

## Excellency in Solidarity

Older people already account for 32.8 % of population in the Portuguese districts of Portalegre and Evora, in the Alentejo region, and this trend will increase with the net emigration from these rural areas which are in a bleak, social and economic situation. Unemployment is high, institutional resources are limited, the provision of social services is inadequate and, in general, the community is becoming less and less concerned with its dependent members. Older people, and in particular older women who have a higher life expectancy, see themselves as being in an increasingly fragile and precarious position. The DP Excelência na Solidariedade (Excellency in Solidarity – ES II) is the answer that has been proposed in Castelo de Vide by the Casa da Misericórdia. This is a long established charity that intends to develop the social economy and set up a professional system of home care support, in cooperation with the national Institute of Social Security. As Rogério Roque Amaro, from the DP partner PROACT, said at the launch of the project: "it is about increasing the human dignity, the well being and the access to fundamental rights of all, independent of their gender, way of life or existing capacities".

### Building on previous experience

Through the Senior Tourism Network that was tested in Castelo de Vide, during the 1st Round of EQUAL, one of the partners of the DP created a social and religious tourism agency, called "TOURISCORDIA". This was done by mobilising tourism operators and offering special "packages" that are both appealing to elderly consumers (tourists) and tourism service providers. This network provides the opportunity for more isolated elderly people, with low and sometimes irregular incomes to enlarge their horizons and participate in cultural activities. It also facilitates the participation of elderly women who, traditionally, often lead a more passive and isolated life than men. The benefits in terms of local development were many. It boosted the local services provided in the social economy such as home care and it also provided more varied experiences for tourists including the chance to sample traditional handicrafts, cultural events and the local hot spas whilst, at the same time, creating new

businesses opportunities related to tourism.

The 2nd Round EQUAL project that concerns the structuring of a quality home care service, can now build on the Senior Tourism Network. In fact, people with (elderly) dependent relatives can choose Castelo de Vide as their holiday destination because the home care service will provide proper support, either in hotels, in rented accommodation or in the home of family members with whom they might stay for their vacation.

In another strand of Excellency in Solidarity I (ES I), volunteering had been considered as an activity to be treated "professionally", playing as it did an important part in local development and in the informal economy. This led to the production of:

- A Guide for the animation of groups in voluntary projects (Guião para animação de grupos em projectos de voluntariado);
- A Manual for the trainers of volunteers.

### Quality management in elderly care

The purpose of ES II is to set up an integrated model of home care support and to develop a system of quality management for these local services to enable them to apply for certification. The holistic approach that covers health, hygiene, social and psychological support, cultural identity, environmental aspects and economic needs, requires a wide network of partners on the ground. Thus, the first task was to mobilise several different types of "allies" such as official institutions involved in social services, local development agencies, relatives and neighbours and volunteers. Empowering these "allies" with technical know-how and also with the necessary interpersonal skills, such as empathy and interaction, was the first challenge of the project. The DP also made sure that everyone understood its overall approach which is



that the elderly person is considered to be someone who can achieve a series of things and not simply seen as the sum of needs to be met by helpers.

According to Carolino Tapadejo, Head of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Castelo de Vide "it is the first time in Portugal that a concrete solution has been tested, on the ground, to provide a Home Support Service. With this project, we are determined to answer the needs, expectations and wishes of the elderly of today, thus contributing to the social recovery of Alentejo." The DP also intends to raise the level of scientifically-based knowledge on the concept of quality and its multi-dimensional features that include aging, citizenship and participation, shared responsibility as a social model, well-being, local development and integrated services. An important partner in the DP is the Portuguese Institute of Quality (I.P.Q.) which is in charge of norms, standards and certification at national level. Its participation is a guarantee of the credibility of the outcomes of the project and also increases the potential for their transfer and mainstreaming.

## The gender dimension as a quality factor

In the care of the elderly, both the professionals and the beneficiaries are mainly women and so gender equality will now be explored as an important factor in quality. The issue of home care support raises several questions like who is going to provide it and who is going to use it and how? Perceptions, attitudes and habits play a key role and aging is experienced differently by women and men. Retirement changes the balance of daily life. While women continue to be at home, men who had previously "lived outside" for most of the day now "invade" this female territory. Some men will gradually come to share domestic tasks previously carried out by women but others will only cope with cooking and washing in situations of emergency or dependence. Widowers are keener than widows to marry again, but look for a younger wife so what is the impact on the isolation of older women? In home care, some men won't accept help from a female carer to take a bath and how is this to be addressed when most carers are women? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having men or



women as providers of home care? Does the gender of the carer make a difference to the acceptance of the service by the beneficiaries? The answers that are found to these questions will be monitored as part of the evaluation process of the DP.

## DP products will go through the EQUAL validation process

ES II envisages two main products as its final outputs for further dissemination:

- an Integrated model of home care services;
- a Model of certification in quality and qualification of home care services.

When they are ready, these concrete outputs will go through the validation process set up by the EQUAL Managing Authority in Portugal to ensure quality and transferability. Products are scrutinised by a group which looks at them from three angles:

- The "authors" present their work, including a critical self-analysis;
- Professionals in the same field, who are external to the DP and have not been directly or indirectly involved in the products' design, ensure input from an independent "peer" perspective, and provide a technical and qualitative validation that helps to guarantee the value of the products to other potential users;
- Specialists are involved in testing and validating the products, to provide the perspective of "external experts." This offers a market orientation as the experts are able to compare these new products with solutions and products already available and to take into account the needs and priorities of the contexts, beneficiaries and future users of the products.

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