EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This is the fourth and final EU-wide evaluation report of the EQUAL Community Initiative covering the activities of EQUAL between 2001 and the beginning of 2006.

2. The aim of EQUAL is to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market. To achieve this aim, EQUAL operates in 9 thematic fields. Implementation takes place through geographical or sector-based Development Partnerships (DPs), and is guided by 5 key principles (partnership, empowerment, trans-nationality, innovation and mainstreaming). DPs are also required to follow a horizontal approach for equal opportunities. A first call for proposals was organised in 2001 in the 15 Member States (17 CIPs) as well as in CZ and HU, and led to the funding of 1,352 DPs. With the enlargement, EQUAL opened to the 10 New Member States. A 2nd call for proposals, in 2004, led to the selection of 1,999 DPs across 27 CIPs.

3. The activities of EQUAL at national level will be completed by the end of 2008. This report includes recommendations for the two last years of the Initiative with particular reference to evaluation at national level.

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

4. The 3 overall objectives of the EU-wide evaluation, which started in 2002, were:
   - *To assess the rationale, the potential and initial impact of EQUAL* as a testing ground to develop, validate and disseminate new ways of delivering employment and social inclusion policies;
   - *To identify and assess the added value* of EQUAL to existing labour market policies and practices at national and EU level;
   - *To identify good and innovative practice* in delivering employment policy, developed and tested under EQUAL with the potential to be mainstreamed into ESF programmes and the European Employment Strategy and relevant parts of the Social Inclusion Process.

5. Four EU-wide evaluation reports have been produced since the beginning of the contract:
   - *The 1st Interim report* (26/9/2003) provided a synthesis of the appropriateness of CIP strategies, an overview of management and implementation systems with a focus on the selection procedure in R1 and an analysis of the understanding of the key principles at CIP and DP level.
   - *The Mid-term report* (2/3/2004) provided an update on the appropriateness of strategies and on management systems, a first analysis of the implementation of the key principles, as well as an analysis of European networking and mainstreaming mechanisms, including mechanisms for the identification and validation of good practice.
   - *The 2nd Interim report* (29/03/2005) mainly focused on the implementation of the EQUAL principles and on their contribution to innovation. European level networking and mainstreaming were also addressed with an update assessment of the mechanisms for the identification and validation of good practice.
   - *This Final report* derives the main lessons of the implementation and results of EQUAL so far, with a particular focus on R1 and on the launch and preparation phase of R2 in the New Member States (NMS). The time span covered is 2005 and the beginning of

2006, although the report also integrates previous results, notably those of the 2nd Interim Report.

6. The specific objectives of this report are to integrate and update the EU-wide evaluation findings concerning:
   - The appropriateness of strategies in EQUAL, both at CIP and DP level (including in the NMS);
   - Management and implementation systems at CIP and DP level (including in the NMS)1;
   - The effectiveness and added value of the key principles and of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities in round 1 (R1);
   - The effectiveness of dissemination, networking and mainstreaming arrangements at the national and EU level in round 1 (R1);
   - The intermediate impacts of EQUAL: policy, institutional and organisational impacts in the Member States[2].

7. The present report is based on:
   - The review and analysis of the national evaluation reports;
   - Case studies of transnational partnerships (TNPs);
   - Interviews with programme actors: the Managing Authorities and National Support Structures of the EQUAL programmes in the 10 NMS;
   - Interviews with potential policy users in the European Commission;
   - Participant observation in various European mainstreaming events;
   - Surveys - An e-mail questionnaire to the 'non-EQUAL' participants in the Madrid policy forum of June 2005 (July-September 2005); an e-mail survey with the MAs and NSS of the 10 NMS (March 2006); an e-mail survey targeted at the ESF Heads of mission (March 2006).

8. Generally the coverage by OMS national evaluation reports of the issues to be addressed by the EU-wide evaluators has been good, although less so for the issues of appropriateness of strategies and programme management, which most evaluators had addressed in their Mid-Term reports and for which they were not necessarily required to provide an update in the 2005 reports. Impacts have been looked at unevenly across Member States, and the picture provided is necessarily preliminary, given the stage of programme implementation. Community added value has hardly been addressed at this stage.

9. The evaluation questions addressed in the NMS have been modelled on the terms of reference suggested by the EU Commission and were more specifically focused on the appropriateness of strategies at programme level and the consistency between DP work programmes and CIP priorities; on management and the implementation systems at CIP and DP levels, and for Transnational Cooperation. However not all the questions asked in the EU terms of reference were addressed in all NMS. In particular questions concerning monitoring systems, self-assessment and transnationality were not systematically dealt with.

10. A wide variety of methodological instruments was used, in 2005, by the national evaluators of the 25 MS, ranging from documentary analyses to interviews at various levels of implementation and quite often surveys. More specifically, the methods used included:
    - *Desk research (*review of documents, analysis of monitoring data, analysis of DP reports and in some cases analysis of statistics on the target groups);
    - *Interviews with programme actors* on implementation issues (i.e. MA, NSS and, where relevant, regional support structures, Monitoring Committee members). In addition,

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[1] The effectiveness of management systems in transnational partnerships is addressed in the analysis of the implementation of the principle.
[2] The initial evaluation questions concerned the impact of EQUAL on the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion Process and other Community programmes and Community added value. These were rephrased in the course of the evaluation. However, elements of response to the initial questions can be found in Chapter 14 (Conclusions).

NTN moderators and experts were often interviewed as well as external actors (experts, officials of other public administrations) in some MS;

- *Participation in – and organisation of – meetings and seminars with programme actors* (in most OMS and in 3 NMS). In some OMS, workshops with selected experts and/or DP evaluators were also organised.
- *Case studies of DPs* and interviews at DP level (in most OMS but only in 2 NMS). Case study methodologies and samples vary widely.
- Most of the evaluators carried out *surveys* of R1 DPs. Surveys could be general and address implementation issues as well as results or could be more focused on specific aspects. R2 DPs were surveyed in several MS.
- A few evaluators carried out *surveys of beneficiaries*, with varied success given the difficulty to contact beneficiaries, especially once the action has come to an end.

11. The *national evaluation process* in the NMS took more time than planned, with important delays in half of the NMS, due to a very tight schedule. Evaluators often had only a few weeks, during summer. In most cases, the period covered by the evaluation reports extends from June 2004 to June 2005. Thus DPs had only been operational for a few weeks at the time of the evaluation and the information available was sometimes limited. The main difficulties faced by some evaluators may have come from the limited budgets dedicated to the evaluation.

OVERARCHING CONCLUSIONS

Overall assessment of the rationales at play in EQUAL. Initial and potential impacts.

12. EQUAL was set out as a 'testing ground to develop and disseminate new ways of delivering employment policies in order to combat all sorts of discrimination and inequality experienced by those seeking access to the labour market and those already within it'. A posteriori, this overall rationale can be said to have given rise to 3 main, not mutually exclusive, orientations and rationales for implementation:

- A first approach to EQUAL was to use it as a strategic instrument for reforming existing policies in order to improve their *effectiveness*.
- A second approach consisted in making existing policies more *inclusive*, e.g. by exploring ways for strengthening the access of specific groups to existing programmes, and therefore by adapting existing policies and programmes.
- The third approach was to seize EQUAL as an opportunity to strengthen and consolidate recent policy initiatives in line with the European Employment Strategy or to *explore* or improve the organisation and structure of fields of practice which had so far received little policy attention.

13. In the first rationale, which applied particularly to thematic fields where policies are well established, and which has been dominant in some Member States in R1, the implementation capacity has been good, since experienced players could apply, although this may also have resulted in few new players coming on board. Innovation has been focused on the promotion of new mechanisms of governance between partners. Mainstreaming opportunities are good, in principle, since the stakeholders concerned by reformed governance are the very partners of development partnerships. However, evidence of impacts has been limited so far, with a few noticeable exceptions.

14. The second rationale was also applied to thematic fields where policies are well established, but has been dominant in other Member States. In these cases, capacity building took place through partnerships between experienced players and newer, and usually smaller, partners, such as grass-roots NGOs. The innovation reported in these cases has consisted in adapting and tailoring existing solutions in order to cater for new target groups. Mainstreaming faces more obstacles than in the first strategy, since there can be a lack of political will for ensuring mainstream funding for these groups.

15. Finally, the third rationale applies to themes which correspond to a new policy impetus in some Member States, or which had not received much policy attention in others. Here, implementation capacity can be at issue: given the lack of prior experience, there has sometimes been a lack of promoters, and/or applications have been, at times, of poor quality. However, these are themes where much innovation has been reported (new structures and systems). Again, mainstreaming requires political will, but the choice of these thematic priorities at CIP level has usually been indicative of such interest. There are already significant results.

Added value with regard to existing labour market policies and practice at the national and EU level

16. The clearest added value lies in the promotion of/further progress in new, stable, co-operation mechanisms giving rise to integrated and co-ordinated approaches, in lieu of the piecemeal approaches sometimes prevailing. Co-operation between statutory agencies, as well as the opening up of labour market agencies to partnerships with employers and grass-roots NGOs, has sometimes led to sustainable changes in ways of delivering policies. Integrated strategies for combating discrimination addressed factors of discrimination lying in institutional and employer-based strategies, processes, and prejudices in parallel with mentoring for individuals.

17. Secondly, added value has stemmed from the exploration and/or further structuring of relatively new fields of intervention. For example, in combating racial discrimination, added value has lied in the already mentioned integrated strategies, as well as in equipping employers with 'soft tools' (self-diagnoses, codes of conduct) in a context in which legal obligations (equality legislation) had already set the basis. Another example of thematic added value lies in the global approach taken to the social economy. Whereas it is often considered merely as a vehicle for the reintegration of vulnerable people in the labour market, EQUAL has promoted it as an economic sector per se, in the sense of an alternative organisation of economic activity. It thus contributes an alternative approach, not just to employment, but also to the economy as a whole.

18. Finally there is an added value of the EQUAL architecture per se, as compared with other labour market integration programmes, in particular through, the idea of the phasing of actions, and especially the introduction of a 'preparatory phase' (Action 1); the requirement to form partnerships, with 'all relevant stakeholders', from the beginning or over time; the (on-going) learning which has taken place with regard to experimental and project management methods, from initial research and diagnoses, to monitoring and self-assessment; and the various strategies and arrangements which have been set up for the exploitation of results ('valorisation') and for 'vertical mainstreaming'[3], even though they are still in their first stages.

Good and innovative practice with mainstreaming potential in ESF, the EES and the Social Inclusion process

19. EQUAL good practice should not be limited to project results and include programme strategies, structure and management. In particular, there has been an original attempt, at the European level, to provide support to implementation, networking and mainstreaming both on the thematic and on the organisational front, around the implementation of the key principles. Clearly the role of the European Commission has not been only one of secretariat or 'platform' for Member States to meet – it has also provided direction, not co-ordination in a vacuum. A second achievement of programme management to be capitalised upon has been the importance given to mid-term evaluation reports in the Member States.

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[3] See for definition paragraph 91

20. With regard to 'good and innovative practice' at project level, we have selected practices which were identified as innovative by the national evaluators, and, whenever possible, for which preliminary impacts had also been detected in the Member States. In addition, we have sought practices which seemed illustrative of the wider results achieved in EQUAL and which could be relevant for the Integrated guidelines and the Social Inclusion process. Results and illustrations are provided for each relevant 'Integrated Guideline' as well as for the Social Inclusion process and other European strategies and programmes: see below, Paragraphs 117-123).

21. It is still too early to identify areas of take up of good practice at the European level. Mainstreaming at the European level has so far taken place mainly concerning the take up of the EQUAL principles in the programming of ESF programmes for 2007-2013, where considerable support has been provided to the Member States in order to inform their choices for the organisation of the principles. Concerning the mainstreaming at the European level of the thematic lessons of EQUAL (such as the ones we present below in Paragraphs 117-123), the mechanisms for mainstreaming are in place (see below, Paragraphs 102-114 and our recommendations) and their impact will need to be reviewed in the medium term. However it may be regretted that the mechanisms for informing the future review of the European Employment Strategy are lacking and, what is more, no step seems to be taken in that direction.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE EVALUATION TASKS

Appropriateness of strategies

22. CIP priorities have been specified to varying degrees in R1. However the analysis of DP activities has shown, *a posteriori*, a trend towards homogeneity of actions across all themes, and, in some cases, vague targeting of beneficiaries, which may have stemmed in part from a lack of specification at CIP level, and, in the first place, of the EQUAL guidelines, as they tended to promote support to labour market access across all themes.

23. In 9 CIPs, 7 or more thematic fields were selected out of 9. In 4 CIPs, 6 thematic fields were selected. And in the other CIPs, including all New Member States except CZ, one or less thematic field per (former) pillar has been selected. Opting for a focused or more spread programme appears as a strategic decision with important consequences for the effectiveness of the programmes, in particular with regard to mainstreaming, as, when there are less thematic fields, efforts can be focused on the mobilisation of a smaller number of potential users.

24. CIP strategies have generally been assessed as appropriate by the national evaluators, including, in R2, in the New Member States. The consistency and the complementarity of the EQUAL priorities with the national employment and social inclusion policy have been improved in R2, in the old Member States, and the external coherence of EQUAL has been reinforced.

25. The CIPs are generally regarded as being still valid in their main orientations. The main reason for the continued relevance is that EQUAL seeks to address structural inequalities, which were independent from the economic cycle. However, national evaluators pointed out to insufficiencies in R1 in some Member States concerning (a) specific groups who were not being targeted adequately by EQUAL (b) a lack of specification of the thematic fields. Adjustments were thus advocated for Round 2 (R2). Moreover, there has been a general lack of initiatives addressing the quality of employment conditions, whereas inequalities in employment, for example for migrants, are, in some Member States, a more serious issue than access to the labour market.

26. Although national evaluators generally found, in R1, a good level of consistency between CIP priorities and DP objectives, some of them also alerted to an excessive focus on

support to labour market access, and, consistently, to a lack of targeting of workers. In the NMS a high level of consistency between CIP and DP priorities had been found even though assessments are, in most cases, rather general. The distribution of the selected DPs is similar to the distribution of the planned budget in most NMS.

27. In R1, geographical DPs prevailed and DP strategies were found to be highly responsive to local contexts. However this does not mean that geographical disparities were addressed. In the NMS, the share of geographical DPs is comparatively lower. There is a prevalence of sector-based DPs in 6 out of 10 NMS. In addition, the small size of the programmes has limited the possibility for selecting DPs focusing on remote or disadvantaged areas.

28. On average, the number of DPs selected has increased by 21% between R1 and R2 in the OMS, but has decreased in some MS. The DPs selected in the NMS represents 19% of all DPs in R2.

29. The changes introduced in R2 were oriented towards an improvement of the definition and the focus of the existing priorities. A more balanced distribution of DPs between thematic fields has also been observed. In most MS, the CIPs have thus been revised and adjusted quite thoroughly on the basis of the lessons learnt in R1 and of national policy changes.

30. In several MS, the target groups have been defined in a more precise way. The partial re-orientation of thematic fields towards specific target groups, which was not the approach initially favoured in the EQUAL guidelines, became dominant in some OMS and prevails generally in the NMS. There is some evidence that this may make innovation more focused – and certainly more visible. However, this may also contribute to the prevalence of a 'supply side' approach to the detriment of initiatives addressing structural factors of discrimination on the demand side of the labour market.

Management and Implementation Systems

31. Overall management and implementation systems have been improved over time towards greater quality and efficiency.

32. EQUAL has been implemented differently according to the level of decentralisation of employment policy within the Member States. In BE and the UK, regional authorities have produced their own CIP; in FR, and now IT, EQUAL is implemented in a context of territorialisation, and in a number of MS, regional authorities have been involved in monitoring and in the selection process. The close involvement of regional level actors in programme management has favoured the regional relevance of EQUAL. However, it may also give rise to conflicts of interests – when institutions participating in selection committees are also involved in projects (this is valid for other actors as well). The participation of regional actors in selection committees may also account for higher numbers of selected DPs than planned in some cases.

33. On the issue of partnership and multi-stakeholder governance for the design and management of the programme, a number of government departments or public institutions are systematically involved in Monitoring Committees (MC) and have sometimes been involved in drafting the CIPs. However, the role of MCs in the programme should not be exaggerated as they have sometimes met relatively rarely since the beginning of the programme. Social partners have been systematically involved and they are likely to have made a greater contribution in those MS where they are active stakeholders of the employment policy.

34. In R1, all NSS have carried out tasks of information and advice to applicants, guidance to the development partnerships (DPs) once selected, monitoring, and support to the MAs. The main difference between NSSs has lied in their role in the selection process. Opinions (e.g. of national evaluators) are divided as to the relevance of NSS staff's participation in the selection process. Although NSS staff may have knowledge of applicants which no

other actors taking part in the selection process can have, they are, for that very reason, both judges and parties.

35. The integration of the NSS in the same Ministry or department as the MA has facilitated cooperation between the two, although this cannot be a guarantee of good communication. Some coordination problems between NSS and MA were indeed pointed out by the evaluators which could be explained, notably in the NMS, by staffing problems (understaffing, inexperience people).

36. The objective of the *preparatory phase (Action 1)* was to improve work programmes and to develop partnerships. This phase has proved crucial for setting a good basis for implementation.

37. In R1, in some MS, Action 1 was used for the consolidation of selected partnerships while in other MS it was used as a period to prepare DPs for selection for entry in Action 2. Even though it seemed more rigorous to keep the possibility of de-selecting DPs at the end of Action 1, in practice this caused many difficulties especially with regard to the preparation of transnationality. It seems more reasonable to maintain this possibility, but as an exceptional case, as has been done for example in LT in R2.

38. Different approaches were taken, in R1, to the definition and weight of selection criteria: in some MS, the distribution of DPs according to planned budgets by theme and political criteria played an important role; in others, technical criteria prevailed. As a result of this, the variation of selection rates between MS and themes ranged between 10% and 100%. Both strategies have their relevance: following strictly the planned budget allocation is relevant when new fields are being explored and few applicants are expected – as a selection on the basis of the quality of applications leads to having very few projects in these specific priorities. It may be more relevant in such cases to select the planned number of DPs and to focus efforts on supporting DPs in the implementation of their projects. Conversely when the priorities selected in the CIP are not new, and many applicants are likely to come to the fore, an assessment mainly on the basis of the technical quality of bids seems more adequate.

39. *The implementation phase (Action 2)* has been the phase of implementation of DP work programmes in R1 and covered a period to 2 to 3 years. During this phase, the NSSs provided guidance to DPs, especially on administrative issues, monitored and controlled DP activities, and organised communication activities. Evaluators' assessments of programme guidance have been contrasted. A main source of dissatisfaction for DPs has lied in the very important administrative burden and problems with delays of payments. Evaluators, both in R1 and in R2 (NMS) have advocated the strengthening of technical guidance to DPs.

40. In most MS, budgets for the *implementation of the work programmes* were assessed as realistic and appropriate. However, implementation difficulties, leading to delays, were identified in R1.

41. *The phase of transfer to policy and practice (Action 3)* has been dedicated to the organisation of networking, dissemination of good practice and mainstreaming activities and has taken place through 3 main mechanisms:
    - Individual Action 3 budgets included by DPs in their Development Partnership Agreements (DPA), along with Action 2 budgets: all DPs could thus benefit from an Action 3 budget;
    - Individual or collective Action 3 budgets accessible through a call for proposals: not all DPs could obtain such funding;
    - Action 3 budgets made accessible as an option to all DPs that submit an application.

42. Several changes were introduced in programme implementation in R2 which are likely to improve the quality of implementation and of outputs. The capacity of programme actors to learn from national evaluation reports and take up their recommendations has usually been high. Amongst the most significant changes, we have noted:

- The increased flexibility of each Action, of their phasing and of the allocation of budgets to each Action;
- The clarification of NSS roles;
- More qualitative guidance and monitoring;
- Improvements in the launch phase (2nd call) leading to higher numbers of applications and applications of a greater quality;
- Adjustments in the selection process, with, for example, more weight given to innovation and mainstreaming in the selection criteria.

43. In the NMS, the usefulness of the preparatory phase was highlighted and NSS guidance during the preparatory phase has sometimes been very substantial (training sessions, seminars, guides).

44. The selection process was also assessed positively in the NMS, although evaluators sometimes pointed to the low quality of applications, which led to severe selection rates in some NMS.

45. At DP level in NMS, management and monitoring are, at the moment, very much constrained by financial issues, including heavy administrative procedures, payment delays, complex verification of eligibility and low advance payments. In CZ, DPs created a *Council of Final Beneficiaries* in order to collectively claim for payments and to find solutions to avoid payment delays in the future.

Effectiveness and added value of the Partnership and Empowerment principles

46. The implementation of the partnership and empowerment principle, understood as a mechanism for bringing together various relevant actors for tackling an issue and for working together towards shared goals, has probably been one of the main successes of EQUAL. It has been a necessary (though not sufficient) condition to facilitate access, both to 'target groups' and, though to a lesser extent, to the decision-making community.

47. *The design of partnerships appears as crucial*. Successful partnerships involve *all strategic partners[4]* (which facilitate sustainability), seek the early participation of the relevant co-funding agencies, and promote *the concrete and active participation of partners*, including representative of target groups.

48. *Partnership composition* based on the comprehensive representation of all relevant stakeholders is important for external credibility and for mainstreaming. Partnership composition on the basis of the skills and expertise of each partner is likely to facilitate joint work to a greater extent.

49. *The difficulty to attract enterprises* in DPs has often been explained by the fact that enterprises are deterred by the administrative requirements, but also that participation throughout the DP lifecycle is difficult for companies to sustain. Thus, acquiring the 'right skills' and involving the key stakeholders at the right time constitute a success factors for the implementation of the partnership**.**

50. *The issue of the optimal size of the DPs* remains debated. Some MAs now recommend restricted partnerships*,* regarded as more reactive, more manageable and hence more efficient. Others recommend wide partnerships, as this increases the potential for mainstreaming and sustainability. In any case, whilst the average size of R1 DPs had been 10.4 partners, R2 DPs have an average of 7.5 partners (all MS). In the NMS the average size is 6 partners.

51. *Successful partnerships have achieved a balance between 'stability' and 'fluidity' over time*: fluidity, i.e. the flexible mobilisation of partners at different phases in the DP

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[4] Strategic partners are members that are not actively involved in the DPs' work, but which have are supposed to play a role for mainstreaming.

lifecycle, is necessary to adjust capacity and activities in a reactive way, whilst the stability of a core group of partners is important to maintain direction and have credibility in the mainstreaming stage.

52. Various *decision-making mechanisms* have been used at DP level: centralised decision-making seems to have been more effective (provided adequate consultation and capacity building mechanisms took place) than fully participative mechanisms, which can be slower and heavier. However, *day-to-day decision-making bodies have been the working groups in charge of the projects of the Development Partnerships*, much more than partner assemblies or steering/monitoring committees.

53. *Capacity building* has taken place, notably for small organisations, which testifies to the effectiveness of empowerment. Some evaluators found that large DPs had acted as *fora for capacity building and 'social learning'*. However, capacity building has been hampered by financial difficulties in small organisations, and has been found to be less feasible in small partnerships.

54. *The quality of project management*, in particular adequate starting diagnoses and on-going monitoring and evaluation, has progressed over time across the MS, but self-assessment and monitoring still need strengthening, as R1 DPs still found it difficult at this stage to explain what they had achieved.

55. *NSS methodological guidance* (through tools, training, guides, and visits) has contributed actively to enhancing the quality of the projects and of project management. Proper staffing and proper training of NSS staff is thus essential and should be given due consideration.

56. Overall, the implementation of the partnership principle in EQUAL has made a significant contribution to the added value of the Initiative: *It has contributed to progress towards the reduction of inequalities and discrimination; It has contributed to innovation,* especially as ways of working together have sometimes been profoundly changed, and transfer of knowledge and experience took place between partners. *It has contributed to transfer and mainstreaming*, especially as partners became able to speak a common voice in key policy areas and therefore to influence policy.

Effectiveness and added value of the innovation principle

57. Innovation is the *raison d'être* of EQUAL. The initiative has been designed as a 'testing ground to develop and disseminate new ways of delivering employment policies'.

58. DPs sometimes struggled, at the beginning of R1, to understand how they could comply with the principle. Over time, however, *awareness of innovation as experimentation*, in other words, as a concept which can steer project management and procedures, has increased. An experimentation dynamics has been documented in some MS, in which the monitoring of project results led to abandoning some projects and setting up new ones.

59. Evaluators often found that *innovation had mainly been incremental* (bringing about improvements of former practices), which is partly linked to the fact that EQUAL was often used to open up existing programmes to new target groups. In view of this, the distinction made in the EQUAL guidelines between process, goal and context innovation did not appear as very operational or useful for an analytical understanding of innovation, since process innovation (new methods) often went together with goal innovation (new target group) and context innovation (to change the context of provision for these target groups).

60. Despite the prevalence of incremental innovation, *innovation has been more 'radical' in some themes:* in a few MS, EQUAL was used as a strategic instrument to explore or further structure fields of intervention where policy was not developed and/or there was not much practical experience. The more or less new character of thematic fields naturally depended on the MS, but 4 of them were particularly mentioned as relatively new areas of policy/practice developments: the fight against racism and xenophobia (1B); the social economy (2D); reconciling family and professional life (4G); and support to asylum seekers

(5I). Conversely, some areas of intervention, such as training in general, seem to have been less prone to innovation.

61. A few evaluators carried out a systematic analysis of the *quality of the innovation* produced, with very different methods and criteria. However, there were some common findings. In particular, as could be expected, only a share of operations or DPs can be considered as having produced innovation with clear added value, relevance, sustainability and/or mainstreaming possibilities. This, to a certain extent, can be considered as intrinsic to any experimental programme. However, this may also be due to what could be called a 'trivialisation effect', derived from the 'obligation to innovate' extended to the whole programme.

62. The *main areas of innovations* put forward by the national evaluators include:
   - Comprehensive, integrated strategies, targeting the demand side and the supply side of the labour market at the same time; seeking to rely on new 'multipliers' for combating discrimination – amongst elected policy makers, social workers, in the media etc.; and targeting discrimination in various contexts in parallel (the education system, the workplace, social services, public opinion in general).
   - Both in support schemes for labour market reintegration and business creation, more attention has been paid to the preliminary phases of support and to follow-up (once in employment or once established as entrepreneur or self-employed).
   - A range of EQUAL initiatives have sought to professionalize, equip and structure sectors such as the social economy and the care sector.
   - Finally much innovation has been taking place in relation to the enhanced capacity of institutions, support centres and methodologies to cater for highly marginalised groups or groups suffering from multiple discrimination.

63. Concerning the *factors which have favoured the emergence of innovation*,
   - A few evaluators argue that DPs with a target-group orientation, with partners chosen for their complementary knowledge of the target group(s) are more prone to innovation, than, for example, wide territorial partnerships targeting a range of different target groups, as they are more focused. However more analysis would be required to generalise this finding.
   - Many evaluators have highlighted the positive contribution of the partnership principle to the development of innovation. However some of them found that the partnership principle should be considered a favouring but by no means a sufficient factor.

64. *Limits to innovation* have been identified when DPs were insufficiently prepared to experimentation methods, in particular with regard to starting diagnoses, monitoring and self-assessment. But structural limits in the EQUAL Initiative have also been pointed out: thus the short timeframe for project implementation, as well as the lack of further funding perspectives, have been an important explanatory factor of the type of innovations developed, i.e. improvement of existing practices rather than testing new practices, especially in DPs dealing with very vulnerable groups.

Effectiveness and added value of the transnationality principle

65. The main *expected outcome of* transnationality was to add value to DP actions. In addition TN cooperation was also to contribute to European and national policy developments. One major conclusion is that TN learning has been capitalised upon by DPs but that added value has been uneven.

66. *The European Common DataBase (ECDB) has been an effective and relevant resource for partner search*. However the use of the ECDB constitutes only the first step for identifying the 'right partner': direct communication and in-depth talks were felt to be necessary and helped decide whether a potential partner was 'suitable' or not.

67. *Others channels* were also used for finding potential partners, including relying on previous contacts or hiring an external consultant. This latter channel has been effective to build TN partnerships provided sufficient debate with DP partners on the various dimensions of the draft Transnational Co-operation Agreement (TCA) was ensured. The organisation of seminars and conferences between MAs and NSSs at the European level has also been helpful for support in partner search.

68. DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships with DPs working in the same theme. In R1 there were slightly more plurithematic than monothematic TNPs. This was in part due to the fact that the types of actions promoted under each thematic priority at times differed strongly from one MS to the other.

69. DPs were encouraged to form TN partnerships all throughout the EU. However, in most MS, links have been much stronger with 2 or 3 other MS. In R2 some OMS are 'over-represented' in partnerships with NMS DPs. NMS DPs have also been interested in partners from other NMS, due to similarities in language and common historical background.

70. On the basis of our fieldwork, we found that the *success factors* in the formation of a TNP included: (a) choosing partners working on common issues and/or with similar target groups, and with comparable TN budgets; (b) ensuring that there is a congruency or complementarity of interests and objectives; (c) drafting a precise work plan and involving all partners in this exercise; (d) taking into account that the construction of transnationality requires time.

71. DPs have experienced TCA preparation as a rather complex process in R1, due to the inherent difficulties of reaching agreements with often unknown foreign partners, but also due to some specific aspects of the framework for transnationality in EQUAL R1 (differences in time schedules between MS, in the thematic content of programme priorities, in budget sizes etc.). R2 TCAs were drafted more rapidly thanks to the previous experience of R1 DPs. Nevertheless, quality remained uneven.

72. During R1, the process of *validation of the TCAs* by Managing Authorities was rather difficult and long: despite the common criteria agreed for the validation of TCAs, MAs/NSSs were not always in agreement about the minimum effort required and what each section should contain. The validation process was less lengthy in R2, thanks to a shared concern for not delaying validation and not hindering TN cooperation work. Thus guidance during the implementation phase of TNPs in R2 will need strengthening, as TCA validation has sometimes been lenient.

73. Whatever the mechanisms chosen for *decision-making at TNP level*, they tend to ensure, at least formally, the participation of all transnational partners on an equal basis and their voice in the steering of the TN partnership. The most frequent models include a rotating secretariat supplemented by co-ordination meetings or a lead partner with a steering group. In both models, decisions are usually made by consensus.

74. We have found 3 main models of *work organisation* in TNPs: (a) Working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, and involving all partners: in principle, this model favours maximum co-operation but has hardly been feasible economically. (b) Working groups led by each partner in their area of competencies, in which other partners participate if they are interested. This organisation proved to be quite efficient. (c) Division of labour between partners: each partner is responsible for a specific product or activity. One risk of this organisation is that it only provides for limited exchange of experience. However, when common objectives are clear, this way of working can be very effective, especially if the 'products' developed by each partner are then subjected to constructive feed-back by other partners.

75. There have been *important differences in the budgets* dedicated by DPs to transnationality (between 5% and 15%). Budget differences tend to be particularly important in R2 TNPs involving NMS DPs and this represents an obstacle to the implementation of TN activities,

as partners with low budgets cannot fully participate in TN activities. A solution has been to organise large events in the country with the lowest budget to save travel costs.

76. Three main formal models of *self-evaluation* have been identified: (a) An external evaluator is contracted for the evaluation of the whole TN partnership; (b) The evaluation of the TNP is organised internally; (c) The TN partners assess transnationality through their self-evaluation at DP level. The combination of a TN partnership level and of a DP level of evaluation is particularly rich and consistent with the orientation of transnationality in EQUAL. However, our case studies of R1 TNPs showed that self-evaluation reports were often delivered at the end of the TN project, which is of course of little use.

77. Many TN partnerships, in R1 and R2, focused their activities on the *structured exchange of information and experience*. This type of activity, when it has had continuity over time, has been highly successful, as it led to a widening of the scope of activity of each partner, to increased professional skills, and to the transfer and adoption of methods. Exchange of staff has also generally been a source of high satisfaction, both for the visitors and for the hosts. Structured visits have been an opportunity to see concretely other professional practices, and to reflect back upon one's own. As the TN project is developed on the basis of national projects, joint development has been less frequent and more difficult.

78. Although high starting commitment to transnational co-operation is desirable, we have shown that *motivation for transnationality* can increase over time when concrete benefits are derived from transnational work.

79. All NSS have provided, as a minimum: (a) *Basic collective guidance*: This includes guides on transnationality, translation or adaptation of the EC Guides; budgetary guidance; organisation of seminars with DPs. (b) *Individualised support to DP*: This kind of guidance was mostly provided in the preparation phase. But lack of human resources in the NSSs has been a serious issue in several MS and especially in the NMS.

80. The *guidance and co-ordination provided at the European level* has been regarded as useful in both rounds. The guides and handbooks on TN were generally received positively by DPs, MAs and NSSs. The ECDB was regarded as a helpful tool for partner search, although the quality and reliability of the information has been criticised in both rounds. The cooperation between MS intensified in R2 as it had been found to be insufficient in R1. A network of transnationality co-ordinators was set up and a series of seminars and conferences took place, which were assessed very positively by programme actors.

81. Overall the *added value* of transnationality has mainly derived from the learning processes it gave rise to. Direct contribution to innovation in domestic projects has not been frequently documented, but there is more evidence that transnationality impacted on the quality of DP activities. The structured exchange of experience as well as study visits and staff/beneficiary exchanges have generated learning and benchmarking. The development of 'European products' through joint development has not been frequent. However the more general benefits of transnational work for fostering a sense of European belonging should not, in our view, be undervalued.

Effectiveness and added value of the horizontal approach to equal opportunities

82. 'Equal Opportunities for all' is meant, in EQUAL, as equal access of all discriminated groups to each thematic field. In addition the EQUAL guidelines specified that 'within this horizontal approach, the promotion of equality between women and men will be integral to thematic fields in all four pillars as well as being targeted through specific actions in the fourth pillar.'

83. Only a few MS have conceived their programmes as addressing explicitly 'Equal Opportunities for all'.

84. Two MS both promoted 'gender equality' and 'diversity mainstreaming'[5]. The overlapping between both concepts created some difficulties for DPs.

85. DPs have tended to focus on specific discriminated or disadvantaged groups although this depended on the themes. For instance, theme 1A (facilitating access and return to the labour market) is more likely to include a wide variety of target groups as compared to other themes. As said above, some MS have reinforced the target group approach in R2. National evaluators have generally tended to see this as a positive development.

86. In a majority of MS, the notion of 'Equal Opportunities' has been interpreted as 'gender equality'. This does of course not mean that combating other forms of discrimination and inequalities have not been the focus of the Programme, but rather that this was not achieved as a transversal principle.

87. The implementation at DP level of the horizontal approach to *Equal Opportunities between men and women* has been disappointing. DPs found it difficult to define clear objectives and deficiencies were identified in the monitoring and evaluation of the equal opportunities approach (as said above, monitoring has been a more general weakness in the implementation of the programme). Nevertheless some evaluators assessed the implementation of the horizontal approach as globally positive (e.g. ES) or show that progress has been made (e.g. DE, FR). Improved guidance of MAs/NSSs has certainly contributed to an important degree to this progress.

88. In many MS, *more weight and attention has been given in R2* to equal opportunities between men and women, through the reinforcement of the horizontal approach towards equal opportunities between men and women, and/or through additional funding in the two equal opportunities themes. A number of MS have also reinforced guidance on gender mainstreaming.

89. Little is said in the evaluation reports about the *added value of the horizontal approach to 'Equal Opportunities for all'*. This is linked in our view to the difficulties that emerged to measure the effects of the implementation of this principle as well as in the clear preference of a target group approach in many MS. It is also linked to the lack of identification of the object of the evaluation and of what can be understood as efficient results.

90. *Concerning the added value of the horizontal approach to 'Equal Opportunities between men and women'*, the dual approach – horizontal and thematic – taken in EQUAL has resulted in probably more efforts and attention than if it had only been a transversal principle. However, in several cases, evaluators found that gender equality received little attention except in the two equal opportunities themes. Even in these themes, projects have tended to be more 'women focused' than 'gender focused'. Overall, compliance with this approach has tended to be disconnected from the other aspects of implementation of the projects, and the added value has remained limited. However, gender awareness, capacity building, and the knowledge on the causes of discrimination have been improved.

Effectiveness of networking, dissemination and mainstreaming at the national level

91. *Three main models have been developed for the organisation of mainstreaming at the national level*. In Model 1, horizontal mainstreaming[6] and vertical mainstreaming[7] are both under the responsibility of NTNs are at the core of the mainstreaming strategy. In Model 2, horizontal mainstreaming is under the responsibility of NTNs and vertical mainstreaming is the responsibility of the Monitoring Committee or of an ad-hoc Committee. Model 3 can be

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[5] The concept of 'diversity' refers to the view that sex, age, ethnical and social background, sexual orientation and functional disorder are all factors that can represent a barrier for employment and career prospects.

[6] *horizontal mainstreaming* is 'the transfer of lessons learnt to similar organisations'

[7] *vertical mainstreaming* is 'the transfer of lessons learnt and integration of all or part of results into policy and practice at the institutional, political, regulatory or administrative level'

seen as a combination of the last two. The choice to adopt Model 1, 2 or 3 may have been related with the time at which a mainstreaming strategy was launched at the national level. MS which went for an early launch and implementation of their mainstreaming strategy were better placed to adopt Model 1 or 3.

92. Whilst mechanisms facilitating the 'push' dimension[8] of mainstreaming have been set up in all MS, those promoting the 'pull' dimension[9] are less developed. In some MS, the pull dimension is addressed by a dedicated Mainstreaming Group in charge of collecting thematic requests from policy makers and establishing the thematic priorities for mainstreaming both on that basis and on the basis of DP work. Other MS have chosen to give their Monitoring Committee a responsibility for mainstreaming. Finally, in a few cases, MAs have taken a proactive role.

93. *National thematic networks* constitute the main networking vehicle at the national level. All R1 MS have set up such NTNs, although at different times since the beginning of the programme. Three networking strategies have been identified: (a) *to involve all DPs in national networking*, (b) to select DPs for their participation in thematic networking, and (c) a DP participation to NTNs on a *voluntary basis*.

94. The composition of NTNs is highly dependent on the role they are allocated. In particular, the *participation of non-EQUAL policy makers and multipliers* (e.g. the social partners) depends on whether NTNs are in charge of vertical mainstreaming or not. NTNs have been hesitant to involve policy makers external to EQUAL whilst there were not any concrete results to show.

95. Different *NTN management and co-ordination mechanisms* have also been adopted. In some cases they are chaired by high level policy/decision makers (i.e. former government ministers and key employers and trade union representatives); in other cases they are co-ordinated by DPs selected either through a call for tender; they are also sometimes directly coordinated by the MA, by the NSS and/or by appointed experts and facilitators.

96. Some *weaknesses* have been identified in the way in which NTNs operate, and in particular in the distribution of roles between NTNs and other programme actors. Whilst NTNs have played an important role to ensure the transfer of know-how and exchange between participants, they have faced more difficulties for the mobilisation of policy actors. On the other hand, vertical mainstreaming is quite a new way of envisaging policy making and it is unsurprising that knowledge and practical know-how are still lacking.

97. *Horizontal mainstreaming* has been more effective than vertical mainstreaming at DP as well as at programme level. Internal transfers between DP actors, as well as between some DP members and TN partners have been really effective, whereas mainstreaming towards the policy community has been more limited.

98. Although NTNs have been supportive of DP mainstreaming strategies in a few MS, there has been a *lack of programme support* to DPs in the implementation of Action 3 (transfer to policy and practice). As a result, Action 3 has been more focused on dissemination actions than on mainstreaming operations. In most cases, mainstreaming was interpreted as the communication of results achieved. Lack of funding has also been an obstacle to the mainstreaming of results by DPs.

99. More generally, mainstreaming, and particularly 'vertical' (i.e. policy) mainstreaming, is a complex task. In many MS, MAs and NSS recommended DPs the early identification of policy links and even the involvement of policy makers as partners quite early in the programme. In our view, it is certainly important to identify these key partners and to raise

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[8] *The push dimension* refers to a mechanism by which DPs 'seek to increase the visibility of their results with a view to transferring the latter to the other actors'

[9] T*he pull dimension* is 'a mechanism in which policy, decision makers or other key actors identify priorities within the experimental activities and follow their progress with a view to using the results'

their awareness on the programme early. However it is also important to involve them at the right time and for the right tasks, not too early and not too often, given their limited availability.

100. The creation of an ad-hoc group in charge of mainstreaming including key policy actors very early on at programme level, on the one hand, and adequate support to NTNs (adequate resources, clear objectives and methods), on the other hand, have been identified as factors likely to facilitate 'vertical mainstreaming'.

101. *Overall the contribution of the mainstreaming principle to the added value of the programme has so far been limited*: as pointed out by some national evaluators, 'most EQUAL achievements remain in the EQUAL Community', 'networking and mainstreaming have worked well inside EQUAL but had little impact outside'. However, following the Commission's second communication on EQUAL, the experience in R1, and the exchanges and guidance which have taken place at the European level, more attention is being given to the implementation of mainstreaming in R2.

Effectiveness of dissemination, networking and mainstreaming at the EU level

102. An intense networking activity has taken place at the EU and cross-national level in the last years. This networking has been concerned both with identifying, sharing and disseminating lessons derived from the DP initiatives in the 9 thematic fields and with facilitating the implementation of the EQUAL principles during EQUAL as well as their transfer to the 2007-2013 ESF programmes.

103. Until mid-2005, European thematic work has mainly been organised in the framework of European Thematic Groups (ETGs). These groups first played an important role as platform of exchange and 'voice' for DPs and TCPs at the European level, whilst in 2004, the priority became 'to validate the good practice from R1 in co-operation with the MS, and to synthesise these into policy messages'. The new structure for European Thematic work adopted in the meeting of MA of June 2005 is meant to address all of these successively adopted objectives – exchange, 'voice', validation of good practice and policy transfer.

104. Our assessment of *European networking and mainstreaming events in 2005* has been focused on the Warsaw conference (February 2005, 'Free Movement of Good Ideas', 400 participants), the Paris Agora (June 2005, 'Experience is Capital', more than 600 participants), and on the Madrid Policy Forum (June 2005, 'Gender Equality: a key to change', 270 participants), and more particularly on the latter. Both the Warsaw Conference and the Paris Agora can be considered more as dissemination and networking fora than as platforms for mainstreaming. However, it cannot be doubted that the Paris Agora took place in a stream of events and policy communications (outside EQUAL), both in FR and in Europe, which have contributed to raising the issue of 'age management' at the top of the employment policy agenda.

105. *The Madrid Policy Forum has demonstrated the interest of organising more focused thematic events, bringing together practitioners and policy-makers*. The design of the conference and its methodology made it possible for participants to derive concrete lessons and in some cases concrete inputs for their policy agenda and/or professional practice, even though this could only be a first step. In particular, the advocate/user methodology (presentation of DP practices by a DP 'advocate' to a potential 'user' who asks questions) has been useful and has been usually well assessed. The policy briefs were also found very useful, as they present syntheses of practices by various DPs instead of focusing on single examples. However, participants found a lack of independent analyses of the transferability potential of the good practice which was presented to them. They also called for more continuity, a report on the event, the organisation of further, even more focused events, on issues addressed in the Forum.

106. From mid-2005 onwards, the *new approach* is that of European Commission grants to Member States for the organisation of various types of events. By March 2006, a total of 30 expressions of interest had been put forward by Member States, and validated. This falls within the Commission's objectives. 12 'old' and 4 'new' Member States expressed interest. New Member States have thus so far been less numerous in putting forward their proposals, which seems logical given their more recent entry in the programme. Most events are thematic in outlook.

107. The *predominance of exchange events* amongst the events planned is to be noted, as their aim is rather vague (sharing of good practice) at this stage of the programme. However, *policy fora*, more focused on mainstreaming, also form an important share of the events planned. What seems most relevant for making a policy impact is the combination of various types of events in a given theme or on a given issue, with a planned progression: this is for example the case for the re-integration of ex offenders and for 'entrepreneurship for all' (business creation). Planning progress in mainstreaming through related events also means inviting at least partly the same participants to these events, as shown by our analysis of the Madrid forum. It would be hardly thinkable to mobilise MAs for inviting each time new participants for little less than 30 events programmed over 18 months.

108. *Collaboration with other units and DGs of the European Commission* is another mainstreaming instrument. However, with European Commission Units in charge of other programmes and financial instruments, collaboration has mainly tended towards the co-ordination between programmes. With the Policy Units, more direct contribution by EQUAL has been identified in the case of focused units (e.g. disability, demography) than in the case of general policies such as the Employment Strategy. The efforts recently made by the EQUAL unit for a more systematic cross-unit communication have been greatly appreciated.

109. The construction of a *European repository of transferable good practices* has also been planned by the EQUAL Unit in agreement with the Managing Authorities. The database will include good practice of the national databases.

110. One of the functions of the ETGs had been the *collection and validation of good practice* in view of their further dissemination and mainstreaming. This was attempted through the production of 29 policy briefs and 30 'success stories' of individual DPs. Despite the considerable difficulties associated with identifying, gathering, and validating good practice, the intensity of collective work in the working groups of the European Thematic Groups (until the end of 2004) and expert input succeeded in making the production of these documents possible. However the new focus on success stories (away from the policy briefs) serves more a dissemination purpose than a pro-active mainstreaming strategy.

111. Despite the fact that some of the cases presented as success stories were also identified by national evaluators as innovative practices, it should also be pointed out that there is a gap between the overall impression stemming from reading the policy briefs and success stories, on the one hand, and the results and impacts identified so far by national evaluators, on the other hand, these being more limited. This shows the need for an update of the policy briefs for the gathering of concrete evidence of results.

112. *European and cross-national facilitation of the implementation of the EQUAL principles has also been provided.* Our assessment has focused on their usefulness for the NMS, as they were the prime targeted beneficiaries. The relevance of EU-level support mechanisms and tools including guides were stressed with extreme clarity by the NMS Managing Authorities, and this is an important lesson for future programming.
    - *Bi-lateral co-operation*: Advice sought from other MA and NSS has been crucial at all stages – and could probably only be provided by national programme actors which had passed through the same processes and asked the same questions.

- *The mechanisms – events, products – set up at EU-level for support to the implementation of the key principles of EQUAL* have been assessed as highly relevant and useful. This has been especially important for the facilitation of transnationality.

113. The decision not to pursue EQUAL in the next ESF programming phase was accompanied by a decision to provide space for the 'mainstreaming' of the key principles of the Community Initiative. On the basis of an ad-hoc meeting of the ESF Committee in June 2005, 4 working groups of MS were set up, with a view to drafting reflection notes on the best ways to integrate the principles in planning the new ESF programmes. Four reflection notes were produced, and served as background documents for seminars mainly targeting ESF negotiators at the national level. These working documents and the seminars have generally been well assessed by ESF Heads of mission. Following presentations to the ESF Committee, the final versions of the reflection notes have been distributed widely and will also be used by the Commission for assessing the 2007-2013 programme proposals.

114. Nevertheless, our survey of ESF Heads of Mission in March-April 2006 showed that *the legacy of EQUAL has been interpreted and capitalised upon in very different ways in the different Member States* and that architecture of the ESF programmes is likely to be very diverse. The partnership principle and the gender equality principle are the ones where options are less varied, but the implementation of innovation and, above all, of transnationality is foreseen in highly diverging ways. This is of course a special cause for concern in the case of transnationality where decisions made by MS have effects not only for their own programmes but for those of others. See our recommendations below.

Potential and initial impacts of EQUAL at the EU level and across Member States

115. Overall it is still difficult at this stage to form a fair view of the impacts achieved by EQUAL in the different Member States. Many DPs were still at the beginning or in the midst of their Action 3 (transfer and mainstreaming) projects at the time of evaluation fieldwork. Institutional impacts have by far been the most documented. Impact on policies are said by most evaluators to be limited, however quite significant examples have been provided. There is a notable lack of reporting on impacts on organisations (other than partner organisations). Impacts can be said to still be very much local in scope.

116. Drawing on the work of the European Thematic Groups, on our review of national evaluation reports as well as on our own fieldwork, we have nevertheless identified innovations and their potential or initial impacts in areas of relevance for the European Employment Strategy, the Social Inclusion process and other Community strategies and programmes. We have related these achievements (innovations and impacts) to those of the Integrated Guidelines where we thought they made a contribution, as well as to the relevant Social Inclusion objective and other European strategies and programmes.

117. *Potential and initial impacts on Integrated Guideline 15* (Promote a more entrepreneurial culture and create a supportive environment for SMEs):
- Reinforced support mechanisms and access to finance in existing business support centres and creation of new integrated support centres: 'non traditional' entrepreneurs, especially women (e.g. in remote rural areas) have been drawn in the business creation process. In some Member States (ES, UKgb) there is evidence that some of these initiatives have secured or are in the process of securing mainstream funding. However, the 'opening up of the business creation to all', which was supposed to be an important added value of EQUAL with regard to the Guideline has not been well documented so far with regard to access of marginalised and vulnerable people, and questions have been raised as to the relevance of such an objective.
- Creation of second level networks, i.e. networks between business support centres or between social enterprises, which have contributed to the professionalisation of their members.

- Recognition of the social economy as an economic sector rather than only as a vehicle for the labour market reintegration of vulnerable people: new support structures, such as offices of social entrepreneurship and social franchising systems, have been developed. The status of 'social co-operatives' (an Italian institution) has been taken up in GR and SE. Governance arrangements were improved, particularly with regard to the place of social enterprises in public procurement. Many of these developments have good sustainability prospects – indeed some of them are already institutionalised.

118. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 18* (Promote a lifecycle approach to work) as well as for *the European Strategy for Equality Between Men And Women*:
- Integrated strategies and mechanisms for gender equality and occupational desegregation: there is some evidence of cross-national impacts. For example the NL campaign on gender roles ('Wie doet wat?'), which has been presented in various international fora, has already attracted the attention of other MS and the BEnl ministry of Equal Opportunities is due to launch a similar campaign in 2007. Impacts of such integrated strategies on employers, however, have so far not been well documented.
- Resource centres on women's training and employment in scientific and technical professions: EQUAL has given rise to the creation and institutionalisation of such centres in GR and the UKgb.
- Creation of new integrated and quality approaches to care: EQUAL has contributed a number of initiatives achieving the virtuous circle recommended at the EU level in terms of support services in the care sector – i.e. providing more flexible care allowing for the labour market participation of women and at the same time creating employment for women in particular. However, some (not all) EQUAL initiatives in this field have made a difference in that they have also qualified the staff recruited (for example, to the level of care assistants) and sought to improve the quality of employment in the sector (e.g. new collective agreement in AT). Many of these initiatives have now secured mainstream funding.

119. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 19* (Ensure inclusive labour markets, enhance work attractiveness, and make work pay for job-seekers, including disadvantaged people and inactive) as well as for the *European Refugee Fund* and *future anti-discrimination actions*:
- Take up of new methodologies and new roles in existing centres of support to asylum seekers – paying particular attention to outreach activities, the stability of staff, and language and skills upgrading methodologies. In many cases these initiatives are sustainable as the reception centres concerned participated in the development partnerships (significant examples have been documented in Scotland and IE).
- Integrated strategies and new resources targeting employers for the integration and retention of migrant workers and members of ethnic minorities (Corporate Social Responsibility campaigns, codes of conduct, self-diagnoses, creation of roles of 'intercultural mediator'): evidence of significant and sustained results at employer level has so far mainly been provided in the media /creative sector (GR, UKgb).

120. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 20* (Improve matching of labour market needs):
- Multi-agency approaches to improve the interface between the (long-term) unemployed or other benefit recipients and the institutions and agencies in charge of delivering employment policy and benefits (significant sustainable examples of such institutional co-operation mechanisms have been provided in IE).
- Diversification of gateways to employment, for example through the creation of new temping arrangements for specific groups (low qualified people in BEfrg, people with disabilities in AT), through the promotion of self-employment (for people with disabilities in AT), or the promotion of telework (for people with disabilities in DE).
- Creation and sustainability of networks involving labour market integration agencies, non profit organisations and employers in sectors facing recruitment difficulties (e.g.

construction) for the upskilling and recruitment of long-term unemployed people. Examples have been provided in FI and the UKgb.

121. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guideline 21* (Promote flexibility combined with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation, having due regard to the role of social partners):
   - New forms of work organisation allowing for a better 'work/life balance': there is some evidence of such schemes and of their effects with public or semi-public employers, although evidence is still lacking on the impact of such schemes in the private sector. What is remarkable about some of the schemes highlighted by the national evaluators (e.g. in FR) is that work-family balance is not used as a device to introduce more employer-led flexibility (part-time contracts which increasingly contribute to forming a stratum of working poor, especially amongst women) but can be arranged and combined with full-time employment.
   - Initiatives for anticipating and accompanying industrial change both through local regeneration partnerships, economic actions, and upskilling and qualifying mature workers: the shipbuilding industry, for example, has benefited in 3 MS (FR, GR, IT).

122. *Potential and initial impacts on Employment Guidelines 23* (Expand and improve investment in human capital) *and 24* (Adapt education and training systems in response to new competence requirements) as well as for the programmes of DG Education and Culture:
   - Dissemination of new methodologies for encouraging low skilled workers' participation in training: impacts have been scattered but some of them are significant (take up of the job rotation methodology in IE for upskilling both the unemployed and low skilled workers, workplace learning agreements in the retail sector in the UKgb with the participation of unionists as 'brokers' of learning).
   - Use of ICT to increase access to learning for people considered as 'disengaged learners' or facing physical barriers to traditional learning: there is evidence of an institutional sustainability of such schemes, through their accreditation.

123. *Initiatives informing the Social Inclusion process*:

EQUAL has promoted local multi-stakeholder partnerships to tackle not only employment issues but also the underpinning attitudes and behaviours of employers leading to the discrimination of employees or jobseekers. New co-operative mechanisms for tackling social exclusion have also been set up. This has probably been one of the major areas of achievement of EQUAL.

In particular we have noted:
   - The creation and sustainability of new networks for tackling worklessness in a more holistic and client centred way, and the design of multilevel and multifaceted strategies to counter discrimination (especially racial and gender discrimination), involving actors located in different institutional and organisational settings.
   - Multi-agency work for an improved interface and 'empowerment' of people suffering from social disadvantage and discrimination. Sustainable initiatives have been documented in the area of support to drug users, the labour market re-integration of prisoners and ex offenders etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation-oriented recommendations in the New Member States for R2, applied to EQUAL implementation in the period 2006-2008

124. In order to improve the *management of EQUAL* at national level, we recommend for New Member States :

- To clarify programme management roles, enhance the co-ordination between the MA & NSSs and organise joint training of NSS/ MA staff to reduce the share of inexperienced people, staff turn-over and increase the quality of the cooperation NSS/ MA;
- To simplify administrative procedures and processes and to make them more transparent and understandable by all;
- To enhance qualitative guidance and support to DPs.

125. We also recommend for the European Commission *more EU-level facilitation and cross-MS support to NMS Managing Authorities* for the last years of implementation of EQUAL, in the following areas:
- Monitoring and evaluation of the added value of transnationality;
- Organisation of the call for proposal for Action 3 (transfer to policy and practice);
- Best practice of 'old' MS for mainstreaming (especially vertical mainstreaming) and for thematic networking;
- Bilateral co-operation with other MS in thematic networks;
- Capitalising the results of EQUAL for the new programmes;
- Capacity building on evaluation, including self-evaluation; and
- Methodologies and indicators for project monitoring.

Evaluation-oriented recommendations applied to EQUAL implementation in the 2006-2008 period

126. At national level, three areas are especially recommended for evaluation in MS :

127. The *evaluation of innovation* should:
- Include an assessment of the incidence of innovation: Are there new developments with regard to the state of the art in given areas of policy development, sectors or territories?
- Include an assessment of the conditions of emergence of innovation.
- Include an assessment of the quality of innovation: potential relevance; effectiveness; added value as compared with existing policies and practices; feasibility/sustainability; and mainstreaming potential/capacity.
- Be carried out both at programme level and by theme.
- Be based on the analysis of DP sources (applications, DP work programmes, monitoring reports, case study interviews with co-ordinator, partners, and beneficiaries) as well as on interviews with experts of the fields concerned.

128. The *evaluation of mainstreaming* should:
- Include an assessment of the interpretation of the concept of mainstreaming by programme actors and by DPs;
- Include an assessment of the mechanisms set up to make the concept operational;
- Include an assessment of the relevance, comprehensiveness, feasibility and sustainability of the mainstreaming strategy at the programme level;
- Include an assessment of the organisation of the mainstreaming strategy at DP and Programme management level;
- Include an assessment of the programme level mechanisms to assess and validate DP good practice;
- Include an assessment of the results of vertical and horizontal mainstreaming.
- Be carried out both at programme level and by theme.
- Be based on interviews with programme actors and DPs as well as on interviews with policy makers, multipliers and key potential users of EQUAL results.

129. The *evaluation of impacts* at MS level should:
- Include an assessment of policy impacts: impacts on employment, inclusion and anti-discrimination policies and impacts on policy making;
- Include an assessment of institutional impacts: impacts on labour market intermediation; on the education and training system; support to business creation; impacts on the regulatory work arrangements;

- Include an assessment of organisational impacts: impacts on employers – public, private for profit or private non profit.
- Be carried out both at programme level and by theme.
- Be based on a review of DP and NTN material, interviews of actual and potential users of EQUAL results and with experts of the field.
- Beneficiary data should be used to assess the actual outreach of the programme (by theme).
- Cross-national impact evaluation studies could be interesting on specific issues.

130. The *evaluation process in the NMS* could be strengthened by:
- Paying more attention to the extent to which the programme communication strategy, the selection process have contributed to shape the implementation of the programme; to facilitating factors, obstacles and problems in programme management; to the distribution of roles between programme actors; and to the performance of the NSSs.
- Giving more emphasis to qualitative evaluation methods (e.g. case studies including interviews with all partners, with external stakeholders/potential users of DP lessons, and including focus groups with beneficiaries).
- Adjusting timeframes and budgets to the evaluation objectives, scope and methods, as too limited budgets and timeframes are not conducive to quality results.

Recommendations for mainstreaming of EQUAL lessons in future programmes

131. In terms of *orientations for future programmes*, we recommend:
- To identify those policy areas most likely to benefit from innovative projects and to recognise potential barriers to policy mainstreaming at an early stage;
- To consider setting up dedicated programmes and/or measures directly targeting employers and employed workers, especially the most vulnerable, and to be proactive in seeking to attract suitable promoters with a good knowledge of and good links to employers;
- To consider setting up dedicated programmes for tackling in-work inequalities, especially in terms of employment and work conditions;
- To encourage initiatives improving work/life balance in the workplace, with due regard to the quality of employment contracts and wages.

132. In terms of future *programme management*, we recommend:
- To carefully design the launch of the programmes in order to attract suitable applicants - suitable meaning with the right mix of skills over time and/or with a clear capacity building strategy (especially if relatively new areas of intervention are selected);
- In the calls for innovative projects, to consider the following selection criteria: potential relevance, added value, feasibility and mainstreaming potential;
- To consider imposing requirements concerning starting diagnoses, monitoring systems and self-assessment procedures, especially for innovative projects, and to review compliance at selection stage;
- To consider organising an 'Action 1' (preparatory phase) in the future programmes and to organise guidance and support accordingly;
- To organise support structures and prepare staff so as to ensure administrative and financial support; ongoing support on demand; and systematic proactive actions aiming at professionalisation of project teams;
- To organise distinct programme level monitoring systems for innovative projects and for mainstream projects with more qualitative indicators for innovative projects, and more attention on changes in structure and systems than in assistance to persons. We recommend setting up working groups involving the European Commission, the Managing Authorities, statisticians as well as former promoters of innovative projects (e.g. EQUAL promoters, Article 6 promoters) in order to ensure the relevance, user-friendliness, feasibility, usefulness and reliability of future monitoring systems. Finally training and support should be provided to project promoters and partners in future

programmes, not only on the use of the monitoring software for data entry and update, but also on how to exploit results.

- The European Commission should consider taking over a coordinating role for the different types of transnational cooperation within the Programmes.
- To consider when designing programme sections or sub-programmes on transnationality that transnational projects can be planned by project applicants as own project or simultaneously with national projects.
- To ensure sufficient resources for transnational cooperation.
- To dedicate priorities to equal opportunities between men and women as well as to ensure that Gender Mainstreaming is implemented as a crosscutting horizontal principle in the Programme as a whole.
- To organise programme level monitoring systems that include indicators for Gender Mainstreaming

133. In terms of *evaluation systems*, we recommend to maintain the three levels of evaluation experienced in EQUAL (European, national, project level) and to learn from their strengths and weaknesses:
- Cross-national evaluation should focus on specific subjects and fields of intervention; European evaluators should have the possibility to conduct their own field work in the Member States; exchange on evaluation methodologies and results should be organised at the European level; twinning and multilateral exchange between national authorities should take place on evaluation issues;
- At the national level, the scope of evaluations should include all dimensions and phases of programme management; the formative role of national evaluators should be maintained and reinforced; the evaluation timeframe has to be planned to allow for an evaluation of impacts;
- At project level, it is crucial to require project self-assessment and monitoring and to train project managers and partners accordingly.

134. Concerning the *mainstreaming of the EQUAL principles* in the next generation of European Social Fund and possibly other programmes, we recommend:
- *For the organisation of the partnership and empowerment principles*: to clarify whether partnerships are a means to achieve an objective or whether they are an objective per se as well (creation of new governance mechanisms). If it the former, a good skill mix has to be ensured over time – with possibly different partners at different phases; if it is the latter, a good representation of all stakeholders has to be ensured as well. Make sure that the planned involvement of each partner is based on a credible and feasible assessment of their potential contribution, skills and availability. Promote the idea of differentiated involvement, so as to avoid to deter private sector participation;
- *For the organisation of transnationality*: transnational projects should be planned directly as such or simultaneously with national projects, rather than as an 'added-on' once national projects have already been designed. Structured exchanges between local actors should also be made possible. Ensure adequate resources. Organise close co-ordination between all the Member States funding transnational partnerships and co-operation, so that there may be a minimum number of common issues, co-ordinated time schedules for the calls, and common instruments (partner search database);
- *For the organisation of innovation*: plan a 'laboratory function' in all programmes, which will allow for a clear distinction to be made between innovative projects and more 'mainstream' projects. Clarify the rationales for organising an innovation function in the programmes (making existing policies more effective, making them more inclusive, exploring new policy fields) so as to draw the implications in terms of likely applicants and needs for project guidance. Organise training and guidance on experimental approaches (research, monitoring, evaluation etc.);
- Partnerships working with highly vulnerable people sometimes hesitate to pilot experimental schemes and prefer to innovate 'on the margins' in order not to take the risk of having to face an absence of further funding with dramatic consequences for the

beneficiaries. A clear positioning of innovation in the future programmes on policy areas where there is an explicit demand for new developments will help reduce that risk. In addition, Managing Authorities may decide to grant support to experimental projects targeting highly marginalised groups even without clear policy take up perspectives: increased support and direct help by programme actors to accompany such projects in their mainstreaming strategy has then to be foreseen;

- *For the organisation of equal opportunities*: maintain the dual approach taken in EQUAL (dedicated priorities and cross-cutting horizontal principle). Indicators should be developed for monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming. We also recommend the organisation of training on gender mainstreaming and the appointment of gender mainstreaming specialists at project level;

- *For the organisation of national mainstreaming*: programme actors should clarify their expectations with regard to the mainstreaming of innovation and define early comprehensive mainstreaming strategies, including 'horizontal' and 'vertical' mainstreaming and the 'pull' and 'push' dimensions. We also strongly recommend the organisation of regional networking and mainstreaming mechanisms. Finally we recommend the development of monitoring of mainstreaming activities and results at programme and project levels; and the training of programme actors, so that they can adequately support project promoters.

135. Concerning the *organisation of networking and mainstreaming mechanisms at the European level*, we recommend, for the future European Social Fund programmes in particular:

- *To maintain the double focus* (thematic and organisational) of networking adopted in EQUAL (in addition to the country desks).

- *For thematic networking*: to agree with Member States on a limited number of policy issues for which some or all of them are interested in mutual learning, networking and, possibly, lobbying. To organise networking at various levels (between national authorities, other stakeholders, project promoters, as well as between the members of national thematic networks), with continuity over time and with clear purposes (preferably common production and/or pushing a policy agenda). To back this up with stable European expertise in the fields concerned as well as with dedicated co-ordination and follow-up in the European Commission. The appointed experts should be asked, as in EQUAL, to produce policy analyses and cross-national thematic analyses of project practices and results on the basis of agreed criteria and with sufficient resources for carrying out their own field assessments.

- *For organisational networking*: networking on the implementation of the principles in the Member States will be made more difficult given the lack of common definitions and modes of implementation. It will be all the more important to organise cross-national exchange on the interpretation of the principles and on their concrete translation into selection criteria, so as to compare models of implementation and inform the Mid-term reviews. Facilitation at the European level is required, also with a view to capitalise on the know-how and knowledge acquired in the previous Community Initiatives.

- *A co-ordination role for the European Commission in matters of transnationality is absolutely essential*. This co-ordination role is even more important as more possible ways of exchange and collaboration are intended. Member States need to agree on a minimum set of common issues on which transnational projects can be funded.

136. Concerning innovative practices which could be recommended for taking on board in other programmes, we have explained earlier the limitations, at this stage, for the identification of innovative practices and of their emerging impacts. The policy briefs prepared by the European Thematic Groups had provided a much more comprehensive picture than the one we feel entitled and legitimate to give: *we would therefore strongly recommend the update of the existing policy briefs in order to take better account of the project results now*

available. Nevertheless, and with these limitations in mind, we would recommend the practices presented in points 116-122 above for capitalisation and further support.