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SOCIAL AND EMPLOYMENT ACTIVATION

A briefing paper by the European Social Network

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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.



Social and Employment Activation: This is the third in ESN's series of thematic social inclusion briefing papers. It sets social and employment activation in the EU policy context and examines the situation in four EU Member States (Norway, Netherlands, France, Germany). An important and growing role for social services in social and employment activation emerges.

ESN publishes inclusion briefing papers on a range of themes. These are available online at: www.socialeurope.com/inclusion.htm.

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1	Access to Quality Services	Please visit website
2	Antidiscrimination and Integration	Please visit website
3	Social and Employment Activation	Please visit website
4	Child Poverty and Child Protection	(to appear March 2007)
5	Long-term Care of the Elderly	(to appear June 2007)
6	Social Services Promoting Social Inclusion	(to appear October 2007)

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ESN: Social Services Promoting Social Inclusion in Europe

The European Social Network (ESN) is the network of directors of social services in Europe and is a key European network in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The network promotes social justice and social inclusion through quality social care in partnership with service users. It works at the European level to facilitate the exchange of best practice between social care managers, professionals and other stakeholders and supporting the role of local and regional providers of social services in the field of social and health care.

As a key European network in the field of social inclusion, ESN recognises that local and regional social services are major providers of services favouring social inclusion in local communities. ESN supports the role of local and regional social services in the *open coordination of social protection and social inclusion* at the European level.

ESN monitors the preparation and implementation of the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion 2006-2008 (NAPs), providing information to our members and to national governments. This establishes contacts between them and promotes the contribution of local and regional social services to the NAP process. ESN publishes a monthly e-newsletter *promoting social inclusion* which is disseminated to members of the network across Europe as well as other relevant stakeholders. The newsletter presents examples of good practice on a thematic basis, provides updates on the NAPs and general news on social inclusion in Europe.

Thematic inclusion seminars form the core of the ESN programme allowing ESN and its members to contribute fully and constructively to the *open coordination of social protection and social inclusion* in Europe. Seminars and themes for 2006 are *Access to Quality Services* (April, Barcelona), *Antidiscrimination and Integration* (July, Venice) and *Social and Employment Activation* (October, Metz). In 2007, we will continue with *Child Poverty and Protection* (March, Copenhagen), *Long-term care* (Prague, July), and a concluding *Social Inclusion Review* (October, Brussels) looking back over the two years of our European social inclusion work.

In advance of each seminar ESN produces a briefing paper, reviewing EU and national policy and current practice of social services. ESN publishes key recommendations emerging from each seminar which are distributed to European and national policy-makers as well as to local and regional social services. ESN ensures a wide dissemination of its inclusion work through a monthly e-newsletter (to which you can subscribe online), direct contact with national governments, European institutions and through attendance at a range of European events.

ESN will publish a report at the end of 2006 reviewing our social inclusion activities and analysing the role of local and regional social services in promoting social inclusion, especially in relation to the preparation of the NAPs. It will be distributed to national governments, European institutions and networks, ESN members and other stakeholders.

For further information about ESN and our social inclusion programme, and to learn how you can work with us, please visit www.socialeurope.com/inclusion.htm

Introduction: Activation in EU and comparative European policy

“Increasing labour market participation: *Seen as the most important priority by most Member States, this translates into expanding active labour market policies and ensuring a better linkage between social protection, lifelong learning and labour market reforms so that they are mutually reinforcing.”*¹

Faced with high unemployment rates and growing budgetary pressures on social protection spending, Europe's governments are developing policies to *increase labour market participation*. At the European level, increasing labour market participation stands alone as a key objective under the “poverty and social exclusion strand” of the *open coordination of social protection and social inclusion policies*, clearly bringing out its importance as a component of strategies promoting social inclusion. With this objective, the European Union commits itself to “the active social inclusion of all [including] by *promoting participation* in the labour market”².

The *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006* reviews the progress made in Europe on the new agreed goals of the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies. The report states that “social protection and inclusion policies should support growth and employment objectives and growth and employment policies should support social clearly drawing the interaction of social and employment objectives in their *National Reform Programmes* (NRPs)³; too frequently, the Commission indicates, not clearly drawn by other countries’ NRPs. National governments highlighted *increasing labour market participation* as an important priority in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion 2006-2008.

Activation and Social Services

Activation in this briefing and in ESN's perception concerns both active labour market or employment policies and social activation. *Activation* thus covers policies and structures which connect people at risk of poverty and exclusion to jobs and to other meaningful forms of activity in the community. An academic definition of ‘activation’ refers to the “broad range of policies and measures targeted at people receiving public income support or in danger of becoming permanently excluded from the labour market”. Such policies and measures cover “various forms of education, vocational training or retraining, group process, coaching and practice programmes and even through the channelling of financial resources.”⁴ Social services – as providers of services to benefits recipients or as conduits of state support – are the key local public agency to ‘activate’ their clients.

Social services' role in “activating” people to take up employment and social activities is growing across Europe in a trend in which the close cooperation – and in some cases structural integration – of social and employment services at the local level is intrinsic. These new integrated services are supporting ‘clients’ to assist them to take up employment: this role can include information about job and opportunities; information about education and training opportunities and assessment of capacity to work. Services are also catalysts for *social* activation, e.g. through voluntary and community work, including subsidised public sector jobs. There is also a reorientation towards an individualised service where activation plans are drawn up with client participation; these look at the

¹ European Commission and Council of the European Union (2005), Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2005 (p10). Web Reference: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/jrep_en.htm

² European Council (March 2006): Common Objectives of the EU in the open coordination of social inclusion and social protection policies. Web Reference: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/objectives_en.htm

³ NRPs are documents produced annual by EU national governments setting out how they are implementing the integrated employment guidelines under the European Employment Strategy.

⁴ J.A. Drøpping, B. Hvinden and K. Vik, “Activation policies in the Nordic countries”, chapter 6, in: M. Kautto, M. Heikkillä, B. Hvinden, S. Marklund and N. Ploug (1999), “Nordic Social Policy: Changing Welfare States”, Routledge: London and New York

whole range of a person's social, educational and job-seeking needs. The ultimate aim is to support all citizens to make an active contribution to society, whether through paid employment or forms of community work.

Core welfare services provided on a local level contribute to creating the circumstances which favour activation for individuals. Care in the community for vulnerable people can, for instance, relieve informal carers to take up part-time employment. The other strands of the open coordination of social protection and social inclusion policies (pensions and long-term care and health) also have an impact on activation. Pensions are financed from employee contributions and for state pensions from direct taxation the more people are in work, the more affordable are pensions for society. Quality health care can expand the active working population and allow people to return to work.

Active Inclusion: a new communication from the European Commission⁵

The Commission counts about 8.5% (31.7 million people) as constituting "a sizeable hardcore of people with little prospect of finding a job", a figure including the long-term unemployed and people facing barriers to work: disability, chronic illness, lack of basic skills, discrimination and/or family responsibilities. The Commission judges that combined social protection and activation schemes (including job training with private firms and subsidised work experience) have made a positive impact, particularly among young people. It recognises that activation gives people a sense of self-worth and a more positive attitude to society. The role of social services is also validated: adequate access to services⁶, it states, forms a "basic pre-condition for being available for work".

The Commission puts forward a policy mix, which it calls "active inclusion" and whose components, which should be interlinked, are:

- i employment services offering access to the labour market and to training or schemes to prepare people for work
- ii adequate social protection and income support for those in need
- iii access to services which remove barriers to work, e.g. health care, child care, education and training opportunities, ICT (information and communication technologies) training, flexible working, counselling and support

It is suggested that common principles and requirements may be established at European level to provide policy guidance to national governments. The Communication launches a public consultation on the proposal for EU-level action to favour "active inclusion".

Inclusion, Employment and Growth in the EU

Social and employment activation policies are of key importance to increasing labour market participation and thus to the wider European Employment Strategy⁷. The recent revision of the framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies was to better integrate with the Lisbon strategy and the European Employment Strategy⁸. This has resulted so far in a cross-checking of objectives in EU documents. *Activation* is thus also supported in the EES and more broadly under the Social Agenda and the Lisbon Agenda.

⁵ Communication from the European Commission: "Concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market" [COM(2006)44 final] Web Reference: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/consultation_en.html
⁶ For ESN's work on access to services, please see: www.socialeurope.com/inclusion/access.htm
⁷ European Employment Strategy (EES) was launched in 1997 by European governments and is now closely linked to the Lisbon Agenda. Under the EES, common goals are agreed at a European level which should be implemented by governments. Progress is reviewed annually in the EU annual progress report on the Lisbon Agenda.

The challenge to national governments and all inclusion stakeholders is to push for joined-up policy and practice on the ground and the mainstreaming of social inclusion in broader employment policies.

The role of local authorities is recognised within the European Employment Strategy (EES). The European Commission notes that European and national strategies for employment "cannot succeed without action, commitment and engagement on the part of regional and local actors."⁹ Further, the Commission refers to the potential for job creation at local level in the service (tourism, transport) and care (home help, child care) sectors and points to the provision of education and training as essential besides the provision of support to jobseekers. This reveals a multifaceted role for local authorities which also sees for local and regional social services as partners in community development.

European antidiscrimination legislation

The Employment Equality Directive (EED)¹⁰ outlaws discrimination and harassment in employment and occupation on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The directive concerns direct discrimination, where one person is "treated less favourably" than another in a similar situation and indirect discrimination, where an "apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice" means that one person is treated less favourably than another on the grounds described. It covers employment, vocational training, work experience and pay and conditions and is thus relevant to many of the activation measures put in place by employment and social services including subsidised work experience and access to mainstream employment. The EED contains a specific clause requiring the provision of "reasonable accommodation" for people with disabilities in employment (including promotion) and training. A separate "racial equality directive" covers discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin in employment and other areas in similar terms to the EED.¹¹

⁸ Communication from the Commission; Working together, Working better: a new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union"
⁹ Employment Equality Directive (EED): Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. Web Reference: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/legis/legln_en.htm
¹⁰ Directives are EU laws proposed by the European Commission and agreed by Member States and the European Parliament. They are then 'transposed' into national law by Member State governments and implemented nationally.
¹¹ ESN looked more closely at this issue in a previous briefing available at: www.socialeurope.com/inclusion/antidiscrimination.htm

COUNTRY CASE STUDIES

NORWAY: “More people at work, fewer on benefits”¹²

Norway is without doubt a prosperous country; it has a low unemployment rate by European standards with high labour market participation, particularly among women and older people. Nonetheless Norway cannot ignore the fact that an average 700,000 citizens of working age are at any given time out of work and receiving various social benefits. People applying for benefits and looking for assistance in seeking a job encountered a divided administration with three separate points of contact: local social services and two central government bodies – the national insurance service and the labour market administration.

The government has sought to take action to deal with both issues and has therefore brought forward a new proposal: “A New Employment and Welfare Administration”, was passed by the Norwegian Parliament, the *Storting*, on 3 July 2006. The proposal has three headline objectives:

- More people at work and in activity, fewer on benefits
- A user-friendly, user-oriented system
- A coordinated and efficient employment and welfare administration.

The major administrative structural reform taking place will see the merging of the two central government bodies into a new employment and welfare agency responsible to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The new central agency will have a joint presence in every municipality in Norway with local social services so that there is a single integrated gateway (employment and welfare offices) for accessing employment and welfare services in the country. There is no change in the division of responsibilities between the local and central level, but an administrative reorganisation which is intended to end the divided administration which jobseekers and benefits claimants encountered.

The Employment and Welfare Offices (EWOs) will fulfil the local social services' obligation to provide basic support for all; they will also provide information and guidance to clients on job and training opportunities and act as the link to all public services. Staff will be trained to evaluate a client's capacity for work and to draw up individual action plans to activate clients in the labour market with client participation. Client groups are principally the unemployed, people on (long-term) sick leave, disability benefits recipients, other benefits claimants, family support recipients and pensioners. The Offices will work closely with local employers to try to match clients to their needs.

A major element of the reform is to create a user-friendly and user-oriented approach; part of this is comprised by the integrated access points for employment and welfare services. The point of an integrated office is that the EWO can provide and manage services to provide for the client's total need for assistance. The EWOs will place special emphasis on individual action plans for people with complex needs, such as those with 'impaired functional capacity' requiring assistance in the home and at work. These action plans are intended to serve as a social contract between the state and the individual, setting out the rights and responsibilities of each. Service users will have the opportunity to participate fully in decisions regarding their own case.

¹² Section based on: A New Employment and Welfare Administration: More people at work – Fewer on Benefits (short version of proposal no. 46 (2004–2005) to the Storting), Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, Norway.

THE NETHERLANDS: “Work above Income”¹³

By the 1970s, a substantial welfare state guaranteed minimum income for all citizens, but this created a new welfare dependence with the label of benefits claimant seeming to exclude some from the labour market. The *Employment and Social Assistance Act* of 2004 heralded a new system which sought to reorient the system to activate or reactivate all citizens to take up employment, rather than claiming benefits. Local social services have new and expanded responsibilities under this system and many local authorities have renamed departments *employment and income services*.

First, local authorities are allocated a budget for *reintegratie* ('reintegration' into the labour market) and social assistance, which they can only exceed by transferring money from other departments' budgets. The local *employment and income services* buy 'reintegration pathways' from private suppliers on an open market or set up their own pathways for clients. Citizens are under a general obligation to accept work, the one exempt group being single parents with young children. The challenge for staff is to develop an eye for people's potential and the employment and social activation opportunities for them locally.

Local authorities try to create an integrated approach for the community which means encouraging different departments – e.g. education, economic development, employment and income services – to work together. In this way, when a new company sets up in the local area, the economic development department alerts employment and income services of the new opportunities. This cooperation between services is indicative of local authorities' wider role under the new legislation to create favourable conditions to get people into work through its education or economic development policies.

We could call this reactive activation, but there is also proactive activation, which can include cooperating with education departments to keep young people in school and training for as long as possible and promoting adult and lifelong learning for employees in local companies. This reorganisation has had structural consequences for smaller authorities who considered they did not have the capacity to implement the new system. They therefore merged with other small authorities so that there are now 467 municipalities and only 390 social services departments.

Local authorities have used discretionary powers in social and employment activation to develop innovative methods to promote activation and to combat fraud, it being in their financial interest to do so – given the limited budget allocated them by central government. For instance, some have reintroduced home visits to check a client's living conditions and their entitlement to some forms of assistance. Many have some form of *work first* scheme whereby a benefits applicant must make an immediate active contribution to the community in return for benefits, e.g. joining a subsidised community work scheme which would keep the client in or get them used to the pattern of a normal working day. This also helps services and client to identify skills and potential as well as the barriers to work.

It remains the case that ordinary work remains beyond the capacity some citizens; local authorities have a responsibility to them as well. Providing clients with a regular social activity which contributes something to the local community gives them a feeling of self-worth which they would not have if they were merely *benefits claimants*. It also prevents them from being inactive and isolated in the community.

¹³ Section based on: Activate the client, file the file; from orderliness to effectiveness; presentation to the 4th European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion, Glasgow 2005, by Tof Thissen and Liny Bruijnzeel, DIVOSA, Netherlands.

FRANCE: Services à la personnes and maisons de l'emploi for social cohesion¹⁴

The government's aim is create a new sector of the economy for personal welfare services (*services à la personne*), which will itself create numerous and stable jobs. This is not specifically an employment measure, but it does favour (re)activation by providing personal tailored support, which makes people more available for work. Personal welfare services include child care; home care, mobility assistance and help in everyday activities for the elderly and people with disabilities, IT and communications support. These services are provided by nationally accredited charities or companies and paid for by the *chèque-emploi service universel* (CESU). The CESU can be 'prefinanced' (i.e. issued to a certain value) by an employer, who benefits from certain tax and social contribution advantages for doing so. The CCAS/CIAS¹⁵ can also issue prefinanced *CESUs* for the provision of personal welfare services to its clients.

The *plan de cohésion sociale* has also heralded the creation of *maisons de l'emploi* (literally 'job houses') across the republic. The *maison de l'emploi* brings together various actors in the labour market: public employment services, the adult learning agency, the missions locales promoting social and employment activation for young people, local development agencies, and local actors working on the ground. The *maisons* are designated as 'organisations with a variable geometry', meaning that in addition to the central partners (the state, the public employment services and a local body or consortium), any number of organisations can be partners including the French regions, federations of employers or professionals and service providers.

It is thus a single access point for everyone looking for employment and assistance in finding employment in France. They have three roles:

- 1 to make a strategic analysis of the local labour market and adapt services to this
- 2 to support and drive forward the network of local actors and provide local access to a range of services for which a personalised action plan is developed with clients
- 3 to work with local employers recruiting staff and to support business start-ups and SMEs.

The *maisons de l'emploi* do not replace existing service providers; their role is rather to facilitate access to the range of services for jobseekers by providing a *suivi*. The government's aim is for the establishment of 300 *maisons de l'emploi* in France, but it is not central government which takes the initiative.

The initiative belongs in fact to the local level: the law formally recognises the leading role of local and regional bodies (*collectivités territoriales*) in promoting employment and establishes them as partners of public employment services. Elected representatives of communes, associations of communes and of the *départements* alone can apply to set up a *maison de l'emploi* locally. Since one of the principal ideas of the *maisons* is to bring together all actors at local, *départemental* or regional level, it is often the case that a consortium will make a joint application under a lead partner.

¹⁴ Based in part on material from: www.servicesalapersonne.fr, the website of the national agency and on http://www.travail.gouv.fr/dossiers/156.html?id_mot=379 for information on the maisons de l'emploi.

¹⁵ CCAS – Centre communal d'action sociale, the municipal social welfare centre; the CIAS – Centre intercommunal d'action sociale, the 'inter-municipal' social welfare centre.

GERMANY: "Local authorities as labour market policy stakeholders"¹⁶

Germany launched a series of labour market reforms enacting the recommendations of the Hartz-Commission on labour market reform. These reforms sought to halve the Germany's unemployment rate and so reduce public expenditure on unemployment benefit. A restructuring of the labour market administration between the federal and local levels came into effect from the beginning of 2005 under the title of Hartz IV.

Prior to the Hartz IV reforms, Germany's local authorities had considerable freedom in the organisation of support for the unemployed, which resulted many different local concepts of employment support. Offenbach (am Main) City Council, for example, had developed a "helping people into work" model underpinned by the "work first" principle. Under this model, Offenbach sought to place as many benefits claimants directly into work, limiting or precluding the need for financial support. Where direct placement was not possible, subsidiary measures such as further training, e.g. IT courses or language courses for immigrants came into play. Other activities could be offered over a 6-24 month period, helping 60% of claimants to find a job within this period.

Local authorities have also had a history of mobilising considerable resources beyond the public sector, so that local networks of employment companies, non-profit organisations and social enterprises have developed. The expansive role of local authorities in employment policy created synergies with local economic development plans and shows the potential for a network of policies at a local level covering employment, social inclusion, labour market and economic development.

Hartz-IV reformed the structure of the unemployment support system in the federal republic, based in part on developments in the Netherlands, the UK, Austria and Denmark. Among the main objectives of the new system (laws Hartz-I to Hartz-IV) were:

- High-quality services for labour market integration by reform of job-seeking support services
- Better incentives to work and a new emphasis on the responsibility of the jobseeker

The reformed structure requires a reassessment of the role of local authorities in employment activation. Their responsibility for the financial management of the main unemployment benefit is transferred to the Federal Employment Agency, while housing benefit for jobseekers remains with the local authorities.

There is a flexibility of responsibilities between the local and federal levels built into the reform and on which creates potential for strong cooperation between the two:

- 1 The Federal Employment Agency and the local authority may established an *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* (consortium) to administer the benefits jointly and offer support and advice to jobseekers.
- 2 The local authority may opt to administer all benefits involved and take responsibility for support and advice to jobseekers. 69 towns and cities have taken this option to test its feasibility as a pioneer group.

The dynamics of a local authority's role has certainly changed, and there is strong potential for innovation within the new structure.

¹⁶ Section based on: Matthias Schulze-Böing, Success without a mandate: local authorities as labour market policy stakeholders in Germany, in: Leo Kissler and Werner Zettelmeier (eds.), Lokale Beschäftigungspolitik in Deutschland und Frankreich, Campus-Verlag, Frankfurt-am-Main 2005

Conclusions: Social and Employment Activation

There are a set of different strategies and processes at the EU level which impact on *social and employment activation*, reflecting that *activation* lies at a crossroads of social protection, social inclusion, employment and economic policy and practice. A principal reason for the revision of the framework on open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies was to create greater synergies with the EES and the Lisbon Agenda. The EU Commission itself acknowledged that "employment is for many people the main safeguard against social exclusion".¹⁷ Social services – central public actors combating social exclusion in the community – can carry the process of activating people at risk of exclusion and those who use their services.

The importance of activation is also fully recognised at the national level, as revealed in national political reforms and the reporting of these through the NAPs/Inclusion. Our country studies of activation policies leads us to present several conclusions:

- 1 Activation takes place at the intersection of between employment policy and social protection
- 2 The main feature of labour market activation policies are encapsulated in a shift from entitlement to conditionality.
- 3 Activation therefore involves the integration or cooperation of employment and social services.
- 4 'Core' welfare services can support activation by creating the conditions to favour individuals' activation.
- 5 Local and regional authorities are key actors in local development and can thus favour activation by encouraging job creation, e.g. support to SMEs, start-ups.

It should not be omitted that activation is not only about people becoming active in the labour market as this may not be possible for some: it must also be about people becoming active in other ways: in community and voluntary work, in subsidised public activities, in community groups. In the same in which social/employment services serve as a catalysts and guides to labour market activation, they can also act as catalysts and guides to 'social' activation. Social services have a central and growing role in social and employment activation, increasingly recognised as key to the fight against social exclusion in Europe.

Questions: Social and Employment Activation

- To what extent do social services in your country act as catalysts for activating excluded people? How do you interact with public employment services?
- Does your organisation offer subsidised public sector jobs? If so, what qualifications do you require and what training do you offer?
- Does your organisation offer specific activation schemes for different groups, e.g. young unemployed people, people with disabilities?
- How does your organisation work with others (schools, career advice centres, youth groups etc.) in your local area to generate opportunities for social and employment activation?
- What is your view of the European Commission's 'active inclusion approach' as outlined in its recent communication?

¹⁷ Communication from the European Commission: "Concerning a consultation on action at EU level to promote the active inclusion of the people furthest from the labour market" [COM(2006)44 final] Web Reference: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/consultation_en.html

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