

# Promoting Territorialised and Integrated Services for Communities

Ana Margarida Canhão

## 1. Introduction

Like many other European Countries, Portugal faces several challenges regarding combating poverty and social exclusion of children and their families, which require new organisational forms of social policy through more focused, integrated and territorialized interventions.

Within the national strategy for social inclusion established in the National Action Plan for Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAPincl), combating and inverting poverty situations in children, through measures which ensure their basic rights of citizenship and correcting the shortcomings in education and training/qualification are 2 of the 3 main priorities identified. Within the scope of Strategy for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, several measures aimed specifically for children have been defined, namely:

- Reinforcement of social protection through family allowances, with positive discrimination of the families with low income and single-parent families;
- Investment and qualification of equipments and services for children and families, such as child care centres;
- More active employment policies reinforcing the support to families and consequently to the children included in these households.

The emphasis is on social inclusion policies which are well co-ordinated, count on the involvement of all levels of government and all relevant agents, are efficient and territorialised.

## 2. Portuguese Experience of Territorialised and Integrated Services for Communities

ACCESS is an interesting initiative which is being developed in the Cottonera Region of Malta that promotes decentralisation and efforts to join up services in one infrastructure with partnership among various actors and stakeholders. Targeted to the most vulnerable citizens, this community based infrastructure has a multidimensional approach through the integration of child care & family support, employment, housing, social & lifelong learning and economic policies. Similar initiatives are being developed in Portugal, such as:

### The Local Social Networks (D-L n.º 115/2006)

The Social Network Programme involves partnerships established with local authorities, deconcentrated public services, social solidarity institutions, other private entities and citizens, acting on the same territories, aiming at the adjustment of policies and actions developed by different local bodies, so as to promote social development at a local level, whose action is systematised in the respective Social Development Plans.

Locally, analysis are carried out at council and/or parish level, in order to identify the problems generating poverty and social exclusion which affect specific segments of the population or particular groups by making profitable the existing resources in the community and organizing responses for specific needs previously assessed. In addition, the territories which are at a greater risk of poverty and exclusion may be the target of an action constructed according to their needs identified at local level, through community plans, as territorial instruments of intervention which co-ordinate the policies and resources coming from different areas of intervention (social action, health, housing, employment, justice, education). It is up to these social networks at local level to adjust the national policy measures to local specificities.

By 2006, 275 municipalities had a Social Network Programme in place (out of 278) and had reached different stages of action planned. On average, 50 to 60 partners are actively involved in each local project.

### Implementation of an Integrated Attendance Methodology

In 2002 a working group was formed within the social network at local level, which included representatives of the partnerships with responsibility in local social attendance Protocols establishing co-operation between local partnerships, starting integrated attendance in key areas of social intervention. The main aim of this integrated attendance methodology was to overcome the overlapping in attendance/follow-up of individual and families with social problems (poverty, health, housing, employment, etc.) arising from the existence of different public and private entities with disarticulated actions on the same territories and for the same population.

Co-ordination and multidisciplinary teams were formed with specific training in attendance. Each family was assigned a case manager, according to the principle that each family should be the target of personalised and integrated attendance. The implementation of this integrated methodology is at an experimental phase, but it has already been evaluated that:

- The number of families which each professional follows has decreased, and at the same time, the social attendance capacity of each professional has increased significantly;
- The quality of attendance and follow-up of the families or citizens has improved;
- The access of citizens to services has become easier.

The Social Security Institute accelerated the computerizing of the family files and is assessing a form to ensure the generalised access to these by the professionals which participate in integrated attendance procedures. Due to the multiplicity of problems faced by individuals and families (health, unemployment, children at risk, etc.) it is not always easy to appoint a professional with the best conditions to be a case manager.

### Local Community Centres

Local Community Centres, run by private solidarity institutions and local development associations, play an important role on the social protection system as well as on the implementation of national social policy measures, since they have most of the services and social equipments for children, adults and older people.

These organisations are responsible for running most of the existing social facilities for children, families, individuals and elderly people, and for implementing national policies, such as the Social Insertion Income, the Social Development Contracts and the development of local anti-poverty projects. Social Integration Income consists of a special subsidy with an integration programme aimed at meeting the basic needs of households and promoting the gradual labour and educational re-integration of its elements. Social Development Contracts are intervention plans agreed on by several restricted local partners, which list several actions/projects to develop on a territory during a specific period of time in order to improve the life of its inhabitants and promote social cohesion.

The central government, through the Ministry for Labour and Social Solidarity, sets standards, funds and monitors the quality of the service provision.

### “Being a Child” Programme

This programme seeks to promote the necessary conditions for the development of disadvantage children and the family, and the social and educational reintegration of children at risk of exclusion. It forms part of a context of prevention and early action and has the following main objectives:

- To facilitate the balanced development of children and the improvement of parental and family competence;
- To promote family and social reintegration;
- To improve children's and families' self image;
- To promote the systematic detection of children at risk and children suffering from disabling conditions as well as their causes.

It is based on different strategies, such as the development of new social responses, an awareness and development of action-research methodologies, the qualification and training of agents of social involvement in the area of at-risk children and young people. The body responsible for managing this programme is the Institute of Social Security.

Community and integrated based services minimises duplication of resources, makes maximum benefit of existing services but the quality of partnership depends on the ability of local service providers to see the relevance of networking and committing oneself to it. Several obstacles have been identified during the implementation of these territorialised initiatives in Portugal:

- Persistent of closed organisational cultures and some reluctance among agencies and organisations to engage with other agencies to develop integrated service responses;
- Limited implementation of shared information management systems precluding the sharing of common data across agencies and the development of responses tailored to individual and local needs;
- Some professional reluctance to such innovative practices and to a culture of information-sharing;
- Variations in practice between regions and municipalities;

### 3. Key Questions

Considering that an external evaluation of ACCESS is planned in 2007:

1. Which external entity is going to carry out the evaluation?
2. Which development indicators and other monitoring mechanisms will be used to evaluate the effectiveness & efficiency of service provision in ACCESS?
3. Who is going to participate in the evaluation process? Will service users be included in that process? How will they be included?