

**BACKGROUND PAPER FOR PARTICIPANTS
AT THE
EQUAL POLICY FORUM
ON
“DIVERSIFYING THE WORKPLACE
STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION”**

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1. CONTEXT

This Policy Forum is the second stage in a European Mainstreaming Platform that was initiated by the Authorities in Northern Ireland for three main reasons. Firstly, there is a proven track record in the Northern Ireland EQUAL programme of interest and expertise in the field of diversity. Secondly, external evaluations of EQUAL have concluded that empowerment has been a strong aspect of this Programme. Finally, Northern Ireland has equality legislation, which is unrivalled in Europe and is perhaps the only positive legacy of the recent community conflict and history of sectarian discrimination.

1.1. THE MAINSTREAMING PLATFORM

UK – Northern Ireland (UKni) initially enlisted the help of Latvia and Malta in capitalising on EQUAL's experience of diversity and empowerment and they were subsequently joined by Belgium – Flanders (BEnl) and Portugal. Together, this Steering Group has planned, and is currently implementing, a European-level Mainstreaming Platform in cooperation with 15 other Members States. The two main foci of this Platform were agreed with the European Commission in December 2006, namely:

- An [Exchange Event](#)¹ for EQUAL DPs in Belfast, in June 2006, that agreed on a set of topics to be presented at a subsequent Policy Forum;
- The Policy Forum that would be used to present the good practices that are emerging from EQUAL to policy makers and employers and to engage their interest in taking some of these forward.

The work initiated by the Platform might also be extended to include a Transnational Network or a "Community of Practice", early in 2008, to ensure the continued transfer and the sustainability of relevant EQUAL outcomes within the European Social Fund's Operational Programmes for the period 2007 to 2013.

1.2. BUILDING ON DIVERSITY

This European Mainstreaming Platform was designed to develop and promote the work undertaken by the European Thematic Group on Employability (ETG1) during 2003 and 2004. ETG1 focused on "[Building on Diversity](#)". That term is used as a shorthand way of describing a particular type of comprehensive and planned approach to valuing the capacities and facilitating the social inclusion of those facing difficulties in entering, or remaining in, employment. Central to the approach is a growing awareness that dismantling preconceptions about ethnic origin, gender, age, disability or other characteristics that stand in the way of the individual's integration and active participation, is both an economic and a social necessity:

- To remain competitive, especially in a global economy, enterprises must be able to capitalise on the experiences, the creativity and the full potential of a diverse workforce. They must explicitly recognise and actively promote different individual talents;
- By the same token, authorities at all levels, public services and agencies must seek to ensure cohesion in a society whose members have very different needs, by carefully tailoring their services to the aspirations and requirements of different groups. This must include specific action to strengthen the confidence, motivation and self-reliance of people facing discrimination or, in other words, deploying effective strategies for empowerment.

Recognising, or celebrating, diversity means fostering positive attitudes towards "otherness" and in this respect, it is important to distinguish between the primary and secondary dimensions of diversity:

¹ For more information click on [2007 EQUAL NI Conferences](#)

- Primary dimensions include those characteristics that should be valued as essential assets of an individual and cannot normally be changed, such as age, ethnicity/race, gender, physical abilities, religious beliefs, sexual orientation;
- Secondary dimensions of diversity are those that can be changed and include, but are not limited to, educational background, skills and work experience, capacity to communicate, self-initiative and an ability to cope with conflict.

Action relating to primary dimensions involves a strong focus on awareness raising and attitudinal and behavioural change. Mobilising the potential of the secondary dimensions of diversity requires positive action to provide opportunities adapted to the needs of individuals and/or groups, as well as incentives and support to enable individuals/groups to make active use of these opportunities. In order to exploit and capitalise on the benefits of diversity, both dimensions must be reflected in a methodological approach to managing diversity.

Early in the work of the Platform, it was agreed to focus on three sub-issues within this overall issue of Building on Diversity and these will also be the topics that will guide the discussions during the Policy Forum:

- The Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups;
- Working with Employers;
- Building the Bridges through the work of all agencies involved in the integration process.

2. EQUAL EXPERIENCE IN EMPOWERING VULNERABLE GROUPS

Empowerment is very often regarded as a buzz word, which does not translate easily into many European languages. It is also a concept which practitioners and policy makers treat with suspicion - the former see empowerment as a challenge to their professional status and the latter see it as a challenge to their positions of power. However, when it has been used effectively empowerment has proved to be one of the most successful approaches in promoting the inclusion and integration of the most disadvantaged groups and EQUAL has been successful in both measuring and transferring this approach.

2.1. DEMONSTRATING THE POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE

The starting point for most EQUAL projects, or Development Partnerships (DPs) as they are called, has been the perspective of their beneficiaries and thus, their life situations were put at the centre of the DPs' activities. However, given their relative lack of success in education and employment, many beneficiaries need to come to a realisation that it is possible to change their existing situations and EQUAL has succeeded in demonstrating to them that it is possible to improve the quality of their lives. Through social, cultural and sporting activities, EQUAL has strengthened the motivation of people to change and has proved to them that they have the capacity to change their lives and to participate actively in the employment process. For example, the Finnish [PoMO DP](#) used outdoor pursuits to develop the self-confidence of young offenders and to build their trust in the mentors who support them in their resettlement.

In EQUAL, it has also been recognised that individuals may need additional assistance in other areas of their lives and may need help with other pressing problems if they are to function effectively either as a trainee or as an employee. Therefore, DPs were active in areas such as health, housing and rights issues and individuals were helped to an understanding of the types of services that were available to them. They also gradually developed the skills and abilities to use such services in an effective way. In the case of young people with little experience of adult life, many DPs organised their preparation for independent living in a way that often covered the aspect of housing and accommodation, particularly for those leaving prisons, children's homes or other care institutions. This was one of the main activities of the [Headstart DP](#)² in Malta

Others DPs applied the slogan "nothing about us without us" and reinforced their on individual empowerment by establishing fora or other beneficiary groups so that their clients played a role in the development of the project and in the planning and monitoring of its various actions. Such groups also had beneficial effects other than simply improving the responsiveness of the DPs'

² For more information click on [Presentation](#)

activities. By working together the potential for change was increased and groups of beneficiaries have played a lead role in many projects in establishing everything from new or renovated housing, as in the Hungarian [BRIDGE DP](#), to work preparation courses for lone parents, such as those run in Northern Ireland through the [Possibilities DP](#)³. Such approaches helped to ensure that people became part of the solution rather than being regarded as part of the problem. This capacity building approach is more evident in Scandinavian countries, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Northern Ireland. It is also demonstrated in the work of another the Northern Irish DP called [Diversity Matters](#) and in the groups established by the Spanish project [Pangea](#).

Another reason for working with groups is that individuals from the most marginalised backgrounds often need to develop or rediscover their social skills. This was certainly the case for the Latvian DP “[Integration of People with Mental Disturbances and Psychiatric Illnesses into the Labour Market](#)”⁴ who reported major advances in participants’ communication skills and abilities to work alongside others. [Basta](#) in Sweden and [Le Mat](#) in Italy have also had considerable success in using a group work or social cooperative approach to integrate drug users, ex-offenders and people with psychiatric problems. For example, an [external evaluation](#)⁵ of Basta and another Swedish project called [Vägen ut!](#) or “Exit” in English calculated their social profits per year, which are the public costs that are eliminated or reduced when addicts recover plus the production values in these two cooperatives. The resulting figure of 13 million Euro roughly equates to the budget for the addiction programmes in a Swedish city of 200,000 inhabitants.

2.2. MEASURING EMPOWERMENT

EQUAL has recognised the importance of developing the competences, skills and knowledge required for navigating through the integration process to the highest possible level and the need to build on each individual’s existing abilities and aptitudes. During its first phase (2002 – 2004), a number of EQUAL projects led by a Dutch DP called [Vrijbaan](#) pioneered a new diagnostic instrument for people with disabilities and this has led to the design of suitable training pathways not only for these people but for others who are at a great distance from the labour market. The instrument is essentially a questionnaire that each individual completes with help and further explanation, if necessary. The questionnaire contains 62 statements and respondents are asked to express the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each statement. The six components covered are:

- **Competence:** *trusting in your own abilities;*
- **Self-Determination:** *being able to make choices and feeling in control of your own situation;*
- **Impact:** *the understanding that your decisions and choices have an effect on your life;*
- **Significance:** *experiencing a meaning in your activities that fits with your own values, beliefs and standards;*
- **Group-Oriented:** *realising that you are part of a community or group and that you all need to work together; and*
- **Positive Identity:** *accepting yourself as you are, including your disability (or disadvantage).*

Having analysed the responses, a psychologist then discusses the responses and indicates those particular components that are not as well developed as they might be. As it is vitally important that the person is committed to further action, an appropriate training pathway can only be established when he or she agrees with this assessment. The instrument attracted much interest amongst key actors and it was validated by a major pension fund in collaboration with a national body for social security. This pension fund believes that empowerment is a crucial factor in ensuring a successful return to work and is now using the diagnostic instrument to measure the empowerment levels of their clients and to determine if it is possible to provide training to help them return to work. During the second phase of EQUAL, the instrument was used with the same success for other target groups including the long-term unemployed.

³ For more information click on [Presentation](#)

⁴ For more information click on [Presentation](#)

⁵ “From the public perspective” – a copy in English is available from eva.johannsson@nutek.se

Also in Northern Ireland, EQUAL recognised the value of capturing soft outcomes. Very often the targets for EU programmes are such things as numbers of unemployed entering employment, numbers of accredited qualifications at various levels etc. These are **hard** outcomes which are easily measurable. However, ESF programmes and EQUAL in particular also perform other important functions.

One example in Northern Ireland after the Troubles ended in the 1990s was women who wished to return to work. However, these women who had spent years in isolation, looking after children and had lost touch with the world of work. Most had lost the confidence to re-enter the working environment. A number of projects in Belfast and elsewhere worked to re build the confidence of women in difficult areas who wanted to return to work. This can be a long process and may not necessarily produce hard outcomes such as qualifications. The soft outcome is often a readiness to return to work, not actually getting work.

Soft outcomes are hard to measure but there are a number of recognised methods. They involve interviewing beneficiaries/participants at the start of the process and then at various stages of their development to see just how far they have come. These "soft" outcomes are actually extremely important because if they are not considered a lot of the benefits of EU programmes can go unrecorded.

In Northern Ireland the Authorities opted to work with [The Rickter Company](#)⁶, which provides a tool for measuring such outcomes. All DPs were trained in the use of this tool and used it alongside their beneficiaries. This proved to be a very useful complement to the other performance indicators for the programme and has allowed the personal progression of EQUAL beneficiaries to be measured and valued.

3. WORKSHOP SESSION: EMPOWERMENT OF VULNERABLE GROUPS

3.1. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

During this first session each of the three Workshops will consider the following four questions. These four questions are meant to provide a path that will lead the Workshop towards the formulation of two strong Recommendations for future Policies or Practices relating to the Social Inclusion and/or Vocational Integration of Diverse or Disadvantaged Groupings.

1. What are the obstacles to employment faced by disadvantaged groups?
2. How did the empowerment activities of EQUAL help beneficiaries overcome these obstacles?
3. What specifically can be done to ensure that the "Nothing for us without us" principle is implemented?
4. Is it realistic to expect beneficiaries to have a direct impact on policy and how could EQUAL beneficiaries' success stories from across the EU be used to raise the awareness of Policy Makers, Bridge Builders and NGOs about the importance of empowerment approaches?

3.2. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Exchange Event held, in Belfast, in June 2007 proposed that the following issues might be explored in terms of future Policy Recommendations. Therefore, these should be taken into account in the formulation of what the Workshop considers to be the two most crucial Recommendations relating to the Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups.

Providing Motivation and Empowerment through Integration/Inclusion Programmes

Many people need to realise that it is possible to change their existing situations and EQUAL DPs have provided them with both the motivation to change and the proof that they themselves have the capacity to change. Through EQUAL activities, people have been given the chance to test themselves in a range of situations that promote their soft skills, their ability to resolve conflicts

⁶ For more information see the Rickter Scale section of this web site www.proteus-ni.org

and their capacity to act on their own behalf. The overall aim has been to develop their sense of self-responsibility and self-esteem.

Promoting Direct Representation

The importance of this type of meaningful involvement was stressed under the slogan “Nothing for us without us” or, in other words, “Don’t do it for us, do it with us.” It is not enough to involve advocacy organisations or agencies that claim to represent the interests of particular target groups. The end users have to be involved in discussions on issues that have a direct impact on their lives. For this involvement to be meaningful the end users must be briefed to take part in debates with decision makers and those who are in positions of power must be prepared to acknowledge the experience, aspirations and needs of these users.

Opening up User Involvement in Policy Development

By taking the opinions and insights of beneficiaries seriously, considerable improvements had been made to the formulation and development of policies relating to their social and vocational integration. Such approaches also helped to ensure that people became part of the solution rather than being regarded as part of the problem.

Working in Partnership – The Key to Effective Approaches

Many individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds require additional assistance in other areas of their lives and help with other pressing problems if they are to function effectively either as a trainee or as an employee. Thus, there is a need for improved coordination and networking between all relevant local agencies and actors, both formal and informal, to provide a coherent and transparent range of services that can respond to their multi-faceted needs.

4. EQUAL EXPERIENCE IN WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

Almost one third of the DPs that were selected under the Employability Strand of EQUAL have worked on aspects related to this sub-issue. The range of methods that are being adopted or developed for awareness raising is extremely wide. For example, apart from face to face interviews, DPs use leaflets, guides, telephone canvassing, press campaigns and professional advertising agencies. For example, the [Deledious DP](#)⁷ employs a range of techniques to get its message across to French employers that “it’s a fundamental right to live, work and love in accordance with your true identity.” However, the remainder of this section of the paper identifies some of the generic aspects in these approaches to employers.

The first relates to awareness raising, as there is a common misconception about diversity, which is also shared by employers, and this is that only certain people or groups are included under its umbrella, when in fact the opposite is true. EQUAL DPs realise that diversity needs managing, as it can have the effect of pushing an employer outside his or her comfort zone. This is a very important point because in most instances the EQUAL DPs have attempted to do more than simply get people from their target groups into a job. DPs like [DiverCidade](#) in Portugal recognise that it is necessary to engender a change in the culture of the organisation if sustainable employment is to be created and if other employment opportunities are to be opened up in the future. Thus, employers must be convinced that there are sound reasons for having and hiring a diverse workforce and based on EQUAL’s experience, there are three main approaches that can convince employers:

- The Business Case that can demonstrate the commercial benefits of employing individuals from diverse groupings;
- Corporate Social Responsibility;
- Incentives and Obligations.

⁷ For more information click on [Presentation](#)

4.1. ELEMENTS IN THE BUSINESS CASE

Developing the Customer Base

As the percentage of diversity increases in the over-all population, the percentage of customers that are diverse also increases. In cases where there is a great deal of customer contact, either face-to-face or on the telephone, the number of customers and sales can increase dramatically when the customers can see that people serving them understand their unique needs, language, or culture. Individual one-to-one interactions between diverse and non-diverse workers may also result in a better understanding of individual and cultural differences. Indeed a Dutch DP called [Different People](#) has developed a list of critical success factors *“for the optimal use of diverse talents in favour of customer service, profit and/or results of the organisation.”* One of the critical success factors focuses on consolidating diversity principles in the whole organisation - in all different departments and in all procedures - and this also covers selection procedures.

Responding to Globalisation and gaining a Competitive Advantage

If an enterprise is to be truly global, its workforce must understand the requirements, and sometimes the language, of people from different cultures and regions. If a company's workforce does not include people who have lived or travelled in different countries then product development and sales may suffer dramatically. Then, if an enterprise is to gain a competitive advantage it must not only just build a diverse workforce but also do it faster than its competitors. In the case of the German DP [Competence and Diversity](#) its objective was to harness the potential of intercultural diversity as a resource for economic development in the Unna district, on the eastern edge of the Ruhr Basin.

Ensuring a Future Workforce and one of Sufficient Quality

Faced with the realities of an ageing workforce and the current demographic trends, employers are more willing to cooperate in integrating groups who previously had been economically inactive into their companies. The same applies to employing people from an immigrant background. This was certainly one of the trends, which was exploited by the [Petmo](#) project in its attempts to combat racism and discrimination in working life and improve ethnic relations in Finland, and it was also the message put across by the Austrian [Living and Working Together DP](#). Also in terms of broadening the skill base of enterprises, two leading UK employers associated with the Action for Carers and Employment ([ACE](#)) DP made their views very clear. Becky Mason from BT, which is the UK's biggest telecommunications provider, explained that *“BT is looking now to find additional sources of talent and to retain the talent we have got. It makes absolute sense to reap the benefits of the skills and resources of carers.”* In a similar vein, Emma Appleby from PricewaterhouseCoopers believed that *“What we want to attract is the widest pool of talent and to cut out a whole section of the market would be totally foolish.”*

Increasing Productivity

Working through diversity issues is an excellent preparation for learning how to change and innovate. Lessons learned in managing diversity can help managers and employees work through complex problems and help them deal with other fast change issues that occur in an Internet economy. For example, TDC Mobil one of the partners in the Danish [Diversity and Social Responsibility](#) DP wanted *“to optimise the possibilities for business-oriented success by reflecting a manifold customer potential within a diverse employee composition.”* The project has been very successful as the company has received many positive reactions from customers who are now delighted that TDC is offering customer counselling in their own language. However, the recruitment and training of bilingual customer counsellors also produced the following benefits for this mobile phone company:

- The development of leadership competences within managers;
- An increased tolerance and decreased anxiety among managers and employees towards problems of an ethnic character;
- A conspicuous need, and potential, for the hiring of managers with other ethnic backgrounds;
- An increased consciousness within the organisation of potential new markets.

4.2. CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Another set of reasons is less concerned with the product and more concerned with the image of the firm or business and relate to the concept of corporate social responsibility which was explored by the Portuguese DP *Nautilus*⁸.

Becoming more attractive to Employees and Shareholders

As a result of the current difficulty in attracting top talent, companies have been forced to carry out market research in order to identify the factors that influence people in the choice of the firms in which they wish to work. What companies have found is that both applicants and current employees demand a diverse workforce, even if they themselves are not from the diverse population! In addition, companies with "liberal" or socially conscious shareholders often find that these shareholders question the firm's lack of diversity in shareholder meetings. These "activist" shareholders expect the firm to respond to their "social" agenda. Suppliers and strategic partners may also be more willing to do business with a company if its workforce is as diverse as theirs.

Improving Public Relations

Diversity programmes and efforts can attract a great deal of favourable press coverage that can promote a firm's image and, thereby, its ability to recruit. A number of DPs are also helping firms in this respect. They publicise enterprises that are employing or offering work placements to their target groups by featuring these firms in their own PR materials or on notice boards in their premises or by submitting articles to local newspapers.

A considerable amount of the creativity of the enterprise can be directed to the improvement of the social-economic relationship. In fact, it is foreseeable that citizens who are clients should be loyal to products and enterprises that present themselves as innovative and that react against those that lack such attributes. The social image is becoming decisive and it can, through external communication, give information about the enterprise that shows clearly its social vision.

4.3. FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AND LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS

The final set of reasons embodies both carrot and the stick approach.

Incentives

Certain financial incentives exist in most Member States to facilitate the recruitment of young people, women, long-term unemployed, people with disabilities and other more specific groups. However, it is often the case that companies are not aware of such grants or schemes. Part of the awareness raising activities of many DPs includes bringing employers up to date with the financial aid that is available if they decided to recruit people with disabilities or other individuals who have certain disadvantages on the labour market.

Obligations

This final reason includes compliance with the equality legislation that exists in the Member State. Such legislation may cover recruitment procedures or management practices or may simply impose quotas for particular groups of people such as those with disabilities. EQUAL DPs have been very active in helping employers comply with their responsibilities and particularly those that have resulted from the transposition of the EU Directives on Racial Equality and Equality in Employment into national legislation.

4.4. SUPPORT AND DISSEMINATION

Apart from a lack of understanding and information, there are other major barriers to the recruitment or retention of people from vulnerable groups by employers. Strategies addressing these barriers have been developed within EQUAL and they appear to indicate the need to ensure a business orientation at all stages and to address the organisation's culture. A wide range of support services has been offered to employers by EQUAL DPs including workplace audits, job profiling and matching services, tutoring/mentoring, and support in the recruitment

⁸ For more information click on [Presentation](#)

and/or retention of workers from disadvantaged groups. However, if a realistic change is to be made in the culture of an enterprise, the more of these services that are contained in the package offered by a DP, the greater the chance that DP will have of making an impact and of sustaining its success.

Some EQUAL DP have noted that large companies, usually with their own HRD departments, are generally up to date in their knowledge of equality legislation and financial incentives and it is the SMEs that require most help in these respects. Conversely, in relation to their size, some SMEs are often much more adventurous in terms of employing people from different groupings.

Apart from dissemination strategies related to the wider use or replication of those EQUAL approaches, tools or products that have been developed and successfully tested, DPs are using two main methods to publicise what they are doing and to get other employers on board. There is a small but significant number of DPs working on aspects concerned with quality and they are developing labels or marks that can be applied to employers in the mainstream labour market.

Showcasing of role models can also promote the dissemination and wider application of successful practices related to the employment of people from disadvantaged groups. One of the most convincing arguments is the experience of fellow employers who can “testify” to the positive effects of diversity strategies on their businesses. Employers’ organisations can actively support the creation of structured opportunities for their members to learn from each other through the organisation of round tables, employer networks and awards.

Similarly the commitment and expectations of employers can place new demands on employment services and can also act a catalyst for more effective cooperation with other relevant operators. This was certainly the case in the Czech [PENTACOM DP](#) where the active involvement of employers was crucial to the establishing of a labour market integration scheme for people with disabilities. It was also reflected in the Slovenian project [SINTEZA](#) that developed lifelong learning for the most vulnerable groups in the workforce.

5. WORKSHOP SESSION: WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

5.1. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

During this second session, each of the three Workshops will consider the following four questions. These four questions are meant to provide a path that will lead the Workshop towards the formulation of two strong Recommendations for future Policies or Practices relating to the Social Inclusion and/or Vocational Integration of Diverse or Disadvantaged Groupings.

1. What can be done to make employers more receptive to employing people from disadvantaged/diverse backgrounds?
2. Is legislation the answer, or what incentives could be offered to aid the recruitment of people from disadvantaged/diverse backgrounds?
3. How relevant is the “business case” for diversity and are there any examples of companies or enterprises having made financial gains from integrating a diversity approach into their policies on recruitment and human resource development?
4. How important a factor is Corporate Social Responsibility in motivating employers and would the development of a European - level Diversity Charter for Employers advance such positive action and, if so, what should such a Charter include (see Annex 1 for examples of two national charters).

5.2. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Exchange Event held, in Belfast, in June 2007 proposed that the following issues might be explored in terms of future Policy Recommendations. Therefore, these should be taken into account in the formulation of what the Workshop considers to be the two most crucial Recommendations relating to Working with Employers.

Convincing Employers

There is a need to address employers in jargon-free language that they can understand. Initial contact with employers is often most effective when it is based on a two pronged approach that combines raising employers' awareness of the need to comply with the provisions of employment and equality legislation, together with an attempt to convince them of the benefits of diversity.

Sharing Positive Messages

Employing people from disadvantaged groupings can appeal to employers' sense of corporate social responsibility, especially when they realise that it could result in an improved image and customer base for their enterprises. However, more efforts are required to disseminate studies showing positive business returns from such social responsibility policies and also in building diversity into HR Management training.

Providing Incentives to Increased Employment

EQUAL's experience of formulating diversity plans for companies has shown that recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds can be stimulated by establishing targets for their representation in the companies' workforces. Increased financial incentives for employing such individuals would be welcomed and significant advances could be made through the introduction of diversity, as a requirement, in public procurement tendering processes.

Developing a Diversity Charter

The creation of an award or quality mark issued and controlled at national level, but endorsed and recognised, at EU level may also provide a further stimulus to recruitment. Such an award could be developed from Employers' Charters that already exist in some Member States (see Annex 1).

6. EQUAL EXPERIENCE IN BUILDING BRIDGES

6.1. NEW ROLES IN THE INTEGRATION PROCESS

Another method of developing empowerment concerns the introduction of new roles into the integration process. Three main roles have been tested under EQUAL and these have the potential for further, large scale application. They are based on the principle that the 'client' is the principal actor and the services and support are designed and provided at that person's request.

Personal Coordinator

One approach ensures that people are offered a **personal coordinator** who is available to advise and support them in all their contacts with various services and agencies throughout the entire integration process. The coordinator must spend time with the client in order to get a proper picture of the situation, as seen from the client's perspective. As the Swedish [SUCCESS DP](#) indicates, "this requires a type of interaction similar to listening to a friend rather than conducting a therapeutic interview." The picture obtained is not limited to the person's problems, but also includes the resources the person has, or has access to, as well as the person's interests, goals and/or expectations. The next stage concentrates on motivating the individual to take charge of the situation and to follow through his or her own interests, goals and ambitions.

Job Coach

Positive experiences have also been gained through EQUAL from the further development of Supported Employment Schemes for people with physical and intellectual disabilities such as that operated by the Northern Irish [SEA DP](#). The approach tested is similar to that described above but the main support is provided by a **job coach**, as in the [Koutsi DP](#), in Finland. The role of the job coach is to provide assistance but not to take any action without the individual's agreement. EQUAL has demonstrated a number of ways in which job coaches encourage empowerment and has also shown that job coaches are effective in empowering people in their search for employment. The job coach is a relatively new role and while no European training course has been established, EQUAL has provided a platform for the sharing of experiences and certain common elements in the preparatory training have emerged.

Peer Supporter or Role-Model

Another job profile that has been developed in EQUAL is that of the **peer supporter or peer role-model**. In some DPs, young individuals have been trained to become youth workers or peer coaches for other young people. In the Dutch "[Catch the Coach-to-Be](#)" project, this training has led to a professional youth work qualification. In other situations, individuals from other EQUAL target groups have also been trained and then employed as project workers or even social workers, as in a Lithuanian DP with the very long name of [the Development of Support Mechanisms for the Integration of Roma into the Labour Market](#). The main idea is that these people better understand the needs of the projects' "potential clients" and can make better contact with, and be accepted by, the "clients," as they come from the same background, experience, language or culture. This is also the case for the peer "befrienders" employed in the English [Thresholds DP](#). Such approaches have two main benefits in that these individuals are empowered through their training and subsequent employment and, at the same time, they help to motivate and empower other clients of their DPs on the basis of "*Well if they can do something like this, then maybe we can too.*" This was certainly the case for the peer researchers from ex-offender backgrounds who were employed in the [Women into Work DP](#), which is also based in England.

These EQUAL experiences offer new approaches that combine activation measures with a deliberate strategy of empowering people to steer their own integration processes. In particular, they provide templates for new roles that could be introduced by public employment services, perhaps in conjunction with other agencies or NGOs, which would improve the uptake of their services by disadvantaged/diverse groupings.

6.2. EMPOWERMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One concept or slogan that has emerged from EQUAL's empowerment activities is "nothing about us without us." EQUAL has tackled a major problem in this respect: the fact that, although many professionals and integration service providers agree with this principle, they very rarely apply it to their own work. These organisations have to at least respect, if not stimulate and strengthen, the individual's empowerment to make sure that he or she can really take charge of the integration process.

The EQUAL experiences suggest that the traditional caring or helping approaches found in education and training, basic employment services and employment and job coaching initiatives tend to perpetuate dependency. Whereas, clients who are allowed to make their own decisions on employment paths are more likely to sustain their involvement and progress towards employment and so new skills and competences are required by the staff of some integration agencies. Thus, a guideline for empowering quality models in organisations, which contributes to the achievement of quality standards, has been produced in an EQUAL transnational partnership called [\(Equip\)ment](#) involving [DPs from the Netherlands, Belgium and Finland](#)⁹.

Through questionnaires applied to customers, consensus meetings and training sessions the staff are encouraged to look at the organisation in terms of:

- Content – how the organisation listens to, involves and communicates with its customers;
- Process – how the organisation listens to, involves and trains its staff;
- Policy – the impacts on the organisation of the government's employment and social security/benefit policies and of the expectations of employers.

The end result is an assessment of the extent to which the organisation's quality policy is empowering and an agreement on any necessary changes that have to be made. However, it is always acknowledged that empowerment must be embedded within quality principles and not just quality standards. In other words there has to be real action and not simply a ticking of boxes. This guideline approach has produced positive changes in public employment services, training agencies, local authorities' social security and social income departments and even in the offices of one national income tax authority.

⁹ For more information click on [Presentation](#)

7. WORKSHOP SESSION: BUILDING BRIDGES

7.1. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

During the third session, each of the three Workshops will consider the following four questions. These four questions are meant to provide a path that will lead the Workshop towards the formulation of two strong Recommendations for future Policies or Practices relating to the Social Inclusion and/or Vocational Integration of Diverse or Disadvantaged Groupings.

1. How do bridge builders/policymakers ensure that consultation is real and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries?
2. What are the constraints faced by bridge builders/policymakers in taking forward recommendations from beneficiaries?
3. How realistic is it to expect “bottom-up” opinions to make it to the policymaking level (whether local, national or EU level)?
4. What mechanisms could be put in place to ensure that the EQUAL principles are not sidelined in the future development of policy and programmes, at national and European-level?

7.2. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Exchange Event held, in Belfast, in June 2007 proposed that the following issues might be explored in terms of future Policy Recommendations. Therefore, these should be taken into account in the formulation of what the Workshop considers to be the two most crucial Recommendations relating to Building the Bridges.

Creating and Empowering Environment

Empowerment must always be approached from both the individual and the environmental perspectives and, in the latter instance, “environmental” relates to the practices of integration agencies. These agencies should listen to the customer’s viewpoint and should increase his or her abilities to make choices and to transform those choices into action. Experience from EQUAL also indicates that when an individual feels ownership of the choice process, he or she is more likely to stick with or sustain the chosen course of action.

Improving the Quality of Services

Thus, there is a need to enhance the capacities of local or regional agencies and services to better understand the different needs of groups that suffer from discrimination and to build on the diversity of such groups to create a positive momentum for their integration. Quality standards for the operation of these agencies such as the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) would not, in their own right, guarantee an empowering environment and it was necessary to embed empowerment within the quality principles of the agency.

Increasing Cooperation

Cooperative working should be promoted and this should result in committed integrated partnerships that involve all the key players including the beneficiaries. Perhaps the term shareholders rather than stake holders should be used, in this respect, to describe the members of such partnerships, as it tends to suggest that all have an equal involvement.

Promoting Partnership and Empowerment

EQUAL’s achievements in terms of partnership and empowerment should be taken forward in all European programmes and activities aimed at combating social exclusion and discrimination. Perhaps the most important of these is the ESF as the EU Social Agenda states that the ESF will provide support for the Member States’ policies to implement the guidelines and recommendations adopted under the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the objectives approved by the EU in the area of social inclusion.

ANNEX 1: EMPLOYERS' CHARTERS

The Charter of Diversity for Businesses in Germany

Germany's economic landscape is shaped by the diversity of modern society, influenced by globalisation and demographic change. We can be economically successful only when we recognise and capitalise on this existing diversity. This applies to the diversity of our workforce and the diversity in terms of the requirements of our customers, as well as those of our business partners. The diversity of our employees with their different skills and talents offers opportunities to take advantage of innovative and creative solutions.

The implementation of the "Charter of Diversity" within our organisation aims to create a working environment that is free from prejudice. All employees will be appreciated and valued regardless of their gender, race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or ideology, disability, age, sexual orientation and identity. The recognition and promotion of this diversity creates potential economic advantages for our company.

We are creating a climate of acceptance and mutual trust. This has positive effects on our image in the eyes of our business partners and our customers, both in Germany, and abroad.

Within the framework of this Charter we will:

- 1) Nurture a company culture that is marked by mutual respect and esteem for each individual. We are creating the conditions for both managers and employees to recognise, share and internalise these values. This requires a strong commitment from management;
- 2) Assess our human resource policies and procedures and ensure that they take due account of the multitude of skills and talents of all employees, as well as our performance requirements;
- 3) Recognise the social diversity within, and outside, our organisation, value the potential within this diversity and use it profitably for our company;
- 4) Ensure that the implementation of the Charter is the subject of internal and external dialogue;
- 5) Report publicly each year on our activities and progress regarding the promotion of diversity and on how we value it;
- 6) Inform our members of staff about diversity issues and involve them in the implementation of the charter.

We are convinced that living the reality of diversity and holding this diversity in high regard has positive effects on German society.

The French Diversity Charter

The Rationale

The concept of Equal Rights for all our citizens is enshrined under our Constitution. However, many immigrants, often highly qualified, fail to find employment, while their French-born counterparts manage with little difficulty. A "glass ceiling" inhibits the upwards social mobility of many of our citizens, who face discrimination because of their ethnic origin, the colour of their skin or their place of residence. They are excluded from whole sectors of economic activity and from participation in public life. We discriminate, often without realising it.

If French society is made up of diverse components, then that diversity should be reflected at the different levels of society, including the highest. It is a question of justice, the national interest and even simple economics.

The Diversity Charter for enterprises is predicated on a very simple notion: it is in the interest of companies to reflect the diversity of the society in which they operate. In the same way that the male/female mix in the workplace produces a social dynamic and helps improve performance, we should recognise that diversity is not driven by compassion, but is in the social and economic interest of the company.

In other countries, companies which have incorporated diversity into the core of their strategies recognise that diversity in society has as many economic as social advantages. They are also aware that diversity strategies impact positively on the creativity and competitiveness of the company.

Ethnic origin will never become “the” criterion for finding employment. Our action aims to counteract discriminatory practices, not to introduce new ones. The Charter simply seeks to compensate for the obstacles to employment faced by many immigrants: shortcomings in understanding the cultural and social contexts, as well as unfamiliarity with the types of networks, that could help them to find a job. The commitment of a company to engage positively with such groups extends beyond recognising qualifications: it depends quite simply on recognising people’s competence.

To achieve this, companies need to be ready to leave their comfort zones, to be willing to take risks and to be non-conformist in order to counterbalance the barriers to recruitment faced by graduates from minority ethnic communities, and, once they are employed, to ensure that avenues to promotion are open to them. To this end, companies should, as quickly as possible, move to formalise and validate their commitments to the Diversity Charter. The aim is to open access to employment for candidates from North Africa, Asia and to those of other colours, in order to allow them to demonstrate and prove the value of their talents.

All companies which are signatories to the Charter will agree to publish in their Annual Report an account of the actions they have undertaken to promote diversity and real equality.

The Charter carries a strong message, a pledge to openness, a clear promise to tackle discrimination and to promote diversity in France. While this promise is an important step forward, it is not enough. We need to establish a reliable means of evaluation the effectiveness of the activities undertaken under the auspices of the Charter.

The Charter goes beyond rigid and discriminatory quota systems and beyond good will, which is doomed to failure. It is a first step towards a pluralist democracy which is clearly in the spirit of our republican heritage.

The Charter

Companies which promote diversity in their recruitment and promotion practices will benefit in the long term, as such approaches contribute to their effectiveness and to quality of their relationships with the wider community. They can also impact positively on the company’s image in a number of fields: with clients, external services and customers both in France and in the rest of the world.

The Diversity Charter adopted by our company serves to demonstrate our commitment, in France, to ethnic, social and cultural diversity in our company.

Under the Charter, we pledge to:

1. Make our managers and colleagues who work in recruitment, training and career development aware of anti-discriminatory and diversity issues;
2. Acknowledge and promote the principle of non-discrimination in all its forms and at all levels of human resource management : recruitment, training, professional development and promotion;

3. Attempt to reflect in all levels of our staff teams the diversity of French society, in particular its ethnic and cultural diversity;
4. Inform all our colleagues of our commitment to non-discrimination and diversity, and keep them informed periodically of the outcomes of that commitment;
5. Engage with staff representatives (Trades Union Officials) on the development and implementation of the company diversity policy;
6. Include in our annual report a section which details our commitment to non-discrimination and diversity, focusing on actions, activities and results.