

Making Policies for and with Seniors – From Isolation to Inclusion Project

1. Project Relevance

The project work focused on the identification and improvement of measures that enable groups with a multi-dimensional risk of social exclusion to fully participate in the community life. A major focus was placed on strengthening initiatives undertaken by older persons for older persons and on supporting networks of these initiatives.

Especially important is the fact that, through the development of the available project materials (for instance, Regional Action Plans and especially The Guidelines for Action), relevant regional actors in the field of seniors' care and senior citizens themselves were involved to work together. The Regional Action Plans are very specific to countries and regions; thus, they represent the opinions of many parties involved: stakeholders by means of the given overview, figures and statistics; professionals/governmental representatives by means of in-depth analyses and official legislative documents; seniors themselves by means of interviewed participants; during the project, many samples are described as good working initiatives.

The key outcome of the respective introductory preparatory phases (described in details under p.6 "Educational process") was the establishment of Regional Action Committees formed of representatives of senior citizen groups, welfare organisations, voluntary services, representatives of the church, members of the target groups, representative groups in local government agencies, politicians and social scientists. These experts met regularly and the Regional Action Committees grew into a dynamic forum for dialogue and cross-sector exchange of expertise.

In this respect, the project offers a perspective on the involvement of policy-makers and on the communication of governmental organisations with regard to the existing policies for empowerment and participation of older citizens.

2. Background and Aims

In Austria, the project was implemented by the Municipality of Graz together with the Federal Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, Vienna, as an associated partner and Queraum, a cultural & social research organisation from Vienna, specialised in the coordination of and participation in European projects, the empowerment and participation of socially excluded groups, volunteering, care for the elderly, quality of social services and new social partnerships.

In the Czech Republic, the organisations involved were the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Prague, responsible for the implementation of the National Programme of Preparation for Ageing for 2003 - 2007 and for the coordination of the social inclusion strategy in the Czech Republic; as well as Život 90, which is one of the key actors in the field of care and services for older people in the Czech Republic and a partner for many of the Czech non-governmental and governmental organisations, *i.e.* working on the improvement

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of the quality of life for the entire society by developing social activities that help solving the problems of the elderly.

In Germany, the Hessische Staatskanzlei - the Minister President's office which promotes civic engagement as one of the political focuses of the regional government and acts in close cooperation with 447 Hessian municipalities and counties as well as with welfare organisations -cooperating with ISIS, Institut für Soziale Infrastruktur, Frankfurt am Main, a private social science research, training and consultancy institute specialised on issues of population groups threatened or concerned with higher risks of disadvantages, such as older persons, migrants, people with disability or the unemployed.

In Italy, Emilia-Romagna Regional Government and Lunaria, Rome, as a consultant which every year exchanges with partner organisations worldwide about 1.000 short, medium and long-term volunteers in socially useful sectors were the project partners.

In Lithuania, the cooperation within the project was between the Federal Ministry of Social Security and Labour, Vilnius (as an associated partner) and Pagyvenusios moters veiklos centras, Kaunas, an elderly women's activities centre working with socially active women to come together and engage in self-improvement, common realization of individual possibilities and self-esteem.

The UK partners were the UK Government, the Department of Work and Pensions (as an associated partner), which has strategic and delivery responsibility for the labour market and state pensions issues in the UK and The Experience Corps, London, which recruits people 50+ to work voluntarily in their local communities and develop innovative projects to use the experience of older people.

As one of the main products of the project work, all the involved regions developed **Regional Action Plans** for the inclusion and re-integration of older citizens into the community life.

The project partners drafted the **Guidelines for Action** to assist people and communities working on or interested in the Regional Action Plans for inclusion and re-integration of isolated and excluded older citizens into the community life. Based on the experience gained within the project, the handbook provides an insight into how such an Action Plan may be developed within a specific regional setting.

Up to that date, all the Member States already had national action plans against poverty and social exclusion. Although in most of the countries older people were identified as a group at high risk for social exclusion, age-related topics are hardly addressed and specific groups are rarely targeted in an explicit manner in the national action plans. In this respect, the i2i-project was launched in order to meet the needs quoted in the respective political documents and to elaborate action plans including implementation strategies for the social integration of older people at a regional level.

3. Description of the Target Groups

The target groups considered within the project could be combined into two:

-On the one hand, there were the governmental organisations, local authorities, experts and scientists (social, welfare, etc.), namely the actors which developed the project and the project materials. Developed materials (such as the Guidelines for Action, the Regional Action Plans) are an excellent tool for those considering or already working on the Regional Action Plans for the social inclusion and re-integration of older citizens (again: individuals and organisations at a regional level, such as representatives of the target group and local authorities, welfare organisations and social scientists).

-On the other hand, there were the project materials (the Regional Action Plans) focusing and fundamentally outlining a general political strategy to promote the social participation of older people in a particular region. The starting point for the development of measures to re-integrate isolated older people into the community life presents an extraordinary variation across regions; in this sense, their targets differ from one country and region to another, as set out hereinbelow.

Austria

In the city of Graz, the institutional structures of political representation and social participation of older people have already been established by the implementation of the Regional Senior Citizen Advisory Council and of the City Department for Seniors' Affairs. However, the main challenges are the further development of the existing structures for political and social participation, the creation of new concepts of direct involvement and the support of a barrier-free and user-friendly environment.

Based on the interviews conducted with regional experts and on the work of the Regional Action Committee, their Regional Action Plan is structured around the main groups of older people at high risk for social exclusion and around the target groups. The measures and activities identified include:

- People without family and social networks;
- Very old single people (80+);
- People with low incomes;
- Mentally ill and disabled persons;
- Older people who are no longer mobile;
- Older people taking care of their relatives (mainly women);
- Black and minority ethnic elderly people;
- Older people entering 3rd age (prevention).

The Czech Republic and Lithuania

In Hradec Králové and Kaunas, the (further) development of social services for older people and increasing quality standards represent the focus of recent activities. In the Strategy of Development of Social Services for 2004-2014 developed by Municipality of the City of Kaunas, however, older people are hardly mentioned at all.

Objectives and target groups in Hradec Králové:

- Improving the situation of some of the most vulnerable groups of older people by developing and implementing innovative measures;
- Strengthening the partnership of key stakeholders at a local level;
- Creating a wide range of appropriate services for older people.

In Lithuania, the Regional Action Plan is based on the needs of older people and it is structured around older people at high risk for social exclusion:

- people without a family or with a strong lack of social involvement;
- people with a lack of knowledge about social activities and information;
- people suffering from age-related disabilities and people who are helping them at home;
- older people who are no longer mobile.

Germany

The Hessian government published their "Senior-Political Principles and Guidelines" which include, *inter alia*, recommendations for activities in the fields of civic engagement, lodging and living conditions, and palliative care.

A special attention will be paid to the following groups among the senior population:

- People without family networks;
- Very old single people (80+);
- People with low incomes;
- Mentally ill and disabled persons;
- People entering the third age (in terms of prevention).

Italy

The focus in Emilia Romagna is to create an integrated and multidimensional approach to all the regional policies: town-planning, housing, transport and mobility, trade, social, social-medical, cultural, economic, pension and safety policies.

Based on the interviews carried out by a regional committee of experts, the target groups of older people at higher risk of isolation are the following:

- People without a family and social networks;

- People living alone or in a family including other older people, over 80 and/or requiring long-term care;
- People with low incomes;
- Carers (especially women);
- Isolated people living in high criminality risk zones;
- People with a limited condition of autonomy and mobility;
- People living in isolated areas (rural, hill and mountain areas);
- Adults entering the third age.

UK

A Bristol Older People's Strategy was developed in cooperation with older people, carers, representatives from voluntary and welfare organisations, as well as public authorities. As a part of the further development of this Strategy, Bristol is working on the often differing needs of older people in black and minority ethnic communities and of those suffering from dementia.

The randomly selected group of older people who were asked which were the risk factors that are most crucial to Bristol identified the following groups of older people most concerned with or at risk of social exclusion and isolation:

- very old people (80+) and the housebound people due to illness/disability/mental health;
- older people who live in areas of deprivation and who have low incomes;
- particularly older women who –on the average- live longer than men;
- older people from ethnic minority groups;
- older people living in areas with a high crime rate;
- older people who cannot access public transport services due to ill health, disabilities or lack of services;
- older people without a family or friends;
- older people (>50) who were forced to retire, but wish to continue working.

4. Outputs and Multiplying Outcomes

Inventory of Innovation – a tool on the project web to submit your sample/good practice description and share with the project-parties – still working and available link/tool.

All the involved partner regions developed **Regional Action Plans** which are pointing out many policy and research documents, and emphasize an overview of facts and figures along with samples of projects and good working practices, as well as interviews with experts and seniors. They encompass a description of the *status-quo* and the framework of community care in the region. Furthermore, they consist of a list of targets set by the regional committee to improve the situation, broken down to concrete measures to reach these goals, and a set of indicators to evaluate the performance.

The Quick Scan Reports include an analysis of policy and research documents; they also provide an overview on the existing European and national policies for empowerment and participation of older citizens and on the gaps concerning these issues.

The Guidelines/Handbook provides experience-based knowledge to politicians, practitioners and others interested in developing a Regional Action Plan aimed at minimising the social exclusion of isolated older people:

- an overview of the socio-economic and political contexts in which the Regional Action Plans were developed. By describing objectives, target groups and steps made towards developing a Regional Action Plan, different approaches of the regions involved;
- case studies - how the involved partners proceeded in developing a Regional Action Plan; information on the political and social background of the respective regions, as well as on target group(s) and risk factors identified;
- relevant findings of the i2i-project including suggestions for the content of Regional Action Plans and useful tips for the development process.

The last output described provides the parties interested in the topic with descriptive information on projects/actions/samples done on European level and their details on who

developed these Plans, and when, where and how these Plans were developed– a real benefit to all the co-workers for inclusion and empowerment of seniors.

5. Impact and Sustainability

Within the **Inventory of Innovation**, there are impressive numbers of seniors' initiatives and projects on the project-web (82, with a short description and link, as well as contact details), divided by the country of origin (Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and UK); on the other hand, it is possible to sort this information by theme - 8 different subjects, which are:

Poverty - 30 samples;

Loneliness/isolation - 77 samples;

Gender with specific risks for women and men - 16 samples;

Very old age - 31 samples;

Poor health condition - 49 samples;

Migration background – 12 samples;

Loss of job – 10 samples;

Poor access to services e.g. ICT, means of transport – 35 samples.

In most of these initiatives and samples, a special attention is given to voluntary work. This large collection of good examples shows the creative potentials of civil society and makes clear that solutions for demographic questions can be given in close cooperation between the State and the third sector.

The project ended, but the website is still functioning and all the mentioned materials and project-outputs are available for free reading and downloading from the web. An important element of the project is that it creates possibilities to gather examples of practices. This part is still functioning since the website is still providing the opportunity to a person to upload such examples.

5. Educational Process

For the I2I project, it is more relevant to present the Regional Action Plans' development process:

In each country, a governmental and an external consultancy organisation cooperated at regional level. The project approach combined political impetus, expert know-how and direct links into practice; thus, it intended to increase the chances for a successful implementation of socio-political measures in favour of isolated old persons.

To keep important stakeholder groups (mainly targeting policy makers and public authorities) informed about the project, three **newsletters** were disseminated - containing information about the ongoing results and the development of the project.

The Regional Action Plans were jointly developed by the relevant stakeholders. These plans form the basis for concrete measures and activities in the field of empowerment, inclusion and participation of older citizens in the respective region.

Each region established a Regional Action Committee made up of appropriate/relevant stakeholders and experts, such as representatives of local and regional governments, charitable and welfare organisations, members of the target groups, senior citizens' organisations and social scientists. The number of meetings, as well as the number of participants varied. However, in most regions a core of 10-20 people worked on the Regional Action Plans regularly.

In addition to the Regional Action Committee, project partners in the Rhine-Main Area established a Local Action Committee to deal with specific topics. By contrast, two meetings of the Regional Action Committee were held and transferred the project results from the city of Wetzlar to the Rhine-Main Area.

In the Rhine-Main Area and Graz, disadvantaged older people were involved in the development process. Special workshops were convened to include their ideas and point of view into the Regional Action Plans.

As initiators of the Regional Action Plans, in most regions a member of the local or regional government acted as a chairperson of the Regional Action Committee and moderated the meetings.

Working phases:

1/ Preparatory phase

Regions were selected as exemplary regions and initial consultations with regional and local governments, organisations and agencies were made.

2/ Introductory phase:

- A survey was conducted by experts in the target groups and selected older people in order to identify those groups of older people concerned with or at risk of isolation and risk factors.

- Furthermore, face-to-face interviews and/or questionnaires were used to get in contact with those organisations which are considered suitable to provide solutions.

- The key development in the introductory phase, however, was the establishment of the Regional Action Committees. The main function of the committee was to formulate the Regional Action Plans by identifying objectives, strategies, priorities, vulnerable groups and activities. In most of the regions, these activities took place during the preparatory phase and they did not require any introductory phase.

3/ Development phase 1

Participants of the Regional Action Committee elaborated a draft version of the Regional Action Plan. In some regions, external experts were invited to present good practice examples in order to quicken the discussion.

4/ Draft version of the Regional Action Plans

5/ Review phase

Regional Action Plans were subjected to peer review by European partners.

6/ Development Phase

Based on the feedback from the European partners, experts and Regional Action Committees, the Regional Action Plans were further developed.

7/ Final version of the Regional Action Plans