

MAINSTREAMING – TIPS AND TRICKS!

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the EQUAL programme started in 2002, development partnerships set up in Member States across the EU have helped asylum seekers arriving in Europe build a new life and create opportunities for the future. EQUAL partnerships did this by first examining asylum seekers' needs and problems and then finding ways to make their integration into a new society easier and offering them a chance to develop important skills which could eventually be used in the labour market.

Under the first round of EQUAL which ran from 2002-2005, asylum seekers were able to benefit from a wide range of activities such as: language classes and professional training aiming to improve their employability, volunteering and job-shadowing opportunities which gave them valuable work experience, and access to useful information on matters that concern them, including information on asylum procedures, training and employment opportunities, and services available to them. These are only a few examples of a wide variety of projects and activities organised by partnerships under the first round of EQUAL.

But EQUAL does not stop there. A particularly important objective was to ensure that EQUAL's 'legacy' continues beyond the end of the programme. Partnerships took their most successful practices and examined how they could promote these activities as tried and tested practices so that they would be taken up by other organisations or bodies working with asylum seekers. They also considered how to continue to receive financing for their activities from alternative sources once the EQUAL programme was over. This aim to reach a wider audience and transfer successful practices and approaches to other organisations and bodies is referred to as mainstreaming. Several EQUAL partnerships were successful in mainstreaming their activities and in this way were able to ensure the continuity and sustainability of their projects.

1.1. WHY THIS PAPER?

The second round of EQUAL started in 2005 and will go on until 2008. Some partnerships have continued their activities by setting up 'new and improved' projects based on their experiences during the first round. This paper will highlight the mainstreaming results achieved by EQUAL partnerships under Round 1 and examine 'what worked' by describing the methods and approaches used. The purpose of the paper is to provide practical suggestions and recommendations to EQUAL partnerships under Round 2 on how they can best prepare to mainstream their innovative practices and learn from the experiences of partnerships from the first round. The paper will feature specific examples of the mainstreaming successes of EQUAL partnerships across the EU and identify the factors which were key for success, as well as the relevant lessons learnt and obstacles faced. This paper addresses the following questions:

- What are the challenges of mainstreaming?
- What are the horizontal and vertical mainstreaming results achieved by partnerships under Round 1?
- What methods and approaches did partnerships use to mainstream their best practices?
- What were the challenges of mainstreaming faced by partnerships under Round 1?
- What were the main lessons learnt?
- What are the key factors identified under Round 1 for successful mainstreaming?

2. 'MAKING CHANGE POSSIBLE: THE MAINSTREAMING PRINCIPLE UNDER EQUAL

2.1. WHAT IS MAINSTREAMING?

Mainstreaming is one of the most important objectives of the EQUAL programme. It is a way to disseminate successful results and to encourage their transfer to other organisations working with asylum seekers, and to influence and improve current policies and practices. This could result in a change in the attitudes or practices of the persons and organisations who deal with asylum seekers on a daily basis and in the way they deliver services. By influencing policies and transferring successful practices, mainstreaming enables innovations supported under EQUAL to have lasting results.

Mainstreaming can take place at different levels. When successful practices or lessons learnt are adopted and applied by other organisations working in the same field, with a similar target group, or even in other fields with other disadvantaged groups, this is referred to as 'horizontal' mainstreaming. This results in changes taking place in practices at local, regional or even national levels. 'Vertical' mainstreaming refers to changes made at the political and administrative levels. A change in a law or administrative procedure would be the result of vertical mainstreaming. This type of mainstreaming is more difficult to achieve as change at these levels needs to go through a decision-making process which is often lengthy and complex.

In order to succeed in mainstreaming, the right support is needed. Each Member State has a Managing Authority responsible for the EQUAL programme as well as a National Support Structure which offers support and guidance to partnerships. Each Member State was also requested to set up National Thematic Networks in order to help partnerships to join forces to make their voices heard. Together, these structures play an important role in the mainstreaming process, as they can provide the necessary support and resources to help partnerships develop mainstreaming and dissemination strategies. These support structures can also provide the political support needed, acting as an interface between projects and key actors by encouraging the active involvement of policy and decision makers. The participation of these key actors in partnerships is crucial to success, as they are the ones who can adopt the lessons learned from good practices and translate them into practical policy results.

2.2. EASIER SAID THAN DONE: THE CHALLENGES OF MAINSTREAMING

Convincing others to adopt the practices and approaches which have been used successfully to change the personal lives of asylum seekers and result in changes at other levels is easier said than done. Mainstreaming requires an investment in time, as well as the necessary tools and financial resources. Mainstreaming also needs to happen at the right time and place to be successful.

2.2.1. A challenging policy area

The EQUAL Asylum Seekers Theme has faced challenges which are particular to this theme at all stages of the programme, from the start up of projects to the mainstreaming of results and activities. The programme's aim is to promote the social and economic integration of asylum seekers but there are legal obstacles to this faced by many EQUAL partnerships. In most countries of the EU, asylum seekers are not allowed to work or face strict restrictions which limit their access to the labour market. Such restrictions include work permits limited to a certain job or to a certain time period, or other requirements (i.e. a waiting period of anywhere between three months to a year, before access to employment is granted). These restrictions imposed on asylum seeker's access to the labour market have limited the types of activities that EQUAL partnerships could put into practice. This also presents challenges for mainstreaming because government authorities responsible for employment and training matters may be reluctant to adopt the best practices developed by EQUAL partnerships. Also, the often hostile political climate and negative media coverage on asylum seekers in many countries have hindered efforts to advance policy development in this field.

The EU Directive on reception conditions for asylum seekers (adopted in February 2003) has some scope to improve policies on asylum seekers' access to training and employment. The Directive was to be transposed into national law and implemented by Member State governments by February 2005. Article 11 of this Directive states that Member States should determine a period of time, which should not go beyond 12 months, after which asylum seekers have access to the labour market. Article 12 states that Member States may provide access to vocational training. Despite the February 2005 deadline, many Member States have not yet transposed this Directive or have transposed it only partially. Also, although the Directive offers scope for more flexible policies governing access to the labour market for asylum seekers, most Member States have maintained restrictions on this access. Of the Member States who have transposed the Directive, only Finland and Spain offer unrestricted access to the labour market (after 3 months in the case of Finland and 6 months for Spain). Many Member States require asylum seekers to apply for a work permit before accessing employment. Ireland and Denmark have opted out of this Directive and therefore will not be subject to it. Though a few Member States have opened up access to the labour market for asylum seekers following the transposition of the Reception Directive, it seems that many of partnerships implementing projects under Round 2 will continue to be faced with policy restrictions limiting the nature of activities they can put into place.

2.2.2. Size can matter

The number of partnerships working under the Asylum Seekers Theme can vary from one Member State to the other. Germany and the Netherlands had several partnerships working on this Theme under Round 1 of the programme, while countries such as Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Luxembourg and Spain had only one. Such partnerships often had to start their activities from scratch and as a result, devoted most of their time during the life of the project on the implementation of activities before they could envisage a strategy for mainstreaming. The fact that there is only one project working under the Asylum Seekers Theme also limits its political weight and influence, making vertical mainstreaming especially challenging.

2.2.3. Transferability

EQUAL partnerships develop very specific and specialised activities and approaches meant for a particular target group and within a specific context. In order to be able to transfer such practices within other contexts, the ultimate goal of mainstreaming has to be kept in mind, so as to avoid developing new models and approaches in a vacuum.

With regard to the transnational transfer of successful practices, the fact that different policies and systems are in place in each Member State has a significant impact on the extent to which results achieved by an EQUAL partnership in one country can be mainstreamed in another. Practices addressing very specific needs in a certain country may not be easily applied to another context, limiting their potential for transferability.

3. WORKING TOGETHER, MAKING AN IMPACT: OVERVIEW OF DP MAINSTREAMING UNDER THE ROUND 1 OF EQUAL

3.1. SETTING PRIORITIES: OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN THEMES

Despite the difficult policy context which is characteristic of the Asylum Seekers Theme, and other challenges described above which were often faced by EQUAL partnerships, there are many examples of successful mainstreaming results that have come out of Round 1. EQUAL partnerships have developed innovative models and practices that have been taken up by other organisations working with asylum seekers, who have been convinced of their added-value. EQUAL partnerships have been successful in securing alternative sources of funding, which has ensured the continuation of their projects. Partnerships have also been able to get themselves heard and communicate key policy messages to government officials, and in this way influence decision-making.

3.1.1. Horizontal mainstreaming successes

Most of the mainstreaming successes which have come out of Round 1 have been achieved at a local or regional level through the transfer of tried and tested practices to other bodies and organisations working with asylum seekers. Partnerships were also successful in making their projects sustainable beyond the EQUAL programme by securing other sources of funding for the continuation of their activities, or by attaining accreditation of training courses they had developed. There have also been other 'smaller' yet notable successes which are the result of mainstreaming activities, such as new partners joining partnerships under Round 2, and a general change in attitudes. These main themes and examples of horizontal mainstreaming results which have come out of Round 1 are described below.

3.1.1.1. *Transferring 'tried and tested' practices*

EQUAL partnerships have been very successful in having their innovative practices and models adopted by other organisations working with asylum seekers, who have been able to implement these activities into their own programmes. Around 12 EQUAL partnerships under the Asylum Seekers Theme have been successful in transferring their innovative practices to non-governmental organisations, schools and other educational institutions. Several partnerships have had their good practices adopted by a local government authority, and one partnership was even successful in having its practices transferred to organisations in other countries.

The most notable activity put into practice by the **SONAS** partnership in Ireland was the training of four outreach workers to provide guidance and advice on the most important matters that concern asylum seekers in Ireland. As a result of successful discussions with a local Citizens' Information Centre in Cork, a pilot of the outreach programme was started in early 2005, based at an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. It will run for several months as a pilot project to assess the needs and type of information and referral services required by asylum seekers in Cork. Initial feedback has been very positive.

One of the partners of the **ATLAS** partnership in Scotland, the Glasgow City Council Education Services, produced a parent's information pack made up of a booklet and cd-rom, in order to give asylum seeker parents a better understanding of how the education system in Scotland and in Glasgow works, and to help empower them to support their children's educational development. The information pack can be customised to give parents specific information about a particular school as well as details on resources and agencies in their local area. This model has now been successfully mainstreamed by the Scottish Executive for use in schools throughout Scotland.

The **Want2Work** partnership in Denmark developed several learning modules for asylum seekers which together formed an integrated package for labour market integration in Denmark or elsewhere. Examples included: the European Computer Drivers Licence (ECDL); Start your own business; Media and journalism; and Social work and healthcare. The fact that Want2Work made its products available online, and in a language understood by most organisations in other countries, led to some transnational transfers. A few partnerships under Round 2, especially in the New Member States, have expressed an interest in their skills audit tool. Others are planning to use Want2Work's methods for helping clients to obtain the European Computer Drivers Licence and for teaching ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

3.1.1.2. Securing alternative sources of funding

Five EQUAL partnerships have been successful in finding alternative sources of funding for their activities. In this way they have succeeded in ensuring the sustainability and continuity of their projects beyond the life of the EQUAL programme. This demonstrates the innovativeness and added value of their best practices.

The Maryhill Citizens' Advice Bureau, another **ATLAS** partner in Scotland, developed a tailored training package for asylum seeker volunteers, who following training, acted as advisers who would offer support to other asylum seekers. This training package was adapted from the Bureau's mainstream training programme by adding components including one-to-one language support for technical terms used in everyday work concerning benefits and housing, for example. An innovative by-product of this model was the development of a training dictionary compiling technical terms as well as slang words and phrases commonly used in Glasgow. Once trained, asylum seeker volunteers were able to assist all of the Bureau's clients and not only asylum seekers, bringing them into contact with the host community and in this way assisting their integration. A quarter of volunteers at Maryhill Citizens' Advice Bureau are now asylum seekers or refugees, offering services in more than 20 languages to their clients. This successful model is currently being implemented in Citizens' Advice Bureaux in Greater Pollok and Parkhead (in Glasgow). There has also been interest in the project from other Bureaux located in England. The Scottish Executive is providing the necessary funding for the extension of this programme to other Citizens' Advice Bureau offices.

3.1.1.3. Accreditation of training courses and programmes

Two partnerships have been particularly successful in developing a training course or programme which was officially recognised by an educational institution. The accreditation of courses and training programmes is a good example of a tangible result which will carry on beyond the EQUAL programme.

The asylum seeker outreach worker training course developed by the **SONAS** partnership in Ireland was successfully mainstreamed through the formal recognition of its training course by Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, where it has been accredited as a Certificate Course. This ensures that the training programme will be available to staff in mainstream organisations, or others who are interested in working with asylum seekers, and will provide programme participants with a formal qualification.

Partners making up the **ASSET UK** partnership have been successful in mainstreaming many of the courses developed. Several organisations in Wales have mainstreamed products developed by the Basic Skills Agency, one of the ASSET UK partners. These products include: 'ESOL for Working in Construction' which will be continued by Peterborough College, and 'ESOL for Working with Children', which has been integrated by Cardiff City Council into its ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) Programme. This product has also received accreditation.

3.1.1.4. *Attracting new partners*

By finding effective ways to reach out and let others know about their activities, EQUAL partnerships have attracted strategic new partners eager to collaborate and work towards common goals. This also led to a strengthening of partnerships who are continuing under Round 2 of EQUAL, bringing new and influential actors together.

As a result of **Want2Work**'s well-organised events which ensured the participation of key players, the Immigration Services of the Ministry of Integration is now taking part in the continuation of the partnership under Round 2 of EQUAL, as part of its steering group. It is hoped that the direct involvement of this important policy developing institution will favour mainstreaming of the messages coming out of the EQUAL partnership.

The Greek EQUAL partnership, **Anadrasis-Istos**, created an electronic network called ESTIA to connect agencies working with and for asylum seekers. Mainstreaming ESTIA started at a very early stage. As soon as the online network became operational, word of mouth instantly led to a doubling of agencies that wished to be connected. The system now covers 90% of the NGOs operating on the Greek territory and links to a few important actors such as the UNHCR and the Ministry of Health. Other ministries are also looking at way to connect to the system, taking into account potential data protection and security issues. ESTIA is being further elaborated under Round 2, and several new EQUAL partnerships have expressed an interest in testing the networking tool in their national contexts.

3.1.1.5. *Changing attitudes*

One of the goals of many EQUAL partnerships under the Asylum Seekers theme is to raise awareness to the plight of asylum seekers in local communities. While a change in public attitudes is difficult to measure, partnerships have made note of signs of change, which are the result of their activities aiming to assist the integration of asylum seekers and promote a diverse and inclusive society.

The work of the **ATLAS** partnerships in Scotland has contributed to change at the level of organisations who have adjusted and adapted their practices to take into account the diversity of local populations. This model of 'mutual adaptation' has the potential to create sustainable change in communities and an environment of mutual respect. Examples of this process include the adaptation of curricula in schools, businesses offering work shadowing opportunities to asylum seekers, and colleges supporting learners with 'non-traditional' backgrounds. The partnership has also noted a positive response by the Scottish Executive and Glasgow City Council to new arrivals through the acknowledgement of Scotland's need for multiculturalism and the benefits of diversity.

3.1.2. **Vertical mainstreaming results**

Influencing changes at a political or administrative level has been a particular challenge for many EQUAL partnerships. This results from political will on the part of many governments to listen and learn from experiences in the field, or a lack of mechanisms to inform politicians about on-the-ground level successes. Many partnerships have been disappointed that they have not been able to influence and change government policy to allow asylum seekers easier access to the labour market and vocational training opportunities. However, despite these obstacles, there are some examples of changes taking place at administrative and policy levels as a result of mainstreaming efforts. Many EQUAL partnerships have been successful in spreading important policy messages to those who need to hear them, and in rallying support from other influential actors.

3.1.2.1. Influencing policy changes

Influencing changes at the national policy level is the most difficult aim to achieve through mainstreaming, especially in the asylum policy field. For mainstreaming to occur, policymakers need to have an interest in the results coming out of the activities of programmes such as EQUAL and in how these could inform policy. The restrictive nature of policies governing asylum seekers in most countries makes influencing such policies a challenge. However, there are some examples of policy changes taking place as a result of the hard work and perseverance of EQUAL partnerships.

The extensive lobbying undertaken by the **Anadrasis-Istos** partnership in Greece managed to convince the Greek Manpower Organisation (part of the Ministry of Employment) to issue a Circular which allowed asylum seekers, for the first time in Greece, to benefit from employment subsidies made available to disadvantaged groups. It is only a first step, as some bureaucratic issues still make it difficult for them to actually apply for these subsidies, but it is a very important one, as these new arrangements will certainly make asylum seekers more 'attractive' to potential employers.

The Immigration Services of the Ministry of Integration in Denmark has included one of the **Want2Work** partnership's key recommendations into a law on the activation of asylum seekers. The proposed legislative change would mean that asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected could continue to benefit from education and training programmes, instead of being cut off from activities organised to help their vocational and personal development.

3.1.2.2. Contributing to the policy debate

Through dissemination and awareness-raising activities, EQUAL partnerships have been able to spread important policy messages to those responsible for policy-making and other important actors. Rallying the support of organisations such as trade unions, and chambers of commerce, for example, is a way to add political weight to efforts to influence and change restrictive policies which exclude asylum seekers from the labour market and training opportunities.

Through the setting of a strategic lobbying group, the **Epima** partnership in Austria formulated key policy messages which were taken up by the Austrian trade union confederation who on the occasion of their General Assembly called for access to the labour market for asylum seekers. Members of the chambers for labour and commerce also made public calls for increased access to the labour market for asylum seekers, especially those experiencing long waiting times.

4. HOW DID THEY DO IT? GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT

Letting others know about the positive results and successes of EQUAL projects has been a high priority for EQUAL partnerships. Partnerships have used a variety of innovative methods and strategies to ensure that the right messages go out at the right time to the most relevant persons. Some examples of the mainstreaming methods and tools used by partnerships are highlighted below.

4.1.1. Development of a communication strategy

Many partnerships developed a formal communication and dissemination strategy, often at a very early stage to diffuse results as they happened. Strategies included the production of a newsletter, the organisation of dissemination seminars and the appointment of representatives responsible for the promotion of the project with policy and decision makers.

The Restoring Trust for the Future partnership in the Netherlands developed a communication strategy from the very beginning which included regular newsletters, seminars and the appointment of representatives responsible for promoting the project with policy and decision-makers. It also prepared clear descriptions of the training methods it developed which could be used by other actors.

4.1.2. Use of publications and media

An important step in a mainstreaming strategy is for partnerships to identify the best practices coming out of their activities in order to determine which practices or models could be transferred. Many partnerships have published their best practices in the form of a publication, often in collaboration with other partnerships working in the same field. Other products developed for dissemination included policy proposals, research documents, analyses and recommendations. These products and publications were presented at various events to make them public and raise interest among policy and decision-makers. Several partnerships regularly published newsletters to keep others informed of their activities and project results, or submitted articles and reports for publication in newspapers and magazines. Radio and television were also used to reach a wider public.

Want2Work: Students on the media course produced a magazine called *The New Times* which was distributed to over 3000 asylum seekers, authorities at national, regional and local levels, and other relevant actors. The magazine attracted the interest of “mainstream” media, who are now regularly requesting additional information and checking their facts with *The New Times* journalists.

The **SONAS** partnership was conscious of the need for an improvement in the planning, coordination and delivery of services for asylum seekers. They took the experiences and lessons it learnt from its outreach work and translated them into a practical policy proposal calling for an improvement in the planning, coordination and delivery of services for asylum seekers.

4.1.3. Organisation of mainstreaming events such as expert seminars and conferences

The organisation of mainstreaming and dissemination events such as seminars, press conferences and meetings to formally present projects, was one of the most common methods used by partnerships to publicise project results. Policy-makers, social partners, government authorities as well as specialised experts and NGOs also attended these events which took place at national and transnational levels. This provided an opportunity to bring all relevant actors together and transmit key messages and project results to those who could make use of them.

In October 2005, the results of the work of the **RE-KOMP** project, in particular the sub-project on International Health Advisors, were promoted at a national conference held at the World Culture Museum in Gothenburg, attended by numerous policy-makers, including the Immigration Minister, Barbro Holmberg. The conference also had a European dimension in that representatives of projects from other EU Member States were present as well as representatives of the European Commission.

Want2Work organised several large-scale conferences throughout which were very well attended. The project made use of its partners and the wider Red Cross organisation to attract important participants. In January 2005, it organised a conference on the right for asylum seekers to work and access education. The conference was meant to officially present the recommendations stemming from the experiences of Want2Work, and to show the good practices on which these were based. Interest in the event was much higher than expected, and the conference saw many key players who were not involved in EQUAL but were certainly interested in taking up some of the partnership's lessons. It provided an excellent opportunity for Want2Work to push for change.

4.1.4. Websites and other on-line tools

Several EQUAL partnerships set up a project website which was then regularly updated in order to keep others informed of project developments and results. This was considered to be a useful and versatile communication tool which could include information on on-going activities, upcoming seminars and events, showcases of successful results, as well as interactive tools which allowed for an exchange of information between a variety of actors.

From the very start, the **Want2Work** partnership focused on developing high quality dissemination products, such as their very well designed website. The website included downloadable versions of all their products, including course materials, and a skills audit database, which could be easily accessed. All the products are free of charge and translated in English.

The EQUAL Asylum Seekers partnership in Portugal – **Reception and Integration of Asylum Seekers** – developed an on-line forum which connected several organisations working with migrants, ethnic minorities and refugees which allowed them to share information interactively.

4.1.5. Networks as mainstreaming tools

Networking is a very important aspect of mainstreaming as it enables partners to share experiences and know-how and to adopt successful approaches which have already been tested by others. National thematic networks were set up in several Member States for the purpose of mainstreaming. These networks acted as a forum, providing an opportunity to pool resources, promote information-sharing and learning, and address problems. Networks proved to be a key tool to identify, compare and measure successful practices and policy lessons and examine their potential for transferability.

EQUAL partnerships also created larger networks which went beyond implementation partners to include strategic partners such as policy and decision-makers, social partners, and employers. Having the right people around the table meant that key policy message could be directly delivered to those who could use them.

The **Dutch National Thematic Network** brought together the six EQUAL Asylum Seeker projects and a wide range of relevant actors such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Refugee Council and other refugee organisations, the Association of Dutch Municipalities and Netherlands' largest trade union confederation. An innovative "user-producer" concept was developed, where potential users of results were from the very start in contact with the projects producing them, so that they could have a chance to jointly "shape" interesting practices for their wider use. This approach which brought together EQUAL projects and potential users together around the same table from Day 1, meant that the necessary arrangements for transferring innovative approaches and methods to other organisations could be made "in real time".

Transnational networks were also key to promoting activities at the European level and in this way spreading good practices and successful models beyond national borders to organisations in other countries who could also benefit from tried and tested methods.

The **ASPIRE! Transnational Partnership** brought together EQUAL development partnerships working under the Asylum Seekers Theme from six different countries. This transnational partnership served as more than just a forum for exchange of good practices. Partners actively worked together to come up with policy recommendations based on the partnership's experience and learning.

Through this partnership the RE-KOMP partnership has actively promoted its activities at European level and has been able to establish close links between its International Health Advisors project and a similar one developed by the TranSPuK partnership in Germany, which is also an ASPIRE! partner. Such collaboration has strengthened the efforts to create impacts also at national level.

For the SONAS DP, the project was able to greatly benefit from the exchange of ideas and learning experiences, as well as the development of common policy documents. It also appreciated the opportunity to pursue common policy objectives with partners at EU level, giving its work a depth which went beyond the national level.

4.1.6. Organisation of face-to-face meetings with policy and decision-makers

In order to get the right actors around the table and present them with the practical results and relevant policy messages which have come out of projects, partnerships have taken a 'direct approach' by organising face-to-face meetings with policy and decision-makers to discuss the possibilities of mainstreaming.

The **SONAS** partnership arranged several meetings with senior staff members of the Irish Reception and Integration Agency to discuss the concerns it raised in its proposal for the improvement in planning, coordination and delivery of services for asylum seekers in Ireland. This proposal outlines the partnership's policy concerns and is the result of its learning from the work of the outreach service it developed.

The partnership also held several meetings with the local manager of Comhairle (a statutory agency which provides information to the public through a network of Citizen Information Centres) in Cork about the possibilities of mainstreaming the outreach programme in Cork. As a result, a pilot project was set up to run for several months to assess the need, type of information and support required by asylum seekers in the area, as well as the training needs of the persons who will be responsible for providing this information.

Members of the **Anadrisis-Istos** partnership did not hesitate to knock directly on the doors of policy makers either. They lobbied at local, regional and national level, using every opportunity possible to promote the benefits of helping asylum seekers into gainful employment. Determination and commitment seem to have been the key ingredients of their mainstreaming approach. As a result of extensive lobbying, they were successful in influencing the Greek Manpower Organisation to allow asylum seekers to benefit from employment subsidies.

4.1.7. Using external specialists

Most EQUAL partnerships developed mainstreaming strategies and produced their own information material to spread lessons and messages and to try to make an impact. In some cases, this was a difficult process as many partnerships were busy implementing activities and focussing on reaching beneficiaries and did not have sufficient time or resources to concentrate on mainstreaming and dissemination. Some partnerships solved this problem by using external specialists to develop and implement a mainstreaming and dissemination strategy.

The **Becoming Visible** partnership in Finland started dissemination activities while the project was running. Information was disseminated to the wider public at national level through professional public relations officers who were employed and supervised by the Finnish Association of Adult Education Centres, one of the partners. This was done through the local media, newsletters, an Internet site, the organisation of seminars and a road show which communicated results by travelling to different areas throughout the country.

The **ATLAS** partnership in Scotland employed two policy advisors to assist with the dissemination of the results of the ATLAS projects. They were involved in several activities including the ATLAS Conference which gave projects a chance to showcase their successful practices and share information with similar projects, and the publication of the ATLAS Compendium featuring all projects and their results, providing an opportunity to promote good practice and inform policy making. The visit to Glasgow of a Swedish Delegation provided the opportunity to promote the work of ALTAS abroad while gaining insight into practices taking place in other countries.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The following section highlights some of the most significant obstacles and challenges which were faced by partnerships under Round 1 and the lessons they have learnt as a result of their experiences. The paper concludes with a 'recipe for success' which outlines the necessary ingredients identified to achieve successful mainstreaming.

5.1. OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

EQUAL partnerships trying to achieve an objective as challenging as mainstreaming are sure to face obstacles and hurdles on the way. Many partnerships faced similar problems. Others had to address difficulties which were specific to their national context and situation. Some of the most significant obstacles encountered by EQUAL partnerships are described below.

5.1.1. A restrictive policy area

For the majority of EQUAL partnerships under the Asylum Seekers Theme, government policies restricting access to employment and vocational training for asylum seekers have been the most significant obstacle faced, not only to the implementation of activities, but also to the mainstreaming of results. Vertical mainstreaming especially has been a particular challenge as few governments are willing to listen and learn from experiences on the ground and there is little political will to ease restrictions and provide unrestricted access to the labour market and training opportunities for asylum seekers. As a result, some partnerships were aware of the fact that they have not been able to share the vertical mainstreaming successes which other projects working under other EQUAL Themes in their country enjoyed.

5.1.2. Working in isolation

EQUAL partnerships who are working in isolation in their country, i.e. they are the only partnership working under the Asylum Seekers Theme, faced particular challenges. Not only did such partnerships have to start their activities 'from scratch', but it also took a long time before they were in the position to promote mainstreaming as most to their time and effort was devoted to the implementation of activities. Also, there was less opportunity and scope for exchange with other projects working national level although participation in transnational activity enables exchanges with development partnerships from other countries.

5.1.3. A new concept

For some EQUAL partnerships, mainstreaming was something very new in their national context which many actors were not familiar with. This required even more effort to formulate and develop a mainstreaming strategy, and explain the concept of mainstreaming to others. It took some time before the appropriate structures and systems were in place to ensure that the issue of mainstreaming took centre stage.

5.1.4. A challenging objective

In order to be successful, mainstreaming requires a huge investment in time and resources. It also requires the right approach and methods. While partnerships had significant experience in implementing project activities, many lacked the skills and experience to disseminate their products and results which may have made the goal of mainstreaming easier to achieve.

5.2. SHARING RESULTS: LESSONS LEARNT

As a result of their experiences and the challenges faced under Round 1, EQUAL partnerships have learned some valuable mainstreaming lessons.

5.2.1. Getting the right actors on board

Dissemination and mainstreaming has been particularly successful for partnerships who were able to build strategic links with key actors and organisations. Involving such actors from an early stage has allowed for the joint development of strategies and strategic insights into the best approaches to take towards mainstreaming. Having these persons on board throughout the project also created a greater commitment and ownership of products and results, which has increased the motivation and willingness to let others know about them.

5.2.2. Joining forces for change

In response to the difficult policy context that partnerships are forced to work in, partnerships have called for greater dialogue and increased communication through information and awareness-raising activities in order to bring about change. Partnerships have repeatedly emphasised the need for a review of policies in order to improve access to employment and vocational training for asylum seekers and allow them to use their skills to build a future. While the transposition by Member States of the Reception Directive has improved the scope for change, many have not taken this opportunity to ease restrictions. Partnerships under Round 2 may be facing the same challenges and restrictions as a result. In order to address this, experiences from Round 1 have shown that increased communication with other relevant actors, such as social partners or Members of Parliament could rally support and achieve critical mass to work for and ultimately bring about change.

5.2.3. Learning from others

Partnerships who have been working in isolation as the only EQUAL Asylum Seeker partnership in their countries, have been able to benefit from the experiences of partners in other Member States through their participation in transnational partnerships. Transnational opportunities such as these have provided useful insights and exchanges of know-how which have helped these partnerships to set up the strategies and methods necessary to address the objective of mainstreaming.

5.2.4. Calling on external experts

Most partnerships produced their own information material and mainstreaming strategies in order to spread important messages coming out of their projects. With hindsight, some partnerships have reflected that these could have been strengthened and made more effective with the use of professional communication and policy advisors. The partnerships who have used such external experts have been successful in reaching a wider audience.

5.3. A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS: KEY FACTORS IDENTIFIED UNDER ROUND 1 FOR SUCCESSFUL MAINSTREAMING

Experiences from Round 1 have shown that in order to achieve successful mainstreaming, partnerships need to incorporate all the right ingredients. Some of the key factors for success identified under Round 1 of the EQUAL programme are highlighted below.

- ⇒ Mainstreaming and dissemination activities need to start early – from the very beginning of the project. The early development of a clear mainstreaming strategy helps to focus the work of the partnership, plan effective methods and clarify the roles and tasks of each partner.
- ⇒ Key actors, such as policy and decision-makers at local, regional and national levels need to be involved in the partnership from the very beginning. Bringing potential users around the table from Day 1 can allow for clear policy links to be made with the work of EQUAL, while involving them at all stages of the programme. If potential users have been directly involved in the development of good practices, they are more likely to take them on board in the future.
- ⇒ The rallying of support from organisations such as chambers of commerce, trade unions, and social partners is a way to add political weight to efforts to influence and change restrictive policies which exclude asylum seekers from the labour market and training opportunities.
- ⇒ The use of networks at horizontal, national and transnational levels are instrumental in identifying, comparing and measuring good practices and approaches which could be transferred elsewhere. Networks are an effective way for partners to share experiences and adopt successful approaches.
- ⇒ The expertise of external specialists such as communication experts or policy advisors can be sought to develop a tailored mainstreaming and communication strategy and publicise results and key policy messages and in an effective and professional way.
- ⇒ Dare to take a direct approach by knocking on the doors of high-profile actors and policy-makers and bringing them around the table to discuss the good practices and practical results of EQUAL projects and the possibilities to mainstream them.
- ⇒ The media can be used to get key policy messages and good practices out and make them public while raising interest among policy and decision-makers. This can be done through the publication of articles in newspapers and magazines, or through broadcasts on radio and television.
- ⇒ The use of web-sites and on-line tools can be an effective and versatile way of making products easily accessible on-line and keeping others informed of project developments and results. On-line tools also offer the possibility for an interactive exchange between a variety actors.
- ⇒ Personal commitment and perseverance can go a long way. For many partnerships, determination and commitment seem to have been the key ingredients of their mainstreaming approach and subsequent success.