



ESF Empowerment HANDBOOK



**THE ESF LEARNING NETWORK
ON EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION**



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EMPOWERMENT

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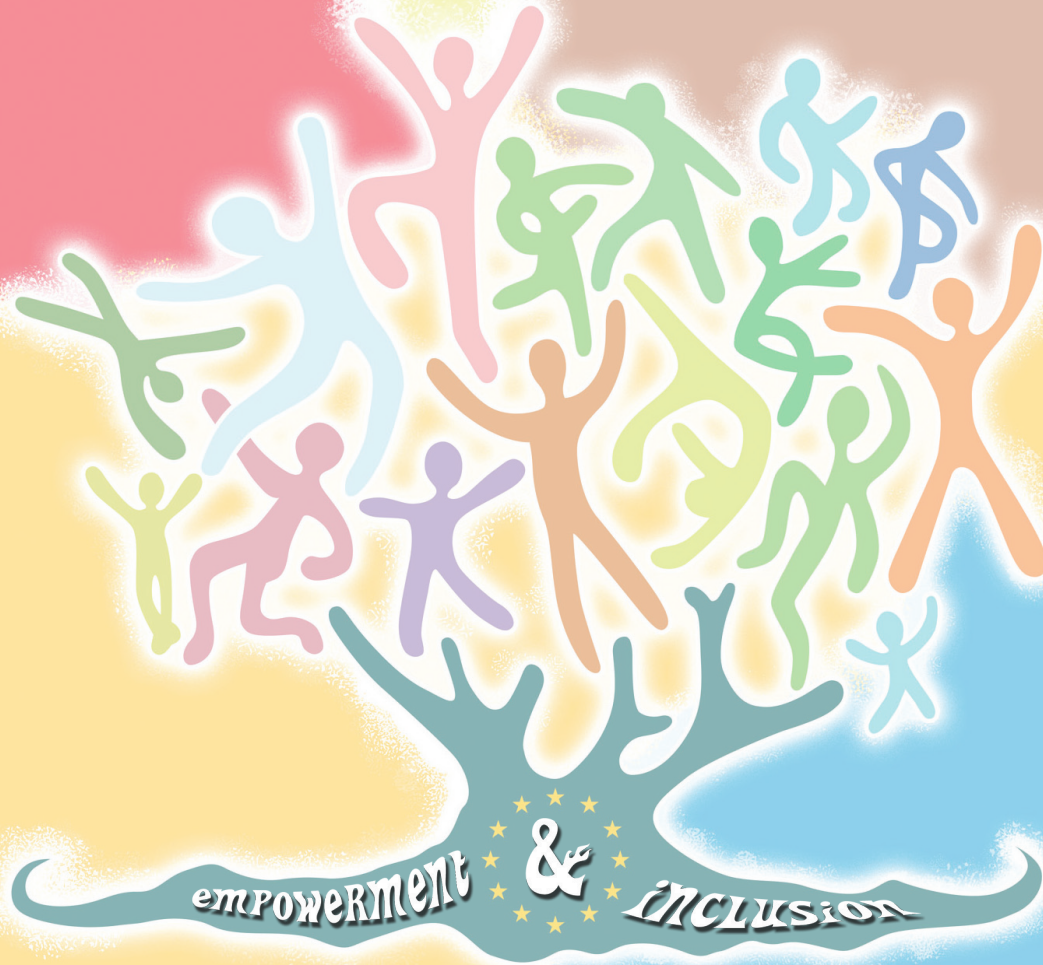
September 2012

A decent provision for the poor is the true test of civilisation.

Samuel Johnson, 1770

Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives... Since poverty is multidimensional, poor people need a range of assets and capabilities at the individual level (such as health, education, and housing) and at the collective level (such as the ability to organise and mobilise to take collective action to solve their problems).

World Bank, 2002



Preface: Establishment of the Network

Following calls for proposals launched by the European Commission in 2008 and 2009, 13 ESF Learning Networks¹ were created to strengthen ESF transnational exchange and cooperation through networking for capacity building and mutual learning between ESF Managing Authorities (MAs), Implementing Bodies (IBs) and strategic stakeholders.

The Learning Network on Empowerment and Inclusion comprises partners from six Member States:

- UK Northern Ireland: Department for Employment and Learning, which is the ESF MA and Lead Partner in the Learning Network, PROTEUS (NI) Ltd - the ESF National Support Structure and Belfast City Council;
- Belgium - Flanders: the ESF Agency - the ESF MA;
- Spain: Ministry of Labour and Immigration - the ESF MA;
- Greece: Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare - Special Service for Social Inclusion and Social Economy, designated by the ESF MA;
- Sweden: Thematic Group on Equality/ Arbetsmiljöforum an organisation designated by the ESF MA in Sweden;
- Slovenia: Government Office for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy - the ESF MA.

Together, these partners have been taking forward activities started² during the EQUAL Community Initiative.

There have been three main aspects to this work:

- **Production of a Handbook on Empowerment** - designed to help ESF Managing Authorities, Intermediary Bodies and Project Promoters to use empowerment approaches to attain their objectives.
- **Empowerment of Individuals** - testing and final development of tools to enable ESF projects to measure the degree of empowerment of their participants and to benchmark empowerment processes across projects;
- **Establishment of Inclusive Workplaces** - creating a diagnostic tool and award scheme, which recognises employers who excel in the provision of inclusive workplaces³.

This Handbook draws on the experience and advice of representatives of a number of projects that have been supported by the ESF. Through a workshop and subsequent continuing communication, these projects have contributed to the development of this text. Contact details for these projects and their representatives can be found in Annex B of the Handbook. All the partners in the Learning Network wish to express their gratitude to these individuals and organisations, as it would have been impossible to produce this Handbook without their active involvement and ongoing support.

1 <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=56&langId=en>

2 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/news/200712-belfast_en.cfm

3 Reports on the individual empowerment tools and the diagnostic tool for employers are available on the Network website

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Executive Summary



Europe has been battered by the 2008 Credit Crunch and subsequent recession.

The rise in unemployment is the central problem. In July 2012, the EU27 rate was 10.4 per cent or 25.3 million unemployed. **The young have been particularly hard hit**, as again in July 2012, almost five and a half million or 22.5 per cent of young people were unemployed in EU27. **In addition, around 80 million citizens are estimated to live below the poverty line** in Europe - about 16 per cent of the total population.

In such a situation, it is easy to see why social and employment issues are so fundamentally important. As part of its response, the European Commission issued a Communication COM(2010) 758 final, which proposed the establishment of a European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion to be one of its seven flagship initiatives within the Europe 2020 Strategy. This Communication states that:

“The participation of people experiencing poverty is acknowledged as a paramount objective of inclusion policies, both as a tool for individual empowerment and a governance mechanism.”

The Communication also commits the ESF to being the key European financial tool for supporting employment and social inclusion.

Thus, this Handbook has been produced by the ESF Learning Network on Empowerment and Inclusion to assist ESF Managing Authorities (MAs), Intermediary Bodies (IBs) and the promoters of ESF-funded projects to use empowerment approaches in their work. The Learning Network believes that:

“Empowerment and inclusion are inextricably linked. Employment measures, which embed empowering processes, are more effective in enabling beneficiaries to gain and sustain employment. They also provide the most reliable route out of poverty and social exclusion.”

The Handbook sets out to demonstrate how empowerment approaches can contribute to the attainment of the goals of the ESF and, in particular, the four Thematic Objectives and the 18 Investment Priorities that have been established for the 2014 - 2020 programming period. It also outlines the types of activities or measures that might be included in national or regional Operational Programmes (OPs) or Joint Action Plans for this next period. More generally, the Handbook concludes with proposals on how empowerment can be used to improve the implementation of ESF OPs and ESF projects.

Chapter 1:

WHAT EXACTLY IS EMPOWERMENT?



- Increasing the possibilities for individuals and groups to make independent choices (improving structures of opportunity);
- Stressing how individuals, groups and societal structures are connected. Empowerment changes the situation of excluded groups, which also entails changing those societal structures that are limiting the use of power by vulnerable groups (institutional reform).

Empowerment is both a process and a goal, which, although looking different in different settings, will contain measures that increase the knowledge, confidence, skills and capacities of individuals while seeking to increase their influence over institutions and programmes that affect their lives.

The use of empowerment in the ESF was reinforced by the EQUAL Community Initiative that ran between 2000 and 2007. Empowerment was one of EQUAL's five 'Building Blocks' and it was intended 'to strengthen capacity building by making all relevant actors, including beneficiaries, work together on an equal footing.'

When successful, the target groups of the EQUAL projects or Development Partnerships moved to higher self-esteem and value, improved their competence and became more proactive. The Development Partnerships also increased the connection between 'hard to reach' groups and policy-makers that enabled a better design and delivery of measures and services.

The Empowerment and Inclusion Learning Network has built on such experiences in EQUAL and in ESF projects funded during the 2007 -2013 Programming Period. These have influenced a core assumption, which underpins the Learning Networks' activities:

“Employment programmes work best when beneficiaries are fully involved in their design, delivery and evaluation. This places the idea of empowerment at the centre of the employability agenda.”

This chapter begins with a short overview of international empowerment literature. Based on this overview the Learning Network developed the following definition:

“Empowerment is about the processes where excluded individuals and groups increase their power to take control over the decisions that affect their lives, on individual, group and societal levels.”

This, in turn, links to the European Commission's definition of social exclusion, as being:

“A process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from a job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feeling powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.”

There are several approaches to empowerment including:

- Strengthening individuals in different ways, making them more powerful and able (more powerful agents);

Chapter 3:

REINFORCING THE EMPOWERMENT
DIMENSION IN THE ESF

This chapter is primarily addressed to those individuals who may be responsible for drafting or implementing the Operational Programmes (OPs) or Joint Action Plans for the next ESF Programming Period. It points out that the 2014-20 Programming Period will be very different from the previous. In 2007, the ESF programme was launched in what appeared to be a period of unprecedented prosperity but 2014-20 is more likely to be one of modest recovery from the deepest slump in 70 years with some economies struggling to meet their debt obligations. The challenge will be to sustain inclusion as a central policy objective in a world of low (or negative) economic growth and fiscal retrenchment - a world where the imperative to restore the health of the European economy may marginalise an agenda of social cohesion.

The key test for the ESF will be how it responds to the challenges of: **understanding the situation**, how it has developed and what new vulnerabilities have appeared in the lives of the poor; **exploring all possibilities for achieving maximum impact** in what will be very difficult economic situations; **realising the transformative possibilities** of the ESF and the fact that empowerment has become more, not less, important.

This chapter illustrates how empowerment approaches can assist in the attainment of each of the four ESF Thematic Objectives and its 18 Investment Priorities for the next period and the key messages are outlined below.

Objective 1: Promoting employment and supporting labour mobility

1. Access to employment for job-seekers and inactive people, including local employment

initiatives and labour mobility - Through empowerment measures, ESF beneficiaries have gained greater self-confidence and motivation, which has enabled them to overcome many obstacles along their pathways to employment.

2. Sustainable integration of young people not in employment, education or training into the labour market - The pathways approach provides a local, low threshold, entry point to a multi-stage integration process that may take place at several levels, linking and matching the needs and interests of these young people to different, hitherto separate services and offering individualised support and follow-up.

3. Self-employment, entrepreneurship and business creation - Some of the ESF empowerment projects have experimented successfully in training people to set up their own enterprises or to become self-employed, which is one way of avoiding the prejudice or stereotyping of employers or work colleagues.

4. Equality between men and women and reconciliation between work and private life - The empowerment projects that have used the dual approach to gender equality work have shown that this systematic approach has improved the quality of analysis, measures and results, and shown how women and men may require different approaches to improve their situations.

5. Adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change - The Learning Network on Empowerment and Inclusion is also working on the creation of an award scheme, which recognises employers who excel in the provision of inclusive workplaces (please see www.empowermentandinclusion.businesscatalyst.com/index.html).

6. Active and healthy ageing - There is considerable unharnessed potential in older people who as 'Experts of Experience' could offer their accumulated wisdom and knowledge as mentors for ESF participants.

7. Modernisation/strengthening of labour market institutions, including actions to enhance transnational labour mobility - Empowerment approaches have helped people towards employment by complementing existing institutions in offering improved information, counselling, training, networking opportunities and practical support.

Objective 2: Investing in education, skills and life-long learning

8. Reducing early school-leaving/equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education - The approach of empowerment projects enables people to search, and negotiate, for the best forms of provision.

10. Lifelong learning, skills/competence of the workforce, labour market relevance of education and training systems - ESF experience has shown that empowerment and ownership are at the core of lifelong learning, which involves acquiring the skills to play a full role in economic activity, in society and in personal life.

Objective 3: Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty

11. Active Inclusion - The use of empowerment strategies is extremely important when it comes to creating an environment that is conducive to active labour market policies and programmes. Having influence and choice contributes to an increased capacity to be proactive.

12. Integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma - There are certain key practices that can deliver effective integration pathways for these communities including assessing and recognising their qualifications and experience,



9. Quality, efficiency and openness of tertiary and equivalent education to increase participation/attainment levels - Many of the empowerment projects act as conduits to tertiary education because they develop people's self-confidence and skills and open up new horizons such as previously un-dreamt of possibilities like going to university.

training that includes language and basic life skills like ICT and capitalising on their culture, contacts and language skills to develop new employment opportunities.

13. Combating discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation - Operational Programmes

should emphasise the need for projects to focus on the “rights” perspective and to work with those who have experience of exclusion - this could provide a good starting point for their work. It is also vital to focus on changing structures and institutional practices (such as recruitment) in order to change discriminatory practices in the labour market.

14. Access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services - Here it is proposed that ESF OPs should stimulate improved coordination and networking between all relevant local agencies and actors to provide a coherent and transparent range of services that can respond to the multi-faceted needs of disadvantaged individuals.

15. Promoting the social economy and social enterprises - Even the most deprived urban and rural communities can become ‘business incubators’ - but this means designing long-term integrated itineraries which build individual and collective empowerment and link broader social issues to economic activity.

16. Community-led local development strategies - Central to this concept is the direct involvement and consequent empowerment of beneficiaries and local citizens. ‘Real’ consultation obtains a high degree of commitment and ownership and conversely, a lack of genuine consultation results in cynicism and disillusionment.

Objective 4: Enhancing institutional capacity and efficient public administration

17. Institutional capacity - ESF projects have been able to contribute to changes in the policies and practices of public administrations but, the next, and last, priority is the most relevant to reinforcing empowerment.

18. Capacity building for delivery of employment, education/social policies, and sectoral/territorial pacts for reform - One concept or slogan that has emerged from ESF empowerment activities is “nothing about us without us.” However, new skills and capacities are required by the staff of some integration agencies to strengthen people’s empowerment so that they can take charge of their own integration pathways.

The chapter concludes with examples of consultative processes that have led to a better reflection of the views of projects and participants in ESF OPs from three Member States.

Chapter 4: SUGGESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In this chapter the Learning Network suggests how empowerment approaches can be used to improve the overall implementation of the ESF and its projects.

ENHANCING PROBLEM ANALYSIS

A key lesson from the case study projects is that understanding is enhanced through an **engagement between popular and formal knowledge**. Through involving those who have direct experience of the problem, a new and important category of experts participates in analysing and describing the issue at hand. By connecting these experts of experience with other experts and agents of change, the analysis will be improved. In this way, the ESF can improve its capacity to lay a better foundation for the sustainability of the new measures that it funds.

SEEING SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PEOPLE AS THE KEY TO TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

A realisation that people, who are usually described as the ‘target group’, are, in the words of the Choices project, “*its biggest resource*”, means that they should have ownership of the development and implementation of measures for, and solutions to, the issue at hand. The excluded are an unharnessed resource that can be tapped by the ESF and become part of the solution rather than the ‘problem to be solved’.

INCREASING IMPACT BY FOCUSING ON THOSE WHO HAVE THE POWER

The starting point of empowerment projects is that those experiencing social exclusion need access to improved labour markets and societal structures to use their capacities to the full and have the same rights as everyone else in society. In order for this to happen, support structures and labour markets must change the ways in which they work and function. This means that ESF

projects can have greater impact by putting more emphasis on influencing those who have the decision-making power to achieve such changes.

STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE

The link between good governance and successful development needs to be appreciated and applied. Clearly, it is vital to put in place an effective structure of management that provides coherent policy-making and appropriate delivery and evaluation mechanisms. However, the best of structures cannot measure up to the task without being underpinned by the right cooperative culture. This new culture is mainly about creating opportunities for collaborative practice within, and amongst, a range of agencies and target groups.

PROMOTING SOCIAL INNOVATION

Social innovation is a priority area for the next ESF Programming Period and this has a strong relationship with empowerment. To achieve social innovation and to increase the social and economic resilience of society, it is vital that vulnerable people are re-engaged in the main-stream economic, social and cultural institutions. This re-engagement should be not as recipients only, but as active participants and contributors.

HIGHLIGHTING HOW POWER IS CENTRAL IN THE WORK OF THE ESF

The ESF has a central role to play in developing the power of excluded groups, through continuing to support capacity building. Empowerment is about the excluded having more power to do things, but also about institutions exercising less unaccountable power over them. Thus, empowerment also involves working for more accountability and more equal representation within institutions that have ‘power over’ citizens.

USING SYSTEMATIC APPROACHES TO EQUALITY

Research shows that unequal power relationships do not change automatically. Starting to recognise inequalities is an important step. The next step is to identify how things can be done differently. Experiences in Gender Equality, which has the longest experience of systematic, evaluated work to overcome inequality, can be of help when looking at changing unequal power structures. The ESF regulations stipulate that Gender Mainstreaming should be central to the work of the ESF. Only a few projects in the study work with Gender Mainstreaming approaches in their work, but many said that they are interested in developing their activities through applying the dual approach to gender equality. Combining empowerment approaches with systematic approaches to equality is an interesting development from both perspectives.

BEING CLEAR ABOUT THE LEVELS OF EMPOWERMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

It is also important to be clear about the purpose of empowerment and to make sure that the level of increased ownership and involvement is meaningful for all concerned. Where necessary, members of the target group and members of staff in organisations and institutions should receive capacity-building training to increase the impact of this type of involvement.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In exploring the relevance of the case study projects, the Learning Network was primarily concerned with producing recommendations for strengthening the social inclusion dimension of the coming round of the ESF, in particular the relevance of empowerment to the 18 investment priorities that have already been set out in the ESF Regulations. However, EU programmes need to be sensitive and adaptive to the turbulent economic and social conditions that are likely to persist for the rest of this decade.



WAW - trajectory: Participants painting images of themselves showing how they have changed and evolved during year one of the project

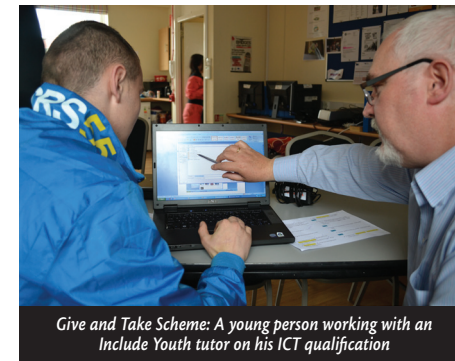
The role of ESF is particularly relevant in this respect, as it provides relatively small scale projects with the resources and space to test new ways of tackling social inclusion, new ways of ensuring citizens' rights and new ways for the relatively powerless to take control over their lives. Some of these experiments will fail, but their small-scale operational level means that the lessons of failure can be learned without endangering flagship programmes. Encouraging risk and experimentation within the ESF enables the EU, and indeed its Member States, to design programmes that will have the maximum positive impact on the participants and on the communities in which they live. Even with limited resources, invention and imagination can ensure that positive changes actually take place.

INTRODUCTION

Europe has been battered by the 2008 Credit Crunch and subsequent recession. In particular, the peripheral economies, characterised by exposure to high levels of public and private debt and by relatively low levels of productivity, have suffered the brunt of the crisis. Eurosceptics suggest that the Euro itself is part of the problem - a single currency across a bloc with different levels of competitiveness generating divergent, rather than convergent, development.⁴ Since 2008, the Greek economy has been particularly hard hit, with a double digit fall in GDP in just three years, but both the Portuguese and Irish governments also required bailouts. Meanwhile, borrowing costs for Spain and Italy have been dangerously high. Concerted action by Europe and the IMF have (so far) prevented any exit from the Eurozone, but the social and economic costs for the weaker economies have been enormous, while the core economies worry about paying for unending subsidy. By the end of 2012, eleven Member States are expected to remain at output levels below those preceding the crisis. As Reuters (06/09/2012) comments:⁵

Most economists see the euro zone, which generates 16 percent of global economic output, shrinking by at least 0.3 percent this year (2012). A recovery may only come in mid-2013.

However, the rise of unemployment is the central problem. In July 2012, just over 18 million people were unemployed in the Eurozone - 11.3 per cent of the working age population (the EU27 rate was 10.4 per cent or 25.3 million unemployed). Moreover, the range in unemployment rates amongst the member states was extraordinarily high - 4.5 per cent in Austria, 25.1 per cent in Spain. Not only has unemployment in aggregate risen, but is increasingly concentrated in about half of the member states.⁶



Give and Take Scheme: A young person working with an Include Youth tutor on his ICT qualification

The young have been particularly hard hit by unemployment growth. In July 2012, almost five and a half million were unemployed in EU27 (22.5 per cent), of which three and a half million were in the Eurozone (22.6 per cent). In some countries, youth unemployment has exceeded 50 per cent (53.8 per cent in Greece and 52.9 per cent in Spain).

In addition, around 80 million people are estimated to live below the poverty line in Europe - about 16 per cent of the total population. Like unemployment, poverty is concentrated amongst particular groups and in particular places. Almost 20 per cent of children in EU27 are estimated to be in poverty. For lone parents with dependent children the poverty rate is over 30 per cent. 40 per cent of the unemployed are in poverty compared to eight per cent of those in work. In Sweden, Denmark and Austria less than 12 per cent of the population live in poverty compared to more than 20 per cent in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland.⁷ Moreover, the full poverty impact of the recession has not yet been charted - poverty is undoubtedly greater than suggested by these figures.

4 In the 2012/13 Global Competitiveness Index, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany are ranked 3-6, compared to Spain's 36, Italy's 42 and Portugal's 49. Global Competitiveness Report 2012-2013, Geneva, World

Economic Forum.
5 www.reuters.com

6 Eurostat Press Release (31/08/2012), www.europa.eu.

7 www.poverty.org.uk

Moreover, **there is growing evidence that official headline data fail to capture the particular vulnerabilities of women and dependent children in the current recession.** For example, although female unemployment is only marginally higher than male unemployment in a large number of member states, the female employment rate for EU 27 in the second quarter of 2012 was 59 per cent compared to 70 per cent for males (58% compared to 70% in the Eurozone).⁸ Thus, significant numbers of women are classified as being inactive or completely out of the labour market and are invisible to unemployment statistics. Those dependent on benefits have suffered as benefits regimes have been pared back via austerity programmes. An OECD study in 2008 found that child poverty had steadily increased over the decade.⁹ Lone parent households with dependent children, overwhelmingly headed by women, have had the consistently highest poverty risk across the EU (see above).

In addition, **achievements in gender equality are at risk.**¹⁰ One example is that women in the EU public sector face higher risk of losing jobs.¹¹ An in-depth study of working patterns shows a decrease for women compared with men in the EU, in paid working hours and an increase of precarious employment.¹²

In such a situation, it is easy to see why social and employment issues are so fundamentally important. As part of its response, the European Commission issued a Communication COM(2010) 758 final,¹³ which proposed the establishment of a European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion to be one of its seven flagship initiatives within the Europe 2020 Strategy.¹⁴

This Communication states that *“The participation of people experiencing poverty is acknowledged as*

a paramount objective of inclusion policies, both as a tool for individual empowerment and a governance mechanism. It also speaks about the important role that NGOs and Foundations play in fostering the *“empowerment of people facing poverty and social exclusion and their participation in society.”* Finally, it calls for *“inclusive and targeted online services in key areas (employment, housing, health and other social services) that support the empowerment of users, in particular from vulnerable groups.”*

Since the Lisbon Summit, the European vision has been of a globally competitive bloc also committed to achieving high standards of social inclusion. It is imperative that crisis and recession do not derail that vision. In maintaining the priority of social inclusion in EU programmes, the European Social Fund (ESF) has a crucial role.

THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND

The Communication commits ESF to being the key European financial tool for supporting employment and social inclusion. It explains that every year, 5 million unemployed and some 1 million people from vulnerable groups benefit from direct support and that over the 2007-2013 programming period more than €10 billion was earmarked for projects combating social exclusion.

Indeed, the ESF is regarded by the Commission as the cornerstone in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.¹⁵ Although the ESF was originally set up to promote employment, it has evolved into a highly effective tool for reducing poverty risk. The ESF was developed as labour market strategies increasingly transformed from passive (supporting the unemployed through social welfare payments) to active (assisting the unemployed to move

back into employment) in response to growing fiscal costs and fears about long-term benefits dependency - a process taken to extremes in the US under the slogan, *‘a hand-up rather than a hand-out.’* Central to this process were the beliefs that the key barriers to full employment lay on the supply side (labour market regulation, segmented labour markets and inadequately trained or inadequately mobile workers) and that the only sure route out of poverty was employment.

While there has been intense economic debate about the veracity of such assumptions, the post 2008 crash has tested both to their limits. The collapse in output across Europe in 2008-09 with its accompanying rise in unemployment suggest that even the most ‘flexible’ labour markets have been unable to ensure full employment. Concerning poverty, there is substantial evidence of a growing working poor with something like 60 per cent of poor children living in households with a working head¹⁶, primarily as a result of labour market restructuring and the growth of short-term or part-time employment contracts. Even though the poverty risk for those in employment is less than for the unemployed, the much greater size of the former group ensures that the total numbers

of working poor are very large. Thus, moving the unemployed into work is not, in itself, a guarantee that they will escape poverty. Moreover, there is a growing body of research evidence that even were national training goals fully achieved, the impact on poverty would be marginal.¹⁷ In short, the evidence that employability programmes can, by themselves, significantly reduce poverty is hard to find.

To be an effective anti-poverty tool, ESF has to **go beyond a paradigm of helping people to help themselves.**

At its basic level it does help Member States to reinforce the social inclusion of disadvantaged people with a view to their sustainable integration into employment and to combating all forms of discrimination in the labour market. That is a necessary but insufficient process in eliminating poverty. As the case studies analysed below will demonstrate, ESF projects have taken more radical steps to employment and social inclusion, best summed up as ‘a human rights-based approach’ (see chapter 2 for detail on projects employing a human rights-based approach). This was defined by a UN High Commissioner as:¹⁸



8 www.stats.oecd.org.

9 OECD, (2008), *Growing Unequal: income distribution and poverty in OECD countries*, Paris.

10 COM(2009)694 final p.3.

11 ILO/European Commission (August, 2012), *Public Sector Adjustment in Europe*, Geneva

12 See EP, 2010/2018(INI)

13 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52010DC0758:EN:NOT>

14 http://europa.eu/press_room/pdf/complet_en_barroso_007_-_europe_2020_-_en_version.pdf

15 The European Social Fund: a cornerstone in the fight against poverty and social exclusion at <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?pager2.offset=5&catId=3&langId=en#opt2>

16 See Lansley, S. (2012), *The Cost of Inequality*, London, Gibson Square.

17 See, for example, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012), *Can improving UK skills levels reduce poverty and inequality by 2020?* York, which estimates that the accomplishment

of ambitious training/skills targets for the whole working age population would only have reduced the poverty rate by one percentage point.

18 Mary Robinson - foreword to “A human rights conceptual framework for UNICEF”, Santos, M. UNICEF, Paris 1999

The rights-based approach... means describing situations not in terms of human needs, or areas of development, but in terms of the obligation to respond to the rights of individuals. This empowers people to demand justice as a right, and not as charity... (and) implies the direct involvement of people in decisions relating to their own development.

Its principles are:¹⁹

- Explicit, accurate **use of the international human rights framework**;
- **Empowerment** as a precondition for effective participation - as of right;
- **Participation** in development decisions - as of right;
- **Non-discrimination** and prioritisation of groups vulnerable to human rights violations;
- **Accountability** of duty-bearers to rights-holders

In reality, ESF projects have become more than active labour market interventions. As the programme has been written and particularly as implemented in practice, the ESF has become a framework for enhancing participant capabilities within an empowerment and human rights framework. The transformative possibilities of the ESF are only fully realised when an explicit commitment to empowerment is set at the heart of the programme.

The ESF is being adjusted to the new framework of Europe 2020 so that it can play the fullest possible role in expanding human capabilities and in reducing poverty. Part of that adjustment has been the establishing of thematic objectives for the next programming period, 2014 to 2020. These are:

- Investing in education, skills and lifelong learning;
- Promoting employment and labour mobility;
- Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty;

- Enhancing institutional capacity and an efficient public administration.

In addition, **promoting the principle of equality between men and women** will continue to be an important goal during this period.

The Communication COM (2010) 758 final indicates that the “EU has been setting the example and will **continue to disseminate knowledge and best practices on participation**” As part of this overall effort, this Handbook sets out to show how the empowerment and participative approaches advocated in the Communication can be used to attain the thematic objectives and investment priorities that have been set for the next ESF programming period.

The Handbook features a range of methods and approaches, which have been developed by ESF funded projects in the current and previous programming periods. Reflecting some of the levels and situations cited in the Communication, the Handbook looks at the promotion of empowerment **for individuals, for groups, and within NGOs and public services**. It also considers how empowerment can create **more effective governance arrangements** not only for the ESF but also for public authorities.

PRODUCING THE HANDBOOK

From the beginning, the intention has been to focus on the practices and outcomes of projects that are receiving, or have received, ESF funding to develop approaches that are largely based on the principle of empowerment. At the end of February 2012, 13 of these projects were invited to a workshop in Brussels to share their experiences and, particularly, the factors that made them successful. They also identified how their empowerment activities could contribute to the four main Thematic Objectives that have been established for the next ESF Programming Period and submitted further written responses to explain these contributions.²⁰ Based on the responses and on previous work related to empowerment that has been carried out within the ESF at European level, the Handbook has been drafted to synthesise the key experiences and lessons. The Handbook is presented in four sections:

- Chapter 1 - Exploring the concept of empowerment;
- Chapter 2 - Summarising the relevant experiences and outcomes of the projects;
- Chapter 3 - Suggesting types of activities or measures that might be included in national or regional Operational Programmes (OPs) for the next ESF Programming Period of 2014 to 2020;
- Chapter 4 - Concluding with proposals on how empowerment might be used to improve the implementation of ESF OPs and ESF projects.

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- Partners in the network who made suggestions for revisions to the handbook
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- Mike Morrissey who worked with Anna and Allen to revise the drafts and produce a final version
- Patrick Sanders who produced the illustrations

1. WHAT EXACTLY IS EMPOWERMENT?

1.1. THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

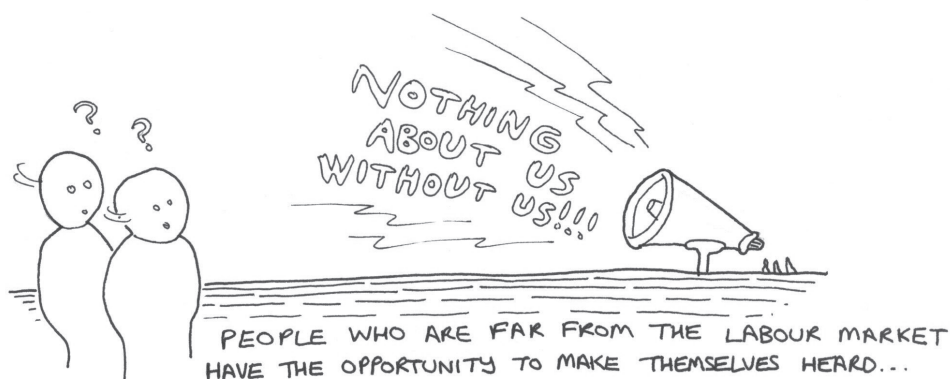
The use of the concept of empowerment has become increasingly common. It has been used in a variety of contexts including the Civil Rights Movement in the US, community development, health care and management circles. It has been cited by left wing as well as right wing politicians and by the EU, the World Bank, trade unions and NGOs. There is thus a danger that a concept so ubiquitously employed could lack meaning and focus. To explore whether empowerment is more than a banner headline and if it can contribute to the creation of a more socially inclusive EU by 2020, it is important to:

- develop a detailed understanding of the concept;
- explore the ways in which it could be employed as a guiding principle of ESF;
- chart the ways in which existing ESF projects have been constructed around, and realise empowerment, in their work;
- draw lessons from such experiences;
- frame those lessons as a set of guiding principles for the next round of the ESF.

Chapter one covers the first two of these objectives, the rest being dealt with in chapters two, three and four.

In an overview of international empowerment literature, researchers conclude that empowerment involves disadvantaged persons or groups in positions without power and influence, moving to positions with more power and influence in society. Empowerment is also about approaches that look at, and question, the nature of power, its use and consequences, injustices in society, oppression and exploitation²¹. Whitmore²² argues that nearly every use of empowerment incorporates four basic elements:

1. individuals are assumed to understand their own needs better than anyone else and therefore should have the power both to define and act upon them;
2. all people possess strengths upon which they can build;
3. empowerment is a lifelong endeavour;
4. personal knowledge and experience are valid and useful in coping effectively



21 Askheim, O. P. & Starrin, B. (2007). Empowerment - ett modeord? [Empowerment - an in-word?] In O. P. Askheim & B. Starrin (Eds.), *Empowerment i teori och praktik [Empowerment in theory and practice]* (pp. 9-17). Malmö: Gleerup.

22 Whitmore, E. (1988). 'Participation, empowerment and welfare', *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, 22, 51-60.

Moser²³ suggests that empowerment is the key to poverty reduction: 'people are citizens with rights (entitlements and capabilities) rather than beneficiaries with needs; the government, with its obligations to its citizens, has a central role to play in rights-based development; grassroots participation is crucial to ensuring that the voices of the poor are heard.'

Empowerment is thus about more than equipping individuals and groups to engage better in the labour market (agency) it is also about challenging inequalities, injustices and the unequal distribution of power - an empowerment perspective also looks at changing institutions. The World Bank produced a major report on empowerment and poverty reduction in 2002, which focuses direction on institutional reform. The four key elements of empowerment that underlie institutional reform are:²⁴

- **Access to information.** Information is power. Informed citizens are better equipped to take advantage of opportunity, access services, exercise their rights, and hold state and non-state actors accountable. Critical areas where information is most important include state and private sector performance, financial services and markets, and rules and rights regarding basic services. Information and communication technologies often play a pivotal role in broadening access to information.
- **Inclusion/participation.** Opportunities for poor people and other excluded groups to participate in decision making are critical to ensure that use of limited public resources builds on local knowledge and priorities, and brings about commitment to change. However, sustaining inclusion and informed participation usually requires changing the rules so as to create space for people to debate issues and participate in local and national priority setting, budget formation, and delivery of basic services.

- **Accountability.** State officials, public employees, and private actors must be held answerable for their policies, actions, and use of funds. Government agencies, both administrative and political, and firms must have horizontal or internal accountability mechanisms, and must also be accountable to their citizens and clients for their performance.
- **Local organisational capacity.** This refers to the ability of people to work together, organise themselves, and mobilise resources to solve problems of common interest. Organised communities are more likely to have their voices heard and their demands met

Given this understanding of empowerment, the Learning Network has conducted its work with the following definition:

Empowerment is about the processes where excluded individuals and groups increase their power to take control over the decisions that affect their lives, on individual, group and societal levels.

This, in turn, links to the European Commission's definition of social exclusion:

A process whereby certain individuals are pushed to the edge of society and prevented from participating fully by virtue of their poverty, or lack of basic competencies and lifelong learning opportunities, or as a result of discrimination. This distances them from job, income and education opportunities as well as social and community networks and activities. They have little access to power and decision-making bodies and thus often feel powerless and unable to take control over the decisions that affect their day to day lives.

23 Moser, M. (2004). 'Rights, Power and Poverty Reduction' in Alsop, R. (ed.), *Power, Rights and Poverty: Concepts and Connections*, Washington, World Bank, p.35.

24 World Bank, (May, 2002), *Empowerment and Poverty*

Reduction: a source book, Washington, p.vi
25 Eurostat, (2011), *Combating poverty and social exclusion: a statistical portrait of the European Union, 2010*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p.7.



Empowerment is important in changing the situations of excluded groups, as it involves building on and strengthening their capacities to enable them to become agents of change in working for a more inclusive society. Empowerment also involves challenging organisational and institutional structures to make it possible to use those capacities in a better way.

There are different approaches to empowerment. Overviews of these approaches show that empowerment approaches often focus on:

- Strengthening individuals in different ways, making them more powerful and able (more powerful agents);
- Increasing the possibilities for individuals and groups to make independent choices (improving structures of opportunity);

- Stressing how individuals, groups and societal structures are connected. Empowerment changes the situations of excluded groups, in which they are weak and powerless. This entails the need to change those societal structures that are limiting the use of power by vulnerable groups (institutional reform).

Empowerment is necessary because power is distributed unequally in society. This means that not only should individuals and groups be strengthened, but attempts should be made to ensure that everyone can influence and have an impact on those institutions and organisations that affect their lives. If empowerment only relates to improving individuals, it can be used to suggest that *"oppressed groups have the power to change their material circumstances through psychological restructuring"*²⁶

The World Bank²⁷ stresses that empowerment *"implies bringing together the supply and demand sides of development - changing the environment within which poor people live and helping them build and capitalise on their own attributes. A demand side approach to improving governance focuses on educating, informing and enabling citizens and poor people's organisations so that they can interact effectively with their governments. A supply side focuses on the macro level institutions and legal framework which determine how poor people can access development opportunity. An empowerment approach ensures that the two act in synergy."*

Empowerment is thus both a process and a goal, which, although looking different in different settings, will contain measures that increase knowledge, confidence, skills and capacities of individuals while seeking to increase influence over institutions and programmes that affect the lives of those experiencing social exclusion.

1.2. BOOSTING EMPOWERMENT IN THE ESF

The use of empowerment in the ESF was reinforced by the EQUAL Community Initiative that ran between 2000 and 2007. Empowerment was one of EQUAL's **five 'Building Blocks'**²⁸ and it was intended *'to strengthen capacity building by making all relevant actors, including beneficiaries, work together on an equal footing.'*

When successful, EQUAL projects (Development Partnerships) empowered groups and individuals to find their own paths towards the labour market and fulfilling lives. They also aimed to provide the groups with a real influence over support structures and decision-making powers at various levels. Results showed how the target groups moved from experiences of low-value capacities to higher self-esteem and value, improved competence and greater proactivity and agency. The Development Partnerships increased the connection between 'hard to reach' groups and policy-makers to enable a better design and delivery of activities and services.

The Empowerment and Inclusion Learning Network has built on such experiences in EQUAL and in ESF projects funded under the 2007 -2013 Programming Period. These have influenced the core assumptions, which underpin its work - *'Employment programmes work best when beneficiaries are fully involved in their design, delivery and evaluation. This places the idea of empowerment at the centre of the employability agenda'*

Within ESF, an empowerment approach could be embedded into programmes by providing a framework within which ESF projects :

- Are conceived as development projects and should start with a rights-based-framework - a needs framework emphasises dependency and places the responsibility for exclusion on the excluded themselves;
- Are designed and structured to challenge the condition known as 'internalised helplessness'

which is the belief that nothing can be done to change the situation of the excluded and is a key element of social exclusion;

- Provide opportunities for building competence and skills (including self-value and confidence) which give the excluded greater control over life chances;
- Facilitate participation in project governance - this is an indispensable feature of an empowerment project;
- Allow project ownership which is an even better empowerment tool;
- Can demonstrate new ways to tackle problems that affirm the dignity and increase the influence of the excluded in all aspects of their daily lives;
- Connect their participants with the broader community and encourage involvement in collective organisation and mobilisation;



In Loco: Participative sessions where citizens discuss and vote on public investments

- Encourage participants to become engaged in advocacy and campaigning for policy change/institutional reform;
- Endeavour to connect those experiencing exclusion with the policy makers responsible for tackling it;
- Provide mechanisms to allow project participants to have a role in the design and structure of the ESF itself.

Chapter two explores how a group of ESF projects variously exemplified the above aspects of empowerment.

26 Morley, L (1995) Empowerment and the New Right. Youth and Policy, 51, 1-10

27 <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTEMPowerment>

28 http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/about/index_en.cfm

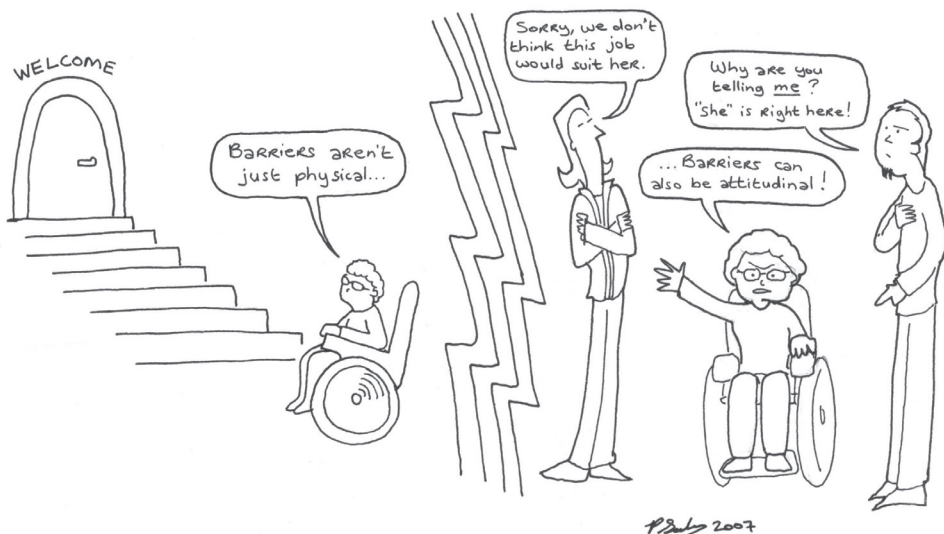
2. THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS - SOME ESF PROJECT CASE STUDIES

As indicated above, this chapter summarises the experience of the 13 ESF-funded empowerment projects that attended the workshop in Brussels, along with an additional 6 which provided case study material. It attempts to show why the projects have chosen to work in the way in which they do - what they believe is not functioning well in current attempts to combat social exclusion, and what they suggest as better solutions.

The chapter begins with a description of the starting points for the projects - the limitations and the problems that they have identified and also some approaches on which they base their work.

The second section focuses on the responses that the projects have adopted.

The final section outlines the results that they have identified as a result of their work on empowerment.



2.1. STARTING POINTS FOR EMPOWERMENT ACTIVITIES

An overarching aim of the projects was to facilitate the social inclusion of groups living in, or at risk of, social exclusion, and also to affect structures that maintain and reproduce social exclusion. Thus, they sought both to work with vulnerable groups and also to change existing social, economic and political structures. Individuals involved in projects were, for example, people experiencing poverty, drug problems, mental illnesses, being young and unskilled, Roma, ex-prisoners or those who were simply struggling to enter a labour market that presents very few job opportunities.

Projects had two kinds of starting points:

- **First, identifying the limitations and hindrances affecting those in social exclusion;**
- **Second, having the fundamental belief that people, no matter how excluded, can, with appropriate support and with action to overcome those hindrances, take control over their lives.**

Projects described these two factors as being the underlying reasons for their work with empowerment.



2.1.1. THE EXCLUDED HAVE LITTLE POWER AND INFLUENCE OVER THEIR SITUATIONS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The projects describe their central reason for empowerment working as being the fact that **people experiencing social exclusion have little power to influence actions directed at them or to change the limiting situation in which they live.** They are often treated as 'the problem to be solved' and any discussion about their situation usually takes place 'over their heads'. This means that their competence and expertise are unused, their views and experiences are not taken into account and much of the work directed at marginalised groups is carried out on the basis of 'for' rather than 'with'. Adding an additional dimension to powerlessness, a Northern Ireland project linked it to the impact of political conflict - *'the impact of historic political and violent conflict on the socio-economic capacity of the most excluded groups to participate effectively in rebuilding the community.'*

2.1.2. A LACK OF ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN THOSE WITH POWER AND THOSE WITH EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Politicians, senior administrators or others who have the power and influence to initiate change are **rarely in contact with, or are knowledgeable about, those who actually experience social**

exclusion. This leads to incomplete analyses, inadequate measures and poor results. While the separation of the powerless and the powerful is part and parcel of socio-economic division, there is also a problem about the nature of knowledge in the process of policy formation. At best, policy makers take decisions on the basis of formal knowledge and evidence (at worst, on the basis of expediency and self-interest). There is, however, a growing interest in the idea that the knowledge required for the second decade of the 21st Century should be an engagement and synthesis between formal and popular knowledge. The fact that anti-poverty programmes frequently have little measurable impact is only partly to do with the fact that poverty is a structural condition that requires economic, social and political reform. Such programmes' inefficacy is also to do with a lack of participation by the 'targeted group' in their design and implementation. ESF projects working within an empowerment framework seek an integration of formal and popular knowledge in framing and delivering programmes. This not only builds a better knowledge base but also sponsors engagement between the excluded and those supposed to do something about their condition.

2.1.3. EDUCATION AND WORK MEASURES ARE NOT BASED ON EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

Capacity building, education and work experience measures are seen as cornerstones of the empowerment projects. According to the projects, there is a problem with other measures working in the field of social inclusion because they are **rarely based on the influence and strengths of the people that they concern.** They are formulated without input from beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries; they are therapeutic in orientation (dealing with 'problem' clients rather than labour market problems); they are remote and ultimately, inhuman. The Northern Ireland STEP project identified as a key problem the, *'continued reluctance of those engaged in rebuilding society to change structures, processes and attitudes which reinforce exclusion.'*

2.1.4. LABOUR MARKET SUPPORT IS NOT ADAPTED TO THE REAL SITUATION OF THE EXCLUDED

Most of the projects indicated that the **structures, which should be providing their target groups with the same rights and opportunities as others, were lacking or not working effectively.**

In Greece, there was no existing support to immigrants. Other projects identified inefficiencies or gaps in existing support structures. In Northern Ireland, the Include Youth project was *developed in response to evidence and research findings that highlighted educational disadvantage and obstacles to educational attainment experienced by many young people at risk of social exclusion.* A project run by SOVA in the UK carried out research by women in, or just out of, prison. It outlined the situation of women leaving prison and offered solutions, in order to better adapt the support available to such women at this crucial stage in their lives.

2.1.5. LACK OF RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY

Projects **stressed the human rights or democratic perspective**, since this is often lacking in work to redress social exclusion. Several contrasted the lack of appropriate support for their target groups with the latter's entitlement to human rights, equality and democracy. The Spanish FSG considers that *'the access of the Roma community to economic and social rights on an equal footing with the rest of the population is the first and unavoidable step towards the full and effective empowerment of this community.'* The WAW project in Belgium describes how *"poverty is an injustice"* while the Greek project was attempting to tackle *"the limited exercise of labour rights on behalf of immigrants. The project has attempted to remove the relevant obstacles through the creation of an empowering environment that would enable immigrants to fully exercise their rights"*. Another example is the UK project Restore that indicates how its support to people with mental illnesses differs from other kinds of support. *"Restore exists to work with people to overcome the obstacles caused by stigma and discrimination".* Include Youth works in Northern Ireland *"to ensure*

that they (young people) have equal access to the labour market". The Portuguese In Loco Association connected its work to the crisis in democracy and people's non-participation in political life. The STEP project reported, *'the key aspect of the work which contributes to empowerment is the value-base of our approach. Our core document is the UN Charter of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. We do not define human beings by religion, citizenship, colour, or contribution to the economy but by their shared and equal right to protections and entitlements and their collective responsibility to protect and respect the rights of others.'* There is a corresponding need to change existing discriminatory presumptions about target groups - target groups are often considered as not knowing what is best for them, and so someone else formulates solutions to their situation, which equates to an erosion of fundamental democratic rights.

2.1.6. EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION LEADS TO 'LEARNED HELPLESSNESS'

To have lived in social exclusion often means having no opportunity to exercise skills and capacities. Many people have struggled to do so but many have internalised a feeling of being unable to affect their life situations and have entered a state of 'learned helplessness'. Others feel the 'shame' of being socially excluded, which considerably reduces their levels of emotional energy. Thus, the projects emphasise that it is important to practice proactivity and agency, and to build on inherent strengths. This can make it possible for people to start to experience small successes and with time they can begin to see how they can use power and influence to affect their life situations.

2.1.7. PEOPLE CAN BE ACTIVE AND CAPABLE GIVEN THE RIGHT PRECONDITIONS

Despite the pervasive nature of the limitations to people taking control over their own lives, all the projects shared a common belief in the potential for people and situations to change. The projects shared a positive view of all individuals, seeing

everyone as being capable, active and knowing what is best for them, if given the right preconditions. Those experiencing social exclusion are not different from other people and, as everybody else; they have strengths and capacities that should be allowed to develop in, and contribute to, sustainable societies and labour markets. The projects feel that this belief is often missing from measures that attempt to promote social inclusion. Instead, the focus is often on changing people and removing what is 'wrong', rather than on strengthening existing capacities and creating the right preconditions for all.

2.2. RESPONSES

The responses to the issues highlighted above have taken many different forms. They include new forms of tailored support, starting a newspaper, university training, creating empowering organisations, establishing new representative bodies and engaging citizens in local/territorial development and governance.

Projects share many of the starting points in how they think about people and their situations in society and in the labour markets. These starting points have then 'materialised into the methods they use, the organisations they have started or the general approaches that they have developed'.



WORKING WITH
EMPLOYERS

The following sub-sections describe the forms that the empowerment approaches have taken, with respect to the organisations working with individuals and to other institutions and local governance.

2.2.1. PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE IF GIVEN THE RIGHT PRECONDITIONS

The projects base their work on a **positive view of all individuals, seeing everyone as being capable, active and, in a position to know what is best for themselves, if given the right preconditions.** A quote from the evaluation of the Choices Programme in Portugal encapsulates the thinking that has been at the root of what the empowerment projects have been attempting to do. It describes the programme as being based on: *'The ability to believe in these people, their resources and their capacity for change and resiliency. Not perceiving them as victims but as actors, the intervention focuses on the construction work itself, strengthening positive identities, overcoming forms of vulnerability and re-creating strong social ties.'*

2.2.2. PRACTISING TO BE ACTIVE AND TO SHED 'LEARNED HELPLESSNESS'

Experiences of feeling unable to affect participants' life situations often lead to feelings of learned helplessness. **Therefore, practising to be active, to take responsibility and to take small steps to improve situations has been central in the projects, both for individuals and organisations.** In the Swedish social cooperative, Villa Vägen Ut, being part of solving problems was a core method - *"From the beginning it was hard to finance the Villa and everybody who was involved from the beginning had to take part in discussions with the politicians and so on to find a solution. We - the staff - don't present the solutions. We have found that it takes a longer time and needs more work, but it is a good way to let people grow and feel empowered"*.

This approach is a central organising principle. It is not only up to individuals to take charge of their own destiny and to be proactive, it is also something staff and institutions need to learn, to

encourage agency and to let go of some of their power and influence. In Restore - *"Agency is given to the members of the organisation as to their own progress rather than what the 'organisation' may decide is 'best' for them"*.

Many projects also described how important it was to build on the positive skills, strengths, initiatives and experiences of those who have experienced social exclusion, as Restore explains: *"People have their own strengths and their own answers, and should be trusted with these. Every individual with a mental health problem has their own skills, talents and value and they should be judged on these attributes rather than medical history or diagnosis. Every individual has the right to be allowed to take "risks" in an attempt to progress from the therapeutic ghetto into mainstream society"*.

In SOVA - *"Both male and female peer champions have been involved with the setting up and sustainment of allotment projects and supporting and mentoring clients through job and training applications through into work. All the peer champions have engaged in personal development activities ranging from skills training to applying for jobs. They have worked alongside SOVA staff and assisted in the organisation of events. They have been able to make the transition from mentoring into paid work in a non-threatening environment and this did prove difficult for some. They enjoyed their work role and found that this employment reduced their desire to re-offend"*.



SOVA's Homegrown Project: Participants develop skills in horticulture and organic produce

Even if options and societal structures are limited - which can contribute to some people having to struggle harder - projects emphasise the need for everyone to take responsibility for the choice that is always present, in spite of the limitations. Experiences of social exclusion can mean that people get stuck in feelings of powerlessness and take on the role of "victim". As one workshop participant said, we need to remember to take off our *"victim's cardigan"*.

In the view of Fire Works, *"It seems very important for people from disadvantaged groups to have support methods that depart from what people have in terms of strengths, life experiences and dreams of a better life. It is important for people to take responsibility, and projects should be designed so that the responsibility for them remains... it seems very important to start from the idea that every person has the right to assistance by society, yet the responsibility to contribute to the greater whole"*.

2.2.3. A FOCUS ON RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES - MOVING OUT OF SHAME

Many projects base their work on **UN formulations about everyone having the right to work, to reasonable support and to respect. A shared experience of the projects was how they worked in order to support people in moving out of shame and in to feeling that they have the same worth as everyone else.**

One way that this was achieved was through challenging the notion that people who experience social exclusion are different from others and that they are to blame for the situation in which they find themselves. The Italian project Ristretti works from inside prison to dispel the prejudices that those in prison are *"practically born with the DNA of the offender. Our idea is to produce a magazine able to create a contact between people in jail and the community outside"* to make it easier for people with a prison history to come back into the labour market and community life.

A rights perspective means stressing how everyone has a right to an educational system,

support structures and a labour market that gives everyone fair opportunities. The focus shifts from changing or blaming those with less power to changing those with power. This involves looking at how organisations and the structures "do" things, rather than only concentrating on strengthening those who are excluded.

The projects also stress the rights perspective in the importance of how you relate to others. Empowerment is very much a relational concept and the current head of Basta, gave an example from a meeting with the social services when she was still using drugs - *"I felt very much that I was met with disrespect. So I said to the social worker that in different circumstances, you could be in my position, and I could be in yours. She then said that 'no, that could never happen, I could never become a junkie.' That made me feel like someone else, I did not even feel like a human being"*.

2.2.4. INCREASING CAPACITIES THROUGH EDUCATION AND INFORMATION PROVISION

To increase the competence of those experiencing social exclusion through education and continued learning is a cornerstone of project empowerment work. All projects have some dimension of education or capacity building. Include Youth describes its approach to education as an 'individual action plan', whereas the SOVA Yorkshire and Humber Offender Partnership talks about 'one-to-one tailored case management'. The main innovative aspect of these approaches lies in providing, at a local level, a low threshold, entry point to a multi-stage integrative process that may take place at several levels, linking and matching the needs and interests of people to different, hitherto separate services and offering individualised support and follow-up. These "pathway" approaches draw on the whole range of resources that can be mobilised in a local or territorial context and can offer flexible responses to the needs of very different groups.

FSG recognises how the low academic level of the Roma has a profound effect on all aspects of

employment and occupation including low levels of qualification, instability and precarious employment, under-employment and unemployment. It provides specific actions for education to increase the academic success of the Roma. Its educational programme *Promociona*, seeks to promote the educational mainstreaming of Roma students. The programme involves active outreach and awareness-raising for families to help them realise the potential of education for full citizenship and inclusion. Roma and the professionals working with them are fully involved in the design and development of the programme and its activities.

The Roma are thus both beneficiaries, and also the people in charge of project implementation. Working with integrated and individualised employment pathways, enables them to take account of the needs and views of each beneficiary family and child. Key factors contributing to the programme's success are the involvement of families and schools through a formal agreement and a selection of those Roma students who are better positioned to succeed and can then serve as a reference point or role model for others.

The educational promotion of girls is a key objective in the programme because of the gender inequalities and the tendency for girls to marry and become mothers at an early age. The programme works with both the mothers and fathers of the students and the approach has been quite successful as in the academic year 2009-2010, 52% of those benefiting from the programme were girls and this increased to 57% in 2010-2011. This approach has contributed to the educational achievements of Roma girls. In 2009-2010, 46.3% of students completed primary education without any negative grades, 34.78% in the case of girls, 54.84% in the case of boys. In 2010-2011 the proportion increased to 68.22%, 75.71% of girls and 59.32% of boys.

In Italy, an individual example of progress comes from Elton, an ex-inmate, who, after spending several years in a prison near Padua, now runs the Ristretti Orizzonti or Limited Horizons project, a press agency which produces, from inside the

prison, a national journal called Ristretti Orizzonti and a daily newspaper with 75000 subscriptions, most of them justice professionals and university researchers.

'When I started working in the Ristretti Orizzonti project, I had never used a computer. As editorial group staff we organised a series of computer courses. After the initial courses, I continued to study computers. I improved my knowledge and after a few months I became responsible for the editorial. When I saw that I was capable of doing important things at work, I decided to go further. I decided to study and enrolled at the university. So, when I returned from work in my cell, I would go to the bathroom looking for peace and quiet and studied there. In this way, I managed to get a degree in Political Science and later I completed a two-year second level degree with a course in 'Institutions and policies for human rights and peace.'



Ristretti Orizzonti:
Workshops for Journalists who cover crime and justice issues

Provision of information is also crucial in increasing capacity. In Chapter 1, reference is made to a World Bank report on empowerment which focuses on institutional reform. One of the four main elements that are highlighted as underpinning

empowerment and institutional reform is access to information. Similarly, several projects in the study are using information as a central tool in their empowerment work.

In the STEP project in Northern Ireland, information was a key element in contributing to its core aim of building a peaceful and prosperous community in one of the areas most affected by the recent conflict, which is also one of the most fragmented and segregated regions. One objective of the project was to work directly with those most excluded and to provide them with information, advice and guidance. The intention was that this would enable them to participate equitably in the decision-making processes which affected their daily lives. This also empowered them to become involved in the socio-economic and cultural activities of the community and in the shared responsibility to protect the "rights of others".

An initial phase in STEP was to ensure that everyone had equal access to information about the Peace Process and the Peace Funds, and had opportunities to identify their problems and potential solutions. Village and town meetings were held from which the work of the project developed. Community support workers were then trained to inform others about what they had learned, and function as specialists on different levels. Information, advice, guidance and advocacy was provided by base-line level and specialist staff on issues such as employment; training; housing; family welfare; education; social care; health; debt; addiction; personal development; reporting hate crime; discrimination; abuse of rights and entitlements. These workers also provided representation and advocacy at an informal level in negotiating solutions with agencies and service providers, and at formal levels such as immigration hearings and employment tribunals.

Information was also central in the Italian project Ristretti Orizzonti. The main idea was to provide information about prisons from the inside and to overcome the rupture caused between inmates and society caused by crime - a rupture that is at times fuelled by "media coverage that contributes

to fear and hatred". Those in prison use autobiographical writing to talk to the outside society, which the project describes as a patient work of "weaving a fabric of collective mediation". These prisoners have grown professionally by working with information; through courses in writing, computer and digital graphics. The two websites that they operate expand their ability to talk to the free world, informing people outside about justice and prison, as seen from the inside. Representatives of the project also go to schools and talk to students, make movies and documentaries, and arrange visits to the prisons. Through reclaiming the discourse on who offenders are, information is used as an empowerment tool. In the words of Elton Kalica, project manager, "Writing with honesty is a good way to break the chain of hatred in a society that has a huge need to stop hating".

2.2.5. TAILORING LABOUR MARKET SUPPORT TO THE SITUATION OF EXCLUDED GROUPS

Through their work, **many projects have identified certain weaknesses in the labour markets and in support structures.** These weaknesses can contribute to keeping people in social exclusion. Thus, all of the projects were working to develop forms of support and action that would make it possible for their target groups to enter the labour market more easily.

Restore describes how - "We trust people and operate all our services according to the wishes, comments and suggestions of those who use them. Members are also involved in the trusteeship of the organisation and are always well and vocally represented at our general meeting. Some 40% of our staff has direct personal experience of mental ill health and many are former Restore clients with the insight into the positives and negatives of the services we run."

In Greece, the Centres for the Employment of Immigrants and Refugees provide "Better information, counselling, training, networking opportunities and practical support for the exercise

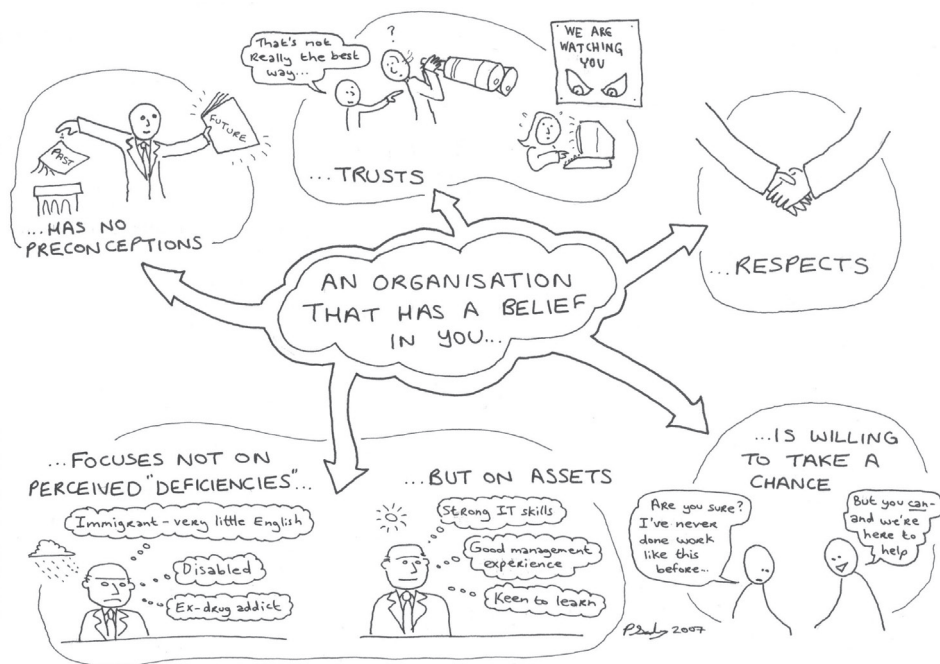
of immigrants' rights due to the involvement of the centre's beneficiaries".

Another approach to improving support is by training those with experience of social exclusion in order to enable them to provide advice and mentoring to their peers. In SOVA, after training, peer mentors offer one-to-one support to other prisoners on financial matters and advice and guidance on the steps in preparing for life outside prison.

In Bruksvärde, a special course on social mobilisation was introduced at Lund University in Sweden, through which those with experience of social exclusion and marginalisation have the opportunity to influence future social workers. During the five week course, the 'would-be' social workers study together with those from different client-run organisations. Some of the teachers have also had their own experiences of social exclusion and so the training contributes to increasing empathy and understanding, and hence the quality of the interventions of the future social workers.

At Basta, the improved support to people with drug abuse is provided by the social enterprise itself. "The rehabilitation at Basta is built around the work and the company we run together". Through experiencing real work in an empowering environment and with the support of peers in the company, people move away from drugs and into work.

In the UK, the Women into Work programme run by SOVA looked at ways of combating discrimination and inequality experienced by women who have been disadvantaged, particularly by their experiences of the criminal justice system. Female offenders were involved at all stages of the programme, including the peer research phase. Some went on to be employed by SOVA as part of the pilot projects. The research findings promoted an understanding of the experiences of female offenders and provided SOVA with a sound evidence base from which to develop their services.



Many of the projects say that it is important to combine 'traditional' experts and experts on social exclusion. WAW indicates that "In all our working groups we 'mix' people with and without poverty experience. This allows us to start from a 'knowledge of poverty, and to combine it with the perspectives of the non-poor who have a different knowledge base'".

2.2.6. GAINING MORE POWER AND INFLUENCE OVER LABOUR MARKET SITUATIONS

Projects regard those with experience of exclusion as being experts in their own situations and so they make sure that they are involved in any attempt to describe and to change these situations. As Basta believes "Whatever you want to do, whoever you want to help, start by asking the people that are concerned, because they are experts on their own situation".

STEP argues, "in the first instance, the solutions were formulated entirely within the target groups... Throughout all STEP processes, choice, decision making and responsibility remain with the client. Choices, possible decisions and the potential consequences of each decision are explained and clients supported in decision making. STEP does not however do anything for people, we do it with them. The power, however limited remains with the person, growing in the process, as the person becomes increasingly empowered, so does their capacity for shared responsibility for others".

The projects make sure that the individuals and groups achieve more power and influence over their different situations. They are also strengthened through making sure that organisations are run or strongly influenced by those concerned, and also through local governance practices that shift influence and power to excluded groups. Often projects address many of these levels at one and the same time.



In Include Youth's Give and Take Scheme, the young people influence the form of support they receive and continue to improve its design - "Once enrolled on the programme the young person is involved in the design, implementation and review of a tailored individual action plan aimed at meeting their individual needs and thereby overcoming the barriers to education, employment and training. The young people also have the opportunity to put forward their views and opinions on the structure and development of the scheme through young people's local and central advisory groups".

At organisational level, the influence of target groups varies from their views being taken into account on the one hand, to organisations being run mainly by the target groups on the other. Some organisations are run by those with experience of the societal issue they are working to change together with those who have no personal experience of it. In the FSG, more than 40% of the staff is Roma. At Basta, 95% of the people running

the company are former drug users. In WAW, working against poverty in Belgium, "People in poverty owned the whole process, were involved on equal terms in defining the problems, resolutions, timing of the steps in the trajectory, defining the priorities etc. In this sense they were in control of their lives and trajectories. As we went further in the project they became more and more owners of the trajectories. The organisation and its partners made it possible, created the preconditions and added their much needed expertise for the people in poverty, but this was in balance with what they themselves brought to the table. We went on a "journey" together where there was much learned on both sides, both for the services and people in poverty."

In Greece, the Observatory for the Employment of Immigrants and Refugees and seven supporting centres were established in five major Greek cities. The target group was involved in formulating the project's action plan, and eventually, the whole support centre was run entirely by and for immigrants.

Empowerment on an institutional level is found in The Choices Programme, a Portuguese governmental programme created to promote the inclusion of children and young people from the most vulnerable communities, particularly the descendants of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Looking to promote equality of opportunity and to reinforce social cohesion, it supports local actions in school integration and non-formal education, vocational training and employability, civic and community participation, digital inclusion, entrepreneurship and empowerment.

The starting point for Choices is that it considers its target-groups as being its biggest resource. This approach is reflected in the strong attention that is paid to youth empowerment. During the last period of applications to the programme, the target-groups were involved in the diagnosis, definition of the action plans, implementation and the evaluation of all actions proposed. All the proposals had to be validated in the design phase by the target groups. Some examples of youth involvement are:

- Mandatory Youth Assemblies that, every six months at a minimum, validate the reports and action plans delivered by the staff and the projects;
- Direct support to the young people's projects where 50% funding is given to the projects developed by the young people. The other 50% has to be raised by the young applicants and this helps to foster their empowerment and entrepreneurship;
- Support for youth associations and community participation.

The programme evaluators describe the intervention as being based on this philosophy - *"During the last 10 years the focus of the programme on participation and empowerment has allowed the emergence of a generation that is now taking charge of the projects."*

That is clearly evidenced by the increasing number of youth associations that have emerged within the programme, but also by the number of former participants that are now part of the staff of the local projects and organisations which, nowadays,

clearly reflects the strategy of empowerment started ten years ago."

These examples demonstrate how those experiencing social exclusion can be directly involved in improving their own situations, when appropriate support and opportunities are provided.

2.2.7. EMPOWERMENT THROUGH REAL WORK

Having a job or some fulfilling activity is central to social inclusion. Work, in empowerment projects, is both a goal and a means. As part of the integrated pathway approach, projects have either provided on-the-job training or negotiated work placements to complement a course of study. The direct involvement of employers or employers' organisations is also often the key to success for many projects that have worked with disadvantaged groups.

WE MUST FULLY ELABORATE
THE BUSINESS CASE TO EMPLOYERS -
EXPLAIN HOW A DIVERSE WORKPLACE
WILL BENEFIT THEM.



Basta, a social enterprise in Sweden started to offer better support to people with drug abuse problems, homelessness or long time unemployment. Today Basta is a company on the open market with a yearly turnover of 5 million Euros, with 95% of the people who work and manage the company being from these target groups. The company and the actual work it does is the 'form' that makes it possible to work with empowerment processes at Basta. Basta began its work as a reaction to existing structures that regarded the clients as lacking the capacity to know what would be the best support

for them - an approach that contributes to passivity and marginalisation rather than integration.

Basta now runs several companies that offer carpentry, financial management, construction, cleaning, horse riding and animal husbandry. Through this real work, ex-drug users get a new identity and move towards their own version of Basta's vision of a better life".

"The rehabilitation at Basta is built around work and the company we run together. We don't have traditional therapy, only the support from friends here at Basta. Basta is like an empowerment support structure where people can empower themselves. Empowerment is a feeling that you can control your life and make decisions about your life, to have power over what happens to you. But to get that power you also must take responsibility over your choices. We believe that people have a lot of skills, so much that we run a company on the open market to which we recruit only drug users. With this staff the yearly turnover is around 5 million Euros."



Basta: Basta's construction workers building a house

for newcomers, it is inspiring to see that the company is run mainly by ex-drug users:

"It is very powerful to realise that everyone at Basta, even the highest boss, once stood at the doorstep with their plastic bag, just like the newcomer."

Several projects turn negative experiences of social exclusion into something on which to build a professional life. One example is Le Mat, a hotel franchising system that started in Italy as a response to a reform of the psychiatric sector. Here, a 'madhouse' as it was called, was turned into a cooperative bar and hotel, run by people with a psychiatric disability. One success factor is said to be how having lived in social exclusion shows you what it is like to feel unwelcomed. So, Le Mat make sure that all guests are warmly welcomed.

FSG in Spain conceived its Acceder Programme to create jobs *"as a programme involving each and everyone within the Roma community rather than a programme for the Roma community"*. The activities are run by Roma and non-Roma and some positions such as mediators are mainly held by Roma. This gives the organisation continuous first-hand information and feedback from the Roma community, allowing them to adapt the programme to specific needs and circumstances.

The programme's support to each individual follows the same pattern, where the needs and views of each beneficiary steers the support activities - a diagnosis followed by the design of appropriate measures, tutoring sessions, and individualised employment pathways that are monitored at different stages.

The FSG stresses how the approach where Roma have the power to influence the whole programme, as well as individualised employment pathways, has meant that Acceder can provide the most appropriate support for the inclusion of Roma into the labour market in Spain.

Since 2000, close to 65000 people have benefitted from the programme, with close to 44000 labour contracts being obtained and 55% of these were obtained by women. These positive employment

results have also changed many ideas that Roma families had about salaried employment, and also preconceptions that public administrations, the business sector and the society at large had of the Roma community. There are now also, thanks to the programme, many Roma women and men that can serve as empowering role models for others.

Other projects have experimented successfully in training members of vulnerable groups to set up their own enterprises or to become self-employed. Associação In Loco, a non-profit organisation created by a group of concerned citizens, works in the *Serra do Caldeirão* in Portugal, a fairly mountainous area which has been losing its population since the late 1950s. To combat this situation, the project, in cooperation with the local population, came up with a number of solutions, and one of these was to promote the self-employment of women.

Several meetings revealed that the women were interested in traditional activities like weaving or cake confection, but at the same time were aware of the meagre income that such products would generate. The solution was found in a significant reformulation of those activities by trying to incorporate innovative features into the old traditions, for instance, in terms of production processes, management, design of the products or the ways of marketing and selling them.



FSG Acceder Programme: Cooking lesson

At same time, new economic activities involving the women were conceived and developed as part and parcel of the community animation process

and closely linked to the other social, economic and cultural initiatives that were taking place in the same community.

The women went through a long and very intensive training process. The trainers' team comprised of a local monitor who possessed the traditional know-how and the cultural background of the territory, external professionals bringing with them modern contributions of design, production technologies and management and marketing systems and a coordinator from In Loco. When the training course was finished the unit was properly equipped. There was a sufficient stock of raw materials and a range of regular customers had been established. In addition, the group had put aside enough money to cross the hazardous transition period between the completion of the training and normal production.

The participatory approach that the central team tested with these local women has since been replicated by a network of local development animators, which is EU-funded. It has helped hundreds of people, NGOs, enterprises and local authorities to launch their employment projects.

2.2.8. CONNECTING THOSE WITH POWER AND SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PEOPLE

Empowerment cannot be done **for** people, they need to empower themselves. This implies that a top down approach will not work and that any empowerment approach must engage those experiencing a lack of power and influence.

However, a combination of a top down and a bottom up approach may also produce positive outcomes (The World Bank's concept of bringing together the supply side and demand side of development). The projects stress that it is vital to involve those with power in the effort to cascade power downwards to those who have little. Research also shows that in order for equality work to make an impact, those with decision-making power need to be involved so that practices and procedures in organisations and societal structures can be changed.



WAW describes how the local municipality and several public services were involved from the start - *'It is essential to begin adding the involvement of political actors - it may be more difficult and challenging to work that way but that enables major changes. These projects can only ensure success if we achieve the commitment and involvement of all parties. This means to involve political decision-makers, technicians and citizens.'*

In Choices and in the In Loco project, the combination of using empowering practices at local governance level together with increasing the capacities of marginalised groups to increase their influence and power has proven to be effective.

In short, projects have attempted to organise their efforts to increase power and influence over resources and institutions and have not left the empowerment processes solely to those experiencing social exclusion. A challenge for all working with these issues is to maintain awareness of the existing power differentials amongst those working towards empowerment. It should not be taken for granted that connecting those with power to those with less power will automatically produce the desired result. Working towards equality or sharing of power is an ongoing, challenging process.

2.2.9. RESHAPING LOCAL GOVERNANCE

An example of empowerment at local governance level is the Portuguese organisation In Loco that has worked with **the methodology of participatory budgeting at local authority level**. This organisation sees participatory budgeting as a new way of governance, based on the direct participation of men and women in identifying local problems and needs, in the definition of priorities by voting on the projects and public funds to be allocated and in the implementation of projects as well as in their monitoring and evaluation.

In Loco provides consultancy for the design, implementation and evaluation of participatory budgeting, training for technicians, politicians and civil society and they also organise workshops and seminars on the subject. In Loco believes that, in general, local authorities are not designed to involve their citizens and are not prepared for citizens' participation in the design and management of local policies. However, through the methodology of participative budgeting, it is possible to introduce such participation.

Many projects stressed the importance of ensuring a connection between socially excluded groups and policy makers, in producing positive changes.



The Ristretti Orizzonti Project has had the opportunity to communicate with decision makers on laws concerning people in prison, and was able to influence the actual formulation of some of the final drafts of the laws. In Northern Ireland, Include Youth was instrumental in having a motion brought forward by the Employment and Learning Committee to the Northern Ireland Assembly on widening access to the Education Maintenance Allowance for the young people on its project and similar ESF projects.

It can be seen that some projects want to go beyond beneficiary participation in project governance to citizen participation in the running of local areas. This also emphasises the idea that beneficiaries are citizens with rights and entitlements rather than just needs.

2.2.10. STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS TO STIMULATE EMPOWERMENT

Projects work to make sure that the target groups and organisations have the capacity to guarantee meaningful involvement in influencing their own situations. They stress that opening up participation and involvement should be matched by competence-building among those concerned and also by the strengthening of civil society to make such involvement meaningful. **They are also concerned with how members of staff in mainstream organisations and support structures increase their capacity to work with socially excluded groups in an empowering way.**

In Greece, experts from immigrant backgrounds trained multi-ethnic personnel from the target group. This increased their capacity to respond to different needs and language requirements through their personal experience of the complex issues that immigrants face. People from these immigrant communities were also trained to work as counsellors in their respective organisations. This counselling has helped organisations to solve internal conflicts and improve their functioning. Immigrant organisations have also been educated

on how to organise and manage their work effectively.

The FSG has provided courses for Roma leaders, and invested in the training of Roma professionals. FSG also acts as a catalyst for the social participation of Roma, and has facilitated such participation in, and capacity building for, neighbourhood associations, associations of parents and platforms and associations for women.



FSG Acceder Programme: Uzipez social enterprise in Madrid

SOVA trained a group of young peer researchers who have participated in project reviews and evaluations. This has brought a service user perspective to the organisation and also enabled young people to talk to reviewers of their own age who have similar experiences. Evaluations have been shared with the whole organisation and the lessons learned have been applied, where appropriate.

RESTORE provided training for its members in public speaking, reading statutory services' tendering documents, bid writing for funding applications, financial budgeting techniques, group work and visits to conferences focusing on initiatives led and run by service-users.

These skills could then be used in the formation of community groups in which trainees would play central, leading roles. The intention was that these members would:

- Be involved and in contact with local groups in those roles and not primarily as 'mental health patients' or 'service-users' but as chairs, treasurers or organisational secretaries;



- Reconfigure their self-image and develop self-confidence as a result of the training and moving into these roles;
- Come into contact with the general public on an equal footing, as colleagues rather than the 'well' working with the 'ill'.

The In Loco project has trained members of staff of local municipalities in its participatory budgeting methodology so that they can learn to use more empowering practices.

STEP provides 'Information Advice, Guidance and Advocacy by base-line (level1) and specialist staff (level 2) on employment; training; housing; family welfare; education; social care; health; debt; addiction; personal development; reporting hate crime; discrimination; abuse of rights and entitlements. They also provide representation and advocacy at informal level in negotiating solutions with agencies and service providers. Level 3 specialists provide representation and advocacy at formal level e.g. immigration hearing; employment tribunal. STEP has recently secured the first community level 'law waiver' - enabling them to provide key legal services directly on a not-for-profit basis



STEP: Information, advice and registration for learning

2.2.11. WORKING FOR EQUALITY AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

For many who are outside the labour market, inequality and discrimination play a role in limiting their access to the labour market. Empowerment is about challenging unequal power relations, and creating fairer conditions for everyone in society and in the labour market. The case studies suggest that empowerment approaches can contribute to equality between women and men and also to other equalities. Thus, shifting power and influence to those who have less, stressing the rights and responsibilities perspective, awareness-raising and the individual approaches used are important. Some projects have used more systematic approaches in their work for equality such as the dual approach to gender equality. This means to have specific measures for gender equality as part of the projects, but also to integrate a gender dimension in all steps of the project work.

The ESF Regulation clarifies and strengthens the ESF contribution to the EU's commitment to eliminate inequalities between women and men and to prevent discrimination. It says that Member States should combine a robust mainstreaming approach and specific actions to promote gender equality and non-discrimination.²⁹

29 <http://eurex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:210:0012:0018:EN:PDF>

2.2.11.1 SHIFTING POWER AND INFLUENCE TO THOSE WHO HAVE LESS

Projects challenge the systematic lack of opportunities for excluded groups to have power and influence over their life situations - an inequality in itself contributing to sustaining patterns of inequality. Some projects believe that using methods in which everyone has a say are themselves contributions to fairer conditions.

In the In Loco project, *'the participative budgeting methodology must enable equal access between men and women, young and seniors and immigrants etc. We seek to develop the actions of participation in widespread accessibility spaces - with particular attention to access for people with reduced mobility - and at times that are compatible with most citizens.'*

2.2.11.2 HAVING THE A 'RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES' PERSPECTIVE AS A STARTING POINT

The FSG in Spain has worked on anti-discrimination and the promotion of equal treatment for Roma, a heterogeneous population but many of whom still experience daily discrimination. The FSG has worked to detect cases of discrimination, giving advice and support for the victims, training key players in the fight against discrimination, and promoting policies to advance equal treatment through the monitoring of legislation and social awareness actions on discrimination and equal treatment.

People who are far from the labour market are often treated as victims, or as 'the problems' that need to be solved. However, the empowerment projects stress that it is for those people with more power to make sure that the educational systems, the labour market and support structures work in a way that make it possible for everyone to become resources for themselves and the labour market. The focus shifts from changing those with less power to changing those with a lot of power and this involves looking at how organisations and the structures 'do' things, rather than focusing solely on strengthening those who are excluded or at risk of exclusion.

The projects also balance the rights perspective with a focus on responsibilities, and emphasise that everyone has the responsibility to make choices that are sustainable for the individual and for society.

2.2.11.3 USING SYSTEMATIC APPROACHES WHEN CHANGING UNEQUAL POWER POSITIONS

Empowerment supports equality but examples of more systematic approaches to equality also improve the quality of empowerment approaches. The FSG works with the dual approach to Gender Mainstreaming that is requested by the EC. This means that it strives to include the gender dimension in all aspects of its work such as data gathering, analysis and studies and also to have specific actions and programmes for gender equality. These are often carried out with support from experts of the Spanish Women's Institute. The FSG is of the opinion that this approach has contributed to the balance in the numbers of women and men achieving labour contracts - 55% by women, 45% by men.

In Choices, following research undertaken with young women, the project now address the higher risk of girls leaving school because of pregnancy by trying to guarantee conditions for them to continue to study after giving birth and by preventative measures to reduce the number of unexpected pregnancies.

The Restore project realised that men often need longer periods of rehabilitation. Statistics had shown that men do not seek or obtain mental health care to the same extent as women. Societal norms contribute to men waiting longer before they ask for support, and to health care not responding as easily to signals from men. Since there is a better prognosis for mental illness if it is treated earlier, this situation has become more critical. It has had an impact and now the project works with men and women differently. Normally, it extends the process of recovery, progress and return to employment for men.

At Basta, an evaluation investigated if women suffered discrimination in terms of their access to resources and opportunities, as they were in a minority within the organisation. Its findings indicated that this was not the case and instead described Basta as an organisation in which it was easy for women to move up the hierarchy. At Basta, they believe that the empowerment approach used contributes to creating this situation.



Basta: Taking care of Taxinge Castle

Other projects work for gender equality through removing obstacles to women's participation and providing childcare and transport when needed. There were also examples of how projects strive to achieve equal representation of men and women on their boards and other decision-making bodies.

It should be noted that not all attempts to increase the involvement of groups experiencing social exclusion guarantee that everyone is included and heard. Blindness to inequalities in terms of power

exists within all groups and this can affect the possibilities of empowerment work. Men and women may, for example, have had different training in, or experience of, voicing their opinions and power differentials can make it difficult for some people to contradict what seems to be a general opinion. Societal norms, which affect what people are expected to do and be, function invisibly and can limit people differently. Gender research shows that they can rarely be addressed without specific systematic efforts, which is also the case with other inequalities. Many of the empowerment projects said that they were interested in working more with systematic approaches to gender mainstreaming, and that they needed more gender and equality competence among their members of staff, and/or more help in applying systematic support. Further research on how empowerment approaches could be strengthened by systematic approaches to gender mainstreaming and equality, in general, could add value to activities in both of these fields.

Another point to be noted is that all groups are not homogenous when it comes to wishes, experiences and considerations. There will be differences along lines such as age, gender, class and ethnicity and the intersection of these categories will have an impact on what people can or cannot do or be. A strong focus on a group's specific categories and behaviours often goes together with sustaining inequalities between groups. It should be remembered that most groups are heterogeneous and that sharing similar experiences is important.

2.3 ARE EMPOWERMENT APPROACHES SUCCESSFUL?

What outcomes have resulted from using an empowerment approach? Of course, it is not always possible to isolate the results of an empowerment approach from other factors that have contributed to project success. Still, these are the results that the projects ascribe to working with empowerment approaches.

2.3.1 BECOMING MORE CAPABLE WITH THE RIGHT PRECONDITIONS

Those with experience of social exclusion become both more capable and more active, when the right preconditions are provided. To be seen as having both potential attributes and capacities rather than being regarded as a problem to be solved seems to play a key role in changing how individuals are perceived.

Basta describes how its success has contributed to changing the limited expectations of members of its target group - *"Basta as an organisation has by good results for the company shown society that socially excluded groups have a value and are not the burden they are often seen as"*.

2.3.2 FROM LEARNED HELPLESSNESS TO BEING ACTIVE IN INFLUENCING ONE'S LIFE AND SURROUNDINGS

For those experiencing social exclusion, having influence and choice has contributed to an increased capacity to be proactive and able to influence their life situation and this is described as a key result by the projects. Experiences of being valued and trusted and of being able to contribute to real work has also increased individuals' confidence and self-value. Other reported results are increases in the participants' belief that they are actually able to have a positive effect on their own their life situations. Many projects describe how the target groups grew in their awareness of how they, with their own experiences of different forms of exclusion, have an expertise that is needed to improve limiting situations and the systems in the labour market.

In Vågen Ut, *'The women living in the house grow and feel more empowered on an individual level and as a group when they find that they can solve their own problems and take responsibility over their own lives. People grow and can take care of themselves instead of being taken care of. We have been a part of the whole process from idea to where we are today. And it's our idea and nothing anyone else has told us to do.'*

Through Fire Works, *'Trainees get back in touch with their own talents and inspiration. They learn to make choices based on personal power and build a future they want. They learn in an appreciative way of looking at steps that they have already put forward, and develop a perspective on their lives and events that departs from the possibilities, rather than from problems.'*

With Restore, *'Individuals who come to our services come to see themselves as part of the services, not simply recipients. In this way confidence and self-value grow and the individual often finds that a perceived inability in agency or decision making is challenged and shown to be false.'*

Finally in Greece, *'Where, up to now, the target group managed only to react to problems they were facing, their empowerment is expected to improve their readiness to be proactive as well as to apply a long-term perspective when dealing with complex issues. Furthermore, it is expected that the Greek Forum for Immigrants will play a decisive role in mobilising more immigrant and refugee communities in the direction of taking ownership of their situation.'*

Other results at an individual level are growth in social capacities such as becoming more comfortable in the workplace and other in social settings.

2.3.3 MOVING FROM SHAME TO PRIDE WITHIN A RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

Working with a rights perspective involves seeing that social exclusion has structural causes and affirming that everyone has a right to support that is adapted to their situation. This has contributed to a shift in consciousness:

In Restore, *'Generally people leave the service having recognised their own strengths and abilities and their right to expect the same opportunities as those fortunate enough not to have been affected by mental ill-health.'*

Restore also provides training for staff, volunteers and other organisations which come across mental health problems every day, such as the police force and the probation service - *'The course is a practical*

grounding in the realities of mental illness, the symptoms, treatments and causes of the spectrum of conditions and a valuable anti-stigma message. Attendees consistently report a positive impact on their understanding of their own mental health and a far greater understanding of how these conditions actually affect people, as opposed to the myths surrounding them.'

The Ristretti Orizzonti holds seminars for journalists who cover crime and justice issues. It has reached 200 journalists in order to make sure that prisoners are presented fairly in the press. They have also met young people in schools. When the students meet inmates face to face, they see them as real people and they also understand just how easy it can be to finish up in prison. Such understanding can help to ensure that inmates face less hostility from the outside community, when they leave prison.



Ristretti Orizzonti: Journalists' seminar

The Spanish FSG has noted an increased number of reported cases of discriminatory incidents, and believes that this is a sign of the increasing awareness of Roma people about their rights.

2.3.4 THOSE EXPERIENCING SOCIAL EXCLUSION HAVE GAINED INCREASED INFLUENCE AND POWER OVER THEIR SITUATIONS

The projects aimed to involve those experiencing social exclusion in describing and analysing their situations on the labour market, and also in formulating the responses to the issues that they

described. This has been done at varying levels in all projects, from a listening level to a level in which those concerned are tackling the issues themselves, influencing support, getting their own funding or being supported in local budgetary processes - 'just like everyone else'. This increased influence can be seen mostly at individual and group levels, but also at organisational and other structural levels. For In Loco - *'A direct result is that today there are more than 30 participatory budgeting initiatives in Portugal that are implementing our type of methodology. We tried to produce change in the consciousness of people in terms of the conception they have of what is and what should be a democracy. What we want is to combat this crisis of democracy with more citizen's participation.'*

For STEP - *'Everyone who comes to STEP is supported in articulating their own starting point; where they need/want to be; and encouraged to articulate what is stopping them getting there; how that problem could be resolved over time. This enables the base-line support worker to identify short term and longer term need; provide information; advice or appropriately refer the individual either internally or externally for appropriate support and assistance.'*

2.3.5 NEW JOBS, EDUCATION AND STEPS TOWARDS THE LABOUR MARKET

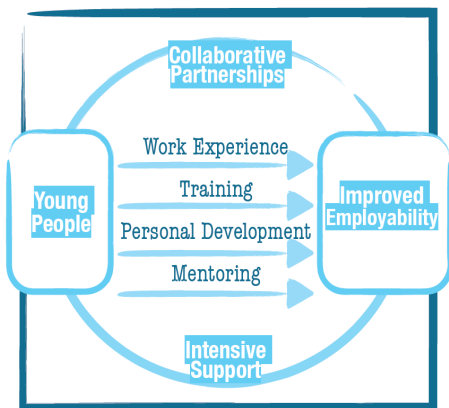
The projects have contributed by providing new jobs, education and other valuable experiences for people who are moving towards the labour market.

Some examples are:

- In Restore, 92 out of 946 people started paid or voluntary work.
- In FSG, 65 000 people have benefitted from the programme, with almost 44 000 labour contracts signed and 55% of these were obtained by women.
- In WAW, seven out of 17 job seekers are at work, five are in training.
- In Include Youth's Give and Take Scheme in Northern Ireland, 60% of the young people made positive progress. Some 70% of young



people achieved a numeracy qualification, 67% achieved a literacy qualification, 78% of young people achieved more than one qualification and over 80% of young people demonstrated an increase in their self-esteem and self-confidence.



Include Youth: The Give and Take Model

- In 2011 over 6,500 individuals came to STEP for support. Everyone who came received support and a solution with which they could progress. For some the empowerment journey is short; for others long and winding but with support most people progress along the road. Key results include attitudinal change towards self; then others; personal progression and personal sustainability: without these the benefits of training programmes cannot be sustained. They have a high level of retention, completion and progression from formal training. This is directly related to their 'whole person' approach to the individual. The STEP approach recognises collective agency and advocacy. By developing groups of service users and clients (e.g. Homeless service users; migrant worker rights groups), the confidence and capacity of individuals grow. Policy makers and service providers have avenues of direct contact to see whether their programmes actually have an impact or whether they create new problems. The groups developed through STEP are viewed as partners in social change rather than social problems in themselves.

Projects have also increased the capacities of those in, or at a risk of, social exclusion. Learning about how the local budget processes work and actually influencing them builds up citizenship capacities of those who get such an opportunity. In Choices, target group organisations gained management skills and their representatives are now effectively leading newly established organisations and local consortia. In Restore, training in community group leadership has meant that the successful students were able to work as chairs, treasurers or organisational secretaries and to collaborate with members of the general public as colleagues, on an equal footing. Ristretti Orizzonti describes how it has created one of the most complete websites on the situation in Italian prisons. These pages are entirely compiled by the inmate editors, most of whom had never previously used the internet. In the Swedish university course Bruksvärde, individuals from the target groups gain new experience of starting and running different projects within their own organisational frameworks.



Many projects also describe how participants have become more open to taking steps towards the labour market. For Include Youth's young people:

Primarily, participation has significantly improved their self-esteem and skills to enable them to move into training and ultimately employment, something that would have been unthinkable when they first participated. The long-term effects of our empowerment approach will be the increased self-confidence and self-esteem of the young people. The young people will have gained up to seven accredited qualifications and experienced a range of work experiences which will have equipped them with transferable skills that will improve their long-term employability prospects. They will feel more connected to the formal systems of training and employment, and will have improved their view of how they can contribute to their own communities, in other words a greater sense of citizenship.



A last comment on results from empowerment work comes from Elisabeth Lindgren, from Vägen Ut:

'When we work with empowerment, diamonds are created. People grow and carry their heads higher. They start to make phone calls and stop apologising for themselves. People start to believe in themselves and that they have the power to change their lives.'

2.3.6 IMPROVED ANALYSIS, SOLUTIONS AND CAPACITIES THROUGH CONNECTING THOSE WITH POWER WITH THOSE WITH EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

By ensuring a connection between those experiencing social exclusion and those with the power to improve that situation, an improved analysis of issues can be obtained and better responses can be suggested. Also, everyone involved can increase their capacities through such a connection.

Bruksvärde explains that *'In our example, client-run organisations get new knowledge, which can help them 'punch above their weight' in new and different areas. For the more traditional students in the field of social work and their universities, there is an opportunity to develop new contact points with the very same excluded communities they will either eventually work with or continue to study through their future research. To conclude, it is important that all different groups, in our case academics and users and ex-users, have an own clear advantage of working together, that means that all different groups really see the advantage of working together in a project. What they are doing together is for real!*

In WAW, *'we strengthen the capacity of people in poverty to speak and to shape their lives. Through our policy work we change the rules and legislation from the government so as to eliminate poverty and through dialogue with the community and service providers we change their view of those concerned and show them how without meaning to, they force people into poverty.'*

In Include Youth, connecting the knowledge of young people with policy makers has proven successful - *'Include Youth, with young people at its heart, has been empowered to challenge the policies that see young people on the scheme denied educational maintenance allowance which their peers on government sponsored schemes are entitled to. We have successfully engaged our Members of the Local Assembly and the Minister and have managed to have the motion debated in the NI Assembly and have secured the support of the Employment and Learning Committee.'*



2.3.7 SUPPORT STRUCTURES OR ORGANISATIONS WORKING FOR SOCIALLY EXCLUDED GROUPS ARE IMPROVED OR CREATED WITH THE INVOLVEMENT OF THOSE CONCERNED

Through the projects, those experiencing social exclusion are involved in delivering and improving support for their situations, and are also involved in running organisations that work on issues of direct concern to them. The projects have pointed to a number of existing services being enhanced, as well as a number of new organisations being created to improve the situation of the target groups. These organisations are partly, or mostly, run by groups previously seen as 'problems'.

Ristretti Orizzonti in Italy started a magazine with two offices, to improve the situation of people in or leaving prison. Three of its editors are ex-inmates, and one in home detention.

In Greece, there was no existing support for immigrants, and now the Greek Forum for Immigrants is a legal entity, with one of its centres being run by immigrants themselves - "The culminating point of this empowerment process was the transformation of what used to be an informal network prior to the project, into a legal entity, the Greek Forum for Immigrants, which did not only manage to respond

to the target group's needs, based on the target group's own ideas about how these needs should be met, but also became a point of reference for anyone who occupies their agenda with immigrants".

The Greek Forum today represents 24 immigrant organisations. It holds regular meetings of its members and representatives of immigrant communities in order to plan and decide on the appropriate courses of action. It also engages in dialogue with ministries, independent authorities, central and local government agencies and other institutional bodies that implement immigration policy or handle issues relating to immigrants. In this framework, it expresses views and submits proposals that have been formed by the target group. The Forum also develops cooperation with public and private organisations and participates in other fora with the aim of raising awareness among those who shape public opinion and of pushing for the necessary action to strengthen the position of immigrants.

SOVA describes how its empowerment approach has contributed to the development of quality services for the client group, resulting in clients being better equipped to access work. Their approach also helps them to keep up to date with the issues that affect the client group and the best way of working with these, ultimately leading to "participants accessing and sustaining appropriate and meaningful work and going on to lead fulfilling and crime free lives".

2.3.8 IMPROVING ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY TO EMPOWER CITIZENS

The projects have succeeded in improving the capacity of organisations, support structures and local communities to shift power and control over resources and institutions to those who had previously been excluded from having that influence. Their organisational practices and their activities are informed by the principle "Nothing about us without us" and they are often carried out in cooperation with those who presently have most power to exert and use their influence.

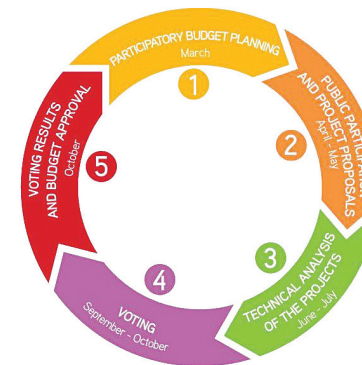


Choices explain that "During the last 10 years the focus of the programme on participation and empowerment has enabled the emergence of a generation that is now taking charge of the projects. That is clearly evidenced by the increasing number of youth associations that have emerged within the programme and also by the number of former-participants that are now members of staff in the local projects and organisations which, nowadays, clearly reflects the strategy of empowerment started ten years ago".

In SOVA - "Continuing consultation and participation as part of SOVA's quality cycle gives everyone the opportunity to shape the way we work and the peer champions have been very much a part of how we can take this initiative forward".

While Include Youth says that, "Through the workings of the local and central advisory groups the organisation is flexible and responds to the views of the young people on the scheme. This 'listening' ability means that we are more likely to successfully engage the young people we serve. Young people are also involved in the recruitment of staff and volunteers, another example of how we value the input from the young people".

In Loco contributes to the capacity building of organisations involved in local governance in Portugal as "These organisations were not designed to involve the citizens. With this participatory budgeting methodology, organisations are able to introduce such participation, which is not restricted to the methodology of participatory budgeting. The structures were very formal and hierarchical and were not previously prepared to receive citizens' participation in the conception and management of local policies".



In Loco: Cascais Methodology

In summary, projects reported positive outcomes from empowerment approaches:

- at the individual level in terms of a new pride, new competences, the ability to engage better in labour markets, the ability to participate and run ESF projects, the capacity to develop new projects, to engage in the policy arena and to assert their rights as citizens;
- at the organisational level - ESF projects adopting empowerment approaches were more effective, more sensitive to beneficiary rights as well as needs and more able to make connections with other issues like gender inequalities;
- at the institutional level, those with power were challenged and held to account though greater 'voice' for the excluded, more assertion of citizen rights and even a reworking of governance arrangements.

3 REINFORCING THE EMPOWERMENT DIMENSION IN THE ESF

The projects featured in the previous two chapters show how to promote empowerment approaches within ESF projects funded during the 2007 - 2013 programming period. However, empowerment could be reinforced if national and regional Operational Programmes for the 2014 - 2020 Programming Period were to give project promoters more scope and encouragement to introduce these approaches.

3.1. ANALYSIS

The 2014-20 Programming Period will be very different from the previous. In 2007, the ESF programme was launched in what appeared to be a period of unprecedented prosperity - the period 2014-20 is more likely to be one of modest recovery from the deepest slump in 70 years, with some economies struggling to meet their debt obligations. Most projections suggest that (with the exception of some key northern economies like Germany and Sweden) recovery from the 2008 crash will be sluggish, perhaps with more of the weaker states requiring support from the Stability Mechanism. Large swathes of Europe's banks will require recapitalisation and re-regulation. There is an ongoing debate about whether austerity is the right route to competitiveness and growth and considerable popular opposition to austerity programmes. In Germany, the Constitutional Court has had to rule that the Stability Pact does not run counter to the German constitution. In some Eurozone countries (Netherlands and Finland, for example) there is growing opposition to the Euro project. In states outside the Eurozone, these feelings are more than matched - in the UK, for example, the government has not ruled out the idea of a referendum on EU membership. Some suggest that the dominant economic paradigm since the 1970s has imploded creating

the need to rethink the architecture of European capitalism. Wood, for example, argues:³⁰

...neoliberalism has been derailed by the financial crisis and the ensuing recession. Its promises have been shown to be illusory - not simply for the poorest, but for the vast majority of working people.

Despite such turmoil, it is significant that the EU embraced a new growth perspective (Europe 2020) that combined 'smart', 'sustainable' and 'inclusive' strategies. The inclusion element set the objective of reducing European poverty numbers by 20 million - poverty and exclusion being defined in terms of three indicators: the at-risk-of-poverty rate (after social transfers), an index of material deprivation and the percentage of people living in households with very low work intensity. The priority of inclusion in the new growth strategy was evidenced by the creation of a European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion³¹, which re-emphasised the role of employability in the fight against poverty:

Unemployment is the main cause of poverty for the working-age population. *The risk of poverty for the unemployed is more than five times higher than for those who have a job (44% against 8%). Poverty and exclusion from the labour market go hand in hand, and this is particularly visible for women and younger people. (p.8) - Getting a job is the safest route out of poverty for those who can work.* *This is a difficult message to preach at a time of economic crisis, but as our economies move back to growth our primary focus must be on ensuring sustainable job-intensive growth. (p.11)*

The Platform has agreed to convene an annual convention to take stock of progress, review implementation and make suggestions for future initiatives.

For those committed to tackling social exclusion across Europe, the centrality of inclusion in a growth and competitiveness strategy is heartening.

30 Wood, S. (26/09/2011), 'The God that Failed, *New Statesman*, p.45

31 See The European Platform against Poverty and Social

Exclusion: *a European Framework for Territorial and Social Cohesion*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2011.

In a significant number of states, the response to the crisis has been fiscal austerity despite growing evidence of its disproportionate impact on the poorest.³² It is thus important that Europe as a whole does not neglect the agenda of social inclusion.

The challenge, however, is to sustain inclusion as a central policy objective in a world of low (or negative) economic growth and fiscal retrenchment - a world where the imperative to restore the health of the European economy may marginalise an agenda of social cohesion. Simultaneously, in some member states, unemployment and poverty have reached unprecedented levels. In Greece, for example, almost one million public sector jobs have been cut in successive austerity programmes. Average household income has fallen by over 50 per cent and swathes of Greek citizen have become dependent on soup kitchens to survive - 'ordinary Greeks, among Europe's lowest wage earners before the crisis erupted, are being stretched to breaking point is too obvious to ignore'³³ One NGO in Greece estimates the poverty rate (estimated at 20 per cent in 2009 by Eurostat) 'is already above 30 per cent and could reach 40 per cent if, as expected, unemployment goes on rising this year'.³⁴

Even the ways in which poverty is measured may fail to capture the realities of this new situation. In periods of economic growth, it is important to use 'relative' indicators of poverty and exclusion. Otherwise, there is the danger that improvements in the living condition of the poor will lag behind everyone else's - hence the importance of the indicator, 60 per cent of median household income. If median incomes increase, then the threshold at which we judge households to be poor also increases. The goal is to ensure that the most disadvantaged citizens also share in the proceeds of growth.

In a recession, however, there is a different kind of problem. Median incomes tend to fall so that, even while those at the bottom have falling incomes, poverty levels may remain unaffected. In relative terms, the poor may have exactly the same percentage of median household income that they had previously. In that situation, the incomes of the poor may fail to cover the cost of basic necessities (absolute poverty) without registering a widespread increase in poverty levels.

Absolute poverty - the inability to pay for food, fuel and accommodation - is a common feature of long-term recession. Greece, Portugal and Spain have seen a dramatic growth in the share of the population whose incomes have fallen to the point where they are simply insufficient to pay the bills. Even the core economies have begun to see the growth of absolute poverty - in the UK '42% of charities surveyed reported an increase in demand for food in the past year as food prices soar and the recession bites, putting additional strain on families and people on low incomes'.³⁵

The key test for the next round of ESF will be how it responds to these challenges:

- First, there is a need to understand the situation, how it has developed and what new vulnerabilities have appeared in the lives of the poor - ESF projects should have access to local, and detailed, knowledge about how their labour market is functioning, who is most vulnerable to economic restructuring and fiscal retrenchment and how to reach those most distant from the labour market;
- Next, such projects should explore all possibilities for achieving maximum impact in what will be very difficult situations characterised by permanent resource scarcities. The 2007-13 round of ESF invested 10 billion Euro in social exclusion projects - in terms of the scale of current problems, that is actually very modest.

32 See, for example Jenkins, S. P. Brandolini, A. Micklewright, J. and Nolan, B. *The Great Recession and the Distribution of Household Income*, London. Presented at the XIII European Conference of the Fondazione Rodolfo De Benedetti, Palermo, 10 September 2011.

33 The Observer, (25/09/2011), *Despairing Greeks say: 'We can't take any more of this'* pp. 12-13.

34 'Volunteers step in as Greek Poverty Soars', (16.04.2012), www.ft.com.

35 www.fareshare.org.uk Press release (1/10/2011).

In the decade following re-unification, Germany transferred around €90 billion annually to the East, still its most deprived area;

- Finally, the work undertaken by the Network suggests that the transformative possibilities of ESF can best be realised in projects that are rights-based and fully committed to empowerment processes. Empowerment has become more, not less, important in the current situation.

3.2 STRATEGY AND PRIORITIES

The regulations for the next programming period of the ESF contain 4 thematic objectives (in bold type) and 18 Investment Priorities as outlined below.

PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORTING LABOUR MOBILITY	
1	Access to employment for job-seekers and inactive people, including local employment initiatives and labour mobility
2	Sustainable integration of young people not in employment, education or training into the labour market
3	Self-employment, entrepreneurship and business creation
4	Equality between men and women and reconciliation between work and private life
5	Adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change
6	Active and healthy ageing
7	Modernisation/strengthening of labour market institutions, incl. actions to enhance transnational labour mobility

INVESTING IN EDUCATION, SKILLS AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING	
8	Reducing early school-leaving/ equal access to good quality early-childhood, primary and secondary education
9	Quality, efficiency and openness of tertiary and equivalent education to increase participation/attainment levels
10	Lifelong learning, skills/competences of the workforce, labour market relevance of education and training systems

PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMBATING POVERTY	
11	Active inclusion
12	Integration of marginalised communities such as the Roma
13	Combating discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age of sexual orientation
14	Access to affordable, sustainable and high-quality services, inc. health care/ social services of general interest
15	Promoting the social economy and social enterprises
16	Community-led local development strategies

ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND EFFICIENT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	
17	Institutional capacity the efficiency of public administrations services - reforms, better regulation, good governance
18	Capacity building for delivery of employment, education/social policies, sectoral/territorial pacts for reform

Empowerment approaches can assist in the attainment of each of these four Thematic Objectives. It is also possible to outline what they can offer to most of the 18 Investment Priorities that are subsumed under these four objectives.

3.2.1 PROMOTING EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORTING LABOUR MOBILITY

3.2.1.1 ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR JOB-SEEKERS AND INACTIVE PEOPLE, INCLUDING LOCAL EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES AND LABOUR MOBILITY

The case studies have used different terms such as individualised pathways, action plans or tailored case management to describe the measures that have succeeded in opening up access to employment for job seekers and inactive people. Through these measures, beneficiaries have gained greater self-confidence, motivation and a strong sense of personal empowerment, which has enabled them to overcome many obstacles on their pathways to employment.



WAW – trajectory: Project participants working together

Support in a variety of formats such as guidance, advice and mentoring has also been given to beneficiaries and some factors that were identified as being particularly important in helping beneficiaries to overcome obstacles, included:

- Offering beneficiaries trust, respect and responsibility;
- Focusing upon individuals' personal abilities and potentials and not their limitations;
- Promoting personal development tailored to individual beneficiaries' needs;
- Recognising their multiple 'identities' such as being a woman, a mother and an employee with different abilities/disabilities and thus, recognition of multi-dimensional problems.

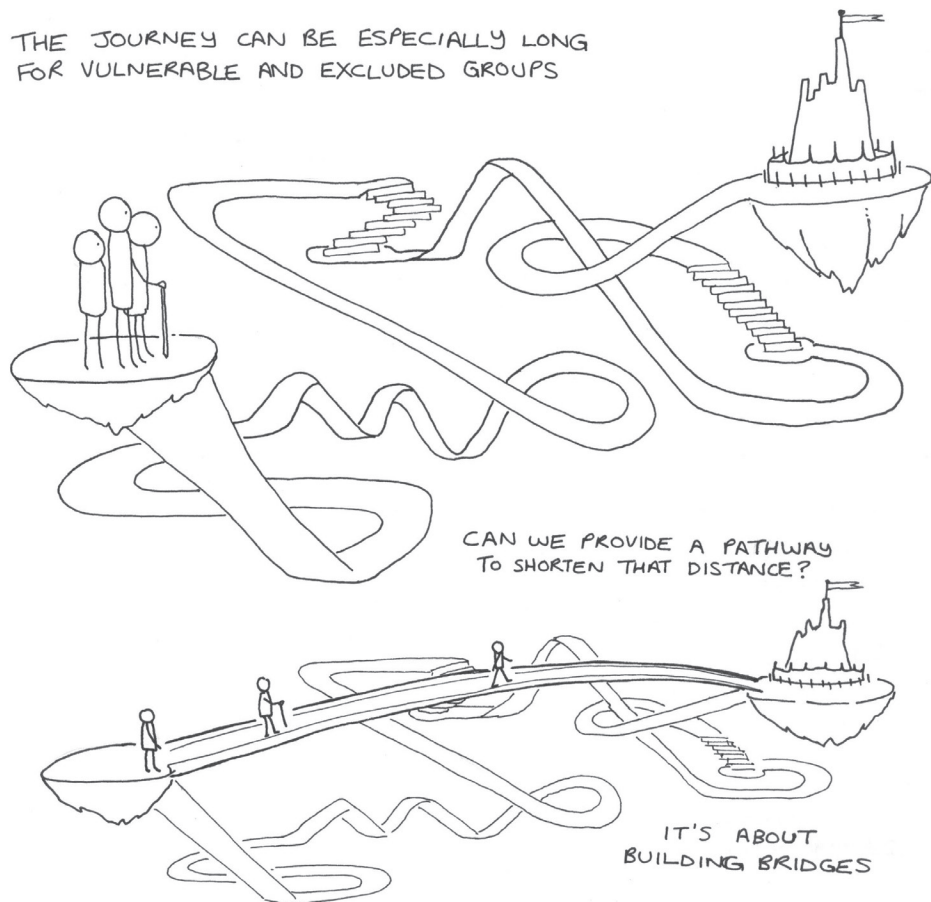


This helps to affirm of the primacy of people's rights and abilities over their needs. Where it has been most successful, it has shown how to move from advocacy and acceptance of individual rights, to develop learning and employment practices that enable people to develop their talents and abilities, and to use these to find work.

3.2.1.2 SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING INTO THE LABOUR MARKET

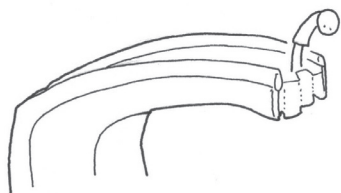
The case studies have also shown the value of a pathways approach in promoting the social and vocational integration of young people. It provides, at a local level, a low threshold, entry point to a multi-stage integration process that may take

THE JOURNEY CAN BE ESPECIALLY LONG
FOR VULNERABLE AND EXCLUDED GROUPS



place at several levels, linking and matching the needs and interests of these young people to different, hitherto separate services and offering individualised support and follow-up. Pathways draw on the whole range of resources that can be mobilised in a local or territorial context and can offer flexible responses to the needs of this group.

Each beneficiary is involved in the design and implementation of an individual action plan and is often supported by a mentor. Thus, the beneficiary feels ownership of the action plan and empowered to work towards its attainment.



P. B. 2007

3.2.1.3 SELF-EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS CREATION

Some of the ESF empowerment projects have experimented successfully in training members of vulnerable groups to set up their own enterprises or to become self-employed. This autonomous route is one way of avoiding the prejudice or stereotyping of employers or work colleagues, as individuals search for an acceptable and economically-viable form of work. Section 2.2.3 provides an example of an approach that has now been replicated on a national scale.



Basta: Participant who became a blacksmith and now looks after horses at Basta

3.2.1.4 EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN AND RECONCILIATION BETWEEN WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE

The European Commission sees gender equality as a "fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social

cohesion". The empowerment projects that have used the dual approach to gender equality work have shown that this systematic approach has improved the quality of analysis, measures and results, and shown how women and men require different approaches to what will improve their situations. Many projects also stress that empowerment methods, in themselves, contribute to equality, through changing inequalities in the power to influence the situation of excluded groups.

This point could be explored further. The ESF Regulation stresses how robust mainstreaming approaches and specific actions to promote gender equality and non-discrimination are needed. Further research into strengthening empowerment approaches by including systematic approaches to gender mainstreaming could both reinforce empowerment approaches, and contribute to the gender mainstreaming agenda.

It should be noted not that all groups are homogenous when it comes to wishes, experiences and considerations. There will be differences along lines such as age, gender, class and ethnicity and the intersection of these categories will have an impact on what people can or cannot do or be. A strong focus on a group's specific categories and behaviours often reinforces inequalities between groups. It should be remembered that most groups are heterogeneous and that sharing similar experiences is important.

Empowerment approaches can contribute to equality between women and men and also other equalities. The shifting of power and influence to those who have less, stressing the rights and responsibilities perspective, awareness-raising and individual approaches are all important. Thus, empowerment has a contribution to make under this particular investment priority.

3.2.1.5 ADAPTATION OF WORKERS, ENTERPRISES AND ENTREPRENEURS TO CHANGE

While, there are few echoes of this investment priority in the case studies, the Learning Network

on Empowerment and Inclusion is also working on the creation of an award scheme, which recognises employers who excel in the provision of inclusive workplaces.. As part of the award, a scoring framework has been devised which acts as a diagnostic tool, indicating areas where improvements could be made to ensure that workplaces are made more inclusive.

3.2.1.6 ACTIVE AND HEALTHY AGEING

None of the case study projects were specifically working with older people. However, the paragraphs on Investment Priority 11 - Active Inclusion indicate below that influence and choice contributes to an increased capacity to be proactive, and that is true, irrespective of age. However, the projects indicated that getting support and backing from people who are in, or who have been in, a similar situation can be a turning point in many individuals' lives. The terms that the projects used for these people were mentors, buddies, role models or simply friends. There may be considerable unharnessed potential in older people who as 'Experts of Experience' could offer their accumulated wisdom and knowledge, particularly to young people who are currently without education, employment or training and need help in developing a positive perspective or rhythm for their lives.

3.2.1.7 MODERNISATION/STRENGTHENING OF LABOUR MARKET INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING ACTIONS TO ENHANCE TRANSNATIONAL LABOUR MOBILITY

People at a disadvantage or people in poverty face many obstacles and exclusion mechanisms in their lives so that they seldom find a good quality job in the long-term. The existing range of guidance services is often not well suited to their needs. The focus on short term solutions just does not work because they face problems in a lot of different areas of their lives including: low income; low education levels; family problems, housing and health. However, work is an important lever in escaping from this vicious circle. Section 2.2.5 describes how some

of the case studies have helped people towards employment by offering improved information, counselling, training, networking opportunities and practical support.

3.2.2 INVESTING IN EDUCATION, SKILLS AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

3.2.2.1 REDUCING EARLY SCHOOL-LEAVING/ EQUAL ACCESS TO GOOD QUALITY EARLY-CHILDHOOD, PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

There is no direct link between the empowerment projects and this Investment Priority except that the approach of these projects enables people to search, and negotiate, for the best forms of provision, whether that is in the areas of health, housing, social security payments or education. Women, who are most susceptible to a life of poverty or inactivity because they are left to cope with the children, can benefit from this approach.



Choices Programme: Digital inclusion for children

It is always very difficult to combine family and work, particularly as a single parent but empowerment projects have helped both women and men to find the best solutions for themselves and for their children in terms of primary and secondary education (please see Section 2.2.2).

3.2.2.2 QUALITY, EFFICIENCY AND OPENNESS OF TERTIARY AND EQUIVALENT EDUCATION TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION/ ATTAINMENT LEVELS

The right to education is a universal entitlement, recognised as a human right. According to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights the right to education includes an obligation to develop equitable access to higher education, ideally by the progressive introduction of free higher education.

Many of the empowerment projects act as conduits to tertiary education because they develop people's self-confidence and skills and open up new horizons such as previously un-dreamt of possibilities like going to university (Section 2.2.2)

3.2.2.3 LIFELONG LEARNING, SKILLS/ COMPETENCE OF THE WORK FORCE, LABOUR MARKET RELEVANCE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEMS

ESF experience has shown that empowerment and ownership are at the core of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning involves developing the capacity to acquire the skills to play a full role in economic activity, in society and in personal life. Participants build up their confidence, acquire new knowledge and skills and exercise choice - all within the context of staged learning.



Establishing practical co-operation with employers and their organisations and involving employers in decisions about the nature of the training and how it should be implemented are of vital importance in ensuring the labour market relevance of education and training systems. Work experience placements are also a good way of empowering job seekers, as it enables them to prove their abilities to would-be employers and also to decide if they feel that the jobs on offer would suit them (please see Section 2.2.3)

3.2.3 PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMBATING POVERTY

As empowerment is so inextricably linked with social inclusion and combating poverty, each of the investment priorities merits a separate mention about how they might be used with future Operational programmes to promote the further empowerment of ESF beneficiaries.

3.2.3.1 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 11 - ACTIVE INCLUSION

Integration or re-integration into the labour market can be a long process and the longer it continues, the more people will be discouraged from adopting pro-active approaches. Waiting for the system to solve problems simply creates an increasing reservoir of passive potential workers. Thus, the use of empowerment strategies is extremely important when it comes to creating an environment that is conducive to active labour market policies and programmes. Section 2.3.6 explains how having influence and choice contributes to an increased capacity to be proactive.

It should also be noted that active inclusion does not happen on its own, as it requires the Operational Programme or Joint Action Plan to provide for a number of other Investment Priorities and not only those that appear under the 'Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty' Thematic Objective.

3.2.3.2 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 12 - INTEGRATION OF MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES SUCH AS THE ROMA



ESG Acceder Programme: Metalwork training in Madrid

There are certain key practices that can be introduced and implemented in ESF Operational Programmes in order to develop effective integration pathways for immigrants, ethnic minorities and Roma and also promote their empowerment and these include:

- Providing suitable tools and services to assess and recognise the qualifications and experience of members of such communities;
- Providing training that includes language and basic life skills including ICT and for the recently-arrived, training that is accompanied by an introduction to the local work culture, practice in the technical language required and support in developing personal networks of contacts;
- Capitalising on culture, contacts and language skills to develop new employment opportunities in industry, commerce, social services and the third sector and also exploiting all possible opportunities for self-employment.

3.2.3.3 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 13 - COMBATING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEX, RACIAL OR ETHNIC ORIGIN, RELIGION OR BELIEF, DISABILITY, AGE OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION

There are two types of action that can reinforce the empowerment of people in these groups.

- The first relates to activities aimed at awareness raising and attitudinal change with regard to the value of diversity and the methods that can be used to tap this resource;
- The second is the promotion of fair recruitment practices that value diversity and take account of the full potential of individual applicants.

Within empowerment projects, the work is often based on UN formulations about the right to work with reasonable support and respect (Section 2.2.6).

3.2.3.4 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 14 - ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES, INC. HEALTH CARE/ SOCIAL SERVICES OF GENERAL INTEREST

It has been recognised that individuals may need additional assistance in other areas of their lives and may need help with other pressing problems if they are to function effectively either as a trainee or as an employee. Therefore, projects have been active in areas such as health, housing and rights' issues and individuals have been helped to an understanding of the types of services that are available to them. They have also gradually developed the skills and abilities to use such services in an effective way.

While most of the institutions, agencies and services in the integration system share common overall aims, many of them work in parallel, operating in different, target group specific legislative structures and under different funding arrangements. This reduces the chances of smooth integration pathways being offered and the potential for new methods and tools to be developed. Thus, Operational Programmes could propose improved coordination and networking between all relevant local agencies and actors to provide a coherent and transparent range of services that can respond to the multi-faceted needs of disadvantaged individuals.

3.2.3.5 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 15 - PROMOTING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY AND SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

ESF activities have shown that entrepreneurial ability does not depend on educational qualifications, social status or race. Even the most deprived urban and rural communities can become 'business incubators' - but this means designing long-term integrated itineraries which build individual and collective empowerment and link broader social issues to economic activity. ESF projects stress the importance of starting with small activities that spring directly from local people's concerns and using these to create positive examples and role models which are the seed for entrepreneurship. Building trust through family and social networks is vital - as is the use of ICT.

The activities and approaches of Basta and Villa Vågen Ut demonstrate how such social enterprises can make a profit whilst still supporting people who have problems with drugs and alcohol. In many ways, the rehabilitation is built around the work and it and the company run together. Through experiencing real work in the empowering approach and with the support of peers in the company, people move away from drugs and into work.

Here again Operational Programmes could encourage further developments in the social economy.

3.2.3.6 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 11 - COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

ESF beneficiaries and members of local communities can be seen as 'Experts through Experience,' as they have faced the problems or have lived in the local areas concerned. However, the starting point for any real consultation and consequent response to their needs is an appropriate engagement strategy. This can take many forms but should involve an organisational consciousness of the critical importance of needs-driven, individualised interventions.



Central to this concept is the direct involvement and consequent empowerment of beneficiaries and local citizens. Projects working in this area have focused on clear information provision, flexibility, individualised needs, involvement of stakeholders, responsiveness to change and the use of the community and voluntary sector in a brokerage role. 'Real' consultation obtains a degree of commitment and ownership that could not otherwise be achieved. Conversely, the absence of genuine consultation results in cynicism and disillusionment. The involvement of citizens and beneficiaries in consultations where they are proactively involved and respected as 'Experts through Experience' has had a significant impact on the quality and appropriateness of the resulting provision.

The same is particularly true of ESF provision and projects, and those responsible for the drafting of Operation Programmes for the next Programming Period should decide how beneficiaries might be involved in setting the objectives and targets for their ESF projects and in the monitoring and evaluation of their projects' outcomes. This aspect is considered to some extent in the implementation section below.

3.2.4 INVESTMENT PRIORITIES 17 - 18

3.2.4.1 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 17 - INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY THE EFFICIENCY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS SERVICES -



REFORMS, BETTER REGULATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

Sections 2.2.7 to 2.2.9 give some indications of how ESF projects have been able to contribute to change in the policies and practices of public administrations. However, the next, and last, priority is most relevant to the reinforcement of empowerment in the 2014 - 2020 Programming Period.

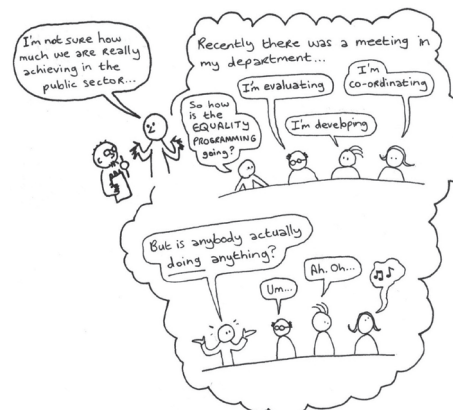
3.2.4.2 INVESTMENT PRIORITY 18 - CAPACITY BUILDING FOR DELIVERY OF EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION/ SOCIAL POLICIES, SECTORAL/ TERRITORIAL PACTS FOR REFORM

One concept or slogan that has emerged from empowerment activities is "nothing about us without us." Although many professionals and integration service providers agree with this principle in theory, they rarely apply it to their own work in practice. The traditional caring or helping approaches found in education and training, basic employment services and employment and job coaching initiatives tend to perpetuate dependency. However, clients who are allowed to make their own decisions on their employment paths are more likely to sustain their involvement and progress towards employment. Thus, new skills and competences are required by the staff of some integration agencies. These organisations have to at least respect, if not stimulate and strengthen, the individual's empowerment to make sure that he or she can really take charge of the integration process.

Capacity building is required at two levels that might be included in Operational Programmes :

- Firstly, support should be provided, to enable beneficiaries to influence policy-makers through capacity building and the establishing of formal arrangements for consultations, at local regional and national levels;
- Secondly, training or some form of experiential learning should be provided for members of staff in ESF projects and in the public and the voluntary sectors. This training should stimulate a greater urgency in making the cultural changes that would result in a more direct and active involvement of either the clients or those groups that claim to represent their interests.

Elements of the activities outlined above, under the various Investment Priorities, might be reflected in Member States' and regions' Operational Programmes to order to strengthen existing, or to promote new, empowerment measures.



3.3 IMPLEMENTATION

Some ESF Managing Authorities have encouraged consultations on their Operational Programmes or even on the next Programming Period. This has tended to involve project promoters who are most aware of the beneficiaries' rights, needs and expectations.

UK NORTHERN IRELAND

During a major ESF publicity event held in June 2011, an offer was extended to all the ESF projects to become more involved with the Innovation and Mainstreaming Working Group (IMWG) that the Northern Ireland ESF Managing Authority from the Department for Employment and Learning had established. The projects were invited to form themselves into cluster groups and to begin preliminary discussions in the free space provided during the afternoon of the event.

The next meeting of the IMWG was in December 2011, when the Chair explained that the new ESF programme for 2014-20 contained two major themes which were directly relevant to the work of the Innovation and Mainstreaming Working Group and could be of great benefit to the Voluntary and Community Sector. These themes were Social Innovation and Transnationality. He stressed that it was vital to continue with the work of the cluster groups in identifying and showcasing innovation and that a consultation process was being initiated with the project representatives to seek their views on the content of the Operational Programme, which would be developed for the period 2014-2020. Five cluster groups of project promoters continued their work on the topics of:

- Young people
- Disability
- Women
- Transnationality
- Governance and accountability

PROTEUS, the ESF Technical Support Structure in Northern Ireland, facilitated a number of sessions with the cluster groups between February and mid-May 2012. Then, a presentation of the views of the ESF projects was made at an EU conference held in Belfast, on 30 May 2012.

Those that were present to hear the projects' views included Dr Stephen Farry, the Northern Ireland Minister in charge of the Department for Employment and Learning, and Peter Stub Jørgensen, the Director of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, who is responsible for the ESF.

The work has continued and a further seminar was organised in October 2012 bringing together the NI ESF projects with experts from across the EU.

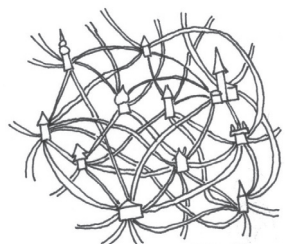
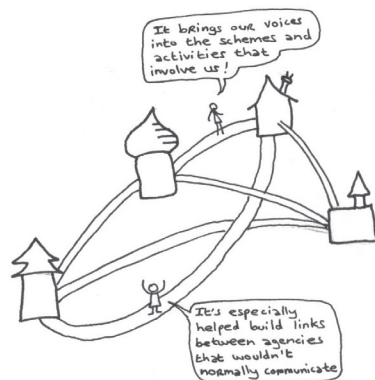
GREECE

When the Operational Programme for the 2007 - 2013 Programming Period reached the stage of a first draft, it was uploaded onto the Managing Authority's website. This launched a period of consultation open to a wider public and gave interested parties the opportunity to react to what was being proposed.

On a more formal level, a conference was held with the participation of the social partners and broad consultation was undertaken. The list of participants included all organisations, NGOs and associations that were representative of ESF target groups together with other organisations that had issues to do with the target groups on their agendas. These included international organisations like UNHCR and IOM, universities and governmental authorities including the Greek Manpower Organisation, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality and the General Secretariat for Youth.

Following the conference, meetings with the Managing Authority/General Secretariat for Community and other Funds/Ministry of Labour also took place on the basis of the individual interests expressed by social partners. The input from this consultation process contributed to the revision of the OP.

INTER-AGENCY PARTNERSHIPS RESULTING IN BETTER COMMUNICATION



THESE PARTNERSHIPS
MUST CONTINUE AND
GROW

Ph.D. 2007

An example of the significant contribution from target groups was provided by the National Confederation of People with Disabilities, which represents associations of people with disabilities and their families. The confederation believed that the proposed criteria in the OP for accessibility were too general and submitted a detailed proposal on how these criteria could be specified to fit the needs of people with disabilities. Also the National Confederation of People with Disabilities is now a member of the OP's Monitoring Committee which sanctions the evaluation criteria for projects under the OP.

BELGIUM - FLANDERS

For the 2007 - 2013, Programming Period, the ESF in Flanders has what it entitles 'Outcome oriented calls' for projects that relate to the achievement of wider, policy-relevant objectives. The actual solutions within the relevant policy domains are not determined by the call and project promoters have the time to think about, and decide how to contribute to, the policy objective. This also provides the time to engage the target groups in project design.

For example, the Manual for these 'Outcome oriented calls' indicates that:

- A good way to is to present the initial theme of the project to representatives of the final target group;
- Empowerment through involvement of the final target group when designing and implementing a project makes sure that the project better responds to their needs. This form of empowerment increases the chance of the effective use of the service made available by the project;
- The final target groups and the intermediaries have to be involved to the greatest possible extent and this can be achieved by granting formal decision rights or by consulting;
- The strongest form is formal participation which would allow them to block a project proposal or the project implementation. Neither would it be possible to proceed without paying sufficient attention to their concerns and input;
- A weaker form consists of just consultation. In that case, a project cannot formally be blocked. This means that, if a project proposal, rejected by the target group

and/or intermediaries, is submitted by the promoter anyhow, there was de facto only consultation;

- Participation has to be ensured both in the design and the implementation of the project. It always concerns the entire project proposal. It is not enough if the final target group has only been requested to provide input for a certain part of the implementation of the project when the proposal is written;
- Of course, not all members of the intermediary or the final target group/end user have to be involved; representatives should suffice. However, it must be clear who the representatives are with regard to the organisation they belong to and/or the role / position they hold.

It is hoped that the above examples provide some guidance as to how ESF MAs and IBs might open up their implementation arrangements during the next Programming Period to representatives of ESF projects and their beneficiaries. The participation of beneficiaries in project design and implementation has been a recurring theme in this Handbook but some thought might also be given as to how they might play a role in the more formal arrangements or structures for the management, monitoring and evaluation of ESF projects and Operational Programmes.

4 SUGGESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

To this point, the handbook has focused on the lessons drawn from a group of ESF projects that explicitly underpinned strategies and work programmes with empowerment values and practices and explored their relevance for the investment priorities. More generally, the Network suggests that empowerment approaches be used to improve the implementation of the ESF.

4.1 ENHANCING PROBLEM ANALYSIS



Choices Programme: Activities with young people

A key lesson of the case studies is that understanding is enhanced through an **engagement between popular and formal knowledge**. Through involving those who have direct experience of the problem, a new and important category of experts becomes involved in analysing and describing the issue at hand. By connecting these experts of experience with other experts and agents of change, analyses will be improved.

The situation in the European labour market is volatile and the situation of the poor increasingly precarious. Programmes with a social inclusion remit require to be flexible and adaptable to rapidly changing situations. A key problem with formal knowledge systems is that, while fundamentally robust, the data generated is almost always time-lagged because of collection and verification

processes. Not only is popular knowledge more immediate but those involved move from being the 'subjects of research' to recognised actors in the production of knowledge. Engagement and synthesis of the understanding of 'experiential experts' and those involved in the formal production of knowledge leads to better programme outcomes.

In this way, the ESF can improve its capacity to lay a better foundation for sustainable work in any relevant measure that it funds.

4.2 SOCIALLY EXCLUDED PEOPLE ARE KEY TO TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION

A realisation that people, usually described as the target group, are, in the words of the Choices project, *"its biggest resource"*, means that they should have ownership of developing and implementing measures and solutions to the issue at hand. **People know their own problems and should be at the core of tackling them.**

The purpose of ESF is provide the information, advice, support and training that enables people to address their own problems and, indeed, to be sensitive to the problems of others. This not only maximises the impact of any programme but extends its reach and connections with what else is happening in communities. Interventions have to be transformed from being 'programme driven' to 'people driven'. The excluded are an unharnessed resource that can be tapped by the ESF measures if they become part of the solution rather than 'problems to be solved'.

4.3 INCREASE IMPACT BY FOCUSING ON THOSE WHO HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE STRUCTURES

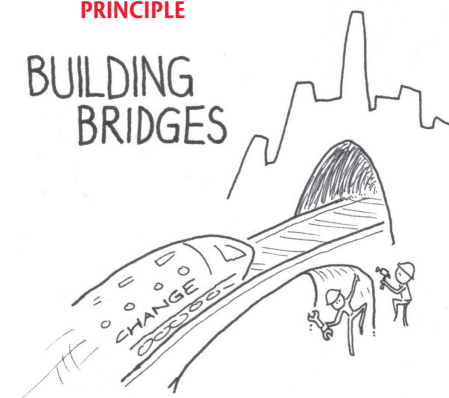
Research shows that the effects of projects go wider and deeper when structures, ways of organising work and workplace procedures are changed, rather than when attempts are made to change individuals.³⁶ **However, empowerment**

projects focus both on supporting individuals and on stressing that systems also need to change.

Their starting point is that, if social exclusion is to be adequately addressed within ESF, people need to enhance their own capabilities to be transformed into agents of their own change. In addition, labour markets and societal structures need to be reformed to create a structure that does not disadvantage the powerless. The framework for this approach is human rights based development, and is central to the work of the UN. The excluded have, at least, the same rights as everyone else in society. Arguably, they should have more rights - the test of any society is how it treats its weakest members.

In order for this to happen, support structures and labour markets must change the ways in which they work and function via *'efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions, on the part of those who have been excluded from such control'*.³⁷

4.4 STRENGTHENING THE PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE



Partnership has been a visionary idea but a difficult practice. The key proposition here is that an empowerment agenda can only be achieved by redefining existing programme and project

governance, by focusing on relationships and transactions rather than formal structures or centralised decision-making - this depends more on social capital than social bureaucracy. The European model of partnership as a form of democratic and local governance has been historically comfortable with concepts like empowerment and equity. The EQUAL model set out partnership as the key organising principle of the programme together with full participation. The benefits of such arrangements have been repeatedly demonstrated.

The link between good governance and successful development needs to be appreciated and applied. Clearly, it is vital to put in place the right *structure* of management that permits coherent policy-making and appropriate delivery and evaluation mechanisms. But, the best of structures cannot measure up to the task without being underpinned by the right culture. The new culture required is mainly about creating opportunities for collaborative practice within and among a range of agencies and target groups. Flexible networking ensures that the added value of all development effort is greater than could be achieved by a series of separate developments spearheaded by different organisations, driven in part by inter-agency rivalry. The challenge is to move beyond a procession of disjointed initiatives so as to fine tune development effort into a more co-ordinated, focused strategy. Supported by a vision of the long-term future, this process can then signpost the most appropriate strategy and organisational structure for each stage of implementation.

Partnership implies that equity must stand alongside economy and efficiency as measures of effective performance. It implies that good governance will not come from a return to old-style distant public bureaucracies, nor can the welfare of citizens - particularly the most vulnerable - be left to the limits of business or voluntary support. It implies that no one sector has all

36 Brulin, G & Svensson, L. (2011). Att äga, styra och utvärdera stora projekt, Studentlitteratur AB, Lund, p 210

37 STIELFEL, M. AND WOLFE, M. (1994) A voice for the excluded: Popular participation in development : utopia or necessity? London, Zed Press, p. ?

the resources, or all the answers. It implies that decision-making has to work with those most affected by those decisions. It implies that people will better appreciate those services in whose development they have been involved. It implies that drawing people together from diverse experiences and viewpoints stands the best chance of creating new thinking for the new times. And, it also implies that what can be achieved by the sectors acting co-operatively is greater than the sum of what each could achieve acting separately.

Moreover, an effective structure of partnership can helpfully resolve the contentious issue of 'ownership'. In this structure, a programme is 'owned' by all the partners, and all have equal opportunities and responsibilities. While it means that the local actors cannot claim sole control, it also means that other partners, such as the statutory agencies, are locked into accountability for the successful outcome of the programme. Interestingly, the bulk of case studies examined here are functioning partnerships.

4.5 PROMOTING SOCIAL INNOVATION

A priority area for the next ESF programming period is social innovation, which has a strong relationship with empowerment. To achieve social innovation and to increase the social and economic resilience of society, it is vital that vulnerable populations are re-engaged in the mainstream economic, social and cultural institutions. This should be *"not as recipients only, but as active participants and contributors. As these groups are excluded from contribution, their viewpoints, diversity and potential for specific local contributions are lost"*³⁸

The same authors stress how *"the capacity of any society to create a steady flow of social innovations, particularly those which re-engage vulnerable populations, is an important contributor to overall social and ecological resilience"*.

38 Westley, F. and Antadze, N. (2010), 'Making a difference: strategies for scaling social innovation for greater impact,' *The Innovation Journal: The Public Sector Innovation Journal*, Vol. 15(2), 2010, article 2. P. ?

4.6 HIGHLIGHTING HOW POWER IS CENTRAL IN THE WORK OF THE ESF

Empowerment has become a popular concept that is used by many, but one that is not always understood in the same way. For that reason, the Network decided early to move from general proclamations to specific definitions and the creation of tools to measure empowerment in practice. From the network's perspective, it is crucial to stress that empowerment concerns power. Those experiencing social exclusion have less power than others over decisions that affect their lives because of the unequal distribution of power in society. These inequalities are built into the ways people interact with each other, how labour markets are organised and also in the thinking that determines how to support excluded groups to gain access to the labour market. The ESF has a central role to play in developing the power of excluded groups, through continuing to support increased capacity building and assistance. The ESF can also support organisations working towards a society where all individuals and groups can be active and contribute to labour markets and society as a whole.



In Loco: Participative sessions where citizens discuss and vote on public investments

In this way sustainable social inclusion can be achieved. A continued focus on the power dimension is vital as otherwise there is a risk that the sole focus will be on strengthening individuals and no real impact will be achieved in terms of

societal structures. Power and power relationship are rarely discussed, but it is very important to understand how power functions and the part that it can play in working towards social inclusion.

In discussions about power, the debate is sometimes about whether power concerns 'power over' (getting people to do things, even if against their will) or 'power to' (being able to achieve and do things). Empowerment work is about the excluded having more power to do things, but also about institutions exercising less unaccountable power over them. Thus empowerment also involves working for more accountability and more equal representation within institutions that have 'power over' citizens.

Importantly ESF can prefigure a more accountable and representative form of 'power over' through asserting participant ownership of the project and involvement in the programme as a whole.

4.7 USING SYSTEMATIC APPROACHES TO EQUALITY

Research shows that unequal power relationships do not change automatically. Starting to recognise inequalities is an important step to take. The next step is to identify how things can be done differently. Experiences in Gender Equality, which has the longest experience of systematic, evaluated work to change inequality, can be of help when looking at changing unequal power structures. The EC and ESF regulations stipulate that Gender Mainstreaming (GM) is central to the work of the ESF. A few projects use GM approaches in their work, but many are interested in developing these activities through applying the dual approach to gender equality. To combine empowerment approaches with systematic approaches to equality would be an interesting development from both perspectives.

4.8 BEING CLEAR ABOUT THE LEVELS OF EMPOWERMENT AND INVOLVEMENT

A common critique of empowerment work is that it can often take the form of tokenism. Many groups experiencing social exclusion have been

invited to meetings to be listened to, but then these discussions have no real impact on the work that follows. Therefore, it is important to be clear about what kind of power the target group can have, or not have, in projects and organisations. As Bruksvärde indicates, *"We always keep the discussion ongoing about power and powerlessness. Who has got the power in different situations and why has she or he got power? The system of power within the organisation must constantly openly be questioned"*.

It is also important to be clear about the purpose of empowerment and to make sure that the level of increased ownership and involvement is meaningful for all concerned. Where necessary, members of the target group and members of staff in organisations and institutions should receive capacity building training to increase the impact of this type of involvement.

Focusing only on strengthening individuals and their options to choose is also a risk. In the present economic climate, focusing solely on empowering individuals to increase their possibilities in a limited labour market is somewhat unrealistic. The focus should be on the structural causes of the high levels of unemployment. Some of the projects have involved those who are excluded in discussions about how common resources can be used. They have also involved them in creating more jobs and improving labour markets by making them more inclusive.



SOVA's Homegrown Project: Participants develop skills in horticulture and organic produce



4.9 SUMMARY

In exploring the relevance of the case study work, the Network was primarily concerned with recommendations for strengthening the social inclusion dimension of the coming round of ESF, in particular the relevance of empowerment to the investment priorities already set out. In the final chapter, the claims are more ambitious - particularly that ESF and other EU programmes should be sensitive and adaptive to the turbulent economic and social conditions likely to persist for the rest of the decade. This requires finding new ways to cope with new problems. The role of ESF is particularly relevant here - it provides relatively small scale projects with the resources and space to test new ways of tackling social inclusion, new ways of realising citizenship rights and new ways for the relatively powerless to take control over their lives. Some of these will fail, but the small-scale operational level means that the lessons of failure can be learned without endangering flagship programmes. Encouraging risk and experimentation within ESF allows EU, and indeed Member State, programmes to be designed and delivered with maximum impact.

If the victims of economic change are viewed as being mainly responsible for their fate and just one more problem to be tackled, there is growing evidence that this will not 'fix' the economy but will damage social structure and punish those least responsible for the crisis.³⁹ However, even with limited resources, and some imagination, change can happen.

39 See Krugman, P. (2012), *End this Depression Now*, London, W Norton & Co.

Annex A:

THE PROJECTS & ORGANISATIONS THAT PARTICIPATED IN THE EMPOWERMENT WORKSHOP

PROJECT CONTACT DETAILS	MS	PROJECT CONTACT DETAILS	MS
<p>WAW - Trajectory Fourth World Group - Aalst Heidi Degerickx heidi@vierdewereldgroepaalst.be www.vierdewereldgroepaalst.be +32 05378 3660</p>	BE(nl)	<p>Participatory Budget Initiative In Loco Association Vanessa Sousa / Nelson Dias (President) / Priscila Soares sousavanessa@sapo.pt / nelson.dias@in-loco.pt www.in-loco.pt / www.op-portugal.org / www.infoop.org +351 91 6067 390 / +351 289 840 860</p>	PT
<p>Fire Works Stebo Griet Bouwen griet.bouwen@stebo.be www.stebo.be +32 08950 1244</p>	BE(nl)	<p>Choices Programme Programa Escolhas Paulo Vieira paulov.consultores@programaescolhas.pt / escolhas@programaescolhas.pt www.programaescolhas.pt +351 21 8103 060</p>	PT
<p>The Strengthening of Immigrants and Refugees in the Job Market Greek Forum of Migrants Moawia Ahmed ingreece@hotmail.com +30 69 3856 9068</p>	EL	<p>Basta Basta Namu Nambiar namu.nambiar@basta.se www.basta.se +46 733 265 215</p>	SE
<p>Acceder Programme Promociona Programme Equality Area and Anti-Discrimination line of action Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) Andreas Tsolakis andreas.tsolakis@gitanos.org www.gitanos.org +34 91 4220 960</p>	ES	<p>Bruksvärde Bruksvärde ('User Value') Cecilia Heule cecilia.heule@soch.lu.se www.powerus.se +46 707 434 001</p>	SE
<p>Journal of Prisoners and Volunteers in Prison Ristretti Orizzonti Elton Kalica eltonkalica@hotmail.com / direttore@ristretti.it www.ristretti.it / www.ristretti.org +39 049 654 233 / +39 392 558 0837</p>	IT	<p>Villa vägen ut! Susanne Villa vägen ut! Susanne Elisabeth Grankvist elisabeth.grankvist@vagenut.coop www.vagenut.coop +46 766 459 867</p>	SE

PROJECT CONTACT DETAILS	MS
<p>Potential At Work (p@w) Leadership Training Programme</p> <p>Restore Pat Wood pat.wood@restore.org.uk www.restore.org.uk +44 845 250 0518</p>	UK
<p>YHOP Home Grown Project Women into Work</p> <p>SOVA Sophie Wilson swilson@sova.org.uk www.sova.org.uk +44 121 230 9970</p>	UK
<p>Give and Take Scheme Campaign to extend the provision of Education Maintenance Allowance</p> <p>Include Youth Paddy Mooney paddy@includeyouth.org www.includeyouth.org +44 28 9031 1007</p>	UK(ni)
<p>STEP</p> <p>STEP Bernadette McAlliskey bernadette@stepni.org www.stepni.org +44 28 8775 0211</p>	UK(ni)

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