

PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social exclusion is a multidimensional process which weakens the links between individuals and the rest of society. These links can take on an economic, political, socio-cultural, and a spatial perspective. The more dimensions by which a person is excluded, the more vulnerable this person becomes. The characteristics of exclusion are linked to accessing labour markets, basic services and social networks. Thus, depending on the general level of development of an economy, the following dimensions can be of relevance: exclusion from goods and services, from labour market, from security and from human rights.

The Project consists of five subcomponents:

- improving coordination and co-operation of all stakeholders (horizontal and vertical)
- improving employability as a precondition for enhancing social inclusion
- enhancing information and accessibility to the rights in the social welfare system and insurance
- palliating and prevention of over-indebtedness
- adjustment of the demand and supply in the welfare system through social planning on lower level of government.

1 Improving coordination and co-operation

Croatia started the elaboration, drafting and implementation of the various documents and strategies for full participation in the open model of coordination in fighting poverty and social exclusion in the EU accession process. For preparation and implementation of these documents working groups were formed consisting of representatives of line ministries and other state bodies, local authorities, civil society organizations, labour unions and employers' associations.

In social welfare and insurance system in Croatia one can find insufficient coordination and co-operation of social stakeholders at the various levels. It could be caused by, but also be result of the lack of empathy and/or low level of interest of community and various stakeholders for the problems of social exclusion and the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, there are the cases of insufficient clear division of authority and responsibility, what undermines the quality, coverage and accessibility to required goods and services.

All mentioned causes a situation that some service users are "lost" in the system. The problems faced by users of social care services often require a multi agency response. There are currently no mechanisms to facilitate multi agency planning at the local level. Thus, it is extremely important to develop and/or improve the cooperation between state and non governmental organizations in both capacities - as representatives or voice of socially excluded and marginalised group, and as social care providers - in the implementation of the various programmes for preventing and/or reducing the social exclusion.

2 Improving employability

Employability is not simply the capacity for *getting a job*. It involves ensuring that people can adapt to the changing working environment, develop and build their capabilities and meet their career goals. Employability is a main outcome of education and training of high quality, as well

as a range of other policies. Employability encompasses the skills, knowledge and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change, secure another job if she/he so wishes or has been laid off, and enter more easily into the labour market at different periods of the life cycle. Best protection against unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, is one's own employability. Thus, person can with further education and acquiring new knowledge and skills improving his or her employability. Generally, the causes of social exclusion in Croatia are very often linked with low employability, limited employment possibilities and low educational endowments and/or narrowly formed skills.

3 Information and accessibility to the rights

Social services are intended to those individuals who are faced with life difficulties or those who, due to physical and mental handicaps, have specific needs that they cannot satisfy alone or with assistance of their family. It is necessary to develop services that will be better suited to the needs of the various user groups (including the possibility of choice) and to expand the social services network so that they better cover all areas of Croatia.

Knowledge of the available services and rights significantly varied. In some user groups and/or regions and municipalities knowledge of the available services and rights was limited to an awareness of the existence of these services and rights but there was a lack of information as to what exactly was provided by them. The goal of this subcomponent of the Project is to help in defining and/or improving the fairness of provision in relation to need by the developing clear eligibility criteria and insure provision of accessible information about the provision of services. Furthermore, it is necessary to collect the knowledge and opinion of all stakeholders for proposing the improvement in legal provisions aimed at increased the quality and accessibility of social services. Finally, the idea is to participate into the process of preparation of the successful service performance criteria and development of the good practice standards.

4. Palliating and prevention of over-indebtedness

There is a based assumption that over-indebtedness of the population is one of the most important determinants of social exclusion. According to UNDP Survey, every fifth Croatian household (22%) was unable to pay for its accommodation or utilities as scheduled. Less than a tenth of the households (6.7%) were indebted because of their inability to pay for accommodation, while every fifth household did not pay for utilities on time.

5. Social planning on the lower level of government

There is a concern that social care services in Croatia are not necessarily targeted to those most in need. Reasons for this situation are manifold: the current data collection system and organisation are largely concerned with the measurement and of and orientation to outputs e.g. how many of the various types of cash/in kind benefits were provided, how many counselling sessions were delivered, how many people were in residence each year etc, while the insight into achieved outcomes is missing; also, it is difficult to obtain reliable information on the level of utilisation of existing social care services.

In order to plan effectively, it is essential to have a clear picture of the current resource base and a prognosis of the likely increase/reduction in spending at the local, county and national level. Through social planning is possible to realise better identification of local needs, involvement of beneficiaries and local communities and the development of new services that are adjusted to need. In relation to service delivery social planning is an opportunity to increase the quality, efficiency, diversity and inclusiveness of services.

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- Institute of Public Finance, Zagreb – public institution
- The Croatian Employment Service – public service
- ZaMirNet – citizen association
- The Union of Autonomous Trade Union of Croatia
- Forum of European Journalism Students – NGO
- Most – NGO for improving the quality of life
- Shine – The Association of People with Mental Disabilities
- Women's Network Croatia
- Association of Physically Disabled
- The Association of Free Trade Union of Slovenia
- The Austrian Trade Union Federation

Expected activities and outcomes

For all mentioned activities in the five subcomponents there is a need for increase the awareness of general public about the problem of social exclusion. Among others, planned related activities are:

- organisation of various workshops, round tables and seminars on social exclusion, indebtedness, as well as counselling services on financial planning and financial management;
- to propose simple, user-friendly and understandable guides: how to manage personal finances and avoid indebtedness, how to obtain rights in social welfare system, how to improve one's employability etc.

As each other country, Croatia has to find and develop constitutional and legal arrangements for reducing social exclusion that best suit its own historical, social, cultural and economic situations, conditions and possibilities. Government could provide stabile legal framework, social infrastructure and with the co-operation of its citizens establish the rule of law. Otherwise, socially excluded will suffer most from the lack of clear laws and unwillingness of society in disrespect of laws. In order to make the laws work, political will and leadership commitment is vital. Just as important is the empowerment of citizens and their full participation in the political process.