit from this comprehensive experience having developed a large number of Local Sure Start programmes (LSSP) including services and support for all parents to further good parenting.

Hungary as well developed some experience with the “Sure Start programme”. In 2006, it did not work as a separate service but cooperated with other established social health and educational institutions operating in the area. Agreements were reached with some institutions for them to provide experts and professional support to help ensure the effective operation of the programme. The first Sure Start houses opened in very varied organisational forms according to the particular local needs and the state of the institutions created to serve those.

In the UK Sure Start Children’s Centres are developed as places where children under 5 and their families receive a range of service and information and access help from multi-disciplinary teams of professionals. The range of services will vary according to the needs of the local population. But the basic concept is that providing integrated education, care, family support and health services is key to achieving improved outcomes for children and families.

For the UK Sure Start high quality care, education and play for all children, particularly in the early years, is the key to raising educational standards and opportunities, and enhance children’s social development. But to ensure that quality services are provided to children, a suitable qualified workforce is essential.

Finally, still at the risk that the type of welfare state regime (especially its models of care and education) differ too strongly, the Maltese authorities could turn to those EU Member States having developed different views of the role of public authorities, service provision and child welfare. Some countries may inspire ACCESS in the nextcoming years with their provision of universal welfare services (incl. childcare), leave policies (incl. promoting the involvement of fathers) but also with the often vigorous debate on the place of children in society and on the meaning of childhood framed in understandings of equality and democracy.

In this respect, it is very relevant to learn from the way Home-Start International¹³ is developed and implemented, among others in the UK and Hungary. Member States struggling with similar levels of (child) poverty, strong regional disparities in deprivation of parents or inadequate childcare provision can find inspiration. More recently, Agenzija Appogg as well initiated Home-Start Malta in the Cottonera area with 9 volunteers. A first year of experience seems to provide very satisfactory results¹⁴ to the extent that it will be expanded to other localities as well.

Learning from families with young children is the key message in the Home-Start approach in order to build social environments that encourage protective buffers, lessen the accumulation of risks and help families out of social exclusion. Few policies take proper account of the uniqueness of each family or provide non-judgemental services where parents can feel confident and have a sense of self worth. Parents being listened to by volunteers can easily point to services and professionals they experience as family unfriendly and identify gaps and inefficiencies.

Part B DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE POLICY

Note

It is felt that the Paper by the National Expert (*Host Country Report*) will provide here the most essential information.

B.1 Background

Malta's total population numbers about 404.000, including work and resident permits holders and foreigners residing in Malta. The TFR is 1.37 with a downward trend in the number of births over the past ten years. With a crude mortality rate of 7.76 (infant mortality rate at 5.9 in 2005), the Maltese population enjoys a high life expectancy (81.39 for women; 77.67 for men)¹⁵.

Malta's population is still young by EU standards but its population is also ageing at a fast rate. The proportion of children under age 15 is expected to decline slowly from 19.7% (2001) to 17% (2015)¹⁶. During the period 1995-2005, Malta witnessed a quite significant decline (17%) in the total number of children below 15 whereas the 65+ age group continues to increase (+28% from 1995 to 2005). Malta has had a long history of migration. Currently, the migration dimension in Maltese demography is gradually phasing out. The crude marriage rate was 5.88 in 2005. Divorce is not legal in Malta.

The economic position of Malta in relation to the EU-25 average stands at 68.4% of GDP per capita in purchasing power standards (Eurostat 2006 data). But the GDP growth rate stood at 2.5% in 2005 (EU-25= 1.6%). Public deficit has been reduced to 3.3% in 2005 (EU-25= -2.3%). In general, the education index (0.87) of Malta's population is quite high (UNDP-2003-p237).

In Malta, the formal employment rate is 53.9% with a substantial difference between men (73.8%) and women (33.7%). The unemployment rate stood at 7.1% in 2005. The share of children (0-17years) living in jobless households was almost 9% in 2005. To reverse this trend presents major challenges in poverty prevention. Maltese authorities therefore have prioritized for 2006-2008 "*the empowerment of the emancipatory potential of children and young people*"¹⁷.

The proportion of the Maltese population at risk of poverty remains comparatively modest in comparison with many other EU Member States. In 2005, 3.4% of the adult population is registered as long-term unemployed. All these figures need to be compared more in detail with those from other EU countries with similar macro-economic characteristics. Comparing Maltese data with those for all other EU Member States is more difficult but remains relevant.

Some features of Maltese society may be especially relevant to keep in mind in order to understand and review ACCESS¹⁸:

- Malta's "smallness" together with an ethos of centralised welfare service provision has necessitated that over the years policies and strategies have been developed and implemented on a macro, national level. An approach tending to overlook the regional specificity of certain social problems
- Voluntary organisations have a long and valued tradition in Malta. In June 2005, the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) issued the White Paper "Strength-

ening the voluntary sector” for public consultation. NGOs forwarded a series of amendments to the proposed legislative framework.

- The culture of information sharing is not deep-rooted in Malta. Differences in work practices, a sense of competitiveness and territoriality, delays triggered by the bureaucratic processes, staff turnover, conflicting interpretation of policies and laws, are cited as challenges that hinder the promotion of effective networking in service delivery.
- Overall, a mentality that the political authorities and public services “must provide” or the perception that I ought to ‘receive’ as a citizen still pervades parts of Maltese society. It goes alongside with a more passive attitude.
- Malta aspires to combat various forms of poverty and reduce the risk of social exclusion through measures that empower the emancipatory potential of children and young people, further mobilise community development, strengthen its voluntary sector and enhance its networking framework.

B.2 The goals and target groups of the policy

ACCESS aims to be a catalyst for sustainable community development and long-term social change through a genuinely collaborative, participatory, holistic and empowering approach which improves the quality of life for all residents in Cottonera and Kalkara.

The aims formulated at the onset of the project were to:

- provide accessible services that meet the social and personal needs of families and individuals;
- strengthen the community by supporting families and individuals;
- support and facilitate the work carried out by existing and future community groups, to meet the needs for which provision is currently lacking and to encourage more people to become actively involved in building their communities;
- work towards the social and economic regeneration of the Cottonera community, by complimenting that which is being done and which is being planned for the near future with regards to infrastructure, architecture and cultural heritage.

Or as stated in the Report 2002-2003 “The concept of *ACCESS as a one-stop shop for social welfare services reflects very well the strategy of Government of putting the family and social solidarity at the centre of its national policy*”. ACCESS is a concrete example of taking the service to the community “*while making it possible for the community to be involved in its development.*”¹⁹

The project was piloted in three localities (*Cospicua, Senglea and Vittoriosa*) as they had/have the highest population density in the southern region with a steadily ageing population as most young couples choose not to remain in the locality. They also have the highest levels of unemployment, among the lowest participation rate of women in the workforce, the lowest academic achievement rates and aspirations accompanied by high levels of truancy and absenteeism and

one of the highest percentage of residents living in substandard or inadequate housing conditions.

It was set up to address in a holistic manner the diverse needs of the Cottonera community. Within Cottonera there were already a number of existing services which were then incorporated into the complex. These included the Department for Social Security Regional Office, the ETC Job Centre and the Community Development Unit all based in Cospicua.

B.3 The legal and financial provisions to implement the policy

ACCESS falls under the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity (MFSS) except the entity Employment and Training Corporation (Ministry for Education, Youth and Employment). It is a financial project between Appogg, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), Social Security, Department for the Elderly and Community Services, the Housing Authority and the Ministry for Public Works and Infrastructure.

Apart from the formal structure of Board of Directors and Management Meetings joint staff training sessions and team building events are organised in order to facilitate positive working relationships among staff from the different entities. Internal referrals are facilitated by the fact that all entities are based in the same complex.

A number of joint projects are organised involving collaboration between two or more different entities at ACCESS as well as other organisations present within the community. The Social Security Regional Office has been most difficult to integrate. It tends to provide only the services delivered in other regional offices around the country and with little involvement in joint projects. This situation improved in recent months with the advent of a new district manager.

Maltese authorities clearly invested into this new type of services. Additional to the budgets the various entities receive from their Departments this new programme was allocated a budget constituted as follows

	x 1.000 Lm (1Lm = approx. 0.429 €)
<i>APPOGG</i>	<i>Lm 70</i>
<i>Employment and Training Corporation</i>	<i>Lm 20</i>
<i>Housing Authority</i>	<i>Lm 15</i>
<i>Ministry for Public Works and Infrastructure</i>	<i>Lm 45</i>
<i>Dept. for the Elderly and Community Services</i>	<i>Lm 15</i>
Total	Lm 165

B.4 Institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation (from planning through implementation and delivery, to monitoring and evaluation)

In 2000 a proposal was made for setting up a resource centre in Cottonera. A report was drawn up outlining the philosophy, aims, client groups, range of services, staffing requirements and cost of the project. This was discussed with key stakeholders such as the Cottonera Local Councils, the Social Welfare Development Programme (cf. Appogg), the Employment and Training Corporation and the Housing Authority. A possible site was identified, a manager was appointed to oversee the project and a building plan drawn up. Work started on the construction of the complex in 2001 and finished in October of 2002. A marketing campaign was drawn up to launch the project and make it known within the Cottonera area.

The project was spearheaded by Appogg Agency (sub MFSS). However, other Directors and Chief Executives were also involved, e.g. of the Employment and Training Corporation the Housing Authority, the Adult Training Centres and Social Security Department, and the Ministry of Public Works and Infrastructure (Scerri).

ACCESS gathers various entities in one complex with each entity having its own policies and procedures Smartkids, and the Cottonera Community Services (under Appogg) and the Adult Training Centre for people with a Disability all are agencies within the Foundation for Social Welfare Services and might have policies in common. The ACCESS Mission Statement and Vision, however, are shared by all entities.

The Chairman of the ACCESS Board of Directors (Mr J. Gerada) is also the Chief Executive of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services. Other members are the senior officials from the various entities of ACCESS as well as a representative from the MFSS and from the Foundation for Educational Services together with the Manager of ACCESS. They meet every two months and oversee the overall strategy of the complex and its various services and projects. A Management Team comprising the Unit Leaders of the entities meets every two weeks to discuss operations, joint projects and emerging needs and to update one another on any new developments which might be undertaken by each service.

Annually, an Operational Plan is drawn up. From 2006 on, a Business plan is also drawn up for a 3-year period. The implementation of the Operational plan is the responsibility of the ACCESS manager who reports to the Board of Directors on progress at each meeting. Staff appraisals are carried out on an annual basis evaluating individual performances as well as their learning needs and professional development targets.

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services delivered in other regional offices around Malta and with little involvement in joint projects. This situation improved in recent months with the advent of a new district manager.

B.5 Intended future adaptations to the policy

Meanwhile, the Social Inclusion Office was set up in March 2005 (within MSFF). The activities of this Office aim to:

- monitor projects listed in the National Action Plan on Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- devise and implement measures to evaluate the progress of such projects.
- give regular feedback to the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) Steering Group on social inclusion on the progress of these projects.
- work in close liaison with the other OMC technical teams monitoring the National Action Plan on Employment and other National Action Plans.
- keep regular liaison with government departments and agencies, NGOs and other stakeholders involved in the field of social inclusion, this also involves service users.
- carry out research on issues relating to social inclusion.
- draft reports and replies to questionnaires.
- establish criteria for and convene focus groups dealing with social inclusion.
- carry out necessary consultations and draft the NAP on Social Inclusion for the next cycle.

The participants of the Peer Review seminar may wish to look at what of these aims and activities could (have been) applied best to the work of ACCESS. For example, developing devices and tools to monitor and evaluate parts of the work, to commission or to carry out evidence-based research focused on core issues of the objectives of ACCESS.

Part C THE RESULTS SO FAR

C.1 The quantitative results of the policy so far

This part mainly draws upon the analyses and results provided by two (biennial) Reports of ACCESS (2002-2003 and 2004-2005), the Host Country Report as well as the information kindly provided by key resource persons. A number of paragraphs below are clearly inspired by their views.

All services keep various data and statistics that provide information on the uptake. Evaluation reports are also drawn up for individual projects. Besides the general biennial report most entities (e.g. Appogg, ETC) also produce their own reports. The MFSS (in collaboration with EAPN Malta) will consult service users regarding issues pertaining to social inclusion.

The Thematic Expert has little financial information about ACCESS. Noticing that the Government grant (cf. 23,000 Lm in 2005) did not suffice to cover all recurrent expenditure, how does the ACCESS Board of Directors overcome the yearly deficit? Does time of personnel or volunteers needs to be diverted to fundraising activities as well?

Overall, it needs to be reminded that the Maltese authorities did not aim for specific quantitative goals. They rather aspired to improve the overall quality of life of this community by bringing (existing) services closer to the people in order to serve them better and understand better specific needs. Through promoting a community spirit formal and informal services could also be better mobilized and co-ordinated.

An external evaluation of ACCESS is planned in Autumn 2007. In previous years, it is said that the Maltese authorities drew information from broader evaluation projects providing relevant information for the work of ACCESS as well. At present, for the sake of parsimony, we refer the participants of the Peer Review meeting to additional data provided by the National Expert and other Maltese participants for relevant and valuable sources of information.

C.2 An evaluation of the delivery system of the policy

Monitoring and evaluation of services increasingly becomes a relevant issue for policy makers, management, service providers and users alike. Yet, finding accurate measures and indicators of the effectiveness and efficiency (E&E) of services, not to say of its impact on various actors and stakeholders remains a substantial challenge.

It is commonly observed that clear arrangements are mostly lacking for monitoring and assessing the implementation and impact of programmes within EU Member States on an ongoing basis. Overall, it is felt that ACCESS still lacks a comprehensive set of data to thoroughly evaluate the service delivery of the various entities. We therefore need to turn to a set of issues and indicators quite commonly looked at whenever E&E or impact measurement is considered.

Overall, on the basis of the information available at present, the picture seems quite bright. On some issues it may even be considered very good. But about four years of work only allows to measure *short-term* effects. It remains too early for monitoring medium-term effects and outcomes, not to mention possible 'sleeper' effects. A number of crucial preconditions especially need time to develop (for example, building trust or confidence).

2.1. **Effectiveness.** How to consider ACCESS in being able to bring about the results intended? Needless to say we have to look at the goals and target groups of the policy (sub B.2). A number of indicators may be considered

- Outreach activities. Makes it possible (especially in community development) to target the most excluded and who may probably not seek help on their own
- Focused service provision. A regional community project operating within a particular area can better identify the specific characteristics and needs of subgroups of the population for services or other forms of help.
- Community based service provision allows to *identify earlier* potential needs and service users thus facilitating early intervention or even preventive actions

2.2. **Efficiency.** How to consider ACCESS in being able to perform its tasks and duties in the best possible way? The following indicators may be considered of community based services and service providers

- Facilitate *interactions and co-ordination* with NGOs as well as with informal support networks;
- Contributes to the development of *trust and mutual respect* between service providers and their (potential) clients;
- Offering services under one roof *saves time and resources*;
- As the Foundation for Social Welfare Services oversees the finances and also provide logistic support, IT support services, the establishing of maintenance agreements, this has improved the cost-effectiveness as well as makes more time available for project management.

2.3. **Impact.** This is probably the most difficult issue to assess. Again a number of indicators may be considered. The general Manager of ACCESS for example point to the following positive results:

- *Feedback from parents* is very positive
- a *waiting list* also confirms the high demand for the service.
- attendance for *parental skills seminars* is also high
- the involvement of *fathers* in the service (traditionally Maltese mothers have taken on the caring role)
- Smartkids as a new service offered by ACCESS is also having an impact as a training provider by offering placements to post-secondary students undertaking child-care courses. It has also been involved in the drawing up of quality standards for child care centres. It is still too early to say what difference if any, this service will have on the educational attainment of the children who attended Smartkids in the future. A tracer study would be needed for this.
- It has an impact on children and families. It has implemented a number of projects through community work initiatives targeting literacy and educational attainment. It plays a key role through social work support in reducing the number of children in care as children at risk can be monitored in the community and intensive work can be carried out with families to change harmful behaviours and improve parenting skills.
- the Reach project has worked with school drop outs and absentees for the past three years and is now showing some success in increased attendance rates and re-integration into school.

C.3 Other results and achievements of the policy

Minister Cristina (MFSS) made reference to the Smart Kids centre within the ACCESS complex. She explained that the Maltese Government was currently developing a centre built on the Smart Kids model together with the Birkirkara Local Council as the public is genuinely interested in quality childcare and Government, therefore, needs to continue to respond to this interest in an effective manner. *"Now that we have found the ground to stand on, we can only move forward. Childcare together with all the measures Government has taken recently in favour of children, from legislation to family-friendly measures announced in the last budget, all go to show that we firmly place our children at the forefront of this country's agenda"*²⁰

The Cottonera Community Service has also been influential in the setting up of Homestart Malta (support to parents of young children through volunteers). Homestart is privately funded but is

supported by Appogg agency. In a more indirect manner, ACCESS also counteracts the more passive mentality of service users. It aims to promote a culture of service user involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects and services. With regard to children, it aims to address their particular needs, to listen to them and enable children to have a voice²¹

C.4 An assessment of the obstacles and constraints encountered (and an indication of the factors determining success)

The analyses provided by 'significant others' point to various critical factors which seem to make a difference in terms of impact of effectiveness of ACCESS. For example:

- Programme Manager;
- Training provision by ACCESS as well as by the different entities;
- Networking between various service providers within and outside ACCESS;
- Outreach activities;
- Consultation with service users in project planning and implementation;
- Awareness of what is happening in the community and nationally;
- Standards of Care being adhered to were applicable
- Staff that are well informed not just of their own service but of other services within ACCESS;
- Insufficient human resources hamper the provision of good work.

The results and experiences point to the advantages of delivering universal based services for children and families. But the overall project work is confronted with problems of capacity and of budget. The current workforce seems to be insufficient in size and sometimes in specific skills needed.

Viewing that ACCESS is a gathering of entities in one complex with each entity having its own policies and procedures it is more vulnerable to divergences of views. It is more vulnerable as well for shifts of management or personnel in general. The unifying role of the Director therefore becomes crucial to safeguard the cohesion among the various entities, even if the Mission Statement and Vision are shared by all entities.

As ACCESS is designed to operate within the Cottonera region this may raise problems for children and families outside this area. Area boundaries may exclude existing services to some who may need them even more. Much depends on the amount of rigidity of applying these boundaries.

Changes in communities. An important aspect of the work of ACCESS is to network with other community groups and this is done through meetings with community leaders such as mayors, parish priests, and NGO representatives where possibilities for co-working are explored. It is said that the relationship with Local Councils has improved over the years.

Trust works out to be fundamental to parental engagement. Building trust is a long-term task for programmes, with cultural and ethnic dimensions that need to be taken into account. The overall project planning and funding needs a time frame in line with the substantial challenges and the type of targets set for ACCESS.

More generally, in order for innovations like ACCESS to succeed in other deprived localities in Malta, it is felt worthwhile that authorities and service providers would first consider to what extent three conditions are met simultaneously. For an innovation (ex. new type of service) or a new type of behaviour (ex. using a childcare service) to succeed it is necessary that the citizens are:

- **Ready** (it must be advantageous to the actors)
- **Willing** (it must be culturally legitimate, i.e. ethically or religiously acceptable)
- **Able** (there must be 'technical' means available, i.e. material, legal)

The adoption of new behaviours (e.g. the use of a new service, another lifestyle) may imply that the slowest moving condition (of the three) sets the pace of actually observable change. Adopting innovations is often easier for the well-off (cultural and economic elites) and often more difficult for the deprived with few assets or modest amounts of human capital.

Part D THE POLICY DEBATE IN MALTA

D.1 An assessment of the arguments of the different interest groups

This part is considered very relevant but more difficult to be in touch with for an outsider. ACCESS undoubtedly has triggered large interest in national and regional media in Malta. This important dimension of the work may impact on further policy developments.

To start with, the Thematic Expert already collected a number of *quotations* which he submits for further discussion:

- "The time for a piecemeal approach is over and quality services that respond to real needs depend on an integrated child and family policy, based on empowerment of the individual as opposed to dependency"²².
- "If we take a look at Malta's history, we are looking at changes in society that have started to take place only some 15 to 20 years ago. As a result, we cannot compare Malta to countries which have a much longer history in the provision of childcare, as the benchmarks will naturally be different. What is important is that we always keep in mind that we are talking here of offering a choice"²³.
- Certain pilot projects (e.g. ACCESS) have remained 'pilot' not because of their ineffectiveness but mainly because of the lack of funds to establish similar projects on a national level²⁴
- The advantages of addressing the needs of the poorer communities through community development are clear. By being closer to the real situations, by building trust and credibility with the local residents, the service providers are in a better position to design projects or other services that are relevant to the local perspective. It is a more favourable measure as opposed to a national strategy because a national strategy may fail to have a sensitive understanding to the history and culture of a particular community, which are present even in a small country such as Malta"²⁵

- From a survey commissioned by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), it results that nearly half of the respondents were not aware of what constitutes adequate childcare facilities, while 71% were of the opinion that the general public is not well informed of the benefits of childcare facilities²⁶.

D.2 Main questions and areas of debate on the policy (within Malta or at European level)

Stating the obvious, it is essential to frame the discussion in its proper policy context taking into account the specific economic, historical, political and social characteristics to recognise similarities and differences in each of the participating countries for comparative purposes.

Public authorities could better monitor and/or evaluate these services by keeping relevant statistical information and focused (customer) databases. By organising focus groups or seminars, they could also target community members dealing with service user involvement.

2.1. **Child development.** Research on child development has clearly revealed a multi-layered ecology of influences. Among others, the importance of responsive and stimulating parenting and quality childcare has been confirmed. This also brought to the fore the importance of the multidimensionality of the concept of child well-being. This supports the plea for taking the perspective of primary prevention by offering a decent minimum of universal support and access to (affordable and good quality) early childhood services combined with appropriate targeted services.

Research points to various factors most beneficial for children's development. All personnel (directly) involved with young children could screen themselves against the following factors and see on which items there remains room for progress.

- Well-trained staff committed to their work with children;
- Facilities that are safe, sanitary and accessible to parents;
- Ratios and group sizes that allow staff to interact appropriately and responsively with children;
- Staff development that ensures continuity, stability and improving quality;
- In-service training beyond formal education;
- Adequate wages so that staff are comfortable in their jobs;
- A developmentally-appropriate curriculum.

2.2. **Gender issues.** Although we commonly refer to parenting, a major gender bias needs to be acknowledged as the vast majority of care is provided by mothers. In general, it is therefore suggested that the policies, programmes and services also be looked at from a gender perspective apart from class and ethnicity. It can for example be argued that the situation of (poor) single mothers can work as an indicator of the overall situation for women within a certain national context. Which discourses are dominant about the role of fathers? A related issue is the gendered nature of the workforce operating in ACCESS, especially the early childhood services and therefore considering the effects of the feminization of care and education.

Research findings also point to a number of positive principles for programmes of support for parents. It is suggested to discuss the practices of several entities of ACCESS against each of these principles:

- A non-judgmental and non-stigmatising orientation
- A bottom-up approach
- Multi-focused and flexible services
- Integrated, community based services
- Inclusive of the experience of minority and ethnic groups

2.3. **Parenting programmes.** Historically speaking, parenting programmes have targeted their services for mothers. This was not different for Maltese society. Overall, such programmes for fathers are still in an infancy stage. It therefore remains a tremendous challenge to examine which type of programmes are effective in altering the way fathers approach their parenting roles.

2.4. **Quality.** This issue may be looked at by considering the common Triple A: adequacy, accessibility and affordability. These criteria may apply to a different extent for the various entities and types of services offered by the ACCESS complex.

2.5. **Political momentum.** In previous years, a good record of achievement can be looked at. At the same time, much work remains in progress and needs proper time frames enabling all actors to further deliver the goods. Till now, Maltese authorities clearly supported this type of philosophy and practices. This is a clear and opposite strategy compared to a very liberal welfare state such as the USA where persistent childhood poverty is estimated to cost that nation \$ 500 billion each year, approx. 4% of its GDP²⁷. The USA authorities tolerate persistent poverty alongside great wealth.

As new challenges and aspirations have been added to the (political) agenda it is necessary that medium-term financial sustainability be provided. The obvious need for comprehensive, consistent and continued policies remains. Can the Maltese political and administrative authorities keep up the commitment and investments which have carried the valuable ACCESS initiative till now? Or could efforts even be strengthened at the time of the 5th anniversary of ACCESS? It is certainly encouraging to notice that the Maltese authorities decided upon the start of a few comparable initiatives in other parts of the country.

¹ National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2006-2008) - Malta (September 2006: p.24)

² Daly, M. (2002). Access to Social Rights in Europe. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

³ OECD (2001, 2006). Starting Strong I, II. Paris: OECD Education Committee (www.oecd.org/edu)

⁴ <http://ec.europa/education/policies>. See also Eurydice Report "Equity in pre-primary" (forthcoming).

⁵ See reference Note 2

⁶ www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2004/review-11 (Finland)

⁷ www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2004/review-7 (Sweden)

⁸ www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2004/review.18 (Ireland)

⁹ www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2005/review.22 (Portugal)

¹⁰ Fleri Soler, C. (2005). Comment Paper – Malta. EC Peer Review Portugal « Support for Social and Community Development » (see Note 9)

- 11 www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2006/sure-start
- 12 see also extensive data sets on monitoring and evaluation of Sure Start www.ness.bbk.ac.uk
- 13 see www.home-start-int.org
- 14 see www.appogg.gov.mt – News and Events, 19 April 2007
- 15 Annex 1.1 - Statistical Overview in: National Report (2006-2008), see Note 1
- 16 UNDP (2003). Human Development Report 2003. Millennium Development Goals: an impact among countries to end human poverty. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press (www.un.org/Publications), p.237
- 17 see reference Note 1 p.7
- 18 see National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion (2006-2008) - Malta (September 2006)
- 19 ACCESS – Biennial Report 2002-2003
- 20 Press release – 27 April 2007 "Conference on the Quality of Childcare Services"
- 21 Biennial Report 2004-2005, p7.
- 22 The Times – Interview with J. Gerada – 11 April 2007 p.5
- 23 Hon. Dolores Christina, Minister for the Family and Social Affairs (Press Release 27 April 2007)
- 24 Statements and Comments – Malta. 2006 Peer Review Meeting UK Sure Start.
- 25 See Note 10
- 26 MFSS – Press Release 27 April 2007
- 27 Greenberg, M., I. Dutta-Gupta & E. Minoff (2007). From poverty to prosperity. A national strategy to cut poverty in half. Washington: Centre for American Progress (www.americanprogress.org).

www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net (selected)

www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/peer-reviews/2006/sure-start (UK)

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www.oecd.org/edu/earlychildhood

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http://mfss.gov.mt/documents/msp/nap_inc_2006_2008.pdf

www.childcaremalta.org

www.appogg.gov.mt

EU Documents (selected) (www.ec.europa.eu)