

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE EQUAL POLICY FORUM ON PREVENTION OR RE-IMPRISONMENT

THE SITUATION IN EUROPEAN PRISON SYSTEMS

Prison Services throughout the European Union are being stretched to the limit. As Annex 1 shows,¹ there is an overall occupancy level, based on officially stated capacity, of 114%. In some Member States such as Greece and Cyprus, the corresponding figure is over 170%. In only nine of the 25 Member States is the figure less than 100% with five of these nine still being above 95%.

This overcrowding is a direct reflection of the fact that the prison population has been rising steadily over the last 10 or 11 years and throughout the EU, it is now 27.9% more than it was in 1995. As expected, given their current occupancy levels, Cyprus (+241.2%) and Greece (+69.6%) show large increases but the rate of increase is over 50% for five other countries and more than 100% in the case of the Netherlands. Only three countries have reported a decrease in the number of prisoners and, in one of these cases, Northern Ireland, the decrease was a direct result of the freeing of political prisoners or detainees, after the "Good Friday" agreement. At the moment, one out of every 800 European citizens is in prison, whereas the figure for Estonia is as high as one in 300, with Slovenia being the lowest with only one in 1538.

A major factor in producing and maintaining these record numbers of inmates are high reconviction rates. It is difficult to find reliable and comparable data on these rates but a recent UK study² of all adults released from prison in the first quarter of 2003 shows that 58.9% were reconvicted in the following two year period. Whereas, the Netherlands³ seems to have one of the lowest rates but it is still 37% over a post-release period of four years.

THE EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE SEEKING NEW SOLUTIONS

Amongst all of the current EU Programmes and Initiatives, the 1281 Development Partnerships (DPs) launched under the Employability pillar of EQUAL (see Annex 2 for details of this Community Initiative) offer the widest and deepest pool of experience that can be used to strengthen the employability of disadvantaged groups.

As early as 2003, it was possible to identify innovative results from EQUAL in working with (ex)-offenders that had the potential to make a significant impact on training and integration policies for the prison population. In addition, a number of strong EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) from Austria, Germany, France, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and UKgb had been cooperating very successfully in two Transnational Partnerships (TPs) that introduced new arrangements for distance learning in penal institutions. Thus during Round 1, it was suggested that the "Early Intervention in the Training of (Ex)-Offenders", should be a theme to be explored in the future.

¹ Based on National Data, last updated on 10 December 2006, from the International Centre for Prison Studies at Kings College, University of London

² Home Office Statistical Bulletin - Re-offending of adults: results from the 2003 cohort – November 2005

³ Recidivism following treatment: a statistical overview of criminal recidivism of former offenders under an entrustment order in the Netherlands - ISBN: 90-5454-613-1 - 2005

This proposal was well-founded because the topic of working with (ex)-offenders is even more strongly represented in projects that were selected, during 2004, to participate in Round 2 of EQUAL:

- 66 DPs in Round 2 are working with (ex)-offenders, as compared to 45 in Round 1;
- 55 DPs in Round 2 are dealing *exclusively* with (ex)-offenders and involving the institutions/authorities of the penal system as partners (Priority 1 DPs), as compared to 26 in Round 1;
- 15 TPs have a particular focus on (ex)-offenders and that is more than double the number in Round 1;
- The number of Member States with Priority 1 DPs has increased from 12 to 19, and also includes 7 of the 10 new Member States, as shown in Table 1.

In total, 121 Employability DPs have piloted new approaches to prevent offending and re-offending by working with ex-offenders in re-settlement support and aftercare or assisting inmates whilst in prison.

Table 1: EQUAL DPs Working with (Ex)-offenders

No of Priority 1 DPs	Round 2		Round 1	
	Member States (MS)	No of MS	Member States (MS)	No of MS
1	AT, BEfr, CZ, EE, ES, FI, IE, LT, LU, LV, UKni	11	AT, BEfr, BEnl, FI, GR, UKni	6
2	HU	1	DE, FR, SE	3
3	NL, SK	3		
4	DE, PT, PL	2	NL, UKgb	2
6	FR	1	IT	1
8	UKgb	1		
9	IT	1		
Total No of MS		20		12

Criminal justice and prison services have used other EU programmes to test new approaches and to promote mutual learning between peers in different Member States. These have included the AGIS Programme and a Twinning Programme with 3rd Partners operated by DG Justice, Freedom and Security and, in the case of DG Education and Culture, projects have been financed within the Socrates, Grundtvig and Leonardo Programmes. However, EQUAL as an ESF financed programme has provided a much more structured environment for the promotion of innovation and exchange – an environment that has been appreciated and well-used by the institutions and authorities of penal systems throughout the EU. Table 2, presents an analysis of the main themes that are being addressed by the 55 DPs in Round 2 that involve these institutions or authorities. As can be seen from this table, most DPs tackle several thematic priorities, at the same time.

Table 2: Working with (Ex)-offenders – Thematic Overview (EQUAL Round 2)

Thematic priorities	DPs *Total=55	
	No	%*
1. Re-settlement support	50	91
2. Assisting prison inmates (<i>action within prisons</i>)	44	80
3. Differentiated focus on target groups	34	62
4. Cooperation arrangements, multi-agency working	31	56
5. Training and support for key operators	26	47
6. Preparation for self-employment (<i>including cooperatives</i>)	12	22
7. Work with/assistance to families	12	22
8. Awareness raising, lobbying, publicity	16	29

Many of the new measures tested by EQUAL DPs have been successful in combating recidivism. For example, the “Mabis.Net” project in Germany provided systematic support and management in resettlement and reduced the recidivism of young offenders from 80% to 40%. This dropped to 30% when it was possible to find jobs that corresponded to the training, which they had received in the juvenile detention centres. The promoter of the “Telfi” DP, the Institute for Justice and Criminal Sociology in Vienna, has proved that participation in education and training programmes developed under EQUAL leads to a reduction in recidivism, which is directly related to the length of time spent in these occupational preparation measures.

In total, the 121 DPs that are concerned with (ex)-offenders have received financial support from the ESF in excess of 170m €. Thus, they represent a very substantial European investment in the development and testing of innovative practices.

MAINSTREAMING THE NEW EQUAL APPROACHES

UKgb and Germany are leading the task of capitalising on EQUAL’s experience of working with (ex)-offenders. A Steering Group has been established of ten Member States which, in turn, are twinned with another 12 countries.⁴ During the period October 2005 to June 2006, the Steering Group planned a European-level Mainstreaming Programme which it has been implementing since summer of last year. The three main foci of this Programme are:

- An Exchange Event of EQUAL DPs held in Portugal, during October 2006, that agreed on a set of topics to be presented at the subsequent Policy Forum;
- A Policy Forum in Poland, in June 2007, to confront policy makers with the good practices that are emerging from EQUAL and to engage their interest in taking some of these forward;
- A Transnational Network or a "Community of Practice", later in 2007, to ensure the continued transfer and the sustainability of relevant EQUAL outcomes.

The Exchange Event entitled Passport2Freedom was held, in Lisbon, on 23 and 24 October. The majority of the two days was spent in Workshop Sessions during which the good practices

⁴ **Belgium (fr)** with Belgium (nl); **The Netherlands;** **Germany** with France, Czech Republic and Greece; **Luxemburg;** **Italy** with Sweden and Austria; **Portugal;** **Poland** with Lithuania and Finland; **Spain;** **UKgb** with Estonia; **UKni** with Latvia, Hungary and Ireland

emerging from EQUAL were presented and potential policy messages were developed. The discussions focused on the following five topics:

- Transition from prison to the outside world;
- Inter-institutional cooperation;
- Involving employers;
- Quality and change management in prisons;
- Learning inside and outside prison.

All of the preparatory papers for the event and the conclusions of these five workshops are available from <http://www.passport2freedom.org>. Having considered the outcomes of the Exchange Event, the Steering Group proposed the following three main themes for this Policy Forum:

- Resettlement or Re-offending;
- Prison Innovation;
- Learning across Borders.

The next three sections of this paper outline some of the good practices in EQUAL, which relate to each of these themes and, in the final section, some potential recommendations are proposed based on this good practice. These themes and proposals will be addressed during the Panel Sessions, at the Policy Forum, in Warsaw.

Most of the practical examples that are mentioned are featured in greater detail on the European Commission's EQUAL web site. By following the hyperlinks, readers will be able to acquire a more complete understanding of EQUAL's successful approaches to working with (ex)-offenders, prior to their participation in the Policy Forum.

PANEL 1: RESETTLEMENT OR RE-OFFENDING

Coordinated approaches are of fundamental importance to the successful re-integration of offenders. If the many different, individual needs of offenders are to be met and all the related problems resolved, there has to be close communication and collaboration between the prison and the outside world and between those agencies involved in the integration process or chain. Fortunately, these types of cooperative arrangements are greatly facilitated by the fact that partnership is a key principle in EQUAL, and in recognition of this, time and money was made available so that effective, working partnerships could be established. The partnership principle of EQUAL has produced many positive examples of cooperation involving ministries of justice, employment, education, health and social security, major NGOs, employers' and trade union organisations and, at local level, organisations representing offenders, their families and their victims are also involved. Some of these new approaches are described below.

Creating a Regional Model of Cooperation

One such example is the [Car.Te.S.I.O.](#) DP that created local networks called GOLs (Local Operatives Groups) in the Piedmont Region of the north of Italy. The 12 GOLs were formed in the geographical areas around each prison and brought together the municipality, the social service centre, vocational training providers, voluntary organisations and representatives of the DP's partners. The DP was constructed in a way that maximised the chances of its model being mainstreamed. One of the most important players in this respect was the Regional Office of PRAP (the National Department for Prison Administration) as PRAP brought on board the managers and staff of all the penal institutions and all the other offices and agencies concerned with the administration of the criminal justice system in Piedmont. Another partner, the Regional Confederation of Cooperatives also had a very important role to play in raising the awareness of employers. The model developed by CarTeSIO that includes the training of operators, vocational training and "stages" or work experience for prisoners, support in finding housing on release and information desks in all prisons has now become known as the Piedmont model. In addition, in recognition of the value of the GOLs, the Provinces within Piedmont have taken on the role of

coordination and are providing their secretariats and this ensures the continued sustainability and success of this cooperative model.

Involving almost Half of Germany

The German EQUAL [e-LiS Development Partnership](#) (DP) was launched in 2002 to promote the employability of ex-offenders and to prepare them for their re-integration into the job market. The DP involved six Northern States (Länder) of the Federal Republic of Germany⁵ and was based on 32 separate, but inter-related, projects. One important outcome of its networking activities has been the adoption of a formal agreement by the Ministries of Justice of those federal states that participated in the e-LiS DP and, also the State of Lower Saxony, to establish the [“RESO-Northern Alliance”](#) (see point 2.1 of linked document). This is a structured framework for cooperation between the administrations of justice in the fields of education, training and labour-market programmes for the social and vocational integration of offenders.

The members of the Northern Alliance have made a firm commitment to engage in coordinated action to improve the employability of prison inmates, and to promote the exchange of experience and transfer of good practice between the relevant institutions in their justice and penal systems. They have also agreed to coordinate their action in initiating the necessary legal changes and creating favourable framework conditions for their work. Each of the participating Länder has taken a lead role in one of the thematic areas, and/or a responsibility for particular tasks in the organisation and management of the Alliance. The thematic areas include:

- Combining relevant assistance and employment measures inside and outside the penal institutions, as part of an integrated support system;
- Introducing modular, flexible and individualised education/training processes, based on a common approach to individual assessment and profiling;
- Developing the use of IT-based learning systems;
- Ensuring the labour market relevance of education and employment offers in prisons;
- Creating a common system for the re-integration of ex-offenders after their period of custody.

Since its establishment, the RESO Northern Alliance has attracted considerable attention and some of the other nine German have already indicated their strong interest in cooperating, and sharing experience, with the Alliance.

Collaborating in Training Provision

The ambitious objective of the EQUAL [REINSERT](#) Development Partnership (DP) is introducing learning opportunities as part of the regular provision in all 17 prisons in the French (and German) speaking Community, of Belgium. Within the context of REINSERT, a total number of 28 further education and training centres are actively engaged in prison education and training. Qualified staff develop and deliver courses, assist in interviewing and assessing potential participants and offer them advice and guidance.

Eight of the 28 participating further education and training centres have nominated a socio-pedagogical coordinator. These coordinators meet every two months to discuss, and find solutions to, issues that may have arisen from the training courses, such as the need to adapt course material or how to handle psychological problems that are related to course groups or individual participants. Inside each prison, these new activities are coordinated by a “Local Monitoring Committee” chaired by the Prison Director. The members of this committee include representatives of all of the different interests that are involved such as the prison wardens, the psycho-social service and the external training staff. It also includes the senior staff member of the prison, normally the Deputy Director, who has the responsibility for maintaining close links with relevant agencies and actors outside the prison, like the employment services and social and labour market intermediaries.

⁵ Berlin, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Schleswig-Holstein.

Paving new, less treacherous pathways that also signpost more clearly the transition from prison to work and civil life implies more effective cooperation and coordination and REINSERT is working hard to create strong links between the numerous public authorities and agencies that have an important role to play in this transition. These include the 10 Ministries that are currently involved in the whole process leading from detention to re-integration. A greater involvement of employers and labour market intermediaries is also being sought.

Coming together to establish Effective After-Care

During the Round 1, the German **MABIS.Net** DP's after-care agencies (see page 3 of linked document) were established in seven regions of North Rhine-Westphalia. Different types of private providers played a central role in piloting these new agencies, including NGOs and trade union and employers' organisations. The agencies have knowledge and expertise in both the world of prisons and the field of employment, unlike most other labour market intermediaries with whom they cooperate closely. Thus, they are particularly well placed to offer advice and services to ex-offenders, training providers and employers and to help to normalise the situation of ex-offenders during the first six months after their release by preventing them dropping out of training or work. The effective networking contacts that exist between the regional agencies make it possible to ensure that this resettlement support is also available to the large number of individuals who, after having served their sentence, decide to move away from the location of their previous imprisonment.

The large majority of those who call on the services of the **MABIS.Net** after-care agencies are ex-offenders who did not access employment or have dropped out of an initial placement. During the period 2003-2004, 85% of the 1100 individuals who were "registered" with the after-care agencies after their release from prison⁶ were facing these problematic situations. For half of this large group of clients, the agencies were able to offer job or training opportunities. Whilst help in providing placements appears to be the most frequently requested form of support, it is not the only one. More than one third of the clients also required other types of assistance to enable them to stabilise their life situations. These included job coaching, help with social or health issues, solving housing problems or advice in dealing with debt and other financial matters. Only 16% of all its participants abandoned the after-care programme and this is a testimony to the relevance of the assistance that it offers.

Counting the Benefits of Partnership

In Finland, the **PoMo** DP has developed a comprehensive system of after-care. Some 90% of young offenders were returning to prison after serving their first sentence but PoMo responded to this problem by creating a Support Programme. The supporters who work on this programme include not only professional staff, such as qualified youth workers or social workers, but also mentors who might appear to be ordinary people, but in the course of their lives, they have all accumulated wisdom and experience that is invaluable to young offenders. Since many of the young offenders do not have adult males in their families or social networks and most of the professionals in the project are women, the majority of the mentors are male. The mentors' support in finding useful and fulfilling activities is vital because the unemployment rate in the area is around 20% and most of the young people cannot rely on a job to create a daily routine that will stop them from re-offending.

However, it is unlikely that individual partners would have maintained their interest in imagination and reform unless they had evidence that it was bringing some benefit to their agencies. Happily this is the case for PoMo. The Chief of Police in Koillismaa identified one aspect of the project's success as being the fact that two brothers had not re-offended over the last year and compared with their previous record that meant that his officers had 30 less crimes to investigate. Similarly, the prosecutors, courts, housing departments, joint social work/employment offices and youth work offices all realise that these young people will be making fewer and less frequent demands on their time and resources, as a result of their participation in the programmes. Also, in a more positive sense, they now know that if they are having problems with a young offender, they can

⁶ In addition, **MABIS.Net** provided support to more than 500 prisoners **during** their period of detention.

call on other agencies who can assist them or on mentors who might be in a better position to advise or counsel that individual. For the prisons involved, the situation is slightly different but certainly they welcome the increased contact with the “outside world” and the fact that there are organisations that can assist in the planning and the implementation of plans for the release of their inmates.

Peers and Partners Empowering

Women into Work was a broadly based DP from England in which empowerment featured very strongly. The peer research conducted by WiW had a range of beneficial outcomes for the women involved. They took part in nine different training and development opportunities: Public Speaking & Presentation Skills; Marketing & Media Awareness; Training for Trainers; PowerPoint; Report Writing; Working with Challenging Behaviour; Working with Addictive Behaviour; Working with Volunteers; Effective Volunteer and Staff Supervision. This has equipped them with the skills needed to feel confident and prepared to make a pro-active contribution to meetings and speak in front of large audiences at conferences. Whilst the peer research was being conducted, the trainees were encouraged to attend DP meetings as part of their learning and development - an innovation in itself. In WiW, beneficiaries were involved at all levels in the DP and were represented on all groups and committees including the DP steering group.

Trainees who had been involved in the peer research believed that it had some empowering effect for the women they interviewed, who were made to feel that their experience and views were valued. The employment of women (ex)-offenders in professional full time jobs, proved useful for these employees and also for the beneficiaries they were supporting. The employees gained work experience, a salary, a reference, and new-found self-confidence. In addition, they provided a role model and raised the aspirations of the beneficiaries. The response of many women when told of a staff member’s background was often *“If she can do something like this, maybe I can.”* For most DP members, the peer research was seen as the most innovative aspect of WiW and the part most likely to have a lasting effect through the DP’s Moving Mountains report and the precedents set through women prisoners being given access to other prisons. The research findings have been cited in the Home Office Offending Reduction Programme, the Prison Service Women’s Team Business Plan, the Prison Service Plus bidding guidance and Fawcett Society’s Gender and Justice Commission on Women. The peer research methodology was also developed into a training course, accredited by the Open College Network, and delivered nationally to 33 organisations.

Allies in supporting Self-Employment

The Italian **SALIS** DP is creating entrepreneurs from ex-offenders, as it sees this as being a way to avoid the prejudice of potential employers or work colleagues. Two of its partners CNA (the National Crafts Association and Confesercenti (the Association of Commerce, Tourism and Service Enterprises) have offices throughout the Province of Pescara that offer a variety of support services to entrepreneurs and micro-businesses. Each of these centres is now also providing guidance and entrepreneurial training to ex-offenders, and helping them with the design of their new enterprises and the production of their business plans.

Another significant advance has been the establishing of a line of micro-credit that can be used by ex-offenders. The CNA in Pescara and the Province of Pescara are working with the Cooperativa Artigiana di Garanzia Futura and also FINART, which are two organisations providing loans and financial guarantees to local artisans. Together, they have provided a fund of 50.000 euro to be used to cover guarantees with local banks, when ex-prisoners ask for a small loan. In the case of normal business operations such a guarantee fund would generate an amount 15 times larger, but in this case where the banks believe the risk is much greater, the multiplier is only 4 and it will generate only a fund of 200.000 euro. This means that up to 50 loans will be available at an average of 4.000 euro to be repaid over 36 months. However, the good news is that the bank is prepared to increase the multiplier in relation to the number of the loans that are paid back on time.

PANEL 2: PRISON INNOVATION

This theme takes account of the many EQUAL innovations that are taking place in prisons. Some of these are structural and are related to the management of change, the introduction of quality systems and the motivation of staff to adopt a more creative, pro-active attitude to the rehabilitation of inmates. Others are concerned with the development of new forms of education and training that reflect the skills that are in demand in the surrounding labour market and with attempts to explain, in a way that employers will understand, how individuals have improved their skills, attitudes and behaviour whilst in prison. Many of these initiatives involve opening up prisons to agencies and individuals, including employers, so that offenders are empowered and prepared to play a more positive part in society on their release.

Defining Individual Integration Pathways

Many of the DPs organise activities that focus on prison inmates and they try to respond to individual needs by establishing “Pathways” or “Routings”, as the **MATCH** DP in the Netherlands calls them. Originally, the Work-Wise programme operated in 11 of the custodial institutions for juveniles but through its EQUAL activities all 13 institutions in the Netherlands are now involved in the MATCH DP. The programme is focused on boys and girls aged 15 to 24, who have been placed in a custodial institution as a result of a criminal sentence or a supervision order removing them from their parents’ care. When a young offender is placed in an institution, the programme usually starts in a closed setting but because all the institutions in the Netherlands are involved, the routings can be continued if the young person is transferred to an open institution. The programme has three routings that are followed simultaneously:

- *Work and Education* prepares young offenders to function effectively in a paid job by providing training and work experience placements and assistance in making an application for a job or work placement;
- *Living Independently and Coping with Leisure Time* assists juveniles and young offenders in creating a rhythm and a structure for their daily life, which reduces their chances of re-offending;
- *Creating a social network* provides intensive coaching in socially acceptable behaviour, relationships and social skills.

Involving Employers

The **IMPACT** DP in the north of England identified the vital role that employers can play in the successful re-integration of offenders but, at the same time, employers were largely unaware of the untapped pool of workers represented by ex-offenders. IMPACT has developed two main tools to remedy this situation. A Portfolio of Achievement helps employers to understand more clearly what individual (ex)-offenders can offer to their firms or companies. This is a smart looking brief case with standard sections covering personal details, work and educational history of the offender and signed statements from a number of prison personnel and the individual offender that help to explain how his or her attitudes, behaviour and expectations have been changed by the learning opportunities and the support received during the time in prison.

A second initiative has been an Employment Charter that is presented in two sections. The first part is a certificate that can be easily displayed in the foyer or reception area of the business concerned, which states both the Prison Service’s willingness to share accurate information about a prisoner and the employer’s willingness to treat such information in a confidential and sensitive manner, whilst appreciating the specific difficulties ex-prisoners face in the labour market. The second part is included in the Portfolio of Achievement, as a demonstration of the offender’s willingness to disclose their criminal record to the employer and to abide by the terms of employment and conditions of their future work place. Finally, as part of this working together, IMPACT runs Employment Fairs when employers are invited into the institutions. These one day events are an opportunity for potential and existing employers to meet with offenders and with prison staff. They have the chance to see for themselves the positive outcomes that can be achieved when people work together to help offenders gain employment.

Linking Support in Prison with After-Care

The **Balancing the Future – A New Challenge** DP, in the Netherlands, has been carefully constructed so that each partner brings specific expertise to the various aspects of the resettlement processes of women prisoners. The partnership includes agencies or departments that work inside the prison and those which mainly operate outside the prison. During the period in detention, support is provided by the *Individuele Traject Begeleider* or individualised vocational guidance. Through this *Individuele Traject Begeleider* (ITB), the training that can take place in the prison is planned, as are the links between this training and work experience placements outside the prison. ITB also arranges all the paper-work and certificates that the women will need for their lives when they leave the institution. In addition, *Delinkwentie & Samenleving* (Delinquency and Society), is actively involved in explaining what the DP can offer to the women prisoners. This organisation distributes promotional leaflets and then speaks directly to the female inmates, either individually or during group seminars, about how the DP and its partners can provide immediate help.

In terms of those agencies that work mainly outside the prison walls, *Zorgconcept* (Care Concept) is responsible for employment-related support that includes job mediation, vocational training and education. *Zorgconcept* also coordinates the work of the external “chain” partners. Questions related to accommodation, which is a big problem for 40% of the women, are covered by *Exodus*, an NGO with considerable experience in the field of housing. During the Round 1 DP, *Exodus* opened a new house in which female ex-offenders could stay with their children for up to nine months before they found permanent accommodation. A third partner, *Humanitas*, offers assistance with all aspects of family life and, particularly, childcare. This combined, intensive support represents a highly developed and specialised reintegration service that could not be guaranteed by the prison service or the probation department working alone.

Preparing properly for Release

The **Personal Progression System (PPS)** was a Round 1 DP led by the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO). This project successfully tested a process-orientated type of innovation for employability progression whilst in prison which now forms a significant element of the Resettlement Strategy for Northern Ireland that was launched in 2005. A dedicated staff member, employed by NIACRO with EQUAL funding, was based in each of the three penal establishments in Northern Ireland. These members of staff pioneered the concept of employability assessments, which were then followed up by a consideration of what could be done to reinforce the individual inmate’s employability through the prison’s education department or training workshops and/or by providing additional training opportunities after release.

The DP explored all possible avenues to breaking down the barriers between prisons and local communities and between prisoners and employers so that the impetus created by the project could be maintained. Employers and training agencies were invited into the prisons to meet prisoners and to evaluate their potential either as employees or trainees. The PPS also used periods of work experience with local employers during which the inmates returned each evening to prison. Where appropriate, the DP introduced new forms of training into the institutions such as employers explaining the job requirements of a particular sector or tutors running a business start-up courses. Finally, constructive use was made of home leave with prisoners starting to contact local agencies and services prior to their release so that their re-integration into their local communities would be as smooth as possible.

Making Training real and relevant

The **ZUBILIS** DP in Germany recognises that successful reintegration into employment does not only depend on effective support systems for the transition from prison to work, it also requires access to skills and qualifications that have a real market value. Therefore, its policy priorities are now focused on adapting education and training to changing labour market needs and on linking

vocational preparation with new forms of after-care that enable ex-offenders to continue their training on release and also facilitate their placement in a job. The primary aim of *ZUBILIS* is to increase the relevance of education and training provision for ex-offenders, by modernising its content and methods of delivery, in close cooperation with employers and other labour market actors. Activities until the end of 2007 will focus on three main areas:

- Increasing the media competence of teaching and training staff in the penal system and developing media-supported programmes for prison inmates that offer a combination of vocational and basic educational qualifications;
- Adapting existing vocational qualification programmes for use in prisons, through modular design and certification of learning units and the introduction of e-learning;
- Mobilising, and capitalising on, relevant expertise available outside the penal system, e.g. from temporary employment agencies and research organisations.

Drawing on the accumulated experience of the *MABIS.NeT* DP, *ZUBILIS*, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice, now involves almost all the groups of key actors and stakeholders in North Rhine-Westphalia whose cooperation is needed to achieve a sustainable improvement in the transition from prison to working life.

Changing the System

A Portuguese DP entitled [Managing Innovation in the Prison Services](#) has adopted an holistic approach to the introduction of the quality and change management processes that support the type of developments that are outlined above. Its experience has shown that leadership involvement and training at different levels are the keys to sustaining quality levels and change. Thus, it has developed a leadership satisfaction index and a management style assessment in order to enable its specific leadership training sessions to be tailored to the needs and requirements of the prison directors and the more senior prison warders.

The Managing Innovation in the Prison Services DP has also developed instruments that help with the empowerment and personal development of prison staff. A corporate climate survey is now being regularly used, as are tools for measuring the motivation index of staff and specific training for all levels of staff is also being organised. In addition, Communities of Practice of professionals have been set up in order to promote the type of mutual learning and knowledge sharing that reinforces the social capital of the prisons and provides support systems for staff. The DP has found that in a change process, specific training on “what’s new?”, “what’s my role in it?” and “how to act” can sustain people’s involvement and commitment.

PANEL 3: LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS

EQUAL is based on a number of principles including that of transnational co-operation, which can bring added-value both to project operators and to policy innovation. During the selection process, DPs had to identify at least one partner from another Member State and set out in the form of a Transnational Co-operation Agreement:

- A transnational work programme accompanied by a budget;
- The role of each transnational partner, the common methods of decision making and the organisational arrangements for implementing the common work programme;
- The methodologies for monitoring and assessment of joint activities.

Having studied the outcomes of the application of transnationality, EQUAL Managing Authorities from eight Member States produced a reflection note on [the Principle of Transnational and Interregional Cooperation in the new ESF Programmes \(2007 – 2013\)](#), which has been published recently by the Commission. This note contains a Table (see Annex 3), which summarises the most important benefits of investing in transnational and inter regional cooperation, and these are also shared by the DPs and networks that are dealing with (ex)-offenders.

The Benefits to DPs

In the case of DPs, the [Tele-Learning for Imprisoned People \(Telfi\)](#) provides a very good illustration of the transnational gains. *Telfi* was closely involved in the [PRILEARESNET](#) Transnational Partnership (TP), together with [e-LIS](#) (e-Learning im Strafvollzug) in Germany and

the [Reïntegratieproject NL's na buitenlandse detentie](#) in the Netherlands. All three partners pursued almost identical objectives and approaches. However, it became rapidly evident that there were many other EQUAL DPs sharing a common concern about the reintegration of ex-offenders, facing very similar challenges and developing new methods, including the use of distance learning in penal institutions. Some of these projects cooperated in the [MIKIRI](#) TP which also involved the German Partner of *Telfi*.

During the first Round of EQUAL, contact and exchange evolved steadily between these two TPs, especially through mutual involvement in their respective transnational meetings. They gradually moved towards the formation of a European network that links the experience of seven Member States in this thematic field. Exchange within this growing network raised awareness of the need, and also the scope that exists, to progress towards a common vision for transnational action that would make a significant impact on training and integration policies for the prison population throughout the EU.

The Transnational Partnership also took its first steps towards the development of a European server infrastructure which could benefit greatly a substantial proportion of the *Telfi* target group. Approximately 4000 inmates in Austrian prisons do not have Austrian nationality (see last column of Annex 1) but many of these are citizen of other EU countries. The use of a common IT platform could provide access to learning opportunities that are recognised in, their countries of origin. The Dutch partner in PRILEARESNET had particular experience in working with prisoners who are serving sentences abroad.

For *Telfi* the intensive exchange with its transnational partners has had a direct practical effect as it provided a basis for the development of the prison education server and the *Illias* learning platform and it helped in the identification and adaptation of suitable software for tele-learning in prisons. But transnational cooperation has also had significant intangible effects. The positive lessons learned from innovative experience in other Member States “confirmed” the validity of *Telfi*'s ambitious, holistic approach. A new Development Partnership, entitled “[Step by Step](#)”, is now furthering the experience of *Telfi*.

EQUAL DPs in Round 2 are also benefiting from the transnational transfer of products developed during Round 1. For example, the Employer Training Programme and promotional DVD developed by Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders during its first Round Personal Progression System project has been transferred, via the [Exodus DP](#) in England, to DPs in Portugal, Italy and Belgium through the Exodus [Caravel Transnational Partnership](#). Similarly, a DVD which was produced by four Round 1 UK projects targeting Human Resources Managers in local authorities with a view to challenging and changing those recruitment policies and practices that excluding ex-offenders, has now been distributed to [all Exodus' transnational partners](#), as an example of good practice.

Benefits to Networks

Though in the first Round of EQUAL no National Thematic Networks (NTNs) were formally established on the reintegration of prisoners, many “ex-offender DPs” cooperated closely in strong [informal networks](#), notably in Germany and the UK. These networking activities have not only increased the “visibility” of the new approaches piloted by the DPs but also helped to attract and maintain the interest of decision makers, as a basis for further developmental work on a larger scale. Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands launched, National EQUAL Offender Networks (NEONs) early in Round 2 and several other Member States including Italy, Poland and Portugal have now established similar networks. These networks are important in mainstreaming at a national level because the majority of them relate to, or liaise with, agencies that have important roles in the formulation or implementation of penal and criminal justice policies. NEON in the UK has even gone as far as establishing a National Policy Reference Group of such agencies to advise it about current and anticipated developments in policy, practice and legislation, receive evidence of innovative EQUAL practices developed by the NEON projects and provide opportunities for mainstreaming these practices into national policies.

However, these networks also operate transnationally and the first main meeting was at an EQUAL conference on “*New ways for a sustainable reintegration of offenders*”, in Berlin, during October 2005. This conference brought together 200 participants from thirteen EU Member States, including representatives of the Ministries of Justice and other relevant Departments, prison services and about 30 DPs that cooperate in five large transnational partnerships. The

conference centred on the practical organisation and the legal framework for reintegration, effective approaches to ensure concerted action and the articulation of the period of imprisonment with the time after release. Since then, there have been a number of smaller scale events and those that take place in May 2007 are good examples of this exchange process.

The first seminar, in Bremen, is on the theme of *“E-Learning as Strategic Approach for Re-integration of Inmates – Chances and Challenges for Penitentiary Institutions in Europe.”* EQUAL DPs and other practitioners will share their experiences and explain them to representatives of penal institutions and authorities from a number of different Member States. The second seminar is organised in the UK and will concentrate on the experience of developing the *“case management model”* of the National Offender Management Service, and *“the holistic Offender Assessment (OASys) for adult offenders.”* The OASys tool has already been taken and adapted by the Netherlands and this process of adaptation will be of particular to the other Member States that will participate. Another item on the agenda is the *“ASSET tool for assessment of young offenders,”* which has been tested by the EQUAL [RESET](#) DP. Two more transnational seminars will be organised on the topics of *“Prison Industries”* and *“Development Funding,”* before the end of the year.

The special aspect of these occasions is that they provide an opportunity for people to see what is happening and what really works on the ground, which in turn increases their interest in testing or transferring successful approaches. Not all of the approaches featured have been developed in EQUAL, but it is through EQUAL’s networks and EQUAL’s firm conviction of the benefits of transnationality that this mutual learning and sharing of experience can take place!

Transnational Tools

To facilitate further transnational exchange of good practice, the German BABE DP is developing a [Knowledge Portal](#) to collect and update relevant national and European experience and make this experience easily accessible. This integrated process will be part of a proposal offered to offender networks and partner projects all over Europe. The European prison education and re-integration projects are invited to participate and provide their knowledge in special fields of the penal system. At the same time, the knowledge of hundreds of peers can also be accessed via the system. The European dimension of the BABE project and especially the provision of a knowledge framework are considered to be the main goals for its participation in several transnational partnerships. The final vision is that of a European co-operative internet-based computer network for penitentiary knowledge management. This knowledge component will become a powerful tool to support the consultation processes in the penal system and thereby, improve the chances for the re-integration of prisoners into working and social life, after release.

Similarly, the Portuguese Authorities are investigating the possibility of maintaining the Passport2Freedom website, as a support to future Communities of Practice on the theme of (ex)-offenders. They are suggesting a phased approach to its development. The first phase would bring together a team of people from the different communities of practice who would be prepared to act as technology stewards. In the second phase, the technology stewards would start building a profile of the needs of the members of his/her community of practice. Each community of practice would review the plan prepared by their technology steward(s), make additional suggestions and prepare their commitment to learning some of the basics such as choice of browser, filtering messages and some of the language for talking about functions, tools and technologies. In the meantime, an online space (the site) would be developed so that it could also have a public interface where products and processes were shared or showcased with the wider community and stakeholders. These could be in the form of a blog, sharing of documents, image galleries and opinion polls.

Transnationality in Action

In many ways, the operation of the Steering Group is an excellent example of transnational cooperation. Ten Member States have come together to design a common work plan. While the work has been led by UKgb and Germany, all the other Member States have accepted certain responsibilities including:

- Producing papers for, and minutes of, group meetings;
- Keeping Member States who are not members of the group informed of developments;

- Hosting meetings and larger events;
- Organising workshops and panel sessions;
- Identifying the DPs from their countries to be involved in the group's activities;
- Liaising with DPs that make presentations at events.

All those Member States represented on the Steering Group have demonstrated their commitment to theme of Reintegrating (Ex)-offenders. That is why they are anxious that the momentum that has been generated should be maintained and why they are making the proposals contained in the following section.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE RE-INTEGRATION OF (EX)-OFFENDERS

Participants at the Exchange Event in Lisbon expressed the view that the process of mainstreaming the approaches that had been tried and tested in EQUAL could be significantly enhanced through the establishment of European Union level recommendations⁷ for the re-integration of (ex)-offenders. Whilst specific reference was made to the existing Council of Europe recommendation on European Prison Rules⁸, it was felt that, within the context of the European Union, a stronger emphasis needed to be placed on improving employability through the provision of marketable training in prisons, strengthening equality of opportunity and delivering more effective inter-service cooperation. These measures would help to ensure that Member States' resettlement policies also clearly reflected the objectives of the EU's overarching strategies in the fields of employment, anti-discrimination and social inclusion. The Exchange Event also indicated that the development and implementation of such recommendations should be embedded in a process of continuous and regular dialogue at EU level, on the transnational piloting and validation of new practices.

Based on its knowledge of EQUAL approaches and the proposals made at the Passport2freedom Exchange Event in Portugal, the Steering Group would like to submit the following draft set of recommendations.

The draft nature of these recommendations should be emphasised and it is recognised that further consultations and subsequent refinements are required before they can be translated into an effective instrument.

This process of consultation will start during the Policy Forum when the three Panels will be asked to endorse, reject or amend each of the following recommendations. Because of the mutually reinforcing elements in EQUAL good practices, both inside and outside prisons, the recommendations are not directly related to the themes of the Panel sessions.

National or regional level

1. Successful re-integration of (ex)-offenders requires a case management approach from arrest, through the period of imprisonment, to the time of release and beyond.

1.1 This necessitates the engagement of stakeholders, including statutory, non-governmental and private agencies and the offenders together with their families and victims, in the design, development and implementation of these approaches.

⁷ EU-level recommendations for the re-integration of (ex)-offenders could be modelled on the example of the Commission's Communication "A Common Agenda for Integration [COM (2005) 389 final]. The suggestions in this Common Agenda are based on a set of Common Basic Principles that were adopted by the Council, in November 2004, to underpin a coherent European framework for the integration of third-country nationals. In a similar way and through a similar process, the good practice emerging from EQUAL might be used to assist in the shaping of recommendations for the re-settlement or re-integration of (ex)-offenders.

⁸ Recommendation Rec(2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the European Prison Rules (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 11 January 2006 at the 952nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

- 1.2 The vertical systems of delivery and of accountability in prison services and other public and private agencies concerned with resettlement represent a major barrier to such approaches and thus, more structured inter-institutional cooperation is required.
- 1.3 The use of transversal or “single pot” funding, such as that offered through EQUAL, should be investigated as a method of stimulating more multi-agency, holistic approaches to resettlement activities.
- 1.4 The financing of these approaches should be driven by innovation to ensure continual change and development.
- 1.5 Partnership approaches to resettlement should be further encouraged by promoting demonstration projects in coalition with champions in relevant institutions and by actions led by municipalities that increase society’s responsibility for successful reintegration.

2. *All prisoners should have the opportunity of engaging in training and educational programmes that will increase their employability.*

- 2.1 In most Member States, policies on the provision of basic and vocational skills in prison already exist but there is a need to provide better solutions for their implementation. These should include procedures for a thorough assessment of the individual prisoner’s competences, needs and aspirations, at the point of admission, on the basis of which an appropriate resettlement plan can be developed.
- 2.2 The training that is offered in prison should be geared as closely as possible to the needs of, and skills gaps in, the surrounding labour market(s) and the views of prospective employers should be sought in order to improve the targeting of the provision.
- 2.3 There should also be opportunities for employers to visit prisons to gain their own perspective on the training offered and the suitability of inmates for employment.
- 2.4 More opportunities for relevant work experience should be provided both inside and outside prisons.
- 2.5 Experiments in the use of e-learning in prisons should be expanded.
- 2.6 Any new solution must be embedded in current practices and not simply be an add-on and thus, cost effectiveness is a major driver and the solution must give better outcomes for the same or a lower price.

3. *Having a job is the most important factor in preventing re-offending so more efforts are required to engage both public and private employers and to explore other forms of job creation.*

- 3.1 There is a need for more intensive public information campaigns that will raise employers’ awareness of the untapped pool of workers represented by ex-offenders and promote the “business case” for their employment.
- 3.2 The assistance of employers’ federations and trade unions should be sought in both finding employment for (ex)-offenders and in combating any potential discrimination in the workplace.
- 3.3 National, regional and local authorities should lead by example through implementing the principle of equality in their employment policies and introducing legislation that alleviates the stigma of possessing a criminal conviction.
- 3.4 Legislation to drive the issues of disclosure or employers’ obligations would be helpful, as would the introduction of additional financial incentives for employers to recruit (ex)-offenders and for (ex)-offenders to seek employment.

3.5 Initial positive experiences in cooperating with temporary employment agencies and in using experienced enterprise agencies and business incubators to promote self-employment should be extended.

4. Attention must also be given to other aspects of the lives of (ex)-offenders if re-integration is to be successfully achieved.

4.1 Housing is often a crucial factor for the (ex)-offender and any resettlement plan should ensure that the individual has somewhere to live on his, or her, release.

4.2 Aspects concerned with families and the care of children are particularly relevant to women prisoners and these should be addressed in resettlement planning prior to leaving prison.

4.3 In so far as it possible, prisons should empower (ex)-offenders to play more open and constructive roles within their local communities. This is especially true of young offenders where attempts to inculcate new values and attitudes and to involve them in new sports, hobbies or social groupings can help reduce their chances of re-offending.

4.5 Issues concerning the social reintegration of offenders should be resolved, in advance of release, by inviting representative of the relevant agencies or skilled advisors who can liaise with such agencies to counsel prisoners.

4.6 In addition, greater use should be made of periods of home leave by encouraging prisoners to contact local agencies and services prior to their release so that their re-integration will be as smooth as possible.

5. There is an urgent need to promote change in prisons and to foster a culture of innovation and feedback in order to support cooperation with external agencies and the type of developmental action that is outlined above.

5.1 In complex and very hierarchical structures, such as prisons, any changes can only be sustained on the basis of an holistic approach to quality and change management.

5.2 All professional groups employed by, or operating in, prisons should be involved in the development, continuous improvement and maintenance of change projects.

5.3 In order to achieve higher levels of quality, prisons should manage and develop their employees by communicating, empowering and recognising their individual contributions, in a way that motivates these members of staff and builds their commitment to using and enhancing their skills and knowledge.

5.4 Cultural and organisational change in prisons should be driven by the promotion of leadership competences, knowledge sharing, a customer (stakeholder) focus, transparency and networking.

Transnational Level that also embraces the EU and its Institutions

6 The developments that have been pioneered in, and through, EQUAL should be consolidated.

6.1 There should be continuity of approach with (ex)-offenders being a priority group in ESF Operational Programmes and the emphases on innovation and transnationality should be maintained.

6.2 Assistance should be made available through the ESF or programmes operated by DG-Justice, Freedom and Security and DG-Education and Culture to support the national networks of developmental projects working with (ex)-offenders and, in particular, their transnational activities.

- 6.3 Before the end of EQUAL, a decision should be made on the most appropriate tool(s) to support future transnational exchange and development of skills and knowledge in the resettlement of (ex)-offenders.
- 6.4 The draft recommendations outlined at 1 – 5 should be refined in consultation with the European Commission's services and interested Member States. The implementation of each resulting recommendation should then be demonstrated by the addition of relevant examples of practice from EQUAL.
- 6.5 A framework should be established at EU level for debate on policy issues and initiatives related to the reintegration of offenders. In addition to DG-Employment and Social Affairs, the involvement of DG-Justice, Freedom and Security and DG-Education and Culture would ensure that all the aspects - social, vocational, legal and educational - were covered in a concerted attempt to improve European and Member State policies and practices for the Resettlement of (Ex)-offenders.

ANNEX 1: THE PRISON POPULATION IN THE EU-25⁹

Country	Prison ¹⁰ Population	Percentage Change in Prison Population since 1995	Occupancy level (based on official capacity)	Prison population per 100,000 of national population	Foreign prisoners
Austria	8,766	+ 41.8%	107.2%	105	45.1%
Belgium	9,597	+ 26.9%	110.6%	91	4.2%
Cyprus	580	+ 241.2%	170.6%	76	47.1%
Czech Republic	18,980	+ 1.2%	99.8%	185	7.2%
Denmark	4,198	+ 22.1%	95.3%	77	17.5%
Estonia	4,463	+ 1.4%	102.2%	333	36.4%
Finland	3,954	+ 31.0%	112.4%	75	8.0%
France	52,009	+ 0.7%	109.9%	85	21.4%
Germany	77,166	+ 16.7%	96.5%	94	28.2%
Greece	9,984	+ 69.6%	178.8%	90	41.7%
Hungary	15,720	+ 23.8%	139.6%	156	3.8%
Ireland	3,080	+ 50.0%	98.5%	72	9.0%
Italy	61,721	+ 24.3%	131.5%	104	33.2%
Latvia	6,676	- 29.4%	79.0%	292	0.5%
Lithuania	8,124	- 38.4%	84.6%	240	0.8%
Luxembourg	768	+ 63.8%	110.3%	167	75.0%
Malta	352	+ 79.6%	79.3%	86	35.0%
Netherlands	21,013	+ 105.0%	95.6%	128	31.7%
Poland	88,494	+ 41.1%	122.6%	232	0.7%

⁹ Based on National Data, last updated on 10 December 2006, from the International Centre for Prison Studies at Kings College, University of London

¹⁰ Figures include pre-trial detainees / remand prisoners and whilst all relate to 2006 the counts for each country have been taken at different times

Portugal	12,846	+ 4.1%	104.4%	121	18.5%
Slovakia	8,493	+ 14.6%	81.2%	158	2.0%
Slovenia	1,301	+ 57.7%	116.6%	65	13.0%
Spain	64,215	+ 59.9%	129.5%	145	29.7%
Sweden	7,450	+ 29.2%	102.7%	82	26.2%
UK-Eng./Wales	79,950	+ 56.9%	112.7%	148	13.6%
UK-Scotland	7,171	+ 26.8%	111.5%	140	1.3%
UK-N. Ireland	1,454	- 16.4%	97.3%	84	0.8%
EU Overall	578,525	+ 27.9%	114.0%	125¹¹	19.1%

¹¹ Taking the Eurostat figure for the total population of the EU in January 2006, as being 463,523.4 million

ANNEX 2: THE EQUAL COMMUNITY INITIATIVE IN ACTION

EQUAL is a Community Initiative financed through the European Social Fund (ESF). This programme tests and promotes 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 is 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-finances activities in all EU Member States. The EU contribution to EQUAL of 3.274 billion EUR is matched by national funding. Two calls for proposals for EQUAL projects in the Member States have taken place so far, the first one in 2001, the second and final one in 2004.

EQUAL operates across eight thematic fields which embrace 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 has a strand that promotes the Social and Vocational Integration of Asylum Seekers.

EQUAL funds activities implemented by strategic partnerships called Development Partnerships (DPs) that address one of the above nine strands. These DPs bring 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 is at the heart of EQUAL. At national level, many networks have been 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 bring DPs together with other actors including political decision-makers from outside the initiative who are the potential users of their outcomes.

At European level, the objectives are identical. In order to identify concrete and transferable lessons and to develop new policies and practices, it is essential to capture the outcomes of the experiences of around 3.300 EQUAL Development Partnerships. This is being done on the basis of a common work programme for mainstreaming at EU level that has 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 have been set up, which allow the validation, exploitation and long-lasting dissemination of EQUAL results. These include peer reviews, exchange events, learning seminars, communities of practice and policy fora.

This Policy Forum, in Warsaw, is one element in an EQUAL Mainstreaming Programme on the topic of (Ex)-offenders that had been agreed between the European Commission and a number of Member States.

ANNEX 3: THE BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN TRANSNATIONAL AND INTER-REGIONAL COOPERATION

DIRECT BENEFITS	INDIRECT AND ASSOCIATED BENEFITS
It directly stimulates and supports innovation by encouraging sharing of research and technical and practical techniques and experience.	It reinforces formal and informal sharing of ideas and experience across Member States. Participating organisations are encouraged to reflect more widely on their work, and are better-informed about alternatives and comparable activities.
It is a cost-effective means of validating and passing on learning and experience , avoiding unnecessary duplication of experimental work, and providing a broad basis for benchmarking.	It helps improve communications between national, regional and sectoral groupings, and helps them reinforce their value-for-money measures by developing the new means of comparison and benchmarking .
	It helps promote common standards and enables products and ideas to be validated more widely and at higher levels.
It helps reinforce a European idea of culture, ideas, ideals and policies, and provides an important European dimension to the pursuit of the Lisbon Agenda.	It contributes to the wider objective of building Europe by providing a setting for cross-cultural debate and exchange.
It provides those participating in it with professional stimulus and connects them with European and international networks .	
It builds the capacity of participating organisations and of regional and national administrations.	It helps reduce risk in social and policy innovation and the development of good practice by providing a context for real-time exchange of information on successes and failures.