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Autumn 2010



Towards greater social inclusion

Regional policy's contribution

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The future of our Europe – as a competitive player on the world stage, as a place that is good to live, work and retire in, as a social model emulated as far away as Brazil – depends on our ability to give every one of our citizens the potential to be an active, respected and fulfilled member of our society. 2010 – the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion – highlights the need to build a more inclusive Europe as a vital element of sustained economic growth, more and better jobs and social cohesion.

These goals are supported by action undertaken under the EU's cohesion policy with financial instruments such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). These two key instruments target support at diverse programmes, from improved transport infrastructure which opens up underdeveloped areas to new opportunities, to the promotion of lifelong learning. Panorama presents six projects from around Europe which highlight how ERDF expenditure is helping vulnerable sectors of our community combat the risk of exclusion.

What is the role of cohesion policy in alleviating poverty and exclusion? What is being done to breathe life into the depressed areas of our cities? How responsive are existing regulations to the changing face of Europe? Along with considering these questions, we also interview three key figures in the field of social inclusion and find out what they feel the priorities should be.

Europe 2020 is a strategic vision of Europe for the 21st century. It shows how the EU can come out stronger from the economic crisis and how it can be turned into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.

Cohesion policy, operating as it does on the ground, where people are, plays a key role in achieving the goals of the 2020 Strategy, ensuring those at risk of exclusion are not left by the wayside. It is within the regions that the full benefit of a fully participative society will be first felt.

Dirk Ahner

*Director General, European Commission
Directorate-General for regional policy*

GREATER SOCIAL INCLUSION: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

2010 has been designated by the EU as the Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. This edition of Panorama considers the issue and takes a close look at how the actions funded by regional policy are furthering the EU's goals of an inclusive, productive society.

What is the Year's goal?

Renewing the EU's commitment to combating poverty and social exclusion is one of the key objectives behind this year's designation. With the challenges that face us – climate change, the EU's demographic profile to name but two – and the recent economic crisis still very much in evidence, it is clear that Europe cannot afford a society which leaves able and willing people by the wayside.

The Year represents a wakeup call, seeking to challenge stereotypes and give a voice to those who live excluded and in poverty. By harnessing the EU's principles of partnership and solidarity, 2010 sets out to tackle the causes of poverty head-on and enable everyone to play a full and active role in society. It will also act to improve coordination between existing programmes and initiatives for fighting poverty and social exclusion.

Poverty reduction – the key to fighting exclusion

Within a country, the level of regional development has a substantial impact on poverty. The latest estimates of risk-of-poverty income rates show that cohesion policy funding is concentrated in the countries and regions where relative poverty is highest. The fund is finding its targets.

Poverty reduction is not the main objective of cohesion policy, nor does it aim to change national welfare systems, but it does target funding at projects which speed up development, promote equal opportunities, improve quality of life and expand job opportunities, all of which reduce risk-of-poverty rates.

How regional policy furthers the EU's goals

The regional policy of the European Union aims at overcoming the economic and social disparities between regions in order to promote the harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the European Community. Article 158 of the EC Treaty states that the Community "shall aim to reduce disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions or islands, including rural areas."

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Those most at risk of poverty include the elderly, large and single parent families, children and young people, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minorities including Europe's 10 to 12 million strong Roma community. Across all these groups women are more exposed to poverty and social exclusion than men.

These are difficult goals to achieve, taking into account the vast heterogeneity of EU regions in regards to their geographical size and location, income level and political importance. The EU enlargements have brought considerable changes as well – between regions of the 27 current EU Member States disparities are now twice as high as those within the 15 EU Member States before 2004.

Cohesion policy's current practice, which bases allocations on GDP/head, provides more funding to regions with high shares of their population in absolute poverty.

Some countries seem to be doing very well, and yet have pockets in which people are at high risk of poverty. In less developed countries, poverty tends to be lower in the capital region. In other countries, the capital region often has higher rates of poverty as affluent households have moved out.

The less developed cohesion countries receive the bulk of cohesion policy's funds and clearly have much higher shares of materially deprived people (an absolute measure of poverty that indicates that people lack three or more out of nine basic amenities).

Cohesion policy also addresses concentrations of relative poverty in the convergence regions of more developed countries. Greater aid to regions such as Wales in the UK, parts of Wallonia in Belgium and southern Italy and southern Spain, shows that some funding is targeted to help these regions to address poverty.



The regional competitiveness and employment objective addresses the issue from a different angle, taking into account above average unemployment rates and low educational attainments, which strongly correlate to both relative and absolute poverty.

ERDF and ESF – working complementarily

It is important to invest in the social and economic infrastructure required to allow people living in disadvantaged communities to take advantage of training and employment opportunities elsewhere. ERDF funding can make key contributions in this area by supporting developments that empower individuals to gain access to such opportunities.

Enterprise support is targeted particularly at small and medium-sized enterprises and start-ups.

“We have convincing evidence that European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) support led to increased investment in companies and increased research and development activity. For example, R&D investment per employee in Thuringia in East Germany was nearly two and a half times higher in assisted enterprises. This means a clear leverage effect,” explains Dirk Ahner, Director General for regional policy.

ERDF investments result in better jobs and greater access to training, supporting:

- locally-based job brokerage schemes that aim to match disadvantaged individuals with employment opportunities;
- the refurbishment and enhancement of locally-based training/ learning and e-skills centres;
- safe transport hubs to link areas of need with those of opportunity;
- investment in increased local access to ICT facilities within communities.

“ Latest estimates show ... cohesion funding is finding its targets ”

From 2007-13, €347 billion, or 35.7% of the Community budget, will be invested by the EU through cohesion policy's instruments, to support regional growth agendas and stimulate job creation. By this means, cohesion policy is helping to bring people out of poverty.

European Social Fund (ESF) funding is supporting the sustainable integration of the disadvantaged and people with disabilities into the workforce. Activities to achieve this include:

- counselling and training that is adapted to the specific needs of disadvantaged and disabled people;
- providing pathways for integration and entry into employment, and job creation for disadvantaged and disabled people in the social economy;
- support for the entrepreneurship of disadvantaged and disabled people;
- awareness campaigns to fight discrimination, change attitudes and promote diversity in the workplace.

ERDF adapting to needs

But it is not just about jobs. In May 2010 the ERDF was amended to limit the segregation of marginalised communities living in poor housing conditions. The changes to the regulations were made with a view to enhancing the economic and social cohesion. The scope of eligibility now covers the renovation and change of use of existing buildings owned by public authorities or non-profit operators, thus providing low-cost housing for low-income households or people with special needs. Limited interventions for the replacement of existing housing, including by newly constructed housing, should also be considered as eligible expenditure.

And the effect?

The ERDF and Cohesion Fund have a strong focus on promoting the economic development of regions and Member States. This is one of the most important ways to combat social exclusion – stimulating economic activity which will create more and better quality jobs.

Latest evaluations demonstrate the success of the funds in stimulating growth and jobs. Two different macro economic models both conclude that the funds had a substantial effect on economic growth particularly in the convergence regions between 2000 and 2008. Member States report the creation of approximately 1 million jobs through enterprise support in the 2000-06 period.

A significant proportion of ERDF resources are also allocated to social, territorial and environmental cohesion. Projects supported include the improvement or generation of various kinds of social infrastructure and the clean-up and renovation of rural villages, inner city areas, old industrial sites and historical monuments.

Projects of this kind, including those aimed at improving tourist facilities, absorbed almost a third of the total allocation of the ERDF to Objective 1 regions and 36% of the total in Objective 2 in 2000-06, with similar allocations in the current 2007-13 period.

The evaluations of the 2000-06 period conclude that environmental infrastructure projects had tangible results. For example, a substantial number of households in deprived regions across the EU were connected to a supply of clean drinking water or main drainage (14 million people connected to improved water supply; 20 million additional people served by waste water treatment projects).

The result? Towns and villages all over Europe, including run-down, post-industrial areas and depressed inner cities are now more attractive areas in which to live, visit and work.

While there is not an accepted set of indicators, or data, to quantify such effects, the evaluations conclude that these projects have undoubtedly improved living standards and the quality of life, as well as territorial balance by encouraging more people to live in the places concerned and more businesses to locate there.

HIGH TECH REACHES THE HEART OF RURAL FRANCE

Rural and isolated, the region of Auvergne is nevertheless the first in France to offer high-speed internet connections to its entire population, thanks to the ERDF under the regional competitiveness and employment objective. This RegioStars 2010 award-winning project is a welcome development for the region, which has seen a recent influx of young people moving to the area and setting up businesses.

Cecile Hesse and Gael Romier are two young photographers who have based themselves in the Auvergne. When they first arrived, sending an image to a client could take as long as 20 minutes for just one photo. The new high-speed broadband access makes the process instantaneous. "That has enabled us to develop our business and, above all, stay in our region", explains Hesse.

The region has been revitalized since 2009 with all kinds of initiatives emerging such as that in a primary school in the town of Mazayes, where children have been creating their own school website. Head teacher Etienne Anquetil has no doubt that both children and parents alike are happy to see their school finally catching up with today's society.

The effect of instant, universal access has transformed all sectors – health, the economy, education and tourism have all benefitted.

Broadband in Auvergne, from 2006-09

Total budget: €38 500 000

ERDF: 26%

René Souchon (right), President of the Regional Council of Auvergne, receives the RegioStars award from Commissioner Hahn



KARIMA DELLI

MEP



Karima Delli is a member of the Greens/EFA, member of the Regional Development Committee, Vice-President of the URBAN Intergroup, and activist of the Jeudi Noir collective.

What do you hope the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will achieve?

The EU will not solve the issues of poverty and social exclusion within one year. But, after the failure of the Lisbon Strategy, the goal of this Year is to give visibility to these 84 million people who are victims of the crisis, particularly the working poor, and to those working, day after day, to help excluded and marginalised people to live in dignity. After that, I hope we will be able to tackle the poverty issue by convincing the European Commission to make a proposal on framework directives on minimum income and on the fight against discrimination, to defend universal access to services, and to get recognition of the right to housing in all Member States.

How do you see your role in addressing poverty and social exclusion?

I think our role, as MEPs, is to give a voice to those experiencing poverty, and to all the organisations that are working to fight poverty and that are implementing solutions in everyday life. As I always say, we must not make policies for the people, but with them. This European Year should give us the opportunity to gather best practices in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and to show there is hope for the most vulnerable people. Furthermore, as an ecologist, I think we need to sound the alarm, not only on social inequalities, but also on environmental injustice. After the failure of the Copenhagen negotiations, those who will pay the price for climate change are the poorest, worst housed and most precarious people.

How will the recent changes to the ERDF regulations with regards to housing for marginalised communities and promoting energy-efficient buildings contribute to combating poverty and social exclusion?

This new regulation is the best example of what I was saying concerning the link between the fight against climate change and social exclusion. It represents a major advance in the improvement of the living conditions of disadvantaged populations, insofar as it makes eligible for the ERDF the projects for renovating and building housing and for combating energy poverty in all Member States. This proposal has long been awaited by all those who campaign for respect for the integration rights of marginalised communities, and particularly of the Roma.

But we must not stop now that we are doing so well. We will be very vigilant with regard to the actual use of these funds, since they must not result in the exclusion of marginalised communities from the city centres by real estate speculation through the explosion in rent and rental charges.

Now we have to ensure that all stakeholders will be involved in urban regeneration projects, including local authorities, public investment banks, and European networks such as the Covenant of Mayors, so that every single vulnerable population actually receives sufficient funding and is afforded a dignified existence in the long term.

“

... a major advance in the improvement of the living conditions of disadvantaged populations ...”

”

Exclusion is also felt in the countryside



FINTAN FARRELL

Director of EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network)



Fintan Farrell was appointed Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) in 2002. Previously he had been President of the Network from 1996 to 2000. He has also been President of the Social Platform and Chair of the EU Civil Society Contact Group.

What do you hope the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will achieve?

It is hoped that the Year can engage people in a reflection about the type of society we want to build and get across the message that more equal societies are better for everyone. The Year arrives at a time of crisis. It looks as if poor people will be asked to carry its cost.

Poverty and social exclusion need to be clearly identified as major challenges to be addressed in the Europe 2020 Strategy. We must also tackle the causes of poverty and make it understood that the reduction of inequalities in wealth through effective redistribution mechanisms is a prerequisite for delivering a better, fairer EU.

The Year should also aim to have a legacy at local and national levels through more consistent engagement with, and support for, the work of anti-poverty NGOs from public authorities.

How do you see your role in addressing poverty and social exclusion?

EAPN aims to defend the interests of people experiencing poverty through influencing relevant EU policies and programmes. The network will monitor how poverty and social exclusion are addressed in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the 'Platform against Poverty'. It will also assess how employment policies contribute to creating inclusive labour markets and how Structural Funds are used to deliver an inclusion agenda. To achieve this we provide opportunities for NGOs to share experience on how these policies and programmes are delivered on the ground and to propose new areas for EU action. Direct participation of people experiencing poverty is central to the ongoing work of EAPN.

In what ways can cohesion policy contribute to the Europe 2020 target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty by 2020?

To achieve the target of lifting 20 million people out of poverty by 2020, cohesion policy should be used as a cross-cutting tool to ensure social inclusion. The ERDF and ESF should be used in a more innovative and complementary way to really answer the needs of the most vulnerable groups and are accessible to social NGOs. Moreover, EAPN would like to see a shift from the current growth and jobs model towards one which benefits vulnerable people through active inclusion, social innovation, new social services, green jobs and technologies available to those furthest from the labour market.

While Structural Funds are given a particular focus in Europe 2020, all EU financial instruments need to be mobilised to contribute to the achievement of the proposed poverty reduction target fixed in the Strategy. A specific EU financial instrument should deliver on three key objectives: access to rights, particularly related to affordable access to quality services of general interest; social inclusion, particularly focused on developing integrated active inclusion; and participation of key actors.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.eapn.eu/index.php?lang=en>



“ ...cohesion policy should be used as a cross-cutting tool to ensure social inclusion. ”



The Three Towns Initiative – regenerating parts of Yorkshire and Humberside in the UK

PAUL BEVAN

EUROCITIES Secretary General



EUROCITIES is the network of Europe's major cities. Established in 1986, the association's 140 members between them govern 25% of the EU population. Paul Bevan became Secretary General in November 2008, following a career of senior roles in UK local and regional government.

What do you hope the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will achieve?

This European Year must raise awareness that the fight against poverty is not just about altruism. Europe's people are our greatest economic asset – our human capital. The Europe 2020 Strategy recognises that we will not compete in the global economy if we don't use this potential to the full. Investing in skills, quality jobs and social inclusion provides a clear economic payback, as well as directly improving the quality of life of our citizens.

How do you see your role in addressing poverty and social exclusion?

Poverty and exclusion are predominantly urban. Even Europe's most prosperous cities have high levels of deprivation, often concentrated in particular neighbourhoods. For this reason, EUROCIDITIES has focused its 2010 campaign on raising awareness of the urban dimension of poverty.

City governments are well placed to manage these problems by adopting a multidimensional approach. Education and training, helping with job searches, business advice, better housing, improving health, social and family support, public transport, an improved environment, civic participation – all these need to be organised in an integrated way to achieve real, sustained change in such deprived areas. This conclusion has come out strongly from the 'Cities Against Poverty and Exclusion' events that EUROCIDITIES is holding across Europe.

But in practice, poverty and exclusion probably present the most difficult challenges for any city mayor. Motivating citizens, NGOs and businesses, coordinating different agencies and finding new ways of working all demand supreme political leadership. And it is resource intensive too. EUROCIDITIES not only promotes exchange of experience between member cities; we also make the case for greater powers for city governments to tackle these complex problems.

How can European cities use cohesion policy to tackle poverty and social exclusion?

The role that EU cohesion policy has played in helping cities to explore new ways of tackling these challenges has been hugely important. City governments have been able to show that this integrated approach is central to achieving lasting success. As the economic crisis proceeds, the challenges facing our cities are greater than ever.

Three quarters of Europe's people live in cities and 85% of EU GDP is created in cities, so the prospect of a sustainable European recovery without prosperous cities is unthinkable. Whether we live in a big city or not, it is in all our interests that Europe's cities continue to attract investment and to generate innovation and wealth. Cohesion policy has the chance to play a key role in delivering Europe 2020 targets by supporting a continuing urban renaissance and social cohesion throughout the Union.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.eurocities.eu/main.php>

Regional funds help finance an interactive training course in automotive engineering in Malta



“ Investing in skills, quality jobs and social inclusion provides a clear economic payback ”

SOCIAL INCLUSION, THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY

Against the backdrop of the worst social crisis in its history, European Year 2010 presents itself as an opportunity to build momentum, develop new partnerships and take action. The existence of poverty in one of the world's wealthiest regions is nothing short of serious. Despite an overall increase in living standards over recent decades, nearly 84 million Europeans – 17% of the EU's population – live below the poverty line today.

Drawing on all sources

Tackling this challenge calls for a comprehensive approach, including the assessment of structural and individual factors, use of a wide variety of tools, and mobilisation of regional and national actors. Such a multi-dimensional approach has been at the heart of the EU's action. Over the years, 'Social Europe' has taken shape through a range of policies and programmes supporting job creation and better working conditions, promoting education and social and territorial cohesion, and combating discrimination.

The EU has not been sitting back, waiting for 2010 to arrive before tackling the challenge of poverty. In 2000, Member States launched an innovative, common strategy for social inclusion, which saw them define national plans and common objectives, and learn from each other in crucial areas such as child poverty, minimum income and homelessness.

New impetus given to fight this battle

Yet more needs to be done: European Year 2010 aims to build on existing tools and create momentum for action across Europe. Four cross-disciplinary objectives lie at the heart of the campaign:

- Raising awareness, by promoting a better understanding of the reality of poverty in the EU today, challenging stereotypes and highlighting ways to tackle poverty.
- Spreading the message that combating poverty is a shared interest and shared responsibility, and fostering commitment by public and private players.
- Calling people to action and generating new impetus, from local to European level.
- Supporting the active participation of people experiencing poverty and a better acknowledgement of their right to live in dignity.

A total of 29 countries are taking part and have developed national programmes in partnership with stakeholders (NGOs, social partners, foundations, regional and local authorities).

Over 1 000 initiatives are expected across Europe, ranging from conferences, solidarity chains and debates in schools to training programmes for the media, interactive plays, and tests of new policy schemes.

A European campaign is being coordinated by the European Commission and is built around information tools (website, publications, video material ...) and key activities: an Art Initiative (bringing together art students, NGOs and poor people in Europe), journalist competition for audiovisual and written press, and 'focus week' in mid-October with seminars and forums. The closing conference will be organised by the Belgian presidency in December.

A host of other activities are being planned by NGOs and other stakeholders which have been heavily involved in this campaign, as well as other European institutions and bodies: European Year 2010 is a joint project, where all interested actors have a role to play.

However, the measure of European Year 2010's success will also be its ability to impact on the policy agenda in the Member States and at EU level. In June 2010, the European Council agreed on the objective to remove 20 million people from the risk of poverty and exclusion, as a part of the Europe 2020 Strategy. This important step will therefore need to be followed by long-term, sustainable action at all levels.

FIND OUT MORE

www.2010againstopoverty.eu



ENDING THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

The European Social Fund invests in helping people get into work and out of poverty. As part of its 10-year economic strategy, the EU will focus on alleviating poverty and giving people a better chance in life.

While national governments work together to put in place specific measures, such as minimum income schemes, poverty and social exclusion are Europe-wide problems. Treating them is an essential part of the EU's commitment to building a prosperous and inclusive society, where individuals are given the right to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

Better life chances

Through its 10-year economic strategy, Europe 2020, the EU places poverty alleviation high on its list of priorities. A powerful tool in this battle is the European Social Fund (ESF), the aim of which is to make a lasting, positive influence on individuals' chances in life.

It is precisely through this scheme that 3 500 jobless Roma residents in Trebišov, Slovakia are being given a helping hand. An ESF-backed project is employing Roma workers to renovate a local school which will accommodate more than 600 Roma students. This example is one among many of how the ESF is helping EU countries give people back their independence and dignity.

Combating poverty and social exclusion

During the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, measures are being taken to raise awareness of a reality that not only is harmful to the economy but also blights individual lives. The ESF is helping member countries in their efforts to address this challenge. It is clear that action is needed at all levels, and the ESF will continue to play a key role.

It is not only the Roma who are on the margins of society, 84 million people are at risk of social exclusion in Europe. And, it may be hard to believe, one in every six Europeans lives below the poverty threshold. As many as seven million people in Europe survive on less than €5 a day. To tackle this, a total of some €76 billion (one sixth for social inclusion initiatives) is being invested in projects whose aim it is to:

- help unemployed people get into work by giving them the necessary skills;
- combat discrimination and enable vulnerable groups to join the labour market and be active members of society;
- offer training and education so disadvantaged people can obtain skills and qualifications;
- encourage workers and businesses to adapt to economic changes;
- foster partnerships for a better workplace and better jobs.

FIND OUT MORE:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf/index_en.htm

“ As many as seven million people in Europe survive on less than €5 a day ”

The EU marks International Roma Day on 8 April 2010



SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COHESION

POLICY – THE URBAN PERSPECTIVE

Regional policy is addressing the issue of depressed urban areas head-on. The second round of the URBAN Community Initiative, 'URBAN II', selected sites which faced a broad range of social and economic challenges, including unemployment (an average of 17% across URBAN II) and a poor urban environment.

URBAN II supported 70 programmes across the EU-15, involving a total population of 2.2 million. Cohesion policy contributed €754 million, and the total rose to €1.6 billion when funding from the countries and regions concerned was put forward to match the EU's investment.

WHAT'S BEEN ACHIEVED?

- Of the 108 000 people trained, more than half were from vulnerable groups and were helped to overcome illiteracy and continue their education or to enter the labour market for the first time.
- Around half the programmes (8 out of 15 case studies) saw impacts from the provision of additional or new social services and resources. URBAN II was found to have been vital to the provision of better social services (for example, by building or renovating social centres offering information, advice, guidance and other support to residents).
- 247 security projects to reduce crime at the local level. These projects have included street wardens, CCTV, landscaping and street lighting, delivered in collaboration with community groups and neighbourhood watches.
- 593 initiatives to build community capacity. In one case (Burnley in the UK), this led to 134 people becoming involved in community management.

Local development and local partnership

A striking conclusion from the ex post evaluation of URBAN II is that project success did not depend on the theme treated or on the specific instrument. Successful projects were characterised by local leadership and local ownership. They were selected in line with local perceptions of need, with commitment from local players and delivered in partnership with locals. Unsuccessful projects were usually imposed from above, with little local ownership and involvement.

Over 80% of the local partnerships could be characterised as inclusive, involving a wide range of players such as community groups, the private sector, employment agencies, training providers, development agencies, law enforcement and health

professionals. The voluntary sector also led some 10% of projects and was involved in the implementation of many more. This had a spillover benefit in terms of building the capacity of local partners for other projects in the longer term.

The European Union played a role in capacity building, not least through the URBACT network for exchange of experience.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/expost_reaction_en.htm

URBAN II – challenges and solutions

All programmes were in areas suffering significant economic, social and physical problems. Although all had different local contexts, and within these a wide range of challenges, many programmes dealt with the symptoms of de-industrialisation (vacant land, high unemployment, poor business growth and the associated social problems).

The programmes aimed to tackle all of these challenges in an integrated and holistic fashion. However the programmes could be grouped into two large clusters:

- a social and economic regeneration group consisting of 40 programmes which focussed particularly on one or (usually) both of these themes, with smaller investments in physical infrastructure;
- a physical regeneration group consisting of 30 programmes which focussed particularly on this theme, with smaller investments in economic and social regeneration projects.

Physical regeneration – URBAN II helped to reverse urban decay, created transport hubs and new transport facilities, developed new community facilities (museums, libraries and crèches) and improved public spaces. Most of these changes improved the attractiveness of the area.

Economic regeneration – projects boosted entrepreneurialism and supported business creation and growth and the (small-scale) development of industrial sites. Supporting people into employment was another key aspect of URBAN II measures.

Social regeneration – projects helped to reduce crime, improve educational performance, improve the skills of local people and support disadvantaged groups (especially young people) in various ways.

Social exclusion was a key factor affecting the lives and opportunities of several key demographic groups in most of the URBAN II programme areas. Women, younger and older people, residents from minority ethnic groups, and asylum seekers and refugees all experienced some form of social exclusion or disadvantage.

A tool in the fight against exclusion

The ex post evaluation noted that most URBAN programmes supported projects to tackle unemployment and the lack of job opportunities. As most target areas had very high unemployment levels, this primary problem was tackled head-on through investing in projects for training, workforce development, education and skills enhancement.

Almost half of the programmes supported projects that addressed crime issues, with a relatively large number of drug-related projects and interventions with an emphasis on anti-social behaviour.

About a third of programmes had projects for capacity building and strengthening the voluntary and community sector. Projects supported these organisations to grow and develop and become more robust and sustainable, so that they could effectively deliver support for local communities.

Many projects targeted specific groups in deprived communities. Key groups included women, ethnic minorities and (to a lesser extent) young people. Projects therefore seemed to prioritise the hardest to reach in the target communities.

HOW IT WORKS – DORTMUND

The main challenges were high unemployment (especially among young people and migrants), poverty and risk of exclusion, low educational attainment levels, an unbalanced economy, sub-standard living conditions and a poor external image. The target area was affected by high population turnover rates, with more successful residents moving out to be replaced by more disadvantaged groups.

Most resources were focused on entrepreneurship and employment (42%) and physical and environmental measures (33%), with 15% devoted to social inclusion. The main priorities were creating and preserving jobs; improving the urban fabric and housing; developing structures for residents in commerce, housing and culture; and promoting social cohesion.

The programme logic was strong, with close links between the problems highlighted in the baseline analysis and the strategy developed. A study of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme area was supplemented by intensive consultation with local partners and residents, and helped to ensure that the programme strongly reflected local needs and conditions.



SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES



THE CASE OF THE ROMA

Cohesion policy has an important role to play in improving the living conditions and the integration of minority groups. It provides support through a wide range of anti-discrimination and inclusion policies as well as targeted funding. The particularly vulnerable Roma community receives special attention: recent steps on its behalf include measures to facilitate access to housing, education and start-up capital as well as an information campaign.

Across Europe, Roma suffer from marginalisation, social exclusion and racism. Studies show that the problems they are faced with range from the lack of enjoyment of rights such as access to basic services and employment to a high incidence of violence sparked by racial prejudice.

What's at stake?

Earlier this year, the Commission released the Communication 'The social and economic integration of the Roma in Europe' which sets the tone for future actions. Stating that the situation of the Roma in Europe needs urgent action, it calls for 'full social and economic integration'.

The document shows clear commitment to Roma inclusion and clarifies that while progress has been achieved during the last two years giving the Roma issue a more central role in policy-making, existing instruments have to work more effectively and in a more integrated way to achieve this aim.

A number of concrete measures for Roma inclusion are set out in the Communication. These include a targeted use of Structural Funds and mainstreaming of Roma issues in the framework of cohesion policy.

FIND OUT MORE:

Communication on the Roma:
<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52010DC0133:EN:HTML>

Housing – helping Roma benefit through wider scope for funding

Improving housing conditions is a crucial element of action in favour of Roma communities. Findings of the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights show that many live in overcrowded shacks and caravans in segregated areas with limited access to clean water, electricity and waste disposal, facing not only health problems due to poor hygiene conditions, but also the constant risk of forced evictions.

A new regulation brings hope that this situation can be turned around through correcting the mismatch between available ERDF funding opportunities and the particular living conditions of Roma communities. It extends the use of ERDF funding for Roma housing to all Member States, and rural areas will now also be eligible for funding. The money will be made available for the construction of new houses as well as the renovation of existing ones.

Roma inclusion pilot project: an all-round approach to integration

Although housing is an important aspect of Roma integration, progress on other levels is needed to achieve full inclusion. DG Regional Policy has launched a pilot project integrating multiple concerns:

- Early childhood education and care is promoted through the 'Good Start' project for improved access to education and care services for Roma children up to six years of age.
- Higher levels of self-employment are to be achieved through a project supporting the provision of micro-credit – especially to women – to accompany business creation projects.
- In order to increase public awareness of Roma issues, anti-racism campaigns involving celebrities, targeting notably sports events, are implemented in Italy, Romania, Albania and Bulgaria.

With an estimated 10 to 12 million living in EU countries, the Roma are the Union's biggest ethnic minority.

EC GRANTS FOR SELECTED PROJECTS:

Early childhood education and care (Roma Education Fund):
 €1.9 million
 Self-employment and micro-credit (Polgar Foundation):
 €1.4 million
 Information and awareness-raising (Spolu International Foundation): €0.9 million

FIND OUT MORE:

The European Union and Roma:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=518>
 Employment and social exclusion:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/themes/employment/index_en.htm



REGIONAL FUNDS HELPING IMMIGRANTS INTO BUSINESS

Arab cookies, Thai massage, sushi... different ventures with one common theme – female entrepreneurship. This year's RegioStars award-winning Micro-Finance Institute in the south east of Sweden is helping women with foreign backgrounds to kick start their businesses and contribute to the EU's objectives of regional competitiveness and employment.

"You have momentum. You have ideas. You want to run a business." This is how the website entices women who are excluded from financial systems to develop their own companies. In most cases, unemployed, these women can benefit from financial support of up to €26 000. What's more, they are entitled to tailor-made support at each stage of business set-up.

Drivers of growth

Transforming the role of women who previously depended on social security into drivers of regional growth is one of the incredibly positive aspects of the institute which opened its doors on 11 September 2009. Of the 80 women who have taken up the challenge, 15 have now launched their own mini enterprise and 20 jobs have been created.

Qualified business coaches reach out to women whose chances of making it onto the job market are slim. They create personal relationships with them, building up motivation and instilling a sense of 'can-do'. Ideas are fostered and grow to become viable business plans. And, support is provided even beyond start-up to ensure not just survival but also stability and even expansion.

The investment is made possible through the backing of Sormlands Savings Bank, JAK Members Bank and Ekobanken, and covers four counties, Sodermanland, Ostergötland, Vastra Gotaland and Stockholm, over a period of three years.

The Micro-Finance Institute (MFI) received €340 000 from the ERDF for a period of three years.

OPENING DOORS

For those women who lack the network, the credit history or the experience of running a company, a small loan can be just the trigger needed to get an idea off the ground. This has been the case for Kholoud Yamani. Originally from Jordan, Ms Yamani only arrived in Sweden in 2003. And, yet, in spite of her degree in physics and her 14 years' experience at the United Nations, she was unable to overcome the obstacles in the way of setting up a small business in Sweden.

Those unable to speak fluent Swedish and dependent on welfare do not have access to financial markets in Sweden. Not really knowing where to start, Ms Yamani struggled until the county council recommended that she get in touch with the MFI.

From the first conversation, everything changed. The doors opened. JAK Members Bank approved a loan of €10 000. And with this money Ms Yamani bought the necessary equipment and set about finding a clientele. She now sells cookies based on recipes from her homeland Jordan using dried dates. The biggest breakthrough for her was when she was asked to double her production and sell her cookies in one of the biggest supermarkets in Sweden. Her production went from 200 to 700 cookies per day.

With a three-year follow-up plan, she still receives support from the MFI, helping her with all types of legal and financial concerns. Expansion has also been possible and her company now includes cleaning services.

Similar stories tell of a Thai lady, Thitapha Ekberg, who opened a massage parlour and Wannamon Lofgren who started central Katrineholm's first sushi restaurant.

FIND OUT MORE:

More about this project can be found at:
<http://www.mikrofinansiering.se/>



NEW EU TOOLS TO MEET THE DEMAND FOR MICRO-CREDIT

Several EU institutions have joined forces to close the gaps in micro-credit provision for non-bankable entrepreneurs.

Many among those who would like to start a business or expand an existing one cannot provide sufficient guarantees to benefit from a traditional bank loan. As a result, the short-term demand for funds in the form of micro-credit – loans of up to €25 000 – is estimated at 700 000 new loans worth around €6.3 billion.

Introducing JASMINE...

DG Regional Policy's answer to these needs is a new instrument called JASMINE (Joint Action to Support Microfinance Institutions). Set up jointly with the European Investment Bank (EIB) group and the European Parliament, it provides both funding and technical assistance to non-bank micro-finance institutions (MFIs). Through increasing their number and developing the capacity and trustworthiness of existing institutions, more entrepreneurs will get access to loans enabling them to transform their ideas into viable businesses.

A first investment was signed in the framework of JASMINE in September 2009. The Belgium-based CoopEst fund providing micro-finance to MFIs in Central and Eastern Europe received commitments of around €1.8 million.

"Instead of creating unnecessary competition with the many banking institutions providing micro-credit, we are trying to achieve synergies and to fill in the gaps where banks cannot intervene due to the high costs involved in accompanying micro-entrepreneurs" explains Philippe Delvaux, JASMINE coordinator at DG Regional Policy. "It is worth noting that our initiative [...] is followed with great interest by the banking sector."

The new initiative, complementing the micro-credit offer provided through the JEREMIE (Joint European Resources for Micro to medium Enterprises) instrument, includes a pilot phase involving a limited number of MFIs. As a first step, the JASMINE team set up within the European Investment Fund selected 15 institutions wishing to enhance or expand their services; around twice as many will benefit from technical assistance in the course of 2011 following a second call to be launched by the EIF in the last quarter of this year.

The selected MFIs receive targeted training following an assessment by a specialised rating agency focussing on four areas: governance, financial management, quality of the information systems and risk management. They also benefit from business support services such as an online database, advice on good practice and access to a mailbox providing answers to questions on JASMINE and micro-credit. A voluntary code of conduct for MFIs is in the making. "Although not mandatory, we would like it to become a reference manual for MFIs," says Delvaux.

Funds from various sources amounting to some €55 million have been earmarked for the pilot phase.

...and PROGRESS

An instrument with complementary functions is in the process of being set up. The PROGRESS Microfinance Facility, launched by the Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, will be complementing JASMINE through increasing the loan offer for unemployed people wanting to set up their own business, people who are at risk of losing their job and vulnerable groups.

A first block of funding will be made available to financial intermediaries to extend loans to beneficiaries, but other financial products will follow. Unlike JASMINE, PROGRESS is open to banks as well as non-bank institutions.

PROGRESS will provide up to €100 million over the 2010-13 period and is expected to lever a multiple factor. The facility should become operational by the end of 2010.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=836>
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/2007/jjj/micro_en.htm



THE CASE FOR CARE IN THE COMMUNITY



Using regional funds to train people as carers for the elderly in Spain

Across Europe, more than a million children and adults live in long-stay residential institutions. This number will increase, as the population gets older. Yet many experts believe that extended stays in institutions do harm to individuals. Hence the drive towards ‘deinstitutionalisation’ and more community-based care, as recommended by the European Commission and soon to be backed by EU Structural Funds.

Academics and professionals say that people living for long periods in institutions can suffer social and psychological damage – even in well-financed and smooth-running institutions. Institutionalised babies are a special concern, as they may be at risk of impaired brain development and stunted physical growth.

One solution is to enable people, traditionally placed in institutions, to enjoy a more ‘normal life’ in the community, supported by targeted services. This is the recommendation of many international bodies and NGOs. It is echoed by the European Commission, which in September 2009 addressed the complex issue of institutional care reform in an experts report.

EU ready to fund deinstitutionalisation

The Spidla Report, named after the former Czech EU Commissioner for social affairs, included eight recommendations to the European Commission and Member States on how best to deliver the process of deinstitutionalisation. It clearly

GREECE PUSHES PSYCHIATRIC REFORM

Until the 1980s, Greece’s mental health system was institutional, centralised and lacked primary care and rehabilitation facilities. Psychiatric care was provided mainly in nine psychiatric hospitals, accommodating up to 9 000 mentally ill patients. But these institutions failed to provide the modern care people needed, as highlighted by an international group of experts.

The Greek government began reforming its psychiatric care system, in line with EU Regulation No. 815/84. Goals included deinstitutionalisation, a new community care system and more training for mental health staff. Four psychiatric hospitals have been closed and new residential facilities created. But a lack of funds, demoralised staff and other problems in Greece’s psychiatric care sector threaten long-term reform.

recommended that the EU Structural Funds should prioritise investments in community-based services rather than in institutions. Its implications are now being debated widely within the Commission.

Who is on board?

Bulgaria is deinstitutionalising care for its orphans, without waiting for EU policy to crystallise on this issue. In 2009, seven different ministers joined forces to coordinate a new child care group. Last February, the country endorsed a child care strategy focused on deinstitutionalisation.

Guided by a new national 10-year Action Plan, the goal is to build community-based services and facilities for some 7 000 children and young people, such as day-care centres for disabled children. National funds are already being invested to that end, but the EU has now also committed multi-annual EU funding of €25 million from the ERDF and €14 million from the ESF to bolster this reform process.

Drawing on Romania’s experience of deinstitutionalisation, which reduced the number of children in residential care by some 90% over two decades, Bulgaria feels ready for this major task. “The life quality of some of our most fragile citizens is at stake, so we cannot afford to fail,” says Nadia Shabani, Director of the Bulgarian Child Protection Agency, the main technical driver of the process.

FIND OUT MORE ON THE SPIDLA REPORT:

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=3992&langId=en>

INVESTING IN YOUTH ACROSS BORDERS

Young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Medway in the south east of England and Dunkirk in the north of France are being given the chance to improve the quality of their lives and raise their ability to be employed through the Acces project.

The Acces project covers a period of 36 months ending in November 2011. From the ERDF, the project was granted €509 947.33, which is 50% of the total budget of €1 019 912.60.

Empowering young people is the aim the Medway Council and Dunkirk Urban Community set out to achieve when they launched Acces in 2007. Fostering among them a desire for urban regeneration and intergenerational contact, the project seeks to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and hope throughout these two communities.

The disadvantaged neighbourhoods targeted include Medway and especially the White Road estate and Wayfield where numbers of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETs) are growing. The French equivalent, also a rising trend, is known as JAMOs, Jeunes À Moindres Opportunités. Giving these young people greater say in what happens in their neighbourhood will develop in them a sense of ownership and, importantly, a sense of pride.

Learning to live

The programme includes lessons in the practicalities of community development and citizenship. Subjects such as the following are covered: home cooking; the basics of electricity; IT; the Highway Code; orienteering and outward bound skills; community development.

Also, through practical French/English conversation classes, the young people will be able to forge ties with those on the other side of the Channel, learning more about them and their culture. Together they will produce a video recording their activities.

Planning for the future

Professional development is also an Acces project priority, especially in the run up to the 2012 Olympic Games. Sports marshalling, first aid and event management will all be taught to these young people so that they will be well placed to put their organisation and language skills to use during the Games.

Parenting with experience

It's never easy to raise a family but when you're young and from a disadvantaged background, it's harder still. This is why experienced parents have been brought on board as part of the project to share with young parents what works for them. The young and experienced parents are encouraged to meet on a regular basis and with their combined knowledge to create information booklets and videos so that these can then be passed on to others.

Creativity without borders

Like sports, the arts also have considerable potential to bring people together whatever their background, age or culture. With the help of professionals, young people are putting on various performances to revitalise social networks and generate greater interest in the arts.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.acces2seas.eu>

“ The course has taught me invaluable skills in art and design, such as making a suitcase museum! I have also become involved in many other activities – IT support, diplomacy, running and playing the drums. It's been amazing and has even given me a thirst for the limelight! I only meant to help out as a volunteer, but I ended up becoming a full participant. ”

22 year old
programme participant



Cultures and generations unite through performance art

COMPUTER LITERACY – A WINDOW TO THE FUTURE

When the Langas į ateitį initiative began back in 2002 only a very small percentage of Lithuania had internet coverage, 11% to be precise. Not surprisingly computer literacy was also low. Since then, however, internet coverage has grown and with it the number of computer literate. Backed by funds from private businesses (the founders of Langas į ateitį) as well as the European Social Fund, the Langas į ateitį initiative has gone a long way to close the digital gap in Lithuania.

Since 2002 over 75 000 Lithuanians have been offered computer literacy training courses free of charge. One of the most significant courses was the 'Computer Literacy Basics for a Lithuanian E-citizen' which was held from 2006 to 2008. The elderly, disabled and those living in remote areas have all benefited, and over 50 000 adults have completed ICT courses.

The computer literacy project received €2 million from the European Social Fund.

Universal access, universal interest

"I am delighted to be able to discover information and broaden my knowledge. I particularly like the teachings on poetry which I've found online. I can find anything, including flowers", says Ina Laurinaityte, a retired Lithuanian, effectively showing her ability to adapt skills to interests.

This example, alongside many others, has been made possible through the activities of the Langas į ateitį alliance which were initiated by socially responsible companies, banks and telecommunication and IT firms. And, while some are using the internet only for leisure, others are showing the positive impact it can have on their business.

The idea behind the initiative was to stimulate economic growth and improve the standard of living in Lithuania, as well as to boost its competitiveness in Europe and further afield.

Enthusiasm for learning

Setting up free public internet access points was the first step of the Langas į ateitį project. Cooperating with the Ministry of the Interior, a network of over 800 access points was established and kept open until 2008. This development has helped to empower local residents, especially those from remote areas.



By cooperating with local municipalities, the project was able to set up these access points in libraries, post offices, schools, hospitals and local government offices. Each point was equipped with between two and five computers.

From March 2006 to August 2008 during the implementation of this project, special courses in computer literacy and internet basics were held in each of Lithuania's 60 municipalities. This gave 50 400 people from the age of 16 the chance to boost their IT skills and, in turn, their employability. Of these people, the vast majority were female.

As the 'Computer Literacy Basics for a Lithuanian E-Citizen' project drew to a close, it became clear that many participants still wanted to improve their newly acquired skills. So, with the help of the Microsoft Unlimited Potential Programme, the project branched out further, creating a distance learning scheme under the title 'Modern Ways of acquiring ICT Knowledge'. This scheme covers four online e-learning courses in ITC skills development. Around 8 000 people have registered for one of these online courses since 2008.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.langasiateiti.lt/index.php/en>

"After the computer literacy programme and the expanding internet network, ordinary people have been able to develop contacts without leaving home, read newspapers online, download information, make payments and keep in touch with local services," said Zigmantas Janciauskis from Lithuania's association for the physically disabled.

ROBOTDALEN – SMART ASSISTANTS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Robots conjure up images of impersonal and futuristic machines. But many being developed or tested in central Sweden in 'Robot Valley' (RobotDalen) will change people's attitudes towards them forever. New healthcare and assistive-technology robots can improve quality of life for the elderly and disabled – a growing population that often finds itself on European society's fringes.

Stretched over an area 100 km across, Robot Valley is a leading European robotics centre that brings together researchers, developers, manufacturers and academia. It specialises in robotics for industry, logistics and healthcare and is backed by Sweden's government agency Vinnova, plus various Swedish authorities, universities and the private sector.

The umbrella project will run until 2013 and enjoys additional funding from the European Regional Development Fund, with a view to creating at least five new products and five new operations or companies during the financing period that ends in 2010. It has already introduced around 150 small businesses in its home region to the benefits of robotics and automation. The EU funding has also raised Robot Valley's profile and established links to similar European clusters.

Bringing together national and international robotics equipment-makers, the project works closely with users such as hospitals to test new developments. It is now more than half way towards its initial target of creating 30 new operations or companies within the robotics field and 30 new products.

Healthcare robotics

Several of the project's latest robots are designed to ensure a good quality of life for elderly or disabled people, by keeping them socially connected and empowered and/or allowing independent living at home. "When approaching healthcare, we see our work in terms of humans rather than robots," says Erik Lundqvist, General Manager, Robot Valley.

According to the Japan Robot Association (JARA), 'service robots' (which include robots for personal, medical and health applications) could account for a global market of around €24.35 billion by 2020, a figure well over twice as high as the market for manufacturing robots. Robot Valley believes that most of the growth in service robotics during this decade will come from the personal/medical/health segments.

SOME EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE ROBOTICS

Launched last year, 'Bestic' is an eating aid for people with limited arm movement. The compact table-top robotic arm has a spoon or pincers at the end, and can be controlled by buttons or a joystick. Another useful device under development is the 'Giraff', a mobile robot that enables people to communicate with others via a two-way communications monitor. "It allows family, friends and caregivers to visit the elderly in their homes via the Internet, just as if they were face to face," says Maria Gill, registered nurse and project manager, ICT in Elderly Care.

Smart robots are vital for human interaction with an ageing population. 'Genesis' is a recently launched machine that helps people to rebuild muscle after illness or accidents. 'Zoom' is an electric wheelchair able to take users up stairs or off roads. To enhance healthcare efficiency, the project is also working on 'RobCab', a robot to assist nurses in duties such as shifting hospital beds.

A maximum of €850 000 per year was allocated to the Robot Valley project from the ERDF for the 2008 to 2010 period.

FIND OUT MORE:

www.robotdalen.org



Unique chassis design enables a wide range of functional exercises

ROMA INCLUSION – CAMPAIGNING FOR CHANGE



What makes a campaign for Roma inclusion effective? How does one pinpoint where the problem lies and how it can be resolved? And, most importantly, how does one make sure it is linked to political action – to create and sustain conditions for change?

The Spolu International Foundation, an NGO from the Netherlands with over 10 years' experience in building up Roma organisations, brings together Romania's Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, Roma Active Albania and Integro from Bulgaria. Together they will take part in a pilot project which sets out to answer these, and other questions. This will run in four countries, under the banner of the European Roma Grassroots Organisation (ERGO) Network.

A 'pilot project' is designed to test the feasibility of a certain action as well as to assess its usefulness. The Interinstitutional Agreement between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and sound financial management allows for these projects to be implemented by the Commission at the request of the Parliament.

Attacking stereotypes

The campaigns will tackle Roma stereotypes in the public arena and among policy-makers, as well as in Roma communities. The aim is not only to address these attitudes but also to mobilise and empower Roma communities to change the conditions shaping their future.

One of the overarching objectives is to develop an awareness-raising campaign – with models, methods and messages. This will help to measure the impact of the campaign and replicate it elsewhere. Spolu also intends to invest in human resources via a development programme for Young Roma Professionals.

How to get the message over?

In Romania, the Policy Center for Roma and Minorities will use films to reach wider audiences. The aim is to empower youth and discourage them from joining one of Bucharest's worst Roma ghettos – Ferentari. Underlying this is a need to break the cycle of exclusion and stigmatisation that plagues their neighbourhoods. Kids from this neighbourhood are encouraged to explore alternative futures. A documentary on life in Ferentari is being produced in close cooperation with Romania's award-winning production company, Strada.

In Romania and Italy, campaigns centering on sporting events will spread positive messages to a wider public. This component seeks long-term commitment from sports associations to address anti-Roma sentiment. The Policy Center for Roma and Minorities will take part alongside other groups, such as the Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti (UISP).

In Albania and Bulgaria the emphasis will be on encouraging local and regional authorities to address Roma issues more seriously. Very often local authorities acknowledge Roma issues only at a superficial level. What's more, many Roma have become passive and consider this 'normal'. Consequently, Roma communities rarely take their place as equal stakeholders in municipal policies.

For Albania's RAA and Bulgaria's Integro the mission is to stimulate integrated approaches to Roma inclusion through the involvement of local Roma communities, municipalities and regions. The expected outcome is greater recognition for Roma citizens as equal stakeholders in policy design and implementation.

The project is funded by the pilot project 'Pan-European coordination of Roma integration methods' – Roma inclusion, under the 'Information and awareness-raising' component.

It runs from 5 June 2010 to 5 December 2011

ERDF funds represent €989 140

National funding is €175 000

Total budget is €1 164 140

FIND OUT MORE:

www.ergonetnetwork.org

TARGETING THE MOST DISADVANTAGED IN HUNGARY

An experimental programme to kick-start development in some 30 'micro-regions' across Hungary is being rolled out. With strong input from local communities and EU financial backing, it funds hundreds of infrastructure, environment, transport and tourism projects.

The Least Developed Micro-Regions (LDMR) Programme helps the most disadvantaged micro-regions, mainly in the country's north-east, south and south-west. Focused on economic development, employment, education and Roma integration, it innovatively combines a range of different funds and operational programmes.

LDMR Programme total budget: €340 million of funding

The EU's European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund together contributing 85% for the 2007 to 2013 programming period, Hungarian funding 15%.

Driving the Programme and its goals are unemployment, poverty, segregation and discrimination. Hungary's most depressed micro-regions are home to around 10% of the population and one in three of the Roma population. Further challenges include a lack of economic activity, failing schools, workforce migration and growing debt.

Under its first National Development Plan (2004-06), Hungary channelled higher-than-average funds to many of these micro-regions. However the results were not that impressive and national authorities realised that additional action would be necessary. This gave rise to the LDMR, a complex development programme targeting the nation's 33 most depressed micro-regions – located in the North Hungary, South Great Plain, North Great Plain, and South Transdanubia regions.

The LDMR's funds are distributed via three Hungarian national operational programmes (Regional, Social Renewal, and Social Infrastructure). One third is evenly distributed, one third depends on the number of inhabitants per micro-region (between 11 000 and 72 000), and one third depends on the number of settlements per micro-region (between four and 49). Several other national instruments are also contributing funds to the LDMR.

Territorial approach, resource-based planning

The Programme has an office in Budapest at the National Development Agency (NDA). Besides this office, it benefits from two NDA coordinators per micro-region, several experts and assistance from local 'adopting' universities. Together they helped the micro-regions draw up a project package with various integrated projects, based on a local development plan to spend each micro-region's allocated sum.

Around 5 000 people participated in project planning, highlighting the involvement of local communities in each micro-region. "The LDMR Programme is unique in Hungary, introducing a new development instrument and selecting micro-regions as a target area rather than more centralised regions or counties," says Frigyes Janza, LDMR Programme coordinator.

Of the 900 projects selected by managing authorities, some 250 have already started. They include work to build or refurbish schools, kindergartens, health and social centres, and bus stations as well as to improve wastewater, drinking water and flood prevention facilities. Roma communities outside towns are being helped, thanks to construction of better linking roads, while several main regional roads are also planned. Lastly, the programme aims to boost tourism to these rarely visited micro-regions, which have major cultural and heritage attractions.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.nfu.hu



ERDF CHANGES – REDUCING RED TAPE, FREEING UP FUNDS

With Europe reeling from the effect of a series of financial crises, the EU has stepped in to amend the regulations governing the European Regional Development Fund, aimed at simplifying management rules for the Structural and Cohesion Funds. Panorama examines the likely effect on the ground.

A key part of the European Economic Recovery Plan

The ongoing economic crisis has dented business confidence, increased the number of people out of work, and is putting a massive strain on public finances. Regarding the last in particular, this pressure on public budgets means that governments and regions are finding it increasingly difficult to provide the match funding which is a basic pre-requisite for European Structural Fund investment.

On 16 June 2010, the EU published new measures aimed at simplifying management rules for Structural and Cohesion Funds. The changes should help to facilitate access to the funds and accelerate flows of investment at a time when public budgets are under pressure. As part of the measures to counter the economic crisis, additional advance payments totalling €775 million will be paid out to some member countries to tackle immediate cash flow problems.

These new changes have been brought in to help tackle liquidity problems, as well as reduce red tape to make it easier to access funds. Speeding up project implementation on the ground will give a helping hand to national and regional economies in these times of crisis.

Through cohesion policy's three funds – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund – the 455 cohesion policy programmes are investing a total of €347 billion, between 2007 and 2013, in all EU regions.

The key changes are:

- **Introducing a single ceiling of €50 million for all types of major projects that require the Commission's approval.**

The new uniform threshold will allow, for example, smaller-scale environmental projects to be decided by Member States alone, thus helping them to start up more quickly.

- **Allowing for major projects to be financed by more than one programme.**

For example, the construction of a major motorway section which cuts across different regions can now be co-financed by several regional programmes. Under previous rules, this could not be accommodated.

- **Enhancing the use of financial engineering.**

Creating the possibility of setting up dedicated instruments to boost spending on energy efficiency and renewable energies.

- **Easing the obligation to maintain investments over a five-year period.**

These rules will now only apply to certain projects, such as those in the infrastructure and productive investment sectors. They will not apply to undertakings which go unintentionally bankrupt.

- **Simplifying the rules on 'revenue-generating' projects (e.g. toll motorways or projects involving the leasing or sale of land).**

In order to reduce the administrative burden on Member States, revenues will now only be monitored until the closure of the related programme.

- **Targeting additional advances of €775 million**

(4% from the ESF and 2% from the Cohesion Fund) for Member States which received a loan under the IMF balance of payment scheme, or saw a GDP decrease of more than 10%: by applying these two criteria, this concerns Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary and Romania.

- **Postponing 'N+2 decommitment' rules.**

Under N+2, if the funding allocated in 2007 had not been spent by the end of 2009 it would be automatically returned to the EU budget. The changes will allow the commitments for 2007 to be spent over a longer period.

These modifications complement the large number of other initiatives which have been taken since the beginning of the crisis under the European Economic Recovery Plan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/recovery/



In each edition, Panorama finds out how two projects are unfolding from the perspective of the people managing them. We look into the highs and lows of managing an ERDF-funded project: identifying the problems and sharing solutions.

PROJECT 1

INSIDE LONGLIFE

Facts and figures

Some €2.3 million is being invested in the Longlife project from January 2009 to January 2012.

Design matters

Foundations are being laid in July of this year for a prototype building which may well become the gold standard for buildings of the future. Characterised by energy and cost efficiency, the new prototype will draw on the expertise of five countries in the Baltic Sea Region.

A 500-page comparative review setting out the practices used in Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Russia forms the groundwork of this new building prototype. It is intended that this model will offer a sustainable, yet affordable, alternative to the building industry internationally.

"If you spend enough time preparing a project application, you will save time in its implementation" says Ms Kiefel, "the benefits of discussing with partners the various tasks and expectations shouldn't be underestimated".

Pooling strengths to maximise impact

The past few months of the Longlife project have been taken up with gathering information and reporting on the current state of technological development, administrative requirements, legal procedures, financial perspectives and demographic needs of the building industries of the project's participating countries.

Similarities were drawn and differences uncovered to identify just exactly how certain construction methods can be optimised and subsequently harmonised. The outcome will be a set of guidelines for energy efficiency, sustainability, resource optimisation and low lifecycle costs.

From guidelines to architectural designs

For the summer semester, project manager and lecturer, Klaus Rückert has been giving classes at the Berlin Institute of Technology and Josifas Parasonis at the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. The aim of these classes is to come up with a prototype for a sustainable and energy-efficient residential building.



Making progress in communication

Understandably, a project with such a broad geographical coverage has required a remarkably high level of communication among its partners. Ms Maria-Ilona Kiefel explained that simply writing emails just wasn't enough.

"Following our workshop in Vilnius, at the end of January, we decided to hold regular video conferences. This has proved very efficient.

Regular monitoring and confidence-building cooperation have been the most important matters for the Longlife project," she added.

Flexibility in the face of austerity

While progress has been steady, the project did suffer as a result of the financial crisis when three partners had to drop out. This Ms Kiefel said was a real low point. It required restructuring certain tasks in order to meet the goals of the Longlife project.

In each of the five participating countries Longlife has three partners – one university, one administration and one company. The crisis saw one partner dropping out from Germany and two from Poland.

The project held its midterm international conference in St Petersburg in June where partners made plans to work alongside their Russian counterparts.

FIND OUT MORE:

http://www.longlife-world.eu/home_en.html

While we will be following up on the Musikpark and the NanoHealth Centre in our next edition, in this issue we discover what's been happening in two other projects – Competitive Health Services and Longlife.

PROJECT 2

INSIDE COMPETITIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Facts and figures

Just under €1 million is being invested in the Competitive Health Services project from January 2008 to the end of 2010.

Making life easier for distant patients

Kidney patients in the far north should soon experience shorter waiting times for local appointments to see their consultants, with fewer outpatients having to make the 200-mile round trip to Raigmore Hospital in Inverness. The latest services mean certain check-ups for patients receiving dialysis treatment can be carried out via a simple video link. Through the Competitive Health Services project, technology is being used effectively to cut travel and waiting times – much to the relief of the patients living in remote locations in northern Europe.

Project Coordinator Minna Mäkineniemi is satisfied with the progress so far. "We are actually piloting more services than originally planned", she said of the project which spans Finland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Scotland's outermost regions. These are the areas in which population density stands at around 3.5 per km².

Far beyond traditional care

Much has been achieved since our last project update. Here are just a couple of examples of the new services which have taken root.

The main renal unit at Raigmore Hospital in Inverness is now connected with Caithness General Hospital in Wick (110 miles away) via a video link, thereby helping the increasing number of Caithness patients with renal disease. Nurses are also able to benefit from the link as they can consult with specialists about their patients' treatment.

Oulu University Hospital specialists are treating patients with various wounds and leg ulcers at a remote healthcare centre via a high-definition video link. These patients are able to consult with dermatologists, plastic surgeons and wound care nurses. And, their home care nurses can in turn consult with

wound care nurses. This ongoing service is welcomed by patients who no longer have to make the long and sometimes painful trips to the hospital or health centre.

Modern healthcare requires modern means

The project has not been without its fair share of obstacles – technical constraints for one. Ms Mäkineniemi explained that sometimes the existing IT infrastructure doesn't always support the new services. Sound and picture quality in Scotland, for example, suffer in the event of low bandwidth ISDN connections. And, as healthcare is brought to homes, patients are also required to have fast broadband connections, which is not always the case with the elderly.

Coordinating multidisciplinary teams has also posed a challenge. The project calls on input from many busy professionals – doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, ICT staff and administrative staff – this has made it tricky to match schedules. The international dimension adds to this.

Ensuring the information flow between partners, who meet only twice a year, has been important.

For Ms Mäkineniemi, this has been one of the more gratifying dimensions of the project – being able to share knowledge and learn from the other partners, as well as carry out some benchmarking. The international dimension has also helped to analyse the success and feasibility of the pilot e-services, as data is shared among partner countries. This in turn can help to further develop new services in the Northern Periphery.

Were Ms Mäkineniemi to give one piece of advice to others in a similar position, it would be to have a jointly drafted implementation plan which everyone agrees on to ensure full commitment to meeting all of the various goals. The challenge now is to pave the way for sustainable services which will outlast the Competitive Health Services project.

FIND OUT MORE:

www.ehealthservices.eu



REGIONS FOR ECONOMIC CHANGE

– BUILDING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Greener cities for Europe and sustainable solutions in the fields of energy and ICT were at the heart of discussions at the annual conference of the Regions for Economic Change initiative (20-21 May 2010).

True to its role as a motor for innovation and economic modernisation, the conference looked at how growth can be made sustainable through targeted actions, intensified cooperation as well as political consensus.

“Cohesion policy is uniquely placed to contribute to the delivery of the EU’s sustainable growth objectives,” said Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik in his keynote speech, explaining it could drive the move towards a more resource-efficient, competitive and greener economy.

The conference made a contribution to achieving this objective through the organisation of workshops and the launch of local action plans, the awarding of the 2010 RegioStars as well as through providing opportunities for networking and the exchange of good practice.

The regions in action

New perspectives on hot topics were sought in a series of workshops. Regarding sustainable ICT solutions, speaker Luc Soete from the Maastricht research and training centre UNU-MERIT Focus suggested that long-term research and innovation policies were essential for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. “Given the fiscal pressures on Member States’ budgets in the years to come, it is crucial to stress today the particular role and responsibility of European governments towards a long-term public commitment in support of research and innovation,” he said.

As a contribution to the discussion on how to achieve more energy efficiency in regions and cities, the Barcelona Provincial Council presented a model project aiming at an efficient implementation of the carbon reduction objectives. The network of municipalities has helped to improve environmental management in the region through the development of sustainability indicators and the provision of support services.

The workshop on greener cities focused on the importance of re-using urban brown fields and contaminated landfill sites for the development of cities and regions.

Action plans for fast-track networks

The conference marked the launch of local action plans for the so-called fast-track networks focusing on topics including innovation, sustainability, integration and social inclusion. The field experience of several fast-track networks was presented during the conference. Turin City Council presented the local action plan for ‘Building Healthy Communities’, an initiative illustrating the social aspects of sustainable growth: promoting health issues in urban environments, the project highlights the need for coordinated action involving different policy areas such as environmental, social or economic policies. For instance, health issues created through social vulnerability cannot be solved through health policies alone.



REGIOSTARS 2010: REWARDING INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Six innovative projects having benefited from regional funding received RegioStars Awards during a ceremony organised in the framework of the conference. The winners include:

- The Belgian C-Mine centre for transforming an industrial site into a hub for entrepreneurs and visitors;
- A Swedish micro-finance institute which helps migrant women to secure capital for setting up their own businesses;
- The Lithuanian ‘Langas į ateitį’ alliance promoting e-services among the elderly, the disabled and people living in remote areas;
- A new German business model for ambulatory monitoring of patients;
- A French high-speed broadband project for sparsely populated areas;
- The Lithuanian website project esparama. It providing information on EU structural funding.

The RegioStars which included for the first time two CityStars categories are awarded yearly to highlight projects which could be inspiring to other regions.



Regions setting the example

The participants had many concrete examples of innovative and sustainable solutions to bring to the table. Juan Alario from the EIB presented ELENA (European Local Energy Assistance), a technical assistance facility helping cities and regions to prepare sustainable energy projects for EIB funding. He explained that ELENA projects were designed to be replicated elsewhere, thereby helping to spread good practices. Financed through the EU's Intelligent Energy – Europe programme, ELENA provides support for projects such as sustainable building or environmentally-friendly transport.

In the Czech Republic, energy efficiency measures in the building sector co-financed through the ERDF have resulted in a reduction of air pollution and CO₂ emissions, operational savings for firms, the creation of green jobs as well as a healthier environment.

Other showcase projects include the PIKE project for access to e-government services and the B3 regions' actions for Better BroadBand connection to tackle the digital divide.

The Regions for Economic Change initiative was launched in 2006 in order to provide regions with an opportunity to influence policies in an efficient and coordinated way. It is financed through the INTERREG IVC and URBACT II programmes.

FIND OUT MORE:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/sustainable-growth/home_en.cfm

Committee of the Regions Forum on exclusion

The Europe 2020 Strategy with its strategic objective of 'inclusive growth' and the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion 2010 have put poverty and social exclusion issues firmly in the spotlight.

Within this context, the EU's Committee of the Regions organised a forum on local and regional responses to poverty and social exclusion on 8 June. The aim was to showcase some of the numerous examples of actions on the ground as a way to help translate local action into national and European policy. In light of rising unemployment and fiscal constraints in the wake of the economic crisis, these actions have taken on even more importance.

The conference focused on three broad themes: making local social services more accessible to all, preparing people for integration into the labour market, and providing for inclusive citizenship in urban and rural areas. Local project managers and other regional stakeholders from across the EU shared their own experiences of the many approaches in addressing these questions. The wide range of best practice examples shared a common focus on disadvantaged groups of society – children living in poverty, refugees and asylum seekers, unemployed young people, people with disabilities, or homeless people.

In the concluding session participants argued for a better understanding of the multiple needs of disadvantaged individuals and an approach building on individual strengths – talents, interests, skills and qualifications. This approach was reflected in many of the successful projects which focused particularly on fostering enthusiasm and motivation as well as on empowering people to take back control of their own lives. As one project example from Scotland summed up the idea: "Nothing About Us Without Us is For Us".



DATES 2010/2011	EVENT	PLACE
4-7 October 2010	The 8 th Open Days, the European Week for Regions and Cities www.opendays.europa.eu	Brussels (BE)
13-14 October	Annual Forum of the EU Baltic Sea Strategy http://www.bsssc.com/news.asp?id=8657&pid=79&sid=79	Tallinn (EE)
November (tbc)	Roma inclusion: From data collection and evaluation to evidence-based policy http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/	Brussels (BE)
9 November	Micro-finance instruments http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/2007/jjj/	Brussels (BE)
16-19 November	Espon week (http://www.espon.eu/)	Liège (BE)
18-19 November	JESSICA and JEREMIE Conference http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/funds/2007/jjj/	Brussels (BE)
22-23 November	Informal ministerial meeting	Liège (BE)
30 November -1 December	URBACT Annual Conference http://urbact.eu/en/homepage-2/	Liège (BE)
2 December	Forum of cities	Liège (BE)
31 January -1 February 2011	5 th Cohesion Forum	Brussels (BE)
26-27 May	Regions for Economic Change Conference and RegioStars Awards	Brussels (BE)

Additional information on these events can be found in the Agenda section on our Inforegio website:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/agenda/

The winter edition of Panorama will be taking a close look at the Fifth Cohesion Report, due to be adopted at the beginning of November.

Following that, we intend to examine in one of the later editions of Panorama how the global economic crisis which began in 2008 has revealed inherent structural weaknesses in many countries and regions in Europe regardless of their level of economic and social development.

It will analyse the different responses made available through European cohesion policy and Panorama very much welcomes contributions and examples of projects on this subject.

In 2011 Panorama will be taking a look at territorial cooperation, so if you would like to share interesting work in the above areas, ask questions or express your views on this or any other regional policy issue, get in touch by contacting:

regio-panorama@ec.europa.eu

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