

**EQUAL Malta Ongoing Evaluation  
Third Interim Report  
June 2007**

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## PREFACE

Funded through the European Social Fund, the EQUAL programme is an initiative of the European Union. The objective of EQUAL is to test and develop different ways of how to decrease exclusion, discrimination and inequality in the labour market.

Malta has obtained and programmed € 1.65 million allocated for this ESF Community Initiative. Its four main thematic priorities are:

1. EMPLOYABILITY by facilitating access and return to the labour market for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into a labour market which must be open to all;
2. ENTREPRENEURSHIP by opening up the business creation process to all, providing the tools required for setting up business and for the identification and exploitation of new possibilities for creating employment;
3. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES by reconciling family and professional life, as well as the re-integration of men and women who have left the labour market, by developing more flexible and effective forms of work organisation and support services; and
4. ASYLUM SEEKERS by supporting the social and vocational integration of Asylum Seekers with status.

Interim evaluation reports have chartered the progress and evaluation of the EQUAL projects. Following the First and Second Interim Evaluation (in October 05 and 06 respectively), this report is the Third Evaluation of the EQUAL Programme in Malta. As such it presents a continuation of the EQUAL Programme evaluation between October 2006 and June 2007.

It focuses on the following elements:

- **Projects' effectiveness for networking, dissemination, mainstreaming, and transnationality**
- **Analysis of the preliminary results obtained from the projects**
- **Potential lasting impacts from the EQUAL projects**

An important task of the EQUAL programme evaluator is to assess the results of the principles of EQUAL rather than the output indicators of projects (the projects are experimental activities). Given that in most projects, many of the activities have been carried out, this report focuses on the way the projects have proceeded and their likely success or otherwise.

The third Interim evaluation report is based on the Terms of Reference for the Evaluation, the Inception Report (June 2005), the study of relevant documents (the 2006 AIR, the MFSS website, executive summaries, management database, project documents), the



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answers to a questionnaire sent to the DPs in May 2007 and a series of interviews/discussions/meetings with Maltese officials and project leaders in May/June 2007.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The report presents the findings for the Third phase of the Evaluation of the EQUAL programme, undertaken by EMCS Ltd in conjunction with Research voor Beleid. This study took place between April 2007 and June 2007, and followed a qualitative and quantitative methodology featuring e-mailed surveys and personal interviews with DPs, and interviews with public officers dealing with the management of the programme.

Malta has participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of the programme, which is structured around three Actions:

- Action 1 – Development Phase
- Action 2 – Implementation Phase
- Action 3 – Mainstreaming Phase, running concurrently with Action 2 and for up to six months after its completion.

This report evaluates Action 2 and part of Action 3.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

The main research questions which should be answered at this stage are the following:

- Are there already any results with respect to the implementation of the principles?
- Are the DPs still aiming at the same results and impact of their activities?
- Did unforeseen circumstances or changes in the socio-economic environment change the way activities had to be carried out? To what extent?
- Have any good practices been identified?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project?
- What types of potential intermediate impacts are expected from EQUAL?

### **1.3 The socio-economic situation**

The socio-economic situation has not changed during the last 2 years. In the sense that, since the start of the projects there has not been any major socio-economic developments. Unemployment has decreased slightly, while the female participation rate has also registered a slight improvement.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed employment growth reached 0.9% in 2006 in line with historical trends. The pace of employment creation is anticipated to remain unchanged in 2007 and 2008. Over the forecast horizon, jobs are expected to be mainly generated by the services sector, in particular information technology, financial services and activities arising for the utilisation of new opportunities such as remote gaming and call centres. As a result, according to

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<sup>1</sup> Source: National Statistics Office – Labour Force Surveys

the European Commission, the unemployment rate is foreseen to decline to 7.3% by 2008.<sup>2</sup>

While there have been small improvements in terms of growing employment and decrease in unemployment, the need remains to facilitate access to employment for those who have difficulty in being integrated or re-integrated into the labour market. Indeed, as unemployment and economic inactivity are particularly high among certain 'harder to reach groups' (such as long term unemployed, young people and people with social problems), this has reinforced the relevance of the EQUAL Programme over the period.

In addition, despite recent developments in the number of women employed in the labour force, the rationale for the Equal Opportunities theme in the programme still remains valid. Malta still remains one of the EU countries with the lowest female participation rate, with only around 35% of the total females of working age forming part of the labour supply.

Considering that one of the thematic priorities focuses on asylum seekers and that Malta has been experiencing a growth in the number of asylum seekers landing in this country, underlines even further, the need for an EQUAL project to be directed at this specific target group. Hence this further confirms that the programme strategy is still appropriate.

## **1.4 Methodology**

The evaluators have followed the model of the 'Standard Terms of Reference for Independent Evaluators for the EQUAL Community Initiative Programmes in the New Member States' and have carried out all the necessary tasks to assess the EQUAL programme.

In order to gather the data for the third interim evaluation report, the following methods have been used.

### **1.41 Desk research**

Desk research has been carried out by utilising the following documents:

- Development Partnership Documents (mainly promotional material)
- Executive Summaries from the Project Leaders
- Documents from the MA and NSS on EQUAL (EQUAL Mainstreaming Strategy, AIR 2006)

### **1.42 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire with both open and close ended questions was sent by e-mail to all 5 Project Leaders in April 2007 in order to gather information relating to the questions in section 1.2.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Source: European Commission: Economic Forecast Spring 2007

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Annex 1 for a copy of the questionnaire

### **1.43 Information from relevant meetings**

Since the last evaluation report, the evaluator has participated in one informal meeting with the MA. In addition, the evaluator has attended another informal meeting organised by one EQUAL project Leader. In the latter meeting, the evaluator met directly with the participants of the project.

### **1.44 Interviews with programme managers of EQUAL CIP Malta, with members of the National Support Structure and with project leaders**

Interviews have been conducted with the Managing Authority (PPCD) and the National Support Structure to get additional information on programme management, on support activities and on the monitoring system and structure.

All five project leaders have been interviewed personally by the evaluators in order to gather information on the progress of the projects, the elaboration of the EQUAL principles, the reporting procedures and any potential results, best practices or outcomes.

## **1.5 Layout of the report**

The next chapter of this report will focus on the progress of the projects, the success or otherwise of project activities, in other words, the implementation phase. Chapter 3 analyses any potential lasting impact with regards to the EQUAL principles, in particular, , if there will be any lasting impact of transnational partnerships which will survive after EQUAL, or development partners who will remain active in the field of the labour market. Chapter 4 deals with an analysis of the temporary results obtained from the projects. Chapter 5 concludes the document with a number of recommendations based on the findings of the report.



## **CHAPTER 2: ACTION 2- IMPLEMENTATION PHASE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

EQUAL supports the development of *innovative solutions* to the problems raised by Member States in their National Action Plans for Employment and Social inclusion.

It is part of the EU's strategy to create more and better jobs and to ensure that no one is denied access to these jobs. It is also part of the EU's strategy to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

EQUAL differs from the European Social Fund (ESF) programme as the others are more focused on delivery. EQUAL focuses on testing innovative materials, methods and approaches to develop alternative ways of tackling labour market discrimination and inequality.

Indeed, the evaluators felt that in this report they should point out the importance of the above notes before initiating the evaluation process.

With satisfaction, one can already highlight evidence of good practice for these innovative approaches used in the EQUAL programme for Malta, and indeed some projects have emphasised cooperation, particularly with transnational partners to ensure that the most positive results are adopted and shared across Europe.

### **2.2 The progress of the projects**

EQUAL Malta has 5 projects which include:

- ❑ 2 projects under Priority Theme 1 A (Employability)
- ❑ 1 project under Priority Theme 2C (Entrepreneurship)
- ❑ 1 project under Priority Theme 4G (Equal Opportunities)
- ❑ 1 project under Priority Theme 5 I (Asylum Seekers)

Since the second evaluation phase, all Equal projects in Malta recorded considerable advancement and are all in line with scheduled plans. Each project continued with the proposed training sessions and schemes. At the end of July all project work was on track.

This is positive considering the delays experienced in 2006 in the contracting phase, which had a negative effect on most projects, but nonetheless Action 2 is now well underway or complete – the project leaders envisage that all activities will finish by latest December 2007.

Indeed, the evaluators estimate that project benefits may be more than originally anticipated, as the limited funds available were spent very efficiently and in the few cases where some savings were made, these were reinvested appropriately to add further value to the projects..

On the other hand, in seeking to implement the projects, a number of barriers and constraints to progress were identified by the evaluators. These included:

□ A disparity in DP involvement

While some partnerships established a strong level of involvement, other organisations lost interest in the project as it evolved. Indeed, personal interviews revealed that some DPs have been more active than others. Such a drawback may be reflected in a weak policy focus and less added value from DPs when carrying out the following evaluation exercise. One must note that lessons learned from Round 1 highlight the fact that it is through the creation and dynamics of partnerships that some projects can develop strategies and solutions to the multidimensional problems of discrimination and exclusion.

□ High administration requirements

The high administrative burden is a general complaint. This has increased pressures on both DPs and government representatives restricting opportunities to focus on project outcomes. The main feature is the number of on-the-spot visits that each project leader had to endure; some were held back-to-back, hindering further the progress of the project.

The evaluators wish to indicate that the Managing Authority and the National Support Structure have to follow the guidelines set out by the European Commission and by Maltese procurement regulations. Therefore the evaluators realise that administrative procedures cannot be further simplified. On the other hand the evaluators acknowledge that the complaints of projects are justified. The evaluators fear that the administrative burden has already discouraged present project leaders and potential ESF applicants in the future.

□ Lack of human resources

Coupled with the above, one must also mention that some of the DPs lacked human resources for their own activities, let alone to be involved in EQUAL. On the other hand, organisations with larger capacity were able to dedicate more time, transfer previous experience and improve the level of engagement. This possibly indicates inexperience with ESF (and particularly EQUAL projects), on the part of some project leaders is the cause of some of the problems the projects were facing.

### **2.3 Progress on key principles of EQUAL**

The evaluation found that the principles of transnationality, innovation and empowerment are working well across most of the projects and are being incorporated into project activities. Nonetheless the outputs from partnerships were varied as indicated above, even though important steps have been made to ensure the selection of appropriate development partners.

On average, the level of local partnership achieved has been of medium level. Indeed, during the inception phase, each of the DPs found the partnership a fruitful mechanism for implementing their objectives as the process provided an opportunity for organisations to forge new relationships and access resources and expertise for

the project. Nonetheless some project leaders gained less energy, assistance and resources as the project developed further. Although in 3 projects (Gender Role, Entrepreneurship and Asylum Seekers), the partnership process even acted as a forum for capacity building, in the others (Headstart and the Recycling project), the partnership process merely provided participants. Nonetheless, EQUAL has provided an innovative opportunity in achieving a cross-sectoral involvement from a number of key policy stakeholders, creating networks and contacts which will certainly continue beyond the life of EQUAL.

In overall terms, the transnational component of the programme has proved to be a positive experience for the majority of the projects. Of significance is also the good relationships fostered in particular between some DPs and Transnational partnerships. Indeed in many cases the Equal programme will definitely provide a platform for future ongoing advice and support to the transnational participants after project completion.

At the outset, however, one DP continued experiencing difficulties in establishing a good transnational partnership with an already established team. These initial difficulties, as explained in the second evaluation report had implications for the success of this particular transnational arrangement for this project. In this case, this may show a lack of pre-agreement contact between players and the DP may have not been so successful in finding partners that are closely aligned with its own objectives.

With regards to the administration of the transnational work, the local DPs managed well the transnational activities, in spite of the low financial budgets for these activities. Over the course of the programme, the DPs engaged in the transnational activities sufficiently to benefit from the exchange of information and experience. All DPs confirmed that the transnational component of their projects provided an important insight into the different cultural approaches to common social and labour market problems in other EU Member States. . Project leaders successfully managed to balance transnational cooperation and their own DP activities. Yet some of the DPs found it difficult to carry out all the activities of the transnational programme due to lack of finance and human resources. For example, the Asylum Seekers and the Headstart project leaders mentioned occasions where they could not benefit fully from the transnational meeting. The transnational meeting required more than one Maltese participant in times when concurrent meetings were held.

Nevertheless, to ensure that the transnational outcomes are sustained beyond the EQUAL funding period, it is necessary that the networks created continue to exist in order to support the integration of new approaches into policies at national and European level.

With regard to empowerment, all DP project leaders intentionally or unintentionally worked to apply this concept to their project. There is evidence that each DP did succeed in this aim to different degrees. The implementation of projects involved DPs consulting with representatives of the target group on decisions made within the DP, communicating directly with beneficiaries to get feedback and experimenting aspects of the project with target groups to receive comments. This is probably the most effective form of participatory empowerment. Two of the DPs (Asylum Seekers and the Recycling Project) can be described as succeeding in 'deeply empowering' the target group. This involved actually employing a few participants representing the

different target groups and indeed a small number of them were engaged to continue working after the programme.

A further analysis of the project implementation suggests that other DPs were somehow committed to applying the concept of empowerment. One of the DPs succeeded in 'partial empowerment' by using unspent funds to develop focus groups for the target people (NCPE project).

It has also been common to involve beneficiaries as part of the dissemination strategy. This typically took the form of involving beneficiaries in DP event and conferences, something that the evaluators see as empowering in itself.

The issue of Equal Opportunities is also a key commitment in the management of the EQUAL Programme. Overall, the realisation of Equal Opportunities as a cross-cutting principle in the programme and the implementation of the DP projects, has contributed towards raising awareness of equality issues. At the project level, the DPs have adopted a proactive approach to the range of beneficiaries by adjusting projects in accordance with the needs of different target groups. Hence, their action was primarily focused on adding value to equal opportunities practice. Indeed, all DPs have focused on the Equal Opportunities theme within the programme in particular:

- Integrating young persons in the labour market
- Promoting training opportunities for men and women
- Supporting unemployed men and women to start and run their own businesses
- Supporting asylum seekers of both sexes in integrating in Maltese society; and
- Supporting disadvantaged people to overcome barriers to work.

## 2.4 Indicators for the Projects

It is important to look at the **planned** indicators as per projects selected, because the evaluators must use these indicators as a starting point for their assessment of project implementation. The following indicators are in fact being used to track the progress of projects and the programme.

Priority	Output	Result	Impact
1A	Persons in training: 20 M / 15 F Volume of training: 23,550 participant hours	Certified beneficiaries: 18 M / 13 F Success/satisfaction rate: 65%	Numbers of Jobs Created / retained: 16 M / 12 Female Labour Market Placement / Integration Rate Beneficiaries: 90% of Certified after Assistance
2C	Participants: 20 M /25 F Volume of training: 16,200 participant hours	Certified Beneficiaries: 7 M / 9 F Success/satisfaction Rate of certified beneficiaries: 70%	Number of businesses set up by participants: 4 M / 4 F Labour Market Placement/Integration Rate Beneficiaries: 50%
4G	Participants (in seminars): 50 M /350 F 10,800 participant hours	Certified Beneficiaries: 12 M / 88 F Success/satisfaction Rate of certified beneficiaries: 66%	Numbers of Jobs created/retained: 15 M / 35 F Labour Market Placement/Integration Rate

			Beneficiaries: 50% of Certified after Assistance
5I	Participants: 20 M / 10 F Volume of training: 30,000 participant hours	Certified Beneficiaries: 13 M / 7 F Success / Satisfaction Rate 66%	Numbers of Jobs created/retained: 7 M / 5 F Labour Market Placement/Integration Rate Beneficiaries: 60% of Certified after Assistance

Source: Government of Malta, *ESF CIP EQUAL Malta 2004-2006. Draft Annual Implementation Report 2004.*

## 2.5 Current measurable output indicators

In terms of output, all projects except that relating to general equality, managed to reach, and in some cases over-exceed, the target number in terms of persons in training, including the number of training hours.

In terms of results, certified beneficiaries are in line with the planned ones, except for the Gender Role project. The Asylum seekers project, the Entrepreneurial project, and the Recycling project actually surpassed the targets. The Headstart project met the objectives in line with the letter of offer.

In relation to impact, although still early, a number of jobs may have been found due to the EQUAL programme. Impact in this regard is very difficult to measure, as each project can directly or indirectly contribute to improve persons' chances to integrate in the labour market. In addition, participants may decide to delay or postpone their entry in the labour force although becoming 'more' employable.

Reasons for the low output and result indicators for the Gender Role project organised for the inactive population are explained below:

- The percentage of the inactive women as per Letter of Offer did not exclude those who are involved in the voluntary sector and therefore were not interested in training or formal employment and possibly others involved otherwise.
- A number of EU projects were targeting the same cohort of individuals. This hindered the number of participants that were expected to attend the training seminars.
- The participants emphasized the fact that they were interested in finding employment and not in training.
- The seminars that were planned to be organized in Gozo had to be cancelled, as there was no response from the general public due to lack of interest. Even though apart from adverts in the local media, the Ministry of Gozo, the local councils, parish churches, and various schools have been contacted and informed about the seminars. Moreover, the unemployed individuals were also informed by the Employment and Training Corporation about the seminars.
- The participants of the seminars were monitored to ensure the uptake of courses and/ or employment. In fact the participants were contacted and informed about the commencement of, amongst others the MCAST and adult education courses. Some of the participants did apply for the courses offered by the development partners including amongst others ETC, MCAST, MEYE and local councils. Therefore, although these individuals are not currently employed however, they are

retraining and applying for courses with the intention of finding a job in the near future.

- Moreover, a number of participants are now registering for employment and therefore are not part of the inactive population any longer (the target beneficiaries). Therefore although they are not yet in employment, they are actively searching for a job. The project in question considers this move as a success in achieving the aims captured in the letter of offer.
- Although the training seminars were necessary they were not sufficient because there were other confounding factors that have influenced the uptake of employment such as lack of childcare facilities, lack of job flexibility; lack of part-time jobs; gender and age discrimination, need for extend school hours, the need to make work pay, change in policies and a change in culture.
- Other certified training organised by the other EQUAL DPs was advertised on TV and radio programmes 'Nahdem u Kif!' and were also indicated during the local council seminars organised by the NCPE project. As stated by the participants themselves, the cohort chose these courses, some even promoted through other EQUAL projects, as a stronger link to employment, affecting negatively the attendance at the local council seminars of the NCPE project.

The output and result indicators being analysed are monitoring indicators which projects are required to report against during the life of the project. Evaluation allows for in-depth assessment of significant departures from the originally set indicators. The next chapter looks at potential project impacts.

## **CHAPTER 3: POTENTIAL LASTING IMPACT AND MAINSTREAMING EQUAL**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Systematically assessing the overall impact, and likely impact, of the EQUAL programme at present is not easy. Isolating the impact of each project is always challenging due, for example, to the presence of other extraneous influences on relevant trends and the associated challenge of identifying distinct EQUAL causation. The fact that the EQUAL programme is not yet complete, that it is only a small part of the ESF, and that other EU funds are contributing to improve employability, all contribute to the challenge.

At the level of individual programmes, tangible results are however already evident. In areas such as training and provision of support, the intended outputs are being delivered and these in turn allow for increased or improved services and other longer term benefits/impacts for/on beneficiaries.

### **3.2 The importance of Mainstreaming**

DPs should have taken account of mainstreaming from the very beginning and implement it on an ongoing basis to take advantage of relevant mainstreaming opportunities as and when they occur. In this sense, Action 3 should be running concurrently with Action 2.

Mainstreaming is more likely to be successful when implemented over time rather than applying the sudden approach. The Managing Authority and NSS cannot wait until DPs complete their work before informing policymakers. Opportunities to influence may be lost, their innovation may be less relevant than when first planned and policymakers may be less inclined to trust their outcomes if introduced to them at a late stage.

Through mainstreaming, EQUAL can:

- Contribute to improving public policy and practice, based on what actually works (and does not work);
- Involve key stakeholders, including the groups who experience discrimination in this process;
- Raise the awareness of decision makers at all levels, and of the public, about potential solutions to common social and economic problems;
- Provide a way to share and transfer knowledge, expertise and experiences through networking and learning;
- Help DPs see the value of their work from the eyes of others who want to use the results to achieve similar outcomes;
- Ensure the continuity of good practice explored in EQUAL beyond the life of the programme.

Despite the fact that partnerships often include representatives of organisations who could influence policy and/or policy-makers, these are not always fulfilling this role.

These partners are not assisting with the mainstreaming potential of the projects they are involved with and need more encouragement.

Finally, to maximise the impact of EQUAL, the Managing Authority and NSS have a crucial role to play. It is they who can build the links between DPs and the policy level.

### **3.3 Impact and mainstreaming of EQUAL**

A final assessment of mainstreaming impacts would be premature at the present time, as few of the DPs have had sufficient time to realise potential mainstream impacts. This is particularly the case for those at the final stages of Action 2 and most have just started their mainstreaming activities.

The evaluators envisage and plan for further investigative work during the coming months, which will examine outcomes and potential mainstream impacts over the remaining duration of the EQUAL Programme.

Although the full impacts may not be realised until after the EQUAL Programme has ended and given that Action 3 is just in the process, evidence suggests that the programme has had already some impact at the horizontal level and the individual / beneficiary level in particular, but less so at the vertical level. To date, few of the DPs have achieved transferability at the vertical level since general mainstreaming so far was aimed at the DPs, partners and other local or agencies (the 'peer'-level) with similar interests, and commonly focusing on practical lessons whilst largely disseminating the outcomes from their projects. Indeed, the Headstart project has managed to transfer the training model to ETC and the latter is now providing the service for the persons in need (horizontal mainstreaming). Other projects have followed suit and managed to mainstream horizontally as explained in section 3.5.

Project leaders commented that getting ideas adopted into national policy and incorporated by other organisations is extremely difficult. It is easier to disseminate findings than to ensure that findings influence policy or is adopted by others. Overall, the evaluators feel that the whole programme has made progress towards meeting its key aim of testing and promoting new means of combating forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market nation-wide.

#### **3.31 Impact at the individual level**

Action 2 in most cases was completed in the first half of 2007 and hence many of the DPs are currently working to finalise the implementation by undertaking final project promotion. As such, there are some discernable impacts at the level of individual beneficiaries at this stage but it is worth pointing out that some 'soft outcomes' across the DPs are difficult to assess.

Overall, the programme has made a positive impact at the individual level by helping beneficiaries move along the pathway to training, education and employment. Project leaders have noted that these impacts can mainly be identified in terms of soft outcomes such as contributing towards increasing self-confidence and motivation, communication and teambuilding skills and most importantly as an enhanced sense of personal responsibility. Project leaders have also developed skills in IT (Recycling Project), cross-cultural dialogue (Asylum Seekers Project) and diversity issues or



worked towards improving behaviour amongst those who had served custodial sentences (Recycling project).

### **3.32 Impact at the horizontal level**

In assessing the impact at the horizontal level, a distinction at this stage can be made between those DPs that contributed towards transferring lessons and approaches from their projects and those that disseminated outcomes.

Evidence of horizontal mainstreaming has emerged, although the degree of impact varies from across the DPs. Asylum Seekers and Headstart have been successful in transferring outcomes from their projects to other partners and organisations within the sector. The Asylum Seekers project, for example, has transferred their training method to organisations in the same sector and a number of approaches utilised by Headstart are being piloted by one of their transnational partners and has also managed to transfer the training model to the Employment and Training Corporation.

Evidence of other horizontal mainstreaming, however, has yet to emerge. The other projects are working to disseminate their outcomes, share lessons and experience, and create wider awareness of their projects and the EQUAL Programme in general. Mainstreaming activities are in their early stages and while it is too early to comment on their potential impact it is important to note that many of the DPs have clear ideas of how the project outcomes are to be disseminated and which key stakeholders they need to target.

### **3.33 Impact at the vertical level**

In contrast with the above, the DPs have had limited impact at the national policy level to date but have worked to disseminate the outcomes and key lessons from their projects. In this task, the DPs have or will conduct a range of activities for example, high level conferences. .

It was clear from the interviews that DPs acknowledge that effective mainstreaming is the key justification for the effort and resources behind EQUAL. The evaluators feel that whereas the project leaders will effectively manage their horizontal mainstreaming, the far more important vertical mainstreaming priority will be challenging. This note is further clarified in section 5.3

The only project who is currently working on vertical mainstreaming is the NCPE project which is in the progress of writing the formulation of a policy in order to combat discrimination.

## **3.4 Sustainability of the projects**

Sustainability of the projects during EQUAL has been good, although staff turnover and staff shortages continued to pose a risk to sustainability despite efforts to mitigate against this. Since the second evaluation report, staff turnover has been experienced in the Managing Authority, National Support Structure and in 2 EQUAL project coordinators, the Entrepreneurship and the NCPE projects. At the end of Action 2, the recycling project experienced a shortage in the number of hours the project leader was dedicating to the project due to new work arrangements.

These changes have caused transitory disruption, but gaps have been filled with minimum inconvenience. A good handover from the resigning persons to the new employees was vital to the continued smooth running of the EQUAL programme. Yet, the evaluators believe that staff turnover could have been mitigated by timing employment contracts with the EQUAL lifetime as proposed in section 5.3.

There is some evidence that at least some of the DP activities will be continued beyond the life of the programme. In many cases sustainability is already by achieved through the continued use of products and services developed under the EQUAL programme – as explained in section 3.32.

The Housing Authority, the project leader for the Headstart project will fund lodging for the Headstart participants, while the OIWAS foundation is replicating the Asylum Seekers project. The significance of the EQUAL objectives and their permanence is also evidenced by this, indicating the importance the demand and the needs of the EQUAL target groups.

## **CHAPTER 4: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS OBTAINED FROM THE PROJECTS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

When the fieldwork for the third evaluation phase was carried out, most projects were in the late stages of Action 2 or starting Action 3. Therefore, the evaluators can only give preliminary results with respect to indicators as it has been done with transnational cooperation, mainstream, partnership and dissemination.

### **4.2 EQUAL Preliminary Results**

Some of the most interesting findings are listed below:

- When analysed, the 5 projects produced numerous tangible outputs (e.g. studies, good practice, training manuals, CD-ROM, TV or radio spots, and many others); A very impressive volume of material was disseminated while most of the projects organised events as well. Others disseminated posters and brochures. The outputs and their dissemination contributed to producing impacts on target groups, end beneficiaries, the general public and other stakeholders.
- In the majority of the projects under the EQUAL Programme, one of the objectives is the exchange of good practice. In terms of results, most outputs produced contributed to the achievement of this objective. This illustrates the added value of EQUAL, which reinforced the dissemination of a number of good practices at the level of the European Union. In addition, all projects produced results that are directly transferable, such as training modules.
- With regard to the impact of these results on the project partners, there is a possibility that these have or will adopt new practices in their work. Of significance is that, all of the partners recognise that their expertise, know-how and involvement in the EQUAL project per se have improved, but also in their transnational networks/partnerships.
- In terms of the impact on the end beneficiaries (unemployed, young people and asylum seekers), in all projects, these populations benefited from better access to assistance and improved their capacity to live independently. This result is of primary importance, because it goes beyond the concept of assistance towards the concept of self improvement and empowerment.
- One of the reasons for this latter impact is certainly the fact that project partners involved the target groups or end beneficiaries as early as the initial phases and during the implementation or dissemination phases. This is a useful indication that should be pointed out/suggested for future projects as a factor contributing to a project's success.
- EQUAL was a unique programme in Malta in addressing the issues of the unemployed, young people and asylum seekers in an integrated way (i.e. considering all the dimensions of the participants);

- There have been additional inputs in the form of contributions and work of ‘volunteers’ that has not been calculated. These inputs have also contributed to outputs and impacts, but are not necessarily sustainable;

These achievements therefore represent substantial value, particularly in view of the small funding amount provided for the EQUAL programme. This is at least partly to the contribution and effort by the project leaders to succeed.

As was detailed in this report, some findings of the third interim evaluation revealed areas where there is room for improvement. Some of these had already been anticipated in the previous evaluation phases, such as for example, the need of a mainstreaming strategy.

#### **4.3 Projects’ effectiveness of networking, dissemination, mainstreaming, and transnationality**

- Networking mechanisms

Four National Thematic Networks have been set up but have not started functioning yet. Hence, there has been no formal networking, including for mainstreaming purposes. Nevertheless, the intensity of networking between DPs has been satisfying, given the smallness of our country and the easiness with which meetings and exchanges can be organised.

- Dissemination activities at DP level

Dissemination activities have been ongoing according to plan. DPs have carried out various different activities, mostly through publicity campaigns, the creation of new websites and seminars. Different media facilitated awareness raising, whilst in some cases, role models or testimonials have helped to explain and demonstrate what the EQUAL projects were all about. Overall, the contribution of the dissemination activities has helped to change or positively influence the general public, including employers and other stakeholders. However, there seems to be some confusion between mainstreaming and dissemination amongst some DPs. Project leaders keep confusing mainstreaming and dissemination activities – mainstreaming activities should not remain at the level of dissemination. Project leaders should bring on board people who have access to policy and decision makers as champions of EQUAL. Hence, the evaluators encourage supporting DPs through the mainstreaming strategy.

- Effectiveness of mainstreaming

Horizontal mainstreaming has been more effective than vertical mainstreaming, as explained in chapter 3. At DP level, transfers between DPs, as well as between some transnational partners have taken place, whereas mainstreaming towards the policy makers has been more limited. Similarly, once the functions of the National Thematic Networks are implemented DPs will face fewer difficulties in mobilising policy makers.

- Added value of transnational partnerships

Value added has been capitalised upon by most local DPs (as explained in section 2.3) to varying extents. In fact, project leaders’ expectations regarding the added



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value of transnationality have been mostly met. In general, project leaders' motivation to implement transnational activities, and their capacity to capitalise on learning remained significantly high throughout the project.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the main findings that have emerged from the third evaluation. It also reflects back on recommendations previously made and how these have been progressed and in turn the impact of this on the EQUAL programme. Finally, in light of the findings of this latest phase of research, this chapter sets out key recommendations for the remainder of the delivery period of EQUAL.

### **5.2 Addressing past evaluation recommendations**

From examining the development of the EQUAL Programme, it is evident that the implementation of the programme has evolved and changed in the light of recommendations previously proposed in the second interim evaluation:

- The National Policy Mainstreaming Strategy has been finalised. It should hence provide the project leaders with better assistance during the remaining months of the project in aspects for mainstreaming.
- Attention continued to be given to the gender factor in terms of actual successful participation in the projects themselves.
- In view of the increasing numbers of asylum seekers and the fact the many women remain inactive, EQUAL target groups remain important elements after EQUAL lifetime. Hence transferability of lessons learned is encouraged for new projects falling under ESF 2007-2013.
- Project leaders still expressed difficulties in administering the paperwork required. The problem is more due to the volume than in the complexity of work. The evaluators acknowledge that paperwork procedures are being followed according to guiding principles and hence cannot be simplified.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Recommendations are being provided concerning future and remaining activities:

- Given the few months remaining for Action 3, an increased commitment to mainstreaming needs to take place. Close collaboration between all stakeholders involved needs to take place while effort could be addressed to increase the visibility of the EQUAL, its objectives, results impacts and thus to increase the political interest and involvement of certain stakeholders. It is also recommended that the planned activities of the Mainstreaming Strategy are carried out without further delays.
- In line with the above, more attention should be given to horizontal mainstreaming but even more to promote vertical mainstreaming. Policy makers need to acknowledge and actively support the opportunities arising from EQUAL's results. Indeed the National Thematic Networks need to start operate, in order to assist the DPs in their mainstreaming activities.
- The evaluators deem it essential to enhance further communication and exchange of information between partners within every partnership. It therefore recommends encouraging exchanges by setting regular meetings, rather than informal ones, where information on the state of the actions may be exchanged, also providing the

opportunity for each partner to provide assistance in the remaining activities. It is important that at this stage, none of the DP partners are excluded from the progress of the project.

- The project leaders are recommended to invest enough time to ensure that final added value from the transnational cooperation is gained – and to keep the transnational element alive until the end of the project life.
- In future programmes, the evaluators recommend better structured employment contracts in order to minimise the chances of key people changing jobs during the life of a programme and to guarantee continuity and stability. Evaluators suggest employment agreements which bind people to work throughout the lifetime of the project. Project ‘ownership’ and the relationship built with local and transnational partners are difficult to be transferred to new employees, especially when there are only few months of work left.

## **5.4 Conclusions**

The success of EQUAL takes time to materialise. Many of the Malta’s EQUAL successes are happening now in small scale and in small steps.

The third evaluation exercise indicates that hitherto all of the EQUAL projects have followed their planned timetables and adhered closely to their budget allocations. The methodology being followed was in all cases progressing according to plan and reaching target beneficiaries. Additionally, many of those interviewed indicated that they were reaping unexpected results from their new experiences in working with EQUAL, including valuable identification of strengths and weaknesses, greater access to new methodologies and examples of best practice, and important lessons on transferability and adaptation of established models.

The evaluation exercise also allowed project leaders to identify interim lessons to be drawn which could be shared with organisations or persons implementing other EU projects. These lessons were drawn from an analysis of the different working methods, operational hurdles and problem-solving strategies of the transnational projects visited, and constituted a useful overview of how the funded projects were being implemented.

All interviews show that organisations have gained greatly from their participation in EQUAL. Whether by learning more about the issues or by improving co-ordination and management skills, they all came out with increased stature. The transnational networking mechanism in itself already has an impact: by bringing groups into contact with one another and prompting them to collaborate, it has made a significant difference to the work of organisations which, by their nature, more often was fairly inflexible. In turn, these partnerships have led to more effective innovation, moving away from rigidity.

Project activities, including innovative methods for testing, co-operation, exchanges, networking, developing new models and sharing best practice, have already started to have multiplier effects on target beneficiaries and related organisations.