

RECOMMENDATIONS MANUAL

Empowerment through
non-formal education:
Experiences and impacts
with vulnerable individuals,
groups and communities.

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND FRAMEWORK OF THE GOOD PRACTICE MANUAL OBJECTIVE OF THIS MANUAL

OBJECTIVE OF THIS MANUAL

This manual presents a series of recommendations and good practices for the promotion of empowerment, as identified by partner organisations involved in the submission of the European project 'Empowerment through non-formal education: Experiences and impacts with vulnerable individuals, groups and communities'.

The objective of this manual is to suggest examples of good practices recognised by this partnership, with the goal of benefiting other European organisations that aim to empower vulnerable individuals, communities, and groups.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project operated from August 2012 to September 2014 and involved four partner organisations from European countries: UK, Poland, Portugal, and Italy. Funding for the project came through the Grundtvig stream of the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme.



// Poland, May 2014: Some of the many volunteers and paid workers involved in the project //

The project functioned as a partnership in which the main learners were adults who work with vulnerable communities (for example, the long-term unemployed, socially-excluded people, financially-excluded people, economically disadvantaged communities, drug users and those at risk of drug addiction, sex workers, etc.). In summary, the project compared, contrasted and debated the experiences and methodologies used by the different partner organisations to empower their publics through non formal education. This exchange of practices and experiences was achieved by numerous visits and work meetings, in which all

partners got to know each other's projects and working practices. These visits entailed, not only, tours of facilities, workshops, and presentations, but also discussions and meetings with other professionals and representatives of the several publics. The act of comparing and contrasting each partner's operations, regardless of the specific characteristics of their publics, was intended to strengthen the capacity of partner organisations to identify, implement and reinforce empowering practices.

The motivation for this the project was based on the acknowledgment that each partner organisation works with vulnerable publics and their intervention implies resorting to non-formal educational methodologies with a similar aim: to empower individuals, groups and communities, so they can improve their situation through the provision of education and training. The processes, procedures and methodologies used to implement the education and training, however, are different in each partner organisation, given the specificity of their publics and their projects. The partnership intended to address the following subjects/questions:

- What methodologies should be established to ensure the promotion of empowerment, throughout the several stages of social intervention (needs assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation and dissemination)?
- What are the expected impacts of each empowering methodology? How to evaluate this impact? Involving which indicators and actors?
- What are the main constraints / challenges to the promotion of empowerment in social intervention?

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS MANUAL

This manual comprises six sections. Section 1, this introduction, outlines the objective of the manual, presents an overview of the project, the structure of the manual and descriptions of the four partner organisations involved. Section 2 provides definitions for the key concepts used during the project, in order to clarify its scope. In this section, the main emphasis is on the concept of empowerment itself, given its complexity and variability in the literature associated with this field of knowledge. Section 3, the most important part of the manual, presents the recommendations and good practices identified by the project partners, regarding the methodologies to promote empowerment, its impacts

and main constraints. The main emphasis will be in the methodologies, since each impact and constraint will be described, not only in general terms, but also having in mind the identification of a specific methodology. Section 4 contains a short conclusion.

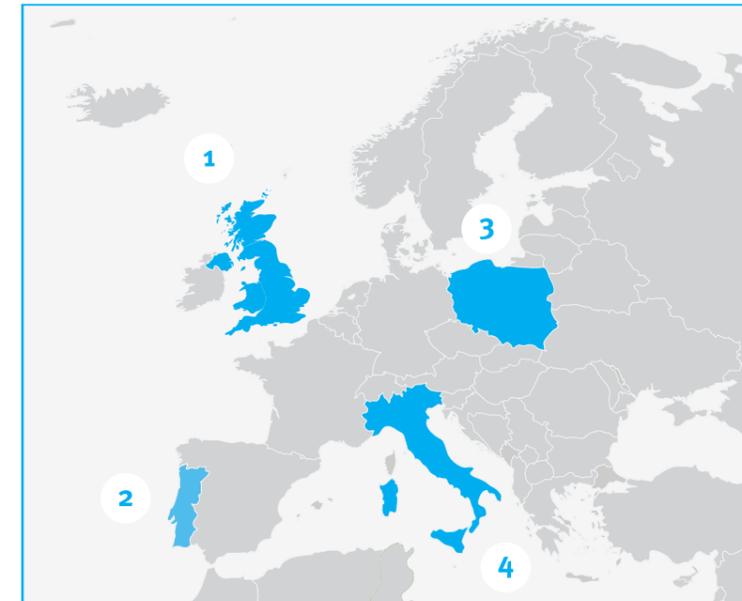
Section 5 provides the bibliographic sources used in the writing of the manual.

Section 6 contains contact details for each of the partner organisations including a named worker.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Below is a brief description of each of the organisations that took part in the project. Contact details for each partner are included in Section 6.

// MAP OF PARTNER COUNTRIES



- 1 ENGLAND
- 2 PORTUGAL
- 3 POLAND
- 4 ITALY



NORTH LIVERPOOL CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX (CAB), LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

North Liverpool CAB provides free, confidential, independent and unbiased advice and information on a wide range of issues (for example, welfare benefits, housing, consumer rights, debt, financial matters, etc) to the communities of North Liverpool. North Liverpool CAB operates from three main sites and additional outreach locations and is a member of the national Citizens Advice Bureau network. Its services are delivered by a mix of volunteers recruited from the local community and paid staff, many of whom started out as CAB volunteers. As well as information and advice, it delivers free financial capability training to local community groups, and organisations. This group training (covering budgeting, choosing and using credit, dealing with debt, etc) reaches over 3000 people per year. North Liverpool CAB operates in some of the most economically disadvantaged city wards in England. Local citizens experience high levels of debt, and there are low levels of understanding about financial products and related issues. The local community includes a high proportion of white, working class people who are unemployed or living on low incomes. In addition, the community includes people with health-related issues, and asylum seekers and refugees, as well as high proportions of lone parents and older people. North Liverpool CAB was the coordinating partner for the project.



AGÊNCIA PIAGET PARA O DESENVOLVIMENTO (APDES), PORTO, PORTUGAL

APDES is a Portuguese non-profit organisation, founded in 2004 to promote integrated development. APDES works with communities and people in vulnerable situations and its main goal is to improve the improving access to health, employment, and education and the enhancement of social cohesion. APDES is particularly suited to work with unemployed people, prisoners, drug users, and sex workers, amongst others, developing activities concerning employment, social integration, and civic participation. Inspired by human rights ideals, APDES promotes health through harm reduction strategies and the improvement of healthy lifestyles in different social contexts, such as schools, local communities, and prisons. APDES also aims to strengthen active citizenship and community participation through the enhancement of citizen's power to exercise their rights and responsibilities. APDES has 40 collaborators from areas ranging from Psychology, Sociology, Social Service, Anthropology, Nursing, Biology, Economics, to Management. APDES is a training entity accredited by DGERT – Directorate-General for the Employment and Working Relations. APDES has been broadening its territorial scope of intervention, extending its action to several regions of the country, such as Barcelos, Vila Nova de Gaia, Porto, Guarda, Lisbon and Viseu.



FUNDACJA NA RZECZ R EDUKCJI SZKÓD, POLAND, WARSAW

Fundacja na Rzecz Redukcji Szkód works alongside long term drug users, people who live in problematic areas and are at high risk of social exclusion (usually homeless) and also migrants who have little access to support and assistance. The stigma and social exclusion associated with drug use causes harm at many levels - psychological, social, health and legal. This organisation provides services to reduce the risks associated to drug use and to reduce social harms among individuals, families and communities. At the present moment, Fundacja na Rzecz Redukcji Szkód has 3 different projects running in Varsovia. They are based on the implementation of social support activities and harm reduction strategies. The leaders and staff involved in Fundacja na Rzecz Redukcji Szkód have extensive work experience in the field of Human Rights, namely in the fields of advocacy and activism for the rights of drug users and homeless people.



SAN BENEDETTO ONLUS, LIVORNO, ITALY

The Association San Benedetto onlus has been active in the field of drug addiction since 1985 (from 1985 to 2000 as Cooperative S. Benedetto). Under its management, a daily rehab centre in the city of Livorno has been operating since 1998, in collaboration with the local Health Sanitary Unit. This centre offers therapeutic, recovery, prevention, training, and support activities, aimed at people with addiction problems, and it is legally established as provider of therapeutic/rehabilitative services - as referenced by Italian laws (L. Reg. 1165/2002). Its main goal is the psychological and physical recovery of people who live with pathological addictions, either coming from drugs or behavioural aspects (such as gambling). Professional social workers offer all cultural and recreational initiatives on a voluntary basis. Some of the projects and actions that S. Benedetto has developed are:

- a training course and therapeutic apprenticeship (industrial cutting and sewing) for women with addiction problems.
- training courses on computing;
- a professional training course for volunteers and general practitioners on the prevention of addictions;
- ("Provincia di Livorno Multimisura POR 2005")A restart project that provides courses in naval carpentry and restaurant management, in collaboration with some recognized national networks (CEIS community onlus, ARCI solidarity, CESCOT).

SECTION 2

DEFINITIONS

This section of the manual intends to deal with some of the concepts that were fundamental to frame the project, such as educator/trainer, learner/trainee, vulnerable groups/communities and empowerment. Having in mind the plurality and diversity of the methodologies carried out by the different partner organisations, and the rationale of the project, it is also important to clarify the various types of education (formal, non-formal, informal), in order to describe, in a more accurate way, the different kinds of actions and methodologies put into practice when promoting empowerment.

EDUCATOR/TRAINER

Those who are part of the staff of a social project or organisation aimed at the implementation of strategies for the education/training of vulnerable individuals, groups or communities. Having in mind this partnership, educators/trainers are referred as the professionals that provide support, advice, and train their publics, so that the individuals can be empowered and live more independently in their communities. In general, the education and training strategies are not implemented separately, but are part of a more comprehensive social intervention approach.

LEARNER/TRAINEE

Individuals who are (to a certain extent) included in vulnerable groups and communities and could be, at the same time, both the target and the participants of the intervention, namely of the education and training strategies implemented by educators/trainers/professionals. Some examples of the publics entailed in this partnership are socially excluded people, financially excluded people, poor communities, unemployed people, drug users, sex workers, etc. These individuals have a common characteristic: a set of vulnerabilities that lead to their separation from the normative dimensions of social life and tend to crystallize their continuity in a situation of social exclusion.

VULNERABLE GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

In this manual learners are included in specific vulnerable groups and communities. Therefore, and taking into account the publics each partner works with, there are several conditions of vulnerability identified among learners, which can be obstacles to their social inclusion:

- In social terms: extended periods of alienation from the labour market – resulting in the loss or numbness of personal and social skills, low educational levels – that are reflected in both the formal level of knowledge and the ability to acquire new knowledge, and poor adherence to different social systems - health, family, justice, tax, etc;
- In economic terms: low income levels, which result in material shortages and the inability to meet basic needs;
- In physical terms: health problems related to the use and addiction to drugs and psychoactive substances;
- In psychological terms: low motivation, low self-

confidence and self-esteem, fear of stigma and lack of trust in society.

This last aspect is particularly relevant while considering sex work. In most countries, sex work is not legal, so this is yet a concealed and stigmatised activity; consequently, sex workers don't have labour rights; are more vulnerable to violence, economical exploitation and discrimination; are afraid to contact the authorities or health and social services (mainly when they are non-documented migrants).

In general, these conditions are not isolated and usually occur alongside others, which embody and reinforce the vulnerability of these groups and communities, such as the economic and social systems that generate increasing inequalities, negative attitudes and stigmatisation from other social strata of society. This set of vulnerabilities makes the definition of education/training strategies a challenging process, thus demanding specific approaches for its design and implementation.

EDUCATION

According to Walsh (2007) education is the 'process of gaining knowledge, developing intellectual capabilities. It is using knowledge, theory and concepts to achieve deep insights, using research to question existing knowledge and to create new knowledge, in a somewhat guided and structured manner.' This can cover a wide variety of activities, ranging from informal and non-formal education activities to structured training courses.

In many countries, the notion of non-formal and informal education is not common in internal policy debates - preferred alternatives being community education, community learning and social pedagogy. According to Combs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1996, cit in Smith, 2011), Dib (1987) and Fordham (cit in Smith, 2011)):

FORMAL EDUCATION corresponds to the hierarchically structured, chronologically graded education system, running from primary school through to university and including, in addition to general academic studies, a variety of specialised programmes and institutions for full-time technical and professional training. It is a systematic, organised education model, structured and administered according to a given set of laws and norms, presenting a rather rigid curriculum as regards objectives, content and methodology. Formal education is linked with schools and training institutions.

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION comprises any organised educational activity outside the established formal system - whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity - that is intended to serve identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives. It reveals the constant presence of two features: (a) - centralisation of the process on the student/learner, as to his previously identified needs and possibilities; and, (b) - immediate usefulness of the education for the student/learner's personal and professional growth. In this respect, the learners should preferably undertake organisation, and curriculum planning for themselves, (a 'bottom-up' approach). Non-formal education is linked with community groups and other organisations.

INFORMAL EDUCATION is a truly lifelong process whereby every individual acquires attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experience and the educative influences and resources in his or her environment - from family and neighbours, from work and play, from the market place, the library, and the mass media. It is mainly linked with interactions with friends, family and work colleagues. In terms of social intervention, informal education is a more spontaneous process of helping people to learn and can take place in various settings. It works through conversation and involves the exploration and enlargement of the learners' experience. It can use a variety of methods including group work, casual conversation, play, activities, work with individuals and casework.

These definitions do not imply hard and fast categories. An analysis to the formal, non-formal and informal education features, suggests the existence of range of transition from formal to non-formal education, as well as from non-formal to informal education.

'Non formal and informal education became part of the international discourse on education policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, by the hand of planners from the World Bank and UNESCO. It was then recognised that formal education systems tended to adapt too slowly to the socio-economic changes around them and that educational policy making generally followed (rather than guided) other social trends. This inadequacy and the incapacity of formal educational models to meet the needs of individuals, and society at large lead to the search for alternatives. This was also related to the development of the concepts of recurrent and lifelong learning, which have to do with the need to extend education and learning throughout life. Within this context a tripartite categorization of learning systems emerged

IDEAL-TYPE MODELS OF FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

	FORMAL	NON-FORMAL
PURPOSES	LONG-TERM & GENERAL CREDENTIAL-BASED	SHORT-TERM & SPECIFIC NON-CREDENTIAL-BASED
TIMING	LONG CYCLE / PREPARATORY / FULL-TIME	SHORT CYCLE / RECURRENT / PART-TIME
CONTENT	STANDARDIZED / INPUT CENTRED ACADEMIC ENTRY REQUIREMENTS DETERMINE CLIENTELE	INDIVIDUALIZED / OUTPUT CENTRED PRACTICAL CLIENTELE DETERMINE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS
DELIVERY SYSTEM	INSTITUTION-BASED, ISOLATED FROM ENVIRONMENT RIGIDLY STRUCTURED, TEACHER-CENTRED AND RESOURCE INTENSIVE	ENVIRONMENT-BASED, COMMUNITY RELATED FLEXIBLE, LEARNER-CENTRED AND RESOURCE SAVING
CONTROL	EXTERNAL / HIERARCHICAL	SELF-GOVERNING / DEMOCRATIC

(ADAPTED BY FORDHAM 1993 FROM SIMKINS 1977: 12-15 CIT IN MARK (1996, 2011))

↑ This table clarifies the distinctions between formal and non-formal education.

Having in mind that the majority of the work developed by the partners of this project – in order to empower their target-public – is intentionally developed as educational and informative moments/ actions, and therefore, established according to the non-formal education principles, it is clear that these characteristics are particularly in line with the project's main goal and also the work with marginalised and vulnerable individuals, groups and communities.

EMPOWERMENT

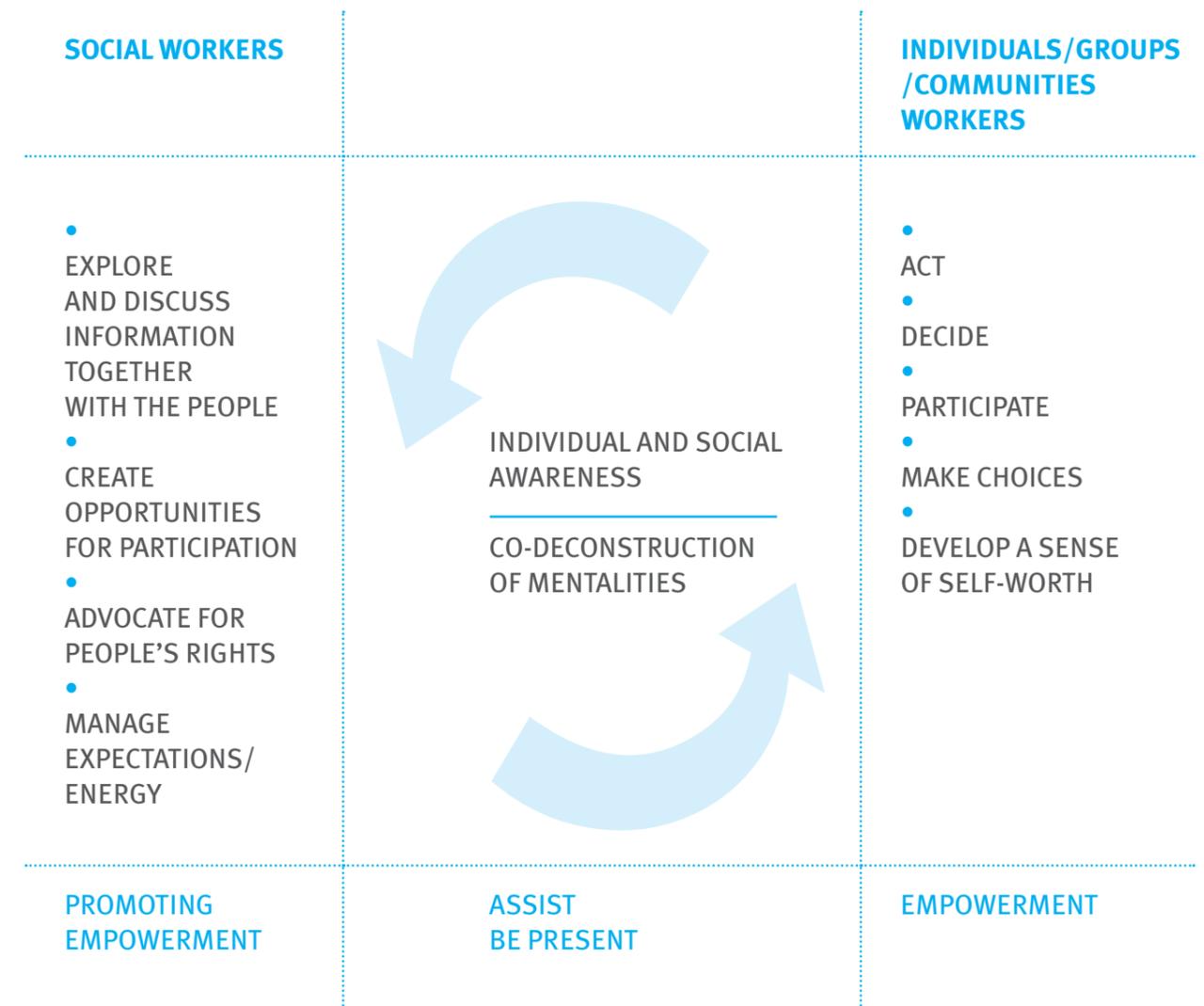
Regarding the concept of Empowerment, many authors associate it to the idea of autonomy, given that most

definitions include the notion of a better understanding of/control over one's situation (Moulton, 1997). Kindervatter (1979, in Moulton, 1997), in a major study about non-formal education as an empowering process, defined empowerment as "gaining understanding of and control over social, economic, and/or political forces in order to improve [one's] standing in society". Zimmerman (2000) defines empowerment as "an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of resources gain greater access to and control over those resources".

By perceiving what is described in literature as a starting point, this partnership began with a thorough debate about the *concept of empowerment*, as a way of deepening the basis concept to all the developed work. In a sense, this was also an ongoing process and throughout the several stages of the project, the concept grew and took a practical form.

This way, empowerment was established by all partners as an action or process where individuals/ groups/communities exercise their power of choice, assuming a leading role in decisions that concern them and taking ownership of their own life circumstances. It is a continuous action or process, because it takes time, it implies small gradual changes and it is a step by step transformation. It can be fostered at different levels – individuals/groups/communities/political – since it can also be related to specific groups, communities of interest, or geographical communities, as to different aspects or areas of one's life. Being empowered comprises key ideas like power of choice/ leading role/ownership, entailing a will and a capacity

for decision making, or feelings of both autonomy and responsibility. In regard to the *promotion of empowerment* in social intervention, it is crucial to underline that professionals do not empower vulnerable individuals/groups/ communities. People empower themselves. In this sense, it is not a one way process, as professionals do not "give" or "pass" power, but rather "stimulate, facilitate, promote" actions that will contribute to the people's empowerment. Empowerment requires a collaborative, non-hierarchical and horizontal approach, which demands a dynamic relationship between publics and professionals, being truly a co-empowerment.



SECTION 3

RECOMMENDATIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

In this section of the manual, we will describe the results of the project per se. Here we intend to present a set of specific recommendations and good practices which aim to empower vulnerable populations. These recommendations must be seen as guidelines for professionals, trainers and organisations that intervene with vulnerable publics and use formal and

non-formal education strategies to empower individuals and communities.

They are the result of the compilation and debate of the experiences of each partner regarding the empowerment of their publics, which helped identify consensual methodologies and their respective impacts and constraints.

1

METHODOLOGIES FOR THE PROMOTION OF EMPOWERMENT

After achieving a clearer concept of empowerment, the following step - and most important - was the definition of a set of recommendations of methodologies with the specific purpose of empowering vulnerable publics.

Based on the analysis of each partners' similarities and differences regarding their intervention to promote empowerment, it was possible to identify several general practices in this field. Given the diversity of each partners' reality and publics, there were some problems in the achievement of consensual methodologies, because not every good practice was easily transferable to all organisations due to several reasons, like the lack of financial support from their state; the non-acceptance or acknowledgement of their groups' needs by their communities; or the developmental stage of each partners' organisation. Nonetheless, all the methodologies listed in this section were identified by all partners as central to the promotion of empowerment and intend to reflect some of the desirable practices in this field and, therefore, what professionals should aim for, regardless of social, institutional or cultural constraints.

In this sense, there were established four final categories of methodologies and strategies defined as best practices to the promotion of empowerment. In the section there will be a detailed description of each methodology, with the resource to practical examples to illustrate how to put these strategies in motion in a daily practice.

A • HOLISTIC APPROACH

It is essential to look at the bigger picture and take into account the wider context and not only the specific issues that our clients bring. These issues are usually related to socio-economic and political conditions, and the context, lifestyle or family of each individual should be taken into account.

Given that our publics' needs are often affected by others, it is only possible to assume that it is disempowering to focus on just the individual. We found that a holistic approach is dependent on four fundamental aspects.

• MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

In order to ensure a truly holistic approach, an agency needs to create and maintain multidisciplinary teams, from different training backgrounds, that offer all their knowledge and expertise to help clients tackle their issues. Only a team composed by professionals of several areas would be able to address the multiple and diverse issues affecting our publics.

// In North Liverpool CAB we carry out gateway assessments to assess the issue that the client presents and to look further for any underlying issues. The gateway assessor will then work with the client to decide the next steps the client needs to take to achieve their desired outcome. The gateway assessor will assess whether the bureau is best placed to assist the client, whether it is assisted information, an appointment with an adviser or referral to a specialist adviser or other agency. NLCAB has a multidisciplinary team which works in close partnership with other social, community and health organisations.

As an example, there is a local family law solicitor's rota which provides free initial family law advice in North Liverpool bureau when the presenting matter is at the stage of requiring legal opinion from a solicitor. Or, when a client has never dealt with finances in a partnership, the client is able to have an appointment with a debt adviser to help negotiate with creditors if the person is left with unpaid debts; they would also see a housing worker if they are threatened with eviction for non-payment of rent/mortgage and a generalist adviser could check for any benefits they may be able to claim. The client would also have access to a money adviser to help them develop budgeting and money management skills.

// In APDES, Porto G is a team that works with sex workers, which is composed of 5 professionals from different academic backgrounds (2 psychologists, 1 social worker, 1 anthropologist, 1 nurse) and 2 peer educators who play a central role in the intervention. All these professionals are trained according to harm reduction and outreach principles, and are aware of the specificities of working with sex workers in indoor settings.

// In **FUNDACJA REDUKCJI SZKÓD** the team is combined with professionals (social workers, psychologist, lawyer, dependency therapists, out-reach workers) and peer workers with a long experience in the harm reduction field. The team undertakes regular supervision and trainings.

• INTEGRATED SERVICES

Ensuring that our services are integrated at different levels - local, regional, national or European – it is also essential to guarantee that the services we have available truly fulfil our publics' needs. This means having the resources and partnerships to offer several complementary services, such as workshops; life skills, improving literacy/numeracy sessions or financial education sessions.

// In **North Liverpool CAB** there are varied additional services offered to clients to help them deal with numerous daily issues, like understanding paperwork; comparing energy providers, insurance and bank accounts, to shop around and get the better, cheaper deal for the client. Clients can also attend financial education sessions either in groups or one-to-one to learn about credit and debt and gain budgeting and savings skills.

// In **APDES – PORTO G – Sex workers** are constantly moving from one place to another and the team works with other outreach projects (national and European) in order to refer sex workers whenever they need some support. Apart from that, the **PORTO G** also involves different partners in the promotion of several initiatives, such as: a self-defence training that was developed with the support of the Self Defence Association, with the goal of improving sex workers' security; a workshop intitled "Sex Work: Glamour, Sex Appeal and Safer Sex", to discuss issues like fetish, use of sex toys, violence and pleasure and risk management during the sex practices; or **APDES** close involvement in a national project (PreVIH Program – HIV Infection among Hidden Groups) that aims at the training of peer educators.

// **FUNDACJA REDUKCJI SZKÓD** is most often the first contact between clients and public health institutions. There is a cooperation between us and other services but still very weak. We are trying to create the best way to communicate with public institutions and NGOs. We are very often assisting our clients in the way they function in the help system. It enables representatives of institutions understand what lacks and be more flexible.

• CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Another fundamental step to ensure a holistic intervention and the development of truly integrated services is the establishment of partnerships. Integrated services have to take into account the boundaries of each NGO's work and, therefore, the need to refer the individuals to other agencies, which offer other specific services. Establishing partnerships is an important way to widen the services available to our publics.

// In **APDES, GIRUGaia** is an outreach team that intervenes with drug users, and health partnerships are particularly important to its work. Our clients are often referred to specific services to ensure that all their needs are conveniently assessed and fulfilled. These partnerships not only facilitate and speed up the access to these services, but also guarantee that the outreach teams have the opportunity to mediate this process, being kept as key figures to their clients, and also the opportunity to raise awareness amongst other professionals.

In **PORTO G** partnerships are also crucial to ensure a comprehensive response to sex workers' needs. Before creating partnerships, the team assesses sex workers' needs to understand which kind of services or referrals are needed. The most needed services in the field of health are gynaecology, stomatology, psychology, and also Hormone taking counselling in the case of transgender clients. Most of these services are public, but others are private, and in this case, the team tries to negotiate special prices for its clients, calling for social responsibility. For example, our dentist makes a 50% discount to all our clients. In regard to the referral to social services, since **PORTO G** has a high migrant representativeness, one of the most requested social service is legal support. So the team counts on the collaboration of three legal associations that provide this service.

Partnerships are also an essential way to carry out advocacy work and raise awareness amongst the professionals of these services - regarding our clients' reality and specificities – in order to promote a humanised service that protects their privacy/identity and prevent discrimination.

// **FUNDACJA REDUKCJI SZKÓD** is a part of national partnerships and networks aiming to change drug policy and create an integrated help system.

B • RELATIONS

The quality of the relationships established with our

publics is another vital element to the promotion of empowerment. We've defined four fundamental cornerstones of an empowering relationship between the client and the professional.

• TRUST AND EMPATHY

The need to build up trustful and empathic relationships with our publics is essential. The establishment of relations with these characteristics is related to several aspects of verbal and nonverbal communication. It is important to adopt an open, empathic and non-judgmental way of communication, which allows our clients to feel accepted and free to express themselves, regardless of their choices, or life experiences. A suitable dress code, neither too formal, nor too casual, it is also important to ensure a close, yet professional, relationship. Furthermore, the certainty of a confidential service is an indispensable aspect to build up trust and to establish a relationship where clients open up and give a more accurate account of their issues.

// In **APDES, GIIC** is an integrated office for information and consultancy that supports the creation of small businesses. When individuals need to have access to consultancy services, they usually attend meetings in our office. We try to create a comfortable atmosphere, have a friendly body posture and use comprehensible vocabulary so that each person feels at ease. In some cases, we offer the possibility of meeting people in a place of their choice (their home, a coffee shop, a public park), in order to better understand each person's condition and perspective.

Trust and empathy are also achieved by listening to what people have to say in all the phases of the business idea maturation. There is no fixed route to develop a business plan: based on each person's perspective, we propose the most adequate steps. In **GIRUGaia** acceptance is a key concept in harm reduction. It helps build emphatic and trustful relationships. As outreach workers, it is essential to understand and accept each individual's right to choose their own path, without any judgment, even when that choice includes drug use. This is an attitude that creates a genuine sense of acceptance amongst our clients, facilitating honesty and trust, and reinforcing the bond between the professional and the client.

PORTO G is an outreach team that visits people in their private environments. We use an informal language when we meet sex workers, and we reinforce the confidentiality (for example, we allow

them to give us an artistic name if they chose to). In the first contact we explain them that we don't judge their choices, and that we consider sex work as work, and that sex workers are entitled to rights and respect. In terms of attitude, we don't act like doctors or wise professionals, we value their knowledge and we don't judge their behavior.

// In **North Liverpool CAB**, to promote trust and empathy, advisers will introduce themselves to the client and explain our confidentiality policy so the person knows they can speak freely. The adviser will then actively listen to the client's issues, giving the person the opportunity to speak without interruption. The adviser will then ask questions to better understand the facts and will agree with the client the next steps or course of action.. Together, client and adviser, explore options, decide primary needs and which strategies to put in place to resolve the clients' issue(s). This is a relationship built on mutual trust and with the goal of achieving the best outcome for the client.

// **FUNDACJA REDUKCJI SZKÓD** drop-in point is for most of clients the only place where they can feel safe and understood. Clients very often express their trust and bond with our place.

• BE REALISTIC

The management of clients' needs and expectations is another important aspect of the relationships established with our publics. Being realistic about what your services can do for the clients, in order to manage the individuals' prospects about the resources available to them, was perceived as a good practice. The client needs to understand from the start of the relationship what each organisation can or cannot do and when certain issues can be resolved, so the client has realistic expectations.

// In **APDES – GIIC** – self-employment is very demanding, especially for those who are more vulnerable and also unemployed. At the same time, people need an urgent solution to solve their unemployment situation. We must clarify the expectations regarding the time it takes to start a company and the possible obstacles that may arise right from the beginning of the consultancy service. It is necessary to highlight the need to mature a business idea and to deal with financing, permits and bureaucratic issues. This "bringing people down to earth" has to be balanced with a more appealing approach in order to maintain people's motivation to proceed.

// In **GIRUGaia**, namely in the Portuguese context, the fulfilment of social needs, as housing or the access to social benefits isn't always easy, nor fast. As outreach workers, we are often approached by individuals who have urgent needs of this sort and expect us to help them solve them in a reasonable amount of time. In these cases, it is essential that the team clarifies that this type of requests cannot be solved autonomously and that they require a combined effort with public social services; therefore, the respect of their timings – which aren't always adjusted to reality - should be respected. In this sense, it is essential to make sure that the clients know the extent to which the outreach teams' intervention can go, so that false expectations can be avoided.

// In **PORTO G** we are always honest with our clients, we recognize our boundaries and we never promise things that we are not sure we can provide. The majority of our clients are migrants and even when they're interested in our legal support, to help them regulate their situation, we don't create expectations regarding this service and its possibilities. We also have different services in the community and in some of them the waiting list is long; so it's important to explain this to our clients. When we talk about safer sex practices and they assumed a risky behavior/ practice, we are pragmatic and, without any type of judgment, we explain the possible consequences of those acts. We recognize that we don't know everything, and when a client asks a question that we are not able to answer, we admit it. Then, we carry out some research and contact him/her to give the correct answer later.

• RELATIONSHIP BOUNDARIES

When working with clients, families, communities, and people in general, boundaries are an essential aspect of our work. Given that sometimes we are key elements in a given moment of one's life, particularly in troubled periods, it is essential to define what exactly our role is and the limits of the work we will be able to offer. In this sense, the boundaries of the relationship have to be respected and adhered to.

// In the case of a client coming to **North Liverpool CAB** and benefit fraud is uncovered, the organisation will explain the implications and consequences of a client's actions but they would not help the client to commit fraud. However, they would not break client confidentiality to report the fraud to the authorities. Confidentiality would only be breached if the client is at risk of self-harm or harm to a child or vulnerable adult is uncovered. In these situations, the manager

would then contact the national agency of the organisation for advice on the next steps.

// In **APDES – GIRUGaia** – the contact with clients' families is an important aspect of reintegration and, therefore, of outreach work. When we act as mediators in the reconnecting process, it is important to be able to balance the families' and clients' expectations. In some cases, the client asks the professional, not only to keep some details private, but also to give an optimistic, but sometimes unrealistic, version of his/her current condition. In these situations, it is essential to explain to our client that, as professionals, we will not break confidentiality, but we can only be honest in our statements, because otherwise we would be responsible to create false expectations amongst their families, which would only damage their relationship further.

// In **PORTO G** we are always discussing the boundaries in our intervention. Sometimes clients see us as friends, and they invite us to dinners, anniversaries and marriages. Sometimes, it is difficult to separate the professional's role from the personal one, so we need to evaluate this type of situations and explain them why it is not ethical to participate in those moments.

We also have clients with legal problems, so when they want us to help them (or they want us to be a witness) we have to be honest and tell them that we will not lie. For example, we've dealt with the case of two clients who asked for our help during a process in which they've pressed charges against each other.

• SUSTAINABILITY

The process of helping or empowering a client is ongoing and should be reviewed to review as priorities change. The only thing that should remain stable is the nature of the relationship between client and professional, which should be an anchor. Therefore, it is important to make plans for sustainability and the continuous satisfactions of our publics' needs, regardless of our intervention.

// In **APDES – GIIC** – Some vulnerable individuals are forced into self-employment by adverse circumstances or because they want to start new businesses, since other income opportunities are gone. As a consequence, they frequently tend to give less importance to this idea while trying to find a job or a training course to attend. Making plans to ensure sustainability means that we need to tell the clients that the consultancy processes are frequently intermittent and that we're able to stop and restart

them as they wish (always taking into consideration their life situation).

// In **PORTO G** the first contact is crucial to ensure the continuity of the relationship. If the clients find the services that team is able to provide important, then we will be able to ensure the continuity of our work. Sometimes, sex workers only become aware of their needs when they resort to **Porto G's** services, as it also happens that some needs are not yet covered by Porto G and the team must be creative, persistent and create partnerships that ensure that the individuals' needs continue to be satisfied, regardless of the project itself.

// In **North Liverpool CAB** one way to plan for sustainability is by giving debt clients a factsheet once their case has been dealt with and creditors have accepted token offers or payment arrangements. The factsheet explains what will happen after 6 months, when many creditors want to review the arrangements and want to re-negotiate and it explains what the client should do if this happens. It gives clients examples of standard letters they can adapt to reply to the creditors if their circumstances are unchanged or if they want to re-negotiate payment arrangements.

C • PARTICIPATORY METHOD

The constant involvement of our publics is of primary importance to any effective intervention, given that it is the only way to ensure that we are successfully responding to their specific and ever changing needs. At the same time, to keep our clients engaged in an intervention that takes them into account, is an extremely empowering practice. We have established four fundamental forms of participation.

• PEER INVOLVEMENT

The integration of peers in the professional teams and their involvement in all the stages of the intervention and project cycles is important and has proven to be meaningful and effective. A peer input is unique, given their life experiences and knowledge of the reality of the public's we work with. Peer educators are also important mediators between clients and professionals, because - given their proximity to their peers - they make the establishment of new relationships much easier. This is a particularly important role when we are first approaching new people, contexts or communities.

// In **North Liverpool CAB**, volunteers from the local

community play vital roles in the bureau delivering our advice service, working as actual peer educators. They are able to have their say through elected bureau representatives and at our quarterly meetings where paid and volunteer workers get together to share experiences and ideas on how to deliver and improve our service and catch up on the latest training updates. The Management Board, which governs the bureau finances and delivery of services, is also formed by volunteers with a variety of backgrounds which include legal and accountancy professionals.

// In **APDES** peer educators are a key element in outreach teams and the foundation of the intervention. In **GIRUGaia**, besides his/her role as mediator with target populations, the peer educator is also an essential element in project planning and evaluation. Since 2009, **Porto G** also integrates two peer educators who are closely involved in all the stages of the project. They play an important role in the evaluation of the project, by bringing an updated assessment of the needs, and by participating in the formal evaluations of the projects. They also disseminate the project among hard to reach contacts and refer situations that need some specialized support. They provide information and preventive materials to their peers and review all informative leaflets produced by the team, in order to ensure that the target population understands its contents. They are also free to suggest new ideas and innovations to the intervention, as well as to participate in moments of advocacy for sex workers rights.

• INDEPENDENT REVIEW AND ASSESSING THE IMPACT

Another form of participation is the assessment of the efficiency and impact of our intervention through our publics' feedback. It is important to pay attention to independent reviews on the services we offer and set up client forums or focus groups, in order to ensure effective policies/actions. If something is not working due to an inadequate practice, it needs to be identified and changed. Collecting regular feedback on how the clients perceive our services and the impact they have in their lives (or current situations) is not only a way to ensure an effective intervention, but also a way to provide a voice to our publics, regarding the services and policies that have an impact in their lives (thus helping them assume an active role).

// In **North Liverpool CAB**, client satisfaction surveys are sent out to clients within one month of their case being closed. The survey asks what they thought of the service, whether they achieved the desired

outcome for their issue(s) and what improvements could be made. On some projects like Horizons and Money Active we do follow-up surveys up to 3 months after and ask whether the individuals feel their confidence, knowledge and skills have increased from the advice and training received and whether they have taken any steps or actions themselves.

// In **APDES – GIRUGaia** – there are several ways to evaluate the impact of an outreach team intervention. The use of evaluation forms has shown to be effective, because it allows us to see concrete changes that have occurred during a certain period of time (according to a pre-test / post-test logic). The development of focus groups where clients discuss our work and what could be improved, are also useful and provides our populations the opportunity to have an actual voice and to take part in our work.

Porto G carries on two formal evaluations each year. In order to ensure that sex workers will feel free to evaluate the services, the team emails an anonymous online questionnaire to all contacts and invites them to respond. In this questionnaire, Porto G informs sex workers that it is important to know their true opinion, in order to improve the services available. We also ask peer educators to fill this questionnaire during outreach work.

• SELF-ORGANISATION

The support of self-organized civic groups or initiatives, in which collectives and client groups assume an active voice and control over the issues that affect them directly, should be actively encouraged and supported by organisations, as a way of empowering their publics. The general idea is that it leads the individual to reflect on how he can help to improve their own condition – as well as the one of a peer, a person who uses drugs, a sex worker, a gambler, an unemployed individual, an individual with debts, etc.

// In **North Liverpool CAB** there is an effort to train people who will be able to train others in similar situations. The joint work with projects as such the Barclays Money Skills champions helped to deliver financial education sessions to young people who were trained to help other young people and act as a link to financial education and other advice services. The trained champions then set up groups of young people to meet on a regular basis, to deliver sessions in financial capability and lead group discussions.

// In **APDES – GIRUGaia** – the promotion of the clients' citizenship is a very important task. In this

sense, outreach teams are aware of the existing drug users' civic associations, so they can inform their clients about their existence and advantages, as well as to help them join them, if that is their intention. In countries where such associations don't exist, it is also possible to promote their establishment, by talking with our clients about the value of organized movements, or by showing successful examples from other countries. In these cases, logistic support is also needed and outreach teams and their NGO's could also facilitate this by, for example, providing a room in their headquarters to the development of meetings and such. **APDES** in particular, has been supporting the first Portuguese drug users' association since its beginning, in 2010.

Porto G is committed to improve sex workers' living and working conditions and believes that this effort only makes sense with the direct participation of sex workers. **Porto G** promotes awareness raising events and celebrates relevant dates for the sex workers movement, as the 17th December (International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers) or the May 1st (Labor Day), encouraging sex workers to participate. Apart from that, **Porto G** also supports sex workers spontaneous movements. For example, sex workers claim that the prices of the ads to publicize their services in the newspapers are very high; a sex workers' representative invited a member of the team to join him/her in a meeting with the sales representative of the newspaper and the group managed to negotiate lower prices.

APDES also expresses its support (economic, but also at a management level) in case sex workers decide to create their own association. Whenever **Porto G** is contacted by the media, the team tries to understand if there are sex workers willing tell their story, although we never impose it!

D • INFLUENCE CHANGES

Promoting changes at different levels is essential for the promotion of empowerment. All aspects of our work are key elements to implement changes: the clients, our publics, the communities, society in general, professionals, policy makers and stakeholders.

• INFLUENCING ATTITUDES

Influencing the local practices and policies and attitudes of the local community are essential to promoting empowerment. This consists on advocating our publics' specific characteristics, life circumstances and needs, and also on promoting

responsible attitudes amongst our clients. Some practical examples are promoting the responsible use of credit or the safe disposal of used needles.

// In **APDES – GIRUGaia** – harm reduction approaches aren't only directed to drug users or other vulnerable populations, but also to society in general. Apart from advocacy work, health screenings and needle exchange programs are a good example of practices that simultaneously involve the individual and society. This way, when we alert our clients to the significance of such actions, the focus should be, not only in their individual health, but also in the obligation that they have as responsible citizens to insure that their conduct does not affect or endanger others.

// In **PORTO G**, the work developed with sex workers allowed a privileged knowledge about the main difficulties that these people face every day, and have revealed that many of them are related to the legal framework of this activity in Portugal. The actual policy pushes this population underground and inhibits their rights of access to health, work and non-violence/ discrimination. Based on this evidence, **Porto G** has developed a set of recommendations for the redefinition of this legal framework. This document is the basis for a strategy of political influence that aims to change the current law, in order to ensure rights to this population and promote their empowerment. In addition - during the outreach work carried out - the teams tries raise the awareness of sex workers on the need to educate their clients for safer sexual practices. It is a way of promoting their skills as educators of a population that is very difficult to reach.

• SELF-CONFIDENCE, AUTONOMY AND DECISION-MAKING

All empowering interventions need to promote sustainability, until they're no longer necessary to the individuals. In other words, providing information and knowledge about their rights and responsibilities will help individuals develop their skills; will promote self-confidence and autonomy; will help them make their own decisions.

For an effective empowerment process, it is important that the organisation tries not to be an indispensable asset for the individual in the future. This can be achieved by encouraging and supporting the individuals to take their own steps, to foresee possible consequences and to assume responsibility for their own decisions/choices, once they've gained the necessary knowledge and skills to do it so.

// In **APDES – GIIC** – the consultancy services are

based on team work. Right from the start, we propose a joint/cooperative effort to develop the business idea. Entrepreneurs must be the main actors in the development of the business plan, because their knowledge and personal/professional experience are crucial for the elaboration and enrichment of the project. The consultants also add their economic and management skills during this process, acting as facilitators. In practical terms, each person has to search for relevant information, make contacts, solve problems, and develop hypothetical scenarios to assess the viability of its own business idea. This way, people are able to mature ideas, develop management skills and gain ownership of the business. This will be very relevant for the future success of their ventures. GIRUGaia's professionals believe it is important to give individuals all the information they need to make informed decisions. A part of our job is also to provide our technical opinion but, although it is essential to give our professional evaluation, it is equally crucial to insure that clients have the final word about the course of action to take, even if we believe that it could be the wrong one. We should always keep in mind that ultimately the individuals have the right to make their own decisions and to disregard our counselling if they chose to. Professionals have to be able to accept this and to keep supporting their populations no matter what. Harm reduction is the philosophy that underlies the intervention of **Porto G** and this theoretical model respects the person and their choices, promotes the informed decision-making and values the promotion of skills and the citizenship of sex workers, facilitating their autonomy in informed decision-making and combating isolation.

Based on this model - either during home visits or escorting to the community services - the **Porto G** team creates dialogue and reflection moments to discuss the target population rights and duties, the services that exist in the community and could help them fulfill their needs and informs them about the necessary steps to achieve their goals.

• GRADUAL DIY – DO IT YOURSELF – STRATEGY

Strategies have to be based on assessment of the individual's competences. The level of autonomy should be assessed: it could be a crisis intervention at an early stage, but the following steps must be negotiated and agreed with the individual, in order to establish a do-it-yourself plan for the future. The message should be “we will work with you, but not for you”.

// In **APDES, GIIC** developed “O Plano da Minha Empresa” [“My Business Plan” – available only in

Portuguese] which is a step by step manual that explains the different stages and issues involved in the creation of a small business. This instrument was created so that people could work autonomously and at their own pace in developing their own business ideas. Its language is clear and accessible to all those who are not familiarized with economic and management terms. The manual is very practical, and can be used as an instrument to support clients' participation in the consultancy services. Nevertheless, it is not an adequate resource to all entrepreneurs, especially those with low skills and literacy levels.

// In **GIRUGaia** a pragmatic approach is one of the pillars of harm reduction. This is an intervention value that tells us that objectives have to be set gradually and according to each individual's current condition and capabilities. If, for instance, we are working with a homeless client, it doesn't make sense to start helping him find a job, before solving his main problem first: lack of housing conditions.

// In **PORTO G**, the mediation of sex workers' access to community services is often requested by the target population, since many users are very isolated and have no knowledge of the geographical space around them. The mediation work includes both the escorting to community services and the referral to our partners (or other appropriate institutions), in order to address the need in question.

We usually escort the individuals the first time they resort to these services, since it is important to reduce the anxiety often associated with going to unfamiliar places, as well as to deal with the individuals when they claim they've found obstacles to the full exercise of their rights. However, every effort we make is aimed to improve the autonomy of our target population while resorting to the community services.

• WORK AT THE POLICY-MAKING LEVEL

The organisations need to collect evidences, both quantitative (through questionnaires to their clients or service users) and qualitative (through case studies) and present them to policy makers. It is essential to demonstrate that the issues that may arise could be important and affect communities at a local or national level. Networking with researchers, health professional, local authorities, the police and other NGO's is vital, as is collaborating with the local media and use other resources as Twitter and Facebook. The promotion of an open social debate within the community can also be a way to help eliminate stigma and discrimination towards the target-groups.

// In **APDES – GIIC** – Consultancy services focused on the individuals and the local context are a way to support unemployed people, but perceiving the self-employment of the most vulnerable individuals as a way to solve social and labor market exclusion can lead to some obstacles. In this sense, **GIIC** is developing a 2 year research project on the Portuguese public policy in support of micro entrepreneurs. We intend to focus on the strengths and constraints experienced by the unemployed when applying for State supported microcredit programs. The results of the research will be used to advocate for change in the policies aimed at improving people's participation in the labor market.

// In **GIRUGaia**, outreach work entails the establishment of partnerships with several local stakeholders. These partnerships aren't only important to guarantee that we can ensure that our clients have easy access to all the services they need, but also to raise awareness amongst all professionals about the importance of our work and the issues that our populations face, as well as the importance of addressing them in an integrated and articulated way. The presence in national networks, were other NGO's that do similar work to ours share their practice and daily obstacles, has shown to be fundamental to exercise pressure amongst politicians and decision makers. This is a fundamental way to insure that the events that occur in the field, and the needs that are yet to be fulfilled, are passed on to those who have the power to make structural changes and to improve the formal network of services. In this sense, these networks often have a role of speakers, regarding their publics' views and needs.

Porto G believes that it is essential to give a voice to the sex workers and that their opinion regarding the definition of measures concerning them must be valued. During the development of the **Porto G** recommendations for the redefinition of the legal framework on sex work in Portugal, a questionnaire for consultation of the target population was developed. This data collection aims to meet (in a more structured way) the sex workers opinion on the matter under discussion. This consultation process is still in progress and several teams that develop work with this population continue to join efforts to know their opinion. On the other hand, **Porto G** integrates different networks in Portugal (RTS - Rede sobre Trabalho Sexual/ National Network on Sex Work) and in Europe (INDOORS- Support and Empowerment of Female Sex Workers and Trafficked Women in Indoor Context). Within these networks, sex workers are called to participate in the design and implementation of campaigns and advocacy activities to increase a public awareness. For example, 2 campaigns were created

last year (one National other European), in order to change the public's opinion on sex workers rights. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R2VEIkTTHo> promoted by INDOORS and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUU3Um1PwAY> by RTS).

• ATTEND TO THE COMMUNITY FEARS

It is good practice to think of an issue in an integrated, holistic way. The stigma, the worries and the fears of a community should be acknowledged, to gain some empathy and understanding. Through empathy, it is easier to tackle any irrationality or discrimination and allay the fears so that a realistic, negotiated solution is more likely to be achieved. It is useful to offer something in return to the local community, to involve them in our interventions and also to give them an opportunity to participate and to express their worries. Sometimes organizing local cultural events or a community open day, to form good relationships with the local community, are good strategies. Also, being able to offer practical solutions to issues affecting a community can change perceptions.

// Within **North Liverpool CAB** intervention area organisations have come together to arrange community events that can help in allaying the fears about specific groups living within the community. Within the Norris Green area of Liverpool there has been a significant increase in the number of households of Polish origin. The Local Housing Association, the police and local advice agencies came together to provide a Family Fun Day with a Polish cultural theme. This brought the community together in a relaxed, fun way to help dispel any preconceptions people from the local community may have about Polish people and it helped to forge links and break down perceived barriers. In North Liverpool Citizens Advice Bureau it is important to us that our workforce both paid and voluntary reflect the communities in which we work so in our recruitment drives we will often encourage specific groups to apply to the bureau, such as older people, people from other ethnic backgrounds, students, so we have a diverse workforce who can bring different skills and life experiences and have empathy with the clients.

// In **APDES – PORTO G** – we believe that it is important to work with the different target audiences to determine the greater or lesser vulnerability of sex workers, due to their exposure to health and well-being situations of risk and social exclusion. Based on this, the project's intervention also involves the owners and receptionists of sex work venues. Since **Porto G** began

to establish close relationships with sex workers, the increasing sense of trust from the owners regarding the team became notorious.

It is essential to establish a close relationship with these actors, in order to raise their awareness regarding the adoption of safety and hygienic measures within their establishments.

Since **Porto G** refers individuals to community services, it is also important to promote training programs aimed at the first line professionals (like administrative professionals), in order to improve their awareness regarding the clients' specificities (migrants, sex workers, transgender) and minimize situations of discrimination.

Every time a **GIRUGaia** team arrives to a new intervention territory, we try to get in touch with the community. In these moments, we take the opportunity to talk about our work, to explain its benefits, not only to our publics, but also to the general community, and to listen to people general concerns.

2

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF EMPOWERMENT

Assuming that one of the main goals of our intervention is to empower our publics, as it happens with any other kind of intervention, it is essential to find way to measure the impact of our work in this specific area.

The partners' debate on the impacts of empowerment was based on three main issues: the importance of evaluating the impacts of empowerment, how it can be done and challenges to measure this process. The group discussed these categories in a broader context, considering the different issues and areas of each organization's work.

A • IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF EMPOWERMENT

In outreach work, evaluation is often perceived as something demanded by funders to "control" service providers and as a dull requirement one must perform in order to get funded. However, evaluation should be seen as much more than this. Evaluation is the most effective way to improve the adequacy of services delivered to each target group. It is a tool to identify gaps and omissions in project planning and its implementation and it also helps workers to understand the value of their work, ergo empowering them.

Evaluation is also an opportunity to widen participation. Through the assessment of our work's impact, beneficiaries of the activities have an opportunity to share their opinions about the project and to what extent their needs and expectations were fulfilled. In fact, service beneficiaries should actively participate in project planning, implementation and evaluation, which is an empowering practice in itself.

The main aim of measuring the impact of ones work is to verify whether results of undertaken activities and actions meet predefined objectives. This should

be done by developing an evaluation plan that starts in the beginning of the intervention, that is ongoing through the all project implementation and that also happens in its final stage.

Evaluation should therefore be considered as a central activity to any project, and time and resources should be allocated to it.

B • HOW TO EVALUATE

Evaluating the impacts of one's intervention should imply four fundamental principles:

- **Utility**

The evaluation questions should be clearly defined and always have in mind that the data reached by evaluation should be useful to all the project stakeholders.

- **Feasibility**

We should be realistic when designing an evaluation plan. Time, resources and budget available should all be taken in consideration when thinking about what and how to evaluate. In fact, it is better to evaluate only one or two activities well, that to conduct a poor evaluation of an entire project. Has in so many other things in life, sometimes, "less is more".

- **Honesty**

One should be honest when collecting information and selecting which data to analyse. We should also be prepared to encounter results that are unexpected or surprising and deal with them in an honest way.

- **Confidentiality**

The evaluation process should respect the same confidentiality principles that all our intervention is subjected to. The respect for the target-group must always be the cornerstone of any of our activities.

Specifically for organizations like the ones in this project, that work mainly with vulnerable populations and that sometimes lack the needed human and financial resources, it would be interesting to apply what Fetterman et al. (1996, in EMCDDA, 2001) defines as "Empowerment evaluation": "This describes an evaluation which enables stakeholders in a given project to develop appropriate and useful approaches to self-evaluation which will promote the development

of the project rather than simply focusing on satisfying funders. "

C • SELF-EVALUATION

Given that the same lack of resources sometimes affects the NGO's ability to develop external evaluation processes, because these require hiring evaluation experts, it is important to mention the possibility of self-evaluation.

Even though it might be seen as less reliable, it is a very valuable strategy and it presents many advantages that should not be ignored:

- Higher sustainability (project workers can lead the evaluation process themselves),
- Gives project staff more power and control;
- Demystifies evaluation (it starts being seen as a tool to help improve the project's, not an external threat)

- It is a group activity that should involve all project personal, peers, volunteers, beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders.

- Easier to become an ongoing process (from project planning until project follow up activities)

- It avoids introducing sensible issues to external elements (it can be problematic to introduce issues to outside people, taking into account that relation and trust is essential part of empowering people.

It is consensual to all partners that the impact of an empowering intervention is something hard to measure. Some problems can occur at the very beginning of the evaluation process, due to difficulty in defining the concept of empowerment. And others have to do with the fact that empowerment is something hard to specify in a concrete manner.

Therefore, one can sometimes measure results of actions and interventions, but we have to remember that this doesn't necessarily means we are truly measuring empowerment.

Because the concept of empowerment is not easily materialized in actions or indicators, it is fundamental to have a clear and consensual definition of empowerment in mind when designing activities or services, as a way of simplifying the evaluation of the impact of any empowering intervention.

3

CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS TO THE PROMOTION OF EMPOWERMENT

Having in mind the main challenges and constraints to the promotion of empowerment all partners have to deal in their daily practice, there are several aspects worth mentioning. Our goal is to list some of these challenges and possible forms of overcoming them, so that other professionals can anticipate them as normal steps of any empowering intervention and not to be discouraged by them.

A • NON FORMAL EDUCATION VS. FORMAL EDUCATION

One of the first challenges named by the partners has to do with the non-formal education strategies, which we commonly use to educate and to pass information to vulnerable publics. In general, we feel that both formal, and non-formal, strategies have an important role in education. But concerning our publics in particular, non-formal practices seems to be more appealing, accessible, and, therefore, effective. We often work with people that are undocumented, illegal or that have judicial problems, and an excessively formal and bureaucratic process would only constitute a barrier to access information.

The fact that formal education has a different and higher recognition in general society is sometimes felt as a challenge or a constraint to the recognition on our work and its importance. In this sense, we feel that it is necessary to value non-formal education strategies, but without transforming them into formal ones. The systematization of the training processes and investment in the development of the skills needed to implement non-formal education strategies is a way of diminishing these differences. In the same way, it would allow professionals to have access to this specific kind of training in their formal education contexts (like universities or so) and, therefore, to be more prepared to deal with vulnerable publics.

B • CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Given that there are different levels of empowerment and the promotion of empowerment is a holistic process that entails the involvement of several stakeholders – individuals, communities, professionals, politicians, etc. – cultural aspects, namely, economic, historical and religious, have an inevitable influence in our practice. In this sense, it is important to expect possible cultural constraints and to embrace them as particularities of our intervention that have to be dealt with. In this perspective, all the historical, geopolitical, religious or economic aspects we find in each of our cultures are a precious heritage in terms of accessing to ideas, opportunities and resources, even if they are not easy to improve and develop.

C • BUREAUCRATIC AND TRADITIONAL SERVICES

As NGO's that work with vulnerable publics, articulating with public services is a mandatory part of our intervention. Given that these are fundamental partners, sometimes it is inevitable to feel subordinate to the timings, rigidity and bureaucracy inherent to their work. In this particular aspect it is interesting to understand that in spite of cultural differences, all partners feel that this is an equally daunting challenge. In general, public services are currently upset by the growing bureaucracy, and sometimes end up stopping people from accessing to benefits / services. In these cases people undergo a process of disempowerment, which makes them dependent from an inaccessible and exclusive system, instead of letting them grow as active citizens. At the same time we are witnessing a state which is stepping back from one of its further tasks, which is continuously reduced through the transfer of several services to NGOs.

On the other hand, a subsequent level in which public entities offer constraints is related to the vertical and paternalistic mentality often found in the network services. This attitude, which comes from an old and traditional view of services, sees the professional as the only one able to recognize problems, identify the causes and suggest resolutions. In this "vertical" dynamic the client is simply supposed to rely on professionals and to follow their directions, while no value is recognized in the "horizontal dimension" of the relationship, where the client brings his active participation in the process of help. Concerning possible ways to exceed this kind of obstacles, the establishment of partnership, which

entail easier access to the individuals referred by our services, the creation of proximal professional relationships with public services colleagues, or providing workshops and seminars, are all ways of mediating our public relations with services, of raising awareness about their specific problems and of advocating for their rights as citizens.

D • EVALUATION DIFFICULTIES

As it has been said, when promoting empowerment, it can be difficult to understand which changes are directly related to project's activities. We can be able to identify some changes as a result of our work, but actually they can also be consequences of many other factors. Evaluation in natural context rarely gives us the opportunity to design an evaluation plan based on a pre-test/post-test methodology and to fully control all the variables. However if we have evaluation in mind from the beginning of the project we will be more alert to any relevant changes and we will start collecting as much information as possible from the beginning. Another great difficulty related to evaluation is the lack of resources. There is a great focus on intervention and project implementation and evaluation is hardly ever seen as a priority in this field of work. Organisations lack, not only money, but also time, or skilled people who could assume the responsibility of evaluating. Self-evaluation can help with the lack of resources and with the motivation towards evaluation, but to gain expertise in this area it would be important to have at least one external evaluation expert to help workers develop their evaluation skills.

E • REDUCED FUNDING

Having in mind the definition of empowerment as a collaborative process, which happens within the individual and the different spheres of his life, evaluation of empowering approaches becomes a central aspect to this kind of work. In the same sense, it is also essential that teams have time and resources to think of holistic and creative forms of intervention, so that their services go beyond the simple fulfillment of immediate needs. For all of this to take place, stable and sufficient funding is essential and for that it becomes crucial to think about ways to promote the continuity of our work. Although it can be a difficult task sometimes, it is vital to have it as a priority and to invest in the dissemination of the importance of our work and in funding activities.

This manual in particular, aims to be a set of guidelines and recommendations for other professionals wishing to empower vulnerable communities. Although we are aware that the manual is far from providing answers to all questions, the good practices here listed rest on the concrete experiences of four European organisations with many years of experience of working directly with a variety of vulnerable communities in a range of contexts.

The set of recommendations previously highlighted in this manual can be used as tools to help and inspire other European organizations and individuals to fully implement the empowerment concept in their projects and professional practices. The methodologies shared in this manual were chosen due to its high transferability and adaptability to different settings and target-groups.

This document gathered and systematized a great deal of knowledge that was diffused between the different project partners with the objective of helping the readers to strengthen their organizations capacity to promote empowerment in their target groups and in themselves.

After these 2 years of working together and intensive practice sharing we believe some of the insights reached should be underlined in the conclusion.

First off all the idea that the implementation of a holistic and well-defined empowerment plan can be an effective intervention strategy. The organization should be able to successfully articulate the relationship and empathy towards the target population with an effective and intentional evaluation, which can contribute to the design of an effective advocacy plan.

The holistic nature can be enforced by establishing horizontal relations and the final-clients participation in all the project/action phases and also by raising strong and heterogeneous partnerships in order to diversify the services offered and also to raise awareness about the target-groups' specificities near these stakeholders.

Evaluation appears to be a core concept when developing empowerment strategies, being absolutely necessary to plan it as a fundamental task, which allows workers to monitor and rethink their own practices and also the real needs of their target-groups. By considering different voices and promoting evidence-based practices it will be easier to design an adequate advocacy plan to influence policy and contextual changes.

SECTION 4 CONCLUSION

The main objective of the ETNE project was to explore experiences and methodologies used by a group of European organizations in order to empower vulnerable individuals.

If it's true that professionals can be empowered by the act of helping and empowering others, it is also important to highlight that Empowerment is not an individual process but happens within a certain context and community. It will only be possible to promote empowerment if the organization and its workers are engaged and committed with this purpose. An empowered professional can be conscious about his/her limits, can better manage resources and expectations and contribute to the sustainability of his/her project and target-groups.

There are also contextual constraints that may affect empowerment's full implementation, namely political or legal constraints and the lack of human and financial resources; however we deeply believe that the difficulties and obstacles can be creative opportunities, so they should be reflected upon in a constructive way. Feasibility is a very important concept in this aspect, because it allows professionals to focus on which tasks can be implemented, rather than being focused on the ones that seem impossible.

In spite of the similarities and differences of each partner involved in this project, it was consensual that all the methodologies identified in this manual are relevant to the promotion of empowerment and reflect desirable practices which the professionals should address, regardless of social, institutional or cultural constraints.

Finally we hope that people find this Manual useful when training their target-groups, and to promote debate and reflection about how their intervention can be improved in terms of the autonomy and sustainability of their target-groups. This can be also a useful tool for the more experienced workers, thus becoming even better at doing their work or get in contact with other practices or partners promoting empowerment.

SECTION 5

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SECTION 6

CONTACTS

The contact details for each partner organisation are in this section. Based upon the examples of good practice listed in section 3, we encourage you to contact any project partner that you feel might have particular insights or relevance to your particular work.



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