

## REPORT ON WORKSHOP C2: INCLUSION THROUGH CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

*EQUAL experience presented at this workshop shows how the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be used to open up a wider debate on issues related to diversity. It also demonstrates that CSR can mobilise employers and trade unions to become involved in the integration of severely disadvantaged or excluded individuals.*

Before the discussion of the two main issues to be addressed by the workshop, the Chair, Valdas Rupšys, Secretary of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour in Lithuania introduced the panellists and spoke about recent developments in CSR within his country.

### 1. AWARENESS RAISING AND MOBILISATION: STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING NEW ALLIANCES WITH EMPLOYERS

In involving employers in new alliances, their obligations under new equality legislation can provide the “push” dimension while the “pull” is the possibility of improving their firms’ image, reputation and business performance. That is the experience of Andy Aldridge, the Director of 3A The First Choice, a commercial consultancy company and an active partner in the Kirklees Common Ground Development Partnership (DP) [UKgb-13](#). Together with small employers and owner managers, the company has developed an [Equality at Work Standard](#). Andy stressed that many small firms see CSR as something for big businesses and therefore, he has to concentrate on establishing the business case and dealing with the immediate day to day issues of individual employers. A range of tools is available to assist such as publications, workshops, e-based materials and standards and criteria. All of these help employers comply with their legislative obligations and at the same ensure that their workplaces are welcoming to diverse groupings.

In Portugal, there is a National Thematic Network of 20 DPs working on "[Integrated pathways for training and integration of disadvantaged people](#)". José Manuel Henriques is the driving force behind this network and he made the case that awareness raising about new alliances should not only take place at an individual level, as it was equally important to work with organisations and communities to remove bottlenecks to progress. In this later respect, DPs had encouraged schools to promote entrepreneurship through their curricula and assisted employment services in introducing changes in the skills and levels of autonomy of their staff. In addition, DPs had been very much engaged in promoting a territorial approach that enables all those involved to develop a response that actually matches the needs of the area and links economic inclusion to economic development through the creation of new jobs. One of the many methods of awareness raising that had been successfully tested with employers was the creation of CSR awards that involved the employers themselves in establishing the award criteria.

“In France, even only two or three years ago issues related to integration were seen to be the exclusive concerns of the government or the third sector!” This was the opening gambit of Henri de Reboul, Délégué Général of the [Institut du Mécénat de Solidarité](#) (IMS) in Paris. However, he went on to explain that things have changed, as a result of a national level think tank on the participation of companies and the subsequent signing of a “Charter of Diversity” by 50 large enterprises, IMS now has a network of 125 enterprises involved in CSR and Diversity Management. It also develops tools and methods that help these and other enterprises to recognise their social responsibility and to demonstrate it through practical action. IMS is very quick to point out “if others have done it (i.e. promoted diversity in the company) you can do it!” EQUAL has supported the extension of the IMS’s network and the use of its tools through the LATITUDE DP ([FR-NAT-2001-10039](#)) and a further impetus to the work will be provided by the new ELMER DP ([FR-NAT-2004-41892](#)).

In commenting on the contributions of these three advocates of good practice, Walter Cerfeda, the Confederal Secretary of ETUC pointed out that the introduction of CSR had to be a voluntary choice and that sometimes in the current economic climate it is difficult to introduce a social

inclusion policy. He also wondered that without more legislation, criteria and public authority support, whether there was a risk that CSR could simply be a “trendy” topic. Jette Steen Knudsen, the Director of the Copenhagen Centre who runs a CSR network for Danish business leaders expressed some concern about whether affirmative action might produce problems for companies. However, in response, the advocates stressed the interdependency that should exist linking the inclusion process with income support and training and with networks being provided to increase employability (through job creation not replacement) and economic prosperity.

Other significant points were made from the floor of the workshop and these were generally endorsed:

- The need for a framework, but not a uniform framework, for CSR;
- CSR must be seen as a management system embracing social, economic and environmental aspects;
- The promotion of CSR could be greatly assisted by sympathetic public procurement policies;
- The importance of partnerships or support networks particularly for SMEs.

## **2. PRACTICAL SUPPORT SERVICES AND THEIR DELIVERY**

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In many cases, existing employment services do not lead to employment on the open labour market. This is not simply a question of the level of resources. It is more about how resources are targeted at employers and clients. This is the strongly held viewpoint of Kristiina Härkää who is the coordinator of the [Majakka-Beacon](#) DP (FI-32). She has extensive experience of [diversity action through Supported Employment](#), and of [cooperation between Employment Services and companies](#). In Kristiina's DP, different services have been combined. Each client has a case manager to sort out all the other aspects (health, housing, social services etc) of their lives. This means that the job coach can focus exclusively on issues related to employment and supporting the client in job search and even afterwards in the workplace. At the same time, the job coach works with employers helping them in the matching and recruitment processes and with all the paperwork or subsidies concerned with hiring someone from an immigrant background. Finally, language teaching is also provided in the workplace. Kristiina stated categorically that these targeted, flexible services have produced more job opportunities than the mainstream employment services.

Services for employers have also been provided through EQUAL DPs in Portugal. José Manuel Henriques described the networks of small firms that had been established to promote job training and the efforts made to help employers understand that behind each contact person there was an organisation that could help to solve their problems. Assistance had also been given in the identification of skills gaps that could be filled by EQUAL target groups. In terms of the target groups themselves, capacity building and new job-specific forms of training had been offered.

There have been certain recent improvements in the services available to French employers. Henri de Rebol explained that the role of the intermediary was becoming more established and not only within the public sector. The intermediary provides a link between a company and potential employees and where necessary, assists the company in changing its profile. There have also been considerable advances in Training in CSR and Diversity and in undertaking Diversity Audits in companies. All of these have helped to integrate CSR and Diversity into the management practices of companies.

“CSR can improve the governance of enterprises and public authorities also have a role to play in promoting and introducing CSR” said Eric Lavillunière in commenting on the contributions from the three advocates. Eric is the Deputy Secretary General of CECOP (European Confederation of Workers' Co-operatives, Social Cooperatives and Participative Enterprises) and has represented that body at meetings of the European Multi-Stakeholders Forum on CSR. He felt that while CSR should be a voluntary activity, it should be undertaken seriously and that it required a high degree of accountability and transparency. He emphasised the importance of capitalising on the positive developments in EQUAL and of promoting the need for cohesion as well as competition.

“CSR is all about good business practice!” or so Przemek Pohrybieniuk believes. Przemek works as the Director of External Relations for Danone in Poland and, in addition, he is the Vice-Chair of the national Responsible Business Forum. He said that he could see the development of the concept of CSR moving through Total Quality Management into Total Responsible Management. He also underlined the need for partnerships and dialogue between policy makers, businesses and the third sector.

### 3. IN CONCLUSION

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Henry McLeish, the Workshop Facilitator, said that now was the time to mainstream and transfer these EQUAL experiences from the first round and to focus on the link between resources and economic inclusion. He also pointed to another encouraging aspect of the EQUAL good practices. While the concept of CSR might not initially mean very much to SMEs and family-owned businesses, the new support services developed by EQUAL DPs have enable these employers to cope with issues related to the employment of disadvantaged people and to fulfil their “social responsibilities”.

#### For more information:

More EQUAL experiences related to the topic can be found in the Policy Dossier “[New Alliances to Boost Jobs for the Most Disadvantaged](#) – Tackling Disadvantage through Corporate Social Responsibility and Diversity Management”.