

# The Programme for developing local plans for social inclusion in Catalonia

Sarka Polova  
IQ Roma servis

## 1. Relevance of the Programme for developing local plans for social inclusion in Catalonia to the Czech Republic

*Brief overview on the Social Inclusion issues and its planning at the national and local level in the Czech Republic*

Currently there is no such a system of local planning in the Czech Republic which would handle the issues of poverty and social exclusion from a holistic point of view. For the present, there is no such positive experience with an open dialogue that can foster the culture of political participation and encourage the political willingness to promote the local planning of social inclusion.

Since the Czech Republic is a country with one of the lowest income poverty rate<sup>1</sup> in the European Union, poverty and social inclusion issues and their policy solutions are not burning topics of the political and public discourse, mainstreaming of social inclusion issues is still underdeveloped and creation of effective networks of relevant stakeholders for planning and implementation of social inclusion policies still remains a challenge.

Within the ongoing EY 2010 the Czech Government has launched a National Program of European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, which includes four main targets for social policy strategy for this year. Mobilisation of the public administration for creating and assessment of regional and local action plans for combating poverty and social exclusion is one of the key issues, which should stress the importance and promote the development of the Open Method of Coordination in Czech social policy.

The Czech regional and local government administrative system is quite different from the Spanish model,<sup>2</sup> particularly when it comes to the degree of autonomy given to the local authorities. Although the basic assumption of dealing with the social exclusion on the level where it takes place is valid also in the Czech Republic, it is also still necessary to have a strong strategic document on social inclusion on the national level, which outlines the main trends and help to tackle the legislative and system barriers that could not be affected from the local level.

---

<sup>1</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty rate (according to EU methodology) in 2009 was 9% (CZSO 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Public administration is divided into 14 regional authorities and 205 municipalities with the extended power execution (among other things, they are responsible for the social benefit payments, social and legal protection of children and care of the elderly and disabled people).

In the Czech Republic there were already implemented three National Action Plans for Social Inclusion. These plans were created in frame of work of the Commission for Social Inclusion which is interdepartmental body including also representatives of different stakeholder level (municipalities association, county councils association, NGOs, academic sphere etc.). It has in total 45 members and its agenda is handled by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

However, National Action Plan of Social inclusion, as a main tool of OMC in Member States, does not fulfil the expected umbrella-document role. In addition, its present creation, implementation and assessment were executed formally. The Commission for Social Inclusion, as a responsible authority, does not have efficient political mandate, which corresponds to the lack of awareness of its existence and of the content of the document among the relevant agents (especially at the local level).

The follow-up system of local planning of social inclusion policies in the Czech Republic has no financial and methodological support from the national level.

As for the existence of local plans aimed at social inclusion targets, there is a stable system of Community Planning of Social Services processes at the regional and local (municipality) level which is anchored in the Czech law and which has significantly helped to improve planning and implementation of social services in the country. However, the scope of planned activities is limited and doesn't include important areas as education, employment or health care.

#### *Similarities with the 'Programme':*

- Despite the above stated facts, several serious attempts<sup>3</sup> to create an overall local plan for social inclusion could be observed in the Czech Republic. Their development was facilitated by the European Union financial mechanism (PROGRESS), through projects based on international cooperation and sharing of know-how. In the cases which can already be evaluated, in spite of financial and methodological support, the process of planning merged in the concurrent community planning procedure and then failed to bring any innovation and progress in the social inclusion policy planning at the local level.
- The community planning processes start with preparation of Diagnosis (analysis) of the current situation in the sphere of social services. Nevertheless, apparently in most cases the diagnosis is focused on the mere needs analysis of social service beneficiaries and of the providers and is carried out by outsourced authorities, which often leads to formality of the process and doesn't allow to apply multidimensional approach to social inclusion policies.

#### *Differences:*

- The concept of community planning in the Czech Republic has been deployed for several years in a large number of municipalities in the country. However, its focus on social services determines its limited impact on the holistically conceived situation of poverty and social

---

<sup>3</sup> Karviná (62,000 inhabitants), Havlíčkův Brod (23,000 inhab.), Olomouc region (640,000 inhab.)

exclusion. The Plan is approved by Municipal Council and this procedure provides the Plan with essential political relevancy.

- Several attempts to stimulate different agents and assure their active participation in the development of the local plan can be observed. However, the dialog with other areas of local politics and cross-cutting perspective is limited and accidental. Although the process is managed and controlled by the local authorities, the participation of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion (a compulsory part of the process) is formal and weak. The weakest part so far seems to be the processes of monitoring of implementation of these local plans and their assessment.
- The process faces the lack of effective technical structure, there is no adequate capacity (in terms of professional staff and stakeholders involved) to maintain the process of planning through the subsequent phases of evaluation and updating of the plan.

## 2. Assessment of potential transferability of the Programme to the Czech Republic. Specific issues that could be useful.

It should be noted that as for the political and financial support of the process of local planning on social inclusion in Catalonia, such an approach has not been observable in the Czech Republic yet. Along with the commitment for active involvement of all relevant stakeholders, these features of the Programme (financial and political support from the 'top') could be regarded both as the strongest and the weakest part for their transferability into the Czech context. During the period of budget cuts, its financial and personal (and also 'time') costs make the Programme hardly enforceable.

However, networking of relevant stakeholders and placing a strong emphasis on managing role of local civil servants makes the 'Programme for Developing Local Plans for Social Inclusion in Catalonia' inspiring tool of tackling planning and implementation of effective social inclusion for the Czech context.

Taking into account the description and experience of the 'Programme', one of the key issues that are advisable to be further developed in the Czech Republic is assuring of stronger political support and existence of such multidimensional approach in planning and execution of social inclusion policies at the local level. As stated above, the Czech Republic lacks local plans that conceive poverty and social exclusion as a complex and structural phenomenon which requires a comprehensive solution and therefore an involvement of different area agents (not only social services stakeholders).

One of the ways for gaining plausibility and ensuring a real target achievement could be attained by building a clear organisational structure similar to the presented 'Programme'. Direct linkage of such kind of 'Technical Offices' (or department of responsible civil servants) with the mayor's office would strengthen the role of the process and facilitate the effective collaboration with the politicians from different areas. Consequently, it would require the expanding of the staff capacity in the sense of number as well as expert competences and would bring additional financial costs.

For the same purpose and under the same conditions it is necessary to initiate continuous work with the citizenry and active communication of the social inclusion policy issues within the local community and foster the participation of the target groups of social inclusion policy by regular meetings during all phases of the process.

### **3. Important questions about programmes/plans for social inclusion at local level that are being raised in the Czech Republic.**

The debate over the local level social inclusion planning must begin at the national level, since, despite the certain autonomy of regions and municipalities in the Czech Republic, shortcomings in the national sphere impede the success at the local level.

National Action Plan of Social Inclusion (NAP) has been implemented in the Czech Republic for the third time. There are several weak points of the Czech NAPs that are constantly being criticised by both the European Union level and the relevant stakeholders at the national and local level.

- First of all, NAPs do not operate as umbrella documents; consequently, there are several resort strategic documents which are not mutually compatible.
- Another burning issue is assuring of political support by direct involvement and commitment of politicians and the linkage of the local plans with the national strategies (especially NAPs – see also part 1).
- The critical comments on NAPs and efforts to create LAPs well demonstrate the persistent lack of adequate participation of all relevant stakeholders – such as local politicians, service providers and most of all people experiencing social exclusion.<sup>4</sup> Creation of the methods of work with the groups of stakeholders which would assure their active involvement and understanding of the process remains one of the most challenging issues. It concerns not only clarification of expectations to all agents involved but also a continuous open dialog from the very beginning, a comprehensive setting of the plan and their targets and sensitive usage of language that makes the process accessible and interesting for all stakeholders.
- National and consequently local plans miss a clear determination of actual top priorities and elaboration of action plan with SMART targets and their appropriate indicators. Not only in the Czech context the most neglected part of planning process remains its assessment which

---

<sup>4</sup> Ongoing project of networking of the Czech NGOs aims at the promotion of the creation of national and local actions plans based on the process of participation of relevant stakeholders. By arranging several workshops with local stakeholders, needs analysis research (conducted in 12 municipalities in the Czech Republic) and organising meeting of people experiencing poverty, they attempt to collect the suggestions from all agents involved to create a base for the further action plan purposes and will be presented to the Commission for Social Inclusion, the interdepartmental body responsible for the NAPs development, which preliminary agreed to use these data (project title: NAPSI SPOLU! – NAPSI TOGETHER, funded by The European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (PROGRESS), implementation: 2009-2010).

would allow a clear identification of un/successful and in/efficient socially inclusive tools and bring the financial and political legitimacy to the social inclusion policy measures.

During the current planning procedure, there is no sufficient space for defining effective measures, matching concrete tools for concrete targets and identifying responsible agents.

- Last but not least there remains the question of financial resources for financing the process of planning and their implementation (realisation of social inclusion policy tools), which are prevalently promoted by the European Union structural funds. This currently functional but narrow-sighted approach threatens long-term sustainability of the processes and social inclusion policy as well as weakens the commitment of responsible actors at the national and local level.