European Commission

Peer Review on

'Social business for people with mental health difficulties'

19-20 June 2018, Nicosia (Cyprus)

Summary report

The Peer Review discussed various national approaches on how social businesses can help people with mental health difficulties to gain sustainable employment.

The event was hosted by the Vocational Rehabilitation Unit of the Mental Health Service at the Ministry of Health in Cyprus. Besides the Cypriot host delegation and a thematic expert, government representatives and independent experts[1] from seven Member States participated at the Peer Review, namely Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Latvia. Two representatives from the European Commission also participated at the event.

The Peer Review aimed to offer insight into the employment opportunities of people with mental health difficulties provided by social business, discussing policies and practices to support social business and people with mental health problems.

Social business

While different definitions of social businesses and enterprises exist, there was general agreement that social economy actors aim for social impact, rather than profit making. Social enterprises have come to prominence in the last 10 to 15 years, as a way to address major social challenges in the context of constrained welfare budgets, increasing inequality and social exclusion. According to the European Commission[2], social enterprises mainly operate in the following four fields:

- Work integration (WISE) - training and integration of people with disabilities and unemployed people;
- Personal social services - health, well-being and medical care, professional training, education, childcare services, services for elderly people, or aid for disadvantaged people;
- Local development of disadvantaged areas - social enterprises in remote rural areas, neighbourhood development/rehabilitation schemes in urban areas, development aid and development cooperation with third countries;
- Other - including recycling, environmental protection, sports, arts, culture or historical preservation, science, research and innovation, consumer protection and amateur sports.

---

[1] Namely from Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Finland
[2] http://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/social-economy/enterprises_en

The European Commission supports social enterprise, amongst other initiatives, by the Start-up and Scale-up Initiative (2016) and the Social Business Initiative (2011).

Support for people with mental health problems

The European Union's strong commitment to an inclusive and cohesive society is promoted by the Europe 2020 strategy. The strategy set the target of 'lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion' by 2020. To help Member States in reaching that target, EU designed the flagship initiative 'European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion'. In line with these overarching principles, the European Commission adopted a Green Paper on Mental Health in 2005 triggering the discussion on how to tackle mental ill-health. In 2013, this was followed by the Joint Action (on) Mental Health and Wellbeing which established a European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing which supports EU-countries to review and improve policies.

In many countries rights and support of people with mental health difficulties are provided within the framework of support and rights for people with disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) defines people with disabilities as those who have 'long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. However, it was emphasised that mental health does not solely depend on biological factors that define mental ill-health as an 'illness', but also depends on the social environment.

Mental health problems have become a major cause of work absence and early retirement all over Europe. According to participants, the economic recession strongly impacted on people with mental health problems, as they were made redundant more often and it is harder for them to gain employment again. In addition, stigmatisation of people with mental health problems is a huge problem, as employers seem to employ people with disabilities, rather than people with mental health problems.

Employment however increases the chances for recovery of people with mental health problems significantly. Considering the challenges people with mental health problems face to enter the labour market, social businesses offer the potential to provide sustainable support.

Host country approach

In Cyprus, a legislation on social enterprises is to be approved in 2018. The main focus of the legislation aims to regulate and support the creation of social business. In this legislation, a distinction is made between two types of social enterprise:

- General purpose: a minimum of 70% of the company profits have to be invested in the social mission;
- Social inclusion: a minimum of 40% of the workforce have to present vulnerable target groups.

In short, an action plan for social enterprises will support the establishment of social enterprise and consists of the following points (see Host Country Discussion Paper):

- Creation of a favorable business environment for social enterprise;
- Promotion of a social enterprise culture;
- Enhancement of access to funding, including financial incentives to employers for employing people with disabilities.

By stimulating social enterprises, Cyprus hopes to create more possibilities for people with mental health difficulties on the labour market. In order to guide this target group

to the labour market, there are two Vocational Rehabilitation Units, which are part of the Mental Health Services of the Ministry of Health. One of the main goals of these units is to educate, train and provide continuous support to people with mental health difficulties to enter and remain on the open labour market. The units consist of multi-disciplinary teams that include occupational therapists, clinical psychologists (part-time), and a part-time mental health nurse.

Next to support to enter the open labour market, Alternative Employment Programmes, developed by the Vocational Rehabilitation Units and NGOs, provide more secure work environments for people who would not get a job on the open labour market immediately. They help to improve and regain social and occupational skills, but also provide immediate support when dealing with possible relapse and following treatment. The Alternative Employment Programmes have therefore shown very positive results and the upcoming legislation on social businesses is a chance to turn Alternative Employment Programmes into social enterprises for integration, so that more people with mental health difficulties will benefit from them.

The key messages from the Peer Review can be summarised as follows:

Communication and awareness -raising

- Public and self-stigma is still a major barrier in all spheres of life, especially on the labour market. **Stigma** needs to be tackled not only to facilitate employment opportunities, but generally to **improve the quality of life of people with mental health problems**. Communication activities to raise knowledge about mental disorders (also to encourage people to raise their mental health problems more openly) and support in education and employment are ways to address stigma.
- **Sharing experiences and challenges** is important to identify lessons learnt and necessary competences to start and maintain a social enterprise and appropriate support for people with mental health difficulties.
- It is necessary to **raise awareness about social enterprises** and education of all stakeholders with the help of expert research proves to be helpful. A national label which identifies social enterprises as such, helps to raise consumer awareness, and may attract social entrepreneurs.

Support structures and approaches for people with mental health problems

- Social enterprises have the potential to provide more **flexible, innovative and supportive ways to help people with mental health problems**. The combination of their entrepreneurial approach with a social mission and a participatory approach enables a more secure work environment which is often similar to the open labour market.
- The **stepping stone approach** proves to be a promising form of guiding people with disabilities/mental health issues into the open labour market. This has been tried in Cyrus with work trails and Alternative Employment Programmes, and in Finland local NGOs or social enterprise offer a more secure work environment, but with the same tasks and work conditions as on the open labour market. Obviously, sufficient support for both employee and employer remains necessary.
- **Continuous and personal contact with employers** is needed to address stigma, but also to support people once in employment, to promote an

inclusive culture and workplace settings suitable for people with mental health problems, and to detect future mental health problems early enough.

- When trying to find job opportunities for people with mental health problems, it is important to adopt a **personal approach that addresses personal needs, but also user choice and participation**. The personalised approach focuses on peoples' ability (rather than on disability) and their interests. By doing so, there is a higher chance on finding the right place on the labour market. Social enterprises with their inclusive, participatory and flexible working culture are well placed to support this approach.

- In order to address the various needs of people with mental health problems, **support and collaboration from various public actors** is needed. Here the Cypriot approach of multi-disciplinary teams and the idea to establish cooperation between mental health professionals and social enterprises helps to provide personal support and to prevent serious relapses. Other examples include the involvement of job coaches and occupational therapists.

- Employment of people with mental health problems requires **community-based care and services**, so the provision of health and social services at home, rather than in an institution. Especially community mental health services play a vital role to address various needs and to support job integration.

Governance and processes

- **Legislation on social enterprise** is important to create an environment in which social enterprise can develop, but it often needs to consider a variety of organisational forms of social enterprise.

- **Various ways of funding,** often a mixture of private (SROI[3], Social Impact Bonds, loans) and public (grants to set up the enterprise, ESF funding) as well as entrepreneurial training are a way to aim for financial sustainability of social enterprises. Tax incentives and an increased use of environmental and social clauses of the EU Public Procurement Directive may also be a way to develop social enterprises.

- A **governmental incubator for social enterprise** can help to share knowledge, including business and entrepreneurship advice, especially with regards to helping and involving people with mental health problems.

- **Data collection concerning people with mental health problems** is necessary to fully scale the number of people with mental health problems, and therefore the need for help, and to evaluate and monitor effective ways of labour market integration.

- A **multifaceted approach** tackling mental ill-health by focusing on health care, employment, education and inclusion of people with mental conditions at all policy levels is necessary.

---

[3] Social Return On impact