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 Οι κοινωνικές υπηρεσίες κοινής ωφελείας: ο συντονισμός των ευρωπαϊκών, εθνικών και τοπικών δράσεων για την κοινωνική ένταξη. Το παράδειγμα του δικτύου του ΕΚΚΑ

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Βιβλιογραφική αναφορά:

Social Services of General Interest: Coordinating European, National and Local Actions for Social Inclusion.
The EKKA Network as a Case-Study

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Ο συντονισμός των ευρωπαϊκών, εθνικών και τοπικών δράσεων για την κοινωνική ένταξη.
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ABSTRACT

This paper contributes to the development of a broader framework for the identification of the key features of a functional system of social services and benefits. This should allow for the elaboration of a social services' network ruled by common general principles and values. Related to this subject is the aim to determine –based on international experience and practices– the best way to deal with both local and national needs and vice versa. After introducing the framework of analysis used to interpret the experiences of social services providers across the European Union, we present the EKKA (National Centre for Social Solidarity) Network as an example of a coordination pole connecting the European, the national as well as the local level. We conclude this paper by highlighting the civic added value of the activities of social services, and voluntary social services in particular, with regard to the European Union and in the light of criteria such as their non-profit character, the special legal mandate given to them as civic actors, their mission within society, working with volunteers in particular, and their quality management system used to maintain adequate quality standards.

KEY WORDS: Social inclusion, social services, local authorities, NGOs, voluntarism

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Στο παρόν άρθρο επιχειρείται η εξειδίκευση των κύριων χαρακτηριστικών ενός λειτουργικού συστήματος κοινωνικών υπηρεσιών και παροχών. Η εξειδίκευση αυτή επιτρέπει αφενός τη δημιουργία ενός δικτύου κοινωνικών υπηρεσιών που διέπεται από κοινές θεμελιώδεις αρχές και αξίες, αφετέρου δε τον καθορισμό –σύμφωνα με τη διεθνή εμπειρία και πρακτική– του καλύτερου τρόπου αντιμετώπισης τόσο των εθνικών όσο και των τοπικών αναγκών. Μετά την εισαγωγή του πλαισίου ανάλυσης για την ερμηνεία της εμπειρίας των κοινωνικών υπηρεσιών στην Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση, παρουσιάζεται το δίκτυο του ΕΚΚΑ (Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικής Αλληλεγγύης) ως παράδειγμα ενός συντονιστικού κέντρου που συνδέει το ευρωπαϊκό, το εθνικό και το τοπικό επίπεδο. Τέλος, τονίζεται η κοινωνική προστιθέμενη αξία της δραστηριότητας των κοινωνικών υπηρεσιών, ιδίως των εθελοντικών, με έμφαση στον μη κερδοσκοπικό τους χαρακτήρα, τον ειδικό ρόλο και την αποστολή τους στην κοινωνία, την αξιοποίηση των εθελοντών, καθώς και στο σύστημα ποιοτικής διαχείρισης που χρησιμοποιούν, προκειμένου να επιτυγχάνουν τις κατάλληλες ποιοτικές προδιαγραφές.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Κοινωνική ένταξη, κοινωνικές υπηρεσίες, Τοπική Αυτοδιοίκηση, ΜΚΟ, εθελοντισμός

1. Introduction

In 2006, the European Commission submitted a Communication on *Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Social services of general interest in the European Union* [COM (2006) 177, 26.4.2006]. The Communication is a follow-up to the White Paper on services of general interest [COM (2004) 374, 12.5.2004], which announced a "systematic approach in order to identify and recognize the specific characteristics of social and health services of general interest and to clarify the framework in which they operate and they can be modernized". That aim was also reiterated in the Social Agenda and the Community Lisbon programme. The Communication on social services of general interest deals with the way social services in the member states are organized, how they function and in what way they contribute to social and territorial cohesion. In addition to these, the Communication deals with maintaining European fundamental rights and securing an adequate level of social protection. This paper should make a contribution towards this direction. It does not intend to merely list the social services provided by different organizations in Greece, but it also intends to play a part in the development of the European profile of social services. The purpose of this article is not to transplant any specific national system or model, but rather to focus on the Greek example and single out some "building blocks" of broader significance within the EUs' social and political context. Also, in the pursuit of the objectives of Article 136 of the Treaty, which establishes the European Community, to stress the importance of cooperation between the European institutions and charitable associations and foundations as institutions responsible for social welfare establishments and services (Maastricht Treaty, Declaration N° 23 in cooperation with charitable organizations).

The ambition of this paper would be to contribute to the development of a broader framework for the identification of the key features of a *functional system of social services and benefits*. This should allow for the elaboration of a social services' network ruled by *common general principles and values*. Related to this ambition is the aim to determining –based on international experience and practices– the best way to deal with both local and national needs. Therefore, the first part of the paper introduces the framework of analysis used to interpret the experiences of social services providers across the European Union. In the second part, we present the EKKA Network, as a case study, as an example of a coordination pole connecting the European, the national and the local level. EKKA (National Centre for Social Solidarity) is a government organisation coordinating a network of national foundations, voluntary social services (NGOs) and local authorities. We conclude this paper by highlighting the civic added value of the activities of social services, and voluntary social services in particular, with regard to the European Union and in the light of criteria such as their non-profit character, the special legal mandate given to them as civic actors, their mission within society, working with volunteers in particular, and their quality management system used to maintain adequate quality standards.

2. Social Services in the European Union
2.1 Legal Basis and Requirements

For the European Union, modernizing social services is considered to be one of the most significant issues faced today. It has been acknowledged that social services play a vital role for social cohesion, but also that their transformation and job-creation potential make them an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy. The conclusions of the European Council in March 2006

confirmed this aspect, emphasizing that the internal market for services should be made fully operational, while preserving the European social model. Nevertheless, following the vote in the European Parliament on the first reading of the proposal for a directive on services in the internal market in February 2006, the Commission excluded health services from the field of application of its amended proposal. Thus, "social services relating to social housing, childcare and support of families and persons in need" are excluded from the scope of the Directive.

Initiatives taken by the European institutions should be seen in the context of the shared responsibility of the Community and of the member states for services of general economic interest, established by article 16 of the EC Treaty. Although the Commission conducts an important process of consultation and survey on this topic, it should be recalled that the existing EC framework respects the *subsidiarity principle*. According to this principle, member states are free to define what they mean by the term services of general economic interest, or in particular by social services of general interest. Within the member states, public authorities define the obligations and mission of general interest of these services, as well as the way they are to be organized. The EC framework requires member states to take certain rules into account while they determine the arrangements for applying the objectives and principles they have established. Therefore, it is clear that the division of tasks and powers between the European Union and the public authorities in the member states leads to a shared responsibility of the Union and the member states. However, detailed definition of services to be provided and their delivery remain in the sphere of responsibility of the member states.

As regards the field of social protection and the fight against social exclusion in particular, the application of competition rules should be seen through a different perspective: that of social services of general interest. The notion itself of *service of general interest* is not to be found in the text of the Treaty. It derives from the term *service of general economic interest* used in articles 16 and 86 §2 of the Treaty, which covers in particular certain services provided by the big network industries, such as transport, postal services, energy and communications. This list is not exclusive and the term 'service of general economic interest' also extends to any other economic activity subject to public service obligations. In Community practice, the term "service of general interest" refers to services of economic nature that member states or the Community assign to specific public service obligations by virtue of a general interest criterion. This could include market and non-market services. Terminology differences, semantic confusion and different traditions in the member states may lead to misunderstandings in the discussion on European level. In the member states, different terms and definitions are used in the context of services of general interest, thus reflecting different historical, economic, cultural and political developments.

On the other hand, the terms 'service of general interest' and 'service of general economic interest' should not be confused with the term *public service*. This term might prove to be less precise, as it can have different meanings and can therefore lead to confusion. The term sometimes refers to the fact that a service is provided to the general public, occasionally highlights that a service has been assigned a specific role for the public interest, and it sometimes refers to the ownership or status of the agent providing the service. Further confusion may exist between the terms *public service* and *public sector*, the latter covering all public administrations together, where all enterprises are controlled by public authorities.

It should also be recalled that it is up to competent authorities on the national, regional or local level to determine, organize, finance and control services of general interest. This shared responsibility is based on article 16 of the EC Treaty, which assigns to the Community and the

member states the task of determining, within the framework of their respective duties, that their policies allow the operators of services of general interest to accomplish their missions and goals. The right of member states to impose specific obligations of public service on economic operators and to verify the observance of those obligations is also stipulated in article 86 §2 of the EC Treaty.

The definition of social services in Europe, in addition to health services, could be summarized in two main categories of social services:[1]

- Statutory and complementary *social security schemes*, organized in various forms (mutual or occupational organizations), covering the main risks of life, such as those linked to health, ageing, occupational accidents, unemployment, retirement and disability.

- Other *essential services* provided directly to the person, playing a *preventive and social cohesion role* and consisting of customized assistance to facilitate social inclusion and safeguard fundamental rights. They comprise, first of all, assistance for people facing personal crisis (such as debt, unemployment, drug addiction or family plight). Secondly, they include activities to ensure that the people concerned are able to completely reintegrate into society (rehabilitation, language training for immigrants) and, in particular, the labour market (occupational training and reintegration). These services complement and support the role of families caring for the youngest and the oldest members of society. Thirdly, these services include activities to reintegrate persons with long-term health or disability problems into society. Fourthly, they also include social housing, providing housing for disadvantaged citizens or socially less advantaged groups. Certain services can obviously include all of these four dimensions.

2.2 Social services as pillars of European society

As pointed out in several European documents, under EC law, social services do not constitute a legally distinct category of service within services of general interest. Nevertheless, the list above demonstrates their special role as *pillars of the European society and economy*. This is primarily a result of their contribution to several essential values and objectives of the Community, such as achieving a high level of employment, social protection, health protection, equality between men and women, and economic, social and territorial cohesion. Their value is also a function of the vital nature of the needs they are intended to cover, thus guaranteeing the application of fundamental rights such as human dignity and integrity.

The public discussion in Europe on services of general interest has confirmed their importance as one of the pillars of the European model of society. Despite some differences in views and perspectives, there is a significant consensus on the need to ensure the provision of high-quality and affordable services of general interest to all citizens and enterprises in the European Union. There is also a common concept of services of general interest in the Union. This concept reflects Community values and goals and it is based on a set of common elements, including universal service, continuity, and quality of service, affordability and accessibility, as well as user and consumer protection. For the European Union citizens, this access and this protection are essential components of European citizenship as well as necessary in order to allow them to fully enjoy their fundamental rights. For enterprises, the availability of high-quality services of general interest is an indispensable prerequisite for a competitive business environment. Both aspects contribute to the achievement of the strategic goal of the European Union "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". As the Commission highlighted in the

Green and the White Paper on services of general interest, these services have helped to achieve the Union's objectives in a large number of Community policies and vice versa.

In line with the principles set out in article 16 of the EC Treaty and article 36 of the of Fundamental Rights' Charter, the Commission is committed to taking full account of the specific role of services of general interest in the policies and activities within its sphere of competence. The European Union seems determined to have a positive contribution to the development of services of general interest as part of the European model, while respecting the diversity of traditions, structures and situations prevalent the member states. At this crucial point in the development of the European Union, particular attention must be paid not only to the situation in the new member states, but also to their specific needs formed in particular from the transformation of their economies during the last two decades.

In an effort to elaborate some *criteria and/or organizational characteristics* of social services of general interest, we should highlight the fact that they operate on the *solidarity* principle basis, which is required in particular by the non-selection of risks or the absence of individual equivalence between contributions and benefits. As mentioned above, social services of general interest are comprehensive and personalized, integrating the response to differing needs in order to guarantee fundamental human rights and protect the most vulnerable people. As for non profit organizations, they address the most difficult situations with assistance from voluntary workers. Social services are strongly rooted in (local) cultural traditions, which often find their expression in the proximity between the provider of the service and the beneficiary. Social services of general interest have an important role to play in this aspect. By virtue of the solidarity principle, these services focus on the person. They are person-oriented services, which take into account the beneficiaries' specific needs. The relationship between providers and beneficiaries cannot be categorized as a typical supplier-consumer relationship, and it requires the financial participation of a third party.

2.3 Quality, sustainability and modernization

As a result of all the aforementioned features, social services of general interest guarantee for all citizens the possibility to enjoy their fundamental rights and a high level of social protection, facilitating social and territorial cohesion. The *Open Method of Coordination* (OMC) could prove, in the areas of social inclusion and social protection, to be particularly useful in order to evaluate best practices in different member states. At the same time, social services of general interest should be organized and regulated as closely as possible to the citizens and the principle of subsidiarity must be strictly respected. One of the *guiding principles* of the Union's approach is that of proximity, enabling public authorities to work closely to the citizens, on a local level. This principle is related to ensuring cohesion and effective universal access to services of general interest. Universal service is a key concept in order to ensure effective accessibility of essential services.

On a legal basis, the definition of the missions and objectives to be carried out by social services of general interest falls into the member states' competence; yet, Community rules may have an impact on the "tools" for establishing and financing such services.[2] A clear distinction between the missions and the instruments of social services should be made, in a context of increased needs of the beneficiaries and particular demands for more solidarity, voluntary collaboration and social inclusion of vulnerable groups. This clarification will help member states which provide social services thought the market sector to reap the possible benefits competition might bring along.[3] Providing *legal certainty* to such questions is quite significant, as the application of Community law to the provision of services of general interest has not always been sufficiently clear. A series of

questions have been raised regarding the application of state aid rules to the financing of services of general interest and the rules on procurement and service concessions. Legal certainty should improve in this area, without prejudice to the case law of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). The Commission and member states have already achieved the modernization of the existing public procurement rules and launched initiatives in the areas of state aid, with regard to public-private partnerships (PPPs). However, the member states' efforts to define and design the missions of services of general interest often interact with Community law in two areas, namely financing and awarding contracts.[4]

However, there has not been a detailed definition on European level of what *quality is*. Many European documents use the terms of sustainability, continuity and reliability, accessibility and availability, very abstract notions, that have to be combined with tangible evidence and cannot be seen as typical quality standards, but rather as indicators of a political framework for action. A key notion in the European debate upon further development of social protection and the social model is "modernizing social protection". High priority is given to modernization and related notions, such as efficiency, legal certainty and transparency, while changing needs, participation and sustainability are under consideration. Often modernization is seen exclusively through the viewpoint of cost saving. The idea is that services have to become more efficient, prices more transparent and costs as a whole must be reduced. Nevertheless, such a view does not take into account the values and objectives of the European Union found in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe and the fundamental rights therein enshrined.

The notion of quality is important in order to demonstrate that, besides a market-oriented/economic viewpoint, social objectives too have to be considered when looking at the performance of social services. To a large extent, quality depends on resources society recognizes and provides, including the significant resources owned and brought in by the charitable organisations themselves, which in part they receive by donations they solicit for. It may be possible to find a quick understanding as to structural quality trails. How many beds/places must be available to have a full coverage? What is the staffing ratio (use of professional workers)? But the key aspect is how the very processes of assistance are designed in order to achieve the agreed performance objectives and have results. In legislative terms, these aspects are taken into account mostly by agreements being supposed to be made only with providers of services that fulfill the requirements of capacity to perform, economic viability and financial prudence when rendering the service. Therefore, efficiency and transparency are integral parts of such agreements, along with legal provisions contributing to legal certainty.

3. The link between the EKKA as government organisation and municipalities and NGOs: National and local cooperation
3.1 A brief account of the EKKA Network

As mentioned before, there is a general trend towards modernization and upgrading a social services of general interest. Although social services are organised quite differently in each member state, certain general aspects of this trend are still evident, namely the introduction of benchmarking methods, quality assurance and the users' involvement in administration. Furthermore, the decentralisation of the organisation of these services towards local and regional level, and the outsourcing of public sector tasks from the private sector, with the public authorities becoming regulators and guardians of competition and effective organisation on national, local

or regional level, can be mentioned as well. In a country like Greece, where public administration was one of the most ineffective, emphasis is laid on connecting the European to the national and the local level. The starting point for the EKKA network was the European background on social inclusion, namely the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000, recognizing that the extent of poverty and social exclusion in Europe is unacceptable. The public authorities have set as one of their priorities to address coordinated action, counselling and the use of indicators for increasing quality and accessibility of social services, in order to deal with social exclusion and enhance social inclusion. This goal can be better achieved by linking up the discussion about quality and accessibility of social services with National Action Plans on social inclusion (NAPs/incl.), by connecting European debates, national processes and local activities and by endorsing the social indicators as relevant to the work of social services.

3.1.1 Definition and legal context

The National Centre for Social Solidarity (EKKA) is a state organisation located in Athens. It comes under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. It was established on the basis of the article 6 of Law N° 3106/2003 on *the development and reform of the social care system*. The Centre is administered by a five-member Council, three of which are selected by the Minister of Health and Social Solidarity and the other two are appointed by the National Federation of the Employed in the Public Health Sector and the National Federation of Civil Servants, both national representative trade-unions of public sector employees.

3.1.2 Objectives and target groups

The objective of EKKA is the coordination of the network that provides social support services to individuals, families, groups and populations facing emotional crisis or in need of immediate social aid. In particular, the services provided include:
- Immediate social interventions
- Provision of information on issues regarding welfare and social solidarity
- Counselling on individual, group and community level
- Short-term psychological support to individuals, families, groups and populations
- Coordination and implementation of social solidarity programmes as well as voluntary support to cope with immediate needs
- Short-term provision of accommodation, food and clothing to citizens in a state of emergency.

Immediate social aid is provided to individuals, families or groups facing severe problems or situations of crisis or social exclusion or social hazards because of natural phenomena or a combination of psychosocial, organic or/and financial factors which the people mentioned above are unable to cope with. The EKKA Network of services addresses and aims at the following individuals and groups:
- Abused children and adolescents
- Neglected or wandering about children and adolescents
- Children and adolescents who have run away from home
- Victims of domestic violence
- Adults and old people in need of immediate social aid
- Individuals in crisis and intense emotional state etc.

3.1.3 EKKA Network services
- Three-digit Crisis Hotline Service 197
- Social Support Centres (SSC)
- Crisis Management Service
- Urgent Intervention Service
- Short-Term Residential Shelters

3.2 The EKKA as a coordinating organisation
3.2.1 Coordinating actions for psychological support

As mentioned before, the Social Support Centres (SSC) operating in different areas, constitute the peripheral entrances to the urgent social care system. The specialized personnel of the local agencies of the Network, i.e. social workers, psychologists and sociologists, make admissions and evaluations of incidences and provide psychological support and information. Eventually, incidences are referred to the short-term Residential Shelters. Admissions are subject to the person's consent and agreement. In the case of minors and/or persons who are not capable of giving their legal consent, standard procedure through the Justice Department and the General Attorney is followed. In the psychological support part, the EKKA is integrated and follows international trends and methods. In most European countries, there are common trends and actions towards the mentally ill. First, nowadays there is massive condemnation and denunciation of asylum policies. The shift is from asylum policies and hospital inmates towards open centres for day-treatment, which provide every-day psychological support. The EKKA network of psychologists and social workers is a front-line structure of community care and social help, playing also the role of preventive mental treatment, which often leads to social exclusion. This function is part of a national policy for the promotion of community support and the prevention of social exclusion. It also takes into account and brings down to the local level the guidelines and recommendations of international organizations, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO). In fact, WHO has often stressed the potential and the value of primary health care in the mental health sector as well. Such primary structures should be as close to people as possible, aiming at the prevention of mental illness. A second principle guiding the EKKA actions is that of psychological support within the local community. It is acknowledged that the provision of mental health care and psychological support is far more effective for the patient when provided in his/her own environment and community than in a hospital. Such treatment has important results and gives more chances for a better quality of life of the persons concerned, in respect of their rights. On the other hand, such approaches help save money and reorientate resources within the social budget.

3.2.2 The "Help at home" programme

The EKKA coordinates all local "Help at home" actions run by local authorities all over Greece. Many Municipalities from all over Greece participate in a programme called "Help at home" run and mainly financed by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. In that case, there is an official cooperation with the EKKA Network, regulated by the Ministry. Whilst it is widely believed that asylum institutions have more or less failed to ensure dignity and provide effective treatment to psychological or family crises, the "Help at home" programme run by many Municipal authorities and coordinated by the EKKA aims exactly at mobilizing all supportive mechanisms, such as the family and the neighbourhood. The competent social services are taking advantage of such structures in order to improve –above all– the quality of services provided. This goal is served by

the proximity principle, according to which the competent social services should be accessible and close to the beneficiary, close to his/her residence. On the other hand, mobile units can facilitate accessibility to the social support services, intervene "on the spot" in the case of family crises, etc. The implementation of such a programme implies the elaboration and application of a coordinated policy, which should take into account and evaluate the needs of the population, according to scientific research, assessments and data. Whilst the process of elaborating a specific social policy has a predominantly political character, it should integrate a process of counselling and social dialogue involving a great number of social actors. The EKKA aims at the development of such action plans and programmes by setting timetables and providing scientific standards and human resources.

3.2.3 The establishment of the network

The EKKA Network has been established and funded by the State as an independent organisation, namely it is self-administered and makes its own planning. The EKKA Network has the ambition to develop into an *expanding network of services*, of psychological and social support, towards specific disadvantaged individuals or groups, towards families facing some serious situations, crisis or social exclusion. The EKKA services intervene in cases of *emergency situations*, in order to prevent the crisis from climaxing and becoming a "chronic disease". An individual or a group of people are in need of immediate social intervention when they face some intense problems or crises and the danger of social exclusion due to social and/or psychological factors resulting from a combination of financial difficulties, social status or even natural disasters. As a matter of fact, one of the very first interventions of the EKKA Emergency Unit was in the island of *Lefkada*, following a disastrous earthquake. Today, this Emergency Unit is equipped with a state-of-the-art vehicle, meant to be the Head Quarters of the EKKA intervention on the spot, when there is no electric power, no telephone communications etc. This might happen during a big natural disaster, a terrorist attack or in stand-by during a big international event, as it was the case in the 2004 Olympic Games. The EKKA services are in a way *supplementary* to other social services of the State or those organised by local authorities and NGOs. The aim is to make the EKKA a coordinating pole of all social services. Only networking with NGOs and local authorities can help achieve this goal. A first step taken towards this direction was the use of computer networks and technology linking all EKKA agencies, helping exchange data and share experience in order to allow for a more general assessment of the situation and perspectives. In this aspect, a double effort of rationalisation and systematisation has been adopted in the EKKA services, namely:
- The "197" Telephone Line
- The Service for Immediate Social Intervention, including the Reception Unit, the Intervention on the spot and the Few-Hours Accommodation
- The Centres of Social Support
- The Guest Rooms for short-term accommodation and
- The Rapid Intervention Team for Natural Disasters etc.

3.3 Collaboration with local authorities and NGOs

3.3.1 Collaboration with municipalities and local authorities

After the first phase of the EKKA's institution and early development, the Network today is linked to the regional and municipal services of social care, on the local level and in close cooperation with local authorities. In this aspect, one could mention some good and some bad examples.

We shall focus on the Greater Area of Athens, where we have examples of excellent, immediate and useful cooperation with the Municipality of Athens or Piraeus, and bad examples, like the Municipality of *Drapetsona*, one of the poorest and socially vulnerable areas of the region, where the local Mayor claims a building where a local EKKA service has been established and the legal dispute has already reached the Courts. In fact, there are different degrees of commitment to this cooperation between the EKKA Network and local authorities. A "best practice" example could be the cooperation between the EKKA and the Municipality of Athens running a Centre for Abused Women, in a broad "social coalition" framework along with the State (Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity, Ministry of the Interior – Secretariat General for Gender Equality).

Cooperation with the Municipality of Piraeus is also very good. However, it is rather informal, that there is no contract between the EKKA and the Municipal Services. There is no official regulation for this collaboration; it is only daily practice dictating the rules of this cooperation, namely legal and administrative uncertainty. Despite the good practical results, it also means that the competent municipal services of Piraeus are not part of the Network. The EKKA and other Municipalities have an official cooperation. In some cases, this consists of sharing infrastructure, buildings, personnel and resources, as is the case in *Lavrio* (in the Athens region), an area of high unemployment and continual social problems. Many Municipalities across Greece participate in the so-called "Help at home" programme run and mainly financed by the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity. In that case, there is also an official cooperation with the EKKA Network regulated by the Ministry. The "Help at home" programme overlaps with the EKKA Network services, but out of Athens and Thessalonica, the EKKA is often coordinating appropriate actions. This happens when people from, e.g., Corinth call "197" demanding immediate social action. Then the EKKA refers the case to the local "Help at home" unit, that rushes to the spot of the crisis.

Still missing from this cooperation is the *immediate information through a computer* available in other units and services. At present, the EKKA agent who receives an abused child or a phone call for intervention in another town needs to make a few phone calls before transferring the case to a hospital or referring it to a local Centre for children or before taking whatever actions needed. This question is also related to the mater of full accessibility to social services. This computer network should not only link different EKKA services and agencies, but all partners of the Network as soon as possible.

3.3.2 Collaboration with NGOs

A second group of EKKA *partners* are the NGOs, mainly in the Athens and Thessalonica regions. One of the first priorities related to the task of expanding this Network was to revise the framework of cooperation and contracts with NGOs. The main legal and institutional provisions for the EKKA were set by a Law voted in 2003, transforming a "pilot project" of the Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity into the distinct organisation of today. Throughout 2004-2006, the Government, following the EKKA suggestions, in the same direction, has proposed a series of Decrees and regulatory texts. The reform of the legal framework of cooperation with NGOs has given the flexibility often needed in the cooperation between the public and the private sector. It gives EKKA e.g. the option, instead of hiring new personnel through a rather difficult bureaucratic procedure, to pass an immediate agreement with an NGO, which will appeal to its volunteers or employees to staff a specific service. The Government has turned over several buildings to the EKKA services, which remained unoccupied and out of service for months or

even for years before the Network offered a building to an NGO, which in turn occupied it and organised a service e.g. for abused children, following the Network's standards and guidelines. The exchange of clients is mutual between the EKKA and NGOs operating local or specialised agencies. Both sides serve as *instances of transmission* within the EKKA "social web".

The main aim of the recent legislative texts was to establish a certain control and evaluation of the quality of the services provided by the Network and its partners. The role of labelling, of the *accreditation* of NGOs to sign a contract with the EKKA, has been taken up by the National Council of Social Care (*ESYKF*). There are also some cases of a contract and an official commitment involving the EKKA, several Municipalities of *Thessalonica* Greater Area and 4 NGOs. This action is focused on children, teenagers and mothers with children who are faced with social exclusion. The contract has been signed by the Ministry, the EKKA, the Municipalities of *Kalamaria* and *Oreokastro*, and 4 NGOs specialized in social inclusion of the youth and social support for women, promoting e.g. employment for single mothers. The agreement for this 2-year cooperation was signed last year. This cooperation has resulted to an overall reaction to the specific problem; with the help of all actors, the EKKA service has developed and it provides a full service of *counselling and social support during the stay* of the children and/or the mothers in the EKKA local centre, in order to facilitate their reintegration to society or to the family as soon as possible. This local Network also helps women find a job and reintegrate them into the labour force. Also as a result of this "alliance", a Guesthouse for adolescent girls operates in an EKKA building at the area of *Phynicas* in Thessalonica, next to the Guesthouse for mothers with children. The Guesthouse for adolescent boys operates in *Oreokastro* and the Short-term Reception for abused children operates in Thessalonica, at the building of the *Papafion Foundation*. A similar agreement has been signed in Athens with several Municipalities of the greater area and the "*Hermes*" NGO of Parents and Friends of the Disable.[5] This service aims at the development of actions and programmes which will facilitate people with disabilities to deal with their daily problems and needs, as well as people in need of a temporary accommodation due to unexpected needs related to themselves or to their families. This agreement provides a 24-hour accommodation in the EKKA building at *Elliniko*, the area of the old Athens airport on the coast. The building has been accommodated to fulfil the specific needs and standards for this action and offer a "semi-independent" accommodation and training courses. This means that people are mainly responsible for cleaning, cooking, etc during their stay, while the EKKA agents offer help.

3.3.3 Statistics

In order to give an idea of the amount of cases dealt with by the EKKA in cooperation with local actors, we should give two figures: out of a monthly average of 540 interventions and interviews of any kind on behalf of the EKKA itself, an average of 71 were in cooperation with local partners. The referral cases (84.6%) involved very often some kind of *mediation or networking*. It seems that in all countries of the European Union, the same problems are more or less present and have to be dealt with. Although networking is very important for social service providers and highly esteemed by all, coordination and collaboration of the services seems to be a very difficult goal to achieve. Still, most of the time, networking takes place on a personal relation basis. This rather atypical procedure will be potentially undermined by the "labelling" and "contextualisation" of problem(s) groups.

3.4 The Future Vision for Social Inclusion

3.4.1 The human factor

This brief presentation had the ambition to give the reader a closer view of the EKKA actions, as a government organisation, in cooperation with local actors. Some examples of such cooperation were given and some points were made on the framework of this cooperation. However, the *human factor* cannot be easily described in such a presentation, that is the determination and the personal involvement of all agents, the EKKA agents in particular, who often volunteer for crisis situations or accept to work anytime of the day or the week, in order not to disappoint their "clients". They even sacrifice some of their family time for their duty and their work for the network. Or they sacrifice their summer holidays, as they did the period before, during and after the 2004 Olympic Games and the Special Olympics that took place in Athens in August-September 2004. The *future vision* of the EKKA network involves a *double significance of networking*: the first is, related to the existing frame of cooperations and partnerships and the second and most important, to the development of a national Head-Quarter, of a central Operation Centre coordinating social actions on the local or broader level depending on the situation. The EKKA Network participates in several European *fora* and projects, which facilitate the connection of the European and the national and local level, regarding the guiding principles, know-how and modernisation of social services.

3.4.2 Visibility of the network

The visibility of the network's activities has been sustained and increased throughout 2004-2006, taking various forms. It aimed at target groups, partners, decision-makers and the general public. It covered the local and national area; not only the members of the EKKA's administration initiated it, but also the staff and the target groups themselves. In fact, visibility of local actions was conceptualised as involving not only the partners or the policy and decision makers, but also the target group and the local community as well. The visibility initiative took a more comprehensive and systematic approach and focused both on the activities and the network's philosophy. Furthermore, visibility activities focused to a large degree on the forms of social exclusion in Greece and in Europe. The involvement of the EKKA President and Vice-President with the University and the National School of Public Administration was instrumental, since they promoted the dissemination of its activities and actions through their presentations in scientific conferences, directly or indirectly related to poverty and social exclusion. As it refers to *public agents and policy makers*, in other words, to the authorities responsible for policy and services besides the networking efforts with the public agents mentioned previously, the EKKA has been carrying out a series of contacts and forming relations with members of the Greek Parliament who visited the network's activities several times. The role of those authorities in improving the status of the network as the organisation coordinating local and national actions and expanding the necessary network was crucial, in particular during and after the "Olympic" period (2004). In addition, contacts and meetings were initiated with authorities from the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Education in reference to issues related to accessibility for physically disabled people and Roma education and training. A good working relationship was also established with the National Secretariat for Equality based on the membership of the General Secretary to the national network for single-parent families. The visibility of networking and coverage by the local media were very successful. Radio, TV shows, local newspapers and magazines have often hosted members of the network and its activities. All activities and initiatives of the EKKA were publicised to all major newspapers of the country, and journalists wrote several articles both in newspapers and in magazines.

3.4.3 Networking

Everyday exclusion of the underprivileged groups can only be fought effectively if the public and/or private agents of social policy-making are involved in efforts of networking, managing thus to transform themselves and accommodate the needs of those underprivileged groups. In the course of EKKA's development, there were several examples of surpassing barriers of every-day exclusion. The EKKA took several initiatives both in terms of networking and dissemination, in order to achieve maximum effectiveness and minimum cost –financial or other– for its activities. Moreover, the consistent efforts for networking overcame the bureaucratic structures, bringing together services from different agents in ways that can serve as a model for the future.

3.4.4 Lessons learned and taught

First important lesson from the EKKA's experience: the establishment of network institutions for fighting and preventing social exclusion is possible. The efficiency of such institutions and services is magnified by cooperation and networking between the public and the private sector. Administrative problems persist. The fighting of social exclusion entails surpassing *strong discrepancies,* expressed by agencies that exert political power in relation to socially excluded people. The development rate of a network, such as the EKKA, and the time for tangible positive results are slowed down by the fact that the partnership of agencies mentioned above is considered a necessary element of the intervention, thus by virtue ruling out any form of opposition with them as a means of attaining the final goal. The success of the effort, therefore, depends to a large degree on the result of the "*pedagogic*" influence the EKKA may exert on those agencies.

 Participation of the members of target groups in expressing problems and in developing strategies and/or activities for the achievement of the objectives can be much more essential than originally and theoretically anticipated. Moreover, activating members of the target groups often brings them in opposition to some agencies of the network, especially those that operate –more or less– on the basis of clientele relations. The evaluation of services provided both by the coordinating organisation and the users can resolve such conflicts to everyone's benefit. Perhaps, the relatively good results of the network so far involve firstly the *redistribution of power* (in a wider sense) among employees of the agencies and members of the target group and, secondly, the appearance of new pressure groups, which cause realignment of power within the framework of local societies. After all, processes of solidarity, self-organisation and mutual benefit of poor and socially excluded people can start easier than what it is generally believed. Whether this is going to happen or not depends on whether a project's structure promotes or allows for such a development to take place.

 A few years after the establishment of the EKKA Network in the areas of Greater Athens and Thessalonica, various aspects of reality have changed. Economic and financial problems have worsened, leading more people to unemployment and lack of financial security, making the situation worse, especially for the target groups previously entering the state of of poverty. The combination of the rising number of poor people in Greece and the growing number of refugees and/or immigrants coming into the country from neighbouring countries, along with the reduction of public funds distributed through social welfare until 2003, have created a very difficult situation: more people at the brink of poverty, less job opportunities, lack of an efficient social welfare system, very low development of non-governmental structures to fill in the gaps of social policy. The two latter features describing the situation need to be underlined. Social policy in Greece does not only face the lack of funds, but also the inefficiency of a traditional, non-flexible administration,

which does not correspond to the modern social needs. Furthermore, the great influence exerted by political parties on the function of social institutions, prevalent clientele relationships and lack of information dissemination constitute the frame into which EKKA functioned in its early development. However, reality did not shift only to the worse. During the last two years after the restructuring of EKKA, the target groups, the local authorities, the public and ourselves are far more aware of the characteristics of social exclusion in the specific area, as well as the means and the methodology that may lead to a new synthesis of policies implementing social inclusion.

4. The civic added value of social services
4.1 Key features of a common analysis of the experience of social service providers

Local actors often hesitate to propose and elaborate common strategies on a local community level (town, municipality, greater area). Beyond any doubt, there is a certain uncertainty, which sets a barrier to *common programs of social inclusion*. A related issue, which is of considerable interest to policy makers, social scientists and jurists, concerns the *simplification* and *rationalization* of social protection rules, in order to facilitate access to social services.[6] A multi-disciplinary approach directly addresses the range of issues involved in the development of such a scheme of principles. From a sociological, social-policy, legal, organizational and practical point of view this approach is necessary because of the multi-faceted nature of the problems being addressed. The results of a research carried out in the framework of the QuASi project (Quality and Accessibility for Social Inclusion)[7] capture the complexity of the multi-disciplinary nature of social service provision across the European Union. Social service providers are involved in the provision of a wide variety of social inclusion initiatives, operating in complex policy environments. These environments are clearly outlined by the parameters of social policy as defined in the first part of this paper. The remainder of the paper concludes with an analysis of the implications of the research findings for developing a framework of analysis for social service providers.

4.1.1 Common programs of action
In this context, it is remarkable that common programs of action are being undertaken by different social service providers in a variety of member states, e.g. information/advice. The evidence from the research would also suggest that social service providers face common problems such as racism and the disconnection of many households and individuals from their local community. It is also clear that dealing with the needs of ethnic minorities and disadvantaged young people is a priority for many social service providers. It is apparent that broadly similar target groups and challenges present themselves to social service providers across the European Union. The opportunity for collaboration on developing models of best practice cannot be underestimated – despite the complexity of country and specific regional legal traditions and administrative practices.

4.1.2 Financing social services
The results of the research show that a common barrier faced by social service providers is lack of funding. A related point is the capacity of social services to attract skilled staff. This issue needs to be examined on a number of levels. This includes (i) funding linked to best value in day-to-

day expenditure - *efficiency* and showing improvement in quality of life - *effectiveness* and (ii) funding linked to the achievement of European wide normative values of solidarity, human dignity and rights. These are political questions, which have traditionally been left to member states to answer. However, increasing integration of the member states might help make the application of common standards of social services in all member states possible. In this situation, the question of common standards on funding patterns may have to be addressed. A huge challenge is looming, in particular, over the funding of social services in the member states of Eastern Europe.

4.1.3 Simplification of social service delivery

Another key issue is the recognition that the simplification of social service delivery is important. It is particularly important with regard to groups facing severe social exclusion, e.g. immigrants who do not speak the host nations' language. The simplification of social service delivery however must meet the needs of both staff and users. This requires a great deal of planning, consultation, monitoring and evaluation. Re-organisation of service delivery cannot be only about saving money. It must also ensure the provision of a better service to users.

4.1.4 Social dialogue

Many researches show strong evidence of cross-agency partnerships. However it is generally felt that this is time-consuming and requires resources. Involving users is also a huge challenge for social service providers. The importance of supporting the role of the non-profit and volunteer lead organizations is also a dimension of this issue. It appears that the rhetoric for social inclusion has improved the focus of national governments with reference to the identification of national guidelines and prioritised target groups. A lot remain to be done in this area. There are considerable differences between member states on the extent of social dialogue that takes place. In some states it is embedded institutionally more than others.

4.1.5 Indicators

Our research shows no evidence of systematic use of social inclusion indicators by social service providers. European Union indicators are also not generally considered significant sources of policy innovation. Developing a systematic framework for the effective use of indicators is still a huge challenge. This putative framework must deal with:

- Defining the characteristics of good indicators. A lot of research has been done in this area, but coherent strategies for their deployment remain to be developed in many member states for social service providers to use.
- Developing a coherent E.U. strategy that links, European, national and local indicators in a value increasing way.

There are significant challenges for social service providers in dealing with the complexity of administrative rules in their local environment, securing resources and inter-agency cooperation. However these are common challenges for all social service providers across European Union. There is much to be gained from the sharing of ideas on best ways to tackle with these problems. Social inclusion has had a positive influence on national policies. The NAPs/Incl. should further enhance this process.

4.2 The civic added value of voluntary social services

To *conclude* this paper on social services of general interest and the coordination of European, national and local actions for social inclusion, the following key points should be highlighted:

- Implementing social rights and social justice, promoting social cohesion and securing a balanced economic and social development require structures that allow citizens to become involved and to participate (*participatory democracy*). Within these structures, voluntary associations, with regard to the social services they offer, are in the midst of tension between the necessary economic strategies and constraints for action and the objectives and tasks of a non-profit association designed to be active in social policy and the civic community and to communicate values.

- Continuity and reliability are trademarks of a high quality service. The citizens must be able to rely on finding a variety of forms of assistance and support appropriate to their various life situations and orientations. Starting with voluntary work, social services of charitable associations are geared towards sustainability. In other words, they are integrated into the associative structure; they have no time limitation, and act locally. Charitable associations realise that their task is to assume social responsibility on a continuous level.

- Mobilising resources of civic society is decisive for the viability of social Europe. Neither the state nor the market can do this to the extent voluntary organisations can. Volunteer involvement still needs a structural framework that promotes initiative. This leads to the political conclusion that social services show special characteristics as to aspects regarding social policy and social protection, which have to be taken into account when applying Community rules. Greater legal certainty for non-profit providers of social services is important, while special consideration needs to be given to the Commission's documents on social services of general interest. This is a central topic in the debate on the European social model. Member states maintain their powers of defining them with regard to the fulfilment of their mission and the safeguarding of national, regional and local diversity.

Notes

1. Commission, *Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Social services of general interest in the European Union*, COM (2006) 177 final, p.p. 4-5.
2. Cf. European Court of Justice (ECJ) 13.1.2005, *Commission vs. Belgium*, C-38/03; ECJ 11.3.2004 *Commission vs. France*, C-496/01; ECJ 16.3.2004, *AOK*, C-264/01 etc.
3. Cf. ETUC-UEAPME-CEEP-BUSINESSEUROPE, *Key challenges facing European labour markets: A joint analysis of European social partners*, p. 64
4. White Paper on services of general interest, *COM (2004) 374,* p. 13 ff.
5. This is perhaps a typical Greek NGO, where people directly or indirectly are affected by a problem of joining forces. Voluntarism in general is developing in Greece, with amazing results before and during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, but still a lot needs to be done in the direction of mobilising different social actors and a broader (than families) circle of volunteers.
6. PARENT Anne-Sophie (2004), *Social services of general interest: The perspective of social NGOs*, p. 106, and Bernard ENJOLRAS (2004), *General interest and social services in the European Union*, p. 110, Documentation of the conference "Social services of general interest in the EU – Assessing their specificities, potential and needs" (28-29 June 2004, Brussels), Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend.
7. Tsantilas Petros, (2003), *Final report of the QuASi project*, Phase I, www.eurodiaconia.org/quasi.