

Social and Employment Activation

ESN is a key European network in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and is funded by the European Commission in the framework of the EU Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006.



The **European Social Network** (ESN) held a two-day seminar on social and employment activation on 25-26 October 2006. The event was organised by ESN in cooperation with the *Union Nationale des Centres Communaux d'Action Sociale* (UNCCAS) and was attended by 35 ESN delegates from 18 European Union (EU) member states. It was the third in a series of thematic inclusion seminars organised by ESN as a key European network.

These key recommendations form the basis of local and regional social services' contribution to policy-making on social and employment activation at European and national level. Social services are at the intersection of social exclusion and activation. Through the care and support they provide, social services are in direct contact with vulnerable people – they can therefore have a key role in favouring active inclusion. Ultimately, these recommendations are intended to lead to *action to activate people at risk of social exclusion and poverty into work or social/community activities as part of their social inclusion*.

Activation and opportunity for all

- The **involvement of service users** should be a primary concern in all activation programmes: they should have the appropriate advice and support to enable them to participate fully in decisions which affect their lives.
- Programmes should take account of the needs of specific minority groups and consider targeted approaches to ensure that there is **opportunity for all** including young people, single parents and older people whatever their background, skills and ability.
- Careful attention should be paid to the **sustainability of activation policies** to ensure that people remain active beyond the duration of a particular programme to avert the risk of compounding marginalisation.
- Where participation in the primary labour market is limited or not possible, people should be given **every chance to be active** in the community and participate in civic, social and cultural life in alternative ways which fully utilise their skills and ability.
- Activation programmes should take full account of the equality laws derived from **European antidiscrimination legislation**¹ and raise awareness of these among service professionals.
- Incentives and conditions should be in place to ensure **that people are ultimately better off in employment** than on any social benefit – this is central to the long-term success of activation policies.

¹ *Racial Equality Directive* (RED): Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin and *Employment Equality Directive* (EED): Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/legis/legln_en.htm

Coordination and inter-agency service provision

- Social services are **key partners in supporting activation** for those furthest from the labour market in cooperation with other local services: employment, education, adult learning. Given their primary duty of care and protection, they should ensure that active inclusion programmes take account of the full range of needs of vulnerable people and families.
- There should be a duty for social services to **consider the service user's activation opportunities** from the earliest stages of care needs assessment in consultation with other partners.
- An **effective working relationship between social and employment services** is pivotal to effective policy and practice for the active inclusion of vulnerable people.
- The **participation of employers and trade unions in activation programmes** is also important: this could help to ensure that skills and training provided are matched to the real needs of the labour market. Support could also be provided to employers for in-work training and advice given to them on the adaptation of work surroundings to the needs of people in activation.
- Training of frontline staff and managers to **work across professional and organisational boundaries** will enhance the effective delivery of these services.

The European dimension

- Service providers from all sectors should be aware of **funding opportunities under European Union programmes**, in particular the new European Social Fund 2007-13, which has particular strands for: worker adaptability; access to employment; social inclusion (including antidiscrimination); partnership for reform on employment and inclusion.²
- In the context of the EU social inclusion process, further support should be given to building **indicators measuring the long-term effectiveness** of activation measures for vulnerable groups.

The European Social Network, drawing on the experience and expertise of its membership in local and regional social services, calls on policy-makers and service providers across Europe to consider the points above in social and employment policy-making and in the provision of services to diverse communities.

We invite the European Commission to take particular note of these recommendations in the context of the **active inclusion** agenda.

² For further information, please visit: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/