

The sea is the limit

The fishing industry in the Azores has suffered several serious setbacks over the last decade. The islands are located in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, and the variety of fish is already limited by extreme depth of the seabed a short distance from the coast. But recent European fishing quotas further restrict the quantity and species of fish that can be caught. Added to this, the islands' harbour infrastructure and fishing fleet are both in urgent need of renovation. Most of the ports lack basic facilities such as cold storage and machinery to lift boats out of the water, and the boats, 80% of which are shorter than 9 metres, lack storage possibilities, decks or cabins.

Largely as a result of these threats, unemployment among fishermen is high, but mostly hidden. Some 85% of all workers in the sector do not (or rather, are unable to) work full-time. The workforce is also ageing fast because the industry is not able to attract young people, so there is a high risk that important skills will be lost. What's more, workers in the fishing industry tend to have very low levels of formal education and training, and efforts to help them update their skills have so far been unsuccessful.

Working with all sectors of the community

The *Mudança de Maré* Development Partnership (DP) brought together many different organisations and stakeholders to tackle the challenges faced by the Azorean fishing industry. The involvement of local development associations and cooperatives (representing the crew of more than 500 boats) ensured the project's close cooperation with the local fishing community. Youth associations took part to raise young people's awareness of the benefits of working in the fishing industry and to highlight the importance of proper education and training. Two women's rights organisations helped to address the gender issues that characterise the fishing industry – a sector heavily dominated by men and "male customs". A film production company was also invited into the DP to reverse the sector's negative image using film. And last but not least, the participation of the Azorean regional authority for agriculture, fishing and environment ensured the policy relevance of *Mudança's* activities.

Mudança de Maré had three key goals: modernisation, re-orientation, and "valorisation". Its activities were based on an in-depth audit of the sector, taking account of the

overall socio-economic situation, the sector's employment profile and new trends and opportunities. Each of the DP's activities were therefore based on real problems and needs rather than perceived ones.

Some 39 activities were carried out, each with a specific aim such as: modernising skills, techniques and infrastructure; helping workers to find alternative ways of making a living in the sector (for example through tourism or alternating fishing methods and species fished); protecting nautical heritage; increasing the levels of confidence and cooperation among workers in the sector; and improving the sector's image.

Getting women on board

A key activity of *Mudança de Maré* was to develop the existing knowledge and skills of women, and to make them aware of their rights. Generations of women have worked in the fishing industry helping to prepare bait, nets and traps, unload boats, and process the catch. But their contribution has frequently gone unrecognised and they are hardly ever paid for their work.

The EQUAL project organised an 8-month training programme for 12 women from different backgrounds and ages. It combined theoretical courses (including IT, English, administration, health and gender equality) and on-the-job training. Specific emphasis was placed on how to use their new skills in the fishing sector, for example by offering administration and accounting services. It is hoped that in the longer term the women will set up small cooperatives to provide paid services to the fishing sector.

The EQUAL project arranged for the course participants to meet with women from the other islands and to take part in a conference in Spain, so as to exchange experiences and views with women from other fishing communities.

One participant reported: "It made me realise that traditions and habits vary enormously in Europe, and even between two islands of the same Archipelago! For example, on our island, it is considered inappropriate for a woman to work – or even set foot sometimes – on a boat. And on the other island (Terceira), just a few kilometres away, women do it all the time, and there are even some that navigate their own boat."



The Azores fishing industry is in need of modernisation

A better future through partnership

Mudança de Maré was not the only EQUAL partnership helping the fishery sector to adapt to the demands and trends of the new millennium. Under the "Pêche et Aquaculture transnational partnership", the Azorean DP joined forces with four others in Spain, Italy and France that focused on fishing as their central theme.

Despite sometimes conflicting interests regarding access rights to fishing territories, the exchange of views and experiences enabled the partnership to come up with a series of common recommendations for EU fisheries policy. And on a practical level, Italy's legislation on tourism in the fishery sector inspired Mudança de Maré to recommend changes to their own policies and legislation in this area. As a result, the regional authority has recently proposed new legislation to help the fishing community contribute to the tourism sector, using the Italian approach as a model.

A more detailed version and other EQUAL success stories can be found at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/activities/search_en.cfm

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