

## MOVING FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY - EQUAL PAVES THE WAY FOR NEW APPROACHES TO THE RESETTLEMENT OF (EX)-OFFENDERS

Prison Services throughout the European Union are stretched to the limit. The prison population has risen by almost 28% over the last 10 years which means that one out of every 800 European citizens is in prison. There is an overall occupancy level, based on officially stated capacity, of 114%. A major factor in producing and maintaining these record numbers of inmates are high reconviction rates but recently more than 100 EQUAL Development Partnerships have piloted new approaches to preventing re-offending through re-settlement support, aftercare or assisting inmates whilst in prison. A European Mainstreaming Programme now provides a unique opportunity to convince key actors, who are responsible for penal and/or resettlement policies, that they should adopt or adapt the good practices that are emerging from these projects.

### SETTING THE SCENE

As early as 2003, innovative results from EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) working with (ex)-offenders were identified that had the potential to make a significant impact on training and integration policies for the prison population. In addition, a number of strong DPs had been cooperating very successfully in two Transnational Partnerships (TPs) that introduced new arrangements for distance learning in penal institutions. Thus, during the first round of EQUAL, the European Thematic Group on Employability suggested the "Early intervention in the Training of Offenders", as a theme that should be explored in the future.

This proposal was well-founded because the topic of working with (ex)-offenders is even more strongly represented in Round 2 of EQUAL. Given this spread of interest, it was with some confidence that the two Member States, UKgb and Germany, which had agreed to lead the work on (ex) - offenders, invited others to join them in a Steering Group to explore the theme. These two Member States have been joined by Belgium (fr), Spain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Portugal and UK (ni) in developing a [European Thematic Mainstreaming Programme](#) with three main foci:

- an Exchange Event in Portugal, in October 2006 to gather evidence of the successful practices that have been tested in EQUAL and to formulate a case for the introduction of new measures or approaches, based on these practices, that would be presented at a subsequent Policy Forum;
- a Policy Forum in Poland, in June 2007, to inform policy makers about potential measures or approaches that can be based on EQUAL's experience and to engage their interest in taking some of these forward;
- the launch of a Network or a "Community of Practice", later in 2007, to ensure the continued transfer and the sustainability of relevant EQUAL outcomes.

### THE FIRST EVENT IN THE PROGRAMME



Passaporte 2007  
*Liberdade*  
Passport to Freedom

Almost 150 people from 21 Member States came to the Passport to Freedom Exchange Event that was hosted by the [Gabinete de Gestão EQUAL](#), which is the Managing Authority for this Community Initiative in Portugal. The majority of these delegates represented the 55 EQUAL Second Round Development Partnerships (DPs) that have a primary or exclusive focus on the re-integration of (ex)-offenders ([see link and fourth topic](#)). The need for the resettlement programmes created by all of these DPs was illustrated in a few lines from rap performed by the Phoenix Group of male inmates from the Sintra Prison at the start of the event. They highlight perfectly the confusion and the sense of isolation that can be

experienced by offenders both in prison and after their release.



The Phoenix Rap Group launching the (Ex)-Offender Exchange Event

*“ Behind bars I wonder*

*What I did wrong*

*But this crazy life  
changed me*

*Into an outsider „*

Focusing in on the work to be undertaken over the two days Ken Lambert, the Chair of the EQUAL Steering Group on (Ex)-Offenders, explained that the main purpose of the Exchange Event was to decide on the policy messages to be transmitted during the subsequent Policy Forum and to consider how some type of web-based Community of Practice could be established that would enable everyone to communicate with each other in the lead up to, and after, the Policy Forum.

Participants were also provided with an [overview](#) of the numbers of EQUAL projects working with (ex)-offenders and of how the activities of these projects reinforced the five Workshop themes that had been chosen for the Event. This overview also showed how the work of EQUAL DPs could be related to the recommendations contained the Prison Rules that had been adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in January 2006. No equivalent guidelines existed at European Union level, but it was suggested that the experience of EQUAL DPs could offer a sound basis for the preparation of such a set of EU Common Basic Principles for the Re-integration of (Ex)-offenders.

## THE WORKSHOPS

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Presenting the Dual Case Management System in the Netherlands

Almost all of the rest of the event was spent in Workshop Sessions during which the good practices emerging from EQUAL were presented and potential policy messages were developed. The discussions focused on the following five topics:

- Transition from prison to the outside world;
- Inter-institutional cooperation;
- Involving employers;
- Quality and change management in prisons;
- Learning inside and outside prison.

To assist the debate in the workshops, all participants received an [Issues Paper](#) containing the questions that might be addressed suggested and a [Background Paper](#) that recorded some examples of EQUAL good practices in relation to these issues. Each workshop started with presentations from a few DPs but then everyone was encouraged to share their projects' experiences in relation to the topic with a view to creating a "case" that would strong enough to stand the test of the Policy Forum. All of the workshops came up with a long list of potential lessons and the most important of these are contained at the beginning of the [report on the Passport2Freedom event](#). This report, the proposals on the Community of Practice and the

papers for this Exchange Event will shortly be sent by the **Gabinete de Gestão EQUAL** to Managing Authorities in all the other Member States.

## **PREPARING FOR POLAND**

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At its November 2006 and January 2007 meetings, the Steering Group on (Ex)-offenders considered the outcomes of Passport to Freedom and also the analysis of the [participants' evaluations of the event](#). In looking at the feed back from the Workshops, a considerable element of reinforcement was detected and taken into account in determining the topics that will be featured during the Policy Forum, in Warsaw, on 21 and 22 June 2007. The three chosen topics are:



There were also opportunities for more informal exchanges of experience

- **The 'holistic approach' to rehabilitation of offenders**—The partnership principle of EQUAL has resulted in many positive examples of structured cooperation between all those public and private bodies and NGOs that are involved in the process of resettlement. The fundamental message is that such approaches offer more effective and also less costly solutions than more traditional practices that are constrained by institutional boundaries and thus, often involve fragmentation of effort. Experience from EQUAL has shown how all relevant services, within and outside the penal institutions, can be harnessed to prevent re-offending and to facilitate the social rehabilitation of prisoners;
- **The balance between security and citizenship** - Some of the EQUAL innovations in prisons are structural and relate to the management of change in prisons, the introduction of quality systems and the motivation of staff to adopt a more creative, proactive attitude to the rehabilitation of inmates. Others are concerned with the development of new forms of education and training. Many of these initiatives involve opening up prisons to agencies and individuals, including employers, so that offenders are empowered and prepared to play a more positive part in society on their release;
- **The benefits of European cooperation** – This topic will concentrate on collaboration between the various National EQUAL Offender Networks (NEONs) and other networks of projects working with (ex)-offenders. These transnational partnerships provide an effective framework for comparing, analysing and eventually transferring successful practices. Other activities focus on joint production – such as the setting up of a European knowledge portal on rehabilitation issues or the development of a common European IT platform offering non-national prisoners access to learning opportunities which are recognised in their country of origin.

Another issue that will be pursued over the next few months is the drafting of **a set of European recommendations for the re-integration of (ex)-offenders** based on those approaches that had been tried and tested in EQUAL. Despite the fact that, since 1989, the Council of Europe has established a number of recommendations in the areas of criminal justice and penal policies, the common view of the Exchange Event in Lisbon was that a set of European Union level guidelines would have a more effective impact on existing resettlement policies and practices. The possibility of producing such a draft will be discussed over the next couple of months, as if this draft was to feature at the Policy Forum, it might initiate a wider European network that would bring together projects working with offenders and the relevant political actors in the field of resettlement.