

## New network helps socially excluded access the labour market in Greece



Social services network office in the Kozani municipality, Greece

### Project name

Establishing a Social Support Services Network

### Project duration

2003-2006

### ESF priority area

Social inclusion

### Country

Greece

### ESF funding

€ 11,550,000

### Total funding

€ 15,400,000

### ESF funding type

Objective 3

### Target group

Socially excluded Unemployed

### Name of coordinating organisation

- Managing Authority of O.P. Health and Welfare
- Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, Division of Social Security

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Under a bold new employment and social reform initiative, the Greek government in co-operation with the European Social Fund, is establishing a network of municipal offices around the country dedicated to helping people living on the margins of society gain access to the labour market, as well as to the social services system. So far, approximately 70 social support services offices have opened.

The disabled, abused women, ex-offenders, refugees...these are just some of the many social groups who can find it hard to contact social services and access the labour market on their own. As a way of encouraging them and others into employment, the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity is opening a network of offices around Greece to advise and refer people on where they can receive help in accessing the labour market as well as specific social services (i.e. social benefits schemes, health, mental health and social care services, and vocational training) according to their particular situation.

### A cross-section of beneficiaries

A small team of specifically trained social workers, psychologists and sociologists are employed in each centre. Apart from providing counselling and information, the offices, operated by municipal or inter-municipal enterprises, are also monitoring the number and type of applications they receive.

"The type of people going to the centres varies according to the region," says Director of the Managing Authority Thanos Papanastassiou. "In each office, we have installed software that will provide valuable statistics in the long term on how much they are being used and by whom." Initial statistics suggest that of around 18,000 applications for assistance received so far, approximately 10% come from ethnic minorities, 9% from resident aliens and 6% from single parent families. "You have to remember that these offices are a relatively new concept in Greece, and will take longer to catch on in certain areas. Some mayors we have talked to have been reluctant to our setting up offices in their municipality, as they are prejudiced against the benefits of such schemes," he adds.

### On track to empower the socially excluded in finding work

Nevertheless, the project is expanding and gradually taking root in the country. "The results are much better than expected. We've opened approximately 70 offices to date and look set to open a further 80 in the near future," says Mr. Papanastassiou. "The services offered by the offices, which are co-funded by ESF and the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, will be provided for two years. At the end of this period, the municipalities are committed to maintain operation and funding of the offices."