

# **Mid-term Evaluation Report on EQUAL Community Initiative Programme Document**

## **FINAL REPORT**

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# Summary

This Evaluation Report analyses the progress in implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative since its approval on July 7, 2004 until July 31, 2005.

Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily correspond with opinions of EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority in the Slovak Republic and of European Commission.

## *Historical context*

Support and strengthening of development of less developed regions or those most affected by structural changes is among the priorities of the Slovak Government's regional policy.

The National Development Plan is a basic programming document for implementation of structural and regional policy of SR for the period 2004-2006. It provides a complex overview on the current situation of regions in the Slovak Republic and barriers to their development. It defines development priorities and the means of their achievement. It includes objectives, strategy and underlying financial and implementation framework. It also contains characteristics of elaborated sectoral operational programmes and Operational programme Basic Infrastructure as well as characteristics of other programming document with allocated financial aid from the European Union.

The European EQUAL Community Initiative, operating within the framework of European Employment Strategy forms one of Community's initiatives focusing on elimination and alleviation of all forms of discrimination and inequality on the labour market. Moreover, it provides the opportunity for development, verification and application of new integrated approaches, the results of which are to be incorporated into employment and inclusion policy formation of the Slovak Republic. As part of this Initiative, all Member States have agreed on common thematic fields, on which they wish to cooperate, and to learn from one another. The Commission also formulated principles, acceptance of which forms one of the basic conditions for participation in solutions within the EQUAL Community Initiative.

## *Objectives*

The strategic goal for the EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia is to enhance efficiency of the tools, methods and procedures for addressing the challenges in the field of discrimination and inequalities at labour market through searching for innovative solutions of their operation.

Within the global goal for the EQUAL Community Initiative, specific objectives representing targets of particular measures selected have been identified below:

- Reduced unemployment of marginal groups and promoting their integration in the labour market.
- Enhanced conditions for minorities for seeking for the opportunities to find a job at labour market
- Strengthening the role of the NGO sector in the field of provision of public services
- Support the establishment of an environment which motivates the HR development
- Strengthening the equal principle regarding opportunities within the labour market
- Assistance provision to asylum-seekers in their social and vocational integration
- Ensuring conditions for a successful implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia

## Current state

### Financial progress

Following tables show current state of the financial progress in EQUAL Community Initiative implementation by July 31, 2005:

Programme Document	Allocated Funds SF+SB in SKK	Volume of Selected Applications in SKK	Volume of Selected Applications in %	Volume of Contracted Funds in SKK	Volume of Contracted Funds in %	Volume of Funds Paid Out in SKK	Volume of Funds Paid Out in %
EQUAL Measures	1 205 054 903	1 202 540 970	99.79	1 198 540 970	99.46	0	0.00
EQUAL Technical Assistance	104 787 390	104 787 390	100.00	2 873 763	2.74	2 873 763	2.74
<b>EQUAL total</b>	<b>1 309 842 293</b>	<b>1 307 328 360</b>	<b>99.81</b>	<b>1 201 414 733</b>	<b>91.72</b>	<b>2 873 763</b>	<b>0.22</b>

The total EQUAL Community Initiative allocation from the Structural Funds and from the State Budget is SKK 1 309 842 293. Thereof there is SKK 1 205 054 903 allocated for measures and SKK 104 787 390 for technical assistance.

The total volume of applications approved within the EQUAL Community Initiative is SKK 1 307 328 360, which is 99.81 % out of the total allocation. Thereof there are applications approved in the total of SKK 1 202 540 970, which is 99.70 % out of the funds allocated for measures. There are SKK 104 787 390 approved for technical assistance, which is 100 % out of the funds allocated for technical assistance.

The total volume of funds contracted (signed contracts) within the EQUAL Community Initiative is SKK 1 201 414 733, which is 91.72 % out of the total allocation. Thereof there are contracts with final beneficiaries in the total of SKK 1 198 540 970, which is 99.46 % out of the funds allocated for measures. There are SKK 2 873 763 contracted for technical assistance, which is 2.74 % out of the funds allocated for technical assistance.

The total volume of funds paid out in line with signed contracts is SKK 2 873 763, which is 0.22 % out of the total allocation. So far, there were no payments made within measures. There were SKK 2 873 763 paid out to technical assistance.

Programme Document	Allocated Funds SF+SB in SKK	Number of Submitted Applications	Volume of Submitted Applications in SKK	Number of Selected Applications	Volume of Selected Applications in SKK	Number of Signed Contracts	Volume of Signed Contracts in SKK
EQUAL Measures	1 205 054 903	161	3 114 626 616	101	1 202 540 970	100	1 198 540 970
EQUAL Technical Assistance	104 787 390	4	104 787 390	4	104 787 390	4	2 873 763
<b>EQUAL total</b>	<b>1 309 842 293</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>3 219 414 006</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>1 307 328 360</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>1 201 414 733</b>

The total number of applications submitted under the EQUAL Community Initiative is 165 in the total volume of SKK 3 219 414 006. Thereof there were 161 proposals applying for SKK 3 114 626 616 from the allocation for measures and 4 technical assistance proposals in the total volume of SKK 104 787 390.

There were 105 project proposals approved in the total volume of SKK 1 307 328 360. Thereof there were 101 projects in the total of SKK 1 307 328 360 approved under measures and 4 proposals in the total of SKK 104 787 390 approved under technical assistance.

By July 31, 2005, there were 104 contracts signed (1 applicant backed out of his proposal) in the total volume of SKK 1 201 414 733. Thereof there were 100 contracts (1 applicant backed out of his proposal) signed with applicants for the support from measures in the total volume of SKK 1 198 540 970 and 4 contracts in the total volume of SKK 2 873 763 signed with technical assistance.

### *Physical progress*

Following table shows current state of the physical progress in EQUAL Community Initiative implementation by July 31, 2005:

Call for proposals	Deadline for submitting proposals	Assessment of the proposals by Evaluation Committee	Evaluation confirmed by Minister's signature	Preparation phase		Implementation phase	
				Action 1	Action 2	Action 1	Action 2
24.5.2005	15.10.2004	15.11. – 26.11.2004 22.11. – 3.12.2004	22.12.2004	January – July 2005		since July 2005	

### *Conclusions*

Primarily it is necessary to highlight the efforts of all responsible people both in Slovakia and Brussels to improve the first implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia.

The evaluation of financial progress is positive.

We appreciate the active approach of EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority towards following activities:

- Very active efforts to increase the relevance of implementation in line with identified problems or needs by improving the structure of development partnerships. To avoid certain risks, the structure of development partnerships has been balanced in most cases. In the concrete, the development partnerships of non-profit organisations and businesses have been extended by municipalities, Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office, high schools and universities.
- Efficiency of the input – results process. However, the early stage of implementation allows solely a positive estimation based on successful efforts of the Managing Authority to effect advance payments to entitled applicants. That should be really helpful.
- Concerning the efficiency of the implementation, we really appreciate the endeavour of the Managing Authority to cut overpriced budgets. In many cases the efficiency was increased by cutting proposed budget whereas planned activities remained unchanged (the comparison of projects approved in France and in Slovakia showed that in Slovakia there were - with respect to the total allocation - three times more applications approved than in France. On our opinion, it is positive.)
- Another positive estimation concerns the impacts of the results achieved by implementing the EQUAL Community Initiative. Seeing that there is a direct link to relevant employment strategy resulting from the structure of development partnerships, we expect improvement of identified problems.
- Experimental nature of the EQUAL Community Initiative does not imply the permanent sustainability of all approved projects. Therefore it is assumed that not all projects will be permanent sustainable.

Besides that there are several objective reasons of implementation problems:

- Insufficient administrative capacities, particularly at the beginning, that caused overload of responsible officials.
- A long time spent on advance payments negotiations that shortened time for other activities, e.g. monitoring and mainstreaming strategy preparation.
- Absence of the person responsible for ITMS (Information Officer) who would be a useful communication point.
- Engagement by solving internal operational problems resulted into overload of employees and time stress.

In spite of the positive general evaluation by July 31, 2005, there are some potential risks that could threaten the success of the EQUAL Community Initiative implementation both in current as well as in future programming period:

- Approving a relatively large number of projects despite of Managing Authority's disagreement (out of 101 approved projects, there were 17 projects proposed to be rejected and 15 projects were marked as not innovative) can influence the implementation process in a negative way.
- Approving several projects led by non-profit organisations established few days before the deadline for submitting applications can have a negative impact on the quality and permanent sustainability of the projects.
- Several projects have been approved with similar activities (e.g. computer-assisted trainings) and the same members of development partnership. Similar activities can be possibly carried out at the same time for different projects.
- The implementation process can possibly show that some projects will not be able to spend the whole approved budget or some applicants will back out of the contract. Non-existence of the real project pipeline can cause that the EQUAL Community Initiative allocation will not be fully drawn.

## *Evaluation*

By July 31, 2005, the implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia is

**SATISFACTORY<sup>1</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> Evaluation scale: HS-Highly Satisfactory, S-Satisfactory, U-Unsatisfactory, HU-Highly Unsatisfactory

## *Recommendations*

Consider engaging of a new employee for the position Information Officer (ITMS Administrator).

Elaborate a training needs assessment of the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority. Afterwards train all employees with focus on monitoring and evaluating skills, management of the project cycle and quality of the management process.

Within six months conduct (internal or external consultants) an in-depth ongoing evaluation including physical visits to approved projects.

Immediately ensure archiving of important documents; possibly analyse the internal processes and document flow.

In the future programming period don't approve projects that didn't pass through the evaluation process and were not recommended by the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority. Document the reasons for approving this kind of projects.

Immediately start working with the real project pipeline as a tool of transparency and a source of reserve projects. Publish the project pipeline in internet.

In the future programming period don't approve applications of the non-profit organisations that have no history and references; nor of businesses without references.

Establish an early warning system which will cover (among others) the detailed project flowchart, regular monitoring and a quick reaction mechanism to low drawing of the allocated funds or to substantial delay in project implementation.



# Report

## Introduction

This Evaluation Report is concerned with the progress in implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative by July 31, 2005. The essential sources of information were programme documents, projects and information from the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority.

Moreover, this information was amended by interviews with employees of EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority, CSF Managing Authority and Government Office of the Slovak Republic.

## 1. Programme context in Slovakia

### 1.1 The Programme Document of EQUAL Community Initiative

1.1.1 The growing interdependence of Member States' economies led to the incorporation of a new head concerned with employment into Amsterdam Agreement. This head coordinates the employment strategy and assures the adoption of common principles by Member States. The employment principles (based on 4 pillars: employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability and equal opportunities) and their transformation into National Employment Action Plans constitute the framework for the financial aid from EU, in particular from Structural Funds.

1.1.2 The European Employment Strategy aims to achieve a high employment rate of all groups on the labour market. In order to reach this goal, it is crucial to develop the skills and employability of those who usually stand out of the market. However, the skills of people employed in unprotected or endangered sectors must be renewed and modernised too. Furthermore, it is necessary to support private sector and gender equality. There must be a large number of activities focused on combating inequality and discrimination that affect both employed and unemployed undertaken.

1.1.3 To ensure the full efficiency of the European Employment Strategy, its principles must be transformed into the activities at the local and regional level in urban as well as in rural areas; i.e. by self-governing regions that are able to coordinate the local cooperation. A new approach towards common priorities and efficient know-how sharing is required.

1.1.4 European Social Fund (ESF) is, besides the funds focused on the agriculture and regional development one of the Structural Funds. ESF concerns the field of increasing employment and flexibility of labour market, development of inclusive labour market and equal opportunities and increasing qualified potential and adaptability of workforce. It aims to support the activities and objectives set out by the European Employment Strategy.

1.1.5 The European EQUAL Community Initiative is a part of Community's integrated strategy combating discrimination and social exclusion. It is an addendum to other policies, tools and activities affecting the labour market, particularly to the specific legislation and action plans according to the articles 13 and 137 of this agreement. Commission and Member States secure the interconnection between EQUAL and those activities. Therefore, EQUAL plays a key role in linking of activities according to articles 13 and 137, programmes supported by ESF and the political goals put into life within the scope of the European Employment Strategy.

1.1.6 Council Regulation No. 1260/1999 sets the goals and intentions of the EQUAL Community Initiative as an independent form of assistance under Structural Funds. The EQUAL Community Initiative complements the preceding ADAPT and EMPLOYMENT Community Initiatives. In line with the EC Council Regulation 1260/1999, it is being implemented in the 2000 – 2006 programme period. The contents of the EQUAL Community Initiative focuses on assistance provided to activities supporting the European Employment Strategy.

1.1.7 The European EQUAL Community Initiative, operating within the framework of European Employment Strategy forms one of Community's initiatives focusing on elimination and alleviation of all forms of discrimination and inequality on the labour market. Moreover, it provides the opportunity for development, verification and application of new integrated approaches, the results of which are to be incorporated into employment and inclusion policy formation of the Slovak Republic

1.1.8 Its main objective is to create conditions and provide the opportunity for seeking, testing and applying new innovative approaches in resolving problems occurring while combating all forms of discrimination and inequalities on labour market. As part of this Initiative, all Member States have agreed on common thematic fields, on which they wish to cooperate, and to learn from one another. The Commission, in the Guidelines for EQUAL, also formulated principles, acceptance of which forms one of the basic conditions for participation in solutions within the EQUAL Community Initiative.

1.1.9 Co-operation between key stakeholders in inclusive labour market policies and actions forms the basis for the EQUAL Community Initiative establishing so called Development Partnerships. A wide range of institutions may join a Development Partnership such as: state and public sector organizations, local governments, business entities, NGOs, social partners, employers, training establishments, etc. Development partnerships will agree a joint working strategy to develop, test and validate innovative approaches while tackling issues of discrimination and inequality in the area of focus. Each Development Partnership must have arrangements for ensuring that the administrative and financial responsibilities are handled by an organization which have the capacity to manage and account for public funding.

1.1.10 The Programme Document was developed in accordance with the recommendations and regulations of European Commission, notably the General Regulation for the Structural Funds (EC Council Regulation 1260/1999) and the EQUAL Community Initiative Guidelines (COM 2003/840) and the European Employment Strategy formed key starting points in developing Single Programme Document for the EQUAL Community Initiative.

1.1.11 The Programme Complement is a document specifying the basic areas to be supported under Structural Funds as well as the rules for steering and implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative Programme Document for the period 2004 – 2006.

1.1.12 In line with the Article 18, Para 3 of the General Regulation for the Structural Funds (EC Council Regulation 1260/1999), the Programme Complement concretizes and closely specifies the implementation process of the Programme Document measures, especially the physical and financial performance, planned activities, monitoring, evaluation of impacts and results achieved by the implementation.

1.1.13 Basic goals and priorities of the EQUAL Community Initiative in the Slovak Republic are set out by the Programme Document. This document outlines the system of interconnected objectives, priorities and measures that create a compact programme framework for submitting project proposals. The Programme Complement serves as a tool for steering of operations carried out within the system. Therefore it is very important to acquaint with the contents of the Programme Complement and follow the rules and instructions it constitutes.

## 1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 EQUAL Community Initiative is based on following principles<sup>2</sup>:

- **Partnership approach** - bringing together actors who cooperate in Development Partnerships and work on innovative solutions of jointly defined problems. EQUAL is implemented through the development partnerships. These partnerships bring together different organisations in order to design and put into practice a coherent strategy for solving discrimination or inequality on the labour market. Each partnership should involve all organisations relevant for proposed activities. Partnerships can operate within a certain geographical area or in a certain sector.
- **Transnational co-operation** - a significant element contributing to cross-border know-how transfer and innovative solutions for a given topic. EQUAL Community Initiative is expected to be a platform for planning common activities and sharing information, experience and know-how.
- **Innovation** - The EQUAL Community Initiative provides a support for innovative solutions of inequality and discrimination in the labour market as well as employment and education. Each partnership has to contribute to the innovation of policy or its implementation. Innovation can be done in different ways and can cover: political goals, tools and methods, performance and institutional structure.
- **Empowerment** - Partnerships bring together very disparate groups under active participation of people exposed to discrimination due to inequalities. Each partner should be an active participant of the development partnership and must be involved in decision making. Moreover, all target people and groups should be involved into proposing, development, implementation and evaluation of the activities performed by development partnerships.
- **Thematic approach** - the European Commission stated 8 thematic areas, the 9<sup>th</sup> theme focused on the promoting the integration of the asylum seekers. All thematic areas are in line with European Employment Strategy. Each country selects the priorities of its programme from the EQUAL themes. Every development partnership has to choose one of those themes to be focused on.
- **Mainstreaming** - integration and incorporation of new ideas and approaches into policy and practice. Results and experiences of development partnerships must be sorted and analysed so that the lessons learned become a part current policies and practice.

### *Strategic goal*

1.2.1 The strategic goal for the EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia is to enhance efficiency of the tools, methods and procedures for addressing the challenges in the field of discrimination and inequalities at labour market through searching for innovative solutions of their operation.

### *Specific goals*

1.2.2 Within the global goal for the EQUAL Community Initiative, specific objectives representing targets of particular measures selected have been identified below:

- Reduced unemployment of marginal groups and promoting their integration in the labour market.
- Enhanced conditions for minorities for seeking for the opportunities to find a job at labour market
- Strengthening the role of the NGO sector in the field of provision of public services
- Support the establishment of an environment which motivates the HR development
- Strengthening the equal principle regarding opportunities within the labour market
- Assistance provision to asylum-seekers in their social and vocational integration
- Ensuring conditions for a successful implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 3 for details

## 1.3 Priorities and measures

### *Priorities*

1.3.1 For the period 2004 – 2006, there were following priorities outlined:

- Priority 1 (Theme 1.1) - Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated and re-integrated into labour market;
- Priority 1 (Theme 1.2) - Combating racism and xenophobia in relation to the labour market;
- Priority 2 (Theme 2) - Strengthening the social economy (third sector) in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs;
- Priority 3 (Theme 3) - Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies;
- Priority 4 (Theme 4) - Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation
- Priority 5 (Theme 5) - Asylum seekers
- Technical Assistance

### *Measures*

1.3.2 Measure is a tool for implementation of the priorities of EQUAL Community Initiative during the programming period.

### *Monitoring Indicators*

1.3.3 Managing Authority of the EQUAL Community Initiative defined in line with the Guideline for Monitoring Systems of the ESF Assistance a group of monitoring indicators for each priority. Indicators are relative to specific objectives, reflect actual status achieved according to the physical outputs, results and impacts and depict achieved development in relation to the financial plan.

1.3.4 Monitoring indicators have following structure:

- Indicators of outcome – monitor fulfilment of individual activities (immediate results), reflecting number of final beneficiaries or financed projects;
- Indicators of results – evaluate achieved results at the time of its fulfilment (qualification, employment, attendance at requalification)
- Indicators of impact – evaluate long-term effect of the finished project, reflecting the sustainability of the project

## 2. Evaluation of the progress in EQUAL Community Initiative implementation

### 2.1 Dynamics of the programme implementation

2.1.1 The Programme Document of the EQUAL Community Initiative in the Slovak Republic was approved on July 7, 2004.

2.1.2 Following table shows the time frame of the EQUAL Community Initiative implementation:

Measure	Call for proposals	Deadline for submitting proposals	Assessment of the proposals by Evaluation Committee	Evaluation confirmed by Minister's signature	Preparation phase	Implementation phase
					Action 1	Action 2
1.1 Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market	24.5.2005	15.10.2004	22.11. – 3.12.2004	22.12.2004	January – July 2005	Since July 2005
1.2 Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia	24.6.2004	15.10.2004	22.11. – 3.12.2004	22.12.2004		
2.1 Strengthening the capacity of NGOs and other social economy organisations as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially social economy organisations providing community service)	24.6.2004	15.10.2004	22.11. – 3.12.2004	22.12.2004		
3.1 Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies	24.6.2004	15.10.2004	15.11. – 26.11.2004	22.12.2004		
4.1 Gender awareness-raising activities – gender studies, gender audit, gender awareness as the means for labour market equality between men and women	24.6.2004	15.10.2004	22.11. – 3.12.2004	22.12.2004		
5.1 Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers	24.6.2004	15.10.2004	22.11. – 3.12.2004	22.12.2004		

2.1.3 Calls for proposals for all measures were published on June 24, 2004.

2.1.4 Deadline for submitting proposals was October 15, 2004.

2.1.5 Proposals submitted within the measure 3.1 were assessed by the Evaluation Committee between October 11 and 26, 2004. All other measures were evaluated between November 11 and December 3, 2004.

2.1.6 The results of the evaluation process were confirmed by Minister's signature on December 22, 2004.

2.1.7 All contracts with development partnerships were signed in February and March 2005.

2.1.8 The first phase – preparation phase (Action 1) was running from January until July 2005. During this time period all projects were revised in line with directions from the Managing Authority, particularly in the field of implementation procedures, financial plans, development partnerships and transnational cooperation. At this time, the Managing Authority is completing the assessment of updated projects.

2.1.9 As of July 2005, updated projects approved by the Managing Authority started implementation of its activities (Implementation phase – Action 2).

2.1.10 Adequate communication with DG Employment was provided through the Desk Officer in Brussels. Since July 1, 2003, the Desk Officer responsible for Slovakia monitors the EQUAL Community Initiative in Denmark and works as a shadow team member for Germany.

## 2.2 Managing the assessment process

### ***EQUAL Procedure Internal Manual***

2.2.1 EQUAL Community Initiative is implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic.

Managing Authority	Priority	Theme	Measure
MLSAF SR	1 EMPLOYABILITY	1.1 Facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated and re-integrated into labour market	1.1 Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market
			1.2 Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia
	2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP	2 Strengthening the social economy (third sector) in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs	2.1 Strengthening the capacity of NGOs and other social economy organisations as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially social economy organisations providing community service)
	3 ADAPTABILITY	3 Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change and the use of information technology and other new technologies	3.1 Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies
	4 EQUAL OPORTUNITIES	4 Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation	4.1 Gender awareness-raising activities – gender studies, gender audit, gender awareness as the means for labour market equality between men and women
		5 Asylum seekers	5.1 Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers
		6 Technical assistance	6.1 Expenditures for managing, implementation and monitoring
			6.2 Other eligible activities

2.2.2 For the implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative, there is an Internal Manual of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family setting out the duration of the assessment process.

### 2.2.3 Submitting and assessment of applications

- The ESF grants can not be claimed. It is not possible to appeal against the rejection of the application.
- Inseparable part of the grant application (further “application”) is the project proposal. Applicant is obliged to **declare the development partnership** with at least one partner (max 5 partners), that is formalised under Action 1 and completed by submitting the Development Partnership Agreement.

2.2.4 The assessment of applications takes approx. 62 working days. It has following steps:

1. Application (project) is registered and assigned to competent department
2. Monitoring Manager checks for its formal completeness
3. Monitoring Manager gets written assessments from the Financial Manager and Publicity Manager (project proposal is assessed on the budget and cost eligibility, third part of the check-list, publicity, equal opportunities and employment strategy)
4. Monitoring Manager draws up an Evaluation Report based on the submitted assessments and subassessments. The Evaluation Report includes a recommendation to approve or not approve the project. Subassessments are filed by Monitoring Manager into ITMS. The Evaluation Report and complete project documentation is handed over to the Head of Department who elaborates his own assessment.
5. Head of Department arranges the meeting of the Evaluation Committee and presents to its members all applications and evaluation reports. At the same time a copy of project proposals is submitted to the Minister / State secretary.
6. Evaluation Committee consisting of min 5 members for each measure reviews the project quality based on the Evaluation Report in line with the criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee. Evaluation Committee selects projects to be financed under EQUAL Community Initiative. Managing Authority draws up a grant contract which is submitted to the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family / State secretary for final decision.
7. Announcing the results of the assessment process to the applicants – Minister’s approval is followed by sending of a written statement to all applicants; unsuccessful applicants are informed about the reasons of refusing their projects.
8. Successful applicants sign grant contracts.
9. ITMS entries – Financial Manager enters financial details of the project (budget and financial plan according to contract), Monitoring Manager enters assessments of the Evaluation Committee, Head of Department – General Manager of the Programme enters the information about signing the contract.
10. ECDB entries – Managing Authority continuously enters the details of implemented projects into common database administrated in Brussels.

**Time frame of the assessment procedure (working days):**

According to the Internal Manual for the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme Document

Activity	Time allocated for the activity
Registration of the project and its assignment to competent department (Registry + Head of Department secretary)	2 days
Monitoring Manager checks for project's formal completeness	3 days
Financial Manager checks for project's budget and cost eligibility – project is submitted back to Monitoring Manager; subassessment on equal opportunities and employment strategy	7 days
Monitoring Manager draws up Evaluation Report (2 days) which is handed over to General Manager of the Programme – Head of Department. At the same time, General Manager – Head of Section time is informed and approves the application (3 days)	5 days
General Manager of the Programme – Head of Department arranges the meeting of Evaluation Committee and presents to its members all applications and evaluation reports	5 days
Evaluation Committee reviews the project quality in line with the criteria approved by the Monitoring Committee. Selected projects are confirmed by the signature of the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family.	30 days
Announcing the results of the assessment process to the applicants (within 5 days after Minister confirmed the selection) and signing the grant contract	10 days
<b>Project selection and approving cycle (days) - TOTAL</b>	<b>62 days</b>

2.2.5 Grant contract is signed by Minister and the statutory body of the development partnership (lead partner).

2.2.6 Following table compares the duration of the selection and approval of submitted applications according to Internal Manual with reality:

Programme	Duration of the selection and approval of submitted applications		Managing Authority
	Maximum according to Manual	Maximum in reality	
EQUAL	62 days	46 days	MLSAF SR



*Assessment and recommendation of the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority*

2.2.7 Following table shows the overview of projects' innovation and recommendation of the Managing Authority for Evaluation Committee:

Measure	Recommendation of the Managing Authority			Managing Authority's Assessment on Innovation			Application Folder or Evaluation Report is Missing	Number of Approved Projects
	Amend	Approve	Not Approve	Yes	Partly	No		
1.1	11	2	3	8	3	5	7	23
1.2	6	2	1	6	0	3	5	14
2.1	15	2	6	16	4	3	2	25
3.1	4	5	6	10	2	3	7	22
4.1	11	0	1	11	0	1	2	14
5.1	3	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>101</b>

## 2.3 Financial progress in EQUAL Community Initiative implementation

2.3.1 The Programme Document of the EQUAL Community Initiative approved: July 7, 2004

2.3.2 Deadline for submitting requests for the first interim payment to EC: January 7, 2006

2.3.3 End of implementation: December 31, 2008

2.3.4 Following tables show the financial progress in EQUAL Community Initiative implementation by July 31, 2005:

Priority	Measure	Allocated Funds SF+SB 2004 - 2006 in SKK	Volume of Selected Applications in SKK	Volume of Selected Applications in %	Volume of Contracted Funds in SKK	Volume of Contracted Funds (signed contracts) in %	Volume of Funds Paid Out in SKK	Volume of Funds Paid Out in %
1.	1.1	261 703 861	261 703 861	100,00	261 703 861	100,00	0	0,00
	1.2	170 107 483	170 107 483	100,00	170 107 483	100,00	0	0,00
2.	2.1	314 957 531	314 930 200	99,99	314 930 200	99,99	0	0,00
3.	3.1	268 398 546	268 398 546	100,00	264 398 546	98,51	0	0,00
4.	4.1	153 370 627	153 370 627	100,00	153 370 627	100,00	0	0,00
5.	5.1	36 516 855	34 030 253	93,19	34 030 253	93,19	0	0,00
<b>Total for Measures</b>		<b>1 205 054 903</b>	<b>1 202 540 970</b>	<b>99,79</b>	<b>1 198 540 970</b>	<b>99,46</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0,00</b>
6. TA	6.1	65 492 129	65 492 129	100,00	1 972 325	3,01	1 972 325	3,01
	6.2	39 295 261	39 295 261	100,00	901 438	2,29	901 438	2,29
<b>Total for Technical Assistance</b>		<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>2 873 763</b>	<b>2,74</b>	<b>2 873 763</b>	<b>2,74</b>
<b>Total for Programme</b>		<b>1 309 842 293</b>	<b>1 307 328 360</b>	<b>99,81</b>	<b>1 201 414 733</b>	<b>91,72</b>	<b>2 873 763</b>	<b>0,22</b>

Priority	Measure	Allocated Funds SF+SB 2004 - 2006 in SKK	Number of Submitted Applications	Volume of Submitted Applications in SKK	Number of Selected Applications	Volume of Selected Applications in SKK	Number of Signed Contracts	Volume of Signed Contracts in SKK
1.	1.1	261 703 861	32	570 729 393	23	261 703 861	23	261 703 861
	1.2	170 107 483	18	441 159 940	14	170 107 483	14	170 107 483
2.	2.1	314 957 531	44	807 815 711	25	314 930 200	25	314 930 200
3.	3.1	268 398 546	40	832 151 590	22	268 398 546	21	264 398 546
4.	4.1	153 370 627	21	400 028 217	14	153 370 627	14	153 370 627
5.	5.1	36 516 855	6	62 741 765	3	34 030 253	3	34 030 253
<b>Total for Measures</b>		<b>1 205 054 903</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>3 114 626 616</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>1 202 540 970</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1 198 540 970</b>
6. TA	6.1	65 492 129	3	65 492 129	3	65 492 129	3	1 972 325
	6.2	39 295 261	1	39 295 261	1	39 295 261	1	901 438
<b>Total for Technical Assistance</b>		<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2 873 763</b>
<b>Total for Programme</b>		<b>1 309 842 293</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>3 219 414 006</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>1 307 328 360</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>1 201 414 733</b>

2.3.5 The total EQUAL Community Initiative allocation from the Structural Funds and from the State Budget is SKK 1 309 842 293. Thereof there is SKK 1 205 054 903 allocated for measures and SKK 104 787 390 for technical assistance.

2.3.6 The total volume of applications approved within the EQUAL Community Initiative is SKK 1 307 328 360, which is 99.81 % out of the total allocation. Thereof there are applications approved in the total of SKK 1 202 540 970, which is 99.70 % out of the funds allocated for measures. There are SKK 104 787 390 approved for technical assistance, which is 100 % out of the funds allocated for technical assistance.

2.3.7 The total volume of funds contracted (signed contracts) within the EQUAL Community Initiative is SKK 1 201 414 733, which is 91.72 % out of the total allocation. Thereof there are contracts with final beneficiaries in the total of SKK 1 198 540 970, which is 99.46 % out of the funds allocated for measures. There are SKK 2 873 763 contracted for technical assistance, which is 2.74 % out of the funds allocated for technical assistance.

2.3.8 The eligibility of expenditures starts on the day of signing the grant contract so that the first requests for payment were delivered to EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority by the end of May and in June. At the beginning of June accorded Ministry of Finance an exception to the Concept of the Structural Funds Financial Management System in the form of permission to pre-finance the projects led by non-profit organisations through advance payments.

2.3.9 Advance payments are an option for those projects that have a non-profit organisation as a leading partner. Projects led by businesses (Ltd., Plc.) are not eligible for advance payments.

2.3.10 The exception was a result of a long negotiation process between the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority and Ministry of Finance. Managing Authority had to make changes in different documents, e.g. Managing Authority Internal Manual, National Support Structure Internal Manual. Several changes have been made by adjusting contracts. The first payments are expected to be realised in August.

2.3.11 Following table indicates demand for single measures and funds approved out of the total EQUAL Community Initiative allocation by July 31, 2005:

Priority	Measure	Allocated Funds SF+SB 2004 - 2006 in SKK	Demand			Approved			Meeting the Demand	
			Number of Submitted Projects	Volume of Submitted Projects in SKK	Volume of Submitted Projects as % out of the allocation	Number of Projects	Volume of Projects in SKK	Volume of Projects as % out of the allocation	Number of Projects in %	Allocated funds in %
1.	1.1	261 703 861	32	570 729 393	218,08	23	261 703 861	100.00	71.88	45.85
	1.2	170 107 483	18	441 159 940	259,34	14	170 107 483	100.00	77.78	38.56
2.	2.1	314 957 531	44	807 815 711	256,48	25	314 930 200	99.99	56.82	38.99
3.	3.1	268 398 546	40	832 151 590	310,04	22	268 398 546	100.00	52.50	32.25
4.	4.1	153 370 627	21	400 028 217	260,82	14	153 370 627	100.00	66.67	38.34
5.	5.1	36 516 855	6	62 741 765	171,82	3	34 030 253	93.19	50.00	54.24
<b>Total for Measures</b>		<b>1 205 054 903</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>3 114 626 616</b>	<b>258,46</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>1 202 540 970</b>	<b>99.79</b>	<b>62.11</b>	<b>38.61</b>
6. TA	6.1	65 492 129	3	65 492 129	100,00	3	65 492 129	100.00	100.00	100.00
	6.2	39 295 261	1	39 295 261	100,00	1	39 295 261	100.00	100.00	100.00
<b>Total for Technical Assistance</b>		<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>104 787 390</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>Total for Programme</b>		<b>1 309 842 293</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>3 219 414 006</b>	<b>245,79</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>1 307 328 360</b>	<b>99.81</b>	<b>63.03</b>	<b>40.61</b>

2.3.12 As a part of the implementation process, the call for proposals was published in June 2004. There have been 161 applications submitted.

2.3.13 The total allocation for measure 1.1 was SKK 261 703 861, thereof SKK 207 mil. for Objective 1 and 55 mil. for Objective 2. There have been 32 applications submitted, 23 have been approved.

2.3.14 The total allocation for measure 1.2 was SKK 170 107 483. There have been 18 applications submitted, 14 have been approved.

2.3.15 The total allocation for measure 2.1 was SKK 314 957 531. There have been 44 applications submitted, 25 have been approved.

2.3.16 The total allocation for measure 3.1 was SKK 268 398 546. There have been 40 applications submitted, 22 have been approved.

2.3.17 The total allocation for measure 4.1 was SKK 153 370 627. There have been 21 applications submitted, 14 have been approved.

2.3.18 The total allocation for measure 5.1 was SKK 36 516 855. There have been 6 applications submitted, 3 have been approved.

2.3.19 There have been totally 101 projects approved under the EQUAL Community Initiative. The results of the evaluation process were confirmed by Minister's signature on December 22, 2004. All contracts with development partnerships were signed in February and March 2005.

2.3.20 The first phase – preparation phase (Action 1) was running from January until July 2005. During this time period all projects were revised in line with directions from the Managing Authority, particularly in the field of implementation procedures, financial plans, development partnerships and transnational cooperation. At this time, the Managing Authority is completing the assessment of updated projects. As of July 2005, updated projects approved by the Managing Authority started implementation of its activities (Implementation phase – Action 2).

2.3.21 The total demand for the EQUAL Community Initiative was 245.79 % (volume of submitted applications as a percentage out of the total allocation). Thereof there was 258.46 % demand for measures and 100 % for technical assistance.

2.3.22 The total volume of applications approved within the EQUAL Community Initiative is 99.81 % out of the total allocation. Thereof there are applications approved in the total of 99.70 % out of the funds allocated for measures. There are applications approved in the total of 100 % out of the funds allocated for technical assistance.

2.3.23 Demand for each measure within the EQUAL Community Initiative exceeded 100 % of the allocation.

2.3.24 The largest demand of all EQUAL Community Initiative measures noted the measure 3.1 Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies (310.04 % of the allocation).

2.3.25 The lowest demand of all EQUAL Community Initiative measures noted the measure 5.1 Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers (171.82 % of the allocation).

## 2.4 Physical progress in EQUAL Community Initiative implementation

2.4.1 Following tables show the current state of the EQUAL Community Initiative indicators:

Measure	Group of Indicators	Indicator	Unit	Expected Indicator Values (based on the contracted projects – current state by 31.7.2005)	Real Performance by July 31, 2005
1.1 Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market	Outcome	Number of persons involved into projects supporting the employment of disadvantaged groups	number	23 051	-
		Number of persons involved into projects supporting the education of disadvantaged groups	number	4 901	-
		Number of Individual Action Plans elaborated for employment applicants	number	8 668	-
		Number of the newly established Supported Employment and Temporary Employment Agencies	number	15	-
	Result	Increase in number of persons introduced into the labour market (compared with standard solution)	number	8 427	-
		Cut/Increased costs of analysed system within the scope of implantation (compared with standard solution)	%		-
		Ratio of Persons introduced into the labour market to Persons involved into project	%	36,5	-
		Number of persons introduced into the labour market through public employment services	number	792	-
1.2 Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia	Outcome	Number of persons involved into projects supporting the employment of Roma and other minorities	number	9 772	-
		Number of persons involved into projects supporting the education of Roma and other minorities	number	3 778	-
		Number of Individual Action Plans elaborated for employment applicants	number	390	-
		Number of the newly established Supported Employment and Temporary Employment Agencies focused on Roma and other minorities	number	9	-
		Number of project activities targeted on the promotion of multicultural society values	number	348	-
		Number of partnerships created to monitor the labour market-related racism and xenophobia	number	213	-
	Result	Number of persons who gained a new qualification within the projects supporting education of the Roma and other minorities	number	3 900	-
		Number of persons who gained a new job within the projects supporting education of the Roma and other minorities	number	1 681	-
		Number of entrepreneurs involved in the projects targeted on solving the labour market-related racism and xenophobia	number	618	-
		Number of new areas and forms of introduction of Roma and other minorities into the labour market	number	3	-
Increased public awareness of existing forms of labour market-related racism and xenophobia	%	35	-		

Measure	Group of Indicators	Indicator	Unit	Expected Indicator Values (based on the contracted projects – current state by 31.7.2005)	Real Performance by July 31, 2005
2.1 Strengthening the capacity of NGOs and other social economy organisations as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially social economy organisations providing community service)	Outcome	Number of persons involved into projects screening the potential of NGOs in the field of providing employment services	number	41 238	-
		Number of consulting and streamlining services provided by NGOs.	number	13 090	-
		Number of persons involved into projects supporting the education of disadvantaged groups	number	10 369	-
		Number of third sector bodies receiving financial support to strengthen the human resources capacity	number	123	-
	Result	Number of persons who gained a new qualification in the field of providing employment services through NGOs	number	6 846	-
		Number of trained employees of public and other employment services	number	1 580	-
		Range extension of the NGOs' consulting and assistance services	number	733	-
		Reduced costs for provision of employment services by NGOs (compared with standard system)	%	4,5	-
3.1 Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies	Outcome	Number of persons involved into projects supporting the education of disadvantaged groups	number	8 539	-
		Number of persons involved into projects supporting the education of disadvantaged groups	number	4 351	-
		Number of Individual Action Plans elaborated for employment applicants	number	960	-
		Number of persons who received financial support to improve their skills and qualification	number	4 502	-
		Number of newly established and innovated forms and programmes for lifetime (further) education	number	68	-
	Result	Increase in number of persons introduced into the labour market (compared with standard solution)	%	32	-
		Cut/Increased costs of analysed system within the scope of implantation (compared with standard solution)	%		-
		Number of persons introduced into the labour market who improved their skills and qualification within the measure 3.1	number	6 284	-
		Number of employed persons who improved their skills and qualification within the measure 3.1	number	619	-
		Number of realised training and educational activities focused on the needs of businesses in the region	number	283	-
4.1 Gender awareness– raising activities – gender studies, gender audit, gender awareness as the means for labour market equality between men and women	Outcome	Number of employment applicants involved into projects targeted on the gender awareness (total)	number	5 020	-
		Support to the principle of gender equality within the projects targeted on the gender awareness	number	9 772	-
		Number of analyses and databases with gender differentiated data	number	94	-
		Development of tools for auditing equality of opportunities of men and women policies	number	14	-
	Result	Creation of the equality of opportunities assessment methodology for different areas of the labour market	number	56	-
		Number of new job created within gender awareness projects	number	40	-
		Number of concrete cases supporting the equality of opportunities in the engagement of new employees within gender awareness projects	number	711	-
		Number of concrete cases supporting the equality of opportunities in wage distribution within gender awareness projects	number	300	-
		Creation of equality of opportunities stimulation systems for employers	number	22	-

Measure	Group of Indicators	Indicator	Unit	Expected Indicator Values (based on the contracted projects – current state by 31.7.2005)	Real Performance by July 31, 2005
5.1 Supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers	Outcome	Number of persons trained in the field of social skills	number	8 218	-
		Number of events organised to increase public awareness of the introduction into the labour market	number	886	-
	Result	Percentage of trained persons who found a new job within 6 months after the training	%		-
		Public awareness campaigns attendance	%	75	-

2.4.2 The EQUAL Community Initiative Programme Complement defines monitoring indicators for all measures. However, there are no values estimated for the indicators; which corresponds with the spirit of the EQUAL Community Initiative.

2.4.3 Expected values of the monitoring indicators were calculated according to signed contracts. Presented values become the target values of the EQUAL Community Initiative.

2.4.4 Updated projects approved by the Managing Authority started implementation of its activities (Implementation phase – Action 2) in July 2005. Therefore there are no real values of the monitoring indicators available by the date of evaluation (July 31, 2005).

## 3. Accordance of the EQUAL Community Initiative with strategical documents

Implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative is based on the Programme Document and the Programme Complement. The programme is in line with European Employment Strategy, National Employment Action Plan and Common Assessment of Employment Priorities (so called JAP – Joint Assessment Paper).

Strategy and priorities of the programme are in line with thematic fields described in the specific EU document Nr. 2000/C 127/02 Communication from the Commission to Member States, specifying the principles of international cooperation in supporting new tools for combating all forms of discrimination and inequality on the labour market.

Implementation of the EQUAL Community Initiative operations is performed in accordance with other regulations and guidelines related to the use of Structural Funds resources.

Managing Authority of the EQUAL Community Initiative is the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The implementation process is supported by the National Support Framework of existing institutions in the field of employment and combat on social exclusion. The activities of the EQUAL Community Initiative are financed by ESF.

### 3.1 European context

3.1.1 Council Regulation No. 1260/1999 and Commission Communication COM 2003/840 setting the goals and intentions of the EQUAL Community Initiative as an independent form of ESF assistance constitute a basis for selection of priorities and formulation of intentions of the EQUAL Community Initiative in the Slovak Republic in relation to the European Union. Other documents have been considered, namely those regulating conditions for drawing resources from the EU Structural Funds and specifying the scope of activities where the ESF support is targeted to. (Commission Regulation 1780/1999, Commission Regulation 1159/2000, Commission Regulation 1685/2000, Commission Regulation 438/2001 etc.).

3.1.2 Following the European Council meeting in Lisbon in March 2000, a new strategic goal for the EU was stipulated for decades to come – to develop competitive and dynamic economies based on knowledge, with greater social coherence and higher employment levels. This Lisbon strategy followed up the Union's processes and policies commenced in the preceding period – the European Employment Strategy (adopted in November 1997 in Luxembourg) and macroeconomic reform adopted in Cologne (1999).

3.1.3 The Luxembourg summit on jobs initiated implementation of a new open co-ordination method and approved the first Principles of Employment Policy in a 4-pillar form:

- 1<sup>st</sup> pillar – Improved Employment,
- 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar – Business Development,
- 3<sup>rd</sup> pillar – Supporting Adaptability of Enterprises and their Employees
- 4<sup>th</sup> pillar – Enhanced Equal Opportunity Policies.

3.1.4 Principles of EU Employment Policy represent a general form of macroeconomic, social and educational policy of EU member countries, while at the same time; they are presented as a result of their experience with efficiency of former active labour market policy measures and labour market policy. The European Employment Strategy is aimed at achieving a higher employment level of all labour market groups. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to enhance skills and employability



of those who are usually outside the labour market as well as upgrading the skills of those who are currently at work and provide incentives for life-long learning and upgrade their skills and knowledge.

## 3.2 National context

### *EQUAL Community Initiative and National Development Plan*

3.2.1 The National Development Plan is a basic programming document for implementation of structural and regional policy of SR for the period 2004-2006. It provides a complex overview on the current situation of regions in the Slovak Republic and barriers to their development. It defines development priorities and the means of their achievement. It includes objectives, strategy and underlying financial and implementation framework. It also contains characteristics of elaborated sectoral operational programmes and Operational programme Basic Infrastructure as well as characteristics of other programming document with allocated financial aid from the European Union.

3.2.2 It was elaborated to increase the competitiveness of undeveloped regions and their performance respecting permanent sustainability and so reduce the differences in GDP per capita in SR compared to the average of member states of the European Union. At the same time the National Development Plan assures the functionality of regional policy symbiotic with mid-term economic priorities of Slovakia.

3.2.3 The **long-term objective** of regional policy of the Slovak Republic is providing for a well-balanced economic and social development of the Slovak Republic

3.2.4 **Strategic objective** for the NDP during 2004 – 2006 is to support, by respecting the principle of balanced sustainable development equally across the regions, such GDP growth that the Slovak Republic by 2006 achieves a level exceeding 54% of the GDP per capita average in the EU countries

3.2.5 For achieving the strategic objective of the NDP the Slovak Republic will support three specific objectives of the NDP:

- Support to economical development and competitiveness;
- **Support to the growth of employment;**
- Support to balanced regional development.

3.2.6 The above specific objectives have been developed into four priorities:

- Competitiveness - Growth of competitiveness of industrial production and services, and development of growth potential
- **Employment - Employment growth based on qualified and flexible workforce under conditions of improving labour market efficiency**
- Basic infrastructure - Development of infrastructure supporting balanced regional development
- Agriculture and rural development - Growth of efficiency of agricultural production and quality of life of the rural population;

3.2.7 NDP is implemented through the programme documents (including CI EQUAL) shown in the following table:

Programme document	Date of approval
CSF	18.6.2004
SOP Industry and Services	30.06.2004
<b>SOP Human Resources</b>	16.07.2004
SOP Agriculture and Rural Development	12.07.2004
OP Basic Infrastructure	29.06.2004
SPD Objective 2	21.06.2004
SPD Objective 3	08.07.2004
CI INTERREG IIIA SR-CR	21.10.2004

CI INTERREG IIIA HU-SR-Ukr	09.12.2004
CI INTERREG IIIA PL-SR	15.11.2004
CI INTERREG IIIA AT-SR	15.11.2004
<b>CI EQUAL</b>	07.07.2004

3.2.8 NDP was elaborated in accordance with conceptual and strategical cross-sectional documents that already have been approved by the Government. The most important document concerned with the employment is National Employment Plan.

### ***EQUAL Community Initiative and Policy Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic***

3.2.9 Basic policy priorities of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the period specified includes a growth of productive employment rate based on economic growth and economy restriction, which considers the requirement to create new job opportunities and conditions to decrease the unemployment rate gradually.

3.2.10 Strategic goal of the EQUAL Community Initiative in the conditions of the Slovak Republic is defined as followed – support of the effective tools, methods and approaches to solve the problems of the discrimination and inequalities at the labour market through the innovative approaches and its influence. This goal is in accordance with the priorities of the government in this area that forms the supportive solutions vis a vis this goal. Concrete linkages between the SR Policy Statement priorities and the EQUAL Community Initiative measures are described in the table below:

<b>SR Policy Statement priorities</b>	<b>EQUAL Community Initiative measures</b>
In cooperation with Slovak partners Government supports on employment increase, solves and prevents the long-term unemployment of those, who have difficulties to integrate their selves into the labour market because of disabilities, age or other factors.	<p><b>Measure No. 1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market</p> <p><b>Measure No. 1.2:</b> Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia</p> <p><b>Measure No. 2.1:</b> Strengthening the capacity of NGOs as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially NGOs providing community service)</p>
To support the flexibility of the work force towards the labour market, Government will support the better conditions for the local mobility of work force through flexible forms of re-trainings, or other forms of education and availability of the part-time jobs.	<p><b>Measure No. 1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market</p> <p><b>Measure No. 3.1:</b> Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies</p>
Government will focus its interest on the creations of tools to ensure the respect of men and women equal opportunities rule.	<p><b>Measure No. 4.1:</b> Gender awareness-raising activities – gender studies, gender audit, gender awareness as the means for labour market equality between men and women</p>
Government will discuss the insurance system for unemployed so that they are motivated to search for new job, re-trainings or other additional education.	<p><b>Measure No.1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market</p> <p><b>Measure No.1.2:</b> Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia</p> <p><b>Measure No. 2.1:</b> Strengthening the capacity of NGOs as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially NGOs providing community service)</p>

## ***EQUAL Community Initiative and National Employment Action Plan***

3.2.11 National Employment Action Plan 2004-2006 sets three objectives:

### 1. Full employment

Job creation supported by the growth of new production activities as well as by the active labour market policy will increase the employment in all regions of the Slovak Republic.

### 2. Increasing quality and productivity at work

Increasing the quality of jobs and productivity is an important mean for achieving the strategic objective of making the EU the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy till 2010, capable of sustainable long term economic growth with more and better jobs and social cohesion. The Slovak Republic intends to contribute to the achievement of this strategic objective by consistently implementing the following policies:

- Supporting change and adaptability in enterprises in order to increase their competitiveness;
- Innovative forms of work organisation that support the quality of work, the productivity of work and work-life balance;
- Support for further education;
- Gender equality and removal of discrimination in access to employment, remuneration for work done and career progress;
- Flexibility of labour relations and working time;
- Development of social dialogue with an emphasis on quality, protection of health and safety at work and productivity.

### 3. Strengthening social cohesion and inclusion

The SR government has prepared and approved the Joint Inclusion Memorandum to join collective fight against poverty and exclusion and achieving the common objectives of the European Union that were agreed in Nice and reviewed in Copenhagen. The strategic framework for the national action plans on inclusion sets the following common objectives:

- Facilitating participation in employment and universal access to resources, rights, goods and services;
- Preventing exclusion risks;
- Helping the most vulnerable groups of citizen;
- Mobilising all parties involved.

3.2.12 Links between Measures of CIP EQUAL and Principles of the National Action Plan for Employment:

<b>NEAP 2004-2006 Principles</b>	<b>EQUAL Community Initiative measures</b>
<b>Principle 1</b> – Active and preventative measures for the unemployed and inactive	<p><b>Measure No. 1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market</p> <p><b>Measure No. 1.2:</b> Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia</p>
<b>Principle 2</b> – Job Creation and Entrepreneurship	<b>Measure No. 2.1:</b> Strengthening the capacity of NGOs as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially NGOs providing community service)
<b>Principle 3</b> – Address change and promote adaptability and mobility in the labour market	
<b>Principle 4</b> – Promote development of human capital and lifelong learning	<b>Measure No. 1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market

	<p><b>Measure No. 2.1:</b> Strengthening the capacity of NGOs as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially NGOs providing community service)</p>
<p><b>Principle 5</b> – Increase labour supply and promote active ageing</p>	<p><b>Measure No. 1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market</p> <p><b>Measure No. 2.1:</b> Strengthening the capacity of NGOs as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially NGOs providing community service)</p>
<p><b>Principle 6</b> – Gender equality</p>	<p><b>Measure No. 3.1:</b> Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies</p>
<p><b>Principle 7</b> – Promote the integration of and combat the discrimination against people at a disadvantage in the labour market</p>	<p><b>Measure No. 1.1:</b> Creating a system supporting the introduction of long-term unemployed, low-skilled and other disadvantaged groups into the labour market</p> <p><b>Measure No. 1.2:</b> Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia</p> <p><b>Measure No. 2.1:</b> Strengthening the capacity of NGOs as actors to help eliminate inequalities in the labour market (especially NGOs providing community service)</p> <p><b>Measure No. 3.1:</b> Support the creation of an environment stimulating human resources development and providing their adaptability in the process of structural changes and coming of new technologies</p>
<p><b>Principle 8</b> – Make work pay through incentives to enhance work attractiveness</p>	
<p><b>Principle 9</b> – Transform undeclared work into regular employment</p>	
<p><b>Principle 10</b> – Address regional employment disparities</p>	<p><b>Measure No. 1.2:</b> Creating an environment supporting the development and creation of effective solutions combating all forms of labour market-related discrimination, racism and xenophobia</p>

3.2.13 The above overview of links between the National Action Plan for Employment and selected measures of the EQUAL Community Initiative demonstrate that the EQUAL Community Initiative will address most of the problems identified by the National Employment Action Plan 2004 - 2006 by developing new and innovative approaches to them.

3.2.14 In addition, the overview presented above shows that all selected topics within the EQUAL Community Initiative will deal with one or more principles of the National Employment Action Plan 2004 - 2006 responding thus to a need to approach actual issues of the Slovak labour market.

## 4. Evaluation of the EQUAL implementation in the Slovak Republic

Evaluation of the Community Initiative EQUAL implementation in the Slovak Republic is based on the fact that by the date of evaluation (July 31, 2005) the Action 1 was finished and Action 2 just started, i.e. the implementation of approved projects didn't start yet.

### *Evaluation of the EQUAL Community Initiative in European and national context*

- Programme is in accord with European Employment Strategy
- Programme is a part of National Development Plan
- Programme is in accord with Policy Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic
- Programme is in accord with National Employment Action Plan 2004-2006
- Programme is expected to influence the forming of new legal documents

### *Evaluation of the EQUAL Community Initiative priorities and themes*

- Priorities set by the programme correspond well with the current situation in Slovakia.
- Joint Inclusion Memorandum is an integrated programme, with which the Government of the SR officially promulgates and engages in the support to the process of social inclusion.
- Regional context is safeguarded by 101 development partnerships that geographically cover the whole territory of Slovakia.

### *Evaluation of the implementation*

In most cases the criteria for approving projects have been followed. Concerning e.g. gender perspective, it was considered in general. In the concrete, there is a separate measure dedicated to the gender equality.

### *Evaluation of key principles*

**Partnership** (Bringing together actors who cooperate in Development Partnerships and work on innovative solutions of jointly defined problems).

We appreciate very active efforts to create as good development partnerships as possible. The aim was to reach balance between business companies and NGOs on the one hand, and municipalities and Labour, Social Affairs and Family Offices on the other hand.

**Transnational co-operation** (A significant element contributing to cross-border know-how transfer and innovative solutions for a given topic).

Despite of commencement of the Community Initiative EQUAL in Slovakia, we appreciate the ability of Slovak development partnerships to establish cross-border cooperation. 101 development partnerships entered into relations with 266 partners from all EU countries (about half of them come from Italy, Spain and France).

**Innovation** (Allows to discover and to test new employment and educational practices and policies).

With respect to early stage of the implementation process, it is not possible to assess the innovation of employment and educational practices and policies. However, the innovation principle was an important assessment criterion in most cases which is a good basis for implementation.

**Empowerment** (Partnerships bring together very disparate groups under active participation of people exposed to discrimination due to inequalities)

With respect to early stage of the implementation process, it is not possible to assess the empowerment of relevant structures and human resources. We appreciate the efforts to make optimal the structure of development partnerships which makes a good background for future empowerment.

**Thematic approach** (All activities are focused on thematic areas defined in line with European Employment Strategy)

As results from above (see chapter 3), all implemented activities are focused on thematic areas defined in line with European Employment Strategy.

**Mainstreaming, integration and incorporation of new ideas and approaches into policy and practice** (Ensures that EQUAL shares information with other relevant bodies in order to incorporate new approaches into employment and social inclusion policies).

As there is no national mainstreaming strategy, it is not possible to assess the potential of experience sharing and know-how transfer.

By July 31, 2005, the implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia is

**SATISFACTORY<sup>3</sup>.**

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<sup>3</sup> Evaluation scale: HS-Highly Satisfactory, S-Satisfactory, U-Unsatisfactory, HU-Highly Unsatisfactory

## 5. Conclusions for the EQUAL implementation

5.1 Primarily it is necessary to highlight the efforts of all responsible people both in Slovakia and Brussels to improve the first implementation of EQUAL Community Initiative in Slovakia.

5.2 The evaluation of financial progress is positive.

5.3 We appreciate the active approach of EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority towards following activities:

- Very active efforts to increase the relevance of implementation in line with identified problems or needs by improving the structure of development partnerships. To avoid certain risks, the structure of development partnerships has been balanced in most cases. In the concrete, the development partnerships of non-profit organisations and businesses have been extended by municipalities, Labour, Social Affairs and Family Office, high schools and universities.
- Efficiency of the input – results process. However, the early stage of implementation allows solely a positive estimation based on successful efforts of the Managing Authority to effect advance payments to entitled applicants. That should be really helpful.
- Concerning the efficiency of the implementation, we really appreciate the endeavour of the Managing Authority to cut overpriced budgets. In many cases the efficiency was increased by cutting proposed budget whereas planned activities remained unchanged (the comparison of projects approved in France and in Slovakia showed that in Slovakia there were - with respect to the total allocation - three times more applications approved than in France. On our opinion, it is positive.)
- Another positive estimation concerns the impacts of the results achieved by implementing the EQUAL Community Initiative. Seeing that there is a direct link to relevant employment strategy resulting from the structure of development partnerships, we expect improvement of identified problems.
- Experimental nature of the EQUAL Community Initiative does not imply the permanent sustainability of all approved projects. Therefore it is assumed that not all projects will be permanent sustainable.

5.4 Besides that there are several objective reasons of implementation problems:

- Insufficient administrative capacities, particularly at the beginning, that caused overload of responsible officials.
- A long time spent on advance payments negotiations that shortened time for other activities, e.g. monitoring and mainstreaming strategy preparation.
- Absence of the person responsible for ITMS (Information Officer) who would be a useful communication point.
- Engagement by solving internal operational problems resulted into overload of employees and time stress.

5.5 In spite of the positive general evaluation by July 31, 2005, there are some potential risks that could threaten the success of the EQUAL Community Initiative implementation both in current as well as in future programming period:

- Approving a relatively large number of projects despite of Managing Authority's disagreement (out of 101 approved projects, there were 17 projects proposed to be rejected and 15 projects were marked as not innovative) can influence the implementation process in a negative way.

- Approving several projects led by non-profit organisations established few days before the deadline for submitting applications can have a negative impact on the quality and permanent sustainability of the projects.
- Several projects have been approved with similar activities (e.g. computer-assisted trainings) and the same members of development partnership. Similar activities can be possibly carried out at the same time for different projects.
- The implementation process can possibly show that some projects will not be able to spend the whole approved budget or some applicants will back out of the contract. Non-existence of the real project pipeline can cause that the EQUAL Community Initiative allocation will not be fully drawn.



## 6. Recommendations

- 6.1 Consider engaging of a new employee for the position Information Officer (ITMS Administrator).
- 6.2 Elaborate a training needs assessment of the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority. Afterwards train all employees with focus on monitoring and evaluating skills, management of the project cycle and quality of the management process.
- 6.3 Within six months conduct (internal or external consultants) an in-depth ongoing evaluation including physical visits to approved projects.
- 6.4 Immediately ensure archiving of important documents; possibly analyse the internal processes and document flow.
- 6.5 In the future programming period don't approve projects that didn't pass through the evaluation process and were not recommended by the EQUAL Community Initiative Managing Authority. Document the reasons for approving this kind of projects.
- 6.6 Immediately start working with the real project pipeline as a tool of transparency and a source of reserve projects. Publish the project pipeline in internet.
- 6.7 In the future programming period don't approve applications of the non-profit organisations that have no history and references; nor of businesses without references.
- 6.8 Establish an early warning system which will cover (among others) the detailed project flowchart, regular monitoring and a quick reaction mechanism to low drawing of the allocated funds or to substantial delay in project implementation.