

NATIONAL NETWORKS OF DPs TACKLING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST IMMIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

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1. THE ROLE OF NATIONAL THEMATIC NETWORKS IN MAINSTREAMING THE OUTCOMES OF EQUAL

"EQUAL provides a range of resources, including support to National Thematic Networks (NTNs), to assist the transfer of good practices that have emerged from its Development Partnerships (DPs) into mainstream policy and practice. The NTNs have a key role to play in this mainstreaming process, as they provide a structured framework for identifying innovative good practice that responds to policy needs, and they also help to establish links with policy makers and other stakeholders. They offer opportunities for DPs to discuss and validate the most promising outcomes of their work and assist them in the dissemination and mainstreaming of these products and methods. The NTNs thus enable effective dialogue between those promoting innovative activities and those responsible for the development of policy. This practical support to mainstreaming is a new feature in the Human Resources Initiatives of the European Social Fund.

Networks coordinating and focusing EQUAL's contribution to tackling discrimination

During the first round of EQUAL (2002-2005), a total of 76 DPs addressed the issue of "Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market" (EQUAL Theme B). These were selected by 11 Member States (A, Bnl, FI, FR, D, GR, IT, NL, PT, ES and UKgb) and by a candidate country (CZ). Most types of activity that they undertook could be grouped under two main lines of action:

- The first was concerned with improving the existing situation and creating a climate that is more conducive to the social and professional integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities. Activities undertaken in this respect included everything from public information campaigns to action aimed at strengthening diversity approaches in enterprises and measures to improve the skills and understanding of workers in employment services so that they are in a better position to handle the issues presented by members of immigrant or ethnic minority communities;
- The second line of action was related to improving the employability of members of the target group through a range of training and employment measures.

These two lines of action were also reflected in many of the DPs that were launched under EQUAL Theme A, "(Re-)Integration into the labour market". Approximately 100 of them (i.e. more than 20% of all Theme A DPs in round 1) catered for immigrants or ethnic minorities, either as the sole focus or amongst other target groups.

In order to provide a stronger focus for the work of the round 1 DPs, several Member States launched NTNs that specifically addressed issues concerning the integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities (AT, D, F, IT, P, UKgb). Most of these networks became operational in 2004 and all of them offered a platform for cooperation and exchange between DPs and for the identification, validation and dissemination of those good practices and products that emerged from the DPs' work. In some cases (including F and P) the activities of the NTNs have already stimulated a wider transfer of promising outcomes from the participating DPs that, in turn, has provoked change in conventional mainstream practices.

This paper describes some of the outcomes and successes of the networks of DPs (EQUAL round 1) that have been working with immigrants and ethnic minorities in Portugal and France. It is intended to stimulate and underpin the work of relevant NTNs in round 2.

2. OUTCOMES AND SUCCESSES OBTAINED BY NETWORKS OF DPs TACKLING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST IMMIGRANTS AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN PORTUGAL AND FRANCE

Commonalities and Particular Interests

A comparison of the situations of the two NTN reveals some common aspects in terms of their activities but also some issues or concerns that are specific to each of the two Member States.

The types of thematic issues that were of **interest to both NTN**s include:

- Combating discrimination at the workplace and seeking support from employers;
- Facilitating access to education, training and support services;
- Information and awareness raising (aimed at key actors and the general public);
- Fostering comprehensive/inter-agency approaches.

In **Portugal**, the work programmes of several DPs involved in the NTN refer explicitly to the changes that this country has had to face over the past 20-30 years, during its transition from a country of emigration to a country of immigration. The speed of these changes really started to increase at the beginning of this 21st century and since then the immigrant population has doubled in just three years. Different flows of migration have been identified, i.e. influx of citizens from former colonies and from Brazil, immigration from Eastern European countries and the settlement of Romani people.

These changes confront Portuguese society with new challenges, as now immigrants are to be found outside the two metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto and this, in turn, requires the development of new forms of labour market integration. Each of these migration processes and types of immigrants present different integration problems that require different forms of support. The diversity and rapid evolution of these processes place new demands on policy, administrations and the civic society.

They also raise issues related to the co-existence/interrelations of/between different types of immigrant populations in the same area, including competition and crowding-out effects on the labour market. Thus, the NTN has been particularly concerned to develop new strategies for not only the vocational but also the social integration of immigrants and ethnic minorities. It has also sought to create a new sense of solidarity by promoting a range of opportunities and activities that involve both the immigrant and the indigenous communities.

In **France**, most of the DPs involved in the NTN explicitly acknowledge the existence of a broad and comprehensive regulatory and institutional framework for the integration of migrants and the prevention of discrimination, but they have also diagnosed the striking failure of this framework to improve the situation of the target groups significantly. Existing legislation is not applied effectively and the work of the various institutions and agencies in the integration chain is segmented and uncoordinated. For these reasons, the NTN had a strong focus on mobilising key actors in the public and private sector, and on inter-institutional cooperation.

Reliable and representative data on the types and the incidents of discriminations faced by target groups is scarce and there is little quantifiable evidence. Hence the NTN has placed an emphasis on the development of generally applicable tools and indicators, and on “observatories” and systems to detect and monitor discrimination.

Another particular aspect in France is that the involvement of Trade Union Organisations in these issues is greater than in any other Member State. As key partners in a number of DPs, they have taken a lead role in developing and implementing such new tools and systems and in stimulating debate between the social partners on how best to combat discriminatory practices. Representatives of the social partners were also directly involved in the NTN.

2.1. PORTUGAL – A CREDIBLE FRAMEWORK FOR VALIDATING EQUAL’S OUTCOMES

In Portugal, the National Thematic Networks (NTNs) have been given the important role of validating the products that are created by their constituent EQUAL Development Partnerships

(DPs). This process of assessment takes place not only in the final stage of the project but also at various critical moments in the development of the product such as its testing. In the case of the NTN on the Social and Vocational Integration of Immigrants, Refugees and Ethnic Minorities, the process and the times set aside for analysis and reflection provided a real opportunity to consolidate and fine-tune the products to the needs of other DPs and other agencies that are seeking new integration strategies.

Leaving a Legacy

The EQUAL Managing Authority in Portugal was very aware that previous generations of Community Initiatives and other experimental actions financed by the ESF had produced innovative results but, by and large, these had not been generalised. Many of the projects had not developed tools or products that could be used by others or where resources had been produced, they were often too specific in terms of approaches or even geographical context. The Managing Authority was anxious that EQUAL should not fall into the same trap and therefore, it tried to come up with a process that would mean that the vast majority of EQUAL DPs would have a concrete output and that these outputs would have the scope for being replicated throughout the country.

The quality analysis and validation methodology for EQUAL products in Portugal was designed to:

- Support reflection on products, particularly within and between the DPs and NTNs, with a view to improving their quality;
- Provide DPs with a model for product validation and this validation was then a compulsory requirement for application to Action 3 (the mainstreaming and dissemination phase);
- Incorporate the very first steps in the process of disseminating the products to organisations that were external to the Development Partnerships and to EQUAL.

Putting the System in Place



Some of the 18 members of the network

The NTN on the Social and Vocational Integration of Immigrants, Refugees and Ethnic Minorities, was one of Portugal's seven NTNs in round 1. There were 18 people in the network and they included representatives from seven different DPs, a facilitator, and a coordinator belonging to one of the DPs. The coordinator Carlos Bronze was the manager of the SEM FRONTEIRAS DP, and he was responsible for the logistics of the networking process. The facilitator Jorge Malheiros came from outside the EQUAL family and was an academic with considerable expertise in the issues related to immigrants, who was also skilled in group work.

His main task was to ensure the quality of the network's activities and the relevance and value of its discussions. Jorge Malheiros and Carlos Bronze worked together to promote the process of validation and to develop a kind of "plural analysis" incorporated perspectives or viewpoints from the internal and external beneficiaries, and particularly those agencies that were interested in appropriating and incorporating the products.

As empowerment is one of the EQUAL Programme's strategic principles, ensuring that product end-users had an input and were involved in discussions was especially important. Their involvement meant that any adjustments or improvements introduced were in line with their needs and also that strategies were created that enhanced the products' dissemination and future use. For instance, a Mediators Training Course was being developed by the SEMEAR PARA (A) COLHER DP. During the validation of this new course, it was recommended that there should be more simulated training in work places, whilst the more theoretical, classroom training should be reduced. The DP acted on these suggestions and subsequently produced a course that was more useful to the trainees and more satisfying to their tutors.

All the members of the network had certain roles to play in the validation process and these were as follows:

- The members from the DPs in which products were being developed ensured that there was an input from the “**authors**” perspective by undertaking a critical self-analysis of their products;
- Network members and the partner-players who were external to the DP or NTN, and who had not been directly or indirectly involved in the products’ design, ensured input from an independent “**peer**” perspective, and provided a technical and qualitative validation that helped to guarantee the value of the products to mediators or other potential users;
- The specialists involved in testing and validating products provided the perspective of “**external experts.**” This offered a market orientation, as the experts were able to compare these new products with solutions and products that were already available and to take into account the needs and priorities of the contexts, beneficiaries and future users of the products.

Essentially, the validation was based on a scoring of EQUAL products by representatives of each of the three different “perspectives.” Ana Vale from the Managing Authority explains that *“the validation was done on a voluntary basis. So, we wanted to establish a system that was not too off-putting or threatening for the DPs but, at the same time, it had to be seen by everyone, including external agencies and potential users, as being both credible and comprehensive. We had to strike a balance and I think that we just about got it right.”*

The first scoring on the “Analysis Grid for the Quality of EQUAL Products” was against a set of 6 mandatory criteria and these were: **Innovation; Empowerment; Suitability; Usefulness; Accessibility; and Transferability.** These level 1 criteria were included on all the analysis grids, and for scoring purposes, they represented two-thirds of the total weight attributed to all criteria.

There was also a second set of discretionary criteria, some of which might be less familiar to those associated with EQUAL. These were:

- **Equality** (the extent to which the product is actively reinforcing gender equality);
- **Governance** (the extent to which the product enhanced cohesion, addressed greater sharing of responsibility on the part of the target group, and raised organisations’ social awareness);
- **Universality** (the products should be capable of being applied/used in different contexts and with diverse target groups; this requirement could also be gauged by the products’ potential for generalisation).
- **Scalability** (organisation of knowledge in small updatable units, ensuring that the content and resources incorporated in the products were produced on a modular basis to facilitate updating and renewal).
- **Autonomy** (ease and extent of independence of the user in terms of exploiting and employing the contents and materials in the products).

These level 2 requirements could be wholly or partly substituted by other criteria considered more appropriate to the specific nature of the products under analysis. For scoring purposes, this set of criteria represented no more than one-third of the total weight attributed to all criteria.

The analysis grid also enabled the person who was assessing the product to record any strong points or weaknesses and to make suggestions or recommendations for improvement. The final stage in the validation involved a discussion that aimed to produce a synthesis of the different perspectives and reflections and a consensus on the overall scoring and on the different parties’ qualitative assessments.

“For us the stress associated with the validation was good stress, as the comments from the other members of the network helped us to slightly refocus and to improve our guide” says Tito Matos, from the ACOLHIMENTO E INTEGRAÇÃO DE REQUERENTES DE ASILO DP who adds that *“the process also made us think more carefully about our plans for dissemination.”* After a positive validation that covered all six level 1 criteria and involved at least two external specialists, any round 1 DP could move on to present an Action 3 application for EQUAL funding that would support their dissemination and mainstreaming activities. This application had to include:

- The “physical” product(s);
- An outline of the validation process (how, when and by whom it was undertaken);
- The results of validation carried out at the final stage of product elaboration (synthesis grid for the final validation).

In the Network on the Social and Vocational Integration of Immigrants, Refugees and Ethnic Minorities, the final validation was only the conclusion of a process that went on over the life time of the network. People knew about each DP's intentions in terms of developing products from very early on and more informal assessments were offered on a regular basis, particularly when the DPs were being monitored or when they were demonstrating or testing their product. It was also crucial to share an understanding of the methods that gave rise to the products, the practices that emerged, the difficulties that were encountered and the experiences of creating a new product or service – this understanding was seen as being just as important as the final, tangible products.

The Actual Outcomes

As a result of all of these activities, twelve products or methods or processes were validated that had been developed by five different DPs and these are detailed in the table below.

The ACOLHIMENTO E INTEGRAÇÃO DE REQUERENTES DE ASILO DP

- *Provision of (integrated) information as a driver for territorial inclusion* - This has three sub-products according to the DPs end beneficiaries (asylum seekers and refugees, technicians and institutions, and the local community). These are as follows:
 - Asylum seekers and refugees:
 - A Model for an Integrated Information Centre;
 - A pool of interpreters and a training module for interpreters;
 - A pool of socio-cultural mediators;
 - Informal Consultative Group – a methodology for setting up a consultative group comprising asylum seekers and partner organisation representatives.
 - Technicians and Institutions:
 - A Guide to the Reception and Integration of Asylum Seekers including training/awareness-raising sessions for technicians and the wider network of institutions;
 - The functioning of the DP itself.
 - Local Community:
 - Videos on the subject of asylum in Portugal and throughout the world;
 - The building of the new refugee Reception Centre.

The SEM FRONTEIRAS DP

- *A Kit for Intercultural Learning* - This comprises a set of 2 games, 1 book, 1 activity manual and a web site where the product is publicised and where some components of it may be accessed.

The SUNRISE DP

- *Eastern European Culture Week*
- *Jobs Pool*
- *Programme for Community Integration of School-age Immigrants*
- *Sunrise Training - Practice Narrative*

The SEMEAR PARA (A) COLHER DP

- *A Mediators Training Course* - This has training methodologies and support resources for mediation skills development;
- *An Immigrants' Support Guide* - This is designed for immigrants and intermediaries (mediators and target group support staff) and clearly set outs rights and responsibilities relating to: health, the law, employment, and education.

The MIGRAÇÕES E DESENVOLVIMENTO DP

- *A Training Guide on "Citizenship and Cultural Diversity in Professional Practices"*
- *The Selling Points for Corporate Citizenship: "What if it were your decision? The benefits of non-discriminatory practices and diversity in enterprises"*
- *A Citizenship Resources Guide* – This contains information to help technicians who are working directly with the immigrant and minority communities
- *The Seixal Intercultural Dialogue Territorial Pact* – This is a territorial mechanism for facilitating social and vocational integration of immigrants and other socially disadvantaged groups, by coordinating and developing the local resources in Seixal.

These products are now beginning to demonstrate that the validation strategy adopted by the EQUAL Managing Authority has produced the desired results. The participation in the network of the Portuguese High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities has opened up new perspectives for the larger scale transfer of integrated approaches to providing information and

advice to immigrants. In addition, the Training Guide on “Citizenship and Cultural Diversity in Professional Practices” is being used by the Public Employment and Training Institute (IEFP) and the Municipalities’ Training Centre (CEFA). Finally, some municipalities and the authorities of the Great Metropolitan Area of the Algarve were present during the validation of the products developed by the SEMEAR PARA (A) COLHER DP. They have expressed their interest in using the “Immigrants’ Support Guide” and are also considering the development of one-stop-shops where several services, such as Social Security and the Red Cross, provide guidance on, and solutions to, the problems of immigrants.

The validation process also made a very positive contribution to the network’s dynamics and promoted interaction amongst the participants. The process was not only valuable for the Development Partnerships whose products were reviewed but also provided an excellent learning opportunity for other network members as they were able to compare these new practices with their own. More details about the validation process and all of the products that received a positive assessment are available from the EQUAL Management Authority in Portugal.

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2.2. PORTUGAL - LEARNING FROM OTHERS AND LESSONS TO MAINSTREAM

As indicated above, one of the other successes of the Portuguese NTN on the Social and Vocational Integration of Immigrants, Refugees and Ethnic Minorities, was the opportunities for learning that it provided. There were two aspects to this learning. The first was concerned with the sharing of experience related to project management and to the various practices that the DPs and other agencies in the network were testing. This aspect was very much linked with reinforcing the skills and expertise of the individuals and the organisations represented in the network. As Jorge Malheiros, the network facilitator remarked *“it’s cheaper in time, effort and hard cash if you can learn from the mistakes and the achievements of others!”* The second aspect was capitalising on the lessons that had been learned by all the DPs and on those integration strategies and approaches that had really worked. Together, the DPs drafted a document to highlight the methods or policies that could be of value to other authorities and agencies that cater for immigrants, ethnic minorities or refugees.

Removing Isolation and Coming Together for Change

Working to promote innovation and change can sometimes be a lonely existence, even when this happens in a partnership context. There are two common problems that are encountered. The first is that the work involves challenging traditional approaches or ways of doing things and this can make you very unpopular and the second is that “prophets are never recognised in their own countries.” To overcome any feelings of isolation that DPs in Portugal were experiencing, the Network on the Social and Vocational Integration of Immigrants, Refugees and Ethnic Minorities brought them together in a grouping that provided a very real source of mutual support. In addition, it reinforced the spirit of creativity by spotlighting new approaches that were showing signs of success and by adopting an open, adventurous approach in all of its activities.

The network brought together five Portuguese DPs from the Employability Theme in round 1, namely:

- [PT – 2001 – 060](#) – SUNRISE – Integração de Imigrantes de Leste no Sector do Calçado (Integration of Eastern European Immigrants in the Footwear Sector);
- [PT – 2001 – 163](#) – SEM FRONTEIRAS (Without Borders);

- [PT – 2001 – 262](#) – SEMEAR PARA (A) COLHER (Sow now to reap rewards later);
- [PT – 2001 – 326](#) – MIGRAÇÕES E DESENVOLVIMENTO (Migration and Development);
- [PT – 2001 – 328](#) – INTERCULTURACIDADE (City Interculture);

Also included were [PT – 2001 – 138](#) – IGUALDADE – CIDADANIA (Equality – Citizenship) that was working on reducing gender gaps and desegregation and [PT – 2001 – 057](#) – ACOLHIMENTO E INTEGRAÇÃO DE REQUERENTES DE ASILO (Reception and Integration of Asylum Seekers). Tito Matos from the Portuguese Council for Refugees firmly believes that *“taking part in the network was one of the best things that happened to our DP. At the beginning we were involved in the European Thematic Work on Asylum Seekers but before we joined the network, we had no national reality or context in which we could place our practices.”*

Learning Together

A working methodology for the network was defined, which was flexible, informal and friendly. The 18 participants that had volunteered to join shared the concerns that they had about their work and also swapped their highlights and successes during the monthly meetings of the network. Jorge Malheiros the network facilitator saw this as *“a new dynamic experience for many of the participants and gradually a common identity and a sense of belonging, mutual trust and confidence were built.”* Within the network, participants became committed to an interactive exchange of experience and continuing learning, both of which were designed to discover new solutions to their problems and those of their peers.



Jorge Malheiros animating a meeting of the network

From the beginning of the network activities, an increasing number of contacts were made between the DPs, outside the context of the formal meetings. Several of these contacts were concerned with bilateral problem-solving. For instance, the SUNRISE DP was consulted on topics related to the vocational training of immigrants and about how it was possible to regularise the situation of foreign workers and ensure that they had the necessary permits. Other DPs also took up the idea of the Interpreters' Training and the supporting Database that had been developed by the ACOLHIMENTO E INTEGRAÇÃO DE REQUERENTES DE ASILO DP and adapted it to provide a much-needed resource not only for refugees but also for immigrants. Finally, the best example of such interaction was a new partnership that emerged from cooperation between the SEMEAR PARA (A) COLHER and the SUNRISE DPs and they jointly disseminated the products that they had developed separately.

The learning that took place in the network was not restricted to the EQUAL DPs. Bernardo Sousa from the Portuguese High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities says that *“the NTN really helped us to discover more about what other agencies were actually doing on the ground. It presented a great opportunity to contrast and reflect on our own practices in the High Commission’s programmes.”*

Other participants tended to agree with Bernardo. In the evaluation of the functioning of the network, the two objectives that revealed the members' highest levels of satisfaction were “sharing reflection, knowledge and experience” and the “validation of products,” which is described above. In general, the evaluation showed that the participants appreciated the network as a space for finding out more about:

- The principles of the EQUAL Initiative;
- Different forms of intervention with target groups;
- New practices and working methodologies and other organisational cultures;
- Development partnership methodologies for project management.

Another outcome of the learning about each other was undoubtedly the new partnerships that emerged. The network was a gathering of authors and potential users and they took this chance to create new alliances. Bernardo Sousa again, *“we were able to incorporate three of the DPs into our national chain of local information centres and then, we joined up with another DP for an Action 3 activity entitled Space for Citizenship.”* In addition, a number of the EQUAL DPs that have been selected for round 2 have resulted from the new relationships that were established in the network.

Formulating the messages for those outside

This mutual learning and assistance was of considerable benefit to the on-going activities of the DPs and the agencies in the network but these members felt that it was even more important to produce messages for others, based on the lessons that they had learned. Thus, they worked on the drafting of a common policy document as a testimony of their experience. This document summarises the major problems that have been identified by the DPs in receiving and integrating immigrants and asylum seekers. It also includes some policy recommendations or strategic messages that in the opinion of the NTN members can improve the situation of those people who are new arrivals to Portugal and these are illustrated by summaries of the most innovative products developed by the DPs. A small team of four people was responsible for the organisation of the information and the facilitator prepared the final version, which was circulated for revision and endorsement by all network members.

As the vast majority of the messages that the network is transmitting are not specific to Portugal, they are reproduced in full, as a stimulus to EQUAL round 2 DPs and other agencies that are working on similar topics.

Recommendations on Relationships between the Local Community and the Target Groups: Interaction and Daily life

- Flexible teaching initiatives (adaptable to different environments and groups) that incorporate the know-how and experience of both immigrants and native citizens encourage the development of an anti-xenophobic culture amongst children and young people that is based on tolerance and respect for one another.
- Especially in areas experiencing recent immigration, awareness-raising activities directed at the native community, and innovative forms of entertainment that involve both the native and immigrant communities, can help to foster mutual knowledge and trust. The success of these initiatives requires them to be well-publicised in the media and they should also incorporate creative elements that are linked with the pro-active involvement of the two communities (sports tournaments, music, activities for children and young people, sampling each other cuisine).
- When the two communities have certain problems in common, the availability of centres for social and legal support that can be used by both communities can aid interaction and mutual understanding.

Recommendations on the Social Integration of Immigrants and Refugees

- There is a fundamental need to ensure broad and easy access to information and to legal and social support designed for immigrants and asylum seekers, but there is no single, ideal way of making this provision.
- People with specialised knowledge of mediation work are of paramount importance in the promotion of the social integration of these groups.
- The greatest possible involvement of asylum seekers and immigrants, from the early decision-making stage to final implementation, can improve the effectiveness of responses to these groups, strengthen their self-esteem and self-confidence and thus, reduce their dependency.

Recommendations on Immigrants/Asylum Seekers and the Labour Market

- Portuguese language/citizenship training and guided vocational training, which are coordinated and customised to suit the requirements of specific target groups and then combined with vocational integration support systems, have considerably improved employability and prospects of accessing the labour market. This is especially true if employers have been actively involved.
- The combined involvement of immigrants, potential employers, vocational trainers and specialists in job selection and recruitment in the creation of training schemes strengthens mutual trust among these players. It also increases the effectiveness of responses and enables better articulation between employment supply and demand.

- Computers can be powerful tools for immigrants and asylum seekers in the processes of self-learning, accessing information and accessing employment.
- Awareness-raising and training initiatives for employers and workers' representatives, which trade unionists have helped to design, improve the integration of immigrants into enterprises and reduce workplace discrimination based on racial and ethnic origin.

Recommendations on Immigration and the Need for a New Institutional Culture

- Specific training for technical staff and local agents, which involves the institutions and seeks to address, in each specific situation, the needs and interests of the trainees, can optimise and improve the efficiency of the responses of their services.
- The identification of specific problem areas (e.g. the application of new regulations on immigrants' integration or migratory flows or asylum seekers' rights) should justify the development of short, specific awareness-raising initiatives for technical staff and local agents, to ensure that the responses of their services are continually updated.
- Articulated networks of partners seeking to optimise operations (territorial agreements, local networks...) improve the effectiveness of institutional responses and make a substantial contribution to the successful social integration of immigrants.
- Manuals that are specifically designed for technical staff can facilitate the responses of such members of staff to the target groups, and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the work they carry out. This is especially the case when they have been heavily involved in the drafting of the manual and the manual has "easy" updating mechanisms.

Where to now?

The policy document is now being addressed to Portuguese High Commission for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities and to those individuals who are responsible for drafting Portugal's National Action Plan for Employment and its National Action Plan for Inclusion. However, it is generally acknowledged that the production of the document has been a long, and perhaps too lengthy, process, even if it was very rich and very participative.

Thus, in round 2, a special, national Mainstreaming Group will be created to ensure that the outputs of all NTN, including those from round 1 that are still relevant, will be transferred into policy measures and disseminated as widely as possible throughout the country. However, that is not the only hope for the future. Jorge Malheiros the network facilitator is convinced that *"the capacity building of members was the key to the success of our network and this will stand the test of time. It has really strengthened the social capital within the member organisations, which will enable them to continue to experiment with new ideas and to reach out in the future to other disadvantaged groupings."*

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2.3. FRANCE – INTEGRATING EXPERIENCE FROM EQUAL INTO A COHERENT POLICY APPROACH

The National Thematic Network set up in France within the framework of the fight against racial discrimination brought together 18 of the 22 DPs that were launched under Theme B in the first round of EQUAL. External experts also attended the three meetings of the NTN that took place in the period 2003/2004. These meetings explored mutual thematic interests, stimulated an exchange of experience and developed a common plan for the dissemination of good practices

that were being piloted by the DPs or had already emerged from their work. A main outcome from these meetings was the clear identification of a number of issues for collective action that could provide the basis for applications for further support under Action 3 of EQUAL (*Mainstreaming the innovations of EQUAL*).

In terms of its function as a structured organisational framework, the formal life-span of the NTN was limited. However, the series of meetings provided the spark for a number of DPs to cooperate closely on the mainstreaming of their outcomes in a concerted approach. “*Even though the NTN did not have a perennial role in supporting this process, it laid the foundations for different forms of collaboration that forged links between DPs operating in the same region, between regions and between regions and the national level*”, says Marie Christine Palicot from Racine, the EQUAL National Support Structure, who coordinated the work of the NTN.

A forceful illustration is provided by a group of DPs that jointly developed and implemented a common strategy for the mainstreaming of innovative practices that had proved to be effective in tackling racial discrimination in the work place. This group involved DPs from different regions and also from national level, with complementary experience of action in the world of enterprise and the public sector.

Mobilising Corporate Social Responsibility to tackle Racial Discrimination

Most members of the NTN agreed that, in order to effectively combat racial discrimination in the labour market, simultaneous and concerted action was required, that related to different actors and segments of the employment system. There was also agreement that the most important issue was not to seek impact on legislation or create new structures, but to promote a sustainable change in the attitudes and current practices of these different actors.

To focus the network approach, four key questions were identified under which transferable innovative practices piloted by the DPs could be grouped:

- How can enterprises be convinced that they should engage in combating racial discrimination?
- How can Public Employment Services and private intermediaries be mobilised and helped to become more effective in tackling the mechanisms of racial discrimination that they encounter in their interface role on the labour market?
- How can dialogue be stimulated between the Social Partners on racial discrimination in the workplace and how can the Trade Unions be mobilised to tackle this issue in a more proactive way?
- How can action addressing these questions be articulated with discussion and dialogue in the civic society on the value of diversity, e.g. by involving actors concerned with urban policy, or associations engaged in the fight against racial discrimination?

Each of these questions refers to a specific group of actors with particular roles and responsibilities. In order to facilitate a comprehensive “systemic” approach to mainstreaming, the members of the network sought to define a common theme that could embrace all four aspects and also appeal to the distinct responsibilities of the Public Employment Services, Employers, Trade Unions and organisations representing other societal interests in combating discrimination. Thus, the issue of **Corporate Social Responsibility** (CSR) emerged as a common denominator in addressing these types of actors. “*Integrating immigrant minorities and fighting discrimination are central elements in practicing CSR. In fact, CSR must be based on intercultural management. The presence of people from very different origins and the coexistence of diverse cultures can generate internal dynamics that are beneficial to the enterprise. It can be noted, for example, that the cultural diversity of its work force facilitates helps Casino to be accepted in places that are known as urban problem areas*”, explains Laurent Labrot, a Trade Union representative (CFDT) in the Rhône-Alpes region, who initiated and coordinated the LUCIDITE DP in partnership with CASINO, a large chain of hypermarkets and supermarkets.

As in the case of LUCIDITE, other DPs in the network had already experienced positive results from articulating action against racial discrimination with the issue of CSR. It was thus felt that this issue could provide an effective transmission belt for disseminating the successful practices that the DPs had developed in response to the key questions identified at the initial network meetings.

It was not possible to implement the intended plan for the dissemination of good practices within the formal life-span of the NTN. However, the common work on its preparation fostered the creation of informal networks that brought together key actors in a number of DPs, from both national and regional levels, to cooperate in various combinations on promoting attitudinal and behavioural change amongst the different operators in the employment system. These network activities do not only draw on the experience of DPs from the first round of EQUAL, as they also involve new DPs that were launched, or develop their action further, in the second round. Thus, the thematic framework established by the NTN will evolve and provide continued guidance for the dissemination and mainstreaming of outcomes throughout the second phase of EQUAL.

Overcoming Fragmentation and Compartmentalisation of Action and Responsibilities

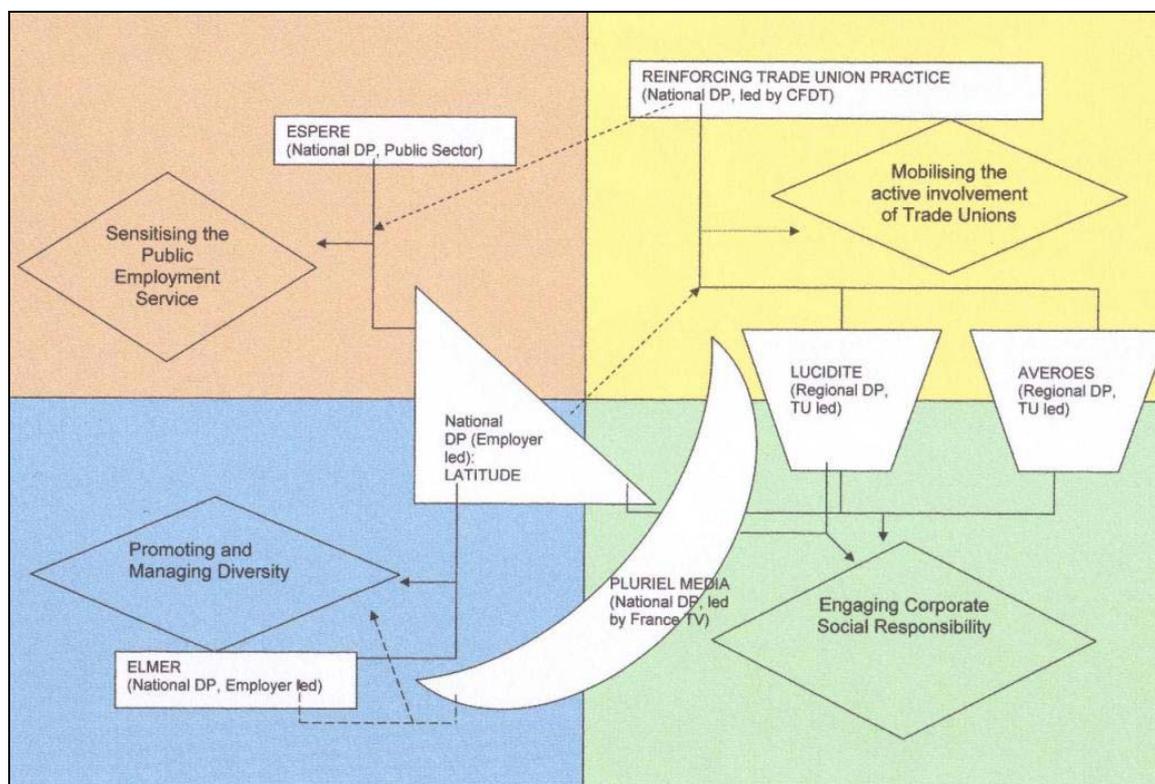
One of the most positive outcomes of the networking approach resides in the fact that it created dialogue and sustainable links between key actors who hitherto had little operational contact with each other. *“In our region, there was no practical cooperation and no dialogue, between the principal trade union organisations and the principle enterprises, on the issue of racial discrimination in the work place”*, said Laurent Labrot in explaining the point of departure. A similar comment could also have been made concerning the gaps in cooperation and exchange between actors from different regions or between regions and the national level.

The network was able to successfully tackle this problem, because it involved DPs that, in line with the common thematic framework, worked at the interface between four areas of action:

- Sensitising the Public Employment Service;
- Mobilising the Active Involvement of Trade Unions;
- Promoting and Managing Diversity;
- Engaging Corporate Social Responsibility.

In addition, the well established information and communication links between the DPs facilitated cooperative and concerted action between different regional and national levels of operation.

Seven DPs provided the backbone of the networking activities that followed on from the initial meetings of the NTN. Their activities are explained in more detail in the next section below, but their inter-relationship and their interface position in relation to the thematic areas of action is illustrated in the chart below.



A particular characteristic of this network can be seen in its apparent capacity to integrate common objectives, distinct but complementary thematic interests and different practices of the lead DPs into a coherent and concerted approach to mainstreaming. *“Agreeing on a common approach meant that each partner in the network had to recognise, and get acquainted with, the reasoning, the constraints and the priorities of the other partners”*, explained some network members in describing the challenge of overcoming compartmental boundaries. This process fostered new modes of relationship and a fertile exchange between key partners from different DPs and also between institutions and policy makers with wider responsibilities, outside the DPs, in one or more of the four areas of action.

Two national public agencies played a pivotal role in facilitating contact between those who piloted new practices within the DPs and actors at institutional or policy level:

- the “Direction de la Population et des Migrations” (DPM) of the Employment Ministry, and
- the “Fonds d’Action et de Soutien pour l’Intégration et la lutte contre les Discriminations” (FASILD).

Beyond their direct involvement in several of the DPs, these agencies also have a reputation, amongst public and private actors in the labour market and in the economic world, for their expertise and their competence as promoters of new experience in tackling discrimination. Their role in the dissemination activities of the network is crucial in terms of validating the approaches, tools and methods of delivery that result from the work of the DPs and they are also seen as strong levers for transferring successful new practices into mainstream policy.

Harnessing the Potential of Informal Networks

One of the factors that helped the network to cope with the complexities linked to its ambitious thematic approach was the informal nature of the networking arrangements. In fact, these arrangements enabled, under one common thematic umbrella covering a range of complementary issues, very flexible modes of cooperation involving:

- the core group of seven DPs, which was the driving force in building up the armoury of validated good practices that had a strong potential for transfer and mainstreaming;
- a broader group of DPs that were interested in receiving information and practical material on the work and productions of the core group, and possibly some form of training on its use, so that they could act as multipliers in the dissemination process;
- key actors from relevant public institutions and policy makers, who could play a central role in validating and supporting the transfer of new methods, practices and tools;
- finally, the wide range of private or public agencies and organisations, practitioners and decision makers actively concerned with the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility who formed the central target group of the network’s activities.

This informal set up facilitated the development of multiple cross linkages between the actors in a context that could be enlarged “à géométrie variable”, which, in turn, induced real change in the practices of enterprises, employment services and territorial associations. Arguably, a more formally structured network might not have brought about similar internal dynamics.

“New micro-networks involving new partners emerged from this informal approach which has generated a new culture of intervention”, underlines Marie Christine Palicot, adding that it is hoped that *“the common interests on which these new partnerships are based, and the involvement of actors whose operation is not affected by the limited period of funding from EQUAL, will foster more perennial links between the partners”*.

The EQUAL Development Partnerships involved in the core “production” group of the network are:

- **ESPERE** - *Engagement du Service Public de l’Emploi pour Restaurer l’Egalité*
Launched in 2002 and operating in six pilot regions, this project has engaged in an unprecedented programme of training and other activities to sensitise the principle agents of the Public Employment Service (PES) and their hierarchies in relation to the issue of combating and preventing discrimination in the fields of employment and vocational training. This programme is aimed at the entire PES, including different services and agencies with distinct responsibilities for placement, training, advice and inspection/control. The programme is also closely articulated with other EQUAL DPs that pursue similar objectives in the world of enterprise. ([FR-NAT-2001-10456](#))

▪ **LATITUDE**

This DP provides an outstanding example of unconditional commitment to combating discrimination in placement practices and access to work. The lead partner, ADECCO, a private nationwide temporary employment agency, has progressively implemented an active policy of non-discrimination in recruitment processes and in the workplace, throughout all its branches. This strategy is promoted internally by in-service training for staff and also through awareness raising and information activities aimed at clients and the general public. ADECCO's stance on non-discrimination permeates all of its external relationships with clients, which also entails categorical refusal of client orders if they don't comply with this policy. Very similar positions and activities are actively promoted by ADIA France, another large temporary employment agency involved in the DP. ([FR-NAT-2001-10039](#))

▪ **ELMER**

Based on its experimental work with four large companies (ADECCO, IKEA, AXA and PSA Peugeot Citroën) this DP is aimed to mobilise enterprises to actively engage in non-discriminatory recruitment and work practices that value cultural diversity. Led by IMS (*Institut du Mécénat de Solidarité*), an organisation that associates about 100 large companies in France on the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility, and with the National Association of Human Resource Directors as a partner, ELMER offers practical support to promote effective approaches to diversity management. ([FR-NAT-2004-41892](#))

▪ **LUTTE CONTRE LES DISCRIMINATIONS: RENFORCEMENT DES PRATIQUES SYNDICALES**

This DP was initiated by the largest French trade union confederation (CFDT, *Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail*) to develop and reinforce the capacity of trade union representatives, at all levels of the CFDT organisations and in all industrial sectors, to take a proactive stance on the fight against discrimination. Main lines of action include information and training activities aimed at employees and employers to change attitudes and behaviour that can obstruct the recruitment of French or foreign workers from ethnic minority origin, and the dissemination of good practices in non-discrimination. While the strategic approach to these activities is coordinated at the national CFDT level, its practical implementation and further development on the ground is promoted through the active involvement of the CFDT in several regional DPs. ([FR-NAT-2001-10568](#))

▪ **LUCIDITE - Lutte Contre l'Ignorance et les Discriminations au Travail et dans l'Entreprise**

This DP was initiated in the Rhône-Alpes region with strong support from the regional organisations of the two largest French trade union confederations, CFDT and CGT (*Confédération Générale des Travailleurs*), and from the *Union Professionnelle Artisanale* (Association of Craft Enterprises). Its main thrust was on promoting active dialogue, between employers and trade unions, on the role of Corporate Social Responsibility in combating discrimination. The main activities involved a combination of research and sensitisation/training activities, coordinated by ISM-CORUM (*Inter Service Migrant – Centre d'Observation et de Recherche sur l'Urbain et ses Mutations*), to identify and counteract discriminatory practices relating to access to employment, promotion in the work place and the delivery of public services. This action research focused on the situation in a number of different contrasting environments, including a large international distribution group (CASINO), small mono-industries (SMEs in the chemical sector), agriculture/tourism (precarious seasonal work) and local public administration. ([FR-RAL-2001-11139](#))

▪ **AVERROES - Actions Visant à l'Égalité sans distinction de Race, de Religion ou d'Origine dans l'Emploi et les Services**

This DP aims to develop the initial approaches that were piloted by the LUCIDITE DP (see above), by extending its field of action to include the issue of equal treatment of women and men, in addition to its focus on racial discrimination. With continued strong support from the regional (Rhône-Alpes) branches of the two main trade union organisations (CFDT and CGT) and most of the strategic partners who cooperated within the framework of LUCIDITE, the AVARROES DP now also involves a number of new partners, including the *Confederation of Craft Enterprises in the Construction Field* (CAPEB), several large enterprises (e.g. ADECCO, Club Méditerranée) and the public administrations of Greater Lyon and the City of Grenoble. ([FR-RAL-2004-42044](#))

▪ **Pluriel Media - Promouvoir la Lutte contre le Racisme-pour l'Insertion et l'Égalité**

Coordinated by the group *France Télévisions*, this DP involves the main public television chains (France 2, France 3, France 5, Réseau France Outre-mer). It seeks to facilitate access to employment, in these television companies, for French collaborators from ethnic minority or

immigrant background and to increase their visibility in television programmes. Additional flanking activities include research on stereotype attitudes and discriminatory practices related to ethnic origin or gender and, based on the results of this research, the production and broadcasting of guides and other material that can be used in information programmes addressing the public at large and for distance training modules aimed at administrative staff, managers and trade union actors. ([FR-NAT-2004-41787](#))

Outcomes

Clearly, the work of the EQUAL NTN provided a major stimulus to strengthen the dialogue between the Social Partners, and between them and public services, on the issues of tackling racial discrimination in the workplace and promoting Corporate Social Responsibility. The outcomes of this process are reflected in a number of formal agreements, declarations or codes of conduct that were signed between key operators in this field:

- two Charters of Ethical Commitment were signed by the Public Employment Service (*Service public de l'emploi*, SPE) and the Association of Temporary Employment Agencies (*Syndicat des entreprises de travail temporaire*, SETT), in November 2005, concerning the prevention of discrimination. In signing these documents, the SPE and the SETT both confirmed their commitment to engage in concrete preventative action, through their activities in the labour market and also in relation to their own employees. The Charters explicitly refer to the use of methods, tools and information or training material developed and piloted by the ESPERE and LATITUDE DPs;
- by the same token, a Charter on Diversity in Enterprises was proposed, drawing on the work of the ELMER DP. About 120 enterprises have already agreed to sign this charter and adhere to its principles;
- a framework agreement was concluded between the group France Télévisions and the national employment authorities, concerning the promotion of diversity based recruitment practices in public television companies that reflects the principles fostered by the Pluriel Media DP;
- within the context of three DPs with strong trade union involvement (*Renforcement des Pratiques Syndicales*, LUCIDITE and AVERROES), several declarations and charters were signed between the social partners to promote non-discriminatory practices and diversity action at regional level and they also called for more intensive dialogue on these issues at the national level.

These examples of manifestation of commitment illustrate a climate of change that was strongly stimulated through the work of a number of lead DPs, and equally through the network activities which made it possible to demonstrate more clearly how the complementary outcomes from different DPs can be combined in a strategy to tackle discrimination in a “systemic” way. Indeed, these new commitments to action are backed by a whole armoury of practical validated methods and tools that can be integrated in a comprehensive approach, and by the fact that these “products” have already been successfully used to sensitise and train several thousand field operators.

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3. CONCLUSIONS

The examples of networking in section 2 present convergent messages in terms of their objectives but demonstrate differences in their specific approaches, outcomes and the context in which they have operated.

The Portuguese NTN illustrates a structured and formalised approach that involves a clear strategy and an agreed systematic methodology to identify and validate good practices emerging from the DPs, including action to test and improve the quality of the products and tools related to these practices. This approach has been successful in strengthening the credibility and recognition of the value of products developed in EQUAL, especially amongst agencies and organisations that are potential users of such products. The Portuguese approach is now being assessed by ESF Authorities in other Member states and has already been adapted and adopted by BE(fr) for use with their second round DPs.

In stark contrast to this experience in Portugal, the strength of the French example resides not in its methodological proceedings but in its focus on one main thematic priority issue and in its dynamic approach to changing mainstream practices by sensitising and mobilising clearly identifiable key actors in the labour market and in the economic world. The experience in France demonstrates the catalytic role that a NTN can play in stimulating flexible alliances between the network members and in capitalising on the different types of informal links that may exist between these members and those decision makers that have been targeted for the mainstreaming of EQUAL outcomes.

The convergent messages that have emerged from the experience in both Member States highlight the importance of three factors that have played a crucial role in strengthening the networks' capacities for increasing the impact of the work of its constituent DPs and for mainstreaming the good practices that they have developed:

- early, active involvement of stakeholders that have (policy) responsibilities that relate to EQUAL's concerns but who are in national or regional government departments, employers organisations, trade unions and NGOs, which are not directly involved with the management of the EQUAL Community Initiative or its Development Partnerships;
- involving actors whose roles and responsibilities are mutually complementary rather than conflicting;
- ensuring a well balanced spread of network activities in order to exploit the scope for dissemination and mainstreaming both at regional and national level.

As a more general conclusion, the views expressed by key actors involved in the networking activities described in this paper leave no doubt about the important role played by the different types of networks in providing a forum for collective learning and the promotion of a wider use of the practical tools, products and other outcomes that have been developed and tested by EQUAL DPs.