

CROSS-BORDER RECONCILIATION IN ETG 4

Experiences and Achievements of Transnational Partnerships

1. ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is presenting the work of the [European Thematic Group on Equal Opportunities](#) (ETG 4), undertaken in 2005 and focusing on good practices developed by EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) whose work was concentrated on the theme of reconciliation between private and professional responsibilities, including childcare and elderly or other dependents care as well as work-life balance measures for men and women in public and private organisations.

In EQUAL transnationality is one of the transversal principles that should be integrated at both programme and project level. This means, as emphasised in the EQUAL Communication and Guidelines, to make it possible for individual DPs and national authorities to learn from each other and co-operate productively across borders.

The 11 DPs which have contributed to this report belonged to the first generation of projects and are now involved in the second round of EQUAL. Together, they identified the impact of their EQUAL transnational activities on the achievements which they were able to generate “at home”. Yet, their cooperation also focused on good practices in the process of setting up and managing Transnational Partnerships and also on the lessons learned and the tools produced through cross-border cooperation.

The report is covering the key components of successful strategies for transnational work that have enabled projects to improve the gender equality performance not only within their EQUAL partnerships but reaching beyond and influencing policies and practices at local, regional and even national levels. The main chapters are centred on the following crucial aspects:

- Setting up and managing Transnational Partnerships
- Preparing to get going
- Implementing the work programme
- Mainstreaming through transnational work

2. SETTING UP AND MANAGING TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

2.1. FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER(S)

Obviously the first step to set up a transnational partnership, this key stage of the process was greatly facilitated by the availability of the EQUAL database (ECDB): all DPs reported using it, either to find their partners themselves or to be found by them (DK). If there had been some timing problems in the 1st Round – DPs entered last in the database discovering that all the other potentially interesting projects were already matched; others losing their potential partners when those failed to be selected for Action 2 – the 2nd Round ran much more smoothly. In the 2nd Round, DPs also used their previous contacts: either their initial partners or projects identified in the 1st Round but too late to launch a formal cooperation.

Selection criteria were usually a mix of thematic interest as a first priority, geographical scope and language capacities (see below)

Based on its 1st Round experience with @CCEDE, the Spanish [Proyecto Alborarada](#) had defined the following selection criteria to identify its new generation of partners

- *Mixed DP membership – public and private – to match its own profile: municipalities, trade union and SMEs;*

- *Projects working in a non-profit perspective, due to unsatisfactory experience in previous ESF Initiatives where the partners' objectives were to sell their products;*
- *Similar problems addressed – work-life balance measures in companies – but with a different approach, as in Germany;*
- *Countries that were expected to be more advanced than Spain on changing gender stereotypes, as in the Netherlands.*
- *Partners which agreed to spend money on simultaneous interpretation, so that local members of the DP who, unlike the project team, don't all speak English can also participate in, and benefit from transnational activities.*

TCA – R1: [FLEX@ction](#) – R2: [Jumping Barriers](#)

Another Spanish DP, [Deloa 1](#) and [Deloa 2](#), made the case for choosing partners across the different Themes of EQUAL. In their case, Gender equality and Entrepreneurship were two complementary aspects of global approaches to rural development, hence their choice of partners to work on their Adaptability project. One of the more practical concern was to secure active partners, rather than end up with silent partners.

TCA – R1: [TEAM](#) – R2: [WIT “Women innovating tourism”](#)

2.2. GETTING ORGANISED

The number of partners seemed to have played an important role in the way TPs organised their work: with 1 or 2 partners, they could all work together; with more than 3 partners, they tended to divide their cooperation in sub-groups on specific issues. As could be expected, drop out rates were higher and sleeping partners more frequent in larger TPs.

Collaborative tools such as extranets did not always meet the expectations of the Reconciliation DPs: in [UC - Universes of Conciliation](#) only the coordinators used it; and in [ATTIVA I TUOI TEMPI](#) the knowledge management database came somewhat late in the life of the TP.

The 2-page evaluation questionnaire developed by the British partner in [EMPOWER](#) proved highly useful to evaluate the effectiveness and added value of each transnational meeting.

2.2.1. Organisational models

Three forms of leadership have been practiced by the Reconciliation DPs:

- Rotating leadership, usually on an annual basis;
- Shared leadership on specific issues;
- Single leadership: in particular in countries, such as Austria, where the principle of rotation was not allowed by internal national rules;

For the [FOGaflex](#) DP in Luxembourg, rotating the secretariat seemed the appropriate solution at the beginning of the TP, to promote the idea of equality among the three partners which did not know each other yet. All responsibilities (i.e. invitations, reports, caring for deadlines) switched on a chosen date; each partner taking over the lead for the same duration. The experience was so positive that it was proposed, and accepted, for the 2nd Round partnership. It was underlined that the first secretariat is the most important because it launches the work programme and sets the pace for the whole project.

TCA – R1: [Accueil de l'enfance](#) – R2: [Improving Childcare](#)

Rotation was organised on a 6-month basis during which each partner should try to push forward their own theme, such as the "conciliation week" ran by [Viver](#) in Portugal during the first semester of 2004.

TCA – R1: [European Cities Network for Conciliation](#)

Under the leadership of [TEMPORA](#), the organisational model to manage the transnational project was a matrix system, by theme / activity / country. Spain ran the

secretariat: overall coordination, closing event, publication of results, evaluation. Each country led a Working Group (WG) to fulfil a specific objective and develop the agreed product or action to achieve the common transnational aims. All three countries participated in each Working Group:

TCAs – R1: [TEMPORA](#) – R2: [Vertex for equity](#)

2.2.2. The language issue

It is no surprise that all DPs reported language as a key issue for their transnational cooperation. While in most cases, project leaders had a relatively good command of one foreign language (if not two, this was not always the case for team members on the ground and even less for the participants in the DPs steering groups and member organisations. Choosing English as the *lingua franca* was the commonly adopted solution, not always without problems. Interpretation had to be provided for larger meetings, in particular those involving policy makers or a wider audience such as dissemination events.

The Austrian [F&Mpower](#), now [Job.Plan](#) had set up a TP with a [ACE National](#) in the UK. As the project leader, Elke Beneke, puts it "Although we've learned English at school, we need more than daily English in this context; we need specific terms in the field of reconciliation and family care. When we started to work transnationally, colleagues felt very insecure about using the language to communicate with native English speakers. At the end of the process and at the beginning of the second round, we were very happy that this was no longer a problem."

This did not come by chance: support was provided by both the British colleagues and the Austrians with the best language skills; native speakers also helped to develop products of good quality in English. And the DP offered a well attended crash course for trainers and multipliers participating in its working groups. Special language support was also provided during these transnational meetings.

And last but not least, one of the most useful transnational products was also a result of the language barriers: TP partners produced together a glossary of more than 1.800 terms used in social care in EN, DE, ES, FR and IT.

TCAs – R1: [EMPOWER](#) – R2: [Bridging the Gender Gap](#)

3. PREPARING TO GET GOING

3.1. GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

As already identified as an issue in the previous Adapt and Employment Initiatives, the lack of prior knowledge on the training and employment situation and systems in the partner countries had to be overcome at the start of cooperation. This was generally done informally or during the first meeting(s) of the partnership.

In the 1st Round [EMPOWER](#) TP, however, a formal approach was developed which proved so useful that it was repeated by the [Job.Plan](#) Austrian DP for its second partnership. A short structure was developed for the preparation of a 10-page background paper by each partner, including:

- *Description of the country*
- *Short presentation of the demographic situation*
- *Overview of the main labour market relevant data*
- *Family and partnership issues*
- *Equality legislation*
- *Policy on Gender Equality including Gender Mainstreaming*

And to provide for a good understanding of the partners, the TP had also developed a template to present the profile of each DP, under the following aspects:

- *National partners*
- *Cause and purpose*
- *Objectives*
- *Activities*
- *Steering and controlling*
- *Specific framework at national level*
- *Expected results and products*
- *Sustainability and mainstreaming*

TCAs – R1: [EMPOWER](#) – R2: [Bridging the Gender Gap](#)

3.2. DEFINING THE WORK PROGRAMME

This was the first, and probably the biggest, challenge for TP partners, described by @CCEDE as "sailing on a rough sea, in unclear weather". Only one of the TPs ([EMPOWER](#)) finalised its whole transnational programme in a 3 hours initial meeting... and did not need to change it until the end of the 1st Round: this might be linked to the fact they only had to agree among two partners!

For the others, it took much longer: up to 9 months in the case of [Deloa](#) as the TP membership kept changing. Brainstorming meetings were the most frequent method to identify themes and activities and to allocate roles and tasks. However, the need to sign a TCA immediately meant that the feasibility of the agreement was challenged very soon: most participants in the Transnationality Working Group reported that they had to change not only the timetable (too tight) but also to re-focus the objectives and, in some cases, scale down the activities foreseen (too ambitious or unrealistic). They would have preferred a longer induction phase.

Among the lessons learnt between the 1st and the 2nd Round was the need to include the local DP partners in the preparation of the transnational work programme ([Il Laboratorio del Tempo](#)) or even to have them signing the TCA ([Deloa](#)) to ensure their participation, support and commitment.

As could be expected, budget issues had to be raised at that stage: such as the eligibility of certain types of expenses depending on national rules (example: hosting foreign guests, or travel authorisations needed for civil servants), or the size of the DP and the amounts available for transnationality (differences ranged from 1 to 4) However solutions were found, usually with the "richest", or the most flexible, DP taking over.

4. IMPLEMENTING THE WORK PROGRAMME

Except in the above-mentioned Austrian case, the first thing that TP members did was to up-date their original plans!

In [Pro European Care Sector](#), a systematic approach was used at each transnational meeting to match the achievements with the expectations and reassess if the objectives for the next period were still realistic. According to Helga Pinstrup, in charge of [SOS-mx](#) in the 1st Round and of [Faktor 2007](#) in the 2nd "There is no point in forcing objectives which cannot be reached... Better revise them when it is still time!"

TCAs – R1: [PECS](#) – R2: [MESSage. Models of Excellence in Senior Services](#)

The action reported in the Working Group was therefore the result of these changes and the experience presented here does not always reflect the sometime painful process involved.

4.1. ALL ON BOARD

The division of tasks among the partners having been agreed, each PD set to fulfil its share of the common programme. The following example, showing how some of the Reconciliation themes and issues were distributed among TP members, is rather representative of the operation of Reconciliation partnerships.

In [TEMPORA](#), each Working Group were led by one DP in charge of coordinating the contributions of the two other partners on a specific issue and to organise a transnational event in its country:

- [Tempora \(ESP\)](#): New formulas for the organisation of work
 - Model for Best Practice: a guide of new formulas for the organisation of work and recommendation for collective bargaining
 - Training program for social agents in reconciliation policies
- [Tempora \(F\)](#): New social services for the quality of daily life
 - Recommendations for the creation of a service model to support dependent persons and to improve work-life balance
 - Training program for the organisation of support services for reconciliation programs
- [Con Tempo \(IT\)](#): Perspective of social times
 - Awareness-raising model on work-life balance in the academic context
 - Model of “good practice” regarding working hours and organisation of times
- [Tempora \(ESP\)](#): Model for a resource centre on work-life reconciliation,
 - Services to be provided to private and public organisations
 - Tools and products necessary for support structure of the resource centre.

TCA – R1: [TEMPORA](#) – R2: [Vertex for equity](#)

4.2. HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

All participating DPs emphasised the importance of field visits to get truly acquainted with the reality of their partner on the ground.

4.2.1. A variety of participants

Not only did they involve the project central team, but also some of their staff in the field, to lesser extent representatives from their local stakeholders and, in a few cases, final beneficiaries.

For [EMPOWER](#), study visits took place in advance of transnational seminars, as a preparation on specific issues. But they also served as vehicle for exporting or importing experience. For their first study visit to the UK, the Austrians took an active part in the national Carers Week; on their second trip, they visited a computer course for tele-learning soft skills. Because of their respective expectations and budget constraints, partners chose different target groups for these visits: [F&Mpower](#) involved project staff and strategic partners, while the [ACE national](#) also brought project beneficiaries and staff. When hosting events, both invited all relevant stake holders (beneficiaries and strategic partners).

After these visits, seminars were organised seminars to deepen the experience on specific themes and compare different approaches in different countries. The last session of the workshops was dedicated to lessons learned and what could be transferred at national level.

TCA – R1: [EMPOWER](#) – R2: [Bridging the Gender Gap](#)

Considering study visits as a learning event for everyone, [SOS-mx](#) hired a bus to take some 35 people to Sweden to discuss flexible working models: project staff and DP decision makers but also unemployed, male, metal workers currently trained in social care for the elderly. "Giving knowledge and getting knowledge" was at the heart of this exchange process.

TCA – R1: [PECS](#) – R2: [MESSAge. Models of Excellence in Senior Services](#)

In Luxemburg, [FOGaflex](#) ran three short term training courses to equip the beneficiaries with the basic skills necessary to work in the new flexible childcare structures created by the DP. A major conference was organised by the [French partner](#) for its own national network, including a presentation of transnational cooperation in EQUAL. The Luxemburg

DP was asked to show the impact of its training on the new structure, on the quality of services and also on the target group. The DP took three beneficiaries and two trainers as witnesses to the conference. The effect was enormous: the audience of about 300 professionals was highly impressed with the testimony of these women, which were very honest with the impact of the training on their private and professional lives. But even more important was the empowerment effect on to the women themselves: they felt highly valued and proud of what they did. Now, two years after the conference, "we still talk about this story, when we want to describe the impact of our training and the effect of transnational exchanges on the beneficiaries" says project leader Marco Deepen.

TCA – R1: [Accueil de l'enfance](#) – R2: [Improving Childcare](#)

4.2.2. From strategic partners to working partners

Several DPs realised, during the course of Round 1, that the role of decision makers in transnational activities went beyond opening and closing conferences or hosting a reception in the Town Hall, which was already a first step but easily achieved when involving the local press.

In [F&Mpower](#) (AT), the main objective to involve them more closely in this 2nd Round project is to increase the impact of the DP on structures and systems, by showing top managers and head of public services the value of the experience acquired abroad. An effective motivating tool was to involve delegates from the public employment service, from the trade union and from the chamber of crafts in a study visit to the UK: on return, they introduced this new information and experience into the debate at national level and used it to develop new strategies in their respective fields of work. In the 2nd Round, some of those partners have changed their role, moving from strategic partners to working partners: some of them were now responsible for specific projects in [Job.Plan](#).

TCA – R1: [EMPOWER](#) – R2: [Bridging the Gender Gap](#)

[French](#) visitors to [Portugal](#) were interested in testing the organisation of public services at night in Vila Nova de Gaia as part of their study visit on opportunities for workers with atypical schedules. 16 members of the Town Council accompanied them in their tour which lasted until 6 am... and, for the first time, realised that the town was not a safe place at night for older people.

TCA – R1: [European Cities Network for Conciliation](#)

4.3. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Having, sometime with difficulty, overcome the language barriers, the differences in training and employment systems and the need to define common concepts – such as the notion of "carers" in languages where this word had no direct translation but five different equivalents depending on the target group – DPs could start exchanging lessons and good practice.

In [Pro European Care Sector](#), the initial gap of understanding between partners was perceived as enormous. Denmark was concerned with bringing more men into social care, Italy was legalising immigrant women from Eastern Europe in order to find carers; in Germany the approach was structured by type of social or health problem; and in France the job didn't exist as such. "In some countries, you cannot be a home-carer without formal training, in others you can just come off the street, get a quick induction course and start the job" noted the Danish colleagues. With such different approaches, transnational work was therefore rather difficult. But benefits of transnationality were in the other activities, through seeing how differently things happened in France for example. Working together to set up a [database](#) that contains new ways to recruitment and retention of staff in care for the elderly, in particular women and immigrants, helped to overcome those difficulties. The work process required all partners to explore the differences of occupational profiles, training systems, labour market situation of carers and decision-making structures in the care sector of the five countries involved (AT, CZ, DK, D, F, I, E). It meant a real quantum leap in terms of knowledge and understanding of how things are handled in other parts of the EU and what can be learned from all those

differences: "The reports were not the most interesting thing. It was the contact with the partners and the inspiration".

For instance, those in charge of further training for carers in DK were interested in the work on dementia from Germany; other colleagues were interested in how training was done for carers in the south in France and how beneficiaries were assessed at the start of the training; the cooperatives idea from Italy was also of interest.

TCA's – R1: [PECS](#) – R2: [MESSage. Models of Excellence in Senior Services](#)

4.3.1. Import / export of experience

Many DPs went beyond mutual information activities but did not necessarily go all the way to actually develop products jointly, the emphasis being placed more on transfer and processes. They formally expressed that it was not books, CD roms or DVDs that mattered but the fact of working together and understanding what one could share in terms of skills, techniques and approaches.

For instance, through its study visits, the [FOGAflex](#) DP imported from [Familles rurales](#) (F) the practice of providing childcare and childminding in the home through a single structure: this helped to develop the flexibility of the service and also to raise its quality by organising the same training for both types of staff. Accreditation of prior learning was another focus interesting for the [Belgian partner](#).

TCA's – R1: [Accueil de l'enfance](#) – R2: [Improving Childcare](#)

The experience of Italian cooperatives was one of the ways forward identified by the Czech DP [Partnership in Family](#), to be explored in the 2nd Round project [MOPPS](#). Under the old system in CZ, it was normal for factories to start at 6 am; all men and women worked and were used to getting up at 4.30 every morning. Childcare centres opened at 5 am for babies and infants. School started at 8 am but, as parents started earlier, were open early. Children also went to after-school institutions. Parents often also had two jobs. This system was possible because the companies owned everything: factories, offices and childcare facilities.

With the changes which occurred in the early 90s, it was felt that it was better for women to stay at home. But this did not work either. So there was a need to set up childcare structures again, but this time private... and too expensive for most parents. Hence the interest in setting up cooperatives.

From their [Scottish partner](#) the CZ DP also imported and adapted tools to assess and close the gender pay gap.

TCA's – R1: [Born Equal](#) – R2: [Balancing Life in Europe](#)

4.3.2. How to approach companies

In the area of social work, actors on the ground often feel that companies are "more important" than them and may feel intimidated or ill-equipped to approach them as partners on an equal footing. Engaging firms in project activities is however a must when dealing with work-life balance issues.

When [F&Mpower](#) realised how difficult it was contact and get involved in the DP's reconciliation activities, they also recognised that their British partner had a lot of contacts with companies and that these companies were very interested in providing offers for carers. One of the most interesting activities was the "self test for companies for reconciliation of professional and private life". The DP analysed this experience and found out that:

- It was much easier to **to build a cooperation** with companies in a region of full employment (London)

- *Their British counterparts had a completely different self perception: they contacted the companies as partners, not as “sellers of ideas no one needed”, and with a different approach – information mixed with humour!*

This became the topic of an ad hoc working group, where [ACE national](#) shared their experience and taught the project staff and the DP's Steering Group how to contact companies. These new approaches were put to good use in the 2nd Round when the focus the new project was placed on working with firms.

One of the by-products of this experience was that, already in the 1st Round, another Austrian DP mainstreamed this self test for companies and used it for bringing more women in technical jobs.

TCA's – R1: [EMPOWER](#) – R2: [Bridging the Gender Gap](#)

4.4. JOINT DEVELOPMENTS

Joining forces to develop common products was another effective form of cooperation, leaving lasting traces for further replication;

The [German](#), [Spanish](#) and [Dutch](#) partners of [FLEX@ction](#) cooperated on 4 common objectives, which lead to the production of a Good Practice Guide on flexible forms of work organisation and greater flexibility in labour relations:

- *Diversification of the employment services from a reconciliation and work-life balance perspective;*
- *Creation of new companies of family support services and adaptation of opening hours of public services;*
- *Sensitisation campaigns on role models and role sharing in the family;*
- *Action plans in companies to promote new forms of work organisation to support reconciliation.*

Besides providing a description of the national context of each DP, the Guide offers a series of 18 case studies, each one with a description of the why and how of the activity and some indications on the costs and benefits of the approach tested.

TCA's – R1: [FLEX@ction](#) – R2: [Jumping Barriers](#)

4.5. EVALUATION

Evaluation of transnational activities was maybe a less satisfactory aspect of the implementation of the work programme. Several methodologies were tested but from the experience described not all proved to be up to the initial expectations.

In two TPs – [TEAM](#), and [EMPOWER](#) – this part of the evaluation was carried out and paid for by one of the member DPs. This was also the case in [ATTIVA I TUOI TEMPI](#) and [European Cities Network for Conciliation](#), where some of the initial evaluation methods had to be changed, on request from the partners, to be more criterion-based and participant-friendly.

In [UC – Universes of Conciliation](#), partners had agreed on a joint evaluation of their transnational activities but faced serious difficulties when the evaluators of each country tried to exchange their methodologies. Private consultants, they showed to be fairly possessive of their own methods and not quite prepared to share them.

In [FLEX@ction](#), evaluation was one of the TP activities and cost were shared between the DPs. Experience with an external organisation was not rated positive by the partners, as the consultant tried to make them change their methods of communication.

5. MAINSTREAMING THROUGH TRANSNATIONAL WORK

Although it is too early to fully assess the role and impact of transnational activities on the mainstreaming of DP results, there were already some indications of the "snowball" effect of transnationality.

Between [Rennes](#) and [Prato](#), exchanges and transfer of experience were used to reinforce the position of the DPs within their respective contexts. Business-to-business meetings with the Italian Macrolotto Time Manager convinced the Rennes business community of the advantages to be found in setting up reconciliation services in business parks and urban areas of economic development:

- Car pooling service
- Centralised mail service
- Childcare facilities
- Centralised laundry service
- Shared food shopping service

The main arguments in favour of a replication of these achievements were that it had been done before, it worked, it did not cost too much to the companies involved and workers concerned were highly satisfied. The approach was also taken on board by the administrative grouping of municipalities surrounding Rennes, to promote a coordinated effort for the benefit of citizens living in the neighbouring suburbs. The creation of a new crèche in Rennes can be directly linked to the participation of the Macrolotto Time Manager in a TP event in France.

TCAs – R1: [ATTIVA I TUOI TEMPI](#)

In [F&Mpower](#), the British tool for companies to run a self-test of their reconciliation-friendliness had been adapted to the national context and was now used by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce.

TCAs – R1: [EMPOWER](#) – R2: [Bridging the Gender Gap](#)

The new, more flexible forms of childcare developed by [@CCEDE](#) had been piloted in one municipality and are now spread in 25 communes of the Madrid area.

Before the TP, trade union members of the DP were strongly opposed to the very notion of "flexibility" in work organisation, which was considered as precarious work: they had even objected to the title [Flex@ction](#) for the partnership. After cooperating with their partner in the Netherlands, including study visits to Dutch firms, they brought it back to the work councils and are now in the process of importing the idea of job rotation in companies in Madrid.

TCAs – R1: [FLEX@ction](#) – R2: [Jumping Barriers](#)

In Luxemburg, six months after the end of [FOGAflex](#) DP, formal legislation (règlement grand-ducal) was passed by the Ministry of family and social affairs to recognise the new forms of flexible and high quality childcare provision. The participation of representatives of the Ministry not only in the DP Steering Group but also in its transnational activities is perceived as a key element of this mainstreaming success.

TCAs – R1: [Accueil de l'enfance](#) – R2: [Improving Childcare](#)

Reports on Action 3 of the 1st Round and new projects under the 2nd Round should provide more examples of how transnationality contributed to the mainstreaming efforts of Reconciliation DPs.