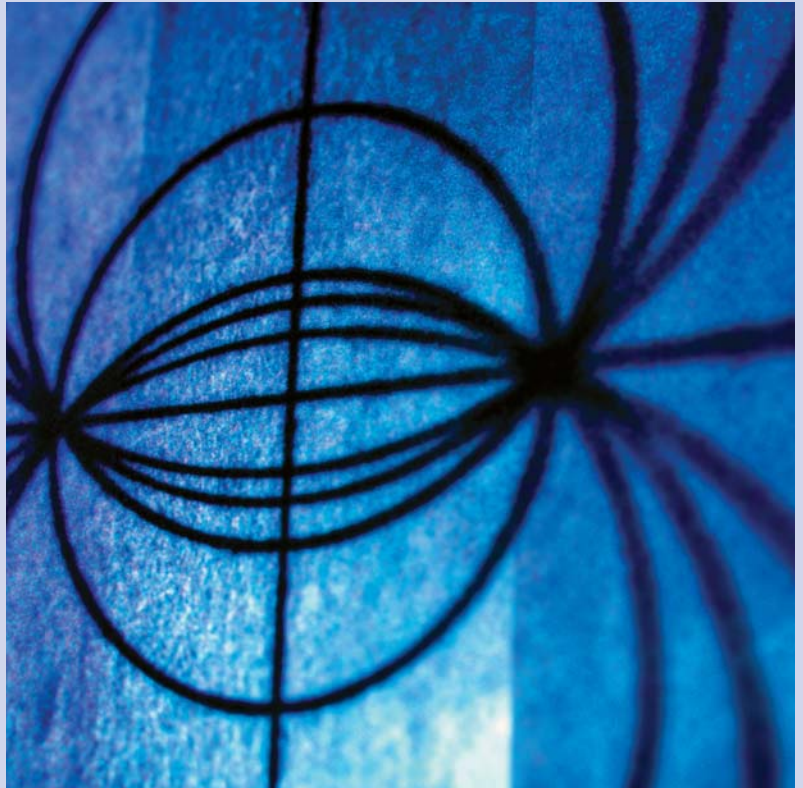




European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

# Social inclusion: Local partnerships with civil society



Foundation paper



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# Foreword

Foundation papers highlight knowledge and analysis from Foundation research over recent years in the areas of employment, equal opportunities, social inclusion, time use and diversity. The objective of the papers is to make past, present and future work of the Foundation relevant and accessible in a concise format. The subject of each paper is linked to current social policy issues and therefore provides a timely contribution to the debate at European level.

Supporting social inclusion through partnerships with civil society is the focus of this paper. It draws largely on research carried out by the Foundation in this area over the past decade. The paper looks at policies and strategies identified in this research which could promote social inclusion, particularly through local and regional partnerships. It also points to factors which could enhance the impact of partnerships.

Willy Buschak  
Acting Director

# Introduction

There is ongoing debate at European and national level on the role of non-governmental organisations and civil society at large. Discussions at the high-level European Convention on the Future of Europe<sup>1</sup> have seen the issue come to the fore. The draft treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe<sup>2</sup>, underlining key European values such as social justice and combating social exclusion, defines the European model of democracy as built on three main principles. The first is representative democracy (e.g. the European Parliament and, indirectly, the European Council), the second, participative democracy, and the third, social dialogue. Article 46 specifically examines how participative democracy can be strengthened through stronger dialogue with civil society.

The challenge of enlargement to ten new Member States in May 2004 pulls the issue into sharper focus. The role of civil society in these countries is complex and varied and the historical and political dimension cannot be underestimated. The extent to which the acceding countries have used such partnerships in promoting social inclusion has yet to be evaluated. But it is clear that what the current EU can offer by way of experience in this domain will play an important role in charting the direction for civil society partnerships in an enlarged Europe.

For its part, Foundation research has focused on the involvement of a broad range of civil society organisations in social and economic development. Particular attention has been given to measures for social inclusion and how the European social model can be strengthened by systematic involvement of the local partners concerned. These partners include citizen groups, service users, users' organisations or representatives, voluntary organisations, private businesses, trade unions or local government.

This paper outlines the strategic and practical importance of civil society in supporting social inclusion. It looks at the role of partnerships in this area, for example between social partners and public authorities at local and regional level, and it proposes guidelines to assist policymakers in strengthening the role of civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> The convention met from February 2002 to July 2003 under the chair of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

<sup>2</sup> Document Conv 850/03 of 18 July 2003 available at <http://european-convention.eu.int>.

# Context

'Social inclusion' in the context of this paper refers to people's capacity to participate fully in both economic and social life. The term is relatively new. A shift in terminology took place in the 1980s, moving away from the term 'poverty' in order to capture the multifaceted processes and character of deprivation. From the early 1990s, the European Commission increasingly used the term 'social inclusion' in an effort to promote a more 'inclusive society' (Fahey et al, 2003). But in a quickly changing Europe, social inclusion is neither simple nor static: people move in and out of 'disadvantaged' circumstances over time and in varied and complex ways. The strategies to promote social inclusion need to reflect this.

To date, social inclusion strategies have, for the most part, placed the emphasis on combating unemployment, especially long-term unemployment. It is, however, essential to acknowledge the multidimensional nature of social inclusion. People in employment may still be socially excluded while, equally, people not seeking employment, e.g. poor pensioners, may benefit from social inclusion strategies. As a result, there are different roles in social inclusion strategies for labour market policies, social public services and social benefits.

It is difficult to capture the multi-dimensional aspects of social exclusion in EU-wide statistics. However, the number of people at high risk of exclusion and poverty is considerable. Around 15% of the EU population, or 60 million people, live in households with income below 60% of the national average income. Half of these people had been living below this relative poverty threshold for three years in a row (European Commission, 2002a).

The key risk factors for poverty and social exclusion are many and varied. They include discrimination, poor quality public services, unemployment (especially long-term), low income, low quality employment, poor health, low qualifications, disability, old age, migration, family break-up, drug addiction and alcohol abuse, as well as living in disadvantaged areas. These social risk factors often interact and accumulate over time.

For example, for the first time in seven years, the EU unemployment rate increased slightly, rising from 7.4% in 2001, to 8.0% in October 2003, according to the EU statistical office, Eurostat. This sparked further concerns about social exclusion. As social inclusion itself is related to social relationships, social isolation, caused by labour market marginalisation and poverty, may trigger a breakdown in social networks. Providing support to these networks can help to contribute to the individual's 'social capital'.

‘Social capital’ is defined in terms of ‘networks, norms, values and understanding within groups’, as well as ‘habits, assumptions and institutions’ (Chanan, 1997). It requires vibrant community and voluntary organisations to ensure participation in social and cultural activities. According to Chanan, such organisations can also help improve people’s access to information in areas such as job opportunities; can develop the concept of mutual aid to assist socially excluded people; can create networks that link the more fortunate groups to isolated individuals or weak communities; and can provide individuals with socially and economically useful skills for working with other people.

Under Article 6 of the Regulation establishing the European Social Fund<sup>3</sup>, the Commission refers to local social capital as an important ‘innovative’ instrument. Close cooperation with civil society is also encouraged. In 1998, the Commission launched an innovative project, together with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), to explore the relevance of building local social capital. From 1999 to 2002, the Commission supported 30 projects. The evaluation report published in December 2002 (European Commission, 2002c) stated that ‘...using intermediary bodies was an effective way to facilitate access to Social Fund support for disadvantaged groups and people suffering social exclusion. The “decentralised delivery method” had a positive impact on participants, partnership members and the areas concerned. Key factors for the success of the pilot project were the combination of ongoing support, small grants and the high degree of flexibility in the management of the intermediary bodies.’

Articles 136 and 137 of the Amsterdam Treaty (European Commission, 1997) refer directly to the fight against ‘social exclusion’. This has stimulated several important initiatives. The European Social Policy Agenda agreed at the Nice Summit in December 2000 aims to substantially reduce poverty by 2010 (European Commission, 2000c). It sets out the mechanism for developing commonly agreed indicators to measure both poverty and social exclusion across, and within, all Member States. Based on these indicators, all Member States have adopted two-year National Action Plans on Social Inclusion (NAPs)<sup>4</sup> aimed at tackling poverty and social exclusion. To ensure the achievement of these goals, the new social inclusion strategies have harnessed the involvement of civil society in a number of countries, according to the *Joint report on social inclusion* (European Commission, 2002a).

Although ‘civil society’ is mentioned consistently in the EU Treaties, there is no agreed definition. The term itself is understood to refer to a broad range of organisations, such as consumer associations, environment

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<sup>3</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1784/1999 of 12 July 1999.

<sup>4</sup> Two types of National Action Plan exist: one aimed at social inclusion, the other at employment.

groups, human rights and charitable organisations, religious organisations, youth organisations, family organisations and local community groups. Civil society is, therefore, a structure outside government. This paper focuses on civil society organisations which reflect and promote the interests and experiences of those who experience poverty, exclusion and inequality.

This paper acknowledges the role of the social partners as important actors in local partnerships with civil society. In this context, 'local partnership' refers to a formal organisational structure for policymaking and implementation. This mobilises a coalition of interests and the commitment of a range of partners around a common agenda for combating unemployment, poverty and social exclusion (Geddes, 1998, p.15).

A large number of organisations is involved in the debate on social inclusion strategies at both national and European level. The Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform) was established in 1995 with the support of the European Commission, bringing together over 1,700 organisations in the social field. Its aim is to promote and implement a long-term process of cooperation between social NGOs and the EU (Platform of European Social NGOs, 2003).

## European Commission initiatives

In an effort to further develop relationships with civil society, the Commission launched a discussion paper in 2000, *The European Commission and non-governmental organisations: building a stronger partnership* (European Commission, 2000b). The document describes how cooperation between the Commission and civil society has developed over the past two decades, moving from consultation and dialogue to a stronger partnership in policy delivery and project management. More than €70m is now allocated annually to EU NGOs in the social field. The Commission then launched a wide-ranging consultation process from December 2000 to April 2001, with particular focus on civil society. The result was the White Paper, *European Governance*, which was published in July 2001 (European Commission, 2001c). The Commission then took a number of concrete actions to implement the recommendations.

### **EQUAL**

One such initiative is the EQUAL Guide on Transnationality (European Commission, 2002b). EQUAL, a programme which aims to promote the transnational exchange of good practice on measures to combat discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, was started in 2000 and will run until 2006. Drawing on the successful partnership experience of its predecessor programmes, ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT (1994-1999), the programme links its local and national strategies to the National Action Plans for Employment (NAPs) aimed at developing innovative ways to



deliver labour market and social inclusion policies. Within the framework of the European Employment Strategy (EES), EQUAL seeks to promote new ways of combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market, and to take account of the particular needs of asylum seekers. The six principles of the programme are:

1. Thematic approach
2. Innovation
3. Partnership
4. Empowerment (or participation)
5. Mainstreaming (from innovative experiments to policy implementation)
6. Transnationality.

EQUAL co-finances strategic partnerships under the themes of the EES. As part of an integrated approach, these Development Partnerships (DPs), gather all relevant actors – such as public authorities, NGOs, the business sector and the social partners – at the earliest possible stage of strategy design. A coherent strategy is developed defining common goals and monitoring and evaluation measures. EQUAL differs from ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT in that the mechanisms to ensure effective transnational cooperation between DPs are significantly stronger.

### ***URBAN and LEADER+***

URBAN is another Commission programme aimed at promoting partnerships in local employment development as well as economic, social and environmental programmes. Based primarily on partnership with civil society, it offers support for urban development programmes aimed at tackling economic, social and environment problems in a more comprehensive way (Geddes, 1998). URBAN II (2000-2006) is a follow-up to URBAN I (1994-1999). The LEADER+ programme, for its part, focuses on developmental programmes in the social field in rural areas.

### ***Third system and employment***

Against a background of high unemployment rates across the EU in 1997, the European Parliament called on the Commission to examine the employment potential of the so-called ‘third sector’ – to date referred to as civil society. The result was the pilot action programme, the ‘Third System and Employment’ (European Commission, 2003a) which is managed by the Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs. Its main focus is on organisations and partnerships with limited profitmaking and which are self-managed. These include associations, cooperatives and mutuals which typically work in the area of social services, environment, culture and sport. A total of nine million people are employed in this sector in the EU. An evaluation of the project in 2000 concluded that job creation in this sector

represents good value for money and a source of savings for government. In addition, it found that close links with the users ensured high quality services, while innovation, local development and social cohesion are just some of the added benefits of the local partnerships involved.

### ***Territorial employment pacts***

Territorial Employment Pacts (TEP) play a key role in the European Union's regional programmes. The TEP is a strategic agreement between local partners, aimed at boosting the economic development of an area: a city, rural area or local labour market.

The evaluation of this project offers interesting findings. In particular, it finds that effective local partnerships are a vital catalyst for innovation and creativity, as well as policy development (conception and implementation). Covering 33 experimental projects financed by the Commission during 2001, the report also underlines the need for leadership, competency, and clear and deliverable objectives (ECOTEC, 2002). Entitled, *Acting locally for employment – findings of the preparatory measures for a local commitment to employment 2001*, the report concludes that partnerships are not easy and often experience difficulties. It suggests that both the leadership and tasks should be better defined (INBAS 2002, pp 20-21).

### ***Joint report on social inclusion 2002***

The Commission's *Joint report on social inclusion 2002* (European Commission, 2002a) is a good source of information on the functioning of the National Action Plans on social inclusion. Formal consultation on NAPs, with the social partners and NGOs, now takes place in all countries.

### ***New employment guidelines***

In order to tackle the challenges of an enlarged European Union, the new guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States promote better governance at local, regional, national and EU levels, based on more effective partnerships between the major stakeholders such as European institutions, national governments, regional and local authorities, the social partners and civil society.

However, despite this recognition of the value of cooperation with civil society, dialogue on employment policies at EU level takes place only with employers and trade unions. The Maastricht Treaty provides a legal basis for dialogue with the social partners, but not with NGOs. The fact that NGOs typically have no elected authority may be one reason for their current 'non-legal status' and therefore gives rise to issues such as NGO representativity and legitimacy (Sudbery, 2003). But these issues must be placed in the context of a wider discussion about the role of civil society actors and the distinct contribution they can make to the development, implementation and evaluation of social inclusion policies. In this context,

the question of providing a legal basis for structured civil dialogue will almost certainly be raised in future inter-governmental conferences.

## International organisations' involvement

Other international organisations have emphasised the importance of partnership with civil society as a means of dealing with employment and social issues. The LEED (Local Economic and Employment Development) programme in the OECD used case studies to examine the added value of local partnerships with civil society (OECD, 1999), resulting in the report '*Local partnerships for better governance*' (OECD, 2001). The report points to the fact that partnerships today are mainstreamed into social policy. However, it also underlines that partnerships can be very different in both organisation and aim, and that experiences are mixed. It suggests that partnerships may enhance cooperation between the main organisations relevant to their policy goals both within the sector and also across the sector to other policy areas. NGOs play a particular role in some partnerships as they are closely connected with disadvantaged groups and can identify obstacles to employment and social inclusion. However, NGOs are often found to be the weaker partner, with case studies revealing the municipality to be dominant in many instances.

In some countries, the social partners have been considered as representing civil society as a whole. According to the OECD report '...this view is challenged by community-based organisations, voluntary associations and NGOs, who represent people such as unemployed and minority groups, whose concerns are not directly addressed by the trade unions and employer organisations. The civil society, as represented by these groups, has often played an important role in establishing partnerships.' (OECD 2001, p. 59)

To improve the effectiveness of partnerships, the OECD puts forward four main recommendations:

1. Develop consistent policy goals at central level
2. Adapt the strategic framework for the partnership to the needs of the partners
3. Strengthen the accountability of partnership
4. Provide flexibility in the management of public programmes.

Against this background and taking account of the significant European policy developments listed above, this Foundation paper will focus on the following questions:

- Can local partnerships with civil society promote better social inclusion strategies?
- What are the most effective mechanisms and principles to improve partnerships between local government, the social partners and civil society?
- How can partnership contribute to better governance?
- What are the links between local, regional, national and EU levels in the area of partnership with civil society?

# Overview of Foundation research

During the 1980s, governments across Europe came under increasing budgetary pressure. Unemployment was high and social exclusion was increasing. Many governments decentralised public services and deregulated policies, while at the same time seeking wide-scale public savings. Against this background, the idea of strengthening local partnerships to develop strategies and deliver services gained momentum.

As social exclusion problems are largely interrelated and therefore require coordinated action from a wide range of actors, the partnership approach increasingly gained appeal and was gradually mainstreamed into public policy. The specific strength of this approach is that it involves those directly affected by the problems in the development of solutions.

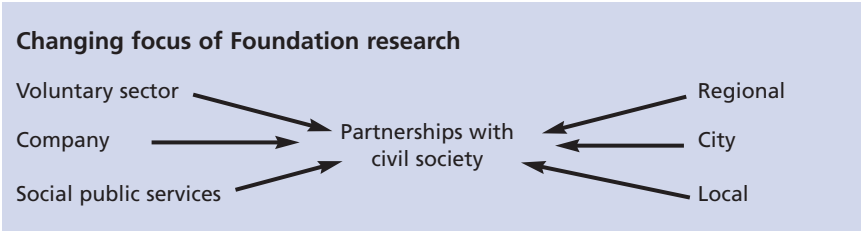
The Foundation studied these developments closely from the late 1980s, focusing initially on local community groups and organisations in a project on social and economic change at neighbourhood level (Chanan, 1992). This underlined the need for new multidisciplinary approaches to combat poverty and disadvantage and to promote social cohesion. As the 'local partnership' approach flourished, the Foundation carried out research to critically examine its processes and results (Geddes, 1998). This report describes the partnership approach, the partners, working methods and impacts. It concluded that firstly, the polarisation between advantaged and disadvantaged groups was a threat to social cohesion; and secondly, there was potential to mobilise greater self-help in disadvantaged groups by building up their capacities, e.g. through networking.

More recent reports have documented a range of partnership approaches to promote better services, such as social public services (Pillinger, 2001) or local employment development (Ditch and Roberts, 2002) involving governments, social partners and user/citizen groups.

In the 1990s the Foundation studied the urban environment and partnerships between central governments, local authorities, the social partners, the private sector and voluntary/community organisations (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1995). As time went on, the focus moved from physical and spatial issues to time planning for cities in order to improve citizens' quality of life. This also pinpointed the need for new forms of NGO partnerships with city planners in order to ascertain citizens' needs (Boulin and Mückenberger, 1999).

The Foundation's work on partnerships moved in a new direction when the project on corporate responsibility towards society was launched in 2001. This initiative examined partnerships between companies and various actors aimed at promoting local community and environmental action. Several of these cases include partnerships with local community groups.

Thus it is clear that Foundation research over the past decade has tackled the issue of partnerships from different angles, moving from the local level to public services, through to the voluntary sector, the company and the city.



## Can local partnerships with civil society promote better social inclusion?

There are of course both good and bad examples of partnerships with civil society. Some of these partnerships amount to 'talk shops' with little effect on social inclusion. Others are innovative and developmental, and make a substantial contribution to tackling social problems. The Foundation has carried out much qualitative research to analyse why certain partnerships work well. At the same time, it examined how such experiences can best be transferred to policymakers at local, regional, national and EU levels to assist them in developing supportive structures and in creating a higher degree of partnership professionalism.

The most relevant publication in this context is *Local partnership: a successful strategy for social cohesion?* (Geddes, 1998). The partnerships examined in this 10-country project involved public authorities and other key social actors in private, voluntary and community sectors.

A four-dimensional approach to 'local partnership' was adopted:

- A formal organisational structure for policymaking and implementation
- The mobilisation of a coalition of interests and the commitment of a range of different partners
- A common agenda and multi-dimensional action programme
- A vehicle for combating unemployment, poverty and social exclusion and promoting social cohesion and inclusion.

This approach takes into account the territorial dimension to social exclusion. The traditional focus of social policies had been on sectors (housing, health and education) or categories (women, the elderly, young people, people with disabilities, ethnic groups and migrants). There was a need for these initiatives to be supplemented by a more integrated and multi-dimensional approach, reflecting the complex causes of social exclusion. Local partnership was seen as a way of bringing together institutions and local communities to create new alliances and policy initiatives for the promotion of social inclusion.

The research programme on local partnership had the following key objectives:

- To better understand the different circumstances underlying the development of local partnerships (e.g. history)
- To survey the different approaches and experiences which exist, and to analyse how partnerships work.

### **Local partnership: Wulkow, Germany**

Faced with the prospect of being resettled by the former East German government, the inhabitants of the small village of Wulkow (population 130) in Brandenburg, near the Polish border, had two options: to abandon their village or to fight for its future. The community mounted an initiative to revitalise their locality. In 1990, following reunification, they set up a partnership, the *Ökospeicher*, which included almost every inhabitant: farmers, commuters, the mayor, traders, the school and the church.

Research across Europe has shown that impetus for the formation of local partnerships comes from many different sources:

- Grassroots initiatives
- Initiatives by employers and trade unions
- Encouragement (including the possibility of funding) from national governments
- Opportunities offered, or conditions imposed, by EU programmes.

### **Local partnership: Lousa, Portugal**

The ARCIL partnership in Lousa, Portugal was founded in response to the needs of disabled children. Established by local voluntary associations, the partnership linked these with public sector agencies, and with other sources of funding, including EU programmes, for the delivery of integrated care to the local population of children with disabilities.

Thirty detailed case studies from the project show that policies for social cohesion and inclusion at national and regional level can be more effective if supplemented by social inclusion initiatives at local level, especially in disadvantaged areas.

#### **Local partnership: Ballymun, Ireland**

The Ballymun Task Force, on a housing estate in north Dublin, represented a model approach to public housing policy in Ireland. An area of high-rise housing in poor condition, the residents included a high proportion of lone parents, single and formerly homeless people. The Task Force emerged as a community response to this housing crisis. This led to the establishment of a partnership comprised of representatives from the public health and housing authorities, the Community Coalition and tenants' associations.

The research demonstrated through numerous case studies how local partnerships with civil society can (alongside other policy programmes) bring added value in the promotion of a more socially inclusive society.

#### **Local partnership: Tyrol, Austria**

Responding to a growing demand for mobile care and medical services in this rural area, the social services and health care districts in the Tyrol created a partnership between local authorities, general practitioners, the Red Cross and individuals active in the local community on social matters. The initiative provided a formal organisational structure, a focal point of contact and a multi-purpose centre through which tight resources could be coordinated and developed. This included self-help alternative solutions and support from non-professionals.

Geddes concludes that it is within a strong public welfare system that public agencies can make the greatest contribution in local partnerships. On the impact of social inclusion, Geddes states that:

- Partnerships can help to develop a collaborative culture in an area.
- Partnerships provide a local institutional framework which can empower key actors, including local community interests and excluded groups, in addressing issues of local development, social cohesion and inclusion.
- Local partnerships can improve the delivery of policies at local and regional level, by the direct implementation of integrated programmes or as agents and intermediaries.
- Local partnerships can enhance the performance of mainstream economic, welfare and environment policies by tailoring them to local needs and capacities, and introducing a greater degree of differentiation,



specificity and responsiveness to the needs of vulnerable social groups; and in relation to specific social problems such as crime and alcohol/substance abuse.

- Local partnerships have a learning function: they can act as fora for innovation and experimentation.
- Partnerships can help fully exploit resources, by using resources more effectively in local contexts and by channelling additional resources, monetary and other.
- Local partnerships can play a valuable role by acting as a ‘spokesbody’ for a range of local interests in influencing policies nationally and at European level.

To summarise, the research showed that local partnerships contribute positively to both the processes and the outcomes of social inclusion initiatives. They can lead to better policy coordination and integration as well as stimulating creative and innovative ideas. Importantly, this facilitates multi-dimensional approaches to social inclusion. In this way, local partnerships can be good value for money.

### **Coordination of social policy**

According to Foundation research, measures to integrate excluded groups into employment demand better coordination of welfare and employment policies (Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

Coordination is not a new concept within social policy. In fact coordination structures have been in place for more than four decades. Typically, countries have dual systems for the support of unemployed people. On the one hand is insurance-based unemployment protection and on the other, means-tested social assistance. Often it is the social welfare authorities that take the lead in shaping coordination, not least because of the cost burden of the unemployed. It is this national setting which determines how coordination develops.

Voluntary organisations and the private sector also play a significant role in coordination structures. These partnerships with civil society are crucial, not only in identifying the problems but also in the development of integrated programmes.

Another recent Foundation project studied employment in household services across Europe (Cancedda, 2001). The study covered services such as childcare, care of the elderly, domestic cleaning, home maintenance and catering. The quality of services of this kind is very important in relation to social inclusion as well as job creation, especially in light of the ageing population. The study found that Member States are giving increased

attention to partnership as a tool for coordinating services, thereby improving their quality. Civil society is directly involved in these new partnerships. The comparative advantage of involving such organisations lies in their ability to identify problems and solutions due to their close contact with local communities.

The Foundation study, *Quality in social public services* (Pillinger, 2001), points out that partnerships with civil society are important tools for improving user involvement in service design. The case studies show, however, that this issue remains under-developed. User involvement could be better resourced at both national and local level, and could include greater involvement of the wider civil society. A number of cases point to the increased role of civil society in closing the 'needs gap' left by the state. This is the case in Spain, where there has been a significant increase in private involvement in previously state-run social services. Similarly, the voluntary and community sectors in Ireland and the United Kingdom have seen considerable growth in recent years.

#### **Partnerships in service provision: The commune of Bologna, Italy**

A planning agreement between the local health trust, the hospital trust, two public welfare and charitable institutions, trade union and pensioners' federations led to the upgrading and reorganisation of a network of social and health services. The aim of the Total Quality Plan was to reduce institutional care and promote new home care services for older dependent people. This has led to coordinated services in home care, day care, residential and sheltered housing, income-related support, family support, neighbourhood solidarity initiatives, inter-agency assessment systems and alarm call systems into one planning framework. The single point of access for all services is organised through a case management approach.

Pillinger's report identifies the importance of monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives. This would imply increased responsibility for civil society organisations, in particular regarding working conditions, in order to ensure that employment growth does not result in a dual labour market with secondary status for social service jobs.

The report highlights the importance of community involvement in service planning and development. Effective partnership has become a necessity for coordination and, according to Pillinger, this works best within a framework of users, voluntary and community organisations, private businesses and public agencies. Because many users experience multiple forms of 'disadvantage', integrated, preventive programmes are needed. Formal systems of partnership, but also more informed networking, play a significant role in the delivery of coordinated and integrated social services. The research (Pillinger, 2001) points to the fact that networking and

partnership require new skills. It is also important to allocate sufficient time for work in external partnerships and networks and this can be facilitated by local or regional authorities. Models of good practice were identified, notably in Austria, Finland, Italy and Spain.

In short, local partnerships with civil society can contribute to better social inclusion strategies by:

- Including concerned groups in developing solutions
- Developing fora for discussion and innovation
- Ensuring better coordination between policy areas and services as a result of civil society involvement.

## **What are the most effective mechanisms and principles to improve partnerships?**

Foundation research (Geddes, 1998) shows that building and maintaining partnership is a balancing act. From the local perspective it requires:

- Identifying and bringing together the relevant partners
- Negotiating a consensus strategy
- Developing organisational structures and procedures
- Finding skills and resources
- Establishing links at local, national and international levels.

The research highlighted a number of prerequisites for building partnerships:

- Clear identification of the benefits to be gained by participants
- Strong leadership, especially in the early phases
- Skilled management and project staff
- A strong, shared local identity
- Active involvement of all partners in the shaping and implementation of strategies.

From the work of both Geddes (1998) and Pillinger (2001) it is clear that civil society and voluntary groups can play a crucial role in the design and implementation of integrated social inclusion strategies targeted at disadvantaged groups, often with multidimensional needs. However, the research also points to limitations. To improve the effectiveness and impact of partnerships, action is required at both strategic or policy level (in management boards and committees) and at practical or operational level. It is useful for local partnerships to build relationships not only

horizontally, between local actors, but also vertically, with regional, national and European stakeholders. Local partnerships are often complex and bureaucratic, requiring ongoing skills and support.

Civil society representation and its influence is varied. In some cases, marginalised communities lead the initiatives, but in most cases their role is limited. To boost civil society participation, Geddes suggests developing an active network of voluntary and community organisations, especially those representing excluded social groups and communities. As highlighted by other Foundation research, this requires long-term financial, and other, resources to support the process of capacity building of community organisations (Chanan, 1992 and 1997).

### **The role of the social partners**

Employers and employer organisations often play an important role in local partnerships with civil society. Some commentators argue that this contribution could be strengthened if employers adopted a ‘more representative stance on behalf of the local community and foster better exchange of communication between the individuals in partnership bodies and the wider business community’ (Geddes, 1998). In the same way, they recommend employer organisations providing better advice and training opportunities for members engaged in partnerships. Geddes suggests disseminating examples of the successful involvement of employers through international business networks.

Similarly, research suggests trade unions could participate more strongly in local partnerships with civil society by promoting better working relations with community and voluntary organisations. To ensure increased participation, the research highlights the need for trade unions to provide training and support for their members and to disseminate experience of trade union participation at local, national and international levels.

Summarising Foundation research in this domain, we can now identify some of the most important motivating factors for local partnerships:

### **Mutual benefits**

Partnerships only develop if there are benefits for all participants. Some of the benefits are tangible and can be measured; others are not. While the financial aspect is important, so too is experience and exchange of knowledge. In many cases, the public sector benefits further from the partnership as the other partners may be better equipped to identify and solve problems (Geddes, 1998). Similarly, private companies that demonstrate strong commitment to social partnerships can benefit from a competitive advantage in marketing products, particularly where consumers are increasingly informed. For example, it has been shown that 22% of Belgians would like to consume in a socially responsible way (Copenhagen Centre et al, 2002).

Improved image, which is often a byproduct of corporate social responsibility, is also important in the recruitment and maintenance of a qualified workforce (Møller, 2003). At local community level, the benefits for the participants are often visible through the chain of social inclusion into employment (Geddes, 1998; Chanan, 1992, 1997).

### **Social policy framework**

A common sense of purpose is important for successful partnerships. Development of local, national, regional and European frameworks for social inclusion policies for partnerships clearly play a role in defining common objectives at local level, e.g. around a local social agenda (Geddes, 1998; Møller, 2003). Such frameworks can be supplemented with economic incentives at national or European level. Examples at European level include the Social Fund and EQUAL programme.

### **Quality of social public services**

High quality social public services tend to have a greater understanding of the role of partnerships (Geddes, 1998). Countries with strong, universal public welfare systems also tend to be more proactive in developing partnerships, mainly because partnerships are needed to meet the multiple needs of disadvantaged people (Geddes, 1998; Møller, 2003; Pillinger, 2001).

### **Skills and training**

Training and development of skills are important enabling factors for effective local partnerships (Geddes, 1998; Møller, 2003; Chanan, 1992, 1997; Pillinger, 2001). Particularly important are management and project expertise, as well as skills in tackling social problems. Training is crucial to help reduce inequalities between partners in terms of skills, experience and resources. Public authorities, private companies, the social partners and civil society organisations are all training providers. The Eurocounsel project, launched by the Foundation in the 1990s, examined good practice in counselling services for the unemployed and those at risk of unemployment. It looked at existing services available to provide information, advice, guidance and counselling and explored how these services could be further improved (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1994). The findings highlighted the role of local-level partnerships between authorities, private businesses and (sometimes) civil society. It recommended better coordination of these different service providers and suggested higher user involvement.

### **Networks**

Closely linked to the issue of skills and training is the existence of networks outside partnerships to facilitate the exchange of information on innovative ideas and programmes (Geddes, 1998; Møller, 2003; Chanan, 1992, 1997).

Geddes argues that information on partnerships tends to flow easily from local level to higher policy levels on a networking basis. However, the information exchange between local partnerships is seldom adequate, even though most EU-funded programmes have allocated resources to transnational exchange. The Ökospeicher partnership in Wulkow, Germany (see page 14) underlines how small, local and resource-constrained local partnerships may have a much wider impact if these partnership principles are diffused horizontally in other areas. In the case of the Ökospeicher, the innovative and effective nature of the initiative has attracted external recognition and resources which have helped create further local initiatives on a similar model in other countries.

### **Trust**

Openness, transparency, information and accountability are necessary elements for establishing and continuing partnerships with civil society. Geddes points out that voluntary and community organisations should create more open and democratic procedures, in order to enhance their representativity.

## **How can partnerships contribute to better governance?**

In social inclusion policies across Europe over the past two decades, there has been a change in focus from ‘government’ to ‘governance’. ‘Government’ was either national, regional or local, and often policy-sector specific. It was characterised as being hierarchical and bureaucratic. With the multiple needs of socially excluded groups, there was a need to move to a more all-embracing, multi-centred and integrated approach. This is where the term ‘governance’ is relevant. Local partnerships with civil society are just one element of a new broader governance.

On the question of how partnerships with civil society can contribute to improved governance, the Foundation’s research points to three main issues: vehicle for participation; integration of policy areas; and the changing role of corporate responsibility.

### **Vehicle for participation**

Partnerships often involve groups that are traditionally excluded from decision-making. The study, *Out of the shadows – Local community action and the European Community* (Chanan, 1992), reported from disadvantaged urban areas using case studies of residents’ problems. These focused on where they looked for help, how active they were on local issues and whether they made use of, or were involved in, local community groups. The local partnerships also carried out a range of low profile, but crucial, social functions such as enabling people to make friends and overcome social isolation; providing personal support for people in distress; spreading information about local opportunities; and helping people to develop new

skills. According to Chanan, however, such initiatives were limited and too small to reach a significant number of those in need.

Case studies carried out by Geddes and Oxford Research (Geddes, 1998; Møller, 2003) show that excluded groups are increasingly included in a new, broader governance. This occurs through cross-sectoral local partnerships, often with links to EU-level programmes. Civil society organisations and publicly supported networks can also boost participation, although Geddes points to the need for equal opportunity policies to ensure an ongoing increase in participation in partnerships.

### **Integration of policy areas**

A particular advantage of effective local partnerships with civil society is that they can be fora for better coordination and social integration of the various public and private services, e.g. social welfare, social inclusion, employment, health, education and the local environment (Geddes, 1998; Ditch and Roberts, 2002; Pillinger, 2001). This is of particular importance in the light of the multiple needs of socially excluded groups (Ditch and Roberts, 2002).

#### **Joint municipal partnership: Ravnsborg, Denmark**

High unemployment and few jobs created the impetus for close coordination between welfare and employment institutions in Ravnsborg. A coordination committee was established, involving four municipalities, the Employment Service, the Employers' Confederation, the Trade Union Federation and the Council of Organisations for Disabled People. The committee seeks to improve mutual awareness among all the relevant organisations, and also funds specific initiatives. One of its key aims is to promote the introduction of vulnerable groups into local businesses. Employment projects often have a mix of employment, welfare and environmental aims. People are placed on them regardless of which of Denmark's 'dual' unemployment assistance schemes they come from (the employment fund scheme or the social welfare scheme). The target groups of the two systems are becoming increasingly similar and the tools available to help them are practically identical.

### **Changing role of corporate responsibility**

The relationship between business and society is changing. Over the past twenty years, many companies have taken increased responsibility for areas such as social inclusion, local development, working conditions, environment and human rights. Other companies have taken on new responsibilities. This changing role is partly a consequence of the globalised economy. Supply chains to countries in the developing world are constantly being improved. The information and knowledge society makes companies'



activities more visible and companies' relationships with their stakeholders are now vital. The phenomenon has different names, ranging from 'corporate citizenship', 'corporate governance' or 'corporate responsibility' to 'corporate responsibility towards society'.

In the European context the common term is 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR). In a Green Paper launched by the European Commission in 2001 (European Commission, 2001b), CSR is defined as 'a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis'. These stakeholders are often local community groups or NGOs. It is an approach that goes further than minimum legislation. Often, however, it is very difficult to distinguish what is regulation and what goes beyond. Much regulation in the area is framework legislation and directly concerns stakeholders, or, to put it in other terms, the 'development of local partnership'.

Foundation research (Møller, 2003) shows clearly that CSR is primarily the initiative of company management. Management will, for the most part, act out of conviction or strategy. And in the case of strategy, it is about anticipation of events. Foundation studies in this area cover working conditions, the local environment and local community action. For the latter, results reveal that support for local community action involves a trend towards the development of partnerships between companies and civil society groups.

### **Linking core business and partnership: British Gas, UK**

In 1998, Centrica (a UK gas supplier, with a number of brands such as AA, British Gas and Goldfish) tried to identify an appropriate cause for British Gas's core business to develop a flagship community programme. Using detailed customer focus group research, the company identified 'Help the Aged' as a suitable partner, due to its solid reputation in the charity sector and its effective delivery mechanisms. The charity works at national level, delivering services at local level, and had campaigned in the previous year in particular on cold-related deaths. The British Gas-Help the Aged partnership was formed in 1999 and, to date, more than GBP4.5 million has been provided by British Gas. Both organisations agreed on clear objectives, targets, methods of delivery, stakeholder involvement, communications and funding.

Activating partners in CSR is a matter of rethinking governance, i.e. rules, processes and practices (Bronchain (ed.), 2003). It can be applied either at company or societal level. At company level, the diversity of the partners' expectations is a challenge. Processes are required to manage this and to provide trade-offs between expectations. The trade-offs can be between some shareholders' short-term profit aims and the management's long-term



vision for survival of the company. Governance of CSR at local, national or international levels is about ensuring that both companies and civil society benefit from mutual enrichment.

## **What are the links between local, regional, national and EU levels?**

Foundation research reveals that the most fertile environment for the emergence of strong local partnerships is where there is collaboration between excluded groups in local communities and local public bodies, the social partners, government and EU programmes (Geddes, 1998; Chanan, 1997).

In the majority of cases, the objectives of the partnership are broadly based, with a multidimensional approach to social inclusion, local regeneration or rural development. In some cases, however, the remit is more specific, focusing on the social needs of particular groups.

Public authorities can play a leading role, for example through funding. Partnership often means seeking funding from various sources over time. In this context, the sustainability of partnerships is a key issue.

One consistent finding of the research is the importance of framework programmes established by public authorities at local/regional and EU levels. When designing and implementing these programmes, it is important to take account of local experience and skills. Employment and social inclusion objectives should be clear and funding should be secured for a number of years if the social inclusion targets are to be met.

Good practice examples reveal the importance of participation and partnership at all levels (local, regional, national and the EU) across different sectors, and with civil society, users and the local communities in particular. The connection with the EU level is mainly through the European Social Fund, which provides support for partnerships in this area.

For many social service providers, partnership has become a necessity. Partnership strategies for economic and social purposes have been pioneered under local partnership structures formed through the European structural funds.

The detailed study of local partnerships confirms the importance of EU funding. This is crucial in countries where partnerships through local initiatives or national programmes have not yet been developed. In France, Germany and the UK, the impact of EU initiatives has been limited as the level of EU funding has been significantly lower compared to national programmes and policies. EU interventions have had the most positive impact in Ireland where national and EU policies have been closely aligned

and where the scale of EU intervention is more significant in the national context (Geddes, 1998). Geddes also found that the timescales for building local partnerships and achieving benefits are longer than the typical programme cycle of four or five years.

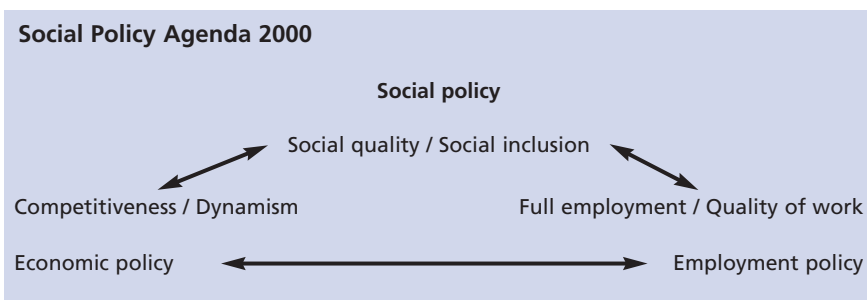
The research shows that there is no one ‘best practice’ for local partnerships. This suggests the importance of continued support from the EU for the transnational exchange of experience and good practice between local partnerships supported by different EU initiatives, by national programmes, and by local initiatives.

Research (Geddes, 1998) also highlights the positive effect of stimulating local initiatives to attract matching funding. This was achieved in some LEADER I partnerships, where funding arrangements encouraged a flexible and responsive use of resources. It also shows that in many cases effective ‘horizontal’ partnership at the local level needs to be supplemented by ‘vertical’ partnership between local actors, regional and national authorities and the EU itself. This is confirmed in the report, *Integrated approaches to active welfare and employment policies* (Ditch and Roberts, 2002), which points to the need for good communication and feedback between local and national actors, and emphasises that policy frameworks should be responsive to the reality of local experience.

## Elements of a broader social inclusion strategy

As mentioned several times in this paper, local partnerships with civil society bring added value to social inclusion policies. They are not, however, a replacement. For that reason it seems appropriate to briefly introduce some elements of a broader social inclusion strategy proposed on the basis of experiences from other Foundation research.

The Foundation’s research programme is closely linked to the Social Policy Agenda 2000 (see figure below). This points to three interlinked policy issues: economic growth, growth of quality jobs and social inclusion. It is important to reiterate that integration into employment is only one pathway to social inclusion; some groups need other objectives and services.



The specific priorities and guiding principle of the Social Policy Agenda are outlined in the *Joint report on social inclusion* (European Commission, 2002a). The guiding principle is the open method of coordination. This means that countries have to report regularly on commonly agreed indicators to measure poverty and social exclusion across, and within, the Member States. It also means setting up National Action Plans for combating social exclusion.

Based on an assessment of the specific needs of socially excluded groups, the Foundation's work has emphasised five key approaches, all of relevance to the European Social Policy Agenda (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2001):

### ***1. Increased participation***

Excluded people should be offered the possibility to become involved in the planning and evaluation of social policies designed to improve their situation. In the same way, disadvantaged groups should be provided with secure, effective representation. Local partnerships with civil society are one strategy for this type of increased participation. Similar initiatives may require a longer term culture change for policymakers and service providers.

Chanan considered participation at two levels (Chanan, 1997):

- general citizen action, through local community and voluntary organisations, whereby most of the local population are involved in social contact, leisure activities, mutual aid and promotion of relevant issues;
- participation by community representatives or organisations in local development schemes.

In order to increase these forms of participation, Chanan suggests that:

- baselines, targets and monitoring should be established;
- mutual reinforcement between the two types of participation should be fostered, for example, a forum of organisations in the sector of general activity could appoint community representatives;
- a strategy for building up the capacity of the local community sector to meet its own objectives and to contribute to the objectives of other projects should be devised and implemented.

### ***2. Integration into employment***

An important element of the European social inclusion strategy concerns increased employability and adaptability of the workforce. This clearly involves training. But it could also involve better employment counselling services with evaluation and minimum standards, possibly with a stronger

focus on preventing unemployment. Social and care services are relevant not only to young parents but to older workers and other disadvantaged groups. Policymakers and the social partners could consider more active labour market measures, for example, the development of entrepreneurship and self-employment. The sustainability of these measures is important. It is not enough to look at the supply side of labour. The long-term demand for the products and services that the jobs are creating is equally important.

The European Local Employment Development initiatives are crucial in this regard and are often based on local partnerships with civil society. Although employment is an important tool in ensuring social inclusion, social inclusion strategies must go further in support of groups who are not interested in employment, such as pensioners and certain people with disabilities.

### *3. Promoting diversity and equal opportunities*

Opportunities exist to improve the situation for ethnic minorities and third country nationals. To ensure their full integration into the labour market and society at large, cultural awareness training is essential. Specifically, there is a need to promote initiatives building on the immigrants' own skills and experiences. Local civil society organisations, often established by immigrants themselves, can contribute to these activities, sometimes in a partnership arrangement.

With an ageing population and workforce, there is also a growing need to ensure better integration of older workers into society and the labour market. In particular, this raises the issue of care – an area where voluntary organisations are already strongly involved with the elderly – in terms of both enabling the employment of family carers and creating new jobs.

Specialist, voluntary, mediating organisations also play a critical role where people with disabilities are concerned, easing barriers to employment in partnerships with private companies and social public services.

#### **Local partnership for inclusion: The Freezehouse, Stockholm**

In Finland, Denmark and Sweden, voluntary organisations concerned with specific social groups such as the mentally ill, the disabled and alcohol and drug abusers have played leading roles in local partnerships projects. The Freezehouse in Stockholm, a centre for youth activities and training, was founded as a result of initiatives by individuals working with young people in local sports and leisure associations (Geddes, 1998).

#### **4. Coordination**

Social integration strategies acknowledge the multifaceted needs of disadvantaged groups. Coordination arrangements should not only link local services but also regional and national levels. Local level initiatives should be planned, resourced and maintained. The services tailored to multiple needs require new ways of working and sometimes even new structures. One way forward is stronger local partnerships.

#### **Local partnership for youth: Valdocco, Spain**

Valdocco is an Andalusian social NGO, which works to achieve socio-vocational and community integration. It works mainly with young people threatened by exclusion, developing actions that are coordinated by the users themselves, their families and their neighbourhoods. The organisation is well established in the local area as a result of earlier work in combating exclusion. It has acquired a large degree of local trust and credibility – a substantial achievement in an environment where groups tend to be wary of institutions and organisations. It has a high degree of identification with the neighbourhood and its residents. Its privileged position in this sense has enabled it to establish a range of formal and informal links.

Closer coordination of social and employment policies is needed, based on a better understanding of reasons for social exclusion. Partnerships certainly contribute to such an integrated framework (Ditch and Roberts, 2002). Involvement of civil society in partnerships can also contribute to a better understanding, as the example from Spain below illustrates.

#### **5. Training**

In addition to the points already mentioned on how to strengthen partnerships, it is important also to focus on staff training. Effective partnerships result in new ways of working, new competencies and styles of work, and even new categories of workers. Against this background, working in partnerships requires increased professional, managerial and communication skills.

# Discussion and proposals

Over the last 10-15 years, the role of civil society in local partnerships has undergone substantial change. At least three stages can be identified.

In the 1980s, as public services faced financial difficulties, major social, economic and environmental problems led to the creation of local community groups and self-help organisations. NGOs often established themselves on an ad hoc basis due to the inadequacy of local infrastructure. They were often poorly connected with each other and/or the public sector.

In the 1990s, social services and policymakers at local, regional, national and EU levels saw the potential of better cooperation and involvement of civil society organisations in social inclusion policies and programmes. Partnerships flourished, especially with support from EU programmes that emphasised the role of the social partners as well as public authorities and private companies.

More recently, an increasing number of companies in the EU made social responsibility part of their business strategy for long-term survival. Local partnerships were used as a key approach. There are no quantitative estimates of the proportion of companies choosing this route. However, the development is significant and is one factor driving the growth of partnerships for social inclusion.

In conclusion, local partnerships with civil society develop from specific needs at local level and because of the potential benefits for the participating partners as well as the resources available. The benefits for society are often larger than the sum of the benefits to the individuals. This is the basis for public policy intervention of a supportive kind. Partnership should be a means to address a problem and not an end in itself. Nevertheless, even research which has sought out 'good practice' identifies the many challenges for more successful partnership development.

Local partnerships with civil society can potentially contribute to reducing the level of individual isolation or, in other words, build more 'social capital'. In order to have a socially inclusive society, vibrant local communities are crucial. As a result, partnerships should promote participation and involvement in a variety of ways. Against this background, it is extremely important that the impact of civil society partnerships on social inclusion is monitored and evaluated.

Another challenge is to consider how best to sustain the process. Funding is often short-term and support from public agencies often poorly coordinated. Strategic funding could be considered, linking the resources for partnerships to specific social inclusion goals and objectives.

Civil society covers a very broad range of organisations with different structures, aims, resources and working methods. Public policies should thus support the specific and different needs of civil society organisations.

Foundation and other research has confirmed the importance of EU policies in promoting and supporting local partnership. However, there is a need to strengthen support for the international exchange of experience and good practice. Moreover, the EU needs to examine how best to optimise the typical funding period of the programmes to ensure a positive impact.

Key issues for the development of policy and good practice include:

- A stronger, but flexible, policy framework for partnerships with civil society, to be included in any Treaty revision debates. At national level, this could be considered in the context of the debate on decentralisation. Foundation research shows clearly that in order to mainstream innovative approaches on partnerships with civil society, strong structures are needed at both local and central level.
- Development of indicators, evaluation and monitoring tools to assess the outcomes and impacts of partnerships on social inclusion. Development of this kind of indicator could take into account the work of the Social Platform and the Council's Committee on Social Protection.
- Ensuring funding of partnerships – mainly a consideration for local municipalities, national governments, and EU programmes. Policymakers could consider making longer term funding available and making it more strategic by linking the economic incentives to specific partnership and social inclusion targets. It is crucial to think of social inclusion as a long-term investment.
- Improved information and guidelines. While the European Commission in particular has been responsible for substantial progress in this domain, further efforts are required. In particular, there is need for more information on funding options.
- Development of relevant training programmes for partnership participants. Over the last decade, civil society participation in partnerships has become more professional. Emphasis should be placed on sharing experiences from advanced training programmes with less advanced areas.
- Facilitating networks. Foundation research shows that, by supporting networks, the social partners could have a more important role to play

at local, regional and national level. To link the different levels and sectors, the networks must be very specific in their functions. Extensive networks for the cross-border exchange of innovative approaches already exist at EU level, but there is a need to promote more initiatives at local level.

- Better coordination of policies and departments – an issue for national governments and local municipalities as well as the European Commission. It also concerns better quality of social and employment services through more integration. Public organisations could jointly identify and debate how social services could be strengthened by civil society involvement.
- Broadening the field of social partnership research from employment and social inclusion to ‘social capital’. Social capital research can better capture a number of the issues listed above, for example, by supplying vibrant civil society organisations with networks, training, etc. through case study experience.

For the most part, the recommendations above concern integrating input from civil society organisations into social inclusion strategies. The Foundation’s comprehensive research in this area suggests that this would ensure both better quality policies and their successful long-term impact. The European Social Model itself is based on this very notion of a shared vision of solidarity and participation. Only by designing better partnerships with civil society and improving their management can this be reinforced.



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