

## THE EVALUATION PROCESS IN EQUAL

### 1. GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Evaluation is a guarantee of progress, accountability and effectiveness of European programmes and funds. It runs at project, local, regional, national and Europe-wide levels and is an important task for all the responsible actors. The professional independent evaluators have a key role to play.

The European Social Fund evaluation follows articles 40-43 of [Regulation \(EC\) 1260/1999](#), that set out the requirements for evaluating the Community Initiative programmes. Within this framework, in the EQUAL initiative for the period 2000-2006 the national mid-term evaluations were launched in **2001** (upon adoption of the Programme Decisions) by the Managing Authorities of the old Member States. In parallel, the Commission contracted an independent consultant in order to carry out an evaluation at EU-level, based on the results of the national evaluation reports, and on own analysis and field work.

In defining their national evaluations, Member States were requested to synchronise delivery dates, to follow a common methodological approach, and to focus on common issues in order to exploit synergies between national and EU evaluations. Chapter 10 of the [EQUAL guidelines 'Free movement of ideas' COM\(2003\) 840 final](#)<sup>1</sup> resumed the situation and the remaining tasks for the Evaluation of EQUAL in December **2003**.

National mid-term evaluation reports were submitted to the Commission in December **2003**, and served in the preparation of the EU-wide evaluation. This evaluation focused on the implementation of [action 1](#) (selection procedures, partnership development and the trans-national partner search), and early elements of [action 2](#) (implementation phase) and [action 3](#) (dissemination and mainstreaming) as well as other trans-national activities. Interim Reports were submitted in December **2004**. By December **2005** the old Member States submitted Update Mid-Term Reports. These 2005 reports had to meet the requirements of the update of the mid-term report according to the provisions of Regulation 1260/1999.

Also new Member States submitted interim Evaluation Reports by the end of **2005**. These reports focus on management systems, programme implementation dynamics, monitoring systems, selection procedures and implementation of *Action 1*, in line with the Commission recommendation in the Communication (2003) 840.

Similarly, at the starting up of the EQUAL Community Initiative, [terms of reference](#) were defined in order to launch a EU-Wide Mid-Term Evaluation of EQUAL. Different reports have already been issued that can be found on the [Evaluation pages](#) of the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions establishing the Guidelines for the second round of the Community Initiative EQUAL concerning trans-national co-operation to promote new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities in connection with the labour market*

## 2. EQUAL EVALUATION FOCUS AND WHAT IS NEXT

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According to Chapter 10 of the EQUAL guidelines, the evaluation of EQUAL needs to reflect its experimental approach and therefore covers not only the classical evaluation dimensions such as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, utility and sustainability, but also focuses on the processes, support structures and policy delivery systems. The [Guidelines for monitoring and evaluating EQUAL](#)<sup>2</sup> gave the general framework and are applicable all along the programming period. In order to effectively extract the good practice and mainstream it, it is important to maintain an evaluation function in all actions of EQUAL, and an observatory function to integrate experience and evidence generated elsewhere.

The Communication encouraged Member States to continue their evaluation activities beyond the formal requirements of the Regulation, with a focus on identifying factors contributing to the success (or failure) of innovation, the mainstreaming of results, and sustainability, but in concrete the Communication doesn't say what to do in old Member States after 2005.

Instead, for the new Member States it affirms that ongoing evaluation will facilitate learning processes among all stakeholders involved and will contribute to capacity building within the public sector. It adds that *"in an innovative, trans-national programme like EQUAL it is important that new Member States make use of the 2004-2006 period to build and develop capacity to carry out evaluation of the programmes and to draw lessons for the 2007-2013 programming period"*.

The Commission produced a number of methodological documents and guides and organised seminars and partnership meetings, etc. between 2000 and 2005.

Finally, on the basis of the evaluation results and no later than three years after the end of the programming period (31/12/2009) the Commission will have concluded the ex-post evaluation, in collaboration with the Member States and the Managing Authorities (this refers to all Member States). Ex post evaluation will cover the utilisation of resources, the effectiveness and efficiency of the assistance and its impact. It will draw conclusions regarding policy on economic and social cohesion and will cover the factors contributing to the success or failure of implementation and the achievements and results, including their sustainability.

There is no legal obligation for evaluation activities for the period 2006-2008 (except the obligation established by the Regulation for the ex-post evaluation), still, in order to guide better the evaluation activities in EQUAL, the Commission is discussing since May 2005 with the Management Authorities a series of evaluation topics proposed via some key documents. A distinction is made between old and new Member States. Based on the consultation with all MAs about evaluation plans and/or intentions for 2006-2008, a document was presented at the Coordination Meeting of the Management Authorities the 27/10/05 in order to start preparing an agreement so as to ensure that EQUAL implementation at DP, national or EU-level between now and the end of the activities will be evaluated in a consistent and comparable way and that a common baseline for the ex-post evaluation will be set with coherent contributions from all Member States and the Commission. The evaluation topics were agreed for 2006 and also it was agreed to start with further discussion at a seminar to be held on the 24 of February 2006 and onwards for the evaluation topics for 2007 and 2008.

## 3. THE SUPPORT TO THE REMAINING EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

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The Commission intends to support the process of EQUAL Evaluation in the period 2006-2008 through various activities, including;

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<sup>2</sup> "Guidelines for systems of monitoring and evaluation for the Human Resources Initiative EQUAL in the period 2000 – 2006". DG Employment and Social affairs, July 2000.

- The Seminar of 24 February 2006 which would discuss the modalities for the monitoring and evaluation process of EQUAL from 2006 onwards.
- Network/platform of EQUAL evaluation stakeholders for coordination, expertise, knowledge sharing and capacity building
- EQUAL Evaluation Partnership meeting in Brussels on 16 June 2006
- Evaluation seminar in the fourth quarter of 2006 in collaboration with the Management Authority in the Czech Republic to capitalise and share best practices of the EQUAL evaluation methods and indicators used both by national and EU-wide EQUAL evaluators.