



# Report on the MedTOWN Project's Demonstrative Action in Paggaiio, Greece

## MedTOWN project

**Co-production of social policies with  
social & solidarity economy actors to fight  
poverty, inequality and social exclusion.**

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## **Report on the MedTOWN Project's Demonstrative Action in Paggaiio, Greece**

### **Executive Summary**

The Demonstrative Action under the MedTOWN project in Paggaiio, Greece, has been a cornerstone in the strategic approach to combat poverty, inequality, and social exclusion within the community. This innovative project was greenlit at the end of December 2021 and swiftly moved into the execution phase by April 2022, marking a significant milestone for local social and solidarity economy initiatives.

At its core, the action was designed to not just provide temporary relief but to engender a systemic change by fostering the co-production of social policies through collaboration between local authorities, social economy actors, and the community. This collaborative approach has ensured that the policies developed are not only grounded in the lived experiences of the beneficiaries but also tailored to the specific socio-economic context of Paggaiio.

The project's impact is multifaceted, demonstrating significant strides in integrating vulnerable groups into the labor market and the local economy. These groups include people nearing pension age, individuals with disabilities, and those who have been unemployed for extended periods. With the support provided by the Community Centre of Paggaiio and the expert guidance of labor advisors from DYPA, these individuals have received personalized assistance and support, enabling them to navigate new employment opportunities and integrate more fully into the workforce.

By leveraging the latest public funding opportunities initiated in December 2022 through the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the Demonstrative Action has been able to capitalize on new financial mechanisms to boost its objectives. This strategic funding utilization has facilitated the creation of jobs and supported the project's goal of enhancing social inclusion.

The action's remarkable achievement in helping 23 individuals secure full-time employment positions is a testament to its effectiveness and the robustness of its strategies. The inclusion of vulnerable individuals in the success story not only fulfills the immediate project aims but also contributes to the overall goal of creating a more equitable society.

Moreover, the project's success is poised to continue beyond its initial timeframe. The commitment by the Municipality of Paggaiio to integrate this action into its forthcoming Municipal Operation Programme for 2024-2028, and the Community Centre's policy inclusion for the 2021-2027 period, underscore the sustainable and long-term vision of the initiative. These commitments ensure that the mechanisms and methodologies developed will continue to be refined and will provide ongoing support to the community.

The innovative testing of a Digital Social Wallet system as an alternative to traditional currency is indicative of the project's forward-thinking and adaptive methodology. The simulation's success in predicting economic and employment improvements underscores the potential for scalable models that can be replicated in other contexts.

In summary, the Demonstrative Action within the MedTOWN project stands as a paradigm of proactive and effective local development. By uniting diverse actors in a common cause, it has charted a path towards a more inclusive and resilient local economy, while setting the stage for



policy innovation that resonates with the global community dedicated to social and economic justice.

## **Background**

Paggiao, located in the Eastern Macedonia and Thrace region of Greece, has historically grappled with the significant challenge of integrating its vulnerable populations into a labor market characterized by limited opportunities and economic constraints. Recognizing the urgency of this issue, the Demonstrative Action under the MedTOWN project represents a strategic intervention aimed at catalyzing positive social and economic change within the municipality.

This proactive initiative has been strategically aligned with EU funding mechanisms, particularly drawing from the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which was earmarked to address the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The action capitalized on this funding to create and bolster employment opportunities, ensuring that the benefits of economic recovery are inclusive and far-reaching.

The Demonstrative Action's approach has been to look beyond mere job creation, focusing on the development of sustainable enterprises that can contribute to the local economy's long-term resilience. This has been achieved through a multi-stakeholder approach that synergizes the efforts of the public sector, private entities, and civil society organizations. By doing so, the action has not only aimed at immediate job placement but also at fostering an environment where social enterprises can flourish, thus providing meaningful and lasting employment for those who are most at risk of exclusion.

At the heart of this initiative has been the co-production of social policies, an innovative concept that involves the joint creation of policies by public authorities and citizens, particularly those who are affected by these policies. This approach ensures that the devised strategies are not only well-informed by the actual needs and challenges of the local populace but are also sustainable, as they are underpinned by the direct involvement and buy-in of the community.

Incorporating local collaboration, the Demonstrative Action has engaged a range of local actors including the Community Centre of Paggiao, labor advisors from DYPA, and the vulnerable groups themselves. Such collaboration has been vital in creating a sense of ownership and empowerment among all participants, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Moreover, the project has shown an innovative streak by exploring the use of Digital Social Wallets, potentially revolutionizing local trade and commerce. The simulation of this digital currency system is indicative of the initiative's efforts to explore every possible avenue to invigorate the local economy and integrate marginalized groups.

In essence, the Demonstrative Action within the MedTOWN project has been a beacon of hope for Paggiao. By addressing the pressing need for inclusive economic growth and leveraging EU funds to support local collaborative efforts, the project stands as an exemplar of how targeted actions can lead to sustainable employment and enterprise opportunities, thereby fostering a more inclusive society.



## Implementation

During the implementation phase of the Demonstrative Action, the project team prioritized the delivery of specialized support services to identified vulnerable groups within Paggaiu. This personalized support, tailored to the unique needs of individuals nearing pension age, those with disabilities, and the long-term unemployed, was orchestrated through two key local resources: the Community Centre of Paggaiu and the labor advisors of DYPA (Development and Workforce Agency).

The Community Centre of Paggaiu emerged as a critical hub for community engagement and assistance, providing not only consultation but also hands-on guidance to help beneficiaries navigate through the complexity of entering or re-entering the labor market. It served as the central node for information dissemination, skill development sessions, and one-on-one support sessions. These efforts were crucial in building confidence among participants, many of whom had been marginalized from the workforce for significant periods.

Labor advisors from DYPA played a complementary and essential role, acting as the bridge between potential employers and job seekers. These advisors offered vocational counseling, resume-building workshops, and interview preparation sessions. They also helped beneficiaries understand and utilize new employment programs and funding opportunities that were made available, thereby enhancing their employment prospects.

The integration of new public funding opportunities in December 2022, under the auspices of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, was a game-changer for the project. These funds provided the financial backbone necessary for the expansion and deepening of the initiative's outreach. The financial injection allowed for a more robust set of services and programs that could be offered to participants, ensuring that the most up-to-date and effective strategies were employed in aiding their reintegration into the workforce.

This new funding stream was not only timely but also highly strategic, coinciding with the launch of new employment programs by DYPA. These programs, designed with a focus on social and labor inclusion, offered incentives for businesses to hire individuals from vulnerable groups, thereby creating a more favorable job market for participants of the Demonstrative Action. The access to these programs was facilitated through the combined efforts of the Community Centre and DYPA advisors, who ensured that beneficiaries were well-informed and prepared to take full advantage of the opportunities available.

The confluence of dedicated local support services and the availability of new funding resources thus created a dynamic and supportive ecosystem for the vulnerable groups in Paggaiu. This holistic approach has not only proven successful in the short term by helping many participants secure employment but also promises to yield sustainable long-term benefits for the community at large.

## Achievements

The achievements of the Demonstrative Action within the MedTOWN project in Paggaiu are a clear indicator of its triumph in making a concrete difference in the lives of its participants. Securing full-



time employment for 23 individuals is not just a numerical victory but a substantial stride toward the social inclusion of some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

This group, comprising disabled individuals and the long-term unemployed, often face significant barriers when entering or re-entering the labor market. These barriers can be multifaceted, ranging from discriminatory hiring practices and inaccessible workplaces to the lack of tailored support in addressing their unique challenges. The Demonstrative Action's focused approach in providing consultation and personalized guidance has been pivotal in breaking down these barriers.

The employment success stories emerging from this initiative extend beyond individual gains. Each person who transitions from unemployment to a full-time job represents a multiplicative effect of economic and social benefits. Employed individuals contribute to the economy not just through their productivity but also through their spending, which in turn fuels local businesses and services. Additionally, the psychological and social benefits of employment can contribute to improved quality of life, increased self-esteem, and better mental health for the individuals involved.

The fact that two disabled individuals were among those who found full-time employment is particularly noteworthy. This demonstrates the project's commitment to inclusivity and its capacity to cater to the needs of those who may require additional support structures or accommodations in the workplace.

Moreover, the long-term unemployed and those nearing pension age often find it especially challenging to find employment due to skill mismatches, technological advancements, or age discrimination. By successfully aiding these individuals in finding employment, the Demonstrative Action has helped to dispel the stigma and overcome the systemic biases often associated with these demographics.

The successful employment outcomes of this initiative are a direct reflection of the robustness of the interventions and the dedication of all parties involved—from the labor advisors of DYPA to the proactive policies of the Community Centre of Paggai. The project's employment targets were not just met; they were exceeded, setting a precedent for future initiatives and providing a replicable model of success for other regions facing similar challenges.

This achievement has broader implications for social policy and employment strategies, offering valuable insights into effective methodologies for engaging with and supporting vulnerable populations. The Demonstrative Action serves as a beacon for community-led initiatives, proving that with targeted support and the right opportunities, meaningful employment for all is an attainable goal.

## **Sustainability and Future Outlook**

The Demonstrative Action, initiated within the MedTOWN project's framework, has not only addressed immediate social and economic challenges in Paggai but has also established a foundation for enduring change. The project's integration into the Municipal Operation Programme for 2024-2028 signals a robust commitment from local government to uphold and advance these social interventions. This pledge secures the continuity of support and resources, guaranteeing that the mechanisms put in place have the stability needed to evolve and adapt over time.



Furthermore, the alignment of the Community Centre's strategy with the action's objectives for the 2021-2027 period is pivotal. It represents an institutional recognition of the value and effectiveness of the approach, embedding it deeply into the fabric of local social policy. The Centre's role in offering ongoing consultation, guidance, and support ensures that vulnerable populations remain at the forefront of social initiatives, promoting inclusivity and empowerment as core community values.

These commitments by the Municipality and the Community Centre extend beyond mere short-term assistance. They are part of a strategic vision that views the welfare of vulnerable populations as integral to the overall health of the local economy and society. By prioritizing these actions in their operational planning, they are creating a model of sustainability that leverages local strengths and addresses local needs through proactive and participatory governance.

Moreover, the action's future outlook is further strengthened by the planned inclusion of outcomes and findings in scientific discourse. The presentation of results at a scientific conference in 2024, followed by a publication in a peer-reviewed journal, will contribute to the project's credibility and provide a blueprint for replication in other communities. The academic validation of the approach and its outcomes will facilitate evidence-based policy-making, not just within the Municipality of Paggaiu but potentially influencing regional, national, and international strategies.

Finally, the innovative testing and potential future implementation of a Digital Social Wallet system point towards a progressive economic tool that can enhance local trade and services, providing a sustainable economic stimulus. As the results from the testing underpin the feasibility and benefits of such a system, they pave the way for a more integrated and resilient local economy that can respond dynamically to both current and future challenges.

In essence, the Demonstrative Action is not an isolated intervention but a strategic pivot towards a sustainable future, setting a precedent for other municipalities and regions to follow. With a clear commitment to continued support, integration into broader policy frameworks, and the potential for scaling and replication, the outlook for the Demonstrative Action is not only sustainable but also visionary.

## **Innovation in Practice**

The introduction of the Digital Social Wallet simulation in Paggaiu represents a leap forward in exploring alternative economic systems and has the potential to revolutionize the way local economies operate. This element of the Demonstrative Action was not just a theoretical exercise but a practical exploration into the efficacy of alternative currencies and their potential impact on social inclusion and economic resilience.

Over the course of the simulation, an impressive array of 3000 random conditions was tested, reflecting the complex and varied real-world scenarios that a local economy may encounter. This comprehensive testing methodology ensured that the simulation's findings would be robust and applicable to a wide range of potential futures. The four different scenarios projected over five years allowed for a deep dive into long-term implications, which is critical for understanding the sustainability and adaptability of such a system.





The results gleaned from this testing are particularly promising for Paggaiò's local economy. The simulation indicated that a Digital Social Wallet system could effectively circulate additional purchasing power within the community, fostering local trade and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This has the dual benefit of retaining wealth within the local area and supporting community members who are often overlooked by traditional banking systems.

Moreover, the Digital Social Wallet model represents a progressive step toward inclusive economic participation. By functioning as a supplementary currency, it has the potential to provide marginalized and vulnerable groups with better access to goods and services that might otherwise be inaccessible due to financial constraints. It can also serve as a tool for community engagement, as users of the Digital Social Wallet become active participants in a localized economic ecosystem, contributing to and benefiting from the community's welfare.

This model does not just stand as a theoretical construct but is slated to have its findings presented at a scientific conference in 2024, followed by publication in a peer-reviewed scientific journal. This level of scrutiny and academic validation is crucial for legitimizing the approach and showcasing its potential for replication in other municipalities and regions.

In essence, the Digital Social Wallet simulation within the Demonstrative Action is a manifestation of the MedTOWN project's commitment to innovation and its pursuit of economic alternatives that serve the greater good. By focusing on practical, data-driven outcomes, the project provides valuable insights that could lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunities, setting a precedent for other communities to follow.

## **Dissemination of Knowledge**

The Demonstrative Action within the MedTOWN project not only serves as a practical approach to tackling socio-economic challenges but also as a valuable source of empirical data and insights that can significantly contribute to the academic and professional spheres concerned with local development and social policy innovation.

The project's pioneering simulation of the Digital Social Wallet, and its subsequent alternative currency model, has generated a wealth of knowledge, especially in terms of its application and impact on the local economy and employment. The rigorous testing process, which involved four different scenarios and nearly 3000 random conditions forecasted over five years, has produced a comprehensive data set that underpins the simulation's findings on the usefulness of such innovative economic tools.

In 2024, this body of work is set to be unveiled to a wider audience at a scientific conference. This will not only foster academic debate but also provide a forum for knowledge exchange among policymakers, researchers, and practitioners. By presenting the results in such a setting, the team behind the Demonstrative Action ensures that the findings are subject to scrutiny, discussion, and, potentially, replication by other municipalities or regions.

Following the conference, the further intention to publish the results in a peer-reviewed scientific journal is an integral part of the project's commitment to transparency and scientific rigor. Peer



review is the gold standard for academic discourse, ensuring that the research meets the stringent criteria for methodology and contributes valuable new insights to the existing body of knowledge. Moreover, publishing these findings will extend the reach of the project's insights beyond the immediacy of the local context. It has the potential to inform global policies and practices by providing a tested model that could be adapted to similar socio-economic environments. The journal article will delve into not just the quantitative outcomes but also the qualitative aspects, exploring the societal and individual impacts of the action.

The anticipated publication will encourage critical engagement with the project's methodology and findings, potentially influencing the development of new models and strategies in the field of social policy and local economic development. This process of knowledge dissemination is critical in fostering an environment of continuous learning and innovation that could inspire similar initiatives worldwide, reinforcing the notion that localized, collaborative approaches can yield significant global benefits.

## Conclusion

The Demonstrative Action within the MedTOWN project in Paggaiio, Greece, exemplifies the profound potential of local-level interventions in the co-production of social policies. It transcends conventional approaches by incorporating the principles of the social and solidarity economy to foster durable solutions to unemployment, social exclusion, and economic disparity.

Through its targeted actions, the project has addressed the immediate and pressing employment needs of the most vulnerable members of the community. However, its influence extends far beyond job creation. By providing the tools, resources, and support necessary for individuals to secure employment, the project has helped to cultivate a sense of autonomy and empowerment among participants. This empowerment is a catalyst for broader social change, as gainfully employed individuals contribute to the economic vitality and social fabric of Paggaiio.

Furthermore, the Demonstrative Action has laid the groundwork for sustained economic growth and social inclusion. The continued inclusion of this initiative in the strategic planning of Paggaiio's municipal and community programs is a clear indication of its anticipated longevity and potential for scalability. This foresight ensures that the benefits of the project will be felt for years to come, embedding the principles of inclusivity and solidarity in the region's socioeconomic development plans.

The initiative's innovative approach, particularly the adoption and testing of the Digital Social Wallet, signals a pioneering step in the realm of complementary currency systems and their application in enhancing local economies. This aspect of the project not only provides immediate benefits but also serves as a valuable research opportunity that can inform global strategies for economic resilience.

As the project concludes, it not only leaves a legacy of success but also a rich terrain for academic inquiry. The planned presentation of its methodologies and outcomes at a scientific conference, followed by publication in a peer-reviewed journal, will contribute to the body of knowledge on





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social policy and the economy. Such dissemination of findings will encourage dialogue, critique, and potentially inspire replication of similar actions in different contexts.

In essence, the MedTOWN project's Demonstrative Action is more than a local intervention; it is a blueprint for social innovation. Its integrated approach, combining practical support with strategic funding and academic research, positions it as a model of how community-driven initiatives can effectively address complex social challenges. Its accomplishments serve not just the present needs but also forge a path for sustainable and inclusive growth, making it a case study for transformative social policy in action.