

REPORT ON WORKSHOP B3: MINORITIES TAKING THEIR PLACE

The testimonies of advocates during this workshop provide ample evidence of EQUAL's achievements in established more training and employment opportunities and more effective information and support services for ethnic minorities and migrants. These new approaches have a potential contribution to make to the full implementation of the EU Directives on Racial Equality and on Equality in Employment.

Before the EQUAL advocates made their presentations, the Chair, Ken Lambert, outlined the two issues that the workshop would address and the Facilitator, Nathalie Wuiame, introduced the panellists.

1. WORKING WITH BUSINESSES

Companies can benefit from new recruitment strategies based on ethnic diversity. It is now IKEA's policy that each store should try to mirror the population of its trading area in the profile of its staff, as Veronika Liljander from the HR Department of IKEA/Backebo explained. IKEA/Backebo is the company's newest store in Sweden and one of two IKEA outlets in Gothenburg. This new store was to open in September 2004 and to offer some 350 jobs and prior to this opening, a four month long recruitment process was undertaken. Through IKEA's involvement in [the Town's Together EQUAL Development Partnership](#) (SE-51), the company had become more aware of its potential customer base and the spending power of ethnic minority groups that made up 25% of its catchment population. As IKEA's HR Manager said, "Sweden has changed and today we have a lot of Swedes who haven't grown up with Billy the bookshelf, who don't know IKEA's business idea, who don't care when IKEA's catalogue arrives but still need furniture and home furnishing products at good quality and low prices." Thus, it was decided that the criteria for selection during the recruitment process was that new employees would reflect IKEA's vision and values, which the company sees as being trans-cultural and that the final numbers of people recruited would mirror the racial composition in the surrounding area. Over 9000 applications were received for the 350 jobs and in many instances, the company had to read between the lines in making offers for interviews. It was only during the job interviews that real decisions could be made as to whether applicants had the skills, including a sufficient mastery of Swedish and the attitudes to be employed in the company. In the end, 22% of the employees who were recruited were non-nationals and together they speak 40 different languages, in addition to Swedish. Each employee has a name badge and a flag on that badge indicates the additional language that he or she speaks. The results of these efforts are becoming evident. There are many more new customers from ethnic minority groups using this store. This has to be contrasted with IKEA's other store in Gothenburg that in all the years that it has been operating has had very few clients from these groups. These new customers are expressing their pleasure that they can be served by people who speak their own language and the message about reconciling diversity and profit is spreading because the HR Department is now receiving calls asking "Can I work for you?"

Having heard about this IKEA initiative, Afsana Shukur, Manager of UK Government's Ethnic Minority Employment Division was interested to know of any plans to transfer this experience to other IKEA branches throughout Europe and of any barriers or difficulties that had been experienced in operating this new recruitment policy. Also, Ana Csongor, Director of Autonomia Alapitvany (the Hungarian Foundation for Self-reliance), said that she had experienced major difficulties in trying to find work experience placement for Roma and did Veronika feel that IKEA's approach could apply in other situations? In reply, Veronika said that transfer was possible because of policy of reflecting the racial mix of trading areas in the composition of IKEA staff complements and she also saw no reason why the approach of IKEA/Backebo should not be generally applicable. She felt that the main barriers existed in people minds and attitudes and that it was important to take a first step towards bridging the gap because then you begin to see the common aspects rather than the differences.

During the wider debate that involved the workshop participants, a number of interesting and important points were made including:

- Possible problems with positive discrimination in recruitment vis-à-vis national legislation but it was noted that incentive measures and positive action were permitted in EU legislation;
- The need to have new methods to assess applications from individuals who have a different linguistic and cultural background;
- The benefits accruing to those enterprises that are prepared to organise language learning for non-native employees

2. NEW TYPES OF TRAINING AND SERVICES

Positive experiences have been gained from a new national Operational Programme for the Fight against Discrimination in Spain. This programme addresses the needs of Roma people who whilst being the largest minority group in Europe, often have to face the most discrimination and disadvantage. The fact that the [Fundación Secretariado General Gitano](#) (FSGG), the responsible body for this programme, is an NGO is another innovation in Spain and as an NGO, FSGG is also involved with a number of EQUAL DPs. Bélen Sánchez-Rubio from FSGG reported that in Spain, there is a lot of prejudice towards Roma but also a lot of unskilled labour is needed. Thus, FSGG has developed a comprehensive employers' service as a way of promoting more job opportunities for Roma. This service stresses the importance of understanding the needs of SMEs and of explaining that the people that it is offering are firstly serious workers and secondly Roma. The FSGG intermediaries supply the back-up services to employers and try to develop a relationship that is founded on mutual trust. FSGG is also providing basic training that makes it possible for Roma people to go on to vocational training and is helping others to access these training courses. In total there are some 15,000 people in "employment insertion" activities in almost 50 local and regional administrations throughout Spain. This success is explained by:

- Providing timely support and assistance;
- Introducing a cross-sector approach;
- Providing flexibility in the use of resources and in access to them;
- Benchmarking in, and with, the Roma population.

In Portugal, immigration is a relative new phenomenon and so there is considerable added value to be gained from EQUAL in terms of policy development. At least that is the view of Jorge Malheiros, Coordinator of EQUAL Portuguese thematic network on "[Social and professional integration of immigrants, refugees and ethnic minorities](#)". He said that the DPs in this network were working on a process that gave migrants the skills and capacities to become citizens in the widest sense of that term and this often involved changing the perceptions of individuals and institutions. Jorge saw three main EQUAL contributions to policy and practice in Portugal:

- Developing integrated modular solutions that reduced fragmentation and produced answers that responded to local needs: for example continuing vocational training for employees in the shoe industry combined with language learning;
- Developing solutions that are flexible and adapted as through the network, the products of individual DPs are assessed and validated by their peers and experts and these products are then rebuilt to make them even more rich and relevant;
- Changing institutional cultures through cooperative work engendered by EQUAL: for example cooperating in the production of a manual for integration agencies or through the in-service training of civil servants and others working with immigrants.

Miranda Vuolasranta from the Council of Europe, DG III Social Cohesion, Migration and Roma/Gypsies Department was interested to find out if Spain had produced a National Implementation Plan related to EQUAL treatment and if there was any research related to Roma. Afsana Shukur wanted to know more about plans for the transfer of these EQUAL solutions and Ana Csongor posed a question about the involvement of the target group in the activities. Further contributions were then sought from the floor of the workshop and some crucial issues were flagged up and two questions posed:

- The desirability of leaving a EQUAL legacy such as an effective regional network;
- The value and efficiency of partnership work in EQUAL;
- Strong support for the role of the mediator;
- What is happening in EQUAL vis-à-vis asylum seekers?
- How many Roma people were employed in the Spanish programme?

In reply to the last question, Bélen said that 40% of FSGG's staff, 80% of the programme beneficiaries and 70% of those that found employment as a result of the programme were Roma. She stressed the importance of these people as role models. In relation to Miranda's question, Spain had not yet transposed the Racial Equality Directive into national law and there was little research on the situation of Roma, although it was FSGG's aim to undertake a study that could provide some credible figures. Bélen also mentioned the need to empower Roma to use their rights and the success of mediation in resolving cases of discrimination. In terms of mainstreaming, she indicated that a number of institutions have now altered the curricula or the entry requirements for their courses.

Jorge spoke about mainstreaming through institutions and the fact that a number of DPs will leave behind an operational network but that other legacies will depend on the success of DP's Action 3 activities. In Portugal the most effective partnerships had been those that were smaller and contained a mix of national, local and third sector interests. As to asylum seekers, he explained that there were only two to three hundred per year and that these were dealt with by the Portuguese Council for Refugees which had used EQUAL to develop a pilot project with one local authority, which it now intends to transfer throughout Portugal.

3. IN CONCLUSION

Ken Lambert reminded the workshop that while the two Directives are very important, the Commission believes that "laws by themselves are not enough. If discrimination is to be eliminated, attitudes and behaviour have to change". He was convinced that EQUAL was making these types of changes and he urged EQUAL Managing Authorities to pass on the approaches and tools that had been successfully tested within this Community Initiative to the Equality Bodies and other relevant institutions in their Member States.

For more information:

More EQUAL experiences related to the topic can be found in the Policy Dossier "[Equality, the Labour Force and the Law](#) – EQUAL supports the implementation of the Directives on Racial Equality and on Equality in Employment".