

→ The formation of in-formation

Country Bulgaria

Project title The formation of in-formation

Twinning Municipality of Dordrecht (The Netherlands)
Municipality of Varna (Bulgaria)

Project period 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2009

Project budget € 45.258,75

Project objective

Improving the quality of life of the citizens of Varna by increasing the use of existing social services, through a better communication about these services with citizens and between departments and institutions.

Project summary

The cooperation between the two municipalities has led to the establishment of an integral information centre where citizens can receive comprehensive information about all types of social services and the necessary documents for the use of relevant services.

Core information

Varna is the largest city on the Bulgarian Black Sea Coast, with a population of 351,151 inhabitants. Varna is the second most important economic centre for Bulgaria after Sofia, mainly due to tourism. Furthermore, Varna comprises an university centre, a seaport, the headquarters of the Bulgarian Navy, and the merchant marine.

Problem analysis

The municipality of Varna experienced an insufficient quality of social service provision for its citizens. The problem can be divided into:

- The lack of information provision about the available social services.
- The absence of visiting procedures for social services departments.
- The lack of one central service point; citizens were obliged to go to separate institutions for the services.
- The civil servants sometimes rude attitude towards the clients.

Project implementation

The different target groups did not recognize the existence of the services, and therefore did not know how to make use of them. The service providers were not familiar with the use of their full capacity; consequently the quality of life of the target group was not improved. One of the main concerns Varna was

facing, was a lack of structure in the Directorate of Social Services and Housing Policy – one of the directorates often directly dealing with citizens. Its departments were spread over different parts of the municipality of Varna, which made citizens have to go to separate locations to get their social services arranged. The project resulted in: obtaining a strategic vision regarding the provision of information about social services, rendered by the Directorate of Social Services and Housing; the development and implementation of a plan of approach for the establishment of an information centre, including personnel and equipment; the training of the staff of the information centre in communication methods and information and service delivery in an effective, client orientated and efficient way; and the establishment of the planned information centre based on the strategic vision and plans.

Process management

For the purpose of the project, an active involvement of the responsible state institutions and NGOs was necessary and achieved. A strategic vision on the provision of information about social services to the citizens of Varna was formulated with the support of the partners from Dordrecht. Focus was put on establishing an effective communication between all stakeholders in the project; this guaranteed the priorities of the strategy and the further developed plan of approach for the establishment of an information center for social services. An emphasis was put on a wide publicity campaign of the project activities and on the training of the staff for the information center, who needed to be able to inform citizens and handle all kinds of questions and customers in an effective, customer oriented and efficient way.

Recommendations: do's and don'ts

- It is recommended to have an integrated strategic approach ready to be used for the solution of problems. There should be a clear vision concerning qualitative services delivered to all customers.
- There should be no limits or obstacle for the provision of high quality service delivery.
- The needs of the customers should be a first priority. If the state and municipality have limited possibilities to fulfill these needs – they should adapt themselves in order to be adequate to the citizens' needs.