

PREVENTION OR RE-IMPRISONMENT?

This was the unambiguous question posed by the organisers of the EQUAL Policy Forum on (Ex)-offenders that was held in Warsaw, on 21 and 22 June 2007. During these two days, representatives from EQUAL Managing Authorities, National Support Structures and Development Partnerships were joined by representatives of criminal justice and penal systems, employers, educationalists and non-governmental organisations. Together they concentrated on ways of taking forward the successful approaches to reintegration that have been pioneered by EQUAL.

REVIEWING RELATED DEVELOPMENTS

In welcoming the 220 delegates, Grażyna Gęsicka, Minister of Regional Development in Poland, referred to the 121 EQUAL Development Partnerships that had received more than 170m € from the European Social Fund. She indicated that the Policy Forum was part of a European Mainstreaming Platform that had begun with an Exchange Event in Lisbon at which some of these DPs had helped to prepare the programme for Warsaw.



An attentive audience for the opening plenary session

The Minister was joined in this Plenary by two other Polish colleagues. Beata Kempa, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Justice, gave a very detailed presentation of the structure of the Polish Prison Service and how it had used EQUAL to improve the resettlement support that could be offered to (ex)-offenders. Then, Anna Kalata, Minister of Labour and Social Policy, explained how the Public Employment Services were actively collaborating in these types of resettlement programmes.

These Polish experiences were contrasted with developments in Germany and Italy. Uwe Döring, the Minister of Justice, Labour and European Affairs in Schleswig-Holstein outlined how EQUAL had brought together seven Länder in the "[RESO-Northern Alliance](#)", which is a structured framework for cooperation between the administrations of justice in the reintegration of offenders. He also emphasised the need for cross-governmental cooperation between ministries of education, labour and justice if the European debate initiated by EQUAL was to be concluded successfully. Carmella Cavallo, who is Head of the Juvenile Justice Department at the Italian Ministry of Justice, reported on the services that are available to young offenders aged 14 to 18. She highlighted the fact that there is now increased use of mediation or probation in Italy and that one recent experiment has been the introduction of cultural mediators to work with foreign offenders.



Commission representatives Peter Stub Jorgensen and Thomas Ljungquist flanked by Carmella Cavallo from Italy

The Policy Forum also heard about some European, as distinct from national, initiatives. Thomas Ljungquist, a Principle Administrator in the European Commission's DG Justice, Freedom and Security, reviewed recent proposals related to the cross-border supervision of suspended and conditional sentences. These proposals also covered alternative sanctions and pre-trial supervision measures. In addition, Peter Stub Jorgensen, Director of Directorate B of DG Employment, spoke about some of the achievements of EQUAL. He stressed that *"coordinated approaches are of fundamental importance to the successful re-integration of offenders and there has to be close communication and collaboration between the prison and the outside world."* He then added *"the partnership principle of EQUAL has produced many positive examples of such cooperation involving ministries of justice, employment, education, health and social security, major NGOs, employers' and trade union organisations and, at local level, organisations representing offenders, their families and their victims are also involved."*

THE ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

That afternoon and the following morning were spent in Panel Sessions, which considered EQUAL's achievements and how they could be extended. The themes for the panels were:

- The Effectiveness of an Holistic Approach to Re-socialisation;
- Prison Innovation: Changing Roles and Building Bridges;
- Learning across Borders: The Benefits of Transnational Cooperation.

On the first day the focus was more on practice with each panel receiving presentations from two DPs. In the second session, the panels attempted to consider these good practices through a "policy lens." In addition, the panels looked at European level recommendations for the re-integration of (ex)-offenders. These had come from the Exchange Event in Lisbon when participants had felt that the process of mainstreaming EQUAL approaches could be enhanced by such recommendations. The [29 recommendations](#) that they produced are grouped under the following six headings:

1. Successful re-integration of (ex)-offenders requires a case management approach from arrest, through the period of imprisonment, to the time of release and beyond;
2. All prisoners should have the opportunity of engaging in training and educational programmes that will increase their employability;
3. Having a job is the most important factor in preventing re-offending so more efforts are required to engage both public and private employers and to explore other forms of job creation;
4. Attention must also be given to other aspects of the lives of (ex)-offenders [housing, health family life etc.] if re-integration is to be successfully achieved;
5. There is an urgent need to promote change in prisons and to foster a culture of innovation and feedback in order to support cooperation with external agencies and developmental action;
6. The developments that have been pioneered in, and through, EQUAL should be consolidated.

THE OUTCOMES

Panel Reports showed that in terms of consolidating the results of EQUAL, some mainstreaming is on the way, as during the next programming period of 2007-2013 the ESF Operational Programmes will finance (ex)-offenders projects in almost every Member State. However, a plea was made for the construction and support of a Pan-European network bringing together projects and European organisations working with (ex)-offenders to ensure that all the aspects - social, vocational, legal and educational - would be covered in a concerted attempt to improve European and Member State policies and practices for the resettlement of (ex)-offenders. In terms of the third step in the EQUAL European Mainstreaming Platform, which is establishing a Community of Practice, it was noted that the [Knowledge Portal](#) established by the German BABE DP is already collecting and updating relevant national and European experience and making this experience easily accessible. All of the Panels were broadly supportive of the European level recommendations and attention was drawn to the need to promote a greater involvement of both

public and private employers through incentives and by raising the awareness of middle management about the business case for the employment of ex-offenders.



A dance group from the Warsaw-Grochow prison provides a welcome break from the discussions

In the closing session, Piotr Stronkowski Deputy Director of the Department for ESF Management at the Ministry of Regional Development, who had coordinated the organisation of the Policy Forum, asked three representative stakeholders for their comments on the Panel Reports and the Recommendations. Paweł Nasiłowski, Deputy General Director, Central Board of Prison Service indicated that EQUAL had already been instrumental in the drafting of a new law in Poland that enabled individuals to serve their sentences by undertaking socially valuable work within local communities. David Cragg, Regional Director of the Learning and Skills Council in England proposed a two pronged approach with one firmly rooted in policies for multi-agency and cross-ministerial cooperation that can result in systemic change and the other geared to creating effective support networks and tools for practitioners. The last speaker, Gudrun Tolzmann, Head of Division Prison and Probation in the German Federal Ministry of Justice was very strongly in favour of sending the Recommendations to the Council of Europe, as she believed that the Council could act in this area and was also interested in improving conditions for (ex)-offenders.

The ideas and results of the Policy Forum will be discussed in greater detail at forthcoming conferences including the [50th Anniversary of the European Social Fund](#), in Potsdam on 28/29 June, an event entitled Education and Training for Offenders organised by the Belgian French and German speaking Community on 2 October and a Workshop on EQUAL and (Ex)-offenders that will be held on 9 October, as part of DG Regio's series of Open Days ([see 2006 programme](#)). These results will also be considered at the final meetings of a number of strong EQUAL Transnational Partnerships that will take place over the next months. In addition, European prison and probation journals have already published EQUAL outcomes and so these are also being debated by other European networks and organisations. Finally, to end on a practical note, the existing Knowledge Portal will shortly be transferred and integrated into a wider European dimension, thereby providing the basis of the Community of Practice.

THE ADDED-VALUE OF TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Agir para a Igualdade has transnational partners in [Austria](#), [Italy](#) and Hungary. The Italian DP is working on life-long-learning and the Hungarian project aims to increase the employability of the Roma community. Transnational exchange has generated a learning process that is helping all partners to take more account of the needs of ethnic minorities and to integrate a gender dimension into their activities. Building on the Portuguese experience, partners in "Igualdade.Sociale@it.hu.pt" are producing a guide to support enterprises in introducing equality plans covering both dimensions of gender and ethnicity.