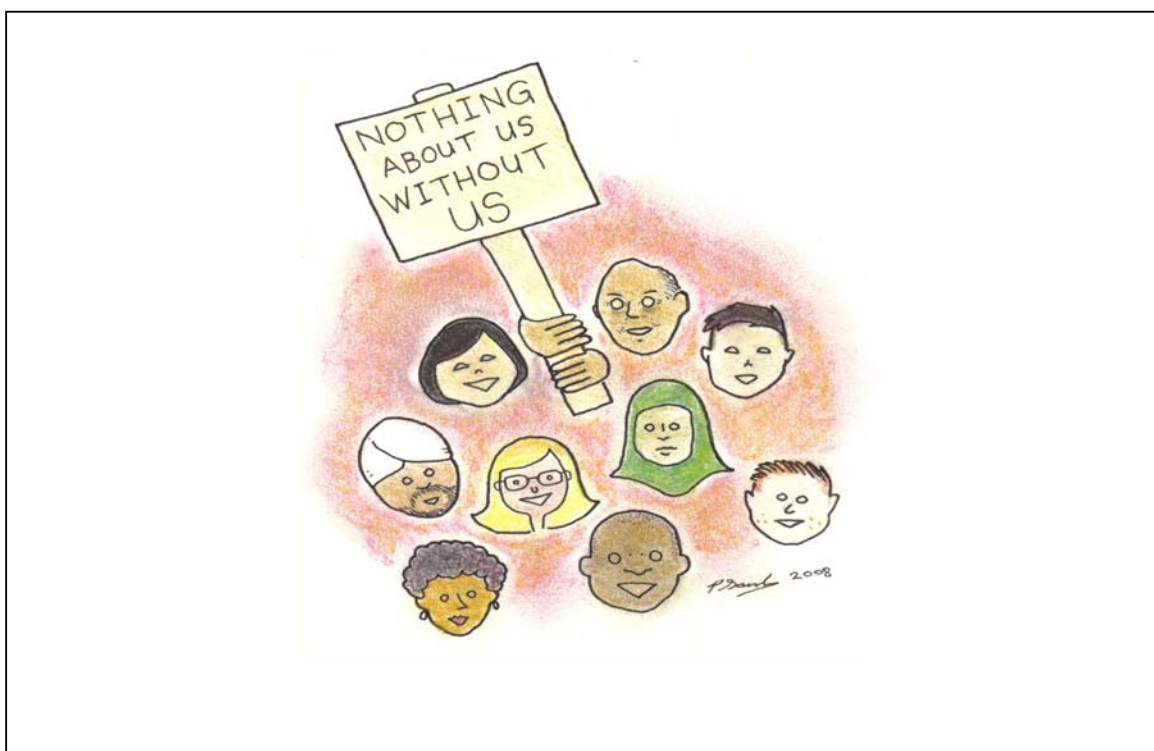


**DIVERSIFYING THE WORKPLACE:
STRATEGIES FOR
EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION**



**The Report on an EQUAL Policy Forum
held in
Belfast, Northern Ireland
on
29 and 30 November 2007**

THE 2000 – 2006 EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE IN ACTION

EQUAL was a Community Initiative financed through the European Social Fund (ESF). This programme tested and promoted new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market, both for those who are in work and for those seeking work. EQUAL was part of the European Union's strategy for more and better jobs and for ensuring that no-one is denied access to them.

EQUAL co-financed activities in all EU Member States. The EU contribution to EQUAL of € 3.274 billion was matched by national funding. Two calls for proposals for EQUAL projects took place in the Member States, the first one in 2001 and the second and final one in 2004.

EQUAL operated across eight thematic fields which embraced the four pillars of the [European Employment Strategy](#) :

- Employability - (Re-)integration to the labour market;
- Employability - Combating racism;
- Entrepreneurship - Business creation;
- Entrepreneurship - Social economy;
- Adaptability - Life long learning;
- Adaptability - Adaptation to change and NIT;
- Equal opportunities - Reconciling family and professional life;
- Equal opportunities - Reducing gender gaps and desegregation.

It also had a strand that promoted the Social and Vocational Integration of Asylum Seekers.

EQUAL funded activities implemented by strategic partnerships called Development Partnerships (DPs) that addressed one of the above nine strands. These DPs brought together key actors such as local and regional authorities, training bodies, public employment services, NGOs, enterprises and social partners on either a geographical or sectoral level to tackle discrimination and inequality.

The process of sharing information and exploiting the results of innovation was at the heart of EQUAL. At national level, many networks were established to discuss and evaluate the most promising outcomes of the work of Development Partnerships and to prepare for their dissemination and integration into policies and practice. These networks brought DPs together with other actors including political decision-makers from outside EQUAL who were the potential users of the outcomes.

At European level, the objectives were identical. In order to identify concrete and transferable lessons and to develop new policies and practices, it was essential to capture the outcomes of the experiences of around 3.300 EQUAL Development Partnerships. This was done on the basis of a common work programme for mainstreaming at EU level that had been agreed and confirmed with the EQUAL Managing Authorities in the various Member States. Different platforms of common interest to the Member States and the European Commission were set up, which facilitated the validation, exploitation and long-lasting dissemination of EQUAL results. These included peer reviews, exchange events, learning seminars, communities of practice and policy fora.

The Policy Forum on Diversifying the Workplace: Strategies for Empowerment and Inclusion that was held in Belfast on November 29/30 2008 was the second element in an EQUAL Mainstreaming Programme on the themes of diversity and empowerment. This Mainstreaming Platform had been agreed between the European Commission and a European Steering Group (See Annex 1) led by UK-Northern Ireland working in close cooperation with Belgium-Flanders, Latvia, Malta and Portugal.

THE MAIN OUTCOMES AT A GLANCE

The main recommendations to emerge from this Policy Forum were as follows.

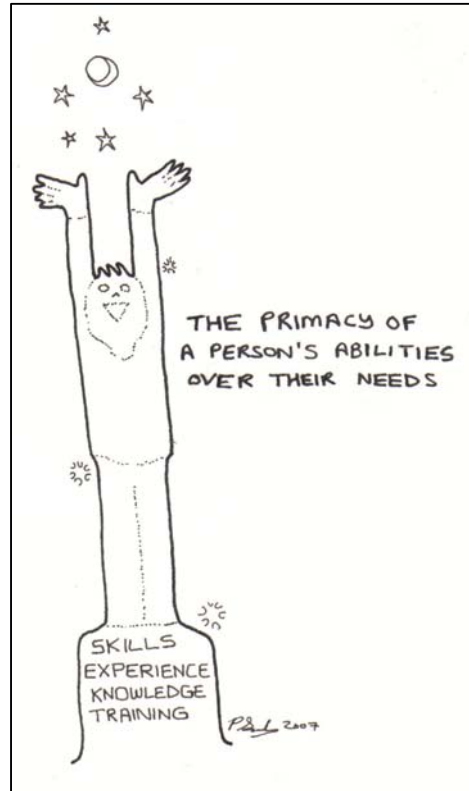
1. ***The principle of 'Nothing about Us without Us' should be a required feature of all publicly-funded activity – and should be seen as a key determinant of value for money.***

The main legacy of EQUAL is seen to be the affirmation of the primacy of people's abilities over their needs. Where it has been most successful, it has shown how it is possible to move from advocacy and acceptance of individual rights, to good learning and employment practices through which people are trained to develop their individual talents and abilities, and then are employed to exploit them. (See page 30 - Closing Plenary Section)

2. ***Listening to disadvantaged people and recognising them as "Experts through Experience" should become the basis for future schemes and projects.***

EQUAL has created a great deal of inter-agency working, including partnerships and networks activities that have brought the voice and the lived experience of disadvantaged people into the schemes and activities that involve them. These structures that have actively and directly involved such "Experts through Experience" must not be lost after EQUAL and should be used as examples of good practice in the future. (See page 31 - Closing Plenary Section)

3. ***The learning from EQUAL's employer engagement should be captured and sustained through the sharing of these positive experiences.***



In EQUAL, employers have had the opportunity to test new ways of promoting diversity such as establishing alternative recruitment strategies, guaranteed job interview schemes, work placement and mentoring programmes, new tailored training courses and employers' networks. These positive experiences have stimulated a change in employers' attitudes and mindsets about diverse groups and also a change their behaviour in relation to how they recruit and retain employees, in general. In addition, it should be noted that public authorities and public agencies are also employers and, in many cases, they have a lead function in demonstrating positive recruitment and employment practices to private employers. (See page 31 - Closing Plenary Section)

4. There should be more guidance about, and research into, the business case for diversity and its applications.

Whilst legislation may be helpful in the recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly in Member States with less comprehensive equality frameworks, the desired cultural change throughout Europe requires persuasion and commitment and not merely compulsion. The business case is an important factor in the promotion of diversity but it may not always be possible to demonstrate the benefits of diversity by using economic criteria alone. However, EQUAL has shown that employers will engage in the creation of opportunities for disadvantaged, if such cooperation is clearly focussed on approaches to reconciling business objectives with social responsibility. (See page 31 - Closing Plenary Section)

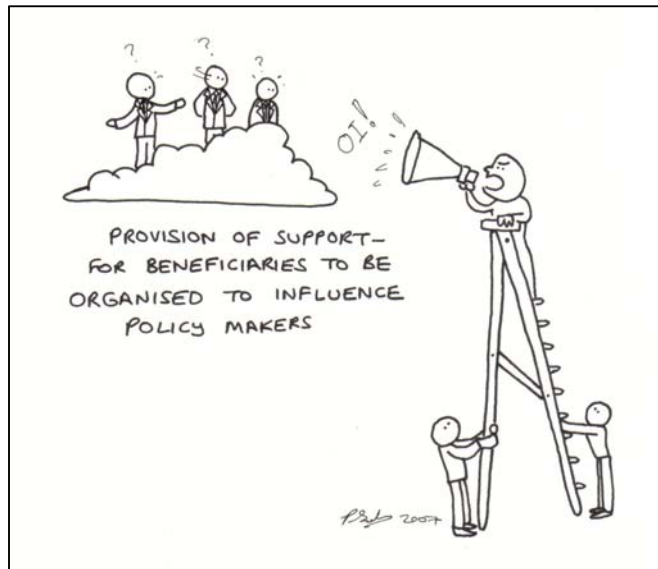
5. There should be genuine engagement of official agencies and policy makers with project beneficiaries and also practitioners. Such consultations should treat beneficiaries as equal partners within a partnership of shareholders and “consult and ignore” scenarios” should be avoided by providing feedback to beneficiaries - thus ensuring accountability.

EQUAL experience has shown how the conscious involvement of beneficiaries, as Experts through Experience, in the planning, delivery and evaluation of programmes has had a significantly positive impact on the quality and appropriateness of the interventions. Such consultation also obtains a degree of commitment and ownership from beneficiaries that could not otherwise be achieved. (See page 32 - Closing Plenary Section)

6. Support should be provided, through capacity building and the establishing of formal arrangements for consultations, at local regional and national levels to enable beneficiaries to influence policy-makers.

EQUAL has demonstrated that if beneficiary groups are to influence policy, they need assistance in preparing and presenting their case and communicating evidence-based successes and benefits in support of that case. (See page 32 - Closing Plenary Section)

7. Training or the type of experiential learning that has been developed in EQUAL should be provided for members of staff in the public and the voluntary sectors in order to stimulate a greater urgency in making the cultural changes that would result in a more direct and active involvement of either their clients or those groupings that they claim to represent.



Two types of bodies have a major role to play in ensuring that beneficiaries are appropriately involved and consulted. These are the public authorities that are the main service providers and the voluntary or representative organisations that are in closest contact with the beneficiaries but both need to change their thinking and their practices. (See page 32 - Closing Plenary Section)

8. The concepts of empowerment and diversity should be developed within the 2007 – 2013 ESF Operational Programmes and within the wider framework of national and EU social inclusion, anti-discrimination and employment policies.

Whilst some of the principles and approaches of EQUAL have been incorporated into the new ESF Regulations and into national and regional Operational Programmes, initiatives must be taken to advance all of its achievements to continue the validation and mainstreaming of models of best practice. (See page 33 - Closing Plenary Section)

9. Provision should be made for the appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the accountability of ESF and other European or national programmes to their beneficiaries and for the recording of examples of good practice in terms of beneficiary involvement and empowerment.

European programmes like EQUAL can have significant innovative and catalytic effects, particularly at local and regional levels where they can stimulate the introduction of new structures and practices. (See page 33 - Closing Plenary Section)

At its meeting, in Paris, on 4 February 2008, the European Steering Group for this Mainstreaming Programme considered a draft of the report on the Policy Forum and, in particular, it agreed the above recommendations. The Steering Group also decided to work with the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities to establish another platform within the 2007 to 2013 European Social Fund Programming Period, as suggested during the final Plenary Session of the Policy Forum. The objectives of this platform will be to pursue the above recommendations and to incorporate EQUAL's best practices in terms of diversity and empowerment into the implementation of ESF Operational Programmes and national and EU employment, inclusion and anti-discrimination programmes. The ultimate aim will be to create a stable and real link between people and projects on the ground and policy issues at EU and national level. This could prove a very important instrument in bringing sustainable change to national and European actions to combat labour market inequalities.

The Steering Group would like to recommend the format of this Policy Forum to the European Commission as an example of good practice for the management of future events. In their experience, which goes back to the start of the Community Initiatives in 1992, few other formats have been as successful in presenting and showcasing the experiences of beneficiaries of ESF funded activity.

THE CONTEXT

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

The Mainstreaming Platform

UK – Northern Ireland (UKni), together with Latvia, Malta, Belgium – Flanders (BEnl) and Portugal worked to capitalise on EQUAL's experience of diversity and empowerment. This Steering Group, which also included a representative of the European Commission, planned and implemented 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 were emerging from EQUAL to policy makers and employers and to engage their interest in taking some of these forward.

It was also envisaged that the work initiated in the course of these events might be extended through another platform that would ensure the transfer of EQUAL outcomes on diversity and empowerment into the European Social Fund's Operational Programmes and their mainstreaming into national and EU policies.

Building on Diversity

This European Mainstreaming Platform was designed to develop and promote the work undertaken by the [European Thematic Group](#) on Employability (ETG 1) 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, they should deploy 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:

- 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;

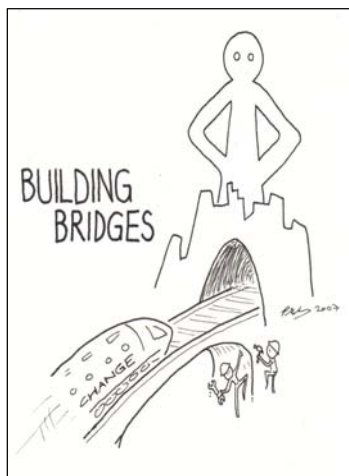
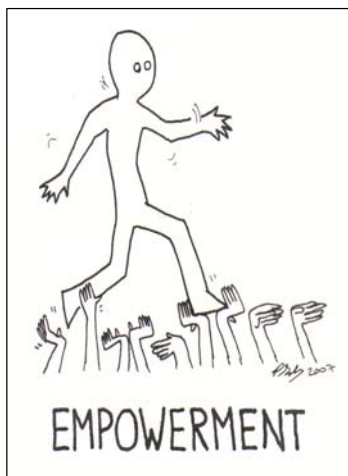
¹ For more information click on [2007 EQUAL NI Conferences](#)

- 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 the provision of 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 the following three sub-issues within this overall issue of Building on Diversity and these were also the themes that guided 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.



SETTING THE SCENE AT THE EVENT



Pictured at the event are: Trevor Connolly, Director Finance and European Division, Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), Peter Stub-Jorgensen, Director, Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission and Greg McConnell, Deputy Secretary, DEL.

The Policy Forum was introduced by Trevor Connolly, **Director, Finance and European Division, Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)** in Northern Ireland, who introduced the keynote speakers. The Policy Forum, according to **Greg McConnell, Deputy Secretary, Department for Employment and Learning** in his opening remarks, was “*a unique opportunity to identify innovative and effective policies that will enable disadvantaged groups to overcome inequalities in employment.*” Greg also believed that “*this Policy Forum will take things a stage further through identifying and highlighting definitive emerging policy messages which have the potential for implementation throughout Europe.*”

Greg spoke about the innovative structure of this event which provided an opportunity for key stakeholders, beneficiaries, employers, policy makers and NGOs, to come together to discuss their particular policy needs and to begin to influence the direction of future strategy. His view, as a policy maker, was that it was vitally important to hear of the experiences of the beneficiaries and employers and to learn from them. He reminded the audience that the slogan “*nothing about us without us*” had emerged from the preceding Exchange Event held in Belfast, in June 2007. This slogan alluded to the requirement for service providers to take into account the needs of service users when developing or enhancing policy. Although many agreed with the principle of empowering service users, he believed that, very often, it does not materialise in practice. Greg expressed his hope that “*the Policy Forum will reinforce the message that taking into account the views and needs of service users is of paramount importance, as these can underpin the development of appropriately targeted initiatives and policies.*”

Peter Stub-Jorgensen, Director, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission echoed Greg's thoughts by focussing on the contribution that EQUAL's empowerment and diversity outcomes could make to the concept of "active inclusion" that had been developed by the Commission. He explained that this concept was based on three pillars: a link to the labour market; income support; and better access to services that may help some individuals and their families to enter mainstream society.

In its most recent Communication² on taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market, the Commission had emphasised the need to develop quality services comprising, among others, user involvement and a framework for equality both in recruitment policies and in service provision.

Peter indicated that EQUAL's approaches were also reflected in the European Employment Strategy's calls for active and preventive labour market measures as part of a broader inclusion policy, the targeting of those furthest from the labour market, the introduction of tailor-made programmes and the provision of personalised advice and guidance.³ He believed that the road to active inclusion also required tackling the structural barriers faced by many disadvantaged groups and so stamping out discrimination in employment and society was vital.

Finally, he outlined the opportunities to take EQUAL outcomes on empowerment and diversity further during the 2007 – 2013 programming period of the European Social Fund (ESF). Peter was particularly pleased to report that *"a conservative estimate indicates that within all the ESF Operational Programmes, which the Commission has received, a total of €3 billion has been allocated to support transnational exchanges and this is the same level, as the resources that were available through EQUAL."*

² Commission Communication of 17/10/2007 on "Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward the active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market" (COM(2007) 620 final)

³ Employment Guidelines 2005-2008 Guideline No 19 Ensure inclusive labour markets, enhance work attractiveness, and make work pay for job seekers, including disadvantaged people, and the inactive

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORKING SESSIONS

The organisational arrangements for the Policy Forum were outlined by **John Neill, Head of the European Unit at the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)** and also **the Chair of the Steering Group of Member States** that had overseen the Mainstreaming Platform. He indicated that the remainder of this first day and the following morning of the Policy Forum would be spent in Working Sessions that would showcase EQUAL's achievements and consider how they could be extended. The themes for the sessions were those that had emerged from the Exchange Event, namely:

- The Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups;
- Working with Employers;
- Building the Bridges.

John stated that *“empowerment had not been a topic that had been addressed by any of the previous EQUAL European Mainstreaming Events and thus, the organisers of this Policy Forum were particularly anxious that the beneficiaries’ viewpoint should make a real impact on all of the discussions over the two days.”* The Steering Group had made a conscious decision to give beneficiaries the first say, in terms of the working sessions and John explained that three of them would introduce the topic of empowerment and then the Policy Forum would break into Workshops. In each of these three Workshops, two more personal and compelling stories would be recounted by EQUAL beneficiaries prior to the detailed discussions. The consideration of the other two themes would follow the same pattern with three employers and then three bridge builders or policy makers speaking about their involvement with EQUAL followed each time by Workshops to consider their views and the views of their peers in greater detail. The outcomes of all of the Workshops would then be presented during the final Plenary Sessions (see Forum Programme in Annex 2).

The Plenary Presentations made by the three Beneficiaries, the three Employers and the three Bridge Builders/Policy Makers can be found on the [Northern Ireland EQUAL web site](#)

John also explained that **Patrick Sanders⁴, a Belfast Artist**, had been commissioned to provide a “visual” account of the Policy Forum and that his “cartoons” would be incorporated into the final report of the event. He ended by reminding participants that a [Background Paper](#) had been produced in advance of the Policy Forum to promote discussion in the Workshops and to help with the formulation of recommendations.

⁴ Patrick Sanders’ email: prhsuk@yahoo.co.uk

FIRST WORKING SESSION THE EMPOWERMENT OF VULNERABLE GROUPS



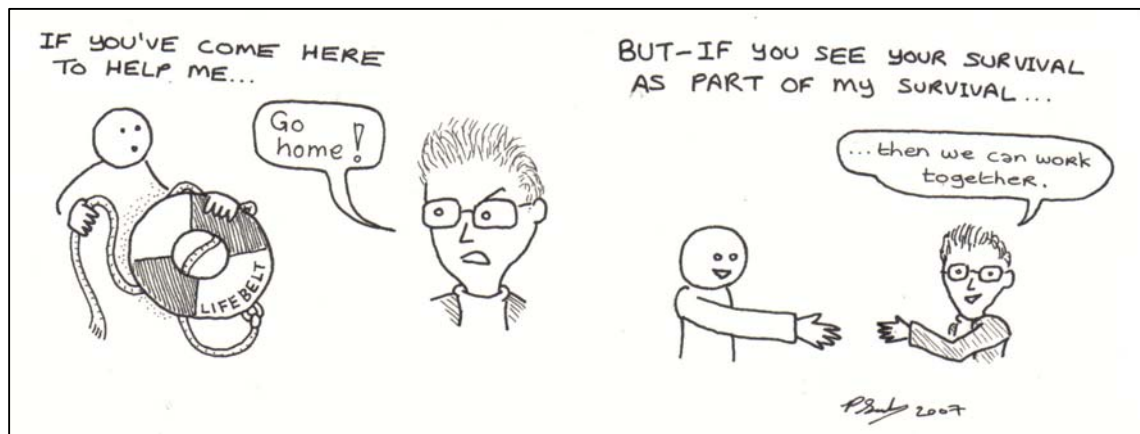
Pictured at the event are: Namu Nambiar (Sweden, Clare Broome (UKni), Wilberforce Essandor (Finland), Orlando Silva (Portugal) and Anne McAleer (UKni).

Plenary Presentations

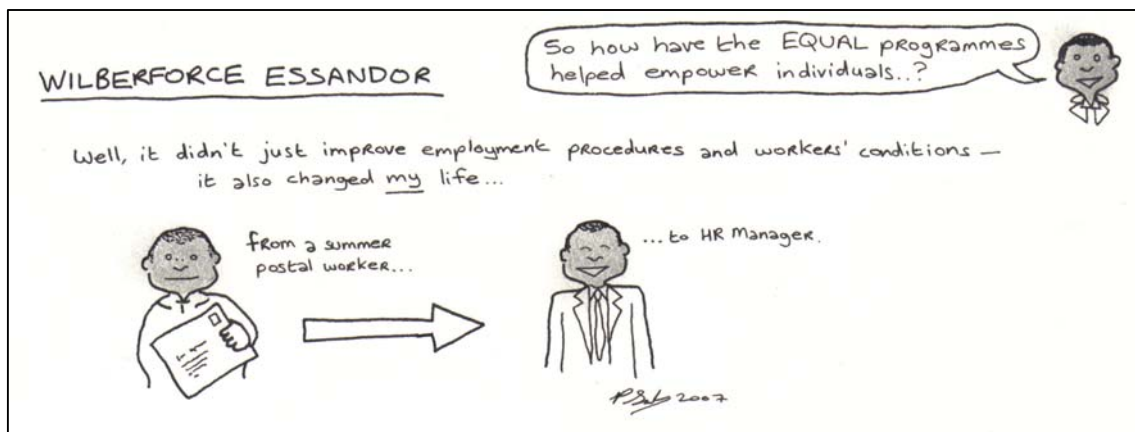
Elisabeth Lindgren traced her history back to a point when she had been rejected by her local job centre because of 25 years of periodical substance abuse and was feeling at just about her lowest point in terms of self-esteem and value. However, while many public services had been unable or unwilling to help her, a social worker finally put her in contact with the **Kooperativet Kullen** that had been set up by an **EQUAL DP** in Baronbackarna, Sweden. This project adopts an empowering approach and it recognises everyone as having the same value because each person brings with them particular skills and knowledge. Elisabeth explained that after just a few weeks, "I was in charge of the petty cash and even the keys to the safe – people trusted me and that made a great difference. Gradually, through the project's support, I found all the power that I needed." Today Elisabeth is sober, she has money coming into her home and she can look after her daughters properly. She is able to help other women set up cooperatives and has even been consulted by a range of local and national politicians. Her main lesson for the Policy Forum was that "individuals who have experienced marginalisation are 'Experts through Experience' and have a lot to offer in developing successful approaches and policies for inclusion."



Anne McAleer from [the Cedar Foundation](#) experienced the very early onset of osteoporosis that meant that in her 20s, she had the bone structure of a woman in her 80s. Then, to make things worse, at the age of 29 she suffered a stroke. As a direct result, she lost her children because she was deemed incapable of caring for them and then she subsequently lost her husband and a number of her friends. However, she became involved in the SEA DP which was managed by the [Northern Ireland Union of Supported Employment](#). This DP aimed to overcome the barriers that people with disabilities face in accessing and staying in employment. Anne was asked to join SEA's Beneficiaries Focus Group and this gave her the opportunity to influence the way in which the project was operating, to meet other people with disabilities and even to take part in transnational exchanges. Anne believed that through these experiences, she has increased her self-confidence and self-belief and has acquired new skills in presentation, negotiation, networking, campaigning and lobbying. She has also regained her children, remarried and developed a much wider circle of friends. She says that "now people see Anne first, not my disability, and I am treated as being part of society." Anne's main message to the other participants was "if you came here today to help me, you can forget it but if you see your survival as part of my survival, we can work together!"



Whilst coming from a totally different background, **Wilberforce Essandor**, or Willie as everyone called him, was also involved in a group that had a similar advisory role to Anne's. Willie came to Finland from Ghana in order to study. He first joined the Finnish postal company, **Itella Corporation**, as a temporary worker and was then taken on full time. In 2001, his employer became one of a number of companies associated with the "Multiculturalism as a resource in a working community" or Etmo DP followed by the "How to initiate into multiculturalism in a working place" or Petmo DP, in 2004. It was quickly recognised that Willie's history and first-hand knowledge made him an excellent candidate for the bridge-building group that the initial DP wanted to establish. This brought together representatives of employers, immigrant workers, native workers and shop stewards. As the work progressed, it was also decided to employ four regional coordinators and Willie applied and was successful in gaining one of these posts. He felt that EQUAL had given him a similar boost to his self-confidence and the same skills as Anne. In addition, he believed that he acquired project management skills and a more profound knowledge of diversity, equality, multicultural issues which served him well when he returned to work in the Itella Corporation. As Willie says, *"I am the living proof of the potency of EQUAL's empowering effect as it has helped me, an immigrant worker, to progress from a summer job to my current post of a Human Resources Manager."*



Workshop Discussions

The three Workshops on the theme of The Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups addressed a set of four questions and a synthesis of their responses is outlined below. Details about the Panellists, Chairs and Rapporteurs of these Workshops may be found in Annex 3.

1. What are the obstacles to employment faced by disadvantaged groups?

Obstacles facing disadvantaged groups are multi-faceted but it is possible to divide them into those on the **demand side** such as employers' attitudes and those on the **supply side** such as the capacities of jobseekers. The physical and attitudinal obstacles also vary for different groups of people.

On the **demand side**, the most widespread obstacles resulted from "attitudinal" barriers and preconceptions about disadvantaged or vulnerable groups that are commonplace amongst employers and government agencies.

There also seems to be a culture, amongst 'officialdom' and employers that can disempower individuals by focusing on their limitations, rather than on their assets and potential abilities. This is reinforced by the fact that the majority of assessment processes tend to concentrate on what the individual **cannot do** as opposed to what she or he **can do**.

Another factor is the use of "blaming language" - terms like "those distanced from the labour market" place the blame squarely at the feet of the individual. The implication is that the fault rests with the individual and not with the system.

In addition, the exclusion of vulnerable groups is sometimes an unintended effect of official processes, as in the case of prisoners who are deliberately disempowered and encouraged to become good prisoners, not good citizens.

Similarly, welfare systems may perpetuate marginalisation by encouraging disadvantaged individuals to become good claimants, not good employees.

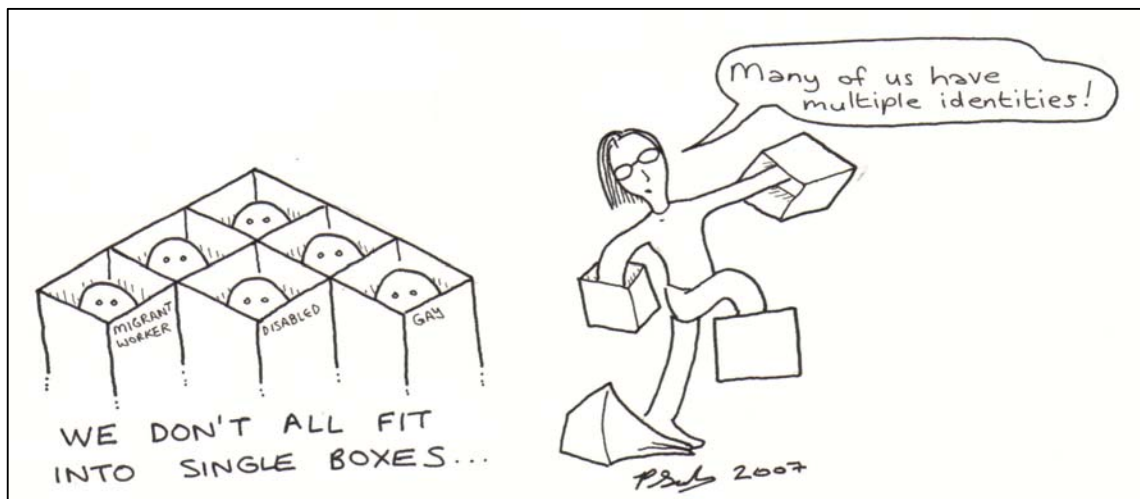
The pace of change is slow among government and employers. The necessity for profit often inhibits employers' willingness to try new or innovative approaches or to employ individuals from disadvantaged groups, particularly when these employers face stiff competition from cheaper markets overseas. Whilst many employers may have diversity policies, their practices, particularly in terms of recruitment and retention are weak. In addition, if employers do not see government taking the lead, they are not inclined to feel any urgency. However, there seems to be a reluctance on the part of official agencies to "lead by example" by employing people from disadvantaged groups.

Existing structures and agencies are too inflexible in responding to multi-dimensional problems and cannot provide appropriate services to answer the problems, as they continue to work in isolation. This isolation tends to be reinforced by a lack of professional training in interagency working. Legal and administrative systems can also hinder cooperative approaches and, in some instances, they contribute to the barriers that impede the access of potential clients.

Another problem in access is the low level of engagement that these more official agencies have with the most marginalised groups. They do not seem to understand how to engage or make contact with people who are experiencing labour market disadvantage. Here, the community and voluntary sector can play a crucial role by acting as an 'honest broker.'

Other issues that were mentioned were the shortage of appropriate occupational guidance and counselling for unemployed people, gender and age bias in varying degrees amongst Member States and the lack of transferability and recognition of qualifications and skills across the EU.

The biggest obstacle that was identified on the **supply side** was the life situation experienced by individuals from these groups, many of whom were facing multiple disadvantages including low levels of education, inadequate housing and poverty.



In some cases, this produced a lack of motivation and poor self-esteem among disadvantaged groups, together with a feeling of helplessness.

Many individuals simply did not have the skills and competences to meet the needs of local employers and did not believe that they had the potential to redress this imbalance.

Another obstacle was the separate language of work. This language often differs from the language that any job seeker speaks and whilst job seekers may have the relevant skills and competences for the job, they do not know how to articulate or present these in a language appropriate to the work place.

2. How did the empowerment activities of EQUAL help beneficiaries overcome these obstacles?



EQUAL projects have created space for all stakeholders such as beneficiaries, policy makers and employers to define and activate solutions that best fit vulnerable people in terms of their access to the labour market.

Beneficiaries cited examples of empowerment activities that delivered life-changing benefits. In particular, beneficiaries had gained greater self-confidence, motivation and a strong sense of personal empowerment that enabled them to overcome many obstacles to employment. Support in a variety of formats such as guidance, advice and mentoring has also been given to beneficiaries to help them become empowered and to take control.

Some factors that were identified as being particularly important in helping beneficiaries to overcome obstacles, included:

- Empowering beneficiaries through management or governance of programme activities and their real participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of projects throughout the programme;
- Organising effective consultation and the inclusion of beneficiaries in decision making;
- Offering beneficiaries trust, respect and responsibility;
- Focusing upon individuals' personal abilities and potential and not on their limitations;
- Promoting personal development tailored to individual beneficiaries' needs;
- Recognising their multiple "identities" such as being a woman, a mother and an employee with different abilities/disabilities and thus, recognition of multi-dimensional problems.

Whether they are a lone parent or a person with a disability, individuals become experts in their own personal circumstances. Thus, the conscious involvement of beneficiaries in the planning, delivery and evaluation of EQUAL projects has had a significant impact on the quality and appropriateness of the interventions.

One of the more striking outcomes of the work done under EQUAL is the understanding that empowerment is not just about beneficiaries, but is also about how policy makers and other actors can be empowered to "change" how they do things. Official organisations and institutions have often

disempowered individuals, and the approach of such organisations must be changed to serve the needs of their clients. EQUAL has demonstrated how this can be done.

In Spain, where the issue of empowerment has been about changing the behaviour of all actors in a process and not just the beneficiaries, EQUAL has changed the way agencies work together through the introduction of partnership, equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

3. What specifically can be done to ensure that the 'Nothing for us without us' principle is implemented?



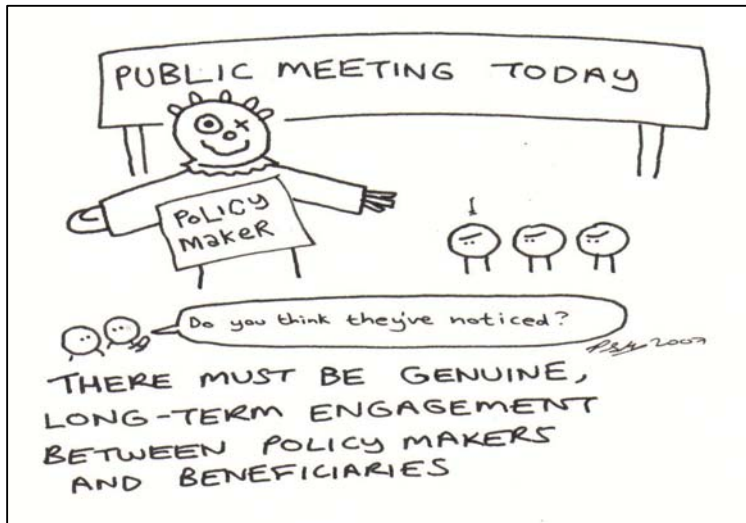
There needs to be an increased acceptance by policy makers that services and support interventions should be tailored to meet the needs of the client group. This means a cultural shift for policy makers in terms of their thinking about how they engage with beneficiaries – not just as passive recipients of support but as full actors in their own progression who can offer valuable personal experience that can ensure that policies and programmes are targeted effectively. Training should also be provided for staff in government agencies and private employment services throughout Europe in order to stimulate a greater urgency in making such a cultural change.

There was some support for legislation that would enshrine the principle of 'Nothing for us without us', although views varied between beneficiaries from different Member States. Some beneficiaries acknowledged the value of existing legislation that provides for consultation but asserted that there needed to be a greater willingness among policy makers to effect change and to go beyond the legislative requirements.

Any meaningful consultation with beneficiaries required their participation throughout the policy-making process right from programme design, through to delivery and evaluation of programmes and policies. This form of consultation involves listening to beneficiaries and learning what the real – as opposed to the perceived - obstacles are, and also providing explanations, when, or if proposals from beneficiaries cannot be implemented.

There is a need to support beneficiaries after their initial participation, if their engagement is to be maintained. EQUAL has helped to highlight the value of such “supported” employment, but there will be a continuing need for such intervention “post EQUAL.” This might be achieved through the establishment of an agency for the employment of vulnerable groups to act as an intermediary between excluded groups and the mainstream labour market.

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?

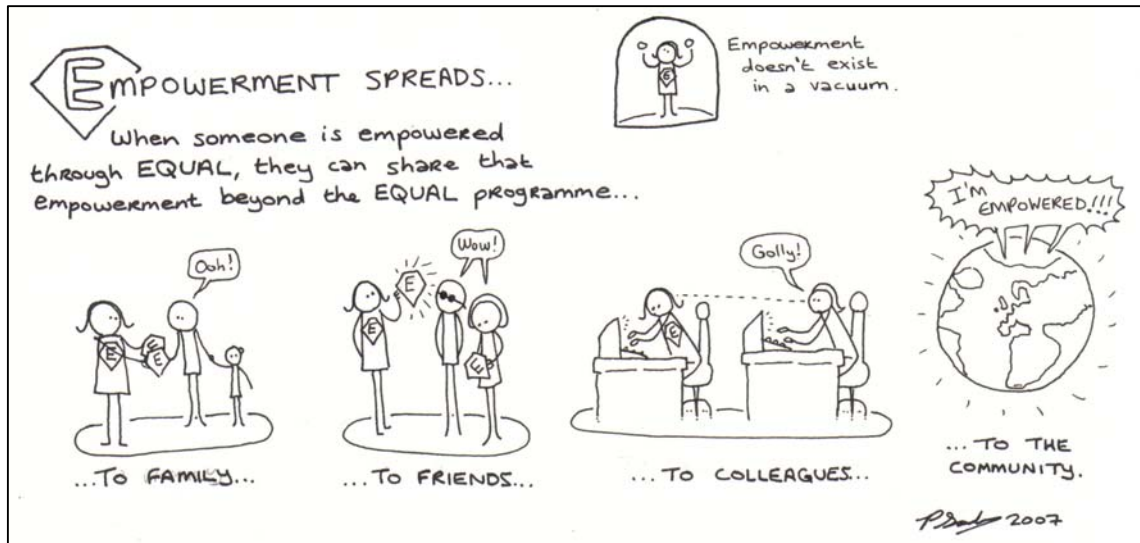


EQUAL beneficiaries have the potential to influence policy, but their influence is most effective where there is early engagement with politicians, civil servants and employers. There is, however, a difference between influencing politicians and influencing civil servants and EQUAL success stories must be communicated at all levels in order to influence practices and ultimately policies. The message is to keep going, not to give up and to use as many different media and openings to policy makers as possible.

“Language” barriers need to be broken down or beneficiaries should try to use “government jargon” to ensure their message is heard. However, the “language of money” might be more vocal and it is also important to highlight the social return on investment or, in other words, how new approaches and practices can save public money in the long term.



Engagement with previously excluded groups in society offers potentially significant gains for both society and the economy. For example, in the BASTA Co-operative in Sweden, former drug-users are employed and paying taxes. This co-operative is sustainable and profit-making, and provides an environment for beneficiaries to embark on social entrepreneurship. Such successful models developed in EQUAL should be used to “open doors” to policy makers, bridge builders and NGOs.



Following these discussions of the theme of Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups, the Chairs and Rapporteurs of the three Workshops met together to agree on a set of Common Recommendations. These were presented to the Closing Plenary by Jeremy Harrison (see final section of this report).

SECOND WORKING SESSION

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS

Plenary Presentations

Alec Carlberg from the [Basta Work-Cooperative](#) explained that its main objective was to get marginalised people into jobs and that this involved giving them a fair chance to regain self-confidence and self-esteem and providing them with an individual “empowerment trip” within the collective framework of a social enterprise. Basta operates in the Stockholm area of Sweden and is providing jobs or vocational training for 150 people, all of them previously excluded from the labour market. Basta’s target groups have continuously been enlarged. In the beginning, it only involved heavy drug users with a high average age of around 40. In recent years, Basta has begun working also with young drop outs from schools and also with migrants. Its vocational programme, YES, has proved to be extremely successful, as more than 70 % of the students get their diploma, and of these another 70 % find a job at once. Alec said that *“the success of Basta activities is based on clear empowerment perspective as it provides real production instead of “killing time,” responsibility instead of irresponsibility, power instead of powerlessness and human communication skills instead of social isolation.”* Basta has shown that it is possible to integrate and rehabilitate people with previously severe problems back into the labour market through running an efficient enterprise that is based on empowerment principles.

Mary Cusick works for the [Wilson Group](#) in Northern Ireland and the mission of this private company is to be involved in building the future with its Property Development ventures, whilst providing an environment in its Nursing Homes that promotes an atmosphere of caring together. It was through its flagship Abingdon Manor Care Centre that the company became involved with the Diversity Works DP. The Wilson Group had always attempted to develop a workforce profile that reflected the diversity in the surrounding population which was increasingly difficult, as Northern Ireland was becoming more attractive to people from other countries. Mary stressed the underlying business need which was to increase “bottom line” profitability. However, through its involvement in the EQUAL DP’s transnational activities, the Wilson Group had found the views of a Portuguese employer to be very helpful in reconciling this need with the increased recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds. The Wilson Group is now integrating the Diversity Works’ recommendations related to employers into its Service Agreement and into its policies and working practices. Mary felt that *“the other benefits for our company from its involvement in EQUAL involvement have been improved communication between various departments and a greater receptiveness on the part of Company Directors to third party intervention.”*

Simona Korez is a member of staff of **Racio Social**, which is an institution for the development of social and employment programmes in Slovenia. It is also the Lead Partner in the SINTEZA DP that aims to develop and implement a model of Lifelong Learning suitable for companies and to enable disabled and disadvantaged people to acquire additional knowledge thus, enhancing their chances of remaining employed. The target groups of the DP also include people who are not motivated to learn, people who are functionally illiterate, people with low educational qualifications and people with decreasing work abilities. Simona explained that *“our DP has developed and tested educational and motivational programmes and ICT training methods and we are now concentrating on transfer of models of lifelong learning into the existing systems of education and training.”* Again, transnational cooperation was an important aspect in the work of this DP and ideas and experience were exchanged with Italy, France and the Netherlands within the EN-POWER Transnational Partnership. Proposals for new legislation on the status of people with disabilities have been drafted, a method of assessing the effectiveness of companies’ HR Departments has been established and a joint report has been produced. Now, the achievements of the DP are gradually being introduced into policies and practices at national, as well as international level.

Workshop Discussions

The three Workshops on the theme of Working with Employers addressed a set of four questions and a synthesis of their responses is outlined below. Details about the Panellists, Chairs and Rapporteurs of these Workshops may be found in Annex 3.

1. What can be done to make employers more receptive to employing people from disadvantaged or diverse backgrounds?

The first step is to ensure that the employers see that there are gains for them and that their involvement is not defined on a purely “philanthropic” basis. A range of promotional and awareness-raising activities have been organised by EQUAL to challenge perceptions and stereotyping and to alleviate any potential fears that employers might have about hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds. These activities have often included explanations about the social advantages of diversity for employers and education and training focused on awareness-raising at middle management/practitioner and staff levels. There is anecdotal evidence emerging from EQUAL that this real-time engagement with managers, staff and co-workers does change attitudes and practices.



Employer engagement is more likely to happen when they are presented with an explanation of what is expected of them, accompanied by clearly defined aims and objectives. A number of projects have adopted this strategy to gain employer involvement in piloting interventions in the work place, such as alternative recruitment strategies, guaranteed job interview schemes, work placement and mentoring programmes. In addition, these types of alternative employment and retention measures seem to have had a knock-on effect in terms of the existing policies of employers. Through EQUAL, employers have had the opportunity to test new ways of doing things and this positive experience has allowed them to think differently about how they recruit and retain employees, in general.

There are also a number of examples of employers' networks in EQUAL which have, in effect, acted as support structures for employers in terms of meeting their obligations under equality

and non-discrimination legislation. Relationships play a major role in engaging employers, as they are more willing to employ people from disadvantaged groups if a convincing case is presented by a trusted third party organisation. These localised networks have also acted as information points for employers in both the public and private sectors on issues associated with recruitment, progression and retention of employees. Coordinated through EQUAL projects, the networks provide a vital space for employers to test new ways of operating. However, one thing that is critically important to note is that these networks have to be resourced and coordinated if they are to work and it cannot be assumed that employers will be able to do this themselves.

The value of the partnership approach was also evident in that, with input from employers, training organisations have been able to restructure their provision to better meet the needs of the local labour market and to ensure skill matching. With advice from employers, EQUAL projects have been able to create new tailored pre-employment training programmes comprising of life-skills, work-readiness and communications and IT skills.

Given the wealth of this experience, efforts must be made to capture and sustain the learning from the EQUAL Programme and to develop the existing engagement with employers.

2. Is legislation the answer, or what incentives could be offered to aid the recruitment of people from disadvantaged/ diverse backgrounds?

There is a sense that legislation has, in some ways, been the driver that stirred employers in their response to issues of equality and anti-discrimination. Whilst legislation is viewed as being helpful in the recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds, it is felt that it only partly addresses the issue. Achieving the desired cultural change throughout Europe requires persuasion and commitment, and not merely legislative compulsion. In addition, the impact of legislation is too slow in being realised - Northern Ireland's long-established equality legislation has taken decades to achieve its intended outcomes. There is a degree of support for legislation in some Member States, mainly those with less comprehensive equality frameworks; but in the case of Member States with longer-established legislation, there is strong opposition to further statutory measures.

It seems that the use of quota systems creates or cements existing prejudices. Quotas tend to have a negative impact on beneficiaries who can feel that they have been recruited because of their status as a "lone parent" or a "person with a disability," as opposed to their skills and abilities. A quota system might be seen as an appropriate "temporary measure" but that depends on the legislative system and organisational culture in the Member State in question.

There are also mixed opinions about the use of financial subsidies for the promotion of diversity, which is acknowledged as a complex issue. Focused subsidies like reduced taxes or tax incentives might be used as kick-start or temporary measures but these should be corporate incentives and not incentives based on the number of "beneficiaries" recruited. Larger companies have greater capacity and flexibility to adopt new employment practices, whilst smaller enterprises have much less flexibility and are more likely to need financial incentives or subsidies to persuade them to employ people from marginalised groups. This appears to be particularly true for SMEs in some new Member States.



The crucial point in this context is that there should be a matching process between the skills and competences of the job seeker and the needs of the employer. Financial incentives should also be directed towards awareness-raising activities and the promotion of life-long learning within the workplace, as opposed to acting purely as a "job subsidy".

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?

The business case is an important factor in the promotion of diversity, particularly where the focus on the gains that can be made by employers is allied to a focus on the skills and ability of people wishing to access employment. The relevance of the business case is likely to be dependant upon the nature and size of the enterprise or organisation, the sector in which it is involved and the prevailing economic conditions. For example, employers are more willing to recruit from disadvantaged groups if the labour market is tight and workers are difficult to recruit and, of course, the converse is also true. In addition, the business case has not yet been articulated in some Member States, where government agencies do not employ people from marginalised groups. In these situations, best practice has not been established and there are no clear examples for SMEs to follow.

The business case is intrinsically linked to the issue of added value for employers but, on occasions, this is not reflected in a direct financial benefit but rather in a general improvement or change in the organisation's day-to-day employment practices.

Participation in a modern 21st century economy is likely to encourage employers to embrace diversity. Demographic changes in society and geographic mobility of workers are likely to bring changes in both the workforce and the wider population. Such changes are likely to promote greater diversity as businesses develop PR practices and exploit the commercial benefits of employing a workforce that is demographically representative of its customer base.

However, there should also be more guidance about, and research into, the business case for diversity.



4. How important is Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in motivating employers and would the development of a European-level Diversity Charter for employers advance such positive action and what should such a Charter include?

The aim should be that employers want employees to believe they work for an organisation which embraces the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility. This should result in employees wishing to stay with this employer and the skills and experience base of that company should therefore increase and that, in turn, should lead to greater profitability. However, it is not always a financial decision, but a social attitude decision and as there is too little information available on “financial gains,” employers have to look at the “wider gains.” A change of social attitude should be promoted to achieve a “hearts and minds” win rather than a “statistical win” or the achievement of a pre-determined quota. Employers should be encouraged to recognise and invest in diversity, and be open-minded about the benefits of a diverse workforce. There should also be gender mainstreaming at all levels.

There is guarded support for the idea of the Diversity Charter. Charter recognition could have an impact on the “image” of a company or organisation if it was perceived to a progressive employer. However, charters should be set within a context, as they are part of a process of promoting positive action and the refinement of good practice, rather than being an all-embracing solution. A diversity charter or quality mark might be formalised as a compliance mechanism so that to secure public contracts, an organisation or enterprise would have to reach specific diversity targets. Such an initiative might best be supported and implemented through localised employers’ networks.

Some Member States favour “Quality Awards” as an approach to promoting diversity. For example, Slovenia has recently introduced a “Quality Mark” for organisations that aim to be recognised as ‘family friendly’ employers. Under this scheme, employers are required to establish a minimum number of family friendly practices in order to achieve recognition. More than seventy companies have so far registered for the quality award.



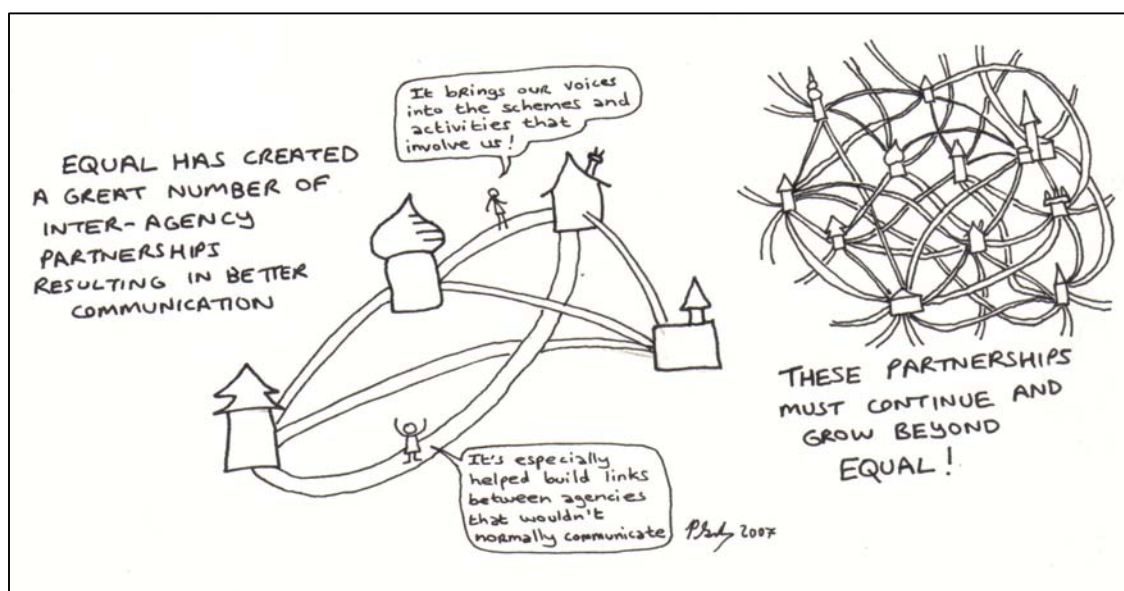
Following these discussions on the theme of Working with Employers, the Chairs and Rapporteurs of the Workshops met together to agree on a set of Common Recommendations. These were presented to the Closing Plenary by Mike Morrissey (see final section of this report).

THIRD WORKING SESSION

BUILDING THE BRIDGES

Plenary Presentations

Panu Artemjeff from the **Ministry of Labour in Finland** (now Ministry of the Interior) explained that this ministry was responsible for EQUAL and also for the Community Action Programme to Combat Discrimination and that his joint responsibility had facilitated a sharing of information between these two programmes. For example, EQUAL DPs had made presentations at the annual Diversity Day Conferences and other events organised by national anti-discrimination campaign. There had also been mutual learning and exchange of experience and the dissemination of relevant models, methods and findings on both sides. Panu felt that *"whilst anti-discrimination activities have adopted horizontal approach across ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability, sexual orientation and mainstreaming of gender equality, EQUAL projects are often single-focus but our working together has led to a better identification of multiple discrimination."* Other benefits of the common activities had been a strengthening of the anti-discrimination perspective in integration policy and the networking between, and involvement of, new actors. Panu identified the most important common lessons as treating clients as subjects rather than objects and involving them in the planning process, gathering feedback in a way that makes specific and small groups visible and involving the social partners.



Geraldine Teggart is a member of the Strategy Directorate of the **Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)**. She pointed out the significance of carers as, for example, one in eight people in the workforce is a carer and over the next 20 years, the UK will need an extra two million workers and an extra three million carers. This is an important issue right across Europe, as society cannot afford for people not to work or not to care. She believed that *"the business case for supporting carers to care and to have a life outside caring was clear as such support resulted in better productivity, reduced absenteeism, better morale, improved equal opportunities and the reflection of a diverse customer base."* CSCI became involved as a policy partner of the ACE DP because of its commitment to put people who use social care first and to recognise them as an expert voice in social care. This partnership has influenced the development of the National Performance Assessment Framework for Carers and also raised the profile of carers in the State of Social Care in England Report. CSCI believes that ACE is an effective partnership as it works to influence from grass root operational to regional, and upwards to national, policy level and recognises all contributions to the agenda from beneficiaries, employers and policymakers, as being equally important.

Felix Petit works in the **UWV**, an organisation that is responsible for employee benefits/social security schemes in the Netherlands. As one of the key-organisations in the re-integration process, UWV became a partner in the REQUEST DP. This DP has developed a guideline for empowering models in organisations which, in turn, contributes to the achievement of quality standards. Through questionnaires applied to customers, consensus meetings and training sessions, the staff are encouraged to look at the organisation in terms of its content, process and policy. Content covers the way in which the organisation listens to, involves and communicates with its customers, whilst process is concerned with how the organisation listens to, involves and trains its staff and finally, policy relates to the impacts on the organisation of the expectations of employers and of the government's employment and social security/benefit policies. The end results are 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. A group of UWV professionals had already undergone the REQUEST training and Felix was pleased to report that *"we are now looking at the how this training in empowering skills might be best be offered to our 2,000 members of staff through the standard training provided by what we call our UWV Academy."*

Workshop Discussions

The three Workshops on the theme of Building the Bridges addressed a set of four questions and a synthesis of their responses is outlined below. Details about the Panellists, Chairs and Rapporteurs of these Workshops may be found in Annex 3.

1. How do bridge builders /policy makers ensure that consultation is real and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries?

The starting point for any real consultation and consequent response to the needs of the beneficiaries is an appropriate engagement strategy. This can take many forms but should involve an organisational consciousness of the critical importance of needs-driven, individualised interventions. Central to this concept is the direct involvement of beneficiaries.

Examples of such approaches include focus groups and capacity-building measures involving the active participation of beneficiaries in the roll-out and management of activities. The critical issue is the relevance and the appropriateness to beneficiaries of the activity and, in this regard, some projects have had to make links with organisations and services in the community and voluntary sector in order to use them as intermediaries and advisors.



A key message is that the involvement of beneficiaries in the consultation process should be an integral part of policy development and programme delivery. "Real" consultation obtains a degree of commitment and ownership from beneficiaries that could not otherwise be achieved. Conversely, the absence of genuine consultation resulted in cynicism and disillusionment. The involvement of beneficiaries in consultation can be promoted by a variety of means, but works best where beneficiaries are proactively involved and respected as "Experts by Experience."

Policy makers need to manage expectations and be honest throughout any consultation process regarding timescales, budgets and realistic opportunities for implementation. Beneficiary groups are often impatient for change but their expectations are sometimes unrealistic, for example, in relation to the extent of change that it is possible to achieve within a given period of time. It is also unrealistic to expect that macro-level policies or programmes will be introduced if they are only based on the outcomes from small-scale 'pilot' trials.

Feedback must be provided following consultations outlining why some suggestions cannot be implemented, thus ensuring accountability.

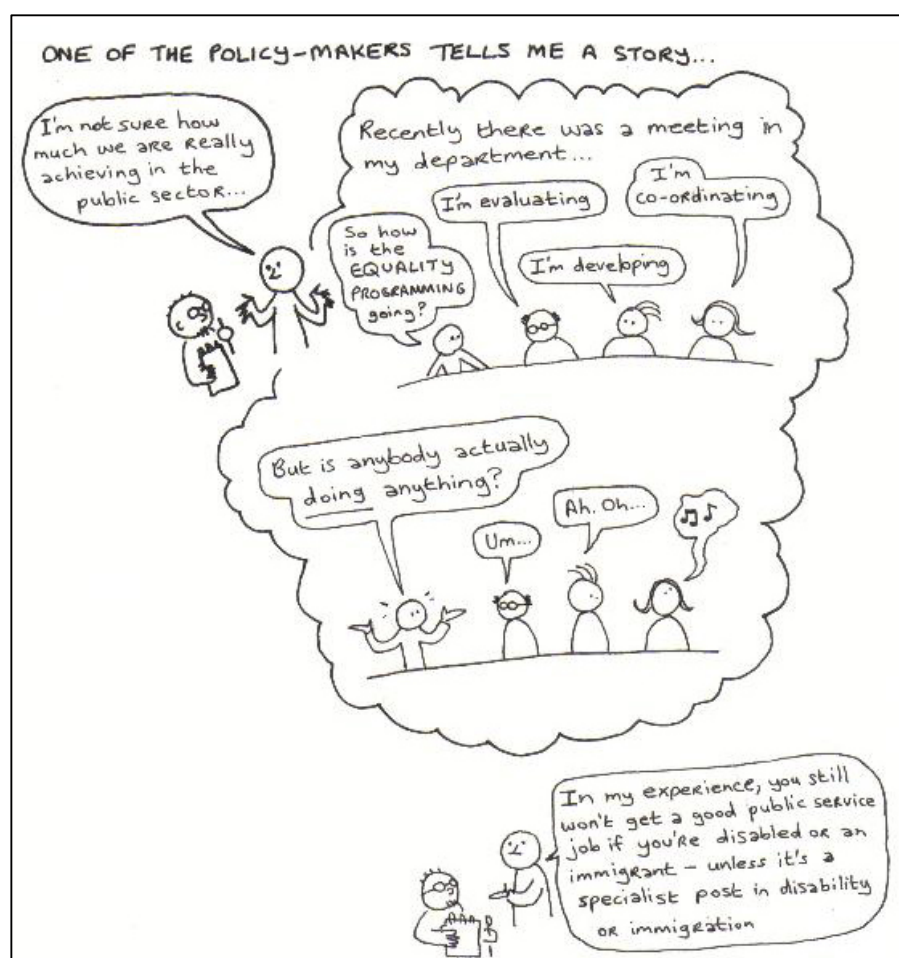
Trust and respect have also to be built up between beneficiaries and policymakers and there needs to be an empowering organisational environment for consultations if they are to be responsive to the needs of beneficiaries. It is important to:

- Avoid token consultation;
- Ensure that any consultation is timely and regular and gives sufficient leeway for response;
- Lobby policy makers effectively.

European programmes like EQUAL can have significant innovative and catalytic effects, particularly at local and regional levels where they can stimulate the introduction of new structures and practices. Thus, it is important that the monitoring arrangements for European or national programmes should take due account of the views of beneficiaries, as this could assist individual programmes to be more responsive to the real needs and problems of their potential users. Provision should also be made for the appropriate monitoring and evaluation of relevant action in ESF and other European or national programmes and for the recording of examples of good practice in terms of beneficiary involvement and empowerment.

2. What are the constraints faced by bridge builders/policy makers in taking forward recommendations from beneficiaries?

Often bridge builders and policy makers work within monolithic organisations that are rigid and hierarchical and where there is no organisational culture of openness and little responsiveness to change. When departments, services and agencies operate as separate entities, there is likely to be a lack of coordination across all those individual areas or responsibilities that might otherwise contribute to an effective response. The emphasis or priority focus can also be on the administration, as distinct from the qualitative policy impact.



The most frequently cited constraints are budget limitations and competing pressures. Therefore, policy makers are most likely to be positively influenced by the availability of a strong business case that clearly defines the rationale and cost benefits for the adoption of the beneficiaries' recommendations. The availability of such a business case may also complement the "moral argument" for change.

Recommendations often do not represent common issues or highlight unanimous points of view and therefore better self-organisation and capacity building of beneficiaries' groups should assist them to voice their recommendations in a more focussed and clear way. However, policy makers also need to understand that there are different approaches and solutions for the multi-dimensional and diverse issues brought to them. If they wish to embrace some interesting recommendations, but do not have all of the necessary resources, these recommendations might be piloted on a smaller scale and, if successful, be rolled out gradually.

3. How realistic is it to expect "bottom-up" opinions to make it to the policymaking level (whether local, national or EU level)?

Some Member States operate sophisticated systems of social dialogue and others have a greater emphasis on top-down decision making. However, EQUAL has generated many examples of how bottom-up opinions can be pushed upwards through "the system." The coordination of relevant services and support mechanisms through EQUAL DPs is an example of good practice in terms of facilitating a bottom-up approach to delivery. It is clear however that this needs to be resourced and facilitated.

"Bottom-up" opinions and recommendations have the potential to make significant impacts upon policy but the degree of impact is heavily dependant upon the engagement of influential organisations or personalities. In Sweden, for example, bottom-up views have stimulated the launch of a programme on social enterprise. This process was greatly assisted by the EQUAL National Thematic Network (NTN) which included MPs among its members and thus, provided a direct means of "opening doors" and influencing policy. In another example, beneficiaries were recognised as being "experts by experience", with a wealth of knowledge to contribute. In this DP, two members of staff from a stakeholder organisation were seconded to the policy branch of the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland, and became real partners in influencing and changing policies.

In UKgb, the most successful DPs are those which have worked within existing policies to improve the implementation of these policies. These DPs were realistic in their objectives and persevered in their work, thus even if policies have not changed, practices certainly have. Such a process is "a marathon and not a sprint" but it will have a long-term impact and could eventually change policy. Naturally, it works best when there is a political will for change.

Beneficiaries should communicate evidence-based successes and benefits to policy makers and can use the media to influence policy making. Most of the EQUAL projects are relatively small in their geographical scale and are more likely to impact upon policy at local or regional level, rather than national level. However, every effort should be made to ensure that EQUAL legacy is sufficiently mainstreamed, also at national level, and that it is taken forward by managers of the new programmes, so that the momentum is not lost.

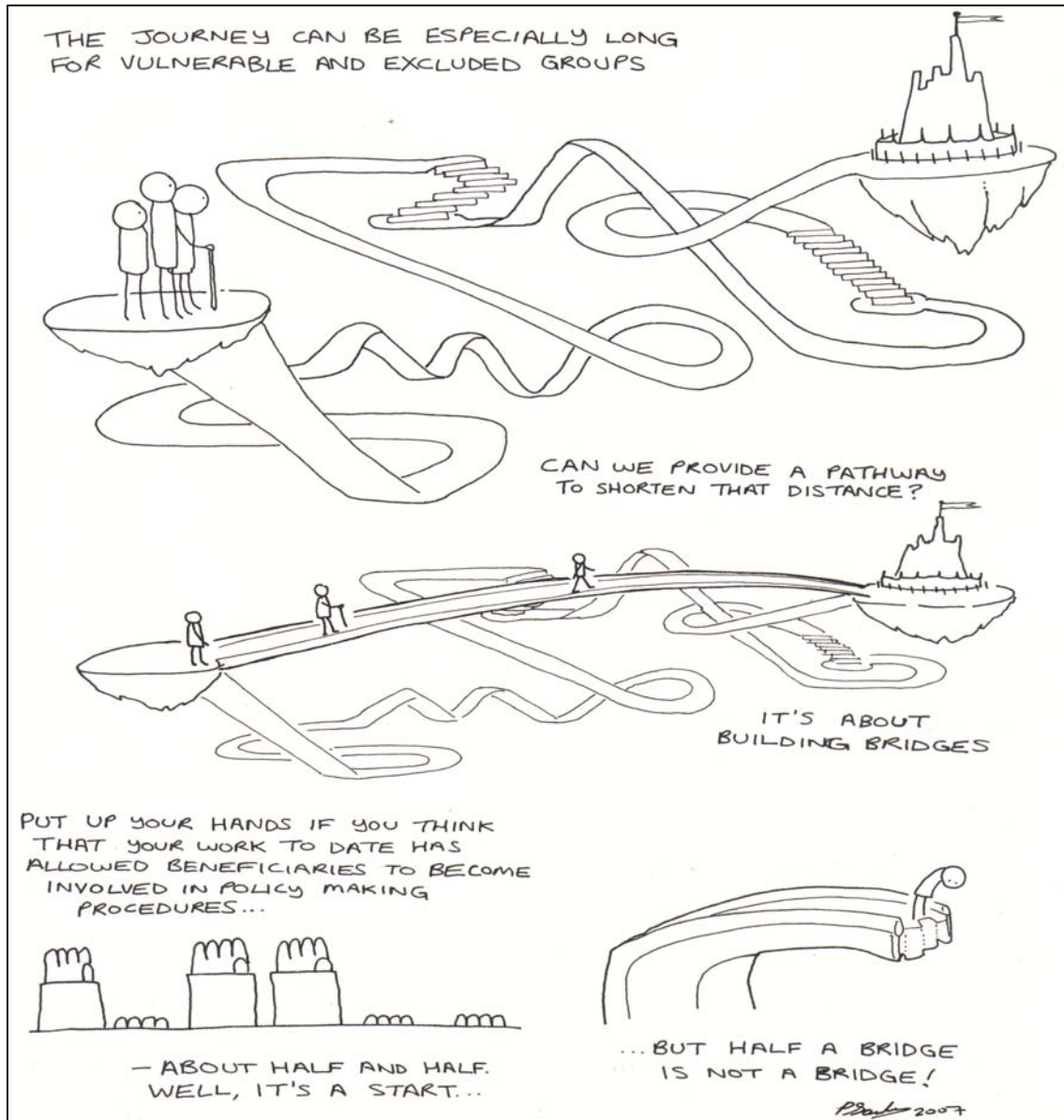
4. What mechanisms could be put in place to ensure that the EQUAL principles and approaches are not sidelined in the future development of policy and programmes at national and European-level?

EQUAL has been a "success" and is regarded as a "good brand" throughout Member States. Many examples of good practice have been established and whilst some of the principles and approaches of EQUAL have been incorporated into the new ESF Regulations and into national and regional Operational Programmes, momentum may be lost if further initiatives are not taken to advance these achievements. For example, the EQUAL thematic networking groups that have been established in some Member States should continue to be involved in project selection, development and guidance within the current ESF Programming Period. There is also a need to continue the validation and mainstreaming of models of best practice. Other comments from the Workshops included:

- EQUAL results must be demonstrated throughout the mainstreaming platforms and policy makers, including ministers, must be involved and kept informed of successes;
- Continuing efforts should be made to engage senior policy makers and politicians with beneficiaries and bridge builders;

- Outside of the new programme, policy makers must carry on working to promote the principles of EQUAL and to mainstream these issues into the “normal business agenda”;
- There is a need ‘post EQUAL’ to establish formal groups including DPs, beneficiaries and policy makers working together at local, national and European level. These groups might adopt various formats such as Communities of Practice.

In general, funding must be made available for the continuation of approaches developed under EQUAL and the concepts of empowerment and diversity should be developed within the 2007 – 2013 ESF Operational Programmes and within the wider framework of national and EU social inclusion, anti-discrimination and employment policies.



Following these discussions on the theme of Building the Bridges, the Chairs and Rapporteurs of the three Workshops met together to agree on a set of Common Recommendations. These were presented to the Closing Plenary by Dorothee Wagner (see final section of this report).

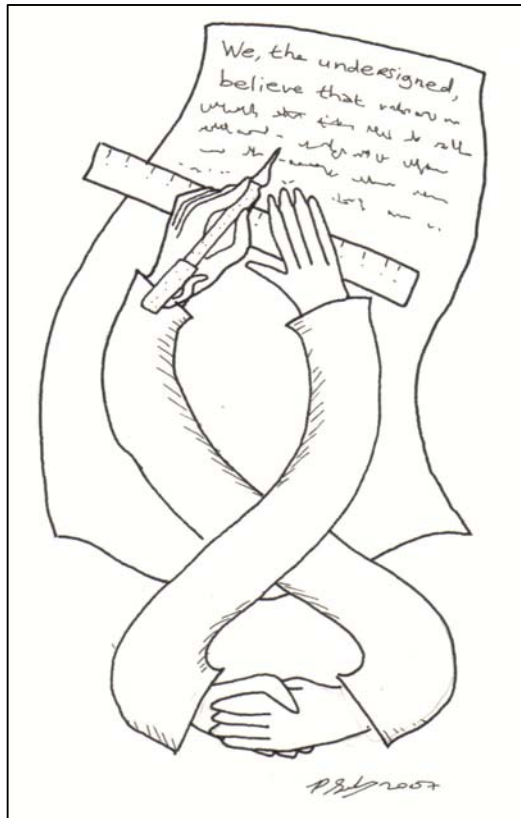
THE CLOSING PLENARY AND BEYOND

Workshop Reports

Jeremy Harrison, a consultant from UK-Great Britain, reported on the Workshops that had addressed the theme of **The Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups.**

In EQUAL, beneficiaries had gained greater self-confidence, motivation and a strong sense of personal empowerment that enabled them to overcome many obstacles to employment. Support in a variety of formats such as guidance, advice and mentoring has also been given to beneficiaries to help them become empowered and to take control. Some factors that were identified as being particularly important in helping beneficiaries to overcome obstacles, included:

- Offering beneficiaries trust, respect and responsibility;
- Focusing upon individuals' personal abilities and potentials and not their limitations;
- Promoting personal development tailored to individual beneficiaries' needs;
- Recognising their multiple "identities" such as being a woman, a mother and an employee with different abilities/disabilities and thus, recognition of multi-dimensional problems.



The main legacy of EQUAL is seen to be the affirmation of the primacy of people's abilities over their needs. Where it has been most successful, it has shown how it is possible to move from advocacy and acceptance of individual rights to good learning and employment practices through which people are trained to develop their individual talents and abilities, and then employed to exploit them.

Recommendation 1: *Thus, the principle of 'Nothing about us without us' should be a required feature of all publicly-funded activity and should be seen as a key determinant of value for money.*

EQUAL projects have created space for all stakeholders such as beneficiaries, policy makers and employers to define and activate solutions that best fit vulnerable people in terms of their access to the labour market. One of the more striking outcomes of the work done under EQUAL is the understanding that empowerment is not just about beneficiaries but is also about how policy makers and other actors can be empowered to "change" how they do things. However, in terms of the beneficiaries an important aspect has been the fact that they have been recognised as "Experts through Experience" and thus, have a wealth of knowledge to contribute to the solution of the problems and issues that affect their lives. The conscious involvement of beneficiaries in the planning, delivery and evaluation of projects has had a significant impact on the quality and appropriateness of these interventions. In addition, this engagement with, and inclusion of, previously excluded groups has offered significant gains for both society and the economy. EQUAL has created a great deal of inter-agency working through partnerships and networks that bring the voice and the lived experience of disadvantaged people into the schemes and activities that involve them. These structures and, in particular, their "Experts through Experience" must not be lost after EQUAL.

Recommendation 2: *Thus, the EQUAL partnership model that involves listening to disadvantaged people and recognising them as “Experts through Experience” should become the basis for future schemes and projects.*

Mike Morrissey, a consultant from UK-Northern Ireland, presented the response from the Workshops that had considered the theme of **Working with Employers.**

It was important to regard employers as users and to recognise that services had to be tailored to meet their needs as well as those of the beneficiaries. In this context, a range of promotional and awareness-raising activities for employers have been organised by EQUAL DPs. These have often included education and training focused on awareness-raising at middle management/practitioner and staff levels and there evidence of the success of this real time engagement with managers, staff and co-workers does change attitudes and practices. There has also to be considerable employer engagement in testing new approaches such as alternative recruitment strategies, guaranteed job interview schemes, work placement and mentoring programmes and these types of alternative measures have enabled employers to think differently about how they recruit and retain employees, in general. Relationships play a major role in engaging employers, as they are more willing to employ people from disadvantaged groups if a convincing case is presented by a trusted third party organisation. The support and development of employers’ networks, diversity charters and quality marks in EQUAL has been very important in this respect. In addition, public authorities and public agencies are also employers and, in many cases, they have a lead function in demonstrating positive recruitment and employment practices. In their relations with enterprises, they also are important customers in terms of the size and frequency of the orders that they place and can use this position to influence change.

Recommendation 3: *Thus, the learning from EQUAL’s employer engagement should be captured and sustained across a range of approaches and strategies.*

Whilst legislation and the use of quota systems may be helpful in the recruitment of people from diverse backgrounds, particularly in Member States with less comprehensive equality frameworks, the desired cultural change throughout Europe requires persuasion and commitment and not merely legislative compulsion. The use of quota systems can have a negative impact on beneficiaries who feel that they have been recruited because of their “disadvantaged” status as opposed to their skills and abilities. Focused subsidies like reduced taxes or tax incentives might be used as kick-start or temporary measures, particularly for SMEs in some new Member States. However, the business case that outlines the added value for employers is the most important lever in the promotion of diversity, particularly when it is accepted that this added value may not simply be reflected in a direct financial benefit but in a general improvement or change in the organisation’s day-to-day employment practices. The relevance of the business case is likely to be dependant upon the nature and size of the enterprise or organisation, the sector in which it is involved and the prevailing economic conditions. In addition, the business case has not yet been articulated in some newer Member States, where best practice has not been established and there are no clear examples for SMEs to follow. However, in EQUAL, employers have engaged in the creation of opportunities for disadvantaged groups and in new forms of partnership with employment services, if such cooperation has been clearly focussed on approaches to reconciling business objectives with social responsibility. In many cases such approaches have built on, or been linked to, strategies aimed at the development of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Recommendation 4: *There should be more guidance about, and research into, the business case for diversity and its applications.*

The outcomes of the Workshops on the theme of **Building the Bridges** were presented by **Dorothee Wagner** from **PROTEUS, the EQUAL NSS in UK- Northern Ireland.**

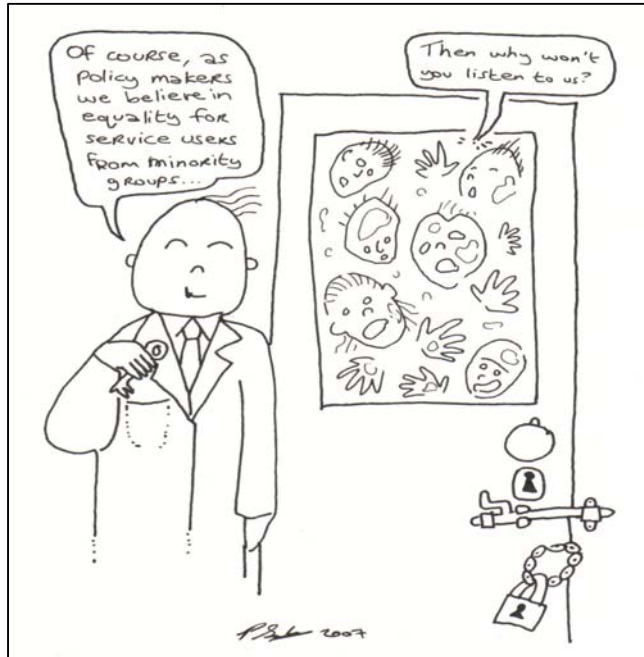
The starting point for any real consultation and consequent response to the needs of the beneficiaries is an appropriate engagement strategy. This can take many forms but should involve an organisational consciousness of the critical importance of needs-driven, individualised interventions. Central to this concept is the direct involvement of beneficiaries and related EQUAL innovations have focused on clear information provision, flexibility, individualised needs, involvement of stakeholders, responsiveness to change and the use of the community and voluntary sector in a brokerage role. “Real” consultation obtains a degree of commitment and ownership from beneficiaries that could not otherwise be achieved. Conversely, the absence of genuine consultation results in cynicism and disillusionment. The involvement of beneficiaries in consultations where they are proactively involved

and respected as “Experts through Experience” has had a significant impact on the quality and appropriateness of the resulting provision.

Recommendation 5: *Thus, there should be genuine engagement of official agencies and policy makers with project beneficiaries and also practitioners. Such consultations should treat beneficiaries as equal partners within a partnership of shareholders and “consult and ignore scenarios should be avoided.”*

There is a very large gap between the status, competence, power and social or professional contacts of policy makers and senior officials and those of beneficiaries. EQUAL has shown that it is possible for beneficiaries to influence policy makers or those responsible for the implementation of policy but that they often need some assistance in bridging that gap. They can benefit from help in the following respects:

- Preparing and presenting their case;
 - Being focused and clear about all of the diverse issues;
 - Gathering evidence-based successes and benefits;
- Gaining an “entrée” to policy maker/ implementers;
- Using the media to help create a climate conducive to their case.



Recommendation 6: *Thus, support should be provided, through capacity building and the establishing of formal arrangements for consultations, at local regional and national levels to enable beneficiaries to influence policy makers.*

Two types of bodies have a major role to play in ensuring that beneficiaries are appropriately involved and consulted. These are the public authorities that are the main service providers and the voluntary or representative organisations that are in closest contact with the beneficiaries. In the first instance, there needs to be an increased acceptance that services and support interventions should be tailored to meet the needs of the client group. This means a cultural shift in terms of their thinking about how they engage with beneficiaries – not just as passive recipients of support but as full actors in their own progression who can offer valuable personal experience that can ensure that policies and programmes are targeted effectively. In the second instance, these organisations also require to change their thinking and to relinquish some of their “representative power” to ensure again that it is the real beneficiaries or potential end users that are consulted and involved. However, one of the more striking outcomes of the work done under EQUAL is the understanding that empowerment is not just about beneficiaries, but is also about how policy makers and other actors can be empowered to “change” how they do things.

Recommendation 7: *Thus, the training or the type of experiential learning that has been developed in EQUAL should be provided for members of staff in the public and the voluntary sectors in order to stimulate a greater urgency in making the necessary cultural changes that would result in a more direct and active involvement of either their clients or those groupings that they claim to represent.*

EQUAL has been a “success” and is regarded as a “good brand” throughout Member States. Many examples of good practice have been established and whilst some of the principles and approaches of EQUAL have been incorporated into the new ESF Regulations and into national and regional Operational Programmes, momentum may be lost if further initiatives are not taken to advance these achievements. For example, the EQUAL thematic networking groups that have been established in some Member States should continue to be involved in project selection, development and guidance

within the current ESF Programming Period. The activities related to the validation and mainstreaming of models of best practice also needed to be continued. This might be achieved through formal groups, which include DPs, beneficiaries and policy makers working together at local, national and European level. These groups might adopt various formats such as Communities of Practice and funding must be made available for the continuation of approaches developed under EQUAL.

Recommendation 8: *Thus, the concepts of empowerment and diversity should be developed within the 2007 – 2013 ESF Operational Programmes and within the wider framework of national and EU social inclusion, anti-discrimination and employment policies.*

European programmes like EQUAL can have significant innovative and catalytic effects, particularly at local and regional levels where they can stimulate the introduction of new structures and practices. In addition, the incorporation of the principle of empowerment into the National Action Plans for Inclusion and the National Action Plans for Employment could have very positive implications for the policies and practices of the wide range of private, public and voluntary agencies involved in the integration process. In both respects, it would be very helpful if the monitoring arrangements for national and European policies and programmes could take due account of the views of beneficiaries, as this could make such interventions more responsive to the real needs and problems of the people to whom they are addressed.

Recommendation 9: *Thus, provision should be made for the appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the accountability of ESF and other European or national programmes to their beneficiaries and for the recording of examples of good practice in terms of beneficiary involvement and empowerment.*

Final Words



Pictured at the Forum: Pat Donnelly, Chief Executive, PROTEUS NI Ltd, Aideen McGinley, Permanent Secretary, Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) and Walter Faber, Head of the EQUAL Unit in DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission.

Walter Faber, Head of the EQUAL Unit in **DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities** indicated that these Workshop recommendations helped the European Commission and Member States to identify a number of areas in which they needed to concentrate their efforts to promote more diversity and equality of opportunity. These included better implementation of legislation and policy, a greater mobilisation of all actors and most importantly more active participation, involvement and empowerment of disadvantaged people.

He explained that, in the 2007-2013 programming period, out of a total of 117 programmes, the Social Inclusion Priority alone has been allocated almost EUR 10 billion. This represented some 12.4% of the total ESF budget available, which was € 76.216.424.285 and, of course, more of this ESF funding is available to support actions to promote the labour market integration of disadvantaged people.

Walter felt that it was important to put all this ESF money to good use by ensuring that actions would not be stand alone initiatives but that they would represent the implementation of policy at national and EU level that complemented national, regional, and local action and funding. These actions should also reflect needs and common concerns, as they arise along the way. Thus, he concluded by welcoming *“the proposed development of a Community of Practice to extend what this platform has so successfully started which is the creation of a stable and real link between people and projects on the ground and policy issues at EU and national level.”*

Aideen McGinley, Permanent Secretary, Department for Employment and Learning then thanked all who had been involved in making the Policy Forum a success – the participants from 24 Member States, the presenters, the European Commission and, of course, the Steering Group from Belgium Flanders, Malta, Portugal, Latvia and Northern Ireland. She also expressed the gratitude of her Department for the support of DG Employment and Social Affairs and the attendance at the event of Peter Stub Jorgensen, Walter Faber and other members of staff of the Commission.

Aideen indicated her interest in the feedback on the important issue of empowerment for those experiencing obstacles in entering the labour market and felt that the Policy Forum had adopted a unique approach in taking on board the views of the key shareholders, beneficiaries, employers and policy makers. The idea of greater consultation with end beneficiaries when developing policy was one with which she could readily identify and whilst it had always been accepted by policy makers as being important, she felt that the challenge had been to embrace it.

Aideen believed that most of the above Workshop recommendations reflected the advances that had been made by EQUAL but also the fact that more work remained to be done. She stressed that the excellent work of the local, regional, national and European partners must be continued within the context of the new ESF programming round and that such an exchange or Community of Practice could only serve to firmly enhance the creation of stable links with all shareholders at EU and national level.

She ended with a Celtic proverb that she had quoted at the previous Exchange Event and which really underscored the crucial role of active participation in increasing the empowerment and knowledge of individuals - *“if you tell me I will forget: and if you show me I may not remember - but if you involve me I will understand!”*

ANNEX 1: THE STEERING GROUP

The members of the Steering Group for this EQUAL Mainstreaming Platform on Diversity and Empowerment were:

- Dr **Depasquale, Helga**, Managing Authority, Malta
- Ms **Deschrijvere, Liezelotte**, National Support Structure, Belgium-NL
- Ms **Dunlop, Edyth**, Northern Ireland Union for Supported Employment, UK-NI
- Mr **Donnelly, Pat**, PROTEUS NI Ltd, National Support Structure, UK-NI
- Mr **Gillespie, Owen**, Managing Authority, UK-NI
- Ms **Haddock, Margaret**, European Union for Supported Employment, UK-NI
- Mr **Howell, Martin**, Business in the Community, UK-NI
- Ms **Jansone, Antra**, Managing Authority, Latvia
- Ms **Milca, Elita**, Managing Authority, Latvia
- Dr **Neill, John**, Managing Authority, UK-NI
- Ms **Nunes, Maria do Carmo**, Managing Authority, Portugal
- Ms **Platsouka, Elissavet**, European Commission
- Mr **Reilly, Declan**, Managing Authority, UK-NI
- Ms **Vale, Ana**, Managing Authority, Portugal

The work of the group was led by **Dr John Neill**, who heads the EQUAL Managing Authority in Northern Ireland supported by **Pat Donnelly**, the Director of PROTEUS NI Ltd, which is the EQUAL National Support Structure in Northern Ireland.

Allen Mercer, the European Commission's Thematic Expert for Employability, was responsible for drafting the ground papers and the reports for the Exchange Event and Policy Forum that were held as part of this Mainstreaming Platform.

Brita Terpe, from PROTEUS NI Ltd, coordinated the organisation of the Exchange Event and Policy Forum with the assistance of other members of staff from PROTEUS and from the European Unit of the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL).

ANNEX 2: PROGRAMME FOR THE POLICY FORUM

DIVERSIFYING THE WORKPLACE: STRATEGIES FOR EMPOWERMENT AND INCLUSION *Wellington Park Hotel, Belfast, Northern Ireland* *29 – 30 November 2007*

THURSDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER 2007

- 08:30** **Registration and Travel Claim Processing**
- 09:30** **Welcome**
Greg McConnell, Deputy Secretary, Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland
Peter Stub-Jorgensen, Director, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission
- 10:15** **Plenary 1: Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups**
Beneficiary presentations by:
Wilberforce Essandor, Finland
Elisabeth Lindgren, Sweden
Anne McAleer, UK Northern Ireland
- 10:55** **Workshop 1 – Syndicate Room 5-6**
(Chair: Jeremy Harrison; Rapporteurs: Ciara Monaghan; Brenda Kennedy)
Panel Members:
Wilberforce Essandor, Finland
Orlando Silva, Portugal
Clare Broome, UK Northern Ireland
- Workshop 2 – McWilliams Suite**
(Chair: Mike Morrissey; Rapporteurs; Owen Gillespie; Deirdre McCoy)
Panel Members:
Elisabeth Lindgren, Sweden
Zamzam Mohamed, UK Great Britain
Mariead Magill, UK Northern Ireland

Workshop 3 – Middleton Room

(Chair: Monica Wilson; Rapporteurs: Dorothee Wagner; Amanda McAuley)

Panel Members:

Anne McAleer, UK Northern Ireland
Namu Namibiar, Sweden
Iluta Lace, Latvia

12:30 Lunch

13:30 Plenary Session 2: Working with Employers

Employer presentations by:

Alec Carlberg, Sweden
Mary Cusick, UK Northern Ireland
Simona Korez, Slovenia

14:20 Workshop 4 - Syndicate Room 5-6

(Chair: Jeremy Harrison; Rapporteurs: Ciara Monaghan; Brenda Kennedy)

Panel Members:

Alec Carlberg, Sweden
Suzana Bohorc, Slovenia
Joan Peden, UK Northern Ireland

Workshop 5 – McWilliams Suite

(Chair: Mike Morrissey; Rapporteurs; Owen Gillespie; Deirdre McCoy)

Panel Members:

Mary Cusick, UK Northern Ireland
Michal Vokurka, Czech Republic
Jane Garvey, UK Northern Ireland

Workshop 6 - Middleton Room

(Chair: Monica Wilson; Rapporteurs: Dorothee Wagner; Amanda McAuley)

Panel Members:

Simona Korez, Slovenia
Alan McCully, UK Northern Ireland
Harri Niukkanen, Finland

15:50 Close

18:45 Pick up at hotels and transfer to Ulster Folk and Transport Museum for Dinner

FRIDAY, 30TH NOVEMBER 2007

- 09:30** **Plenary Session 3: Building Bridges**
Policymaker/policy influencer/NGO presentations by:
Panu Artemjeff, Finland
Geraldine Teggart, UK Great Britain
Felix Petit, The Netherlands
- 10:10** **Workshop 7 Syndicate Room 5-6**
(Chair: Jeremy Harrison; Rapporteurs: Ciara Monaghan; Brenda Kennedy)
Panel Members:
Panu Artemjeff, Finland
Luk Zelderloo, Belgium
Sheila McNeill and Maureen Gillespie, UK Northern Ireland
- Workshop 8 – McWilliams Suite**
(Chair: Mike Morrissey; Rapporteurs: Owen Gillespie; Deirdre McCoy)
Panel Members:
Geraldine Teggart, UK Great Britain
Barbara Vidensek, Slovenia
Rosemary Mulholland, UK Northern Ireland
- Workshop 9 - Middleton Room**
(Chair: Mike Evans; Rapporteurs: Dorothee Wagner; Amanda McAuley)
Panel Members:
Felix Petit, The Netherlands
John Mallon, UK Northern Ireland
Elissavet Platsouka, European Commission
- 11:40** **Coffee Break**
- 12:15** **Feedback from Workshops**
Closing Remarks from
Walter Faber, Head of Unit: Community Initiatives & European Globalisation Fund, DG
Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities, European Commission
Aideen McGinley, Permanent Secretary, Department for Employment and Learning in
Northern Ireland
- 13:15** **Lunch and departure (pre-booked Belfast tour taxis leave hotel at 14:00)**

Annex 3: Details of the Workshop Staffing and Panellists

Staffing of Workshops

Workshops 1, 4 and 7

Chair: **Jeremy Harrison**, a consultant from UK-Great Britain

Rapporteurs: **Ciara Monaghan** from WRC, the EQUAL NSS in Ireland and **Brenda Kennedy** from PROTEUS NI Ltd, the EQUAL NSS in Northern Ireland

Workshops 2, 5 and 8

Chair: **Mike Morrissey**, a consultant from UK-Northern Ireland

Rapporteurs: **Owen Gillespie** from the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL), the EQUAL MA in UK-Northern Ireland and **Deirdre McCoy** from PROTEUS NI Ltd, the EQUAL NSS in Northern Ireland.

Workshops 3, 6 and 9

Chair: (Thursday - Workshops 3 and 6) **Monica Wilson** from Disability Action which is the Lead Partner in the Diversity Works DP ([UKni-17](#)) and (Friday – Workshop 9) **Mike Evans** from the [European Union of Supported Employment](#)

Rapporteurs: **Dorothee Wagner** and **Amanda McAuley** from PROTEUS NI Ltd, the EQUAL NSS in UK-Northern Ireland

Panellists

First Workshop Session: Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups

Workshop 1

<i>Name</i>	<i>M.S.</i>	<i>Background</i>
Wilberforce Essandor - Itella Corporation (formerly Finland Post)	Finland	<p>Itella Corporation has played a leading role in the employment of immigrant workers and has also given them the necessary support for their professional advancement. Wilberforce who is known as Willie is a living example, because through the equal opportunities policy of Itella, he has risen from being a summer postal worker to the post of HR Manager.</p> <p>He holds a Master's degree in Political Science (International Politics and International Law) from Helsinki University, Finland. Originally from Ghana, he studied Finnish intensively at the university, as part of his degree programme. His employer, Itella, also organises further language training for its immigrant workers so that they can participate in the professional in-service training courses provided for all its workers. This training helped him to break through the language barrier and work on an equal footing with his Finnish colleagues and he rose to the positions of foreman and then trainer. Willie has benefited immensely from Itella's equal treatment of its workers and from its equal opportunities policy in the workplace.</p>

Willie's organisation is a member of the [How to initiate into multiculturalism in a working place, Petmo DP \(FI-58\)](#), whose website can be found at www.sak.fi/petmo.

Orlando Silva - Portugal
CEAM/AEIPS
Orlando believes that the best way to overcome the difficulties is to never give up and now he has been working on an insurance company's helpdesk since October 2006.

He is the leader of two organisations - the Empowerment and Mutual Help Centre and the National Network of People with Mental Health Problems. He feels that he was born to help others with similar experiences. Orlando is involved with the [Nautilus DP \(PT-2004-019\)](#).

Clare Broome - UK-ni
Gingerbread NI
Clare is a lone parent who was living on state benefits. She volunteered to be a member of the [Possibilities DP \(UKni-11\)](#) and to take part in the training that was piloted through EQUAL. She was able to benefit from the training personally, as well as providing ongoing feedback from the beneficiary perspective directly to the DP. Clare has also organised a feedback event for all of the DP's beneficiaries to evaluate the project from their perspective.

She is now employed to develop and deliver the Department for Employment and Learning's mainstreamed version of the programme that was developed through EQUAL and she has just recruited and begun training her first 10 lone parents.

Being involved with the DP has given her the chance to work with a wide variety of people from public, private and statutory organisations and she has helped to dispel some of the myths about lone parents. Clare encourages other lone parents to reach their full potential by sharing the experience and knowledge, gained through participating in the DP and in the EQUAL programme, and also by acting as a role model.

Workshop 2

Name	M.S.	Background
Elisabeth Lindgren – Kooperativet Kullen	Sweden	Elisabeth's empowerment journey was from being powerless to having all the power she needs. She talks about every human's value and the importance of seeing people as a resource rather than a problem. She also believes that work has a good effect on rehabilitation and that it makes people grow fast! Her social cooperative is a partner in the AGDOR DP (SE-68) .
Zamzam Mohamed – Peabody Trust	UK-gb	Zamzam gained work as a Peer Befriender in the Thresholds DP (Ukgb-113) . When she started, she was not sure how to transfer or relate her previous education and training about communities to her new role. The training for mentoring was her first step in identifying her strengths and she gained a sense of empowerment through the mentoring programme. The training encouraged her to be more confident, and enabled her to support students not only with their studies but also with their individual needs. She has thoroughly enjoyed her work as a Peer Befriender, as it is rewarding because it allowed her to support people and make a difference to people's lives. She wants to go onto working within communities as a Community Development and Outreach Worker.

<p>Mariead Magill – POISE DP (Project Manager) who replaced Jamie Murphy - South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust</p>	<p>UK-ni</p>	<p>Thanks to the POISE (UKni-19) DP's “Care to Make a Difference?” training programme, Jamie was able to secure employment as a care assistant at Ards Training and Resource Centre, working with people who have a learning disability. When he started the training programme, he was unemployed and had not previously thought about working in the social care sector. Jamie now really enjoys his job and gets a lot out of supporting people with learning disabilities in acquiring life skills and preparing for employment.</p> <p>He feels that, as a male in a female dominated working environment, he contributes to meeting the needs of male clients who want to be supported by male care assistants. Additionally, he feels that as a trained joiner, he brings other life skills which he can pass on to the clients.</p>
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Workshop 3

Name	M.S.	Background
<p>Anne McAleer – The Cedar Foundation</p>	<p>UK-ni</p>	<p>The EQUAL Programme, through the Supported Employment in Action (SEA) DP (UKni-21), has provided Anne with an opportunity, as a person with a disability, to actively participate and engage with policy and decision makers.</p> <p>She is a member of the SEA Project Beneficiaries Focus Group (BFC), which is composed of people representing all areas of disability and from across all of Northern Ireland, and aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify barriers to employment; ▪ Put forward recommendations to assist people with disabilities to access and stay in employment; ▪ Critically review the model of Supported Employment. <p>She highlights the process and mechanisms used to ensure that the members of the BFG were fully engaged and involved.</p>
<p>Namu Nambiar – Basta Arbetskooperativ</p>	<p>Sweden</p>	<p>Namu is a member of a social enterprise called Basta and its structured support and empowerment processes helped her after a 17 year-long heroin addiction. Within Basta’s structures, she could empower herself, first by managing the horse stable and then by achieving a Bachelor’s Degree in Social Work at the University of Stockholm.</p> <p>Today, she is a teacher and assistant manager of Basta’s educational and vocational training programme (YES). As if that is not enough, she has been made a member of the Rotary club in her local community. No one has done these things <i>for</i> her, but she could not have done any of them without the supporting surroundings of Basta. Today as she continues to empower herself, in YES her own empowerment process becomes part of other people’s empowerment processes and vice versa. She thinks that she represents beneficiaries, as someone who has been empowered, as well as someone who can help others to start an empowerment process. She illustrates the motto “nothing about us without us” - something in which she strongly believes in.</p> <p>Basta is a member of the Vägar till arbetsmarknaden genom utbildning och socialt företagande DP (SE-77).</p>

<p>Iluta Lace - “Marta” Resource Centre for Women</p>	<p>Latvia</p>	<p>Iluta’s highlights gender equality expertise through the results of the new developed cooperation model between NGOs, research organisations and state institutions. This model provides policy analysis and initiatives for the legal system, whilst empowering discriminated people to use existing anti-discrimination instruments to protect their rights.</p> <p>It has led to positive changes in legislation which have benefited the whole society by opening up the labour market to more women. The gender expertise model has also developed some creative activities to support policy makers in the development of gender equality policies. “Marta” is the lead partner of the Atvertu darba tirgu sievietem DP (LV-10).</p>
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Second Workshop Session: Working with Employers

Workshop 4

Name	M.S.	Background
<p>Alec Carlberg - Basta Arbetskooperativ</p>	<p>Sweden</p>	<p>Basta is providing jobs or vocational training for 150 people, all of whom were previously excluded from the labour market. At the beginning Basta’s target group was merely heavy drug users with an average age of around 40. In recent years, Basta has begun working with young school drop-outs of 17 and 18 years of age. Its vocational programme, YES, has proved to be extremely successful, as more than 70 % of the students get their diploma, and of these another 70 % find a job immediately after the training.</p> <p>All activities at Basta are based on a clear empowerment perspective, giving power and responsibilities to those who want to go from unemployment to vocational training or who want to begin work at one of the cooperative’s 13 different workplaces. What Basta has shown is that it is possible to successfully integrate and rehabilitate people who have had severe problems, for example heavy drug abuse and homelessness, through running an efficient enterprise. Today, Basta’s annual turnover is € 3.7 million and last year’s “profit” was€ 250,000.</p> <p>Basta is a member of the Vägar till arbetsmarknaden genom utbildning och socialt företagande DP (SE-77).</p>
<p>Suzana Bohorc - ZELVA Ljubljana d.o.o.</p>	<p>Slovenia</p>	<p>Suzana is the Head of the Centre of Employment and Vocational rehabilitation within Zelva. Zelva, as a member of the SINTEZA DP (SI-20), cooperated on educational issues and piloted education for the vulnerable group of employees.</p> <p>The Advantages of the Educational Programme for Employers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improved qualification of employees; ▪ Satisfied employees; ▪ Employees with higher goals who aim to produce a better quality of work; ▪ Employees are motivated for education, their goals are set and they want to gain promotion; ▪ Through promotion an employee obtains a better working position, but the employer also obtains a better employee;

- A higher level of effectiveness and self-initiative in employees;
- Employees are more independent in implementing tasks;
- Improved working climate.

The Advantages of the Educational Programme for Employees

- Acquisition of computer knowledge and literacy;
- More effective functioning in working and social environments;
- Development of horizons and exploration of vocational goals;
- Improvement of financial and social situation;
- Strengthening of self-consciousness;
- Acquisition of social skills and routines;
- Possibility of career development.

Joan Peden - UK-ni
Belfast Health
and Social Care
Trust

The [Employment Access Project DP \(UKni-10\)](#) has both involved health sector employees in a programme that has delivered tangible outcomes and provided a learning and development opportunity for its sponsoring organisation, most importantly for its managers and staff, which ultimately resulted in improvement in the delivery of care.

The project was also part of the Trust's Health and Social Inequalities Programme, to reduce health inequalities by promoting the employability of the long-term unemployed. The Pre-Employment Programme delivered by the project included two-week work placements for beneficiaries and those who completed the programme were guaranteed a job interview.

Workshop 5

Name	M.S.	Background
Mary Cusick – The Wilson Group	UK-ni	Mary was involved in the Diversity Works (UKni-17) DP's "Three Employer Pilot" and worked on developing and integrating the recommendations of this pilot into the Wilson Group's Service Agreement and into its policies and working practices. She was particularly involved in developing a Communication Policy, which dealt with 'working language' in the workplace. This was a particularly difficult and sensitive issue, which has been tackled successfully.
Michal Vokurka – Czech Chamber of Commerce	Czech Republic	Michal has experience of working with two EQUAL DPs - For the full life DP (CZ-45) and PENTACOM-labour office-training-vocational rehabilitation-target groups-employers DP (CZ-23) . He highlights the importance of cooperation between social partners including employers' organisations, state administrations and NGOs and also the importance of life long learning and of providing other possibilities for people to gain the right types of skills to help them access the labour market. He also believes that diversity management is a suitable tool for employing disadvantaged people.
Jane Garvey – Queen's University Belfast (QUB)	UK-ni	Queen's University Belfast is one of the largest employers in Northern Ireland with over 3,500 members of staff. The university's ongoing internal diversity initiatives include the Queens' Gender Initiative and Disability Forum and it has received many awards in recognition of its

work on gender issues.

The university was a partner in Employment for Autism DP (UKni-14) in which it:

- Offered guidance on the employers' viewpoint;
- Served on the equal opportunities sub-group, working alongside the user representatives;
- Worked with the Project Manager in the development of ASD awareness training which was piloted and delivered to a range of staff in the University;
- Provided work placements.

Workshop 6

Name	M.S.	Background
Simona Korez - Racio Social	Slovenia	<p>The SINTEZA DP (SI-20) ran activities in the field of lifelong learning in companies employing people with disabilities. The partners in this DP also exchanged their experience and ideas with partners from Italy, France and the Netherlands within the Transnational Partnership called EN-POWER. The members developed and piloted educational and motivational programmes and ICT training methods for workers with low qualifications and also for experts in the field of education.</p> <p>The achievements of the DP are being transferred into policies and practices at national, as well as international level.</p>
Alan McCully - Translink	UK-ni	<p>Alan is the main Translink representative on the WINS DP (UKni-20) and has been involved with the project from its very early stages. He has direct knowledge of reconciling employer's operational needs with participation in initiatives such as WINS and also extensive experience of working with other employers in the transport sector and in European networks.</p>
Harri Niukkanen - Neo-Act Ltd and NETSER	Finland	<p>Harri has been involved in a DP of social enterprises called SYTRIM – developing social entrepreneurship in the field of recycling (FI-64). The SYTRIM project (www.sytrim.fi) focuses on developing social enterprises which are able to operate in different recycling and reuse activities. His organisation, Neo-Act Ltd, employs 25 people at the moment, and most of them are formerly long-term unemployed people or people with disabilities. The organisation is classed as a social enterprise and according to Finnish law a minimum 30% of its workforce must comprise disadvantaged people.</p> <p>The DP partners have established a new network called NETSER which employs around 350 people mainly in recycling and reuse of electronic and electric waste.</p>

Third Workshop Session: Building Bridges

Workshop 7

Name	M.S.	Background
<p>Panu Artemjeff – Ministry of Labour (now Ministry of the Interior)</p>	Finland	<p>Panu works in the Finnish Ministry of Labour (now Ministry of the Interior) and has considerable experience in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building bridges, connecting networks and linking projects with other actors; ▪ Testing of transferable models created by the projects; ▪ Mainstreaming the good practices created by the projects through strategic planning and guidelines; ▪ Information sharing and dissemination of project results.
<p>Luk Zelderloo - EASPD</p>	Belgium	<p>EASPD, a partner in Plug-in Gaps DP (BEnI-5), is an Employer Champion for different reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The organisation is the mouthpiece for close to 8,000 NGO's in the disability sector. These NGO's are supporting people with disabilities in their difficult pathway towards employment on the one hand, but on the other hand they are often employers of people with, and without, disabilities; ▪ EASPD was the coordinator of a transnational EQUAL partnership on structural stakeholder-cooperation. This project (Hop Skip Jump) focussed on structural models of good stakeholder-cooperation and communication in the field of employment for people with disabilities; ▪ EASPD has a policy of providing positive workplaces for trainees with, and without, disabilities. It offers people the chance to gain experience in an open working environment; ▪ The organisation provides an empowering environment for its members who are asked to provide the same open working environment to trainees and employees with disabilities.
<p>Sheila McNeill and Maureen Gillespie - Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)</p>	UK-ni	<p>Sheila is currently Head of the Programme Management and Development Branch in the Department for Employment and Learning and has responsibility for the delivery of the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds and New Deal 25+ programmes in Northern Ireland. She joined DEL in 2005.</p> <p>Maureen is responsible for the day to day management of the New Deal for 18 to 24 year olds and New Deal 25+. She joined the branch in 2002.</p>

Workshop 8

Name	M.S.	Background
Geraldine Teggart - Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI)	UK-gb	<p>Geraldine works in the Strategy Directorate of the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The CSCI acts as a national inspector and regulator for care services and is an active policy partner within the Action for Carers and Employment (ACE National) DP (UKgb-91).</p> <p>The partnership with ACE has been a key influence in the development of the National Performance Assessment Framework for Carers and also the State of Social Care Report. CSCI's main message is to endorse what ACE has done, as the partnership worked to influence at all levels - from grass root, operational to regional and onwards to national policy level.</p>
Barbara Vidensek - Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs	Slovenia	<p>Barbara works for the Directorate for Disabled within the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. She is responsible for the European Social Fund and was partially involved in the activities of the EQUAL Community Initiative. The Directorate for Disabled is the authority communicating with the EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) and cooperating in the development of future policies for employment of people with disabilities.</p> <p>The Directorate, together with other institutions in the same field of work, tries to incorporate the DPs and their innovative ideas and approaches into their main strategies for the employment of people with disabilities. The activities of these DPs are going to be included in the financial perspective of the 2007-2013 ESF programming period, so that the work and projects, initiated within EQUAL, can continue.</p> <p>The concepts of diversity and social inclusion are a part of the ESF Operational Programme for Human Resource Development, which will soon be approved by the European Commission as the main programme for the new period. The main goal of the 4th priority of this document is to achieve greater social inclusion and to reduce the discrimination of vulnerable groups, as well as to contribute to implementation of the equal opportunities in the labour market, the educational system and the field of culture. This means that projects such as the former EQUAL DPs, will now be part of the 4th priority, and this can strengthen their influence on policies, dealing with social inclusion. The Ministry is a member of the SINTEZA DP (SI-20).</p>
Rosemary Mulholland - Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)	UK-ni	<p>Rosemary is currently the acting Head of the Northern Ireland ESF Programme 2007-13 Managing Authority Unit in the Department for Employment and Learning. She joined the Department's European Unit in 1999 and has been involved in the management and delivery of ESF funded activity under a number of Programmes including the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation - PEACE I, EMPLOYMENT and ADAPT and the Northern Ireland EQUAL Community Initiative Programme 2000-2006. Rosemary has also been involved in providing an ongoing Departmental EU Policy Information and Advisory Service and was responsible for the development of the new Northern Ireland ESF Programme document.</p>

Workshop 9

Name	M.S.	Background
Felix Petit - UWV (Social Security Agency)	The N'lands	<p>Usually empowerment is looked at from the perspective of an individual, for example whether a person has the capacity to steer his/her own re-integration process. It is important though to realise that empowerment has to be looked at from another perspective, i.e. from that of the professional environment, which needs to respect and support the empowerment of the individual.</p> <p>As one of the key-organisations in the re-integration process, UWV had already incorporated actions to promote the empowerment of individuals into its reintegration policy. Through the participation in the REQUEST DP (NL-2004/EQA/0015), a group of UWV professionals became more aware of their empowering role in the reintegration process of unemployed people. The REQUEST quick-scan helped to determine the areas in which professionals of the organisation had to strengthen their empowering skills. At the moment, these professionals are being trained and the organisation is now looking at the possibility of incorporating this empowering skills training into its standard training, which is offered to its 2,000 professional members of staff.</p>
John Mallon - Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)	UK-ni	<p>The Possibilities DP (UKni-11), through its piloting of training and research, has produced new ideas that DEL subsequently introduced into their New Deal programmes that are designed to assist lone parents to find employment. Participation in this DP has provided John with ideas and information that he has developed for use within the New Deal programmes. The ideas that have been mainstreamed are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ A new information leaflet for lone parents;▪ A personal information form that the lone parent completes prior to her or his Work Focus Interview with the Personal Adviser;▪ Work experience placements for lone parents;▪ A pilot qualification programme introduced to allow participants the opportunity to follow an NVQ level 3 training chosen from a core list of occupational areas. <p>Gingerbread, which was the lead partner in the DP, has been awarded one of the contracts to deliver DEL's new Work Preparation Programme for lone parents.</p>
Elissavet Platsouka - European Commission		<p>Elissavet works in the Community Initiatives Unit of the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. This unit is responsible for supporting and monitoring the transnational and innovative actions under the ESF operational programmes 2007-2013, and for the management and monitoring of the EQUAL Community Initiative. The Unit contributes to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs and to economic and social cohesion through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Monitoring 27 EQUAL Community Initiative Programmes;▪ Promoting peer learning amongst ESF managers in Member States and regions in the fields of labour market and social inclusion;▪ Facilitating the exchange of good practice on selected issues of employment policies;

- Promoting thematic networks and platforms at European level;
- Mainstreaming the lessons learnt;
- Providing EU-wide support for transnational cooperation under the European Social Fund.

Elissavet is particularly involved in the unit's work concerning the labour market (re)-integration of disadvantaged people and combating racism.