



Integrated approaches to combating poverty and social exclusion

Best practices from EU Member States

Brief summary of the best practice

Following the successful EU-funded LEAP pilot project, locally-based Family Resource Centres and Regional Development Centres were set up with the aim of providing a point of reference within the community through the provision of various forms of social support. These centres also aim to foster more inclusive communities through the empowerment and participation of disadvantaged groups, and collaborative networking among stakeholders with the aim of combating poverty and social exclusion.

Which elements make this an integrated approach?

LEAP centres present a community one-stop shop offering multiple services, varying from information, professional advice and support in a number of areas, such as employment, access to training and child day care, to social work and community services with an outreach component for a comprehensive response to the needs of surrounding communities.

Through the LEAP project, a wide participation of local stakeholders was and is continuously promoted in order to ensure that individuals receive the necessary support and guidance to improve their success prospects. Moreover, a multi-disciplinary team consisting of service area leaders, community workers and social workers work together to help alleviate poverty and create an inclusive community.

Why is this a best practice?

Preliminary analysis² of the effectiveness of the social community teams practice suggests that the LEAP centres have led to greater cooperation with civil society and other grassroots organisations; a more outreach-oriented approach within deprived localities; and a more bottom-up approach to service provision, leading to a less bureaucratic and a more accessible structure which humanises and empowers service users. This facilitated access to services is seen to have overall led to greater efficiency and less duplication of work; improved sharing of information; mutual understanding; and a healthy sense of ownership amongst stakeholders and service users in general. It has also led to greater opportunities for cooperation between the government, civil society and private entities as well as across ministries. However, this evaluation has also identified a number of weaknesses and limitations, mainly arising from the lack of sufficient human resources, resulting in limited opportunities for collaborative work; disappointment arising from the heightened expectations; concerns regarding data-

protection issues; and reluctance shown by some professionals and other stakeholders towards the innovative changes. The evaluation also highlighted the need to further facilitate communication between agencies (St Jeanne Antide Foundation - SJAF, 2015).

The LEAP project aimed at facilitating the development of a cluster-based network system at both regional and local levels and fostering social cohesion and mobility in various vulnerable localities while contributing towards: i) increasing the female participation rate; ii) the integration, retention and progression of disadvantaged groups in the labour market, whilst addressing labour market segmentation; and iii) preserving and strengthening families through social welfare services, particularly the provision of support for the consolidation of families who are undergoing difficult situations.

The LEAP centres specifically aim to combat poverty and social exclusion through a grassroots outreach-oriented and integrated approach. Training and mobility are the main target issues of the LEAP project, which also aims to enhance employability prospects and thus improve the outcomes and quality of life of those who are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The LEAP centres also aim to combat poverty and social exclusion through social welfare provision. Whilst the centres generally act as a single first entry point for social welfare service provision, through outreach-oriented work by community workers, contact with the LEAP centres may also take place following referral by other specific professionals.

Further relevant information

- <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1024&langId=en&newsId=2334&moreDocuments=yes&tableName=news>
- <http://mfss.gov.mt/leap/Pages/default.aspx>

2. Arising from a S.W.O.T. analysis of the LEAP (pilot) project carried out with a number of stakeholders (St Jeanne Antide Foundation - SJAF, 2015).