



Peer Review on “Social Business for people with mental health difficulties”

Host Country Discussion Paper - Cyprus

Vocational integration: let’s go back to work

Cyprus, 19-20 June 2018

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Written by the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit of the Mental Health Service, Ministry of Health, Cyprus

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Executive Summary

The upcoming legislation ('Creation and Maintenance of a Register of Social Enterprises') in Cyprus aims to regulate social enterprises. It is likely to cover general purpose social enterprises and social enterprises that aim to hire at least 40% of their staff from vulnerable groups. The proposed legislation is awaiting approval from the House of Representatives (Βουλή των Αντιπροσώπων).

Since 1990s, the Mental Health Services, through the Vocational Rehabilitation Units, have established Alternative Employment Programmes (soon to be named social enterprises) to help people with mental health difficulties reintegrate into the labour market. Three different Alternative Employment Programmes are described in more detail in the first chapter of this report.

The new legislation will help to turn the Alternative Employment Programmes into social enterprises, building on the lessons learnt so far. There is a long history of supporting people with mental health difficulties in the open labour market, however, some of these efforts were hindered due to the absence of legislation. To date, Vocational Rehabilitation Units were able to implement the above-mentioned programmes only with the help of volunteer associations, due to the lack of legislation and funding.

The need for supporting and regulating social businesses for people with mental health difficulties is of great importance for mental health professionals and other professionals who support the former, because job vacancies have been scarce after the economic crisis. Apart from that, people with mental health difficulties are often afraid to enter the labour market without the support of experts or without trying their skills in a more secure environment.

1 Situation in the host country

1.1 Brief history of alternative social entrepreneurship for people with mental health difficulties in Cyprus

In the early 1990s the Psychiatric Reform was in place in Cyprus and one of the main goals was the social and vocational rehabilitation of people with mental health difficulties.

The Athalassa Mental Health Hospital had, back then, 'protected workshops', that slowly and methodically evolved into the Vocational Rehabilitation Units in Nicosia in 2002 and later in Limassol.

In 1995 the Cabinet of Ministers (Υπουργικό Συμβούλιο) approved the institution of vocational rehabilitation with support, and the coordination was given to the Service for the Care of Disabled (Υπηρεσία Μερίμνης Αναπήρων) and the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of People with a Mental Handicap.

The alternative forms of social entrepreneurship started growing in the 1990s through the initiative of a small group of mental health professionals of the Mental Health Services, but lacked legislation and funding. A number of initiatives for the employment of people with mental health difficulties were implemented, but none is still ongoing. This effort was the outset of the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit in Nicosia.

Nowadays, the volunteer association 'Association for the Protection of Mental Health' (Σύνδεσμος Προστασίας της Ψυχικής Υγείας) has the main role in the development of the three social enterprises for people with mental health difficulties that will be mentioned later in the paper, in close collaboration with the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit of the Mental Health Services.

1.2 Current situation in Cyprus regarding social enterprises for people with mental health difficulties

In Cyprus there are two Vocational Rehabilitation Units, one in Nicosia and one in Limassol, which are part of the Mental Health Services of the Ministry of Health. The funding for these Units is exclusively from the governmental budget for the Mental Health Services.

One of the main goals of the Vocational Rehabilitation Units is to help educate, train, and provide continuous support to people with mental health difficulties to enter the open labour market.

The multidisciplinary teams of the Units include occupational therapists, clinical psychologists (part-time), and a part-time mental health nurse in Nicosia. There are also work coaches who are employed by volunteer organisations through funding from the Department of Social Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.

Apart from the alternative employment that the Units have developed in the last four years, there is a long history of successfully supporting people with mental health difficulties who work in the open labour market (as employees of companies and individuals). The main support of the Units for people who work in the open labour market are:

- Support from a work coach and an occupational therapist weekly or depending on the needs of the individual;
- Support from the clinical psychologist when needed or when requested by the person;
- Meetings with the employers regarding issues that need attending, or for evaluation of work performance of the employees;
- Support groups for individuals in the workforce;

- Support and psycho-education of families and /or significant others regarding the vocational rehabilitation.

To support labour market integration, Alternative Employment Programmes / Social Enterprises have been developed as alternative employment for people with mental health difficulties. The Vocational Rehabilitation Units implemented these programmes and the financial support was provided partly by volunteer organisations.

The Alternative Employment Programmes can be considered as one step into the open labour market, or even the first step, because they provide a secure environment as well as guidance for people with mental health problems to develop and maintain their vocational tasks.

The fact that there are mental health professionals supporting and guiding them in work results in more beneficial outcomes for the participants. The on-the-spot counselling regarding their vocational skills helps them to get a better training and allows questions and issues to arise that would have otherwise been kept aside. Every individual who has the support of the Vocational Rehabilitation Units has a personal action plan that is frequently being modified according to the needs.

The following section presents three forms of alternative employment provided to people with mental health difficulties.

1.2.1 Alternative Employment No1 (Social Enterprise to be) 'Canteen' at the Athalassa Mental Health Hospital

The 'Canteen' started working at the premises of the Athalassa Hospital by the Association for the Protection of Mental Health. The Mental Health Services provide the infrastructure and the Association runs the canteen.

There are five people with chronic mental health difficulties working part-time at the canteen. The working hours are 8:00am - 12:00pm and there are usually three persons working from 8:00 – 10:30am and then one person working from 10:00am to 12:00pm. The Association pays the employees and they also have insurance coverage (social security).

The staff of five is supported by work coaches on a daily basis and other members of a multidisciplinary team, which includes an occupational therapist, a clinical psychologist (part-time) as well as a mental health nurse (part-time). The occupational therapist visits them every week or every other week and a small number of staff has regular meetings with the clinical psychologist as well.

The participants never faced a serious relapse, although relapses have occurred in two of the employees, but no hospitalization was needed because of the support they had from the Unit and from the Community Mental Health Services.

This form of employment has helped the people working there, all with chronic mental health difficulties, to avoid serious relapses, improve their communication and social skills and to help their families financially. Through the years working there, participants had a very smooth and stable course, and the frequent evaluations showed that their vocational skills remained in a good condition, compared to other individuals who do not get the support from the Units.

The financial statement of the 'Canteen' is usually balanced and sometimes a small profit is made and is invested back into the canteen or it is used to pay for the practice placement (trial period at the open labour market) of one of the people who cooperate with the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit.

1.2.2 Alternative Employment No2 (Social Enterprise to be) 'Agricultural Services – Nursery Garden'

This form of alternative employment (that will also be turned into a social enterprise for people with mental health difficulties, once the legislation is implemented) deals with plants and flowers, how to grow and nourish them so that they can be sold.

The Association for the Protection of Mental Health, along with the financial support and with the support in human resources of the Mental Health Services, is trying to set up this business. The Mental Health Services provided the land at the premises of the Athalassa Mental Health Hospital.

There is also an oregano plantation that needs attending and care from the people working there. It was planted with the help of the Department of Herbs of the Ministry of Agriculture that provided the plants for free.

The people working there are not getting paid at the moment for the hours they put in, unfortunately, because of the lack of customers. That is why the occupational therapist responsible for the nursery asks them to come only once a week. The nursery needs a lot of infrastructure and consumables (such as plants, soil etc.) and there is not enough funding for the evolution into a competitive nursery.

The costs are far more than the profits, so, for the time being, it is not an autonomous business with its own employees. However, the engagement with the nursery activities provide some benefits to those working there. They maintain their vocational skills, for example: to be on time, have responsibility for something at the workplace, take initiatives, follow instructions, communicate with others regarding vocational issues and social issues.

1.2.3 Alternative Employment No3 (Social Enterprise to be) 'Arts and Crafts'

This form of alternative employment is run by both Vocational Rehabilitation Units in Nicosia and Limassol and is very successful in many ways. It is again one of the workshops that the Mental Health Services and the Association for the Protection of Mental Health would like to register as a social business. There are usually five people involved in this initiative in Nicosia, and four in Limassol. This Alternative Employment Programme is also used as an assessment for the ability to work by the occupational therapist responsible for the programme.

The main products of this workshop are crafts that the people with mental health difficulties produce or help to produce, such as greeting cards, Easter candles, chaplets, paintings. The products are usually sold by the people who create them in bazaars that are organised by the Association of the Protection of Mental Health and on a one-to-one basis.

The workshop is "open" once a week for the people who work there, except when there is a big order and there is the need to put extra hours into it. The Vocational Rehabilitation Units offer a room at their offices for the sole purpose of this alternative employment.

The people working there vary between those who have the skills to work in the labour market, but cannot find a job, and those who feel not ready yet to enter the open labour market and do not yet have the skills needed to work as employees in the labour market. Both categories mentioned above are welcome at the alternative employment No 2 & 3.

2 Policy measure

2.1 The bill regarding the registration of social enterprises (2018) in Cyprus

On 11th December 2013 the President of the Republic of Cyprus announced a series of measures to combat unemployment and social exclusion. This included a specific measure to develop and promote actions in the social economy.

Since then, a great deal of work was done by a number of experts and other public stakeholders (i.e. Minister of Interior, Unit for Administrative Reform, non-governmental organisations, Departments from the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance) to start designing and implementing the Action Plan on social enterprises.

On 9th January 2018 the Cabinet (Υπουργικό Συμβούλιο) has approved the proposed legislation/bill on the 'Creation and Maintenance of a Register of Social Enterprises' and this was sent to the House of Representatives (Βουλή των Αντιπροσώπων) for voting.

The main aim of the upcoming legislation in Cyprus is to regulate social enterprises. This will cover two different aspects of social enterprises:

- a) Social enterprise of general purpose (γενικού σκοπού) aimed to promote positive social or environmental actions by services or goods based on an enterprise model (without necessarily employing vulnerable groups). This enterprise will be obligated to invest 70% of its profits for the promotion of its social mission.
- b) Social enterprise for integration/inclusion (ένταξης), aimed to hire at least 40% of its staff from vulnerable groups, that will offer services or goods based on an enterprise model that includes the participation in decision-making of the people actively involved in the enterprise.

2.2 Action Plan for the development of a social enterprise ecosystem

The government and more specifically, the Unit of Administrative Reform, has developed an Action Plan, based on the Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship, Groupe d'Experts de la Commission sur l'entrepreneuriat social – GECES, recommendations and other countries' best practices. This Action Plan has three priority axes:

- c) Axis 1: Formation of a favorable business environment.
- d) Axis 2: Promotion of a social entrepreneurship culture.
- e) Axis 3: Enhancement of access to funding.

For the implementation of the axis the collaboration between the public sector, the local government (i.e. municipalities), the academic community and the private sector is necessary.

2.2.1 Axis 1: Formation of a favorable business environment

The first axis includes actions that will ensure the successful creation of a social business ecosystem, like the necessary coordination between the involved agencies, the establishment of an agency for the implementation of policies and management of a register.

Action 1: Development of a bill for social enterprises.

Timeframe: 1st semester of 2018.

Action 2: Conduct research to map the ecosystem of social enterprises in Cyprus.

Timeframe: 1st semester of 2019. Budget: EUR 20 000.

Action 3: Establishment of a 'Unit for Social Entrepreneurship' under the Deputy Ministry for Development and Competitiveness.

Timeframe: 1st semester of 2018.

Action 4: Establishment of a 'Commission for Social Entrepreneurship'. The Commission will include representatives from the public service, local governments, the enterprises and the universities / academic staff.

Timeframe: 1st semester of 2018.

Action 5: Facilitate the access to public contracts. The social enterprises for integration will be exclusively awarded with contracts by the public service and broader public service.

Timeframe: 2nd semester of 2018-2019.

Indicative budget: EUR 30 000.

Action 6: Tax and other incentives from the government.

Timeframe: 2nd semester 2018. Budget: N/A.

Action 7: Development of an incubator.

Timeframe: 1st semester 2018-2020.

Indicative Budget: EUR 180 000 (for a period of 3 years) for each incubator. Total: EUR 360 000.

2.2.2 Axis 2: Promotion of a social entrepreneurship culture

The actions for this axis aim at the development of knowledge and culture and the promotion of positive perception for social entrepreneurship.

Key actions of Axis 2

Action 1: Development of an internet portal. This will help to promote and recognize the meaning of social enterprise and social economy in general. The aim of this action is to provide specific information of all interested stakeholders.

Timeframe: 1st semester of 2019.

Indicative budget: EUR 20 000.

Action 2: Creation of a "Social Enterprise" label/marketing for easy access, recognition, promotion of social enterprises.

Timeframe: 2nd semester of 2018.

Indicative budget: EUR 5 000.

Action 3: Training and guidance from social entrepreneurs.

Timeframe: to start on the 2nd semester of 2018.

Indicative budget: a. Twenty keynote speakers from abroad EUR; 20 000, b. Manuals and instructions leaflets EUR; 10 000.

Action 4: Information campaigns to various organized groups all over Cyprus regarding social entrepreneurship and educational visits abroad.

Timeframe: 1st semester of 2019.

Indicative budget: EUR 20 000.

Potential social entrepreneurs will have the chance to visit other social enterprises abroad and gain experience and knowledge.

Timeframe: to start on the 1st semester of 2019.

Indicative budget: for 30 persons, EUR 45 000.

Action 5: Development of 'Social Entrepreneur Ambassadors'. They will be responsible for informing the public and politicians about social entrepreneurship.

Timeframe: 2nd semester of 2018.

Action 6: Education and training

The 'Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship programme (ΙΔΕΟΔΡΟΜΙΟ)' is a programme regarding the promotion of a business ecosystem in Cyprus. It focuses on social entrepreneurship and aims to promote creative and innovative thinking and development of skills for students in Cyprus.

Timeframe: for school years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

Indicative budget: EUR 20 000.

Youth Entrepreneurship Actions 'Clever city: I improve my city with clever ideas' is a pilot programme developed in 2016-2017 at the Municipality of Aradippou in collaboration with the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute.

Timeframe: school years 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

Indicative budget: EUR 20 000.

2.2.3 Axis 3: Enhancement of access to funding

Action 1: Sponsorships /incentive schemes for Social Enterprises.

Subvention of Social Enterprises. The subvention amount is up to EUR 25 000, and if there are:

1. people with disabilities employed an extra subvention for each person of EUR 4 000 to 12 000 is given.
2. people from vulnerable groups: EUR 3 000 to 12 000 for each person.

Indicative budget: $EUR\ 25\ 000 * 80 = EUR\ 2\ 000\ 000$ (2 million).

Funding of social enterprises (priority to those that are already active for the last 2 years) through a creation of a funding instrument in collaboration with a financial institution (that will be responsible for providing microloans with the highest amount being EUR 25 000, given favorable interest rate).

Provision of coupons for social innovation through a relative programme from the Institute for the Promotion of Research (Ινστιτούτο Προώθησης Έρευνας). More specifically, the enterprises will apply at the above mentioned Institute for technological equipment. The main criterion will be social innovation that addresses various needs.

Coupons value varies between EUR 2 500 and 5 000.

Timeframe: 2018-2019.

Action 2: Exploration and information about available financial programmes/tools.

Timeframe: 2nd semester of 2018.

Action 3: Study for the exploitation of alternative financial tools for social enterprises (i.e. equity funding, Social Impact Bonds etc).

Timeframe: 1st semester 2019.

Indicative budget: EUR 10 000.

Apart from the policy making for all social businesses that is conducted by the Unit of Administrative Reform, the Mental Health Services have included the Alternative Employment Programmes (soon to be social business) in their Policy Planning 2019-2021. The services have included the operating expenses and the cost for the hourly paid staff (that includes technical instructors).

3 Results

3.1 Alternative Employment Programmes of the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit

The last four years of Alternative Employment Programmes have shown that the transition to the open labour market for people with mental health problems is easier and smoother. People with mental health difficulties are usually isolated, not having much chance for social interaction. Their participation in the Alternative Employment Programmes battles the above-mentioned problems and gives them the chance to be active citizens.

Participants of the Alternative Employment Programmes have the chance to regain and maintain their vocational skills. They gain the skills needed: for example, time management, to express themselves freely, knowing what to avoid mentioning when in employment, to feel free to ask questions regarding the job they need to do and learn how and when to ask them – all without the stress of being fired.

One other major benefit from this scheme is that people, who otherwise would not have been able to claim a job on the open labour market, are given the chance to test their skills in an environment that provides security regarding their mental health difficulties. The Alternative Employment Programmes help the individual to develop new skills and improve his/hers vocational skills so that he/she can proceed to finding a better job on the open labour market, to establish himself/herself and to invest in the social enterprise.

The Mental Health Services plan to develop the Alternative Employment Programmes into social enterprises for integration, so that more people with mental health difficulties will benefit from them.

Here, there is the need to address the fact that there is no provision in the upcoming legislation for the cooperation of the social enterprise with the mental health professionals and the Vocational Rehabilitation Units of the Mental Health Services. The experience that the Units have can be very beneficial to those who develop and implement the legislation.

4 Difficulties and constraints

4.1 Possible gaps in forthcoming legislation

Through our experience in the last 4 years, it is not easy for all people with mental health difficulties to go back to the labour market without the regular support of mental health professionals who focus on their vocational rehabilitation and the difficulties that they face at the work place.

Therefore, the social businesses to be developed by the Vocational Rehabilitation Units include mental health professionals in the whole process. Unfortunately, there is no provision in the legislation for mental health and other professionals to be incorporated into the social enterprise. In our experience, especially in Greece, this is something that works very effectively and efficiently for the social enterprises/co-operations that employ people with mental health difficulties.

Unfortunately, the upcoming legislation addresses issues for regulating social businesses, but not specific issues for the vulnerable population. As mentioned above, the social businesses that will employ people with mental health difficulties will need to collaborate with mental health professionals who train for vocational rehabilitation of individuals with the specific difficulties. The experience of the Vocational Rehabilitation Units has shown that there is a need for support on a vocational level. Professionals from the Vocational Rehabilitation Units have the knowledge and training to address possible issues in an understandable and acceptable way for the employees with mental health difficulties. The professionals can also provide psycho-education for the rest of the staff. There are quite a few occupational therapy assessment tools regarding the worker's role, the impact that the work environment has on the individual who has mental health difficulties, that can be very beneficial for both the employee and the employer, in this case the social business.

The vocational rehabilitation of people with mental health difficulties will be addressed in the upcoming legislation for the Community Care of People with Mental Health, in both the labour market and otherwise. The Ministry of Health prepared the legislation proposal, but it awaits approval from the House of Representatives. The legislation will address issues regarding the community care for people with mental health difficulties including the actions provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation Units of the Mental Health Services.

Another difficulty from lacking legislation is that the social businesses that are run by the Vocational Rehabilitation Units in collaboration with the volunteer associations are not able to compete on the market, since the relevant legislation for businesses and the finances behind it cannot be fully managed by these associations. This problem will be addressed by the upcoming legislation for social businesses.

4.2 Stigma and declining skills

Unfortunately, stigma is one of the major issues that people with mental health difficulties are facing at the workplace and in the community in general. The Vocational Rehabilitation Units inform and, if needed, educate the staff, regarding mental health and mental health disorders.

The proposed legislation aims to include people from vulnerable groups as well as people with disabilities in the social businesses. However, the special needs of people with mental health difficulties need to be considered, due to the fact that they may face a number of relapses and their skills are descending when in a chronic condition of mental disorder. There is no provision in the upcoming legislation for declining skills and their vocational rehabilitation.

4.3 Collaboration and communication difficulties between public departments

It is not always clear who has the responsibility regarding the improvement of vocational and financial resources for people with mental health difficulties. The services are not communicating sufficiently for better results, due to the structure of the government's public services.

5 Success factors and transferability

5.1 Establishment of the 'Commission for Social Entrepreneurship' (Action Plan for the development of a social enterprise ecosystem Axis 1: Action 4).

This action will be very beneficial for the social businesses for people with mental health difficulties, if there will be a provision for the participation of a mental health professional or a spokesperson for people with mental health difficulties.

5.2 Facilitating access to public contracts (Action Plan for the development of a social enterprises ecosystem - Axis 1: Action 5).

The direct access to public contracts for social businesses that employ at least 40% of their staff from people with disabilities is one of the most important actions of the legislation. This is very helpful for the social enterprise to get established and have the chance to prove its competence.

5.3 Tax and other financial incentives (Action Plan for the development of a social enterprises ecosystem - Axis 1: Action 6).

One of the problems that the Alternative Employment Programmes / social business face is gaining and maintaining financial security and stability. This will hopefully be overcome when the legislation is in place and the Action Plan for this will be implemented. This will grow to be very beneficial for the social businesses and their sustainability and success.

5.4 All actions regarding the promotion of social businesses

The actions regarding the promotion of social business will also help with the de-stigmatization of people with mental health difficulties, as well as with the financial profits and sustainability of the enterprise.

6 Conclusion

Years of experience in the field of vocational rehabilitation of people with mental health difficulties has shown that the end results are far greater when there is professional support at the workplace. These interventions have shown that people who got support from the Vocational Rehabilitation Units were far less likely to lose their job than those who had no support while working, because they receive support when dealing with possible relapse and following treatment.

The development and implementation of Alternative Employment Programmes have shown that this can also be done if the individual is not entirely fit to work in the open labour market, and needs guidance and training on vocational and every-day skills. Those programmes are a first step to implement social entrepreneurship and helping people to get ready to go back to work, while allowing them to have a 'trial and error' approach before seeking employment by themselves or with the support of professionals. Support for social entrepreneurship activities, financially and in terms of capacity building, is however very important before a social business can become sustainable, in particular when working with people with mental health issues.

Stigmatisation of people with mental health problems exists and should be addressed, and the best way to prove to the community that people with mental health difficulties can be productive members of the community is through work. This will be implemented in a great way with the help of the upcoming legislation.

The implementation of the upcoming legislation on the 'Creation and Maintenance of a Register of Social Enterprises' will address unemployment for a significant number of people with mental health difficulties, as well as other vulnerable groups. It will also help with the establishment of new social enterprises that can really make a statement and help the individuals with mental health difficulties in many aspects of their lives, first and foremost with their vocational rehabilitation.

In light with the upcoming legislation, we would like to discuss the case regarding people with mental health difficulties and vocational rehabilitation through social businesses in other Member States. Possible discussion questions are: Is there a provision for mental health professionals and their involvement in a social business? Is there any research on social enterprises that employ people with mental health difficulties and their success rate and sustainability?

Legislation is written by humans and amendments have a place in the legislation, especially because it involves people from vulnerable groups. So let's all get back to work and make things better once more.

