

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Social exclusion, marginality and social vulnerabilities are complex phenomena. As such, they require different levels of explanation and entail a range of interventions. Therefore, different agencies and professionals are necessarily involved in dealing with these phenomena. This brings up the issue of how they articulate. Surely, this reasoning applies to work integration programmes.

A collaborative approach is a complex challenge, a difficult path that needs to be trodden for services and programmes aimed at social integration to be successful. It transcends individuals' wills and involves a number of elements, from each agency's organisational culture to its implementation in a given territory, through to the legal framework.

This approach guarantees:

- Integrated support and client referrals (coordination of different projects/services)
- Exchange of good practice, views and experiences
- Creation of local, national and European platforms to enhance collaboration among work integration programmes
- Shared marketing, advocacy and lobby actions
- Mediation and facilitation during transition from work integration programmes to the open labour market
- Involvement of the general public in support of better public policies

However, it is necessary to pay attention to some of the obstacles to developing a collaborative approach, such as: the lack of integrated services, which give the target easy access to support and help (also to ensure decent follow-up), the lack of mutual support of the social sector by buying and using the services of work programmes and social firms (e.g. using social firm products), and the fact that service providers and social firms become competitors instead of partners (e.g. public procurements). Indeed, particularly in times of crisis, competition may be stronger even between organisations focused on promoting social justice and fighting social exclusion. After all, each and every organisation has its own survival instinct. Striking a balance between fulfilling one's mission without falling prey to extreme competitiveness is an important challenge.

Also, at a more general level, it can be said that developing and implementing a collaborative approach poses challenges regarding personal beliefs and experiences, interpersonal relationships, mutual trust and openness, creative thinking, goal sharing and work methods.

Work integration programmes need to be included in an integrated and effective network that is able to guarantee social/education/health/housing/economic support; to be sure, networks are also fundamental to the success of the business initiatives.

Coordination among different actors of the social support network and the local context is of the utmost importance. This means establishing rapport with:

- Social support services
- Education and training services
- Health services; local authorities
- Local employers (for future job referrals)
- Suppliers and business partners
- Universities
- Local community

Therefore, a collaborative approach is instrumental not only for monitoring the implementation and development of the work integration programme, but also to make sure it really encompasses everything it should.