

DP "MAINSTREAMING" AND DISSEMINATION VISIT TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Representatives of EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) participating in the EQUAL Asylum Seekers Theme organised a mainstreaming and dissemination visit to the European Parliament in Brussels on 9 December 2004. The purpose of the visit was to inform MEPs and the Director-General of ESF/EQUAL of the results of a conference organised by several DPs in Maastricht in September 2004, discuss important issues arising from the DPs' work, and to establish contacts for the next round of EQUAL.

The visit was undertaken by DP representatives from the HIT DP (Restoring Trust in the Future) in the Netherlands and the SEPA DP in Germany. They also represented three other DPs: Back to Work (the Netherlands), JobShop (Austria) and ENEAS (Spain). Together, these five DPs had organised a European conference on vocational training for asylum seekers in Maastricht on 17 September 2004. The purpose of the conference was to present recommendations and conclusions based on the innovative methods developed by the five DPs during Round 1 of EQUAL to combat the discrimination of asylum seekers in the job market. The recommendations were aimed at policy-makers and politicians at national and European levels, as well as other implementing agencies. Since it had proved difficult to attract EU decision-makers to the conference, the organisers decided to take their message to Brussels themselves.

The DP representatives met with MEPs from a broad range of political parties. DG Employment's EQUAL Unit supported the efforts of the DPs and participated in the meetings. After an introduction to their work under EQUAL, they shared the results and experiences of their respective projects.

Some of the topics discussed included:

- The experiences of a study visit to Kosovo conducted by HIT and SEPA in 2003 and especially questions of sustainable return and the interconnectivity of activities in host countries and countries of origin.
- The establishment of a network of 'advocates' on issues related to asylum seekers. MEPs expressed their interest to participate in such a network and agreed with the need for ongoing information.
- European Parliament reactions to European Commission proposals on asylum and immigration issues.
- Other issues related to immigration in general, as well as integration and re-integration and the need for political commitment at European and national levels.
- The situation of the new Member States with regard to asylum
- The implications of demographic change in the EU.
- Drivers and barriers to labour market integration.

The visit elicited an enthusiastic and positive response from MEPs. As a result of the discussions, the DP delegation was asked to draft a briefing note on the obstacles faced by the fact that EQUAL funds cannot be used outside of the EU, making a more integrated approach to the issue of repatriation impossible. The DP participants were invited to hold a seminar on the integration of migrants in order to showcase experiences from EQUAL activities. A suggestion was also made to organise a conference which could examine a range of topics including asylum, ethnic minorities and integration issues.

The programme of the day was as follows:

9:30-10:30 EP Mr Schutte (Assistant Ms Buitenweg - Green - NL)

9:30-10:30 EP Ms Mastenbroek (Socialist - D)

10:30-11:00 EP Ms Hennis-Plasschaert (Liberal - NL)

11:00-11:30 EP Mr Ozdemir (Green - D)

11:30-12:00 EP Ms Kudrycka (EVP - PL)

15:30-16:30 EC Mr Kastrissianakis, Head of Unit, DG Employment & Social Affairs

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