

The project

“Promoting Social Inclusion through EU Citizenship”

**was funded with the support of the European
Union under the Programme "Europe for
Citizens"**

Applicable to the Action 1 – Measure 1.2 "*Networks of Twinned Towns*"

The events have been carried out within this project:

PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH EU CITIZENSHIP

Event 1 - Social Inclusion of Roma People

Participation: The event involved 99 citizens, including 12 participants from the city of Godeni (Romania), 16 participants from the city of Downpatrick (UK), 6 participants from the city of Bezons (France), 15 participants from the city of Szekszard (Hungary), 11 participants from the city of Michalowice (Poland), 11 participants from the city of Jelgava (Latvia), 15 participants from the city of Listowel (Ireland) and 13 participants from the city of Ceuti (Spain).

Location / Dates: The event took place in Godeni, Romania, from 20/10/2013 to 24/10/2013.

Short description: The aim of the event was to look at best practice across Europe in supporting the social inclusion for the Roma people.

Event 2 – Integration of Disabled People

Participation: The event involved 54 citizens, including 6 participants from the city of Godeni (Romania), 11 participants from the city of Downpatrick (UK), 0 participants from the city of Bezons (France), 5 participants from the city of Szekszard (Hungary), 6 participants from the city of Michalowice (Poland), 6 participants from the city of Jelgava (Latvia), 8 participants from the city of Listowel (Ireland) and 12 participants from the city of Ceuti (Spain).

Location / Dates: The event took place in Ceuti, Spain, from 28/11/2013 to 01/12/2013

Short description: The aim of the event was to examine the best practice across Europe in terms of promoting social inclusion for people with a disability.

Event 3 – Promoting Social inclusion for Older People

Participation: The event involved 118 citizens, including 17 participants from the city of Godeni (Romania), 22 participants from the city of Downpatrick (UK), 8 participants from the city of Bezons (France), 13 participants from the city of Szekszard (Hungary), 14 participants from the city of Michalowice (Poland), 12 participants from the city of Jelgava (Latvia), 16 participants from the city of Listowel (Ireland) and 16 participants from the city of Ceuti (Spain).

Location / Dates: The event took place in Listowel, Ireland from 19/03/2014 to 22/03/2014

Short description: The aim of the event was to examine the best practice across Europe in terms of promoting social inclusion for older people.

Event 4 – Promoting Social Inclusion for Young People

Participation: The event involved 105 citizens, including 16 participants from the city of Godeni (Romania), 20 participants from the city of Downpatrick (UK), 0 participants from the city of Bezons (France), 11 participants from the city of Szekszard (Hungary), 12 participants from the city of Michalowice (Poland), 14 participants from the city of Jelgava (Latvia), 16 participants from the city of Listowel (Ireland) and 16 participants from the city of Ceuti (Spain).

Location / Dates: The event took place in Jelgava, Latvia, from 01/04/2014 to 01/04/2014.

Short description: The aim of the event was to look at best practice across Europe in supporting the social inclusion for young people.

Event 5 – Promoting Social Inclusion for Disadvantaged People

Participation: The event involved 119 citizens, including 16 participants from the city of Godeni (Romania), 16 participants from the city of Downpatrick (UK), 8 participants from the city of Bezons (France), 17 participants from the city of Szekszard (Hungary), 16 participants from the city of Michalowice (Poland), 12 participants from the city of Jelgava (Latvia), 18 participants from the city of Listowel (Ireland) and 16 participants from the city of Ceuti (Spain).

Location / Dates: The event took place in Downpatrick, UK from 08/05/2014 to 11/05/2014

Short description: The aim of the event was to examine the best practice across Europe in terms of promoting social inclusion for people with a disability.

“Promoting Social Inclusion through EU Citizenship”

Social Inclusion Best Practice Publication and Action Plan

Introduction

In 1984 the town of Downpatrick in Northern Ireland, United Kingdom developed town twinning partnerships with Bezons (France) and Listowel (Republic of Ireland). Through an annual programme of cooperation this town twinning partnership flourished. Activities included social, cultural, educational and economic events affording citizens from the towns to develop close personal contact. Events included workshops, training, lectures or events promoting the many issues facing the European Union (EU) including conflict resolution, youth, social inclusion, sport, arts and much more.

After twenty five years of continued town twinning success the lead town Downpatrick developed further twinning links with Ceuti (Spain); Iezer (Romania); Szekszard (Hungary); Jelgava (Latvia) and Michalowice (Poland).

Following the expansion of this town twinning partnership the towns have spent the last five years developing, planning and implementing town twinning and themed networking meetings of citizens.

The citizens of meetings have included active participation of young and older people and people drawn from a range of social backgrounds including those who are socially disadvantaged.

Again many of the events have showcased the way of life across the European Union and specifically included the promotion of arts, culture, education, sport and the general wellbeing of European citizens.

In general, and on average, three hundred people have benefited annually through the engagement in a twinning event organised by this town twinning partnership.

Promoting Social Inclusion through European Citizenship

The Downpatrick Twinning Partnership (UK) along with seven other European partners implemented a series of network of town's themed meetings to explore the policy area of social inclusion with an aim to promote greater social inclusion through European Union citizenship.

Partners participating in the project included -

- Downpatrick Twinning Partnership (UK);
- Ceutí Town Council (Spain);
- Listowel Downpatrick Linkage (Ireland);
- Jelgava Local Municipality (Latvia);
- The Mountain Community Iezer Muscel Association (Romania);
- Szekszard Town Council (Hungary);
- Michalowice Municipality (Poland); and
- Mairie de Bezons (France).

The themed meetings brought together experts working in the policy area of social inclusion, from across all the partners, to examine how citizens could engage in the European Union (EU) by promoting greater EU citizenship for youth, older persons, disabled people, socially disadvantaged and Roma people.

The project aimed to examine how the Citizens programme help encourage the target groups to engage more fully at local, national and EU level and thereby promoting a more socially inclusive active EU citizenship. It identified what work at local, national and EU level is undertaken to engage the target groups in the EU; undertake a detailed analysis/ comparison of the social inclusion work to determine if there are any discrepancies; share best practice and debate areas of concern; if work being undertaken is actually making a difference and engaging the target groups in the EU; and examine how twinning can make an impact both locally, nationally and at EU level on active citizenship for the target groups.

Each meeting looked at best practice and new innovative ways to encourage greater active citizenship and participation in the EU by the target groups.

The themed meetings, while promoting social inclusion itself and the benefits of the EU and citizenship to the target groups, also aimed to explore and understand why the target groups do not currently participate in EU programmes and feel more a part of Europe.

As part of the project participants explored ways to address the concerns and issues of the target groups and engage them in such events and other EU programmes.

The themed meetings created synergies between social inclusion policies ensuring coordination at EU, national and local activities aimed at the target groups, with an aim to secure their active participation in EU citizenship and subsequently other EU programmes. Active participation in the meetings also led to a more socially inclusive EU and promotion of citizenship for those who all participated in the project.

The Project Itself

A working group, coordinated by the lead partner Downpatrick, from each town across the European wide partnership planned, implemented and evaluated the five themed meetings. This ensured participants fully engaged in the programme of each meeting which consisted of workshops, events, seminars and discussions, all held in a public forum.

The working group were also be responsible for the recruitment of participants from each town to include a range of policy makers, political, community and statutory organisations working with the selected target groups at local, national and European levels.

Each participant was encouraged to discuss and debate so as to gain a better informed opinion about the issues relating to social inclusion and specifically the target groups of youth, older persons, disabled people, socially disadvantaged and Roma people.

Each themed meeting session allowed everyone to develop a more informed opinion on the target groups, how EU citizenship impacts on their daily life and where this sits with the social inclusion policies at local, national and EU to engage the target groups more in Europe.

For each workshop, seminar and discussion groups presenters were identified from across the relevant policy theme at local, national, EU level to prepare and make verbal presentations on the key target groups followed by the chairing of an open discussion and debate. In the workshops participants formed smaller groups to address the topics being examined while during presentations an open floor forum allowed for debating the issues, asking relevant questions and developing possible solutions to the issues.

The aim was to allow participants to engage with the themed meetings to determine the opportunities available in Europe for the target groups and how best to utilise those opportunities for greater social inclusion.

Although the main language of the themed meetings was English, interpreters from each country participating were made available and time allowed during all sessions for translation. This further enabled full inclusion of participants in all aspects of the themed meetings.

Social Inclusion across the European Union

The European Commission supports and complements the Member States' policies in the fields of social inclusion. This is implemented through the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth which aims to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion and to increase employment of the population aged 20-64 to 75%.

The flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 strategy, including the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Agenda for New Skills and Jobs, support efforts to reach these targets.

Through its Social Investment Package, the European Commission provides guidance to Member States to modernise their welfare systems towards social investment throughout life.

The package complements:

- the Employment Package, which sets out the way forward for a job rich recovery,
- the White Paper on Pensions, pre social protection, setting a strategy for adequate, sustainable and safe pensions, and
- the Youth Employment Package, which deals specifically with the situation of young people.

The European Commission provides the framework for steering and monitoring EU countries' economic and social reforms to reach the Europe 2020 targets. The challenges and proposed solutions are reflected in the Country-specific Recommendations.

As social policies are an integral part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission also supports EU countries' efforts to address their social challenges through the actions foreseen in the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and Social Investment Package as well as the EU funds, in particular the European Social Fund.

The Commission works together with EU countries through the Social Protection Committee using the Open Method of Co-ordination in the areas of social inclusion, health care and long-term care and pensions (social OMC).

The social OMC is a voluntary process for political cooperation based on agreeing common objectives and measuring progress towards these goals using common indicators. The process also involves close co-operation with stakeholders, including Social Partners and civil society.

The European Union Citizens Programme

The aim of the European Union Citizens Programme is to bring Europe closer to its citizens and to enable them to participate fully in the European construction. Through this programme, citizens have the opportunity to be involved in transnational exchanges and cooperation activities, contributing to developing a sense of belonging to common European ideals and encouraging the process of European integration.

The general objectives of the Europe for citizens Programme are to contribute to:

- giving citizens the opportunity to interact and participate in constructing an ever closer Europe, which is democratic and world-oriented, united in and enriched through its cultural diversity, thus developing citizenship of the European Union;
- developing a sense of European identity, based on common values, history and culture;
- fostering a sense of ownership of the European Union among its citizens;
- enhancing tolerance and mutual understanding between European citizens respecting and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity, while contributing to intercultural dialogue.

The Programme has the following specific objectives, which are implemented on a transnational basis:

- bringing together people from local communities across Europe to share and exchange experiences, opinions and values, to learn from history and to build for the future;
- fostering action, debate and reflection related to European citizenship and democracy, shared values, common history and culture through cooperation within civil society organisations at European level;
- bringing Europe closer to its citizens by promoting Europe's values and achievements, while preserving the memory of its past;
- encouraging interaction between citizens and civil society organisations from all participating countries, contributing to intercultural dialogue and bringing to the fore both Europe's diversity and unity, with particular attention to activities aimed at developing closer ties between citizens from Member States of the European Union as constituted on 30 April 2004 and those from Member States which have acceded since that date.

The Citizens Programme is implemented through a number of specific measures including citizens meetings and network of twinned towns meetings.

European Citizenship for Roma people

Themed meeting held: 20th – 24th October 2013 – Iezer (Romania)

The Roma people are one of the main groups of people in the European Union that are socially disadvantaged. However there are concerted efforts now being made by the European Commission to put the integration of the Roma people firmly on the political agenda across Europe.

In 2011 all Member States signed up to a European Union Framework for progressing national Roma Strategies. Since then much work has been undertaken to reduce social inequalities between Roma and the rest of the population within four areas: education; employment, healthcare and housing. This has been monitored annually by the European Commission to ensure that each Member State is showing progressing in improving the life of the Roma people.

Social Inclusion of Roma People workshop, in Godeni, Romania debated major aspects related to the topic. There was underlined Roma history and cultural traditions that impact on social inclusion. The partners got valuable social inclusion information. The debates were centred on efficient integration methods from both educational and social point of view. From the point of view of the four areas, the debates were summarised as follows:

EDUCATION:

Roma children face language barriers due to the language of instruction being in something other than their first language. They often start school later than the other Romanian students.

-Roma children integration in local schools is a national policy. One of the most efficient measure is *their involvement in common formal and informal activities*: cultural events; ecological campaigns; sports competitions. It is the case of most municipalities members of Iezer Muscel Mountain Community Association. In villages as Dragoslavele, Bughea de Sus, Bughea de Jos or Cetateni where Roma communities are a little bit isolated from the main village, there were built their own schools(primary schools mainly).

-support for secondary/ university education/training via Placement Centres (6 units in Arges county);

-local initiative to reduce school abandon: every day free meals offers; after school training; social/ psychological assistance.

EMPLOYMENT:

*support traditional Roma activities such as: forest fruits collecting; wattles products, brushes or smiths' old manufacturing;

* "The Chance" Programme which means: profession orientation centre; inform on labor market needs; offer psychological support for unemployed persons.

At a national level, the Strategic Operational Programme for Human Resources Development enable Roma population to apply for Governmental and EU finances in order to train their people in traditional/ modern occupations-needed on the local/national labour market.

HOUSING:

The EU integration strategy has been vocal in the need for member states to respect the Roma right to housing as a part of their integration strategies.

In Romania, there are – on one hand- many isolated Roma communities with substandard housing; on the other hand- those famous Roma "palaces" built all over the country (many stored houses; expensive furniture and a lot of gold house devices).In IMMCA area there were offered hosing facilities by local authorities: electricity; access roads to the location to Roma people houses-usually on the river bank (villages of Cetateni, Dragoslavele, Domnesti, etc.). In some of the villages, members of IMMCA, Roma people are well integrated from a housing point of view (Rucar, Godeni, Valea Mare Pravat, Poienari, etc).

HEALTHCARE

Generally speaking, Roma people face serious barriers in access to healthcare: lack of health insurance, and other official documentation leading to exclusion of health services, lack of information – especially for isolated communities. It is not the case of IMMCA area. Here, Roma people are well integrated from this point of view (health assistance at local human dispensary; periodical vaccination; school medical assistance; emergency assistance, free medicines, etc)

At Arges county level, one of the best examples of good practice is represented by PRO EUROPE Roma Association, located in IMMC Aarea-Bughea de Sus village. The association has been supporting Roma people to be represented at local/ county level; identifies people needs and possible solutions; supports traditional Roma activities.

Best Practice Case Study: Supporting the Roma People

The Roma Community Development project which was delivered in Belfast (UK) aimed to provide an outreach service to the Roma people supporting parental skills; build a sense of confidence, empowerment and employability for Roma women; increase the knowledge and information available to other sectors and professionals about the Roma community and promote a more integrated and cohesive approach to policy development and provision of services for the Roma community.

In addition the project supported intensive programmes designed around developing and building skills leading to formal and informal qualifications.

Key work was planned through a Roma Working Group which comprised of Roma people and the relevant statutory and local community representatives. The Working Group facilitated consultations with other Roma people to secure their experiences in accessing employment, health, housing, education services and their general experiences of living in Northern Ireland. Other work included identifying barriers for the Roma people and working to address those barriers. A Regional Roma Inclusion Strategy was advocated on behalf of the Roma people.

Strengths of this project were identified as –

- **Unique relationship with the Roma community** supported by expertise (cultural competency), consistency of approaches and the range of services offered;
- **Consistent partnership with people in the Roma community:**
 - through employing and mentoring Roma workers
 - through building capacity in the Romanian Roma Community Association (RRCANI) to support their own community: the Roma community shouldn't be segregated into alternative services, RRCANI is the best placed organisation to provide single identity (Roma) services
 - through regular community consultations;

- **Holistic approach to our work:** project worked in partnership with service providers to deliver wrap-around support;
- **Partnership working/ coordinated approach to service provision:**
 - project developed close collaborations with various stakeholders: Police Service for Northern Ireland, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Education and Library Board and various community organisations supporting the Roma communities;
 - project coordinated and support a multi-agency approach through the Roma Working Group;
- **Aiming for the mainstream:** the project worked towards integrating the Roma children and their families in the existing services as much as possible: the Roma people shouldn't be segregated into alternative services!
Project supported mainstream services to develop culturally sensitive practices and to increase their capacity to work with the Roma communities;
- **Progressive pathway to accessing services:** advice, children's education, adult education, employability and employment; and
- **Value for money:** project developed comprehensive and efficient responses to the needs of the Roma community on a low budget investing in specific skills and expertise and tapping into already existing resources in the local community.

Some of key successes from the project were:

Roma capacity building/ empowerment

- First Roma workers to be employed as community workers. They've been offered relevant training, experience and mentoring: community resource;
- In partnership with other statutory and community organisations (BHSCT, BCC, PSNI, LORAG, BEELB, South Belfast Sure Start) project has been supporting capacity building in RRCANI as the Roma Resource Centre – RRCANI will continue to support the range of education services for Roma children; training services for Roma young people; employment, welfare, housing, health, community safety support for Roma adults;

- Modelled good practice through creative and meaningful community consultations; and
- 80 Roma individuals wrote to OFMDFM in response to the Draft Racial Equality Strategy requesting that Roma specific (but not exclusive) measures are taken.

Roma access to services/ mainstream service provision:

- First Roma children to access mainstream early years provision: nursery education, Sure Start 2 year old programme and family support: project engaged with 100% of target group and offered more intensive support to approximately 80% of them;
- First Roma adults to gain formal qualifications for employment: CSR cards for Roma men and Health and Safety for Cleaning for Roma women; and
- Carried out 2 extensive community mapping exercises to inform needs in the local communities.

Culturally competent programmes/ resources:

- Modelled a community based Parent and Toddler with the Roma community: model to be mainstreamed by South Belfast Sure Start;
- Designed and delivered a bespoke Parenting Programme to Roma carers;
- Modelled access to formal training for illiterate non-English speakers;
- Designed and delivered bespoke English classes for Illiterate Speakers of Another Language;
- Designed and delivered Roma Cultural Awareness Workshops (over 30 workshops delivered);
- Currently developing a good practice guide based on our experiences; and
- Compiled a series of information leaflets for health professionals, education professionals, local communities (Embrace NI) and video materials; `Welcome to Belfast` Roma DVD and `Roma voices`.

Policy:

- `Building allies` - approximately 80 statutory and community organisations and 80 Roma individuals have requested specific Regional Roma Inclusion Strategy in their responses to the Draft Racial Equality Strategy;
- Partnership working for a coordinated approach to service provision: Roma Working Group (RWG); and
- RWG currently working on developing a good practice guide for Roma inclusion.

There were many future challenges identified through the project including;

- Funding restraints: difficult to develop sustainable initiatives with 1-2 year funding;
- Bad practice in the sector: no consultations with the Roma community, no real partnerships and transparency, programmes that look good on paper but are not backed up by values, knowledge, cultural competence, methodologies, attitudes etc... this damages the good work which reflects badly on the Roma community; and
- The good work takes place in a political vacuum, with no coordination or oversight at regional level despite the existing expertise and recommendations at European Union level

European Citizenship for People with a Disability

Themed meeting held: 28th November – 1st December 2013 – Ceuti (Spain)

The event in Ceutí focused in the social inclusion for people with disabilities, being mainly centred in the opportunities of employment, showing different organisations which employ people with disabilities or prepare them to get a job.

One in six people in the European Union (EU) has a disability that ranges from mild to severe making around 80 million who are often prevented from taking part fully in society and the economy because of environmental and attitudinal barriers. For people with disabilities the rate of poverty is 70% higher than the average partly due to limited access to employment.

Over a third of people aged over 75 have disabilities that restrict them to some extent, and over 20% are considerably restricted. Furthermore, it is projected that these numbers are set to rise as the EU's population ages.

The EU and its Member States have a strong mandate to improve the social and economic situation of people with disabilities.

The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 aims to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their full rights, and benefit fully from participating in society and in the European economy, notably through the Single market. The Strategy identifies actions at EU level to supplement national ones, and it determines the mechanisms needed to implement the UN Convention at EU level, including inside the EU institutions. It also identifies the support needed for funding, research, awareness-raising, statistics and data collection.

The Strategy focuses on eliminating barriers with eight main areas identified for action: Accessibility, Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and training, Social protection, Health, and External Action. For each area, key actions are identified, with the overarching EU-level objective highlighted.

These areas were selected on the basis of their potential to contribute to the overall objectives of the Strategy and of the UN Convention, the related policy documents from EU institutions and the Council of Europe, as well as the results of the EU Disability Action Plan 2003-2010, and a consultation of the Member States, stakeholders and the general public. The references to national actions are intended to supplement action at EU level, rather than to cover all national obligations under the UN Convention.

The Commission will also tackle the situation of people with disabilities through the Europe 2020 strategy, its flagship initiatives and the re-launch of the single market.

The European Commission published a report on how the EU is giving effect to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This Convention is the first international legally binding instrument setting minimum standards for a range of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights for people with disabilities around the world. It is also the first comprehensive human rights convention to which the EU has become a party.

The publication of this report coincides with the launch, by the European Commission, of the 5th Access City Award competition – an annual prize recognising cities for their efforts to make it easier for disabled and older people to gain access to public areas such as housing, public transport or communication technologies.

Across the countries in this partnership there was clear evidence of support for people with a disability. For example the Spanish policy regarding Social Inclusion for Disabled people has run parallel to UN and EU contributions, passing from an approach based on social benefits and subsidiarity to the defence of all people's rights, regardless of their physical or psychological conditions. The adopted model passes from considering people with disabilities as second-class citizens to consider them as people with full rights. In this consideration the need to make goods, services, buildings and technological resources available as a way to build a world with room for everybody, plays an essential role.

However, although this important evolution in legislation has been reflected in technological, urban and leisure areas, there is still a long way regarding the change in social attitudes. With reference to the educational level, where cultural innovation may lead to a change in attitudes, there has been great advances for visually impaired people, thanks to ONCE in Spain, but for other disabilities the idea of limitation is still bigger than that of equal opportunities.

Best Practice Case Study: Supporting People with a Disability

One of the most important organisations for disabled people in Spain is ONCE and an example of best practice in supporting people with a disability. The birth of the ONCE in 1938 was made possible by the confluence of a series of historical and social factors, resulting in a unique, member-based organisation that is unequalled anywhere else on Earth. A delicate moment in the history of Spain and the courage of a group of men and women who refused to be marginalized by society and asserted their many abilities are two of the key elements that contributed to the founding of the ONCE.

Over these years, the institution has laid the foundation for a system of specialized social services for the blind that today forms the basis for associations for the blind worldwide and it is a requisite standard for social services professionals. It is a system of services that emphasizes rehabilitation as the means for blind people to overcome the obstacles posed by this disability and to develop socially, professionally and personally.

Self-reliance, educational services, job normalization and universal accessibility are some of the elements that comprise the ONCE service structure.

The everyday kindness of Spanish society provides the essential financial support to this institution which Spaniards claim as their own. It is the purchase by Spaniards of the Cupón and other games of chance sold by the ONCE that make its existence possible. The ONCE, through its Foundation, allocates part of its proceeds to the other groups for the disabled.

ONCE is a very good example of best practice.

Other examples of best practice are:

- FUNDOWN, a regional organisation in Murcia for people with Down syndrome, pioneer in the creation and development of the first Service for Promoting Personal Autonomy, giving a holistic approach to the training and adult vital path of this group.
- ALFA, an association in Ceutí which works with mental disabilities. They live in flats with monitors, and assist courses in the Cultural Center during morning. The event in November 2013 included a visit to an ALFA exhibition, one of its numerous projects. They are nowadays part of a Grundtvig project called Start-up with partners from Italy, Portugal and Holland.
- LABOR VIVA and FEYCSA. FEYCSA, a regional social enterprise, employs people with disabilities to carry out different services. The most known branch is LABOR VIVA, which produces very nicely designed stationery, and has gained support from great artists such as Alejandro Sanz, El Canto del Loco, Dani Martín and Maldita Nerea. The visit of LABOR VIVA premises was included in the Ceutí event.

European Citizenship for Older People

Themed meeting held: 21st – 24th March 2014 – Listowel (Ireland)

Examining the main policy documents for older people in the European Commission it was very much evidenced that the European population is living longer and therefore a greater percentage of the population are aged over 65. Projections are also being widely made that in the future the percentage of people aged over 65 will increase. By 2030 the number of older people at pension age in the European Union will have increased by more than 25 million, placing more pressures on the pensions and health and elderly care systems.

That is why as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Commission focuses on improving three key areas for older people, pensions; health care and long term care. The European Commission recognises that older people are also exposed to a higher risk of poverty compared to the overall population (at 19%) and in a number of countries, the elderly population is particularly exposed to material deprivation.

Older people are amongst the more vulnerable to social exclusion. One of the achievements of modern welfare states has been the increase in life expectancy, so that people reaching age 60 to 65 can now on average look forward to up to twenty disability-free years of life. Another achievement is that poverty and insecurity for older people has been greatly reduced through improved pensions and services.

These developments, however, present their own challenges. We now have in virtually all developed countries increasing numbers of older people, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population as a whole. At any one time a majority are in relatively good health, active and largely self-sufficient. But if we are to continue with the more passive policies of the past, many may also be socially excluded by virtue of their age from the mainstream of society. As a result, both nationally and internationally, there is a policy shift to more active social policies for older people to meet these challenges.

One of the greatest challenges currently facing Europe is how best to adapt EU policies and strategies to meet the demands associated with demographic change. As the EU faces this challenge its headline strategies such as the EU 2020 Strategy are heavily influenced by these prospects.

The European Commission (EC) is taking proactive measures to tackle the future challenges posed by an ageing population by prioritizing initiatives that will contribute to building a healthy and active population for the future. In order to achieve this, the importance of health and being healthy must be promoted throughout the life course, starting with investment in early years and continuing right through into old age.

European Union and Social Policy

The European Community Treaty enacted in Maastricht in 1992 emphasises connections between economic growth, employment and welfare. Social policy and social protection are seen as factors promoting economic growth. The EU-level social policy decision making is restricted in drawing up general guidelines and principles that can be found in different Council's Recommendations and Charters agreed by Member States.

From an ordinary citizen's viewpoint the question lies more with the national social policy legislation: social policy is a core responsibility of the Member States. The EU has laid down only minimum standards and minimum rights.

The European Social Charter represents a consensus over basic economic, social and cultural rights. The rights guaranteed by the European Social Charter are as follows:

- The right to education;
- The right to employment;
- The right to health;
- The right to housing;
- The right to non-discrimination; and

- The right to social protection.

The European Social Charter defines the rights of EU-citizens on a general level. The implementation of these rights is executed by Member States. Under the Charter, states must guarantee the right to social protection i.e.

- The right to the protection of health;
- The right to social security; and
- The right to social assistance and social services.

It lists the special measures, which must be taken for the older person. The revised Charter guarantees the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion. The European Social Charter defines the rights of EU citizens on a general level. The implementation of these rights is executed by Member States.

Social Protection of Older People- Social Charter

The following additional protocol to the European Social Charter specifies older people's rights to social protection. As all Member States have ratified the Charter, it binds Member States and they are expected to adapt their social policy programmes and measures to meet the aims of the Charter. The additional protocol lays the guidelines for the social protection of older people on a European Union level, in the following way:

Article 4 - Right of older persons to social protection

With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right of older persons to social protection, the Member States undertake to adopt or encourage, either directly or in co-operation with public or private organisations, appropriate measures designed in particular:

1. Enable older persons to remain full members of society for as long as possible, by means of:

(a) adequate resources enabling them to lead a decent life and play an active part in public, social and cultural life;

(b) provision of information about services and facilities available for older people and their opportunities to make use of them;

2. To enable older people to choose their life-style freely and to lead independent lives in their familiar surroundings for as long as they wish and are able, by means of:

(a) provision of housing suited to their needs and their state of health or of adequate support for adapting their housing;

(b) the health care and the services necessitated by their state.

3. To guarantee older people living in institutions appropriate support, while respecting their privacy, and participation in decisions concerning living conditions in the institution.

The European Commission has identified active and healthy ageing as a major societal challenge common to all European countries, and an area which presents considerable potential for Europe to lead the world in providing innovative responses to this challenge.

The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing is a pilot initiative which brings together key stakeholders (end users, public authorities, industry); all actors in the innovation cycle, from research to adoption (adaptation), along with those engaged in standardisation and regulation.

The Partnership provides these actors with a forum in which they can cooperate, united around a common vision that values older people and their contribution to society, identify and overcome potential innovations barriers and mobilise instruments.

The European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing will pursue a triple win for Europe:

- enabling EU citizens to lead healthy, active and independent lives while ageing;
- improving the sustainability and efficiency of social and health care systems; and

- boosting and improving the competitiveness of the markets for innovative products and services, responding to the ageing challenge at both EU and global level, thus creating new opportunities for businesses.

This will be realised in the three areas of prevention and health promotion, care and cure, and active and independent living of elderly people. The overarching target of this pilot partnership will be to increase the average healthy lifespan by two years by 2020.

EuroHealthNet is an active partner of the European Innovation Partnership on Healthy and Active Ageing (EIP AHA). We are part of the group working on Action Group D4: Innovation for age-friendly buildings, cities and environments. EuroHealthNet has an important role in creating the links with other EU policy areas and in promoting WHO guidelines and evidence based policy recommendations. We support the creation of an EU covenant on demographic change and enable the necessary political and technical framework to bring together local and regional authorities and other stakeholders across the EU.

EuroHealthNet identifies smart and innovative initiatives to facilitate exchanges and disseminate knowledge and information which support active and healthy ageing and the development of age-friendly environments.

As host organisation, Listowel Downpatrick Linkage Group organised a number of guest speakers to provide insight into initiatives being undertaken at national & local level in Ireland to combat social exclusion among older people. The following is a summary of the best practice work being undertaken:

Best Practice Case Studies: Supporting Older People

Senior Enterprise: Entrepreneurship for the over 50s.

Senior Enterprise, an EU supported initiative through INTERREG IVB NWE, is specifically designed to encourage a greater involvement with enterprise by those aged over 50.

This may be through starting a business, alone or with others, acquiring or investing in a business, advising an entrepreneur or supporting innovation within a business owned by another.

In this way Senior Enterprise addresses the concerns of the European Union with regard to the challenges posed by an ageing population, and the need to increase productivity, competitiveness and entrepreneurial activity across the EU. It is intended that as a result of Senior Enterprise that more businesses will have been started, more investment will have been made and that more senior citizens will be active as advisors in new and developing businesses.

Partners involved in the project are:

- Mid-East Regional Authority, Ireland (Lead Partner)
- The PRIME Initiative, UK
- Inno TSD, France

Observers to the project are:

- City of Bonn, North Rhine Westphalia, Germany
- Conseil Général des Côtes d'Armor, Brittany France
- County Enterprise Boards in Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, Ireland
- Dublin City University, Ireland (Link to Professor of Entrepreneurship)
- Ministry for Intergenerational Affairs, Family, Women and Integration, North Rhine Westphalia, Germany
- Perspective 45, Luxembourg
- Provincial Government of Gelderland, Netherlands
- PRIME Cymru, Wales

The means by which those in the older groups will engage with enterprise as part of this ambitious pilot programme is:

- ❖ Through **starting and partnering**
- ❖ Through **investing and acquiring**
- ❖ Through **advising and supporting innovation** in new and existing businesses

Senior Enterprise is also focused on:

1. Raising awareness of the many ways in which older people can engage with enterprise and the many benefits that can flow from that engagement.

- **Among those aged 50+ of the possibilities that exist**

To raise awareness among those aged 50+ of the merits of their engaging with enterprise and to suggest realistic ways for them to do so across a broad range of options.

- **Among a range of influential parties**

To raise awareness among enterprise development agencies, financial institutions, agencies working with older people, younger entrepreneurs among others, of the untapped potential that exists among older people.

2. Starting & Partnering - To encourage a greater number of those aged 50+ to become an entrepreneur and to start a new business either by themselves or in partnership with a younger individual.

- **Starting**

Regardless of age, many entrepreneurs cite the desire to be economically independent as the primary motivation for setting up a business. Older entrepreneurs may be in a position for the first time in their lives to pursue the long cherished dream of starting their own business. For others creating a job for themselves through starting a business is a means of improving their economic situation and standard of living.

This initiative will support older individuals to explore the personal, financial and commercial aspects involved in taking the first step into entrepreneurship.

- **Partnering: Starting a business with someone else.** Those aged 50+ may consider starting a business in partnership with a younger individual. The drive and enthusiasm of the younger person would then benefit from the wider knowledge, experience, networks and resources of the older individual.
- **Be Inspired** - Senior Enterprise Role Models are happy to share their stories of how they started new business aged 50+:
- **Getting Started** - Specifically tailored courses for those aged 50+ starting their own business have been successfully piloted.

3. Influencing policymakers to view older people through engagement with enterprise as a resource

To encourage policy makers at regional, national and European level to perceive the personal, economic and societal benefits that can arise from the fruitful engagement of those aged 50+ with enterprise and to increase their support to its further development.

Making Your Community a Safer Place to Grow Old

Muintir na Tíre was founded in 1937 by John Canon Hayes, the first unit of which was launched in Tipperary Town, Ireland in November of that year.

This was the beginning of Canon Hayes' rural community idea which was to develop and expand into a comprehensive movement designed to raise the standard of living of people in all aspects of Irish rural life.

The emphasis was on local improvement - social, economic, cultural and recreational - based on the participation of people themselves in the promotion of the welfare of their community.

Through its core principles of neighbourliness, self-help and self-reliance, Muintir na Tíre has promoted and supported the concept of active community participation and championed the idea of community development in both Ireland and Europe.

From the early 60's the organisation adopted the United Nations definition of the Community Development process, which states that it is "a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with the fullest possible reliance upon the communities own initiative". This definition reflects Muintir na Tíre's approach to this process which is based around "the whole community" as a unit of organisation through which social, economic, cultural and environmental development can take place.

The framework developed and adopted by Muintir na Tíre to promote this holistic approach to community development is the representative Muintir Community Council. Through this framework, Muintir na Tíre has succeeded in building a national network of community groups dedicated to promoting and supporting local development within their communities.

The organisation has been in the forefront of rural development since its inception. It has been the pioneer, instigator, motivator and the mentor to many local community groups and this is the role with which it is most competent. Muintir's role focuses primarily on the animation and capacity building of local communities and this is complementary to the role which other agencies and organisations play in the process of community development. Muintir understands the need to have up-to-date information, to keep abreast of what is happening locally and to contribute to the decision making process nationally.

Muintir has been involved in various pieces of research and pilot studies starting with the Parish Plan for Agriculture (1950), the Limerick Rural Survey (1948-1954), the Training of Trainers Project (1970) and the Four Co. Tipperary Parishes Study (1994), the Three Counties Pilot Project for the setting up of representative community councils funded under the LEADER II Programme (1998-2001), the E-Volve joint Irish/Welsh Project funded under INTERREG IIIA and Celtic Community Link, a Rural Development Initiative based in South Tipperary & Waterford and

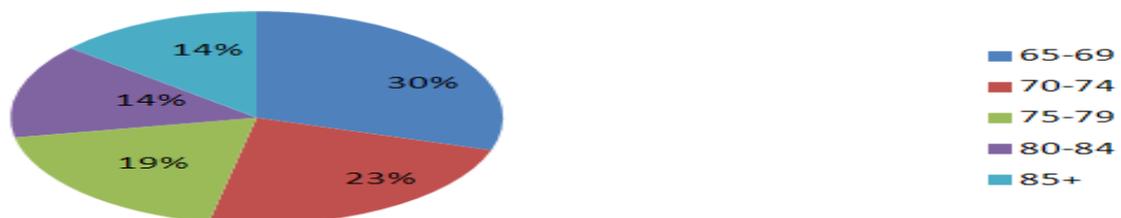
Carmarthenshire in Wales funded by The Ireland Wales Territorial Co-operation Programme 2007-2013 (INTERREG 4A).

Ageing in Ireland

The 2006 Census of Population of Ireland recorded 435,000 people 65 years and over, which represented 11% of total population. This has increased to 502,000 people 65 years and over in 2011, representing 12.75% of Total population

It is estimated that by 2036 Over 65's will make up at least 25% of the overall population of Ireland.

The following table details the age breakdown of people over 65 in Ireland:



Ireland – Census of Population 2011

25% live alone
65% are female
35% male.
75% of over 85's living alone are female.

In Listowel 16% of the total population is in the over 65 category almost 4% above the national average.

A socially inclusive society is defined as one where all people feel valued, their differences are respected, and their basic needs are met so they can live in dignity. Social exclusion is the process of being shut out from the social, economic, political and cultural systems which contribute to the integration of a person into the community (Cappo 2002).

Community Alert Programme

One of the key programmes nationally co-ordinated by Muintir na Tíre in promoting social inclusion for older people in Ireland is 'Community Alert'.

Community Alert is a community safety programme for rural areas with an emphasis on older and vulnerable people. It operates as a partnership between the community, An Garda Síochána (Irish Police Service) and Muintir na Tíre. It works on the principle of shared responsibility for crime prevention and reduction.

What are the Aims of the Community Alert Programme?

- To foster the process of community development
- To reduce opportunities for crimes to occur
- To unite communities in a spirit of neighbourliness and community service
- To devise programmes to improve the quality of life for all in rural communities

What are the different roles in a Community Alert Group?

Normally these would include:-

- Community Alert Committee - Manages the Group and should comprise a community member from each townland within the group.
- Community Alert Area Coordinator - The Coordinator is appointed or elected by the Community Alert Committee and will maintain close contact with the Liaison Garda.
- Community Alert Member - Community Alert will work successfully with the active input of all members. Your actions and support will ensure its success. Don't leave it to others!

What is the Garda Input into Community Alert Schemes?

While Community Alert is a partnership programme between An Garda Síochána and Muintir na Tíre, An Garda Síochána will give an added commitment at every level to promote and support the establishment and operation of Community Alert groups.

- We will include Community Alert in District and Divisional Annual Policing Plans with performance indicators to realise the full potential of this partnership programme.
- All resource material (booklets, window stickers, survey forms and associated administration forms) will be provided by An Garda Síochána along with appropriate promotion material.
- Senior Garda managers, in consultation with the relevant Community Alert Development Officer, will establish District and Divisional Community Alert Committees.

Social Enterprise: A Local Case Study

North and East Kerry Development (NEKD) is one of 53 local development companies in Ireland. Its main objective is to promote, support, assist & engage in:

- Social development;
- Enterprise development;
- Community development; and
- Education & Training.

NEKD is a non-profit organisation with supported by the Irish Government and the European Union, through the Local & Community Development Programme and the LEADER (Rural Development) Programme.

The mission statement of the company is:

“To encourage and empower people to enhance their quality of life through the development of innovative programmes, services and supports that promotes respect, equality and inclusion.”

Local & Community Development Programme (LCDP)

The LCDP aims to tackle poverty and social exclusion through partnership and constructive engagement between Government and its agencies and people in disadvantaged communities or circumstances.

Programme Goals

The programme has four key goals under which actions and projects are developed:

1. Promote awareness, knowledge and uptake of a wide range of statutory, voluntary and community services.
2. Increase access to formal and informal educational, recreational and cultural activities and resources.
3. Increase people's work readiness and employment prospects.
4. Promote active engagement with policy, practice and decision making processes on matters affecting local communities.

Examples of type of work supported:

- Early intervention evidence based Childhood and youth projects
- Employment supports including enterprise and training
- Development work with vulnerable groups
- North Kerry Home Maintenance Service for Older People

Case Study - North Kerry Home Maintenance Service

NEKD works with 17 Community Alert Groups and 13 Active Retirement Groups in North Kerry in developing its supports for older people. Both have a dedicated network which meets on a quarterly basis. The work of the Network includes:

- Information gathering and dissemination
- Consultation
- Planning
- Pre-development and development of initiatives

From this consultation process the need for a dedicated Home Maintenance Service for Older People was identified. The service targets the following:

- People aged 65 and over,
- Older people living alone with low income,
- Older people living in poor housing conditions,
- Older people living in isolated areas.
- It also supports people between 50 and 65 that need supports due to isolation.

The project provides a 'General Handyman' Service which includes:

- Garden Maintenance

- Home Maintenance
- Minor Repairs
- Spring Clean Service

Workers on the project are employed through National community employment programmes funded by the Irish Government. A fleet of vans is provided by NEKD which enhance the service.

Social Benefits of the Service

- Completion of over 800 jobs in the homes of older people in North Kerry per year
- Client base of over 350 clients
- Provision of employment to 13 people who work with the service.
- Trusted home maintenance provider in North Kerry
- Assist older people to live independently in their homes
- Increase safety and security in the home
- Planned expansion into cleaning service

Following the main presentations outlined above, delegates from each visiting country gave an overview of work in their respective Regions in combating Social Inclusion for Older People.

Best Practice

Delegates were then taken on site visits to facilities & organisations which directly promote Social Inclusion for Older People in Listowel. These included Listowel Family Resource Centre and Listowel Active Retirement Group.

Following the formal presentations & visits, delegates discussed the issue of 'Social Inclusion for Older People through interactive workshops. These identified the following approaches to be taken:

- Adopt a 'bottom-up' approach to social inclusion – working with older people on the ground in each partner country to determine their issues with regard to social inclusion and identifying needs.
- A collaborative approach should be adopted – all stakeholders should be involved in tackling the issue, i.e. community groups, social services, the police service etc. in each partner country.
- Town twinning groups can play a key role in combating rural isolation by sharing knowledge and expertise among partner countries.

- Through the EU citizens programme, town twinning groups are in a key position to involve older people in their activities, thus ensuring greater engage of EU citizens at all levels.
- Greater promotion of town twinning activities in each partner country is required to ensure full participation of its citizens among all target groups.
- Ensure EU funding supports for older people are maximised in each partner country.
- The Senior Enterprise Project highlighted during the event was particularly noted as a project which could be adopted in other partner countries to ensure older people can play a leading role in this area following retirement.

European Citizenship for Young People

Themed meeting held: 1st – 4th April 2014 – Jelgava (Latvia)

The European policy debate about social policies for young people has been dominated by issues of employment and education (which are also addressed in the Europe 2020 targets). The economic crisis has affected young people particularly hard, with unemployment and inactivity rates consistently higher than for other groups in most EU Member states. However, some disadvantaged groups of young people face exclusion in the longer term for reasons beyond the current crisis. Remaining outside the labour market has far-reaching consequences – not solely economic. These include a loss of confidence, and undermining of trust and expectations, and an increasing risk of social exclusion and disengagement from society.

European policy on the situation of young people is framed by the EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018, which has two overall objectives: to provide more and equal opportunities for young people in education and in the labour market; and to encourage young people to be active citizens and participate in society. The strategy proposes initiatives in eight fields of action: Education and training; Employment & entrepreneurship; Health & well-being; Participation; Voluntary activities; Social inclusion; Youth & the world; Creativity & culture.

The EU's Vision for Young People is based on a dual approach:

- Investing in Youth: putting in place greater resources to develop policy areas that affect young people in their daily life and improve their well-being; and
- Empowering Youth: promoting the potential of young people for the renewal of society and to contribute to EU values and goals.

One of the possibilities providing opportunities for young people to live, learn, and play an active role in society is new ERASMUS+ programme.

The youth policy in Latvia is the purposeful set of activities in all the fields of state policy to promote versatile development of young people, their inclusion in the society and improvement of life quality. As a result of implementing the youth policy the persons involved (state and municipality institutions, youth organisations, etc.) promote the initiatives of young people, participation in the decision making processes and social life, support youth work and providing children easier transition to adult status envisaging corresponding activities for personal development of young people.

The essential document that defines the youth policy in Latvia is the Youth Law which came into force from January 1, 2009. The aim of this Law is to improve the life quality of young people – persons between 13 and 25 years (15% of the total population in Latvia or 308 435 young people) – by promoting their initiatives, participation in decision-making and social life, as well as by supporting youth work.

The Youth Policy State Programme was developed to implement the aims and objectives set in the Guidelines of Youth Policy for years 2009-2018. The activities included in the Programme envisage the promotion of youth involvement in the decision taking processes, to promote youth social economic development, competitiveness and inclusion in society as well as to improve international collaboration in the field of youth policy.

National development plan for Latvia for years 2014 – 2020 (priority Human Securability) foresees:

- Promotion of youth employment, including a careers education system; integration of young people into the labour market following the completion of vocational or higher education, including business start-ups; support measures for unemployed youth to obtain first work experience; improvement of the infrastructure and facilities of vocational education institutions;
- inclusive educational development and assurance: support staff, including assistant teachers, the introduction of special teaching material education.

To ensure coordination of the youth policy, a Youth Advisory Council has been established, which aims to promote the development and implementation of a coherent youth policy, as well as promote the participation of youth in the decision-making process and public life. What has been done at state level to encourage social inclusion of young people: Securability as a state goal; Dual education system; Micro enterprises; Summer jobs; Shadow day; «Lielā talka» - the big cleaning.

Nationally, as a member of the European Union, Romania is increasingly exposed to politico-economic realities of European nature and worldwide, consequently the young Romanians are facing similar needs to those in other European countries.

In the youth field, Romania is engaged in the development and implementation of policies both nationally by Law. 350/2006 - Law of Youth and at an European level through the New European strategy "Investment and Empowerment 2010 – 2018".

Also, an important component of the implementation of youth policies is their ability to respond to the real needs of youth and to be locally adapted as they are formed, and in this way the consultations among the youth are a viable way to make this thing possible.

At the national level there were implemented several projects:

- *"The participation in decision-making and community involvement"* aiming to support NGO initiatives that aim to increase the involvement of citizens in the community and in the process of making decisions which will improve the community's development and the public policy through active citizenship.
- *"The Voluntary service"* supports initiatives that bring an important contribution to the community, providing all ages and social groups the opportunity to get involved in voluntary work.
- *"Encouraging democratic values"* supports initiatives that promote and respect for democratic values and human rights.

Hungary has been addressing the issue of youth unemployment as a key way to support young people move into employment and therefore promote greater social inclusion. One example of the work in this respect is the Hungarian governments focus on supporting university courses/ degrees that the economy requires. Therefore young people are encouraged to undertake the courses/ degrees that should secure them employment once they leave university as these are in priority or growing sectors. This helps provide the skilled workforce for employers and grow the Hungarian economy.

In Northern Ireland young people have many opportunities to engage fully in society and which are supported by local and national policies. There is an excellent schooling, college and university system to support education. In addition a youth service provides opportunities for young people to engage in formal and informal activities outside of the education system. Activities include engaging with youth centres, participating in sports, cultural and personal skills development. All of this is to ensure that young people progress in society as good citizens.

Best Practice Case Study: Support for Young People

To facilitate long-term youth work at local governments and youth work in accordance with youth policies and based on best practice examples, local governments have developed local youth policy planning documents.

YOUTH POLICY system in Jelgava Local Municipality:

- ✓ **Youth coordinator at local municipality level** – responsible for overall youth politics in municipality, youth issues, projects etc.
- ✓ **Youth workers** in each parish (13)
- ✓ **Children and youth centre** – in Vircava, Jaunsvirlauka, Eleja parish
- ✓ **NGOs** working with youth – «ideA», «Development centre – Get to know yourself»

Youth Council of JLM (since 2011)

- ✓ 13 youth representatives from parishes (they are school pupils, students and unemployed youngsters 16 – 30 years old representing different interests)
- ✓ representation of youth interests, identification of needs, promotion of youth participation

- ✓ meetings once per month – to talk about current events and plan future events and projects
- ✓ first “Coffee with politicians” organized in 2014 to facilitate communication between decision makers and youth
- ✓ to increase the capacity for young people experience exchange events are organized both in Latvia and abroad – Romania, Germany, Hungary, Poland



Consulting Commission of Youth issues of JLM (since 2011)

- ✓ 11 local professionals and representatives of organizations
- ✓ Meetings at least twice a year
- ✓ analysing the situation, making proposals for government policy and action strategies development and implementation of youth issues
- ✓ currently work with Development Strategy of Youth politics in JLM

This system allows and stimulates the development of youth network at local level. All the involved institutions/ parts cooperate with each other and thus allow reaching the best possible result and development. Also youth workers and children and youth centres are incorporated in this system thus working in common team.

European Citizenship for Socially Disadvantaged

Themed meeting held: 8th – 11th May 2014 – Downpatrick (UK)

As outlined earlier social inclusion is a priority for the European Commission and achieving social inclusion is a priority for the Northern Ireland Executive (United Kingdom). The work addressing social inclusion is coordinated through the Northern Ireland Anti Poverty and Social Inclusion Strategy. A number of general challenges have become the priorities for action. These are as follows:

Eliminating Poverty - Despite improvements in general prosperity and social conditions in recent years, the focus policy and effort is on the 327,000 people in Northern Ireland, including 102,000 children and 54,000 pensioners, who are estimated to remain in poverty.

Eliminating Social Exclusion - The priority is also to provide opportunities for everyone to participate fully in the social and economic life of our community. For those individuals and families who suffer from multiple social problems, this presents the greatest challenge.

Tackling Area Based Deprivation - The concentration of multiple deprivation such as high unemployment, crime and low educational attainment in mainly urban areas in Northern Ireland has posed particular challenges for government. For the 284,000 people living in such areas there is much greater risk of poverty, poor health, both physical and mental, and the despair that comes from having no apparent prospect of improvement. Tackling the multiple deprivation that has persisted in many areas for decades, is a priority within the overall strategy.

Eliminating Poverty From Rural Areas - While poverty and multiple deprivation tend to be concentrated in urban areas, pressures on the agricultural sector, demographic change and the physical isolation leave many in rural communities in or at serious risk of poverty and social exclusion. The challenge and priority is building a strong rural community infrastructure which will help provide economic and social opportunities for everyone, but in particular for young people who want to live and work in the countryside.

Shared Future – Shared Challenges - Against the backdrop of 30 years of conflict and a longer history of community division in Northern Ireland, the promotion of respect and tolerance between the two main communities has proved a significant challenge. However this has been an essential condition nonetheless for achieving the pace of further economic and social change needed to eliminate poverty and social exclusion in Northern Ireland.

There are a range of specific measures to promote social inclusion including the promotion of good relations which aims to ensure that everyone in Northern Ireland.

In Romania it was noted that poverty was an issue for people aged over 45 years, particularly woman. To tackle this issue there has been a great emphasis to support women in rural areas to improve their skills, including IT, learn foreign languages and promote self employment. Tourism has also been promoted in Romania as a key driver to support people who are socially disadvantaged to improve their living standards and increase income.

Best Practice Case Studies: Support for the Socially Disadvantaged

An example of social inclusion best practice is the Drive Your Way to Success programme which is delivered in Downpatrick (UK) with a mainly rural population. This programme was led by the South Eastern Regional College aims to improve the skills of people who are unemployed to enable them to fully engage in the labour market and secure sustained employment.

The programme is a package of holistic support tailored to the specific needs of the participants with a focus on vocational qualifications, personal development and IT skills. In addition the support addresses other barriers that preclude people from engaging in education or skills programmes like Drive Your Way to Success such as access to the training and employment. To address this barrier driving lessons are provided to programme participants so as to gain access to transport to attend the training and in the long term to be able to travel to jobs.

Another example of best practice that helps support social inclusion is the accompaniment programme supported by Ceuti Town Council. This programme aims to help people who are socially excluded by providing them with relevant support. A key worker acts as the accompaniment support by first of all undertaking an analysis of a person's needs. Then an action plan would be agreed that assists with providing people a range of support and services such as helping them to secure employment, organise professional support to address issues such as mental health or assist with day to day activities like helping people go to the bank, doctor or hospital. This allows people to feel socially included rather than excluded.

Conclusion

Social inclusion occurs day after day as more and more people engage not just in their local community but also in national and European programmes. However everyone must do more to ensure that social inclusion continues to flourish and supported and citizens have opportunities to fully engage in society with their fellow citizens.

Everyone needs to play their part in engaging disabled, Roma, young, old and socially disadvantaged people in future social inclusion cooperation, allowing people to develop and continue meaningful friendships and closer working partnerships. This should have the effect of continuing to encourage the disabled, Roma, young, old and socially disadvantaged people to take a more active role in Europe and become greater EU citizens.

There should be opportunities for everyone to obtain a greater understanding on the needs of disabled, Roma, young, old and socially disadvantaged people to engage with the wider EU and indeed be more effective EU citizens. The impact should have a major lasting impression on societies across Europe.

In the widest context the impact on social inclusion policy work of people at national, local and European level should be focused on engaging the disabled, Roma, young, old and socially disadvantaged people in European citizenship and other European programmes.

It is recommended that social inclusion work should be fully implemented with support from both national and local government representatives to ensure the overall impact of increasing participation by the disabled, Roma, young, old and socially disadvantaged people in Europe and all the relevant programmes.

Key Actions for supporting Social Inclusion

- Participating in meetings/events/ seminars across European are an important way for everyone to gain a broader view of key issues and very much supports and contributes to the sense of belonging to the European Union.
- Finance is crucial to supporting social inclusion as often people who wish to engage are excluded because of cost. Member States and the European Commission should promote programmes that allow people who feel socially excluded to fully engage with finance a key component of any support provided.
- Priority should be given to programmes that promote social inclusion at the very heart of their work.
- Promoting education and improving the skills of people was highlighted as key to addressing social inclusion and move people from unemployment into sustained employment. There are many programmes across Member States that assist with this work and these are complimented and supported by European programmes such as Erasmus + and the European Social Fund. It was important these opportunities are promoted at local and national level through partnerships, links and the engagement of the non government agencies (NGO's).
- It was noted the economic crisis had a major impact on every country across Europe, although some more than others, and that this has lead to the erosion or decrease in some services. This appears to have undone some of the earlier work by Member States to promote and support social inclusion. For example it was noted that in Ireland many local post offices, police stations, banks and hospitals have closed resulting in a lesser service for citizens. This leads to further social exclusion, particularly within a rural area.
- Supporting opportunities for volunteering is an important way to promote social inclusion for everyone.

- Peer mentoring or operating a buddy system which encourages people to share their experiences with other people who do not normally engage with civic society. This allows for experienced citizens to explain and highlight the importance of engaging more fully with society and importantly with other citizens.

- Motivation is a key component to engage people fully in society and programmes should examine how this is best addressed. If people understand the benefits of engagement then they are more likely to participate however they will need to be educated on those benefits.

- Social inclusion is easier to deliver on a local and potentially national level but is more difficult at European level. For this support needs to come from both national and European levels to ensure that people have the opportunities to fully engage. Town twinning can be that initial step to engaging people who feel socially excluded but there then needs support to continue that engagement so the initial work is not lost. This support could be through other programmes which normally have social inclusion as a key component or indeed through a potential dedicated social inclusion programme targeting many levels of support and engagement.

- Language continues to be a barrier for many people across Europe and leads to social exclusion. More work needs undertaken to promote languages across Europe and not just at local or national level. The European Union needs to develop a specific programme that supports foreign languages and therefore making people feel more socially included.

- Continued emigration of young people across Europe through such programmes as Erasmus + should help promote social inclusion and ensure young people integrate more in Europe.

- Culture and cultural differences need to be understood to ensure that people can fully integrate without fear of intimidation or exclusion.
- Consulting with people who are socially disadvantaged is an important way to understand the specific issues that preclude people from fully engaging in society.
- Direct personal marketing to support social inclusion should be undertaken in each town through local press, personal contact and working in partnership across the community, statutory, political and voluntary groups.

More specifically for social inclusion of Roma people there is a need;

- to engage the Roma people by the involvement of children in common formal and informal activities;
- to offer them professional orientation and inform them on labor market needs; and
- to make them aware of the necessity of obeying the Romanian legislation regarding compulsory documentation.

More specifically for social inclusion of disabled people there is a need;

- to educate and promote people in relation to disabled people;
- to integrate in local families life;
- to enlarge volunteering in helping disabled people;
- to involve them in social activities; and
- to offer psychological support.

More specifically for social inclusion of young people there is a need;

- to provide professional orientation;

- to *enlarge* local initiative to reduce early school leavers;
- to provide 'coaching' method for young people to discover themselves, to develop their full personal potential, to find answers to achieve the objectives what helps;
- to support Improvisation theatre as the tool to support social inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities; and
- to adopt a forum as the tool of social inclusion involving youth, youth leaders, NGO, youth coordinators and decision makers.

More specifically for social inclusion of young people there is a need;

- To enlarge volunteering in helping old people;
- To provide regular information for old people's self-confidence;
- Awareness about current developments for older people;
- Motivation to act on behalf of other older people; and
- Dialogues on ageing issues.

More specifically for general social inclusion there is a need;

- To fully engage the socially disadvantage in all aspects of society;
- To draw people's attention on their social problems;
- To raise awareness of rural women's role in the local community;
- To organise solidarity campaigns.

Further information on this project available by emailing dtwinningp@aol.co.uk